

原版文学核心概念丛书

创意写作的 核心概念

Key Concepts in
Creative Writing

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近年来,文学研究的理论和方法取得了不少新的进展。为了帮助文学专业学生及广大文学研究者、爱好者迅速而有效地掌握文学研究的核心概念和背景资料,外教社特从 Palgrave 出版社遴选引进了这套权威、实用的“原版文学核心概念丛书”。

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相信本套丛书的引进将满足我国广大文学专业的师生及其他文学研究者、爱好者的需求,有力推动我国文学研究的发展与繁荣。

Key Concepts in Creative Writing

Matthew Morrison

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For Wendy, Alan and Paul

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General Editor's Preface

The purpose of Palgrave Key Concepts in Literature is to provide students with key critical and historical ideas about the texts they are studying as part of their literature courses. These ideas include information about the historical and cultural contexts of literature as well as the theoretical approaches in the subject today. Behind the series lies a recognition of the need nowadays for students to be familiar with a range of concepts and contextual material to inform their reading and writing about literature.

But behind the series there also lies a recognition of the changes that have transformed degree courses in Literature in recent years. Central to these changes has been the impact of critical theory together with a renewed interest in the way in which texts intersect with their immediate context and historical circumstances. The result has been an opening up of new ways of reading texts and a new understanding of what the study of literature involves together with the introduction of a wide set of new critical issues that demand our attention. An important aim of Palgrave Key Concepts in Literature is to provide brief, accessible introductions to these new ways of reading and new issues.

Martin Coyle

General Introduction

This *Key Concepts* book has three aims: to provide a thorough glossary of 'technical' terms relevant to the craft of creative writing; to set down the industry terminology needed to negotiate the bewildering world of literary agents, booksellers, commissioning editors and production companies; and to give a sense of the on-going process of questioning that characterises the writer's working method. Behind these aims is a guiding belief that, far from being a solitary pursuit, creative writing flourishes within a well-defined network of shared ideas, collaboration and debate.

Two questions are often put to creative writing teachers and authors of creative writing handbooks: can such an activity really be taught? And what does the study of creative writing prepare you for in life? In part, this is a response to these questions. Again, one answer lies in the fact that writers rarely learn to write in a vacuum. As the members of any successful writers' group, attachment scheme or creative writing course will tell you, progress is made through dialogue and discussion. Thought of as one person standing before a class explaining 'how to complete a novel', the teaching of creative writing is a hopeless enterprise. But seen as an exchange of ideas and experience, courses at universities and elsewhere can provide a foundation in some of the essential modes of discourse for the aspiring writer. Writers also need to be left to their own devices. A novelist friend of mine absconded first to Slovakia and then to Siberia to complete his first book. But on his return he still found himself forced to submit to the rigours of editorial notes from agents, publishers and fellow writers. Negotiating feedback and revisions can be a gruelling business and advice given carelessly can be damaging. In the right hands, however, it is invaluable. I hope this book will provide assistance to writers both in terms of the development of their work and their response to feedback, but also through the introduction of the contexts in which their practice will be embedded.

The individual entries attempt to fulfil these ambitions in different ways. For example, discussion of creative concepts such as change, character and structure will introduce a shared vocabulary with which writers can articulate feelings about their own work and the work of others. When writing, it isn't always necessary to know the literary devices being employed. Much is intuitive. In the process of re-drafting and editing, however, it can be important to be able to identify a turning point, say, or the overuse of exposition. Most writers find a need to analyse their work at some stage. To accompany such entries, I have included writing exercises to give readers the chance to experiment with the ideas under consideration. The entry on character, for example, is adapted from a series of workshops that I have used with my own creative writing students.

In recognition of the fact that many undergraduate courses work in combinations with others (so, for example, the University of Westminster offers a joint degree in English Literature and Creative Writing), a number of entries introduce literary movements, genres and writing styles from the dramatic monologue to chick lit, folktales to science fiction. The intention is to help writers contextualise their work and consider the theoretical and ethical questions that surround written texts. The inclusion of these entries should also remind us that writers continually address similar dilemmas. E. M. Forster introduced his famous 1927 lecture series *Aspects of the Novel* with the image of a circular library in which writers from all historical periods sit together, pondering the same issues, struggling with the same human concerns (Forster, 1976, p. 31).

