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WRITING IN THE CROSSROADS: EXAMINING FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION
AND CREATIVE WRITING

By

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B.F.A., University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 1995

M.A., University of Maryland, 1998

A Dissertation

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May 2004

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A Dissertation Approved on

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Dissertation Director

ABSTRACT

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Leah Schweitzer

April 16, 2004

The trend in writing curriculum has been to diversify and separate courses. This dissertation looks at one set of divided curricula—creative writing and composition—in order to examine the ways in which writing pedagogy has been affected by this parceling out of writing objectives into separate niches of the English department. I argue that there should be a way for different curricula and disciplines to share information between them and to bridge arbitrary gaps created by misguided binaries. My dissertation examines some of the problematic generalities propagated within the English department and interrogates the limits of such generalities. Using what scholars have termed grounded theory, I closely examine the assumptions underlying the construction of historical texts, scholarship on pedagogy, and some predominant textbooks used in composition and creative writing and make arguments about the effects of these implicit assumptions on writing curricula.

Chapter one studies the more widely read and influential histories of composition and creative writing in order to call attention to the ideologies which imbue the histories and establish how these unstated assumptions have molded the English department we see today. Chapter two looks at scholarship about pedagogy in both fields in order to

parse the binary of assumptions about the students in and the stated and unstated goals of these courses. Additionally, chapter two takes up the issue of teacher education, questioning why composition insists its instructors need schooling while a proven track record of publication is enough to qualify as a creative writing instructor. Chapter three studies popular textbooks used for composition and creative writing courses and argues that the texts are a direct reflection of the assumptions underlying what should be taught in each discipline. Chapter four examines the peer review/workshop and uses this practice as a case study of one pedagogical technique which has been integrated into both curricula. Chapter five presents conclusions which can be made from this close reading of scholarship and texts used for and about composition and creative writing and makes recommendations for more integrated pedagogies.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
ABSTRACT.....	iii
CHAPTER	
INTRODUCTION.....	1
I. HISTORIES OF THE FIELDS.....	9
II. SCHOLARSHIP AND PEDAGOGY.....	39
III. TEXTBOOKS.....	87
IV. FORUMS FOR PEER RESPONSE.....	119
V. CONCLUSIONS.....	148
REFERENCES.....	167
CURRICULUM VITAE.....	177

I'm hoping for nothing less than to change our profession, so that the parts of it which proved incredibly valuable for me and others like me are not lost to the kind of anger and difficulties you can hear in my story.

-- Wendy Bishop, *Teaching Lives* 245

INTRODUCTION

About two years into my doctoral program, I started applying to transfer. I wanted to move from my rhetoric and composition program to a doctoral program in creative writing. It wasn't so much that I was unhappy where I was but more that I wanted to do a different kind of writing, one which I seemingly couldn't do in a rhetoric and composition doctoral program. I wanted to write creatively; I wanted to work on my novel, take more than the one workshop course I'd been allowed as my elective, and most important, I wanted my creative work to count for something. But, I still wanted to work on improving writing pedagogy and contribute scholarship—and I wanted that writing to count as well. It's difficult to imagine a space in which both academic and creative writing are equally valued.

There tends to be a lot of suspicion about creative writing in rhetoric and composition programs, just as there is a skepticism about academic writing in creative writing programs. Compositionists believe that creative writing is anti-academic; they may admit to loving reading, but few of them see fiction or poetry contributing to the world in the way scholarship does. Creative writing is something one does for fun; academic writing is work, a pursuit which requires the kind of rigorous training a doctoral program offers. Academic work is based in reason and practical concerns while creative writing is emotional. Creative writers, for their part, think that scholarship takes

the craft out of writing, overanalyzing and pulling apart texts until they no longer resemble the piece the author created. The same doubts composition has about writing steeped in emotion, creative writing exhibits about writing which is solely analytical. The schism is even greater here. Most of the skepticism creative writing has for scholarship comes from literary studies; composition is rarely on the map when creative writing scholarship discusses academia. Composition is for creating academics; creative writing produces writers. That the two could coexist—composition and creative writing or academics and writers—is a foreign idea to both fields.

I eventually decided against changing programs. But, my conflict about how to be both an academic writer and a creative writer, to have both forms of writing valued equally, sparked questions about why the two are so divided in the academy. If writing is at the heart of both composition and creative writing, why are they so staunchly divided?

My dissertation is motivated by several factors, not the least of which are my concerns about what is being taught in writing classrooms other than writing, an issue I'll come to in a moment. But, the inciting question was a personal one: how was I to create a space for someone like me, someone who wants to have a foothold strongly in both fields? There are very few who work in both composition and creative writing; to be fair, creative writers now often teach first-year composition as part of their load, and there are composition scholars who dabble in poetry and fiction. But there is, perhaps, only a handful who have published in both, who identify themselves as both scholars and creative writers; Wendy Bishop and Donald Murray spring most readily to mind, but as the epigraph above indicates, it's not easy to work as both. So, I began quite selfishly

trying to carve my own niche. But, if that's all this dissertation amounted to, it wouldn't do much more than fulfill my own needs.

Motivated by the question of why I can't be both academic and creative, I began to wonder about the scholarly construction of composition and creative writing. How do they define themselves and why? What identity does each cling to, and why are they incompatible? I suspected that these questions of identity were crucial to maintaining the divide, and I started reading texts, looking for identity markers.

Methodology

My dissertation is based on close reading and analysis of the texts which help to shape our field. The documents produced by both composition and creative writing—in this case, the histories, scholarship, and textbooks—are all grounded in implicit assumptions. My goal is to make those assumptions explicit, analyze the ways in which they've affected the development of each field, and demonstrate why those assumptions don't necessarily hold true. This method of close reading and analysis of assumptions is what scholars such as Kathy Charmaz, Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, Joyce Neff, and Deborah Brandt have termed grounded theory.

Grounded theory, defined by Strauss and Corbin as “a general methodology for developing theory that is grounded in data systematically gathered and analyzed” (273), has primarily been used thus far to study the “perceptions of the subjects under study” (Neff 139). In this dissertation, however, I turn it around to study the perceptions and assumptions of the researchers, as demonstrated in the scholarship. According to Strauss and Corbin, “interpretations *must* include the perspectives and voices of the people whom

we study. Interpretations are sought for understanding the actions of individuals or collective actors being studied” (274). Rather than look at the usual subjects—the students—I look at the “studies” themselves, subjecting the writers and scholars to scrutiny in order to make explicit the sorts of assumptions which underlie the scholarship they produce. It is the published texts which are under analysis here, the results of the work we do in composition and creative writing which are being compared.

Grounded theory is a general methodology because its goal is not so much to prove a theory but to establish one. According to Strauss and Corbin, “[t]heory evolves during actual research, and it does this through continuous interplay between analysis and data collection.” Central to grounded theory is constant, comparative analysis (273).

In keeping with grounded theory, I had some expectations about my findings. Casual conversation reveals many of the binaries that divide composition and creative writing. I started with the belief that 1) those binaries would appear implicitly and explicitly in the scholarship and 2) when pushed, those binaries would fall apart. I also started with some primary concerns, particular areas I wanted to focus on: how students are characterized in the literature, student-teacher relationships, the nature of the writing process, the role of the course, epistemological foundations, and the role and structure of pedagogical tools (primarily the workshop).

Where grounded theory differs from other methodologies is largely in the refining of ideas. Rather than waiting until all data are collected to come to conclusions, grounded theory is a recursive process. “[T]here is built into this style of extensive interrelated data collection and theoretical analysis an explicit mandate to strive toward *verification* of its resulting hypothesis (statements about relationships between concepts).

This is done *throughout the course* of a research project, rather than assuming that verification is possible only through follow-up quantitative research” (Strauss and Corbin 274). Hence, it differs from thick description, which collects ostensibly objective observations, holding off until the end to make any definitive statements about the collected material. Grounded theory allows for a constant revision of hypotheses and findings. The process of discovery and rethinking is evident throughout the process and is a part of the methodology. Thus, every chapter of my dissertation presents findings which are later added onto, revised, and complicated as more layers of texts are added. A key part of grounded theory is that “researchers are interested in *patterns* of action and interaction between and among various types of social units. [...] [Researchers] are also much concerned with discovering *process*—not necessarily in the sense of stages or phases, but of reciprocal changes in patterns of action/interaction and in relationship with changes of conditions either internal or external to the process itself” (Strauss and Corbin 278). It is these patterns—the recurring insistence that composition and creative writing should be taught in particular ways to certain students for variant goals—that I focus on in each chapter, noting where the patterns are broken or don’t quite work.

That the patterns break down and binaries meld into one another is also a function of grounded theory, a process which Strauss and Corbin characterize as fluid. Grounded theories “call for exploration of each new situation to see *if* they fit, *how* they might fit, and how they *might not* fit” (279). It is this unfitting and refitting that I’m particularly interested in— intersections between composition and creative writing where the underlying assumptions don’t meet with “reality,” and places where these two fields might be able to fit their experiences together to not only create a personal space in which

to work as both an academic and a creative writer, but to improve writing pedagogy in general.

A Brief Overview

Chapter one, “Histories of the Fields,” looks at the historical roots of this question. The histories each field writes about itself locate identity in very different practices. Part of this derives from composition and creative writing’s mutual need to carve its own niches into the English department and justify its place in the academy. Since composition and creative writing both began as marginalized fields, they have a common motivation to establish their importance. But how each does this is quite different. Each works from a set of underlying assumptions about themselves and each other. These assumptions often, on the surface, form neat binaries: composition is work while creative writing is fun; composition is academic, creative writing, art; composition is for everyone but creative writing is for the talented elite. However, what I found as I began to push just slightly at these binaries is that they break down quite easily. Chapter one is an examination of how historical texts support these underlying assumptions, loosely as they might do it.

Chapter Two, “Scholarship and Pedagogy,” follows this line of questioning, but turns to current scholarship—published in sources such as *College English*, *CCC*, and the *AWP Chronicle* as well as in edited collections about composition and creative writing such as *Colors of a Different Horse*, *Teaching Writing Creatively*, and *Tacking Stock*—to examine current practices and the assumptions which underlie them. The same binaries persist, codified in the scholarship with statements about each curriculum’s goals

and contributions to the university. And, again, these binaries begin to break down. As they do, the lines which separate the two fields bleed into one another; issues often overlap. The binary between work and pleasure is tied up with issues of authority and service. The lines are even less easily distinguished here, further suggesting that the division of composition and creative writing is not as clear as the fields would like to suggest.

Of more concern for me are the implications of this (fabricated) division for the teaching of writing. If scholars in both composition and creative writing hold fast to the idea that they teach very different subjects and skills, then what is it that they're teaching other than writing? And, how might they benefit from opening the lines of communication and bridging the gaps in the curricula they've created? Chapter three, "Textbooks," examines the texts used in each field and argues that there is more than the teaching of writing at stake for each. The textbooks used in each field interestingly support some of the binaries, such as composition is work while creative writing is fun, while breaking down others, like composition is for everyone while creative writing is only for the talented. They do, however, maintain the binary between scholarship and art; they focus on very different elements of writing. Composition texts discuss organization, argument, and audience while creative writing texts provide lessons on craft, focusing on character, setting, imagery, and voice. More important than that textbooks break down or support these binaries, however, is what they talk about other than writing. The textbooks for these fields are as much, if not more so, about reading, the canon, and politics. In some cases, especially in composition textbooks, writing is merely a tool, not a focus. How these books are organized, their chapter titles and the

readings they choose to incorporate suggest that each course has a limited scope of what constitutes “good” writing.

This issue of what is valued in writing can further be seen in the way that composition and creative writing conduct their common practice of peer review or workshop. Both use this pedagogical tool of having students read one another’s work and provide feedback, though the actual structure and rules differ. Chapter four, “Forums for Peer Response,” examines the similarities and differences in peer review and workshop, argues that there are theoretical and practical gaps in the protocol for each, and provides suggestions for ways in which both fields could benefit by talking to one another and incorporating each others’ strategies. This chapter serves as an informal case study, looking at one way in which both fields would be enriched by crossing the lines which divide them and opening a space for conversation about other ways in which they could mutually benefit by working together to teach writing.

My conclusion, then, is that each field is rich in writing instruction, but in very different and limited ways. Chapter 5, the conclusion, argues for what is missing from each curriculum and suggests ways in which creating a conversation between composition and creative writing could benefit writing pedagogy in general. My conclusion presents problems we need to deal with in order to improve the teaching of writing and argues that we don’t need to reinvent the wheel to do so—we simply need to look down the hallway to our colleagues and the work they are doing.

CHAPTER ONE: HISTORIES OF THE FIELDS

Robert Frost was one of the first writers to teach at a university and is often credited with creating the position of poet-in-residence, the first poet to accept a theoretically permanent position at a university. But, Frost found it hard to maintain his role as writer and teacher, never staying at one university for more than a couple of years, though never truly giving up teaching either. Frost's struggle with his roles as teacher and writer in the university is one which many experience—most who work in the English department identify themselves as primarily one or the other. There is a conflict between writer and teacher within the walls of the English department. There are several roads to take when forging a career, all of them worthwhile and interesting, but rarely intersecting, most often viewed as completely divergent. On the one hand, the parceling out of academic niches within English departments makes perfect sense: PhD programs are structured to allow students to specialize, to focus on their area of interest, and those who matriculate should move on to careers which utilize their knowledge. We apply to and graduate from programs in literature, composition, technical writing, creative writing, etc., and so the departments we go to should provide equally clear, designated spaces for us.

On the other hand, these divisions create a conflict like the one Frost faced—it is hard to play two roles at once and even harder to find a place where they can co-exist. It's a problem for people like me who find themselves in some liminal space to

comfortably participate in two disciplines (in my case, creative writing and composition) which claim, for what I would identify to be largely “political” reasons, to be very different.

The histories of the academy, the development of writing programs, and accounts of the places of composition, creative writing, and literature within the academy vary greatly, focusing on different moments and emphasizing different effects. It is not my intention to rewrite them. An additional historical text would necessarily fall victim to the same kinds of critique which follows here; an additional history is not needed for my purpose of highlighting the assumptions which guide their creators and creations. One of the major problems with histories of writing, as Katherine Haake argues in “Teaching Creative Writing if the Shoe Fits”—indeed the problem with many histories of the English discipline in general—is that they persist in looking at the field in a compartmentalized way (in Bishop and Ostrom 81), focusing on one “strand” of the story, for example, how material products have defined composition’s identity or how the informal workshops at Iowa created several generations of professional writers and spawned a surge of MFA, and recently PhD, programs in creative writing. This narrowed focus makes sense; one has to define the limits of a topic somehow. It would simply be impossible to write an all-encompassing history; a written text has set parameters. But, the set parameters of each history reflect the political agendas and individual ideologies of its time—clearly histories have the authors’ personal motivations and desires guiding their writing. As Janice Lauer asks in her section of “Octalog II: The (Continuing) Politics of Historiography,” “[t]o what extent [...] is our effort to foreground our own ideology complicitous with writing a ‘definitive’ story imbued with this ideology?” (31).

Lauer notes that one of the many problems of historiography is that “some stories of our field merely name drop and critique, setting up straw persons against which to authorize their own accounts instead of representing another’s work in its own time and exigencies and acknowledging its contribution. [...] Too often [...] ideas are only labeled [...] as if these terms were self-explanatory or self-warranting” (31). My purpose here is to call attention to the ideologies which underlie the histories in order to establish how these unstated assumptions have molded the English department we see today.

In her section of “Octalog II,” Cheryl Glenn argues that “[r]hetorical history has never been neutral territory; it has always done exactly what we wanted it to do—for the good of our community. Until recently, rhetorical history has embodied and reflected our institutional focus on powerful public men whose texts, lives, and actions surely transcended (or so we told ourselves) the particularities of history and circumstance” (28). One effect of calling attention to the traditions which have created disciplinary histories is a carving out of much needed spaces for traditionally marginalized concerns, such as the place of composition and the place of women in the academy; however, this has also created histories which either ignore previous work, or set it off as unrelated, as Roxanne Mountford argues in her part of “Octalog II.” In their vigor to establish niches, the authors of these histories have disregarded the importance of other disciplines (31-32). This disregard—though not necessarily intentional—has created a story of a department divided which pervades today.

What is striking about the histories for me is that no matter what path they go down, they all seem to arrive at essentially the same destination. One need not grapple with Frost’s dilemma when examining the histories; all the histories focus on different

paths within the English department, but seem to agree on one basic point: the English department is indeed comprised of different factions which are only tangentially, and often incompatibly, related. This chapter demonstrates how the histories establish the divide between niches of the English department. Through an analysis of the rhetoric and terminology used in several prominent histories of the field, I show how the (artificial) divide between fields such as creative writing and composition has been institutionalized.

Historical Binaries

The ardent insistence each history writer has for his or her place within the academy has helped to institutionalize the idea that English departments can and should be divided into separate spheres, an idea which is perpetuated not through blatant criticism or insistence that these sub-fields are entirely different, but with subtly enunciated biases and binaries implied within the written histories. Written histories establish and continue the myth that composition is work intended for the masses, while creative writing is art created by the elite and gifted. In scholarship, composition and creative writing are often polarized as practical work and frivolous play, respectively. Composition is practical while creative writing is emotional. Further, while creative writing histories are largely concerned with discussions of the writer and his process, there is often little, if any, mention of actual writing in composition. Implied in important histories of composition—recent works which have helped to shape the field such as those written by James Berlin and Robert Connors—is that the true work of composition is politics and morality. Creative writing helps students write; composition creates better citizens.

It is the unstated assumptions which underlie the construction and presentation of these histories on which I would like to focus in order to explicate some of the misguided beliefs which continue to encourage the unnecessary divide I see affecting English departments and, especially, writing curriculum. One of the implications of the ways in which the histories have been written—and, the one focused on here—is that they provide justification for keeping creative writing and composition—as well as other fields—separate. The histories implicitly provide misleading proof that they are different modes of study, different disciplines, often unrelated to or in conflict with one another. It is important to show the role which the questionable historical divide plays in the actual divide of writing curriculum.

Many traditional accounts of both creative writing and composition place the history of rhetoric and the rise of liberal education at the beginning of their stories. When this rise began is disputed, though often located around 1880. That the actual historical time lines can vary is interesting and appears dependent on one's definition of "liberal education" and what historians note as significant moments and moves in education. For example, scholars disagree about whether rhetoric was a part of liberal education; others, in an effort to elevate the place of composition, suggest that literature was not initially a part of the liberal education. Certainly, the motivations guiding the direction of these histories helps to determine which moments are emphasized. But what is more fascinating and seemingly more pertinent to the discussion of assumptions which help to construct histories is the way in which authors characterize these moments in history, the way in which they present liberal education and the alliances they wish to uphold or break down.

Creative Writing

There are few actual texts which record the history of creative writing; most focus on the Iowa Writer's Workshop and creative writing's history since the beginning of that program. The notable exception is D.G. Myers' *The Elephants Teach*, which begins, like most composition histories, with the rise of "liberal education" in the 1880's. Myers' history of creative writing downplays the role of rhetoric and suggests that composition and creative writing branched out of literature studies in the late 19th Century and that both were in service to the pedagogy needed to effectively teach literature. Furthermore, he argues that creative writing and composition were the same thing until the 1920s, when English composition was "attacked" and "redeployed to other than literary ends" (37). He asserts that creative writing appropriated composition's initial function, but admits that creative writing as a discipline is indebted to composition not for "accepting poems and stories as academic work but in showing that literature could be used in the university for some other purpose than scholarly work" (41). The language Myers employs suggests that he sees creative writing as a course which initially opened literature to more students, taking it from the grasp of scholars and opening it to everyone. Initially then, at least for Myers, creative writing was intended to counter the elitism of literature. However, as I'll discuss later, Myers is among the few who see creative writing this way.

Myers sees the beginning separation between creative writing and composition as a conflict between historical and practical concerns centered around a question about the true purpose of literature. One of the most striking themes in Myers' account is this emphasis on literature, which he connects to both creative writing and composition. His

wording implicitly insists that all writing is literature and that the conflict between the disciplines lies in the idea of what literature should accomplish.

For historical reasons, English has become home to several logistically distinguishable and perhaps even mutually incompatible modes of activity—it is a ‘contradiction-crossed territory,’ in Evan Watkins’s^[1] phrase. But the contradictions are logical ones; scholarship, composition, and constructive literature operate from different postulates to different conclusions; and the explanation for their differences is to be sought, then, in the thinking that differentiates one from another. (10)

Myers marks a departure from other accounts which, for various reasons (some of which are discussed below), would like to firmly ally creative writing and literature and separate composition into its own, unrelated category. It further deviates from the underlying assumption that composition is other than literature, which guides many composition histories.

Histories of composition separate themselves from literature arguing, as Gerald Graff does in *Professing Literature*, that studies of literature were not connected to liberal education. Rather, it was connected to the “old elite” who “hope[d] that academic literary studies would help impose a unified, ‘male-centered’ American culture and values [sic] on an increasingly heterogenous population” (71). Literature was not a part of liberal education because it kept education closed to all but the elite, preserving education for the wealthy, male population. Composition was an important part of the rise of liberal education because it addressed the needs of “the masses.” It served a larger

¹ Author of *Work Time*, “a study of English as a form of labor” (Myers 9)

population, a role it still plays today—an identity I'll look at more closely in the next chapter.

Myers, however, combines all three into his picture of liberal education, linking literature, creative writing and composition together, arguing that composition began as a course designed to teach students how to argue about literature while creative writing served as a sort of “lab” for experimenting with literature. That composition still focuses on argument, though not about literature, as a central skill while literature tends to focus on primary texts, criticism and theory does not cause Myers to deviate from the position that the two are related disciplines. For Myers, the divide is not about political positioning as much as curricular changes and personnel shifts.

Important to the discussion about the split between creative writing and composition is Myers' focus on concerns about writing and the writer. His emphasis is on the curriculum and its goals. He states that what began to separate the new writing curriculum—that which would eventually become creative writing—from previous studies of rhetoric were the principles of writing which Adams Sherman Hill and Barrett Wendell established at Harvard:

- (1) It is literary rather than rhetorical, conceiving of communication otherwise than in light of the expectations belonging to a specific and restricted audience.
- (2) Instead writing is thought of in terms of its intrinsic demands—that is, the formal demands intrinsic to the piece of writing under hand. Thus (3) it is a constructive activity that depends upon flexibility of judgment, the capacity to devise ad hoc solution to a unique problem of literary form, and not upon tested and essential principles, which are better suited to the comparatively more limited

number of rhetorical situations. Finally (4) composition is a liberal art, an effort to retrieve English study from the illiberal influences of philological science and rhetorical dogmatism. (45-46)

Hill and Wendell, especially Wendell, believed that the best people to teach writing were writers, and this belief initiated the practice of hiring published and recognized writers, most often poets (who were often thought to be closer in spirit to the ancient rhetoricians than prose writers), to teach writing courses. “Wendell’s approach to the subject can best be described as a writer’s approach to writing. [...] Wendell was perhaps the first professor of rhetoric who taught students how to write on the basis of his own ambition to write. He came to the subject with the habits and concerns of a working, published writer” (48). However, what Wendell originally termed composition eventually became the creative writing course. Between 1900 and 1925, “college instruction was put on a different footing as the constructive, developmental, and professional aspects of it diverged. Creative writing was formed by amputating ‘expression’ from a concern with the communication of ideas and proficiency in usage. The latter is now recognizable as the subject that is now taught under the name of English composition” (61).

With the clear divide between creative writing and composition also came the separation between creative writing teachers and composition instructors. The assumption about who is best suited to teach writing courses has clearly played out in English departments today: published writers are hired to teach creative writing while graduate students and part-time instructors are placed in the composition classroom. This issue of who teaches courses and the training they receive will be taken up at more length in the next chapter. For now, it is important to note that while being a working writer is

an essential job requirement for a creative writing teacher, it is not even a tangential one for most first-year composition instructors. Creative writing has, essentially, remained a field devoted to writing; composition as a discipline has embraced a slew of other agendas.

James Berlin and Composition History

Myers' assumption that writing is even at the heart of the issue is a stark contrast to James Berlin's history, *Rhetoric and Reality: Writing Instruction in American Colleges, 1900-1985*, which takes a more political and ideological stance, focusing on the ideology surrounding what is taught rather than the curriculum—or the students. His account of the growth of the discipline doesn't focus on what students need, but rather what he views as the undemocratic and elitist agendas composition should combat.

The rhetoric of liberal culture was aristocratic and openly distrustful of democracy. The perception of the ideal beyond the real was possible only through study and then was finally attained only by the gifted few. The colleges that embraced this educational stance were a very small but conspicuously vocal minority. They included those schools that were the last to abandon the prescribed classical curriculum of the Yale Report of 1828, a document reactionary even when first presented [...] Most proponents were Anglophiles who favored class distinctions and aspired to the status of an educated aristocracy of leadership and privilege, a right that was claimed on the basis of their spiritual vision—partly a matter of birth and partly a product of having attended the right schools. (45)

However, while Berlin seems to be combating the conformity of this aristocratic voice, he is equally against any sort of individual expression, a liberal indulgence which he also connects to the privileges of an elite education.

The rhetoric of liberal culture defined writing as the embodiment of spiritual vision, a manifestation of the true significance of the material world. [...] The writing cultivated in this rhetoric thus valued the individual voice, the unique expression that indicated a gifted and original personality at work. Of course, this personality could not be allowed to violate the strictures of a certain notion of cultivation and class. Still, unique self-expression within these bounds was encouraged. There was also an insistence on organic form, on the inextricable relation of form and content. Indeed, it was considered to be this organic relationship that enabled the personality to express itself in its own unique way, finally making the text it produced intranslatable. (45-46)

Berlin appears to be arguing that texts which possess unique voice—that other than the academic voice used for traditional essays— and are concerned with both form and content—organized differently than the thesis-grounded essay— are incomprehensible to anyone outside the elite minority. However, if composition is not to be concerned with voice, organization, or expression—concepts which seem to me to be fundamental to the teaching of writing—it is unclear which components of writing Berlin believes essential to teaching composition.

At some points in Berlin's work, it doesn't even appear that he believes writing should be taught in composition, claiming that behaviorist pedagogical techniques which remain today "focus on the activities of writing rather than on thinking skills or reading"

(145). His critique of these teaching methods separates writing and thinking as though they are two unrelated processes. In the conclusion, Berlin lists what he believes the objectives of a writing class should be; nothing in his description suggests that he believes actual instruction in composing is at the heart of the course.

Writing courses should prepare students for citizenship in a democracy, for assuming their political responsibilities, whether as leaders or simply active participants. Writing courses should also enable students to learn something about themselves, about the often-unstated assumptions on which their lives are built. In short, the writing course empowers students as it advises in ways to experience themselves, others, and the material conditions of their existence—in methods of ordering and making sense of these relationships. (189)

Clearly, there are political agendas guiding Berlin's narrative, a motivation for writing which is different from Myers'. Each is trying to establish the basis for a different tradition. Myers is focused on demonstrating how the growth of the English department and the expansion of its duties within the academy divided curricular responsibilities, though he is careful to maintain that these divisions were often superficially, as opposed to necessarily, created. Berlin, however, wants to firmly prove the importance of composition in the academy, and for him this value is connected to politics. For Berlin, as he states in his introductory overview, this importance is located in the ideology which surrounds a given practice, not the practice itself. Despite Berlin's opening assertion that he is "concern[ed] with both rhetorical theory and actual classroom practices" (18), his discussion of these is confined to the political developments which changed them.

