



Creative Writing Studies and Literary Studies: Converging Agendas?

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ABSTRACT

During the 1990s and early 2000s, much of the scholarly work we would now call “creative writing studies” was conducted by people working at the intersections of creative writing and rhetoric-composition. For aspiring academics looking to work beyond the limited modes of inquiry then available in most creative writing programs, rhetoric-composition provided what academic literary study could not: a platform for philosophical inquiry and scholarly research into textuality founded in issues of production, as opposed to mere interpretation. There were even some calls for creative writers and compositionists to band together and leave English departments behind, thus freeing themselves from the curricular constraints formed by nearly three quarters of a century in which “English” had become largely synonymous with “literature”: the scholarly, interpretive study of literature, to be more exact.

The professional reality in the 2020s, though, is that most people interested in creative writing studies must exist—if, in fact, they are able to find academic employment at all—within the confines of college and university English departments that also house other sub-fields, including literary study, which, although it may be less dominant than it once was, is still a force to be reckoned with.

Although academic literary study may still be a largely interpretive enterprise, there are some literary scholars who have moved in new—and, from the perspective of creative writing studies, promising—directions. This presentation will survey some of that scholarship, including Hannah Sullivan’s *The Work of Revision* (an exploration of how “modernist” ideas about the process of writing, formed by the available technologies of the early twentieth century, came to inform practices both in literary study and in the creative writing workshop) and Matthew Kirschenbaum’s *Track Changes: A Literary History of Word Processing* (which, as its title suggests, explores the effects on writers’ processes of a technology that emerged later in the twentieth century).

This presentation will end with a call for participants to consider whether—and if so, in what ways—new directions in literary study provide a possible opening for creative writers to do what some did a couple of decades ago: look to forge connections with practitioners in another subfield of English studies with an eye toward transforming English studies.