

*Book review***Michael D Clark, Trent Hergenrader, & Joseph Rein (2015) *Creative Writing in the Digital Age: Theory, Practice, and Pedagogy*. Bloomsbury. ISBN: 9781472574077**

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Creative Writing in the Digital Age: Theory, Practice, and Pedagogy, edited by Michael D. Clark, Trent Hergenrader, and Joseph Rein, who are writers and instructors themselves, offers guidance for practical applications of digital media and online teaching tools for creative writing classrooms. In the digital era, the technology ethos has penetrated educational fields, with creative writing classrooms no exception. The 14 contributors reflect the influence of digital media on creative writing and outcomes of their digital-mediated creative writing projects applied in their classrooms.

The book is comprised of two sections. The first section, “Digital influences on creative writing studies”, covering Chapters 2 to 7, overviews the effect of the digital age on creative writing as a discipline. The second section, “Using digital tools as creative practice”, comprising Chapters 8 to 15, practically introduces a contemporary approach to creative writing classrooms using digital tools in order to meet the needs of modern students’ interests.

The first unit of the book begins with a discussion of how the idea of space and time has been transformed (Harper in Chapter 2) and multimodality has been intensified (Koehler in Chapter 3) in creative writing in the digital age. Various digital mediums such as online presentation tools and blogs allow students to become creative about their spacing, placing, coloring, and other effects of the texts, as Leahy and Dechow (Chapter 4) review. Hergenrader (Chapter 5) highlights that the reference of creative writing is expanded by social media and other digital tools such as video games and Google which students today consume every day. Such multimodal tools provide students with broad “avenues for creative exploration” (p. 56), bringing creative

writing closer to students and place it in the context to which students are more accustomed.

Despite the book’s discussion being centered around the implementation of digital media in classrooms, it is not their intention to suggest a complete shift from print-based to multimodal creative writing practices. Clark (Chapter 6), for instance, acknowledges established creative writing pedagogy as a “legacy” (p. 62). To end the first section, Amato and Fleisher (Chapter 7) concern themselves with the definition of aesthetics and stylistics in multimodal writings in new media forms. As they suggest, teachers need to balance between pioneering multimodal writing approach and pursuing traditional creative writing aesthetics.

It is notable that Clark mentions “marketability” in his chapter as a benefit of using digital tools in classrooms where students acquire technical skills. Marketability of classroom content is a matter striking education in general especially in a society today commonly characterized as neoliberal (Holborow 2015) where students’ knowledge is sold as human capital after graduation. Clark actively offers his students e-publishing tasks rather than in-house classroom tasks. By providing students with an opportunity to become a “published author”, his class offers them “a higher standard of accountability” (p. 79) valuable for their future careers. In this light, using digital tools lets teachers fulfill the role of “helping students better articulate the marketability of their skill set” (p. 64).

The second unit of this book is more practical. Rein (Chapter 8) guides readers on how to conduct a creative writing course online. Adsit (Chapter 9) introduces examples of using social media (Facebook) in her creative writing class. The contributors further introduce digital tools and tasks that enable students to develop

advanced skills beyond writing texts in classrooms. For example, similar to Clark's project, students in Scheg's (Chapter 10) class publish their writings online to an open community. Reed (Chapter 12) and Letter (Chapter 15) use advanced software in their classes: Inform 7, a programming language for interactive fiction, and Adobe Creative Suite. The students in these high-tech creative classes built trouble-shooting and problem-solving skills through being cooperative with each other and tackling the difficulty of processing the software (p. 185).

Another important lesson each student learns from using social media in creative writing classrooms is the presence of a digital persona. As Adsit explains in her chapter, by writing in online communities, students learn that their identity is "context-dependent and contingent" (p. 109) depending on their audience: one writes differently according to discourse communities they belong to. Similarly, Brown, Jr (Chapter 11) claims that students in his class learned that the author-self is "multilayered and dynamic" (p. 133). Students find their "online persona" (p. 181) different from their "self" in other online discourse or real-life communities, a matter which Letter (Chapter 15) also touches on. Students, therefore, could take advantage of such an opportunity in classrooms for social media literacy, a skill in high demand in this digital age.

Using digital tools in classrooms possibly creates difficulties for teachers who may not be digital natives. However, they are encouraged to "view digital tools as providing an opportunity for students to broaden their creative skill set" (p. 2). With this book, teachers are more guided when using technology in their classrooms. The capability of effectively using digital skills or

conducting online classes is a skill desired by many teachers who went through the global pandemic of COVID-19. Considering the possibility of the coming age being more digitalized after the experience of the coronavirus pandemic, creative writing pedagogy (or any pedagogical field) needs, a "constant study and critique, constant reassessment and practice" (p. 102) to meet the needs of the age. In this respect, this book remains, or is more than ever, relevant after six years of its publication.

As Hergenrader suggests, digital-mediated creative writing practices can offer students some technical skills that enable them to practice various ways of artistic expression and even open a new frontier for the future of creative writing classrooms. This book is supported by one core value, which is well described on the second page of the introductory chapter: "regardless of the composing tools students use, the fundamental tenets of creative expression, be it precise language, narrative, or self-reflection, will always remain".

Author biography

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Reference

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