

BITS CREATING BONDS: LORE AS A FORM OF HISTORY IN CREATIVE WRITING
AND COMPOSITION PEDAGOGY

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ABSTRACT

Phil Sandick: Bits Creating Bonds: Lore as a Form of History in Creative Writing and
Composition Pedagogy
(Under the direction of Daniel Anderson and Jordynn Jack)

This dissertation develops around a series of related arguments about lore: the role lore played in the disciplinary histories of both composition and creative writing, the longstanding yet diminishing dependence on lore in creative writing pedagogy, the distributed network created from tidbits of author testimony that helps students form social bonds, and finally, the mode by which contemporary students are situated through new media to be bricoleurs—or *bricolores*—of the array of conventional wisdom regarding how writing is “done, learned, and taught.”

The canon of creative writing craft books and author interviews constitutes a major source of creative writing’s rich mythography. The House of Lore is largely comprised of and informed by these tidbits, and, through pedagogical dissemination, these fragments of writing advice, reflections on writing processes, and ruminations on “the writing life” are passed down through the generations. These fragments have a profoundly historical charge, and actually contain within them a record of how creative works come into existence. When these fragments subsequently become part of individual student narratives of learning, apprentice writers in turn have the ability to form strong and meaningful bonds with mentors, fellow students, as well as with creative writing’s past.

Lore’s potential for productive value might be elucidated if we can refocus our attention on the relational and history-specific contexts that shape these new encounters. All—teachers and students alike—who come in contact with these pedagogical fragments

recombine/remake/remix them to meet new needs in what we can begin to think of as “Lore 2.0.” These tidbits can fuel further rhetorical invention, as well as create social bonds. Through the theoretical lens of Actor-network theory, we may better visualize and understand contemporary student learning narratives with respect to writing, both in first-year composition and creative writing.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES	x
LIST OF TABLES	xi
CHAPTER 1: A 21 st -CENTURY LOOK AT LORE	1
Narratives of How Texts Come into Being.....	10
Lore as Historically-Charged Agent	12
Tidbits Create Social Bonds.....	29
“Lore 2.0”	38
Chapter Outlines	40
CHAPTER 2: THE FRAUGHT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMPOSITION STUDIES AND CREATIVE WRITING AND LORE AT THE HEART OF THIS DIVISION	44
Seeking Common Ground and More Open Borders.....	44
A Longstanding Yet Uneasy Partnership.....	49
The Closing of Borders.....	59
Stereotypical Aversions: The Strong Oppositions between First-Year Composition and Creative Writing.....	64
Lore at the Heart of a Pedagogical Divide: Theory and Practice	72
Resisting Lore: Practitioner Knowledge at the Margins of Pedagogical Scholarship, a Response from Creative Writing Studies.....	77
Toward a More Coherent Partnership.....	90
Addressing the How and the What	95
<i>Exercises in Style</i>	99
Once More Beyond Dichotomy	103

CHAPTER 3: REIMAGINING LORE AS A HISTORICAL PHENOMENON: A WELLSPRING OF TIDBITS.....	109
Pedagogical Metanarratives and Self-Reflexivity	109
Lore as a Form of History: Writing about Writing as Historiographic Emplotment.....	114
The Historicity of Lore	125
The Archive: Locating and Valuing Sources of Lore.....	133
“Rooting Through the Discard Heap”: Student as Bricoleur.....	138
CHAPTER 4: THE NETWORK OF LORE: IMITATIVE TRANSCRIPTION AS A CASE STUDY	144
Key moves of Actor-network Theory.....	146
Tracing a Unit of Lore	153
Age and Cognitive Development: “Just eleven or twelve”	154
Magnetic Combinations: “The Arrangement of Those Sentences”	165
Form Precedes Freedom: “They were so simple” and “I thought I could learn”	181
The Aura of the “Famous Writer”: Hemingway.....	200
The Value of Self-Appointed Apprenticeship: “See how they worked”	214
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION: WHAT THE “LORE 2.0” NETWORK MIGHT MEAN FOR CREATIVE WRITING AND FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION STUDENTS AND PROGRAMS.....	224
Bits Creating Bonds: Pedagogical Implications and New Directions	231
The New Graduate Scholar: <i>A Bricoleur</i>	232
Creative Writing Pedagogy 2.0.....	235
“We Are All Practitioners”	239
Composition, Creative Writing, and Living in The Future (of English Studies).....	244
WORKS CITED	247

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 – Lore as iceberg	14
Figure 2 – Writers on Twitter re-interpreting lore	123
Figure 3 – Writers on Twitter re-interpreting lore	123
Figure 4 – Snapshot of first trace	164
Figure 5 – Snapshot of second trace	180
Figure 6 – Lan Samantha Chang on the importance of retaining early narratives of becoming a writer	232
Figure 7 – “Can You Guess Who Said These Common Quotations?”	244

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 – Main Differences between <i>Exercises in Style</i> and <i>The Art of Dramatic Writing</i>	102
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CHAPTER ONE: A 21ST-CENTURY LOOK AT LORE

The problem with icons is that they are static, unable, from their brittle pedestals, to respond to sea changes that surround them, to evolve and remain relevant to the society in which they were anointed.

--Stephanie Vanderslice

A further exploration is in order, an exploration of institutional and historical factors that have both helped to create and to sustain the lore of creative writing.

--Tim Mayers

In *The Making of Knowledge in Composition: Portrait of an Emerging Field* (1987), Stephen North defines lore as the “accumulat[ion] of traditions, practices, and beliefs” that influence “how writing is done, learned and taught,” and, in the context of teaching writing, is a kind of “experienced-based framework” that is “driven...by a pragmatic logic” (North, *The Making of Knowledge*, 22, 23). Practitioners continue to remake lore, repeatedly, in a never-ending House of Lore, “in a way that suits their needs in a particular time and place” (25). Throughout these chapters, I will make the argument that teaching strategies dependent on lore still possess great potential if seen through contemporary theoretical lenses (Ritter and Vanderslice, “Creative Writing and the Persistence of Lore” xiv). Today, in 2017, lore still retains its original definition, and is commonly considered in rhetoric and composition to be a set of “ideas and assumptions that are grounded in local experience,” infrequently “informed by research,” not “generalizable or transmutable” and “passed along informally...from one faculty member to the next” (Hesse, “We Know What Works”). The “practitioner” in the field (as opposed to the historian or the philosopher), both then and now, uses lore as the go-to, default model of knowledge-making. In order for composition studies to gain credibility and achieve a

higher status within the academy, it was necessary to move past the use of practitioner logic as the main form of reasoning. There were a variety of methods and methodologies that composition was already engaging with, and the field needed to branch out from its reliance on conventional wisdom alone and pursue a research program akin to other departments.

Creative writing and first-year rhetoric and composition pedagogy have both confronted the overuse of practitioner logic and experiential-based knowledge, referred to in both fields as “lore.” Each field has sought to push back against pedagogical tendencies that rely only on conventional wisdom as evidence of best practices (i.e., the workshop model for creative writing, the dissemination of classroom activities without theoretical grounding within composition and rhetoric). The emerging field of creative writing studies has similarly sought to push back against its own lore, frequently in its resistance to the “Bobby Knight school” of aggressive creative writing workshops that came with the democratization of creative writing within American academia in the latter half of the 20th Century (Vanderslice, “Once More to the Workshop”). In particular, each field has sought to push back against scholarship that relies on unsystematic ideas about how to best teach writing.

Even given the trend toward writing pedagogies informed by ideas and interpretive positions that go far beyond the personal or the anecdotal, there seems to be something inextricable about lore’s continued power within actual college writing pedagogical practice. Lore’s original, though now obsolete, meaning was one and the same with instruction itself: “The act of teaching” (“lore, n.1”). Lore also, from the tenth to nineteenth centuries, referred to the knowledge conveyed by the teaching act: “that which is taught,” “that which is learned,” and “a body of knowledge” (“lore, n.2a, 5a, 5b”). In the mid-nineteenth century, *Oxford English Dictionary* editors noted that lore began to take on its present-day chief meaning: “the body of

traditional facts, anecdotes, or beliefs relating to some particular subject,” which often take on a noun, like “plant lore” or “bird lore” or “baseball lore.” Douglas Hesse similarly notes that “lore is a form of knowledge in every field,” and we can easily see how students are positioned in any field or subject to acquire lore from their teachers, mentors, peers, and from their own activities within that domain (Hesse, “We Know What Works”). We can see how lore can quickly take on slippery definitions that slide from expressivism, to unsystematic pedagogical ideas, to the use of anecdotes in teaching practice. Lore is not singular, as we will see in this attempt to define a methodology for something inherently unsystematic. However, much like Hayden White saw narrative inherent to all acts of historical interpretation, some degree of lore, in this context, is inherent to all pedagogical practice and research about effective teaching.

In the early nineties, and again within the past decade, many scholars in composition studies “attempted to rehabilitate lore (the personal-narrative-based method) as a credible way to make knowledge,” and at present, lore and its associated philosophies of invention are still undergoing numerous reconsiderations as objects of study (Fulkerson, “The Epistemic Paradoxes of ‘Lore’” 53).¹ Lore continues to be topical in part due to its well-outlined potency: North originally depicted the practitioner-based model as “very rich and powerful,” seeing as it was the go-to teaching and research method for 1980s compositionists, and perhaps still is currently (North, *The Making of Knowledge* 27). North’s portrayal of lore was not dismissive, but rather was one that elevated practitioner logic to a kind of inquiry that could exist alongside history, philosophy, and sociology. North represented lore as an unfinished house built with new and old materials, attending to its fundamentally historical valences. By having its own specific “past and

¹ See Massey and Gephardt’s 2011 edited collection, *Changing of Knowledge in Composition: Contemporary Perspectives* as one such example.

present,” North gave “lore and practitioners a chance for a legitimate scholarly future, on par with other disciplines” (Butler et al.).

North’s text has served as an emerging map for the territories of writing studies that have since been extensively filled in, at the same time that they have fragmented considerably (Massey 305). Perhaps, in retrospect, it is unlikely that a “debut book by an untenured Writing Center Director” that served as a fairly incomplete map of the field, would stir such debate and precipitate disciplinary discussions for years to come, but it is obvious to scholars working today that rhetoric and composition has evolved to include an even broader range of methods and methodologies, and that the intervening thirty years have “further blur[red] already indefinite boundaries” (North, “Notes on the Origins Of” 11, Butler et al.).² The intersections of creative writing pedagogy and rhetoric and composition, the subject of this dissertation, is one such area of disciplinary cross-pollination, advocated by Douglas Hesse in the September 2010 *College Composition and Communication* article, “The Place of Creative Writing in Composition Studies.” The map itself of rhetoric and composition today might appear less as a map and more as an interactive work of art—a truer portrait—with multiple transparencies stacked atop one another. Creative writing appears to be moving along its own parallel timeline of slowly excising practitioner logic from its criticism, despite its continued use and value in the classroom.

Critical affordances and cultural developments within the last thirty years—Actor-network theory, remix culture, new media literacies, and the “DIY” and craft movements, to name only a few—have fundamentally changed how students and teachers interact with lore within college writing. Given that, major theorists within rhetoric and composition, such as Paul Butler (“Remixing the House of Lore: Theory, Practice, and the New Graduate Scholar”) and

² Lynn Bloom used North’s text as a graduate student and noted the lack of attention to “rhetoric, reading, style, theory, collaborative writing, writing in the disciplines, and issues of literacy, class and ethnicity” (Massey and Gephardt 6).

Victor Villanueva (“Rhetoric, Racism, and the Remaking of Knowledge-Making in Composition”), have entered the conversation on lore’s evolving epistemology.

Further, many in creative writing have started to theorize on the importance of moving beyond the traditional writing workshop format, and to challenge the conventional wisdom that craft is the only teachable aspect of creative writing. Ron McFarland notes in his 1993 *College English* article, “An Apologia for Creative Writing,” that of all the things it takes to be a writer, such as drive, talent, etc., craft is the only one that can be taught. While this is generally the agreed upon principle in creative writing pedagogy, there is a critical mass of discussion about early memory and the role of unconscious processes—non-craft issues—in creative writing lore. For example, Ron Carlson describes in *Ron Carlson Writes a Story* his particular conversion narrative from being craft-obsessed to becoming process-oriented. Carlson describes his twenty-five years of teaching experience, in which he taught creative writing at the high school and college level and even contributed to one of the earliest scholarly collections of creative writing pedagogy, *Creative Writing in America*. After years of teaching, Carlson changed his mind. He found that most students attended to sentence-level issues and the issues of point of view, persona, pacing, and dialogue on their own, and that what students really needed was an encouragement to feel confident in their process.

Compositionists and scholars of writing studies working in creative writing pedagogy need to change our epistemological stance toward lore in order to get up to date with the new directions that rhetoric and composition has taken. This dissertation develops around a series of related arguments about creative writing studies changing its epistemological stance toward lore in order to get up to date with these new directions: about the role lore played in the disciplinary histories of both composition and creative writing. It looks at the longstanding yet diminishing

dependence on lore in creative writing pedagogy, the nature of lore as a historical entity, the distributed network created from tidbits of author testimony that helps students form social bonds, and how contemporary students are situated through new media to be *bricoleurs*—or *bricolores*—mixing and matching from the array of conventional wisdom on how writing is “done, learned, and taught.”

If scholars working at the intersection of creative writing and first-year composition are truly to follow Douglas Hesse’s 2010 call in “The Place of Creative Writing in Composition Studies” to “examine writerly activities and processes,” then our investigations should be as inclusive as possible (43). We should aim to not only understand how powerful myths about writing influence student writing processes but also look into where that mythography comes from, how it continues to be deployed through lore, and “embod[ied]” in “ritual, writing, and talk” (North, *The Making of Knowledge* 29).

So, what exactly do these fragments look like? The array is almost overwhelming. Because lore remains so dominant within creative writing pedagogy, it might be advantageous to start with creative writing classrooms, and specifically fiction writing classrooms, which emphasize lore in the writings, recorded speeches, interviews, letters or other testimony given by canonical authors. In what Stephen North has called the unfinished House of Lore, we discover, among other things, adages and fragments of writerly advice that often have an unclear origin: write 500 words per day, write two hours each day, or don’t take days off; type out sentences or verses of literary greats in order to see them from the inside; recapture a childlike state of seeing; pretend you’re explaining _____ to a visitor from a distant planet who has never seen or heard of it before; you can create any world you want, as long as your rules are consistent; and of course there is the ubiquitous “show, don’t tell.” Many of these cross over into composition

classrooms, and composition retains its own present-day lore of assignments and lessons: the go-to ethos/pathos/logos in-class rhetorical analysis of a TV ad; the recursive mentioning of the idea that “writing is a recursive process;” the discussion of rough drafts vs. first drafts and the iconic essay “Shitty First Drafts;” the topic of the “Five Paragraph Essay” and learning to forget everything you learned in high school; the handling of persistent questions about whether to use a personal vs. impersonal, formal or informal writing style; the advice to students that they read their papers aloud to catch typos; and the marginal comment to “eliminate ‘to be’ verbs” or “avoid passive voice.”

Lore-based writing pedagogies can give off an impression of softness, of lacking in intellectual rigor; they can signal an isolated discipline guilty of mindless traditionalism or, at the very least, one that refuses to actively keep its teaching practices in check. A dependence on lore-based pedagogies in creative writing of late has opened the door for various indictments, the most pointed of which come from practitioners working in the emerging field of creative writing studies. The charges include a critique of lore’s properties of mystification, a critique of teachers who often reinforce a sense of writing’s “unteachability,” as well as a critique of lore that characterizes creative writing as ultimately a “romantic process that exists outside the boundaries of the classroom” (Ritter and Vanderslice, “Creative Writing and the Persistence of Lore” xvi).

While lore-based pedagogy in creative writing has isolated the field from more research-based disciplines, it is potentially hazardous to be too hasty in looking for ways to dismiss lore from our pedagogical frameworks. For instance, we might encounter the transmission of practical “advice” or literary tidbits and/or experience-based anecdotes in response to student ideas or to student work. Over the course of a semester, the students and the instructor often informally craft from these encounters a unique web of references. As an undergraduate, my

creative writing professor used to emphasize the way stories often benefit from unexpected, or even whimsical turns of plot. This professor described such a turn from an obscure Victorian novel he had read in graduate school, and repeatedly came back to this text in future workshops, using this author's work as shorthand for a reminder about striving for dynamic pacing and plotting.

Another major source for these classroom conversations is the canon of creative writing craft books, which exists within a larger continuum of texts that I will refer to here as “the archive of writers on writing.” This group of texts exerts considerable influence over the teaching of creative writing, and in many ways, is the engine of the field's sociality. The little tidbits, or fragments that comprise the lore can often be the discussion starters or discussion extenders that serve to cement affective bonds within the creative writing classroom. This capacious archive serves as a kind of universal source text or dataset for what becomes creative writing lore, and embodies a diverse spread in terms of genre, intended function, and consideration of audience. Most are popular texts, intended for aspiring or established writers, or those with an interest in language, literature, cultural studies, literary culture, and/or literary history. In the classroom, all of this information is up for grabs and units of lore are continuously borrowed and re-borrowed and sometimes repurposed by students and teachers to fit various exigencies: structuring a workshop, leading a discussion, offering feedback, revising a poem. This seemingly haphazard method of instruction has proven to be steadily persistent, even as writing theorists continue to note both its drawbacks and the field's overdependence on, what Tim Meyers has termed, “institutional-conventional wisdom.”

But why?

To address this question, I believe we must delve deeper into the nature of lore, and consider how the anecdotes, myths, conventional wisdom, and bits of advice present in all writing classrooms possess a value to practitioners beyond obvious or superficial writing advice. In fact, we can see lore working in complex ways within the context of the writing process. We can see aspects of the complexity in lore, connected to the writing process. The very nature of “process” (as a series of actions, both conscious and unconscious) makes it impossible to discuss an act of composing with complete thoroughness; there are bound to be omissions and elisions as writers reconstruct narratives of how texts come into being. As Paul Prior discusses in his analysis of writing as a practice: “A text does not fully or unambiguously display its history—even the most insightful of interpretation and analyses are only likely to recover some elements of its fuller history....” (Prior 171). Likewise, Graeme Harper points out that the “evidence trail of writerly action” does not rely solely on the finished work (Harper, “Creative Writing in the Age of Synapses” 14). And yet, through lore, we may be able to gather clues. In other words, lore can point toward a history of writing processes and thoughts—and a history of creative writing instruction—and say, “I can’t show you the whole process of writing or teaching, but I can show you some recoverable bits.” Lore’s productive value might be elucidated if we can refocus our attention on relational and history-specific contexts that shape its new encounters—as well as the role of those who come in contact with fragments of processes and pedagogies and recombine/remake/remix them to meet new needs. Specifically, we should be looking at the narratives of writers discussing writing in order to figure out how this information travels and is disseminated from person to person.

Narratives of How Texts Come into Being

Hesse rightly notes that studying the archive of writers on writing is a part of a larger and longer tradition of the work of the “interpretive humanities” and “the tradition of artists speaking about artistry.” Hesse notes how creative writing has been “largely disinterested in (and occasionally contemptuous of) systematic research on writing and writers, especially empirical studies, trusting instead authors’ own accounts, in memoir, essay, or interview” (Hesse, “The Place of Creative Writing” 32). Similarly, but within the context of rhetoric and composition, Kelly Pender has argued there has not been enough research into the intricacies of invention (Massey and Gephardt 7). Both compositionists and creative writing studies theorists need to do more to make an intervention and begin systematic research on lore. On one hand, the move to perform systematic research on something so outwardly unsystematic as lore may be problematic. On the other hand, though, “lore” and “systematic research” come to us with particular residues of meaning, prior to engagement with their actual content. After all, even “systematic research” has lore-based, anecdotal, testimonial elements, and much lore about what works in writing or the teaching of writing has been derived from systematic research. Through the attempted development of a research methodology for lore, we might better see how narrative functions within pedagogical and social systems.

My immediate intervention involves contemplating the critical nature of lore in understanding the disciplinary histories of both rhetoric and composition and creative writing, viewing lore itself as a form of history, and using actor-network theory-inspired tracing in order to better understand how students are positioned in order to accept or reject institutional-conventional wisdom. Institutional and disciplinary structures reinforce lore, and surely much lore is counterfeit and/or outdated at best, hegemonic and hateful at its worst. Further, I propose

that lore's distribution channels have been fundamentally and irrevocably altered. Following Adam Koehler's "Digitizing Craft: Creative Writing Studies and New Media," both composition and creative writing studies must better theorize how "digital spaces alter the act of composing 'creatively' and help teachers, writers, and scholars of creative writing and composition better theorize our current methods and practices" (380). Students and teachers are interacting on-demand with high capacities of conventional wisdom about writing both within and beyond the classroom, all the while making affective investments with people and ideas, and repurposing writing advice for new ends. These new interconnected webs then become new "interpretive lens[es] to filter new experiences" ("Story as the Landscape of Knowing").

We can comfortably move past much of the prior anxiety about lore's contradictory nature in order to reach a conceptual framework where we see those tidbits as existing alongside objects, materials, and various forms of affective and relational ties.³ Academic conversation abounds that promotes embracing ambiguity and contradiction, and exploring "both/and" options in order to transcend "either/or" dichotomous thinking. The 2014 NCTE Convention theme, "Story as the Landscape of Knowing," called for proposals that explored the dimensions of stories as sites of pedagogical innovation: "Each story carries a multiplicity of meanings that capture the richness and nuances of life and accommodate the ambiguity and complexity of experience." Lore, then, has an inextricable connection not only to subjects, learning, and teaching, but also to people, communities, and shared experiences.

There is also potential value in the contradictions or "double binds" that exist in interdisciplinary pedagogies, those that Stanley Fish famously referred to as "pedagogies of antiknowledge" (Fish, "Being Interdisciplinary" 18). Fish's claim that pedagogies that "call into

³ See Fulkerson's continued critique of lore-based knowledge as existing with an epistemic paradox ("Beyond North: Modernist Views of the Epistemic Paradox").

question the foundations of all disciplines” are “pedagog[ies] of antiknowledge” seems to not stand the test of time, especially when academic discourse has tended within the last decade to look at the ways people are marginalized from a multidimensional point of view. As Rebecca S. Nowacek argues in 2009:

Both students and instructors I argue, must negotiate double binds placed upon them when various disciplines conflict. Those double binds can limit and constrain the work of individuals, but if made an object of reflection, the double bind can also facilitate higher-order thinking about disciplines and the role of writing within them. (Nowacek 494)

The move to resist lore—and bind lore with “process theory” in composition—was a reactive yet necessary move in order to build prestige across the academy. Fundamentally, not enough voices in creative writing and rhetoric and composition have read lore through contemporary theoretical lenses. This dissertation serves as one specific historical and theoretical intervention. Much lore derives from writers’ testimony about the act of writing. This form of lore is fundamentally intellectual work that seeks to narrativize the lived experience and micro-level processes inherent in making. Further, lore has irrevocably shaped the disciplinary histories of creative writing and composition, and while many writing studies theorists would rather discard author testimony, I advocate going through the dustbin of the past in order to further interrogate lore as a form of history.

Lore as Historically-Charged Agent

The fields of composition and creative writing can develop a closer understanding of each other by reassessing what we mean when we talk about *lore*. Lore in composition and creative writing represents a particular kind of knowledge that stems from the act of writing itself and takes a particular form when it is taught/communicated to an audience. In this sense, we may come to

understand lore both as a historical entity (existing in time) and as a rhetorical entity, meant for primary and secondary audiences. Again, drawing from North's definition of lore from his foundational 1987 book, *The Making of Knowledge in Composition*, we can view lore as a site of history, which is embodied in its "accumulat[ion] of traditions, practices, and beliefs...that influence how writing is done, learned and taught" (North, *The Making of Knowledge* 23). And yet this is in no way a complete history. Because a majority of traditions, practices, and beliefs come through the performance of writing itself—the acts of typing or writing by hand—lore is not a full description, but a capturing of what remains from the largely unrecoverable history of writing production. In other words, despite the thorough critical work undertaken by scholars, the process of *how* a text comes into being is fundamentally elusive. Textual and contextual criticism may construct narratives to help us imagine this process; and author autobiographies, interviews, and contemporary "craft talks" might help us imagine somewhat further, especially when combined with literary criticism; but still, the accessible history of the creative act remains fragmented and largely incomplete. A helpful visual might be something akin to Hemingway's iceberg in which lore is the tip above the surface of the water, and the unrecoverable material of a work's production is below (see Fig. 1). The mysterious and invisible history beneath the surface is akin to a kind of unconscious or unknown space. It points toward the ineffable. We know that this history is there; it must be because the creative texts themselves exist. But lore is a vital and potential access point to that history. Because of its very condition, lore is bound to be resting above a region known for its exoticism, its hugeness, its formlessness, and its randomness.⁴ Ultimately, what so many scholars (both in composition and in creative writing) fail to understand is that lore stands in for an infinite number of ephemeral writing processes and

⁴ North notes that *The House of Lore* is "seemingly random, yet all connected" (North 27).

performance modes. This material is valuable and mysterious, and valuable in its mysteriousness. To put this new definition of lore succinctly: *Lore captures the recoverable fragments of a mostly unrecoverable history of writing production.*

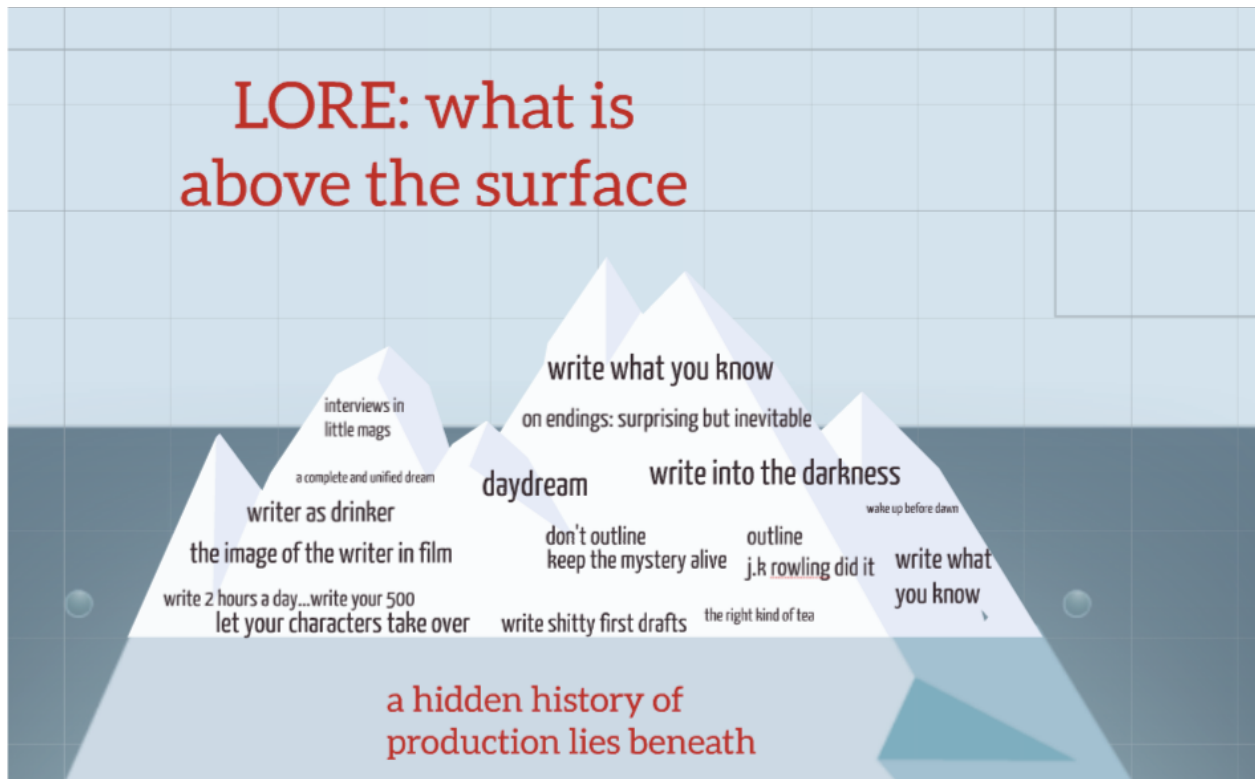


Figure 1 – Lore as iceberg

In this study, I do not wish to argue that viewing lore as “history” does not present large-scale issues. Any rehabilitation or reconsideration of lore must, ethically, address the inherent problem in “doing things as they’ve always been done.” For instance, the archetype of the “famous writer” as the “famous male writer” endures as a classroom stereotype. Conventional wisdom can give way, rather quickly, to cliché, and then to control. Consider the starving artist

or Barthes's "writer on holiday" and the mythic image of the hardworking writer who cannot even take time off because a writer is always working. This gives way to mystification of writing processes, as well as playing into anxieties about writing that are still a subject of conversation in many classrooms. Further, institutions can easily play a part in this mindless reinforcement of lore, where past practices are continually "naturalized by positioning creative writing"—and one might infer, composition—"in relation to both English studies and the academy at large" (Mayers, *(Re)Writing Craft* 14). It might not be difficult to see, given this conception of lore, how the call to resist mindless repetition of lore became something of a rallying cry for an emerging field.

Along the same lines, there have been many formidable arguments that describe lore as an unreliable or uncertain access point to knowledge. Richard Fulkerson is one of the chief skeptics of lore, noting that lore elides assessment because "any composition teacher" can make a claim about "what works or has worked" because nothing gets ruled out. It is impossible, Fulkerson argues, to ever get around the epistemic paradox of lore, to ever know "what works" or even if we can know "what works," and if we could, whether it would *count* as knowledge (Fulkerson, "The Epistemic Paradoxes of 'Lore'"). Similarly, Hesse expresses doubts about lore's capacity for truth. Hesse responded in early 2017 to a piece by Joseph Teller that used first-person experience to question, "Are We Teaching Composition All Wrong?" by writing a response entitled, "We Know What Works in Teaching Composition." Within his response, Hesse argues that "Teller's essay participates in the tradition of lore" and does not pass muster for any truth value beyond local experience (Hesse, "Are We Teaching"). The various research methodologies used in contemporary rhetoric and composition have certainly advanced our understandings of what composition is, how it works, and how it might best be taught.

North, in what was no less than a seismic shift for the field, emphasized how composition was in the process of moving past its reliance on lore in order to develop as a field of inquiry with its own research methods and deployment of critical methodologies, independent of literary studies traditions. The case against the mindless use of lore is a good one, but we still haven't resolved the question of how to use critical apparatus to view lore. It still plays a massive role in the teaching and scholarship of compositionists and creative writing instructors, and we actually may have the methods and methodologies to get a better handle on how it works, and even account for its apparent epistemic paradox. Pender argues, in part referring to the scholarship of Janice Lauer, that "after the 1980s, compositionists weren't exactly lining up to answer the question, *what is invention?*" (Pender 66). North's book, according to Pender, created "the perception of an impasse" into "explicit research on invention" because of rhetorical invention's links to a research methodology based on lore (67). The vast majority of theoretical perspectives on rhetoric and composition have moved past lore-based scholarship. Hesse, in his most recent defense of the field, seems to be advocating for his own conventional wisdom—that the field knows what it is doing—when it counters essays like Teller's, which "participate in the tradition of lore." However, with the transition toward craft and making in the new millennium, perhaps it's time to give lore another reconsideration.

In general, there have been two principal kinds of responses to lore's wide range and its pervasiveness both inside and outside the academy: either a wholesale and uncritical acceptance or an overly comfortable rejection of lore. The first mode—acceptance—we find alive and well in the halls of creative writing departments: not only in the attitude of their instructors, but in their deep institutional structures. In the field of creative writing, for instance, teachers are often hired by institutions based on the quality of their published fiction, nonfiction, or poetry works.

There is very little emphasis on teacher training or pedagogical professional development. The real-life result is that most creative writing instructors operate within the classroom by drawing upon their own reading, writing, classroom experiences, and network of authors to invite to campus, as well as whatever archive of writing advice they have happened to come into contact with over the course of their own training. In the vast majority of cases, an instructor will come up against very little counterpoint and/or theoretical challenges to however he or she has decided to run his or her workshop. Though there are some exceptions, most MFA programs do not run pedagogy workshops specifically designed to teach undergraduate creative writing, with the result that there is little encouragement of critical perspectives within the field, even for beginning instructors. Mayers, who sees certain problems with an overly accepting attitude toward lore, describes lore operating within creative writing departments as such:

[Institutional-conventional wisdom] denotes a system of belief that often appears to some creative writers to be a form of “natural” or “commonsense” knowledge. Thus, it is “conventional wisdom,” believed by many to be beyond dispute. But it is also “institutional” in the sense that it has become embedded within institutional structures and therefore has helped to form the kind of academic enterprise creative writing is.

((Re)Writing Craft 13)

Lore, in other words, has its own history and reasons for being advanced and favored; much in the way that “official” historical records that aim for objective standards of truth are constructed, and possess an authoritative content inherent in their form as “official.” This marks a sharp contrast to the way that composition seeks out published research that uses methods and methodologies that move beyond lore. Mayers illustrates the cycle by which lore—within creative writing departments (i.e., this is how we workshop, this is how we ask students to

distribute their work, this is how we ask students to engage with new media)—is institutionally re-inscribed without such checks and balances.

On another level, seen from that remove, lore represents a “body of knowledge very much like those accumulated among practitioners of other arts—art here being broadly conceived—like painting or parenting” that may not have a direct pedagogical function but serves as the core conceptual framework (North, *The Making of Knowledge* 23). This “reflective, pedagogical talk” is almost akin to “recipe swapping,” where one passing recommendation of one instance of perceived classroom success is enough to signal pedagogical success. While the wholesale movement away from lore in the late 1980s was understandable, given the academic climate, it still remains troubling. For instance, “craft criticism,” as Mayers has explored, is a genre of critique that rose in popularity with the rise of MFA degrees, especially in the 1990s, in which creative writing pedagogues discuss issues of process, genre, authorship, and institutionality. Mayers offers a preliminary definition of craft criticism as follows: “in craft criticism, we find a genre of writing about writing that refers to critical prose written by self- or institutionally identified ‘creative writers’ . . . [and] a concern with textual production takes precedence over any concern with textual interpretation” (*(Re)Writing Craft* 34). Mayers adds that “often, though not always, craft criticism has a pedagogical element” (34). These pieces of writing often have the intellectual heft to question the nature of how we talk about writerly activities and processes, and might too easily be put into this same category of lore even though technically they are questioning rather than re-articulating a set of traditions, practices, or beliefs based on how writing is learned and taught. This kind of work is often read on popular websites (Identity Theory), literary magazines (“The Writer’s Life” in *American Poetry Review*; *Kenyon Review*, etc.), and creative writing pedagogy focused magazines or newsletters (*The Writer’s*

Chronicle). Since craft criticism is an officially sanctioned form of scholarship—and will often help with promotion and tenure within academic creative writing—it suggests that grappling with lore already has some theoretical ground to stand on.

Additionally, the resistance to even the examination of lore in composition is a fairly troubling state of things, considering that the dissemination of lore seems to be a natural byproduct of writing pedagogies. Shortly after the publication of *The Making of Knowledge in Composition*, Patricia Harkin explored lore's "nondisciplinary" nature in "The Postdisciplinary Politics of Lore" (1991). Considering lore's "limits and possibilities as a form of inquiry in composition," Harkin argues that lore is, "capable, at least in some circumstances, of usefully addressing pedagogical problems for which the traditional limits of disciplinary inquiry would be too constraining" (Harkin qtd. in Mayers, "Figuring the Future" 2). Though we work at the margins of both composition studies and creative writing, creative writing studies scholars believe that lore is "well worth examining." Writing in 2007, Mayers wonders if perhaps we are at a "similar moment in the development of creative writing" (Harkin). Nearly a decade later, the role of conventional wisdom in composition and creative writing pedagogies is still greatly under-explored.

Author testimonies have a limitation inherent to their form: that testimony is singular and prone to contradiction. Why not celebrate this complication, when the large part of academic thought (so-called "critical thinking") is acknowledging complications and adding further nuanced ways of considering individual acts. As Andrew Pickering uncovers in his analysis of scientific experiments, most creative acts and discoveries come about through manifestations of a surprisingly large set of prior actions and thoughts. In this "mangle of practice," as he calls it, prior traditions, acts, and beliefs are tested, embraced, or rejected through the machine of

creation and experiment. I believe we can use the concept of “the mangle of practice,” derived in part from actor-network theory, in describing how creative works come into existence. This approach can help account for the individual instances, as in North’s original description of lore as a form of knowledge-making: “The communal lore offers options, resources, and perhaps some directional pressure; but the individual, finally, decides what to do and whether (or how) it has worked—decides, in short, what counts as knowledge” (North, *The Making of Knowledge* 28). Here practitioners have a heightened degree of agency,⁵ which coincides with the recent prosumer turn in creative literacy.⁶ Meanwhile, lore gives us an account of the composing process—this complicated mangle—and also provides a component in future composing practices for others. Or as Patricia Harkin pointed out in the context of composition research, lore tells us “what practitioners do” instead of offering “abstract accounts” of process (Harkin 125).

There is no experience-less classroom, just as there is no experience-less instructor, or scholar, or student. While practitioner-based scholarship might be cast off by many composition researchers—be it 1987 or 2017—as not “scientific[ally]” rigorous and as a “muddled combination of half-truths, myths, and superstitions,” we can see that lore when read intertextually or through some of the critical apparatus meets present-day requirements for truth value and social scientific rigor, and represents the reflections and experiences of writers with the rhetorical purpose of describing their practices to an audience, which automatically takes on an official yet informal pedagogical function (North, *The Making of Knowledge* 23). While the mechanism by which lore was endlessly repeated and propagated was surely in need of fixing,

⁵ North here refers to practitioners as “relatively free agents.”

⁶ See Steve Healey’s “Beyond the Literary: Why Creative Literacy Matters” in Donnelly and Harper’s *Key Issues in Creative Writing*, as well as Healey’s “Creative Literacy Pedagogy” in Hunley and Peary’s *Creative Writing Pedagogies for the Twenty-first Century*.

the notion that all of the micro-level processes of all of the elements of the “mangle of practice”—knowledge about writing derived from writers’ recollections of the process—would be lost to the same bin as lazy pedagogues assigning freewriting without comprehensive thought is similarly frightening. Not only was the baby thrown out with the proverbial bathwater, but pedagogy derived from the experiences—the activities and process of composing—of literary writers was once again pushed to the margins, this time for creative writing.

The mythologies that inevitably stem from writer accounts and the “cyclical” use of lore in the classroom are indeed complex, but they are still, I would argue, analyzable, particularly in their nature as a “*collective history*” (“Creative Writing and the Persistence of Lore” xvi, emphasis mine). Each unit of lore carries a historical trace, and in its deployment, leaves a historical trace. As Ritter and Vanderslice have said: “Behind our collective pedagogies as teachers of creative writing lies a collective history of learning fueled by lore” (xvi). And, “to ignore this history and its deceptively simple construction does a great disservice to the field” (xvi). Instructors are constantly doing the work of historical writing when we categorize structures and processes of the past into our own pedagogical narratives. For instance, imagine a college student attending a reading where a poet instructs the audience to “write into the dark,” and twenty years later, this same student, now an assistant professor, makes the same claim in a graduate poetry workshop. If we take a step back and consider the discursive nature of lore, perhaps we can learn more about how individual writers are actually interacting with some amount of process-based knowledge that precedes them.

Lore, in this understanding, does not exist in a vacuum, but functions as both a historical entity (existing in time) and as a rhetorical entity, meant for both primary audiences and in many cases secondary and tertiary audiences. It comes to us slantwise: through a capacious archive of

beliefs and customs that stems from our collective activities and processes of writing, and is passed from generation to generation through spoken, written, audiovisual transmission, and even interactions with materials: visual art, new media objects, writing tools, writing spaces, and even Hesse's mention of the best kind of tea for writers to drink (Hesse, "The Place of Creative Writing" 33). Our first instinct may be to laugh or shrug shoulders at this sort of advice, but is that really fair? For instance, what have cognitivists said about caffeine, creativity and the flow state? How does the scene of writing (in a café, at home, at the library, in writers' spaces or writing colonies, on the subway, in a car, on an airplane) affect output? How does the ritual of drinking tea compare to other writerly rituals? These are the sorts of mundane, yet potentially eye-opening questions that our field has yet to research. In the haste of resisting the more counterfeit-seeming or cliché-sounding parts of writing's powerful mythography, there's the very real possibility that we will discard time-tested strategies that work for many students.

These tidbits of writing mythology come to new audiences circuitously, often through indirect channels and a large dispersed network of agents—via "the mangle"—but nonetheless are traceable. Seen through this lens, I would like to engage with the idea of lore as a form of historical discourse: specifically, the history of how we talk about how texts come into existence. In this framework, each unit of lore is not necessarily prescriptive or proscriptive in and of itself, but rather represents a *topos* within a larger, more expansive, socially contingent, and potentially chaotic system of knowledge-making. Particular units of lore, then, serve as signposts toward even deeper and more complicated histories of both teaching and composing in the literary arts. Lore is unofficial, unvetted, fairly chaotic, and even teetering on irrationality, yet still it remains significant in its accumulation of past practices, traditions, and beliefs regarding writing processes.

The history of any act of compositional creation is always, only partially recoverable. We can assume that we never really get it exactly right when we describe and narrativize how a work came into creation. They are all attempts where oversimplification misses the nuances of construction. This narratological consideration reminds us of the problem that many philosophers of history and historiographers have explored. Historical writing can never truly get the ineffable aspects of lived experience, but it can attempt to record an account of causation of how and why certain events occurred as they did. Similarly, “to write a history of [a work of] art” is to fundamentally “diminish the force of . . . artistic events” (Deleuze and Guattari qtd. in Bell and Colebrook 4).

Geffrey Sirc notes that “by dumbing down the complicated process of composition to a scrupulously teachable method,” we have “reduc[ed] the roles of chance and the imagination in the production of textual knowledge” (“Resisting Entropy” 512). If lore—and in particular the archive of writers on writing—points us toward a unique interaction with a fluid collection of composition activities and processes, then self-reports should become far more important to writing researchers than they presently are.

These self reports, in turn, become their own points of emphasis. For example, there is Hemingway’s decree that “writers write,” Woolf’s call for “A Room of One’s Own,” Forster’s “only connect,” Lamott’s “bird by bird,” and that type of iconic guidance. On beginnings, start them *in medias res*. When coming to the final scene of a story, aim for surprising but inevitable endings. On the feel of a story, John Gardner advises writers to aim for an uninterrupted fictional dream. Even discussions of how to live life in a “literary” way become part of the lore: whether to get married, whether to have children, how to take notes surreptitiously at parties, and should one pursue non-literary interests in a serious fashion (like cooking or traveling or music-making).

Here drugs and alcohol often come into the mix—the mythic images of the writer as drinker (or continually inebriated) both finds its backers and its detractors in lore. Emphasis on the writer as worker is a pretty universal form of lore (see *The Paris Review Interviews* and “Writers at Work” series). Some writers suggest outlining, others suggest letting plot follow from character, and “letting your characters take over.” Some writers argue for writing complete drafts before going back and playing with sentences; other writers swear by meticulously crafted prose even in early drafts. And often, a third position takes over: that there are two ways of doing things, and you have to do what works for you. This choose-your-poison approach is also part of the lore.

As observed here, many units of lore can be contradictory, with camps of writers holding antithetical positions. This makes some theorists very uncomfortable, and the obvious question emerges: if these units are fragmented, contradictory, and conditional, then why does lore have any place in pedagogy, and even dominate the prevailing creative writing pedagogy? Is this not the pedagogical equivalent and throwing darts at a dartboard? To address these concerns, we must return to the idea of lore as the remnants of a mostly un-recoverable history: specifically, the history of how texts come into existence.

Lore serves the essential function of reminding student writers that there is a subterranean structure that exists below the surface of textual production. Its presence consistently reminds us of the complicated processes that engender final products. The very nature of “process” (as a series of actions, both conscious and unconscious) makes it impossible to discuss, be it in composition, in creative writing, or in any setting, with complete thoroughness; there are bound to be omissions and elisions in reconstructing narratives of how texts come into being. When looking at the formal definition of “recovery,” in the larger context of historical recovery, the third of three basic meanings catches our attention. Recovery, in that alternate sense, is “the act

of obtaining usable substances from unusable sources.” I’d like to alter the definition just slightly, while using “recovery” in the context of lore. Here, recovery is the act of obtaining usable substances from *unknowable* rather than *unusable* sources.

I am aware of the unorthodox, on some level, connection between lore and history or historiography: lore is not often considered a trustworthy historical site. As a space of shared memory, lore often gets attacked, and its connections to truth are seen as tainted, irrelevant, misguided, and tinged with metanarratives. In the post-Lyotard age, that kind of mistrust diffuses out not only onto the form that lore takes (oral or textual transmission) but also to its content. Here, however, is exactly where I wish to afford lore a certain degree of credibility that the imprimatur of “history” provides. As part of this claim, I hope to demonstrate that lore has many positive properties that have not been explored or analyzed fully. I revisit the topic of “lore” nearly thirty years after *The Making of Knowledge in Composition* and attempt to re-describe the generation of lore as a necessary byproduct of all processes of composing. In this way, I hope to bridge composition and creative writing pedagogies and explore the relation of both fields to process in the “new postprocess world” (Hesse, “The Place of Creative Writing” 40). While I agree with Ritter and Vanderslice when they mention creative writing’s position as “a separatist site of teaching and learning, whose practice and traditions are rooted in a powerful lore that sustains such separation, with negative results for both faculty members and students,” I also believe that lore serves as inspiration and guidance for teaching and learning—for both students and instructors—and I wonder if lore needs to be the dividing force that it has become.

While Douglass Hesse has acknowledged the rich tradition within the humanities of “artists speaking about artistry” as “healthy complements to more social scientific traditions,” what many in both composition and creative writing pedagogy should consider is that lore—our

treatment of lore in the classroom, our attitude toward lore as theorists, and its mode of dissemination—represents much more than a wild or inchoate collection of disparate pieces of writing advice and unconnected material (Hesse, “The Place of Creative Writing” 33). Rather, as Ritter and Vanderslice note in their introduction to the first edition of *Can It Really Be Taught?: Resisting Lore in Creative Writing*: “Behind our collective pedagogies as teachers of creative writing lies a collective history of learning fueled by lore; to ignore this history and its deceptively simple construction does a great disservice to the field” (xvii).

In the context of describing the overly romantic “rosy nostalgia” of the traditional mid-century Iowa-style creative writing workshop, Vanderslice identifies the need for creative writing instructors to resist this “iconic tendency.” Fundamentally, lore-centered pedagogies, in the way they have been characterized, make no room for critical pedagogy, no room for the political, little room to intervene in contemporary conversations, and even less room for improvisation, imitation with a difference (which Linda Hutcheon notes in her writing on parody), remix, or deviation from the conventional wisdom. Part of composition’s move away from current-traditional rhetoric was a desire to have the field’s practices catch up, in a sense, to advancements in critical theory/cultural studies. Successfully, by most accounts, this move against practitioner-based knowledge as the sole source of knowledge, helped push the field’s research and practices past contradictory pedagogies that lacked any accountability for why some practice might work, and why another might fail. Oddly enough, pedagogies based solely on the needs of the present moment—and driven by “pragmatic logic”—were seen as inherently reactionary and fairly conformist, traditionalist, and reflecting the same societal biases embedded in earlier practices.

By contrast, the work of creative writing instructors has remained largely dependent on lore-based teaching practices. Creative writing's "privileged marginality" and isolation from larger academic circles has been greatly documented, and often the blame for such sequestration has been placed on a mythos within the field that writers in the academy are writers first, and teachers/academics second (Mayers). In recent years, the emerging field of creative writing studies has endorsed strategies similar to what we have seen in composition: to move away from its substantial dependence on lore and push creative writing pedagogy toward more theory-based practices. This move has been met by new linkages between the two fields. Composition and rhetoric has featured special issues of *College English* 71.3 (January 2009) dedicated to creative writing pedagogy and *College Composition and Communication* 51.1 (September 1999) dedicated to "teaching writing creatively" and featuring a Letters/Interchanges section on "Inquiring into the Nexus of Composition Studies and Creative Writing." However, these links are nascent and pedagogical and theoretical approaches have yet to take hold within the vast majority of creative writing classrooms, making this is a crucial moment for evaluating precisely the lore-steeped modes of teaching practices that many seek to excise, and for continuing the work of refiguring composition.