Berlin's concern—at least as it appears in his scholarship—is clearly for the politics which necessitate composition's place in the academy rather than a practical, curricular debate.

Responses to Berlin

This political bent allows for a much more comprehensive view of the world surrounding academic institutions, especially since Berlin avidly wants to demonstrate how the ideological world surrounding the university is responsible for the wrong turns academic institutions take. He is not alone in wanting to put up composition as a shield against such negative influences. Charles Paine, using a very different approach—one that is quite critical of James Berlin's scope and use of history—places composition in a different sort of political light in *The Resistant Writer*. Paine argues that composition instructors, persuaded by Berlin, want to protect students from the influences of popular culture by teaching them to question such influences. He looks at the same period in English department history and questions why the popular media and its influence are ignored.

Almost all histories begin their critiques by looking at the Harvard model but reach very different conclusions about the effects of that model. One need look no further than the varying accounts of Adams Sherman Hill's effects at Harvard to see the pronounced differences in the interpretation of his influence and its ramifications. Berlin characterizes the Harvard model as one concerned with “superficial correctness—spelling, punctuation, usage, syntax—and paragraph structure” (*Rhetoric and Reality* 38) which maintained the status quo by assigning uniform themes centered around narrow

and elitist topics. However, Myers looks at the same curriculum and states that “Harvard stressed good usage, although good usage was defined not by abstract grammatical rules but by the best that was thought and said in the world—especially at present. Over and over in their books on composition the Harvard teachers scoff at rule-bound dogmatism and conservative efforts to fix usage such as spelling reform” (44). Paine’s critique falls somewhere in the middle of the continuum between condemnation and commendation. “[T]he composition course, for Hill, was not intended to prepare students to fit in with, for instance, the new ‘managerial capitalism,’ but was to oppose a pernicious popular culture that had seized control over the nation’s reading material—and thus the citizenry’s reading habits. Sound rhetorical training, thought Hill, might endow students with the resistance they needed to oppose all-too-enticing culture of the newspaper and dime novel” (128). In other words, by teaching students how “dangerous” the rhetoric of popular culture is, we can inoculate them against it. While Myers presents Hill’s curriculum as entirely benevolent, both Paine and Berlin agree that the Harvard agenda was to remove students from the influence of popular culture. However, they see this move serving very different purposes. Paine argues that scholars like Berlin have placed too much emphasis on the role of ideology and cultural critique and that this emphasis can create students who may be able to resist popular influences but who are also being politically shaped by other influences; it’s simply a different ideology they are being molded by. Paine looks to the influence of newspapers which were popular at the same time as the “Harvard model” to show how their influence was ignored by the academy.

This conception of ideology, reinforced by the massive scope of [Berlin’s] investigation, leads to an unhelpful, and perhaps, paranoid representation of the

relationship between society at large, the composition course, and the students and teachers who labored there. The nature of his argument forces him to assume tremendous and awful powers of social control that reach every nook of social life [...] one rarely gets the feeling that one has sufficiently got a grip on culture [...] enough to understand or resist it. (32)

Berlin, however, argues that the Harvard model was intended to mold students into ideal intellectual elites by assigning them writing themes which narrowed the scope of their critical thinking and kept them concerned with purely superficial matters. Both Paine and Berlin want to discuss ideology; Paine's criticism of Berlin is that he creates one master narrative of this ideology while Paine would like to examine smaller narratives which take into account institutional and cultural changes and the individual students and teachers affected by them. Paine makes a call to do just what I'm attempting to here: "[W]e need to recover more than just the composition methods and theories; we also need to recover our forebears' sense of the underlying assumptions about the relationships among students, the students' culture, and teaching composition" (36). However, Paine is calling on compositionists to recall social influences and ideologies which are outside of or subsumed by the grand narrative, to acknowledge the complexities which are often disguised by histories such as Berlin's. What I would like to do is call attention to the ways in which we've let these underlying assumptions come to the surface and become "fact," how we've let them shape and divide the discipline we work in.

Despite the personal appeal of Paine's argument, it is Berlin who has been more influential in constructing composition's identity. I would argue that this is in part due to the tangible nature of the subject content which an adherence to Berlin's suggested

curriculum lends us. If one agrees that composition should be concerned with politics, then it follows that the texts we read and the tools we give students in the composition classroom should be centered around politics as well. The way in which this has affected what is generally understood to be the curricular goals of composition can be seen by looking at commonly used readers which are often structured around social and political themes, a topic which will be taken up in more depth in chapter four. Evidence of Berlin's legacy can be seen not only in current pedagogy, but by simply acknowledging how many later histories feel the need to reference him, for good or ill; it is important to consider the legacy of the assumptions which underlie his work and the divide they've helped to create.

In "Paths Not Taken," Louise Wetherbee Phelps accuses Berlin of "homogenizing multiple scholarly positions and misrepresenting them in [his] idealist categories, while acknowledging no need for broad-based empirical evidence of instructional and social practices." She fashions her critique to "[resemble] that which feminists and other historians have mounted of standard intellectual histories of ancient rhetoric and the subsequent (pedagogical) tradition; of Harvard-based accounts of 19th-century writing instruction; and of conventional wisdom about women's and American minorities' limited public role as rhetoricians" (48). Phelps, in a relative tirade against all that Berlin has written about the history of composition, wants to say that Berlin has created such a linear and closed account of composition's development that he has excluded all other possible stories from the mix, especially those stories located on the margins. In effect, his work (and the acclaim it received) has managed to map a very particular path for composition to the exclusion of many other possibilities. Her critique seems a bit harsh

(or at least the particular point of her critique), especially given the value she places on work like Robert Connors *Composition-Rhetoric*, which she believes expresses “personal [and] moral commitment and recognition of the moralism infusing composition/rhetoric” (40). She praises work like Connors for presenting “historical knowledge as a precondition not only for defining the field (self-understanding), but also for making wise choices in our personal actions as writers or teachers and for deciding where the field should go as a research discipline” (40). Phelps is placing morality at the center of composition’s purpose, but this doesn’t seem too far off from Berlin’s objective. Berlin’s history seems to be doing much the same thing Phelps claims her work does; Berlin is more overtly political, asserting that political ideology is a moral imperative, while Phelps positions politics and morality as semantically different ideas. In either case, neither seems to place writing at the heart of composition, a direct contrast to Myers’ history which doesn’t begin to suggest that English programs are doing anything other than teaching writing and literature. Phelps and Berlin position themselves as scholars involved in a discipline which should morally and/or politically influence greater society; to varying degrees, both seem to believe that composition should lead the way to the creation of a better society. Myers and Paine, in contrast, seem to be arguing that the responsibility of English departments is to create more astute readers and writers. For Phelps and Berlin, the emphasis is on creating a particular type of student while for Myers and Paine, the focus is more on the education those people are receiving.

Material Production

Berlin's history places the university and the English department in a context which demonstrates how outside influences affect what Myers often presents as institutional changes and curricular decisions insulated from societal pressures and unaffected by influences outside the academy. Both of these are in contrast to Robert Connors' *Composition-Rhetoric*, which focuses on constructing a history of the discipline centered around material presence and conditions. What both Connors and Berlin do seem to assume, however, is that the central players in first-year composition—the first-year students and the graduate or part-time instructors who teach them—are a large part of the problem. Both seem to imply that there should be—and would be—higher goals for composition, unfulfilled moral or political promise, if only for those present in the classroom. Berlin's scholarship suggests that freshmen aren't ready for the education composition courses should offer, stating that “the English department *has been forced* to continue teaching writing to freshmen even as some of its members simultaneously disavow its responsibility for doing so. [...] The English department has, moreover, commonly used the power and income gained by performing this ‘service’ to reward those pursuing the ‘real’ business of the department—the study of literature” (25, emphasis mine). While I don't think Berlin really believes the business of the department is literature, I do think the language he uses is telling. He suggests that the instructors see freshmen as a sort of scourge, people one only has contact with when given no choice. Add to this Connors' description of those who teach first-year writing, “‘section hands’ who are either graduate assistants or instructors, many of whom are frustrated literary specialists who teach writing only because compelled” (13), and you have a pretty

despairing base upon which to construct any history of the discipline. It's no wonder composition—or any academic writing—is considered work.

Even early on, writing (before it was divided into composition and creative writing) was viewed as the trenches of the English department while reading was luxurious. Hill and Wendell's mission statement quoted earlier emphasizes the labor involved in writing. Points three and four imply that Hill and Wendell considered all writing work. Writing is a "constructive activity" and an "effort." While it may be work intended to move us towards better goals than just reading literature can provide, the underlying rhetoric is still couched in terms of labor. This assumption that *all* writing is work gets lost in many creative writing and composition histories; indeed, often creative writing and composition are polarized as play and work respectively.

Connors creates a narrative of composition as work by organizing *Composition-Rhetoric* largely around the material goods produced by the discipline. Even his chapter on gender issues looks at traditional materials produced by men and not produced by women to argue for their respective influences (or lack of) on the history of rhetoric and composition. He is invested in studying the written products of the discipline—the goal is to demonstrate that the tradition of rhetorical studies had morphed in the 19th Century, moving from an oral practice to a written one, and so our parameters of what makes up rhetorical history must expand. He often discusses composition in terms of consumerism, tracking its development (or regression) through its "perceived worth" in the market of academics. He sets up the progress and regression of rhetoric and composition by paralleling the university structure with the corporate ladder, noting the rise and decline in the power of those who teach it.

Like Berlin, Connors often tracks the history of the discipline with little regard for the students' place within it, and with no regard for the materials they produce. In his introduction, he states that his central concerns in "practicing history" are for the "ways in which we think of ourselves and our work, the respect we give each other, [and] the degree to which we think of other researchers and practitioners in composition studies as kin, as 'our folks'" (17). Students are not mentioned as central, or even tangential, to the practice of constructing history. Students are part of the production, important only in that upon exiting composition courses they can enter the labor force as literate workers. So, part of what is created by the English department is good employees. The writing which students create to demonstrate their literacy is important only as material proof that composition is contributing a literate labor force; student writing has no inherent value on its own.

What is important in establishing the historical place of rhetoric in the university, for Connors, is firmly showing that the discipline and those in it have produced tangible items—works of theory, textbooks, modes of discourse (and, for Connors, there is a hierarchy of value by which he organizes and chooses to discuss them), and an improved labor force. Connors argues that this shifted purpose of the university began as early as the late 1800's. The clientele no longer consisted solely of future lawyers and ministers. Rather, "the growth of vocational specialties and the concept of college as training in social acceptability meant that the purposes behind enrollment were much broader" (124). When composition hasn't been able to contribute to scholarship, Connors attributes the lack to poor working conditions, which often includes a recounting of how many students instructors have to deal with.

Writing, in comparison to oral rhetorical instruction, was early seen to demand by its nature an essentially individualized pedagogy. Writing is an interior activity, and although techniques can be used to share writing among students, a primary transaction in any serious composition course came to be seen as being between the student and the teacher. Each student came to be seen as deserving a measurable individual chunk of the teacher's time and energy. It might be much or it might be little, but it had to be there. This inescapable time demand came from the best-known teachers and schools in America, and the related inability of teachers and administrators to grasp its meaning in the changing college environment led to the nightmare of overwork that composition courses became.

(188)

Students, though deserving attention, are seen as a liability to the production of composition and rhetoric. That the material goods they produce have only one real consumer, the individual instructor, makes their efforts basically meaningless to academia. Student work doesn't count as a product of labor, so the majority of paper being pushed doesn't get seen outside the classroom. And, without something concrete to show to the university system, the workload for those instructors must increase because, absent of tangible proof, the perception is that no work is being done.

It's not that I think Connors is trying to negate the place of teaching and students in composition and rhetoric; in fact, I think he's trying to show that the tradition has remained important throughout time, and that there never was a decline in rhetorical theory despite the perception that nothing happened in the 19th Century. The rise of first-year composition adds to his argument. Work was being done; however, because student

work is rarely valued, there is little material production from those courses to prove it. Connors himself only uses the texts produced by “professionals” in the field to show that the field was developing despite the perceived decline. His argument is couched in terms we normally associate with a consumer world; the above quote speaks of transactions and time demands. There is no opportunity for fun, or “play,” in a discipline which must constantly produce in order to demonstrate its worth.

Producing Art

Creative writing, in contrast, is dedicated to bringing play back into academia, lest its products become devoid of human spirit. In the introduction to his book *The American Writer and the University*, Ben Siegel looks at how the university is portrayed as a soul-taking institution, ruining novels by turning their authors into intellectuals. “[T]he ‘final horror’ of academic life is not represented by defeated intellectuals who flee the campus or die defeated on it. It is exemplified by those deflated creative souls who have adapted to the university’s demands and remained in the classroom. Usually they have done so ‘to teach literature, and, presumably, to write novels on the side.’” (10). It is the “work” required by academia which destroys the inner artist, a persona which is not present in the characterization of the compositionist. Rather, while the work-load may be a burden, composition is invested in maintaining its identity as the “working class” of the academy. Perhaps this is because, as Siegel points out in his discussion of Paul Engle and the Iowa Writer’s Workshop, along with artistry comes unreliability. “Creative arts programs increased steadily nationwide, but ‘some English faculty members continued to resent the presence of such unreliable, shady characters’ as writing instructors. ‘Writers,

many academics believed, were best when dead and fumigated and tidied up by time and scholarship.” (26).

The assumption that creative writers were less than dedicated to “working” is one which comes from the English department at large, as well as from creative writers themselves. In Paul Engle’s essay on the mission of the Iowa Writer’s Workshop, he justifies creative writing’s place in the university, but steadfastly stays away from the rhetoric used by scholars like Berlin and Connors. Instead, he insists on using terms generally associated with art, always referring to writing as a primarily artistic endeavor. The Iowa workshop “offers proof that writing can be seriously regarded, and that it is a difficult art not only worth an absolute commitment of faith, time, and energy, but demanding it” (5). It’s not that art is devoid of effort; it’s that the discourse of consumerism, a discourse which places value on labor and its products, is missing from these histories of creative writing. Engle’s writing is emotional and grandiose, criticizing implicitly, and often explicitly, “traditional” academic prose. He sees value in “wanting to teach the writers of the past from the writer’s point of view, as imaginative expressions of his agony and delight, rather than as historical instances. If the creative writer is a menace to scholarship, then take a cold look at what that scholarship truly is. All too often it lacks the substance and the power, not to mention the decent prose, of even minor writing” (8). Engle clearly values the emotional impact of writing over the rational one while composition steadfastly maintains that emotion has no place in true, academic writing.

It’s interesting to me that both composition and creative writing define themselves as disciplines focused on the written word but value very different products. As

discussed above, composition is dedicated to proving its worth through the scholarly material it produces about pedagogy and the discipline. Student writing is rarely heralded as historical documentation of accomplishment and progress. Creative writing assumes quite the opposite. For the most part, its history is written by the students, creative writers involved in the programs. There are few accounts of Iowa's program written by those who aren't graduates. And, those graduates create a very different hierarchy of what is important. In "Recollections of the Iowa Writer's Workshop," James B. Hall discusses the philosophy underlying the curriculum of the program.

[The program was an] exciting idea because the workshops were closely aligned with an influential intellectual movement centered in the Iowa English department: The New Humanism. Under that scheme, among other things, learning and creativity were highly valued in that order of importance; to turn loose an ill-educated writer on the world was not in the best interest of the university. Therefore, early on, one was expected to do a variety of things and do them to a certain level of competence: the history of criticism, the rudiments of scholarship, and knowledge of other arts. The creative work was to be of high literary quality. (13)

Scholarship, rather than the end goal or the demonstration of accomplishment in creative writing, became a basis for the important task of producing fiction and poetry. While composition places scholarship at the pinnacle of the career, creative writing looks at such work as a secondary endeavor which only requires competence, not full mastery. Additionally, this critical knowledge was to be used to move all of the literary world to a more "artistic" and less scholarly view of fiction and poetry. According to John C.

Gerber in “ The Emergence of the Writer’s Workshop,” the mission which predated the actual creation of a semi-autonomous program at Iowa emphasized learning criticism to move beyond it.

“[A] (writer) teaches himself to write by a process of constant self-criticism. If he is a thoughtful writer, he will soon proceed from artistic evaluation to a judgment of ideas as well, for he will perceive the need of both art and wisdom. And thus he will join with his natural ally, the critic, to shift the balance of interest in the graduate study of literature away from history and research, back toward art and philosophy, toward an interest in the true as well as the new...” (226-227, quoting Wilbur L. Schramm)

Imagination and creativity were, and largely remain, the valued goals of creative writing.

Meanwhile, at roughly the same historical time period, early to mid- 1900s, composition programs were also developing. James Berlin, in “Writing Instruction in School and College English, 1890-1985,” argues that the goals of writing courses at the secondary, and then the university level, were intended to move students from creativity to more practical and useful endeavors. “[T]here was to be [...] a progression from creative and individual activities in the lowest grades to social and more practical activities at the upper levels. [...] Imaginative work [...] was to appear less frequently in the upper grades except for those displaying a special talent in this direction. Here the writing should be functional” (195). The assumptions here directly contradict those which helped to form creative writing programs; composition should be practical, and practical meant utilitarian. And, apparently, utilitarian meant lacking in imagination. While this idea that only those who display extraordinary talent can write creatively will

be taken up (and disputed) at greater length in later chapters, it is important to note how histories have contributed to creating this perception. In *Composition-Rhetoric*, Connors applies the term “creative” to composition only when it can be talked about in the context of grammar instruction. In the late 1800’s “[s]omething new and important appeared in grammar pedagogy: ‘creative’ and compositional elements were gradually added to the memorization and dissection exercises already used. [...] This pedagogy—which came to be called ‘sentence building’ or ‘language lessons’ [...] focused on writing and then examining the student’s own sentences rather than on rote memorization and parsing” (117-118). What is “creative” here is that students write the sentences which are then used to teach grammar rather than looking at previously constructed sentences for grammar instruction. However, instruction was still intended to be practical in nature—it was simply this new grammar pedagogy which was creative (127).

Richard Ohmann’s essay, “Generative Grammars and the Concept of Literary Style,” goes as far as to suggest that there should be a “grammar that provide[s] certain relationships, formally storable, of alternativeness among [sentence] constructions” (265). Building on Chomsky’s principles, Ohmann argues that there is no such thing, really, as style but rather “transformational patterns [which] constitute a significant part of what the sensitive reader *perceives* as style” (277, emphasis mine). While Berlin is attempting to give composition to the masses by demonstrating its practical use (while reserving creative writing for those with special talents), other scholarship and histories of composition help to establish that there can’t be anything creative about composition. Creative writing, however, wants to develop writers who moved beyond scholarly prose to something more desirable—writing which is well crafted and artful— and that means

that writing needs to be full of imagination and originality. But, not everyone was capable of writing creatively. Descriptions of the beginning of the Iowa Writer's Workshop are filled with statements about the type of person the program was meant to cater to. "If would-be writers do not have the talent, even a good program will not give it to them" (Carrier 23).

The Place of Composition and Creative Writing

What all these histories have in common is the desire to legitimize the discipline they're historicizing, to establish a place for themselves in the academy no matter what their goal. The assumption that both composition and creative writing need to justify their presence in English departments is one literature has seemingly never faced (though that may be changing— composition has demonstrated to the university at large why it's a valuable and integral part of any student's program, and creative writing has demonstrated that it's a profitable one. Literature is, by some accounts, floundering to reestablish its importance.) While asserting that each is good for the university, there is an almost palpably desperate attempt throughout the histories to show how valuable each is for the department, the university, and the world at large. In his 1961 article "The Proper Place of Creative Writing Courses," Morris Freedman feels the need to passionately establish how a creative writing course situated in the university will differ from the commercial teaching of its predecessors outside the academy, asserting that we should not refuse to teach creative writing at the university because of the "hucksterism associated with it currently in the American scene," (23) but rather, embrace it to rescue it from such pedestrian endeavors. Part of his legitimizing effort is to place creative

writing firmly under the domain of literature, but the larger goal is to establish a strong and definitive place for creative writing of its own accord. “Creative writing courses, then, belong nowhere so legitimately as in the departments of English as part of the complete study of the subject. [...] By bringing new writers inside the abbey, and encouraging the living and contemporary literature along with the great and the dead, the colleges can help heal that breach and enrich themselves in the process with some of the raw and often slovenly vitality that lives outside” (25). This is akin to the reasoning Adams Sherman Hill provided 80 years earlier when he argued for the purpose of the composition class.

It was hoped that this requirement would effect several desirable objects,— that the student, by becoming familiar with a few works holding a high place in English literature, would acquire a taste for good reading, and would insensibly adopt better methods of thought and better forms of expression; that teachers would be led to seek subjects for composition in the books named. Subjects far preferable to the vague generalities too often selected, and that they would pay closer attention to errors in elementary matters; that, in short, this recognition by the College of the importance of English would lead both teachers and pupils to give more time to the mother tongue, and to employ the time thus given to better advantage. (quoted in Kitzhaber, 35)

The language is clearly different from Freedman’s, but both assume that the course participants—both teachers and students—need the sort of enrichment that composition and creative writing can offer and justify their respective places in the academy with the far reaching and very needed benefits they can offer. Both Freedman and Hill seem

guided by the assumption that neither creative writing nor composition would be viewed as immediately valuable to the academy—and therefore run the risk of being seen as unimportant.

Despite the often polarized view of composition and creative writing—composition is political, aimed at the masses, work, and requires commercialized output to prove the program’s worth, while creative writing is art for the elite, fun and playful, and profitable with or without material goods—that they both require effort to justify their presence bonds them in the margins of the English department. This desperation to justify one’s place still remains; the legacy of the histories places writing programs in this constant state of jockeying for position. As Wendy Bishop recently pointed out in “Suddenly Sexy: Creative Nonfiction Rear-Ends Composition,” the histories have left writing programs clinging onto what little piece they can still call their own. “The work of historians like James Berlin and Robert Connors suggests that within the rich world of essay writing claimed by its historians, the teaching of the essay in composition is ours by default. In fact, we have before us more of what has been abandoned (i.e., deemed not worth fighting over) than we do of what has been deemed desirable” (265). This need to justify one’s position, of course, necessitates setting oneself off as special, unique in one’s offerings. The lines have been drawn between what we offer. “Exposition and argument were left to us [composition], not narration and description, which were ceded to creative writing. And much of our instructional effort was grounded in further subtractions as we lost or abandoned business writing, reporting, technical writing. Containment and teachability resulted in an eviscerated type of essay, not personal writing (too easy, too dangerous), not professional writing (too challenging), but school

writing and research papers” (265-266). As I’ll argue in the next few chapters, this sort of parceling out creates separation which can be detrimental to the larger goal of helping our students to write.

CHAPTER TWO: SCHOLARSHIP AND PEDAGOGY

While chapter one looked at historical narratives and the assumptions about English studies that run through them, it is equally important, if not more so, to look at the way in which these play out in our pedagogical scholarship. In chapter one, I discussed the historical assumptions that the student of composition is a laborer while the creative writing student is at play, that one becomes a productive citizen while the other becomes an artist. The historical works codify these divisions; the scholarship on pedagogy further demonstrates them. The assumptions which underlie the histories we tell ourselves also form the foundation for composition and creative writing curricula which, on the surface, look very different. Not only do they look different, the scholarship makes the differences between composition and creative writing pedagogies appear to be necessary. These pedagogies share with the historical binaries discussed in the previous chapter assumptions about who students in these courses are and who they should become. The lines that scholarship draws between composition and creative writing create images of composition students lacking in skills and creative writing students brimming with talent, a basic inequity which shows we treat these students very differently and that we don't even assume that they're all students of writing.

The premise that composition students and creative writing students are different types of students requires variant conceptions about what they need to learn, and in neither case is that limited to— or even necessarily centered around— writing. That is

not to say that neither composition nor creative writing courses help students write. One essential premise of all courses with writing as a central activity is that writers and students improve by writing; consequently both courses are dedicated to having students produce written texts. However, scholarship hardly ever treats the writing produced in these courses in the same way, rarely supporting David Radavich's assertion that "the problems students encounter in creative writing courses turn out to be virtually the same as those involved with academic writing: insufficient meaningful detail, unclear purpose or central idea, undeveloped parts or incoherent whole, and lots of difficulty with punctuation" (111). While Radavich's argument that creative writing should focus on the same central concerns of writing as any other writing course—"reading, critical thinking, and awareness of historical context, as well as the particulars of form and evocative expression" (111)—the majority of scholarship about composition and creative writing suggests that very few believe these concepts are central to both courses. In fact, composition and creative writing produce texts about themselves which almost always claim that there is a great divide between the two, that the skills Radavich asserts should be universal are not; meaning, critical thinking, development, and punctuation are the concerns of first-year composition, while form, details, and expression belong firmly to creative writing. The difference is located in each field's presumptions about *who* students should be when they enter and exit the classroom (that there should be some transformation *in the person* as well as the writing is especially important in composition pedagogy) and the beliefs about what those students need, not only in the curricula, but in the instructor as well. Of course there is always the hope that students leave any classroom changed in some way, if only because they are equipped with more

information than before; however, writing classrooms are heavily invested with doing more than providing information. The supposed decentered nature of writing classroom pedagogies—ones which are intended to do away with the lecture format and which include all class members in meaning making—suggest that something other than a simple transfer of information is taking place. This chapter examines the assumptions we have about students' identities and the relationships between teacher and student that these assumptions create.

Scholarship about composition pedagogy and creative writing workshops often begin with the premise that a particular kind of student exists within the boundaries of each classroom. As Bruce Horner argues in *Terms of Work for Composition*, these representations of composition students, as well as others

elide that materiality by locating students on maps that define levels of intellectual and cognitive development; degrees of writing experience; racial, ethnic, gender or class identity; discursive realms; an oral-literate “divide”; field-dependent and field-independent cognitive styles, or left/right brain hemisphere thinking; and so on. Both naming and fixing the salient identifying features of students, these representations aim at answering the pedagogical common sense directive to “begin where the students are” so that teachers can then turn to investigating where they should be taken, why, and how. (32)

I agree with Horner that there exists in the scholarship multiple “fixed” accounts of who students are, but a close reading of scholarship necessarily leads to questions about the effectiveness of prescribing such clear-cut identities, especially since they don't hold up under scrutiny. They are a convenient labeling system which makes it simpler to write

about pedagogy, but it also creates an uncomplicated, essentialized view of students who don't necessarily exist, or at the very least don't fit into the neat categories established by scholarship. Thus, broad assertions about what students should learn based on these fabricated identities often fall short of really addressing student needs.

