Macquarie University

Marcelle Freiman

Dangerous Dreaming: Myths of creativity

When creative writing encounters the academic institution a number of ideas about creativity enter the relationship. The discipline of creative writing is, at the very least, a site for the social interaction between writers, readers and texts, and while there are obvious differences between the creative writing done in the academy and the public reception of creative writing, assumptions brought to its learning and to its role as research bear some relationship to wider social as well as academic expectations of what writing and creativity is. This paper examines some of these assumptions, mainly in their interplay with teaching and learning. Students tend to bring their notions about creativity and writing to the study of the subject, a kind of 'dangerous dreaming' which involves a number of illusions about what they will do and what can be achieved.

This is also evident within the discipline. For example, there are assumptions about creativity that inform the preference in some institutions for limited intake into creative writing courses, which creates an elite cohort. This preference houses the tacit assumption that creative writing cannot be taught; that chosen students will simply develop their already-identified creative talent - an approach to creative writing that is somewhat outdated in the context of contemporary demands on educators. It helps to marginalize and isolate creative writing rather than reflecting its potential for learning and for expanding English studies (Freiman 2001). For example, the university where I teach, Macquarie University, was the first Australian university to introduce creative writing into its English department (Dawson 2001). In fact the university has, since its inception, presented itself as innovative and flexible in ethos and structure, which may account for the move to introduce the creative writing unit, Literary Craftsmanship, into the English discipline in 1970, as a selected entry unit. As with the similar development of Creative Writing in American universities at the time, the course was characterized by its relationship to literature studies. It was concerned with the 'craftsmanship of original writing in poetry or prose fiction', as its course description says - terms which suggest that students will produce works of literary worth due to their learning of the craft. The description echoes an eighteenth-century view of the art of poetry and Rhetoric as craft; it suggests the acquisition of craftsmanship, and assumes a 'natural' originality occurring within the process of writing by students already identified as creative through the selective entry process. [note 1] While learning to write well (rather than 'rhetoric') is a skill that is learned within creative writing, for many students, craft is somewhat secondary to creativity and 'originality' in their assumptions.

These undefined assumptions about creativity encourage both students and teachers into a 'dangerous dreaming'. For the learner, perceptions of creativity and originality afford a romantic view, a kind of innocence, which, although it opens valuable doors and can act to subvert the limitations of culture, is also dangerous in its potential refusal to engage with its reader or audience, and to function as a site of learning through rewriting. Those who both teach and learn in the creative writing discipline confront the interface between a category of creativity as 'dreaming' only, and a view of creative writing that includes

the acts of 'reading', interpretation and understanding - the construction of knowledge which constitutes learning (Freiman 2002). The notion of creativity as 'dreaming' also informs the exclusion of creative work, which is described as 'depending mainly upon the imagination of the author', as stated in the definition of research publications in the 2003 Higher Education Publications Collection guidelines. Also granting a lower weighting, and being of no value in measuring research outcomes in comparison to other scholarly publications, the approach of the guidelines shows evidence of the ambiguity towards creative work as research. As we continue to define the discipline of creative writing, confronting myths about creativity and writing allows us to engage with wider possibilities of what creative writing is, in its material and discursive functions as text and as knowledge formation.

The waking dreamer

In *One-Way Street* (1925-6), in the fragment 'Breakfast Room', critic and commentator Walter Benjamin relates the parable of the dreamer who tells the dream before eating breakfast, a metaphor for differing states of consciousness and representation:

> A popular tradition warns against recounting dreams on an empty stomach. In this state, though awake, one remains under the sway of the dream. For washing brings only the surface of the body and the visible motor functions into the light, while in the deeper strata, even during the morning ablution, the grey penumbra of dream persists and, indeed, in the solitude of the first waking hour, consolidates itself. He who shuns contact with the day, whether for fear of his fellow men or for the sake of inward composure, is unwilling to eat and disdains his breakfast. He thus avoids the rupture between the nocturnal and the daytime worlds - a precaution justified only by the combustion of dream in a concentrated morning's work, if not in prayer, but otherwise a source of confusion between vital rhythms. The narration of dreams brings calamity, because a person still in league with the dream world betrays it in his words and must incur its revenge. Expressed in more modern terms: he betrays himself. He has outgrown the protection of dreaming naïveté, and in laying clumsy hands on his dream visions he surrenders himself. For only from the far bank, from broad daylight, may the dream be recalled with impunity. This further side of dream is only attainable through a cleansing analogous to washing yet totally different. By way of the stomach. The fasting man tells his dream as if he were talking in his sleep (Benjamin 1979: 45-6).