While interventions successfully helped rhetoric and composition cultivate professional respect and legitimacy both within English departments and across colleges and universities, the issue of what has been *lost* by these necessary revisions is understudied and largely unremarked upon within current composition scholarship. As creative writing continues traveling along this same path for further critical pedagogies and awareness of the variety of teaching practices (as opposed to the conventional workshop), how will it deal with its rich body of traditional facts, anecdotes, or beliefs relating to "the act of writing, being a "creative writer," and learning how to

become a “creative writer?” Further, how might creative writing still work with its “place of memory,” embodied in much creative writing lore, in new ways rather than letting it stand frozen, as an “idealized icon?” (Vanderslice, “Once More to the Workshop” 30).

This project is not alone in its desire to bring history into conversation with lore. Paul Butler describes the work of graduate student Erica Friscaro-Pawlowski:

The compatibility of history and lore—history and practice—seems to be precisely what Erica Friscaro-Pawlowski has in mind. Echoing what many of my fellow teacher-practitioners and I have discovered, Friscaro-Pawlowski suggests that our most often-used tools of the trade—what we might call the foundation or roots of our “lore”—are also the basis of a new kind of history in the field. She writes, “[O]bjects of study—including textbooks, testimonials, curricular designs, and so forth—continue to form the primary locus of the contemporary historical impulse. The field’s historians are more likely to use the material, measureable artifacts of composition as their data, rather than less tangible forms of evidence”...Of course, to formalize lore would require a different sort of history entirely. Instead of examining all of the theoretical texts that have been created, emerging scholars would examine successful practitioners at work.” (Butler et al.)

Here, Butler focuses on this same notion of lore as “a new kind of history in the field,” a theory that I have been proposing in relation to creative writing lore throughout my graduate studies.

The examination of studying micro-level processes of successful practitioners at work harkens back to Elbow’s metaphors of cooking and growing for his taxonomy of practitioners; no matter what the special topic of one’s practice, there is a special knowledge base that comes out of that work. It may or may not be transferable, and as historical evidence it may not be as tangible, but it is there nonetheless, even if in more ephemeral form.

Tidbits Create Social Bonds

Tidbits that make up the body of writing lore are probably familiar to most teachers of creative writing. They are often extracted from the archive of writers on writing or from conversations in the field or advice from teachers or writers, and are deployed with a sensibility of “Try it this way; it works” (Lardner qtd. in Ritter and Vanderslice, “Teaching Lore” 105). In addition to those mentioned in the prior section, we also find: “Find your voice”; “Trust the process”; “Everyone knows that poets are born and not made in school”;⁷ “The one thing you can teach is craft”; “The writer whose piece is being workshopped does not speak, except for perhaps one question after”; “This is a course for literary writing: no vampires, no talking squirrels, no caveman allegories”;⁸ “Write what you know”; “Write into the dark, write what you don’t know yet”; “Learn the rules first and then you can break them.”

Again, most of us draw on teaching lore in our instruction and/or have benefited from its use in our own writing, often without thinking much about the epistemological phenomenon that is taking place. We might be testing their truth value informally, but not to the extent as to excise anecdote or pithy wisdom altogether. But what is really happening when these fragments of writing wisdom become part of real conversations between students and teachers? And how do these units of teaching lore come off when an instructor offers them up in a classroom?

In order to answer these questions, let’s take a closer look at the way that lore truly operates within the context of writing instruction. Composition has in many ways moved past lore in its scholarship, but if we look to the field of creative writing, we can perceive more clearly the role lore takes in shaping student-learning narratives. In creative writing, because all teachers of creative writing are, customarily, practicing writers, they embody Bishop’s notion of

⁷ Mary Oliver (*A Poetry Handbook*) qtd. in Tim Mayers’s (*Re*)*Writing Craft* (15).

⁸ *Dispatches from the Classroom* (121).

the writer-teacher, leading from experience—not just personal experience, but from the collected testimony of authorship that every creative writer has encountered. Typically, this mode of instruction exists in fragments (maxims, activities, prompts, rules for workshop, ideas for generating discussions) that pedagogues, writers, and scholars collect and repurpose for their own ends (immediately invoking both “I” and the “future me”). Indeed, the mechanism by which writing lore travels and spreads is certainly complex, though not without explanation. Lore is a tool for consciousness shaping that is very much in dialogue with practitioners as they approach writing or teaching situations. North explored the way lore often travels through action-oriented conversations. These conversations take place in a variety of settings, where practitioners are “faced over and over again with variations on the problem of what to *do* about teaching writing” (North, *The Making of Knowledge* 22). And Bishop might have put it best when considering how lore travels via the mechanism of stealability. She explains her process of teaching and writing as follows: “I often read expressivist-leaning authors for what is stealable, for their aphoristic qualities, for their metaphors, and the issues they raise, as much as for their linear arguments” (Bishop 16).

To look specifically at one instance of “teaching lore” traveling through time, we might take the example of the writing advice, “kill your darlings,” or your “best” sentences, since they are probably overwritten and mannered, markedly stylistically different from the tone of the rest of the composition. This advice is, without a doubt, repeated daily in English-speaking undergraduate and graduate classrooms throughout the world when workshopping a piece or discussing the topic of efficient writing. I had initially thought that this was either Gertrude Stein’s or Ernest Hemingway’s saying, but web searches led me to believe my assumption was incorrect. I found reputable sites that attributed the bit of lore to Allen Ginsburg, William

Faulkner, and Stephen King. I eventually found a piece on Slate.com that traced it back elsewhere, to Arthur Quiller-Couch, in fact, from a Cambridge lecture from 1914 entitled “On Style,” where he criticized “extraneous ornament” and famously said, “Murder your darlings” (Wickman). Following the general movement of writing lore, once Quiller-Couch delivered the statement, he gave up much or all of his ownership of the advice to the makers of future remixes of lore. The fragment, in other words, has taken on its own life, to the point that even the move to resist lore will not stop its flow altogether, as just because the oft-repeated advice is institutionally re-inscribed at the MFA or undergraduate level, or just because it has attained mythic or iconic status, does not mean that it has not exerted influence over generations of writers, or been deployed in a variety of ways.⁹ By looking at lore as a fundamentally historical body comprised of writers discussing writing, we can begin to see lore existing in a chain of “powerful, complicated discourse” rather than as “small, uncomplicated utterances” (Ritter and Vanderslice, “Creative Writing and the Persistence of Lore” xvii).

In the context of the classroom, then, in a broader sense, we may see how a lore-based pedagogy might hold unique benefits for students. In order to illustrate this, I’d like to describe three central ways in which teaching lore has shaped the writing classroom experience. First of all, we might look at the ways in which lore-based pedagogy fosters an *affective bond* both between teacher-and-student and between student-and-author. Creative writing curricula often boast of the small ratios between teacher and student. But what is actually happening when teachers and students are allowed to interact and socialize in a way that is not universal throughout the academy? I would argue that it is discussions of writing, the writer’s life, and the sharing of personal and also overheard/received anecdotes that make up the bulk of these

⁹ Refer to Michelle Cross’s useful typology, which includes “iconic pedagogy” as one of the popular pedagogies of creative writing.

interactions—and that these interactions provide an intellectual space in which lore takes on a material presence, becoming a *felt and experienced* phenomenon. Lore-based pedagogy in this way takes on a necessarily social dynamic, one which is truly experiential: not only does it operate by trading anecdotes or ideas about writing, but it evokes and participates in a new experience for most college students. In this unique setting, students and teachers see each other as colleagues, and strong bonds of mentorship are sometimes even established. Geoffrey Sirc famously called for composition classes to return to their vibrant intellectual roots, embodied in the model of artistic gatherings as a “salon” or a “happening.” In Sirc’s *English Composition as a Happening*, he emphasizes the strict boundaries in English courses in recent years that favor interpretation over making in composition, and “scores” over “minds and feelings” (McCourt qtd. in *English Composition as a Happening* 8). In keeping with this vision, I believe that people who believe in Sirc’s intervention might want to look at current lore-based practices in creative writing classrooms in order to gain ideas for how this might look.

We may also see, as a second point, the way in which teaching lore has allowed instructors to emphasize and perform issues of generating ideas and revising in ways that are often crucial to students understanding of process. Because of its consistent attention to prompts, exercises, and ways to engage students through the arts of invention, academic creative writing has uniquely positioned itself to help young writers understand more about the mysteries of craft, to help diminish fears/anxieties associated with composing, and to fact-check or debunk myths they’ve been told about writing. Additionally, the full-class workshop, while attacked at times for being outmoded, still serves an essential role in performing the revision process for students sometimes not ready or unable to enact these necessary (and often painful) steps on their own. In a conventional full-class workshop, a form that first-year compositionists—as well as those

leading the charge in creative writing studies use infrequently—the instructor, along with fellow students, invite questions for the author and discuss their reactions to reading student work, toward the shared goal of: “giving young writers an audience, a sense of community, and an acceptable social category—students” (Roth qtd. in Donnelly 5). Further, bits of lore instantiate conversations with authors; or, to put it differently, these bits of lore mimic the conversations that an author might have with him or herself, while engaging with his or her own drafts. (In John Barth’s craft essay, he recounts how “Norman Mailer confessed his tendency ‘to mumble about technical matters like an old mechanic.... Let’s put the thingamajig before the whoosits here...’” [*Paris Review Interviews Vol. 3* 126]). Lore-based pedagogies, in this way, offer a window into the writing process perhaps like no other kind of instruction can. Generally, literary writers put on a “romantic” façade “with outsiders (their students are often outsiders) ... [and] often deny being intellectual and knowing what they’re doing.” But within the classroom, there is a common language, made possible by lore. Donald Murray describes this occurrence as well: “When I meet a writer, we immediately talk in the same way as a teacher talks to a teacher, a cop to a cop, a judge to a judge, a mechanic to a mechanic. We all know our territories and our crafts, and we can immediately talk in shorthand” (“Mucking About in Language” 16).

Finally, as a third point, we may see how lore-based pedagogies broaden the reach of writing classes and specifically their potential for transfer: how creative literacies might help students succeed in a variety of other contexts, no matter what their intended profession, career, or personal interests. Richard Florida has controversially termed the “creative class,” to mean a group of individuals who stress “problem finding” as part of their day-to-day work (39). The idea is becoming ubiquitous, and more and more people are trying to erase the line between

“participant and observer, or between creativity and its creators.”¹⁰ As increasing numbers of students and graduates start viewing themselves as creative people or artists, lore-based pedagogies become all the more relevant for their educational narrative and might continue to influence their thinking long after leaving the university. As we become more familiar with the idea that “creative thinking is crucial for our future world,” and as creativity studies departments are added to colleges and universities,¹¹ our opinions on lore also become more nuanced and resourceful (Leahy in Day, Leahy, and Vanderslice). A key epistemology of lore trusts imaginative and poetic writing faculties that help us make and access meaning. Pedagogy, in this sense, works more akin to apprenticeship than to top-down instruction. And instead of a grand universal narrative of writing, students must become the “professional do-it-yourself person” and force themselves to fully engage with multiple perspectives (Hatton 75). There is a strong element of DIY/bricolage in lore-based writing pedagogy, and one which I think many compositionists—as well as professionals in even farther flung fields—might find exciting and inspiring.

In the introduction to *Can it Really Be Taught?*, Ritter and Vanderslice voiced worries about any type of pedagogical approach that fails to “relate theories of writing to theories of teaching” (xiv). Much like North in his section on the work of composition “practitioners,” their arguments against lore-based pedagogy are not wholly different from the arguments against lore itself: i.e., that lore is contradictory; lore is conservative and anti-progressive because it doesn’t have a system of revision; lore is ceaselessly repetitive; lore is not scientifically accurate and cannot be adequately triangulated; lore is often merely self-aggrandizing self-reporting that is

¹⁰ Daniel Anderson has described the metaphor of the prosumer in shaping consciousness and creative literacies for the new media student composer (“Prosumer Approaches to New Media Composition: Consumption and Production in Continuum” in *Kairos* 8.1).

¹¹ See February 5, 2014 *The New York Times* article, “Learning to Think Outside the Box: Creativity Becomes an Academic Discipline.”

preoccupied with the idea of authorship as a cult of personality and literariness. But given my earlier re-definition of lore—as the recoverable fragments of a mostly unrecoverable history of writing production—I hope it’s clear how lore-based pedagogies and scholarship, as well as archive-based “lore,” may not be as deleterious to writing pedagogy as has been previously suggested. In this spirit, we can imagine how any variety of instruction that a writing practitioner feels—in lesson planning or any aspect of preparation—might work to engage is not merely a whimsical, throwaway anecdotal-based pedagogical activity. Because of his or her status as a practitioner, there is immediately a special and intimate knowledge with writing and its attendant processes that allow a practicing writer to follow and adapt a “try it this way, it works” pedagogy. After all, that is the essential ethos of a writing classroom at the college level: a true writing and reading lab that is designed to be (though not always) an experimental space in every sense of the word. By trusting practitioners to borrow and repurpose lore, creative pedagogy elevates, rather than devolves into, a “way of knowing” that merges pedagogy with practice, a goal inherent in all teaching endeavors. While it is true that the desire to have ease in lesson planning is a longstanding goal for college writing teachers—in part due to the field’s obsession with “writing time”—to whole-handedly dismiss these authentic, if sometimes vexed, pedagogies is misguided. Lore is not always articulated through scholarship or through conventional publishing channels. But—and this is an important *but*—that does not mean there is not a history of teaching there, a history that can itself be pedagogical.

Take for instance the ritual (or superstition, or habit) of not talking about or sharing a work in progress. This ritual is associated with the lore that “once it’s out of your imagination it’s no longer yours” and “the work should speak for itself.” My undergraduate creative writing professor suggested we not discuss works in progress. It is possible to read this bit of lore as

connected to the “cult of loneliness” perpetuated by creative writing. Or we might trace connections between this bit of advice and the wider institutions. After all, the idea of a novel will not help one’s teaching career in creative writing. Or we might show how this advice links instructor and student in a social relation. In this dissertation, following the work of Bruno Latour’s *Reassembling the Social*, I will note how lore’s network is more than just a series of mechanical nodes or connected/associated ideas; the links that connect units of lore to individuals also create encounters with groups, and with other bits of lore. The research methodology of “Lore 2.0” is not only practitioner-based, according to North’s original schema, but also a form of knowledge creation itself that comes about via the interconnected nodes of the network. These bonds within the network are made inside and beyond classrooms, and, again following Latour, in manners that extend beyond the human-human to include even the spaces and *materials* with which writers work. Steve Healey presents this notion when describing what he means by “creative literacy,” as opposed to “creativity,” and the collaborative emphases of creative literacy pedagogy:

Creative literacy is collaborative. Rather than framing the artist as the individual talent, the isolated genius with the private imagination who creates something completely “original,” creative literacy encourages artists to collaborate, to participate in a creative community, to see language and other artistic materials as part of a larger public sphere that anyone can reference or appropriate (without actually plagiarizing or denying someone else’s authorship). We often think of collaboration simply as people working together, but I also want to consider collaboration between the materials that those people work with—the working together of different texts, forms, genres, fields, traditions, and

so on. A writer can work alone on a piece of writing but still cultivate a collaborative attitude. (Healey 176)

Within this framework, the individual (student, teacher, writer, scholar, and all combinations therein) still has agency; and yet, the individual becomes more aware that there is a large network at play.

These networks and collaboration can easily be linked back with writing instruction. The question of how “writing fulfills personal and social interests, in ways parallel to woodworking, knitting, baking, or fishing, to scrapbooking, singing, photography” is precisely the point where, according to Hesse, “creative writing now intersects composition” (“The Place of Creative Writing” 47). It is essential, then, to reassess how student learning narratives are pedagogically designed in both creative writing and first-year composition to ensure a feeling that students are in charge of their own writing, so that it can be fulfilling personally and socially. It would be a wasted opportunity to not further pursue how tidbits of writing advice help to situate the individual within networks. Though creative writing and first-year composition are customarily set up to focus on the individual (through reflection assignments, portfolios, etc.), we mostly ignore the way lore operates on an individual basis and its power to forge social bonds.

Via this renewed understanding of lore, creative writing and composition instructors engage with a body of textual material that attends to the fundamentally messy, nonlinear, and uncertain prescriptions of lore, a body that is essentially, at least on the surface, contradictory. Out of that chaos, students can be better positioned to refine their own methods with creative production and self-reflexivity, and better situate themselves among other writers and in conversation with other historical, social, and political contexts.

“Lore 2.0”

Although I have defended lore as a fuel for writerly production, this is not to say that we should indiscriminately reinforce the status quo in creative writing pedagogy, which still relies heavily on “institutional-conventional wisdom.” Rather I’m looking to put a new frame on lore, “Lore 2.0”: a self-conscious, self-reflexive, skeptical curating of lore that emphasizes prosumer creative literacy, and reflects remix cultures of today.

We stand at a slightly different vantage point with respect to lore in 2017 than we did in the earliest inquiries into writing studies and the resistance of lore.

It isn’t difficult to find websites offering writing advice, communities of writers trading feedback and response, and social media networks for writers in every genre on sites such as Facebook and Twitter. As one example, fan fiction sites offer a form of writing workshop for the thousands of people involved, where work is read, responded to, and revised. Other sites, in other genres, take similar approaches. The innovation and energy taking place in creative writing online is breathtaking and global. (B. Williams, “Digital Technologies” 248)

This is particularly relevant to composing in the digital era, when there is an enormous body of information, communal, reasonably accessible, and not necessarily sourced. Apprentice writers are already seeking out this material on their own, so why don’t we try to engage with it and connect it to students at the level of lore? We certainly still need to be wary of accepting unexamined beliefs that give rise to counterfeit pedagogy and stereotyping. But these corrections can often be done within the House of Lore, not necessarily from without. Lan Samantha Chang, for instance, remembers when Frank Conroy, at the time the director of the Iowa Writers’ Workshop, advised her: “If you don’t want to be typecast, don’t keep writing stories about

Chinese-American characters” (Neary). Chang did not follow his advice. Today she holds the same position Conroy once did, as the director of Iowa’s workshop, and has many acclaimed books to her name. This particular story about Conroy, which she has shared in interviews and likely with her own students, is now lore in its own right, and works as a corrective for the lore of a previous generation.

Of course, Lore 2.0 has resonances with Web 2.0, and the added frame of “2.0” might be a handy way to consider the networked way that students are interacting with lore. The degree to which digital tools, new media, and networked culture have affected writers and writing is one of the key compositional questions of our time.¹² Student writers are surrounded by narrative accounts of composing, whether in the form of Elizabeth Gilbert’s TED Talk on “Your Elusive Creative Genius,” Octavia Butler’s inspirational letter to herself (featured on The Huntington Library’s Instagram), the Foo Fighters’ documentary project Sonic Highways, Jerry Seinfeld’s Comedians in Cars Getting Coffee, various advice-related Twitter accounts like “Quotes for Writers” or Writers Digest that post writing aphorisms and how-to briefs, the Twitter accounts of publishing writers, countless podcasts devoted to discussions of art and artistry, or the ever-popular National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo). New media outlets serve as conduits for collective wisdom and encourage input—and user-generated content—from professionals and non-specialists alike.

Given this context, it’s almost impossible to dismiss lore as an unfortunate byproduct of the institutional machine. In fact, lore has become instrumental in our field’s sociality and its connection to popular culture. Harper, among others, has noted the “interconnection” and

¹² In addition to recent collections such as *Creative Writing in the Digital Age*, Adam Koehler provides an excellent overview of the disciplinary and craft-related pedagogical questions related to creative writing’s digital turn (“Digitizing craft: Creative writing studies and new media: A proposal.” *College English* 75.4 (2013): 379-97.)

“reciprocal human connectedness” made possible through “synaptic technologies” (Harper, “Creative Writing in the Age of Synapses” 8). Additionally, Chris W. Gallagher asserts that “teaching and learning...are acts and arts of engagement, and they succeed or fail on the strength of relationships (C. Gallagher 463). If writing studies neglect to engage with these emerging, fluid archives of lore or to acknowledge the potency of process narratives in forming our field’s social bonds, we might never renew and even lose the most essential source of our pedagogical persuasiveness.

Chapter Outlines

In Chapter Two, I will tell the story of lore in rhetoric and composition and consider how creative writing process narratives helped to shaped the field as we know it today, playing an enormous role in pedagogical and scholarly prescriptions and proscriptions. Much talk of the writing workshop, originated from expressivist theory, which, in turn, originated from literary author testimony in *Paris Review* interviews. Expressivism was shuttled out of rhetoric and composition following this “golden age of process,” when new theoretical constructs (including social constructionism, post-process theory, and writing ecologies) and criteria for truth value came onto the scene. The accounts of literary writers were deemed by most to be tangential, subjective, unreliable, and not research-intensive, and left to the compositional dustbin. I then go on to consider the role of creative writing lore, particularly since the inception of “the program era” in the United States and abroad. As Tim Mayers has suggested, “equat[ing] the lore of composition with the lore of creative writing would be a grave mistake,” for the reason that “institutional history has led the fields to very different places” and “they must be understood and articulated within their institutional contexts” (“Figuring the Future” 2). The emerging field of creative writing studies reintroduced lore into the academic conversation within the past two

decades, considering ways to innovate the field of creative writing through a merger of the interpretation and production. I argue that a more coherent partnership between creative writing and first-year composition may come about through a heightened awareness of the affective appeals and social bonds made possible by informal talk and tidbits about “writerly activities and processes,” and what makes “good writing.”

Following this line of thought, in Chapter Three, I will further explore what I mean by lore’s fragmented and historical nature, and consider the ways creative writing, as a field, has benefited greatly from the archive of writers on writing. Self-reflexive texts that fall into what Tim Mayers terms “craft criticism” are examples of “writing about writing” that consider the act of writing as creating performative narratives, acting out the histories of writing, teaching, and reflecting. I urge creative writing studies to re-consider rejecting lore out of hand, and instead, consider the historicity of certain units of lore, in order to see which tidbits of knowledge still possess pedagogical value. In addition to the content of these bits of lore, I argue that there is a powerful social dynamic inherent to the form of the tidbit of writing advice.

I perform a tracing of one unit of lore in Chapter Four: Joan Didion’s self-reported transcription of Hemingway sentences. During the tracing, I explore the embedded subjects of the tradition of imitation and adolescent cognitive development, rhetorical arrangement, ease and Csikszentmihalyi’s “flow state,” the aura of “the famous writer,” and self-appointed apprenticeship. These sections are, in a sense, a large case study through which I examine how bits of lore have been handled/discussed across both composition and creative writing, and construct an actual web, or network of possible associations. By looking at how Joan Didion advocated imitative transcription of Hemingway’s sentences in author interviews, we see how the trace uncovers some of the common ground regarding philosophies of invention between

composition and creative writing. While Mark McGurl has done some of this kind of work, specifically thinking about “Find your voice” in the Program Era, where he traces both its literary and institutional manifestations, McGurl’s focus remains on institutional histories and literary artifacts, which he then sets against the backdrop of a systems theory approach. My project, by contrast, relies heavily on the archive of writers on writing and places emphasis on the pedagogical and compositional encounters taking place within writing studies.

My core method here will be using actor-network theory to elucidate how certain bits of lore connect to one another and, in effect, travel between publishing and apprentice writers. I will be scaling out and zooming in, and occasionally taking snapshots as I create this associational tracing. Chapter Four is also our way into visualizing the network of “lore 2.0”: as these five intertextual webs are combined into one meta-web, all originating from Didion’s quote. We will see the actual web that I suggest is one way of visualizing creative literacies. A decade after Tim Mayers declared that “the work done by practitioners is often ‘invisible’ to academic departments,” that stand “in the shadows” of literary studies, this still remains true (*(Re)Writing Craft 2*). My hope is that the web will illustrate the labor of practitioner-based pedagogy and research that unites English studies. Because actor-network theory is reliant on “practice all the way down,” this tracing will emphasize all of the micro-level details of the empirical world as it relates to this unit of lore (Latour, *Reassembling* 135).

In Chapter Five, I will further consider new directions for lore’s repurposing and usage: such as lore in light of the social network metaphor, and lore’s relation to mysticism and folkloric tradition. Lore is a renewable resource (rather than viewed solely as a never-ending house) with students making their own rules and pedagogical constraints, but it is not a natural resource. Here, I will begin using a new term, the *bricolore*, in order to describe the user-based

filtering, taxonomizing, and producing/consuming of “Lore 2.0,” which is already happening in the lives of our students, both inside and outside the classroom. Further, I will consider the benefits and drawbacks of introducing the discourse of history and multigenerational research into the field of creative writing.

Ultimately, I hope that this historically-based conception of lore will open channels between the fields of composition and creative writing, precisely in the places where their pedagogical approaches have become most widely divergent. While I don’t expect the field of composition to throw off its prominently post-expressivist position, I do believe that reappraising the historical valence of lore, and using an ANT-inspired method to uncover those histories, may allow the field to reconsider the long-eschewed phenomenon of lore-based instruction, and to perceive lore-centered pedagogical techniques for all their possible benefits.

CHAPTER TWO: THE FRAUGHT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN COMPOSITION STUDIES AND CREATIVE WRITING AND LORE AT THE HEART OF THIS DIVISION

What I have come to realize...is that in attempting to draw connections (and highlight divergences) between composition and creative writing in a professional forum for compositionists, I was entering one of the fiercest debates in the field. That debate, of course, is between the so-called “expressivists” and their opponents, who are known by several names, such as “social constructionists,” “rhetoricians,” and “theorists...” Combatants on both sides of the debate claim to have been misquoted, mischaracterized, and misrepresented by those on the other side. While this debate is largely about pedagogy and ideology, it is also about definitions and labels—and about who has the power (the might) and the authorization to attach labels and definitions to their own practices and ideologies as well as to those of others.

--Wendy Bishop

Seeking Common Ground and More Open Borders

In September 2010, Douglas Hesse published “The Place of Creative Writing in Composition Studies” in *College Composition and Communication*: an article that explores the potential benefits of a more coherent partnership between creative writing and composition. In order to implement this renewed alliance, Hesse argues, both fields must “[get] around stereotypical aversions” and “[keep] more open borders,” all in the spirit of “intellectual openness” (Hesse 43). The crucial part of Hesse’s call to action—and a key focus of this dissertation—is how creative writing pedagogy can positively influence the field of composition through a reimagining of lore’s productive capabilities:

This might mean recuperating new interest in writerly activities and processes, including the levels of style and word choice, adapting an expanded persona of themselves as writers for readerships beyond other scholars, and making curricular or, at least, conceptual room for writing that does not “respond” to a rhetorical situation. (43)

In outlining these goals, Hesse offers various pathways for moving forward, each with its own possibilities for researchers who study that intermittently contentious intersection of composition and creative writing pedagogy. While the suggestions to attend to “style and word choice” in particular echo a common goal for English studies instructors who aim to cultivate a sensitivity to language in students, what I find most pressing in Hesse’s call-to-action is his suggestion that we “recuperat[e] new interest in writerly activities and processes.” Through a telling of the disciplinary history of lore in composition studies within this chapter, we can see how lore—in its deep ties to “writerly activities and processes”—has greatly influenced the direction of the field. As rhetoric and composition, through Hesse’s earnest and much heralded call, seeks out a re-affiliation with creative writing, it is important to revisit both the high and low points of this past partnership, its eventual closing of borders and development of strong antipathies, and the ways lore rests at the heart of the debate between the fields. We will also see how the field of creative writing studies has used rhetoric and composition’s wide-ranging methodological/critical bent to solidify a consistent partnership between the two fields.

But what has characterized the longstanding yet uneasy partnership between composition and academic creative writing? How and why have borders closed up, and what particular oppositions is Hesse referring to when he mentions those “stereotypical aversions” between the two disciplines? Any attempt to thoroughly answer these questions should begin with a consideration of early 1960s composition’s relationship to the concept of *process*. A recent CCC Poster page describes process as, “in some ways...the founding term of the field [of rhetoric and composition]” (“Process”).

Through links with process, lore aligns rhetoric and composition with creative writing. Donald Murray describes in his preface to *Shoptalk: Learning to Write with Writers* how writer

testimony holds great power: you can identify with experiences and recollections of other writers, finding something “you have felt when you were stuck or when the writing went well; it may be an attitude or a piece of advice that surprises you; it may be something you want to argue with, or underline” (xv-xvi). To put it differently, lore attends to chance, the imagination, and the whims of “process” better than most other theoretical constructs. Its inclusive nature, its contradictions, and its variability will position lore at the wellspring of creative writing pedagogy.

Insofar as creative writing lore—propagated by literary writers who teach and teachers who produce literary writing—develops out of the experiences of writers, lore serves as a renewable resource for creative writing pedagogies. Perhaps as part of Hesse’s call to revisit writerly activities and processes, we should remember instead that lore holds great mystical power for apprentice writers in its ability to narrativize all aspects of process: from the mundane to the essential. Lore inspires and educates by examining explorations of how works come into existence. This is crucial for compositionists to remember: precisely because rhetoric and composition has largely abandoned its study of how *literary* writers compose their texts, even though composition studies is, by definition, inextricably linked to the topic of writing activities and processes. The turn away from lore—in composition and now in creative writing studies—has arguably gone too far. For as Bishop reminds us: composition, in addition to being an “institutional practice” of “assigned first-year writing within a required undergraduate course” and a “multidisciplinary” field of “graduate study,” is “first and foremost an activity,” or “what we do when we write” (*Keywords in Creative Writing* 36). Our choice to look more closely at contemporary activities and processes stresses composition’s nature as an *activity* shared by all teachers of writing in addition to a top-down institutional practice.

I choose to begin this study of lore within the theoretical framework of disciplinary history because much of the “misquoting” and “misrepresentation” that Wendy Bishop spoke of in “Places to Stand” can be elided by a deliberate look at how composition and creative writing came of age. Tim Mayers, in his recent calls at national writing conferences to pursue institutional histories in the field of creative writing studies, names four main objectives for this kind of research, each of which are instructive to compositionists and creative writing studies theorists alike.¹³ For Mayers, the first motive for doing institutional history is “dispel[ing] the illusion of naturalness.” At times, it bears repeating that academic institutions are constructed, and what may seem to be clear defining lines between “rhetoric and composition” and “creative writing” are culturally, institutionally, and temporally contingent. Creative writing looks different depending on the country, city, region, grade level, type of school, and time period in which it is being undertaken as an academic practice. Given this variability, we find Mayers’s second reason for doing institutional histories: to emphasize that the workshop model was an “accidental outgrowth” that came about after “considerable pedagogical research.” The workshop was only one portion of a much larger set of classroom models, designs, and curricula. Given that every academic department within any given institution has its own standard operating procedures—and a specific history that led to things as they are, rather than the illusion of “naturalness”—we find that fractured disciplinary partnerships will not simply redevelop if “people would just act a little bit nicer” (Mayers). While the myth that kindness alone will broker disciplinary collaborations needs to be debunked, the *actual* histories where interdisciplinary collaborations existed are essential for future partnerships. Chiefly of importance for this dissertation is Mayers’s declaration that the power of doing history comes from institutional

¹³ Mayers speaking at the 2016 Creative Writing Studies Conference and 2017 Conference on College Composition and Communication.

history's ability to "highlight the places in the past where collaborations could have or did occur." Hesse's call to restore interest in "activities and process" comes from the historical fact that once upon a time composition studies and creative writing had considerable overlap, with the earliest versions of process theory coming directly from literary writer testimonies in *The Paris Review*.

In one of the first published pieces that straddled the line between academic creative writing and composition pedagogy, Janet Emig, writing in the pages of *College Composition and Communication* in 1964, cites Gertrude Stein from *Writers at Work: The Paris Review Interviews* on the power of the unconscious in composing practices (Emig, "The Uses of the Unconscious in Composing"). Even over a half-century ago, Emig mentions that composition researchers underutilize the "professional writer on writing," though literary writers are writing's "most powerful primary source" (Emig). Here we can see one of the earliest articulations of the rich iconography of creative writing lore, with Gertrude Stein's words becoming a tradeable knowledge about writing made possible by Stein's firsthand testimony about her recollections of the act of making. This serves as another example where a unit of lore (Gertrude Stein saying to trust the unconscious) both *recounts her personal history of making* of a piece of art, and, through its citation, dissemination and adaptation in process method, becomes traceable back to the disciplinary evolution of both creative writing and college composition. Emig, who later became synonymous with "process theory" and "process methods"¹⁴ in composition, would later go back to these interviews in order to retrofit a method centered around the testimony offered by literary writers. Ever since, discussions of "activities and process" have been the principal site of debate, and more often than not, disagreement and lack of engagement between composition and creative writing.

¹⁴ Again, we may consider Wendy Bishop's point that definitions and labels that have mischaracterized both sides of the debate.

A Longstanding Yet Uneasy Partnership

In the 1960s and 70s, at a time when “process over product” was already a popular rallying cry in the fine arts, many college composition courses likewise shifted away from the product-based teaching philosophies of current-traditional rhetoric, and began to embrace more process-based approaches. The intellectual climate of the time was certainly ripe for this change, given that “American universities began in the 1950s to set their course by the polestar of ‘creativity,’ softening the rigid boundaries of educational tradition to make way for the new” (McGurl 70). We can certainly see this trend reflected in the 1960s composition landscape, a time when composition instructors such as Janet Emig and Donald Murray imported the workshop model from creative writing and began studying and researching “composing practices of basic and professional writers” (Bishop and Starkey 37). Much of that early research included a study of “narrative accounts offered by creative writers”—aphorisms, testimonies, and reflections found in interviews, craft talks, lectures, textbooks, and personal essays—which I refer to as *the archive of writers on writing*. A process-based pedagogy, with attendant stepwise methods, slowly began to take shape. Before long it became dictum throughout college composition that writing was a recursive activity. Writing processes were no longer a question of “mechanical correctness and rote memorization;” and the creative writing view of composition as formulaic tyranny, which had its deepest roots in old responses to current-traditional rhetoric, fell to the wayside (Gradin 12). So-called “expressivist” theories of process now explored the value of “the autobiographical, the intimate and subjective voice, and the organic development of a topic” (Gradin 13). Expressivism was, in fact, “the first of the ‘process’ rhetorics” (Gradin 12).

The intellectual openness and crossover of ideas between creative writing and composition was never greater than it was in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when the

pedagogical emphasis on process began to blur the line between writer and teacher.¹⁵ At this time, “the writing process movement became more and more associated with expressivist approaches to teaching composition,” as well as with approaches that valued theorizing about the creative processes (Yagelski 532). Additionally, during the “long 1960s,” a “system” of graduate programs in creative writing that had slowly amassed during the “first two-thirds of the twentieth century, [and had] culminat[ed] in the founding of the Iowa Writers Workshop,” proliferated in the United States. During this “pivotal and famously ‘expressive’ period,” process-based pedagogies developed alongside theories of “expressivist rhetoricians” who were “drawn to the ways in which the romantics fostered the thinking and creative abilities of students” (McGurl 28, Gradin 46). As instructors were designing and redesigning courses and activities to “encourag[e] students to develop writing fluency and metacognitive awareness of their writing processes,” the theoretical—in addition to the practical—underpinnings of college composition also underwent a seismic shift (Bishop and Starkey 37). In “the 1960s and 70s...composition classrooms came to more closely resemble the graduate creative writing workshop course,” which viewed all “students as writers,” and in which first-year writing students would “share” work in “collaborative settings” with the aim to finish “writing portfolios” that emphasized writing’s repetitive nature (Bishop and Starkey 37, 38). Process theorists looked at *The Paris Review* interviews in order to develop a better understanding about writing (Murray, “Mucking About in Language” 15). Echoes of the “process over product” refrain also sifted down from graduate creative writing courses to undergraduate creative writing courses, which were at the same time being profoundly influenced by “composition theory, research, and practice” (Bishop and Starkey 38).

¹⁵ Donald Murray published *A Writer Teaches Writing*, and in 1973, Peter Elbow published the “still remarkably popular” *Writing Without Teachers* (Yagelski 532).

If this account of creative writing and composition’s longstanding relationship—a history sporadically revisited by scholars in rhetoric and composition during the expressivist-social constructionist debates of the 1990s—suggests an overly Edenic moment of unity and shared ideals embodied in the common dataset of the archive of writers on writing, we can, at the very least, envision that real and palpable spirit of intellectual openness. One of the key scholarly activities that has always defined composition studies, as Stephen North suggested, is “foraging,” or searching through other fields and disciplines for that which may be applicable to composition (North, *The Making of Knowledge* 104). A fair number of prominent and lesser-known “writer-teachers,” “teacher-writers,” and “reflective writer-teacher-writers” (to borrow Wendy Bishop’s terminology) considered their teaching experiences and literary writing experiences—experiences often guided pedagogically by “narrative accounts offered by creative writers” at the very dawn of the Program Era—as valuable forms of practitioner expertise (Bishop and Starkey 37). This expertise would, in turn, go on to inform both their published work and pedagogical attitudes in a cycle of experimental pedagogies.

Expressivists especially were interested in writer testimonies, often with many helpful caveats, a sense of playfulness, and pedagogically valuable lenses. For instance, in the preface to his 1990 collection of interviews, *Shoptalk*, Donald Murray offers advice on “how to read writers on writing” after decades of merging creative writing pedagogy with first-year composition pedagogy:

With respect, amusement, and skepticism. They will contradict one another—as they should—for each writer brings an individual history to the writing task. There is no single theology here. What you will find is writers trying to understand what they are doing and trying to share that understanding. Their opinions may change with experience and with

the writing task. It is your challenge to read these quotations in the light of your own experience writing, learning writing, teaching writing, observing writing, reading writing. You will read these bits of testimony in different ways at different times, make new connections, catch sight of new insights, keep returning to them with delight and doubt, ready to argue and learn. (xv)

While composition researchers “usually dismiss what writers say about writing because they believe that writers do not know, intellectually what they do,” we can see Murray taking an alternate route to composition research (xv). Specifically, we can see how compositionists such as Murray sought to extract meaning from writers on writing by viewing the testimony of literary writers as an “opportunity for research” (xiv). Murray’s merger of “delight and doubt,” along with the multitudes he locates in the audience—teachers, learners, writers, researchers, readers, often wearing several hats—suggests that playful yet rigorous attitude might be possible at the intersection of composition research and creative writing pedagogy. In a way, Murray’s advice embodies the expressivist ethos that successfully merges a variety of theories about writing to complicate and enrich that central “axiology,” as Fulkerson calls it, of composition: “How do written texts come into existence?” (Fulkerson, “Composition at the Turn” 657). That same question remains one of the most pressing concerns that students bring to first-year writing courses. It is also a question that instructors continually ask and consider in their role as classroom practitioners, specifically when designing assignments, lesson plans, and specific day-to-day activities, regardless of affiliation with a particular pedagogical approach or ideological perspective.

When expressivists themselves sought to address these issues in the 1960s and 1970s, many constructed their pedagogical touchstones from the central tenets of literary Romanticism,

specifically from the first-person testimonies that described and philosophized the act of writing. Sherrie Gradin notes that “teachers such as “D. Gordon Rohman, Donald Murray, Ann Berthoff, and Peter Elbow...include[d] ‘unconscious cerebration,’ ‘spontaneity,’ and ‘primacy of the imagination’ as central to their theories and pedagogies”” (46-47). These points of emphasis on the creative process and writing’s relation to the imagination had started out as a “negative dialectic against the evils of the current-traditional rhetoric,” but had now become a “more positive articulation of its own goals and strategies” (McComiskey 38). And yet, as the field of composition changed, and the emphasis shifted toward more context-based modes of instruction, that “positive articulation” soon became the “negative” in the dialectic between expressivism and the social constructionist rhetoric that followed. Not only did Romantic theories of composition, in the eyes of social constructionist philosophy, advance pernicious, ersatz mythology—including the “romantic ‘myth of the inspired writer’”—but these Romantic theories also lacked sufficient standards for objective truth that mattered more and more in the increasingly scientific humanities climate (Gradin 8).¹⁶ Further, the continued popularity of these Romantic theories and pedagogies into the late 1970s and early 1980s was not only denigrated as “teacher lore” and lazy pedagogy but also seen as a conservative elision that deprived students of necessary training in cultural, social, and political critique.

Coincident with expressivism’s rise in popularity were attempts to degrade it as a “fringe movement” (Burnham, “Process Theory” 111). William Covino explores this brand of response to expressivism in *Magic, Rhetoric, and Literacy: An Eccentric History of the Composing Imagination*. Expressivism was immediately repudiated on charges that it promoted an inflated importance of the individual and an unreasonable stress on the role of the individual in writing.

¹⁶ Following Habermas’s definition of scientism the “sciences’ belief in themselves,” I object to empirical observation and experiment as the only models of truth (*Knowledge and Human Interests* 63).

Other popular attacks on expressivism that arose through the decades include: that expressivism stresses the writer in isolation and ignores the socially embedded nature of knowledge-making,¹⁷ that expressivism is utterly un-theoretical and fails to address difference,¹⁸ specifically in terms of race, class and gender, and finally, that expressivism “wastes students’ time” and “disempowers students” by prioritizing “personal writing” over “conventions of academic discourse” (Burnham, “Process Theory” 113).¹⁹ These attacks persist, despite the fact that there have been numerous syntheses of expressivism with social constructionism over the past few decades that stress their shared goal of “raising consciousness to move people to act against injustice.” Texts such *Women’s Ways of Knowing and Writing* (Belenky et al.) and *Writing from the Margins: Power and Pedagogy for Teachers of Composition* (Hill) emphasize the ways “personal awareness” can counter “oppressive material and psychological conditions” (Burnham, “Process Theory” 113). Overall, these texts that synthesize expressivism with social constructionism serve as “models for building a new pedagogy of awareness and equality” (113).

But in many ways, we can read composition’s break with expressivism and, in effect, creative writing, as going hand-in-hand with its break from pedagogies that placed emphasis on the archive of writers on writing. This was an unfortunate fissure, especially if you agree with Gradin’s argument in *Romancing Rhetorics* that the division between expressivism and social epistemic rhetoric was a false one, not in the least because of the Romantics longstanding and

¹⁷ See Fishman and McCarthy’s October 1992 article in *College English* 54.6, “Is Expressivism Dead? Reconsidering Its Romantic Roots and Its Relation to Social Construction” for a successful debunking of the automatic alignment of expressivism with the mythos of the solitary writer.

¹⁸ Berlin compared expressivism to an “untheorized and ideologically debased form of neo-Platonism” (Burnham, “Process Theory” 111).

¹⁹ See Susan C. Jarratt’s “Feminism and Composition: The Case for Conflict” and bell hooks’s “when i was a young soldier for the revolution’: coming to voice.” hooks writes of her experiences as a student in college creative writing classes where she “learned a notion of ‘voice’ as embodying the distinctive expression of an individual writer” (hooks essay), but quickly noticed that her peers’ praise of her “voice” seemed to “mask racial biases about what my authentic voice would or should be” (11). Yet hooks also describes the “versatility” that came from the experience of reading work written by poets, intellectuals, and artists of color who utilized “many voices” and went against the assumption of the solitary notion of writing.

well-documented investment in the social. This conception is in keeping with the work of other composition theorists who used historical/archival and literary studies methods to reclaim expressivism from those who maligned its ideological grounding as premodern and inherently conservative. Gradin has also argued that expressivists were “easily placed in the position of the ‘other’ because Romantic theories of discourse contain many aspects of what our culture has identified as feminine” (12). As Gradin notes, “expressivist theories grew up alongside feminism,” and, perhaps because of this history, one finds many “compatibilities” between expressivism and feminist critical approaches. Because expressivist rhetoricians openly valued “the personal, the emotive, and expression for the self,” this often unfairly made them open to attack, both at that time and in subsequent histories of rhetoric and composition (13).

While it has been convincingly argued that, by the early 1980s, a strand of “expressivist rhetoric [had] evolved into a neo-romanticism that excluded the social contexts hinted at by Coleridge in favor of a rhetoric that privilege[d] individual control over textual meaning and production,” I believe that this fact certainly should not be used to discredit or discount the progressive legacy of expressivist rhetoricians (Cain, “Interchanges” 70). For instance, when Berlin and Faigley “rejected autobiographical narrative out of hand,” they were, in effect, dismissing over three decades of expressivist rhetorical work that sought to successfully “merge the theories that informed” both composition and creative writing pedagogy (Bishop qtd. in Bizzaro 261). Karen Surman Paley echoed the work of many creative writing instructors in her demonstration of how “in the classrooms she observed, even autobiographical narrative often raises issues related to the holy political trinity of class, race, and gender” (Paley qtd. in Fulkerson, “Composition at the Turn” 668). Even despite these arguments, asking students to write about their experiences and read about the experiences of others, though still common in

pedagogical practice, has been relegated to the margins of contemporary scholarship on composition pedagogy. There was a strong, if not necessarily accurate, dichotomy at work here between notions of “critical writing” and “artistic writing,” particularly when we consider how frequently cultural, social, and political critique employs personal, emotive, or self-expressive qualities.

In keeping with this notion of hastily drawn borders, we might see how the simple and dismissive “categorization” of expressivism—even as Murray, Elbow, and Berthoff continued to revise and develop their notions of composition pedagogy over many decades—led to an ahistorical dismissal of pedagogies and theories that were actually in use and tremendously valuable to many teachers of writing (Gradin 14). Likewise, this widespread dismissal of expressivism—in scholarly research, if not also in practice—is in many ways was at the root of what became a weakened partnership between creative writing pedagogy and composition.²⁰ At the present moment, as creative writing theorist Mary Ann Cain has noted, composition’s foray into creative writing has only been “limited to expressivist rhetoric” (“Interchanges” 70). And the valuable archive of writers on writing, which once provided the dataset for early expressivism, is now overwhelmingly ignored by compositionists, despite its potential for meeting different pedagogical ends in today’s varied composition landscape. This oversight on the part of mainstream composition is unfortunate, especially for those who believe that the revolutionary, socially-attuned spectrum of composition pedagogies that stemmed from writers’ accounts on process actually never fully matched its label of “expressivism.” Expressivist theorists themselves, in fact, often did not accept that appellation. As Bishop noted in 1999: “Always, I knew I wasn’t *merely* or *simply* expressivist” (22). She in fact went on to develop other terms for her position within the composition studies landscape writ large: “I find myself

²⁰ Many have noticed that the practitioner-strand is alive and well (Fulkerson).

trying to re-label myself. Dialogic. Examined process advocate. Social-rhetorical. Social-expressivist.” Today we might imagine that her refusal to passively receive the label of “expressivist” stemmed from her understanding that while expressivism is “typically cast as a consistent, unified concept within the field’s literature,” it is better considered as a set of related pedagogies rather than an agenda or a monolithic school of thought (Cain, “Interchanges” 70).

In the last two decades, things have begun changing again, and many in composition have begun to feel that too much was lost in the overzealous rejection of so-called expressivist practices. For instance, in the introduction to the September 1999 *CCC* “Interchanges: Inquiring Into the Nexus of Composition Studies and Creative Writing,” Cain notes the “significant gaps” within “composition’s rhetorical maps of expressivism (by theorists such as James Kinneavy, James Britton, James Berlin, C.H. Knoblauch, and Lester Faigley, among others).” Cain further addresses this topic of “less inclusive” boundaries:

One of composition's most powerful assumptions as a field is that all students deserve an equal chance to learn to write. Yet the boundaries that define what kinds of writing will be taught in composition classes are typically less inclusive, particularly when we consider the boundaries between composition and creative writing. In the following symposium, the authors argue that composition's spirit of inclusiveness should inform not only who is to be taught but also what, namely the diverse forms and genres of writing, including those of creative writing. (70)

Cain makes the oft-repeated yet potent point that creative writing pedagogy is far more than expressivism, and that “composition can draw other rhetorics, besides expressivism, from creative writing poetics, pedagogies, and production.” Until composition seeks out creative writing as an intellectual partner, Cain goes on to say, part of composition’s strength will be

debilitated. Or, as she simply puts it: “If much of composition’s vitality stems from its forays into other fields of inquiry, a dialogue with creative writing can add to that vitality” (Cain, “Interchanges” 71). This particular elision of creative writing certainly does announce itself as a missed opportunity to say the least. Of course, this trend is not new. And while compositionists did successfully appropriate “teaching methods from the creative writing workshop—particularly group-response sessions and portfolio evaluation” and “[improve] on those borrowings and [go] beyond them”—creative writing as a “composition research area... [has been] generally ignored” (Bishop qtd. in Kalamaras 78).

