



The Elephants Teach: Creative Writing Since 1880

By David Gershom Myers

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When Vladimir Nabokov was up for a chair in literature at Harvard, the linguist Roman Jakobson protested: “What’s next? Shall we appoint elephants to teach zoology?” That anecdote, with which D. G. Myers begins *The Elephants Teach*, perfectly frames the issues this book tackles.

Myers explores more than a century of debate over how writing should be taught and whether it can or should be taught in a classroom at all. Along the way, he incorporates insights from a host of poets and teachers, including Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Robert Frost, John Berryman, John Dewey, Lionel Trilling, Robert Lowell, Ezra Pound, and Saul Bellow. And from his exhaustive research, Myers extracts relevant background information on nineteenth-century educational theory; shifts in technology, publishing, and marketing; the growth of critical theory in this country; and the politics of higher education. While he shows how creative writing has become a machine for creating more creative writing programs, Myers also suggests that its history supplies a precedent for something different—a way for creativity and criticism, poetry and scholarship, to join together to produce not just writing programs but good writers.

Updated with fresh commentary on what’s happened to creative writing in the academy since the first edition was published ten years ago, *The Elephants Teach* will be indispensable for students and teachers of writing, literature, and literary history.

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Editorial Review

Review

“*The Elephants Teach* is an astonishing piece of work. . . . Under the author’s magic it becomes the story of a great part of our culture since the turn of the century.” – from the Foreword by Jacques Barzun

(from the Foreword by Jacques Barzun)

“In clear prose and careful scholarship, David Myers . . . tells the story of how what was supposed to free English literature from the trap of academic disciplines became itself an academic discipline.”<*First Things*>

(*First Things*)

“Myers is thorough, his writing is clear, and the history he has to tell will be to most, if not all, current teachers of creative writing little short of a revelation. . . . This is a book all teachers of creative writing should read.”<*History of Education Quarterly*>

(Roger Mitchell *History of Education Quarterly*)

“This material I think should be required for anyone who intends to teach creative writing on the college or university level.”

(Patrick Bizzaro *College Composition and Communication*)

From the Publisher

Prentice Hall Studies in Writing and Culture captures the excitement of an emerging discipline. The writers in this series are challenging basic assumptions, asking new questions, and trying to broaden inquiry about writing and the teaching of writing. These writers raise challenging questions about how we teach and how we build communities of writers. They also investigate subjects as far-ranging as the nature of knowledge and the role that culture plays in shaping pedagogy. The series is particularly concerned with the interplay between language and culture, and about how gender considerations, race, and audience shape our writing and our teaching. Early volumes will be devoted to the essay, audience, autobiography, and how writers teach writing. Other studies will explore matters that are critical to teaching writing. *The Elephants Teach: Creative Writing Since 1880* traces the development of “creative” writing as (1) a classroom subject, the teaching of fiction- and verse-writing; and (2) a national system for the employment of fiction writers and poets to teach the subject. It answers the questions, “Why has fiction and verse writing come to be called creative?” and “When and why was this term first used?”

From the Back Cover

The Elephants Teach is a captivating account of how creative writing has become an integral part of our culture since the last decades of the nineteenth century. A story of the American will-to-art, it also offers a comprehensive reinterpretation of the development of English as a field of study. D.G. Myers argues that English has been split into three rival and antagonist fields: composition, literary scholarship, and the constructive art of literature, which includes both creative writing and literary criticism. He traces this split from the earliest days of the discipline, when it was called philology, through the rise of English composition and the critical wars of the thirties, down to the present. Along the way, he tells how poets and writers turned

to university teaching as a means of economic support, restoring a neglected chapter in the history of American authorship and literary education.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Elaine Bell:

Book is to be different for every single grade. Book for children until adult are different content. To be sure that book is very important for all of us. The book The Elephants Teach: Creative Writing Since 1880 has been making you to know about other expertise and of course you can take more information. It is quite advantages for you. The guide The Elephants Teach: Creative Writing Since 1880 is not only giving you a lot more new information but also for being your friend when you sense bored. You can spend your current spend time to read your publication. Try to make relationship using the book The Elephants Teach: Creative Writing Since 1880. You never really feel lose out for everything if you read some books.

Myrtle Brown:

This The Elephants Teach: Creative Writing Since 1880 book is absolutely not ordinary book, you have after that it the world is in your hands. The benefit you will get by reading this book is actually information inside this e-book incredible fresh, you will get details which is getting deeper you actually read a lot of information you will get. This specific The Elephants Teach: Creative Writing Since 1880 without we recognize teach the one who reading through it become critical in thinking and analyzing. Don't always be worry The Elephants Teach: Creative Writing Since 1880 can bring if you are and not make your handbag space or bookshelves' turn out to be full because you can have it with your lovely laptop even cellphone. This The Elephants Teach: Creative Writing Since 1880 having fine arrangement in word as well as layout, so you will not sense uninterested in reading.

Ricky Bodkin:

The Elephants Teach: Creative Writing Since 1880 can be one of your beginning books that are good idea. We all recommend that straight away because this publication has good vocabulary that may increase your knowledge in terminology, easy to understand, bit entertaining but nevertheless delivering the information. The copy writer giving his/her effort to set every word into delight arrangement in writing The Elephants Teach: Creative Writing Since 1880 yet doesn't forget the main position, giving the reader the hottest as well as based confirm resource info that maybe you can be certainly one of it. This great information may drawn you into new stage of crucial contemplating.

Robert Hansen:

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