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Escaping the tractor beam of literary theory: notes towards appropriate theories of creative writing - and some arguments against the inappropriate ones

Abstract
Calls for creative writing in universities to embrace literary theory are now common, and the adoption of some kind of creative writing theory is inevitable as the number of PhDs in the subject proliferate. In the face of this, the traditional hostility of creative writing teachers to theory of all kinds will not prevail. This paper argues against the co-opting of writer-hostile, reader-and-text literary theories designed by academic readers for academic readers, and suggests directions in which more appropriate, process-based theories might develop.

The call for creative writing to 'theorise' used to come entirely from within universities and from literary academics rather than writers. Now it comes from some writers in universities. What theories are they calling for, why, and are they the right ones?

First of all we need to note that there's an awful lot of 'theory' out there. If we confine ourselves to the ones that directly address literature, we have, for example, the various formalisms, Marxisms, Freudianisms, structuralisms, poststructuralisms, postmodernisms, feminisms, postcolonialisms, and queer theories. Then there are the theories opposed to theory such as neo-pragmatism and anti-foundationalism. Then there's 'post theory' and the retro theorists: for example the new aestheticists, neo-Leavisites, and the new formalists. We should also add neo-classicism, romanticism, realism, and modernism, because all of these can be discovered in contemporary creative writing practice; and beyond literary theory there's creativity theory, consciousness theory and so on, virtually ad infinitum . . .

Are we being called upon to take on board all 'theory' because it's simply *good* for you, like greens? And if it is, are we and our students expected to absorb it *en masse*, like whales sucking in plankton? Or are we being called upon to select, from some Marks and Spencer of the Mind, the pre-cooked theory that most appeals? But isn't that what we do anyway? Don't we always choose that old recipe, the meat-and-two-veg of creative writing: one part realism, one part romance and a big dollop of neo-classical craft-based formalism? But this is one reason some creative writing academics are calling for more and different 'theory': they either don't accept that 'Meat-and-Two-Veg' is a theory or, if they do, they think it's well past its sell-by date and very bad for us.

As it turns out, the majority of the callers for more theory think that what we need is more *literary critical* theory. For example, Hazel Smith: 'because critical theory is an important part of literary studies, it is extremely appropriate for it to be integrated into the teaching of creative writing' (Smith 2006: 25); and Amanda Boulter: 'by tackling the legacy of literary theory we may ... learn from its interrogation of texts and contexts' (Boulter 2004: 140).

Now, there is a problem here, because literary studies and creative writing are very distinct activities. The former is concerned with interpretation, the latter with creation. Or, if you like, writers produce, critics consume. As a result nearly all literary theory is consumption theory, focusing entirely on the relationship between reader and the text, with little or nothing to say about production. This is as true of Marxist theory - which one might assume to have more interest in production - as of any other. For example Pierre Macherey's *A Theory of Literary Production* (2006) speaks of the writing process only in the most general of terms, being mainly concerned to show how a writer's work unwittingly embodies ideological contradictions in history.

It is important, at this point, to note that reader-and-text theories began to evolve in the early twentieth century precisely when literary appreciation - reader work - was being professionalised in universities. For most of the previous century the dominant approaches to literature had been expressive and author-orientated. Reader-and-text theory gradually put paid to this in university English departments. There was, of course, nothing wrong with academic readers producing theories that sought to understand academic reading. Unfortunately their almost exclusive focus on the interpretation of finished texts produced neglect elsewhere. As the literary theorist Seán Burke put it:

> from the era of Eliot onwards, the dominant critical methodology in the Anglo-American tradition has turned away from the problems posed by authorship, or has turned toward them only occasionally, and only by way of the most drastically impoverished descriptions. ... Nor has any decisive or broad-based interest been shown in the project of authorial renewal. (Burke 1998: 187)

Since Burke first wrote this in 1992 (and partly because he wrote it) 'the Author' has once again become a subject of serious literary critical study (see Bennett 2005; Irwin 2002). However, you would be mistaken if you imagine that the critics involved in this field are interested in *you*, i.e. *the actual living writer who makes things up for audiences and readers*. 'The Author' in this case is merely a *concept*, an intellectual figment, whose invention permits academic readers to limit interpretive possibilities, without resorting to anything as theoretically vulgar as the study of the working lives and writing processes of actual living writers. The names invented by theorists of 'authorship' to avoid dealing with actually existing writers are helpfully listed and glossed by Andrew Bennett in his excellent survey of the field. Here they are (with their heads tucked underneath their arms): Apparitional Author, Phantasmic Author, Artificial Author, Author Construct, Author-Effect, Author Figure, Author Function, Created Author, Hypothetical Author, Implied Author, Postulated Author, Pseudo-Historical Author, and so on (Bennett 2005: 129).

But the most influential reader-and-text theories went much further than passive neglect or phantasmagoric projection. In the 1940s and 1950s, Wimsatt and Beardsley argued strenuously that a writer's statements and intentions were irrelevant to the understanding and evaluation of his work (Wimsatt & Beardsley 2001: 1371-87). These arguments left the academic reader in sole

control of textual meaning and value. Then, in the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s the claim was made by Stanley Fish, among others,[1] that authors were not the cause of their own texts and that reading is in fact writing or, as he put it, interpretation is 'text making':

> interpretive strategies ... give texts their shape, making them rather than, as it is usually assumed, arising from them. ... I write when reading ... the notions of the 'same' or 'different' texts are fictions. If I read *Lycidas* and *The Wasteland* differently (in fact I do not) it will not be because the formal structures of the two poems ... call forth different interpretive strategies but because my predisposition to execute different interpretative strategies will *produce* different formal structures. That is, the two poems are different because I have decided that they will be. (Fish 2001: 2085-86)

Here literary creativity itself becomes the property of the reader. Roland Barthes of course had already mythologized his version of this in his celebrated clarion call to the gathering hosts of militant academic readers: 'the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author' (Barthes 2001: 1470). The poet Les Murray spun it differently: 'those who say the author is dead usually have it in mind to rifle his wardrobe' (cited in Bennett 2005: 9). Murray was right, in the sense that nearly all literary theory written since the 1930s can be seen as, in effect, a sustained attempt by academic readers to usurp the role of writer.