Similarly, in Fulkerson’s 2005 portrait of rhetoric and composition, “Composition at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century,” he notes that “there is no single ‘expressive’ way to teach composition, any more than there is a single [critical/cultural studies] way.” Fulkerson writes:

Some expressive teachers are interested in helping students mature and become more self-aware, more reflective. Others are interested in writing as healing or therapy. Some are most interested in creative self-expression. Some have students choose their own topics; others have concerns they want students to address. And another sort of expressivism involves asking students to write the classic personal *essai*. (667-68)

Regardless of pedagogical preoccupations of each instructor, this lack of agreement on the exact definition of “expressivist” rhetoric did nothing to stop the “wide-spread use of the term ‘expressivism’ as a pejorative” (B. Williams, “Dancing with Don”). Over time, this pejorative use of expressivism led to the “distort[ion]” of “important conversations that should be taking place” in the field. Bronwyn Williams lists some of the prominent topics that have not been sufficiently explored as a result of this distortion: “The personal position in writing, including questions about the value of individual experience in intellectual work, the purposes of writing

beyond the composition classroom, and the ways in which experience and writing combine to help writers compose their identities in print” (B. Williams, “Dancing with Don”). To take this chapter back to where we started, we can see how Williams’s list of conversations that should be taking place in composition further supports Hesse’s call for more examinations of *writerly activities and processes*.

In keeping with both Hesse and Williams, I aim in the next sections to push back against the pejorative scholarly attacks on expressivism that came about from a resistance by compositionists to study or critically read the archive of writers on writing that creative writing instructors still use as their chief dataset: what established writers have said and written about the process of crafting texts. This dataset has been cast aside—by pedagogues in creative writing and composition alike—as mere “lore” that is ad hoc, uncomplicated, and endlessly regurgitated. And yet I will continually be making the argument that the archive of writers on writing holds great value for the future of English studies, and possesses a fundamentally historical nature that helps scholars and instructors attend to the questions of approach and process, which, semester after semester, decade after decade, from one institution to the next, are on the minds of student writers and composers. Following the work of Tim Mayers, I am not advocating a “benign, fuzzy pluralism,” but rather arguing that the narrative accounts of writers and writing activities, which once united creative writing and composition in productive interdisciplinary conversations and methodological crossover, deserve further critical attention in a contemporary moment defined by theories of the posthuman (Mayers, “The Struggle over Composition” 452).

The Closing of Borders

As Hesse and other scholars have noted, the disciplinary borders between creative writing and composition are, at the present moment, fairly closed. While this is certainly in part due to

composition's evolution toward more social constructionist philosophies, it is clear that the rise of post-process theory helped to sever those bonds. In "The Salon of 2010," Geoffrey Sirc argues that "post process [theory] has restored the strict delimitation between composition and creative writing that was beautifully blurred in the process era" (Sirc qtd. in Oleksiak 149). He also argues that the "fatal gesture" of post-process was "its willingness to separate itself from the *craft* of writing by focusing instead on the *effects* of writing" (Oleksiak, italics mine). This emphasis on interpretation over making, and on content over process, is in line with Tim Mayers's exploration of craft in *(Re)Writing Craft*. In Mayers's chapter, "Composition, Creative Writing, and the Shifting Boundaries of English Studies," he outlines a trend in the 1990s and early 2000s whereby the work of English departments became more firmly than ever based on interpretation rather than production. Post-process theory, according to Sirc's critique, does not fully explore a text's making, and that is "precisely what necessitates a return to process." Likewise, within the pedagogical-theoretical framework, Sirc goes on to argue that "imaginative possibilities" are "bracket[ed]" by the theory's insistence of seeing all speech acts as, first and foremost, social acts (Sirc qtd. in Oleksiak). To say nothing of the pedagogical difficulties it creates, we can see the rise of post process theory as unwittingly promoting a break within composition studies from a humanistic, trial-and-error-based understanding of writerly activities and processes.

Scholars as wide-ranging as Karen Paley and Thomas Newkirk have also begun to worry that the popular taxonomic split between creative writing and composition has limited composition's intellectual and artistic capacity greatly over the last three decades. As Sirc notes, composition has become homogenized, all in the name of the pursuit of "credibility":

The price we have paid for our increased credibility as an academic field has been a narrowing of the bandwidth of what used to pass for composition. In figuring out our place among the disciplines, we have made the notion of disciplines paramount—what we talk about when we talk about writing is writing-in-the-academy or “real-world” writing that reflects (legitimizes) academic departments. This streamlining of the previously disparate narratives of Composition means that less and less do our genres represent a kind of expressivist or art-writing, a writing for non-academic (or non-ideological) goals, that “First step toward poetry.” (Sirc, *English Composition* 24-25)

Sirc has been one of the most outspoken critics against making the notions of “disciplines” the overriding concern of first-year writing. To repurpose Gertrude Stein’s “history teaches that history teaches,” we might substitute “writing in the disciplines teaches that writing occurs in the disciplines.” Because of “official composition” using “a literally thin corpus of nonfiction readings as prompts” for student writing, this has led to a “bland, sanitized” curriculum that is “so limited, it’s unbearable” (“Resisting Entropy” 511). Even defenders of writing-in-the-discipline-based pedagogies might readily acknowledge that *something* be lost when “writing,” becomes synonymous with training students to imitate the status quo of—often untested and un-updated—disciplinary conventions. Hesse, who is very much in line with Sirc’s attitude, has likewise echoed these sentiments. “[The] major feature of the new postprocess world,” he writes, “has been the primacy of ‘content,’ the notion that writers needed to be steeped in a subject matter, whether in a themed comp course...or, better, a course within a discipline” (Hesse 40). With this emphasis on content over process, there has been much less of an emphasis on textual production. More specifically, Hesse notes:

The polite decline since [the late 1980s] of creative nonfiction within composition studies leads to my third point: faced with deciding—as if there were some moment in which a choice was offered or demanded—among “rhetoric” (as argument and analysis), “composition” (as academic discourse), and “writing” (the broader making of texts), composition studies chose the first two, at least as measured in the field’s conference programs, journals, textbooks, and syllabi. The belletristic “personal” essay dwindled as an object of study or production except in the old guise of the narrative “mode” or the new school genre of literacy narrative. As “rhetorical situation” acquired more pedagogical power, later morphing into theories of discourse communities and genre, forms of writing that had no apparent rhetorical situation—except to acquire a readership—had little valence, especially when tainted by association with “the literary,” as an emerging discipline bristled against its historical second-class status within English departments. (38)

Instead of pursuing “the broader making of texts,” in other words, the field took its current direction of discipline-focused pedagogy, where, as Sirc has stated, “the writer has vanished into a thick clot of rarefied language.” This is a problem for Sirc, who argues in “The Salon of 2010” that process theory’s amorphous nature was in fact a great source of generative power, and sees a major misstep—precisely as evidenced by composition’s movement away from process—in the popular separation of artistic writing from academic writing. As Fishman and McCarthy note, “the view that good writers must master the accepted practices of a discourse community—was widely adopted as an alternative” (647).

If we mark the original schism between composition and creative writing as concomitant with the rise of social constructionism, then we might also acknowledge how, since then, the

schism has only deepened. Within most institutions, composition and creative writing continued to be mostly unconnected entities, in part because of composition's intensifying battle in the 1980s and 1990s for professional respect and in part because of its need to cultivate its own curricular identity. Similarly, creative writing mostly stayed away from composition studies, due to creative writing's habitual "privileged marginality"²¹ within English departments and emphasis on practitioner-based teaching and qualifications for instructors. One major unfortunate result of this separateness is that both creative writing and composition continue to exist as "second-class" citizens housed within English departments; and their very reputation as outsiders has often forced them to argue for their individual importance rather than argue for a collective pairing. As Mayers puts it:

Both composition and creative writing, in spite of their rapid institutional growth during the latter half of the twentieth century, still exist largely at the periphery of English studies, in the shadow of their dominant (and often domineering) counterpart called literary studies. (*Re)Writing Craft* 2)

As I've explored earlier, composition studies felt a need to break free from expressivist methods and ideas, and, in effect, from creative writing; while creative writing, hoping to preserve its autonomy, has resisted melding with composition programs, to the point that even today, as each field still needs to fight for respect and could benefit from a stronger partnership, creative writing's persistent isolation has prevented much in the way of fruitful collaborations at colleges and universities. As Ritter and Vanderslice observe, "in today's university, which welcomes a diversity of fields in order to accommodate a shifting popular notion of higher education's purpose, creative writing remains a separatist site of teaching and learning" ("Teaching Lore"

²¹ Mayers described creative writing's "fortunate" status within higher education as "an anti-academic field existing within academic institutions," whereby it is "insulated largely from the turmoil of English studies, not drawing much attention from outside their own coteries of students and like-minded colleagues" (*Re)Writing Craft* 21, 20, 21).

102). This would suggest that one reason for the closing of borders was that—while composition sought to make more connections and cross-pollinate, both theoretically and practically, with other academic departments—creative writing’s approach was more isolationist, with the result that these closed borders have remained closed.

Stereotypical Aversions: The Strong Oppositions between First-Year Composition and Creative Writing

As a result of the widening separation over the last half century, we unsurprisingly find well-developed “stereotypical aversions” between creative writing and first-year writing present and very much alive today. And while the antipathies vary from vast to mundane, they are, indisputably, numerous. Most of these stereotypes I will mention in this section might need to be dealt with on their own, discussed further, and eventually overcome as the partnership and dialogue strengthens in the decades to come. While I’m not certain this is the best therapeutic model to repair and rebuild disciplinary relationships, I do believe that it is important to air grievances/aversions. In this project, I will only be focusing on one major aversion, which I will examine in the next section: namely, composition’s aversion to creative writing’s endless accumulation of pedagogical foundations without a system of organization or any significant empirical tests of efficacy.

One major point of disjuncture between creative writing and composition hearkens back to the Romantic strain that is present both in creative writing and expressivist pedagogy. In our postmodern climate that rejects and distrusts grand narratives, we might see how creative writing’s stress on Romantic notions of imagination and creative process could have provided one particularly strong aversion for many compositionists. For instructors not invested in that Romantic grand narrative of textual creation, which was borrowed in part from Coleridge’s

Biographia Literaria, expressivist pedagogies could come to seem wholly inauthentic (Cain, “Interchanges” 70). For instance, we have Romantic figures like Wordsworth, who famously asserted good poetry to be “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling” (*Lyrical Ballads*). Expressivist teachers adapted that idea to make it fit with notions of “good” writing across various situations. But that small substitution of poetic writing for all writing was, in fact, a major hindrance to composition instructors who found Romantic pedagogies to be distastefully egotistical and increasingly irrelevant to students. In *Romancing Rhetorics*, Gradin “refutes Berlin's claim that expressivism is solipsistic” and “naïve,” suggesting that both Romanticism and expressivism “value autonomy” and hold strong ideological “concern” for “voice and a belief in the individual's ability to use her awareness to act against the conditions that shape her” (Burnham, “Rev. of *Romancing Rhetorics*” 419).

But instead of acknowledging expressivism’s charge of “developing empathy with others” and “establish[ing] a pedagogy of equity,” expressivism’s open-hearted embrace of Romantic ideas only helped to galvanize the age-old charge that creative writing’s expressivist legacy causes workshop discourse to be a matter of feeling and personal taste rather than rigorous analysis and ideological awareness. For instance, in 2010, Hesse found in a discourse analysis of *CCC* articles, the “few times...the topic of creative writing...appeared in *CCC* can generally be sorted into two categories”: first, there was the “early albeit minor theme” that creative writing helped on a self-empowerment level, by “develop[ing] basic personal human qualities,” and second there was also the topos of “therapeutic” writing, which meets with both celebration and strict opposition (“The Place of Creative Writing” 38). One of the few supporters of an emotionally-centered view of writing was Stephen Minot, who saw the purpose of creative writing, in part, to be “partially conscious therapy,” “entirely conscious therapy,” and “ego

formation” (Minot qtd. in Hesse). And yet, even as early as 1955, any writing in the university that held the whiff of therapeutic work was opposed by the vast majority who found confessional writing to be pernicious, and encouraged all “autobiographical material” to “always be fitted into some form” (“Imaginative Writing” 154). The difficulty of decoupling the image of creative writing as merely therapeutic writing, most crucially in the eyes of compositionists, has persisted throughout the years. And the myths about what the work of creative writing pedagogy actually *is* probably multiplied as a result of silence from most reflective writer-teachers throughout much of the latter part of the 20th Century. The “star pedagogues” of creative writing faculties, who frequently draw students into MFA programs with their literary reputation, rarely contributed to the corpus of pedagogical discourse, according to Kelly Ritter, writing on the “situated ethos” of star creative writing professors in 2009. Instructors on creative writing faculties are considered by AWP to be writers first, teachers second; Tim Mayers notes that this stance “ultimately devalues the other types of writing done in the academy (specifically composition)” (Ritter 287). Finished books were always the most useful blocks of evidence for hiring, advancement, and tenure. Reflections on their work as teachers were neither institutionally mandated nor rewarded. While many creative writers did in fact publish their thoughts on pedagogy in interviews and literary essays in the latter half of the 20th Century, few were found or reviewed in the mainstream composition journals during that same time period when Romantic pedagogies were under attack.

I’ve already established that one of the chief mischaracterizations of creative writing pedagogy was that it was necessarily “expressivist” and disengaged with the social. I believe this to be a fundamental myth within composition that creative writing, or any form of personal writing, is unavoidably apolitical. These were the very terms of the Bartholomae-Elbow debates

on personal/academic writing in the 1980s and 90s. The attacks on expressivism and, by extension, creative writing pedagogy as apolitical and oblivious toward sociocultural issues missed the fact that many strands of literary writing, and narrative accounts of writers on writing discuss the problems of authorship in thorny theoretical and situated ways. Because creative writing was not always really around to answer its detractors, many myths and mischaracterizations of creative writing pedagogy developed. The workshop itself may have developed its own kind of defense mechanism through disseminating dogma that separated creative writing from composition. For instance, a unit of lore I heard in graduate school and as an undergraduate from creative writing instructors was, “If I wanted a message, I’d have sent for a telegram.” Ignoring the “old media” appeal inherent in this dictum, we can see how a traditional charge against creative writing (that it is apolitical and aesthetic-based or taste-based) was deflected through this statement. Flannery O’Connor famously wrote in *Mystery and Manners* that “the meaning is the story,” another unit of lore I heard repeated in an undergraduate creative writing workshop. The point of the original quote was to articulate that to make literature truly instructive and/or didactic, writers should aim for subtlety rather than simply coded messages.

In a 1937 article in *The Nation*, Thomas Mann described social responsibility and how a German author could respond to fascism through literature:

The mystery of the Word is great; the responsibility for it and its purity is of a symbolic and spiritual kind; it has not only an artistic but also a general ethical meaning; it is responsibility itself, human responsibility quite simply, also the responsibility for one’s own people, the duty of keeping pure its image in the sight of humanity. In the Word is involved the unity of humanity, the wholeness of the human problem, which permits

nobody, today less than ever, to separate the intellectual and artistic from the political and social.... (“responsibility of the word”)

Once again, we can note how “intellectual and artistic” is intricately bound with “the mystery of the Word.” Questions of how, precisely, literary texts function, or do not, function politically and ethically would be answered far differently in your typical creative writing class as opposed to your typical first-year writing class. While these boundary zones between the “intellectual and the artistic” serve an organizing function in course rostering and in the training of professionals within a discipline, there is clearly, as Mann notes, an ethical valence to seeking to merge or bridge the two domains.

Another divide between the fields rests on composition’s suspicion sometimes of creative writing as being too intimately tied to the commercial enterprise of writing, setting up a reductive dichotomy of creative writing as capitalist, composition as socialist. As early as 1960, creative writing was connected with “big business” in the pages of *College Composition and Communication*, and the field, as Ritter and Vanderslice note in “Teaching Lore: Creative Writers and the Academy,” has long been seen as having an overly intimate relationship with literary publishing (Freedman qtd. in Ritter and Vanderslice 102).²² We can imagine how these associations only festered in the burgeoning Program Era, during which literary stars were hired based on their publishing record and ethos of writing skill alone, rather than on any demonstration of teaching effectiveness. McGurl too recognizes this same phenomenon when he points out, somewhat glibly, that even if “creative writing represents a further incursion of consumerism into the academy, a ballooning enterprise of mass vanity and anti-intellectualism...we can be sure it is no worse in this regard than many human endeavors” (74).

²² Michelle Cross goes so far as to refer to creative writing pedagogy as “commercial pedagogy” (*Can it Really Be Taught?* Eds. Ritter and Vanderslice: 67-96).

Within this framework, the attack on the MFA that has been levied for years is that the programs produce the same kind of writer or writing. McGurl has called this aesthetic, “lower-middle-class modernism,” and the topic has certainly been discussed widely from inside and outside of the field. And yet, on a pedagogical level, there has been far less said. The MFA defenders have argued that if a framework of high-level access to successful published writers had been in place in earlier eras, aspiring writers would have surely signed up, and that similar professionally and practically-minded attitudes surely existed prior to the Program Era.

This “pre-professional” charge against creative writing is slightly flawed, given that many students across the university can be motivated by professional goals, and find partners in their instructors, without de-legitimizing the intellectual work that they do. In fact, it’s hard to find any space in the academy that exhibits a counterforce to this trend, for, as Dereziwicz has observed: “As college is increasingly understood in terms of jobs and careers, and jobs and careers increasingly mean business, especially entrepreneurship, students have developed a parallel curriculum for themselves, a parallel college, where they can get the skills they think they really need” (30). Likewise, we should keep in mind that creative writing’s main conference, AWP, in fact represents a bastion for small press publishers—for instance, “in 2009 the exhibits at AWP occupied three large halls in the Chicago Hilton with hundreds of presses and journals”—while, ironically, in the face of “publisher consolidation,” CCCC—composition’s main conference—has steadily been reducing its publishing exhibit over time (Hesse, “The Place of Creative Writing” 32). This suggests a thriving, DIY, community-based, small-business approach to creative writing—a “parallel curriculum” if you will—that debunks the popular wisdom that collegiate and graduate creative writing are in some way dominated by the major print publishing houses and elite literary agencies.

Additionally, we should also note the links between “big business” and both nonprofit higher education and K-12 public education. These close ties between the corporate landscape and contemporary education have not only been clearly identified, but have been the overriding narrative of American educational systems throughout the past decades. With the rise in standardized testing, “No Child Left Behind,” “Race to the Top,” and the “Common Core State Standards” in mind, we can see how pervasive the assumption currently is that, “big business values will improve education” (Endacott and Goering 89). The project of “national assessments...represents a clear example of how big business values have actually infiltrated the curriculum in almost every public school classroom across forty-five states” (89). Creative writing pedagogy, then, may not be the root cause of this linkage, but merely an early symptom of this trend toward market-based educational “reform.”

There are, of course, also institutionally-specific sites of division between creative writing and composition: for instance, the status of composition as universal requirement, and the fields’ differing forms of professionalization. Because it is often a university mandate for students to take first-year writing, “official composition” has frequently developed a reputation as a course of busywork, where we teach “clear, correct, citation-based essay form to students, using a literarily thin corpus of nonfiction readings” (Sirc, “Resisting Entropy” 511). Creative writing, on the other end of the spectrum, historically has vast numbers of students wanting to enroll, even though the courses are frequently electives. Additionally, when it comes to oversight, instructors are traditionally treated very differently from composition instructors, in large part because creative writing instructors never have their “outcomes...denigrated by colleagues across the academy (no one asks, ‘why can’t students coming from your course develop even a single character?’)” (Hesse, “The Place of Creative Writing” 33). In terms of professionalism,

the fields likewise set their emphases on vastly different sets of goals. For instance, Hesse describes the way creative writing's and composition's largest academic conferences are "metonymic" of their current state of disciplinary divide. The mission of AWP (Associated Writing Programs) is to "foster literary achievement, advance the art of writing as essential to a good education, and serve the makers, teachers, students, and readers of contemporary writing" (awpwriter.org). As such, sessions at the annual AWP conference "consist overwhelmingly of talks on craft and technique" and readings/performances by authors. Conversely, at CCCC, most sessions center on "teaching, curricular, and administrative concerns, featuring historical, interpretive, and empirical research, every spectral band from qualitative to quantitative" (Hesse, "The Place of Creative Writing" 31). Given these differences, it is not hard to understand why notions of creative writers as scholarly researchers are usually roundly rejected,²³ or how that "dismissal" might originate "from beliefs that real writers should be doing real writing rather than 'merely' writing about writing" (Bizzaro qtd. in Hesse, "The Place of Creative Writing" 36). But these traditional divisions are becoming especially problematic in today's teaching climate, in which instructors with varying backgrounds and skill sets find themselves in the position of teaching first-year writing. More and more MFAs in poetry, creative nonfiction, and fiction are charged with teaching first-year writing classes as part of their funding package. Often these jobs can extend into post-graduate work, usually at an adjunct or lecturer position. What then, are we to make of this segment of contemporary scholars in composition and rhetoric who actively identify as creative writers as well? As in any case where stereotypes abound, instructors might find themselves pulled toward opposing pedagogical models—with few examples in place to help them negotiate this divide. Lately there has been more recognition of this phenomenon of

²³ This is unfortunate, especially after Mayers so aptly noted in *(Re)Writing Craft* that much of the intertextual, close reading, and reflective pedagogical work performed by creative writing pedagogues falls into the well-established genre of "craft criticism" and should count as scholarly research.

cross-pollination. However, until we can get more to the root of the theoretical divisions that have kept these fields at odds, I don't believe that these well-meant initial gestures and studies will be enough to change composition's now long-entrenched resistance to what have become, identifiably, creative writing pedagogical practices.

Lore at the Heart of a Pedagogical Divide: Theory and Practice

The quote that began this chapter about creative writing vs. composition as one of the “fiercest debates in the field” was from Wendy Bishop's 1999 essay, “Places to Stand,” a piece that Gary Olson began to cite as proof of “the death of composition as an intellectual discipline.”²⁴ That phrasing alone should exemplify the degree to which mainstream composition took writer self-reports and personal essay reflections on teaching as a threat to the field. Even more than a decade after North, Bishop's wide-ranging piece was seen as anti-scholarship, rather than, to borrow a 1990s-grunge buzzword, *alternative* scholarship.

So far in this chapter, I have been discussing the history of expressivist and practice-based pedagogies in composition, but I would like now to shift more specifically to how these pedagogies are bound up with the concept of “lore.” In *The Making of Knowledge in Composition: Portrait of an Emerging Field* (1987), North does not cast a purely negative tint on lore. In fact, he counters many of its “denigrative connotations” (23). Nonetheless he aptly describes the pitfalls that composition has identified in the practitioner-based approach to the teaching of writing. North considers lore's “pragmatic logic and experience-based structure [that] account[s] for three of its most important functional properties: since anything can become a part of lore, “nothing can be dropped from [lore],” and “because lore is fundamentally pragmatic, contributions to it have to be framed in practical terms, as knowledge about what to do” and “in

²⁴ In 2017, Tim Mayers recounted on the “Creative Writing Pedagogy” Facebook group about his 2000 back-and-forth with Gary Olson in the pages of *JAC*.

effect, then, once a particular nomination is made the contributor gives up control over it” (*The Making of Knowledge* 24, 25). Lore, then, in the teaching of writing, is not only a set of “textbooks, syllabi,” or classroom anecdotes that provide a conventional wisdom about the art of writing, but is also a kind of archive of narrative accounts about writerly activities and processes—much like the ones that paved the way for the work of early expressivists.

North’s portrayal of lore within practitioner pedagogies “marked a crucial moment in the development of composition studies, allowing a much fuller and clearer articulation of the field than had been previously possible, and—perhaps more importantly—opening up new avenues for development” (Mayers, “Figuring the Future” 2). North not only valued the notion of “practice as inquiry,” referring to lore as a “rich and powerful body of knowledge” but also exposed the dangers of a house of lore, endlessly accumulating and “rambling” (North, *The Making of Knowledge* 19, 27). This “unwieldy” lore is carelessly “inherited” as a pile from the previous generation (27). For composition to continue on its path of attaining greater “power, prestige, professional recognition and advancement,” a “clash” of “methodological differences” would be inevitable (363). North predicted the future prestige of the field rested upon a “subversion of the practical tradition,” which “ordinarily implies preparation for *doing* something” (364). Instead of following the practitioner tradition where theoretically-derived knowledge is merely translated “into knowledge about what to do,” North outlined a fairly accurate path for the immediate future of the field (25). But what was lost in this organization of practitioner knowledge? In critiquing part of North’s taxonomic project, Cain discusses the fallacy of separating knowledge-making into neat categories, and North’s inherent essentialist and ideological argument:

North undermines his own project to “rescue” practitioner knowledge and place it firmly among the various “knowledge-making” communities within composition studies. By defining practitioner knowledge as essentially different from formal research rather than as a product of institutional inequities, especially of those toward women, he maintains binary oppositions between theory and practice, defining each as essentially separate but equal knowledge making communities. He opposes the concrete, local, pragmatic inquiry of practitioners to the abstract, global, speculative knowledge of researchers—a formulation that maintains the subordination of the former to the latter. North assumes that language reflects, rather than constitutes, experience; like a mirror, it sustains distortions that are, however, correctable. (*Revisioning Writer’s Talk* 8)

Much like Gradin did in *Romancing Rhetorics*, Cain sees practitioners as “feminized” within the field of composition studies where for decades, “women dominate[d] composition as a whole” but “men dominate[d] as knowledge makers” (*Revisioning Writers Talk* 4, 4-5). Cain’s intervention involved looking to narrative as “the appropriate mode for representing and interpreting experiential knowledge” (5). Yet again, we see how narratives of writing processes can serve to not only disrupt issues of institutional power and traditional hegemonies, but also can serve to identify a host of unseen issues within the discipline as we move forward.

While theoretical perspectives were being informed less and less by practitioner logic in the 1970s and 80s, that did not necessarily mean that pedagogical practices at that time in composition did not rely heavily on conventional wisdom and “recipe swapping.” As Paul Butler notes, “the relationship—and tension—between theory and practice, researcher and practitioner, come into focus through North’s concept of lore” (Butler et al.) It is possible, and most likely prevalent, to rail against expressivist pedagogy in published scholarship, but to utilize

expressivist pedagogy in one's teaching practices. Ironically, expressivists were not granted the prestige that was bestowed upon other kinds of researchers. Donald Murray recalls his experiences as a visiting professor at a college where "Someone was using my material in a seminar on teaching writing, but I wasn't invited to speak because I wasn't a theorist. I wasn't intellectual" (Murray, "Mucking About in Language" 13).

Ann Berthoff's position in 1981 was to advocate a continual dialectic of theory and practice, in order to help the field move past its reliance on lore, and yet pay heed to a larger pedagogical framework she calls a "pedagogy of knowing."

We English teachers are given to recipe swapping—and that can be hazardous. In my ideal commonwealth...I would order the closing down of the Exercise Exchange; the NCTE would not be allowed to operate it unless they instituted a Theory Exchange. And you couldn't get the recipe unless you also went there. (33-34)

But before one can get too comfortable with this proposed dialectic, we might see, alternatively, how "recipe swapping" itself is a dynamic process. Rather than recipe swapping as practice-in-a-vacuum, the trading of lore about what works among teachers relies upon an already formed awareness of particular theoretical constructs, past experiences, and conjectures about how to best solve a pedagogical problem. As Patricia Harkin notes in "The Postdisciplinary Politics of Lore," practitioners "evoke disciplinary language, not to produce knowledge, but to solve a problem. Lore, in this context, elides without denying the opposition between theory and practice" (134). Similarly, an October 1988 *English Journal* "Exchange" on student writing, designed to highlight possibilities for dialogue among all teachers of writing, includes an Editor's note that focuses on the social bonds inherent in any exchange.

Idea exchanges among classroom teachers are more than “recipe swapping.” As professionals in practice, these teachers know something about theory and research, but they know a great deal about practice, and about the impossibility of direct application of much theory and research in real settings, about the need to transform ‘knowledge’ of literature and composition before it can be applied in classrooms. (“EJ Focus” 53)

Within this framework, the application of lore within teacher conversations is both rhetorical (in that it responds to a particular situation) and transferable (this advice may extend far beyond academic experiences). Harkin goes so far as to argue that “lore, then, is theory,” due to the way its “strategies travel to other situations” (Harkin 134). Karen Kopelson similarly points out that in composition’s “disciplinary birth,” it was necessary to “reform and focus on practice precisely by making theory” (Kopelson 751).

Ultimately what we continue to see discussed is a kind of a standstill in rhetoric and composition between those who view the field as primarily pedagogical, “trap[ping] [the field] in its service-oriented roles and reputation” and those who “produce scholarship that does not seem to bear directly on teaching” (Kopelson 752). While Kopelson admits that this “battle” of the binaries is “oversimplified,” “unproductive,” and “reductive,” he does argue that even after decades of debate, “the theory/practice split remains entrenched” (752).

And yet, is it possible to construct a grand design to finally transcend this forced divide,²⁵ this flawed binary? Following Mayers’s suggestion to look back in order to find places where collaborations did occur or could have happened, we might look to the example of Wendy

²⁵ Bishop’s “Places to Stand” (1999): “This close inspection leads me to propose that there have been fewer spokespersons and fewer articles published by writers who teach than we might expect given the strength of the social-constructionist marginalization and then dismissal of expressivists. In fact, I argue that key-expressivists (so called, not self-labeled) are frequently cast as convenient straw-men, as now-aging, no longer compositionally-hip, and therefore slightly embarrassing advocates of a 1960s touchy-feely pedagogy from which professionals in composition are currently trained to distance themselves” (10).

Bishop, who sought to meld her scholarship to her experience as a writer.²⁶ Bishop, throughout her career, attempted to build a “grand design” whereby she could “merge the theories that informed” both composition and creative writing pedagogy (Bishop qtd. in Bizzaro, “Writers Wanted” 261). Bishop aimed to join “writers’ insights” to “composition research and theory to further clarify what it means to be a writer and have a writing process.” Bishop’s expressivist move to “clarify what it means to be a writer” and her cognitive move to say something generalizable about “hav[ing] a writing process” illustrates just how difficult this grand design was to articulate. The early insights into process had led to composition researchers employing related, yet vastly different, intellectual currents: expressivism and cognitivism. While expressivism and cognitivism were both concerned with what to do with narrative accounts of writing processes, they took sharply different angles in terms of their research methods. Bishop herself “understood [the] concerns about cognitivist research” and the critiques of scholars such as “Patricia Bizzell, Marilyn Cooper, and Kenneth Bruffee, who ‘insist[ed] that neither cognitive models nor expressive models [were] complete” (Bizzaro, “Writers Wanted” 261). The ambitious “grand design” scared off “[many] in the profession [who] would no doubt have preferred for Bishop to limit herself to creative writing” (261).

Resisting Lore: Practitioner Knowledge at the Margins of Pedagogical Scholarship, a Response from Creative Writing Studies

While rhetoric and composition did mature, one could say, to include more academically rigorous research methods and methodologies, creative writing long resisted the theoretical turn, and instructors continued to look to their own writing and classroom experiences, as well as

²⁶ Wendy Bishop notes; “Marvin Bell (1964), William Stafford (1964), Stephen Minot (1976), and Sheila Ortiz-Taylor (1979) published essays in *CCC*, to be followed a decade later by Anthony Petrosky (1982), Alice Brand (1987), Brett Lott (1988), and Ken Kesey (1990) who presented their ideas through *CCC* interviews or as essayists speaking about aspects of writing and writing instruction”(Bishop 9-10).

published self-reports of writers, as the foundations of their pedagogical wisdom (rather than theory and philosophy). Today, as was the case in 1987, when North published his work on lore, the practitioner mode of knowledge-making (i.e., lore-based teaching and writing) is often “excluded and ignored by researchers, scholars, and theorists in composition,” while the majority of creative writing instructors ignore systematic research altogether (Morris).

Over the past few decades, however, a growing number of scholars who write about creative writing pedagogy have taken up the subject, and imported methods and methodologies from the humanities and social sciences at large, in order to try and reverse creative writing’s reliance on lore. This comes as part of a pedagogical and scholarly explosion leading toward a field of “creative writing studies,” a “still emerging enterprise,” that recalls composition studies as it developed in the mid-1980s (Mayers, “One Simple Word” 218).

Creative writing, by all accounts, had not, prior to the early 21st Century, ever taken a step back and studied the basic pedagogical assumptions of the field. That is part of why Ritter and Vanderslice’s work in the mid 2000s was so groundbreaking. Creative writing, according to Ritter and Vanderslice:

[N]eeds to understand the influential mythology or lore that perpetuates the public and academic perceptions of what writing classrooms can do and how this lore dictates what part teaching and teacher training can, and should, play in the education and development of writers to be in both undergraduate and graduate classrooms. Such understanding should go beyond the publication and review of sample lesson plans or sessions on how to beat the employment system. Creative writing professionals need to discuss and challenge theories and principles in writing pedagogy that have passed from generation to generation and that stagnate rather than advance the field, severing future teachers from

the English department and, by extension, the academy as a whole. (Ritter and Vanderslice, “Teaching Lore” 105)

Ritter and Vanderslice’s publication marked one of the first times that, after the rise of social constructionism in the academy, creative writing practitioners published a composition theory-infused, self-critical view of the field, and communicated their message to other teachers of writing.

While process once served to bridge creative writing and composition, followed by a period where expressivist rhetorics helped to develop composition studies, the identification of “lore” as inherent to expressivist-charged pedagogies served as the final crack in the separation between the two. Creative writing pedagogy, and its attendant lore, was further pushed toward the margins in part because, as Kalamaras has argued, “few teachers in creative writing have the occasion to speak their philosophy of teaching creative writing” (Kalamaras 74). The instructor’s experience as a writer and a teacher often falls into the category of “popular craft essays.”

Many works in the archive of writers on writing also fall into a separate category of “craft criticism,” which Tim Mayers has argued, “can and should serve as a bridge between creative writing and composition studies” (Mayers, *(Re)Writing Craft* 117). He defines craft criticism as: “a type of critical prose written by (institutionally defined) creative writers that seeks mostly to subvert—or at least account for—some of the persistent problems in what I call “the institutional-conventional wisdom” of creative writing (Mayers, *(Re)Writing Craft* 13). Mayers, then, is suggesting that craft criticism includes works that challenge the persistent lore of the field.²⁷ Obviously, prior to the Program Era, it is hard to speak of a particular factor of

²⁷ He calls this powerful lore “institutional-conventional wisdom” because “it often appears to some creative writers to be a form of ‘natural’ or ‘commonsense’ knowledge....believed by many to be beyond dispute.” Institutional-conventional wisdom is “also ‘institutional’ in the sense that it has become embedded within institutional structures and therefore has helped to form the kind of academic enterprise creative writing is” (Mayers, *(Re)Writing Craft* 13).

“institutionality” that texts in the archive of writers on writing grapple with. While Mayers is hesitant to claim that “craft criticism” is a centuries-old genre, I would suggest that a certain kind of “conventional wisdom” about the art of imaginative writing certainly existed prior to the first writing workshops. Further, the archive of writers on writing, as might be true for any textual archive, includes a spectrum of different traditions, practices, and beliefs about the art of imaginative writing. Overall, this body of lore, collected through narrative accounts of the processes of writing, and often details experiences of frustration and failure. Writerly activities and processes and their critique and/or pedagogical import are now often documented in “craft criticism” as well.

These kinds of texts appear in *The Writer’s Chronicle*, *Poets and Writers*, and little literary magazines, as well as collections that are often assigned in undergraduate or graduate workshops. In “What Stories Teach Their Writers: The Purpose and Practice of Revision” by Jane Smiley, in Julie Checkoway’s *Creating Fiction*, the novelist Smiley shares her experiences teaching revision using “several elaborate ways to get the students to revise and enjoy it” (244). The lore is that students are wholly confused as to how to edit their own work, and that teachers should find exciting little activities to focus and train their energies. Smiley, then, uses the craft criticism form to go through numerous formal elements of fictional technique and consider how they relate directly to revision. By suggesting creative research at the same time that she advocates scene-combining, Smiley is offering a way of revising more attuned to students’ own belief in their process. On the topic of revision, Anne Lamott’s “Shitty First Drafts” in *Bird by Bird*, describes her two-day drafting and revising method drawn from writing food reviews for *California* magazine. At one point, Lamott describes how she “eventually let [herself] trust the

process—sort of, more or less” (Lamott 24-25). Taking on the lore of “trust the process,” Lamott interrogates how doubt and bad writing are a part of her writing habits.

One piece of lore that circulated frequently while I was in graduate school related to the use of the flashback in short fiction. One visiting writer-editor described the classic “workshop story” she often received at a literary magazine. In these failed stories, the second scene went far back in time, almost with a corresponding *whoosh* sound from the television show *Lost*. Those stories never made it out of the slush pile, she said, because they had become a cliché, a trying-to-sound-like-Alice-Munro effect. Because of the institutional nature of both the MFA and the literary magazine publishing world, this advice spread quickly. Ben Percy echoes this anti-flashback lore in his *Poets and Writers* article, “Don’t Look Back: The Problem with Backstory.” However, Eleanor Henderson’s response essay, “I Wasn’t Born Yesterday: The Beauty of Backstory” published in the same section of *Poets and Writers* as Percy’s responded to this writing advice by taking the opposing side. Instead of simply accepting this as the only way to view backstory, Henderson defended the use of retrospective vision by appealing to our use of backstory in everyday life: “Despite the warnings—don’t look back or you’ll turn to salt—we are preoccupied with our own personal histories, and with our inability to change or reclaim them.”

Lore’s contradictory nature is often on display in craft criticism, and often craft critics engage in this kind of dialogue with each other, always considering the role they play as writers within larger institutions. This is the difference between craft criticism and more conventional craft essays, according to Mayers’s definition. Mayers asks us to see craft criticism as work that questions how institutional entities (such as publishing entities, university policies, and intradepartmental relationships) reinforce or discourage particular practices. In a noteworthy dialogue of sorts, Alexander Chee writes back to his former professor at Wesleyan University,

Annie Dillard, in his essay, “Annie Dillard and the Writing Life,” which appeared in *The Morning News*. Dillard herself was author of a work of craft criticism, *The Writing Life*, in which she demystifies and reflects on various maxims about writing. When discussing self-editing, Dillard makes the point that it requires courage, examines the way that the traces that originate a work of art are ideally excised, and expressly considers why this can be a tender emotional experience. Her craft book is exemplary in its attempt to understand the micro-level processes of writers. Chee describes his apprenticeship with the famous author Dillard, telling of his own struggle to get into her class. Most universities have a lottery system or a mandatory submission of sample work in order to get into the courses with “star faculty” in creative writing. Chee recalls Dillard addressing the class by telling them that over one hundred people applied, but she took only thirteen. He remembers her asking for stories in “triple-spaced” format in order to write more comments and considers the totality of Dillard’s pedagogical style, particular the mentor-apprentice relationship between Dillard and himself (Chee). Told in a confessional style, Chee documents his fits and starts as an advanced undergraduate student of creative writing, and his failures to become a fine arts major, seeing creative writing in context with other disciplines and programs. Chee marvels as Dillard, who having just quit cigarettes, sees Chee smoking on campus and asks him for a drag. Dillard came to represent not only a writer he admired, but someone Chee determined that he “wanted to be” (Chee). In Chee’s telling, Dillard both eschews and plays into the stereotype of the “star faculty” member. In this way, Chee’s essay describes the personal aspect of becoming a writer or teacher, and all of the “obstacles one must overcome to be taken seriously” (Chee).

Craft criticism, as one might infer, in its less reliable form, and understood differently than the way I've outline here, may run the risk of merely repeating clichés—rather than stimulating critical conversation. As Ritter and Vanderslice note:

A pedagogy based solely on these types of essays might lead the uninitiated to ask, as Paul Dawson does, “Is the pedagogical process merely guided by the idiosyncrasies of each teacher, the practicing writer able to pass on knowledge by virtue of his or her innate talent and secret knowledge of the craft?” (Ritter and Vanderslice, “Teaching Lore” 106)

Yet I suggest that it's the very idiosyncrasies of writing and teaching that the archive of writers on writing seeks to speak to. The most persuasive texts within the archive, and especially within the subset of craft criticism, belie a kind of knowledge of writing processes that the author wishes to not keep secret. The knowledge of micro-level processes is easily ignored by compositionists and creative writing instructors within scholarship because a) no singular method for organizing the dataset as yet exists, and b) pedagogies and practices that drift too far into expressivism will often carry the stamp of being outdated and “touchy feely.” While the personal essay might be a useful assignment to entice a student in first-year composition into the course, there is often a corresponding assignment that moves beyond personal writing. Even “craft criticism” itself carries something beyond the personal essay. However, craft critics are moving away from traditional talk of “talent” or “innate genius,” in order to defend local, contested histories of writing and teaching practice.

As evidenced from the Ritter and Vanderslice quote above and from Tim Mayers's notion of “craft criticism,” creative writing studies has borrowed *The Making of Knowledge*

maneuver of painting a portrait of the field as the first step in starting to confront its pervasive use of lore. As Hesse characterizes the work of Ritter and Vanderslice:

The traditional appropriate font of creative writing pedagogy is lore, in the Northian sense, as Kelly Ritter and Stephanie Vanderslice aptly note, foremost the lore of the workshop, though interviews with writers or craft criticism (distinct from contemporary literary criticism) are fine, as to some extent are exercises—as long as they’re confined to intro courses. Most scholarship about creative writing has advocated pedagogical possibilities beyond the workshop. (Hesse, “The Place of Creative Writing” 36)

Haake similarly locates creative writing scholarship in critical works that strive “to move us beyond our preoccupation with the writer or the text to the role of creative writing as an academic discipline inside a profession that includes, but is not limited to, the production and teaching of imaginative writing” (Haake qtd. in Mayers, “One Simple Word”).

Ritter and Vanderslice specifically write that their goal in producing scholarship on creative writing pedagogy is “to provoke...and ultimately to endanger the propagation of unexamined lore in our creative writing classrooms” (“Creative Writing” xix). Unexamined lore, then, suggests a status quo way of doing things: we operate this way because that’s how it’s always been done. Ritter and Vanderslice build on North’s original exploration of lore, and then reprise the disciplinary move that composition made in the 1980s: to begin a systematic examination of its powerfully lore-based pedagogy. Mayers describes the way that creative writing and composition both explored the problems of “lore” as each field began to vie for more professional respectability:

In the case of creative writing studies, the field of inquiry begins to emerge during the last two decades of the twentieth century, although the rapid expansion of creative

writing programs themselves occurs from the early through the middle part of the century. For both composition studies and creative writing studies, most of the field's earliest scholarly works directly address problems experienced by professors attempting to teach writing (of various sorts) to college undergraduates. (Mayers, "One Simple Word" 218)

Grappling with each field's powerful lore seems to be one major commonality in the conventional disciplinary histories of college composition and creative writing. For instance, within creative writing studies in the past two decades, scholars like Ritter and Vanderslice have returned to the question of "teachability" and the popular, persistent lore that creative writing depends mostly on talent and cannot truly be taught. By examining this powerful mythology, Ritter and Vanderslice are trying to elevate creative writing pedagogy to the level of scholarship.

Likewise, Diane Donnelly has argued against the powerful lore of "the workshop" model in creative writing, suggesting that it is a dated format, emptied out of its potential for liberatory pedagogy. Paul Dawson has argued for the incorporation of critical theory into creative writing programs. Those at the forefront of creative writing studies often fit a similar professional profile: publishing literary writers who are trained in composition and rhetoric, and may have an MFA in creative writing or experience in community-based literary projects, and are able to, as Bishop and Moxley sought to do before the field had the name of creative writing studies, "merge the theories that informed" both composition and creative writing pedagogy (Bishop qtd. in Bizzaro, "Writers Wanted" 261). Prior to the onset of published scholarship in creative writing studies, the field's scholarship was either pragmatic in its recommendation about successful exercises or classroom activities, or historical, in its cataloging of past innovations. Ritter and Vanderslice note that both of these "approaches fail to interrogate that pedagogy and history in relation to graduate program design, undergrad curriculum development, and professional development for

teachers in the field” (*Can it Really* xiii). Few scholars prior to Ritter and Vanderslice and Mayers tackled the work that Bishop and Moxley had sought to achieve; that is, to fuse creative writing and composition pedagogies.

We have the attitude of being highly suspicious of lore, and often rejecting its use in writing instruction. This viewpoint has been articulated by compositionists—as I mention in the first chapter—but also more recently within the emerging of field of creative writing studies, which is comprised of compositionists who are deeply invested in reforming creative writing pedagogy. These scholars—including Mayers, Leahy, Haake, Bizzaro—are largely informed by theories of composition studies that aim to merge teaching practice and pedagogical theory, but they also have a strong background in imaginative writing. Across the board, their clarion call has been to “resist” pervasive teaching lore, because it promotes the outmoded notion that writing cannot truly be taught. This form of response is, in a certain way, akin to the modernist dream of resistance to doing things the same way they have always been done, going against conventional wisdom. Following that resistance-based response, scholars have begun to chart the flow of endless lore (representations of writers in film, the circulation of memes celebrating familiar writing advice, endless articles and how-to-write publications, podcasts, magazine special issues) in order to separate the counterfeit from the worthwhile. Many in creative writing studies seek to locate almost scientifically what is purely imaginary or inadvisable, and what seems like good and practical pedagogical work. This kind of maneuvering is all done in the name of recovering a kind of normalcy, or to put it differently, a kind of institutional stability and predictability. That move is primarily analytical: it’s in the name of “accuracy,” but that’s necessarily the most appropriate mode for this kind of knowledge—or perhaps accuracy is based in part on the methods we use to analyze or piece together narratives.

Creative writing studies is enjoying a promising future with its own annual conference and journal as of 2016 and increased presence at national conventions such as AWP and CCCC. There are also now increasing amounts of scholarship that consider pedagogical issues from both a creative writing studies and rhetoric and composition background—especially in the pages of *College English* during Kelly Ritter’s tenure as editor. These scholars at the crossroads of creative writing and composition eagerly appropriated the moves of the past—the jettisoning of counterfeit lore—and yet, it is my belief that, even now, a reconsideration of the value of “lore” would actually serve to redevelop the strong theoretical and pedagogical bonds between creative writing and composition. In its earlier foundations, back when Joe Moxley published *Creative Writing in America* in 1989, creative writing pedagogy included craft essays that looked at pedagogical approaches—often in an autobiographical mode—about how to teach particular skills or techniques, such as narrative modes or stylistic approaches. Even today, prominent writers (often teachers, or with teaching experience) publish wide-ranging interviews in *The Paris Review*, often speaking to the same minute level of writerly activities and process (there are bound to be questions that border on the mundane—about daily writing routines). Similarly, Bizzaro and others publish academic prose that blurs the line between literature, art, and critique; Bob Perelman’s *The Marginalization of Poetry* (1996) is one of those oft-cited works. Repetitive and easily groupable reflections on writing fall into the category of “lore.” But so too might pieces that have true heft and the intellectual power to question the nature of how we talk about writerly activities and processes, potentially dismissed from academic dialogue because of the personal nature of the writing.

In a review essay that looks at Byron Hawk’s *A Counter-History of Composition: Toward Methodologies of Complexity* (2007), Geoffrey Sirc paraphrases and interprets Hawk’s claim

about composition's loss of that "*misterioso altero* quality" that has "result[ed] in a diminishment of adventurousness in the work done in our classrooms" ("Resisting Entropy 512). Sirc continues: "Our most egregious crime [in composition studies] is the insistence on dumbing down the complicated process of composition to a scrupulously teachable method, reducing the roles of chance and the imagination in the production of textual knowledge" (512). With this argument in mind, perhaps it is time to reimagine the micro-level processes of writing and what an effective "teaching method" might be to engage students who are increasingly networked, multitasked, and invested in their own narratives of making, which often involve serendipitous encounters and imaginative flights of fancy? My intervention, much like Wendy Bishop's intervention, comes not with the intention to "toss out the unified text with the academic bath water, but to offer options" (Bishop 17). I propose that scholars in creative writing studies and composition studies use appropriate scholarly apparatus to view tidbits of writerly advice gained from the experiences of writing and composing rather than a simple kneejerk resistance. Donald Murray noted in 1990 that "the extensive testimony of writers has largely been ignored by composition researchers" (Murray, *Shoptalk* xiv). These words still hold true today.