Benjamin's model is a powerful one: It relates a need to move between the world of the individual unconscious and conscious social activity. The narrator of the dream who has not transformed himself, through the deeply physical act of eating - that is, transforming his bodily state into a conscious, physically present one in daylight (washing alone is insufficient, it remains on the body's surface) - will remain 'in the dark', in 'sway of the dream', and therefore within his own illusion. The state of dreaming is non-consciousness, or 'like' the unconscious, and Benjamin seems to be implying that this state is potentially an unhealthy one. This approaches Freud's ascription of creativity as 'neurosis' or illness which must be made healthy, although as Kevin Brophy points out, there is a contradiction, or reversal, in Freud's 'views of the artist as unhappily locked into a predictable set of banal wish-fulfilment fantasies and at the same time as someone who has profound insights into the nature of humanity' (Brophy 1998: 62). Either way, Freud positions the writer as an outsider, whereas Benjamin's warning is for transformation from unconscious dreaming to consciousness and social functioning by creating a *necessary* rupture between the dream and the daylight.

Daylight allows a distancing from the dream for the narrator of dreams, but it does not dismiss the dream's validity as part of a creative or spiritual purpose. Remaining in the sway of the dream may be justified, but *only* by the 'combustion of dream in a concentrated morning's work, if not in prayer'. In any other case, he says, 'The narration of dreams brings calamity, because a person still in league with the dream world betrays it in his words and must incur its revenge. Expressed in more modern terms: he betrays himself.' For Benjamin, it is the 'words', the means through which the dream is told, which can constitute a betrayal, for unless a conscious, social state or context is created in which to do this, the 'clumsy hands' laid on the dream visions, now outside their state of 'dreaming naïveté', would constitute a surrender to illusion.

The key here is the role of 'words'. Language is a social act; the function of language as discourse is what makes the text a social event. It creates a horizon or 'veil' between the dream, or unconscious function, and consciousness. Language brings the creative act into the light, it provides social meaning for the contents of the dream. The dissemination of the dream, as a text (oral or written), is what needs to be free of illusion - the point where the dream interfaces with the rest of the world, its audience or reader. The 'further side' can be understood as the public or social context in which the dream is received. Yet even if it is illusion, the role of dream is acknowledged: Benjamin seems to be saying that it needs to be protected, to be approached from its 'further side' and by 'way of the stomach', the application of the bodily function of eating, which reads metaphorically as a connecting link for the dreamer with the physical, material world. In the first fragment in *One-Way Street*, titled 'Filling Station', which directly precedes 'Breakfast Room', Benjamin refers to writing, or literary work, although not necessarily to an exclusive idea of 'literature' (he includes the inconspicuous forms of 'leaflets, brochures, articles, and placards'), as a strict 'alternation between action and writing'. Here he argues for the overturning of traditional 'convictions', the illusions society has about itself, through writing, which is further illuminated in the following section by 'The fasting man [who] tells his dream as if he were walking in his sleep' (46).

In the section 'Filling Station', Benjamin writes: 'The construction of life is at present in the power of facts far more than of convictions, and of such facts as have scarcely ever become the basis of conviction' (45). Benjamin's focus is on materiality. His parable of the narrator of dreams negotiates the fine line between the power of the dream, and its necessary transformation into 'words' or language if the dream is to be used in the telling. Benjamin proceeds to do this in his own written text: Throughout the fragments that make up *One-Way Street* he refers to, and describes, a number of meaningful and often deeply moving dreams: Dreaming of Goethe, on whom he was to write, and trying to support him in the dream, he writes: 'Touching his elbow, I began to weep with emotion' (47). In *One-Way Street*, the section 'Breakfast Room' serves as a reflexive prologue. It positions the reader to both accommodate and interrogate the dream discourse, directing the reading towards the 'further side', the linguistic construction and interpretation of the dream. Clearly the metaphorical dream discourse is of value to Benjamin's own articulation in his text in which materiality, textuality and the poetic and the symbolic values of the dream intersect.

Myths of creativity

Benjamin's parable can be read as a warning: As teachers of creative writing, we have all encountered the range of assumptions that both students and academics bring to their notions of what constitutes creative writing and the creative process. We have encountered the anarchic, spontaneous outpourings of student writing with no hint of a narrative or structure; we have had to read writing written before breakfast! This kind of writing may have been taught to our students during their primary education as part of the 'process writing' movement begun in the 1980s, where, as I have discussed in a previous paper, 'pupils write spontaneously, copiously and without structure, then

"conference" their work with peers and teachers' (Freiman 2001). This promotes the kind of creativity 'without the necessary conceptual understanding and integration' that we require in teaching (Freiman 2002). [note 2]

Yet creativity *is* desired by our institutions and by our discipline, and it is given high status in our grading criteria (Freiman 2001). What creativity 'is', however, remains a vexed question, mainly due to the impossibility of measuring it, although we can probably agree that it is part of a process that breaks the boundaries of the 'already-known'; that it is recognised as a process of constructing knowledge, as critical thinking, problem solving and continuing learning; that it is discipline specific; that creative writing is dependent upon the transformation of creative responses into language; and that the level of creativity in the creative product can only be measured by practitioners within its domain.

