

writer as (self) critic

A NAWE conference in association with
Lancaster University & St Martin's College

18–19 November 2005 • Lancaster University

Are critical and creative writing at odds with each other? Are they still perceived as distinct and, if so, should they be? Where do the roles of writer, critic and teacher overlap? And collide? Which comes first, your creative or your critical self?

As writers working in education we frequently approach both critical and creative texts. Does this produce tension? And how does it affect our own identities as writer-critics? Do we spend so much time and creative energy on analysing others' work and writing critically about it that we have no resources left for our own creative writing?

How do you see the current state of relations between the disciplines of English Literature and Creative Writing in the education system? Should Creative Writing be more closely aligned to practical arts such as drama and visual art than to English? Should there be a GCSE or A-level in Creative Writing? Would this safeguard young people's right to value their skills and interest in creative writing, or would the inevitable demand for a balance between creative and critical writing to meet perceived academic criteria be damaging?

The current debate around the balance of critical and creative writing in the Creative Writing PhD is fierce. As creative writing now constitutes research in a great many institutions, does investigating the world through creative practice alone provide enough evidence of knowledge of the field, or is there a need for critical exemplification too? And what ramifications does this have for the kind of writing expected of creative writing tutors by their institutions?

Are we creating a monster by institutionalizing creative writing and thereby yoking it with critical writing? Or have creative writers always and necessarily been critics?



Conference programme

Friday 18 November

- 6.30 Drinks reception
- 7.30 NAWE AGM followed by readings from writers teaching at Lancaster University and St Martin's College, Lancaster
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Saturday 19 November

- 9.00 Registration and coffee
- 9.30 Welcome & introduction by Paul Munden, Director of NAWE
- 9.40 **Plenary: Writer/Critic Debate** chaired by George Green of the Department of English and Creative Writing, Lancaster University. This plenary will introduce some of the issues touched on by the papers and sessions throughout the day. It will attempt to set out the terms of the debate, and will offer an opportunity for delegates to express their areas of interest and specific concerns.

10.35 Choice of:

Session A: presentation and discussion

Mother of all Critics – Jan Woolf

Children excluded from school feel the force of external and internal criticism deeply. The overt criticism felt by these children attacks their sense of self and produces a deep need for creative outlet. Not writing as therapy, rather writing as an essential part of living, in the tradition of writers who feel they are 'writing for their lives'. In this presentation, Jan Woolf will explore ways to tap the interesting and intense levels of creativity in such children.

Session B: papers and discussion

Doctoring Creative Writing: being creative in a PhD – Calum Kerr

There is undoubtedly a tension between the creative and the academic at PhD level. Having spent the past four years battling between these two disciplines, Calum Kerr will explore how the studying of a PhD has changed him as both writer and academic. He will look at the process of developing a suitable piece of writing at this level, then developing a fitting academic framework for this, and how these balance with the needs of the University in approving a programme of research.

PhD in Creative Writing: an interdependent programme of theoretical and practical work – Sheree Mack

Sheree Mack, in her first year of a PhD in Creative Writing, is working on a collection of poetry as well as critically exploring and evaluating other Black British women writers as a means of establishing a tradition she will soon graduate into. Creative Writing PhDs are charting new ground, such courses only being recognized for funding since 2001, but Sheree feels that she is also treading new ground because she is a Black British woman, writer, academic, critic, and theorist. Through journal, creative and critical extracts, she will provide some insight into the process of a PhD in Creative Writing.

Session C: workshop

Developing and recording students' critical skills within adult education creative writing classes – Valerie Moore

This participatory workshop will explore ways in which teachers can facilitate the development of critical skills in the adult creative writing classroom. We will identify the rationale for students engaging in offering and receiving pertinent peer feedback, and consider effective and sensitive ways to introduce this as a teaching method along with its implications for group dynamics. We will also look at systems for record-keeping that both satisfy the quality requirements of the Learning and Skills Council and offer clear benefits to developing writers.

Session D: papers and discussion

Creativity and Criticality: Rethinking the Role of Criticism in Creative Writing – Amanda Boulter

This paper attempts to unpick the oppositional thinking that sets 'creativity' against 'criticism' as if they are utterly distinct elements of writing. Writing cannot be divided into a creative process that is purely generative (of ideas and words) and a critical process that is purely censorious or fault-finding. In this paper Amanda Boulter will argue that the creative and critical processes are deeply and consistently interconnected, and that the idea of the 'critical' in writing should be reconceived.