One major conclusion which can be made based on the breadth of scholarly material alone is that composition is more concerned with theorizing its pedagogy than creative writing is; there is simply more scholarship about composition and more training programs for teachers of composition than there are about or for creative writing.

Therefore, many assumptions about who our students are and what they need to learn are grounded in what is said as much as what isn't said. However, traditional ideas about "creative writing" are often enunciated in scholarship about composition, and polarized in differentiations between the student and the writer, the academic and the personal.

Composition scholarship begins by making assumptions about student identity. This seems problematic, as first-year composition is a requirement at most universities, and so the student body is made up of almost the entire entering class. It has become increasingly difficult to characterize the entering college student, as the population has drastically shifted: there are more adult, minority, part-time, and otherwise "non-traditional" students now than ever before. It seems futile, then, to define who students are, and yet composition scholarship does seem to need to locate students under a relatively confining rubric of identities. For example, we divide students into traditional— 18 or 19, white, and upper-middle to upper class— and non-traditional— those who don't fit the aforementioned mold. Laudably, composition scholarship has sought to expand its pedagogical tools to reach this non-traditional student. Research on

technology in the composition classroom, for example, discusses the problems of introducing computers to a population who has not previously been given access to such resources. However, while there is an expanded notion of who students are, they are still labeled in very oversimplified ways.

Students versus Writers

Such limited categories deny the multiple identities of students in composition courses. While certain students have been singled out and permitted to have individual identities (for example, Sandra Perl's Tony), these individuals are still expected to stand in for a larger population (thus, Perl tries to make general statements about the process of basic writers based on her key subject). What is more important to me than the actual limiting labels we assign our students is the static characterization of them which comes out of such a practice, one which, no matter what the label, almost always assumes some level of incompetence. Nowhere is this seen more clearly than in David Bartholomae's "Inventing the University," an article seminal to composition studies.

In "Inventing the University," Bartholomae presents us with a paradox: students in first-year composition need to write academic prose but are incapable of the task because they haven't been indoctrinated into the academic discourse which would allow them to write valuable texts.

Writers who can successfully manipulate an audience (or, to use a less pointed language, writers who can accommodate their motives to their reader's expectations) are writers who can both imagine and write from the position of privilege. They must, that is, see themselves within a privileged discourse, one

that already includes and excludes a group of readers. They must be either equal to or more powerful than those they would address. The writing, then, must somehow transform the political and social relationships between basic writing students and teachers. (9)

As Richard Boyd points out in “Imitate Me; Don’t Imitate Me,” this premise creates a “double bind” because Bartholomae is asserting that students need to learn what and how the teacher knows in order to communicate while also saying that a student can never actually accomplish this. “In ‘Inventing the University’ this double bind appears within the context of Bartholomae’s demand of students ‘to know what I know’ and ‘learn to write what I would write,’ which is always accompanied by his contradictory message that the student can never successfully accomplish this and join the teacher as fully assimilated double” (341). On one level, this makes sense: why would a student who is equally knowledgeable enter a classroom? Of course the assumption is that students come to class to learn from a teacher who holds more knowledge than they do. However, Bartholomae is saying that because the student is outside of the discourse community and the academy, she is incapable of writing meaningful prose, cannot write as an equal for and will never be the equal of this teacher-audience. “It is very hard for [students] to take on the role—the voice, the person—of an authority whose authority is rooted in scholarship, analysis or research. They slip, then, into the more immediately available and realizable voice of authority, the voice of a teacher giving a lesson or the voice of a parent lecturing at the dinner table. They offer advice or homilies rather than ‘academic conclusions” (Bartholomae, “Inventing the University” 6). Inherent in the role of student is the presumed lack of knowledge of and inability to enter a scholarly conversation.

This assumption—that students come to our classrooms lacking in several key areas— seems to underlie all first-year composition curricula, as Patricia Sullivan argues in “Composition Culture: A Place for the Personal.” “Students are defined by their lack. They lack the status of speaking, knowing subjects. Whatever they write, however they write it, their way has no intrinsic value or social import. It acquires value by being processed in the ten or fifteen weeks students spend in our classroom, but even then only as a vehicle for learning, not as a constitutive and consequential act of rhetoric” (45).

Bartholomae grapples with this issue of the worth of student writing, but his criterion for establishing value seems to be connected to the conversational context in which it can be placed (the catch being that Bartholomae doesn’t believe that student writing can enter an academic conversation, at least not within the time frame of an introductory composition course), much like clothing is more valued for the label attached and the store in which it is placed than the garment itself. “For Bartholomae, a fundamental task of the writing instructor is to ‘pry loose’ the student from the discourse community to which he or she belonged prior to entering the university. He characterizes these communities as structured by the ‘naïve codes of everyday life,’ and he insists that we must replace them with ‘the peculiar ways of knowing, selecting, evaluating, reporting, concluding and arguing that define the discourse of our community’” (Boyd 336).

Bartholomae implies that the discourse communities to which our students belong are the wrong ones, at least for academic writing.

Scholarship like Bartholomae’s continues to perpetuate the idea that students are deficient and enter the composition classroom needing to be indoctrinated into academic discourse, a project for which they are sadly lacking the necessary tools. “What our

beginning students need to learn is to extend themselves into the commonplaces, set phrases, rituals, gestures, habits of mind, tricks of persuasion, obligatory conclusions, and necessary connections that determine the ‘what might be said’ and constitute knowledge within the various discourses of our academic community” (“Inventing the University” 11). According to Bartholomae, it’s not that students need to be taught to write; it’s that they need to be taught how to express themselves in a particular academic discourse. The point seems not to be to teach how to think about writing, but how to express oneself in a particular voice, and that voice is the one of academia, a voice which often strives to be scientific or, as the university becomes more of a pre-professional training ground, corporate. “Composition is, after all, that area of our discipline most often assigned the task, or consigned the chore, of teaching the practical language skills—writing, reading, and sometimes speaking—in which the ‘world’ at large and the ‘corporate world’ in particular, expects our graduates to be proficient” (Kameen 36).

In “Composition Culture,” Sullivan argues that we “regard students merely as learners, not as knowers who stand to persuade or educate us” (45). Her argument is that we don’t look at our students as people who could potentially teach us something; rather, they are always in a position of needing to be instructed. As she points out, the value of knowledge is attached to *who* is sanctioned to create it, and this is rarely the student. Central to Bartholomae’s conception of what should happen in the composition classroom is the notion that the teacher guards the gateway to the academic community, and that it is within this community that all student writing must situate itself in order to be valuable. Bartholomae may have solved part of the “problem” James Berlin and Robert Connors were working with— he has, at the very least, defined what *could* make student

writing valuable. But, this is a worth which is, according to Bartholomae, necessarily denied students.

To speak with authority student writers have not only to speak in another's voice but through another's "code"; and they not only have to do this, they have to speak in the voice and through the codes of those of us with power and wisdom; and they not only have to do this, they have to do it before they know what they are doing [...] The university, however, is the place where "common" wisdom is only of negative value; it is something to work against. The movement toward a more specialized discourse begins (or perhaps, best begins) when a student can both define a position of privilege, a position that sets him against a "common" discourse, and when he can work self-consciously, critically, against not only the "common" code, but his own. ("Inventing the University" 17)

In other words, for student work to be considered valuable or powerful, it must demonstrate a sloughing off of the student's voice and vocabulary and appropriate a foreign and privileged one, in this case, that of the academic.

In "Unlearning to Write," Donald Murray argues that composition students are dissuaded from using writing as a tool to help the thinking process because they are taught to conform to the academic model rather than work away from it. "[S]tudents have been taught to write thesis statements, sentences that contain the conclusion that will be reached after the writing is done. Writers write to explore, to discover, to know. The writer has to keep the idea open so there is room for the story to happen" (105). There is a distinction between a student and a writer here: students write to demonstrate

the knowledge they've acquired, the conclusions they've already reached while writers write to find the answers, to explore the possibilities.

In the academy, we separate the writing of fiction and poetry from the serious writing of the essay, the thesis, the term paper. We seem to fear the creative and want to fence it off as if it would contaminate other forms of writing. But the students who have the experience of characters who take over their story often discover they have learned a new and powerful way of thinking that will help them in scholarly, research and vocational pursuits. They have found how to use written language not just as a method of recording but as a way of thinking. (112)

I don't believe that all students need to write fiction and poetry in order to write creatively; I don't think Murray does either. But what is important here are the assumed different processes which the "student" and the "writer" undergo. Murray is calling attention to the assumption that students write from preconceived conclusions— that is, they are often working to construct arguments that support conclusions reached before the writing process began— while writers are working towards knowing something— that is, using the writing process to discover what it is they believe. While Murray himself believes all students are writers, he does point out the difference in the way students and writers are treated.

Students write academic prose which, as Wendy Bishop argues, denies our students a voice. We have negated our students in two ways. For one, "[i]n order to suit the parameters of any research model, such a field should not [...] deny the value of the subjects who are being studied, student writers" (*Teaching Lives* 182). Second, and more important, because first-year writing is a required course, "students' views, opinions, and

experiences are easily suppressed. The implied illogic seems to run something like this: if they had any say in the matter, we know most wouldn't be in these classes; if they are in these classes, therefore, they must not have anything valuable to say about the matter" (183). This devalues students in multiple ways. Student texts are never "literature," and students are never authors.

Authorship is what literature values, authors are what creative writing produces; Bartholomae's contention seems to be that our students should be something other than authors, that the production of written texts is not what defines their role. While Bartholomae may agree with Thomas Newkirk that "there is a mismatch between the way discourse is taught in the university and the way it operates in the wider culture" ("Sentimental Journeys" 25), Bartholomae promotes this separation as a valuable goal of composition. Again, we find the assertion that composition should be producing academics, not writers. Academics can continue in the university, can communicate with scholars, or at the most basic level, can succeed in their courses because they have mastered an accepted discourse. Academics have become something bigger than writers— writing is simply one way in which the skill set they master can be demonstrated. What Bartholomae is working towards is creating the sort of student Berlin lauds: the academic, a citizen of the university and the larger community. While Bartholomae may not be advocating politics in the overt way in which Berlin does, he is complicit with the larger prescribed goal that composition should create community members, those who can participate in society— in this case, that society is the university. This is a bigger goal than merely teaching students to write.

As I argued in chapter one, it is often the case that in composition scholarship, teaching writing is not enough. In the introduction to *Collision Course: Conflict, Negotiation, and Learning in College Composition*, Russel Durst argues that first-year composition does teach more than “just” writing.

A key underlying purpose of the class is to help beginning college students develop what are, for many, new ways of thinking or dispositions of mind. Hence, the teacher promotes a pedagogy of interpretation, critique, meta-awareness, and dialectic types of intellectual work that constitute the hallmarks of critical literacy orientation, while students wish for a simpler, more straightforward, and less conflictual approach. (4)

Durst argues that we haven’t fully come to terms with how to integrate these concerns and so the purpose of his book is to outline ways to more fully integrate these goals. Further, he apparently believes it is the job of composition to form students into proper thinkers, thereby moving the composition course beyond being just a writing class. His purpose is to examine “the political focus of recent composition pedagogy as a way of teaching critical disposition of mind” (4).

To be fair, Durst does address writing issues. He believes that composition should go beyond looking at surface concerns of the text and should encourage students to explore writing possibilities rather than teaching them formulas for producing scholarly essays. He argues that we often give in to the composition student’s belief that she is a bad writer and that the quality of writing is defined by mechanical errors. He further argues we give into the demand for grammar instruction and model essays rather than asking students to think about larger concerns of the text. Durst encourages

compositionists to move away from this. However, he also concludes that “[o]ur goals are not just to help students become more articulate, stronger communicators in writing, but to help them become more critical and intellectual, to deepen their interest in the workings of the world, and to encourage their active participation in the construction of that world” (63), a list of goals which seems, at the very least, like a sideline to teaching students to write. Like Berlin, Durst sees composition courses as a place to construct something other than mere writers; he wants to create scholars.

Peter Elbow argues that students feel an inherent conflict between being a writer and being a scholar. Since composition students are taught first, if not only, to write academic essays, they are denied the opportunity to think of themselves as writers. And, because self-doubt is built into the genre of the academic essay, they are never allowed to move out of the mode of student, a move which Elbow, finding it lacking, thinks is crucial. “I feel I must leave students more control, let them make as many decisions as they can about their writing—despite the power of the culture. I must call on some faith in the ability of students to make important choices, decisions and perceptions of their own when I can clear a good space” (“Interchanges” 90-91). However, Elbow argues, the academy tends to dissuade writing with conviction, absolutes, and strong messages—rather the student position is one of constant self-doubt, created because student have knowledge tested rather than create knowledge. “Thus the basic subtext in a piece of student writing is likely to be, ‘Is this okay?’ In contrast to students, the basic subtext in a writer’s text is likely to be, ‘Listen to me, I have something to tell you,’ for writers can usually write with more authority than their readers” (“Being a Writer vs. Being an Academic” 81). The structure of the composition classroom is such that students are

taught to doubt themselves and their opinions, to rely on other texts to support their assertions and to leave caveats in their work so that no assertion is absolute. This, however, as Elbow argues, undermines our students as writers. “Therefore, unless we can set things up so that our first year students are often telling us about things that they know better than we do, we are sabotaging the essential dynamic of writers. We are transforming the process of ‘writing’ into the process of ‘being tested’” (*Writers vs. Academics* 81). Elbow’s primary assumption is that writing is at the heart of the composition class. The first year composition student is placed in the position of asking if the “answer” is correct. Indeed, Durst asserts that:

A critical approach to literacy thus emphasizes certain broad dispositions of mind, including reflectiveness about self, about one’s wider society, and about one’s role in that society. [...] This pedagogy therefore combines complex and demanding aspects of academic, civic, and personal literacy with the aim, not just of improving students’ ability to communicate in writing, but of encouraging in students a reflective, questioning intelligence and a willingness to use that intelligence as fully participating members of a critical democracy.” (37)

This is a set of goals which assumes a very restricted set of purposes for writing. And, as Wendy Bishop argues, this tends to encourage work which is safe, conventional, and derivative (“When All Writing is Creative...” 195).

The distinction between student and writing appears in creative writing texts as well. In *The Art of Fiction* John Gardner quite clearly draws lines between the writer and the composition student and also reinforces composition as basic. “Don’t try to write without the basic skills of composition,” (33) he warns, because lack of these skills

in “clumsy writing” (98). It is the basic premise of his book that his words of wisdom aren’t meant for everyone. “About all that is required is that the would-be writer understands clearly what it is he must do to become it. If no matter how hard he tries he simply cannot do what he must do, this book will help him understand why he was not set out into the world to be a writer but for some other noble purpose. [...] What is said here, whatever use it may be to others, is said for the elite; that is, for serious literary artists” (ix-x). Paul Allen, in “What Would a Writer Do?,” echoes the much cultivated notion that creative writers are artists while composition students are hacks. Using an analogy from architecture, in which one learns the history, math, and other necessary skills as the foundation for something better, Allen writes, “I submit that in composition classes students are often learning craft without art, and without the art, they have no need for craft, because they aren’t building what is to them a ‘beautiful house’” (38). Were these examples of elitism by Gardner and Allen isolated instances, they would likely go unnoticed. However, in the mid-1990s *The Art of Fiction* was, and perhaps still is, the most used fiction “manual” in undergraduate creative writing courses (Vanderslice 50). *The Art of Fiction* has, as Stephanie Vanderslice argues, become an important book in the creative writing canon and is thus influential upon creative writing curriculum. It has helped to create what Katherine Haake describes as the overriding version of who is in a creative writing class and what that class looks like.

We assume, for example, that such workshops will be composed of homogeneous groups of talented students with strong vocational commitments to writing. [...] We proceed as if writing is somehow a “natural” activity, firmly rooted in talent, which cannot really be taught, but only nurtured. We assure the credibility of

writer as “inspired,” often tormented, genius, who somehow presents a special case in the academy. (in Bishop and Ostrom 80)

Work like Gardner’s helps to cement the assumption that only the select are intended to be writers, a direct contradiction to one of the fundamental beliefs which has made composition an almost universal requirement. “One of composition’s most powerful assumptions as a field is that all students deserve an equal chance to learn to write” (Cain 70). Creative writing lore continues to propagate the myth that only those who are special and naturally talented can take these courses. Composition harbors no such belief, asserting quite the opposite: that anyone and everyone can and will improve by taking the first-year composition course.

The Academic Voice versus the Personal Voice

Assumptions about who the composition student is— and should be working to become— are often clearly enunciated in discussions of voice and what voice represent. In *A Teaching Subject*, Joseph Harris takes issue with scholars like Peter Elbow, James Moffett, and Ken Macrorie for encouraging the personal voice in student writing. On one level, his criticism seems to assume that the personal essay is a genre which requires a specific voice, and that these scholars are encouraging their students to limit themselves and to ignore the many competing voices any society presents. To that end, Harris is encouraging students to recognize the multitude of possible voices they can write with. However, his reading of Elbow and others seems limited, interpreting “personal” writing as anti-intellectual.

Readers are simply asked to say what they felt about a text, not to offer a convincing case for their readings of it; writers need only respond to those questions about their work that strike them personally as interesting or useful. Students in such a class serve more as sounding boards than as interlocutors. The aim of their work together is more to help a writer figure out what *she* thinks or feels, than it is to help her compose a text that will seem persuasive to a certain group of people at a certain time. Writers thus once again seem imagined more as poets, speaking to whom they know not, than as rhetors trying to make their positions prevail in a public exchange of views. (31-32)

Several aspects of this quote bother me, not the least of which is that Harris seems to be suggesting that all writing produced in composition should be persuasive essays. I believe that all writing is trying to give the reader a particular impression and that successful writing conveys the writer's message, so to that end all writing is inherently persuasive. However, I don't believe this is what Harris means by persuasive; rather, he's talking about a particular form of argument, a particular form of essay. As I'll discuss below, the rhetorical tradition Harris is promoting serves the academy (and perhaps the workplace), though not necessarily the student. Teaching students to write in one particular way, indoctrinating them into academic discourse, will help them get through college; however, it does not provide them with the tools to think critically about writing. Instead, teaching them one model of writing provides them with a formula, one which most likely will not work for them outside of the academy.

However, I am even more disturbed by Harris' assumption that composition students who respond as readers in their own right don't count. While Harris finds the

workshop method as described by Elbow and Macrorie laudable on some levels, he repeatedly uses words like “simply” and “mere” to characterize it as therapy which deals with feelings but not intellect, positing those two terms as mutually exclusive. Further, Harris, in what I see as a misreading of the methods proposed by those dubbed the expressivists, argues that this focus on personal voice limits the student to one prescribed voice.

As a teacher I share the goal of helping students form a sense of their own voices as writers and intellectuals. But I think there is a contradiction in trying to get them to do so by asking them to produce a certain *type* of prose. What we need to do instead, I would argue, is to make students more aware of how they can work not only within but against the constraints of a given discourse— of how they can take its methods and use them for their own aims, inflect its usual concerns with their own. [...] We need to think, that is, of a voice as a way of speaking that lies *outside* a writer, and which she must struggle to appropriate or control. Her voice as a writer will thus come out of the stance she takes toward the other social codes and voices, in the ways she makes use of the languages and methods of her field or culture. (Harris 34)

Again, it seems that the student of composition is not allowed to be her own creation; rather, she needs to form herself from those voices already present in the conversation. Harris, like Bartholomae, is arguing that students must be introduced to the voices of particular conversations. Voice cannot come from within, but only after the student has been indoctrinated into social codes. “So too a writer’s text can be seen not as an expression of some inner reality, some authentic self, but as a kind of performance, a

working through of the various roles and possibilities that her language and situation offer her” (35-36). However, it would seem that the acceptable ranges of “language and situation” are limited. It’s not, necessarily, that Harris believes that there is only one voice to choose from, but he does suggest that there are boundaries which preclude looking inside oneself. And this is where he begins to find expressivists limiting, because he assumes that they always deal with the personal. But even a scant reading of “expressivist” literature, like that of Donald Murray, would prove Harris wrong.

The writer’s basic job is not to say what he already knows but to explore his own experience for his own meaning. His experience may be in the library or in the pub, but at the moment of writing he uses the tool of language to discover the meanings which exist in his experience. As he uses his language to try to put down on the page what he thinks he means he keeps changing the words— he thinks. As his writing develops under his hand his words reveal his meaning, an order evolves as his mind uses language to expose what is significant in his experience (Murray, “The Interior View”10).

For one, Murray seems to open the door to places of research beyond traditional academia; I don’t believe Harris would think the pub— or the language of it— is an appropriate source of research, at least not in the way Murray discusses it.

Second, and more important, Murray acknowledges the more realistic way that language and writing work— it’s a working through, a developmental process, rather than one of borrowing from.

Writing is thinking, and thought begins not with a conclusion but with an itch, a hint, a clue, a question, a doubt, a won-der, a problem, an answer without a

question, and image that refuses to be forgotten. [...] You try to say what you cannot yet say, but in the attempt you discover—draft by draft—what you have to say and how you can it. Failure is essential. Failure occurs when the words race ahead of thought, producing insights that may be developed through revision. The writer should seek to fail, not to say what has been said before, but what has not yet been said and is worth saying. (“Time to Write”)

What Murray is stressing here is that writing is a process of discovery, that it is finding one's way through. However, what Harris suggests is that a writing student, unable (or not allowed) to use her own voice, may only borrow from those who have already produced texts.

In “Composition as the Voicing of Multiple Fictions,” Derek Owens takes a more “creative” approach to voice, encouraging students to experiment. Owens agrees with Harris that there are a multiplicity of voices and various rhetorics to which students need be introduced. However, while he agrees that students do read these multiple voices, he also argues that teaching them to write in very particular ones (a position which Harris seems to me to be advocating) is detrimental to writing instruction. Owens also argues that writing classes make a distinction between academic writing and the “writerly voice,” which is often considered to be a fictive one.

One of the striking aspects of Joseph Harris' work is his distinction between the writer and the student, especially since this binary is turned on its head. In *A Teaching Subject*, “writer” is sometimes a derogative designation, especially when Harris asserts that the outcome of pedagogy like Elbow's is to turn the writer into a poet. He uses the term writer to denote the person who concentrates on her own writing objectives and

produces texts for a potentially unknown reader. The student, however, is one who can situate herself in a conversation and appropriate the correct voice in which to express herself. Harris' assumption is that composition should strive to create able rhetoricians who can argue effectively in a traditional model. This is fine in one sense; I do believe that students should be taught to analyze rhetorical situations, should learn how to navigate various situations and appeal to a range audiences, and it seems to me that traditional rhetoricians make a stab towards recognizing this sort of multiplicity. I don't agree, however, that the "traditional"—and here I assume Harris is leaning towards the same model of academic discourse Bartholomae lays out—is the only tradition worth learning. While the distinction between the writer and the student becomes blurred as Harris moves on in his discussion of voice, there is a clear delineation between the “bad” writer and the “good” student; it's interesting that for Harris being just a writer is negative.

The idea that the “personal” is lacking in value—expressed by scholars like Bartholomae and Harris—flies directly in the face of scholarship about creative writing, which often values the personal experience. In *The Creative Experiment*, Frank Whitehead conducts a year long “experiment” in an English course taught at the University of Sheffield Institute of Education for selected students. The course encompassed many subjects including literature, linguistics and expository writing. However, Whitehead's book is about the part of the week during which his students wrote creatively, the part of the course he thinks was most universally successful, that which produced the “best” writing. Whitehead exposed his students to writing stimuli—

music, paintings, and most often, poems— which were intended to inspire, or at least provide a starting point, for their creative writing sessions.

As the year went on, it became increasingly clear to me that the best pieces of writing had to be attributed not to the stimulus itself but rather to the highly idiosyncratic reverberations which the stimulus had touched off in the individual writer's inner world. Though I did not formulate any such policy explicitly at the time, I can see in retrospect that my choice of stimuli was influenced by my own pre-conceptions as to the kind of writing which I expected to value most highly. I was concerned to ensure that the writing should not be content to glide over the surface but should engage with areas of personal experience in which the writer's feelings had been deeply involved. (34)

Here, Whitehead almost seems to regret exposing his students only to what he considers “good” writing, art or music. He finds the value of their work in the individuality the students bring to each piece, not in the way in which they conform to the stimuli offered. If we see reading academic discourse as a sort of equivalent stimulus— that is, we give students academic essays to read and then ask them to generate work as a result of this exposure— we can see a clear difference in what is assumed to be “good” writing. While, as I'll argue below, voice in creative writing becomes a tricky issue—one influenced by the literary market— there is value assigned to writing that is individual, that acknowledges the personal experience. However, good writing in composition begins where the student leaves off and the voice of the academic community begins. “Successful” student writing, as Bartholomae argues, closely resembles the published essays taught in class and often encourages students to critically distance themselves

from the subject. However, for creative writers, the valuable work begins when the student digests and moves beyond the “model” texts. Whitehead values the work which moves away from the models he brings in. He believes that the best student work was produced when he used music as a stimuli; when he used poetry, the student writing mimicked the model too closely. Modeling (an issue which will be taken up even further in chapter three’s discussion of textbooks), then, is valued in one writing classroom differently than in the other. Far from encouraging composition students to branch out, writing to the model arguably teaches them to (re)produce a particular type of text.

It is the academic voice which has prevailed in composition for a multitude of reasons, most notably because this establishes composition as a field which can be of service to the university, an ethic which Sharon Crowley argues is central to composition's identity and place within the academy. "[T]he required introductory course has always been justified, at bottom, in instrumental terms: this is the site wherein those who are new to the academy learn to write its prose" (250-251). Crowley argues that despite composition's status as a discipline in its own right within English departments, the rest of the university still does not recognize it as a scholarly field, thus requiring it to define its usefulness in other ways, and this has historically created the justification that composition serves to indoctrinate students into the language of the academy. "[T]he required introductory course remains in place in order to socialize students into the discourse of the academy [;] to the extent that it succeeds in this it supplements or even erases students' relation to their home languages. This universality of the requirement suggests to me that this is, precisely, its point" (257). Crowley further argues that first year composition is the gateway course to the university, and in that way, it is in service

solely to the university and not to the student; the student is indoctrinated into the academic discourse or, generally, leaves the university, willingly or not. For the larger academic community, the value of composition is found only in its ability to serve the greater good by introducing students to the academic voice they will need to adopt in order to succeed in higher level courses.

Crowley further argues that creating academics fulfills a larger set of needs of which writing is only the first step: "students need composition in order to write better, to write error-free prose, to survive in the academy, to prosper in a job or a profession, to become acquainted with the best that has been thought and said, to become critics of the society in which they live" (257). Composition has become a discipline which serves the university (and with the advent of "service learning," corporations and the community). Because this notion of service has become a pervasive base of the composition course, we can see the assumptions which have formed it underlying subsequent scholarship about how to teach composition.

In "Freshman Composition as a Middle-Class Enterprise," Lynn Bloom makes much the same, if slightly more insidious, argument.