Even as we attempt a definition, we should recognise that creativity is a social construction which is determined by the parameters in which it is applied, including the social and cultural context in which the creative person operates: Creativity involves both an individual and a social action, and the discipline of creative writing is a dynamic, social and collaborative activity of textual production, learning, and knowledge construction (Freiman 2002). Its pedagogy and its produced writing, like other social action, can subvert the educational and social discourses and disciplines with which it interacts. As Kevin Brophy argues, creative writing workshops 'have the potential to be sites for literary writing which is outside of a canonical history, limited genres, or modernist ideals of genius' (Brophy 203). We are inclined to recognise creativity as social and individual effect and outcome. Yet its processes remain mysterious to us, difficult to define, outside the parameters of the knowledge disciplines with which we attempt to measure and understand it.

The mystery of creativity, its illusory nature, feeds the assumptions brought to its meaning: Being invited to do creative writing stirs up notions of dreaming, a chance to be irrational, of accessing the unconscious and altered states of perception, and of a freedom of expression by the individual unconstrained by social discipline. All this is attractive to students - an opportunity to 'do one's own thing', to assert one's identity. Above all, it appeals to the desire to 'be a writer'. Part of the romance of being a 'writer' is the dream of becoming a published writer; a seamless glide in perception between the educational institution and the market-driven world of publishing and publicity and fame, all of which are fed by popular representations of writers and writing in film, media and literature. Cult figures who are writers, almost always male, have fed the romance with writing.

At the centre of this dream is the individual, best illustrated by films such as *Finding Forrester* and *The Wonder Boys*, where we see the writer who marginalizes himself through his eccentricity, who is a failed genius. In these representations writing is seen as a (difficult) rite of passage; the successful writer is either a young un-tapped genius, who gets published, or a failed but recovering older one. The myth of the talented young writer, nurtured through conflict with an older mentor figure who must fail and be supplanted by youth, is perpetuated. The creative process itself remains mysterious, with little actual work seen to be done. This is a dream of possibility, the American Dream of individual endeavour and success at a not-too-high price. In other films, such *The Year of Living Dangerously*, the process of writing is seen as destructive, again with the writer as outcast or misfit figure. Similarly, in a rare portrayal of a female writer, the film *Iris* emphasises not the writing life, but the dysfunctional life of the older 'failed' writer, the loss of creativity as we watch the writer losing her mind to Alzheimer's disease. In these films, the creative process is about the individual; the reception of the writing is mostly portrayed as it affects the individual writer rather than the reader.

The writer is mostly solitary: In these representations it is not possible be a writer and part of society at the same time. The writer is seen as an 'outcast', even if he or she may

have moments of social acceptance. The outsider status of writers feeds the public fascination with the connection between creativity and madness, depression, suicide, social dysfunction. And yet, not without contradiction, successful writing and its writers attract commercial attention. In the popular perception, successful writing and the writer have become commodities; this is creative writing's most visible interpolation into social discourse, and it *appears* to be its most powerful outcome. The cult of personality, the love affair our society has with writers is nurtured by prizes, writing festivals, talks, and the cult of 'young writers' (fed by the same romance of youthful success as seen in films) - in all these manifestations the writer becomes more important than the writing. The demands for writers to perform publicly are paradoxically accompanied by the tacit understanding that the writer is disengaged from society, a picture confirmed by the reclusive stance taken by some writers out of necessity or choice, rather than the capacity their writing may have for powerful social critique. Only part of this view of writers has to do with what writers actually produce, the level of their intellectual social engagement, and very little has to do with reading. But the dream is a seductive one which students may very well bring to their study of creative writing.

The idea of the writer as individual, creating original works of genius through a mystical and a-social process, which is essentially solitary and which can be dangerously destructive or even mad, has been extracted and distilled from the study of literature and literary criticism. More than an accurate reading of literary history, this distillation reveals the assumptions of a culture that marginalizes the practice of art and creativity while at the same time it appropriates them, as distilled myth, for capital.

In educational institutions, the marginalizing of creative writing within English and Cultural Studies departments, or its separation into Creative Arts programs, and the general ambivalence towards the inclusion of creative writing in the curriculum, relates to myths of creativity as 'separate' from other textual knowledge production. This is ironic, given the requirement for creativity in university assessment and performance outcomes, a contradiction that signals the need for an examination of some of the myths about creativity and writing.

Romanticism and creativity

The social function of creative writing, the place of poetry and the poet in society, is not a new debate; it has been discussed in literary criticism since the time of Plato. What is relatively 'new' is the shift from craft, mimesis and persuasiveness, that is, the relationship between writing, audience and social context, to a focus on the writer. M.H. Abrams, in *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (1958), tracks this process through a number of theoretical models of literary criticism: Mimetic theories of art privilege the work and its form in order to promote an ideal of universal form, to copy Nature, as in Aristotle, while according to Pragmatic theories the aim of the work is measured by its effect on the audience, as in Philip Sidney's *Apologie for Poetry*, written in the early 1580s, which defines poetry as the 'art of imitation …with this end, to teach and delight' (Abrams 1958: 14). Pragmatic models emphasise literary craftsmanship, the writer's skill in rules of Rhetoric, the 'skill, or Crafte of making', as Ben Jonson called it, to be utilised to persuade the audience. Samuel Johnson's *Preface to Shakespeare* combines pragmatism with instruction, 'the end of writing is to instruct; the end of poetry is to instruct by pleasing'. These theories focus on the role or effect writing has within society. They regard the poem as a social act with a social function.