Now, why did our colleagues across the corridor do this? Not out of conscious malevolence, of course. Several explanations have been offered: removing writers from the equation made undergraduate literature teaching easier at a time when numbers were increasing rapidly (Eagleton 1983: 50); it also purged English studies of the biographical 'gossip' that 'harder' disciplines hostile to English cited in evidence against it (Bennett 2005: 73). We might also consider the possibility that it helped suppress the irritating and perhaps barely conscious thought that literary criticism is a secondary activity, ultimately parasitic on the creativity of writers. If so, then poststructuralism no doubt spread so fast and so widely in English departments in the 1970s and 1980s because it injected some serious self-esteem, not to say hubris. Poststructuralism was narcotic: giving a vision of *text*, the very thing that literary academics knew more about than *anybody else*, as a kind of *God*. For did it not bring forth, into discursive existence, History, Law, Politics, Sex, Metaphysics, War, Science, Life, Love, the Universe and Everything?

So, when the playwright and creative writing teacher Michelene Wandor insists that writing students should 'study ... literary criticism and theory,' I worry (Wandor 2008: 221). And when Paul Dawson, creative writing academic and poet, suggests that 'what enables the writing workshop to function is not a theory of writing, but a theory of reading' (Dawson 2005: 88), I worry even more. Dawson argues that *reading* is actually the basis of the *writing* workshop 'because ... a student may, in principle, produce work in an unanalysable flash of inspiration, without conscious knowledge of the tools of composition and submit unchanged by suggestions provided in the workshop' (Dawson 2005: 88) but there are flaws in this argument. First, composing a whole, completed work in a 'flash of inspiration' simply doesn't happen. The most famous example of the total-inspiration genre is probably Coleridge's alleged composition in an 'inspired dream' of 'Kubla Khan': but even Coleridge's own account evidences relevant advance 'research', and literary scholarship has detected phrases from the poem written in letters well before he fell asleep (Fruman 1972: 334-50). Second, many 'flashes of inspiration' are perfectly

'analysable' in retrospect. This is because they are frequently the well-attested result of unconscious associations being worked over in immediate working memory.[2] The words produced are then bound together on the page by an interaction with previously absorbed compositional knowledge, of which the writer is not currently aware. There is nothing unusual in this process. It's more or less what we do when riding a bike. Such unconscious and semi-conscious creative processes have been retrieved, examined, studied and understood by both writers and creativity theorists; for example Stephen Spender (in Pfenninger and Shubik 2001: 115), and Mihaly Czikszentmihayli (1997: 107-127). Third, even if such processes could *never* be retrieved, why does the presence of one difficult-to-understand element in a production process invalidate the study and practise of all the other more conscious elements involved, and so confine us to reading as our basis?

The primary task of a writing student is not reading but writing. Critical reading is part of the writing process in both research and revision but it isn't the same kind of critical reading that a literature student or literary critic does. The text writers read most of all is their own text. We read it over and over again as we revise, constantly changing it in order to make it better. And when we read other fictional works, as writers, we read them as de facto instruction manuals for technique, style, structure and thematic possibility. When literary academics and their students read works of fiction, these works are not their own, nor is it their task to change and improve them but rather to describe, analyse and re-interpret; and they certainly don't look to novels, poems or plays for tips on how to write better essays or papers. Ergo: writers need to read differently from literary critics. Reading for writing is not to be confused with the literary critical variety. One example: literary critic Richard Gilman suggests that, in *Three Sisters*, Chekhov abandoned 'the usual linear development of a play' and instead 'worked toward the filling in of a dramatic field' (Gilman 2002: ix). If this were the case we would find it difficult to learn from Chekhov how to write minimalist dramas of ordinary life; for how does one teach, or learn, how to 'fill in a dramatic field'?

Fortunately Chekhov doesn't fill in a field; he writes a play.

What actually *happens* in *Three Sisters* is this: an apparently weak, selfish woman marries the sisters' beloved brother, who then becomes a wastrel and a gambler. This woman gradually takes over the family house, forces two of the sisters out of the house and has an affair with her husband's boss. Sister Irene gives up her dream of going to Moscow in order to marry the manager of a brick works, who is then killed in a duel by a thwarted admirer of Irene. Sister Masha has an affair with an army officer who is unhappily married to a madwoman. Then, when her lover leaves town, Masha finds out that her boring husband knew about the affair all along. Also there's a major conflagration at the beginning of an Act. These events all occur in regular time-sequence rather than back-to-front, at random or in flashback. Chekhov doesn't in fact 'abandon the usual linear development of a play'. He merely gives the *illusion* of this by locating a lot of his melodramatic and entirely linear stories off-stage or telling them 'on the cut' (i.e. in this case between acts), as any experienced scriptwriter would note.

This observation might be useful to a student scriptwriter wanting to learn how to portray the dullness of ordinary life while not actually being dull. Gilman's analysis is, by contrast, useless to a writer because, as a literary reader, he characteristically reads the effects of text rather than its causes. By promoting literary-critical reading to their writing students both Dawson and Wandor risk teaching them exactly the wrong skills.

Paradoxically, the call for literary theory can seem more persuasive when actually promoted as a tool for improving practical writing skills. Amanda Boulter claims that theory can 'inspire a writer and enhance their [sic] writing' (Boulter 2005: 40). She argues, for example, that a study of Bakhtin's theory of the 'dialogic' and 'heteroglossic' nature of fiction can help novelists escape from the anxiety of 'finding their own voice'. She also toys with the idea that grappling with Vladimir Propp's 31 'functions of narrative' may help us come up with better storylines.

I agree that new novelists have to learn that 'self-expression' simply isn't the point. They also need to lose the strange notion that they have a single voice that can be found down the back of some mental sofa. And both novelist and scriptwriter clearly need to learn how to plot. Furthermore I have absolutely no doubt that literary theory can be used to achieve this. There is plenty of anecdotal evidence. Justine Ettler, for example, testifies to poststructuralism getting her 'out of the very adolescent writing down of "feeling"' and self-expression (cited Sved 2005).

My question is simply whether applying literary theory to a task for which it was not designed (i.e. improving creative writing practice) is the best, most efficient way of accomplishing that task? One may, for example, use a bathtub for a boat but, generally speaking, boats float better. In much the same way, formal skills and insights will be gained more quickly and directly by reading novels, plays and poems, as writers, using the existing Meat-and-Two-Veg Theory-Lite. *Writing as experiment?* Read Robbe-Grillet, Gertrude Stein, or Laurence Sterne. *Writing isn't simple self-expression but the use of many different voices?* Try Joyce, or Woolf, or Dickens. *Plotting?* Analyse Wilkie Collins, or Agatha Christie. Using Propp or Bakhtin is like trying to work out why a bus is late using chaos theory rather than your mobile. And it ultimately serves literary theory more than writers, as Hazel Smith tacitly admits: 'In fact the practice of writing is a way of revitalising these theories' (Smith 2008: 26). This may be true, but why should it be the job of a writing teacher to 'revitalise' theories designed not for writers but for academic readers? And if these theories were so efficacious in literary studies why do they need 'revitalising' at all?

