Hugh Burkhart

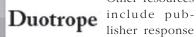# Creative writing and the Web

Resources for the literary arts

Writing can be at once exhilarating and exasperating, and getting your poetry, prose, or script noticed can be the most frustrating part of the process. As a writer and librarian, I understand the difficulty of sifting through online sources for everything from agents to submissions guidelines. Both the beginning writer and the seasoned veteran may find it challenging to determine the best venues for their work. The following resources represent a cross-section of sites aimed at authors investigating publications, searching for contests, looking for new writing, or simply seeking inspiration from a community of literary artists. The resources often cross the categories I've created, but I've placed them according to the needs I believe they serve best.

With 151 full-residency MFA creative writing programs in the United States, finding information on degree-granting programs can be especially daunting.[1] There are many more English master's programs with creative emphases, as well as creative writing Ph.D. programs. The sites under the programs category provide current information on universities and rankings, as well as articles about pursuing graduate education in this area.

These resources should prove useful for teachers and librarians, but they are intended primarily for writers themselves. Of course, the list is not in any way exhaustive. However, most sites include further links to long lists of publications, publishers, contests, graduate programs, and professional organizations. The Internet offers a vast array of materials. My hope is that this compilation will cut down on the amount of time writers spend on information seeking, so that they can spend time on what's most important—writing.

Submissions

• **Duotrope's Digest.** This "award-winning, free writers' resource" lists "over 3,475 current Fiction and Poetry publications." Writers use dropdown menus to enter details of their piece, such as genre, style, and length.

Other resources include publisher response time statistics and helpful tips for writers and editors. The Web site should prove helpful to veteran and burgeoning writers. *Access:* http://www.duotrope.com/.

• **Luna Park Review.** With a name taken from an avant-garde magazine mentioned in a Roberto Bolaño short story, Luna Park features a wide range of material organized by an easily navigable menu. Users can scan the directory for print and online magazines, literary events, and writing contests. There are also interviews with writers and publishers, and reviews of current magazine issues. Writers can also contact the site to contribute interviews and reviews, a good option for those looking for writing opportunities and to expand their Web presence. *Access:* http://lunaparkreview.com/.

• **Top 50 Literary Magazines.** From the online reference source Every Writer's Resource.com comes this annotated list with links to some of the United States' best-known literary magazines. While any "best of" list will be subjective, this one is based

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on clearly elucidated criteria. Users can also go to the site's message boards to post opinions and petition for publications they think should be added to the list. The annotations provide backgrounds on each publication's history, feature links to magazine Web sites, and note which publications accept unsolicited and online submissions. *Access:* http://www.everywritersresource.com/topliterarymagazines.html.

Magazines

• *McSweeney's.* The Web site for Dave Eggers' publishing company is also a gateway to a number of other sites. Links include magazines like *The Believer,* the nonprofit tutoring center 826 National, and, of course, *Timothy McSweeney's Quarterly Concern* and *Internet Tendency*. The *Tendency* is a kind of online companion to the *Concern* and features columns, articles, and amusing lists, such as "Things Liberal Arts Graduates Never Like Hearing." Awareness of this site is a must for anyone interested in contemporary literature and the link between literature and social justice. *Access:* http://www.mcsweeneys.net/.

• *Monkey Bicycle.* This online journal delivers on its promise of "literary goodness." Updated twice weekly, it features poetry, fiction, and intriguing "one-sentence stories." A print version of the journal is published twice a year by Dzanc Books. Online submissions are accepted. *Access:* http://monkeybicycle.net/.

• *Narrative Magazine.* This online magazine features work by emerging artists and well-known writers like Alice Munro, Amy Bloom, and Sherman Alexie. Users can read all works of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and graphic stories by joining *Narrative* for free. While readers do not pay, *Narrative* does pay its contributors, who can submit their work online. *Access:* http://www.narrativemagazine.com/.

