Graeme Harper is Professor of Creative Writing and Dean of The Honors College at Oakland University, USA. A writer of fiction and a scriptwriter, he is an honorary professor in the United Kingdom and was inaugurated Chair of the Higher Education Committee at the UK’s National Association of Writers in Education (NAWE). He is the editor of A Companion to Creative Writing (Wiley Blackwell, 2011) and of Inside Creative Writing: Interviews with Contemporary Writers (2002) and author of On Creative Writing (2010). He serves as Editor-in-Chief of New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing.

The Future for Creative Writing

For thousands of years human beings have engaged in creative writing, as an art and as a form of communication. The results—from pamphlets to books to poems to blogs and beyond—demonstrate the multi-faceted nature of this activity. Industries have grown up around creative writing, but it is a private endeavor as well. Now, with the rise of new technology, creative writing is poised to change and expand in previously unimaginable ways.

Here, preeminent scholar Graeme Harper offers a compelling look at the current state and future direction of creative writing. He explores the practice of creative writing, why humans are drawn to engage in it, its place in the world, and its impact on individuals and communities. The chapters address such topics as writing as a cultural production, the education of creative writers, and the changing nature of communication. Harper challenges the boundaries of the field by delving into the acts and actions involved in creative writing rather than just focusing on the end result. In doing so, he provides readers with an expansive vision of the nature and future of creative writing.

Intellectually alert and deeply committed to its subject, Graeme Harper offers a cogent and wide-ranging vision of what creative writing can become in the twenty-first century. His arguments deserve to be widely discussed and debated. They challenge many of our current assumptions about the purpose and value of creative writing in higher education and elsewhere.

Jon Cook, University of East Anglia

Deeply personal yet grounded in philosophy, Graeme Harper’s monograph on the future for creative writing brightly situates the author at the intersections of culture, therapy, spirituality, and creativity. This is essential reading for anyone concerned about the future of the artist and alphabetic text, or the ever-increasing popularity of creative writing as a discipline. Ultimately, this is an inspiring, uplifting account of the ways creative writing fosters humanity and human evolution.

Joseph Meade, University of South Florida

"Not so long ago, the idea of a creative writer as a creative operating within the academy was viewed as strange at best, anathema at worst. Now, creative writing as an academic discipline has spread across the Anglophone world and is making inroads beyond. As founder and longtime editor of New Writing, Graeme Harper has been uniquely situated to observe—a view might say to preside over—this remarkable disciplinary explosion. The genius of his new book, The Future for Creative Writing, is that it addresses not only our past thinking and methodologies about and within the discipline of creative writing, or even just those that are current, but also those that might be coming. There is much here that is being articulated and made visible for the first time. As the title suggests, Graeme Harper is optimistic about The Future for Creative Writing—and his book makes a powerful argument for this optimistic view."

Katherine Coles, University of Utah
The Future for Creative Writing
Wiley Blackwell Manifestos

In this series major critics make timely interventions to address important concepts and subjects, including topics as diverse as, for example: Culture, Race, Religion, History, Society, Geography, Literature, Literary Theory, Shakespeare, Cinema, and Modernism. Written accessibly and with verve and spirit, these books follow no uniform prescription but set out to engage and challenge the broadest range of readers, from undergraduates to postgraduates, university teachers and general readers – all those, in short, interested in ongoing debates and controversies in the humanities and social sciences.

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Terry Eagleton

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Introduction

From Whence…

Some of this book is about the *Future for Creative Writing* from the point of view of that already in place and now evolving. Some of this book is about where creative writing might be in years to come, if changes in the wider world influence the practice and understanding of creative writing in reasonably predictable ways. Some of this book imagines scenarios purely for the future; other parts of this book look to the past and present in order to suggest why things are as they are and why they will build on their present states to become other things.

This book is strongly influenced by researching and teaching in three creative writing teaching and research locations of the world: the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia. It is mostly influenced by involvement in work undertaken in the English language; however, it has been a privilege to work also with those writing and teaching in languages as different from each other as Welsh, Chinese, Japanese, German, Scots Gaelic, Czech, Dutch, Urdu, Hindustani, French, Irish Gaelic, Italian, Spanish, Finnish, Norwegian, Italian, Afrikaans, and Malay. Among others! **Some people have considered that creative writing in universities has principally been a phenomenon of the United States, the United...**
The Future for Creative Writing

Kingdom, and some other countries associated with work in the English language. If ever that were true, it is no longer true today and there is a growth of creative writing teaching and research in educational institutions around the world and in a considerable number of languages. In all probability such work will continue to flourish.