It was only the increasing emphasis on the individual during the late eighteenth- and nineteenth-centuries that promoted the shift, in Abrams' terms, to Expressive approaches to art. Here the emphasis is on the powers and activity of the speaker himself, exemplified in Wordsworth's Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1800), which announces that poetry 'is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings'. Poetry is defined in terms of

'the imaginative process which modifies and synthesises the images, thoughts and feelings of the poet' (Abrams 22). Rather than measuring art against social norms or effects on the audience, the measure of its worth is whether it is sincere, genuine, and whether it matches the intention, the actual state of mind and feeling of the poet while composing. Poetry therefore becomes the 'index to personality' in the early nineteenth century (23), and the cult of personality is born.

The shift towards the poet, or writer, rather than the world, means also a change in subject matter and orientation. Where poetry now becomes spontaneous utterance of feeling, objects are only relevant in the degree to which they are a stimulus for poetry. This continues in T.S. Eliot's 'objective correlative' where objects, events and other representations are a formula for 'that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked' (Eliot, 1932: 145). Where the outer world is made symbolic, the *mind* becomes the source of creativity. While Abrams' emphasis is to distinguish Expressive from Mimetic and Pragmatic theories, it is worth re-iterating, as Abrams points out, that Wordsworth had also insisted that 'Poets do not write for Poets alone, but for Men' (Abrams 26). However, it is Wordsworth's assertion that poetry is the 'spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling' that has endured in the distillation of Romanticism. It is not a great leap from the idea of the spontaneous utterance of a creation emerging entirely from the poet's imagination, to the theory, prominent in New Criticism, that the poem or creative work itself holds all meaning in isolation from any context and that its discourse is distinct from any social function.

This notion of the creative work as a discrete 'universe' corresponds with another feature of Romantic poetry, the connection between creativity and divinity - the creative act of imagination in its relationship to God, and relationship of the writer to God. For Coleridge, the perceiving mind was made in God's image, and poetic imagination participated - through the perception of creation rendered in poetry - in Creation, generating the relationship between the poet and God, a relationship fostered by New Critical reading practices. [note 3]

The danger of dreaming in this construction of creative individualism has, apart from feeding the egotism of the role of creativity as mysterious and disassociated from social functioning, perhaps not gone anywhere beyond the cult of personality. However, it is important to recognise the connection between the idea of divinity and the prevalence of notions of inspiration and spontaneous insight. This too has historical origins, most profoundly in theories of the unconscious, which evolved in part from German Transcendentalism and theories of 'vegetable genius' (Abrams 209-13). Friedrich Schelling and Jean Paul Richter, German romantic philosophers, added to the psychology of the creative process. Their theory leads to the concept of genius and the privileging of art over all other human endeavours. This 'vegetable genius' is instinctive, freely given, its capacity as 'grace' connecting divinity and involuntary 'inspiration'. In 1801 Friedrich Schiller wrote to Goethe: '…[I]n experience, the poet begins entirely with the unconscious… The unconscious united with awareness constitutes the poetic artist'. Goethe responded, with qualification, that he would go even further:

> "I believe that everything which the genius does as genius, eventuates unconsciously. The man of genius can also operate rationally, after careful consideration, from conviction, but all that happens only secondarily." (Abrams 1958: 211). [note 4]

From German Romanticism we have inherited theories of the unconscious as a source of creativity, together with the theories of Freud and Jung. This trend would lead to a tradition of using drugs to access the creative process and experimentation with freeing the mind from its social constraints through altered states of consciousness in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century - Coleridge and De Quincey's use of opium, then

the experiments of Surrealism and psychoanalysis, to the drug culture of the 1960s, and the influence of writers such as R.D. Laing and William S. Burroughs. [note 5]

This kind of creativity, 'unconscious genius', which became associated with states of altered consciousness and drug use, notably dissociates itself from social connection: it alienates the individual, or group, from the wider society. While this can, of course, be a way of subverting tradition, of deliberately pushing creativity towards the margins in order to maintain its independence from social norms, it is also worth noting the contrast between Richter's definition of the dream and genius where the dreamer (here the genius) is 'in more than one sense a sleep-walker', and Benjamin's parable of the dreamer. Says Richter: 'The source of dreams is a source of poetry. The genius, in fact, is in more than one sense a sleep-walker; in his clear dream he is capable of more than in waking, and in darkness does he mount every height of reality' (Abrams, 212). [note 6] Benjamin appears to be writing directly in opposition to this myth of dissociated genius. Yet amongst young writers, it is a myth that is extraordinarily resilient. Stephen King, in his memoir *On Writing* recalls the experience   of a 1969 student writing workshop: 'Would-be poets were living in a dewy Tolkien-tinged world, catching poems out of the ether. It was pretty much unanimous: serious art came from …. *out there*'. The fact that the writer would be unable to talk about the 'mechanics of creation' was not important, '… if pressed [the poet] might have said that there were no mechanics, only that seminal spurt of feeling …' (King 2000: 42).

