

Discussion On the Nature and Direction of Your Chosen Discipline and
Their Relationship Within the Wider Range of the Humanities.

(HHP4018) -Student Number: 2400613

When one thinks of the humanities, creative writing is rarely the first discipline that springs to mind. Archaeology, or the classics are much more likely to exemplify the discipline. And yet, what are the humanities but the study of the human experience? In literature canon the world over this is precisely the focus. From Lee's discussions on the loss of innocence and racial inequality in *'To Kill a Mockingbird'* (2015), to Shelley's views on the decay of society through ambition and greed in *'Frankenstein'*. "Seek happiness in tranquillity and avoid ambition." (1993, p. 236)

Creative writing and literacy focus upon form, language and communication to express the truth of the writer. The nature of creating literature is to seek connection to other humans, whether by preserving a relatable moment in the form of a poem, or writing a piece of satire that forms a political commentary.

That is not to say that creative writing is purely a discipline focused on the commentary of the time or the framing of a moment. It can also be an expression of identity. As Doblhofer (1961, p.13) argues, "Writing allows the thinking man to reflect upon himself." This is exemplified in the handprints on the walls of Cueva de las Manos in Santa Cruz, Argentina, dating as far back as 7,300 BC and "belonging to the ancient hunter-gatherer groups who first inhabited Patagonia" (Onetto and Podesta, 2011, pp. 67-78). Rather than commenting on specifics, our ancestors were boldly stating that they were here; that they mattered, and their opinions and beliefs held weight in their society and for their descendants. Likewise in his poem *'To Alfred Tennyson My Grandson'* (2007, p. 284), Tennyson memorializes his joy for his grandson and the continuation of his lineage through him, "Laugh, for the name at the head of my verse is thine. May'st thou never be wrong'd by the name that is mine!"

Part of the human experience is wrestling with key themes repeated across various countries and cultures. Life and death. Morality and immorality. Love and acceptance. Survival, faith, responsibility and redemption. Oliver (1994, p.11) refers to this and states, "The subjects that stir the heart are not so many, after all, and they do not change." With creative writing, we sit with these subjects, come to our own conclusions and seek the conclusions of others through *their* writing. Again, that theme of human connection transcending time takes the forefront.

Something all humans have in common is our capacity for emotion. It is how we connect to each other and form an understanding that transcends race and origin. Through creative writing, writers can process their emotions and see similar emotions reflected in the works of others. In a study undertaken by Dingle *et al.* (2017) on choir singing and the benefits of creative writing on emotional regulation, "Findings showed that participation in arts-based groups benefits the emotions of both healthy adults and those experiencing mental health conditions through individual and interpersonal processes."

When it comes to the writings of the past, some of the most prevalent works deal with the subject of morality. From 'The Odyssey's' (Homer, 2003) concern with the Greek hospitality laws of xenia, to Milton's commentary on the nature of morality in 'Paradise Lost' claiming, "Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n." (2000, p. 9). Not only do these works provide insight into the morality of the time, and the opinions of authors and their society, but they allow the reader to compare these worldviews to our own. Through this comparison we can identify discrepancies and infer why these changes might have come to pass.

It is evident today that modern writers have learned from the works of the past, expanded upon them and inserted their modern views. A good example of this is the novel, "The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas" (Boyne, 2007). With the moral question (Is it right to eradicate an entire religious group simply because of their beliefs?) seen through the lens of World War 2 – a catastrophic event we are still dealing with the

ramifications of today. Of course, authors from the past had experience with war, but not within our modern context. This leads to an ongoing conversation with past writers and their experiences and morals, and future writers, whose morality is yet to be determined but will, no doubt, be influenced by modern society. To create today humanity needs to be aware of what came before. It is possible to refer again to Oliver (1994, p.11) who states, "The truly contemporary creative force is something built out of the past, but with a difference".

With this in mind, it is interesting to consider the direction the discipline is heading. Creative writing is no longer confined to the pages of a book but is almost taking a step back to its origins. With modern advancements in technology allowing for further freedom of creativity, a more interactive style of engagement is making a resurgence. Much like the orations and productions staged in ancient Greece, the form of creative writing today is visible through such performative mediums as performance poetry, and screen and video game writing. Ryan (2024), a video game writer, discusses this different style of narrative:

In video games, the players (aka the audience) actively participate as the main character to unfold the story, which means the game writers must guide the player on where to look and go, all while giving context for their action. (Ryan, 2024)

This raises the question of the relationship of creative writing within the larger scope of the humanities. Where does it stand, and how does literature give insight into the beliefs, thoughts and emotions of the past? Essentially, how does literature connect humanity across time?