The final types of entry are concepts relevant to the creative writing industries. Whilst many people will write purely for pleasure, those who seek recognition for their work need to understand the role of the agent, the nature of royalties, and publishing opportunities (on-line and off). These entries also acknowledge that creative writers may find supporting income, as well as creative inspiration, within the wider infrastructure. Many writers are also professional literary agents, script readers, editors and so on.

In the process of compiling these entries, I have had the pleasure of discovering many of the different ways in which writers view their craft. Certain ideas have particularly appealed. John Gardner's image of the writing process – like God opening his fist, 'creating everything at once, his characters, their actions, and their world' – stays with me (Gardner, 1991, p. 50). Suddenly the Aristotelian dichotomies of form and content, plot and character seem less puzzling. I am also moved by Gardner's suggestion that the writer who refuses to believe that human beings have free will cannot write anything of interest (Gardner, 1991, p. 43). When it comes to poetry, I like Al Alvarez's comparison between writing and the opening of an intricate lock: 'each one of the dozens of tumblers has to click into place before the door will swing open' (Alvarez, 2005, p. 44). With respect to drama, I am struck by Harold Pinter's suggestion that language is a continual process of evasion. Rather than using it to announce ourselves to the world, we hide behind it. Language, for Pinter, represents 'desperate rearguard attempts to keep ourselves to ourselves' (Pinter, 1991, p. xiii).

Sigmund Freud thought that most writers were motivated by money and fame. For the poet W. B. Yeats part of the thrill of writing was about cracking a difficult problem (Alvarez, 2005, p. 44). For most writers, however, a quest for truth becomes their main preoccupation. The writer Émile Zola wrote that 'The only great and moral works are true works' (quoted in Morris, 2003, p. 71.) Gardner adds that, 'The true writer's joy in the fictional process is his pleasure in discovering, by means he can trust, what he believes and can affirm for all time' (Gardner, 1991, p. 79). 'Storytelling is the creative demonstration of a truth', proposes screenwriter Robert McKee (McKee, 1999, p. 113). The playwright Robin Soans also makes revealing remarks in his discussion of verbatim theatre. Audiences are more willing to engage with characters emotionally, he suggests, if they are able to identify in the language 'the undeniable ring of truth' (Hammond and Steward, 2008, p. 24). However, the concept of truth in literature – or, at least, the belief in a correspondence between 'text' and 'world' – has come under sustained attack in

recent years, largely from postmodernist critics. Most damningly, the realist impulse, seen particularly in nineteenth-century novels, has been condemned for inscribing the values of powerful voices in society.

The history of women poets during the Romantic period is instructive in this respect. Well into the twentieth century, critics were obsessed with the 'big six' male poets of the early 1800s – Blake, Keats, Byron, Coleridge, Wordsworth and Shelley. Only relatively recently has the work of writers like Felicia Hemans and Anna Barbauld regained the recognition it deserves. A troubling question emerges: is there a sense in which literature has been partly responsible for such neglect? Might the representation of female characters in novels, for example, have reproduced received ideas of women's role in society and the extent to which their status and opinions were to be valued? The French writer Honoré de Balzac commented that Walter Scott's work was dishonest since the author was obliged to conform to contemporary notions of womanhood (Morris, 2003, p. 90). Jane Austen strikes back in a famous passage from her novel *Persuasion* (published posthumously in 1818):

If you please, no reference to examples in books. Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove anything.

(Austen, 2003, p. 220)

Debates about the merits and dangers of realism are much more involved than this simplistic snapshot suggests, but the point remains that writing is an activity that has consequences. The search for truth in literature has an ethical dimension. 'Nothing in the world has greater power to enslave us than does fiction', says Gardner (Gardner, 1991, p. 87), and today's writers should take their responsibilities seriously.

