Beyond the Tipping Point: Creative Writing Comes of Age

Stephanie Vanderslice

“As for the future, your task is not to foresee it but to enable it.”
Antoine de Saint Exupéry


If it is true that in order for a discipline to look toward the future, it must first reach a certain critical mass, then with the publication of The Future for Creative Writing, Creative Writing in the Digital Age, and The Bloomsbury Guide to Creative Writing, a monograph, an edited collection, and a textbook-cum-writer’s guide respectively, creative writing theory and pedagogy may have finally arrived. Momentum toward this point, however, has been building for years, decades even. After a brief lull following the death of field leader Wendy Bishop in 2003, the stream of scholarship interrogating the discipline has continued more or less unabated since 2005, including important work from Heather Beck, Paul Dawson, Dianne Donnelly, Kate Haake, Jeri Kroll, Graeme Harper, Anna Leahy, Tim Mayers, Kelly Ritter, myself, and many others. At this writing, the Journal of Creative Writing Studies is about to debut, generously hosted by the Rochester

Stephanie Vanderslice is professor of writing and Director of the Arkansas Writer’s MFA Workshop at the University of Central Arkansas. She has most recently written Rethinking Creative Writing (Frontinus 2011). Studying Creative Writing, an edited collection for undergraduates, is forthcoming in 2016. She has been an NCTE member since 2000.

Copyright © 2016 by the National Council of Teachers of English. All rights reserved.
Institute of Technology and edited Trent Hergenrader, James Ryan, and myself, as well as numerous talented section editors, and a companion Creative Writing Studies organization and conference (Fall 2016, Asheville, NC, orchestrated by Rachel Haley Himmelheber) are about to launch. The time seems more than ripe, then, to look at three texts that have emerged that take stock of the movement and position the field’s trajectory into the twenty-first century.

Graeme Harper’s monograph *The Future for Creative Writing* provides a good place to start. In it he examines creative writing’s “future from the point of view of that already in place and now evolving,” as well as suggests “where creative writing might be in years to come, if changes in the wider world influence the practice . . . in predictable ways” (1). From there, I will consider the ways in which the work in *Creative Writing in the Digital Age* fulfills some of Harper’s predictions, and then finally look at how *The Bloomsbury Guide to Creative Writing*, as one of the most current creative writing guides on the market, realizes some of the scholarly imperatives that the preceding two books create.

A leading scholar in the field internationally, the author and editor of numerous books on the subject and the founding editor-in-chief of *New Writing: The Journal of Creative Writing Theory and Practice* since 2004, Graeme Harper is uniquely situated to consider creative writing from multiple perspectives. From this vantage point, he asserts in no uncertain terms that “key evolutionary developments” at the end of the last century and the beginning of this one have established an understanding of “the distinctiveness of creative writing as [uniquely] human and something that can be taught and researched” (2), especially as it is taught in higher education institutions around the world. At the same time, Harper also recognizes a certain tension regarding who is “best placed to take the lead in the teaching and research of creative writing” (3), a tension that is heightened by the fact that, “globally, over time, different roles envisioned for creative writing in academe reflect different national contexts” (3). Nonetheless, at this point, despite being filtered through different higher educational settings and histories, it is more or less globally understood that creative writing is a “human field of human endeavor with specific modes of creation and critical understanding and a specific knowledge to explore and advance” (3).

From this understanding, Harper traces the influence of other disciplines in the study of creative writing and in the growth and strengthening of the field, noting particularly the influence of literary study (textual analysis), linguistics, psychology (especially the study of creativity), as well as other sciences and social sciences, especially with regard for the study of writing as a cultural practice. While accurate for the most part, his is a heavily British- and Australian-influenced lineage notable for leaving out connections between creative writing and composition studies in the United States, especially in regard to cognitivist theories of writing (although to be fair, he takes them up later in the book). Indeed, Harper goes on to point out that
what we know and project into the future about creative writing from discoveries [in the sciences and social sciences] is that creative writing knowledge has been most often differentiated from such things as “scientific knowledge” by its individuation and by the practices of creative writing producing hard-to-measure results. (4)

Wendy Bishop also discussed this difficulty extensively in Released into Language (1990), her book on creative writing pedagogy, when she problematized writer’s self-reports as unreliable, an issue I’ll return to later.