There is something very odd about all this, and it can certainly produce odd results. At the 2008 AAWP conference in Sydney I watched a bright young CW academic explain how he demonstrated to creative writing students that understanding the Derridean 'aporia' can help their writing (Lobb 2008). The exercise seemed like it might be astonishingly entertaining, considering the semantically-challenged nature of the subject,[3] but there is just one problem. A writer cannot consciously write an aporia into his or her writing because, by definition, a Derridean aporia is *that of which a writer is not aware*.[4] Thus, if these writing students did eventually understand the concept, they could never, by definition, apply that understanding in their writing. And so precious creative writing teaching-time is wasted in favour of trying logically to explicate one of the most abstruse, obtuse, and impenetrable of literary theories; and one, moreover, which suggests that logic itself is a mere function of the mysterious 'trace' and its equally mysterious 'supplement'[5]. Pedagogic absurdities are liable to occur whenever enthusiastic writing teachers are tasked to force-feed literary theory to writing students.

But there is a much more fundamental problem. The clutch of theories we are being asked to apply to practical writing problems don't accept that such problems exist. For example, when Smith asks in a paper, 'what type of theory is useful to aspirant writers?' she notes that 'a wide range of literary and cultural theory is important' but, tellingly, in her section entitled 'from practice to

theory', emphasises 'the literary theory spawned from semiotics and structuralism … [that] still forms one of the backbones of literary studies' (Smith 2006: 26). That is to say: poststructuralism and its manifestations within feminist, postcolonial and cultural theory, up to and including postmodernism, to which it helped give birth. This focus is not surprising because, rightly or wrongly, poststructuralism became synonymous with literary theory and for many still is, so when 'theory' is called for, that is what is frequently meant. The problem however is that poststructuralism puts severe obstacles in the way of anyone wanting to bring it to creative writing. Amanda Boulter spots a big one herself but then fails to avoid it:

> I would say that theory might help [writers] ... find their voice, if it were not for the fact that the idea of a writer's individual voice might itself be problematised by theorists who see novel writing ... as a ventriloquist's act: a bringing together of many voices. (Boulter 2005: 41)

Exactly. Derrida would have seen the term 'voice' as nakedly 'logocentric' and thus an example of the world historical 'privileging' of speech over writing which, for him, was the root of all philosophical evil. Out of logocentrism springs not just the illusory writer's voice but also the illusion of personal 'presence', out of which, in turn, springs The Self, the Individual, Society, History, Metaphysics, Reason, Logic and - well, just about *everything* constituting what we think of as 'reality'.[6] Similarly, Roland Barthes would surely have taken exception to Boulter's frequent and positive use of the word 'individual' since he considered that:

> Linguistically, the author is never more than the instance writing, just as I is nothing other than the instance saying I: language knows a 'subject', not a 'person', and this subject, empty outside of the very enunciation which defines it, suffices to make language 'hold together'. (Barthes 2001: 1467)

Thus, 'individual' 'authors' are quite as epiphenomenal and illusory in writing as their so-called 'voice'. And when Boulter writes, 'without a sense of human value ... there is no fiction' (Boulter 2007: 60) Foucault turns in his grave. For Foucault, 'Man' - in the oldfashioned, sexist sense of 'mankind' or 'humanity' - 'is an invention of recent date' and for him 'human values' are thus merely the pretence that bourgeois values are universal (Foucault 1974: 386). In short, to put poststructuralist theory in the service of the individual writer, human values and the eternal search for any kind of 'voice' simply doesn't make sense.

This yoking-together of philosophical incompatibles is a notable feature of the current call for creative writing theory. In his *Pedagogical Philosophy for Creative Writing*, Nigel McLoughlin accepts the central poststructuralist notion that 'Reality is constructed ... from language', and goes on to assert that the fictional world is 'constructed by its author' (McLoughlin 2006: 37-42). The only problem is that if reality itself is constructed from language, it must follow that writers, being part of 'reality', can't 'construct' anything - in the sense of wilfully making and shaping - because they themselves are but linguistic constructs, as Lacan carefully explained, albeit at length and impenetrably (Lacan 2001: 1285-90). I shall use a more user-friendly summary of his views:

> Personal identity is itself the effect of a certain temporal unification of past and future with one's present and ... such active unification is itself a function of language, or better still of the sentence. (Jameson 1991: 27)

To conceive of constructing anything - be it a personality or a poem - requires at least some conception of individual autonomy and free will but in, for example, Derridean poststructuralism both of these can only be the illusory symptoms of equally illusory 'metaphysical' discourse, which is itself a mere epiphenomenon of the ultimately unfathomable linguistic *différance* or *trace* that he alleges exists between one word and another without 'origin' or ultimately determinable meaning.

Rob Pope, in his learned survey of creativity, also agrees with Derrida that 'language is composed of an interplay of differences ... so an encounter with an absolute sense is ultimately deferred' (Pope 2005: 34), but in his introduction he lays out his aim 'to recognise that "being creative" is ... (at least potentially) the natural and normal state of anyone healthy' (Pope 2005: xvi). The problem here is that when 'absolute sense' is 'ultimately deferred' there can be no 'nature', no 'natural' and no 'creativity' because these terms make claim to an 'absolute' transcendent 'sense' that the 'interplay of difference' explicitly excludes. Like Boulter, Pope seems to be aware of these contradictions, but unlike her seems remarkably untroubled by them:

> it can never simply be a matter of making a choice between say 'language' and 'intertextuality' on the one hand and 'the author' and the 'autonomous subject' on the other. Depending upon the precise context or use, the one may virtually stand in for the other or, alternatively, mean something entirely different. (Pope 2005: 99)

A claim very close to Humpty Dumpty's: 'when I use a word ... it means just what I choose it to mean - neither more nor less'.

Paul Dawson wholeheartedly approves this 'pick and mix' method of theorising. For him, creative writing is the 'exemplary discipline of the post-theory academy' precisely *because* 'it has cherry-picked from an eclectic range of theories' (Dawson 2008). From the above examples, it clearly has. But if 'cherry-picking' includes meat, custard, ice cream and little bits of pastry, as well as cherries, one ends up not with a fruit salad, but a philosophically indigestible dog's dinner.

