

**Title:** The Absence of Theory

**Author:** Paul Williams

**Publisher:** Routledge (United Kingdom)

**Year:** 2012

## Research Background

'The Absence of Theory' is a performative short story about a creative writing workshop in Milwaukee, Wisconsin run by an inexperienced creative writing teacher. Using the creative language of narrative rather than conventional critical discourse, this short story describes how the notion of 'theory' is deliberately excluded from creative writing workshops, which tend towards self-congratulation, cannibalization of ideas, and conformity of practice.

## Research Contribution

The story examines the standard pedagogical creative writing tool, the 'writing workshop' and questions its basis in New Criticism's assumptions that 'a successful text should contain all the elements necessary for its comprehension.' It questions too the notion that the author is (sole) originator of the text, Peter Elbow's Expressivist notion that the author constructs and transmits meaning primarily through personal feelings and emotions, and the commonly held notion that any discussion of literary theory in a creative writing class is an external and unnecessary imposition that interferes with the writing process. The story also uses fiction as a means to explore issues normally associated with more traditional critical formats (for example, the critical essay).

## Research Significance

The story is published in an international A\* ERA ranked journal (*New Writing*), and is discussed in a companion paper (Williams 2013 'Creative Praxis as a Form of Academic Discourse', *New Writing: The International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing*, Volume 10, Issue 3, 2013). The story is a set text in an Honours course in Creative Writing (University of the Sunshine Coast, 2013 -15).