In compiling the following entries, ethical questions have kept rising to the surface. Particularly relevant to the present discussion is the writing of 'chick lit'. Does this revived form of the romance novel entrench gender stereotypes or promote feminine values? Elsewhere, in the sphere of children's literature, writers must ask which lessons (if any) they wish to pass on to their young readership. The writer and broadcaster William Dalrymple has also recently suggested that travel writers have a responsibility to bear witness to the marginalized or misrepresented (Dalrymple, 2009). The question for the writer becomes not simply 'what do I want to write?' but 'what sort of writer do I want to be?'

How to use this book

All glossary entries are arranged alphabetically. Throughout the text, however, words in bold direct the reader to related topics. Hopefully, this will give a sense of the interconnectedness of the ideas being discussed. Occasionally, for simplicity's sake, such words may be similar, but not identical, to the entry title. So for example, **antagonist forces** might refer to the entry **Antagonist**. Many entries have 'practical advice' and 'further reading' sec-

tions, and there is also a full bibliography of all books cited or mentioned in the text.

Dates and periods suggested in definitions are bound to be contentious. I have no doubt that the first line of the modernism entry will leave some scholars shaking with rage, but we have to start somewhere. There isn't space to get too heavily involved in theoretical debates, but wherever possible I have tried to indicate the major battle-lines. When it comes to entries about the structure of stories or methods of characterization, some writers and critics will also disagree with the approach I have taken. All of which only serves to underline the importance of readers coming to their own conclusions about which techniques or methods are worth adopting.

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Aa

Absurd Literature

Absurd (or absurdist) literature provides a slightly ironic first entry to this book since it implies a rejection of much of what is held most sacred by writers.

Although works of fiction such as Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis* (1915) and Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* (1961) are sometimes referred to as absurdist, it is in the field of dramatic writing that the term has become most familiar. In 1961, Martin Esslin published a book called *The Theatre of the Absurd* in which he identified four leading figures: Samuel Beckett (1906–1989), Arthur Adamov (1908–1970), Eugene Ionesco (1909–1994) and Jean Genet (1910–1986). In later editions he added Nobel Prize-winning playwright Harold Pinter (1930–2008). In much of these writers' work, the **Aristotelian** unities of space, time and action are abandoned, the logic of cause and consequence is undermined, and the importance of psychological motivation is rejected. The limits of language are tested through repetition and non sequitur and there are no obvious **morals to the story**. Characters are not only exposed and bewildered in these nightmare/dream worlds but occasionally completely absent (as is the case in Ionesco's 1952 play *The Chairs*). None of which is to say that absurdist plays are depressing. On the contrary, they often delight in ingenious wordplay, self-referential commentary, songs and poetry.

Such an apparently liberated form can be appealing for new writers, who often feel constrained by the 'rules' of careful plotting or detailed characterisation. It is worth noting, however, that the flourishing of absurdist drama (and literature more widely) in the second half of the twentieth century was the result of specific historical and cultural conditions.

For many, the Second World War presented a fatal challenge to Enlightenment ideas of progress and reason which seemed to have led, through half a century of war, to the horrors of the Holocaust. As Esslin comments, the late 1940s and 1950s were a time when the 'unshakeable basic assumptions of former ages had been swept away' (Esslin, 1980, p. 23). In response, the playwrights of the absurd produced works which resisted attempts by the audience to locate fixed meaning or provide rational answers.

The most famous example of absurdist drama remains Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* which received its British premier in 1955. In the play, two tramp-like figures wait in vain for the mysterious Godot to arrive. Their inconsequential ramblings, which embrace vaudeville, comedy review and clowning, are occasionally interrupted by random acts of violence and occasional kindness. The final implication, however, is that tomorrow will be just like today. Even time cannot give sense or structure to these lives.

Many of the elements that constitute the theatre of the absurd can be traced back to Shakespearian drama with its mix of tragedy and base com-