The more one thinks about it, the odder the poststructuralist family seems as adoptive theory of choice for creative writers. Not only was it at odds with the idea that writers control the meaning and significance of their writing, it also cast doubt on the very possibility of a 'work,' a 'reader,' valid interpretation, and of significance and meaning itself (Abrams 1988; Miller 1988: 264-78). This is one reason the short-lived Age of Theory gave way to the so-called post-theory period in literary studies, and why many literary academics are now deeply suspicious of what used to be called 'Theory'. I offer one example. 'My impression,' writes Robert Miles, Professor of English at the University of Victoria, Canada:

> is that not only have I lost interest in theory lately but so has just about everyone else. Theory has run into the ground ... our colleagues ... don't get het up about writers being in control of their own intentions ... No, the real problem is literary value because literary theory does not engage with this question, broadly taking the view that it's all just ideology ... and, if they do engage, it's in such a tortured self-conscious and indeed apologetic fashion that it is unreadable. (Miles 2009)

So, why, when literary academics have arguably moved on, are creative writing academics asking us to embrace this epistemological nihilism, and its close relative postmodernism which, in Patricia Waugh's typification, is 'a mood arising out of a sense of the collapse of all those foundations of modern thought which seemed to guarantee a reasonably stable sense of Truth, Knowledge, Self and Value' (Waugh 2001: 345).

One crucial reason for the continuing attraction of these ideologies in the academy is probably their long-term association with progressivism, political radicalism and / or the 'oppositional'. This association has been consistently attractive to academics rationally dissatisfied with the status quo, and who wish to link what they do at work with some larger more radical purpose or endeavour. But the link is questionable.

For example, Marcelle Freiman calls for a postcolonial approach to creative writing in order to counter 'Eurocentric ... narratives of progress and causal connections'. To this end she asserts 'the ongoing necessity' in workshops 'to promote and assert local and other identities within the dominating global cultures' (Freiman 2006: 87, 89). In this the commitment to diversity seems clearly progressive, and lays gainsayers open to the charge of being in favour of the 'dominating global culture'.

It is, however, possible to be opposed to the 'dominating global culture' and still question the rather simple equation: *asserting local identity = diversity = good* (or indeed the implication that all 'European histories' have been narratives of progress, and that making causal connections is somehow suspect). For example, the assertion of local Serbian 'identity' resulted in the bloody and brutal siege of Sarajevo between 1992 and 1996, and 'local identities' all over the world are all-too-often defined in opposition to the immigrant 'other'. Meanwhile the dominating global culture' - i.e. multinational capital - is often very much *in favour* of the immigrant 'other' because s/he provides cheap labour. This undermines the efforts of poorly paid indigenous workers to raise wages, which can then provoke them to 'assert their local identity' in ways that can be virulently racist. The implication that all assertions of local identity are ipso facto *good* ignores this crucial complication.

The writings of those who call for theory in creative writing often make such ambiguous and problematic claims on the 'progressive' or 'oppositional'. David Hawkes argues that this has been 'one of postmodernism's most subtle manoeuvres':

> The humanities departments of Western Universities ring with denunciations of the dominant, or 'hegemonic' culture, and postmodernism allies itself firmly with the 'oppositional' and the 'counter culture' ... we are asked, in rigorously suggestive terms, to applaud the 'free play' of 'difference', and eschew the rigidities of philosophies that 'totalize' ... although the details are left suspiciously vague, there is a sense across the intellectual spectrum that postmodernism is a radical, subversive and oppositional mode of thought. (Hawkes 2003: 11)

Arguably, this association with political radicalism originated in France in the mid-1960s. Marxism was influential, revolution was in the air and Foucault, Derrida and Barthes used its rhetoric in their seminal works of this period. Thus for Barthes, the author, an essentially bourgeois creation, held 'tyrannical' sway over 'ordinary culture' (Barthes 2001: 1466). For Foucault - who studied under Althusser, and was briefly a member of the Communist party - the de-centring

of the author might produce the 'liberation' of the reader. Even then this rhetoric sat oddly with what were, in essence, linguistic or textual relativisms. The critical moment, according to Terry Eagleton, came when the May 1968 revolution failed in France and capital re-asserted its power in the state. As he explains it:

> Unable to break the structures of state power, post-structuralism found it possible instead to subvert the structure of language. Nobody, at least, was likely to beat you over the head for doing so. The student movement was flushed off the streets and driven underground into discourse. Its enemies, as for the later Barthes, became coherent belief systems of any kind ... conceptual meaning itself ... was feared as repressive. (Eagleton 1983: 142)

But some of the most influential works of Derrida and Foucault were published in 1967.[7] The failure of the 1968 French revolution cannot have lifted the authors' mood, but these works were *already*, at their epistemological core, fundamentally *negative*: a point well understood by Derrida's friend, the deconstructionist Paul de Man. He found it a cause for celebration that language 'can no longer be said to be determined by considerations of truth and falsehood, good and evil, beauty and ugliness, or pleasure and pain' and affirmed that 'Literature involves the voiding, rather than the affirmation, of aesthetic categories' (de Man 1988: 362).[8]

This negativity, not to say nihilism, did not, however, stop progressive English-speaking lecturers from using the philosophy as the intellectual basis for their own academic revolutions.[9] Its destructive power was undeniable. It could blow apart any thought or value system. The opposing literary canon was exploded first, then the fortress of literature itself. Feminists used it to deconstruct patriarchy, and postcolonialists to topple the linguistic frauds of empire. But the revolutionary work of deconstruction continued and, like all revolutions, soon started to eat its own. So, when the poststructuralist-Lacanian-feminist Julia Kristeva demolished the idea that the feminine, like the self and the individual, had an essential biological or psychic existence, claiming that it could in fact be manifested by *men*, other feminists pointed out the basic problem with such positions:

> to accept the arguments of a strong postmodernism is to raise uncertainty about the existence of a specifically female subject and inevitably, therefore, about the very possibility of political agency for women ... as a political practice, surely feminism must continue to posit some belief in the notion of effective human agency, the necessity for historical continuity in formulating identity and a belief in some kind of historical progress. (Waugh 2001: 347)

Patricia Waugh then goes on to point out that 'strong' postmodern critiques, for example, those of Lyotard:

> seem to entail the view that feminism has no more legitimacy than any other political language game. Within the terms of 'strong' postmodernism one could not even make an unconditional claim that it is wrong to oppress women. (Waugh 2001: 349)

Much the same point could be made with reference to the oppression of poor people, children or, indeed, anyone.