Literature, originally, was an oral tradition. This is most prevalent in the orators and practitioners of rhetoric in ancient Greece. Often considered the birthplace of knowledge, the ancient Greeks had entire temples dedicated to the nine muses – daughters of Zeus and Mnemosyne, and patrons of knowledge, science and the arts. These nine female deities represented each of the elements of education, with four

representing literature in its current form. Epic poetry, lyric poetry, tragedy, comedy and idyllic poetry.

The entire Grecian education system was built up around these nine classifications, with the subjects "...used as a general 'complete' education in the Hellenistic world from Sicily to the Punjab" (Bod, p. 24). Philosophers from the time, such as Plato, Aristotle and Pythagoras, introduced theorems to the world which we refer to today and use in our own understandings of the world. In the words of Ong:

Thus writing from the beginning did not reduce orality but enhanced it, making it possible to organize the 'principles or constituents of oratory into a scientific 'art', a sequentially ordered body of explanation that showed how and why oratory achieved and could be made to achieve its various special effects.
(Ong, 1982, p.9)

As we can see, literature and creative writing was an essential part of education for the ancient Greeks, in the form of poetics. When epic poetry and philosophical musings were immortalised in ink, it sealed the understanding of that period for future generations.

As discussed previously, literature contains the views, morals, beliefs and experiences of a person and society. In relation to the humanities, creative writing and literature allows essential context to the artifacts poured over by other disciplines. With artifacts serving as empirical evidence behind the more subjective beliefs and values of people long dead, it is possible to see *how* people felt and deduce *why* they felt the need to create certain objects or worship in a certain place.

Context and record keeping allows an open discourse with the past, to see modern actions through a different lense and analyse it against ancient peoples and cultures. This allows people to be introspective and alter their actions by learning from the past and, in turn, open possibilities for the future. This is evident in action today, from the lifting of apartheid in 1995, to the legalisation of same-sex marriages, to the 'me too' movement. All are issues touched upon in literature across the globe and that, through

modern-day studies of subjects such as philosophy and ethics, has helped change and open the minds of modern peoples. This is a perfect example of literature/creative writing, and the other subjects that make up the humanities, working in tandem. Candy (2020, p.105) in '*The Creative Reflective Practitioner*' writes about the necessity of interdisciplinary collaboration and how, "There has been a transformation in attitudes to interdisciplinary work across the arts and sciences such that collaboration has become part of the new cultural fabric."

Creative writing is prevalent within the world of humanities, whether informing the public of the layers of history surrounding an ancient monument, to philosophical reflections in scientific journals. Through past writings it is possible to see, whether through metaphor or allegory, common threads present throughout human history. Death – one such thread – has been rationalised, raged against, and even romanticised through mythology. From Freja and Odin ushering ancient Norse warriors to glory in Valhalla, to crossing the river Styx to an afterlife in Hades. People's understanding of these metaphors may change, but their importance remains, helping build a picture of the past and, with current literature, understand the present and our place within it. As Cohen (1969, pp. 337-353) says, "Myths can contain social truths..."

Today, creative writing is used in museums and heritage sites the world over to support the artifacts and ideas presented by practitioners of the humanities. Words are carefully chosen to complement the practitioners' narratives, and in such a way that anyone can access them. Macdonald (2008, p. 327) mentions that at a museum:

One should expect that a myriad of architectural and design features, including lighting, crowding, presentation, context, and the quantity and quality of the information presented, will also affect the nature of the learning that happens there (Macdonald, 2008, p. 327).

Literature itself can be used as a frame – a context in which to think about ideas, topics and experiences. By understanding the reasoning behind a person's actions, it is possible to empathise with their situations. This is essential in the study of the past and

ensuring our own objectivity. An example of this is evident in the works of medieval monks. Upon the decoding and scribing of manuscripts, discrepancies sometimes came to light. By empathising with the monks and putting their living condition into context, it came to be seen that these were not translation differences, but mistakes. And who can blame them when looking at their living conditions? O'Hara (2018) is in support and suggests, "A single room of the monastery, called the scriptorium, acted as the workshop for scribes and was usually isolated, mandatorily quiet, and not very comfortable".