I propose that there is great value in lore because it serves as a potential access point to how texts come into being. Lore better attends to compositional processes than formulaic portrayals of the writing process. Lore captures composers attempting "to understand what they are doing and trying to share that understanding" (xv). While there remains a tendency among researchers to "dismiss what writers say about writing because they believe that writers do not know, intellectually, what they do," literary writers are remarkably articulate about capturing the nuances of "making meaning through written language" (xiv). Further, while Fulkerson claims that expressivism was not a postmodern movement, Faigley, in his history of composition studies,

stresses how “‘free writing’ and early draft” exercises stressed “disorganiz[ation]” and were borrowed from the reigning “postmodern” cultural currents at the time, such as “antiform, play, chance, anarchy, [and] silence” (Faigley 14). The move to resist lore is in large part modernist, foundational, and positivist, without proper scholarship that defends its postmodern and antifoundational notions.

A push past creative writing lore need not be the only way of bridging the divide between the two fields. One historical moment of past partnerships occurred in the 1980s, when researchers such as Linda Flowers and John Hayes, Jack Selzer, and Janet Emig used student and professional writer interviews along with protocol analysis to best understand composing practices. That research tended to translate processes into simplified understandings of a large-scale writing process. More recently, Jody Shipka and Paul Prior’s “Chronotopic Laminations” article—which uses a theoretical methodology informed by both intertextuality and actor-network theory, which are chief methods of my Chapter four case study—engage with both famous artist and student artist testimonies. By riding along a similar, though fundamentally different, disciplinary wave, we can see how there exists a space for translatable experiences between creative writing and composition, and, as Mayers suggests, a potential for future partnerships. Bruce McComiskey’s 2016 edited collection *Microhistories of Composition* and Thomas P. Miller’s 2011 “The Evolution of College English: Literacy Studies from the Puritans to the Postmoderns” are two prime examples representing theorists looking to disciplinary histories in order to inform a future map for this specifically interdisciplinary, boundary-crossing research.

Likewise, we can see how North’s alignment of expressivism with all “lore”-based pedagogies in *The Making of Knowledge* served to further push creative writing pedagogy—

which has relied almost exclusively on practitioner logic—to the margins of composition studies. To put it even more strongly, his exploration of lore-centric practitioners as “undiscriminating, illogical, and sloppy,” was, in a sense, the death knell for the once strong relationship between creative writing and composition (North, *The Making of Knowledge* 27). Kimberly Andrews mentions lore’s comforting quality—in the context of creative writing—which could quickly lull pedagogues into conventionality:

My own suspicion is that teaching lore—this set of mystical principles, this idea that the only thing that matters is the raw (or slightly refined) product of the heart—is fundamentally comforting, because the handing-down of “tried and true” writing tips and tricks is an endeavor requiring little maintenance: no pedagogical trends to follow, no debates to become embroiled in, and, fundamentally, no critics (well, except some of us, and only recently) knocking on the classroom door. Teaching lore further comforts creative writers who are intimidated by the enormous body of literature and criticism that encircles them; it is much easier to speak of the genius of creative writing, to say, like a bad infomercial, “you, too, can cultivate this genius in yourself!” (Andrews 247)

Here we see common gripes against expressivism (automatic, conservative, cheesy, touchy-feely), but now used in the context of contemporary creative writing pedagogy, “a professional world characterized by lore” (Mayers, “Figuring the Future” 2).

Toward a More Coherent Partnership

In spite of the work of many advocates teaching and researching at the intersection of creative writing and composition, it has been exceedingly difficult for writers and teachers of writing to make sweeping changes and form a sound bond between the two fields. Sirc urges, “I don’t think we can hear enough from reflective practitioners” (Sirc, “Resisting Entropy” 515).

Faigley suggests that there never really was a heyday of process in composition because courses were almost always arranged as product-based. Composition, Sirc argues in the same vein, failed to tap into the “Happening aesthetic” (Sirc, *English Composition* 24) of the 1950s and 60s, remaining stuck in its formalism.

Sirc uses a tidbit of testimony from George Braque to illustrate the polarity of ideologies about composition that exists: Braque “knew he was finished with a painting when nothing remained of the original idea. Composition’s definition of finished writing, on the other hand, is when the original intention is perfectly realized” (Sirc, *English Composition* 24).

There are still fundamental and perhaps inextricable institutional and philosophical differences between creative writing and composition that have severely hindered the partnership to this point. Over the last decade, scholars studying this intersection have composed a laundry list of popular and scholarly work that discusses the need to connect further. And yet, it is almost as if the critical conversation is languishing in these starts and calls to action, rather than entering a true brokerage of some of the key differences and similarities between the two fields.

Mayers has posited—in a sense, optimistically—that the separation into two separate “camps” is “as much the result of historical accident as it is of any intrinsic differences between the two fields of study” (*(Re)Writing Craft* xii). While there have been efforts in the past to unite these two particular outsider strands of English studies as part of an umbrella organization of “writing studies,” Mayers observes:

Simply pointing out that the differences [between the two fields of study] may not make sense is not enough to “undraw” the lines between the two fields. In other words, the theoretical connections between composition and creative writing mean very little unless

they are considered in light of the institutional differences between composition and creative writing. (*Re)Writing Craft* xii-xiii)

The institutional differences, those mechanisms by which writing and reading have been part of a larger educational system “within creative writing programs at colleges and universities,” are one of the sources of the current impediment. Separate camps have led to separate buildings, separate funding streams, and distinct fundamental assumptions about each field of study’s day-to-day work.

It is my hope that, even though creative writing and composition underwent a severe schism that resulted in many ruptures regarding their central work and separate theoretical approaches, both fields are, in fact, on their way toward reestablishing and firming up these originary bonds through a more comprehensive analysis of *writerly activities and processes*. Creative writing pedagogy, and its reliance on lore, speaks especially helpfully to a mode of practitioner-based merging that emphasizes a particularly authentic identification between the instructor and the student. Every teacher who does not lecture, is, in some sense, a practitioner, and must improvise and adapt their teaching strategies to the particularities of various pedagogic encounters. This suggests that practitioner logic, and the accrual and deployment of lore, is almost a necessary pre-condition of all seminar-based learning. If teachers of composition can consciously and intentionally find ways to return to this powerful lore of literary writers or genre-specific writers, then we could successfully move away from an overemphasis on writing’s effects and back towards the possibility inherent in *making*. Mayers has worked toward reorienting composition along the borderline of making, stressing production in the process-heavy arts, such as composition and creative writing. Hesse, on a similar note, has described the danger inherent to abandoning process altogether:

.... If we go far toward being “about” composing, we privilege students as scholarly interpreters and researchers in ways paralleling the ways literary studies initiates its students. While students having knowledge about composing is eminently worthy, ignoring different kinds of writing for wider audiences and purposes is marginalizing, especially when digital tools and networks expand the production and circulation of texts. (“The Place of Creative Writing” 34-35)

These networks and processes only add materials to the archive of writers on writing, which has its generic predecessors in instruction manuals, style guides, and teaching notes that date back to antiquity.

Our next steps may involve a need to organize and taxonomize this existing knowledge base, as Ritter and Vanderslice have so eloquently called for, whereby we mine “creative writing myths” and “personal anecdote” in order to “ask teachers to reconsider...how student creative writers ‘learn’ to write” (“Creative Writing and the Persistence of ‘Lore’” xvi). Further, again extending Ritter and Vanderslice, capturing lore can lend a sense of historicity to our work. Ritter and Vanderslice go on to say—and this is where a historical perspective fully comes into play—that “behind our collective pedagogies as teachers of creative writing lies a collective history of learning fueled by lore; to ignore this history and its deceptively simple construction does a great disservice to the field” (xvii). Part of the full historical turn means considering the form (the how) and content (the what) of this lore together—identifying its historicity in order to see more clearly how and why it shapes writers. While the mythologies that stem from writer accounts and teaching lore are indeed complex, they are still, I would argue, analyzable, and not without a historical trace: precisely because they contain certain patterns that at least in part

illuminate how individual writers are interacting with the body of process-based knowledge that precedes them.

Once we begin to attend to creative writing pedagogies, in all of their historical situatedness and intertextualities, we can imagine how creative writing's emphasis on process via its rich and not automatically nefarious lore could potentially pave the way for more interdisciplinary collaboration, which has been minimal due to creative writing's prolonged stance of "privileged marginality." While I agree with Lowenthal's hypothesis that the preservation of the past has "dampened creative use of it," creative writing pedagogy is one site where practitioners still use the past in creative ways (Lowenthal xvii). We must come at it a different way, even different from conventional objective history. We have entered a moment of postmodernity where all of our pedagogical methods are relics, all of our knowledge-making is suspect. This is the condition of working in and around 21st-century academia, and yet we can begin to grapple with it by changing our perspective: i.e., by stressing production over interpretation as a means of cultivating the "habits of mind" of the field the students are entering. For instance, Anna Leahy voices her belief that the work of creative writing pedagogy has been misunderstood. Rather than focusing on ornamental revisions of a text—which are ultimately geared toward increasing a work's entertainment value—what is actually going on in creative writing instruction is the creation of a practice-based environment that initiates new practitioners into the field:

Creative writing shares this prioritizing of practice with medical programs, too, in which book learning is combined with working with patients. During their education, visual artists, doctors, and creative writers learn the habits of mind of the field they are entering. For example, in creative writing, the question of how a text means—how a story makes

meaning, how a poem is put together, how a change alters the effect of the words—is more central than what a text means. (Leahy qtd. in Vanderslice and Leahy, “What Is Creative Writing Anyway?”)

Leahy has gone on to describe her inspiration from “scientific processes” and the way in which she encourages “persistence” and “grit” that goes beyond working with students to keep submitting their creative work. In doing so, she illustrates just how connected contemporary creative writing can be to the rest of the academy at large: encouraging “research” and “drawing from real life,” for instance, in the composition of poems. I would push those ideas one step further, and argue that the encouragement to pursue alternate “habits of mind” is in keeping with the ideals of progressive pedagogy that continually seek to move the field forward through structural change.

Creative writing pedagogy is already moving away from its isolationism, and other pedagogues also speak to the interdisciplinary correspondences between creative processes. Creative writing and composition are two fields where students can truly feel that they “know” something about the course material on the first day of class. I believe it may be possible for us as instructors to do more with that collective energy, and to look to writing lore as a kind of lingua franca across the academy, in which lore and “teaching lore” are omnipresent across traditional disciplinary boundaries.

Addressing the How and the What

The binary Hesse sets up in his September 2010 *CCC* article still holds creative writing to be a fairly simple, global skill rather than an act rooted within the rhetorical tradition. And yet by examining two craft of creative writing books from the dawn of the Program Era, Lajos Egri’s *The Art of Dramatic Writing* and Raymond Queneau’s *Exercises in Style*, we can locate

several of the most common appeals inherent to the genre of the creative writing craft book that actually stress the rhetorical traditions of copia and imitation, which are not currently addressed widely in first-year composition pedagogy. Likewise, these recourses address in their form one other important aspect of craft: Apprentice writers of all ages and levels of experience bring some amount of fear or anxiety to the writing process, and craft books aim to, at least in part, exacerbate and then ultimately assuage those feelings of apprehension and/or uneasiness.

The rhetorical moves that craft of creative writing texts make vary greatly. For example, Queneau's book is a non-narrative re-telling of the same story in ninety-nine different ways, a linguistic and stylistic amplification exercise. Egri's approach differs, as he locates the key to a successful dramatic work to be found in the interplay between storytelling, premise, and human psychology. Queneau's text is technique-based and implicitly stresses the infinite ways of achieving *mimesis*, or an imitation of reality; its *copia* is an abundance of linguistic and stylistic play. Egri's text is rich with discussion of the landscape of human emotions. Egri stresses the formal aspects of character building through a detailed description of how certain recurring emotional psychodramas determine the dramatic premise, which in turn, shapes a work of art. *Mimesis*, for Egri, comes about through a *copia* of subject matter, in this case, of the diverse yet predictable wants and needs of characters. Queneau and Egri are at the opposite end of the spectrum when it comes to what they value in a craft of creative writing book, and, by extension, in a work of literary art: Egri's constraint is premise, while Queneau's constraint is technique. That is to say, Egri prefers a craft text that focuses on substance (the "how"), while Queneau chooses to focus on style (the "what").

Both abundance of language and plethora of emotion could potentially intimidate writers: with so many words, how to choose the right ones? With so many human emotions inherent to

any given situation, is there any room left to invent? I have chosen these two texts to serve as the pillars of creative writing craft texts because they make opposite kinds of rhetorical appeals and represent the great diversity inherent to the craft of creative writing book genre. I will argue for more curricular engagement with creative writing craft books because of their ability to bring about a cathartic experience in the reader and serve as an emotional gateway for the production of more compositions. Via this pitch to achieve a *cathartic* experience—and to lessen their writerly anxieties—the texts help readers locate a sense of themselves as writers. In turn, apprentice writers read with deeper engagement and come back to the page with fewer burdens and more focused anxieties. Through more reading and composing, writers improve.

Lajos Egri breaks down *The Art of Dramatic Writing* into four main parts: Premise, Character, Conflict, and a General final section. Premise is the key to Egri's project; in the introduction that precedes the Premise section, Egri posits that drama needs a "unifying force," something that will generate tension (Egri xvi). However, what makes this different from an analytical text is Egri's insistence that this tension not come from a "conscious attempt on the playwright's part to do so." That is to say, Egri believes that the force of "human character," is more "important" than formal considerations of "scene, tension, atmosphere, and the rest." The goal is to make drama seamless and realistic by listening to one's characters. Egri sees human psychology as a creative force that possesses "infinite ramifications and dialectical contradictions" for the playwright to work with. Immediately upon reading the first few pages of introductory matter, the reader confronts a palette of contradictory shapes, infinite in its scope. It is not hard to imagine an apprentice writer finding this material somewhat frightening, particularly in its copia of emotional conditions that animate a text.

In the section that follows, “Premise,” Egri outlines his idea of premise as a unifying force. He sees all human actions as relating back to some larger theme. He locates premises first in Shakespearean tragedy, finding “Blind trust leads to destruction” in *King Lear* and “Great love defies even death” in *Romeo and Juliet* (Egri 3). Then Egri addresses modern playwriting, finding the premise of “The sins of the father are visited on the children” in Ibsen’s *Ghosts*. Egri quotes a craft book by Moses L. Malevinsky, *The Science of Playwriting*, which asserts that “emotion is life” and “life is emotion.” Egri argues that emotion alone does not make a successful play, but rather an understanding of the “kind[s] of forces [that] set emotion going drive playwriting decisions” (Egri 7). Egri makes perhaps the most important rhetorical move of the project on page 8, when he delivers a list of fifteen premises, each of which follows a conditional construction. On the page, these are arranged, each on their own line. For example:

Foolish generosity leads to poverty.

Honesty defeats duplicity.

Heedlessness destroys friendship.

Ill-temper leads to isolation.

Materialism conquers frustration. (8)

Following these admittedly “flat statements,” Egri points out that these are all that’s necessary for a premise, considering they imply “character, conflict, and conclusion” (8-9). However, the author is nowhere to be found—his or her “conviction is missing” (9). Egri asserts that the author needs to “champion one side of the issue” and construct an argument so that the audience has a chance to consider that point of view. Just as soon as the reader starts to consider these seemingly lofty and emotionally distant goals, Egri places agency directly in the lap of the writer, saying that it is an emotional engagement that will ultimately craft the “argument” of the play.

Exercises in Style

Perhaps the most famous craft book that openly lays bare the issue of copia (in the context of craft decisions and writerly choices) is Queneau's *Exercises in Style*. The first thing one notices when picking up a copy of *Exercises in Style* is its cover: an arrangement of pencil sketches above and below the title. The sketches are of human bodies in various yogic and acrobatic positions; their bodies spell out letters. Inside the book, the title is spelled out by these performers and all of the ninety-nine sections begin with a first letter made by one of these performers. I use the word "performer" most consciously here, in order to emphasize the material way that language completes the text.

The text begins with a section entitled "Notation." An anecdote is told in a narrative shorthand style about a man with a long neck who is riding a bus in Paris and becomes angry at another passenger. The man with the long neck complains that everyone is bumping into him as they move past him. He sits down, exasperated. Later on that day, the narrator of the story sees the man with the long neck in front of a train station, talking to a friend. The friend tells him to put another button on his coat.

The next section is called "Double Entry." The same anecdote is re-told but certain phrases and words are repeated in the telling. Instead of "middle of the day," we get "middle of the day and at midday" (Queneau 21). We also get: "he is with and in the company of a friend and pal who is advising and urging" (22). Queneau's second move—after the simple fact of his re-telling the same tale—is to tell it twice. The second telling is literally a second telling as everything gets repeated. Additionally, Queneau is doing an amplification exercise, since, if one looks ahead, she sees that this same story will be told repeatedly, but with essential differences in the telling each time. The book announces itself as a series of *études*, exercises that might reject

interpretation that treats them as part of a larger narrative. In fact, Queneau, from the first few pages rejects narrative, and enters a non-narrative tradition—the book boasts itself as a series of exercises and moves into an alternative space. Queneau has put a constraint on this tale. There is only one tale, and we will be stuck with it for the rest of the book. Queneau seems to be advocating a kind writerly prolificness and linguistic play necessary in the literary arts; but he’s performing that play rather than making an argument for it.

Seemingly all of the formal elements of language are performed here, on display for the reader. The performance we are being treated to is the metaphorical equivalent of opening a toolbox and showing an apprentice carpenter how to use all of the tools, but not necessarily seeking to build something. The frightening part of this is that we are meaning-searching animals, continually looking for ways to make sense of the world around us. Who is to say a knowledge of such exercises would make a creative writer more proficient?

The third section is called “Litotes.” We get understatement here, the entire story shortened to three vague sentences. Queneau’s choice to follow an overstatement section with an understatement is telling; we’re getting a sense of the variability of how the story can be told. The choices are mounting, and the writer witnesses how this constraint is both a limiting force and a limitless one. The fourth and fifth sections tell the story in metaphor and retrograde respectively. The stylistic exercises vary from figures of speech to order to emotive displays to mood or tonal shifts, to synchysis, a form used by Latin poets. We eventually get different genres: the official letter, the blurb, and the telegram. We get games: anagrams and word-composition (made-up words). We get tonal consistencies (insistence and ignorance). We get temporal shifts (past, present) and tense shifts (passive voice). We get poetic forms (alexandrines). It all

approaches the ridiculous: why would this seemingly unimportant tale need to be told in all of these stylistic ways? The fear sets in: *with so many ways of saying it, what's the right way?*

Later on, Queneau's text breaks off into complicated mathematical permutations, immediately unintelligible. "Permutations by groups of 2,3,4, and 5 letters" begins: "Ed on to ay rd wa id sm yo da he nt ar re at" (129). The permutations increase until we have "permutations by groups of 9, 10, 11, and 12 letters." There we get: "Ards midda one day tow r platform yon the rea..." (132). The book, much like the postmodern notion of one reality, starts to disintegrate, pulverizing into a pastiche of formula and stylistic innovation. Toward the end of the book, we have a "Mathematical" section that represents the story as follows:

$$y' + PPTB(x) y' + S = 84.$$

Since the group of OuLiPo writers that Queneau was affiliated with was rooted in math and theory, they call for consideration of constraints when it comes to writing. The OuLiPo people see narrative as being shaped by choice; for instance, one that gets discussed by OuLiPo is Homer choosing the wrong turn for Odysseus, which then in turn shapes the Odyssey that follows; the constraint created what follows. The book, then, is not necessarily a psychological study of realism for Queneau, but rather a kind of statement about the value of practice, since practice takes place in a no-time, no-space, and isn't a means to an end, but rather, possibly, the end in itself.

Craft books yield a contradictory lore as evidenced by the polarities expressed by the table below (Table 1). However, to reduce them to a level of pedagogical or scholarly naiveté and/or limited view of "creative skills" would be far too hasty. These texts are actually tapping into a much longer tradition of situated communicative acts, and as creative writing studies borrows methods and methodologies from composition pedagogy, so too should composition

pedagogy see many of their most important stylistic concepts embodied in the archive of literary writer testimony.

Queneau's <i>Exercises in Style</i>	Egri's <i>The Art of Dramatic Writing</i>
Emphasis on technique and style	Emphasis on character psychology and human motivation
No clear statement of rules, orders, precepts	Precepts and examples of artistically rigorous playwriting
Draws from Surrealist, Futurist traditions	Draws from Russian and English-American realist traditions
Dreamlike unreality	Psychological realism
Surreal, a futurist unconscious set free	Analysis of unconscious motives
Numbers are key to understanding phenomena	Ideas are key to understanding phenomena
Writing is a set of constraints. The Odyssey came about because Homer chose for Odysseus the wrong turn.	You make the turn. The author decides based on what his or her characters choose.
Announces itself a series of "Exercises", etudes	Announces itself as an analysis of "the interpretation of human motives"
Infinity of action	Infinity of situation
Hyper-rational and mathematical	Emotive and romantic
Deceptively simple in structure	Deceptively complex in structure
Form over content (the How rather than the What)	Content over form (The What over the How)
Postmodernist	Modernist
The subtext: Say it straight	The subtext: Make it matter (have a premise)
Emphasis on the practice of writing	Technique assumed, so the emphasis is on the large-scale concept
OuLiPo	Hollywood
Anyone can do it, it's a matter of practice	You can do it, but it's going to take some work

Table 1: Main Differences between *Exercises in Style* and *The Art of Dramatic Writing*

Celebrating copia inherent to the archive of writers on writing suggests inclusion rather than exclusion with respect to lore. Creating a clear overabundance of tips, advice, strategies for

approaching writing—both at the sentence level, big picture, and more miscellaneous/ephemeral—are part of navigating literacy in any field. Understanding rules and when to break them goes along with understanding that relevance is situated in the compositional task at hand, and so accepting a plethora of advice, including its attendant contradictions, assists in refocusing the individual on the larger intertextual system or “the writing process.”

Once More Beyond Dichotomy

The totality of the efforts of scholars working in creative writing studies demonstrates the way everyday literacy practices—a potential point for rhetorical identification between students and professional writers—are not a set of “autonomous skills,” but rather exist in “diverse and overlapping domains of life” (B. Williams, “Dancing with Don”). Writing literacies, in this same light, should not be divided so casually between composition and creative writing. Students can have the capacity to feel “empowered, not by suppressing their own voices to mimic philosophic language...but by struggling to use it for their own ends, by groping to interweave it with their familiar discourses” (Fishman and McCarthy 659). I suggest students are doing this kind of interweaving with received writing advice and pedagogical wisdom throughout the progression of their long, unique, idiosyncratic, and potentially disorganized literacy journeys.

And yet there is, for all of the conversation about disciplinary boundaries, currently, considerable flow back-and-forth between creative writing and composition, with creative writing graduate students effectively leading first-year writing seminars and rhetoricians and compositionists working closely with visual, sound, and literary artists. Students often freely move between both creative writing and composition courses, often within the same semester or academic year. These collaborations all blur the borderline between the two camps, a notable

achievement particularly in a historical moment defined by intra- and inter-institutional competition and rankings.

Given the state of things, it may be that the borders have been so marked in part because their conversations are taking place in two separate rooms, and are rarely discussed in concert. Bawarshi's groundbreaking piece on composition's institutional growth, "Beyond Dichotomy: Toward a Theory of Divergence," argues that composition studies has no mechanism of accounting for its various epistemic strands. Without a grand unified theory in place, composition studies remains set in a particular "Western epistemological tradition" of familiar Cartesian splits (Bawarshi 69). And yet, instead of vilifying either field of study, it would be better to try and see the closed borders as an opportunity for vibrant debate. Instead of fearing—as Hesse suggests Moneyhun fears—that the "faintest whiff of composition coopting creative writing would be trouble," we should instead consider how sharing of texts, practices, and methodologies is part and parcel with academic life (Moneyhun and Hesse 525). The fear that one or the other would become obsolete is unfounded; there are too many advocates for creative writing, first-year composition, and all their intellectual interstices and border areas to relegate either to the academic hinterlands. In fact, both fields are positioned favorably for such a dialogue that would increase their viability and visibility on college campuses. The labor dynamics that connect creative writing and composition have changed dramatically over the past decade. As MFA programs in creative writing continue to proliferate, there is bound to be greater cross-current between the fields. If Moxley, Bishop, Ostrum, Haake, and Bizzaro were first-wave creative writing studies scholars, and Tim Mayers, Kelly Ritter, Anna Leahy, Stephanie Vanderslice, and Diane Donnelly were second-stream creative writing studies scholars, there will surely be graduates of both undergraduate and graduate creative writing programs heading into

the slipstream between the two fields. We can expect more writer-teachers seeking, as Wendy Bishop did, to build a “grand design” whereby they could “merge the theories that informed” both composition and creative writing pedagogy (Bishop qtd. in Bizzaro, “Writers Wanted” 261). In September 1993, when Frank Farmer commented in *College English* that we must “remain clear about precisely where our ideological categories diverge” in order to highlight differences between “expressivist and social rhetorics,” that seemed like a necessary postscript to the back-and-forth over “ideological categories” (549). Many defenders of expressivism, such as Fishman, Parkinson, and McCarthy, sought to obliterate, or at the very least put severe pressure on, the accuracy of those labels. But now a large part of first-year instructors, those with experience teaching both creative writing and first-year writing, are in fact embodying that dual identity, and putting their developing philosophies of writing instruction into practice. That once divergent space between conflicting theories of composition is now gaining pedagogical inhabitants.

The emergence of creative writing studies has also enumerated steps that creative writing pedagogy can take in order to leave their space of privileged marginality and connect more with the goals of the college or university at large. One of their steps toward realizing this goal has involved placing greater attention on teacher training as part of the curricula of MFA programs. Likewise, Donnelly and many others have pushed back against the workshop as being the default mode of pedagogical practice, while still others have sought to redefine or revise the master/apprentice relationship that has defined much of creative writing instruction from time immemorial. Recent works of scholarship have helped to define the field—sometimes literally—as in the case of Mayers’s suggestion in “One Simple Word” to add “studies” to creative writing in order to help its academic visibility and theoretical might.²⁸ Adam Koehler’s notion of

²⁸ Scholars in the field recently compiled a capacious Creative Writing Studies Bibliography: <http://www.rebeccamoorehoward.com/bibliographies/creative-writing-pedagogy>

“digital creative writing studies” similarly asks scholars to redefine process, authorship, genre, and institutionality with respect to new media texts. Hesse also describes how new media will offer compositionists more chances to engage with the aesthetics of composing: “The digital age has exploded whatever tidiness might have characterized previous civic rhetorical situations.” (Hesse, “The Place of Creative Writing” 47). Hesse sees the re-introduction of *aesthetic* principles as a potential bridging move between creative writing and composition studies. A practicing personal essayist himself, Hesse holds firm to the notion that “multimodality emphasizes creative possibilities for composing that “include the nonfactual, nonpropositional, noncompelled by rhetorical situation” (48).

A firm disciplinary partnership is certainly in reach. It is a goal worth pursuing, large numbers of current scholars believe, rather than resigning ourselves, as Hesse imagines, to one possible future, in which “composition and creative writing continue to fork their separate paths,” or in which composition “could maintain its serious practical focus on argument and idea, explanation and analysis, with the overt goals of shaping how people think and act,” while creative writing “could celebrate the aesthetic artifact, produced and read for pleasure” (48). One way to contribute to the potential partnership—which would serve to enrich the pedagogical possibilities in composition—is to reclaim the study of lore from its current enshrinement within composition’s expressivist past. Specifically, in the next chapter, I will show how we might begin to understand lore-based pedagogy as doing crucial historical work in the classroom, and how individual units of lore can be understood as the surviving fragments of a historical event—namely, the act of composing—and should therefore be preserved and dealt with from within the context of history. My hope is that this historically-based framework might help composition to incorporate some of the lore-focused pedagogical practices that are so integral to creative writing,

and that, ultimately, the field of composition would greatly benefit from this closer look at creative writing practices. For one, composition pedagogies derived from or inspired by creative writing often engage students, by cultivating enthusiasm and “desire”²⁹ over “ideology” and “thinly voiced, unimaginative prose” (Sirc, “Resisting Entropy” 518). Second, lore-based pedagogies are typically generative and answer questions such as “how do works come into existence?” Third, this theoretical framework could help composition reconnect, on its own terms, with the rich archive of writers on writing. Finally, while students are the primary audience for our pedagogies, those in creative writing and composition have a responsibility to many in the “spheres beyond,” “including policymakers on campuses or in federal agencies who make decisions that affect not only the teaching but also the perception of writing” (Hesse 44).

Hesse describes how without the proper explanations and interventions, policymakers could “cast creative writing as a decorative opportunity, with no practical import, serving a few genius students, and composition studies as a training regimen for school and vocational skills” (Hesse, “The Place of Creative Writing” 44). On this subject, we should again remind ourselves that abandoning the partnership altogether risks engendering a public perception that effective writing is simply writing that would score well on the SAT: “organized, formulaic, rule-governed, and relatively straightforward” (Yagelski 532). From this perspective, ascribed to in “mainstream American schools and in the culture at large,” where “learning to write is largely a matter of learning what a ‘good’ text looks like,” composition and creative writing pedagogies tend toward the conservative. For instance, Yagelski describes how “after the new SAT debuted,” a high school teacher and member of the National Writing Project referred to Donald Murray’s “Teach Writing as a Process Not Product” as “radical” (Yagelski 532). And indeed, the

²⁹ Sirc argues, in “Resisting Entropy” and elsewhere, for cultivating “desire” to be a goal of contemporary pedagogues who all too often “inflect” their courses with “ideology rather than desire.”

classroom where students choose “not only their own topics but also the genres in which to write about those topics” surely seems radical in today’s educational climate, a climate in which creative writing often plays an unsung role.³⁰

The unfortunate truth is that “composition” and “creative writing” will likely be defined, in large part, by outsiders, non-practitioners, non-scholars, by those in the “spheres beyond” if both fields are isolated from each other and do not work to forge more “open borders.” Hesse wisely highlights the merits of “getting around stereotypical aversions,” all in the name of “understanding, even coming to value, aspects of how each views writing.” Reopening the bonds—perhaps through a renewed and historicized discussion of lore—might conceivably help to bring forth the social expressivist tendencies of the field that have not been fully articulated. This, in turn, may allow today’s composition researchers, especially those who focus on craft, performance, creativity studies, and design, to engage with creative writing pedagogy. Regardless of the outcome and/or incorporation of creative writing pedagogies into composition studies, we should count on lively debates engendering a stronger, and more coherent, both in the sense of its unity and its clarity, partnership.

³⁰ Admissions programs frequently assign creative writing genres in the writing sample portion of undergraduate applications.

CHAPTER THREE: REIMAGINING LORE AS A HISTORICAL PHENOMENON: A WELLSPRING OF TIDBITS

History has a kind of conscious life in the institutions, ideologies, movements, and forces that seem to constitute the daylight workings of society; but it has a kind of nocturnal life as well—a dream world ruled by the various alchemies of metaphor and symbol, where the boundaries between one institution and another with which it is constantly at war, between an idea and its contrary, swim about in a kind of cultural ectoplasm where forms change places with one another, sending the spirit of one into the body of its sworn antagonist, bringing the dead back to life in new incarnations.

--Robert Cantwell

A genealogy of values, morals, asceticism, and knowledge will never confuse itself with a quest for their “origins,” will never neglect as inaccessible the vicissitudes of history. On the contrary, it will cultivate the details and accidents that accompany every beginning.

--Michel Foucault

Pedagogical Metanarratives and Self-Reflexivity

Ron Carlson Writes a Story is a craft book that attempts to chronicle every step of the process of writing a short story. Carlson is a novelist, short story writer, and essayist who teaches in the MFA program at UC Irvine. In this groundbreaking book, Carlson places himself within the work, using a mode of self-reflexivity, as one would expect in many kinds of postmodern histories. It’s a move that many postmodern scholars call for in the field of historiography, and also one that historiographers and philosophers of history have long argued brings about a heightened awareness of metanarrative, of the fact that histories come with their own content inherent to their form as “objective history.” We can think of the graphic novels *Maus* or *Persepolis* here and countless other works of creative nonfiction that are self-reflexive in their telling; that is, they grapple with the work of writing history.

In the pages of *Ron Carlson Writes a Story*, Carlson offers tidbits and advice about the writing life: Drink one cup of coffee. Twenty minutes after you want to stop writing for the first time, stay seated. He analyzes the anatomy of a story he once published. He describes dialogue as a dance. But we get a lot more than just a typical offering of “lore,” precisely because Carlson re-imagines “the mangle of practice”—to borrow Pickering’s notion of “a performative understanding [of making] (achieved through practice) rather than a representational understanding”—that put his work together (Pickering qtd. in Spinuzzi). Carlson discusses the small serendipities and elements of chance that were involved, along with the deceptively mundane aspects of daily life that merge actual event with revision, and the continuous presence of ambiguous ideas and uncertainty in the process. In the end, we get something more than a creative nonfiction hybrid craft book: we get an attempt at a chronological play by play of how a work comes into existence.

Of course, as Carlson well knows, neither he nor any other writer-teacher, can write an adequate “how to write a story” on the blackboard with diagrams. Rather, the effective writer-teacher, in sharing his or her knowledge, must be content to perform a form of history in order to tell the story of craft more adequately. It’s almost as if Carlson, in this text, is grappling with his own local, contested history in order to demonstrate or enact the process of historical recovery. We can view *Ron Carlson Writes a Story* as a narrative history. Not a complete history—that is impossible—but a self-reflexive document of what is recoverable.

The tidbits that Carlson offers about his own process in his craft book are not offered with a simple, “I did this, and so you should do this,” directive. Instead, Carlson’s hyperattention to his own rituals and idiosyncrasies demonstrates that craft books are constructed from real lives and actual practices, and need not be immediately distrusted or jettisoned from pedagogical and

philosophical inquiry. Carlson's narrative is what remains after the making of his short story, "The Governor's Ball." This recounting—which I deem historical because of its storytelling regarding past events, i.e., the process and micro-level processes of writing a short story—has the capacity to engage students of all forms of writing. On one level, and as evidenced in years of classroom discussions, there is no shortage of student interest in writing rituals. So much of college writing courses involve, at the very least, a *subtext* of allotting proper time for drafting, revision, and creative incubation. Mason Currey's *Daily Rituals: How Artists Work* documents idiosyncratic habits of over one hundred well-known artists. One of the chief questions Currey asks is: "How do you do meaningful creative work while also earning a living?" The book exists within the genre of popular texts about "Creativity and Genius," and one need to look only to the omnipresence of director's commentaries and Sundance Channel's *The Writers' Room* to find examples of ways people are engaging with "the making of" their favorite works of art. Engagement by mass audiences with the folklore of how works of art are made speaks to a kind of truth about learning: audiences, and by extension, our students have the potential to be inspired by reconstructed narratives of creative acts. Lore, in this sense, is not a natural resource, but something constructed in an attempt to be useful to an audience. We can see how these narratives can become prescriptive and proscriptive rather quickly (e.g., "Truman Capote wrote lying down in his bed, I need to do that too"). These narratives can become iconic, frozen in time; but initially, they are a historical account of the act of making.

These tidbits, fragments, or anecdotes are not necessarily to be eschewed in pedagogies or scholarship, in both creative writing or first-year composition. It is often in the footnotes of an

academic article where we find the most interesting material.³¹ The limitations of grand narratives might best be summed up by one of Donald Barthelme's characters in "See The Moon?" who uttered, "fragments are the only form I trust."

The genre of "craft criticism," following the work of Tim Mayers and Adam Koehler, is focused on work that explores conventional wisdom about writing, by considering questions of authorship, process, genre, institutionality, and mediation. Some of these texts take on the narrative form of being highly self-reflexive, and use that heightened self-awareness as part of their argument. For instance, in *But Beautiful*, Geoff Dyer reconstructs scenes of the lives of Thelonious Monk, Lester Young, and other jazz legends through a method that incorporates his own listening experiences with photographs and anecdotes from the artists' own lives. Instead of just recounting rituals or moments from the lives of these artists, Dyer puts himself directly into the text. In a similar project, Javier Marias critiques notions of authorship and invention (i.e., where ideas come from) by recounting snippets of the lives of canonical authors in *Written Lives*. Marias, a Spanish translator of Nabokov and Faulkner, transmogrifies his literary life into these famous authors' lives, at once playing into their rich iconography, and also destabilizing what one should expect from an author biography; *The Lives of the Artists*, this is not. Finally, Bob Perelman's *The Marginalization of Poetry* "interrogates conceptual categories like literary history" through a "self-reflexive meditation on the relationship between poetry and academic discourse" (Mayers, *(Re)Writing Craft* 124). Each of these projects involves inserting the author into experiences of reading/listening/writing in order to, at least in part, fully convey a more thorough, postmodern notion of *process*. In an attempt to be self-reflexive in my own analysis, here's one of my own.

³¹ Geoffrey Sirc notes that in Byron Hawk's *A Counter History of Composition*, "something as nothing as the footnotes in a couple of composition articles leads him on a fascinating scholarly journey" ("Resisting Entropy" 512).

It was the first day of school—a very particular day in 1993, as well as a cliché of the literacy narrative—seventh grade music class to be exact. Michael Stratechuk, our teacher, began class by playing several short snippets of music. After each snippet, he stopped the CD and asked the class to write down what century we thought the composition was originally from, and why. One clip was from Charles Ives, the early 20th-Century American composer. When we discussed our guesses, Mr. Stratechuk told us that Ives’s musical imagination was said to have come alive on a street corner in Danbury, Connecticut, listening to his father’s marching band perform. Other marching bands performed nearby and upon hearing the unfamiliar harmonic counterpoint, the tonal breadth and rhythmic interplay, Ives, future composer of celebrated modern symphonies was said to have been born.

It has been over twenty years since that first day of music class. Not only do I still remember how I felt upon hearing that story—a bit in awe at the tale of serendipity in making music and starting to see, for the first time, music from the perspective of its composer—but I still refer to that story in my teaching practice from time to time. I don’t sell it as the “Eureka moment,” or as the birth of an artist, but make a smaller claim: that daily life presents serendipities that move us to action. Or, occasionally, I’ll read a student short story, position paper, or research question that comes across as one-note, that repeats itself rather than pushes toward more complicated ideas, and either tell the Ives anecdote or use it as a kind of pedagogical guidance in my comments: a way to describe the possibilities that might arise from bringing together two cacophonous-seeming ideas. This tidbit of lore was passed down from Mr. Stratechuk to his students, and I still find myself pulling it from my dataset of short parables. The tidbit was instructive on many levels. Music history was not dry; in fact, its historical appeals engaged me, as did Stratechuk’s conversational pedagogy, which drew upon anecdote.

That small bit of lore provided a window into how things are made, and into the way that people study music. Lore engaged me through its storytelling form, and its emphasis on a particular, synchronic moment in time (the anecdote of Ives) detailing an event, with the diachronic chronological music history (placing songs into time periods and artistic movements), helped me to make sense of the discipline. Music was a conversation, was cross-generational. The fact that Ives could hear his father's marching band made into something new offered me a suggestion that musical style was more dialogue than some pre-destined work of genius. Second, the anecdotal form of the story, suggested that an unspoken, unseen tradition of making was inherent to every song. Third, music making engaged with the imagination—what must have those dissonances or gaps between the bands sounded like?

These lessons have remained a part of my individual memory as well as existing in the collective memory for music historians. At twelve years old, I was interested in music, had played violin for seven years, studied with the school orchestra, but had only seen myself as a performer. In the years that followed, I did not go on to compose much music, but my friends and I composed an impressionistic piano piece for a tenth-grade music project, again with Mr. Stratechuk. My friend Lawrence played piano while I read the children's story, *Big Dog, Little Dog*, fully bridging our recent units on Happenings and musical impressionism, and even hearkening back to that earlier lesson about, what today we would call mash-up capabilities. The tidbit of Ives lore was one pathway to recognizing the nature of possibility in making: how can I make something that will not sound exactly like everything else?

Lore as a Form of History: Writing about Writing as Historiographic Emplotment

Today, undergraduate and graduate students are fairly adept at handling and thinking through notions of the purpose of imaginative writing, the social constraints that form a writer's

work, the material conditions of “becoming a writer,” as well as the importance of craft, style, and voice. In fact, given the breadth of contemporary conversations surrounding creative writing, creative writing lore, for many, has become “a way of knowing.” (For instance, Mayers has suggested that we define creative writing as “a way of knowing...an “epistemology,” or “an approach that focuses on how things are put together, always entertaining the possibility that things might be put together differently” [Mayers qtd in. Ritter and Vanderslice, “What is Creative Writing Anyway?”].) Likewise, I would argue composition’s rich lore (even its resistance of “lore” gets at the field’s fundamental assumptions and epistemologies)—as it derives from teacher orientation programs and teacher training, undergraduate student textbooks and handbooks, canonical rhetoric and composition texts used in graduate classes, ancient rhetorical concepts and terms, shared anecdotes, and even the archives I am about to delineate—provides an invaluable service to writing education. The tidbits of lore—such as the importance of ritual or open and honest ideas on dealing with failure, inexactness, chance, procrastination, revision, and the like—speak to our ways of thinking as well as to strategies for composing. To put it differently: *Part of understanding writerly activities and processes broadly means actually engaging with the idiosyncratic micro-level details of how works come into existence.*

As I mentioned in Chapter One, much of the material that documents writerly activities and processes might be found in the archive of writers on writing. This is a capacious archive with a diverse spread in terms of genre, function, and considerations of audience. Most are popular texts, intended for aspiring or established writers, or those with an interest in language, literature, literary culture, and/or literary history. The five broad generic categories that I have identified in this archive via genre analysis are: 1) author memoirs; 2) craft lectures; 3) hybrid memoir-craft lecture books; 4) author interviews; 5) creative appreciations of other texts. These

are all forms of self-report, and all may include meta-testing, truisms, and micro-strategies. They may appear across a variety of modes and other genres as well, but these five categories are capacious enough to note the patterns of any text that makes “writing on writing” its main or secondary subject. This spread of specific subgenres demonstrates how lore is being—and has been—published and disseminated. I will take some time to describe each category here.

1) In the creative nonfiction/memoir genre, we locate various works that merge themes of authorship, identity, place, whimsy, conventional memoir, initiation as a writer, and sociopolitical observations. *A Movable Feast* (Ernest Hemingway) serves as a bildungsroman for not only Hemingway but his peers in the Lost Generation. The travel sketches of Paris and young adult life metaphorically capture a trajectory moving from alienated young person to the producer of artistic works. “A Room of One’s Own” (Virginia Woolf) again uses metaphor to portray the material situations that might be necessary for “women’s fiction” to come into existence. This essay, part of a series of lectures, uses personal experience and what we would call today “cultural commentary” to highlight impediments that must be overcome in the journey to becoming a writer. Others include: *Biographia Literaria; or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions* (Samuel Taylor Coleridge); *Hand to Mouth* (Paul Auster); *What is Found There: Notebooks on Poetry and Politics* (Adrienne Rich); *One Writer’s Beginnings* (Eudora Welty); *The Writing Life* (Annie Dillard); *Books* (Larry McMurtry).

2) In the craft lectures category, we find some texts that stray more toward implementing a particular pedagogical framework or technique, or a series of related techniques/philosophies. The craft-reliant textbooks often include both reading selections and suggested exercises. A sample of craft lectures/books includes *Burning Down the House* (Charles Baxter); *Exercises in Style* (Raymond Queneau); *The Lonely Voice: A Study of the Short Story* (Frank O’Connor);

What If? (Anne Bernays and Pamela Painter); *The Writer's Notebook: Craft Essays from Tin House*; *A Writer's Guide to Structure* (Madison Smartt Bell); and the entire *The Art Of* series published by Graywolf Press. In the textbook category, I would include: *Method and Madness: The Making of a Story* (Alice LaPlante); *The Sincerest Form: Writing Fiction by Imitation* (Nicholas Delbanco); *A Poetry Handbook* (Mary Oliver); *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft* (edited by Janet Burroway, Elizabeth Stuckey-French and Ned Stuckey-French). Others that fit more into the category of the conventional “style guide” rather than as craft lectures/books include *Artful Sentences: Syntax as Style* (Virginia Tuftes); *The Elements of Style* (Strunk and White); and *How to Write a Sentence* (Stanley Fish). The canonical *The Art of Fiction* (John Gardner) that for a while most MFA students were widely required to read, falls into the category of a craft book, but also includes supplementary material more typical of a “style guide” with exercises and notes on syntax, rhythm, and meter.

3) In the hybrid memoir-craft lecture book, we see examples such as *Bird by Bird* (Anne Lamott) and *On Writing* (Stephen King) that dispense specific writing advice while also discussing initiation narratives, setbacks, and deep reflection on how experiences of the author influenced their writing practice. *On Writing* contains a separate “toolbox” that emphasizes style in its discussion of craft.

4) Author interviews are omnipresent, particularly in the digital era, where *The Paris Review* interview database is free online and searchable for particular keywords and authors. The so-called “little magazines” (e.g., *Agni*, *The Kenyon Review*, *The Carolina Quarterly*) have published interviews regularly for decades upon decades, and still continue to produce new interview content. *The New York Times* features interviews with prominent literary writers in the “By the Book” section of the *Sunday Book Review*.

5) A fifth category I noticed as I attempted to construct a taxonomy of the archive of writers on writing was that of the “creative appreciation.” These are usually essays that document influence and close reading, or “reading as a writer,” as Francine Prose and others have put it. Here we find works such as *The Story Behind the Story: 26 Stories by Contemporary Writers and How They Work* (Andrea Barrett and Peter Turchi, eds.); *The Story About the Story: Great Writers Explore Great Literature* (J.C. Hallman, ed.); *Reading Like a Writer* (Francine Prose); and many of the reviews and essays on the website “Fiction Writers Review” (fictionwritersreview.com), a site that seeks to “get writers and readers talking not only about how fiction reads but how it works and why it matters.” These creative appreciations subvert the tropes of the traditional interpretive “review” and emphasize reading as a producer, rather than as an interpreter of literature. J.C. Hallman traces this kind of writing back to J.E. Springarn’s early 20th-century goal of “creative criticism,” or work that “should limit its concerns to what a writer has attempted to express and how she has attempted to express it” (Springarn qtd. in Hallman). Hallman also describes how in preparing to teach a class on creative criticism, he sought out works that “asked students to emulate the writers’ rather than the critics’ model for writing about reading.” This collection of readings eventually evolved into his two edited collections, *The Story About the Story*.

Together this collection of creative writing lore helps apprentice writers read themselves into literary history and encourages them to see themselves in dialogue with writers they admire. This is not dissimilar from Elbow’s contributions to composition pedagogy. Part of Elbow’s legacy and influence is the way he was valued by both teachers and student writers “for his confusions and his hesitations” (Bishop 14). Elbow made that affective appeal through his autobiographical writing about writing and teaching (e.g., *Writing Without Teachers*). His textual

self-presentation depicted someone who was “just like us, loving literature and writing himself in a troubled way” (Bishop 14). Overall, the value of the lore inherent in all of the texts in the archive is, in part, to more accurately attend to the affective investments of writing practice. In other words, the archive of writers on writing attends to possibility, inexactness, and uncertainty. As Dianne Donnelly argues:

While the creative processes of creative writers and scientists may proceed along the same lines, the practices of creative writing are not associated with certainty, with exactness, with a formulaic methodology of systematic questioning and replication that is located in the scientific realm. (Donnelly in Vanderslice and Leahy, “What is Creative Writing Anyway?”)

To put it differently, reflective writing about the act of writing attends to “process” through essayistic attempts to recreate this un-recreatable set of acts. Similarly, it goes farther than to say, as is sometimes the dogma within composition that “writing is a recursive process,” and even goes farther than to reduce the production of creative writing works to issues of “craft” alone. Mayers—and many others—have noted how Ron McFarland, writing in *College English* in 1993, conveys the typical lore of creative writing that “only craft can be taught.” Craft, then, equates to stylistic ornament, not unlike the Ramist separation that equated rhetoric to style rather than to dialectic (logic). Lore has always attended to far more than craft. Ron Carlson has similarly noted that “a writer’s confidence in [his or her] craft is as important as any accumulated craft dexterity or writing ‘skill’” (4). To repeat Mayers’s suggestion, we may define the discipline of creative writing as “a way of knowing...an ‘epistemology,’ or an approach that focuses on how things are put together, always entertaining the possibility that things might be put together differently” (Mayers in Vanderslice and Leahy, “What Is Creative Writing Anyway?”).

