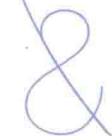
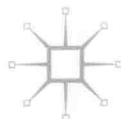


Research Methods in Creative Writing

Edited by
Jeri Kroll



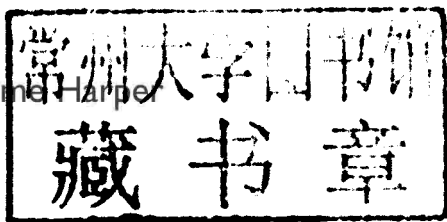
Graeme Harper



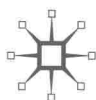
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Creative writing is one of the most vibrant literary disciplines worldwide, but what does creative writing research entail?

In *Research Methods in Creative Writing*, experts from around the globe offer a diverse account of conceptions of research in the discipline that involve not only critical analysis but also creative practice. They examine a variety of approaches and consider the synergy that occurs between undertaking creative writing and understanding creative writing.

Ideal for student writers at all levels, and relevant to writers inside or outside the academy, *Research Methods in Creative Writing* offers a lively selection of research modes and methods that readers can explore and on which they can build.

GRAEME HARPER directs The Honors College at Oakland University, Michigan, USA, and is a Professor of Creative Writing. He previously taught in the United Kingdom and Australia, and he is Editor of *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing*.

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Jeri Kroll:

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Graeme Harper:

Sincere thanks to the contributors, who have been engaged, enthusiastic, and fabulous. Warm thanks to my fine co-editor, Jeri Kroll. We've worked on a couple of books together; this time we've swapped our alphabetical order, or Jeri would never get to go first on the cover. That is simply not fair. A big thank you to you Jeri! Thanks to Katrina for her expert checking and assistance with indexing. Finally, to my wife Louise and our sons, Myles and Tyler, it's been a big year: much love.

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Introduction

Jeri Kroll and Graeme Harper

I Exploring creative writing research methods

The development of creative writing as a research discipline in universities and colleges has not yet been well documented, even though many teachers and students pursue it and many degree programmes incorporate forms of creative writing research. *Research Methods in Creative Writing* aims to address this lack by offering a diverse account of conceptions of research in the discipline as well as a selection of models that readers can explore and on which they can build.

Contributors to this collection hail from around the globe – the United Kingdom, Australia, the United States and South Africa. These contributors demonstrate how creative writing research encourages and supports creative and critical work and can lead to ‘conventional’ as well as ‘experimental’¹ explorations. In addition, they each explore research definitions in an effort not only to provide insights into writing practice but also to illuminate how creative writing can provide new knowledge.

Here in the twenty-first century, creative writing is one of the most vibrant and alert of university disciplines, creating and critiquing itself as it moves the field forward. Indeed, the vitality of creative writing as a research field is never more obvious than when we observe the great numbers of teachers and learners engaged in the subject, and consider the ways in which their creative writing research draws concepts and inspiration from so many sources. While focused on practice, on producing that individual work that distills their vision, these researchers situate themselves within a cultural context and articulate what they contribute to their aesthetic domain.

These efforts demonstrate the synergy between the creative, the practical and the critical. Richard Sennett calls attention to the false divides between the artist, the craftsperson, the critic and the audience in this way: 'History has drawn fault lines dividing practice and theory, technique and expression, craftsman and artist, maker and user; modern society suffers from this historical inheritance.'² Creative writing research can be said, in many ways, to be occupied with healing these rifts.

Creative writing research is, therefore, concerned with actions as well as outcomes, with the individual as well as the culture and, furthermore, with concepts and theories that illuminate these complex interrelationships. Other disciplines engaged in expanding research possibilities share similar objectives and creative writing research often adapts or responds to these. For example, advocates of action research,³ educational research,⁴ and arts-based research in education and the social sciences⁵ have championed new methodologies that can uncover knowledge inaccessible to quantitative methods alone, often by a flexible working method that combines research processes. Those who practise these variations of arts-based and action research and who train others in their methods form networks that enrich discipline-specific vocabularies, map appropriate epistemological frameworks and hence make possible collaboration with other disciplines as well as the mixed genre or hybrid projects that might result.

In the Arts, Humanities, Social Sciences and Natural Sciences, methods related to creative writing research can be found, therefore, and in many cases in this collection you will notice how contributors draw on a range of resources that can be found in these other disciplines. Creative writing research, however, is distinct in being primarily focused on the production of new works, and in the understanding of the processes as well as the ideas and actions that inform a project. In this respect, creative writing research is fundamentally 'practice-led'; or, to put it another way, it always has practice at its conceptual core, even when it is dealing with issues of critical understanding or with theoretical speculation. As craftspeople, therefore, writers attend to technique, but not in isolation, each establishing their own version of the practice-led research loop that drives any creative project forward. It is one of the essential premises demonstrated in

this book that any creative writing involves imagination, practice and critical engagement, working together, questioning and supporting each other. Creative writing research simply builds upon this important premise.