Helping learners in creative writing achieve a balance between criticism and creativity: lessons from a cross-disciplinary perspective – Neil Rutledge

Drawing from experience in promoting creativity in a wide range of contexts in primary schools and higher education, Neil Rutledge will argue that creativity and self criticism cannot be divorced from one another and that creativity in writing cannot be developed without a parallel development of critical skills. He will explore the connection between creativity and self-criticism and link this to learning theory, share findings regarding how creativity has been successfully developed in other subject areas and suggest implications from the above for developing good practice in the teaching and learning of creative writing.

11.40 Coffee/tea

12.00 Choice of:

Session A: presentations and discussion

Creative and critical writing in the A Level classroom – Jane Bluett

In this presentation, Jane Bluett will explicate the opportunities for writing at A Level and the potential involvement of writers in education. She will explore where creative writing sits at this stage in education – is it the preserve of Language or Literature or both? – and will look at how we encourage students to become reflective writers within the constraints of assessment objectives. Jane will bring examples of students' work and introduce activities that have been successful in encouraging their writing.

A Possible Model for an A Level in Creative Writing – Joan McGavin

In English teaching, creative writing has traditionally been a tool in the acquisition of critical skills, or a sop to the notion of developing students' creativity. An A Level in Creative Writing could provide an opportunity to re-assert the status of English as a creative art. Pressure from examining boards to include the development of critical expertise need not create contention. Joan McGavin will present her vision of an A Level syllabus for Creative Writing.

Session B: papers and discussion

Creative/Critical/Creative: Chicken and Egg? – Rose Atfield

When asked to consider the process of creation, many MA students initially state that a piece of writing 'just came' to them. They are often quite resistant to the idea of accepting and offering constructive criticism in a workshop. Teachers of creative writing need to challenge themselves in the same way: why do I teach in the way that I do? Having designed and run a successful MA course, Rose Atfield is convinced that a high level of sophistication in creative work is impossible to achieve without critical skill, and vice versa. This paper will consider this question in a critically creative manner!

Me, My Critic, and I: The Role of the Self-Reflection in the Creative Writing Course – Lucy Collins and Kathy Flann

Many creative writing courses require students to produce self-reflective critiques of their work. But what is the purpose of this document? Is it to provide students with the opportunity to explore the personal experience that led to the finished work? Is it to produce a reader-oriented academic analysis of the text? How can the strategies of published writers help us to develop the potential of this form? Drawing on their own experiences and a variety of texts, Lucy Collins and Kathy Flann will explore these questions.

Theory, practice or a theory of practice?: untangling critical confusion in the MA workshop – Pamela Johnson

As tutors of creative writing in Higher Education we are mindful of institutional demands: accountability, credibility, parity with other subjects, academic rigour. As a result, are workshops too quick to offer the writer solutions? What critical vocabulary is appropriate when evaluating draft fiction? Drawing on recent research workshops conducted with ex-MA students, this paper explores workshop practices which bring rigour to evaluating work-in-progress by developing a personal, practice-based critical vocabulary. It suggests ways to develop a productive relationship between our writer and critical selves.

Session C: writing workshop

Means or Ends? – Liz Cashdan

Creative or critical; which comes first and which is more important? This workshop will explore using a critical approach to help creative writing and the creative approach into critical writing. And, possibly, doing both at the same time! Bring pen and paper because this will be a workshop where we actually try things out.

Session D: papers and discussion

Post-it notes to Poetry: a comparison of the techniques used in innovatory businesses and those engaged in creative writing – Ian Chapman

Creativity in business has been a key area of academic research with much analysis of methods to stimulate innovation, yet little has been done to share these techniques with other creative areas. The balance of business idea generation and risk aversion has been discussed in detail by theorists such as DeBono, and conclusions drawn may be useful when looking at the conflict between creativity and criticism in literature. In this paper, Ian Chapman will scrutinize the creative process both from a writing and business perspective and identify the lessons writers can learn from businesses.

Flexing critical muscles through creative writing – Neil Davidson and Bob MacKenzie

What do we mean by 'writing creatively', 'creative writing' and 'criticism'? Can the critical element of creative writing improve creativity and the quality of thinking? Can this help break down the barriers between creative writing and other disciplines, such as business? From their different perspectives, Neil Davidson and Bob MacKenzie will explore how writers can use criticism more consciously and creatively, and whether criticism can help bridge the gap between creative writing within HE and other 'learning organizations'.