Indeed, one of the major though not necessarily acknowledged reasons that freshman composition is in many schools the only course required of all students is that it promulgates the middle-class values that are thought to be essential to the proper functioning of students in the academy. When students learn to write, or are reminded once again of how to write (which of course they should have learned in high school), they also absorb a vast subtext of related folkways, the whys and hows of good citizenship in their college world, and by extrapolation, in

the workaday world for which their education is designed to prepare them. In this—as perhaps in any—middle-class enterprise, the students’ vices must be eradicated and they must be indoctrinated against further transgressions before they, now pristine and proper, can proceed to the real business of the university... students must first be disinfected in Freshman English. (656)

Of course Bloom must promote Freshman English as something other than just the teaching of writing—her parenthetical assumption is that writing is an elementary skill, one which should have been learned before entering the academy. Her argument hearkens back to Robert Connors’ argument for valuing what composition can produce—and once again, the actual writing doesn’t count as a commodity. The act of writing, rather, serves as an inoculatory process which prepares them for the work of the university and entry into the labor force. Bloom wants to first prepare students to “proceed to the real business of the university.” The result is that composition students learn to behave like academics. And, though scholarship often appears in its final form in writing, the academic here is understood as a thinker and researcher, not a writer.

The alternative to the academic voice, then, would seem to be the expressivist one, the voice of the personal. As scholars like Karen Surman Paley and Thomas Newkirk have argued, this voice is often written off as romantic and sentimental, wrongly accused of treating language as ahistorical, apolitical, and transparent (Paley 182). This voice, Paley argues, is associated “with African Americans and with women who are writing against oppression and producing what Foucault has called subjugated knowledge” (182). In other words, it is a voice from the margins, subversive, but also less powerful. As Newkirk argues in “Sentimental Journeys,” scholars like Bartholomae

can diminish personal writing because of the negative connotations with which it has been linked.

I would argue that those of us in the field of English have constructed our identities upon a rejection of sentimental discourse. It is the “other.” Our sense of elitism, the cultural capital we possess, rests upon a capacity to see through sentimentalism. In this regard we distance ourselves from popular culture in which sentimentality is a real force. We possess a large lexicon of pejoratives for this discourse— mawkish, manipulative, corny, trite, gushy, tearjerker, simplistic, mushy, romantic, touchy-feely, soft, naïve, and, to go back several decades, womanish. (23-24)

While scholars like Joseph Harris bemoan that “expressivist” writing limits inquiry by allowing students to ignore the social context, Owens conversely argues that limiting composition students to expository persuasive writing does much the same thing. “Most English departments continue to imply that expository prose occupies a realm of inquiry and introspection fundamentally alien from the one poets and novelists inhabit; the assumption is that writers of expository prose work with factual data, not fiction. [...] The difference between sestinas and research papers is a matter of technique and craft, not of the content or absence of something akin to truth” (168).

In what has become a relatively famous issue of *College Composition and Communication*—and part of a larger, ongoing conversation— David Bartholomae and Peter Elbow constructed exchanges about the difference between academic and personal writing. Bartholomae’s assumption seems to be that personal writing encourages students to write with no regard for the writing which has come before, with no regard

for the social context and community in which they live, that it allows students to write in isolation as though they are inventing the wheel. Describing what he believes to be Elbow's ideal classroom, Bartholomae writes:

[I]t is also obvious that there are many classrooms where students are asked to imagine that they can clear out a space to write on their own, to express their own thoughts and ideas, not to reproduce those of others. As I think this argument through, I think of the pure and open space, the frontier classroom, as a figure central to composition as it is currently constructed. The open classroom; a free writing. This is the master trope. And, I would say, it is an expression of a desire for an institutional space free from institutional pressures, a cultural process free from the influence of culture, an historical moment outside of history, an academic setting free from academic writing. (64)

Moreover, there is an explicit disdain for allowing students to cast themselves in the role of writer or author. One of Bartholomae's key assertions seems to be that student writers are completely separate from authors; moreover, that separation is necessary to producing academic writing. "I read Peter [Elbow]'s work as a part of a much larger project to preserve and reproduce the *figure of the author*, an independent, self-creative, self-expressive subjectivity. I see the argument against academic writing, and for another writing, sometimes called personal or expressive writing, as part of a general argument in favor of the author, a much beleaguered figure in modern American English departments" ("Writing With Teachers" 65, emphasis mine).

Derek Owens argues that there has been a shift in what the academy recognizes as "academic writing." We can see the inclusion of diverse voices in the readers and

textbooks we include in the composition classroom. We say that we want to include more voices. However, the reality of what we ask students in first year composition to produce assumes that there is still one correct voice with which to write. “A major flaw with all the current professional hype about cultural diversity and ‘opening’ the canon is that the conversations continue to revolve around the inclusion of specific literary texts; absent is the equivalent attention to introducing culturally diverse discourses into the academic classroom” (162). We may be introducing new voices into the classroom with the texts we have students read, but we are still encouraging them to write in a voice which fulfills institutional expectations, which serves the academic needs of the university. In other words, while we are beginning to recognize the multiple identities of writers, we still stifle our students’ identities, asking them to write from the position of student-academic. “In sum, it would appear that many of us never teach our students composition in any broad sense at all but, rather, indoctrinate them into those particularized genres that most closely mirror our own rhetorical predilections, while multiple alternatives are kept at bay” (161). Owens is taking issue with a basic assumption about composition curriculum— that students must be indoctrinated into an academic community, that this service is the only purpose of the first year composition course. It’s an explicit assumption, one which many composition scholars would wholeheartedly acknowledge they support and others, like Sharon Crowley, would fight stridently against, even to the abolition of first-year composition (a movement which Crowley willingly leads). Bartholomae explicitly states that that his goal is to teach students to grapple with institutional expectations, that he wants their work to serve the academy. “I also want students to be able to negotiate the ways they are figured in

relationship to the official forms of knowledge valued in the academy—that is, I want them to be prepared to write themselves out of a rhetorical situation in which their roles are already prepared, where they are figured as simple-minded or not-yet-ready for serious discussion. I want my students to have a way to begin, to establish their power over the text (and the author) [...]” (Bartholomae, “Interchanges” 86-87). The problem for people like Owens, and myself, is that this imagines there is only one way in which to negotiate these rhetorical situations when really “the notion of a central style is a falsity, a creative dead end. We all contain a transient maze of personalities, a fact quickly ascertained when we think of the numerous voices we adopt and discard in speaking to various audiences” (Owens 166-167).

Scholarship versus Literature

It is not only students who are indoctrinated into a particular discourse, it is also confining professionals in the field to a particular model; composition teachers and scholars, too, are expected to perform in certain ways. The assumption is that all effective scholarly writing also fits a mold. However, as Wendy Bishop argues, this scientific model denies not only the “messiness” inherently present in a composition classroom but also other possible voices, some of which may be more appropriate or influential.

For instance, the scientific research report which was so difficult for me to learn to write and my students to learn to read often feels as if it distances us from the very students and classrooms we need to understand. The research report presents a stable, controlled environment very unlike the messy, complicated and

always changing writing classrooms most of us inhabit. [...] As researchers in our own and in other fields have become alert to their own rhetoric (their ways of reporting their research and advancing their own and their community's claims) many, as I have, have increasingly questioned the choice of those in composition studies who borrow the scientific model as the most appropriate one for studying spoken and written discourse and for validating the results of research to others within the academy. (*Teaching Lives* 181-182)

If we question, at the professional level, what composition scholarship should look like, how can we ask students to produce essays which conform to a disputed standard?

Creative writing, too, has begun to question the sort of literature promoted in the workshop. While not always couched in terms of academia, there is an emerging discussion of the problems of adhering strictly to the demands of the literary marketplace and the production of students who can contribute to it. As Chris Green argues in his 2001 article "Materializing the Sublime Reader," writing for the "literary" market only prepares students to address a particular community. "In short, creative writing has developed as an instruction designed to produce writers, to ensure employment, and to create a market for their own product" (158). Like Owens, he assumes students may have access to multiple voices (though Green seems to doubt this access is pervasive—he cites texts used in creative writing classrooms which are exceptions to the canon, but he doesn't believe their use is widespread) but, like in composition courses, students are still asked to produce a specific type of text.

[C]reative writing remains a text-centered approach that privileges an author/ity that, no matter the good will of its intentions, effaces speech communities with an

urgent stake in the life beyond the construct of the workshop. The way students are taught to write is unintelligible to the community of experience about which they write. [...] Regardless of the discipline, theoretical approach, or political bent of the instructor, classes taught under the auspices of university education reorient the students from previous speech communities' practices and uses of poetic discourse to the sanctioned discourse of the university. (160-161)

Green seems to be agreeing with Whitehead that the individual experience is crucial to creative writing; however, what he is arguing is that the presentation of it must conform to a literary marketplace which is potentially far removed from the individual experience. In other words, the individual is valued, but not necessarily the original voice of that individual.

Patrick Bizzaro makes much the same argument in the January 2004 edition of *College English*. He argues that workshops reproduce a particular kind of writer, an apprentice who strives to imitate the master, creating work in the same mold. "[T]he writing workshop phenomenon no doubt works vertically, where sameness is passed from teacher to student who, in turn, becomes a teacher who passes certain literary biases to yet another generation of students" (305).

As Katherine Haake argues in "Teaching Creative Writing if the Shoe Fits," creative writing constructs a strict—though often not fully articulated—definition of "good" writing. "We agree that the appropriate product of the class will be a publishable literary text in a conventional genre. We assess 'publishability' in terms of poorly articulated, but nonetheless prevalent, standards of 'good writing.' We promote the idea that these standards reflect *universal and enduring aesthetic values* that exist somehow

outside of their cultural construction” (in Bishop and Ostrom 80, emphasis mine). The assumption Haake is highlighting is that there is a “literary” text which has value in a vacuum, regardless of variant discourse communities. However, just this examination of composition and creative writing suggests that different forms, different voices, have value in different places. If a look at only two contexts—both of which are located within the academy—can demonstrate such a divide in what is valued, how can anyone assert that there is a “universal and enduring” aesthetic that appeals to everyone? Further, as Haake points out, these valued voices are “outside cultural constructions,” suggesting that creative writing, like composition, is not interested in the discourses students bring into the classroom, but rather, would like to indoctrinate them into one which is more “appropriate” to the literary market.

There is extensive conversation about the kinds of texts composition students should be producing; in absentia are assumptions about what texts can be left to the domain of creative writing. In “When All Writing is Creative and Student Writing is Literature,” Wendy Bishop argues that by teaching students particular genres— in this case, the difference between “academic” writing and “literary” writing— we deprive students of opportunities. One of the essential opportunities they are deprived of is the opportunity to believe that they can write in multiple genres, that they can deviate from the pattern of the academic essay and produce “literature,” a problem stemming from the basic set-up of each course.

[C]omposition was often taught as a skills class. Students were asked to write in particular essay forms (narration, description, exposition, argumentation) and to bring in a finished essay each week for grading. [...] Being product-oriented,

those classes resulted in formulaic writing and rarely offered students glimpses into the messy, generative, exciting process of writing. Creative writing classes, too, for many years were taught in predictable ways; master poets or fiction writers asked students to share and critique a story or poem each week [...] They were also frightening since a traditional creative writing workshop could feel like a performance, making new writers eager to conform to what they assumed were the expectations of their teachers or the models of “excellent” literature found in their class anthology. (194)

While Bishop does believe that some teachers have broken from these models, encouraging free writing in composition or deviating from the traditional canon in creative writing courses, there is still the reliance on strict genres to guide students. “It’s likely that in your writing past, you were not praised for taking risks. Rather, you were told that you had to follow the conventions for the type of writing focused on in that class, writing an academic essay, a short story, or a research report” (195). Composition students write academic essays, a model which they have been given since elementary school; creative writing students write fiction or poetry based on models of “great” literature. The examination of textbooks in the next chapter demonstrates the relatively narrow canon of what is read and taught in each classroom. The difference seems to be located in dividing what is considered literature and what is scholarship, or as Bishop argues, the line between theory and practice. “That students can see the literature within their own writing in order to understand text-building is not a radical notion if we use current theories of texts to let us understand that Literature with a capital *L* is primarily a canonized set while writing literature with a small *l* may be thought of as writing in order

to understand genre conventions, writers' choices, readers' responses: the exhilarating act of experiencing textuality" ("Crossing the Lines" 191).

In Anne Turkle's article "Life in the Trenches: Perspectives from Five Writing Programs," co-written with four MFA students, graduate students/teachers in creative writing programs discuss their conflicting experiences as teachers of composition and creative writing.

Creative writing [at University of California, Irvine] seems to be concerned with analysis and structural ability. At other universities, I know expository writing (freshman composition) also focuses on self-discovery, which I feel is important in the freshman year. [...] I try to smuggle as much so-called creative writing in as possible. We talk about sentence rhythms, vocal qualities of prose, periodic sentences, the shape of good paragraphs, the power of verbs, the way to use details and imagery. At the sentence level I believe there is a lot of overlap between expository and creative writing, but at the global level—the level where the paper is viewed as a whole—I don't think there is nearly as much. The aim of fiction is, by nature, different than the aim of expository writing. (in Bishop and Ostrom 49)

There are two assumptions at work here: one, that aesthetic concerns are the domain of creative writing (while intellectual matters belong to composition) and two, that writing genres have fundamentally incompatible goals. As I argued above, in that both academic essays and works of fiction and poetry are trying to move the reader to see the writer's perspective, they aren't different in objective, just form. While reading the various genres might require learning vocabulary unique to each, the overall process of analyzing

whether or not a piece of writing meets its goals and the needs of its audience—and the larger discourse necessary for that conversation— seems necessary for all writing. The assumption that genres are inherently incompatible seems oversimplified and misguided. The first assumption—that aesthetics and academics are incompatible— seems naïve as well, indicative of the sort of simplified binary which continues to separate creative writing and composition. The concerns here— sentence rhythm, verbs, details, etc.— seem to go to issues of readability and enjoyment as well as the strength of the writing. However, they are subjective, more difficult to assess or measure than grammar or whether an argument is supported. Composition, with its concerns about assessment and its desire to be seen as a scholarly field, is understandably wary of using such slippery criteria as style as part of the rubric for evaluating student writing. Strength of rhetorical analysis and grammar are much neater categories for assessment purposes. That aesthetic concerns are then considered the domain of creative writing while technical merit and argument are those of composition highlights the assumption about what each course is trying to do, and as Randall R. Freisinger argues in “Creative Writing and Creative Composition,” explains the differences in assessment. “Grades in creative writing classes tend to run higher than they do in freshman English. Why? [...] We are dealing with the delicate psyches of students interested in language, and we do not wish to crush that enthusiasm; we are more willing to reward genuine effort; and we are more aware of our own subjectivity in attempting to evaluate creativity” (287).

That creativity is subjective contributes to what Alice Brand sees as the complete absence of creativity in composition. “By design, default, or professional necessity, imaginative writing seems to have fallen away (or perhaps never was) for composition

specialists. Serious fictive or poetic inclinations appear further out of reach emotionally. Whatever creative space once existed has been filled largely with scholarship— or remains a black hole” (in Bishop and Ostrom 147). Several assumptions underlie Brand’s argument, not the least of which is heavily documented opinion that scholarship cannot be creative; hence, it’s no surprise that if composition wants to teach academic and expository essays, it needs to discourage creativity. Nor is it surprising that creative writers distrust scholarship and literary criticism; these forms—with their emphasis on theory and meaning— suck the creativity out of writing. And, as Bishop argues in “Crossing the Lines: On Creative Composition and Composing Creative Writing,” this is not just an issue at the undergraduate level, but at the graduate level as well. “While graduate students in creative writing programs inevitably see themselves as writers, M.A. and Ph.D. candidates in English literature traditionally have prepared themselves for lives as ‘scholars,’ defined by their abilities to read” (in Bishop and Ostrom 184).

Work versus Play

Composition teachers who do incorporate what they consider to be creative writing—and literature— into their classrooms do so in oversimplified manners— or at least the published scholarship represents it this way. In “A Course in Crisis,” John Paul Tassoni assigns his student a short story in which a man discovers that his wife’s renewed vitality is a response to the affair she’s having. The story ends with the man returning home rather than confronting his wife and her lover. Tassoni creates an assignment in which one possible way for students to respond is to write a short story which picks up where the assigned one ends. Tassoni is working from the belief that he needs to spend

more time in class addressing “small fish” issues like style, as opposed to the larger political ones. His move to incorporate creative writing is a recognition that perhaps issues of style aren’t so unimportant after all. However, Tassoni comes to the conclusion that this assignment fails when his students construct stories of an ultimately vengeful husband. They reached the wrong answer.

Fueling the fire of my discontent, my students were enjoying themselves.

Occasionally, class members expressed to me their uncertainties about how to respond to particular pieces of student writing in workshops, but more than a few wrote journal entries expressing the pleasure they had found in their ‘creative pieces.’ For some reason, I studied their happy, contented faces, listened to the genuine unsolicited questions they had about effective response, and started to blame myself for what seemed a failed curriculum. (20)

While Tassoni initially decided to focus on style, his assessment of the work his students do has nothing to do with the artistic merits of their writing. He seems bothered that they enjoy the assignment, disturbed that they remark on their pleasure in their journals. And, because they turn their attention more towards the “creative” part of writing, rather than focusing on the “issue”—the complications of marriage, loyalty, and infidelity—he decides the assignment has failed. Composition students, it seems, aren’t supposed to enjoy the writing they do; Tassoni’s students weren’t actually expected to be creative with this assignment. They were supposed to use a “creative” form—in this case, the short story—to do academic and critical work. When Tassoni’s students experiment not only with the form *but the content* as well, the assignment fails and Tassoni blames the

failure on the creative component of the assignment, the part which allowed his students to experience pleasure and, he believes, distracted them from the critical work required.

Tassoni's problem is an interesting one because it highlights many of the perceived binaries between creative writing and composition. For one, he's not upset because the writing itself is poor; rather he's bothered that his students reached oversimplified answers about how to deal with infidelity, and politically incorrect ones in that most were violent endings. Second, he is parsing the difference between the academic work that he wants composition to do and the pleasure that creative writing seems to bring. This binary—that composition is work while creative writing is pleasurable—is one which seems to underwrite composition curriculum. Like Tassoni, many believe that if the writing process is pleasurable, it isn't academic, nor is it profitable. If composition is work, creative writing, as John Ashmead argues, is something other than that. "I told my [fiction] class that they could expect to write short stories only for the love of the craft; what money they made would come from their wives, or from those substitute wives—the Foundations, or from their jobs" (15).

In "An Apology for Pleasure, or Rethinking Romanticism and the Student Writer," T.R. Johnson argues that this division between what is pleasurable and what is academic stems from modern rhetoricians' characterizations of themselves. In their attempts to separate themselves from romanticism—defined in seminal texts such as Patricia Bizell and Bruce Herzborg's *The Rhetorical Tradition* as a concern for the aesthetic and contemplation—rhetoricians have cast suspicion upon any writing which seems to exhibit emotion (43). Johnson argues that pleasurable writing has been falsely associated with author-centered texts, that is texts which do not have to take into

consideration the reader or her needs, but suggests that a closer reading of the romantics demonstrates that “if the sublime is a feeling of ‘joy and vaunting,’ this feeling is not restricted to any single entity like the author. It spreads contagiously through the audience, an experience of collective harmony in which the author is just one more humming particle” (46). Despite Johnson’s persuasive argument that pleasure is contagious, it is easy to see how a discipline which associates pleasure with overly-sentimental, uncritical thought would attempt to remove the vestiges of pleasure from its writings. Johnson writes that he’s “often encountered teachers of rhetoric and composition who insist that the topic of writerly pleasure is wholly irrelevant to our field, and what’s more, that they have never enjoyed writing at all and don’t encourage their students to think of writing in terms of enjoyment” (54). This makes sense given that there is ample evidence that many compositionists don’t consider their students writers in the first place. Rarely are composition students ever referred to as writers; as I’ll show in my examination of textbooks in chapter three, composition students are framed in a discourse which keeps them from being identified as such. Creative writing may be producing enjoyable texts; moreover, the texts are enjoyable to produce. As Nicholas Coles argues, school systems are concerned with the work of literacy; creative writing is for those with time on their hands. “The ‘imposed’ literacy of our education and cultural experience after primary school largely concerns the reading of other people’s writing. Anything which concerns writing for imaginative or reflective purposes belongs to an area of adult life called ‘leisure’ (which, in terms of funding, belongs on the very edge of serious education for adults)” (205).

While scholars like Bishop, Elbow and Owens are trying to combat the underlying assumption that composition students should be trained in a particular academic model, it continues to be inscribed in traditional scholarship about composition pedagogy. This idea that there are particular objectives, voices and writing forms which belong to composition perpetuates the divide Bishop denotes as political: “fundamentals precede art and art writing is for the elite (endlessly, the white, literate, at least middle-class kind), and composition writing is for those who need nothing more than *basic* literacy (although what that is no group has yet been able to agree upon)” (“Crossing the Lines,” in Bishop and Ostrom 186). And, as Nicholas Coles points out in his chapter about the Federation of Worker Writers and Community Publishers (FWWCP), a large writing workshop created to meet the needs of the working-class in Britain (and now, in other parts of the world), it is this initial focus on the fundamentals (like grammar and spelling)—and the message that if they are not sufficiently mastered, one can’t write at all—that makes many turn away from writing, believing it belongs to the intellectual elite.

Working-class writing is a form of writing expressed by people without any writing background, that is to say by people who, through poor teaching standards, left school at the earliest possible moment with English teachers’ comments on work and school reports, usually in red ink, indelibly stamped on their minds: “*Bad grammar*”... “*Can’t spell*” ... “*Poor punctuation*”... etc.— People who, as children with a natural eagerness to learn had been brainwashed into believing that writing belonged to an elite class of people, that form and structure were more important than content. That imagination was alright as long

as you had a College or University education to go with it. (quoted in Coles 201-202)

Creative—or imaginative—writing is perceived as the domain of those who have already mastered “the basics,” skills which first-year composition should begin to impart to students. In “What Would a Writer Do?,” Paul Allen emphasizes the “hard” lessons first-year composition teaches, once again enunciating the difference between the “student” and the “writer.” “Freshman composition is probably the students’ last hope of learning the painful lesson that writing is a lonely business. [...] Freshmen are too dependent on the teacher as it is, and when we ‘approve’ a topic or outline, when we are too clear about ‘what we want,’ we are stifling the real essay, the one neither we nor the student could possibly have anticipated” (42). In composition scholarship as well, the academic and the writer are necessarily separated. “The academic, for [Elbow] is a person with an eye to the past (or to books and articles) and with a skeptical, critical attitude towards language. The writer is the person who works with pleasure and authority on his or her own language project. [...] This comes very close to the way I [Bartholomae] would define the issues. Peter [Elbow] comes down on the side of credulity as the governing idea in the undergraduate writing course; I come down on the side of skepticism” (Bartholomae, “Interchanges” 84). This is a common criticism of “expressivists” like Elbow, Ken Macrorie, and Donald Murray; there is skepticism that personal writing is a romantic ideal which encourages “sappy” writing that lacks substance. It is precisely this sort of connection that allows scholars like Bartholomae to cast the term “writer” in a negative light.

As Coles argues, the working class was never intended to produce literature, nor are they led to believe they can. Basic writing skills consist of grammar, punctuation, and content. Form and structure—here understood as the “craft” of writing—are writing concerns for the intellectual elites who, as apart of their advanced education, are allowed to write creatively. There is a divide between the working class and the intellectual elite which goes beyond socio-economic status; it is not just defined by the education each has but also by the education they are *allowed* to have. Thus, when “creative writing” is brought into the composition classroom, it is often seen as a subversive act, one which provides the working class with unique access to a higher socio-economic strata.

The work of composition is to create literate members of society, not writers, and this pressure to become able citizens is one which many students, plagued by red marks denoting error, feel they can’t adequately meet. And, as Johnson argues, this creates the risk of “exacerbating [students’] fears of not belonging [...] contribut[ing] to an anxiety that can altogether undermine their ability to write. Such a pedagogy, indeed, seems precisely the sort that generates truly awful experiences of writing, the kind that will make our students deeply disinclined to think about writing or to concern themselves with rhetorical skills ever again” (54). While Johnson wants to put the pleasure back into writing, scholars like Bartholomae, Durst, Bloom and Berlin would argue that first-year composition students aren’t ready to experience the pleasure of playing with language because they haven’t yet mastered basic rhetorical skills. And employing rhetoric is work—if students aren’t inclined to “write” after they leave first-year composition courses, it is because they aren’t cut out to do the work of academics. For these scholars, pleasure falls within the realm of emotion. The privilege of playing with writing is one

composition students haven't earned—and may never. Play and emotion have little, if any, place in the work of intellectuals or in their writing.

Implications

While Peter Elbow's *Writing Without Teachers* has been criticized for asserting that the teacher is not necessary to the learning of writing, it does serve as a good example, perhaps an exaggerated one, of the idea that the composition teacher is not the sole authority in the classroom. Scholars such as George Hillocks and James Zebrowski argue that students are a part of the "meaning-making" in classrooms, that they should be equal participants in the construction of knowledge in the classroom. Creative writing does not seem to harbor such democratic principles. Wendy Bishop, a person with a foot in both composition and creative writing, suggests taking multiple roles: coaches, evaluators, senior learners, mentors. She recognizes the teacher's need "to monitor his classroom persona and his position in the classroom hierarchy" (*Released into Language* 172), but this less directive approach isn't prevalent in the scholarship on creative writing. In fact, there is little written about how to be an effective creative writing teacher, and where there is, it's generally ambiguous. In "Notes on the Responsibility and the Teaching of Creative Writing," an article for the *AWP Newsletter*, Dave Smith tries to answer in concrete terms questions about what creative writing should teach and who should teach it. And yet, he is unable to come up with anything definitive or tangible.

The difference between the teacher of creative writing and the orthodox teacher of literature is that in literature one begins with an established text and context.

There is always critical help for the discussion of text, whether it be historical, polemic, generic or peripheral. The creative writing teacher must be all of this at once, for he is expected to receive, evaluate, and constructively discuss what has theoretically never existed until the moment it is presented to him. He must provide not a lecture but a response which is the terrain of discovery. (3)

It's difficult for me to imagine what exactly this creative writing teacher/discoverer looks like from Smith's description, but I assume that part of his need to use such tenuous terms is that there is no real training ground for creative writing teachers, no programmatic system for teaching creative writing pedagogy. Smith's answer that the value of creative writing is that it provides "one of the few formal opportunities in education for self-discovery and self-creation. It leads students less to the right answers than the right questions. It creates more intelligent, informed and responsible readers by immersing them in the actual process of imaginative exploration and accomplishment" (3). But this is equally vague since it doesn't even begin to describe *how* creative writing teachers help students accomplish these goals.