The drive within poststructuralism to deconstruct *everything*, including itself, poses a serious problem for anyone wanting to use it as a basis for radical action, or any kind of evaluation. For:

> if meaning ... was a passing product of words or signifiers ... did it make sense to claim that one interpretation of reality, history, or the literary text was 'better' than another? (Eagleton 1983: 133-44)

For example: once the values of neocolonialism and patriarchy have been deconstructed, what reason is there to give them up? Neocolonialism and patriarchy are plainly *unfair*, *unequal* and therefore *bad* but such moral judgements rely on the 'metaphysical', 'universalising', 'totalising' and/or 'humanist' values that poststructuralism deconstructs and postmodernism rejects. Academic subjects seeking to ground their epistemology in such thought systems cannot, in consistency, support value of any kind: political, moral or aesthetic (surely a debilitating obstacle to its use in creative writing, where every word has to be evaluated in order to earn its place in a work?). Which is why value always seems to have been illicitly smuggled into their thinking from elsewhere, like oranges to the Arctic.

The adherents of poststructuralism, and then postmodernism, generally ignore the presence of this mammoth in their philosophical toolshed. For example, when Anthony Easthope attacked 'value' in literary studies because it 'lends almost supernatural justification to ... controlling definitions of class, gender, nation and empire' (Easthope 1991: 44), his very attack is a *value* judgement. Is Easthope therefore lending 'almost supernatural justification' to his own controlling definitions? Or, is he, epistemologically-speaking, like the legendary Cretan who said all Cretans are liars?

When a thinker deeply indebted to poststructuralism does, with a certain courage, confront a profound issue of moral value, and tries to remain consistent within his own textually relativist premises, he exposes a disturbing moral bankruptcy. The psychologist and social constructionist, Kenneth Gergen, notes that 'there are multiple stories' about the Holocaust 'each felicitous within its own community of intelligibility' (Gergen 2005: 117). One of these 'stories', of course, says that the Holocaust didn't happen. In the face of this particular 'story' Gergen cannot point to the overwhelming evidence that it *did* happen because 'each history will inevitably select "the facts" necessary to sustain its existence as an intelligible story' and so 'there is, in this sense, no impartial history, no story which transcends community, context, and discursive tradition' and therefore 'the quest for the *truly true* of the Holocaust can never achieve satisfactory closure' (Gergen 2005: 117; emphasis added). Textualist relativism forces Gergen to place - in effect - the palpable lies of neo-Nazi holocaust-deniers on the same level as the testimonies of Primo Levi, hundreds of thousands of other survivors and witnesses, and the work of countless painstaking historians like Martin Gilbert (1987). And yet it is not a question here of some impossible 'transcendental' and strangely naive idea of a '*truly true*' but rather of the massive accumulation of evidence that places an event beyond all reasonable doubt. One need not subscribe to an absolute metaphysic of truth or morality to know that some things are more liable to be the case than others, and that some things are very bad indeed. There is something askew here, morally, epistemologically and politically.

And yet, the myth of progressivism persists. For example, when Paul Dawson suggests that 'teachers of writing' participate 'in the politics of oppositional criticism characteristic of contemporary literary and cultural studies' (Dawson 2008), nowhere in his magnum opus, *Creative Writing and the New*

Humanities, does he make it clear how 'oppositionalism' is morally, politically or epistemologically consistent with the textually relativist theories with which he wants creative writing to engage. And when Rob Pope associates his own eclectic postmodernism with 'radical democracy' (Pope 2005: 10), it's difficult to know what he means because 'radical democracy' could be anything from anarcho-syndicalism to the plebiscitary dictatorship of Napoleon III; and as we have seen, it is hard to see what criteria his postmodernism could justify using to choose between these, or any other, alternatives.

Such postmodern claims to progressive or 'oppositional' radicalism can be, at best, gestures. At worst they are unwittingly aligned with the very forces they claim to oppose. The relationship between postmodernism and modern capitalism has been strenuously argued by Marxist thinkers and critics for decades (see Jameson 1991, 1988; Eagleton 1983, 1988): 'with the complete triumph of the market in our own time, the most valuable commodities traded are not things at all, but ideas, images and brands' (Hawkes 2003: 10).

In this analysis, the postmodern idea (absorbed from poststructuralism) that signs and representations determine 'reality' or, indeed, are reality is symbiotic with the desire of corporate advertising campaigns to equate 'identity', 'values', 'morality' and 'revolution' with the empty but very purchasable signifier known as 'lifestyle'. Hawkes concludes that 'Postmodernism is nothing more than the ideology of consumer capitalism' (Hawkes 2003: 10). Frederic Jameson came to an aligned conclusion even earlier: 'what we have been calling Postmodernism ... has genuine historical (and socio-economic) reality as a third great expansion of capitalism around the globe' (Jameson 1991: 49). One does not have to be a Marxist to take, or make, these points. Management consultant Fiona Czerniawska, for example, advises executives that 'language allows us to create an alternative reality' and is thus 'a truly competitive weapon in practical business' (Czerniawska 1997: 12).

One of the main routes along which postmodernism travels into corporate capital begins in universities. Graduates are recruited into advertising, media, marketing and publicity departments from humanities faculties in which they learnt to understand that 'truth' was a 'universalising' bourgeois lie, to suspect evidence as superannuated empiricism and to consider that 'discourse' determines reality rather than (at least partly) the other way round. From Richard Rorty's idea that 'the way to understand and change our world is through the artificial mutation and manipulation of vocabularies' (Rorty 1989: 94), it is a small step to changing the world of consumers, by *mutating* and *manipulating* their *purchasing vocabulary*, to the greater profit of one's corporate employer. For, after all, if values are merely functions of discourse, one discourse can be no worse, or better, than another, and in the absence of any other permissible value, a corporate pay cheque substitutes very adequately.

This may not be a comfortable argument for some humanities departments but it surely has a force that requires consideration by creative writing teachers, because we train *writers* who, above all, need to report back to society the truth as they see it, and to be able to weigh in their work, and in the world, what is good and what is bad. Do we want to give them a training that fits so snugly into the ideology of the spindoctor?

I am not suggesting that Paul Dawson, Anthony Easthope, Rob Pope or anybody else advocating this kind of literary theory is a closet neo-con, or anything like it. Ideology, as Althusser pointed out 'is a "representation" of the Imaginary Relationship of Individuals to their Real conditions of existence' (Althusser 1977: 162). One may, like the butler in Kazuo Ishiguru's novel

Remains of the Day, think oneself on the side of the angels in one decade and then, as history changes, realise in the next that one has unwittingly acquired very different allies. The trick is to recognise what has happened, and rethink.