Despite challenges in research, creative writing is not going anywhere and in fact, remains a growth field in higher education when other subjects in the humanities are stagnating. As a result, Harper quite wisely forecasts that the future for it is “created by our enduring human passion for it, our interest in both continuing to undertake and to produce it, to engage with both the actions and the results” of it (10). Creative writing is changing, however, something most of us working within it recognize, and so Harper also warns that it is also not a future, “such as we can keep all things about it as they are today or determine all things for the future in a way we might like” (10). Given the field’s earlier tendency—current energetic change agent/leaders aside—to ossify and to rely on traditional, “lore”-based pedagogies, this is a critical warning to issue and one that Harper necessarily returns to throughout the book: The future of creative writing is a moving target. If we hope to give our students the tools to succeed and sustain themselves as writers beyond the university, as professors and researchers, we must continually move with it.

In a key early chapter, “Dynamism and the Creative Writer,” one of the critical changes Harper sees as ascending with creative writing in the twenty-first century is a move away from creative writing as product and toward creative writing as process—a move that will be entirely familiar with American scholars for whom the process movement has been entrenched in composition studies for decades. Harper’s angle on process in creative writing production and pedagogy is slightly different, however. He notes that from the eighteenth through the twentieth centuries, creative writing was all about product, about creating something material: “objects were paramount to the developed world. Everything was connected to this fact” (37). In the early twenty-first century, however, creative writers work in a world of “synaptic technologies,” which are those focused on “experiences and creating points on networks . . . [not] on manufacturing material objects” (37). In other words, synapticism means privileging “behavior and organization and orchestration . . . giving prominence to action” (37). Previously, the “action” of creative writing was obscured by a process that emphasized end, material results (40). Now, however, through the digital connectedness of society, the action leading up to the result can be made visible. To demonstrate this point, Harper provides the example of the supplementary material now packaged with the DVD of a film as a matter of course. When DVDs first began including this material, such as director’s comments and behind-the-scenes
documents, information on process rather than product, the practice was unusual. Today all DVD films are expected to offer this kind of supplementary material, so that instead of providing just the “product” of the film, the DVD now supplies the aggregate texts, including the process that makes up the “action” of the film (43).

Based on this rise in the importance of action or “process,” Harper goes on to predict that “the sequence of composition in creative writing will become increasingly prominent,” and “investigating the ‘sequence’ [emphasis mine] of creative writing will nonetheless move us closer to an understanding of how a creative writer works” (45).

In the next chapter, “Creative Writing Educating,” Harper builds on this rise of the emphasis on action or process to explore more deeply how “the education of creative writers, as individuals and as a body of people involved in a specific kind of human practice, has happened and continues to happen both informally and formally” (54). He shrewdly points out that we have had problems in the past examining this education due to the “romance of the creative, where, at points in human history, we have not approached the creative critically, for fear of interrupting it” (57) and because we have often, in the modern period, begun creative writing teaching at the “end of the practice, (i.e., with the finished artifacts) and then . . . worked backward [in] exploring how to write creatively, what modes or methods or ideas appear to best produce the kinds of results that the completed artifacts represent” (58). Unfortunately, doing so has led to the kind of inaccurate writer’s self-reports Wendy Bishop explored and to a falsification of what “creative writing learning means” (58). Again nodding to cognitivists and composition theorists in the United States, Harper acknowledges that

[while] academic units associated with rhetoric and composition in the US have strongly investigated such writerly [concerns] . . . the field of creative writing has been somewhat removed from or parallel to this, not least (and perhaps ironically) because of an interest in promoting and supporting individuality and an “arts practice” ideal rather than what might be seen in a pejorative sense as an “academic” ideal of writing. (62)