How we see ourselves as professionals is indicative of who we think belongs in the composition and creative writing classrooms; there are very different models of teachers for each. Stephanie Vanderslice argues that the tone of Gardner's work encourages a hierarchal classroom structure in which the writer/teacher is cast as the "writer-as-hero" and "valorizes the teacher as one who either shares the top rung of the classroom ladder with the acclaimed writer or, perhaps, gazes admiringly from the next rung down, hovering still, a great distance above his or her students" (54). This student-as-disciple model assumes that creative writing students come to the classroom either

looking to be saved or to be led to the promised land, perhaps both. As Bishop writes in several places, students come to the creative writing classroom wanting to find out if they are worthy. If students in creative writing courses do not learn, do not receive instruction, it is their own failing, their own lack of worthiness (*Teaching Lives* 240). “[T]hey enroll in creative writing classes, hoping to find out from the teacher if *they* are among the anointed few who can escape the garret and reappear hours later with a soon-to-be acknowledged masterpiece. The role of author is seductive” (*Released into Language* 3). They also come looking for a community of writers with whom to share their work, though the lore, and reality, of the creative writing classroom discourages students from ever considering the teacher a colleague (8). While this makes sense—there is a reason why the teacher is standing in front of the classroom, why that person creates the assignments and assesses work—this hierarchy is often downplayed or complicated in composition.

Derek Owens calls attention to the fundamental distinction between what we assume students do in composition and what they do in creative writing. One implication is that composition is creating truths while creative writers produce lies, or at least something other than the truth. As Bishop argues, there is a supposed difference between truth and artfulness (*Teaching Lives* 274). What is interesting about this binary is that both composition and creative writing believe they have a stronghold on truth-telling, and each is distrustful of work which comes from outside their fields. While composition tends to view art as untruthful, creative writing looks at criticism and theory with the same skepticism. “Most still view such language as the language of the academic community (which, of course, it is) and, as a result, believe such a language to be

contradictory at best and dishonest at worst" (Bizzaro 295). For creative writing, honesty is only a first step, a way in which to use language. "Again and again the young gifted writer must learn to use his language with absolute honesty. But honesty is never enough. Power must be there. And power comes only when the line sings" (Ashmead 17). Given that each field eyes the discourse of others distrustfully, it's not surprising that they maintain their autonomy. However, there is an inherent problem with either binary: neither art = truth nor scholarship = truth holds up under scrutiny, and even shakier is the assumption that these two forms, art and scholarship, have to always be in direct opposition to one another.

Viewing composition in the way Owens would like to would necessarily change some of the fundamental assumptions which underlie it, especially the assumption that composition is an indoctrination into a particular academic world. "Ultimately, composition studies would be viewed as far more than a field concerned primarily with functional and academic literacy: composition could be seen as nothing less than an intellectual process, at once scholarly and poetic, through which feasibly all academic disciplines converge as the writer critically probes the perplexities of authorial voice, and all the inherent fictions implied therein, through an intense, interdisciplinary framework" (170). Owens' argument makes sense to me; writers should be allowed to consider the whole spectrum of tools available to them, not just those appropriate to the academic essay if for no other reason than most of our students will not spend their lives in the academy. Training them to navigate an academic setting, while it may serve the university, does not serve students in the long run. Rather than equipping them with only the resources to succeed in this very particular environment— one which really isn't

mirrored anywhere else— we should be giving them the tools to traverse a multiplicity of situations, the ability to understand the needs of and write for the more realistic variety of discourse communities which they will encounter.

Each body of scholarship seems devoted to drawing lines between the student and the writer, the academic and the author, scholarship and literature, work and pleasure. These binaries can be broken down if pushed; scholars such as Bishop, Elbow, and Owens show how malleable these dividing lines are. Wendy Bishop has been a strong proponent of crossing the lines for the betterment of both classes. “I believe the recent and continuing discussions taking place between composition and creative writing at, on, and about these issues have the possibility of infusing our classrooms with needed energy and offer a chance for teachers and students, together, to sideshow the future in a manner that will allow them to discover what they don’t yet know, to clarify what they don’t yet understand, to preserve what they value, and to share their discoveries with others” (“Suddenly Sexy” 273).

However, while recent scholarship may be allowing for the possibility that there is more in common between creative writing and composition than many have been willing to admit, there is clear evidence that the mainstream perception of composition and creative writing views them as distinct entities. Unfortunately, despite knowing on a practical level that there is more than one “scholarly” voice or one “writerly” voice, there is apparently a narrow conception of which voice first-year composition and creative writing students should be striving to appropriate; they may be different in each course, but in each they are equally rigidly polarized. Composition students are academic and produce factual essays while developing basic skills they are presumed to be lacking

while creative writing students write for pleasure, striving to create art, honing the advanced skills they are assumed to possess. It is this perceived binary of voices which continues to allow those in the English department, and elsewhere, to see composition and creative writing as two very distinct fields. One prominent place in which this can be seen is in the texts most commonly used in each course. An examination of these texts, the assumptions which underlie their constructions, and what these assumptions say about each course follows in chapter three.

CHAPTER THREE: TEXTBOOKS

One place where we can clearly see what is being taught in composition and creative writing classrooms is in the textbooks used for both courses. There is more than just writing skills being foregrounded in the books used for these courses; along with teaching writing, these books, like much of the scholarship about writing pedagogy discussed in previous chapters, make assumptions about their users and what those users need to learn, and promulgate a literary canon. Implicit in the creation and organization of textbooks are not only assumptions about who teachers and students are, but also about their positions in the classroom. Textbooks often say as much to and about the instructors who use them as they do their students. Common criteria for textbooks and generalizations about the field, instructors, and students guide textbook development. It's these universals, the common assumptions underlying textbook creation and the particular ways they play out, that, I want to argue, construct both composition and creative writing as courses about more than just writing.

There are countless textbooks used in both composition and creative writing, and each is unique in some way or another, making it difficult to generalize about what is being taught through them. However, there are patterns to their contents and structures: readings which appear in multiple anthologies, content areas valued by more than one author, and progressions of repeated assignments which suggest that there are some basic lessons and values the fields consider important, many of which have little to do with

writing. The textbooks used as examples in this chapter are those which publishers have stated are their most popularly used readers as indicated by sales¹. I've chosen to look at readers which combine both readings and advice on writing rather than handbooks—which, for the most part are used as tools in composition classrooms, but are not read—or rhetorics—which give advice on argument and writing which is often incorporated into readers. While I recognize that there are composition instructors who still use rhetorics in the classroom—such as *The Prentice Hall Guide to Writing* or John Trimbur's *Call to Write*, both of which are still popularly sold—there is a movement in composition towards using reading with questioning apparatus that often serves a similar purpose as the rhetorics. Moreover, because the readers include both texts and elements of the rhetorics, they are a convenient genre to use for this discussion. And, as I'll discuss below, this popular move to use readers also signals an increasing discomfort within composition about teaching just writing.

It is more difficult to make assertions about which books are being used in creative writing courses because those textbook sales often overlap with books used in literature courses; however, there are texts which have been reissued in multiple editions, suggesting that they are popular enough to merit attention. Along with conventional classroom texts, I've also examined commercial texts on writing creatively, those found not only on syllabi but on the shelves of major bookstores.

¹ According to an informal survey of major textbook producers such as Bedford/St. Martins and Prentice Hall.

The Book Market

That creative writing texts can be found on the shelves of Barnes and Noble, Borders, and other major chains while the majority of “composition” texts found there are grammar handbooks or manuals for creating résumés and cover letters makes a statement about not only the marketability of these texts but supports the assumptions discussed in chapters one and two. That major chains such as Barnes and Noble and Borders are willing to stock books such as Julia Cameron’s *The Artist’s Way*, Elizabeth Berg’s *Escaping Into the Open*, Natalie Goldberg’s *Writing Down the Bones*, and even John Gardner’s *The Art of Fiction* suggests that 1) creative writing is considered fun and 2) people don’t see creative writing as academic or as an activity confined to a school setting. While there are a few composition texts found on the shelves, they are books such as Peter Elbow’s *Writing Without Teachers*, a composition text which again suggests that writing can be learned outside the academy. But, Elbow’s book is certainly not the norm, nor is it used much in composition classes anymore; it fits in with the “creative” writing texts more easily now than it does with composition readers. The writing section of the bookstore is filled with books on how to write fiction and poetry; how to improve grammar, spelling and vocabulary; and how to publish in a variety of genres. The lone copy of Elbow’s book and perhaps a couple other lone volumes talk about academic writing, but what seems to sell are books which assert that writing is fun, a statement which, as I’ve argued in previous chapters, composition doesn’t make.

In what seems like a departure from creative writing scholarship, the mass marketing of creative writing manuals does suggest that anyone can write, a message which is in opposition to the mission statements programs like the Iowa Writer’s

Workshop are grounded in. However, the books themselves are careful to stress the joy which comes from the writing process itself while cautioning would-be authors about how difficult publishing is, when they mention it at all. The message, kinder, but much like the stern warning in the introduction of Gardner's book that if "no matter how hard [the would-be writer] tries he simply cannot do what he must do, this book will help him understand why he was not sent into the world to be a writer" (ix), is that those at home should find satisfaction in merely writing for self fulfillment. Even Elizabeth Berg, who encourages her readers with her miraculous story of her virtually instant publication at the beginning of *Escaping into the Open*, is careful to include caveats. "So many people have things they want to say, on paper. *Some* of these people write freely, and share what they write, *even* publish what they write" (xv, emphasis mine). Berg guides the users of her book through writing exercises and tells readers that everyone has an interesting story to tell, but is also careful to emphasize reasons for writing other than publication. Julia Cameron's *The Artist's Way* likewise markets itself as something other than a manual on how to become a best selling author. Her book asserts that writing is an activity for spiritual growth, a method for being better to yourself, a way of "freeing creativity." The book encourages "creative recovery" but doesn't promote becoming a writer necessarily. Instead, her outlined program is intended to take the flailing creative soul through an emotional journey. "Working with this book, you will experience an intensive, guided encounter with your own creativity—your private villains, champions, wishes, fears, dreams, hopes, and triumphs. The experience will make you excited, depressed, angry, afraid, joyous, hopeful, and ultimately, more free" (7). Her book doesn't include advice on publishing; even the section on finding a writer's group—what Cameron calls a

“sacred circle”—is relegated to the epilogue. These texts, which encourage everyone to write creatively, sell writing as an activity for the individual first. While there are books which provide instruction on how to publish, they rarely discuss craft and are very different from the texts which actually discuss writing creatively. Thus, books on creative writing are marketable because they suggest that writing is useful beyond the commercial and academic worlds; writing can be undertaken for other purposes.

While *Escaping into the Open* and *The Artist's Way* are mostly sold commercially, very rarely making their way into the classroom (though Julia Cameron's book is based on a semester course she teaches); what makes creative writing texts unique is that books recognized by those who teach also grace the shelves. For example, Anne Bernays and Pamela Painter's *What If?*, a book commonly used by instructors of fiction courses, is marketed on the shelves of major bookstores. This book, filled with writing exercises which break down the elements of fiction writing, provides writers with activities more than it does actual advice on writing. However, like other creative writing books, it doesn't focus on publication either. There is a final section which encourages those who want to write to read other (great) writers, but there is no section on publication and no hint that the book is intended to produce publishable texts. Rather, “[t]he exercises in *What If?* are meant to set something in motion. Each exercise is designed to help you to think in new ways, to discover your own material, to enrich the texture and language of your fiction, and to move steadily toward final meaning. And, coming full circle, to help you begin again” (xv). While Bernays and Painter do say that published writers may find their text useful, the emphasis is on discovery and personal fulfillment, suggesting just about anyone can benefit from the book. “The exercises in

this book will help the serious student sharpen her skills—at both thinking and writing like a writer. The raconteur will be able, at least, to write his story, and the competent composer will to come up [sic] with fresh and original ideas” (xvii). And, because most of the exercises can be performed in isolation or in a group, *What If?* can be marketed to teachers and writers alike.

Composition texts can't be marketed in this way since they are dedicated to initiating students into academia, a more focused goal with a much smaller niche. Additionally composition is wholly invested in its relationship with the university; its identity, as I've argued, is based in servitude, in proving its usefulness to the academy. Marketing texts which could teach people how to write without teachers (as Elbow's text, almost alone, asserts we can do) would suggest that perhaps the service composition provides isn't as necessary and unique as the discipline would like to assert.

Teachers in Textbooks

Another reason why composition texts can't be marketed in the same way to the public is that they have a different audience. Composition textbooks are meant as much for the teachers as they are for the students, if not more so. Not only are they marketed to them but are intended, as Nedra Reynolds argues in “Dusting Off Instructor's Manuals: The Teachers and Practices They Assume,” they “operate as mechanisms for training new teachers and for keeping experienced ones in line, [and] in doing so, they ‘flatten’ teacher subjectivity to a few predictable variables and create a number of contradictions” (7). In “Constructing Composition: Reproduction and WPA Agency in Textbook Publishing,” Libby Miles further argues that textbooks are aimed more at presumed

teachers of composition—in most cases adjuncts, graduate students, or new professors—than they are at students. She argues that composition textbooks are intended to guide teachers through the first year course, providing them with sequenced assignments guided by “universalized and normative assumptions” about teachers with little consideration for the particularity of classrooms (49).

Textbooks like David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky’s *Ways of Reading* include assignments, what the authors call “teaching apparatus” (vii) which are made up of sets of (re)reading questions and sets of writing assignments that go along with every text selection as well as longer sequences of writing assignments which ask students to write longer essays based on a series of readings. Although Bartholomae and Petrosky encourage teachers to “feel free to add or drop readings, to mix sequences, and to revise the assignments to fit your course and your schedule” (viii), the assumption seems to be that teachers need the course laid out for them as much as students do. The introduction to their book is an explanation of what students are supposed to learn by reading and writing from this text, framed in a rhetoric which suggests that Bartholomae and Petrosky are at the very least co-teachers along with the instructor who has ordered their book. They are present throughout, arguing that the readings and assignments have been constructed around their students needs, describing problems which Bartholomae and Petrosky have encountered in the classroom and suggesting ways of dealing with those issues. At the end of the introduction, they place themselves in the classroom, a ghostly presence constructing what the ideal *Ways of Reading* classroom looks like. “So here we are, imagining students working shoulder to shoulder with Geertz and Rich and Foucault, even talking back to them as the occasion arises” (ix).

Bartholomae and Petrosky are not alone in thinking they must help instructors. Textbooks often remove the teacher's agency. For example, Andrea Lunsford and John Ruskiewicz's *The Presence of Others* opens by saying "this book aims to lead students through difficult ideas and topics, and toward excellence in articulating their own positions on issues and providing good reasons for supporting those positions" (v, emphasis mine), which begs the question of what the instructor is supposed to do. That the book does the leading suggests that the instructor is merely there to help the student complete the assignments in a timely manner and grade the final product. And, again, like in *Ways of Reading*, the textbook is not merely a collection of readings but a pedagogical tool as well (vi), one which incorporates annotations made up of "commentary by the editors and student commentators, demonstrating how to ask critical questions and read with a critical eye" (vi). This is a different strategy than the rhetorics use; however, guiding students through reading in this way does function as a rhetorical education in much the same way, approaching how to think about argument from a different angle, but nonetheless providing instruction. While this may be useful, it also removes teacher and student agency. The editors can fill in for the teacher, providing guidance on how to read and instruction on what students should be learning from the readings; they can even fill in for the students with the selected student commentary, suggesting the appropriate way to react to the texts. Lynn Bloom and Edward White's *Inquiry* is more subtle, but still provides the teacher with the basic questions which should underlie the first-year composition course. They argue that "[g]ood questions are at the heart of good reading and writing" and then go on to provide six "major" questions which focus on "key issues for writers" (iii). Not only do Bloom and White provide the

major questions, each chapter “provides background for the questions and subquestions, an overview of that chapter’s readings, a discussion of a specific rhetorical concept for writers, and preliminary questions for discussion and writing” (v). Again, not only have Bloom and White compiled the texts, but they’ve created a framework through which to read them. They are present at every stage, from prereading to post-writing, suggesting the way in which texts should be read and the writing which should be inspired by these readings. They can be more present than the teacher; at the very least, an instructor wanting to use the texts in a different way than Bloom and White envision is forced into conversation with the book’s authors, one in which she must justify her deviation. Bloom and White, like Lunsford and Ruszkiewicz, are concretely present around each text; they have to be engaged because their overt presence can’t easily be ignored.

There are countless examples of this sort of intrusion into the classroom.

Jonathan Silverman and Dean Rader’s *The World is a Text* discusses the theory and pedagogy which serve as the base for the book, concluding “[w]hat we envision this book will do for students is help them bridge culture and text. However, we present material in a way that provides context, direction and structure” (xxvi). The book helps the students, the authors provide the direction. Sonia Maasik and Jack Solomon’s *Signs of Life* comes with an instructor’s manual which “provides suggestions for organizing your syllabus, encouraging student responses to the readings and using popular culture and semiotics in the writing class” (ix). Of course, an instructor would be free to ignore these suggestions, but the implication here is that a teacher using the book would need help not only constructing a class but acting within it as well. The authors are explicit in assuming that teachers who use the text are unfamiliar with how to teach. Because Maasik and

Solomon “recognize that adopting a theoretical approach may be new to some instructors,” they provide “clear and accessible introductions that explain what students need to know” (viii). The assumption is that not only do instructors—presumed to be adjuncts, graduate students, and first year faculty— not know how to theorize their own pedagogy, they don’t necessarily even have grasp on what they are supposed to teach. These textbooks which provide not only instructions for teaching but a guiding theory as well also provide a normalizing template for first-year composition. Given, as I’ve argued in the previous chapter, that composition is seen as a course which services the needs of the academy, it makes sense that a textbook—often chosen by the department rather than the individual instructor—would provide the framework as well as the actual texts for the class. Such a tight construction would help English departments claim that all of their first-year students are receiving the same classroom instruction. Textbooks, then, not only serve as a source of readings and assignments for students but as instruction manuals for teachers as well.

Creative writing textbooks (those marketed to the academy), however, rarely make assumptions about the teacher; they rarely even assume a teacher is present. This is due, in part, to the presumption that the creative writing teacher is an expert. The master-writer teaching creative writing is probably tenured faculty, capable of creating a course, granted the freedom to do so because of an assumed knowledge base that goes with the position.

These textbooks also generally include much shorter introductions which use metaphors of journeying and address the writer but include little if any instruction about how to use the book or structure a course. In *In a Field of Words*, Sybil Estess and Janet

McCann “include an abundance of examples of everything [they] discuss, and these vary from the immediately accessible to the difficult, partly to enthrall very different new writers in the pleasure of words, but also to underscore [their] shared belief that good writing is a wide and varied field” for “those who wish to wander through the word-field, gathering and scattering” (v). Rebecca Rule and Susan Wheeler’s *Creating the Story* addresses the writer, providing “guides” for writing, advice about craft combined with exercises which work on specific areas of craft but also “trust[ing] you’ll ignore any guide if it gets in the way of the truth of your story” (2). Rule and Wheeler’s book is the culmination of trial and error in their own classes, influenced by what students have told them worked or didn’t work (3). The introductions to both *In a Field of Words* and *Creating the Story* are framed in a rhetoric of trust, choice and enjoyment. There is the notion that not all the exercises and advice will work for every writer and that books should be used or ignored as best suits the individual. Even Stephen Minot’s *Three Genres*, perhaps the most popularly used textbook in introductory creative writing classrooms, a text which is rather pessimistic about the writing process, addresses the writer and discourages her from relying too heavily on his book or his guidance.

Reading this textbook hastily won’t be of much help. Don’t try skimming. It is essential that you take extra time to study the poems, stories, and plays. The text will show you what to look for, but it is no substitute for close, analytical reading of the literary examples themselves. Ultimately, they are your teachers.

Next, allow time to write and revise your own work. This or any text can’t be a substitute for the effort of actually writing poetry, fiction, and drama. [...] You learn by doing. *Doing* in this case means writing. (viii)

Minot doesn't assume he can provide the answers; students of writing need to do the work for themselves and they shouldn't rely on his text to tell them everything they need to know or learn. And, unlike composition, which assumes that there is a novice teacher in front of the class, creative writing texts like Minot's work from the assumption that there is a master-writer leading the class. There is an expert other than the book working with creative writing students.

While these texts, like the more mainstream ones sold in bookstore chains, address the writer rather than the teacher, suggesting that a teacher may not even be necessary, they also exhibit more faith in those who use the book to make decisions about how it should be used, when, and to what extent. The conceit which often underscores the introductions to composition textbooks is missing from creative writing texts.

Students in Textbooks

Both composition and creative writing textbooks seem to assume that the teacher is secondary, if not tertiary, to the process though for very different reasons; composition textbook authors often stand in for the teacher, assuming that classroom instruction, in the absence of the book, is likely inadequate while creative writing—which advises students to take multiple workshops with a variety of writers in order to get a fuller range of writing experience—publishes textbooks which assume that no text, or person, can be an adequate guide and therefore must be supplemented by a variety of other resources. In both scenarios, the teacher is lacking, though in different ways.

The same composition texts which assume that the teacher is inadequate also frame the student within the same rhetoric of lack I presented in chapters one and two.

Students are assumed incapable of participating in significant meaning making. In “Textbooks and Writing in the 1990s: The Commodification of Process and What Teachers and Students Can Do about It,” Dan Frazier argues that:

Permitting texts to “do more” means students and teachers do less, depriving both of an opportunity to construct their own ideas and values about writing by interacting with one another and the rest of the world on their own terms.

Textbooks that try to “do it all,” or even “do more” by continually adding new features, are still beginning with the assumption that students should receive the knowledge most appropriate to them, rather than construct it themselves with the help of the teacher. (138-139).

Though composition textbooks might disagree about what students need, present in their introductions are directive statements about what students should “get” from the text, something students are lacking that they need to be given. Bartholomae and Petrosky define the lack in what students do or don’t do with complex texts, asserting that students feel “powerless in the face of serious writing, in the face of long and complicated texts—the kinds we thought they should find interesting and challenging” (v). They argue that students don’t know how to read. “Our students need to learn that there is something they can do once they have first read through a complicated text; successful reading is not just a matter of ‘getting’ an essay the first time” (vii). In Bartholomae and Petrosky’s view, students come to composition courses without reading skills; their textbook is designed to give students the skills they need to read like academics. In fact, many popular textbooks seem to begin with the assumption that students don’t really know how to read.

In “Yes, There Are Texts in This Writing Class! The New Synthesis of Composition and Literature,” Susan M. Hunter argues that what newer college composition texts are teaching is how to read, how to engage with texts, but not how to write. She argues that current composition anthologies use writing as a way to engage with the readings, but that they are not teaching writing for its own sake. “For all their directives about composing, these anthologies emphasize the reading process over the writing process, paying little attention to social contexts for writing or to reader-based prose” (139). Hunter’s study of textbooks looked at anthologies popular in the late 1980s. However, the trend she notes then is just as evident today. It’s clear just from the titles of current popular textbooks that reading is now considered central to the writing process. Popular texts have titles like *Inquiry: Questioning, Reading, Writing* (Bloom and White); *Signs of Life in the USA: Readings on Popular Culture for Writers* (Maasik and Solomon); *Rereading America* (Colombo, Cullen, and Lisle); *The World is a Text* (Silverman and Rader); *Reading Culture* (George and Trimbur), *On Writing: A Process Reader* (Bishop); and *Ways of Reading* (Bartholomae and Petrosky). Just the titles alone suggest that we are promoting reading and writing skills equally in the composition classroom. And, as Hunter argued about texts like *Ways of Reading*, which has remained relatively unchanged since 1988², we may be suggesting that “composing is subservient to reading, that readers ‘complete’ a text by writing about it; writing is again a response-technique rather than a rhetorical product” (141).

Given David Bartholomae’s focus on entering a conversation and learning to appropriate the discourse of the academy that I discussed in chapter two, it’s no surprise

² Since Hunter’s article, the included readings have changed and some additional assignments have been added, but the preface which explains the book’s purpose and goals and the overall structure of the text have remained the same.

that a textbook he created would emphasize reading; students would need to be introduced to the discourse of the community they're being asked to join. But, other composition readers focus on reading as well, often suggesting writing assignments which ask students to engage with the text as responders, but not as writers of their own accord. For example, in *Inquiry*, Lynn Bloom and Edward White state that the questions in that text "are designed to deepen the students' understanding of the particular reading," and ask students "to make connections between that reading and other readings, or between that reading and their own lives." Each chapter includes end questions which "ask students to consider the ways that the selections have enriched and deepened their own thoughts" (vi). Though the questions vary, sometimes exploring content, other times asking students about style and voice or calling attention to the organization of the writing, they all require that students consider the selected readings in the book, that they join in these particular conversations.

In addition to reading skills, students are assumed to be lacking in other abilities as well. In Diana George and John Trimbur's *Reading Culture*, what students are lacking is the ability to evaluate the world in which they live.

Reading Culture assumes that students are already immersed in a wealth of culture and that their experiences of everyday life can be usefully brought to attention as material for reflection and deliberation. The reading and writing assignments in *Reading Culture* are designed to promote a critical distancing so that students can begin to observe and evaluate as well as participate in contemporary America. (xxv)

The assumption is that students, before encountering this textbook, live their lives with little or no ability to evaluate or critique the culture they are immersed in, that without the tools the book can give them they merely go along in their days passively reacting to the world with no critical skills to help them appreciate or understand it. As Bronwyn Williams argues in *Tuned In: Television and the Teaching of Writing*, “The distrust of mass popular culture and the belief that composition teachers must provide, through writing, a social inoculation against the deleterious influences of such forms dates to the inception of first-year composition as a requirement for incoming college students” (22-23). This distrust of popular culture is not new to composition— as I discussed in chapter one, we can see it resonating through James Berlin’s discussion of ideology. Maasik and Solomon assume, like many others, that students are passive receptors of popular culture and focus on teaching students to interact critically with the culture they are already immersed in. “As the boundary between ‘culture’ and popular culture blurs and even disappears, it is all the more essential that our students understand how popular culture works and how it generates meaning. This is why we continue to make semiotics the guiding methodology behind *Signs of Life in the U.S.A.* For semiotics leads us, and our students, to take an analytic stance towards popular culture, one that avoids the common pitfalls of uncritical celebration and scapegoating” (vii). Again, it is presumed that students are unable to understand the way the culture they live in works or to think critically while participating in it, and as Williams argues, that is the job of composition to “help students learn, through writing, how to discover the true intellectual selves that will allow them to resist and transcend the banality of mass popular culture discourse” (23).

Bloom and White aren't quite as open about what they believe students lack, in part because their introduction is directed at the students as much as, if not more so than, the teacher. However, they feel the need to overtly invite students to participate in inquiry, explaining how that may be undertaken as though students have never before inquired about or questioned what they've read or seen. To that extent, Bloom and White feel the need to constantly start students off with questions they will want to ask.

We invite you to participate in this subversive [writing] activity. A good way to start your inquiry is by doing some exploratory writing about the given questions as you begin to think about them, before you do much reading. The introduction to each chapter presents a few writing topics to help you focus on the subject.