This book is also informed by the professional and personal pleasure of having edited the journal New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing,\(^2\) for over a decade now, and by working there with a group of supportive Associate Editors and an international Peer Review Board – and with dozens of other generous guest reviewers from around the world too. Over the years, New Writing has published both critical and creative writing from creative writers based, I believe, on every continent. I am pleased to say that in a number of cases, New Writing has been able to provide support for discussions not previously heard in our field and, additionally, support for creative writers and critical and/or creative writing not previously published. Those discussions, and their progress in an increasingly global sense, have certainly informed this book. The discussions here have also been informed by the explorations that have occurred in other journals published by national creative writing organizations around the world. Over the past two to three decades, these national organizations have become increasingly active at all levels of education and in the community, and their vibrancy is a reflection of a thriving interest in creative writing.

The Future for Creative Writing has likewise been written with an awareness of references made to creative writing in other disciplines such as the study of literature, the media, art and design, or performance. In many ways, there have been key evolutionary developments in the final decades of the 20th Century and the first decade or so of the 21st Century with regard to a clearer understanding of the distinctiveness of creative writing as a human practice and thus in relation to how it can be taught and researched, particularly in institutions of higher education.
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At times, one or other academic discipline, most notably that focused on teaching and research relating to literature, has made a contribution to work in the field of creative writing. However, it became increasingly obvious toward those latter decades of the last century that such literary study was indeed a separate though sometimes connected discipline from the study of creative writing, with different practices and often very different epistemological positions.

Some tension occurred in those decades with regard to who was best placed to take the lead in the teaching and research of creative writing. This was exacerbated by the fact that globally, over time, the different roles envisioned for creative writing in academe reflected different national contexts in relation to further developing or strengthening of a literary culture, about the place of arts practices in comprehensive modern universities, and even in relation to the contemporary context of higher learning itself, which in some countries was seen (and continues to be seen) most strongly as a version of professional training and in other countries most strongly as a combination of education for life, citizenship, and employment. Although saying a consensus was eventually reached would be overstating the current condition, there is no doubt that as we entered the second decade of the 21st Century, it was very clear that creative writing was supported by the majority of participants in it as a specific field of human endeavor with specific modes of creative and critical understanding and specific avenues of knowledge to explore and advance. It is from that ground-base that the future of creative writing in universities and colleges around the world is currently being built.

That said, the contributions of other disciplines to the study of creative writing should be noted. There are many disciplines that have played, and continue to play, important roles in assisting creative writers to undertake their work and, in the context of the academic growth and strengthening of the discipline of creative writing, assisting them also in investigating and reporting new findings in the field. Literary study, as mentioned, has contributed much in the realm of textual analysis – locating this analysis largely after the event of
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creation; that is, after the creative writing itself, but nevertheless offering a contribution to a spectrum of interest – as well as some key things associated with biographical study and, in a connected way, studies of the history of book and of literary cultures. Linguistics, perhaps obviously, has had a linked role – globally with less of a sense of being part of the contributory disciplinary spectrum, but having played an important part in introducing creative writing to some teaching and learning situations in countries where it has not emerged beside the study of literature or through arts practice teaching and research. In many cases, this linguistic route has been associated with language learning, and certainly these exchanges between creative writing teaching and research in English and other languages have come about through language learning or linguistics programs positively, and offered opportunities for considering culturally characteristic aspects of creative writing practice.

Psychology has had an interest, and made a contribution, often through a broader concern with the psychology of creativity and through a consideration of an individual’s sense of engagement with circumstances of life or with ways of releasing emotions, feelings, and their responses to the situations in which they find themselves. Psychology as a field of study has contributed something also to how creative writers have thought about subjects and themes. That is, because creative writers draw on other areas of knowledge for investigation of writing content as well as critical understanding, for subjects and themes as well as for cognate critical investigations, Psychology has long had a role – whether from a behaviorist, information processing, perception, or personality point of view – among others. If anything has been more prominent in the contribution of Psychology to the past, present and future of creative writing it has been its attention to the nature of individual human beings, to our formation, maintenance, and sense of self. Much about creative writing draws from this perspective.