• *The Paris Review.* The venerable American publication, founded in Paris in 1953 by Harold L. Humes, Peter Matthiessen, and George Plimpton, has published some of the world's best-known writers. Its homepage

contains excerpts from the latest print issue as

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well as a lively blog. *Access:* http://www.theparisreview.org/.

• *Zoetrope.* Launched by filmmaker Francis Ford Coppola, this Web site links to the site for the print magazine *Zoetrope: All-Story,* but it has much more to offer. Users are free to join the Virtual Studio, where they can submit work for critique by other writers. There are also online workshops available for a fee. Writers will also want to check out the annual American Zoetrope Screenplay Contest and Zoetrope: All-Story Fiction Contest. *Access:* http://www.zoetrope.com/.

Publishers

• **City Lights.** It would be impossible to list all active publishing houses in this article, but the list would be incomplete without mentioning City Lights. Established in San Francisco in 1953 by poet Lawrence Ferlinghetti and Peter D. Martin, it continues to be one of the best independent bookstores in the United States. As a publisher, City Lights puts out fiction, memoir, poetry, and books on social issues. In addition to information about bookstore events and new books, the site has podcasts of readings and interviews. *Access:* http://www.citylights.com/.

• **Dzanc Books.** This nonprofit publisher of books of literary fiction, literary journals, and the Best of the Web anthology series also has a writers-in-residence program and runs an international conference. The publisher also hosts several writing contests for artists at various stages in their careers. In addition, they have online writing workshops and mentoring programs. *Access:* http://www.dzancbooks.org/.

Programs

• **The Best of the Best.** Though this list now dates back five years, *The Atlantic* magazine's ranking is a good starting point for anyone investigating creative writing

graduate programs. Categories include Five Programs with Notable Alumni, Five Top Low-Residency MFA Programs, and Five Top Ph.D. Programs in Creative Writing. Several of the entries have links to program Web sites. *Access:* http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2007/08/the-best-of-the-best/6049/.

• "**Six Myths About the Creative Writing Master of Fine Arts.**" Writers considering applying to graduate creative writing programs would be well advised to consult this Huffington Post article by Seth Abramson. Abramson, himself a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, has also researched and written the annual *Poets & Writers* MFA rankings. He carefully discusses each point without leading the reader to any particular conclusion about the wisdom of pursuing graduate work in this area. *Access:* http://www.huffingtonpost.com/seth-abramson/six-myths-about-the-creat_b_705279.html.

• **2012 MFA Rankings.** The annual ranking of MFA programs by *Poets & Writers* magazine frequently causes controversy in the writing community. Nevertheless, the information provided is thorough and invaluable. Overall rankings are determined by MFA applicants, who answer questions about programs to which they applied. Hard data for the rankings is compiled by writer and attorney Seth Abramson. *Access:* http://www.pw.org/content/2012_mfa_rankings_the_top_fifty.

Organizations

• **Association of Writers & Writing Programs (AWP).** While AWP reserves some of their material for those who pay a membership fee, there is still a range of useful information available for free on this site. The searchable directory of writers' conferences and centers is one such resource. Another is the list of AWP contests and awards. *Access:* http://www.awpwriter.org/.

• **Poetry Foundation.** With a history dating back 100 years to the founding of *Poetry* magazine, the Poetry Foundation works to raise poems and poets to the largest audience possible. On the foundation's Web site users can browse poems and read poets' biographies. There are also articles on relevant topics, along with videos and podcasts of readings. Writers can also submit their work to *Poetry* via this site. *Access:* http://www.poetryfoundation.org/.

• **Writers Guild of America (WGA), West.** This arm of WGA is aimed at screen and video writers, as well as writers for animation and new media. WGA West makes many resources available to nonmembers, including its agency list and FAQs on creative rights, as well as useful links for aspiring film and television writers. Another important intellectual property resource is their free script registration service. *Access:* http://www.wga.org/.