(xvii)

Bloom and White continue by instructing students not to change the questions but to keep them "as complex (and messy) as they really are" (xvii), insinuating that 1) students would automatically look for a way to simplify the questions or 2) that the (modified) questions they come up with would necessarily be less complex than those they were provided. Clearly, the premise of schooling is based on giving those who come some knowledge they didn't have before, so on one hand, it makes sense that these textbooks would identify their contributions to the learning process. However, what is disturbing to me is that these books start with the identification of students as passive participants in the world, people unable to ask questions or think about the texts (in all senses of that word) they encounter. These introductions, far from simply addressing the subject matter they are going to teach, characterize their students in particular ways which set them up

as empty vessels wanting for a way to interact with and evaluate the world they're immersed in.

Creative writing texts position students in a very different way than composition texts, often suggesting that student-writers are all overflowing with stories that need to be put on the page, positing the challenge as a matter of how to manage this task or how to mine the wealth of ideas and experience for good material. The metaphors for this mining aren't always pretty, but the essential idea that students are already filled with the experiences they need is crucial to the creative writing textbook. In *Writing Down the Bones*, Natalie Goldberg writes,

Our bodies are garbage heaps: we collect experience and from the decomposition of the thrown-out eggshells, spinach leaves, coffee grinds, and old steak bones of our minds come nitrogen, heat, and very fertile soil. Out of this fertile soil bloom our poems and stories. But this does not come all at once. It takes time.

Continue to turn over and over again the organic details of your life until some of them fall through the garbage of discursive thoughts to the solid ground of black soil. (14)

This idea is heralded in John Drury's *Creating Poetry* as well. His section on preparing begins, "The good news is, you've been doing it all along. Your experiences—things you've done, people you've known, memories that flash back to you, dreams that perplex or astonish you, books you've read, places you've visited—give you rich deposits of the raw material a poem refines and shapes into something valuable. Of course, this mother lode has to be mined. And before that, you've got to prospect to find out where to dig"

(9). Rather than assume that student-writers are unprepared to write, the assumption is that students need to be given the tools to mine the vast wealth they hold within them.

The imagery of mining is somewhat overused in creative writing texts, a fact that Michael Smith and Suzanne Greenberg acknowledge in *Everyday Creative Writing: Panning for Gold in the Kitchen Sink*. “The book gets the ‘panning for gold’ part of its title from one of possibly an infinite number of metaphors for the writer: that of being a prospector, a forty-niner, who continues to search for gold long after the main veins have been tapped and after everyone has given up. What this prospector discovers is that the plain rocks and jackrabbit bones usually disregarded have their own luster and that virtually anything that we encounter can be valuable once touched with our efforts and marked with our individual signature” (xiii). The mining metaphor has a crucial role in creating the identity of student writers; it suggests that they are people who need guides through the process of discovery, but that everything they need is within (and in front of) them. Other metaphors, however, do position students in similar ways. For example, in Jeff Knorr and Tim Schell’s *Mooring the Tide*, navigating water is the overriding metaphor, but it is one which still places students in the position of being guided through their own inner wealth. “Whether used by a student-writer in a creative writing class or by a student-writer at home alone, this book will serve as a guide to steer through sometimes rough and unsure waters until the writer is safely moored against the tide” (vii-viii). The metaphor is a bit changed, but the identity of the student-writer as one working through her own flood of experience is still intact.

Because the assumption of these textbooks is that students come to creative writing equipped with a lot of the material they need, there is also the assumption that

they can, for the most part, create the course (both metaphorically and literally) that best suits them. While the composition textbooks discussed above provide explicit rules for how to use the book, giving students strict guidelines for how to approach and react to the text, creative writing texts quite often encourage their student-readers to use the book in whatever way they find useful. Natalie Goldberg suggests that a linear reading might be helpful at first, but certainly not necessary. “The book can be read consecutively and that may be good the first time through. You may also open to any chapter and read it. [...] Trust yourself. Learn your own needs. Use this book” (4). Likewise, John Drury states that he organized his book according to a linear writing process, but that the process he’s outlined may not work for everyone.

This book is organized sequentially, according to the process of writing—or rather the process of *learning* to write, which amounts to the same thing—beginning with “Preparing” and ending with ‘Finishing.’ So you could, if you like, follow that order, hunting for the poems I mention, trying out any exercises that interest you, excite you, and incite you to make a poem. [...] It might be useful to open the book at random and start reading, start writing, plunging in anywhere. [...] Follow your instincts, your fancies, your whims. [...] When you have particular questions about an aspect of poetic craft (‘Image,’ for example), glance through the table of contents or index and look it up. (3)

The guide is always present in the text, but the student-writer is allowed to pick her own path, design her own course. Not only is it assumed that the student-writer is knowledgeable enough to know what she needs, but also that the student-writer is curious and gifted enough to read on her own without provocation. This trust in the student is

due, in part at least, to the fact that all of these texts identify their readers not only as students of writing, but as writers in their own right. Given that they all universally present writing as an ongoing, lifelong process, there is never a point when one is writing that one isn't actually a writer. Some of the texts place modifiers in front, calling their readers beginning or novice writers, but all of them bequeath the status of "writer" upon the person using the text.

Again, the teacher is often absent from the picture. A notable exception is Janet Burroway's *Imaginative Writing: The Elements of Craft*, the creative writing text I use with my own students, a text in which the preface is specifically aimed at the teacher. But, even this book, with a preface for the teacher in much the same tradition as those found in composition, doesn't suggest that the book stands in for the teacher or that it is gospel, or even finished. The preface includes Burroway's email address and a request that anyone with suggestions for how to make the book better contact her. And, she is careful to point out that the book cannot substitute for the experience of the teacher or the student. "What *Imaginative Writing* is *not*, is comprehensive. It tries to cover the basics in a way that is sound but brief, overwhelming neither to the student nor the personality and methods of the instructor" (xviii). And, like the other creative writing texts I've surveyed above, after this initial preface, the book does refer to the text's user as "writer."

These texts make explicit that creative writing doesn't need to happen in a formal classroom, so there is more room to give student-writers agency in these textbooks; there is no assumed mediating party or teacher (who is always assumed in composition textbooks) who may be offended by her marginalized role. Of course, some of these texts are intended primarily for classroom use—*Everyday Creative Writing, Three*

Genres, *In a Field of Words*, and *Creating the Story* are marketed more commonly to university instructors than in popular bookstores. But, in all of them is present the assumption that students of creative writing come equipped with the materials they need to write whether on their own or in a more formal, classroom setting.

Ideology

While composition and creative writing textbooks make very different assumptions about who uses their books, what they do share is a propensity to “teach” in a very particular way. Both kinds of texts are located in particular ideologies and the readings and instructions found respectively in each define both a canon for each field (though perhaps more permeable ones than in other fields) and a hierarchy of what constitutes good reading and writing skills in each. While creative writing tends to be more fluid in its hierarchy, certain texts and authors and certain pieces of “advice” do reoccur quite often. This, however, is different from the way ideology works in composition; the canon created in composition textbooks often also pushes particular political views, teaching students not only how to write but how to be better citizens, and in some cases, how (and what) to think.

As we saw above, a primary concern of many composition textbooks is that students are ill-prepared to “read” the world around them and critique it. And, as I argued in previous chapters, one of the prominent ideas which has shaped the field is that composition should be producing responsible members of society, those who participate in certain, acceptable, ways. These are issues not necessarily connected to the activity of writing; an examination of the specific content and organization of many popular

composition textbooks suggests that writing isn't necessarily the primary concern.

Rather, students are being indoctrinated into a way of thinking, a way sanctioned by the field. As Bronwyn Williams has argued, even when we include popular culture in classrooms, we expect students to respond to it in particular ways.

Even in books that include the study of television as a cultural form into the composition classroom, the discursive form used to investigate television is the academic, analytical essay. It is what we give our students to read and what we ask them to write. These texts rarely discuss what students will write or how they will write it. [...] Consequently, though we may be willing to interrogate and investigate various cultural forms as "texts," a clear hierarchy distinguishes the texts that can be studied and the texts that should emulate academic discourse.

(29)

Textbooks stress skepticism, especially skepticism of all things American. *Signs of Life in the U.S.A.* and *The World is a Text* are organized similarly, first around different media such as television, advertising, film, music, etc. and then according to political topics which these media exploit, such as gender, race, class, and ethnicity. *Signs of Life* separates its critique of the media from its critique of the issues into two sections: "Cultural Productions" (media) and "Cultural Constructions" (politics) while *The World is a Text* mixes up the two, alternating sections between media and politics. For example, chapter four is "Reading Race and Ethnicity" and chapter five is "Reading Movies." But, political issues are also subsumed within the media chapters. Social and economic class is in the "Reading Literature" section, a look at family is in the chapter on "Reading Television." In both *Signs of Life* and *The World is a Text*, the critiques are

distinctly focused on America, asking students to examine and analyze the way in which their world is shaped, pushing them to question their belief systems and how they were formed. There is a fairly clear bent to the texts included in these books, one which pushes students towards a particular type of tolerance. *The World is a Text* includes such readings as Adrian Louis' poem "Dust World" and Theodore Roethke's "My Papa's Waltz" in the "Reading Literature" subsection "Social and Economic Class," a set of readings made up mostly of poetry. The questions about these readings push students to consider who is a part of the working class and why it is portrayed negatively. It asks them to think about how "class" is defined, which is a good goal on the surface. However, question such as "Adrian Louis ('Dust World') is only one of a few Native writers whose aim is to expose the appalling economic conditions on many of America's Indian reservations. Write a paper demonstrating how his poem does this important but disturbing cultural work" (102) clearly leads students to a preconceived conclusion. Their job, then, is to read the poem as directed by the authors, not to actually interpret it on their own. *Signs of Life* asks students to think about how the media caters to American values, but it also directs the type of answers students should give. In the chapter on American film, students are instructed to discuss the prevalent violence associated with American movies. "In class, discuss the reasons many moviegoers find violence entertaining. What does the prevalence of violence say about modern American cultural values?" (382). While there is room for students to express their own opinions, the question itself starts with the premise that Americans love violence and almost requires that students find evidence which supports that America is a violent society. The question doesn't suggest that students are free to find examples which disprove the

statement that violence is entertaining and in the forefront; rather, this is the “fact” from which students must start. It’s not that I disagree with the premise; I, too, find movies overwhelmingly violent and worry about how numb to the violence we’ve become. What I take issue with is that students aren’t allowed to form their own opinions about film. Rather, the questions ask students to find support for foregone conclusions reached by the book’s authors.

Both composition and creative writing classes tend to include readings and, because of the rising cost of textbooks, the trend is moving towards using textbooks which include both instruction and readings under the premise obviously, students need common—and, as I’ve previously argued, model— texts to discuss. However, the way in which they focus on the texts and direct students to think about them is often different. Composition textbooks do ask other types of questions than the ones above; they ask questions about how argument is developed, what the tone of a piece is, and how ethos is constructed. But, there are generally questions like the ones above which also ask students to confront ideology, and often, those questions point students in a particular (mostly liberal, “politically correct”) direction. Again, it’s not that I necessarily disagree with the books’ conclusions about these issues. But, that these conclusions are quite evident, presented implicitly as the “truth,” brings up the question of whether we are teaching students *how* to think critically or *what* to think.

Creative writing texts aren’t concerned with these issues; instead, they address issues of creating a writing life. In fact, while creative writing texts marketed to the university do tend to include readings, the texts marketed to a mass audience don’t include readings at all. These mass-market texts, such as *Writing Down the Bones*, *The*

Artist's Way, and *Escaping into the Open*, include advice on creating a writing life and exercises which inspire writers or ask them to focus on particular parts of craft. The advice almost always addresses how to ignore the critical voice in the writer's head which tells her she can't write. Julia Cameron insists that the students of her book write morning pages, three longhand, stream-of-consciousness pages which are written first thing, upon waking. This is intended to 1) move beyond writer's block because three pages of writing everyday will prevent a total lapse in creativity and 2) to silence the inner censor because often it isn't quite awake yet. Natalie Goldberg advises that writers should get to know their inner editor so that it can be more easily disregarded. "The more clearly you know the editor, the better you can ignore it. After a while, like the jabbering of an old drunk fool, it becomes just prattle in the background. Don't reinforce its power by listening to its empty words" (26). Most books also start by sending student-writers out to carefully select a notebook and pen. The notebook and pen should be special to the writer, should have appeal on both an artistic and practical level, and once chosen should never be more than a couple of feet away, always at the ready in a moment of inspiration.

In addition to instructions on how to create a writing life, the books often, though not always, include writing exercises. These exercises have a two-fold purpose: 1) to get the (uninspired) writer writing and 2) to focus that writer on elements of craft. Individual books tend to stress one goal or the other more strongly. For example, in *The Artist's Way*, Julia Cameron's focus is on recovering creativity; thus, her writing activities include artist dates, a time "especially set aside and committed to nurturing your creative consciousness, your inner artist. In its most primary form, the artist date is an excursion, a play date that you preplan and defend against all interlopers" (18). Specific writing

activities ask writers to create lists of their creative goals or to identify “creative u-turns.” Other books, such as *What If*, are organized around craft, divided into chapters like characterization, point of view, and dialogue. The focus of the book is on providing exercises rather than advice on the writing life.

Creative writing textbooks marketed more towards the classroom include both advice and exercises as well as readings for students to discuss. These books are often organized around issues of craft, though because many of them are aimed at introductory students, they are often also divided by genre: fiction, poetry, drama, and, more recently, creative non-fiction. Stephen Minot’s *Three Genres* is organized first by genre and then by elements of craft. The poetry section is broken down into chapters on images, sound, and rhythm. The section on fiction includes chapters on viewpoint, structure, and setting. Even textbooks which focus on only one genre, like John Drury’s *Creating Poetry*, break down the elements of craft into categories such as language (terminology), sight (imagery, metaphor, etc.), and sound (alliteration, rhyme, etc.). Rather than being organized by subjects, creative writing texts tend to be organized around writing tasks. And so, their readings are not thematically linked but rather serve as examples of good writing.

However, there are texts (and authors) which commonly appear in creative writing books to serve as these examples. Often, these include writers commonly recognized in the literary canon, such as Walt Whitman, Theodore Roethke, John Updike, and Edgar Allen Poe. But, even more often, they also include writers and texts not yet canonized by the literature department but recognized in the literary market as those people and pieces currently publishable. Creative writing textbooks are a mixture of

tradition and the current marketplace. So, in the poetry section of *Three Genres*, Minot includes poems such as Gwendolyn Brooks' "We Real Cool" as well as more contemporary poetry like W.S. Merwin's "River Sound Remembered" and more "traditional" poems like Shakespeare's "Sonnet 29." The drama section includes William Saroyan's 1942 "Hello Out There" as well as Glenn Alterman's 1996 "Coulda, Woulda, Shoulda." His book, which always points out the merits of these pieces, thus suggesting they're worth emulating, serves not only as a source of instruction on writing creatively but also as a guide to what the literary market wants. Sybil Estess and Janet McCann's *In a Field of Words* also mixes contemporary authors such as Jane Smiley and themselves along with traditional authors such as Shakespeare, Joyce and Hemingway. Their book contains only a few readings; students are often then directed to other texts for additional examples. But, where possible, the authors indicate conspicuously the publications they've pulled included texts from, thus not only suggesting what makes good writing, but also where good writing is published. Publication credits are listed with the texts rather than at the back of the book, the more common practice for textbooks. Janet Burroway's *Imaginative Writing* guides students towards the market even more conspicuously, including no readings from before the 1950s; the majority are from the mid-1980s or later and include authors such as Margaret Atwood, Nadine Gordimer, Ian Frazier, Stephen Dobyns, and Galway Kinnel, writers who are at the forefront of the current literary market, shaping the definition of "good" writing, often synonymous with publishable. As I argued in previous chapters, one of the lessons taught in creative writing classrooms is what the market will bear, often encouraging students to write for the literary market and pushing other voices to the margins. The "literary marketplace"

constitutes a particular genre which, while it isn't concretely defined, does clearly exclude certain texts. Creative writing textbooks do not include work from genres such as science fiction, mystery, romance, or religious texts; even though those genres are more likely to sell to the masses, they are clearly set apart as non-literary, texts which creative writing doesn't value. Where creative writing books do include multicultural voices, such as Imamu Amiri Baraka and Jamaica Kincaid, they are voices from traditionally marginalized populations which have still made it into the mainstream, suggesting that while these authors may have interesting and controversial messages within their texts, they still conform to some universally agreed upon criteria of good craft.

Composition scholars, too, try to include these multicultural voices, but again, they include texts commonly recognized as part of the academic conversation. Thus, certain texts and authors are reproduced quite often. bell hooks appears in *Signs of Life in the U.S.A.*, *The World is a Text*, *Reading Culture*, and *The Presence of Others*, just to name a few. Gloria Anzaldúa is found in *Reading Culture*, *Ways of Reading*, and *Inquiry*. These are sanctioned voices from the margins, serving as examples of not only politically correct takes on the world but acceptable ways for these voices to reach the academic mainstream. These authors may be discussing marginalized issues, but they do it within the confines of an academic discourse. It is particular works which are valued, those which can still be recognized as contributors to the intellectual community. So, even the voices from the margins serve as representations of what counts for good academic writing.

Conclusions

We can see the same assumptions about who students are and what they should be learning from the scholarship I discussed in chapters one and two resonating in the textbooks. Composition students are portrayed as lacking in the skills they need to survive in academia, while creative writing students are assumed to come equipped with the experience they need. Composition textbooks continue to mirror assumptions found in its field's scholarship by organizing around political and social issues, concerning themselves as much with creating citizens—and a particular kind of citizen at that—as with training academic writers. Creative writing textbooks focus more on craft, stressing that writing is fun and meaningful outside of publication. And both continue to normalize our definitions of “good” writing, a process which, as I argue in the next chapter, continues to affect the writing our students produce and the way they read each other's writing as well.

What does change when we move from the scholarship to the textbooks is a primary binary discussed in chapters one and two: that composition is for everyone while creative writing is for the elite. The textbook market would suggest just the opposite. Composition texts, with their explicit lists of what students don't know when entering the classroom, leave room for the possibility of failure. They instruct both teachers and students to stick to the textbooks' readings and methods, suggesting that deviation from them will have negative results while creative writing textbooks are aimed at everyone and begin with the overwhelmingly positive assertion that everyone can and should write. While publication—a hallmark, if not *the* hallmark, of success— isn't promised in creative writing texts, they do assert and reassert that everyone has a valuable story to tell

and that everyone can benefit from writing. While composition scholarship suggests that everyone can learn to write, a primary justification for why first-year composition is an almost universal requirement, the textbooks don't quite support that. More important, where both composition and creative writing scholarship want to place creative writing in a different niche by holding it as a place for the talented, artistic elite, the textbooks which come out of this field sell themselves to a mass population apparently yearning to be told that it can have a piece of the literary pie. Gone from most of these texts (John Gardner's books still remains an exception) is any sense that creative writing is only for a few exceptional writers. Marketability is a clear justification for this trend; very few are going to buy a book which dooms them to failure from the start. Composition doesn't face the same market problems—its textbooks are marketed to teachers who, as producers and readers of the field's scholarship, are already immersed in some of the same assumptions which the textbooks reaffirm. Whereas buying creative writing texts is optional for many readers, composition textbooks are mostly required purchases, needed to get through a mandatory class. Even though a textbook may be required in a creative writing class, the course itself is generally elective—students can drop with no penalty and no threat of needing the course to graduate.

What these textbooks also suggest is that composition and creative writing value very different parts of the writing process. Composition texts focus on the argument, the organization, and the audience while creative writing focuses on issues of craft like imagery and voice. While these textbooks do sometimes cross the lines into each others' territories—any conversation of publishing in creative writing must deal with audience and conversations about audience in composition often focus briefly on the tone the

author uses to reach readers—when it comes to reading student writing, what is valued becomes even more clearly defined. The writing workshop, a practice common to both composition and creative writing, tends to reaffirm that each course is concerned with very different elements of writing.

CHAPTER FOUR: FORUMS FOR PEER RESPONSE

Despite the belief of those working in composition and creative writing that they are teaching very different classes to very different people, central to the pedagogy of each is the peer review or workshop, an activity begun in creative writing, later borrowed, modified and grounded in theoretical justifications (most often, as discussed briefly below, Vygotsky's theories on learning and behavior) by composition. Peer review/workshop marks one arena where these two curricula are willing to meet, a place where they have been in (brief) conversation with one another, suggesting that there are other common grounds on which to meet and have conversations. While composition and creative writing classes handle responding to student work differently—and as we'll see, the terms "peer review" and "workshop" have different connotations—both are predicated on two fundamental ideas: one, students need feedback on their writing before the "final draft" is turned in for assessment, and two, that students need feedback on their writing not only from the instructor but from their peers as well. That both courses present peer review/workshop as a central element of their pedagogies suggests that perhaps the fields are not as far apart as the binaries I've explored in the previous chapters would suggest.

Both courses attempt to create dynamic interactions with student texts; as Hephzibah Roskelly states, group review of student writing lends the text vitality, removing it from the vacuum of isolation most initially write within. "In short, the

workshop in both creative writing and in composition seems to bring to life Aristotle's triangle within their circles—the relationships among speaker (writer), audience (readers), and subject (texts) that composition students are in the process of becoming familiar with through their textbooks and classroom discussions of communication and effect" ("Broken Circles" 51). The text no longer exists on its own; rather it can be evaluated by multiple readers and become part of a live conversation in which those readers "can confront directly issues of intention and revision, relationship between readers and writers, the emergence of purpose, considerations of appropriateness, and style" (51). Both the workshop and peer review formats seek to take writing out of isolation and give it a place where it can be interacted with and shaped by peers. But, while both courses recognize the crucial role that peer feedback plays in the development and revision of a text, there are some distinct differences in the way composition and creative writing treat their peer forums.

Basic Differences between Peer Review and Workshop

What does strike me as a significant dividing line in this conversation is the difference in terms—I often find myself using the terms peer review and workshop interchangeably, but I think that's due to a lack of precision on my part. There is a distinction between peer review and workshop which even the few scholars who do cross lines between composition and creative writing, and who use both forms, make. When writing about creative writing, as in *Released into Language*, Wendy Bishop refers to the workshop until she begins to borrow from composition pedagogy; she then switches to the term peer review. In *Teaching Lives*, Bishop's book of essays about writing and

pedagogy in both creative writing and composition, there is a clear divide in her terminology. When writing about composition, we see titles like “Helping Peer Writing Groups Succeed,” but when she moves firmly into essays about creative writing, as in “On Learning to Like Teaching Creative Writing,” she critiques the workshop. Bishop never actually articulates that there is a difference between these two. In fact, there are few scholars, with the notable exception of Hephzibah Roskelly, who do explicitly make a distinction, though Bishop’s consistent use of the term “peer review” when talking about composition and “workshop” with discussions of creative writing does suggest that she recognizes a difference. To many, peer review and workshop do appear to be the same activity with interchangeable names. “Both circles emphasize writing from the group—and the discussion of that writing. The two groups pay attention not only to the texts but to the writers who sit in the circle and hear the reactions from their classmates and whose presence helps shape the reaction the group gives. Both classrooms locate the focus of the discussion in the responses of the readers to the piece of writing, the class members who have read and prepared to comment on their readings” (Roskelly, “Broken Circles” 51). However, though to the casual observer peer review and workshop may look alike, they are not the same. Peer review describes a particular activity—that of students reading one another’s papers and providing feedback—while workshop can stand in as a term for the entire creative writing course, denoting the style of the class or the particular activity of providing feedback which, unlike in composition, often includes the teacher in the process.

Peer review¹ regularly takes place in small groups of three or four while a workshop² is generally a whole class discussion. Peer review often asks students to read and comment on work in class (hence the small groups) while workshop participants generally take student work home with them, reading and making comments on texts before the class session in which the work is to be discussed. Questions specific to the writing assignment often guide the reading of texts during peer review while comments on workshop pieces are centered around criteria connected to genre rather than a specific assignment. Peer review is focused on just that—a review by peers. The teacher often monitors the class to make sure it is on task and to answer questions but rarely interacts with the student texts.

Borrowing from Vygotsky’s “zone of proximal development,” a social theory which argues that students benefit from each other’s “expertise” and promote mutual meaning making and learning, composition encourages students to help one another grow as readers and writers by asking them to work in groups. This Vygotskian notion of social constructivism is used in composition to argue that group work provides a productive forum in which students can exchange and mutually create knowledge. The hope in peer review is that:

various components of the teaching provide an environment in which students can move well beyond the levels of their independent functioning. The higher-level processes made possible by the support of the instructional environment and externalized in the group collaboration become internalized and a part of the student’s repertoire of strategies that can be called upon later in independent

¹ For extended descriptions of “typical” peer review formats see Bruffee, 1982; Elbow and Belanoff, 1995; and Zhu 1995.

² See Ziegler, 1981 for a discussion of the workshop as a class and an activity.

situations. As these processes take place, “learning awakens a variety of internal developmental processes that are able to operate only when the child is interacting with people in his environment and in cooperation with his peers.” (Vygotsky, quoted in Hillocks 74)

Peer review provides an “active” environment for students to learn in. The teacher is generally physically absent from this activity, in the room but not a member of any group, under the theory that her direct presence would undermine the authority of the students and their comments on each other’s work.

Power and Authority

Hephzibah Roskelly, in *Breaking (into) the Circle*, her book about utilizing group work in the English classroom, argues that students “learn from peers because they value peers’ opinions and are influenced by them in ways that they are not influenced by teachers. And, of course, the pressure of both the grade and the articulation of an idea to a powerful authority figure is diminished when the writer or responder is talking to others who are in similarly powerless positions in the classroom” (32). Part of the premise underlying peer review is that it helps to decenter authority in the classroom, allowing students to become authorities over their own texts. Kenneth Bruffee, for example, has argued that peer review allows students to move between what Richard Rorty has termed “normal” and “abnormal” discourse, or discourse which conforms to the norms of community and that which diverges from it.³ And, moving into abnormal discourse allows students to challenge the authority of knowledge communities.

³ See Rorty, Richard. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton, Princeton UP; 1979.

The importance of abnormal discourse to the discussion of collaborative learning is that abnormal discourse serves the function of helping us—immersed as we inevitably are in the everyday normal discourse of our disciplines and professions—to see the provincial nature of normal discourse and of the communities defined by normal discourse. Abnormal discourse sniffs out stale, unproductive knowledge and challenges its authority, that is, the authority of the community which that knowledge constitutes. (“Collaborative Learning” 407)

Bruffee believes that peer groups, because they have not yet mastered the teacher’s discourse, can question the norming authority often imposed upon writing because “collaborative learning naturally challenges the traditional basis of authority of those who teach. Our authority as teachers always derives directly or indirectly from the prevailing conception of the authority of knowledge” (408). That is, students, who because they are not yet familiar with academic conventions and discourse, will necessarily work outside what commonly counts for knowledge in the academy, inherently challenge the authority of that knowledge. The absence of the teacher’s immediate presence in collaborative learning groups, in Bruffee’s view, presents an ideal setting for students. However, as John Trimbur argues, this dispersal of power is not as utopian as Bruffee presents it; rather, Trimbur argues, abnormal discourse only reaffirms that there is an approved discourse and assumed conversation which students are supposed to appropriate.