Other arts – drama, music, dance, film-making, painting, design, for example – are also actively engaged in practice-led research, informed by a variety of critical and theoretical positions, and these fields have similarly seen considerable growth in and around universities and colleges in recent years. For example, Smith and Dean⁶ consider research approaches in a range of art forms while Balkema and Slager⁷ survey research developments in European visual arts in particular. Balkema and Slager's introduction suggests the bold sweep of current creative research of all types: 'One could claim that the artistic field comprises the hermeneutic question of the humanities, the experimental method of the sciences, and the societal commitment of the social sciences.'⁸ This scope indicates why creative writing research readily draws concepts and inspiration from so many intellectual as well as artistic sources. As several contributors argue, writers from past centuries, whether inside or outside academia, have been doing just that – whether we call their research approaches 'poetics,' 'narratology' or, indeed, creative writing research.

Being one of the arts, creative writing of course has a connection with these other artistic fields as well as with literary ancestors who have interrogated how and why they practice and, in effect, how and why they research in order to develop. In comparison with other art forms, however, creative writing chooses words as the principal tools and words are the primary outcome. Other art forms may use words, but they are creative writing's substance, its essence.

As an art using words and producing artefacts made up primarily of words, the methods of creative writing research sometimes draw directly, and quite naturally, on notions surrounding written expression or text; for example, considerations of how certain imaginative arrangements of words can be used to unlock emotions or establish a relationship between the writer and a potential reader. At other times, research methods in creative writing refer to concepts that could be encountered in any form of human communication, written or otherwise – so, for example, investigations of meaning, inference

or attitude. In that regard, a creative writer might explore the inference of a particular viewpoint or voice or the situating of a particular cultural or political attitude. Still further, research methods in creative writing can be located in systems of personal or cultural exchange. In this instance, the researcher might consider context or the relationship between their individual understanding and societal understanding, or they might locate a personal history in the realm of local, national or international histories.

What the examples above primarily point towards is research relating to *expression* or *approach*. Creative writing research can be located in a number of sub-sets of these broadly defined interests, and the research questions posed and explored can be situated according to definitions of type or end result. So, to take one instance, a creative writer seeking to explore a result that related to the form of art defined as 'expressionist', or to a mode of expression defined as 'postmodern', would be working within the realm of aesthetic or cultural definition and would most likely either be confirming or challenging notions associated with those established definitions of type or result.

A creative writing researcher, however, might equally be undertaking their investigations with their individual project as the initiator and definer of their progression and success. Such individualism will involve synthesising aspects of knowledge; however, ideas and terms already in place, and related mostly to the *end results* of creative practice, might be felt to serve the creative writer in undertaking and perceiving their work only partially. It might help your perception of the evolving structure of your novel to read another, already published novel, but your perception might also be helped by engaging with other creative arts or conventional disciplines. For example, you might watch a dancer perform or a chemist conduct an experiment or mix a solution. Viewing these actions might stimulate a sense of form in motion, a relationship with evolutionary human activity. That is not to say that a creative writer can work entirely without textual context. Far from it, given the textual nature of much of our practice. But we suggest here that a focus on individualism and the idea of creating something new are frequently reasons why someone undertakes creative writing. This individualism manifests

itself in current, individual human action as well as in texts. We see this situation in the many human fields that create new things. The creative writer can therefore also be aiming to establish as well as respond to elements; they are evolving from their own creative engagements notions that might or might not have well-established definitions, even though they will have imaginative origins. In many ways, creative writing research continues to define itself as well as to respond to modes, methods and philosophies of knowledge that are already available.

What follows is a collection of approaches to researching in and through creative writing. In no sense would we suggest these are the only approaches that might be taken. In fact, if anything, these approaches suggest rather than define, they explore rather than discover, and they point towards rather than stand atop of our destination. Faculty and students continue to develop their research, and we certainly aim here in *Research Methods in Creative Writing* to provide further support and encouragement for what is, we believe, an enormously dynamic field. All the authors in this book provide potential pathways of investigation – pathways that can be followed by advanced creative writing undergraduates at university, as well as postgraduates and faculty. Using the book as a collection of signposts pointing to such exciting pathways is the suggested method of engaging with individual chapters. In fact, with this ideal in mind, the book has the potential to be of use to all writers who show an interest in what they create. Finally our joint, personal objective is to encourage the readers of this book to engage on a deeper level with their creative writing practice; to explore it in order to further understand it for the benefit of their own work and for the discipline generally.

2 The writers

Kim Lasky

This opening chapter nicely situates the present condition of research. Lasky speaks about ancient ‘principles and forms of literary composition’ in order to explicate some challenges to contemporary