Creative writing theory of some kind is inevitable partly because, as Nigel Krauth and Tess Brady point out, the activity of universities is 'perennially to theorise about knowledge,' and also because the number of creative writing PhDs increase year by year (Krauth & Brady 2006: 14). As a result the PhD has already become the qualification of choice for employment in many writing departments. In these, PhDs will be promoted faster, head up courses more quickly and then export their theoretical emphases into the curriculum. According to Paul Dawson, this has already happened: 'a new generation of teachers who perceive themselves as writers and critics has productively engaged with theory to investigate their practices and transform their knowledge base'. This is because they have been 'exposed to what John Guillory calls "the canon of Theory" in the graduate school curriculum' (Dawson 2008). Dawson thinks this has already effected a radical ideological transformation in university creative writing. As he noted in an earlier essay: 'whereas *the authority of writers* in previous centuries relied upon their professional standing as writers, today, in the academy at least, it *relies upon their capacity to adopt the language of contemporary theory*' (Dawson 2006: 22; emphasis added).

Just now, this is probably wishful thinking. An impressive track record of writing success outside the university can still trump the PhD at many, if not most, appointment panels, everything else being equal. Thus, it would seem, there is still 'authority' to be had from being a writer in the world outside. In the long run, however, there is little doubt that Dawson has his finger on the academic pulse; and so creative writing will, whether you like it or not, be theorised by PhDs who, for example, may have been mud-wrestling Derrida when they could have been exploring thinkers with something more useful to say about writing.[10]

And when this happens it will be no use claiming that you don't have a theory. All practice implies theory, so if you think you haven't got one, it just means that you don't know what it is. Best find out quickly and see if it holds up, because it is a truth universally acknowledged that those who cannot defend or clarify their own theories will soon find themselves teaching someone else's.

So, what theories *should* university creative writers adopt or invent?

First we need an acceptable definition of what keeps being called 'theory' despite the fact that there seems to be no agreed definition among those calling for it. At one end of the spectrum Amanda Boulter suggests that theory is 'everything that reflects on or analyses the processes of writing' (Boulter 2005: 40). This liberal definition includes writers reflecting 'on their own and other's work', How-to-Write-books that 'often cite themselves against any notion of "theory"', as well as literary criticism and cultural theory (Boulter 2005: 41). At the other end of the scale is Michelene Wandor's preferred definition (Wandor 2009: 86) taken from Jonathon Culler's in his *Very Short Introduction to Literary Theory*:

> 1. Theory is interdisciplinary - discourse with effects outside an original discipline
> 2. Theory is analytical and speculative - an attempt to work out what is involved in what we call sex or language or writing or meaning or the subject
> 3. Theory is a critique of common sense, of concepts taken as

> natural
> 4. Theory is ... thinking about thinking, enquiry into the categories we use in making sense of things in literature and other discursive practices.[11]

This highly exclusive definition removes from consideration nearly all How-To Books and a lot of the great tradition of writerly poetics from Horace to Kundera. Could, for example, Wordsworth's massively influential and still pertinent Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* be considered a critique 'of concepts taken as natural' when the concept of nature lies behind both his associative epistemology and his descriptions of the relationship between the poet and the external world? So, whereas the tendency in Boulter is to define nearly *everything* literary as theory, the Wandor/Culler definition tends - unsurprisingly, since this is a definition of *literary critical* theory - to leave creative writing entirely in the hands of thinkers who were not creative writers and who saw it as a symptom of something else; as for example in Marxism, Freudianism and poststructuralism.

I would try to avoid both these problems and substitute for the much-abused (and ill-defined) word 'theory' the notion of '*systematic generalisations that can be rejected or modified if found to be internally inconsistent or based on inadequate evidence*'. This excludes unsystematic 'reflections' (except as evidence) but includes all the usual 'named' theories and most of what writers have to say about their own work.

So, what should we be generalising about? Camilla Nelson suggests that 'one of the key differences between creative writing and other disciplines ... is the premium it places on process' (Nelson 2008). I agree. The primary activity of writers is writing, and therefore the writing process should be the principal object of our analyses, generalisations and research. So we now need a definition of that process as it relates to creative production in general.

But first, a suggested orientation:

> *Writing is directed toward the world not just universities.*

The idea that creative writing should orientate towards the world (out *there* or within the vast inner world of the human psyche) might seem so obvious as not to be worth stating; except that one side-effect of the academic institutionalisation of creative writing can be a certain narrowing of vision. Paul Dawson exemplifies this in his 2007 essay entitled 'The Future of Creative Writing' (Dawson 2007: 78-90) in which no creative writing outside universities is mentioned. This perspective also explains a desire to dissolve 'unproductive distinctions between first-order (creative) and second-order (critical) texts' -- a distinction that is only 'unproductive' if one identifies more with the critical than the creative and resents the unavoidable precedence of the latter over the former (Dawson 2008). It is self-evident that without creative work to watch or read there would be nothing to criticise in the first place. There is a tendency, in Paul Dawson's scholarly arguments, for the great world to shrink to the size of a campus.

The tentative definition:

> *Writing is part of a wider creative process. In this process writing can be individual, collaborative, or both and can incorporate contributions from 'non-writers'. The writing process, in the widest sense, is everything that happens to a work before it is 'finished'.*[12] *This would include thinking, researching, planning, writing drafts, consciously revising,*

> *consciously manipulating the unconscious and being unconsciously driven by it. The study of writing is thus the study of a process, of a constantly moving and changing object, not a fixed field or 'text'.*

There is, of course, no single definition that can adequately contain all the different processes in creative writing from screenplay to lyric poetry. In theatre, for example, writing is only one part of a larger creative endeavour that includes rehearsals, the production and all its repetitions, because audience response changes the way actors play the text next time. In the novel it includes comments that cause writers to change a draft, and reviews that cause them to change future editions of the same work or future work. This is to be distinguished, however, from the claims in literary theory that all readers write. All readers interpret, but only the interpretations of some readers actively change what a writer writes. The notion of the reader essentially 'writing' relies on a redefinition of the two terms that dissolves the essential differences between them; a process by which anything can always be said to be *really* anything else. For example: I might decide that eating is *really* cooking and, as long as the rest of my 'discourse community' agree, the redefinition will hold. It's just that, given the *actual* differences, if we really believe that eating food *cooks* it, and act upon the belief, then we will probably have to resign ourselves to a raw cold diet, and periodic intestinal disorders.