The importance of this “epistemology” cannot be overstated. Lore must be viewed holistically and intertextually in order to reap its full benefits. We can look closely at the concept of *ritual*, for instance, to see how the multifaceted treatment of a single topic within the archive generates a system of knowledge for the individual student who is looking for guidance. This is a topic that repeats in many of the types of works I have previously listed. For starters: many writers in *The Paris Review Interview* series will share—either in response to a direct question or as an aside when discussing their careers or completed works—an aspect of their writing ritual. In interview after interview, writers agree with Ralph Ellison that “the use of ritual”—i.e., “practice and traditions,” as Ritter and Vanderslice phrase it—is “equally a vital part of the creative process” (*Paris Review Interviews Vol. III* 9). Toni Morrison describes how she did not believe she had a ritual until one day she realized that every morning she would “get up and make a cup of coffee while it is still dark—it must be dark—and then drink the coffee and watch the light come” (*Paris Review Interviews Vol. II* 358). Similarly, Kerouac describes a ritual to mark his daily writing: “I had a ritual once of lighting *a candle* and writing by its light and blowing it out when I was done for the night” (*Paris Review Interviews Vol. IV* 108). Writers also identify particular writing rituals pertaining to materials. Ashbery describes the way he would “use this very old, circa 1930 I would say, Royal typewriter” (*Paris Review Interviews Vol. IV* 195). David Sedaris has a similar vintage typewriter that he works on. Keeping with lore’s contradictory nature, many writers negate the importance of ritual or describe, as Ashbery does, a gradual moving away from “hang-ups and rituals” through the years (*Paris Review Interviews Vol. IV* 195).

We can see how these writing rituals are part of the powerful lore that sustains creative writing pedagogy, and that the sharing or promotion of rituals is actually useful and creates

connections between writers and readers/students. Instead of merely resisting this lore as “idiosyncratic” and “subjective,” we should seek out the ways that this kind of testimony speaks to the creative process, *the way it reaches off the page or the screen to make an affective or identifying bond with the student composer*. Tidbits create bonds.

In one sense, these testimonies bring attention to the setting of the writing act. Not only does that mimic, in a sense, the kind of scene-setting and use of metaphor involved in imaginative writing, but it also allows students of writing to visualize literary writers as ordinary human beings with anxieties, “hang-ups and rituals” about writing. The fact that student or apprentice writers can connect with established authors is not some minor act of rhetorical identification; it breaks down various barriers and mystifications of authorship that have already been well-established before students enter a writing course.

The lore regarding writing ritual is also valuable for how it places the individual writers within particular, localized histories. Some might call these contributions to lore a mere quirk of the contemporary “cult of personality” or simply an ego trip, but that would be to overlook its clear and present value to audiences. On many levels, we should acknowledge how lore aids students in their journey to identifying as writers. For instance, a student can imagine how and why Ashbery liked that particular typewriter as his main tool or instrument, and what about its design appeals to him as a poet who is interested in the visual aspect of poetics and the slow deliberate accrual of meaning. They can imagine how Morrison’s insistence on beginning the day in darkness relates to her use of gothic imaginative tropes. On another level, we can see the effective time management techniques inherent to Morrison’s process. The longer spent at the page, the more time to revise and sink into a creative ritual. Many in creativity studies have examined the cognitive aspects of writing, and one part of the process that is mentioned

repeatedly in Csikszentmihalyi's interviews seems to be a kind of daydream state for those who pursue imaginative writing. Rituals can then, in turn, unfold into a network of associations and connections for students. Kerouac similarly demonstrates a desire to emphasize warm-up or prewriting because of its potential to open up associative modes of thinking. On all of these different fronts (writing settings, different cultural points that help to access the imagination, and time management techniques), we can observe the intricacies of writerly activities and processes, particularly the way they are embodied in aspects of writing lore such as "writing rituals." It may be helpful to recall here Sirc's critique of postprocess theory, where the theoretical model does not "account for the pleasures of 'modernism's *making*'" (Sirc qtd. in Oleksiak 149).

We can see how the issue of *experimentation*, so deep at the heart of creative writing instruction, and so vital for writing processes, has an intimate relationship with writing lore. Lore helps fuel discovery and embolden students to use "trial-and-error" methods for developing their own unique sets of processes. There may be something inherently gullible about believing a kind of lore or self-testimony at face value that says, "I did it this way," and—subtextually— "I'm such a big success," but most students are interacting with lore in much more nuanced ways. They can tell when it rings true; i.e., when it has a *personal* truth-value. There is little danger of a student becoming too dependent on a spurious unit of lore—many students reject or question the truth value of lore before they actually interact with the idea in any meaningful way—though even when they do, the struggle might have its own pedagogical value (i.e., sometimes you have to figure out what *doesn't* work for you before you stumble upon what *does*). Basically, what I'm suggesting here is that students are doing their own empirical tests of creative writing lore, regardless of the source. On Twitter, we can find countless posts from student writers who are grappling with received conventional wisdom. Through critiques of workshop commentary (see

Fig. 2 and Fig. 3), lore now publically intersects with race, gender, and ethnicity in countless social media posts.



Figures 2 and 3: Writers on Twitter re-interpreting lore, manipulating its truth value and relevance.

The pitfalls of a purely resistance-based attitude toward lore are hazardous. Communal wisdom for collective invention never comes in a pure form; It is always mediated through some historical framework. Even before the advice is received and considered, it's situatedness holds an inherent historical charge. To put it differently: lore has a content inherent in its form—and I would venture to say that there is value in both its form and its content. Even though it is

reinforced as a system of belief in the classroom, turning away from it will not make lore go away. And we should better understand lore's form and content as a history—as a collection of tidbits that came from fragmented attempts to describe acts of writing, which, in turn, create social bonds—to help us examine epistemological assumptions about teaching and writing in both composition and creative writing.

In developing this idea, we might turn to White in philosophy of history and specifically his use of the Ricoeurian notion of “emplotment”: the way historians combine smaller stories into larger stories using plot techniques strategically to give a purportedly complete account of a series of events. Lore has often been linked to romantic emplotment and its powerful mythos invoked by heroic narratives: the “genius (male) writer”—as Katherine Hakke has noted in *What Our Speech Disrupts: Feminism and Creative Writing Studies*—achieving eminence is one narrative that critics of lore seek to correct (Haake qtd. in Mayers, *(Re)Writing Craft* 59). Surely there are lore-based metanarratives that are in need of revising: and yet that does not mean we should go too far to the other direction, and encourage students to take on a fully satirical or ironic stance toward writing advice. First, because it throws out a rich and valuable historical archive, preserving (in part) how written works came into existence. Second, because if the only move that we make toward lore is ironic, and the only attitude we take is the ironic mode, then the new metanarrative that replaces pedagogies based on existing lore is likely to be one based mostly on metanarratives of suspicion. Lyotard's definition/critique of postmodernism, whereby all metanarratives are rejected, may be helpful in thinking through why lore is so crucial to contemporary writing pedagogies. When resistance becomes the universal metanarrative, teachers, scholars, and artists are left having to grapple with a self-contained critical framework used to apply across the board to all pedagogy (i.e., Resist lore!) instead of branching out to

consider how and why the deployment of lore is a feasible pedagogical mode. Anne Barron's *Lyotard and the Problem of Justice* describes Lyotard's philosophy of paganism, and offers us a direct channel for understanding lore:

Postmodern society is 'pagan': it is without a metadiscourse in terms of which the universe of language games—or 'phrases'—can be ordered and hierarchized. It is therefore without a set of stable criteria which would guide the process of judging, whether in the pursuit of knowledge, the evaluation of art, or the conduct of politics....

[Paganism] takes as its premise the impossibility of autonomy or equivalence, and instead takes as given the dissolution of the self within a complex fabric of social relations. (31-32)

If we read units of writing lore to be those "phrases" within a "multiplicity of language games" that do not have overarching metadiscourses, then the resistance of lore would be a clear misstep. The "particularit[ies] of each text of iconic pedagogy," are "contextualized by the reader's knowledge" (Cross 72). Thus, the discursive moves student writers make when looking for "guidance" are akin to these Lyotardian games that exist without fixed standards. Postmodern conceptions of identity have suggested that we are not "free-standing" and "self-possessed individuals" but, instead, we embody a "plurality of identities." If we do not address the specifics, or "pragmatics of each of these games"—specifically how does history engage students as they actually engage with writing lore—then we will be advancing a metanarrative of suspicion alone, rather than a metanarrative that aspires to more transcendent pedagogical ideals.

The Historicity of Lore

There have been moments in the longstanding relationship between creative writing and composition in which compositionists have indeed shown an interest in theorizing lore and

speculating about the benefits of its historical nature. For instance, in his 2009 essay on the career of Wendy Bishop, Patrick Bizzaro describes how Bishop's *Released into Language* interlaced, "self-reports of writers with theories of cognition, urging the profession to see how...composition studies can enrich...creative writing" (Bizzaro, "Writers Wanted" 257). Bizzaro describes how Bishop integrated "revision strategies" and self-reports from writers such as Ernest Hemingway, James Michener, and Anne Sexton into her cognitivist inspired research. However, it is interesting to note that even Bishop showed some uneasiness about fully integrating lore into a coherent pedagogical system. In describing her research method, Bishop "warn[s]" her readers about the dangers inherent in generalizing too broadly from self-reports. She specifically discusses the way that creative writing lore is both local and contextual:

A novice writer certainly gains from reading through collections of writers' wisdom. However, such words should also be read with the understanding that each writer is telling us, primarily, about his or her own writing process as he or she understands it *at that moment*. That process will change and those understandings will alter as the writer moves through a lifetime and a writing career. (Bishop qtd. in Bizzaro, "Writers Wanted" 263)

The conditional accuracy and contextualization fundamental to texts in the archive of writers on writing (or as Bishop calls it, "collections of writers' wisdom") seems to be a concept that Bishop was not fully comfortable with; and indeed, for most compositionists, self-reports without sufficient social scientific methods and "thick description" are an area of haziness and dubious validity. If writer self-reports are so localized and "idiosyncratic," as Paul Dawson has labeled them, then don't they, by definition, produce false pedagogies?

I believe this misconception exists precisely because scholars like Dawson, and even to some extent Bishop, want to view individual units of lore as entities that may be conventionally “true” or “false,” rather than as relics of a historical event—i.e., the act of making. When we look at lore in this new way, however, the problem that many compositionists feel plagues the pedagogies overly dependent on lore no longer are relevant. Again, because the “writing process cannot be directly observed” and must be “inferred from what we take to be its observable effects,” the relics, such as “notes and drafts and reports of mental activity” are in fact providing actual historical traces of process that “look beyond” final products (Warnock 561). Harman’s “object-oriented philosophy” speaks to this notion that most philosophical schools avoid a discussion of objects, and, instead, “pride themselves on avoiding all naïve contact with nonhuman entities” (Harman 1). The historical traces that “look beyond” final products, then, are imbued with felt and experienced phenomena that defy easy grouping into notions of “true” or “false,” and instead form a central epistemological home more akin to Harman’s notion of “guerilla metaphysics,” where relations between objects are stubbornly defended as being something beyond what logical positivists would define as real.

Ian Bogost’s use of speculative realism is also useful when considering the truth value of writer self-reports. Bogost proposes a philosophy of “Alien Phenomenology,” where “humans are elements, but not the sole elements of philosophical interest” (6):

Fleeing from the dank halls of the mind’s prison toward the grassy meadows of the material world, speculative realism must also make good on the first term of its epithet: metaphysics need not seek verification, whether from experience, physics, mathematics, formal logic, or even reason. (5)

Oddly enough, if we frame the substance of self-reports themselves—transcriptions of *lived*, embodied experience—as objects or “things” that are speculatively valid, we no longer need to “seek verification” for their validity. Their material existence in the world speaks to their connection to some event, to something traceable. If we imagine a comprehensive collection, something akin to an archive, of all of the collected written testimonies of writers on writing, we could trace back each of those testimonies, linguistically, to experiences, not necessarily language experiences, of actors and to other phenomena that have actually occurred.

When looking at an archive, Jacques Derrida argues that we are “experiencing the familiar problem of all [textual] analysis,” i.e., “that the archival object is neither present nor absent ‘in the flesh,’ neither visible nor invisible, a trace always referring to another whose eyes can never be met.... (Freshwater’s “The Allure of the Archive” 738, Derrida 54). Analogously, I argue that when we look at lore as “mere” narrative or “mere” accounts, we are in fact “digging up the details of the past hidden in the archive,” an archive whose “structure” is “spectral” (54). This should ring particularly familiar to anyone with experience in creative writing pedagogy. Often processes are described and characterized as mysterious or defying conventional boundaries of explanation.³² Consider Derrida’s description of the archive: “It is spectral *a priori*: neither present nor absent ‘in the flesh,’ neither visible nor invisible, a trace always referring to another whose eyes can never be met” (Derrida and Prenowitz 54). Barbara Biesecker adds, “any figures we encounter in the archive are ghosts, mere shadows of the past. Their actions are complete, and their original significance will remain undetermined, open to interpretation” (126). I would describe the engagement with lore in a composition or creative writing class as something akin to the pursuit of this ghost: in our case, an impossibly complicated network of

³² Mayers cogently describes in *(Re)Writing Craft* the difference between mystery (often useful as a pedagogical tool) and mystification (quite harmful, no doubt).

multiple actors that bring about a text's production. As Ricoeur has argued, historical recovery is a notoriously fallible process, since no one can access, let alone, represent the past just as it was in pursuit of the "motif of truth," as Biesecker calls it (124). David Lowenthal discusses how "all accounts of the past tell stories about it, and hence are partly invented" and often require a Keatsian suspension of disbelief (229). Considering lore—and its embodiment in pedagogical practices and textual material—in this way helps to construct a theoretical framework for understanding lore that is rooted in historical recovery. The past itself, as many historiographers have noted, is an imaginary construct, and yet, it is also (as Biesecker, Lowenthal, and countless other theorists of historical memory have noted) a valuable site that is essential for informing our present moment.

In *The Past Is a Foreign Country*, Lowenthal discusses how all forms of "memorabilia" are "cherished" (Lowenthal xv). The urge to preserve engenders the process of museumification. In creative writing pedagogy, there is an allure to the mystery of the act of composing. Mayers delineates that difference in this way: "Mystery is any thing (or quality) hitherto unknown or unexpected, which the act of writing may touch upon, or suggest, or lead to, at any time. Mystification is the act of shrouding a writing process in calculated uncertainty" (Mayers, *(Re)Writing Craft* 117). All too often the "lore" of the workshop and of particular classroom pedagogies or practices have been adopted merely because of their long lineage. The workshop is the foremost artifact, and teaching device, of the cherished memorabilia of creative writing courses. But to discard the past, rather than attend directly to the process of museumification that has slowed pedagogical change, or "root through the discard heap" as Sirc puts it ("Resisting Entropy" 511), is not an adequate solution. Literary writing has a past, and even though writers' papers may advance the myth of the solitary author and of antiquated notions of genius, once

again we should not throw out the baby with the bathwater. Historical appeals engage students through the pursuit of that ineffable mysterious something. While some of the data in those writers' reports mystify the creative process, other portions of the archive certainly attempt in good faith to recover the exact processes of a work's construction. Much like historical work that seeks to name the unnamable—the authenticity of prior lived experiences, for instance—so too should our consideration of writing lore seek out the recoverable fragments of a mostly unrecoverable history of writing production. If creative writing is, as Mayers suggests, truly “a way of knowing,” then to fully theorize creative writing pedagogy, we must attend to this historical valence. Additionally, composition should attend to its own rich and varied lore in the continuing epistemological project of defining its new boundaries. This is certainly a blind spot of both composition and creative writing up until this point.

Overall, the concept of historicity may allow us to have a coherent theory of writing instruction based on the archive of writers on writing. Seen properly as historical traces that need preservation and that serve as a space of “collective invention,” rather than seen as idiosyncratic egotistical inanities, as their sharpest critics might label them, bits of lore might receive proper placement among compositionists and creative writing theorists (Biesecker 124). Bits of lore possess the potential for students to commune with writers—in both imagined and real settings.

When students interact with collected lore, they begin to see themselves in dialogue with established writers. Appeals to the historical tradition of writing processes and situations engage students through this sense of participation. The appeals are akin to a kind of participation with wisdom literature, where students can connect with minds of the past. While some social critics might argue that such appeals to the past are partly a Marxist “false consciousness,” Hesse quotes James Porter, who argues that “people write because they want to interact, to share, to

learn to play, to feel valued, and to help others” (Hesse, “The Place of Creative Writing” 47). He continues: “For most writers, writing fulfills personal and social interests...[and] composition should value dimensions of *life* [emphasis added] in addition to work, school, and political action.” Biesecker describes this phenomenon when considering the notion of historicity and its relation to an “ontic,” or existence-oriented—or experience-oriented—sense of the past, rather than a phenomenal sense of the past.

Whatever else the archive may be—say, an historical space, a political space, or a sacred space; a site of preservation, interpretation, or commemoration—it always already is the provisionally settled scene of our collective invention, of our collective invention of us and of it. (Biesecker 124)

In a wider sense, then, lore attends to the variability of writing situations, and speaks to not only its conditional truth value, but the extreme rhetorical power of identification, in the Burkean sense: how one practitioner can influence another even though they are divided in many respects. Rhetorical identification even occurs in interactions that are “not wholly deliberate yet not unconscious” in order to “transcend social estrangement” (Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* xiii).

We can imagine a first-year creative writing student reading *A Moveable Feast*, viewing Hemingway’s accounts of travels abroad, and feeling this kind of “social estrangement.”

However, this very mystery is what allows for rhetoric to “bridge the conditions of estrangement” (Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* 211). Following the way remix often engages with processes of cultural hybridization, or bringing one culture into contact with another cultural norm, lore has the ability to cut across social and cultural differences. Each unit of lore or each account in the archive of writers on writing has a potential persuasive value, centered on the archive’s space as site for “collective invention.”

As we have seen so far, tidbits of writing advice are frequently created situationally and later used strategically, remixed to make new needs, meet new ends, create new works. Just as one could listen to Notorious B.I.G.s “Big Poppa” and seek out “Between the Sheets” by the Isley Brothers,³³ it is possible to peel back the onion to see the long lineage of quotation and restatement in advice on how to write, or how to teach writing. The theme of the 61st Annual Conference of College Composition and Communication, “Remix: Revisit, Rethink, Revise, Renew,” suggests that scholars “remix our roots” and contemplate how radical innovations in the field have actually been ongoing long prior to the advent of social media (Gwendolyn Pough).

As many critical historiographers have noted, most notably Lowenthal, the past and its relics are navigated through historical writing in order to serve the needs of the present. He argues that the designation of “historic” fundamentally changes our notion of the item itself. Our interactions with the past can stifle creativity or promote it; and given that lore is akin to historical debris and relics, it should be preserved rather than discarded without proper consideration. By agreeing to designate lore as “historic,” we may be able to have a more consequential interaction with “the past” of our respective fields/disciplines. Lowenthal also points out that “it is no longer the presence of the past that speaks to us, but it’s pastness.” Students of writing shape lore to fit their own needs, taking journeys that interact in part with the “pastness” we present as their teachers. As Lowenthal notes: “memory, history, and relics offer routes to the past best traversed in combination. Each route requires the others for the journey to be significant and credible” (Lowenthal 249). The learning fueled by lore is clearly multifaceted, dealing not only with a work’s past, but its increasing quality of “pastness.” I argue that

³³ Perhaps through social media, or with the assistance of a site like “Whosampled.com: Exploring the DNA of music” or via a knowledgeable friend—all examples of *social bonds* made possible by remix culture.

“pastness” is a source of inspiration and further historical revision, rather than a mere gripe or limitation.

The Archive: Locating and Valuing Sources of Lore

At this point I hope to have already shown how lore is categorically valuable, and points toward a history of writing processes and thought processes (much like Carlson’s text) in such a way as to say: I can’t show you the whole process, but I can show you what’s recoverable. That same kind of pointing toward a performative history of making is also going on in the entire archive of writers on writing: the interviews, the craft memoirs, and the lectures. This is precisely the material that informs writer-teachers in their pedagogy and the cycles of lore’s reintroduction into classrooms and writerly consciousness. To ignore the way lore itself is part of all creative processes is to miss this critical aspect of lore’s role in any act of ideation.

The archive of writers on writing has been especially central to creative writing-based pedagogies, and remains vital in the work of addressing one of the overarching questions of any act of composing: i.e., how do written texts come into existence? The appeal of reading an interview with Virginia Woolf, for instance, to learn what she said about crafting psychological realism takes on its own kind of lore, as does an instructor’s advice in a classroom to “omit needless words” or “write two hours a day.” It should be noted that lore makes no claims to be objective or all encompassing. Units of lore are, then, by definition, conditional, subjective, flexible, and contradictory. If those qualities sound familiar, they are the common gripes against lore in the teaching of writing: instead of universal, objective, fixed truths, lore opens up a can of worms that is hard to immediately theorize as anything but “pragmatic.”

That contradictory aspect of lore, often maligned, should be one of lore’s potentialities for critical study. Lore, deriving from the archive of writers on writing, takes on that spirit of the

postmodern archive, as described by the participants of Octalog III: Archives are “uncatalogued, overwhelming, disorganized” and more than just a set of “documents or artifacts, but always a study of negotiations, valences, shifting claims and refutations, canons and revisions that orbit any history” (Burton in Agnew et al. 111, Dolmage 113).

This amorphousness introduces the following question: *Where* is the archive of writers on writing, ultimately? Is it in the collected corpus of *Paris Review* interviews? Partially in a library at the University of Iowa? Or the famed Hopwood Room at the University of Michigan? Sure, but it also exists elsewhere, and does not fit within a conventional definition of a bounded archive. Lore is embodied: in technologies, through delivery/transmission systems, and within human bodies, our interactions with objects, and objects themselves. Borrowing Robert Cantwell’s notion of “cultural ectoplasm,” the archive takes us to history’s nocturnal life. All of the sites mentioned above are places of official history, but lore is also found in less formal archives—spaces of engagement with materials, objects, and identities via postmodern theoretics.

I should acknowledge here that many academics in creative writing studies call not exactly for a rejection of lore altogether, but for forming a professional consensus to better order the dataset of writers on writing (i.e., organize and throw out the counterfeit). And yet I see even this more restrained mode of lore-rejection as problematic. As Lyotardian philosophy suggests, a preoccupation with consensus is not an effective move: “A pagan world which is suspicious of metanarratives needs ‘an idea and practice of justice that is not linked to that of consensus’” (Barron 33-34). Many may rebuke my encouragement to a relative status of the truth as self-satisfied and unworried about justice or accuracy. But I would respond by saying that I don’t want to engage in that complacent relativism where “anything goes.” In fact, by attending to the fact that “language games are multiple and incommensurable,” we return lore to community

standards—the community including both teachers *and students* of writing—to judge what is pedagogically “just” or “right” (34).

My intervention, again following Lyotard, is to re-open the possibility of the value in lore and in classroom-based teaching lore, specifically by developing a historiographical theoretical framework, one that particularly allows us to treat lore in a self-reflexive way. Lyotardian philosophy suggests that instead of playing the game the same way, in my substitution this means merely “resisting lore,” one should “effect new moves” and “open up the possibility of new efficacies in the games with their present rules.” This is one of the goals of my research as I attempt to better understand lore and its history in shaping the disciplines of composition and creative writing. My approach is pagan, in this sense, “aimed at producing effects or coups in a given situation which will engender in turn other coups” (Beardsworth 55). My turn is to bridge pedagogies of creative writing and composition in order to better understand how we write and learn, and how the archive of writers on writing possesses value for today’s writing students.

Again, this self-reflexive mode depends on a framework of lore that takes into account its historical nature: i.e., by putting a historical lens on the concept of lore, we might be able to come back from these extremes of acceptance vs. resistance and find some middle ground. I argue that the development and accrual of lore is a necessary artistic component of any act of making/composing, and that the crimes that lore was charged with are no longer crimes in today’s theoretical climate defined by postmodern, posthuman, and post-structural methodologies. Baudrillard’s conception of postmodernity might also be useful when setting ground rules for theorizing lore and considering its rich iconography. Baudrillard suggests in *Simulacra and Simulation* that because postmodern society is awash in images, we might as well accept the flow of messages. (We might take that very literally, as in the flow of Joyce Carol

Oates's Twitter feed.) In this way, lore, in its hyperreal state—where the copy holds greater claims to reality than the original—has the ability to delightfully contradict itself and surprise us, and as long as we can “embrace contraries”³⁴ and wisdom that comes in non-traditional forms as paradox or jokes. The fact that stories or accounts can be “truer” than the “real” is a concept that fiction writers and poets may be more comfortable with than most other members of the humanities.

What exactly might this self-reflexive mode of dealing with lore look like? I believe we can find examples of it already within the archive of writers on writing: and that the viewpoints these writers evince might serve as examples for writing instructors and their students. Again, Marias's *Written Lives* is a text that theorizes and adds to the conversation surrounding creative writing lore. It is, as a *New York Times* reviewer puts it, “a collection of short and scintillating portraits...inspired more by intriguing anecdotes and details than by a determination to capture basic biographical facts” (Benfey). Marias takes anecdotes about writers' lives and writers biographical accounts and playfully blurs the line between creative nonfiction and fiction. Each short essay is presented alongside an iconographic photo of the author. Addressing the iconicity of “famous authors” is one way that Marias writes into the contradiction of the cult of personality in authorship. That's a way to resist, but also to accept and play into the notion of iconicity: it still engages students through historical appeals—even if they are appeals to alternate histories. In one sense, he is attempting to revise the cult by demonstrating how one goes about mythmaking. But in another sense, he is humanizing the author-figure and attempting to demonstrate that there are actual people behind the writing of texts.³⁵ The act of including

³⁴ Elbow has encouraged this move in most of his texts, most obviously in “Embracing Contraries in the Teaching Process” (1983) and in “Voice in Writing Again: Embracing Contraries” (2007).

³⁵ Mayers alters Foucault's term “author function,” from “What Is An Author?” and popularized in English Studies, to “author figure” within the context of creative writing pedagogy, to suggest how the writer's “imagination”

images fits with the notion of how authorship is mystified via multiple channels in creative writing.

Another example comes from the work that Ben Ristow presented at the 2015 Conference on College Composition and Communication, discussing how writerly identity is authenticated through visual advertisements produced by MFA programs. Engaging with the overwhelmingly visual culture that adds to the lore of creative writing Ristow both attends to lore with a critical eye while also accepting that it functions rhetorically, and is not exempt from advertisement analysis or critique that questions a platitude. This type of research continuously engages students through the iconicity of famous authors and through the appeals to social class transcendence as Ristow analyzed in his description of Syracuse University's MFA advertisements (invoking star pedagogy and access to "the famous author").

These advertisements for Syracuse's creative writing program are one small example of the intertextual web that surrounds academic creative writing. As Prior points out in his work on the rich histories of texts-in-the-making: "Intertextual analysis can provide much data on the writing process; however, there is much that cannot be captured by these methods: exchanges that are missed; the writer's thoughts, feelings, and sense-making; contexts that do not appear in the text" (504). By performing an intertextual analysis of the material that appears in those outlying contexts, and the thoughts, feelings, and sense-making that derive from tidbits about how writing is best "learned, done, and taught" (to use North's original definition of lore), it is possible to consider an archive of writing testimony that is akin to the *intertext*. Instead of merely

functions rhetorically: "I merely mean to suggest that in the discourse of creative writing, the author is virtually always treated as a figure. The author-figure figure constructed in much of the professional discourse of creative writing is a psychologized figure. By this I mean that all aspects of the text-generating situation are supposedly governed by the writer's 'imagination'; the author's solitary mind is the source of all texts composed and even in many cases predetermines determines what the purpose of the text and its audience will be. Everything about the text is purported to come from 'within' the writer" (*Re)Writing Craft* 14, 15).

being the books of “mostly writers talking about writing, stacked *in front* of the bookcases in my office: fourteen feet, six inches” that Donald Murray kept in his house, or the complete collection of *Paris Review* author interviews, we find the intertext: “a general field of anonymous formulae whose origin can scarcely ever be located” (Murray, “Mucking About in Language” 15, Jasinski 321). Students move through this field, taking bits and pieces that they deem necessary, and, when they are motivated, in much the same way that creativity studies describes the individual’s “internalization of the system” (Csikszentmihayli 48). Csikszentmihayli is especially interested in this cognitive process where, over a period of time, an individual develops a “tremendous amount of information—a big database if you like to be fancy” (Rabinow qtd. in Csikszentmihayli 48). The individual may often then follow that up with “pull[ing] the ideas” from the database “because [they’re] interested.” Following Csikszentmihalyi’s research, if historical self-reports of the acts of composing—in the form of tidbits of lore—have the power to interest students, we can see how well-positioned those students will be toward continued creative motivation and accessing the most relevant ideas to the tasks at hand.

“Rooting Through the Discard Heap”: Student as Bricoleur

The webs of interconnected stories constructed in our minds become an interpretive lens to filter new experiences. They are the glue that creates community and binds us together around common purposes and values.

--“Story as the Landscape of Knowing,” National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) 2014 Theme

The framework of interconnected stories creating social bonds illustrates the merger of the fragment with the student narrative, the discipline with the individual, institutionalized practices that are embodied in human beings and vernacular practices. In the contemporary academy, where we find “pervasive constructions of student disciplines,” it is essential to highlight the interpersonal level of instruction (Mapes 691). As Mapes articulates: “Teaching and

learning... ‘succeed or fail on the strength of relationships’” because, as “Robert Yagelski explains, ‘language and literacy are wonderfully, insufferably complex and resist control (and human beings, the more so)’” (691). In addition to the primacy of interpersonal relationships, we can consider for a brief moment the other social exchanges that are always involved in the making of textual artifacts. Shipka notes that when we focus only on the final product, the textual artifacts in our pedagogies, we are in effect “render[ing] invisible the complex cycles of activity that link the production, distribution, exchange, consumption, and valuation of writing” (Shipka 52). When we interrogate the material that brings about a finished work, we must obviously look to local social and historical context, as well as to the “discard heap,” to find, as McComiskey puts it, “microhistories of composition.”

Here again it may be helpful to evoke the metaphor of Hemingway’s iceberg. While Hemingway was using the iceberg in a different context, to discuss subtext, we have used it to consider the way a unit of lore points toward an unrecoverable history. All of that material located below the waterline is that which is not able to be re-collected. As Ritter and Vanderslice have rightly encouraged us to collect lore in the hopes of “moving beyond personal anecdote and myth” in our scholarship, I’m hesitant to jettison anything from the house of lore no matter how bogus or counterfeit it seems, not even the Hesse line about the “right kind of tea” to drink—lest that by discarding myth and anecdote, we annihilate the histories of how works came into being (Ritter and Vanderslice “Creative Writing” xv, Hesse 33). In fact, I believe that if we are truly to follow Hesse’s call to examine writerly activities in composition and creative writing, then our investigations should be as inclusive as possible. Our investigations into lore should aim to understand where that advice comes from and how it continues to be deployed. We’re at an odd moment in composition where lore has been so degraded, that it is no longer the reigning

“conventional wisdom.” Many lore-based tidbits have been so overused in the classroom and in the archive of writers on writing (e.g., “Write what you know”) that they have become cliché. It would seem, at least on some level, that experimental pedagogies need to break free from the past; but in fact, many craft-oriented pedagogies reach toward student creativity or artistic/imaginative drives to design lessons, assignments, and courses.

The historiographical turn that I have presented here might help to validate lore as a form of knowledge-making based on an actual archive that is more visible than it was when it was degraded by social constructionist philosophy. Likewise, the historical valence we’re granting to lore might allow students to see their work as having a historical precedent, and to see the act of writing as a kind of dialogue. This is particularly relevant to composing in the 21st century, when students encounter a large body of information, communal and not necessarily sourced. Sirc, for instance, describes how the journey to be innovative compositionists—both on the instruction-level and scholarship-level—involves doing historical research with a critical historiographical bent. That means looking to the footnotes and also the seemingly mundane to invigorate our scholarly journeys. We are at the strange moment in composition where so much suspicion surrounds lore that the “conventional wisdom” has diminished the importance of the archive of writers on writing. To get around the conventional wisdom and “find the stuff in the field that really glitters, you've got to root through the discard heap. Your history has to be alternative or, as Byron Hawk calls his, ‘counter’” (Sirc, “Resisting Entropy” 511). For composition, a field that Sirc describes as “stuck in the stale, irresolvable dichotomies of personal/social, rhetoric/poetic, art/method,” a state that has led in turn to lessened “complexity of the scene of writing and its teaching,” much can be gained by re-visiting lore, which currently resides in the trash bin of composition. By contrast, the archive of writers on writing might offer

compositionists a vast collection of texts that would indubitably complicate its present reputation as a “bland, sanitized pedagogy, teaching clear, correct, citation-based essay form to students.”

In *Ron Carlson Writes a Story*, Carlson notes: “I’ve also become convinced that a writer’s confidence in his or her process is as important as any accumulated craft dexterity or writing ‘skill’” (4). This is a marked turn from what has been drummed into creative writing students: “writing is a craft” and “only craft can be taught” (McFarland qtd. in Hesse 36).³⁶ This notion of craft has been one of the hallmarks of creative writing pedagogy in the Program Era, and even “craft” discussions have become a kind of lore. And yet, is it really the compositionist’s view that the entire project of creative writing pedagogy in the last half-century has been entirely useless, futile, and unsuccessful? Perhaps we should acknowledge that lore may help us identify how and why one student develops “confidence in his or her process,” while another may not.

We can imagine the student who hears all of these quotations and allusions and then responds to them both in conversation and in one’s compositional work. They inform those hard-to-pin-down “microhistories” or micro-level processes of composition. What I propose in this chapter is that the field of creative writing studies, in particular, use a historiographic, intertextual system of these micro-level processes. The webs of association exist for our students, and writing advice and instruction are one type of node in this web. First-year composition has much to benefit from this conception as well. NCTE supports this framework for instructors in their formative assessment initiatives, where formative assessment represents the “lived, daily embodiment of a teacher’s desire to refine practice based on a keener understanding of current levels of student performance” (National Council of Teachers of English). Formative assessment is based on a kind of practitioner-based knowledge, specifically the “knowledge of possible paths

³⁶ The entire quote: “I once ascertained five essentials of a serious writer: desire, drive, talent, vision, and craft.... My point...is not altered whether the list is held at five, cut to three, or expanded to twenty: of the essentials, only craft can be taught” (McFarland qtd. in Hesse 36).

of student development within the discipline” (National Council of Teachers of English). Instead of merely relying on instructor’s notions of student development alone, perhaps an assessment instrument to measure a student’s awareness of their own learning narrative would be useful to writing program administrators and teachers of first-year writing. By having the individual student, then, tap into the system as bricoleur, the individual becomes a social animal, a participant in literacy, ever important in a postdisciplinary age where composing strategies “travel” to situations outside of disciplines altogether, making the positivist goal of “theoretical purity” less central to researchers (Adkins 473).³⁷ Rhetorical invention, in this model, is fundamentally social, and essentially the work of improvising with whatever knowledge-base is already present to the composer. Moving outside the realm of the “academic and scholarly” brings with it a wider set of composing possibilities. Shipka discusses in her 2016 *College English* article on transmodality and “changing disposition” how new media projects are necessarily “good” projects, and a consideration of transmodality in relation to *process*, might yield an awareness of the multimodal in all communication.

The benefits of a renewed interest in processes of making are (at the very least) twofold. Firstly, encouraging a kind of hands-on engagement with a wider variety of materials and communicative resources than have traditionally/typically been associated with academic and scholarly practice helps to underscore a point Selfe raises in Horner and Selfe’s *Translinguality/Transmodality Relations*, namely, that not all multimodal texts are created equal.... A second benefit of attending closely to processes of making (including the production of more familiar/traditional, seemingly monomodal/monolingual texts as well as those that employ multiple semiotic resources and language varieties) is that it

³⁷ Seeing the student as bricoleur follows the work of Karen Burke LeFevre’s *Invention as a Social Act* (1987) and Katharine Haake’s “You Bricoleur You” from *What Our Speech Disrupts* (2000).

helps illuminate the highly distributed, embodied, translingual, and multimodal aspects of all communicative practice, something that is often overlooked or rendered invisible when analyzing final/finished texts, products, or performances. It affords, in Bruno Latour's words, a behind-the-scenes or "backstage view" of production practices. (253)

Within the "Lore 2.0" philosophy or paradigm, students are positioned to make sense, through bricolage, of the ephemeral, incomplete, mangled, remixed aspects of composing; instructors, too, are positioned to reassess the value of that which heretofore may not be considered "academic or scholarly practice."

Testimony that fits within the Latourian "backstage" or the "under-the-hood" variety becomes valid and valued pedagogically within Shipka's description of transmodality. Author testimony, traded in tidbits, bonds composers to other composers. The intertextual web of associations exists within something like an *assemblage*, where "heterogeneous elements or objects enter into relations with one another...thus you have physical objects, happenings, events, and so on, but you also have signs, utterances, and so on" (Bryant).³⁸ If one chooses to trace out one tidbit of lore, it is inevitable that the web of associations will develop, with important consequences for writers and teachers of writing.

³⁸ Assemblage theory, which builds off of various social theories, depends upon, for Latour, a "nonhuman conception of cognition, agency, and expression" (Reid 17 quoted in *Assembling Composition* Edited by Kathleen Blake Yancey and Stephen J. McElroy). Instead of relying on a modernist understanding of truth and truth production, Latour "insists that the world is not safely divided between society and science, politics and nature, subjects and objects, social constructions and reality, but rather is populated increasingly by strange hybrids" (Luckhurst 4).

CHAPTER FOUR: THE NETWORK OF LORE: IMITATIVE TRANSCRIPTION AS A CASE STUDY

Writing is...the medium least amenable to representing the results of Practitioner inquiry.

--Stephen North

More supple than the notion of system, more historical than the notion of structure, more empirical than the notion of complexity, the idea of network is the Ariadne's thread of these interwoven stories.

--Bruno Latour

In this chapter, I select one snippet, one tidbit of lore about imitation that is often presented in creative writing courses: typing out sentences of the greats. Using methods from actor-network theory, I trace out part of its relational network, performing a kind of close reading, a kind of intertextual trace, but most importantly, an elision of simply falling into a mode of either accepting or rejecting lore. As evidenced within the first three chapters, discussion of lore and its postmodern qualities often buries researchers and instructors in a dichotomy of either resisting lore and desiring further empirical proof or reductively and wholesale negating the need for empirical proof. Neither of these modes are altogether fair, and so actor-network theory allows for a way out of the modernism vs. postmodernism bind. By tracing out textual, contextual, associational, and even object-oriented valences, we see and experience the panoply of how writers interact with lore, as well as what information might be contained within one particular unit of lore that has entered deeply into the fray of our teaching.

This persistent piece of lore advises the typing out of sentences of canonical authors. This lore has been passed down in countless classrooms—among other places—over the last half-

century.³⁹ Underlying this advice is a suggestion that to write better means learning to read more and better, and even channel a writer’s spirit and feeling by typing out or handwriting their actual sentences. This kind of imitation exists far beyond the domain of teaching creative writing, as imitation exists as a subset of rhetorical invention, one of the five canons of rhetoric and arguably the most central.

The tidbit of lore regarding imitative practice was most famously uttered by Joan Didion in *Paris Review* interviews, first in 1977, then again in 2006. I heard this piece of advice mentioned by a professor in my MFA program, unattributed to Didion specifically, and my wife similarly heard the same advice in her MFA program, in her case, with a specific mention of the “original” source of the quote. Here are Didion’s words, in response to the interviewer’s question in 2006 about what writers as a youth she wished to emulate (key phrases are in bold for later reference):

Hemingway was really early. I probably started reading him when I was **just eleven or twelve**. There was just something magnetic to me in **the arrangement of those sentences**. Because **they were so simple**—or rather they appeared to be so simple, but they weren’t. **I didn’t think that I could** do them, but I thought that I could learn—because they felt **so natural**. I could **see how they worked** once I started typing them out. That was when I was about fifteen. I would just type those stories. It’s a great way to get rhythms into your head. (“The Art of Nonfiction No. 1”)

³⁹ Lore exists both within classrooms but also in non-academic communities, where it may have its own travels outside the walls of academia and outside mass culture with a relatively unexplored folk life.

Key Moves of Actor-network Theory

Within a house of lore that “rivals an Ikea’s size” and within an Ikea model of ‘insert critical theorist A into disciplinary gap B and *voilà!*,’” choosing a methodological orientation becomes a particularly spiky question (Lynch and Rivers 5). With that in mind, and before embarking on my trace, I should say more specifically how and where I am considering Latour’s work as the underpinning of this associational web. In *We Have Never Been Modern*, Latour discusses the modernism/postmodernism stalemate, and specifically how postmodernism cannot persist in its “critique [of modernism] without believing in its foundation” (46). Extending this out to the study of creative writing lore, it is easy to see why an acceptance model of lore, that casts off empirical studies to be “illusory and deceptively scientific” would bring about a pernicious pedagogy, i.e., one that reinforces old stereotypes because it has no system of revision, and makes no ethical progress. At the same time, while many modernists accept that “modern is done for,” these same scholars use its foundations (e.g., the Cartesian split and Kant’s transcendental subjectivity) (Prenosil 99). Instead, Latour promotes “creating categories,” where “entities and ideas are represented not as pure forms, but as forms that flow across fuzzy boundaries” (handbook of psychology, developmental psychology). It is precisely through these fuzzy categories—writing advice, teaching practice, collected wisdom, apprenticeship, memoir, learning narratives, style, sentence construction, ease, flow, the aura of the famous writer—where I will trace Didion’s near cliché of writing advice, which has no verifiable proof for its success other than self-report and anecdote. Each of the five parts of the quote I will zoom in on, and trace relational ties for, possesses intellectual substance. While many may be quick to dismiss Didion’s advice, or not study it further, I am choosing to follow its distributed network.

Using the metaphor of the distributed network, the entire collection of lore appears to scholars and teachers as a single system, or a single system per an individual discipline (e.g. musicologist lore, compositionist lore, gender studies lore, creative writing lore); but if we look closer, in the context of creative writing lore, we see that it is a shared space, one that points back to institutional histories, personal experiences, and intricate details of composing and teaching experiences. Each time an individual interacts with a unit of lore, they are entering into an associational web. The relational ties therein are extremely important to my conception of the network: the individual participates in exchanges of agency over the ties that they make, even over the choice to consider or reconsider this unit of lore in the first place. Actor-network theory evokes associations, and it would be an unmanageable task to adjudicate “what works,” without possessing a better representation of lore’s network of associations. Additionally, each unit of lore that connects to another association regarding practitioner logic has the capability of being peopled; that is, the ties are not merely conceptual, but often brought about through teachers, members of peer groups, or other human agents. For instance, I came to know this quote not only because of my research in the field, but mainly because of: a) my MFA teacher who uttered the quote; b) my wife’s MFA teacher who uttered the quote; c) my conversations with my wife about the quote. To ignore the social bonds that reinforce and that are inherent to the creation of this distributed network would be to miss lore’s affective capabilities altogether.

My methodological framework, inspired by both the philosophy of history and actor-network theory, is intended to present this tracing as one associational web among many possibilities. While I use a historical approach in that I am making an imaginative interpretation about the past, specifically the events leading up to, and following, Didion’s utterance, I am not concerned with diachronic history in this tracing. Instead, I am most concerned with looking for

patterns among the collected evidence in order to better understand why this pedagogical tradition endures and also how academic creative writing is forever interlocked with the tradition of the author interview/author testimony.

When Latour asserts in *Reassembling the Social* that “it’s practice all the way down,” he is calling attention to the fluid and active interconnectedness between things in network relations (135). This is a logical starting point for my research, which suggests that anecdotal tidbits about writing are in fact a consequence of the *practice* of writing. Or, to put it differently, lore emerges into practitioner-based knowledge-making in a form at once “coherent and incoherent” (Boyle 211). Actor-network theory provides an effective lens with which to consider this “paradox” of lore. Pedagogically speaking, much has been written about the role of the mentor teacher and the apprentice in the writing classroom; on the other hand, very little has been done to move beyond the teacher-student dynamic, and instead focus on the entire scene of writing instruction and all of the actors present. As Lynch and Rivers discuss, “to use the word actor...means it’s never clear who and what is acting...since an actor on stage is never alone” (5).

Lore itself, expressed in tidbits, similarly never acts in isolation: it creates a social web that connects writers to objects, things, and other writers. Latour’s notion of “tinkering,” without an overall plan, fits with my conception of the way writers interact with lore: it “suits their needs in a particular time and place and not just once” (Boyle 207). These relational linkages that writers participate in when they produce and consume anecdotal knowledge are continually made and remade within the network; as long as we make new anecdotes and tell new stories about our writing practices and teaching practices, the network will endure.

Throughout this chapter, then, I will consider the assemblage around Didion’s quote in the spirit of Latour’s maxim of “follow the writing,” while keeping in mind that lore is embodied

in people, places, spaces, and things (Lynch and Rivers 9). Didion's anecdote is one part of the assemblage, and by using intertextual methods to find other connected bits of lore, we will see how one bit of lore is reliant on other narratives to extend its meaning. This kind of "play of dependencies," as Foucault describes the making of historical narratives in "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," is central to my goal of seeing lore as a form of history. Foucault describes the difference between a total history, which looks at heroic narrative, and general history, which focuses on local, contested moments: "A total description draws all phenomena around a single center—a principle, a meaning, a spirit, a world-view, an overall shape; a general history, on the contrary, would deploy the space of a dispersion" (9-10). My method for this tracing combines this approach to make general history in large part by noting lore's "polymorphous cluster of correlations," articulated by Latour's notion of the network with a brand of assemblage theory where sets of practices recognize the ways that technologies and objects shape actors within the network (Scanlon 227).

Actor-network theory is also particularly valuable here, because it makes room for creative writing studies and composition and rhetoric to move away from the traditional humanistic notion of "agency as a possession" (Lynch and Rivers 5). This has been successfully demonstrated by Christian Lundberg and Joshua Gunn, who, instead of focusing on an "intentional agent" at the center of a rhetorical situation, or considering it as "something we own," suggest uncertainty toward the question of agency, and highlight the "flows of agents and agency." This chance-infused dance of agency clearly troubles much of the humanistic legacy of creative writing, and specifically the romantic mythography that many have identified as the field's central pedagogical mode. At the heart of academic creative writing, we find associations to the master-apprentice model and to craft or artisan guilds. We might ordinarily, in creative

writing, simply stop there, and see our roles as teachers and researchers as the next in line in a relatively uncomplicated pedagogical scenario. However, following an ANT-inspired method, we alternatively choose “to go all the way in following the networks” (Lynch and Rivers 6). In the case of the lore I trace in this chapter, this means going beyond neatly assigning Didion’s quote to the box of “imitation” or “imitative transcription.” ANT takes a divergent viewpoint from the heroic myths that tell the story of inventions or scientific discovery as the work of geniuses, which is in keeping with my most basic assumptions with respect to creative writing pedagogy; as discussed in Chapter Two, we need to move past the harmful myth of what Katharine Haake refers to as the “solitary male genius.” Viewing lore as an assemblage, comprised of material and discursive entities of “different or similar types found in close association with each other,” we can better see how “participants and networks are coextensive” and how “*both human and nonhuman* [agents] play a role in supporting, facilitating, altering, and at times even thwarting or forbidding the production of a focal text, product, or performance (Lynch and Rivers 12, Shipka, “Transmodality in/and Processes of Making” 253).

Composition and rhetoric has been using actor-network theory in its methodologies for some time now, and so it is possible to draw out some of its most pertinent methods in contemporary criticism that either use a tracing technique to point out relational ties within a network or that propose how Latourian principles may be used in rhetorical criticism or composition theory. Creative writing studies, which continues to look for research methods of particular use to its emerging field, may also find these terms, and this chapter’s tracing, as a model for future scholarship.

Following the trace, as a research method, “entails connecting entities with other entities to construct an actor-network (Gries 303). It is possible to see this network from a macro-scale,

in this case, as one among many examples of rhetorical invention; it is also possible to view the network on a micro-scale, looking at local aspects of Didion's personal history, such as where her childhood house was positioned geographically and what she listened to on the radio. Part and parcel with scaling in ANT is the ability to zoom in or zoom out at any point in the tracing: "The actor-network requires zooming in on a microscale to discover the specific alliances an image establishes within a single collective but also zooming out to account for the network of various collectives in which a single multiple image participates" (Gries 303).