The aim here is not to misrepresent the importance of the literature and philosophy of Romanticism, but rather to emphasise how the contemporary myth has extracted only extreme parts of German Romantic theory, ideas which were themselves subject to debate. In admitting the role of conscious awareness in artistic creation, August W. Schlegel maintains the idea of genius, but points out that true genius 'is precisely the most intimate union of unconscious and self-conscious activity in the human spirit, of instinct and purpose, of freedom and necessity' (Abrams 213). [note 7] In writing of Shakespeare's conscious artistry in 1846, Schlegel locates a combination of 'natural genius' and dreaming together with reflection and learning. According to Abrams:

> The activity of such a genius, Schlegel says, "is, it is true, natural to him, and in a certain sense unconscious"; but he insists, Shakespeare's compositions also exhibit learning, reflection, and the deliberate management of means to effects upon the audience. "To me [Shakespeare] is a profound artist, not a blind and wildly coursing genius". [note 8]

Ideas about creativity developed by Romanticism had in fact long been part of Western tradition; what gained importance is rather a matter of emphasis and orientation within particular critical traditions. Longinus' criterion of the sublime in art, and the concept of intensity, was appropriated by Romantic thought, and it remains within contemporary discourse, attached to the idea of the trance or states of awe. The intensity of the 'short burst of insight' that is often conceived as creativity is found in Keats and in Emily Dickinson, who wrote: 'If I feel physically as if the top of my head were taken off, I know it is poetry'. [note 9] This intensity, coupled with the idea of poetry as catharsis that evolves from Wordsworth's 'spontaneous overflow' - an expulsion of troubling emotions, leading to peacefulness - links directly into psychoanalytic discourse, which sees dreams and poetic imagination as expressions of repressed desires. Writing as therapy is a contemporary manifestation of this cathartic model. While there may be a place for this kind of writing, it is important for our purposes of dismantling the myths, that this one too is addressed. With its focus on self-expression and self-exploration and the likely dearth of attention given to audience or reader, writing as therapy has, I believe, only a limited place within a collaborative and educational context. The problem with a theory of creativity as just 'expression' is that it tends to focus on the poet, or writer, rather than on the writing or the textual strategies utilized.

Conditions for creativity

Myths of creativity focus on the irrational, spontaneous functions, on the capacity for the elements of chance or unconscious connections to be made. These are acknowledged aspects that contribute to the creative process, but they can also be reductive; their focus on the individual is at the expense of the social functions of creativity and writing, especially within the context of learning and reception. The emphasis on individualism focuses on the writer, not the relationship between text and reader, not on the written text and its language. It sets up barriers against openness towards learning, promoting the kind of creativity without discipline mentioned earlier in this paper. So where, then, does creativity come into what we do as creative writing teachers and learners? [note 10]

If we look beyond the constructions of popular culture and literary criticism, we find, in the discipline of psychology, the recognition of creativity as a process that occurs and is dependent upon context. In order to stimulate creativity, educational psychologists point out, environment is important: Conditions that encourage intrinsic motivation (as opposed to extrinsic motivation) need to be provided, and extrinsic motivations such as evaluations and deadlines will lead to less, rather than more, willingness to take the risks necessary for creativity to flourish (Hennessey and Amabile 1988). While psychology tends to emphasise the individual when exploring creativity, psychological and educational approaches can assist us in deconstructing unhelpful myths of creativity: Creativity functions within a context and discourse of previous knowledge; it does not spring unbidden and from nowhere. In terms of education, it is an element of knowledge construction when knowledge is built upon and beyond what is 'already known' in the learning task (Freiman 2002). Studies in the psychology of creativity also acknowledge that the attempt to define creativity must include the specific context in which it occurs, that it depends on 'using one's existing knowledge in the domain as a base to create new ideas' (Tardif and Sternberg 1988: 433). In this sense, creativity is seen as a conscious attempt to 'break through existing boundaries of one's field' (Tardif et al 430), with importance given to conscious thinking.

The application of conscious thought and action reminds us of Benjamin's move into 'broad daylight'. In addressing the role of the unconscious and consciousness in creativity, the Tardif and Sternberg psychological study concludes that in defining the source of creativity 'the consensus lies in between with unconscious elements existing and being important for creativity, but not the essence of creative thought processes' (433). Significantly, creativity is regarded as a *process* rather than a flash of intensity or inspiration, '…the creative process is not generally considered to be something that occurs in an instant with a single flash of insight, even though insights may occur [as]...small but necessary components' (430). Moreover, this process, seen in terms of gestation and evolution, requires time - 'opportunity to revise, or nurture, the outcomes once produced' (430), a process that is familiar to creative writing teaching, where we emphasise process and rewriting. [note 11] What emerges from the psychological study is, in a sense, a de-mystification of creativity as individual and somehow sacred - clearly it depends on context and environment as well as on individual motivation and talent.