Here again it is worth noting, as Patrick Bizarro does in his re-evaluation of Bishop’s Released into Language called “Writer’s Self Reports, (Com)positioning, and the Recent History of Academic Creative Writing,” that “cognitivist approaches to research in creative writing were a great attraction for creative writers because, as research methods, cognitivist approaches privileged the writer writing” (122). Although cognitivism later “fell out of favor in the composition community” in the all-important chapter two of Released Into Language, which focused on the cognitivists themselves (including Janet Emig, Mina Shaughnessy, Sondra Perl, Nancy Sommers, Lillian Bridwell, Linda Flower, John R. Hayes, John Daly, and Michael Miller) Bizarro contends that Bishop importantly brought together what “writers have said about their writing, what researchers have found, and what those who value an entire plan for writing have decided will work best with students” (122).
Even though *Released into Language* remains a critical text in understanding creative writing history and theory, Bizarro is correct that cognitivism fell out of favor after its publication, just as Harper astutely observes that the field of creative writing continues to suffer from a reluctance to focus on process or action, on creation of the material product in order to understand how to teach its creation. “It will always be simpler to focus on objects over actions,” Harper tells us, “if we don’t know how creative writing happens and how it might best be supported” (62).

Given the uniqueness of creative writing to the human species, one might think it “would make us experts in the nature of the creative . . . and creativity . . . yet . . . we have struggled to place the creative in our epistemological realm. . .” (Harper 77). This struggle, he argues, is relevant as we push for continued research and as we “consider the nature of organizational involvement in formal creative writing education” (77). Globally, there are significant national differences on these levels. Great Britain and Australasia have expressed their support of creative writing research “at the level of general involvement of students and college and university teachers and at the level of governmental policy through contributions made to creative writing research as research sponsorship” (78). In the United States, however, research in creative writing has progressed in a different direction, with a less centralized level of governmental sponsorship and lack of support leading to the “study of rhetoric and composition having their own institutional identities and creative writing often differentiated from these areas by the ways in which it approaches learning [and] links to cognate disciplines such as the study of literature” (79). According to Harper, one way to bridge these differences is via genetic criticism, a repositioning of literary research so that “writerly process is more directly explored by mining earlier versions of texts and other physical writerly evidence” (80). Genetic criticism takes the emphasis off final “products” and returns it to process, where Harper feels it belongs and where it can best serve creative writing theory and pedagogy in a connected twenty-first century interested as much in the making of a product as the product itself.

In the last part of *The Future for Creative Writing*, Harper moves from the pedagogy of creative writing to the prospects of students of creative writing, the future writers themselves. He makes several predictions about the future of the paper book that align with current publishing trends: yes, paper books will exist in the twenty-second century; no, they will not be the central focus of our libraries, museums, educational institutions, and reading public, just as publishers and bookstores as we now think of them will no longer exist (96). What, then, will happen to these nascent writers, the very people passing through the writing workshops whose signature pedagogy we struggle to quantify and qualify now? Certainly, as the paper book morphs into something else, as “new identities for commonly known forms and genres of works of creative writing . . . emerge in years to come” (102) creative writing business models will be redefined as there will be “less of a separation of
creative writers who write for one medium, one avenue of dissemination or for one or other genre” (103), an interesting concept to consider for the many creative writers who continue to battle in the genre wars today, arguing for the supremacy for one or another genre in the classroom. In a hundred years, according to Harper, the battle will be moot, genres, in being “less determined” having been given over for avenues of “more mutual critical thought, investigation, and more certainly, creative exploration” (103). It is difficult to say exactly what this means for creative writers except that, as Harper predicts,

if the experience of creative writing becomes more accessible . . . it seems inevitable that commerce will grow up around access to . . . experiences of creating. At some point the idea of selling a work of creative writing without engaging directly with the experience of its creation will be unusual—whether individually, commercially or communally exchanged. (104)

As Harper points out, we have already begun to see evidence of this phenomena in the ways in which publishers and educators seek out creative writers to speak about their works—with the growth of interconnectivity on the Internet, with sites like YouTube and expectations of authors to cultivate a platform around their work in order to sell it, this kind of engagement is a harbinger of the economic future of creative writing.