This frame is important when writers produce their own work. To create an empathetic character, we must understand their motivations in the context of their surroundings. Does the protagonist agree with the views of the society they live in? Why, or why not and what impact does it have on their lives? How does this reflect the real world? Again, this literacy framework is a device other practitioners of the humanities use to understand certain groups or individuals of the past. Only their focus is upon the intellectual side of the frame rather than the emotional side favoured by creative writers. Did the individuals that a historian, classicist, or philologist is studying agree with the views of their society? Why, or why not and what impact did this have upon their lives?

In conclusion creative writing is about human experience, language and expression, and sharing that expression with others. Writers comment on their everyday, whether through reflection, poetry or metaphor. In relation to the humanities and its various disciplines, writers give insight into the opinions and beliefs of a particular time. They also comment on changes in societal ethics, comparing them with a contemporary frame of reference.

Total Word Count: 2,000

Reference List

Bate, J. (2011) *The Public Value of the Humanities*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Bod, R. (2013) *A New History of the Humanities: The Search for Principles and Patterns from Antiquity to the Present*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Boyne, J. (2007) *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*. New York: Random House Children's Books.

Candy, L. (2020) *The Creative Reflective Practitioner*. Oxon: Routledge.

Cohen, P. (1969) 'Theories of Myth', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, pp. 337-353. Available at:

[https://librarysearch.uwtsd.ac.uk/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=cdi_proquest_journals_1295910819&context=PC&vid=44WHELF_UWTSD:44WHELF_UWTSD_VU1&lang=en&search_scope=Search_ELEC&adaptor=Primo%20Central&tab=Everything&query=any,contains,Cohen,%20P.%20\(1969\)%20%E2%80%98Theories%20of%20Myth%E2%80%99,%20Journal%20of%20the%20Royal%20Anthropological%20Institute&offset=0](https://librarysearch.uwtsd.ac.uk/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=cdi_proquest_journals_1295910819&context=PC&vid=44WHELF_UWTSD:44WHELF_UWTSD_VU1&lang=en&search_scope=Search_ELEC&adaptor=Primo%20Central&tab=Everything&query=any,contains,Cohen,%20P.%20(1969)%20%E2%80%98Theories%20of%20Myth%E2%80%99,%20Journal%20of%20the%20Royal%20Anthropological%20Institute&offset=0)

(Accessed: 9 October 2024).

Dingle, G; Williams, E; Jetten, J; Welch, J. (2017) 'Choir Singing and Creative Writing Enhance Emotion Regulation in Adults with Chronic Mental Health Conditions', *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 56 (4), pp. 443-457. Available at:

<https://doiorg.ezproxy.uwtsd.ac.uk/10.1111/bjc.12149> (Accessed: 9 October 2024).

Doblhofer, E. (1961) *Voices in Stone: The Decipherment of Ancient Scripts and Writings*. London: Souvenir Press.

Homer (2003) *The Odyssey*. London: Penguin Books.

Lee, H. (2015) *To Kill a Mockingbird*. London: Random House UK Ltd.

Macdonald, S. (2008) *A Companion to Museum Studies*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell

Milton, J. (2000) *Paradise Lost*. London: Penguin Books.

O'Hara, L. (2028) 'Monks, Scribes and Transcribing...Oh my!', *The Medieval Book Travels and Trials in Digital Codicology at Carleton University [blog]*, 21 October. Available at: <https://medievalbook.hcommons.org/2018/10/21/monks-scribes-and-transcribing-oh-my/> (Accessed: 29 September 2024).

Oliver, M. (1994) *A Poetry Handbook: A Prose Guide to Understanding and Writing Poetry*. New York: Harper Collins Publishers.

Onetto, M. and Podesta, M.M. (2011) 'Cueva de las Manos: An Outstanding Example of a Rock Art Site in South America'. *Adoranten*, pp. 67-78. Available at: <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/cueva-de-las-manos-outstanding-example-rock-art/docview/1521033595/se-2?accountid=130472> (Accessed: 27 September 2024).

Ong, W.J. (1982) *Orality and Literacy: The technologizing of the World*. London: Routledge.

Ryan, J. (2024) 'What Does a Video game Writer Do? And How to Become One', *Game Design Skills*, Available at: <https://gamedesignskills.com/game-design/video-game-writer/> (Accessed: 28 September 2024).

Shelley, M. (1993) *Frankenstein*. Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited.

Slingerland, E. (2008) *What Science Offers the Humanities: Integrating Body and Culture*. New York: Cambridge University Press.