The importance of context and environment as conditions for creativity is extended by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (Csikszentmihalyi 1988) to an examination of creativity in terms of culture and discourse. Csikszentmihalyi argues for a 'systems view' of creativity where the social system supports and receives the creative idea, object or action: In order to make an original or creative contribution, the creator must be within a system of knowledge, culture and language, or what he terms, three main systems of 'person, field and domain' - 'domain' being the 'symbol system' or Culture; 'field' being the 'social organization of the domain', or the Social System; 'person' being the 'individual' associated with his/her 'genetic pool and personal experiences'. All three systems represent three equally valid 'moments' of the same creative process:

> The starting point on this map is purely arbitrary. One might start from the "person", because we are used to thinking in these terms - that the idea begins, like the lighted bulb in the cartoon, within the head of the creative individual. But, of course, the information that will go into the idea existed long before the creative person arrived on the scene. It had been stored in the symbol system of the culture, in the customary practices, the language, the specific notation of the "domain". A person who has no access to this information will not be able to make a creative contribution, no matter how able or skilled the person otherwise is. One needs to know music to write a creative symphony. (Csikszentmihalyi 1988: 229-30)

The systems model is important in allowing a shift from the individual to a broader understanding of creativity that includes the reception and evaluation of the creative product or idea: creativity is supported and received by the criteria of the system.

It is, of course, possible to critique the systems model which does not directly address the discursive make-up and hegemony of the social system and culture which nurture and receive creativity, and the need for counter-discourses to disrupt and subvert dominant discourse. The approach does, however, open the discussion on creativity to include social, educational and institutional contexts. It can be argued that the discipline of creative writing and other creative arts within the university can benefit from such placing, especially in terms of the possibility of teaching, learning and researching as creativity within the tertiary institution, a position that is still required to defend itself both against dominant institutional discourses and social myths that render creativity 'unteachable' and unable to be categorised as research. [note 12]

Csikszentmihalyi examines that most creatively productive period in history, the first twenty-five years of the fifteenth-century in Florence, the Early Quattrocento, to illustrate how 'the field can stimulate the emergence of creativity' (334). [note 13] He argues that rather than the occurrence of an extraordinary number of creative individuals, 'the more likely explanation is that individual potentialities remained constant, and the changes that produced the Renaissance took place in the social system' (334). The system included art patronage, but also a great deal of community involvement. For example, architectural plans and other artistic projects were sought via competitions, with committee decisions and the community directing the commissions and supervision of the projects. While issues of artistic freedom, which would concern us, may also have concerned those individual artists, it is necessary to consider the social component of creativity, especially in terms of systems of support, the function of the field and domain in fostering creativity. Institutional support and cultural reception in a society is vital to its creative accomplishments. More and more these are relegated to market value. In education we can still teach within the context of social group (class or group members) for self-awareness about the individual's role and responsibility. Csikszentmihaly's view is important in considering the role of creativity beyond the Romantic myth of individual genius, for it maintains that

> …an understanding of the complex context in which people operate must eventually enrich our understanding of who the individual is and what the individual does. But to do so we need to abandon the Ptolomaic view of creativity, in which the person is at the center of everything, for a more Copernican model in which the person is part of a system of mutual influences and information. (Csikszentmihalyi 1988: 336)

We might also ask whether the ideal of total artistic freedom (or independence) is possible if we consider the complex range of discourses that come together in the '"author" as a function of discourse' (Foucault 1977). The focus on the individual becomes harder to sustain, as the idea of individual creative freedom must also take into

account the functions of discourse, the intersection within the writing of discursive formations of other texts and their contexts.

The challenge then, for teachers of creative writing, is to ensure that the dream is made conscious - that learning occurs, and that students learn to recognise the (social) contextual implications of their writing; the effect of their writing upon their readers; the amount of control and responsibility that they have for what they say. In other words, that they should recognise the materiality of the texts they produce.

The materiality of the text

That the creative product has a social function through its contact with an audience is intrinsic to its meaning as, and within, discourse. Its meaning also acknowledges the social responsibility of the writer and the need to recognise this. The conflict between artistic freedom and social responsibility is not a new issue, however, its relevance is always paramount: What values do writers want to put out into the world? What is important to them? Why write? These are questions we should be asking of our students in order to work against aestheticism and disengagement from society. The recent production of sculptured figures representing victims falling from the tower of the Trade Center in New York is a case in point: the works are highly controversial, indeed they are deemed offensive, no matter how aesthetically beautiful they may be. The writer or artist walks a fine line between artistic independence and social engagement, and our task as teachers is to encourage critical and self-critical discourse within social contexts to develop awareness and responsibility. At the same time, we need to guard against excessive social control, the danger of uniformity and mediocrity, and the suppression of creative thought. As Fay Zwicky points out: 'If people become so autonomously adjusted to themselves and to each other - the euphemistic phrase that describes captives of totalitarianism - the very springs of their intellectual and artistic survival may be subtly suppressed' (Zwicky 1986: 9).