[A]bnormal discourse represents the result at any given time of the set of power relations that organizes normal discourse: the acts of permission and prohibition, of incorporation and inclusion that institute the structure of practices of discourse communities. Abnormal discourse is not so much a homeostatic mechanism that

keeps the conversation and thereby the community renewed and refreshed. [...] [I]t also refers to the relations of power that determine what falls within the current consensus and what is assigned the status of dissent. [...] [I]t offers a way to analyze the strategic moves by which discourse communities legitimize their own conversation by marginalizing others. (446-447)

Trimbur does not see the teacher's absence in peer review as permission to defy authority; rather, he sees it as an opportunity for students to measure authority, to "give students permission to elaborate what they already know—namely, that schooled reading for 'hidden meanings' reinforces the authority of expert readers and creates professional monopolies of knowledge" (453). The absence of the teacher doesn't give students the authority; it merely gives them a space in which to discuss its effects.

This idea that the teacher is not a part of the group during peer review has become a central tenant in composition. Workshop, however, is a whole class activity which includes the instructor, and while in many cases the instructor may provide feedback last, her "judgment" is presented at the same time as the other participants, perhaps suggesting that all participants in the workshop are on equal footing, though this is misleading. As Wendy Bishop argues, the teacher is clearly in control. "This response business is conducted under the direction of the teacher who mediates the classroom discussion, sometimes by offering only opening or summarizing remarks. Often the teacher is also the timekeeper with the power to linger over texts that interest him or to speed any discussion so that all members get 'workshopped'" (*Teaching Lives* 141). Bishop suggests that the traditional writing workshop has become "unimodal. That is, students are encouraged to rely too heavily on the mediation of the teacher" (142). The writer in a

workshop is often not allowed to speak at all, except perhaps to ask questions at the end, a move which places the writer in a subjugated position and, as I discuss below, is contrary to the way writers are expected to perform in peer review.

Authority issues are often ignored in the creative writing workshop, Roskelly argues, due to an entrenched resistance creative writers have to theory. She argues that silence imposed upon the writer is explicit, but that it also more subversively extends to the reader who has been trained, through the format of the workshop, to react like a market analyzer rather than a true responder. “The reader, like the writer in the workshop, is silent. The workshop group members who speak in that classroom are not real readers, but stand-ins. The classroom responder becomes something like an editor, or arbiter of taste, appropriateness, or expedient notions of ‘what the market will bear,’ not a reader at all” (“Broken Circles” 53). Roskelly finds a similar problem in the composition classroom where the “peer group is often a place where, like in the creative writing circle, the real reader becomes simply the stand-in, the real writer becomes silent in the face of what really matters, which is ‘what will sell’ in the market of the writing classroom” (54), but seems to find hope for redeeming the peer group in *Breaking (into) the Circle* where she looks at how to make small group work effective. It is the overt authoritative presence of the teacher in the workshop which seems to trouble her most.

Overstepping authority in either classroom is a delicate issue, but one which is dealt with in very different ways. The presence of an authority figure is encouraged at different moments in each classroom; in the composition classroom, it is believed that the authority figure should be firmly present at the beginning of the process, modeling effective peer review responses and providing a framework for students to work within

(Barron, 1991; Elbow and Belanoff 1995; Zhu, 1995) while in creative writing classrooms, the teacher is often absent from the workshop discussion until the end, allowing students the freedom to respond as they would like without the comments of the instructor to guide or color their responses (Bishop, 1990b; Zeigler, 1982).

Modeling

Modeling is central to conversations in both composition and creative writing, but in different ways. In composition, the conversation centers around the teacher modeling effective response practices for students while in creative writing, the workshop method itself is modeled. As I argued in chapter two, the teacher-student relationship is different in composition and creative writing classrooms. In composition, it is instructor and instructed, a teacher filling the students with knowledge. But, in creative writing, it is a more artistic relationship, that of mentor to mentee. The assumption is that the creative writing student is on a path to becoming an artist very much like the creative writing teacher, that the student is an artist-in-training, while the composition student is a vessel who needs to be filled with information. The composition student will, ideally, move on to other unrelated courses; however, the creative writing student will continue working towards becoming a professional writer or teacher of writing. In other words, modeling in composition is a teacher/student process while in creative writing it is a teacher/artist-to-future-teacher/artist process.

There are two major concerns about peer review in composition: one, that students don't know how to effectively respond to their peers' work and two, that students don't know how to use the comments they receive to revise their work. Students

need to be trained to participate in peer review and, according to Kenneth Bruffee, this training involves requiring students to follow particular steps. Bruffee argues that for peer criticism to be effective, students must learn to read their peers' work in three ways: descriptively, evaluatively and substantively (*A Short Course in Learning* 114). Their criticism needs to be helpful; for Bruffee this means that:

peer critics have to learn to express criticism tactfully so that writers can accept what they say and make changes accordingly. Peer critics learn to substantiate their generalizations with details, to emphasize good points as well as faults, to suspend judgment about substance when evaluating technique, to suspend judgment altogether when attempting to simply understand the function which the several parts of an essay seem intended to perform, and to find language to express in writing both functional description and technical evaluation of writing. (115)

Bruffee also insists that peer criticism be written down, that students should be evaluated on this form of writing as well as the other writing they do for the class. Writing down peer criticism and making it an integral part of the students' evaluation for the course, Bruffee argues, keeps it from becoming an artificial exercise (119). "Through peer criticism [students] learn the value to themselves of shouldering that responsibility. They gain a stronger sense of the degree to which knowledge, like writing itself, is a social phenomenon, and the degree to which the social context in which we learn permeates what we know and how we know it. And, finally, in writing for each other, students tap the enormous educative power latent in peer influence brought to bear on intellectual development" (116). For Bruffee, then, peer review is not just about providing the

student-writer with more than just the instructor's feedback; it is also about improving the student-reviewer's ability to interact with a text. More than just teaching students how to write for the academy, peer review should also teach them how read in "acceptable" ways, negotiating through the "abnormal" discourse as part of their induction into "established knowledge communities" in order to keep those knowledge communities alive (409).

Since Bruffee's 1982 *A Short Course in Learning*, there have been other descriptions of how peer review should work, what it should accomplish, and clear disagreements about whether or not peer readers should exhibit the type of objectivity Bruffee advocates, but the scholarship does seem to agree that peer review groups which receive no training are ineffective. As we saw in chapters two and three, the assumption is that students come into first-year composition lacking skills; the presumption is that students will not rise to the occasion on their own because they aren't prepared to read and critique their peers' work. As Wei Zhu argues in "Effects of Training for Peer Response on Students' Comments and Interaction," while the hope is that "by allowing peers to intervene in one another's writing process via peer feedback, peer response groups will help students revise and eventually improve their writing" (493), simply putting students into peer review groups is not enough. "[R]esearchers have emphasized that in order for cooperative learning to be effective, students must be prepared; merely placing students into groups does not ensure learning" (495). Zhu's study found that those students who did not receive training interacted less. Students who were simply placed into peer review groups followed a "reader reporting" model in which "responders took long turns reporting feedback to the writer, and there was little negotiation of

feedback between the writer and the readers” (510). Zhu deems this model ineffective because students passively receive feedback on their work, listening to criticism of their work without explaining their intent or actively asking for peers to expand upon their comments. In the ineffective group, writers were unresponsive, passively listening to the they feedback receive. The “untrained” readers didn’t perform correctly either, since they never asked the writer questions, never work to make the conversation active; the readers merely report what they think. Students who were first trained to do peer review during sessions in which the teacher modeled being an interactive member of the group were, Zhu claims, more productive. Successful peer groups exhibited a “‘reader-writer sharing’ pattern” in which the student-writer asked questions about peer feedback and requested clarification, thus sustaining the conversation about her work (514). When students—both writers and readers— aren’t trained and don’t interact with their peers in the review group, Zhu concludes, the feedback is more general while those who receive training are able to be more specific with their feedback. Her praise for the second, trained group notes that all the members of the peer review group participated in the conversation, and they seem to be negotiating meaning rather than merely providing feedback. “Interaction and negotiation were evident from questions and ensuing responses students used to request and provide information and clarification for one another” (511-512).

What Zhu doesn’t mention is that the trained group’s focus seems to be as much on making the text conform to an assignment—asking questions about the required length and whether or not the writer’s opinion should be a part of the paper. Part of what she considers to be productive conversation seems to involve dealing with the assignment as

much as the student's text; thus, training for peer review encourages students to "norm" their papers. While the first group doesn't really move beyond Bruffee's first step for reading, describing the paper, the members of the group are more focused on the text itself. They never explicitly mention the assignment (510-511). While it is clear that training encourages the writer and readers to interact with one another more, I would also argue that it reinforces the teacher's authority in the process; the training seemed to encourage the students to frame their comments around the constraints of the assignment while the untrained group, though less interactive with one another, dealt more with the text in front of them. Zhu doesn't consider the way in which training, while it might improve students reading and responding skills, reinforces the power of the teacher even when she isn't present in the group.

Ronald Barron, in "What I Wish I Had Known about Peer-Response Groups but Didn't," argues that the focus on training students to respond is not enough—they need to be taught what to do with that response as well. Barron argues that teachers need to be willing not only to model how to provide effective criticism, but how to effectively receive it as well. Like Bruffee, Barron notes that successful peer review groups tolerate and respect one another, present alternatives (rather than ultimatums), and indicate both strengths and weaknesses (30-33) and like Zhu, he stresses that peer review groups should be conversational and that the writer should take an active role in the critique. He, however, takes it one step further, focusing on the work which needs to be done out of class as well. Barron, unlike Bruffee or Zhu, suggests that the instructor put himself under fire first. In order to model how to use peer comments, Barron recommends that students first critique the teacher's writing. The teacher should then take the students'

comments and revise his work accordingly, bring the revised text back to the students to show how their comments helped mold the next draft, and discuss how and why comments were used or ignored. Not only does Barron's method provide an example for how to model using comments, but it also gives the students a sense of empowerment—their comments help the teacher.

In "Helping Peer Writing Groups Succeed," a chapter in *Teaching Lives*, Wendy Bishop argues that not only do students need to be trained how to act in peer review groups, but that they need to be taught discourse as well. Students need to be introduced "to the vocabulary and terminology of the composition community" (16). She finds that when peer groups fail, it is often because they don't know how to talk about writing and that, along with improving the text, learning to discuss writing is an important outcome of peer review. I find Bishop's assertion interesting as she is generally an advocate of moving beyond academic discourse, and that when discussing workshop methods (see below) she strongly argues that we need to investigate the traditional discourse with which they are conducted. But here, Bishop seems to be arguing that students need a set of tools to work with and guidelines to work within, suggesting not only that training is essential to the success of peer review but that group members need to play particular roles, such as monitor and historian, within these groups in order to maintain their integrity.

While much evidence suggests that students cannot be blindly pushed into a peer review situation, some argue that confining students to traditional methods of review and academic discourse stifles their ability to respond. In *Breaking (into) the Circle*, Roskelly argues that normative discourse excludes minorities from the conversation.

Teaching normal discourse is central to the work of the classroom at all levels; students are rewarded—as are teachers—for their ability to produce work in the normal discourse of the fields they are working in. [...] And normal discourse encompasses elements other than form—voice, vocabulary, types of evidence, and style. [...] Some students, those already socialized to a school-speech normal discourse—that is, many middle-class and white students—might have a decided advantage in practicing and mastering the normal discourse of academic speech. The apprenticeship model that Rorty’s and Bruffee’s descriptions rely upon is also perhaps better suited for, and traditionally meant for, males in the culture who would take the reins of power as they acquired the tools of discourse they needed. (70)

It’s not so much that Roskelly is arguing that we shouldn’t teach discipline-appropriate discourse, especially as she agrees with Bruffee that “abnormal” discourse can’t be taught; rather, it is the natural—and individual— discourse students come to the classroom with. “Abnormal discourse would seem to be necessary to the kind of knowledge as generative model that many classrooms seek to nurture, but, Bruffee argued, abnormal discourse cannot be taught. Instead, students should be taught ‘practical rhetoric and critical analysis’ in such a way that ‘students can turn to abnormal discourse in order to undermine their own and other people’s reliance on canonical conventions and vocabulary of normal discourse’ (72).

While much scholarship about how to structure peer review suggests that students need material to guide them through the process, often in the form of worksheets which provide questions which lead them through their reading, Roskelly seemingly would

argue for less structure in peer groups. “The conflict between gatekeepers and gate-crashers looms large for teachers, and it gets played out in the way teachers make assignments, evaluate prose, assign grades, and decide on texts. Their solution is often to downplay the ‘abnormal voices’ they hear in students’ texts, and in students’ groups, but the conflict remains, especially for the many teachers who so deeply desire more interaction and interest among their students” (73). It is equally as difficult to discuss “abnormal” discourse as it is to teach “abnormal” response.

(Un)Emerging Voices

What is “normal” has become a pervasive discussion in creative writing pedagogy as well. Most of the scholarship coming out of this field concerns the molding of students to the literary marketplace, leading to accusations like the ones we saw scholars such as Katherine Haake and Patrick Bizzaro making in chapter two: that creative writing workshops are producing the same type of students over and over again, all of whom can write for a particular “literary” marketplace but not for a wider audience. In “Responding to Creative Writing,” Wendy Bishop states that unlike researchers in other English fields, “creative writers have, in general, spent much more time on canon formation (creative anthologies) and discussions of technique and craft (creating guides that develop rules and prescriptions) than they have on the equally important issues of response and evaluation” (in Starkey 180). Such a lapse in the scholarship would explain the two complaints most commonly lodged against creative writing: one, as we’ve seen, that there is a small umbrella under which the rubric of what counts as “good” writing sits and two, that few, if any, theoretical underpinnings get taught in a creative writing workshop.

In “The Workshop and Its Discontents,” François Camoin takes on this issue of theory in the creative writing classroom, claiming that though the language of the workshop is not couched in the same terms as critical literary theory, it is present though perhaps not as effective as it could be.

If the workshop is different from the literature class, it is nevertheless a place where texts are in question, and we must speak, without authority perhaps, but still speak. It’s not a question of teaching without theory—we can be goats and monkeys in the halls and at department parties, but in the workshops the students want more from us than “Be like Me. Write” (which is not very useful advice, finally). The theory (whether we want to call it that or not) is always there, though it’s often suppressed, disguised as craft, or common sense, or literary taste, or *what-I-have-learned-in-twenty-years-of-being-a-writer*. But, finally, it comes down to speaking about how texts mean, what they do, how they exist in the world, how they function. (in Bishop and Ostrom 5)

Camoin argues that the theory being called for belongs to a literary field where the author can be perceived as dead, that the critical theory so many literary theorists say is missing from the creative writing classroom is missing because the workshop deals with live, and very present, writers. “Critical texts exist in the world in a manner different from poetry and fiction. A critical text presents itself as *about* something. It inscribes itself as a passion to communicate, an obsession to be understood. Poets and critics share a common language, but put it to different uses” (7). Camoin’s argument is that bringing critical theory into the creative writing classroom would be unproductive, moving the writer to consider the text’s larger place in the world before she has considered whether

the narrative structure works. Critical literary theory “asserts that there is a place outside of texts where the scholar, the critic, can stand, and, like Aristotle’s God, comment without being commented upon” while writers are positioned differently in relation to the text. “In the workshop, there is no outside; we speak and everything changes. We suggest a new narrative sequence, the collapsing of two characters into one, the elimination of a third, a new ending. Everything is different now; the text under study is no longer the text under study. We are always inside the text” (4). In other words, critical theory works with a static text—finished and unchanging— while the creative writing workshop is concerned with dynamic texts that are still being shaped. Camoin’s argument places critical theory outside the boundaries of the workshop because texts in the workshop are not yet ready to be looked at through that particular lens.

While I do think his justification for leaving critical theory to another classroom has merit because the writing workshop (and peer review, for that matter) is about creating a text, an activity which does require a different critical vocabulary, this debate about whether or not critical theory has a place in the workshop, in light of this conversation about peer review of work, takes on a different cast than the one we saw in chapter two. Rather than this being about holding the writer up as the artist, the scholarship on creative writing workshops centers around a debate about marginalized voices and texts which are discouraged because they don’t fit “literary” standards. What fits is, according to Eugene Garber and Jan Ramjerdi, a two part definition: one, that work meets the expectations of literary editors and publishers and two, that the stories represent society in a way that most of us understand. Garber and Ramjerdi argue that workshops are often at their most interesting and energized when participants are

confronted with texts which don't conform to literary and social norms but are dismayed that the energy is often directed towards norming the text being discussed.

Always part of what a workshop does is enforce a social censor on the work.

Always there is a chorus of voices saying, "No, you can't do this, this is not allowed, that is not the way to write, you have violated some social norm," and because it is fiction workshop we will talk about this as a violation of narrative conventions and this is thinly veiled criticism, what is violated is not a narrative convention but a social convention in narrative form and more so, as you say, if the piece is representational it is what we are most vulnerable to, what is most realistically depicted we must causally connect the actions in the narrative as we would in real life if they happened to a friend or us and here the ideological clash of hypothesized connections we construct as readers of representational work does or does not conflict with the ideological values we use to causally connect real events in the non-fictional world we are living in. (in Bishop and Ostrom 19)

In this way, Garber and Ramjerdi argue, marginalized voices are often kept at the margins of the creative writing classroom, if not in the hallways outside. For Garber and Ramjerdi, the problem with this is that the master narrative continues to be reinforced, told over and over, while other narratives remain outside the boundaries of the workshop.

Garber and Ramjerdi take a theoretical approach to this issue of marginalization, coming at it using tools from literary criticism; while they start their chapter by critiquing pedagogy and looking for ways to make discussion in workshop more productive, the conversation quickly takes a turn and begins to examine reader response in less practical, more theoretical ways, a position which Camoin would find premature. Garber and

Ramjerdi's conversation moves away from the practical restraints of the classroom and begins to investigate hypothetical spaces in which marginalized voices could be heard, a move which provides interesting material to think about, but no practical suggestions for bringing marginalized voices into the fold.

What Garber and Ramjerdi are finding fault with is what Wendy Bishop calls the "Do-Nothing School of Art" which says that writing is art for art's sake, a belief which she argues keeps insiders in and outsiders out, at cost to women and other minorities who have not been raised in the canon (*Teaching Lives* 237).

While Garber and Ramjerdi focus their critique on the texts being produced in the workshop, Bishop looks at how these issues affect classroom practice, how they encourage or discourage students from participating in workshop. In "On Learning to Like Teaching Creative Writing," Bishop talks about her own experience as a female student discouraged from publishing her poetry as "Wendy," but rather as "W.S." to keep her gender hidden, encouraged by the Master Poet to "learn the master plots, imitate the masters, aim for clarity, coherence and correctness," to follow the "rules" (in *Teaching Lives* 241). The propagation of such rules not only serves to discourage women, minorities and members of the lower-class from entering the workshop, as Bishop notes, but when they do enter, these rules encourage them to hide their identities, to hide the work which doesn't meet with the expectations of the masters. More than stifling traditionally marginalized voices, Bishop argues, this workshop model creates a negative classroom with students who feel like outcasts in the midst of very few worthy writers. "As I began to see creativity as more than a two percent issue, I found genre and writer's myths twin tyrants in the workshop, lingering on to trick me and my students into self-

hatred long after my Master was a ghost in the corner of my classroom, sleeping mostly, if awake a trifle condescending or amused” (244).

The Master in the workshop is characterized as one who doesn't like student work, who is waiting (often in vain) for a member of the talented two percent who are worthy to walk through the door. This disdain, Bishop argues, not only limits the number of student writers (which, she suggests, is often the point), but also effects the quality of work we demand from students. Like Peter Elbow, she argues that “liking work allows us to be more demanding of the writer. [...] good writing teachers feel able to like student writing” (246). Liking teaching and, more important, liking *all* student writing, has benefits for both the teacher and the student.

The benefit of liking our students is manifold, for we talk to them and learn them and celebrate their progress rather than bar it. Truly they are not going to displace us before our time. Rather than two percent with talent, there are probably two percent of our students who will follow us into this profession. To the degree that we like their work and know we're orchestrating learning, to that same degree we can raise our class standards, asserting the truth: improvement in writing results from long-term, serious attention to writing, from drafting, response, reading, pushing, experimenting, and succeeding *even if just a little bit*.

The benefit of liking our teaching is manifold. Primarily, we don't feel our class time is stolen from our writing time. If we write with our students in class, write about our classes, read theory and writers with an eye to developing the students in class and the student in ourselves, we develop an ecologically sound system for our writing lives. (246)

Bishop's critique of the workshop enunciates a problem wholly different from the one connected to peer review and composition; she seems actually to be starting back a notch arguing for reevaluating the pedagogy (or lack of it) in the workshop while composition is striving to train teachers and students to better participate in a firmly entrenched and supported method. Again, the fact that these fields firmly define themselves as separate entities often keeps them from sharing mutually beneficial scholarship which 1) could help each other out and 2) could demonstrate that their problems are not so distantly removed from each other.

Common Concerns

While composition and creative writing focus on different problems in their research on peer review/workshop methods, they do share the same concerns. As we've seen, composition is clearly concerned with the issue of marginalized voices and excluded texts, those which don't fit into a determined pattern. And, the workshop has held true to its method of responding to student texts passed down from one master/mentor to another. Like composition, it needs to consider its "training" methods; while creative writing laments that all but very particular voices often are marginalized in workshops, few scholars have addressed how to change the format to address this situation. The notable exception is Wendy Bishop's work, but there is little evidence to suggest that her cross-conversation has affected either classroom format significantly. What I see very little of is a discussion of what each classroom does right. A conversation which highlights the successes of peer review and creative writing workshops might help each improve the effectiveness of their format.

As I discussed above, central to the foundation of both classes is that student work must leave the vacuum in which it is created and interact with readers and that those readers should be numerous, more than just the teacher. However, both classrooms, in their own way, suggest that this student readership isn't as important as the instructor. Both could do away with this impression by borrowing from one another. Composition classrooms often implicitly suggest that peer opinions aren't important by short-shrifting the time that students have with the text. While workshop participants almost always take the text to be reviewed with them at least overnight (and for up to a week at a time), scholarship about peer review suggests that students read and respond to texts (often several) within one class session. This would necessarily create a perfunctory reading; many students aren't able to comment on anything other than surface error when asked to read and comment upon two or three papers in an hour class session.

There are, of course, exceptions. There are composition instructors who ask their students to take papers home over night and other instructors who use conference time with students to look at the paper for the first time.⁴ This suggests that some teachers recognize that students need more than the time provided in class to read and respond to peer work and that there are teachers who feel comfortable responding within the parameters of the time constraints our students face. However, while there is scholarship about conferencing which discusses how time should be managed during teacher/student conferences, there is no scholarship which discusses time in relation to peer review.

Much of the evidence about changing peer review practices is anecdotal, hallway

⁴ There is also scholarship on Writing Centers which deals with these issues as well; however, the Writing Center is 1) a different forum than the classroom or teacher/student conference and 2) still a different scenario as most Writing Center conferences last anywhere from thirty minutes to an hour. While I believe there are connections to be made between Writing Center practices and peer review/workshop practices, it is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss them.

conversation which has yet to be formally presented in the scholarship. The published scholarship on peer review still treats it as a wholly in-class activity. Thus, a prime complaint about peer review, both in scholarship and in hallway conversations between instructors, is that composition students often comment in the most terse terms to their peers' texts, often focusing on surface issues rather than responding in critical ways to the text. However, I wonder what teachers' responses would be like if they were confined to responding in the same manner and time frame, asked to move quickly from one text to the next, scrutinized by the author of the text while they read. It's not that simply asking students to respond outside of class would prevent them from giving terse responses, but it seems unreasonable to ask first-year composition students to respond meaningfully in such a contrived and short time period, especially when we know that one of the critical skills taught in composition is reading. Instructors might have an easier time with these constraints, but they are also, presumably, advanced readers of student texts; they have developed skills which allow them to read and comment more effectively. But, rarely if ever are they placed in this position; instructors take student work home. They are allowed to read at their own pace and without the immediate gaze of the text's author. Just the dichotomy between the conditions of response suggests that the instructor's comments are more valuable. The creative writing workshop, on the other hand, generally gives all participants equal time with the text, suggesting in that way that instructor and students are equal as readers, or at least need to work in the same conditions.

One reason why composition wants to conduct peer review in such short classroom sessions is that peer review is only a component of the first-year course; there

is other work to be done in composition while in creative writing, the workshop—the process of reading and revising texts—is often the whole class. Despite this fundamental difference, just a quick glance at descriptions of the creative workshop would suggest to composition that perhaps part of the problem it faces is easily solved by allotting more time for reading. Even scholarship which recognize that training students for peer review needs to be supplemented with reading outside of the classroom, like Peter Elbow and Pat Belanoff’s booklet *Sharing and Responding*, doesn’t suggest that students take each other’s texts home. Rather, Elbow and Belanoff stop at suggesting that students “read about a feedback process *for homework* before we practice it in class” (iv). If students need time to digest *how* to respond, don’t they also need the time to actually practice it and do it?

Creative writing, likewise, could benefit from looking at composition’s scholarship about peer review, namely its concern with training. There is very little written about training students to respond to texts in the workshop; the sort of criteria which constitutes good writing (obviously problematic in its own right) is communicated through discussions of published texts, but lessons about how to critique a work in progress using the same standards (or different ones) go unmentioned. Students are asked to take texts home which gives them time to respond, but rarely are there the sort of guidelines for response which exist in composition. What Ronald Barron suggests—that students practice peer review before they are given peer texts to read—doesn’t seem to get done in the workshop. There is the expectation that students come prepared to be good readers—in contrast to the assumption we’ve seen made about composition students’ lack of knowledge— but that assumption doesn’t play out, especially in

undergraduate workshops. Again, in the workshop, the teacher's judgment is privileged over the students' as her response is almost always informed by better reading and responding skills, honed over years of participating in and leading workshops. While this may eventually serve as a model for students to improve their own skills, there are rarely explicit conversations about how to read and respond well, no initiation into the process other than simply being thrown into it.

While it can be argued that the training which guides peer review is derivative and leads students to critique each other in a uniform and surface manner, what it does accomplish is giving students clues about how to read, what to look for, and questions to think about when reading. While questions which direct students towards particular responses (sometimes yes/no ones) may not be the most effective way to guide students, we need to give them something. We cannot assume that they come to class with the tools to be good readers and responders. Wendy Bishop suggests that one way to make students better readers is to first ask them to look at their own texts as distanced readers. She suggests that they should write two sets of critiques about their own texts, one before review and one after. The preliminary assignment is to respond to their own work, writing down questions they have about the text, what they would like to change and what they like about the text. The follow-up response asks students "to take peer responses home, to tabulate those responses, and to write an exploratory paragraph deciding how they plan to use (or ignore) workshop responses in their next draft" (in Starkey 184). Bishop's suggestions are geared towards not only helping students to become better readers by allowing them to practice on their own texts, but also towards

helping her read these texts in a way which better suits individual writers and addresses their needs.