If *The Future for Creative Writing* defines a global flashpoint for creative writing as a discipline from a leading scholar’s perspective, then *Creative Writing in the Digital Age: Theory, Practice, and Pedagogy* makes much of what Graeme Harper envisions all the more real and tangible. Edited by three rising scholars in the field, Michael Dean Clark, Trent Hergenrader, and Joseph Rein, the collection is divided into two sections, the first more theoretically based, considering “digital influences on creative writing studies” and the second more praxis based, centered on the use of “digital tools as creative practice” (v). After noting the exponential growth in the field in the last ten years in much the same way Harper does, however, this introduction makes the pointed assertion that despite this considerable wave of recent scholarship, “few works deal with the profound import digital technology has on our discipline” in part because “creative writing remains doggedly more reliant on and rooted in print culture than any other discipline” (2). Indeed, as a scholar who was introduced to digital media by my work in composition and with the National Writing Project years ago and who has been urging creative writing pedagogy to embrace digital technology for years, I couldn’t agree more that in the field of creative writing, a book of this kind is long overdue.

Not surprisingly, an essay by Graeme Harper begins the book with an even more detailed discussion of dynamic/synaptic creative writing in “Creative writing in the age of synapses,” going so far as to actually codify a pedagogy for a curriculum in
which intrinsic goals or processes can be emphasized in a synaptic, interconnected, digital system over extrinsic goals or products. While lengthy because it offers a set of guidelines for classroom pedagogy in the kind of system Harper advocates, the goals he sets forth are worth repeating here. Specifically, in order to teach creative writing synaptically, toward the future, we must

1. Keep in focus the intrinsic and extrinsic goals of writing (both process and product). (13)
2. Create courses that “do not rely on final artifacts to confirm the level of achievement and the level of knowledge but rather that see these artifacts as part of the evidence trail of writerly action.” (14)
3. Understand that while certain “digital technologies as we know them are distinct to our age, digitalism is not.” (14)
4. Teach to experiences that ensure doing creative writing is the emphasis, not the material product of the action.
5. Recognize the “multiple layers of experience, observation and knowledge that creative writing involves.”
6. “Teach with the synapsis in mind,” to empower the creation of conjunctions and meeting places, of opportunities to create bridges that might draw into play new possibilities for [student] work.
7. “Teach to emphasize the role of particular writing situations that define creative solutions.”
8. “Avoid the idea that the classroom defines the parameters of action.”
9. Allow individuality, through a digitally informed world, to reassert itself. (14)

While Harper’s “Creative writing in the age of synapses” offers a universal framework that can be applied to almost any creative writing course in the digital age, Adam Koehler’s “Screening subjects: Workshop pedagogy, media ecologies and (new) student subjectivities” interrogates the fiction workshop as a far from neutral location but, as Donald Morton and Mas’ud Zavarzadeh contend in their landmark 1989 essay “The Cultural Politics of the Fiction Workshop, a “site of ideology, a place in which a particular view of reading/writing texts is put forth and through this view support is given to the dominant social order” (Morton and Zavazadeh qtd. in Koehler 17). Specifically, Koehler examines what happens to “student subjectivity” when the encroaching digital realm forces creative writing to release its grip from privileged, print-based ideologies (19). In relating stories about students so rooted in print culture as to dismiss digital writing technology as too recent, too “low brow,” he points out that students fail to recognize that print culture is also technology (20), something that creative writing’s adherents in academe also sometimes fail to do. In highlighting this tendency, Koehler finds it useful to bring in the work of Kenneth Goldsmith (Uncreative Writing 2012) in identifying print as a technology to engage in and interface with. Goldsmith’s digital workshop privileges the subjectivity of the
A review: Beyond the Tipping Point