The workshop method of teaching creative writing provides a framework in which to explore these issues. Language is a social act within a discursive field - it constructs and is constructed by discourse, which is, according to Foucault's use of the concept, 'a strongly bounded area of social knowledge, a system of statements within which the world can be known' (Ashcroft et al 1998: 70). In any writing and reading act a number of discourses come into play.

> The key feature of this is that the world is not simply "there" to be
> talked about, rather, it is through discourse itself that the world is
> brought into being. It is also in such a discourse that speakers and
> hearers, writers and readers come to an understanding about
> themselves, their relationship to each other and their place in the world.
> (Ashcroft et al 1988: 70-1)

This place in the world, or texts' 'worldliness', is determined by what Edward Said calls the 'circumstance' of their production, whether they are read by oneself or by a much wider audience:

> The point is that texts have ways of existing that even in their most
> rarefied form are always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place, and
> society - in short, they are in the world, and hence worldly (Said 1983:
> 35).

In teaching writing it is vital to foster awareness of the 'worldliness' of the text that is written and workshopped - that it is not an innocent object but has the status of production in an exact circumstance. In this sense, once it is produced, it has 'outgrown the protection of dreaming naïveté' (Benjamin 46), and entered 'broad daylight'. As object

or action it now partakes of physicality, like the waking dreamer who has breakfasted, entering the materiality of the world, and having done this, the text must take up the responsibility of its material existence, its incorporation of discourse. As Said points out, it becomes impossible to continue 'the fallacy of imagining the life of texts as being pleasantly ideal and without force or conflict' (Said 47). The creative text, once written and exposed to reading, cannot ignore the 'self-confirming will to power' (50) of its production. If we only focus on the 'inner structure' of the text, we relegate it to the 'dream', to 'talking in our sleep' - the illusion of a creativity somehow outside any context or worldly materiality, which, as I have argued, promotes the romantic, and dangerous, myths of innocence that separate the writer from the world and society.

It is part of our responsibility as educators to foster self-awareness and critical discourse in relation to society. Yet, simultaneously we should ensure that opportunities exist for the time and freedom required for creative processes, for the 'combustion of dream in a concentrated morning's work' (Benjamin 46), the intrinsic motivation and building of new knowledge that creativity entails. We need also to ensure that our assessment procedures locate the work within its context of both education and social engagement but do not mitigate against the creative processes that will continue long after the students leave our courses. We need to keep ourselves open to the openness and subversiveness of creativity while recognising our other roles as educators. It is the interfacing of creative writing and academic discourses that alerts us to the conditionality of both fields, and provides for the opportunity of creative engagements between the two.

Notes

1. Subsequent to its first appearance, Literary Craftsmanship was re-named Creative Writing. More recently it is no longer a selective entry unit, requiring pre-requisites of first year study including English. Return to article

2. J. R. Martin argued, 'the dominance of "free" creative writing in schools perpetuates the myths of childhood, promotes individualistic (i.e. non-social) responses, preventing socialisation, and that it encourages non-intervention in teaching' (Martin 1985: 61). Return to article

3. 'The poet's "final creation" is "a kind of world or cosmos; a concretely languaged, synoptically felt world; an ikon or image of the "real world"' (Abrams 284 cites Austin Warren, *The Rage for Order*, Chicago, 1948: v-vi). In a telling example of New Critical discourse, Abrams also cites Elder Olson (a Chicago New Critic), who posits the poet as an Old Testament omnipotent God: 'In a sense, every poem is a microcosmos, a discrete and independent universe with its laws provided by the poet; his decision is absolute; he can make things good or bad, great or small, powerful or weak, just as he wills; he may make men taller than mountains or smaller than atoms, he may suspend whole cities in the air, he may destroy creation or re-form it; within his universe the impossible becomes possible, the necessary the contingent - if he but says they do.' (Abrams 285 cites Olsen, '"Sailing to Byzantium": Prolegomnea to a Poetics of the Lyric,' *The University of Kansas City Review,* Spring, 1942, viii, No 3: 210-11, 216-7. Return to article

4. Abrams 211. *Briefwechsel zwichen Schiller und Goethe* (4th ed.; Stuttgart, 1881), 27 March 1801, ii, 278; 6 Apr. 1801, II, 280. Return to article

5. Brophy comments on the 'tradition of excess': '…the use of drugs accepts and accommodates some of the orthodoxies of psychoanalysis and Surrealism - that creativity comes from the anarchic, the confused, the uninhibited, the darkly unconscious side of ourselves, or that the artist is both eroticised and infantilised by their art' (Brophy 141). Return to article

6. Abrams 212. Jean Paul Richter, *Vorschule der Aesthetik*, in *Jean Pauls Sämtliche Werke* (Weimar, 1935), xi, 50-51, 47n. Richter was the most important source for De Quincey's extended discussions on the psychology of the dreamer. Return to article