History, culture and 'discourse' are also relevant to creative writing research because composition is profoundly influenced by them. Finally, many of these elements are present simultaneously at a lot of stages in a process that is both linear and recursive.

If we are to escape from the tractor beam of inappropriate literary theory we have to make a radical conceptual break with it. This cannot be stressed enough. As Camilla Nelson puts it, 'we need to move towards a 'productive, post-critical, research vocabulary', which means that 'instead of mining the text for meanings' we 'follow and analyse the experience of the writer writing' (Nelson 2008). I would add that we also need to reject the conventional wisdoms and implausible radicalism of many of those still calling upon us to adopt literary theory.

For example, we need to look again at the much-maligned individual 'subject'. It is still almost automatic for literary theorists and their fellow travellers in creative writing to intimate that 'individuality' is, crudely, a capitalist plot although perhaps rarely in so overwrought a manner as Morton and Zavarzadeh's assault on the writing workshop:

> The main cultural purpose of the dominant fiction workshop in the present pedagogical regime is in fact to teach the student how to discover the 'self', and the cultural politics of this self-discovery ... is to construct a subject who perceives herself as self-constituted and free so that she can then 'freely' collaborate with the existing social system, a collaboration that assures the continuation of patriarchal capitalism. (Morton & Zavarzadeh 1988-1989: 161)

But patriarchal capitalism has moved on. And it appears now that it may be Morton and Zavarzadeh who have become the unwitting 'collaborators'. Global capital is now much more comfortable with an individual who is 'dispersed, decentred ... the ephemeral function of this or that act of consumption' (Eagleton 1988: 396) - in other words: the classic poststructuralist 'subject'. But in any case the individual was never *just* the function of nineteenth-century

ideology nor was she ever purely bourgeois, as ancient literature and history plentifully evidences; and as any individual who grew up in a working class family can testify. As Terry Eagleton puts it:

> … the bourgeois humanist subject is not simply part of a clapped-out history we can all agreeably or reluctantly leave behind: if it is an increasingly inappropriate model at certain levels of subjecthood, it remains a potently relevant one at others. (Eagleton 1988: 396)

One of these 'levels' is creative writing. The literary theoretical assaults on the 'individual subject' effectively deny free will to the writer and concede all power to history, society, the subconscious or 'text'. But it is impossible to teach, or consciously acquire, writing skills unless we hypothesise that writers have a degree of autonomy. It is impossible to imagine most human activities *per se* unless we so hypothesise.

The individual writer is not, of course, completely 'autonomous'. Social, political, textual and unconscious psychological forces play a well-attested role in the writing process, and therefore should be studied. For example, we should look again at writers and the unconscious. Romantic 'Inspiration' was completely sidelined in literary theory so that 'between 1940 and 1997 there was no major study of "inspiration" by literary academics' (Bennett 2005: 80). This neglect was caused in part by the inaccurate identification of Romantic Inspirationalism with the rise of capital and the 'bourgeois individual'. But the radical opposition of the young Wordsworth, Coleridge, and especially Shelley, to the symptoms of that rise, invalidates this.[13] All three were fascinated by the role of unconscious forces in composition, and 'theorised' interestingly about it.[14] If we are to understand the role of 'inspiration' in our own processes we need to treat the poetics of writers with renewed respect, and not merely as symptoms of something else.

We also need to re-evaluate an approach that is central both to our writing process and our teaching. When we learn and teach literary techniques we use comparisons between writers from very different historical periods. We are thus charged with 'formalism', which means, if it means anything, that we are ignoring history and so falsely 'universalise' the contingent.

While it is perfectly true that bad 'formalist' practice in creative writing *can* ignore history, the 'good' variety doesn't, and shouldn't. One example will have to serve: dramatic silence can be understood and taught *now* with reference to Aeschylus *then*. In *The Agamemnon*, the King returns from the wars and greets his wife, while his Trojan mistress, Cassandra, stands silently in a chariot for a whole act. Cassandra's silence is more dramatic than any words. But this only works for Aeschylus because his audience knew its Homer and therefore Cassandra. A contemporary writer dramatising the same material would have to set up that silence very differently. Observing this leads to discussion of what an ancient Greek playwright could rely on his audience to know, and to a discussion of the audience itself, which requires consideration of Athenian history and culture, its highly evolved but male-only democracy, and its reliance on slavery and a housebound female underclass. If you are fond of 'isms' you may wish to refer to this practise as 'historical formalism' in order to differentiate it from the 'bad' kind.

Once we have escaped the dazzling tractor beam of inappropriate literary theory, and focused clearly on the writing process now and in history, wide fields of study open up before us. Many have already been cleared by literary scholars working on areas once marginalised in the academy by the dominance

of anti-authorial theory - for example: literary biography; attribution studies; the work done by *all* literary critics when they edit texts and track the changes from one draft to another. The social, psychological and technological *differences* in historical writing practices are also, of course, significant, as well as the similarities, and could form the basis of legitimate creative writing research (see Larson 1986). Most important of all would be the return to centre stage, through its study in creative writing, of literary aesthetics - *poetics* - because it is arguably the one indispensible part of our writing process.

This list is not intended to be exhaustive nor this paper to be in any way the last word. The struggle to define the role of creative writing in universities continues and, at most, this paper aspires to be part of the discussion: urging us to keep looking outwards to the world, and at the same time back to a tradition of 'theory' among writers that existed long before literary appreciation was professionalised in universities and made textual *interpretation* and the *academic reader* the lopsided axis upon which the academic literary world wobbled.

Which suggests one final point:

In our future theorising, we should not, in reaction, minimise the role of the reader, as literary theory has consistently minimised the role of the writer. Readers who comment directly to writers are part of the writing process but readers anticipated, or imagined, or unconsciously assumed by writers also affect it, as Amanda Boulter valuably notes (Boulter 2007: 73).