Along with zooming and scaling, ANT methods usually involve copious amounts of description: "Description is a composing act (de-scribing) that ought to be as much a part of one's research methods as...tracing" because of description's ability to "foreground the actions that emerge from 'an association of actants'" (Gries 304, 305). It is not enough, then, within ANT, to note a contextual connection or to explain its importance to the network; for Latour, description leads to further description. With this in mind, it may seem that ANT work may quickly become overwhelming. Latour himself addresses this in a dialogue between student and professor in *Reassembling the Social*:

S: But I have lots of descriptions already! I'm drowning in them. That's just my problem. That's why I'm lost and that's why I thought it would be useful to come to you. Can't ANT help me with this mass of data? I need a framework!...

P: "My Kingdom for a frame!" Very moving; I think I understand your desperation. But no, ANT is pretty useless for that. Its main tenet is that actors themselves make everything, including their own frames, their own theories, their own contexts, their own metaphysics, even their own ontologies. So the direction to follow would be more descriptions I am afraid. (146-47)

While ANT's use value is to illustrate the relational web, it does not provide a direct means for crunching aggregated data. As Gries points out regarding ANT's wide-ranging nature: "this composition of networked mediations can get quite messy and seem impossible to follow, trace, and adequately describe" (Gries 305). Further, as ANT recognizes, there may be an infinite number of accounts made, for, in "multiplying accounts," we "acknowledge that we are never trying to arrive at a correct version but are practicing versions" (Boyle 210). In order to construct this particular associative web, I read and re-read the Didion quote, looking for common themes, and then describing and tracing out associations and intertextual connections from there. Following Latour, I aimed to "deploy the content with all its connections" (Latour, *Reassembling the Social* 146) against, at times, my better instincts to impose a frame or an immediate didactic explanation.

Didactic explanation falls into the category of "grand narrative," which is diametrically opposed to the work of the ANT tracer. Tracing, in this sense, is akin to tinkering. "Practitioners often shy away from grand gestures and engage instead in what [Annemarie] Mol refers to as tinkering: '[tinkering] suggests persistent activity done bit by bit, one step after another without an overall plan'" (Boyle 207). As Boyle points out, North was an "inadvertent prophet for and Skeptic of the Practitioner" because he defined his practitioner as tinkerer: "Practitioners are always tinkering with things, seeing it they can't be made to work better" (Boyle 211).

Instead of seeing lore within the framework of "good vs. evil" my intention is to make lore visible, as a network, via this tracing. At times, it will look like I am making noodles, but I will occasionally pause to take snapshots and note the overlaps between traces. My ANT-method is also infused with a concern for student agency, where tidbits create social bonds, as explored in Chapter 3. In order to trust the process, as the unit of lore implores one to do, I argue that it is

necessary to add a human attachment or feeling to the network itself. As Latour argues in *Reassembling the Social*, it is essential to note the links between actants rather than only the nodes; these links put actants in conversation with each other, and ultimately, they line up to the classroom and to pedagogical practice.

Tracing a Unit of Lore

In the Fall-Winter 1978 issue of *The Paris Review*, Didion describes her replications of Hemingway prose as beginning at a young age: “Hemingway was really early. I probably started reading him when I was just eleven or twelve. . . . I could see how they worked once I started typing them out. That was when I was about fifteen.” Didion is, quite obviously, not alone in her learning the craft via transcription. Poet, essayist, and short story writer Audrey Petty describes imitation as the “first creative strategy [she] reached for when [she] began writing poems” (Leahy 78). It is a frequently assigned approach, and there are numerous graduate courses that center on imitation, one of which was developed by Nicholas Delbanco, Professor Emeritus at the University of Michigan, and is the subject of his book, *The Sincerest Form*. As frequently as it is assigned, imitating sentences is also something that apprentice writers seem to stumble upon. But is it truly by chance that Didion and other autodidacts pick up this approach? After all, pastiche and parody abound in modern times, as they have for millennia; Isocrates used to assign imitations. It also must be said that mimicry is enacted in the young across species, often without conscious or complex thought regarding the activity. Aristotle ascribes imitation as being “natural to man” (*Poetics*). When students begin to harness imitation as a conscious act—as in one assignment offered by Petty to “rewrite ‘Hills Like White Elephants’ from the slant of Updike’s colorful and conflicted narrator in ‘A & P,’” something “revelatory” occurs (Leahy 78). Petty claims that this activity makes students aware of the rhetorical dimensions of creative

writing, emphasizing for students “that creating a story means entering a series of choices.” We must assert immediately a linkage between rhetorical imitation and imitative transcription.

Age and Cognitive Development: “Just eleven or twelve”

This early rhetorical training regarding imitation is not a new trend. Saint Augustine notes in *De doctrina Christiana* that “Imitation is more important than Precept for the newcomer to rhetoric” (Saint Augustine IV.3). The Sophist, Protagoras, argues in the Platonic dialogue that when modeling a new text after a respected text, students derive moral lessons:

And when the boy has learned his letters and is beginning to understand what is written, as before he understood only what was spoken, they put into his hands the works of great poets, which he reads sitting on a bench at school; in these are contained many admonitions, and many tales, and praises, and encomia of ancient famous men, which he is required to learn by heart, in order that he may imitate or emulate them and desire to become like them. (*Protagoras* xiv, 325e-326a)

Let us focus here on the idea of youth and imitative practice. In some of its earliest manifestations in the historical record, imitation performs various social functions: offering moral training, defining the greatness of “ancient famous men,” introducing a common language of literary and philosophical texts, and initiating youth into a life narrative of striving to become excellent rhetors. Imitation, then, in antiquity, was fundamentally an interaction of moral instruction, a set of lessons from a mentor to an apprentice regarding as to how to succeed—and be—in the world. Its social function is, borrowing from contemporary athletic lexicon, to keep the young student on the “bench.” Additionally, the book of poetry in the hands, or the recited poem of the master emanating in the student’s voice, is the place for the apprentice in the Protagorean construction of imitation.

In one sense, Didion reworked this model of imitation by doing her imitation for herself rather than for an assignment. She imitated not to passively consume moral lessons, but to eventually become a writer. While reasonable, that reading might too easily dismiss the way the Quintilian-based system of imitation represented “a specific sequence of learning activities for students from the youngest to the oldest” that would “remain the same over time” only progressing to more challenging models, from “Aesop to Cicero” (Murphy 52). Indeed, one of the most conspicuous things about Didion’s quote is how precisely she describes the ages at which she read and began imitating Hemingway. Again, she was eleven to twelve years old when she first read Hemingway’s writing, and fifteen when she began the practice of typing out representative sentences. Didion creates a progression from one year to the next. Zooming in further, surely some of that time was on the bench, but what else was going on during those intervening years? Psychologists, cognitive scientists, and creativity researchers discuss the importance of “incubation” stages in creative processes. This incubation period is the time where “ideas churn around below the threshold of consciousness,” and “it is during this time that unusual connections are likely to be made,” such as the connection between retyping sentences and eventually learning from the inside how and why these sentences are effective (Csikszentmihayli 79). We can zoom up here, and notice the link between imitation as a teaching tool with other forms of lore that involve instructors challenging their students to make unusual connections or avoid cliché. At the same time that we note unusual connections, we also find a host of artist testimony that celebrates the usual connections, or cliché: Kay Ryan declares herself a “rehabilitator of clichés” and John Ashbery describes one of his collections as having “all kinds of clichés” as a conscious choice, in order to “put together as many different kinds of

language and tone as possible, and to shift them abruptly, to overlap them all” (Ryan, Ashbery, *The Paris Review Interviews, Vol. IV 198*).

Ranging back from the cliché to early childhood, it’s not surprising that so many authors, Didion included, reach all the way back into their early childhood, when describing the paths they took in becoming writers; it is almost as if they were describing the earliest recoverable memories of the incubation process. But what literary authors don’t mention as often—though they do in responses to creativity-focused research—is the need for “problems to simmer below the threshold of consciousness for a time” (Csikszentmihalyi 98). Creativity research notes how incubation rarely occurs via direct, conscious pathways, but rather develops when ideas “call out to each other on their own, without our leading them down a straight and narrow path” (Csikszentmihalyi 79). For Didion, her imitative experience was part of the preparation—“getting rhythms into [her] head”—or the long incubation period before she began literary writing in earnest.

A preteen when first reading Hemingway, Didion was a teenager when she felt compelled to try out his sentences as her own. Didion imitated sentences, rather than full-on short stories, which focuses her awe on a selected dataset. Whereas imitation in the context of contemporary K-12 education can be seen as pernicious (the five-paragraph theme), Didion’s imitation here comes across as liberatory. Additionally, cross-culturally, adolescence has long been understood as a liminal space where an individual must leave or his or her community in order to temporarily undergo a set of trials.⁴⁰ In a ritualistic killing off of one’s former self, a new self with a new identity emerges. This predates the “authentic self” movement in rhetoric and

⁴⁰ Didion’s quote exists within this larger framework of mythic criticism and the study of ritual initiation narratives, following the work of Victor Turner and Mircea Eliade, among others.

composition, but is related to the dominant ideology throughout much of the 1960s and 1970s of writing courses helping students “find their voice” through a similar self-discovery.

Didion has been described as having been the archetypal teenager made aware of her own mortality and of the spectacle of everyday life. We can look to Daugherty’s 2015 Didion biography, *The Last Love Song*, where Didion is portrayed as an adolescent well-versed in existentialism, with an “academic backing for fatalism” and a deep understanding of “life as theater” (61). The next step in her adolescent progression, Daugherty adds, was to “strip away the costumes.” The setting for her identification with Hemingway’s writing becomes clearer as we consider Didion’s search for an authentic self as being dependent upon a corresponding stripping away of masks. First, like Hemingway, Didion as adolescent viewed herself as a reporter, bearing witness rather than making up stories. She shared a backyard for a time with a psychiatric hospital, and as she overheard “anguished dialogue,” she was sure to write down “snippets” (30). As Annie Dillard has mentioned, “a writer’s childhood may well have been the occasion of his [sic] only firsthand experience” (Daugherty 44). Second, “stripping away the costumes,” a Holden Caulfield-esque sentiment was reflected in Hemingway’s spare style, a point that was not lost on young Didion. She cites Mark Schorer’s 1948 work on New Criticism for helping her discover “what writing was about, what it was for,” and, in effect, Hemingway’s “early subject, the exhaustion of value,” which was “perfectly investigated and invested by his bare style” (61). This reflects the incubation period’s “punctuation” by “small epiphanies,” one of which was determining, for herself, the purpose and value of writing (80). Third, Didion, within a social imaginary, was beginning to form an incipient social bond through her performance of typing out Hemingway’s sentences. As Andrea Barrett points out, “until MFA programs became so common, people learned by imitation and by reading. If they were lucky,

they also learned by conversation with fellow writers, but lots of people didn't have that at first, either." The kind of nurturing, affective—and technical—bond, or give-and-take, one expects now from mentors in creative writing, was up to the apprentice writer to determine. It might also be said that in this model, before the Program Era truly took off, "the process [was] the teacher" (Carlson 4). Finally, Hemingway's Nick Adams stories, self-portraits told askance, dwelled on coming-of-age experiences that appealed widely to a generation of younger readers.

Zooming out, one recurring theme in the long rhetorical and literary traditions is the interplay between mentors and apprentices. The Program Era and the Platonic dialogues alike focus on the nature of these wide-ranging exchanges. While the MFA exists today as part of a "coming-of-age" ritual for many apprentice writers, we might see Didion's initiation narrative as being connected to other units of lore that discuss how early childhood is formative in awakening the artistic possibilities of making new symbolic meanings out of remembered experience. Flannery O'Connor asserts in *Mystery and Manners* that "the writer's business is to contemplate experience, not to be merged in it" (84). And O'Connor famously notes: "The fact is that anybody who has survived his [sic] childhood has enough information about life to last him the rest of his days. If you can't make something out of a little experience, you probably won't be able to make it out of a lot." In the case of Didion's childhood, we hear of a young person who "brooded alone over dark doings" and "dreamed up stories" (Daugherty 30). Didion kept notebooks as early as age six, studied California legends and myths, and at twelve freely checked out adult books at the library with a note from her mother granting permission. The power to imitate a writing style was a private space for Didion that was permissible to enter, and beyond the reach of parental authorities, important for cognitive development particularly at eleven or

twelve.⁴¹ But one thing that was off limits, one more adult activity that she was prohibited by her mother from doing, was listening to the radio: “There were scary things on [the radio]” (11). Young Didion focused not on the stories themselves, but on their telling, or *how* scary things came to be scary. Zooming in, these radio tales, told through the static, left an imprint on Didion’s memory. In a 1970 interview with Alfred Kazin, Didion notes that she was “haunted by the cannibalism of the Donner Party” but that she found one of California’s founding myths to be insufferable in its over-sentimentality. The tales, at their most basic, were worry-inducing and ghostly, but Didion was left with a feeling that they could be told better. The American horror radio drama had its heyday in the 1930s and 1940s, with late-night suspense stories offering this sense of life as theater. Perhaps there was something in radio drama that would not allow for these missteps in tone, which Didion had described as being “saturated with sentiment” and told “in the pressed-flower-and-keepsake-style of a young lady’s album” (4). The key move in horror radio dramas was to “open the door and show the audience what’s behind it,” and Didion listened as an editor (King qtd. in Hand and Traynor).

On a macro-scale, looking at other literary authors, Didion’s youthful experiences are far from exceptional. In fact, artist testimony often details early trials and early practice as therapeutic inasmuch as they could provide provisional answers to fundamental questions about existence. Across interviews and craft essays, literary writers discuss early memory as the seed of later invention, a chief source for idea generation, and the shaping influence for particular works. V.S. Naipaul describes a childhood memory of a neighbor that formed the basis of a novel. William Faulkner started his writing process by writing about a particular image or memory from his past, one which he would then seek to reconstruct by adding events leading up to and following that particular moment. Alice Munro describes certain images from childhood

⁴¹ The longstanding myth that a literary writer is private also finds its way into Didion’s reminiscence here.

that serve as seeds for projects, but, much like the process of coming-of-age, those seeds disappear from view as the work matures. Other writers describe memory in more nuanced ways, with writers who experienced severe trauma as children describing memory as incomplete or incoherent. Mary Karr discusses how her mother attempted to murder both her and her sister in an *Art of Fiction* interview. In particular, Karr describes her inability to depict the event and portray her true thoughts in the moment, the actual internal landscape of her experiences. She needed imaginative language in order to both make sense of the event and to give it a full sense of expression. Karr later describes that practice as “corrupt,” but suggests that memoir writing tends to always involve corruption (Karr). In one sense, for Karr, the act of making meaning came out of the practice of writing rather than from the event itself; we might compare this again to Didion’s seeking out transcription as a way to make meaning from an otherwise confusing and jumbled set of experiences.

Similarly, those who lived through the devastations of war or other traumatic events discuss the moments where memory was too faint or incoherent to do much with on its own, where imagination needed to take over. Maurice Sendak, Paul Auster, and Lin-Manuel Miranda have all discussed in interviews or written about in essays the death of a friend in early childhood. Miranda describes the event as the first recognition of a ticking clock of mortality (“Maurice Sendak,” Auster 129, *Black*). Stephen King has written about a severe ear infection, while Peter Straub has discussed a severe car accident he endured as a seven-year-old as having an identity-altering effect:

It took me a long time to see this, but of course it kind of darkened my view of life in general. It meant that I was way more open to fear than any child ought to be, and that I knew more about fear and its first cousin terror, and pain, than children are normally

expected to know. And it meant that I was kind of pushed forward into an emotional understanding that I wasn't quite prepared for...It was very, very complex. I had nightmares; my behavior suffered. I darkened in character; I was less amenable, less friendly. (Timberg)

Didion's early existentialism and deep-seated fears resonates with Straub's and fit into this larger network of artists discussing early trauma and a sense that they felt called into a special knowledge of fear, terror, and pain. This is obviously not unique to literary writers; but the archetypal myth of the famous writer involves a corresponding identification with a mentor who offers—implicitly or explicitly—the apprentice writer a way to respond.

We have now taken our trace from the realm of pre-adolescent cognitive development to the specific theme, and oft-repeated testimony, that writers experience significant early trauma. To follow this tracing further, regarding trauma specifically, would require an associational web that would be too expansive for this project; the web would simply extend too far out for my central purpose in this chapter of showing how networks of advice have the capacity to form social bonds. Instead we will pivot back to the idea of early experience in shaping the work of a creative writer, and I will connect Didion's "just eleven or twelve" to a unit of lore attributed to Flannery O'Connor that I have heard in multiple creative writing workshops: "Nothing needs to happen to a writer's life after they are twenty. By then they've experienced more than enough to last their creative life" (O'Connor qtd. in Jelinek). At the risk of privileging the writer-figure as a special sort of individual, it does seem to be apparent that these psychological threshold experiences—where young people are forced to face hard facts about mortality and pain—stand out in the narratives that literary writers tell of themselves. If the archive of writers on writing serves a pedagogical function here, we can observe how authenticating one's identity as a

student writer might require a willingness to reach back, archaeologically, into one's personal history.

From a different perspective, other writers claim that memory, as we know it, doesn't even exist. Robbie-Grillet asserts that memory can never be truly separate from figural, imaginative impulses. Memory, in some sense, always comes with a tinge of the imagination, and it should come as no surprise that early life experiences and early literacy experiences coincide with our earliest traumas/memories. In the Freudian worldview, "the curiosity at the roots of the creative process—especially in the arts—is triggered by a childhood experience of sexual origin, a memory so devastating that it had to be repressed" (Csikszentmihalyi 100). The artist, through the incubation period, is always trying to find "new forms of representation."

Some artists describe early experiences as being the only true influences on their careers. Graham Greene mentions reading Marjorie Bowen's *Viper of Milan* and then writing multiple imitations of her work. Discussing his choice for the imitation, he notes, "I chose Marjorie Bowen because...I don't think that the books that one reads as an adult influence one as a writer...But books such as Marjorie Bowen's, read at a young age, do influence one considerably" (*The Paris Review Interviews Vol. II* 15). That Bowen's work has staying power, and that Greene had gone back to it again shortly before the interview is a testament to the role of early experiences and early mentors.

In this search for new forms of representation, and in effect, ways to make new meaning, the imitative act is one of the most time-tested and popular approaches. Indeed, many writers consider it a rite of passage before beginning to use or publish an identifiable, signature voice. As Norman Mailer exaggeratingly puts it: "I almost wouldn't trust a young novelist... who doesn't imitate Hemingway in his youth" (*Paris Review Interviews Vol. 3* 403). Robert Creeley

describes imitation as a “natural thing in artists” that should be “encouraged” (Creeley). Creeley offers the metaphor of coming from a farming lifestyle where “learning to plow is both watching someone else do it and then taking the handle of the plow and seeing if you can imitate, literally, his way of doing it, therefore gaining the use of it for yourself” (Creeley). Frank O’Connor shares the assumption that imitation is an early-stage practice, focused on style and technique. “I discovered that growing technical control soon makes an end of imitation, and scarcely does a young writer feel confidence in himself [sic] than he works in a different way from his teacher” (Frank O’Connor).

And yet, while Frank O’Connor mentions these limits of imitative pedagogies, he notes the importance of *confidence*. Didion’s decision to, as Creeley described, “see if you can imitate” (Frank O’Connor) represents a confident moment for Didion where she became the active director of her creative practice, rather than a passive consumer of pedagogy. If one finds an original angle of vision, then one has achieved more maturity as a writer and can take on new problems. Since there is no direct path to writerly confidence, and if self-assurance is one of the goals for any apprentice writer, how, exactly, does a student writer deal with frustrations and those less-than-confident moments that occur after “finding one’s voice?” Jerry Lakaszycsk describes the way that student imitations are not merely about imitating the style of a “great writer,” but rather a way for students to gain “authority” from “the ordinary experiences in their lives...[that] were just as important as what they perceived to be important (Drew 104). Lakaszycsk also asserts how “keeping the idea of authority in flux” is a useful strategy because it keeps students confident, while, at the same time, it takes them off the hook from the notion of a writer being an immovable monument (Drew 103-04). Didion’s act of transcribing Hemingway may on the surface be just another form of hero worship that re-asserts Hemingway’s greatness;

but on another level, her copying of his prose demonstrates an awareness of literary personae that come out of “life as theater.” Writers are social, mutable individuals, playing particular roles, and her transcription could be said to be both a ceremonial coming-of-age trial, and a budding awareness of the artifice of that ceremony.

Here I will pause and take a snapshot (see Fig. 4) of my performance of tracing, which is also fundamental to Latour’s conception of the network: “Acts exist only as snapshots—or what Latour calls ‘performances’ in *Pandora’s Hope*—each moment being wholly unconnected to those previous and subsequent” (Tirrell 173).

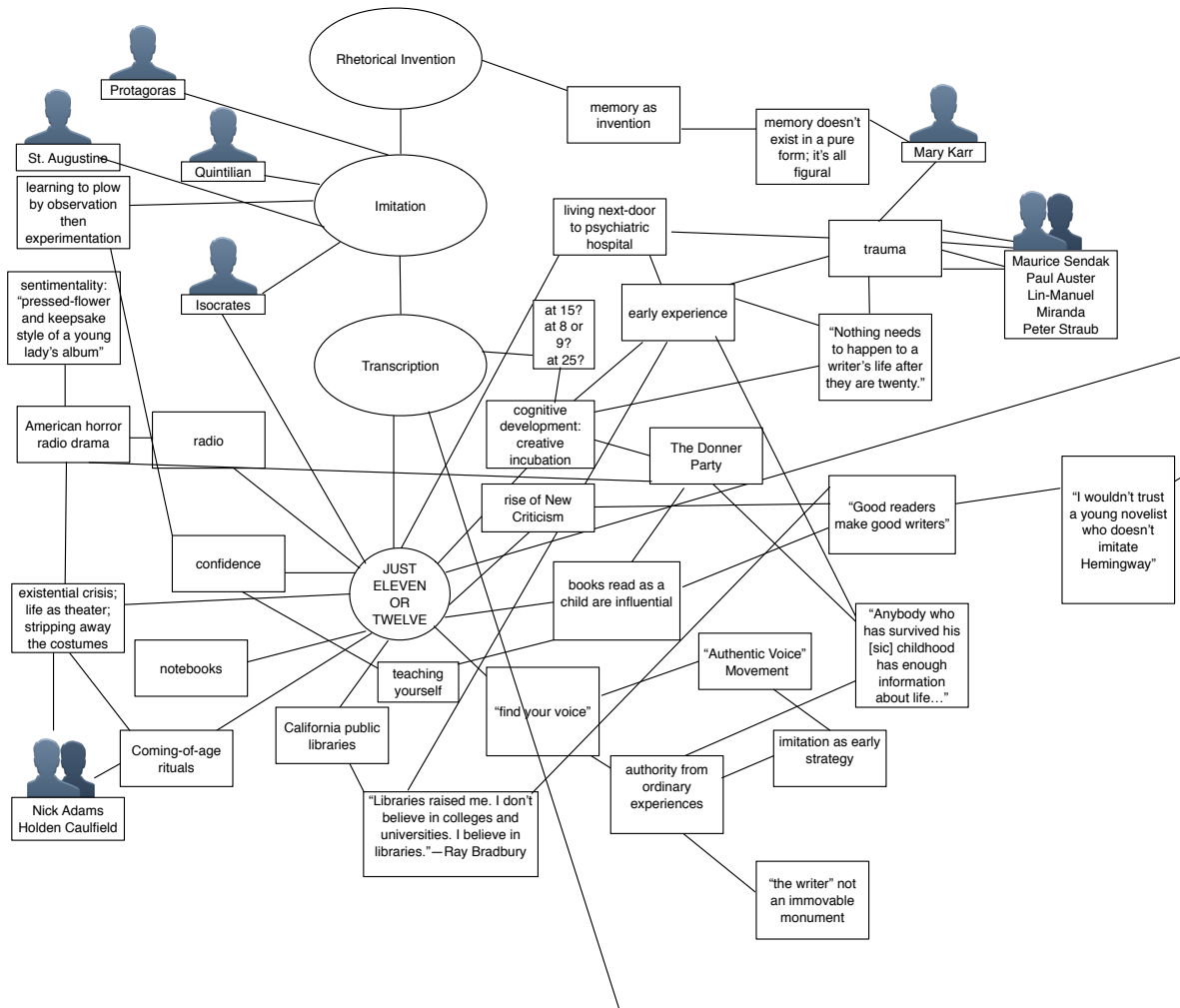


Figure 4: Snapshot of first trace

Confidence and being self-taught exist on the same network of associations as personal trauma and doubts about being the right kind of individual to be “a writer.” Students are presented with and perform much of this lore, with the connection points suggesting some form of interaction or conversation. Lore’s contradictory nature here finds itself temporarily made whole in its participation within the network, a web of libraries, notebooks, radios, keepsake-style albums, personal narratives, and tidbits of advice.

Magnetic Combinations: “The Arrangement of Those Sentences”

Didion did not merely discuss Hemingway in general, or use him as a cultural referent to hold in awe. In fact, she sought out his work, according to her testimony, for a specific reason: she the enjoyed the experience of reading his sentences, in particular the sentence structures she found in his writing. Hemingway was famous in his time for valuing simple rhythms over more baroque sentence structures. “I know the ten-dollar words,” he said. “There are older and better words which if you arrange them in the proper combination you make it stick” (Quote Investigator, Hemingway qtd. in Fruscione 62). This rejoinder was a response to Faulkner, who had called Hemingway a writer without advanced diction (“He has never been known to use a word that might cause the reader to check with a dictionary to see if it is properly used.”).

The Faulkner-Hemingway divide is not the first time that a dictionary, as reference object, has served as a polarizing device between writers. Before the age of the right-click for synonyms, the use (or avoidance) of a dictionary in drafting and revision could separate discourse into two groups: a kind of specialized language or a more ordinary dialect. In the dataset of writers on writing, dictionaries come up often when writers mention holding jobs as lexicographers or copywriters, and they also are mentioned frequently as a form of spell-check, in the context of translators, or for learning language, or language acquisition. They are also described as being

amulets or totems of sorts to remind one of the beauty and potentiality of language. Humorist Fran Lebowitz mentions her ritual of addressing the dictionary: “Every time I sit at my desk, I look at my dictionary, a Webster’s *Second Unabridged* with nine million words in it and think, all the words I need are in there; they’re just in the wrong order.” Maya Angelou discusses her writing space, which she had once described as “a made-up bed with a bottle of sherry, a dictionary, Roget’s Thesaurus, yellow pads, an ashtray, and a Bible.” The Bible, in this case, reminds Angelou of how mellifluous Biblical language is, no matter the “translation” or “edition.” Angelou describes reading the Bible aloud to “remind [her]self how beautiful English is” (*Paris Review Interviews, Vol. 4* 238). Stephen Sondheim admits to using a rhyming dictionary, often seen as a kind of cheat among lyricists. He mentions the exact edition he uses—a Clement Wood 1938 edition—and that it has accrued his own entries over the years since it lacks more contemporary words. The sound of words here too is Sondheim’s emphasis, and yet his admiration for this specific dictionary comes from its vertical design. “That’s the best [rhyming dictionary],” Sondheim says, “and for a very simple reason: all the words are listed vertically. If you use one that lists them horizontally, your eyes start to skip over the entries” (*Paris Review Interviews, Vol. 4* 271). The very choices of graphic design made by those particular lexicographers exerted an influence on Sondheim’s style; that is, finding the right word.

We can zoom in here on Didion’s choice of Hemingway as representative famous author. The “famous writer” himself brings a web of associations into the mix: member of “The Lost Generation” after a well-known set of experiences fighting in World War I, an intervention into the Spanish Civil War, a highly publicized death, an inflated public image more generally, a Nobel Prize speech that included the staccato refrain, “Writers write,” a cult of stoic masculinity embodied by hunting with his father and sensitive yet brash protagonists, the reputation of

having introduced a newly American modernist style influenced early experiences as a journalist, and a bumpy relationship with his mentor, Gertrude Stein.

By aligning herself with Hemingway, Didion writes herself onto one side of the divide. She makes it clear to herself, as a youth, that her focus will be on the visual and aural enticements of language. To return once again to her quote: “There was just something magnetic to me in the arrangement of those sentences...I would just type those stories. It’s a great way to get rhythms into your head” (Didion, “The Art of Fiction No. 71”). Her approach to language itself has a far-reaching, historical arc. This interplay between harmony and rhythm—not surprisingly—is much discussed elsewhere. Protagoras, for instance, separates out the learning of the lyre and the hearing of poems in early education; eventually the two activities are combined. Plato has Protagoras discuss this moment of finally combining word and song:

And these they set to music, and make their harmonies and rhythms quite familiar to the children's souls, in order that they may learn to be more gentle, and harmonious, and rhythmical, and so more fitted for speech and action; for the life of man in every part has need of harmony and rhythm. (*Protagoras* xiv, 326a-326b)

Zooming out to the links between music and all other practitioners, anyone who has learned or attempted to learn a stringed instrument knows of the repetitive practicing of ascending and descending scales necessary to memorize tones, finger placement, and bow-style or strumming-style. These kinds of warm-ups highlight the kind of preparation involved in “get[ting] rhythms into your head.” The acknowledgment of rhythm in written poems or prose is often described as something memorized or internalized rather than deduced, and as a phenomenon that we cannot completely control or understand. Allen Ginsberg mentions that he has “never actually sat down and made a technical analysis of the rhythms” that he writes (Ginsberg, “Interview with Conan

O'Brien"). Philip Levine writes that "rhythm is deep and it touches us in ways that we don't understand. We know that language used rhythmically has some kind of power to delight, to upset, to exalt." Levine goes on to say that he first encountered attractive rhythms not in poetry, but "perhaps simply in speech, in prayer, preaching. That made me want to create it." Again, we note the trend of an apprentice writer who discerns attractive rhythms and delights in their arrangement prior to any sort of decision to embark on formal experimentation. Rather, the lore seems to focus on appreciation prior to experimentation.

As Donnelly explains, imitation is "effectual in the sense that students practice a particular style or learn techniques by mimicry" (57). She locates "imitative approaches" in creative writing pedagogy through prompt books that organize a series of progymnasmata, such as *What If?: Writing Exercises for Fiction Writers* and *The Practice of Poetry: Writing Exercises From Poets who Teach*. While the Didion quote I focus on in this chapter is not conveniently codified within a creative writing textbook, style book, craft book, or prompt book, it is readily available via the web in *The Paris Review Interviews*, which serve as unofficial common language for many instructors. And it has been passed down with the workshop setting, embodied in the assignment of *transcribing* multiple pages of prose by a master writer to see the sentences from the inside. In fact, any time a creative writing course reads literature by writers outside of those in the workshop, there is a suggestion that there is something there, some technique (voice, persona, image, setting, formal constraints) meant to be learned. The predominantly appreciative mode—as described in some of the earlier writer testimony—seems to be less documented in the pedagogical literature. And even within artist interviews, we find many authors warning of the dangers of imitation. Mary Lee Settle mentions using work by writers such as Proust or Conrad as guides, "not to imitate but to warn." Settle describes seeking

out particular authors to achieve a kind of “lyricism” over sentimentality, including one case where she had to write about the “harsh” material of her service in the Royal Air Force during World War II in a sympathetic tone. Even given that Settle’s advice is described in the negative, as warnings (with the assumption that a Proustian-inspired tone covering different subject matter might fall flat), we see further support of Donnelly’s exploration of imitation is the predominant mode of learning technique.

Didion described her interest in the “thrill” of Hemingway’s syntax and rhythm without anxiety regarding this training. Writing an essay for *The New Yorker* in 1998, Didion builds on her observations made in *The Paris Review* twenty years earlier as she describes re-reading *A Farewell to Arms* more than a half-century after its publication:

Four deceptively simple sentences, one hundred and twenty-six words, the arrangement of which remains as mysterious and thrilling to me now as it did when I first read them, at twelve or thirteen... Only one of the words has three syllables. Twenty-two have two. The other hundred and three have one. Twenty-four of the words are “the,” fifteen are “and.” There are four commas. The liturgical cadence of the paragraph derives in part from the placement of the commas (their presence in the second and fourth sentences, their absence in the first and third), but also from that repetition of “the” and of “and,” creating a rhythm so pronounced that the omission of “the” before the word “leaves” in the fourth sentence... casts exactly what it was meant to cast, a chill, a premonition, a foreshadowing of the story to come.... (“Last Words”)

Didion offers categorical praise for Hemingway’s simplicity of language, and again we see a connection between syntactical arrangement and liturgical cadences. The “pronounced” rhythm here carries the paragraph from the simple to the “deceptively simple.” Perhaps it is that

deceptive simplicity that leads the neophyte Didion to a feeling that she too can write in this style. The imitative approach seems to work best, by all accounts within creative writing lore, when it emerges gradually—as a kind of stylistic instruction intuited by the apprentice writer on his or her own. Coerced or assigned imitations would certainly have their own lineage within pedagogical history, and yet we rarely come across the mentioning of specific teaching assignments that brought about these small, fairly consistent, epiphanies. Going inside of sentences seems to be especially welcome and reminiscent of the longstanding imitative practice of going “direct[ly]” and “line-by-line,” “enabl[ing] the writer to learn ‘from inside’ the secrets of some great writer’s style” (Murphy 85, Gardner 142).⁴²

Didion’s comments regarding this kind of close reading, or going inside Hemingway’s sentences return us to some central questions: What did Didion *learn* when she read Hemingway? And why was Hemingway remarkable to her *in this way*? Hemingway asserts in *A Movable Feast* that when stuck, the pursuit of truth in sentence construction is his constant: “All you have to do is write one true sentence. The truest sentence you know” (12). What was the nature of this truth-making? To consider these questions, it is worthwhile to turn back to the lore to the very notion of the sentence. In the classroom, students and teachers are positioned to make assumptions about the capabilities and limitations of the form of a sentence. Additionally, artist testimony comes with frequent reflections on the line or sentence. John Banville mentions the sonic chime after-effect of a good sentence: “It’s only now and then, maybe once every three or four days, that I manage to write a sentence in which I hear that wonderful harmonic chime” (Banville).

⁴² This is set off from imitative practice that involved taking an “old, generally unfamiliar form for the presentation and analysis of modern subject matter” or the Neoclassical Era method where “the student took some classical model—for example, the Pindaric hymn or the Horatian ode” and would then be asked to write an “original work in imitation of that model” (Gardner 142).

Sentences grant a participatory spirit to their readers. DeLillo argues that “a young writer sees that with words and sentences on a piece of paper that costs less than a penny he can place himself more clearly in the world.” Once again, we see an emphasis on the “young writer.” There’s also a spirit of anticipation that emanates from creative writing lore. Amy Hempel notes her training in journalism that taught her “how to write a sentence that would make someone want to read the next one” (Hempel). Sentences are “entirely a matter of wording,” and thus arrangement, testifies Elena Ferrante, and yet also have a vitalist element where “literary truth” is “directly proportional to the energy that one is able to impress on the sentence” (Ferrante).

With all of this energy and sense of participation and promise, we are met by the seemingly eternal need to discipline that energy and vitalism. One of the most read craft books at the time of Didion’s interview was John Gardner’s *The Art of Fiction*: in many ways, an exploration of procedures and mechanics needed to develop one’s prose. Gardner goes so far as to designate imitation as one of the seven “technical matters...that seem to [him] basic” for all apprentice fiction writers (142). Gardner includes section headings—each with corresponding exercises—on the topic of “learning technique by imitation,” alongside development and control of vocabulary, sentence handling, poetic rhythm, point of view, delay and style. The sentence is the chief object of study in many ways, then, for the novelist, as all of these other elements are a central part of crafting one sentence. Didion’s emphasis on the sentence also occurred concomitantly with *The Elements of Style* offering dicta, which later became dogma, on the nature of sentences.⁴³ This book functioned “like a national superego,” according to the editor of *The Paris Review*, Lorin Stein (Haslett). Sentences were now valued for their vigor and toughness, and their ability to act, as the US entered the Cold War, as “smoothly functioning

⁴³ “Omit needless words.”

machines.” Conversely, for apprentice poets there is at times sincere, at times playful, apprehension about the nature of the sentence, the basic unit of measure, and its limiting capacities for expression: “Oh yes, the sentence...that’s what we call it when we put someone in jail” (Filreis, “Robert Creeley”). Regardless of the capabilities and limitations of the sentence, linguists point to the deep structure of fundamental grammatical units. As Stanley Fish has noted, sentences “promise nothing less than lessons and practice in the organization of the world,” and so Fish specifically cites sentence imitation as a crucial developmental process by which one comprehends how sentences work (7). One could say that such “lessons and practice in the organization of the world” are part of most contemporary writing pedagogies.

It is possible that this trace could have started with John Gardner, riffing on the importance of his craft books in the years that followed, rather than starting from Didion. His mythographic status as Carver’s teacher, as practicing writer-teacher, as early craft critic as well as defender of the workshop and its associated methods, could have been an excellent place to begin. It could have also aimed for a synchronic connection to process theory, and even to current-traditional rhetoric’s rules-based relationship to the advent of process theory and to Gardner’s strict outline. But actor-network theory suggests that there can be multiple models, and because my tracing method takes a fairly agnostic point of view regarding dates, I wanted to begin the trace with something iconic-sounding that has a direct classroom corollary. The assigning of Gardner’s work is a form of lore, but perhaps too textual for what is an assembled web that is both intertextual and object-oriented. Regardless of my own reasoning for structuring the trace as I have, we can see two of the limitations of the trace as a method: a) the trailheads can seem random; b) because of my own history as a reader, writer, teacher, student, and individual, “personal weaving occurs” (Rice 240).

Zooming back in to Didion, we might wonder if her auto didacticism, and her DIY-approach to teaching herself to write literary prose is possible in the same manner today. A DIY-mentality regarding writing is still alive and well, but perhaps it is the emphasis on “interpretation” in secondary schools that makes this sort of didacticism harder to access than ever before. Kelly Gallagher writes extensively on the topic of adolescent literacy and the notion of “readicide,” which leads to texts being “drowned” with sticky notes to extract one possible meaning (Gallagher). The major factors impeding adolescent literacy he outlines include a test-taking culture that emphasizes covering texts rather than reading them and a lack of engagement with texts students would actually want to encounter in favor of “worksheets of facts.” These constraints make it nearly impossible to spend class time having students close read and re-read one or two sentences or the same stanza for fear of not covering the material that really matters. Additionally, even John Gardner presented the idea in *The Art of Fiction* that the entire premise of “close critical analysis of literary works”—emphasized by New Critics— “has had the accidental side effect of leading to the notion that the chief virtue of good poetry and fiction is instructional” (Gardner 41). As such, a side-effect of New Critical methods has been students walking away from their reading experiences with the ersatz lesson that “what makes a piece of literature ‘good’ is the writer's thorough and orderly exploration of ideas” rather than imagining how an author “grafts theme onto syntax” on the sentence level (Haslett). Sentences become “smoothly functioning” bronzes rather than materials dynamically crafted and felt.

Didion’s bit of lore reminds apprentice rewriters to experience the texts they encounter as texts, reorienting them from immediately using them for instructional purposes or taking them apart in a quixotic quest for exact meaning. While Didion uses Hemingway’s prose as technical instruction to be sure, she also is embarking on a self-guided search for stylistic techniques that

will affect her through repeated typing or reading. Her investment of time, space, and materials with Hemingway's source text provides a brief glimpse into his implicit assertions about what makes the arc of an effective sentence or paragraph. When Didion mentions the *arrangement* of sentences, surely she is referring to why different parts of speech go in different places and how their syntactical arrangement can alter, shift, and make precise particular ideas, moods, characters, or feelings. At the same time, she is referring to the meter of sentences, cadences made audible and noticeable and particular as these rhythms "get into your head." In an interview, Robert Lowell discusses the poet Allen Tate as being an influence, specifically because of his inimitable-seeming lexical rhythm:

I could see how Tate was done, though Tate has a rhythm that I've never been able to imitate. He's much more irregular than I am, and I don't know where the rhythm comes from, but I admire it very much. Sound too plays a large role in this rhythmic process, not merely on the level of diction, but on a tonal level also. (Lowell)

The question of being imitable or not recurs throughout the canon of writers on writing. Kingsley Amis mentions that he was "a fair mimic" and was able to do a perfect impression of Franklin Delano Roosevelt "as heard by the British over shortwave radio in 1940." Again, we see a kind of media-inspired mimicry, which Amis acknowledges is frequently the case in creative writers given that "a novelist is a sort of mimic by definition."

Associating mimicry of voice in literary fiction to mimicry of voice in academic writing settings, David Bartholomae and many other compositionists would argue that a good writer or rhetor is a skilled mimic as well. For Bartholomae, the sentence is the place where students learn to match the discourse communities they are entering into. The variation of sentence structure, along with frequent repetitions and amplifications are not unique to literary writing, but rather an

aspect of all rhetorical communication where audience engagement and interest are cultivated. It can be generally agreed that most imitations tend to start out close to the original, but through practice, slacken their strict mimicry. While imitation is usually housed within invention and prewriting, we might think of the close connections between invention and arrangement. Didion attested that “the arrangement” of Hemingway’s sentences was just as “mysterious and thrilling” to her as an adolescent as it was as an adult.

More than just mere surface level syntactical arrangement, it is my contention that imitative practice is occurring on multiple subterranean levels. Didion’s quote surely attends to Hemingway’s one-of-a-kind syntax, but it also involves various other affective resonances. The patterns of Hemingway’s sentences reveal a deep structure that comes to us by studying them, listening to them, reading them repeatedly, in addition to potentially writing them out as Didion had done, in order to see how the particular rhythms are made. As stated previously, this kind of close textual analysis comes out of the New Critical tradition that was just emerging at the time of Didion’s schooling; and in part as a corrective to literary study that had become preoccupied with context and biography. Following the early work of Ogden and Richards—on their own, following Peirce and Nietzsche—New Critics sought expanded meaning that was flattened within a larger and more “complex verbal environment” of the literary work. We might then extrapolate that Didion’s choice to imitate Hemingway took place at a noteworthy historical moment: as New Criticism fueled the approach of a writer like Hemingway, who, along with modernist contemporaries, followed Pound’s mantra to “make it new.” Didion, a so-called child of modernism, had studied Hemingway’s sentences as part of a quest to “*see how they worked.*” She was attempting to figure out, in a sense, the preoccupations of her literary and cultural forbearers. Using the machine metaphor, with input and output controls, her practice was defined

by both a curiosity and a confidence that she could answer the question: How do these sentences work?

Tracing the idea of “sentences working” to the suggestion of sentence disorder or chaos, we can scale down to Hemingway’s own participation in an era of sentence experimentation. As evidenced by the work of a bevy of literary critics, his biographies, and *A Moveable Feast*, we can all agree that Hemingway was exposed to—and engaged in—modernist linguistic experiments. In fact, from a modernist frame of reference, the verbal environments were more striated than when Hemingway was writing his novels. Magnifying much further on the grand narrative of the modernist era, writers of that time period felt they could no longer depict psychological states with the same modes of representation available to the Romantics. Hence, we have Woolf’s *Mrs. Dalloway* shifting perspectives, and trying to more accurately portray interiority. Likewise, the modernist poetic revolution involved a recognition that the sentence was an artificial modifier to language—specifically in its inability to replicate or faithfully and realistically represent lived and felt experience. This type of sentence play was not simply contained to the literary, but was woven into the zeitgeist of the times. If we turn to the surrealist parlor game, Exquisite Corpse, popularized during the modernist era and still played today in many creative writing classrooms (and whose cousin is still played by children—in the name of “Mad Libs”), we can see just how thorough the preoccupation with the arrangement of the sentence had become. The collaborative parlor game, which started in 1925, involved writing down representative words in different parts of speech and then choosing words at random to string together sentences (Denlinger). The sentences would occasionally make little sense, though often to the delight of the players. Additionally, certain poetic metaphors or descriptions were surprising in their novelty and disjointedness, and players often had the sense that they

couldn't consciously create sentences as inventive as these sentences were. The game often took on a surrealist bent, thus, again, challenging the concepts of literary realism and conventional narratives. What it is important to note as well is the degree of collaboration present here, as well as the serendipity-based logic with which the game was played. Exquisite Corpse was not a game about telling a story, or at least not exactly; it was a game about making sentences, one after the other. There was a certain trust in playful experimentation, and delight or even joy was part of the goal. Much like Didion's *magnetic* experience of playing with Hemingway's words, it seems that the affect resonances and sense of playfulness are essential in this form of rhetorical invention. Let us also not ignore the note of repetition or the stress on concision that made this game work. As an artifact, Exquisite Corpse is both highly interactive, reliant upon chance and the serendipities of sequence and setting; which is to say, it is a game that is entirely social. It is also a common classroom activity in creative writing where its artefactual traces are part of the allure for future generations of apprentice wordsmiths.

A similar game of this time period, related to—and often referred to as—Exquisite Corpse was the game known as Picture Consequences. This game takes us to another major concern of the Modernist era, and one not wholly separate from the notion of linguistic representation: new modes of visual representation.⁴⁴ This parlor game involves the drawing of a body in requisite parts: head first, then the torso, etc. This collaborative game would often produce an unpredictable finished portrait. Again, while the game was often played for fun, it bespeaks a discomfort in the time period of its origin with conventional portraiture. We can see that across the board within the Modernist frame of thought as captured in Gertrude Stein's famous "completed portrait" of Picasso that begins: "If I told him would he like it. Would he like

⁴⁴ Hemingway was said to have frequently studied Cézanne's paintings.

it if I told him.” The linguistic portrait here, like so many Modernist works, makes the act of making art into its subject. The surrealist phrases, such as “He he he he and he and he and and he and he and he and and...” in the classic Steinian poetic style, invite the audience to see her not as a poet, but as a painter. Similarly, in William Carlos Williams’s meta-love poem, “Portrait of a Lady,” he interrupts what at first seems like a traditional blazon with the poet’s voice questioning the meaning of the poem, its specific associations, and the words of a previous line. Williams writes, “the tall grass of your ankles / flickers upon the shore -- / Which shore?” These abrupt changes in rhythm, with their emphasis on diction and syntactical variety demonstrate the era’s preoccupation with the failure of conventional literary representation to get it right.

Now we will shift from literary criticism that considers its own making to a more central engagement with writing as a physical act. In handwriting or typing, and through mechanical repetition, the seemingly mindless copying of rhythms of sentences traveled from the page and into Didion’s hand as she wrote or typed. We are reminded from Paul Prior, and countless other rhetoric and composition theorists, that writing as a practice is always “situated and embodied” (171). In the act of writing, writers are “not only inscribing text,” but also engaging in a complex process of “rereading text they’ve written,” “pausing to read other texts,” and studying “source materials” and “inspirations.” We can imagine multiple models burgeoning forth from the notion of writing’s materiality, even though, all too often, narratives of writing processes ignore “actual embodied activity” that occurs in literary practice. Alexandria Peary describes her teaching practice, “Yoga For Hands,” as an exercise in both senses of the word here she assigns a freewrite, then asks the students to “sequentially move their attention from the bones of their writing fingers (watching the complexity of their activity), the palm, back of the hands, wrist, lower arms, torso, legs, shoulders, neck, and finally the face” (Peary 17). There are multiple

strands of creative writing lore that emphasize *manual dexterity* as being central to forging an identity as a writer. For instance, in a later *Paris Review* interview, Didion again cites her love of Hemingway's sentences, and describes how she actually "taught [her]self to type at the same time" that she studied his words (Kakutani). The habits of typing or speaking or writing by hand that need to be physically mastered in order to be a proficient writer apply to literary writers just as much as they do any other. All too often though, the vast mythography surrounding Jack Kerouac, his typewriter, and one supposedly long scroll of paper to type out *On the Road* make a problematic case that literary writers are somehow special or different. Personally, I have heard many anecdotes about "famous writers" requesting special writing instruments or devices while at events or on residences or campus visits. David Sedaris was said to have requested one particular kind of typewriter for his hotel room on being invited to speak to students at the University of Pennsylvania. Instead of viewing such idiosyncrasies as part of a larger metanarrative of "specialness," we might better consider the question of syntactical experimentation, writing instruments, and embodied cognition—which suggests physical activities beyond the brain alone—much like the instruments of performing artists. If we speak of a violist's preference for a particular viola, we might be less surprised than we are at first hearing of a superficially particular demand. While the act of typing out sentences may seem dry and doldrums-laden at first, a contextual tracing of this unit of lore suggests that after mastery of rote physical practice, a freedom to innovate arises.