The sciences and social sciences, generally, have situated creative writing as a cultural practice in which they have merely a passing
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interest, but an interest nevertheless. The sciences’ interest because of occasional concerns about making science accessible and creative communication and popular art forms playing a role in that. The social sciences because, as a cultural phenomenon, creative writing represents some aspect of societal and communal formation and maintenance, some aspect of human ritual or transfer of understanding, conditions of community emotional well-being, an outlet to express political, personal, shared, or divergent ideals, and so forth.

Nevertheless, what we know and project into the future about creative writing from discoveries and ideals in those two wide fields of human knowledge is that creative writing knowledge has most often been differentiated from such things as “scientific knowledge” by its individualism and by the practices of creative writing producing hard to measure results. Creative writing has kept the subjective nature of the human exchanges it encourages as a laudable aspect of its practices, and its works have been valued for their investigations but not necessarily for the veracity of a creative writer’s observations or even the strength of what could easily be called their theories.

Interestingly, both the sciences and social sciences in academe have used creative writing in some way, and as teaching and research evolve with inter-disciplinary exchange and cross-pollination in the contemporary academic world, this is likely to occur even more. Anthropologists, sociologists, geographers, historians, social workers, nurses, computer scientists, and specialists in education, community health, philosophy, and business, to name a few, have all found some reason, advantage, or sense of possibility in engaging with creative writing in an academic setting. That is not to mention further the various arts disciplines that have incorporated creative writing into their own practices and investigations.

So the past and present of creative writing as a field of study in education is such that it has been long embraced, broadly appreciated, and actively advancing its range and types of knowledge. But because creative writing involves eclectic practices, and
because it often depends on a wide range of influences, its strengths as a practice and site of human understanding have often also been its weaknesses – at least in terms of industrialized society.

As education (higher education, in particular) became more specialized, especially during the 20th Century, more organized around professional specialization, and more formalized, so creative writing, as both communication and art, was disadvantaged within academe by its desire to keep its doors open and to draw from all around it. Where it was situated, and where education in it became situated (often as part of the professionalized critical study of Literature), reflected the compartmentalizing ethos that much of 20th-Century higher education extolled. Such higher education did so in the name of seeking depth of engagement in fields of knowledge that could feed a perceived need for an increasingly specialized workforce. This, in many ways, was merely a reflection of how creative writing was situated in wider society, for individuals and for communities, as something still drawing from a wider societal participation mentality, while modern industrial practices were creating hierarchies of specialism supported by guild-like certifications and qualifications.

As a practice, creative writing was appreciated and popular, but in a social and economic sense – these two key instances – the practice was not recognized as a significant contributor to tradable human knowledge in the same way professionalized and specialized industrial knowledge was tradable (from the knowledge of biomedical scientists to the knowledge of architects – professionalized practices often also involving the expansion of professional organizations offering formal admission to the field). Though creative writing organizations emerged, and in creative writing genre such as screenwriting even took on the mantel of being certification-orientated and industry-focused, the fact was that the idea of being a creative writer clashed with ideals of being “certified,” or with knowledge (whether critical knowledge of the field or knowledge of the practice itself) being specialized quite in the
industrial way that grew popular and prevalent right up to the final decades of the last century. Creative writing was certainly a distinctive practice but it was also distinctive in being very open to drawing from that around it for content, and for acting in craft ways rather than industrial ways, individual ways rather than professional group ways, using the most commonplace of modern mediums – the written word. Creative writing was simply too popular, too familiar, and too accessible to benefit from the knowledge economies of the industrial age.

Even its end products were directed through relatively narrow gateways created between creative writer and her or his audience. Bookstores, television stations, film production and leisure software companies, and even more traditional routes such as theaters all worked on the basis of control of the outputs of creative writers, in creating industrial practices that made the openness of creative writing and its use of the familiar a strong point but weakened the ability of writer to reach reader or audience directly. The practice of creative writing therefore seemed to be represented in the mainstream of every society as something to do almost exclusively with its end results, not a representation of the practice itself. Its end results were chiefly only available through an industrial system that controlled how they would be delivered and – to a certain extent, through the specializing and professionalization of manufacture and distribution and of accepted critical opinion – how they would be received.

None of this is meant to suggest the situation by the latter decades of the last century was predominantly negative. In fact, the expansion of opportunities for creative writers was a direct result of an industrial complex that during the modern period saw in the products creative writers could produce profits, borne on the back of considerable popular interest, and supported by a cultural and educational ethos that valued the works of creative writers (or at least of some creative writers) at such a high level that prizes for works of creative writing multiplied in number and size of prize a hundredfold in the 20th Century alone. It is remarkable in that