If you are still beguiled by poststructuralism, you may enjoy categorising the various types of readers that writers imagine or anticipate as they write; just as literary theorists of 'authorship' categorise the 'imaginary' author. Thus you might conceive of the 'Apparitional Reader', 'the Artificial Reader', the 'Reader Construct' and so on. But please don't announce: 'the re-birth of the writer must be at the cost of the death of the reader' because we need to understand the entire system of production and reception, if we are to understand where writers fit into it. One useful starting point is the systems theory of creativity evolved by Mihaly Cziksentmihalyi. Unlike most literary theory, this allows a detailed role for the individual in creation, and takes production seriously, linking it to reception, interpretation and judgement. In this, writers create, singly or in groups with other artists, within the limits of a specific 'domain' of knowledge, which they can also change. The works they produce are then interpreted, judged and assessed by 'the field'. For creative writers, 'the field' includes the interpretations and responses of readers and audiences, newspaper reviewers, editors, directors and producers, who make their judgements by word of mouth or with keyboard, contract, commission, wallet, purse, channel changer, or feet. Creative Writing theory *might* even concern itself with literary theory, in so far as it is a small part of our 'field' that occasionally affects what we write, but otherwise, it's just not that important to it.

Notes

1. For example, Paul de Man writing in 1982: The contemporary theoretical scene 'is dominated by an increased stress on the reception rather than on the production of texts ... a direction which is already present, in the New Critical tradition of the forties and fifties' (de Man 1988: 368). return to text

2. For an explanation of this, and a lucid introduction to most other aspects of consciousness theory, see Blackmore 2004. For a convincing account of associative processes in language see Saussure 1972: 121-25. return to text

3. One example from many:

> what I call the erasure of concepts ought to mark the places of that future meditation. For example, the value of the transcendental arche ... must make its necessity felt before letting itself be erased. The concept of the arche-trace must comply with both that necessity and its erasure. It is in fact contradictory and not acceptable within the logic of identity. The trace is not only the disappearance of origin - within the discourse that we sustain and according to the path that we follow it means that the origin did not even disappear, that it was never constituted except reciprocally by non-origin. From then on, to wrench the concept of the trace from the classical scheme, which would derive it from a presence or from an originary non-trace, and which would make of it an empirical mark, one must indeed speak of an originary trace or arche trace. (Derrida 1997: 61)

I hope that clears things up. return to text

4. The *Oxford dictionary of literary terms* gives it thus: 'a final impasse or "paradox": a point at which a text's self-contradictory meanings can no longer be resolved, or at which the text undermines its own most fundamental presuppositions' (Baldick 2008: 22). return to text

5. For example: 'the graphic of supplementarity is irreducible to logic, primarily because it comprehends logic as one of its cases and may alone produce its origin' (Derrida 1997: 259). return to text

6. For example: '*différance* in its *active* movement ... is what not only precedes metaphysics but also extends beyond the thought of being. The latter speaks *nothing other than* metaphysics' (Derrida 1997: 143) . By 'metaphysics' Derrida means all thought which assumes it can ultimately mean anything or refer to anything; also the sense of a self or being, as in 'the metaphysics of presence' or 'onto-theology'. For a detailed demolition of relevant aspects of Derridism see Burke 1998. For Derrida discussing the 'exorbitance' of his method [i.e. the lack of evidence for his thesis] see Derrida 1997: 157-64. Derrida denied, on numerous occasions, that he really meant to suggest that there is no such thing as a world outside language. But if these statements were anything more than expressions of blind faith, they suggest that he thought there was a real, actual referent, which means that 'the signifier' might have a 'signified,' which in turn may have an object *out there*, in which case Derrida's poststructuralism pops. return to text

7. These include Foucault's *Les Mots et Les Choses* (Eng: *The Order of Things*), Derrida's *Writing and Difference* (one chapter of which had been given as a highly influential paper in Baltimore in 1966), and Barthes' 'Death of the Author', which had its first English publication in the US in 1967 (Rice and Waugh 2001: 175-77; Bennett 2005: 9). return to text

8. An interchange at a session of the US Modern Language Association in December 1976 between MH Abram (Abrams 1988: 265-77) and Hillis Miller (Miller 1988: 277-86) was balanced precisely on this issue of negativity as it related to literary criticism. Abrams saw it as deeply destructive, Miller as positive. return to text

9. The ways in which poststructuralism travelled from country to country varied. For example, in the UK young radical lecturers like Colin McCabe, Stephen Heath and Christopher Prendergast led the way both with a book called *Signs of the Times* (1971) and also with their packed lectures (some of which I attended). They soon provoked the opposition of their academic elders. When, in 1980, McCabe was refused tenure at Cambridge the furore made national news, and poststructuralism was thereafter associated with the forces of revolutionary progress pitted against fusty reaction. In the States an older and more political staid generation, with key figures at Yale - e.g. Hillis Miller and Paul de Man - took the baton from Derrida, and then passed it on to more politically radical students. return to text

10. This problem will be compounded if PhDs have been obtained in institutions that massively 'privilege' the critical over the creative. The length of the creative component in British PhDs (where it is now, as in Australia, the final 'exit qualification') can vary from 10,000 to 70,000 words with an overall cut-off point of 80,000. That means that it is possible to acquire a PhD having written something that is about the length of this paper or, in other words, a small fraction of a novel, or a short one-act play. Assuming the successful PhD candidate earned an MA beforehand, and noting that few MAs require students to finish a full length play or a novel, it will therefore be possible to advance in 'the discipline' as both researcher and teacher without ever

completing a significant piece of creative work, while being fully equipped (in theory) to theorise about it and inject your theories into any course you might run. See Butt (2009) for a less critical take on this phenomenon. return to text

11. Given in a published letter (Wandor 2009) responding to a review by this writer of her book *The author is not dead merely somewhere else*. return to text

12. The question 'when is a work finished?' is an interesting one. The seemingly easy answer is 'a work is only clearly finished when its writer is dead'. But of course that doesn't work with collaboratively written works as in, for example, the long running British soap *Coronation Street*, conceived and initially written by Tony Warren. If Warren were to die tomorrow there is little is doubt that his soap would continue to be written, as it has been for decades, not by him but by many other writers. The definition of what constitutes a finished work will therefore differ between and within forms. return to text

13. See Foot (1984) for an impassioned discussion of Shelley's revolutionary politics, and Holmes (1987) for a less partisan take. Meanwhile here is Wordsworth writing to Charles James Fox on 14 January 1801:

> the spreading of manufactures through every part of the country ... by workhouses, Houses of Industry ... superadded to the increasing disproportion between the price of labour and that of the necessaries of life, the bonds of domestic feeling among the poor, as far as the influence of these things has extended, have been weakened, and in innumerable instances entirely destroyed. (Wordsworth & Coleridge 2005: 31) return to text

14. In Wordsworth's Prefaces to the *Lyrical Ballads*, Shelley's 'Defence of Poetry' and Coleridge's *Biographica Literaria*, which provides a useful systematic antidote to his mythologizing account of the composition of 'Kubla Khan'. return to text

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