Student writer, prodding students to interrogate notions of individual genius, the writer’s relation to culture and language and “what the effects of the general reappropriation of texts means in relation to [students’] own writing” (25). In addition, Koehler also introduces N. Katherine Hayles’s work (Writing Machines 2002) as another way to engage students “with not only print and electronic ideologies but also music” and other visual and gaming arts. Bringing Goldsmith into the classroom, Koehler notes then, engages students with ideas of originality while bringing in Hayles engages them with important questions of multimodality—two modes that Koehler classifies as “dominant ways to think about imaginative writers in a digital age” (25) that form a kind of continuum. A creative writing pedagogy that accommodates the digital turn will “imagine student subjectivities between these two positions” (26) and, further, help students understand their positions along this spectrum while “acknowledging the history that has propelled us there” (26).

Anna Leahy and Douglas Dechow are originally more hesitant to embrace the digital turn in “Concentration, form, and ways of (digitally) seeing,” especially when considering brain science that initially indicates digital modes may erode “habits of mind—creativity, concentration—” that they work to cultivate in their students. N. Katherine Hayles’s Writing Machines has also helped Leahy think about the ways in which poets can “benefit from taking into account differences between print and digital modes when making formal choices” (31) and begin to think about how poets could be “the biggest winners in the digital world and the leaders in figuring out how to make digital projects part and parcel of the humanities” (31). Leahy and Dechow’s essay describes several projects, most notably a Prezi poetry portfolio, that are designed to align “digital projects to the goals of creative writing pedagogy” (31), but one that emerges as most interesting to me is Leahy’s poetry blog assignment because it so thoroughly answers Graeme Harper’s call for a process-not-product-based synaptic creative writing pedagogy in both his monograph and his chapter in this collection. For the assignment, students were required to draft a poem a day on individual blogs created for that purpose and to comment on classmate’s blogs. The posts were intended as a means toward the portfolio project at the end of the course, not as an end in themselves, and they were designed specifically to give students the experience of drafting quickly, “moving to another draft the next day . . . and the benefit of having 30 drafts with which to play at the end of the month” (35). Not only did this practice embed students in the process, the intrinsic goals of writing as Harper enumerates them, it also used digital technology and the students’ ability to post and comment on one another’s poems to make this process visible.

In “Game spaces: Videogames as story-generating systems for creative writers,” Trent Hergenrader returns again to the idea that creative writing is stuck on the notion that “maintaining ‘culture’ [emphasis mine] . . . is somehow the unique responsibility of print literature,” by pointing out that the 2009 NEA study on reading...
in America (which reported a four-point gain in literary reading among college students) completely left out reading done digitally and even went so far as to warn against video games, computers, smartphones, and other devices that hasten declining rates of literacy (45). “Print literature,” Hergenrader reminds us, “may be a preferred medium of English instructors [and 2009 NEA Chairman Dana Gioia] . . . [but] we should respect the media preferences of our students” (46). To this I would add, we should also have a healthy respect for the digital world in which they will deploy these preferences, as well as live and work after they graduate.

In respecting the media preferences of his students, Hergenrader, a professor at RIT, an institution known for its embrace of digital media, has gone so far as to probe the world of video games for their uses in creative writing pedagogy. The best video games, he tells us, those that are open ended and character based (in other words, highly literate), function as excellent story-generating systems that are useful for teaching concepts about character and setting (48). His essay shows how he analyzes video games as primary texts in his classes to show students how characters and setting emerge, and how he also engages his students in extensive world building through the digital, collaborative constructions of fictional worlds online. By engaging digital media in this way, “rather than assuming an oppositional stance to other forms of storytelling media,” Hergenrader encourages us to “incorporate concepts from these media in our classes” (56), acknowledging the future that surrounds and awaits them.