1.15 Lunch

2.15 Choice of:

Session A: workshop

Creativity in the Curriculum – Robert Hull

In this workshop, Robert Hull aims to look at the school English curriculum, KS1 to KS4 including Literacy, and try to assess the current balance or relation between critical or academic activity and creative activity. Participants will consider the implications for creativity in how that balance is struck at present, and suggest ways in which the English curriculum might be redrawn (if need be) so as to embody a more fertile or appropriate relation between creative and critical/academic activities.

Session B: papers and discussion

Worldwide Research in Creative Writing: Current Debates, Future Direction – Graeme Harper

This paper will present and explore the current state of creative writing research in universities and colleges, worldwide, and examine the nature, scope and dimension of that research. It will explore the critical engagements of creative writers, noting their key research/practice approaches, and determine the ways in which these developed, and are currently developing. Finally, the paper will outline the future direction of creative writing research/research-through-practice.

Making the Abstract Concrete or Indiana Jones and the Quest for a Good Argument – Susanna Gladwin

Are there aspects of science-based research practice that can be used with advantage by creative writers? The Abstract, vital in the scientific community, tends to be undervalued in our own. Drawing on her experience as an external examiner on a Creative and Critical Writing PhD, Susanna Gladwin will suggest how, at its best, the argument (provided in the Critical Introduction) is a form of literature just as exciting and satisfying as any adventure story, and that it is the role of the Abstract to pinpoint the argument-as-quest. She will provide some examples of abstracts from various PhD theses for analysis and discussion.

Session C: papers and discussion

What's a Story? – Ailsa Cox

Short story theory has been developed almost entirely by its practitioners. A long line of writers, from Edgar Allan Poe to VS Pritchett, Elizabeth Bowen and William Boyd have affirmed the short story's unique attributes, usually in opposition to the novel. How important is it to establish generic specificity? Does an aesthetics of short fiction help us to write? Or is its function to proselytize on behalf of a neglected genre?

Critical rigour and creative freedom: kissing cousins or sworn enemies? – Liz Fincham

In this paper, Liz Fincham will explore the relationship of these two aspects of writing through an examination of the poetry and prose of Eavan Boland, one of Ireland's major poets. Born in Dublin in 1944, Boland's work has always revealed a tension, as a female within the Irish male tradition, as an Irish woman without an Irish childhood. She has held lecturing posts in Ireland and the USA, and is a significant voice both in Irish writing and in an international context. This paper will look at some poems from each of her writing periods and her prose explorations of what it is to be a writer.

'What kind of hearing should I get from all future ages if I wrote ...thus?' (Longinus) – Joan Michelson

Joan Michelson will introduce and guide a discussion in response to a close look at selections from the literary criticism of the third century BC Greek rhetorician Longinus. This will be a reminder of the long tradition in which art and criticism are grounded and a chance to look at a standard bearer who might cast light on some contemporary issues around creative and critical writing.

Session D: papers and discussion

The Case against 'Creative Writing' – David McVey

Much of the focus within NAWE is on those writers working within Creative Writing programmes. However, other writers in HE confront much more basic issues of 'creation' and 'criticism' in student writing. In the era of mass HE, many students are intimidated by any kind of written work. For them, every piece of written work is a learning experience and, in any true meaning of the term, creative writing. David McVey will describe some of the work being done at the University of Paisley to help students into writing and suggest some ways in which the term 'creative writing' can be broadened usefully.

From critical to creative: finding an authentic voice in health care research – Sue Spencer

This paper attempts to tell the story of an 'academic' coming to creative writing via critical thinking and reflexivity. A nurse by professional background, Sue embarked on doctoral studies in health care, but hit problems when trying to write up her research. After wandering into a creative writing class she found herself writing poems based on her research findings. This discovery of an authentic voice in which to express the critical analysis of issues has led Sue to explore new ways of examining health care practice, using reading and writing to help close the gap between the world of the patient and the world of the health care professional.

Session E: round table discussion

Wanted: creative writer seeks criticism – literaturetraining

What's the best way to get constructive, critical feedback on your work? There has been a huge rise in the number of specialist agencies offering manuscript appraisal but is this the best route? What about your fellow writers, the writing group, the online writing community? What can you realistically expect from your agent or publisher or a magazine editor? Join this literaturetraining round table discussion and share your experiences - the success and the horror stories. Hosting the discussion will be a writer with lots of stories to tell on the subject.