Form Precedes Freedom: “They were so simple” and “I thought I could learn”

Next, we will trace Hemingway’s and Didion’s sentence arrangement to a longstanding theme in artistry that we have already seen in Quintilian’s model of stepwise education: that learning formal properties of a practice are necessary before making innovations within that practice. The interview in which Didion first spoke about Hemingway took place in 1978, at which point Didion had already published *Slouching Towards Bethlehem*, *The White Album*, and the novel, *A Book of Common Prayer*. Clearly she had moved beyond the student who “would just type those stories,” spending time imitating but not creating compelling new work. Another recurring theme we find in writer testimony is the idea that “form precedes freedom.” In the context of rhetorical studies, Michael Leff notes that the “imitation of the structure and language of an old text may help to introduce radical new ideas” (Leff 201). After all, over time Didion earned a kind of compositional freedom; she would publish her first novel nearly fifteen years after beginning her practice in earnest. We might argue then that Didion’s sentence-level formal training provided the basis for future innovation.

In one sense, this might seem to be too rash a deduction. Academic creative writing pedagogy, according to Mayers, comes supplemented with “an (often) unconscious and unexamined valorization of...the notions of human selfhood” (“The Past Decade” 3). Does the humanistic ideology behind “form precedes freedom” actually tell us anything legitimately true about writing practices? On the surface, an assignment where one tediously and repetitively reproduces or replicates the language of a celebrated author may seem suspect. At what point does the novice writer stop this game? Assigning a transcription of the time passes section in *To the Lighthouse* might not have a clear next pedagogical step. Might assigning imitative transcription fall into the same kind of “star pedagogy” with its corresponding ethos of “move

over, let me show you how?” or at least into the same well-documented category of lore that emphasizes how “good readers are good writers?” Perhaps, but in the haste of resisting creative writing’s powerful mythography, there’s the very real possibility that we will get rid of time-tested strategies *that work for students*, even if they seem counterfeit to many instructors. The lore of “typing out the greats” is a pedagogical strategy—not empirically tested to be true for all, but loaded with possibilities for writers. Further, Didion’s anecdote about Hemingway persists, leading readers to assume—whether “correctly” or “incorrectly”—that a mastery of form will in some way result in a new and radical style. We can accept that how one student learns—or disengages—might be radically different from another student’s experiences, and yet one recurring maxim in academic creative writing is that you must learn the rules before you can break them.

Most students are familiar with this notion. I’ve personally been the recipient and giver of this maxim, multiple times over. I have also had the experience of hearing students who are newcomers to creative writing workshops say this in their critiques of student fiction. There is an assumption in this advice—central to the idea of any apprentice-mentor relationship—that while a student might learn “from the masters,” there are obligatory intermediate steps in between the process of studying texts and the process of producing high-level texts. But how many steps? And how many rules? And are those rules entirely self-taught through formal/informal instruction, through reading, or mysteriously through the act of writing? These concerns demonstrate how crucial it is that scholars in creative writing studies are intervening in the endless and often chaotic circulation of lore. If teachers do not have a sense of the direction, how can students find their way through this tangle of lore?

We now move into a sub-trace of the importance of lineage in discussions of making. An underlying assumption behind “form before freedom” is that without paying attention to past greats, one’s compositional toolbox would be severely limited. As Murphy has noted, in the context of rhetorical history, the “writer who knows only one mode of writing is not free, but is bound forever to that one mode” (60). Picasso, for instance, was said to have “imitate[ed] the style[s] of the great masters of painting” in order to develop his own style. When Picasso was asked in his later years by an interviewer about his habit of imitating the masters, he articulated the very notion of form before freedom: “If I had not imitated them,” Picasso is supposed to have answered, “I would have had to spend the rest of my life imitating myself” (Csikszentmihalyi 421). Even the epitome of daring innovation and originality saw great value in “mastering the best achievements of a domain,” before realizing one’s own abilities. Picasso presents himself as someone who was aware that, without studying the masters, his toolbox would be severely limited. And yet, scaling out to the archive of writers on writing, we repeatedly hear that every artist “ought to invent his own technique” while also “trusting the process” (Mauriac PR Interview). Technique is described as something both within one’s control (Ezra Pound had a “devotion to technique” that “became proverbial”) and something that comes from without (Pound). Capote describes his lack of agency with respect to technique: “Whatever control and technique I may have I owe entirely from my training in [the short story]” (Capote).

Underneath the construction of Picasso’s paintings, we note an invisible production history—Harper’s “evidence trail of writerly action”—that depended upon experimenting with imitation (Vanderslice, “Beyond the Tipping Point” 608). Through engaging with canonical artists, Picasso left a fragment of his own imitative experiences, while also forging meaningful bonds with his contemporaries; contemporaries who, in all likelihood, would have a well-

developed sense of the work of the masters. The canon, in this sense, provides a *common language*.

The notion of form preceding freedom operates upon a principle of stepwise progression, a principle that suggests that progress is measurable, incremental, and that generally over time writing is a skill that improves rather than deteriorates. A deeply embedded principle in writing instruction, “form before freedom” exists within Ancient Greek and Roman traditions, where imitation coincided with “a parallel program of specific writing/speaking exercises,” the Progymnasmata (Murphy 60). During a student’s late preteen and early teenage years, the teacher would ask the student to write out strict imitations, that would be later memorized and performed, and only later would they be granted the freedom to pursue less strict imitative work. Certain manuals were made just for teachers, and would denigrate students who skipped out on these activities.

We might return to our parallel example of the practicing musician, working on his or her scales, alongside the idea of “form preceding freedom.” There is often a negative connotation associated with scales, and here specifically the instructor’s admonitory question: “Have you been remembering to practice your scales?” In practicing “the basics,” we note a chance to clean up basic skills through rote exercise before learning the harder tasks of studying chord progression and performing with others. The popular lore about John Coltrane learning to improvise only after years of his mother reminding him to practice his scales is similarly dependent on this assumption of stepwise—or half-step-wise—progression where form precedes radical creativity.

When Didion described her early professional writing experiences in the New York magazine publishing world, she detailed how “going to work for Vogue was, in the late nineteen-

fifties, not unlike training with the Rockettes” (Popova). Didion went on to describe how repetition and revision for efficiency were effective tools for building linguistic dexterity that she later transferred into her writing. This seems to be a connection worth pursuing further, especially given the context of interdisciplinary mastery. The Rockettes rehearse from “10 to 5 pm every day...in heels” with only a one-hour daily lunch break for the six weeks leading up to Christmas. Rehearsals involved full run-throughs, followed by notes, and repetition of full run-throughs until the end of day—in addition to full costume and shoe changes—and only minimal morning warm-ups. Even with the high-intensity rote-quality rehearsals, Rockettes “agree there is no way to prepare for the 1,500 kicks they do during a five-show day” (Dominus). If the Rockettes, then, too, abide by the “form precedes freedom” aphorism (simply just to be selected as a Rockette requires years of training, just as Didion had utilized in her earliest literacy apprenticeship by retyping sentences), we can see how during the live performances, the Rockettes achieve an additional step of proficiency.

Zooming out our trace to the importance of practice in becoming proficient, we find the persistent notion that live performance would not be possible without a high intensity practice schedule, and the feeling that comes with feeding off of the “adrenaline of an audience.” Just as Didion described her existential crisis as a stripping away of costumes and a self-awareness of life as theater, we find artists enveloped, uniformly, by the iconic Rockette costume. According to one Rockette: “[We are] known for being a precision dance company. So we really work on details to get precise and clean. And when we jump and do some more kicks we’re building our stamina” (Dominus). In Didion’s case, this would be akin to the tight production schedule which required meticulousness practice and a firm deadline. When Didion describes her intense, high pressure writing at *Vogue*, her literary descriptions might as well be chorographical: “At *Vogue*,

one learned fast, or one did not stay, how to play games with words, how to put a couple of unwieldy dependent clauses through the typewriter and roll them out transformed into one simple sentence...less was more, smooth was better, and absolute precision essential to the monthly grand illusion” (Popova). The kind of practice that goes into the performing arts seems to be widely understood as physically and mentally grueling, but rehearsal is generally intended to be hidden as much as possible in the final work.

The doctrine of form preceding freedom appears to remain a constant across various forms of artistry, even those dependent on significant improvisation such as avant-garde poetry, jazz, freestyle rap, stand-up comedy, or improv comedy/theater. Embedded in the pedagogical traditions surrounding this doctrine is that notion once again of stepwise progression. As Murphy points out when describing the Roman tradition of imitative instruction, whereby through “deliberate modeling” students would make their own compositions through “a carefully plotted sequence of interpretive and re-creational activities” (Murphy 54). Murphy goes on to note:

Each phase in the sequence has its own purpose, but takes its value from its place in the sequence. It would be a mistake, therefore, for a modern reader to assume that each of the parts is independent of the others or to think that the set of compositional activities is a kind of smorgasbord to be picked up and used at random. It is not mere eclecticism. (54)

Form preceding freedom, then, requires not only careful attention to each individual activity, but to the sense—and the belief or buy-in—of the educational narrative as a whole. In contrast, we might find the many student who prefer to skip these activities; and what about the wayward child violinist who neglects her practice of scales and arpeggios?

Zooming out to the rhetorical tradition that informs pedagogical practice, the Roman system included “a seven-step process of imitation, with writing or the analysis of written texts

being coupled to oral performance by the students before master and peers in the classroom” and an emphasis on peer feedback. Quintilian advises that “the teacher is not merely to tell the students what to think but frequently to ask questions upon them, and try the judgment of his pupils” (Quintilian II.5.13). Didion’s early reading and writing could be considered the first two elements if charting against the Roman model: “1. Reading Aloud (*lectio*)” and “2. Memorization of models” (Murphy appendix overview). Didion’s work at *Vogue* focuses on those intermediate stages of getting further “accustom[ed]” to “fastening on the structure of the model rather than its words.” Likewise, Didion’s work at *Vogue* seems a continuation of sorts from her initial investigations into the sentence. However, Didion was about to begin what in Roman instruction was a later stage, the “transliteration of models,” whereby she turned her journalism into imaginative writing.

Rhetorical scholars such as Rita Copeland and Michael Leff have investigated the question of how a seemingly unproductive undertaking can produce radical creativity. What mechanisms are at play in this process of production? Leff argues in a separate discussion of hermeneutics that *imitatio* is far more than a rote-filled “mechanistic reproduction” of an aspect of a text; rather it is “a complex process that allows historical texts to serve as equipment for future rhetorical production” (Leff 201). Leff compares this intertextual process to the Burkean notion of casuistic stretching, by which “one introduces new principles while theoretically remaining faithful to old principles” (Burke, *Attitudes* 229). Implicit, then, in the lore surrounding imitation, is an assumption that radical creativity develops with at least one reference point from which to depart, and at least a spot on which to land. Because of the work Didion would eventually produce, her micronarratives on her early imitations take on a mystical, prophetic aura, and she is granted a particular kind of trustworthiness. Additionally, by choosing

Didion, someone with ample literary success and even mainstream star status, to interview in *The Paris Review* and discuss how she became a master of form and style, the magazine presents its audience with an argument for imitation as gateway, or access point, to creativity.

Didion's unit of lore bonds future artists to a common past. At once it highlights the role of the solitary artist, while also highlighting the need to authentically engage with the worldview and work of others. There was a rhetorical identification forged by Didion, and by her acknowledgment of that identification she was able to open the door to future identifications.

Now we extend this web to a sub-web of Didion's own imprint upon the spread of this unit of lore. When a writer sees the name "Joan Didion" on the page, attached to this memory, it conjures up, at least for many, Didion's complex cultural symbol, including, but not limited to, her reputation as a premier writer. The affective and aesthetic resonances of her writing and her writerly persona are rich; when her memoir, *The Year of Magical Thinking*, was adapted to a Broadway play, multiple friends on social media, each with fairly different literary taste, described their excitement, recalling their enchantment with the memoir. Didion's reputation for eloquent writing about death, dying, and loss (her memoir *Blue Nights* described the death of her daughter) is embedded not only in her persona, but in her writerly wisdom, which has a strongly pedagogical hold in shaping the attitudes of literary writers. More simply, many people like Didion's writing, and are curious as to why she writes the way she writes.

This bit of lore is situated within the context of her adult writing career, and this cannot be ignored in the trace of her quote's meaning, spread, and influence. She has earned her "freedom" and forged a singular literary reputation following the years of practicing "forms." It seems logical to deduce that one needs to be familiar with traditional forms in order to subvert—and expand—those forms within any kind of discourse. After all, that is the

Csikszentmihalyi definition of creativity itself, which begins with studying the past achievements within a domain. It seems nearly universally agreed upon that “form following freedom” is an undeniable part of creative processes. And there are no short cuts, even for someone as celebrated as Picasso, who started his writing career in earnest at fifty-three. When he switched to a domain—poetry writing—whose form he had not mastered, his ideas couldn’t find as fulfilling an end. His unpunctuated prose piece, “The Count of Orgaz,” was met with mixed reviews. While he had painted portraits of Hemingway and Stein, the vision of those paintings was deflated and unremarkable in his prose experiments (Mellow).

Kelly Pender points to Michael Carter’s understanding of “writing as a form of creativity that is valuable for itself rather than for the discovery, knowledge, or insight it produces” (Pender 76). Carter identifies the need for a “juxtaposition of contradictory forces, such as the known and unknown, the finite and infinite”—and sees creativity as not occurring in the “monolithic” and “unilateral” tradition of the master creator, but rather as a collective process where “each moment [is] understood as a threshold that presents an opportunity for newness and change.” What Carter is suggesting, in part, is that there is a resonance with the past occurring in all inventional acts; and that writing itself has an “intrinsic value” in producing creativity, an experience whereby writers “not only participate in archeological beginnings but also become highly aware of that participation.” That seems to be the goal for creative writing pedagogy: how to engage students through historical appeals to writing’s past as they experiment with new modes of meaning making and “problem finding.” It seems as though part of the “formal training” of creative writing today involves finding new ways to illustrate to students that they too are part of ongoing traditions. This direction for the field reminds me of once hearing Adrienne Rich

telling a room of undergraduates that she did not believe all the empty thinkpieces that spoke of the “death of poetry” because on the same day poetry dies, a new poem will be written.

The tracing so far has led to student awareness of participation within an ancient, cyclical tradition, with the network itself leading into various engines and cycles of making. The human impulse to make purposive actions takes us to the “dance of agency.” Didion, even within a system of co-actants that were acting upon her, retained a strong impulse to act and to repeat her initial actions. In her words, she was motivated to “see how [Hemingway’s sentences] worked.” The space between Didion’s research question and the first moments she began copying the sentences out could be described as “preverbal” (Peary 2). Alexandria Peary defines the preverbal as a space that we all have “life-long access” to, a space where “no language has been already produced toward the writer’s particular aim, not even notes.” The preverbal is entirely meditative, indicating “the contemplation of the emptiness before language rushes in... with no decisions yet made about style, content, or possibly genre.” In the Elbovian model, this sprawling space is akin to the unconscious, which prewriting measures aim to awaken. Peary describes the need for more attention to this space in creative writing pedagogies:

The cognitive terrain of prewriting—a one-dimensional, highly generative surface—is a site of tremendous creative energy, for both the conscious and unconscious parts of the writer’s mind. In this disposition toward discovery, the intertextual—overheard and read language of other people—flits and crosses dotted lines of internal voice. Small abstract shapes begin to occupy the scene; each shape is in a state of metamorphosis and so is the text, a new piece which emerges on the suddenly apparent horizon. (Peary 18)

Imitative transcription, then, occupies the “cognitive terrains” of both writing and prewriting. It is certainly an act of writing, a composed work. And yet in its fundamental work as transcription,

as one step of a larger and longer process—not to mention its lack of immediate concern with *newness*—it is also fundamentally an act of prewriting: Didion formulates her ideas and prepares for the self-imposed research assignment.

While the conscious/unconscious divide is certainly slippery to begin with, the topic quickly takes on significant levels of abstraction when attempting to parse out one from the other during an act of creation (and thus answering Hesse’s call for compositionists to “recuperate[e] interest in writerly activities and processes”). Didion’s use of imitative transcription attends to the usefulness of writing that is valuable for the practice itself rather than for the product it produces, but it also invites us to examine the practice itself: the intertextual collaborations that creative writers make with other writers and writing. Peary refers to this intertextuality as the “overheard and read language of other people...[that] flits and crosses dotted lines of internal voice.” A desire to impersonate or try on these other voices as if they were one’s own, as well as making one’s “internal voice” known to others, would seem to be motivated by a host of other desires, impulses, longings, prior choices, and contexts. Lifetime membership in the realm of the preverbal means training one’s self to overhear and read language of other people, hearkening back to the oft-repeated creative writing advice to both eavesdrop, observe people, and read widely.

Didion’s choice to transcribe was part of a concerted effort to learn more about language, and the outcome—that she was engaging in a formative experience that she would dwell on for years to come in multiple published interviews and essays—could not have been expected. It was an impossibility for Didion to recognize how her conscious choice to imitate Hemingway’s prose would be so formative to her life and career. One could argue that in any acquisition of knowledge or in any learning experience, there is bound to be a conscious commitment to

learning that will bring unwitting results. But even in Didion's choice to imitate, there was a premonition of something more: "I could see how they worked *once I started typing them out* (emphasis mine)." That some internal logic would reveal itself was part of Didion's dream or hope upon setting down to imitate. If we do believe that problem finding is a chief epistemology of creative writing, then Didion's curiosity and insistence on following her hunch was just as important as the transcription itself. There was a possibility for failure, but it did not inhibit Didion's inquisitiveness.

Writing separates itself from other tasks or processes when we consider that Didion was not memorizing flashcards or teaching herself equations, but rather was entering into a realm of meaning making whereby failure is the norm. Mary Gordon points to Beckett's famous note he kept alongside his writing desk: "Fail. Fail again. Fail better" (Gordon). Revision rests on the assumption of initial failure to get it exactly right on the first draft. Instead of seeing invention as a stepwise writing process, Carter invites us to see invention as "the creativity inherent in writing itself" (Carter qtd. in Pender 76). What this switch achieves—from a stepwise process toward creativity, toward an acknowledgement of inherent, and incipient creativity in all writing acts—is a redirection toward conscious, ordinary acts that are in fact extraordinary examples of grappling with the unknown. By passing through the threshold toward the unknown, the writer leaves the bounds of the heuristic, and even the corresponding immediate writing "task." Imitative transcription acknowledges that it is in fact possible to train the preverbal unconscious. And viewed from one level up, Didion's testimony itself becomes part of the collective memory storehouse of academic creative writing, embodied in pedagogies, institutions, and practices.

We can return here to the notion of the incubation period, or the recombination of thoughts when one avoids conscious thought, which subsequently allows new ideas to emerge. It

is never clear for the apprentice writer a) exactly how a piece of lore will affect their writing later in life, or b) whether they will be aware of the effect a piece of lore has had on their writing.

Anthony Burgess describes the way that uncertainty surrounds imitative processes, specifically in terms of the incubation period. He set out to write a long novel, an ambitious task that he humbly describes as “a kind of *Magic Mountain*, I suppose,”⁴⁵ but soon found that a large part of the writing process involved waiting for the unconscious recombination of what he had already drafted:

Of course, one never knows what this [literary] meaning will be, but *The Magic Mountain* has its deeper meanings beneath the naturalistic surface. I wouldn't want to imitate that. One has to wait, I'm afraid—a long time sometimes—for the experience one's had to present itself in workable form, as a form that can be shaped into something like a work of art. (Burgess)

Burgess's quote reminds us that invention and preverbal activity occurs all the way through the writing process; seeing it as early or later-stage limits possibility. Along with that, Burgess also reminds us that there often seems to be a conscious choice to think the unthinkable by waiting. As Carter pointed out, the creativity inherent in writing itself defies conventional notions of action and decision-making. We might also find here the phenomena of what Sherod Santos refers to as the poem revising the poet. Mayers explores how Santos describes this kind of “poetic thought” where the poet moves away from the familiar and toward the “unthinkable” (Santos qtd. in Mayers, *(Re)Writing Craft* 85). The poem itself possesses agency, and often a poem will “veer away” from its initial premise and toward something else. The poet/writer may not be aware of this agency at first, but it is the very micro-level detail of thought taking place

⁴⁵ Almost as a kind of self-fashioning hedge, in order to avoid the grandiose notion of writing one's self into literary history, one of central tenets of imitative practice. But to protect the ego, one must hold some of those aspirations at bay, or at least mute them in the public arena.

that brings about mastery in a field. An imitative mode trains the “unconscious” mind by re-framing process as something much more than putting words on the page—but a rich internal set of preverbal decisions.

One of the takeaways from the attention to the verbal/preverbal divide is that the process of self-instruction is rarely organized or linear. Instead, writer reports include instructions that often seem guided by hunches and inchoate plans or desires, similar to Didion’s intuition to try copying out the sentences. John Ashbery’s *Paris Review* interview goes into his early imitations, but Ashbery describes those imitations as something almost unknown (“I don’t know really”), or at the very least, just coming about through a desire to imitate:

I didn't understand much of [poetry] at first. There were people like Elinor Wylie whom I found appealing—wonderful craftsmanship—but I couldn't get very far with Auden and Eliot and Stevens. Later I went back to them and started getting their books out of the library. I guess it was just a desire to emulate that started me writing poetry. I can't think of any other reason. I am often asked why I write, and I don't know really—I just want to.
(Paris Review Interviews Vol. IV 176)

This subdued calling, one seemingly based on the pursuit of simple pleasures (“I don’t know really—I just want to” and “just a desire to emulate”) is not part of a thorough plan for a mastery of art. Ashbery, in Ashberian fashion, eludes the grand narrative, and instead pursues the unknown over the known; that is to say, the imitation is more of a “feel,” then something consciously determined or mapped out. It is, again, a question of motivation. Bellow describes “a writer” as simply “a reader moved to emulation” (Bellow). Imitative writing connects to incubation and the realm of the unconscious, whereby the “thought elements that were stimulated through conscious work at one point in time, result[ed] in novel ideas at some later point in time.”

Ashbery eventually made the conscious choice to imitate, obviously; but it came about organically, as the fulfillment of a *desire*.

We detour to a separate model of desire—the biology of desire and how humans come to prize and use objects. If we recall Creeley’s description of imitation as watching someone plow, and learning how to plow ourselves, we can see that desire as truly impulsive rather than a carefully considered expression of meaning-making. The desire to emulate is, in part, biologically regulated. Learned information is passed among members of the same species through mimicry and imitation. At the risk of slipping into an all-too-easy linkage between animal behavior and human-specific behavior, we might borrow the concept that whatever one generation “learn[s] from its parents (who share their genes)” will “increase their chances of thriving,” if they choose to imitate (Turney).

Two eminent psychologists, Andrew Meltzoff and Jean Decety, who study infant imitation, have noted that mimicking behavior at an early age forms a foundation that “others are like ‘me’” (Meltzoff and Decety 491). This is instrumental in the development of empathy, as infants learn how adults move through the world, often literally. There are learning advantages to simply being alongside other individuals.

In the context of the human, there is a distinction made in infant imitation research about the difference between emulation and imitation. Emulation is behavior derived from “social learning, not of specific actions, but of the features and affordances of objects” (Meltzoff and Decety 491). Meltzoff and Decety use the example of a child opening the door to a dollhouse after seeing another child open the door because of a desire to know what’s inside rather than imitating the specific action. Imitation occurs when an infant stores up the memory of an activity only to use it at some later point in time. Two such representative imitative acts are infants

walking with their hands curled behind them as their parents do and using play pots and pans to cook with the same motions as they have observed in their parents. Jean Piaget coined the term of deferred imitation to describe this kind of behavior. Deferred imitation is defined as “a child's duplication and use of an action, or use of verbal or nonverbal communication, at a later time or place after having observed it” (Collins and O’Brien 131). We might think of how this notion of deferred imitation works in and among writing communities as well, alongside the notion of “bits and bonds.” For a corollary in the animal world, take the example of the bird song. Each species of bird has a different kind of bird song; they initially occur by chance, but over time these calls develop into part of “species-typical behavior” (King and West 321). We might think of writers’ interactions with imitative practice to be operating similarly, where the singer—in this case, the writer—is not aware of the way these chance actions develop into “typical behavior.” Additionally, evolutionary ecologists have noted how “naive males...proceed to alter the potent songs of their youth,” which were developed through imitation, “with the nature of the alterations depending on their social surroundings” (King and West 322, 323). Again, learning occurs through what is fundamentally social.

With imitative transcription, then, might Didion’s imitative act truly be more of an emulation (to use both Ashbery’s description and the psychological terminology) rather than an *imitation*? Both terms take us back to central questions regarding conscious and unconscious learning. What we know for certain is that imitative practices reveal a large collaborative set of processes; all too often the story has been told that we are learning individually, and individually alone in our minds, but we must attend to the “social facilitation,” the fact that the amount of learning our minds can do depends upon the bonds that we are making with others. In some sense this is another way of paraphrasing Kenneth Bruffee’s “Reading and Writing As Social

Acts.” And yet, just as it reinforces a kind of sociality, imitative transcription actually seems to be a method for the training of the unconscious mind, an entity already predisposed to grow based on social cues.

Further, creative writing lore tells us that there’s quite a bit of thinking going on about the role of the unconscious. The unconscious seems to matter and come up in conversation constantly in the archive of writers on writing. In addition to early memory, many writers mention the role of the unconscious in their writing process. The Jungian unconscious comes up in many of the *Paris Review* interviews. Sondheim describes his conversations with a Jungian analyst when writing *Into The Woods*. He had conducted these talks for the purpose of discerning how fairy tales are deeply and cross-culturally embedded in the human mind. Rosamond Lehmann notices how the Jungian unconscious taps into something deeper than the Freudian “wastebasket of sexual desire” and instead seeks something mythic that connects all people through narrative. Many writers in the *Paris Review* interviews note the inherent sexism or questionable theories of Freud, in relation to Jung, and while Jung seems to be the preferred psychoanalytical theorist invoked, John Irving does point out that Freud was a great storyteller, while Jung was less than a stellar writer. Joyce Carol Oates has read both, but came to Jung later in life because she appreciated how Jung gets to the “underworld of the dream” that we all experience. Many writers mention not only their own unconscious mind, but also invoke the Jungian notion of the collective unconscious. Here, and even in Gardner’s famed description of the ideal reading experience in *The Art of Fiction*—“a complete and unified dream”—we observe a preoccupation with reading and writing processes that aim for fiction as a kind of collective dreamspace.

Along the same lines, we can observe many writers describing the passageways to tapping into this collective unconscious. There are similar points of emphasis on discussing the bodily and affective aspects of the writing process, particularly the bodily and affective rigors. Many references abound to the need for hunger and coffee as crucial to the process. Tony Kushner describes writing in a state of extreme anxiety, one that he is embarrassed by because of all of his years practicing the craft. Haruki Murikami describes a physical regimen of writing time and exercise time and a strict bedtime when he is deeply engaged on a project. Cynthia Ozick, in public interviews, has echoed many writers who have claimed that the process can never truly be enjoyable. And yet, as we observe in later considerations of this tracing of Didion's lore, it is the relative *ease* of imitative transcription that is at the heart of its pedagogical usage and importance.

Structure and form are the lattice which the unconscious lives within; writers describe it as a continual push and pull. Overall, writers do not favor the topic of the collective unconscious to the exclusion of discussing craft. Many writers agree with the Picasso formulation, quoted by Jean Cocteau in *The Art of Fiction*, that art is a marriage of the conscious and the unconscious. (Norman Mailer describes fiction as a conflict, perhaps not surprisingly, between the conscious and the unconscious.) When contrasted with revision, we can see the ways that those difficult passageways described earlier seem to have eased some. Bernard Malamud is rhapsodic about the joys of revision, especially when compared to the difficulties of the initial stages of writing. Gore Vidal discusses how he enjoys the revision process and mainly uses language and selection to make shape out of a "shapeless mass." Vidal attacks writers who use a thousand different ways of making a good point rather than just choosing one and moving on. The emphasis on structure also comes through in Milan Kundera's interview, where he describes the

anthropological limits on a work's structure. There is no nine-hour symphony, he claims, and that when works lose their structure, they lose their clarity. Along similar lines, in *The Fire This Time*, Randall Kenan describes the difficult process of attempting to write a story about a troubling news report. In this case, he finds that the blues form, or the sorrow song, offers the best available structure. For many writers in the canon of writers on writing, structural craft choices exist alongside the preverbal and cannot be easily separated.

Many craft of creative writing books contain sections that attend to both conscious and unconscious elements of composing, given that even the unconscious mind is dependent upon "symbol system[s]" and "social environment" (Csikszentmihalyi 102). For instance, as seen in Chapter 2, Stephen King includes both an autobiographical section and writers' toolkit in *On Writing*. In the autobiographical sections, he focuses on particular events like his car accident as an adult and his childhood difficulties with harrowing ear infections and trips to the hospital. Life experiences themselves are never separate from the writing toolkit, and by placing them side-by-side, the memoir bleeds into the grammar lessons, the style guide finds its way into anecdote about a popped eardrum. Anne Lamott focuses on particular writing strategies as well as bridging those strategies with metaphors that come about via lived experience; her bird by bird metaphor stems from advice that her father gave to her brother about a science fair project when they were children. In addition to this conceptual blending of memoir with craft, an attention to mechanical metaphors abounds in the ways writers discuss structuring Vidal's "shapeless dream." Toni Morrison describes narrative gearshifts and Madison Smartt Bell discusses the lack of clay or material with which to operate.

What remains clear, even as the tracing has drifted into the way writers talk about logic in relation to writing as a dreamspace, is that imitative transcription, automatic writing or

freewriting, when student-directed, can help students “learn from past mistakes or criticism of their work” (215). It is an act of making where the product on the page is ignored, but the true “final product” lies elsewhere. Anthony Hecht explains: “[I became] a little more trustful in unconscious instincts than I was before. I’m not as rigid as I was.” His poems changed as well: “The earliest poems that I wrote were almost rigid in their eagerness not to make any errors. I’m less worried about that now.” As for Didion, the early choice to trust one’s instincts and pursue one’s own curiosity, possesses significance for teachers and writers alike.

The node that set off this trace of “form precedes freedom” derives from a stepwise pedagogical notion of “first this, then that.” While ANT does not pursue a search for origins—only connections and descriptions—we can clearly note a mechanized or routinized system of the writing process that comes out of the teacher-student, or mentor-apprentice interaction. Mental processes became social states, and the interconnectivity of teaching and writing to each seems more foundational after this trace, rather than seeing the professionalization of teaching writing as only a late capitalist enterprise.

The Aura of the “Famous Writer”: Hemingway

Apprentice writers alternately accept and reject the aura of the “famous writer.” It can be a powerful, omnipresent force. When a writer enters the collegiate or graduate course in creative writing, the aura of the famous writer is everywhere. The program might be defined by its professorship, some of whom fit the label of “star faculty” or name faculty (Ritter). MFA students customarily apply to and decide to attend programs that feature these prominent faculty members. These star writers are by no means always star teachers, though many live up to the hype. The main point is that the hype, reinforced by a palpable power structure, can often become a byproduct of the curriculum as a student proceeds through a program. There are ample

author visits (each with their honorifics of who will host the party, who will attend the dinner, who will be selected to have their work read by a visiting author, who will be in charge of airport driving, who will deliver the introduction, etc.). An air of mystery is attached to this celebrity aura—are they working on new material? Are they anything like their characters? Who do they like to read? And the associated questions of self-doubt and loathing that no one is fully immune to: Do they like me? What do they see in me? Will they choose me as one of their advisees? Will they help me in the future? Write me a letter, blurb my book?

In Kelly Ritter's 2007 article on creative writing pedagogy, "Ethos Interrupted," Ritter looks to rhetoric and composition's "inclusive classrooms," pedagogy courses, teacher training programs, graduate student writing program internships, and writing center positions as potential models for creative writing (284). In the last decade, many programs have made inroads in terms of teacher training.⁴⁶ The hardest step, according to Ritter, in terms of teacher training, is the student's "breaking away" from the pedagogical investments of the mentor (289). However, as of 2007, creative writing had an "absence of that process altogether, and a concomitant absence of models based on explicit philosophies and values of pedagogy from which to diverge, or set against one another in critical comparison" (289). The note of celebrity and fame that comes with the "star writer" often obfuscates the very role of the instructor, and so now we will zoom in further to see how the star system affects imitative transcription.

Even outside of the "star system" of academic creative writing, and perhaps even more, an air of mystery shrouds the famous author. The mythography regarding that author's personal life, personality, talents, friendships, associations, and publishing is also considered a secret and special knowledge. I was never more certain of this than when I started reading Stephen King in

⁴⁶ See Rebecca Manery's 2015 article in *New Writing*: "Revisiting the Pedagogy and Theory Corral: Creative Writing Pedagogy Teachers' Conceptions of Pedagogic Identity."

the fifth grade, and found a host of librarians and booksellers with interesting Stephen King gossip to tell me (e.g., “Did you know he writes on every day but his birthday? Even Christmas?”). The spectacle of celebrity is certainly a part of the modern-day academy and the writing world (both academic and publishing-wise) as it is in all other industries. Creative writing is not immune, to say the least, to the cult of personality.

One way of dealing with this mystery surrounding the famous writer is to be entirely rational about the role of mystery in the process of writing instruction and do as Ramus did: assign rhetoric to logic, and, in turn, lose the mystifications, the fallacious arguments implicit in a star-based pedagogical system. One would, in that process, also lose the ersatz and repetitive conceptions of teaching (such as those emblemized by and found in the House of Lore itself), and reduce the capitalist-inspired, market-based noise surrounding the teaching of creative writing. Nevertheless, what happens to the role of mystery in inspiring the writers of tomorrow if the magnetic, attractive, alluring, mysteriously attractive or fascinating aspects of popular literature are completely ignored because of fear of mystification?

It is hard to separate Hemingway’s star status from the thrill and mystery Didion found in his prose. As she described in her reappraisal of *A Farewell to Arms*, she found sentences whose “arrangement...remains as mysterious and thrilling to me now as it did when I first read them, at twelve or thirteen” (“Last Words”). How exactly to discern how much the Hemingway aura affected her reading and enjoyment of the texts? Should we read Didion’s fandom of Hemingway as a kind of “false consciousness” where the dominant ideology of the famous white male writer was hidden to Didion? Certainly, Hemingway’s star status and his compelling sentences are not unrelated phenomena; his reputation was built by the community standards of his era and many subsequent eras, which “valued” his work. To wit, it is never possible to find

“pure writing” or “writing for writing’s sake”—literary reputations are a necessary byproduct of any reading community. My choice of this unit of lore in this historical tracing came about, at least in part, because of my sense of the literary reputations of Didion and Hemingway within creative writing culture, in addition to the fact of my pleasurable reading experiences of both authors and my repeated experiences with Didion’s bit of lore in the context of academic creative writing and its extracurricular spaces. As a senior in college, I read a dog-eared library copy of Hemingway’s *Collected Stories* for hours in a Lower East Side bar. I wore a thick wool sweater, nursed a pint of beer, and waited on a friend, only to find out once my friend arrived that literary types of generations past had frequented this very bar. To pretend that at twenty-one my interest in writing and literature was wholly unrelated to my reading experiences and the glamorous reputation of “literary” ghosts would be to ignore the role of affect in learning, in coming to know, in the process of becoming.

The pursuit of a séance with literary ghosts can reinforce a notion of the specialness of “the writer.” Mystery runs into mystification, which comes with its own set of unfortunate social and pedagogical consequences. When authors describe writing as a “mysterious process” and refuse to go into the details or specifics, mystifications are bound to occur. Flannery O’Connor writes:

The more stories I write, the more mysterious I find the process and the less I find myself capable of analyzing it. Before I started writing stories, I suppose I could have given you a pretty good lecture on the subject, but nothing produces silence like experience, and at this point I have very little to say about how stories are written. (O’Connor 87)

O’Connor conceals her experiences when not commenting directly on the subject. But we can see how her silence defines a position: writing is messy, nonlinear, dynamic, unpredictable,

prone to serendipitous occurrences, and so individualized and disparate depending on circumstance that a lecture would never amount to a coherent theory. O'Connor's position hearkens back to other units of lore, including Donald Barthelme's declaration within the context of a story that "Fragments are the only forms he trusts," and Marilyn Nelson's practice of starting every class with five minutes of silence because she believes "creativity comes out of silence" (Nelson qtd. in Hegamin 5). To revisit O'Connor's reticence, her non-answer is in fact more of a secure position than it may at first seem. Now we are unsure why O'Connor discovers she is less able to analyze the process. Is it the nature of the writing process (highly subjective), is it the technical nature of the conversation, or is the forum/audience she imagines when asked questions about her process? Those and other questions go unanswered. But alongside the aura of the "famous writer," we see how easily students can become mystified by the very idea of work in creative writing.

Zooming out, the aura of the famous writer touches on two main issues: 1) the competing notions of mystery and mystification and 2) the topic of teachability. If the famous writer is a coveted teacher for apprentice writers, regardless of evidence of teaching ability, and the famous writer aura has the potential to mystify, then it is not hard to see how creative writing came to its reputation as being, in many ways, unteachable. Lore may refute mystification and unteachability, if lore is viewed as part of a larger network of collective memory of writing practices, but the lines between mystery/mystification and teachability/unteachability are tenuous at best. For instance, Ken Kesey mentions the mystery of storytelling, in an interview where he describes his early initiation as a writer. He describes the way he discovered storytelling's inherent mystery, its "wonder," as a young person. Kesey was taught the "mystery" of storytelling by family members—grandparents and aunts and uncles, but not his parents. He

makes a point of saying that this kind of early initiation does not come from one's parents.

“Somehow I don't think that sense of mystery can be taught to you by your parents. It has to be taught by your grandparents or perhaps your aunts and uncles.” In one sense, we know what Kesey means, and we've heard it before: in Flannery O'Connor's oft-repeated maxim that everything a fiction writer needs to know he or she learns before the age of twenty, and the question of early literary influence.⁴⁷ These other poetic literacies are instrumental, according to the countless testimonies of writers discussing writing. But seen from a different perspective, Kesey's remarks do as much to mystify the audience as they do to explain the process. What does Kesey mean by the “mystery” of storytelling?

Kesey describes the way that the *performance* of a story itself carries with it a mysticism in its possibility to create an illusion, to present wonder to an audience. Kesey's grandmother taught him—often through sentence level tropes such as “alliteration,” or generic repetitions such as events occurring in threes, or even the cultivation of irony (“It's not just God sitting up there laughing at you; there's the whole universe sort of grinning wryly at you”)—that the most essential part of storytelling is “wonder.” He gleaned from his time with her that “the storyteller himself has to feel wonder in order to communicate it.” Kesey goes on to explain a magic show, inspired by the lessons of his grandmother and his extended family, that he used to perform as a child in “farm producers' meetings” with his father. The show involved asking for a red-headed child to volunteer and proceed to dump a bucket of milk on the child's head all in service of some counterfeit tale regarding the process of pasteurization:

A story went with each magic act, and the stories enhanced the act. This is what a shaman does: he has a little story and a few tricks along with it, a dance, some drumbeats, a

⁴⁷ *The New York Times* regularly runs features on authors describing childhood reading experiences and Hallman's *The Story Behind the Story* involves fiction writers writing creative nonfiction pieces about influential short stories that fundamentally shaped their writerly identities or practices.

painted set, and some beads strung together. Writing is just one of those parts. It has been elevated to the point that people think it is the ‘thing.’ It isn’t. Shakespeare doesn’t come alive until it’s on stage. It’s about performance. (Kesey)

I would dare, in this case, to extend Kesey’s point about performance to suggest that it is in that performance where we find the artist’s aura, the intangible quality that radiates from the performer. It’s a quality that cannot be touched or produced (chemically or alchemically), and yet it is present in both the performer and the performance. In turn, Kesey’s early memories serve as seeds for future invention. In this construction, the awareness of cultivating wonder serves as catalyst for the imagination, not only for the immediate exigence of the farm producers’ meeting, but for future rhetorical-artistic situations as well.

As the famous writer develops his or her reputation, and his or her own corresponding aura, this cultivation of wonder (in the artist and in the audience) can take on a tenuous role. This can easily lead to mystification whereby the paths that the famous writers take are only open to a privileged few. Mayers describes this distinction—which he characterizes as the writer’s revenge against the critics/audience—as follows:

Mystery is any thing (or quality) hitherto unknown or unexpected, which the act of writing may touch upon, or suggest, or lead to, at any time. Mystification is the act of shrouding a writing process in calculated uncertainty. It is an assertion, in effect, that the generation of discourse cannot be explained, and it often contains the implicit or explicit admonition that any attempt at such explanation is counterproductive and dangerous to the generative process itself.... ((*Re*)*Writing Craft* 117)

Mayers goes on to cite Bizzaro’s *Responding to Student Poems: Applications of Critical Theory*, in which Bizzaro argues for the creative writing instructor’s cultivation of mystery, even in the

face of possible mystification. Bizzaro notes quite aptly that many writers “distrust the language of pedagogy” and its corresponding “use of ‘methods’ or ‘procedures’ in helping students to write poems” (Bizzaro qtd. in Mayers, *(Re)Writing Craft* 117). Instead of dismissing creative writing processes as either magic or method, a middle ground exists where the creative writing instructor teaches “poetry (or any kind of writing, for that matter) without closing off the pathways between writing and mystery.”

One of my professors in graduate school for creative writing, Lorrie Moore, offers a response to the age-old craft question of whether one uses a typewriter or writes via longhand. Moore bristles at the question: “Gee, people are still asking these questions about longhand versus typing versus computer?” but gives a politic answer, laughing self-consciously at the idea, but then playing along and trying to answer sincerely. She is careful to not mystify, but rather to explain and explore and start to deconstruct the common topic of how one writes. She goes on to mention post-it notes at length, admitting that she feels un-literary and “sheepish” when talking about producing art on a post-it note. Moore takes us back to the idea of the mythic writer. She is in fact one of the “famous writers” who drew me to applying to UW-Madison for my MFA in the first place—who, from a premise of mystification, writes from some unknown pool of inspirations and practices. But when pressed on the details, Moore waxes mock-rhapsodic (and possibly sincere-rhapsodic as well) on the joys of correction tape: “I loved all that toxic Wite-Out. I loved those long white strips you would put on to erase lines.” The lore about writing instruments, which Moore expresses skepticism about, becomes a site where mystery, mystification, and the aura of the famous writer all converge. In this example, Moore is careful to give the demystifying answer, bringing the reader closer in, breaking down the “aura of the

famous writer,” even as one gets a better sense of her own personality and craft, and may be, in turn, inspired to imitate the rituals she describes.

In any conversation about imitative practice, there seems to be some degree of impersonation going on: a “famous” writer presents a viewpoint, and the apprentice writer impersonates the speaker and/or subject of the lore. Impersonation, in other words, is a central part of the progymnasmata: “an imitation of the ethos [character] of a person to be portrayed” (Burton, “Progymnasmata”). For example, Moore’s initial ironic retorts about being asked the same questions as her predecessors is in part a recognition of the impersonation she herself is about to perform. Even Didion’s quote—which also depends upon the aura of the famous writers that came before her—is important to us because of her ethos as star writer. The trickle-down process repeats itself as the apprentice writer impersonates the speaker and/or subject of the lore; and then people repeat that conventional wisdom in classrooms and literary conversations because it worked for a writer who is held in high esteem.

In *Written Lives*, Javier Marías follows the mystery and aura of the famous writer in various directions, most notably the humility in much of their self-fashioning. As Christopher Benfey describes in a review: “The trait Marías seems to admire most in his assemblage of writers is that ‘none of them took themselves very seriously.’” Once again, we find the theme of the “reticence and mystery” of authors. Marías dramatizes the rumors regarding Karen Blixen when Isak Dinesen (her pen name) first entered the literary scene: “She is, in fact, a man; he is, in fact, a woman; Isak Dinesen is actually two people . . . she's from Paris really; he lives in Elsinore . . . she writes in French; no, in English; no, in Danish.” Marías presents these fictionalized biographies as “paradoxes to be savored.” The famous writer, for Marías, is defined

by contradictory mythographies. On Kipling, Marías writes: “Despite being a very widely traveled man, Rudyard Kipling strikes one as more of a recluse or a hermit.”

When apprentice writers read Hemingway, they are both getting Hemingway and “Hemingway prime”—their particular relational interaction with the aura of Hemingway and with the writing itself. So even if Hemingway’s powerful mythography is factually illegitimate,⁴⁸ as Nathan Heller argues in “Hemingway: How the Great American Novelist Became the Literary Equivalent of the Nike Swoosh,” the simulacra stands in for the original. ANT constructions, by showing the interconnections of the social realm, reveal the complexities of the world that are more “real” than what we take as “reality.” Many authors have played with and extend the conversation surrounding Hemingway’s aura; Corey Stoll’s performance in Woody Allen’s *Midnight in Paris* comes to mind, as well as Paul Hendrickson honest and imaginative biography of Hemingway’s world, which presents Hemingway’s “great charm and warmth as well as his egotism and aggression” (Salter). Even though Hemingway did not begin as a prodigy, the cult of personality surrounding him has taken over the mythography. Paul Hendrickson describes in detail this myth-making in *Hemingway’s Boat*, a biography that carefully mines Hemingway’s mythography through an investigation of Hemingway’s boat, *Pilar*. It is a text firmly rooted in myth debunking; building up Hemingway’s star power as well as unsentimentally viewing his social world—including Hendrickson’s inclusion of vile letters where Hemingway refers to James Jones as an “imitator.” Literary celebrity tends to mystify the work of authors, and students and writers need frequent reminders that the writer is/was a real person in order to not “shroud the writing process” as something only done by a special few. As Stephen Armstrong’s “Box Office Poison” covers in Ritter and Vanderslice’s *Can It Really Be Taught?*, the image of

⁴⁸ Hemingway was largely unsuccessful for much of his early career (“his first short stories, sent to magazines after his return from World War I, were uniformly and deservedly rejected”) and was “not chiefly a stylist,” even though generations of students have been taught otherwise.

the writer in pop culture is fraught with troubling romantic mythmaking and capable of unintended pedagogical outcomes, such as glamorizing the “male genius,” “tough guy” or “beautiful loser” apprentice writer, which in turn reinforces harmful stereotypes and damaging cultural attitudes (Armstrong 92).

Magnify the lens on the case of Hunter S. Thompson and the missing antlers. Thompson visited Hemingway’s home in 1964, following Hemingway’s suicide, writing a piece called, “What Lured Hemingway to Ketchum?” While there, he stole a set of antlers belonging to Hemingway, and only recently returned the antlers to the Hemingway family (The Guardian, Alison Flood). In this manner, Hunter S. Thompson used appropriation, quite literally stealing, to access a piece of Hemingway’s image. We trace Thompson adjacently to gonzo journalism, and to the practice of making the writer the protagonist of the piece of writing itself. In this, we find yet another layer of the way the “famous writer” transcends into the realm of the text, rather than merely writing about writing. The fissure of literary theft found its “real” corollary through the missing antlers; and subsequently in the figures of famous writers that followed.

Scaling out, back to the scenes of people writing in film—whether in *Shakespeare in Love* or *On The Road* or *Quills*—we find powerful cultural reinforcements of the work of a writer, even as they give off complicated (occasionally complicated, at least) coded messages regarding the writer in society (Armstrong). Acknowledging the presence and influence of a cult of personality in the literary star system may help to limit the damaging effects of this potential mystification.

Lore is constructed via this star system in greater rates, as the ethos of star instructor is trusted. Just as the Hollywood star system brings heightened awareness of persona, gossip, and glamour, so too does the creative writing star system. As mentioned earlier, Ritter has addressed

how to avoid some of these common pitfalls of star pedagogy in her article “Ethos Interrupted.” Here, Ritter explains how creative writing “as a discipline must prominently feature and support star faculty, showing students that writerly fame is not only possible but also viable within the academic setting. These writers are hired to teach; such teaching, however, is usually incidental in its design” (Ritter 283). What Ritter does not want to occur is what happens all too frequently: the apprentice student gazes at the star faculty member in wonder for four consecutive months while the star faculty member is allowed to engage in a four-month monologue in the classroom. (This is what one of my friends once referred to as “The Frank Conroy Show”—perhaps fairly, perhaps not—in Conroy’s days as presiding member of Iowa’s fiction faculty.) It’s crucial to engage students with questions of teaching in the creative writing classroom, as Ritter suggests, rather than the alternative, which would lead to the student becoming engulfed by the aura of the star author. The apprenticeship pushes teacher-writers and student-writers toward a merger of roles and identifications. This becomes an issue of how students are positioned (and sometimes incorrectly positioned) in relation to pedagogical spectacle. The familiar end-of-semester statement of “they’re the ones who teach me” is taken seriously in the apprentice model. Ritter encourages the diffusion of the star aura in part by more teacher training for graduate students and also through team teaching, positioning a junior faculty member to work in tandem with a star faculty member.

