

## **An easy one: the paradox of the creative writing department!**

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*Abstract.* A department where you study creative writing is a paradox, given the following assumption: creativity is something natural to creative people and they do not need to study it. I try to formulate the paradox more clearly and note a logical gap.

*Draft version:* version 2 (14th December 2022)

I believe this is Helen Beebee in an essay writing guide, from decades ago:

A well known philosopher may be able to get away with starting a paper with the words. ‘Granny and I think that things have gone too far, what with relativism, idealism and pragmatism at Harvard, graffiti in the subway stations, and Lord knows what all next.’ You, on the other hand, cannot. Remember that you are studying philosophy, not creative writing. (Beebee n.d. 10)

It sounds as if Beebee accepts the creative writing department. But you might think the existence of such a thing is paradoxical. Apologies if the paradox has already been clearly stated; it has surely been felt:

- (a) If you are suited to creative writing, then you are creative.
- (b) If you are creative, then creativity is natural for you and you do not need a course.
- (c) The creative writing department gives courses in creative writing.

It does not logically follow from these propositions that the creative writing department should be shut, however. For one thing, imagine a creative painter, call him Salvador. He has trouble making his creativity realize itself in writing. So he goes

for a course. The course enables a creativity that was there to manifest itself in writing. (I imagine it is mainly economists in the creative writing department though. They know the value of mainstream economics for finding agents, etc.)

### **Appendix**

Perhaps someone prefers a different formulation in which creativity cannot be taught. “It cannot be that before you were not creative and now, after teaching, you are!” But much the same gap will arise from that proposition and the existence of such departments.

### **Reference**

Beebee, H. n.d. How to write a Philosophy essay & exam preparation. *Centre for Philosophy. University of Manchester Department of Government.*