3.30 Coffee/tea

3.50 Choice of:

Session A: presentation and discussion

Our thoughts are bees – Mandy Coe and Jean Sprackland

In this presentation drawing on their new book, *Our thoughts are bees*, poets Jean Sprackland and Mandy Coe will talk about the work of writers with schools, their research and their vision. They will discuss the different kinds of writing going on in schools, definitions of the term 'creative writing' and the role writers can play in developing young people's skills in critical thinking and reading as well as in writing itself.

Session B: consultation meeting

Continuing Professional Development in Higher Education – Anne Caldwell

NAWE's CPD Manager, Anne Caldwell, would like to consult with interested NAWE members who teach creative writing in university departments. She would like to find out about any advanced level training or professional development that NAWE could provide. Questions to be addressed could include: How often do writers who work in these sectors share good practice outside their own staff group? Have a chance to consider their own teaching and workshop methods? Have opportunities to reflect on the profiles of students they work with and their differing needs? Look at the balance between their writing and teaching?

Session C: careers workshop for students

Where do I go from here? – literaturetraining

Are you on a university creative writing course and considering the kind of professional future you'd like to have when you graduate? Here's your chance to think about where you want to go, your existing skills and strengths and the areas you'd like to develop, who or what could help you get there and what might hold you back, and to start planning the steps you need to take. This literaturetraining workshop is led by Libby Anson, an experienced and inspirational coach specializing in creative, personal and professional development.

Session D: papers and discussion

The morning after the night before – Mike Harris

Every year, more and more writers and literary critics wake up sharing university beds, but they don't seem to get it on much. Why? Mike Harris argues that there's very little intellectual traffic between writers and academic literary critics. The latter often find evaluation suspect, or old fashioned (if not downright reactionary), whereas writers and teachers of creative writing have to improve writing and so cannot avoid it. How can academics possibly justify their neglect of evaluation when evaluation is what writing (and reading) is all about? Do writers, and writing teachers, really know what they mean when they say a draft "isn't working"? And can they properly justify it? And does the lack of intellectual congress matter one way or another?

Judgement and Development: the creative rewards of critical awareness – Sarah Wardle

What new avenues can the writing of criticism open up for poets, novelists and scriptwriters as creative writers? What lessons can creative writers learn from the praise and blame of critical commentaries and reviews? This paper explores ways in which critical writing for academia and the media can aid writerly development. The rewards at a wider level of ongoing cultural exchange will also be discussed.

5.05 Drinks and close

one-to-one information and advice sessions with literaturetraining

literaturetraining is a group of eight leading literature organizations (including NAWE) working in partnership to provide information, advice and guidance on professional development for writers and literature professionals.

literaturetraining will be at the conference manning an information point for professional development with reference publications, magazines, information sheets and partner leaflets.

In addition, literaturetraining will be offering the following one-to-one sessions for delegates on Saturday:

- one hour creative and professional development consultation sessions for delegates who'd like an opportunity to think about their career and what they want to achieve with the support of skilled coach, Libby Anson. By application only. Please indicate on your booking form if you'd like to receive information about how to apply.
- 30-minute sessions with literaturetraining staff for delegates looking for information and advice on specific professional development matters. Please book in advance on your booking form - places will be allocated on a first come, first served basis.



Contributor biographies

Libby Anson works as a freelance artists' professional development trainer and consultant, and lectures on professional and creative development.

Rose Atfield is course convenor of Creative Writing in the English Department at Brunel University and has established the popular MA in Creative and Transactional Writing.

Jane Bluett teaches A Level English at Bilborough College Nottingham. She is a moderator of Original Writing Coursework and an A Level examiner, and is a member of the NATE Post 16 Committee. Jane is currently studying for a PhD in Creative Writing at Nottingham Trent University.

Amanda Boulter teaches creative writing at the University of Winchester.

Anne Caldwell is Professional Development Manager for NAWE and also a specialist in reader development with young people. She is a poet and is working on a first collection and a poetry/animation project in Calderdale.

Liz Cashdan has taught literature and creative writing in secondary schools and more recently in primary schools and in Higher Education. Her own writing has often taken a dual path when it's arisen in response to the work of another writer.

Ian Chapman has taught corporate strategy, management theory and economics for the last fourteen years and lectures in business studies at St. Martin's College. He is also a student on the MA in Creative Writing there, and has recently had a play performed.

Mandy Coe is an award-winning poet for children and adults. Her work has been widely published and broadcast on radio and television. She has worked extensively with schools, and delivers training and consultancy on writing in education.

Lucy Collins teaches English with Creative Writing at St. Martin's College, Lancaster.