7. Abrams 213. *Vorlesungen über schöne Litteratur und Kunst*, in *Deutsche Litteraturdenkmale des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts* (Stuttgart, 1884), xvii, 102, 83. Return to article

8. Abrams 213. *Vorlesugen über dramatische Kunst und Litteratur*, in *Sämtliche Werke* (Leipzig, 1846), vi, 157, 182. Return to article

9. Abrams 137. As quoted in W. F. Thrall and Addison Hibbard, *A Handbook to Literature* (New York, 1936: 325.) Return to article

10. The issue of measuring and assessing creativity is dealt with elsewhere. See Freiman 2002. Return to article

11. The emphasis on time in enhancing creativity and learning is dealt with in my discussion of online learning in Freiman 2002. Return to article

12. A systems model provides for the intersection of knowledge, research and creativity within the 'field'. Return to article

13. Csikszenmihalyi lists production in the first 25 years of the Quattrocento of the following: the Baptistry doors by Ghiberti (1402-24); the statues of St. Mark (1411) and St. George (1415) by Donatello for the chapel of Orsanmichele; the statue of St. Philip (1414) by Nanni di Banco in the same location; Brunelleschi's start on the Foundling Hospital (1419), the cathedral cupola (1420), and the Sacristy of San Lorenzo (1421); the frescoes of the Adoration of the Magi by Gentile da Fabriano (1420-23); and those Masaccio painted in the Brancacci Chapel (1424-27). These three works of architecture, three sculptures, and two sets of paintings are generally held to be the most notable achievements of the early Renaissance in Florence (335). Return to article

References

Abrams, M.H. *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition.* New York: Norton, 1958. Return to article

Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin eds. *Key Concepts in Post-colonial Studies.* London: Routledge, 1988. Return to article

Benjamin, Walter. *One Way Street and Other Writings*. Trans. E. Jephcott and Kingsley Shorter. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1979. Return to article

Brophy, Kevin. *Creativity: Psychoanalysis, Surrealism and Creative Writing.* Melbourne: Melbourne UP, 1998. Return to article

Csikszenmihalyi, Mihaly. 'Society, culture, and person: a systems view of creativity'. In Robert J. Sternberg ed. *The Nature of Creativity: Contemporary psychological perspectives*.Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988. Pp. 325-39. Return to article

Paul Dawson. 'Creative Writing in Australia: The Development of a Discipline'. *TEXT*, Vol. 5 No 1 April 2001.http://www.griffith.edu.au/school/art/text/april01/freiman.htm Return to article

Eliot, T. S. 'Hamlet'. *Selected Essays*. London: Faber, 1932. P.145. Return to article

Foucault, Michel. 'What is an Author?' (1969, 1977). Trans. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon. In Donald Bouchard ed. *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*. New York: Cornell University Press. Pp 141-60. Return to article

Freiman, Marcelle. 'Crossing the Boundaries of the Discipline: A Post-colonial Approach to Teaching Creative Writing in the University'. *TEXT*, Vol 5 No 2 October 2001. http://www.griffith.edu.au/school/art/text/oct01/freiman.htm Return to article

Freiman, Marcelle. 'Learning Through Dialogue: Teaching and assessing creative writing online'. *TEXT*, Vol 6 No2 October 2002. http://www.griffith.edu.au/school/art/text/oct02/freiman.htm Return to article

Hennessey, Beth A. and Teresa M. Amabile. 'The conditions of creativity'. In Robert J. Sternberg ed. *The Nature of Creativity: Contemporary psychological perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988. Pp 11-38. Return to article

Higher Education Publications Data Collection Guidelines, 2003

http://www.ro.mq.edu.au/OPUS/Guidelines/default.htm   Return to article

King, Stephen. *On Writing: A Memoir of the Craft*. London: Hodder & Stoughton, 2000. Return to article

Martin, J.R. *Factual writing: exploring and challenging social reality.* Geelong: Deakin UP, 1985. Return to article

Said, Edward. *The World, the Text, and the Critic.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1983. Return to article

Tardif, Twila Z. and Robert J. Sternberg. 'What do we know about creativity?' In Robert J. Sternberg ed. *The Nature of Creativity: Contemporary psychological perspectives.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988. Pp 429-40. Return to artilce

Zwicky, Fay. *The Lyre in the Pawnshop: Essays on Literature and Survival 1974-1984*. Nedlands, University of Western Australia Press, 1986. Pp 8-9. Return to article

Dr Marcelle Freiman, Lecturer in English at Macquarie University, is coordinator of the Creative Writing program. Her current research areas are: in post-colonial writing and theory, and the writing and theory of diaspora; in theorising the educational discipline and pedagogy of Creative Writing; and in the writing of J. M. Coetzee. A practicing writer, her poetry has been published in journals in Australia and overseas. Her book of poems, Monkey's Wedding *(Island Press, 1995) was Highly Commended for the Mary Gilmore Award, 1996.*

Notes and Debate

Marcelle Freiman *Writing/Reading: Renegotiating criticism* Vol 9 No 1 April 2005