Michael Dean Clark’s essay, “The marketable creative: Using technology and broader notions of skill in the fiction course,” echoes Hergenrader’s charge to recognize students’ digital milieus when he implores creative writing instruction to change as it faces “classrooms of students who can’t write in cursive but can in code, who have been their own publishers almost as long as they’ve been able to use the language,” and to “innovate rather than merely acculturate” (Clark 61). Motivated by the desire to help students answer the question, “What can I do with a writing degree?” Clark writes about redesigning his fiction class to “engage technology philosophically and materially” (64) while also teaching students the fundamentals of storytelling and helping students in seeing themselves as professionally viable. Unfortunately, in doing so, he discovered a lack of discussion in the field in even the “broadest of terms,” finding instead that the majority of books on creative writing pedagogy are focused on craft or on issues encountered in what he terms the “legacy” or traditional, face-to-face teaching format. This discovery forced him, as it has many others including myself, to look outside the discipline for models, leading him to work in fields “as diverse as organizational communication, engineering and business,” although all of these roads led back to the same place—to the idea that in an increasingly collaborative, connected world, “clarity of communication, the heart and head of creative writing, is as important as it has ever been” (64).
To achieve the hybrid platform he set out to build, Clark designed a course operated “in three phases loosely based on the creative process, each making use of a different basic set of technologies” (65). Phase One included four weeks of face-to-face preparation for the larger creative project and focused on issues of craft and storytelling, during which students studied fiction theory. Completed outside the classroom in small groups, Phase Two involved nine weeks on Google apps (Mail, Docs, Drive, Maps, Hangouts) during which student groups put together a novella or novella in stories. Phase Three “returned students to the classroom for the final submission” and also allowed for “directed reflection on the various skill sets the class required students to employ and the ways those skills make them marketable” (65) by tapping into the “potentials of technology as they pertain to storytelling and professionalization” (65).

If it has seemed so far that the scholars in *Creative Writing in the Digital Age* are perhaps suspiciously eager to hop on the digital bandwagon, the collection also includes an essay that asks us to put the brakes on, Joe Amato and Kass Fleisher’s “Two creative writers look askance at digital composition (crayon on paper).” Hold on a moment, Amato and Fleischer suggest, let’s pause and reflect on “why multimodality, as the new buzzword for new media, should become the ‘turf’ to which creative writers are to migrate, traditions in hand, to see what composition studies has to offer them by way of ‘commonalities’” (75). Why, they ask, “should the multimodal serve as our new commons?” (75). Finally, “why should creative writers opt to trade in their mantle of writer for that of (compositional) composer when a somewhat upmarket appellation awaits, that of—and we offer this with what we trust will appear renewed salience—literary artist?” (76).

These are questions well worth asking and questions that, I believe, are partially answered when creative writers take it upon themselves, as experts in their own field, to address issues of digital relevance in the classroom, much the same way some of the authors do here, without looking to composition studies to do so. Though I may have written earlier in this piece that it took my work in composition studies and with the National Writing Project to alert me to the imperative that creative writing pedagogy address technology, like the authors of the essays in this collection, it was my own knowledge and background as a teacher of creative writing that enabled me to integrate technology into my classroom in a way that was salient to the literary landscape and that did not just re-appropriate composition pedagogy. As Amato and Fleisher, Bizarro, Harper, and many others have argued, no longer composition’s handmaiden, creative writing needs to stake its own claim and continue to develop its own theories and pedagogies.

That this is already happening becomes even more apparent in the second half of *Creative Writing in the Digital Age*, titled “Using digital tools as creative practice,” where scholars enumerate the ways in which they have integrated creative writing’s
signature pedagogies (such as the workshop) with digital imperatives. In “Lost in digital translation: Navigating the online creative writing classroom,” for example, Joseph Rein finds that “the atmosphere created by the best—or worst—workshop cannot simply be recreated online” (92) but that there are nonetheless hidden benefits to the online sphere. Chiefly, the asynchronous discussions of the online workshop democratize the workshop, preventing the hierarchies that eventually form, despite our best efforts, in the face-to-face space. Moreover, the online asynchronous discussion allows students to consider and articulate their responses, allowing them to “give—and receive—higher quality feedback” (93).