Ailsa Cox's short stories have appeared in many magazines and anthologies, including *The Virago Book of Love and Loss*. She is the author of *Alice Munro* (Northcote House Writers and Their Work Series 2003) and *Writing Short Stories* (Routledge 2005).

Neil Davidson has fifteen years experience in advertising and marketing at a senior level. He is now an independent marketing and communications consultant and writer. He recently completed his MA in Creative and Transactional Writing. (www.silverdarlings.typepad.com)

Liz Fincham is a teacher and writer. She is working on her first poetry collection, *Out of the Comfort Zone*, and her poems have been widely published in journals and anthologies.

Kathy Flann teaches creative writing at St. Martin's College, Lancaster. Her fiction has appeared in a variety of publications, many of them in the US, including *The North American Review*. She has an MFA from UNC-Greensboro and is a former fiction editor of *The Greensboro Review*.

Susanna Gladwin was a Teaching Fellow at the time of her retirement from Middlesex University (in 2002) where she had established what was to become the first undergraduate Creative Writing degree in the country. She is now an external examiner, editor and writer.

Graeme Harper is Editor-in-Chief of the journal *New Writing: the International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing*. He is Head of the School of Creative Arts, Film and Media at the University of Portsmouth and his fiction has won various prizes.

Mike Harris is a professional script writer and director. He runs writing and drama workshops in schools and the community, and is a senior lecturer on the MA in Writing at Sheffield Hallam University. He has also been an English and Drama teacher in a comprehensive school.

Robert Hull was an English teacher in schools for many years and has also taught on the MA in Writing for Children at the University of Winchester. He has written books on teaching and many books for children, including two poetry collections, poetry anthologies and retellings of myth.

Pamela Johnson has published two novels and her short stories and poems appear in anthologies. She has

worked as a critic, curator and lecturer on contemporary visual art and is a Visiting Tutor on the MA in Creative and Life Writing at Goldsmiths College.

Calum Kerr studied for his BA in English and MA and PhD in Creative Writing at Manchester Metropolitan University, where he is also an associate lecturer. He was editor of the *Writer's Muse* magazine for five years and is working on his third novel.

Sheree Mack graduated with an MA in Creative Writing from Northumbria University in 2003 and is starting her PhD at Newcastle University researching Black British Women poets and her own poetry. She has been a secondary school teacher and is now a freelance writer.

Bob MacKenzie is an independent consultant and facilitator specializing in supporting personal and organizational development. He recently completed his D Phil on the theme of 'A Learning Facilitator's Uses of Writing', and is a published author and editor. (www.silverdarlings.typepad.com)

Joan McGavin teaches Creative Writing to English and Creative Writing students at the University of Winchester. Her poetry has been widely published. For many years she taught Creative Writing as an adult education evening class, before going into sixth form teaching.

David McVey is a widely-published writer specializing in short stories. He works as a lecturer in the Centre for Learning and Teaching at the University of Paisley.

Joan Michelson teaches literature and creative writing at Birkbeck College, London. Until 2002, she was Senior Lecturer in English and Head of Creative Writing at the University of Wolverhampton. She has published a chapbook of poems, *Letting in the Light*, and essays, reviews, poetry and fiction.

Valerie Moore manages the long-established Writing School at Leicester Adult Education College. She is a widely published freelance journalist and teacher of creative writing and journalism.

Neil Rutledge is a senior lecturer in education at St. Martin's College, Carlisle. Before this, he taught in primary schools. He is a student on the MA Creative Writing at St. Martin's College, Lancaster. His work on creativity in learning has been published and widely used.

Sue Spencer trained as a nurse in the early 1980s. Following an Open University degree and an MSc in Health Sciences, she moved into Higher Education nine years ago. Sue started an MA in Creative Writing in September.

Jean Sprackland's latest book, *Hard Water*, was short-listed for both the Whitbread Poetry Award and the TS Eliot Prize. She has worked extensively with schools, and delivers training and consultancy on writing in education.

Sarah Wardle is a former *Poetry Review* new poet of the year. Her first collection, *Fields Away* (Bloodaxe) was short-listed for a Forward Prize. She is resident poet at Tottenham Hotspur Football Club and her second collection, *Score!*, has recently been published (also by Bloodaxe).

Jan Woolf is an experienced teacher of children with behavioural and emotional difficulties. She currently coordinates children's services for children excluded from Brent schools and is working on a series of short stories, *Isolates*, exploring the internal lives of fictional troubled children.

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Conference updates will be published on www.nawe.co.uk

