



# Manifestos: What Creative Writing Studies Is, Was, and Shall Be

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*Does the US need a peer-reviewed journal of Creative Writing Studies? Do we have the scholars/scholarship to support such a journal? What value would it add, if any, to the conversations we are already having in existing forums? What additional status or credibility, if any, would it add to CWS scholarship? What benefit, if any, would such a journal offer this developing field?*

I posted these questions one year ago to the Facebook group *Creative Writing Pedagogy*. The response was overwhelmingly positive: Yes, we did need such a journal, and yes we did have the scholars and scholarship. In fact, we needed not just a journal but a conference as well, and maybe a professional organization to coordinate the work of both journal and conference and to promote Creative Writing Studies scholarship at the graduate level. These institutions (journal, conference, organization) would do the important work of concentrating and legitimating a conversation that had been happening here and there on the fringes of Rhetoric and Composition and the outskirts of Creative Writing. Important scholarly work was happening, but it didn't have a home, not in the US, anyway. While the UK had *New Writing* and Australia had *Text*, Creative Writing Studies scholars in the US had zero publishing venues inside Creative Writing. They were publishing their work, when they could, in Rhet/Comp journals who saw them as, at best, a marginal interest. A US-based, peer-reviewed journal would focus the efforts of these scholars, adding both status and credibility to their work. It would give them voice. It would turn a fragmented,

marginalized conversation into a discipline of its own.

On the Facebook thread, people posted their support and interest, and many asked what they could do to help. Plans for the journal started falling into place very quickly. While Julie Platt and I discussed strategies for launching an online open-access peer-reviewed journal, Trent Hergenrader secured full support for the journal from his institution, Rochester Institute of Technology. Meanwhile, Warren Wilson College offered Rachel Himmelheber space and some funding to host the first Creative Writing Studies Conference, which will happen in September of this year. Trent created a google form to gauge interest in these projects, and within a few weeks over a hundred people used it to indicate that they would like to review for the journal, attend the conference, and/or become a member of the organization. At AWP 2015, we hosted two off-site meetings for CWS scholars and appointed our initial editorial board with section editors. After a few rounds of drafting mission statements, submission guidelines, and policies--and a bit of work with RIT's tech folks--we were ready to launch.

And so here we are. Volume 1, Issue 1 of

*Journal of Creative Writing Studies*. After only a year, thanks to the initiative and hard work of many scholars, we now open a US-based venue for the publication of Creative Writing Studies scholarship. That we were able to move so quickly from my questions to this issue speaks, I think, to the readiness of our field to become something more. We have reached a critical mass and can no longer fit in the marginal spaces of other disciplines. In fact, there is so much to say and do in Creative Writing Studies that we've had to sub-divide *JCWS* into several sections, each with their own editors, in order to facilitate all the diverse yet complementary interests that constitute our emerging discipline. As you can see from our Submission Guidelines, these sections are all open to submission on an on-going basis, seeking all forms of qualitative and quantitative research on creative writing. We are looking for studies of creative writing as social action; treatments of craft principles in the context of cultural practices and social and literary theory; work that examines issues of diversity and inclusion in creative writing spaces; histories of the teaching and practice of creative writing inside and outside academia; pedagogical work on best practices in creative writing instruction; examinations of the working conditions of creative writing instructors and efforts to professionalize the discipline; and digital and multimedia or multimodal work that treats any of the topics above and/or that studies the intersections of technology and creative writing in the digital age.

In this first issue, we offer context and inspiration for this developing conversation in the form of a set of invited manifestos and positions pieces. While not typical of the writing this journal will produce in the future, these pieces collectively place our work in the context of our field's history, the task ahead, and the values that will carry us forward.

Stephanie Vanderslice traces an academic and personal history of the influence of Wendy Bishop, who many of us consider the founder (or at least a most notable forerunner) of Creative Writing Studies. Vanderslice points to Bishop's scholarly work as a "sizeable launching pad for the next generation of scholarship," but also suggests that Bishop's writings are not her only contribution to our field. Bishop left us not only her writings but also a kind, generous, and civil way of being a scholar. To honor Bishop's contribution, Vanderslice suggests that the way forward for our field begins with the establishment of a graduate program that specializes in Creative Writing Studies.

Tonya Hegamin describes the lived experiences of writers of color in Creative Writing programs and the lack of spaces in these programs for conversations about diversity and inclusion. In response to this lack--and to the present and persistent need for these conversations--Hegamin sets out her goals for the Diversity and Inclusion section of our Journal. Diversity, Hegamin suggests, "is simply an idea, a theory, whereas inclusion is the necessary action," which is to say the action that will create greater equity for marginalized and underrepresented people. Hegamin describes her section as exactly this kind of action, a move to actively include diverse voices. Hegamin follows her introduction with an interview with poet and professor emerita Marilyn Nelson, who offers her perspective on the history of creative writing instruction as she experienced it as both student and professor. Nelson also offers her advice to Creative Writing faculty of color entering predominantly white institutions.