Trade publications

• *Poets & Writers.* This magazine bills itself as the "nation's largest nonprofit organization serving creative writers." In addition to publishing the annual MFA Rankings report, *Poets & Writers* also provides information on grants and awards, jobs listings, and a literary agent database. There is simply too much to list in this annotation. Visit the site to gain free access to an abundance of material. *Access:* http://www.pw.org/.

• *Script Magazine.* There is a wealth of online resources for screenwriters—enough to fill a separate Internet resources list of its own. This publication's Web site is a good place to start. Helpful links include the following: contest calendar, list of pitch festivals, and articles on the craft of screenwriting. *Access:* http://www.scriptmag.com/.

• *Writer's Digest.* This trade publication covers practically every form and genre of writing imaginable. From links to screenwriting competitions to guides to finding a literary agent to daily writing prompts, *Writer's Digest*'s well-organized Web site is bound to

have something for every writer researching the market. *Access:* http://www.writersdigest.com/GeneralMenu/.

Agents

• **Agent Query.** This is a freely accessible and searchable database of agents. Primarily directed at prose writers, the database will be most useful for those looking to narrow their search to specific narrative forms and genres, which appear on easily navigable dropdown menus. There are also tips on writing query letters and submitting manuscripts. *Access:* http://www.agentquery.com/default.aspx.

• **Writers Net.** The most important aspect of this searchable directory that distinguishes it from the previous resource is its note on agents who charge a reading fee. Agents appearing in this directory are required to note in their profiles whether they charge a fee. Users can also post questions in the site's discussion forums if they need further information on a particular agent. A drawback to this site is the presence of some dated articles and dead links. Writers may want to consult the other resources discussed in this article that present similar, more current information. *Access:* http://www.writers.net/agents.html.

Blogs

• **The Creative Writing MFA Blog.** Anyone considering graduate work in creative writing will want to visit this blog. Posts cover a range of topics but center largely around the application process and the pros and cons of the creative writing MFA. Users can limit their archive searches by label. The blog's recommended links are worth a look, as well. *Access:* http://creative-writing-mfa-handbook.blogspot.com/.

• **HTMLGIANT.** In the words of its About page, HTMLGIANT "is a literature blog that isn't always about literature." Along with a plethora of literary and nonliterary diversions, there are book reviews, writer interviews, and feature articles. Like many of the blogs and Web sites discussed in this article, HTMLGIANT is paid for with advertising. In this case, the advertisers are generally literary journals and creative writing programs that may be of interest to the blog's visitors. *Access:* http://htmlgiant.com/.

• **Writer's Lounge.** This blog's subtitle is "Tips for getting noticed in the publishing industry." Thus, there are entries on topics such as marketing a book and social networking for creative writers. Blog author Sybil Nelson is a teacher and writer. Her blog is of a more personal nature than the previous two, but it serves as an example of the kind of Web presence other writers might wish to establish. *Access:* http://sybilnelson.com/wordpress/.

Community

• **Emerging Writers Network (EWN).** EWN was created by Dzanc Books with the goal of developing "a community of emerging writers [and] established writers deserving of wider recognition." Along with a lively blog of its own, the network contains links to other blogs, author Web sites, booksellers, and literary journals. This is a great place to learn about new books by artists who might turn out to be the literary luminaries of the future. *Access:* http://www.emergingwriters.typepad.com/.

• **New Pages.** If it appears anywhere on the above list, it's probably got a link somewhere on New Pages. New Pages should be a bookmark on every beginning writer's browser. There are reviews of new and established literary journals, links to calls for submissions, an online guide to independent and university presses, and much more. It's

also a great place to find news on alternative periodicals and independent record labels. *Access:* http://www.newpages.com/.

Note

1. Seth Abramson, "2012 MFA Rankings: The Methodology," www.pw.org/content/2012_mfa_rankings_the_methodology?cmnt_all=1.