Further exploring the idea of the online creative writing presence, Janelle Adsit’s “Giving an account of oneself: Teaching identity construction and authorship in creative nonfiction and social media,” demonstrates that today’s students come into the classroom already highly engaged in a “writing culture,” some of them with Twitter feeds and Facebook accounts that have a larger audience than some small-press [publications] will ever see (105). Through a series of carefully scaffolded digital assignments, Adsit takes advantage of this culture to teach students about persona, identity, and code-switching in “adapting to the different expectations and values of different audiences” (109).

Five more essays detail ways in which the authors have used specific technologies—#25wordstory, Taroko Gorge, Inform 7, netprov, and digital storytelling—to further demonstrate the range of opportunities available for integrating digital media in the creative writing classroom via creative writing pedagogy. But the last essay, particularly, Amy Letter’s “Creative writing for new media,” reiterates why this is necessary and that “experience teaching traditional creative writing courses, combined with an enthusiasm for technology and experimentation,” (177) is all that is required to begin it. “Teaching new media,” she explains, is not necessarily “a world apart from teaching traditional creative writing. There are more similarities than differences . . . and an enormous as-yet-unmet demand for these courses as people wish to become more capable creators in the digital literary arts” (188).

Given the exigencies created by *The Future for Creative Writing* and *Creative Writing in the Digital Age*, I approached *The Bloomsbury Guide to Creative Writing* hoping that perhaps some of the imperatives issued by current scholars in creative writing pedagogy would be realized by one of the most recently published textbooks on the market. For the most part, I was not disappointed. In many ways, Tara Mokhtari’s *Bloomsbury’s Guide* is a traditional though highly comprehensive creative writing guide written by a particular creative writer with her own particular spin on the creative process, and one that I think most beginning writers will appreciate. What I would like to focus on, here, and indeed, applaud are several ways in which the guide is not traditional and in which, at least in spirit if not in form, it picks up right where *Creative Writing in the Digital Age* left off.
Specifically, Mokhtari writes with a keen awareness of the current and foreseeable literary landscape when she tells students not to limit themselves to one genre but to experiment with many, reminding them often throughout the book of the realities of being a writer and the multiplicity of work a professional writer needs to be able to produce in order to survive. Moreover, she goes well beyond the traditional three- or four-genre creative writing text by expanding this guide to include chapters offering exhaustive introductions to screenwriting, writing for performance, writing for digital media, and writing critical theory/exegeses of one’s own work. In the chapter on writing for digital media, especially, she offers detailed introductions to digital storytelling, online article structure (i.e., the “list” piece, etc.), hypertexts, social media, blogs, and ebooks. Moreover, throughout the book and in the last chapter on critical theory and exegesis, Mokhtari advocates writers learning to write about their own work as a way of not only improving it but also learning to fend for themselves in the literary marketplace. Finally, in each chapter of the *Bloomsbury Guide* the craft discussions are heavily scaffolded by writing exercises, and Mokhtari spends considerable time in the introduction to the book urging readers to complete those exercises when they come upon them, even if it goes against their “introverted, perfectionist, anxious” natures (9) and even if they have to take a deep breath and “relax into what is being asked of [them]” (10). By my estimate, between one-third to one-half of the book comprises these exercises, indicating a focus on craft that would make Graeme Harper proud.

Has Tara Mokhtari read *The Future for Creative Writing* or *Creative Writing in the Digital Age*? Probably not—the three books’ publication dates overlap too much for that. Moreover, it usually takes some time for research and theory to make its way into textbooks, especially introductory textbooks and especially in such a tradition-bound discipline as this one. But it is clear that she has been influenced by both the current realities of digital technology as a practicing creative writer and by a climate, in the last decade, of critical reflection in creative writing pedagogy that has at last reached a tipping point, and, if these three books are any indication, begun to enact, to enable, if you will, sustained change.

**Works Cited**