Tim Mayers examines the current position of Creative Writing Studies and finds it to be a field rather than a discipline, its potential disciplinarity depending upon the emergence of the degree programs Vanderslice advocates. But Mayers

questions whether disciplinarity should be the end goal. True, we could become a fully-fledged sub-discipline within English (as, for example, Composition and Rhetoric has), but we could also work to translate our interests, which span existing sub-disciplines, into a more fully integrated English department where the work of creative writers, compositionists, and literary theorists all take part in a collaborative exchange of ideas. The move toward either disciplinarity or integration, Mayers suggests, begins with our arguing for the value of creative writing across courses in the English department and for a presence for Creative Writing Studies in the major conferences of other sub-disciplines.

Anna Leahy cautions against the uncritical adoption of the term “Creative Writing Studies,” suggesting that the term represents a move toward the critical and away from the creative, a move that carries the conversation outside the bounds of Creative Writing. The move from Creative Writing to Creative Writing *Studies* places scholars further from writers and closer to sociologists and pedagogues. Instead of seeking to please critics, theorists, academics, and administrators, Leahy asks us to focus on producing work that is *useful* to creative writers, and to place that work in the space where it can be most useful to them: inside of Creative Writing.

Trent Hergenrader finds Creative Writing in a tenuous position within higher education. With decreasing funds and increasing pressure from administrators for academic programs to justify themselves in terms of course objectives and student learning outcomes, Creative Writing is faced with a set of questions it is not well prepared to answer. Creative Writing must do more than simply assert the value of art for its own sake or point to the number of well-published authors who attended MFA programs. We must begin “interrogating our discipline in a rigorous fashion.” For

Hergenrader, *JCWS* plays an important role in this interrogation and therefore also in the institutional future of Creative Writing. The journal will increase both the volume of quality creative writing scholarship and the profile of this scholarship in the academy. The result, he hopes, will be a more dynamic future for Creative Writing in the academy.

David Mura interrogates an interaction between David Foster Wallace and one of his students of color in which Wallace insisted that the student conform to the conventions of “Standard White English.” Mura finds Wallace’s lack of insight into his own cultural position as a white male both ethically problematic and representative of current tensions in Creative Writing. The workshop has long been fraught with “white innocence” and its attendant expectations for students of color. Mura turns to James Baldwin’s work and to his own experience working to earn the trust of participants in his VONA workshops. In reflecting on Baldwin and VONA, Mura asks what it would take for white instructors to learn to fully hear the work and the concerns of their students of color. What is required, Mura finds, is a pedagogy of spiritual humility. To respect difference, one must first have the courage to admit ignorance.

Adrienne Perry weaves together a series of reflections on the nature of Creative Writing with a narrative of her efforts to build a bomb shelter as a child. As her shovel makes progress, she gradually reveals Creative Writing as it exists now, and as it may exist in our future. Her dig cuts through worms, peels off “the earth’s muddy top hat,” critiques the methodology of “craft,” and calls out the “colonizing text.” Perry envisions a future for Creative Writing grounded in time and place and driven interact with other times, other places, and other languages. Perry’s bomb shelter could not, she confesses, protect her forever. Eventually, she

(and Creative Writing, too) would have to crawl out of its protective home and face the world.

Jeremy Schraffenberger crafts a unique and lyrical invocation of “our discipline” in an attempt to summon and shape the disciplinarity of Creative Writing Studies. The discipline Schraffenberger envisions is one that has taken to heart issues of environmental protection and sustainability, that has embraced bodies in all their diversity, has transcended limited (and limiting) notions of style, has fully transitioned into the digital age, has learned to make use of Theory, and has fully internalized the values of liberal education. Schraffenberger’s manifesto is wide ranging in its vision both of our future and of the values that will guide us there.

I think these pieces are, together, the best answer yet to the questions I posted to Facebook a year ago. Yes, we do need this journal. There is no other space in which these pieces could be presented in conversation with one another. Yes, we clearly have the scholars and scholarship to support our efforts. The value of having all of

these essays presented together here, rather than having them appear here and there in Rhet/Comp journals (or having them appear not at all), lies in our ability now to begin a common conversation, a conversation we invite you to participate in as readers and also as authors. If something in this issue sparks an idea, or if you’ve been ruminating on some question you’ve had about the teaching, practice, or context of creative writing, we’d like to say to you, in the spirit of Wendy Bishop, “There’s an essay in that, and we’d love to read it.” Submissions are now live and will be open on an on-going basis. After reading through this issue, please examine our Submission Guidelines to see where your work might help develop this common conversation. As we discuss our values, history, future, politics, best practices, and new findings, we will build the discipline of Creative Writing Studies together.

Thank you for your participation in this conversation, in whatever form it may take. I look forward to meeting some of you at the Creative Writing Studies Conference in the fall.