However, I think there are other applications, other benefits which Bishop doesn't articulate, not the least of which is dealing with the problem identified by Ronald Barron of how to teach students to use peer comments for revision. By "forcing" students to actively review comments and respond to them, not through direct revision of the text, but by formulating a plan for revision, students confront comments and rephrase them in ways which can then be implemented in their writing and revision.

Second, being asked to tabulate and respond to *all* comments, not just the teacher's comments, stresses that every set of comments needs to be considered. Composition and creative writing share problems with authority; most students want to please the teacher and are therefore going to place more emphasis on the comments which come from this authority figure. Peer review momentarily displaces this problem by excluding the teacher from peer review, but also gives students unequal opportunity to respond, often making the usefulness of peer comments minimal. Workshop allows for equal time, but since the teacher is included in the circle, and often has the final word, she remains in the privileged position. Students are likely to take the teacher's comments as gospel rather than suggestions. As Alan Ziegler points out, students are more likely to be too agreeable to changes rather than resistant (96). Tabulating responses in the way Bishop suggests prevents students from dismissing peer comments in favor of the instructor's, or at the very least, forces them to articulate why they find the teacher's comments more useful.

Third, reviewing and responding to comments should help students develop their own skills as readers. If they are asked to articulate which comments helped them and why (as well as how they plan to use them), they can concretely see examples of “good” comments (and, here, good can mean those which they personally find useful rather than what an authority figure deems worthy) and thus begin to internalize how to respond effectively.

Fourth, breaking down comments in this way keeps them manageable. In *The Writing Workshop*, Zeigler looks at pitfalls in the writing workshop and makes suggestions for how to conduct workshops effectively. One problem, he notes, is that a slew of comments often becomes overwhelming because “students may get discouraged either because they think they must have done a poor job to warrant all those comments or because the prospect of utilizing all the suggestions to carry the piece to its potential seems overwhelming” (97). Dealing with comments in writing separate from the original text can allow the comments to become manageable. There’s a catalog of the comments, organized in a way that the student understands, and a plan of attack for using them.

Finally, placing this sort of emphasis on the importance of peer responses gives them their own importance. Often, peer review and workshop are viewed by students as hoops to jump through, activities which amount to little, and these attitudes are reflected in the time and effort they expend making comments. However, if peer comments are actively used to generate not only revisions but additional texts, their importance is magnified. All of this post-work accomplishes the sort of follow-up conversations Zeigler recommends. While he sees follow-up conversations as an opportunity to address

discomfort with criticizing work and to ease students' minds about their roles as reviewers (112), follow-up also rescues peer response from the vacuum as well.

Conclusion

Peer review and workshop are one place where these two fields have already begun to cross; however, the conversation has been stifled. It only takes looking at both conversations, the benefits and problems of both methods, to make suggestions for how to improve both peer review and workshop. More important, there is no need to reinvent the wheel here. It's clear that each field can learn from the other, that a few have tried to bridge the gap and the work which has come out of that has produced some very helpful revisions to pedagogy. If composition and creative writing choose to operate in separate spaces, they can't benefit from work already been done; just a combination of some of their methods would help both deal with common problems: authority issues, perceptions of students, reading skills, and the revision process. But, with the lines of communication running parallel to one another rather than crossing, each must deal with these problems on its own, perhaps not always necessarily reaching the best solution. The problems each field must face in the classroom are quite similar, suggesting not only that there are innumerable benefits to working together but that they are—and should be presented as—more closely related than their scholarship and the assumptions underlying them would lead us to believe.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

I find the poetry unit of introductory creative writing the most difficult to teach, not because poetry is both technical and conceptual, but because while my students understand that their fiction and drama is meant for others, they tend to hold onto the belief that poetry is personal, written to express their feelings with little, if any, consideration of what a reader might think. My students resist revising poetry, arguing that their poems represent true, in-the-moment feelings—that their emotional expressions have few concrete images a reader can hold onto or work with means nothing. For some reason, they almost universally begin with the belief that poetry is just for the writer. And, in an effort to convince them that poems have to be for the reader as well, I turn to rhetoric. I talk about inconsistent image systems or lack of sensory details in terms of purpose and audience. The Aristotelian notion that sensory detail and argument are inextricably linked is missing from both composition and creative writing.

Propriety of style will be obtained by the expression of emotion and character, and by proportion to the subject matter. Style is proportionate to the subject matter when neither weighty matters are treated offhand, nor trifling matters with dignity, and no embellishment is attached to an ordinary word [...]. (377-379)

Here, there is a balance between style and purpose which must be maintained. In order to maintain it, however, style and purpose must be taught in the same classroom; they need to be taught in both composition and creative writing. All writing concerns need to be

dealt with in writing classrooms; it is genre which differentiates what these students are doing, not the process and not the elements of “good” writing. Pulling apart style and purpose, academic and craft, leaves students in a liminal space, one which can keep them from expressing who they are.

The Crossroads

I started writing this dissertation with the premise that writing is, above all, always the same process at the start. No matter what the final product, writing always involves that moment of sitting down in front of a blank computer screen or with a blank sheet of paper. There are the same basic decisions to be made: decisions about content—what goes in, what gets cut—organization, style, and voice. There are “problems” which every writer faces: Is the writing clear? Which details are necessary and which are extraneous? Is this appropriate for the audience? Regardless of genre or topic, there are basic decisions and common practices inherent in every writing process—and equally as many differences. What I am proposing is that, since writing is a process of choices, writing courses should expose students to the full range of possibilities as early as possible. The problem is that composition and creative writing limit themselves in particular ways, parceling off writing objectives and lessons, trying to draw lines between their curricula—lines which bleed into one another, demonstrating the artificiality of the constructed binaries. In doing so, they provide a narrow definition of what it means to write. For composition, writing is a scholarly pursuit meant to demonstrate knowledge, prove merit (to the teacher, to colleagues, or to the academy), a product of work. For creative writing, it’s more romantic—to write is to produce art, to express oneself. What

I want to suggest is that all writing can be—and is—both. All writing is work—and it’s all (ideally) art. But for these definitions of writing to permeate would mean that composition and creative writing would need to cross the lines of genre and epistemology and talk to one another. Proposing that two fields talk to one another, mutually help and benefit from one another, and together develop curricula which would improve writing pedagogy does not seem radical; however, it is often a derisive issue.

My argument for encouraging composition and creative writing to work together is the flip side of the argument for why they should remain separate; both arguments stem from the idea that these courses do very different work. I agree that they are doing different work, but much of it is work they should both be doing. Where I would like to see these two fields influence each other most is in their attitudes about teachers and students. As I’ve argued throughout this text, both composition and creative writing are very invested in their respective identities and the identities of the students and professionals which populate them. The binaries provide teachers and students with fixed—and polarized— characteristics. But, as I’ve argued throughout, these are only perceived identities, not the reality. I would suggest that what is actually different about our teachers are the specifics of their educations and the writing they produce which “counts” in the tenure process. The actual differences in their respective students are even more difficult to enunciate, especially at the undergraduate level. Primarily, they are all students—and all writers— though composition and creative writing tend to create a division between these two identities. The arguments for keeping them separate are rooted in the slippery binaries I’ve been discussing.

If we want to keep composition positioned as work that students and scholars produce and creative writing as art that “real” writers create, then the binaries provide a shallow structure for separating the two fields. I’m arguing that writing curricula would be stronger if we allowed all students of writing to see themselves in a richer ways, embodying multiple roles. It is this merging of academics and art which I find intuitive and necessary.

Writing Divided

Where this argument about composition and creative writing is, at the moment, most heated is in the debate about stand-alone writing programs.¹ While I’m not so much concerned about this debate itself, the issues brought up in this conversation parallel those I’ve been discussing throughout. In this debate, the split between composition and literature is presumed; whether or not one agrees with the idea of independent writing programs, everyone sees that such a program necessitates a split between these two fields. However, where creative writing goes is unclear. Those who believe creative writing should remain with literature argue that creative writing is a liberal art. Daniel Royer and Roger Gilles, in “The Origins of a Department of Academic, Creative, and Professional Writing,” their chapter on the development of an independent writing program at Grand Valley State University, state that literature wants to maintain propriety over creative writing because, “creative writing was perceived by many to belong with literature and the reception of texts. [...] If professors of literature were comfortable in their ‘role as exegetes of quasi-religious texts,’ some also seemed to value creative

¹ For an extended conversation about Independent Writing Programs see O’Neill, Peggy, Angela Crow, and Larry W. Burton (eds.). *A Field of Dreams*. Logan: Utah State UP; 2002.

writing more for its devotion to keeping the idea of aesthetic production alive and in its place to foil the interpretive offices” (in O’Neill et al. 31). Those opposed to separating creative writing from literature believe that the primary purpose of creative writing is to introduce students to literature, an idea which harkens back to the early days of creative writing as D.G. Myers describes them, a lab situation which introduces students to literature by allowing them to experiment with it. Additionally, Royer and Gilles argue, those who want creative writing to remain with literature believe that composition is “pre-academic” and “pre-art,” (32) insinuating that creative writing (and literature) are what one does only after indoctrinated into the academy. It is an argument based in the binary which represents composition students as lacking in skills and knowledge, empty vessels who need to be filled, while creative writing students come already filled and brimming with raw talent.

I’m not arguing for or against stand-alone writing programs here; it’s an issue about which I’m personally divided. However, the crux of where creative writing belongs in relation to the argument is for me the fundamental reason why composition and creative writing need to bridge their gaps more. What the argument highlights is the superficiality of the divisions we create. As Douglass Hesse argues in “Who Owns Creative Non-Fiction,” what the programmatic splintering off of writing tasks does is systematically divide identities.

Technical writing claims the vocational applications of composition in which texts, however instrumental, are means through which various kinds of work happen. Creative writing claims the identity of the writer, cultivating an ethos of the student not as “English major who writes” or “biologist who writes” but as

writer who writes, the writing being its own ends. [...] In contrast, composition claims... what? Rarely is it writing as an end in itself. Instead composition often focuses on matters of academic form (thesis-and-support structures, discourse conventions, etc.). Composition focuses, too, on individual development, cultural critique, or argument. [...] As a result, composition stores writing mainly in two sites, one academic and one political, although a limited politics in which discourse always exists in relation to clear exigencies. Technical, business, or professional writing handle the vocational sphere, and creative writing the leisure sphere—or at least some of it—and journalism handles news and reportage, including texts not limited by timeliness: “features.” (262-263)

Hesse’s argument for where creative non-fiction fits into this division of tasks highlights the superficiality of such divisions. Writing isn’t always just an argument, just leisure, or just vocational. Further, as Hesse states and as I’ve argued in previous chapters, this division simplifies students’ identities in an artificial way and places composition students in a lesser position.

Composition studies is more concerned with writing rather than with writings. It supports identities of “students as writers” or, say, “biologists as writers,” subject positions that subordinate “writer” to some prior and primary identity.

Composition studies does not generally support the complementary position of “writer as student” or “writer as biologist,” in which the subject position of writer is foregrounded. One quality occluded in composition’s very important political and social turns is that of writing as craft, as the making of textual artifacts whose maker is important *as* maker. (263)

It's easy to understand why composition students wouldn't see themselves as creators; compositionists don't see them as such. As I argued in chapter one, scholarship such as Robert Connor's *Composition-Rhetoric* creates a picture of a discipline in which all writing *but* that of our students counts. Informal conversations have further convinced me that not only are we discounting student writing, we're not necessarily even promoting the idea that they write at all, at least not primarily. The scholarship bears this out as well; work like James Berlin's *Rhetoric and Reality* doesn't even deal with writing as part of the curriculum.

A colleague of mine once told me that she only teaches argument in her composition courses; her classroom conversations are focused on issues because she is uncomfortable discussing writing. In another conversation, I was told by a department chair that her university decided to organize its first-year writing curricula around subject areas such as biology or political science so that students could be grounded in a discourse; when I mentioned that I organize my classes around writing objectives rather than a particular theme, emphasizing, I believe, a discourse of writing, the chair balked and responded that students couldn't talk about writing without being grounded in a subject area first; further, she believed my approach was impractical since it didn't introduce students to writing in a major. She didn't believe that my focus on writing constituted a subject area or a discourse in its own right. Both conversations are representative of composition's discomfort with writing as a subject. The department chair's opinion reflects the strong assumption that first-year composition should do something other than merely teach writing, as though writing itself is too simple a task to merit a whole course, let alone the two course sequence which most colleges and

universities require. It also explains why composition holds on strongly to rhetoric while leaving craft to creative writing. Craft is either intangible or unimportant.

Technē and Art

Technē—the “art” of rhetoric— deals with “the methods, technique, and strategies that are used in practicing effective writing” (in O’Neill et al. 57), parts of writing which composition is quite diligent about teaching. These are academic issues, ones which have very little to do with craft; they are differentiated from art, “the status of writing as a fine art, a practice of imagination, an act of creativity” (57). Academic writing rarely deals with aesthetics and I find this lamentable. But equally sad for me is the lack of attention to rhetorical concerns in creative writing. This division, the stringent maintenance of the separation between technē and art, is, finally, what I want to argue needs to disappear. As Anne Aronson and Craig Hansen argue in “Writing Identity,” “one of the most difficult ‘marriages’ [...] is that between the most vocational and application-oriented of writing activities—technical communication—and the most creative and impractical of writing activities—poetry, fiction, and other creative genres” (in O’Neill et al. 57). That composition could be seen as merely technical and creative writing as impractical is disturbing.

And yet, we’ve created a writing curriculum which neatly divides up elements of writing. Though there are a few exceptions, writing programs which deviate from the pattern, we’ve largely relegated argument to composition and craft to creative writing in a way which makes this binary between vocational and impractical easy to understand. Composition teaches audience, purpose and argument while creative writing teaches

imagery, detail, and voice. This separation derives, at least in part, from the belief that the artistry of writing is an advanced concern, intended for the elite and talented only; if we can just get our first-year composition students to make a strong, well supported argument and inoculate them against the influences of popular culture, then our job is done. What isn't talked about, however, is the way in which artistic writing can be powerful; readers want to enjoy the process of reading and part of what makes that process enjoyable is writing that not only makes a strong point but does it beautifully, artfully. This is not a new idea—it is wholly present in ancient rhetoric, addressed at length in Aristotle's *Rhetoric*—but it is a consideration which has vanished from composition studies.

Style expresses emotion, when a man speaks with anger of wanton outrage; with indignation and reserve, even mentioning them, of things foul or impious; with admiration of things praiseworthy; with lowliness of things pitiable; and so in all other cases. *Appropriate style also makes the fact appear credible*; for the mind of the hearer is imposed upon under the impression that the speaker is speaking the truth, because, in such circumstances, his feelings are the same, so that he thinks (even if it is not the case as the speaker puts it) that things are as he represents them; and the hearer always sympathizes with one who speaks emotionally, even though he really says nothing. (Aristotle 379, emphasis mine)

The craft of writing contributes to a writer's ethos, but composition's concern with creating academics doesn't allow for conversations about style and emotion to come to the forefront; emotion isn't scholarly. As a service to the academy and the labor market, we teach students to do research and present it in utilitarian form.

This “utilitarian” skill set is missing from creative writing; rarely does one hear a conversation about poetry as argument in an introductory creative writing course or see argument addressed in a creative writing text. Nor do most, if any, creative writing courses include research as a component. The focus is on mood, imagery, rhythm—craft. It’s hard to couch these artistic concerns in practical terms, difficult to answer the question of what students “do with it” outside the classroom because the rhetoric of writing is left outside the creative writing classroom door.

Implications

What is left outside is for me the biggest implication of these constructed binaries which shape composition and creative writing. It’s not that I believe that every class can accomplish every task, but I do think there are attitudes inherent in the binaries which can inform our pedagogies and make them fuller than they are now. One minor change we can make is to refer to all students in writing classrooms as writers. This isn’t a new idea; scholars like Peter Elbow and Donald Murray made this call years ago. But, it’s an attitude about composition students which largely hasn’t caught on. As I argued in chapters two and three, scholarship and texts which discuss composition students refer to them as students—they are not considered writers, not in any real sense. Just making the slight change in our discourse, calling those in composition courses “writers,” would begin to shift the way we think about those students. There is a certain belief system surrounding this term, “writer.” It’s present in the scholarship and in the binaries I’ve discussed; writers have talent, they have something valuable to say. This is not the way we portray students in composition, but think of the possibilities of just that minor shift,

of exchanging the word “student” for “writer.” Seeing students through that lens could change the conversation from what students lack to what they bring to the classroom. Teaching writers is a privilege; we see this in the assumptions about creative writing. Creative writing teachers are assumed to work with the best, the most talented. But what if composition shifted its views just slightly, adopted the stance of creative writing, assumed that its students are talented, that it’s a matter of helping them hone skills they already have, allowing them to cultivate the material they’re brimming with rather than having to fill the void of knowledge they lack? It’s really a small shift, one more concerned with attitude than curricula or course requirements. And yet, it would change not only how students are constructed but how the teachers are constructed as well. Part of the reason that composition instructors can be portrayed as inexperienced is because they are assumed to be teaching students who lack in knowledge as well. Graduate assistants and adjuncts are the primary composition instructors because it’s assumed that even a novice teacher can help composition students in some way; more important, composition is a course in which novice instructors must pay their dues before they can move on to the “real” teaching. It is a course which not only trains students to be academics but indoctrinates teachers as well. Students and teachers both receive what is seen as crucial training in first-year composition; it is a hoop they both must jump through. But, teaching creative writing is a privilege, something that only a master can do. Changing the terminology so that the students in composition were valued would change the way we view not only the teachers in the classroom—reconstruct them as people who are involved in academically challenging work—but could also change the task of teaching first-year writing from a chore to a opportunity.

The implications of breaking down the binaries, of integrating not only the pedagogies but the attitudes of composition and creative writing are endless. As I've argued, composition is seen as a course for everyone while creative writing is a course for the talented and the elite. But what if creative writing were for everyone as well? What would happen if attitudes shift just a bit to see creative writing as a course which could benefit everyone? For one, more students would feel encouraged to take creative writing, wouldn't stay away because they feel they aren't good enough. Second, rather than spending time trying to find the talented two percent in creative writing courses, as Wendy Bishop states her master teacher did, the focus could shift to looking for the talent in every student, even the one who wants to write in the margins, to produce texts which don't meet the literary market's standards. If all students have something to contribute to a writing course, then even those who won't go on to be published have something to contribute and something to learn. Rather than feeling frustrated or put upon by everyone not in the elite two percent, creative writing instructors can feel like they help all student writers and can make an even stronger argument for its place in the university. Popular culture has already made this move. Creative writing scholarship identifies students in one way, but books about writing creatively construct them in a very different, much more positive light. But the tenets of good writing don't change in the textbooks which promote that writing creatively can benefit everyone; what that attitude does, however, is empower anyone who wants to write, encourages everyone to try, and promotes the benefits of writing in general.

Empowerment. This is what is missing for me—it's hard to imagine who of our students is empowered by the sort of binaries of characteristics composition puts forth. It

may be true that our students rarely, if ever, read the scholarship we write about them. But the assumptions which underlie the scholarship filter into the classroom—whether it be that students are lacking or that there are only an elite few worthy of instruction— are written into the textbooks we give them and affect the way we treat students. It’s difficult to empower students, to give them the tools they need to write effectively and think critically when we write scholarship which presents this as an insurmountable task.

A New Curricula

In “The Body of My Work is Not Just a Metaphor,” Lynn Domina argues that students avoid “authentic writing” because they feel pressure to express “the truth,” a concern which, Domina argues, keeps students from expressing themselves. “In each case, it is the student’s persona which has been dismissed and/or censored, and the content of any subsequent writing will be virtually irrelevant, since the student has been judged *a priori* incapable of portraying truth” (in Bishop and Ostrom 28). While Domina is specifically discussing the creative writing workshop, her assessment of how student persona is stifled seems to fit both composition and creative writing. Rarely, especially in composition, are the subtleties of these voices celebrated; we don’t address the ways in which voice and persona are manipulated in order to make a stronger argument.

Composition instructors certainly know that not all academic voices are the same, just as creative writing instructors know that there is a market outside the literary one. We need to recognize this in the classroom as well. There’s a limited scope to the education we give our students, and while I acknowledge that all courses have to be constrained by

limits in order to make them manageable and viable, I would urge that we reconsider what it is we limit.

We need to redefine writing curricula and open up the possibilities of writing and critical thinking to students. I agree with the current trend to incorporate more writing into education; already, we're seeing writing requirements expand in two ways. For one, students are being required to take not only the one or two semester freshman composition sequence, but are often required to take an upper level writing course, either through the English department or in the department of their major, as well. Second, many universities ask students to take more courses designated as "writing intensive;" these courses are often taken outside of the English department and include significant writing assignments which supplement reading and testing. My problem is that, at the moment, this trend continues to look at writing in the same way I've argued first-year composition does—the art of writing is still left out of these academic, writing intensive courses. An ideal writing curriculum, from my perspective, would continue to stress how important writing is and would continue to require multiple writing or writing intensive courses, but would encourage teachers—especially those who teach in first-year and introductory writing classes—to move beyond teaching summary and argument alone. Traditional academic writing would be one among the vast possibilities open to students. And, this would begin in first-year composition.

What I most want to see happen in all writing courses is to have the idea of "choice" introduced and expanded. It's my fear that by removing choice from writing we've also removed critical thinking from the writing classroom. Rather than simply asking students to write papers and revise them, I want students to include memos about

the choices they've made in their writing, to articulate the thinking process behind the revisions they make and don't make. And, I want them to be able to articulate that thinking process at every level of writing, from word choice to overall structure. Critical thinking has been removed from composition because we mandate the voice and the discourse they write with, relieving them of having to think about why that voice or that discourse is the most appropriate for their topic or the audience. In fact, we often tell students who to write for, keeping them from choosing who they would most prefer to address. And, as composition is also seen as a course which can inoculate students against "bad" influences, we're often, at least implicitly, telling them what to argue for in their writing as well. We've removed the choice from writing. "Real" writers choose who they write for (often by constructing their pieces with particular publications in mind), what they want to write about, and what genre to write in—and, they can often justify the choices they've made in definitive terms. However, we're not providing first-year composition students with a vocabulary to talk about their writing; they can often defend their political positions, but can not intelligently talk about why and how they chose to position themselves on the page (other than to say they wrote what they thought the teacher wanted). For me, an ideal writing curriculum in any writing course—no matter what genre was being focused upon—would include a component in which students need to defend their writing choices, to think critically about what they put on the page rather than following a model.

I would also encourage us to rethink how we teach research. At the moment, most first-year composition courses teach students how to incorporate sources into an essay, often asking students to pick an issue, explain all the points of view surrounding

that issue, and argue for a position. However, this is a limiting way to do research. For one, many courses focus mostly on library sources and the internet, ignoring all the other ways in which we research. Rarely are observation, field studies, or extensive interviewing included in the first-year composition course. And, research as a whole is rarely, if ever, part of a creative writing curricula. Additionally, this suggests that the only use for research is to support an (political) argument. Students use quotes from sources more to prove that they've done the work, that they've read up on the issue they are supposed to be writing about, than to develop new ideas or contribute to a conversation.

One of the most difficult moments I have in every first-year writing course is trying to explain the difference between incorporating sources into a paper rather than letting the quotes stand in for the writing. Composition students tend to want to let quotes do the work for them rather than using source material to support their own writing. They include the quote rather than writing their own words. They don't know how to use research to create their own, original material.

Research is important to creative writing as well—often students feel limited because they've been told “write what you know.” But, as Stephen King argues in *On Writing*, “If you're a plumber, you know plumbing, but that is far from the extent of your knowledge; the heart also knows things, and so does the imagination” (158). In other words, it's not “write what you know,” but write what you *can* know—and research is one way to know more. Not only do we need to teach all writing students to expand their notion of what research is, but how to use it as well; it's not merely about presenting facts. “What you need to remember is that there's a difference between lecturing about

what you know and using it to enrich the story. The latter is good. The former is not” (161). We know, as professional writers and scholars, that research goes beyond quoting a source, but that message rarely gets to our students. I would love to see a writing curriculum in which students had to use research to create something other than an argument; for example, what if they had to research a historical time and place in order to write a short story? In order to do this effectively, students would need to read primary and secondary sources to get a feel for social norms, speech patterns, and artifacts. Writing in a genre other than report or argument would mean demonstrating their knowledge in the details—what characters are wearing, the way they interact, their dialects, etc.—rather than by quoting the source to prove they read. In conjunction, students would have to write a memo explaining how what they learned affected the construction of the story and how the research influenced their choices. With this one assignment, students would be learning how to 1) evaluate sources, not only for information and reliability but for voice, tone, and style (since these would need to be incorporated into their own pieces as well), 2) incorporate research in a way other than quoting, 3) experiment with voice and tone, and 4) critically think about their writing and how to articulate their process and choices.

More than suggest particular assignments, I would like to argue that we need to think of writing projects in terms of objectives rather than topics. We need to construct assignments which focus on what we want students to learn from them, not what we want them to say. In other words, if we want students to incorporate outside sources, then we need to stay focused on that objective, rather than asking students to present that research in a formulated way or mandate that research be used to support a political position. We

need to recognize that students—that all people—write for a variety of reasons outside of school and allow all of those possibilities into the classroom, accept that any writing choice is a “good” choice if it can be well defended. Rather than giving our students the audience, the voice, the discourse, and the form, we need to ask them to choose and, intelligently, explain those choices.

Those who disagree with me will argue that this allows students to move away from standard grammatical English, to avoid confronting basic skills and that the “real” world—the working world that most of our students want to be credentialed for—requires. But I don’t think that’s true. In asking students to defend choices not only of content and structure, but voice, style, and genre, we’d be asking students to engage in a sort of analysis which would prepare them to write for any audience, including ones valued by corporate America or the history department. We’d be giving them the skills to analyze a variety of discourses and forms, to understand the conventions of any writing situation. The same analytical skills which allow students to understand the conventions of poetry allow them to read a résumé or an editorial and see what those genres require. And, rather than merely training students in academic discourse or the literary market, we would be providing students with the tools to critique discourses, to move and work in a multiplicity of voices, and to understand why they are doing so.

Finally, what I would like to argue is that we need to not only cross the lines between composition and creative writing, as Wendy Bishop has suggested, but work in the space created by that crossing. “Our students aren’t writers the day they are finally hired as writers in the workplace, or the day they publish in ‘professional’ forums. They are writers whenever they write, and they will believe us when we say so only when we

acknowledge their rights through our course designs and our attitudes toward their work” (Bishop, in Bishop and Ostrom 193). It is in the crossroad of composition and creative writing that we can do this work, that we can collapse the binaries so that all students are working writers, all student writing is academic and fun, and all courses encourage students to see themselves filled with potential no matter where it may lead them. There are lots of revisions to be made in the curricula—as I discussed above, we need to find a way to combine purpose and craft, technē and art, into all writing courses. But the first step that has to happen is that our attitudes about students—and those who teach them—need to change. We can’t limit ourselves to the binary that scholarship and textbooks give us; those binaries create a two-dimensional portrait of the students and teachers in composition and creative writing and that dimensionality prevents us from recognizing the riches that writing curricula could offer everyone.

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