When we look to edutainment-learning modules such as Ted Talks and iTunes U, and as the edutainment model continues to evolve, let’s not forget that “star pedagogy” may exist there as well, and we should pay attention to how the aura of the “star faculty” member is utilized. We should keep in mind how these learning modules have a layer of advertisement built into them. In any advertisement, the future is always bright, and rewards are always in reach. And yet, as

John Berger reminds us in *Ways of Seeing*, in a commodity culture, surrounded by visual images, we find that “future continually deferred.” The entire MFA enterprise—studying with writers you admire, want to imitate within and beyond the page—is built upon this kind of deferral. You may have never met Writer A, and are not sure if that will be a fruitful apprenticeship, or even if you’ll get to work with them, and yet a bond is formed. The nature of this apprenticeship is part of the inherent mystery for MFA trained writers.

Let’s zoom out to the cultural level and the question of the MFA and its connection to the “star system.” A *New York Times* article discusses the romantic myth of the MFA as the reason behind its status as one of the “fastest-growing graduate degrees” (Simon). We find the pervasiveness of digital media and celebrity culture, where anyone with a blog feels like a best-selling novelist-in-waiting; the rise of memoirs, a natural extension of the online selfie writing culture; the popularity of magical realism and noir fiction novels, which have turned many 20-somethings on to literature; and changes in generational attitudes, aspirations and culture.

The national mythology regarding writing relies on its presence in popular culture. The pervasiveness of the Harry Potter franchise generated, among other things, a rich corpus of online fan fiction. These sequels, remixes, and reimagining of the original text, are, in a sense, imitations. Some of the celebrity aura of Rowling, the books, and the films, which were, even prior to the opening of a theme park, a spectacle within the book industry, seeped through to—often, but not always—younger writers. The aura of the famous writer, with J.K. Rowling, perhaps the most famous writer of the last century, inspired, through a series of sociocultural, mediated mechanisms, others to write.

If one makes the rounds of contemporary TV dramas and comedies, we find many portrayals of aspiring, struggling, and/or practicing writers who are adding to the modern-day

spectacle of writers and the corresponding mystery and mystification. Lena Dunham's character on *Girls* attending the Iowa Writers Workshop, multiple stand-up comedian dramedies (such as *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, *Louis* and *Maron*) that are essentially about the lives of writers.⁴⁹ On television, we also find: *Sex and the City*, *Bored to Death*, *30 Rock*, and one of the originals, *The Dick Van Dyke Show*. These shows often tend to reify upper-middle class values about “making it” as a writer. Contemporary writers do not write in a vacuum; they do so against the backdrop of individual auras, and the pervasive aura of the famous writer.

Even for the so-called “famous author,” aura plays a role in creative production. Ian McEwan mentions in one interview that he wrote with the specter of Joyce still present as he aimed for the ideal narrative voice in *Atonement*:

I didn't want the limitations of a childlike vocabulary. Joyce does this in the opening pages of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. We've all tried to imitate it. He holds you there in a little boy's sensory and linguistic universe, and it's a piece of magic that glows—and then it's gone, just like childhood itself. (McEwan)

Yet again, we return to a description of writing as something fundamentally mystical and magical even when it describes the formal task of writing from a child's point of view. How, exactly, McEwan considered, to make that “glow[ing]” magic, how to appeal to “storytelling's inherent mystery,” without being swept up in a form already accomplished, a literary achievement already mastered by a predecessor. Those questions are at the heart of the acceptance and rejection of celebrity aura that pervades academic creative writing.

Celebrity aura itself is viewed, via ANT tracing, as an actant, an instrumental agent in the production of literary texts. While not a textual entity, we have observed on the macro scale, the way celebrity aura produces lore, which itself, has an agential property. The question of the *ethos*

⁴⁹ Dunham is a graduate of Columbia University's film MFA, screenwriting emphasis.

of lore comes to light from this particular tracing. Zooming out to a cultural level, if in America celebrity gossip exerts an influence on our socioeconomic status and day-to-day life, then that same pervasive aura of celebrity gossip exerts its own agency on disciplinary realities and professional status within the academy of writing. Through the extent of the wide-ranging trace, lore, yet again, plays more of a heightened role in the teaching of writing, than previously theorized.

The Value of Self-Appointed Apprenticeship: “See how they worked”

What makes lore about imitative transcription valuable, above anything else mentioned thus far, is that writers are instructed to apprentice themselves—in what could be a lengthy and possibly even lifelong apprenticeship—to someone who speaks to them through their writing. The lore I will trace in this section regarding seeking out apprenticeship prompts us to consider the *interpersonal* nature of writing processes. The actor-network here possesses perhaps more human-human bonds than any of the prior four traces. The person sought out need not be living; the mentorship formed is often one-sided, self-driven, largely symbolic, and identity-forming, but real nonetheless. With the rise of digital modes of composition and dissemination, this apprenticeship can appear in a variety of ways within and across various media platforms (social media, conventional publishing, e-reading applications or devices, etc.) or various learning networks (the MOOC, a local neighborhood workshop, some workshop set up informally, the MFA, fan fiction communities, etc.). But regardless of the specific details of the pedagogical model, the social and collaborative bonds can be so strong that they demand further research. Imitation and reading produce a kind of sociality, a connective tissue to the past and to other writers with a similar set of references and collective memory; as I have argued in this chapter via the metaphor of the network, lore (the bits) helps to secure and cement these relationships

(the bonds). The bond Didion forges with the field's tradition then becomes source material for Didion to connect to her peers and to future generations. While literary studies tends to underscore the influence of one generation upon the next, it often misses a history within literary practice of *imitation*.

At its center, in early imitative transcription, there is an identification between the student writer and someone often with a significant reputation in popular literary culture. If we simply tear down these popular and often-famous writers, we might miss that potential for affective social engagement through composition and creative writing pedagogies. Sirc describes how popular culture used to be the “defining staple” of mainstream composition in the late 1960s, when instructors commonly “deferred” to the interests of their students. Sirc cites the sculptor Claes Oldenburg and his fondness for imitation when thinking about the possibilities for forging affective bonds via the design of ordinary mainstream objects:

We might think, for instance, of Oldenburg's affection for the materials of the popular, the quotidian: “The goods in the stores: clothing, objects of every sort, and the boxes and wrappers, signs and billboards—for all these radiant commercial articles in my immediate surroundings I have developed a great affection, which has made me want to imitate them.” (Sirc, *English Composition* 149-50)

Oldenburg describes here his fondness for commercial objects, and once again we find testimony that speaks to a formula of affection, a strong desire to imitate, and then a next step that was both intuitive and relatively easy, at least at first. We can connect this relative ease to the notion of amortizing debt, the installment school of writing, running a marathon, or learning to fly an aircraft. The “ease” of learning is often wholly dependent upon its framing, its narrative, as a part of a larger personal journey.

If we follow Michael Leff's suggestion that imitation works pedagogically in a similar sense to Burke's casuistic stretching—where the general case extends to the specific—we can see how the accretion of seemingly endless writing advice and the popularization of maxims about “good writing” are felt in deeply personal ways. On some basic level, imitating Hemingway, for Didion, was easy as well, and seemed to follow the same formula as Oldenburg's model above. Didion mentions the way copying out Hemingway was a process of relative ease: “I thought that I could learn—because they felt so natural.” There was a simplicity in Hemingway's writing, “deceptive” yes, but recognized as simplicity nonetheless. Didion engaged in the imitation, in part “because they felt so natural” and something clicked; she even describes the process as “magnetic,” representing the deep rhetorical identification that was taking place. She expresses a nostalgia for this “first love” of prose or “love at first sentence parsing” experience. Didion further explores this deep connection in her 2006 *Paris Review* interview, “Last Words,” noting that “a few years ago when I was teaching a course at Berkeley I reread *A Farewell to Arms* and fell right back into those sentences. I mean they're perfect sentences. Very direct sentences, smooth rivers, clear water over granite, no sinkholes.” This sentiment again follows a narrative of a connection across time that is unbreakable; it will always be one of the pivotal, formative experiences of Didion's life. The fact of her returning to it in interviews and essays for decades is suggestive alone of her perception—to say nothing about the actuality—of the influence Hemingway's writing had on her career.

In Alexandria Perry's “Without Shelter,” Perry invokes Flannery O'Connor's “The Regional Writer” when outlining her desires for the future of academic creative writing. Perry hopes that writers will “recognize the need to write from a ‘peculiar crossroads where time and place and eternity somehow meet,’ and that this need would drive us to write, read, and translate”

(Peary 4). Looking to the future of the world, and to our corresponding “shifting sense of boundaries and nations,” we might “interrogate our positions” by considering our connections across time to writers far different from—and perhaps also situated similarly to—ourselves. Didion forged a meaningful connection across borders of time and gender, and from her considerable discussions of Hemingway’s influence we sense an implicit encouragement from Didion toward other writers to form affective relationships with model texts and admired authors. One aspect of this kind of bond that engages contemporary writers with writing and writers from the past through early imitative transcription is the notion of ease that combats the doubts and anxieties also omnipresent about writing and speaking. Transcription is described within the canon of writers on writing as an effective way for writers, even supremely accomplished writers such as Mary Gordon, to combat the doubt.⁵⁰

In order to combat the doubt about ever being able to do it better than the masters, many writers choose imitation as a route and a direction. Imitation is, as Aristotle described, “natural to man from childhood,” and serves the practical purpose of being a “bridge between one’s reading and writing (or speaking)” (Burton, “Imitation”). The fact that it is described as coming easy to writers and artists should not be overlooked: imitation is a way in. The mantra “trust the process,” popularized in contemporary times depends upon a writer’s—or rhetor’s—dedication to his or her practice. The individual needs to keep repeating their acts—imitative models and specifically imitative transcription forge a path, one that bonds writer to writer, or writer to instructor, or some combination therein.

Many writers speak to the notion of ease that connects them to other writers. Upon discovering the poetry of Sir Walter Scott for the first time, Peter Levi “read the whole of his

⁵⁰ See Mary Gordon’s “Putting Pen to Paper, but Not Just Any Pen or Just Any Paper” (*The New York Times*, July 5, 1999).

poetry” in a matter of “hours” (Levi). He describes them as feeling like “jolly jingles,” which seemed “easy to imitate,” and on a lazy rainy day, he decided to write his own poems in the same style. Ann Beattie too speaks of what feels natural and easy, rather than a methodical articulation of a well-defined plan. She mentions meeting John Updike, who told Beattie that she “figured out how to write an entirely different kind of story.” She describes her reaction as being fairly unsure of how to respond because she wasn’t concerned with models to begin with, and had not given conscious thought to “patterning [her] stories on others, for better or for worse.” In this case, the intuitive act was to not give time to conscious imitation or imitative transcription; instead she avoided working on her difficult graduate work in English at the University of Connecticut, staying up all night writing fiction. She was, as she self-describes, “not a good student” and, while she liked to research, she “just wouldn’t draw brilliant conclusions.” Writing fiction was always a “hobby”—again, we get a sense of relative ease (Beattie).

Beattie relays a story about Donald Barthelme discovering her fiction in *The New Yorker* and inviting her to New York. He made her an elaborate lunch, as he did for various other writers he admired, and Barthelme was instrumental in shaping her early career. When the interviewer asks about the fact that Beattie and Barthelme are often discussed in similar ways in literary circles, Beattie speculates that the bond—the connection with another admired author across time—is more important than a visible trail of influence. She elaborates on the reading experience of Barthelme’s stories:

It showed me an absolutely original mind in action, and it indicated how well speculation and magic could be integrated naturally into a brilliant writer’s fiction. To be clear, I don’t think my writing, early or late, is anything like his. Writers will always tell you unhesitatingly the writers they admire. I notice that stylistically, the writers are usually at

a huge remove from the admired writer's work. The admiration is almost in inverse proportion to similarities in style. (Beattie)

Beattie acutely observes two main principles regarding the question of literary influence: an anxiety of influence (here with Beattie's demurral of a similar style to Barthelme's, which is also an acknowledgement of the Bloomian notion of forming an original style by revising one's literary forbearers) and an admiration of authors whose writing is unlike their own. The connection forged between one writer and another, for Beattie, seems to occur in that same "easy" manner as other writers have noted, here with Beattie observing Barthelme's "original mind in action" and the extent of what a rewarding experience it was to read him.

If we use Csikszentmihalyi's notion of flow for creative processes, we might also extend it to consider those enchanting reading experiences that grab us, like Barthelme for Beattie, or Beattie for Barthelme (the inciting incident in their literary friendship), or of course, like Didion for Hemingway. Csikszentmihalyi explains:

This optimal experience is what I have called flow, because many of the respondents described the feeling when things were going well as an almost automatic, effortless, yet highly focused state of consciousness. The flow experience was described in almost identical terms regardless of the activity that produced it. Athletes, artists, religious mystics, scientists, and ordinary working people described their most rewarding experiences with very similar words. (110)

The fact that early reading experiences and imitative transcription are often described as easy, easygoing, and enjoyable deserves more attention. In the introduction to her *Selected Stories*, Alice Munro examines the recurring setting of her fiction: "The reason I write so often about the country to the east of Lake Huron is just that I love it" (Munro vii). The ease and simplicity of

the flow state in both writing and reading is also described in countless bits of creative writing lore: the advice about daydreaming; Gardner's "vivid and continuous" dream (31), the best reading experiences occur when you forget that you're reading, etc. Perhaps all the attention on authenticity that instructors note when discussing imitation, is another way of describing the *ease* of the flow state—the absence of effort.⁵¹ Imitative transcription too is defined by its absence of effort; even within a field whose term is craft, here we see the evidence trail of famous writers cultivating and advocating *ease*.

Allen Ginsberg defined the poetic process as trying to deflect all of the "plastic" to get down to the bottom of the question of "What do I really think?" (Ginsberg, "Interview with Conan O'Brien"). This process should be, to some extent, automatic when we write, and should be considerably easier for all of us than it already is; but as Ginsberg mentions in that same television interview, we are conditioned to look elsewhere, often to images in popular media, to find out about ourselves. Csikszentmihalyi describes a similar phenomenon: "While one must make an effort to focus attention to enter the flow state, as soon as one is in it, external distractions are much less likely to disrupt concentration." (Csikszentmihalyi 417). All too often, expressivist teaching has been derided for its touchy-feely qualities, and its lack of rigor. But seen as a question of ease—and in light of the idea that "the more flow" states one enters into, the more positive associations one has with the activity, and thus "the more happiness"—we see the scrupulousness that can come with the objectives of an easy process.

But the question of ease, ironically, connects to the notion of the flow state that comes about via "painful, risky, difficult activities that stretched the person's capacity and involved an element of novelty and discovery" (Csikszentmihalyi 110). In Csikszentmihalyi's model, ease is a byproduct of the creative process. Imitative transcription offers the writer a sweet spot where

⁵¹ See Nicholas Delbanco's *The Sincerest Form*.

they can enter into a challenging set of activities and processes via *decomposition*.

Csikszentmihalyi notes that “in most individuals entropy seems to be stronger [than the urge to create], and they enjoy comfort more than the challenge of discovery” (110). The flow state, this optimal experience described by self-report in Csikszentmihalyi’s studies, comes about from “the quality of experience” individuals feel when deeply invested with an activity.

With this “easy” imitation comes a kind of mentorship, a following, a sense of direction offered: “In every act of reading there’s an agreement, however unspoken, that we follow where the author leads” (Delbanco xxi). We should not be surprised, then, that in following another’s direction, there is an intimacy, an affection being developed—at the very least an unmistakable attachment, which just seems easy. It need not be epiphanic to be an actual affective connection. We might be reminded of Ashbery, for whom writing is a subdued calling, one based on the pursuit of simple pleasure: “I don’t know really—I just want to” (*Paris Review Interviews Vol. IV* 176). The bond between apprentice and accomplished writer seems to form in identifiable ways that can be categorized. The bonds can occur very directly: the artist’s letter, where one writer responds to another. This can occur from peer to peer, at any level, or have a more “letters to a young poet,” Rilkean vibe. A second way is the notion that every person you meet is someone you can learn from (oft-stated, including in a famous Emersonian maxim). This can also occur without direct communication, from peer-to-peer in mutual reading experiences. As Malcom Cowley noted: “Hemingway and Faulkner never met, but they read each other and profited by the reading, Faulkner especially. It’s largely a question of emulation that causes writers to appear as if in groups. Even if they never meet, they read each other” (Cowley). Writers describe this kind of reading of masters, or contemporaries in practical terms, more often than not. When Updike was asked by the *Paris Review* about his influences, he responded by thinking through

the question in terms of advantage, a process of learning specific aesthetic modes that, in effect, pointed out prior transgressors. For instance, Updike mentions that he “learned a lot from Salinger's short stories; he did remove the short narrative from the wise-guy, slice-of-life stories of the thirties and forties. Like most innovative artists, he made new room for shapelessness, for life as it is lived” (Updike). Similarly, Updike notes that Nabokov was someone he “admire[d]” but he “emulate[d] only his high dedication to the business of making books that are not sloppy, that can be reread” (Updike). Updike, like many others in the canon of writers on writing, treats the question of lineage with respect and homage, almost piety.

The academy does not often consider the exact link between reading and writing; perhaps that is because when true engagement happens within a reading experience, it comes easily, without a lot of thought. The writers who move you are not necessarily the ones who look like you, or exist in the same time or place. Elena Ferrante describes how she “devoured books” as a child. All of her “models were masculine.” She “didn’t want to write like Madame de La Fayette or Jane Austen or the Brontës—at the time I knew very little about contemporary literature—but like Defoe or Fielding or Flaubert or Tolstoy or Dostoyevsky or even Hugo” so when she “wrote stories about girls, [she] wanted to give the heroine a wealth of experiences, a freedom, a determination that [she] tried to imitate from the great novels written by men” (Ferrante). For Ferrante, the connection, the rhetorical identification, transcended the contextual particularities.

Time and time again, writers discuss their connections with particular texts in their writing processes, and this is often described as a kind of “tuning” ritual. Mary Gordon describes writing by hand, specifically her ritual of “copying paragraphs whose heft and cadence [she] can learn from” as a form of prewriting (Gordon). She notes how she starts with “the fiction I’m reading seriously, the one I’m using as a kind of tuning fork, the one I need to sound the tone I

will take up in the fiction I'm writing at the time." Over time, this prewriting, which Gordon describes as an easy process where "the very movement of my hand, like kind of a dance, starts up another movement that allows me to forget the vanity, the folly, of what I am really about." Gordon even includes a brief account of the occasional joy in writing, the "remarkably pleasant" feeling, "before the failure starts" (Gordon). Recalling the ways that the physical manipulation of words and texts—with writing as fundamentally a bodily act described in earlier parts of this tracing—we note again how pleasure and muscle memory seem irrevocably linked to texts old and new.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION: WHAT THE “LORE 2.0” NETWORK MIGHT MEAN FOR CREATIVE WRITING AND FIRST-YEAR COMPOSITION STUDENTS AND PROGRAMS

To explain is not a mysterious cognitive feat, but a very practical world-building enterprise that consists in connecting entities with other entities, that is, in tracing a network.

--Bruno Latour

An essay by Graeme Harper, “Creative Writing in the Age of Synapses,” imagines a framework for the future of creative writing pedagogy. Among the goals he emphasizes, Harper stresses the need to: a) locate the “multiple layers of experience, observation, and knowledge that creative writing involves”; b) form community-building bonds and cement membership as a fellow practitioner; c) allow “individuality, through a digitally informed world, to reassert itself”; and d) move the “parameter of action” beyond the classroom (Harper qtd. in Vanderslice, “Beyond the Tipping Point” 608). These goals, all embodied by the extensive, messy, and wide-ranging trace performed in the previous chapter, lead to heightened student agency. By looking at an artifact like Didion’s interview within the framework of ANT, we can see that it is not being used merely as mindless instructional technique; but rather, it belies a complex network of writers, texts, bits, and bonds.

The complexities of composing environments, and their respective location of “multiple layers of experience, observation, and knowledge” suggests that student learning narratives are far more complicated than most instructors of composition or creative writing might believe. Further, noting the interconnections that are made between agents suggests the community-building bonds inherent in writing classrooms. Artist testimony stands in for actual people, but does not replace membership in student or professional learning communities. Finally, the

tracing illustrates numerous moments where we see the role of technology as an agent in the network itself. Specifically, students exchange their own bits and make bonds trading artist testimony. The shoptalk, the trading of tidbits like pins or baseball cards or stories around a campfire, return lore back to its roots as a kind of folklore. Its collectible, tradeable nature is both lore's essential agential value and its potential to participate in social projects at multiple levels of zoom. Lore, in its static version, without any source of revision, possesses the dangerous tendency to create and sustain systems. We see the importance of the resistance model with respect to the network. And so, while the social bonds afforded by lore affect student agency, the resistance of lore should always be considered in accordance with the affective power of those social bonds, especially for apprentice writers or anyone who considers themselves in a "process of becoming."

Participating in the networks links with teaching practices for both creative writing and first-year composition. Instructors in either discipline can design artist testimony assignments to make students aware of the network: assigning a craft book or craft criticism article to read or review; using an artist letter from one student writer to another; reflecting on their growth in one peer's writing; encouraging a webspace for writerly tidbits and a class forum for dialogue about ongoing assignments, rather than questions directed solely at the instructor.

When recently teaching a literature course where we read Edgar Allen Poe's "The Importance of the Single Effect in a Prose Tale," I heard many comments from students who observed how Poe's craft essay merged mysticism with rationalist science. Within this model, the individual has agency, but also taps into the realm of mystery. The fact that my students were aware of this without coaching suggests their ability to navigate the appeals that craft texts make with skepticism yet open minds. College students have perhaps the greatest amount of collected

conventional wisdom about what makes good writing, and they are also astute in reading the rhetorical nature of the pitches to “write well.” My students are the first to notice when a textbook is making inelegant appeals or is ignoring their experience as writers. This is not merely a circumstance of their inflated egos, but rather a tendency for textbooks to ignore affective appeals. As Fredric G. Gale points out, the failure of textbooks is that “their authors adopt the objectivist perspective of most business and governmental organizations, a view in which writing is not the social act that composition theory maintains it is” (Gale 163).

We can also see how writing program administration might benefit from this visualization of tidbits creating social bonds. Narrative-based or testimony-based institutional assessments could use tracing to interrogate and revise longstanding lore of the local department and broader discipline. Following Harper’s point that the classroom does not “define the parameters of action” (Harper qtd. in Vanderslice, “Beyond the Tipping Point” 608), ANT tracing encourages instructors to meet scholarship and its attendant composing processes in the alternative spaces in which writing is done, learned, and taught.

Of course, at the risk of repeating, this is only one possible web among many. This chapter does not assert the supremacy of this particular tracing, following Latour’s suggestion that we build multiple systematic recordings of historical sites: “ANT does not tell anyone the shape that is to be drawn—circles or cubes or lines—but only how to go about systematically recording the world-building abilities of the sites to be documented” (Latour, “On Recalling ANT” 21). And yet we should not be troubled by this possibility for multiple histories. In fact, this dynamism is very much in keeping with lore’s ability to be “made new” by each relational and history-specific context that shapes its new encounters: encounters in which students and teachers alike remake and recombine this anecdotal pedagogy to meet new needs. If lore is the

detritus that comes from the act of making, then the “flow state,” that idealized feeling of creative production, is linked to the detritus of prior processes of writing. The links between the nodes make the classroom an assemblage, with lore lined up among its most collected bits.

At the same time, however, the classroom is linked up to all of these aspects of the trace. To deepen our understanding of mentorship and apprenticeship in creative writing and first-year composition, it is useful to consider what is happening beneath the surface of “relentless preparation and practice” for innovators in a variety of fields. Tim Mayers explores the phenomenon of rigorous practice and cognitive development in relation to the classroom:

Recent books by David Shenk, Malcolm Gladwell, and Steven Johnson make the case that talent is far more a matter of relentless practice and preparation—nurtured and supported, especially when people are very young—than an innate quality or gift. Good creative writing programs and teachers make this abundantly clear to aspiring writers. I suspect that many of the writers who went through creative writing programs, but years later claim that these programs can't really teach people anything, have forgotten how their own persistence and determination were sparked in classrooms and professors' offices. (Mayers in “What We Talk About” 144)

The “good” writing classroom ultimately retains its status as an enormously powerful agent in student learning narratives because of its ability to stress practice over talent. An actor-network trace similarly stresses the materiality of creativity over its romantic origins.

The advanced undergraduate and graduate creative writing student might especially be better positioned via ANT to see how literacy technologies, such as registrar lists, email servers, classroom projections, word processors, pens and pencils, and even the workshop itself are as much agented actors in the workshop experience as their fellow students. If students were asked

to trace out a received piece of conventional wisdom about effective creative writing practice, each would be different, and that's the point. Instead of endlessly hearing about writing rituals and superstition, students can be asked directly to become their own architects of lore:

They would have to listen to and record the secrets these masters have to share. With all the years of experience, the years of trial-and-error, surely patterns would emerge indicating what “lore” has been successful and what should be avoided. In this way, practitioners, those who rub shoulders with struggling writers on a daily basis, can be directly responsible for developing theories based on proven practice in the classroom. As North asks, “What can a Historical inquiry tell us about what constitutes a ‘useful’ reality, or about how writing is ‘actually done?’” As a Historian, I want to document the lore of Practitioners and learn what new histories can be forged on a daily basis through classroom lore. (Butler et al.)

These “new histories” develop directly out of the assemblage of network associations from any tidbit of lore. Jody Shipka similarly advocates for this assemblage of truly different concepts of materiality:

What we need to pursue are more robust concepts of materiality and nonhuman involvement and agency, something that would, in turn, allow us to redefine translingual and multimodal collaborations “as partnerships that include and exceed intentional ones established between people”—partnerships that involve the merging of “various forms of matter” (Micciche 498), and that may include, but are certainly not limited to, the complex merging or interweaving of words, sounds, images, varieties of language, dialects, cultural conventions, genres, web pages, social media, electricity, cellphones, clothing, eyeglasses, furniture, keyboards, software, books, paper, clay, memories, rituals,

bodies, blood sugar, food, medication, intestinal bacteria, and pets. (“Transmodality in/and Processes of Making” 254)

Students tracing out the influences and lineages of their own interactions with lore is truly the next step of Hesse’s call for further research into “writerly activities and processes.” Students can ask, in the same spirit of genealogical research or tracing one’s ancestry, “At what point will I be able to tap into the data that tells me more about myself as a writer?”

Didion’s contribution is a valuable anecdote in its ability to preserve one writer’s activities and processes and potentially, in some form, inspire the activities and processes of another. In this way, lore should not be discarded or thrown away by creative writing researchers. At a recent composition conference, after presentations by many leading researchers in creative writing studies, the audience was asked to consider what new research methods might be brought to creative writing studies. I brought up the possibility of re-opening author testimony to do research and was told by a young scholar whose work I respect greatly that author testimony is unreliable fodder for pedagogical practice and theory-building. The philosophical intervention I hope to make here provides, in addition to all of the practical possibilities for teachers, students, program administrators, and pedagogies, a rationale for doing research on a collection of texts that is considered “unreliable.” Often when I tell others about this unit of lore, or refer to it in conversation as something I’ve had students do, creative writing instructors laugh good-naturedly at its whimsical nature. “That’s all they do? Just write it out? How do you grade that?” Maybe what is puzzling or enticing or mind-numbing about the prompt is the hopelessly romantic myth of the aspirational young writer that it offers. Or maybe it is because it captures that archetype of self-training just so.

While the concern over “romantically naïve” still hovers over expressivist-charged composition pedagogy or creative writing pedagogy that inches closely to writers as testimony agents, it is important to stress that the actor-network model allows us to express the ineffable aspects, some of the close-to-invisible processes, inherent to composing. We may need a fair degree of Coleridge’s “suspension of disbelief” to pursue webs of imitation at great length as we have here, risking confusion or a bubble of connected entities. But that, I would argue, is part of the student’s experience in any writing-related course: to seek out the language that best responds to the assignment, but also to ultimately learn to live amongst the mysteries that cannot be handled in the assignment at hand.

Ultimately, I hope this tracing of a unit of lore may lead to a more willing recognition by teachers and writers alike of the “negative capability” involved in practitioner-based approaches to teaching. Understanding how writers trust impulses and accept “uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason,” is in many ways one of my chief findings from studying this unit of lore (Keats). While the cumulative effect of all the writing handbooks, author biographies, craft essays, and maxims collected in interviews and elsewhere can be overwhelming, confusing, and awe-inducing, participating among the copia contained within *The House of Lore* also, I argue here, is a crucial step in every student learning narrative in both composition and creative writing. Students must decide which set philosophies they reject and which they embrace, rather than seek absolute knowledge of every doubt, mystery, or truth—not the chief ontology of writing studies anyway—they can instead to live among the lore.

Bits Creating Bonds: Pedagogical Implications and New Directions

To write well, you need to work from knowledge. Students know stuff.

-- John Warner

As they move through the world—and this starts long before they enter the creative writing or first-year composition classroom—students are collecting tidbits of advice about how to best compose or make meaning. In the same manner that commonplace books or *locus communis* “represented testimonies or pithy sentences of good authors which might be used for strengthening or adorning a discourse,” so too might tracings, even in elementary schools,⁵² help students to develop a network of writing advice that may be useful in future writing situations (Sidney 46). Students’ pedagogical metanarratives with respect to writing advice and received wisdom are generally underexplored in ethnographic rhetoric and composition research, though social media posts abound with examples of advice that apprentice writers find valuable (Fig. 6). While this project does not engage directly with ethnographic methods, or with questions of K-12 crossover with college writing, rhetoric and composition should articulate how personal narratives of making are in fact, *histories*.

⁵² See Glorianne Bradshaw’s “The How of Writing: First-Graders Learn Craft”



Figure 6: Lan Samantha Chang on the importance of retaining early narratives of becoming a writer.

By turning to students' own self-reports and recounting of what they believe to be good advice we can better meet students at the site of their particular, ephemeral, unique, and contested assumptions, beliefs, and fixed ideas about writing. In addition, through testimonies, we might be able to better see the kinds of biases inherent in literacy instruction. For instance, do male and female writers receive the same level, degree, and kind of encouragement, on average, regarding their writing? Asking students to assess and document their writing histories would be a useful instrument in an age of mostly top-down institutional assessment.

The New Graduate Scholar: A *Bricolore*

As seen in Chapter Four, these tidbits of knowledge can also be a form of social exchange, operating as tokens, which then, as in computing, can clear one to perform a different operation. For example, someone can recommend a book to another person. Notably with these token objects, exchanged by human agents, a relationship can form, or strengthen, or grow. Differing opinions or sides can develop, but these tidbits become a unique form of social glue.

One of the chapters of a small book I picked up after a rough writing day in college as an English major was Jon Winokur's *Advice to Writers: A Compendium of Quotes, Anecdotes and Writerly Wisdom from a Dazzling Array of Literary Lights*. Perhaps this was my first taste of both the joys and frustrations of lore. I found the book to have an inspirational value as I imagined myself experiencing the acts that led to the same crumpled up page on the cover of the book. But I also found the book to have a spectral presence, lurking in those guilt-ridden, stalling moments when I knew I should be drafting my next assignment. One chapter within this book is called "The Secret," which attempts to give its reader, through various accounts, the "keys" to opening within oneself the potential for great writing. I mention this text because when friends or coworkers or professors or students have recommended or handed me books, pieces of writing, music, or shared some other made object, I have felt like this connection was a kind of secret knowledge. These tidbits can help writers confront and maybe even temporarily work through block, doubt, and anxieties that surround the acts of composing. Social bonds have the potential to offer countervailing forces to fears of failure as well that plague college students. Even the most systematic methods and processes are bound to break down. Lore attends to the failure inherent in composing processes by making a historical claim (hearing the same topic discussed by a practitioner who lived centuries before and by a peer review group member going through the same assignment in a contemporaneous moment). Lore, as a kind of token, invites students to see themselves as tinkerers, revisers of not only their writing, but of their own understanding of their writing process. I often mention to my students that tinkering is the bulk of writing, and I stress the invention inherent in all revision. Sometimes I use the example of The Tinkerer, a DC Comics character. The Tinkerer is an inventor and technician who remakes devices based on

older forms of technology, and deploys them whenever they are kairotically necessary. He has no superhuman powers; only the power of tracing and assembling.

Reframing composing—and teaching—in the digital age as deejaying is nothing new; but seeing the contemporary composer as *bricoleur*, who mediates between his or her own knowledge and past experiences with their received institutional-conventional wisdom, might be a different way of imagining student learning narratives.⁵³ Introducing lore as a form of knowledge, in this sense, speaks to Warner’s point that opens this chapter: “students know stuff” (Warner). Following the notion of the bricoleur as someone who uses pre-existing materials for new means, we see how deep a literacy practice engagement of lore truly can be. In the context of literacy studies, Deborah Brandt argued for the ways that literacy “requires an ability to work the borders between tradition and change, an ability to adapt and improvise and amalgamate” (Brandt 660). To speak of, and research, a literacy of lore would be a useful step for our fields, even across the academy.⁵⁴ With rhetoric and composition’s heightened emphasis on transfer—the ability to take one set of skills with you to another genre, course, or setting—the student as *bricoleur* is someone who is metacognitively aware of these connections between writing for one situation to another.

In an undergraduate creative writing course, my instructor told us, in regards to one of our stories, the maxim that “life is short, art is long.” I thought he had come up with it—I found out some years later that the quote derived from a Latin aphorism: *ars longa, vita brevis*, which itself derived from Hippocrates. Regardless of origin, I deployed it frequently, including during

⁵³ See *Digital Griots: African American Rhetoric in a Multimedia Age* by Adam Banks

⁵⁴ Many have written on the power of vignettes and anecdotes in medicine, and the ability of vignettes to capture “what doctors see and hear,” and, in turn, “set a research agenda” (Peter D. Kramer’s “The Role of Anecdotes in Medicine,” October 19, 2014). From popular journalistic accounts such as Kramer’s, it seems that professional and technical writing courses should leave curricular and assignment space for the role of the vignette, or the short-short story. Of course, there is always the lore vs. anti-lore debate. In the comments section for Kramer’s article, while many celebrate the power of the vignette as a teaching tool, there are also those in clinical medicine who wrote that anecdote leads to less effective treatment.

coffee with a friend who was considering a career as a scriptwriter. I mentioned it in conversation, and many years later, noticed that this friend had posted the maxim on Facebook. The “2.0” in my conception of “Lore 2.0” suggests a user-centric model to learning and writing, where individuals repurpose adages, using tidbits of practitioner logic as materials for assembling their writing processes, and bonding agents to other individuals.

The “New Graduate Scholar,” as Butler et al. argue, is thoroughly “informed by their humanity,” ready to remix and share (Butler et al.). The very work of categorization that has defined academia for centuries is part of the ongoing sea change. I have found this to be true anecdotally as a graduate student, where far more of my peers and professors are practicing creative writers than I ever would have supposed as an undergraduate student. Kate Highfill argues that over-categorization “sterilizes” the work of composition studies, and “makes it seem less about the reality of confronting social inequality and injustice, racial and ethnic prejudice, and class discrimination, in an effort to bring the field some kind of scientific cachet. Composition does not need science. Composition needs lore” (Butler et al.) If it is indeed true that “practice humanizes theory,” then a Wendy Bishop-inspired merger of the theories that inform writing with the theories that inform the teaching of writing in a time of bits and bonds (Phelps qtd. in Butler et al.).

Creative Writing Pedagogy 2.0

We are officially in the moment of creative writing pedagogy 2.0, made possible by a new understanding of lore (2.0) and increasing amounts of published scholarship on theories of invention, specifically what is lost when we deny the practitioner insight as credible scholarly mode. The critique on dialectics and binary thinking, “such as the binaries of same/different and

traditional/innovative” was not as ostensible in 1987 as it is now (Pender 81). As Pender points out, we may be getting closer to that “more coherent future.”

It would seem, then, that if we used philosophical work on invention as a test case, we could conclude that philosophical inquiry is on its way to the “more coherent future” North anticipated. No, it’s not perfect, but the dialectic appears to be doing its job, forcing composition philosophers to create more synthetic, more self-aware positions over time. (80)

Pender goes on to reference the work of John Muckelbauer, who notes that with all of the innovations to our field, “no one has really considered the troubling implications of how that change happens” (80). Even if we have moved past binary thinking, and can accept a wide array of disciplinary viewpoints that holistically inform our methods and methodologies in all of writing studies, it always comes with a dialectical conflict: out with the old, in with the new. While this is useful when jettisoning “oppressive social structures,” the notion of lore being outdated is the negation that presupposed this entire project. Pender summarizes Muckelbauer’s argument as: “the more things change, the more they stay the same” (81).

In my rehabilitation of lore, I attempted to transcend binary thinking (practitioner vs. historian, compositionist vs. creative writer) through the use of network metaphors. I do not deny “existence of these poles” or the presence of “dialectical change,” but rather choose to view lore from a different vantage point, as histories of making revealed through performing the ANT-inspired trace (Pender 81).

In the 10th Anniversary Edition of *Can Creative Writing Really Be Taught?*, Tim Mayers notes that it’s most likely no longer the case that creative writing still suffers from privileged marginality and pervasive isolationism. We find the field replete with scholarship that directly

engages with questions of privilege and power. As creative writing instructor and writer Tonya Hegamin asserts in her vision of “radical inclusivity” for creative writing:

Radical inclusivity on all levels is a pedagogical commitment. Although some might find it a necessity, many view it as peripheral at best. However, the modern academic Creative Writing classroom is a direct product of grassroots and community activism found in the Harlem Renaissance, the Black Arts Movement, Beat Poetry, Spoken Word, Feminist, Queer and Disability studies. Without these pluralistic revolutions, we would mostly only be reading dead white men in literature classrooms and there would probably not be as many strong Creative Writing programs because the workshop is built to give tangible voice to the assertions of individual diversity; the demand to be heard. (Hegamin 3)

Today’s creative writing lore is a copia, in other words. And it is up to the apprentice writer to bring into the House of Lore whatever he or she has deemed useful for inclusion. This is not a top-down model of pedagogy, but instead one in which a multiplex of individual contributions conspires to build the whole. As we can see with Didion, her experience of becoming a writer took place within a larger web of ideas, objects, and creative writing history (both within and outside of the academy). Likewise, when she shares her experience, as she has done in the *Paris Review* interview, she writes herself into the web: adding to its edges.

Similarly, in the context of first-year composition, we find shifted boundaries. As Butler observes: “It seems the roles graduate students have outlined here are anything but ‘clearly cut’; indeed, they complicate, intersect, and cross boundaries in ways North himself could not have anticipated” (Butler et al.). At the Conference for College Composition and Communication a few years ago, I spoke with an acquaintance who was also an MFA in creative writing and pursuing a PhD in rhetoric and composition. She told me that her research interests were separate

from creative writing pedagogy in part to be able to divide those identities. As I was considering topics for a graduate dissertation, I had the same thoughts about how I wanted to divide my disciplinary identities and what kinds of work might be the most fulfilling. As I write this, in 2017, I am buoyed by the amount of varied and complex work being done at the intersections of creative writing and composition.

The “2.0” partnership between creative writing and first-year writing is really still developing, as CCCC continues to hold creative writing-focused sessions and the newly formed Creative Writing Studies Organization held its inaugural annual conference at Warren Wilson College in Asheville, North Carolina in September 2016, featuring over fifty panels on pedagogy, history, qualitative and quantitative research, digital and multimodal practices, diversity and inclusion, social action, and professionalization and labor, in addition to theory, craft, and culture. A panel at AWP in Los Angeles in 2016 featured presentations by leading scholars in creative writing studies, speaking on “service learning, process and feminist pedagogy, Writing-Across-the-Curriculum, and creative literacy.” While it is hard to speak of the future of the academy with certainty, we do currently have evidence of creative and critical attention to the study of creative writing pedagogy. Even as we continue to explore areas of potential collaboration between creative writing and rhetoric and composition, there are already plenty of organizational and longstanding scholarly overlaps and interactions between the two parties.

We may not have a totalizing divergence theory in rhetoric and composition; but we do have a sense that we have moved past the dichotomies and Cartesian splits that defined the field’s way of knowing, and into a realm more akin to a distributed network rather than a straightforward dialectic. Similarly, as creative writing studies continues to emerge and define itself as a socially-attuned field—both in scholarship and in pedagogical preoccupations—I

predict that it will need to keep actively addressing the alternate histories of people, languages, ideologies, and pedagogies. For too long, creative writing craft was viewed “as if it were a transparent set of values—fixed and universally agreed-upon in how it defines a particular genre” rather than seen as “always embedded in particular cultural, aesthetic, critical, and (often) institutional contexts” (CWSO homepage). Composition and creative writing both should continue our mining of tidbits of lore, reminding ourselves that lore, when viewed via the philosophy of history, is a potential source of sociality for our fields, as well as of writerly confidence, rather than mere confidence trick. I encourage teachers and scholars in creative writing studies especially to engage with—in the form of remixing/revising rather than discarding—the archive of writers on writing with this new framework in mind. Simultaneous acceptance and resistance of lore defines the condition contemporary students face. As Marilyn M. Cooper posited in her influential works on writing ecologies, “a person is continually engaged with a variety of socially constituted systems” (Cooper 367). We can view the notion that tidbits create social bonds as a critical apparatus for these writing ecologies, as well as a refocusing instrument for the way writing advice can act as an agent in student learning narratives. The role of the individual is still alive and well within the distributed network of lore.

“We Are All Practitioners”

Creative writing’s link to “big business” has become more of a point of criticism over the last decades, as for-profit retreats and artist colonies risk counterfeit pedagogy, not to mention the usual arguments against creative writing as a (once) unexamined field. Many have made the argument that for a long time creative writing’s structural conditions were not studied out of a fear that the results of such studies would be unfavorable for the field as a whole. Kimberly Andrews examines the labor aspect of academic creative writing through McGurl’s argument.

“While academic creative writers,” he suggests, “have often perceived themselves as outsiders to the institution that houses them, it is not hard to enumerate their uses beyond the obvious one of teaching students something about writing. Inwardly, their job as teachers is to stand as inspiring exemplars of the unalienated laborer” (“Program Era” 128). The corporate university values creative writing precisely insofar as it produces figures of freedom for the business-oriented, skilled laborers of the captive new class that it trains. We are thus figureheads, beings of leisure, of no real use at all. If this is the case, it is no wonder that creative writers are loathe to examine the field in detail, to read it critically as their institutional emplacement in late capitalist U.S. society, to examine it and turn it over as a critical problem (and perhaps, to figure out what’s to be done about it). (Andrews 251)

The MFA graduate workforce, often employed as teachers of first year writing while still pursuing creative writing, would probably, like myself, readily identify as practitioners. In terms of academic labor, we are all practitioners, and the Practitioner strand no longer stands independently. Taking stock of first-year composition and creative writing pedagogy at this moment, one place we both need to work on is labor: issues related to contingent labor, working conditions, and being able to explain what it is that we do to our various constituents. A renewed investment in writerly activities and processes is partially a way to provide a thick description of what we do on a daily basis, on the micro-level of teaching processes, and of course zoomed up to the level of writing disciplines. Mary Ann Cain imagines a research methodology in *Revisioning Writers Talk* that aims to “constitute the complexities and richness of lived experience, serving as a mode of inquiry into cultural representations of composing, of writers and teachers of writing and their experience, and of women” (1).

Any practitioner-based labor that is reliant on sharing, but not broadcast or made public, will always, to some extent, exist as a form of labor. And yet, it is a labor that is crucial for advancement in the field and a feeling of personal fulfillment. Bizzaro notes how Erika Lindemann “has always clearly expressed her indebtedness to others, understanding quite well that only through sharing do teachers receive information about teaching that constitutes the lore of our profession” (736). Teachers assisting other teachers within professional learning communities remains a constant in our field; yet a constant that does not always come with compensation.

In academic creative writing, for the longest time, the diligent work of creative writing instructors was missing from scholarly channels, rendering the much-discussed and gossiped about topic nearly invisible. The theme of invisibility runs through much of the work that has been done thus far in theorizing creative writing. In “MFA vs. POC,” Junot Díaz describes invisibility on many levels: the failure of the workshop to examine how “racial identities...impacted our writing,” the lack of any conversations about race except “the rare occasion someone wanted to argue that race discussions were exactly the discussion a serious writer should *not* be having,” the withheld traditions of canonical writers such as “Toni Morrison, Cherrie Moraga, Maxine Hong-Kingston, Arundhati Roy, Edwidge Danticat, Alice Walker, or Jamaica Kincaid” in favor of “writers like William Gaddis, Francine Prose, or Alice Munro,” and the not-so-hidden literary bias where “Literature with a capital L—was white, straight and male” (Díaz).

With these critiques in mind, we find scholarship seeking to increase visibility specifically within the archive of writers on writing. A May 5, 2017 post on the De-canon: A Visibility Project website (de-canon.com) entitled, “Writers of Color Discussing Craft—An

Invisible Archive” argued that discussions of craft have relied upon an all “too white” set of voices, to borrow Díaz’s terminology. Similarly, we find the “Thinking Its Presence Conference” at the University of Arizona Poetry Center in the fall of 2017, whose theme is José Esteban Muñoz’s concept of the “ephemeral archive.” Its call for submissions speaks to Díaz’s concerns as well:

What is lost, found, recovered, carried, (de)fetishized, recorded, accreted, (de)authenticated, faced with deletion, elided, made mythic, performed, reenacted, residual, embodied, anecdotal and made evidence, where race, language, queerness and the creative arts intersect? While such discussions on these topics and creative writing in the academy in general, and within MFA programs, are still few and far between. (“TIP 2017”).

So, we should be heartened to begin to hear many voices emerge from that cloak of invisibility that has beset graduate creative writing programs in particular. Lynn Neary’s 2014 NPR report, “In Elite MFA Programs, The Challenge of Writing While 'Other'” also brought this topic to popular audiences.

Even creative writing studies itself, as an emerging field, has a visibility issue. During my pre-exam meeting, a committee member and noted scholar in the field asked, understandably, something to the effect of: “Is this field really a thing?” Even insiders to creative writing studies find themselves asking the same question. One graduate student researcher who presented a large scale quantitative analysis of creative writing pedagogies at the First Annual Creative Writing Studies Conference in 2016 admitted on the Creative Writing Pedagogy Facebook group (with over 4,000 members) in early 2017 that she was not completely aware of creative writing studies as being a distinct field from composition studies. Tim Mayers recommends (in the soon-to-be-

published 10th anniversary edition of *Can It Really Be Taught?*) that all MFA students take a course in the disciplinary history of English, so as to better understand both the creative writing pedagogy landscape and the historical lineages of canonical texts, English subfields, and differing teaching approaches. In this manner, the work of academic creative writing instruction would engage students through texts like D.G. Myers's *The Elephants Teach*, as well as other histories that focus on the proliferation of the MFA.

Pop culture mythologies of “the writer” and “the writing class” are still as visible as ever, and often misdirect student expectations of what they will find in a creative writing or first-year writing course. Essayist Dinty Moore remarks that one of the major challenges of creative writing pedagogy is the “popular notion that creative writing classes consist of celebrated writers lecturing the kids about how exactly it should be done” (“What Is?”). While that is certainly an antiquated notion, the process of a text’s production still possesses the power to engage writing students by appealing to the student’s sense of history. *The New York Times* recently ran a quiz (see Fig. 7) in conjunction with a book review of Garson O’Toole’s “Hemingway Didn’t Say That: The Truth Behind Familiar Quotations.” O’Toole also runs the website “quoteinvestigator.com,” which seeks out the original derivation of famous sayings that are frequently misattributed (like the “kill your darlings” example in Chapter 1). That the quiz appears alongside the article suggests that there is popular interest in aphorisms, and in the act of tracing out how and when they were deployed. As instructors, we should note this development as a sign that “lore as a history” has the potential to be gamified as well as storified as wide audiences seem to engage with this material in enjoyable ways.

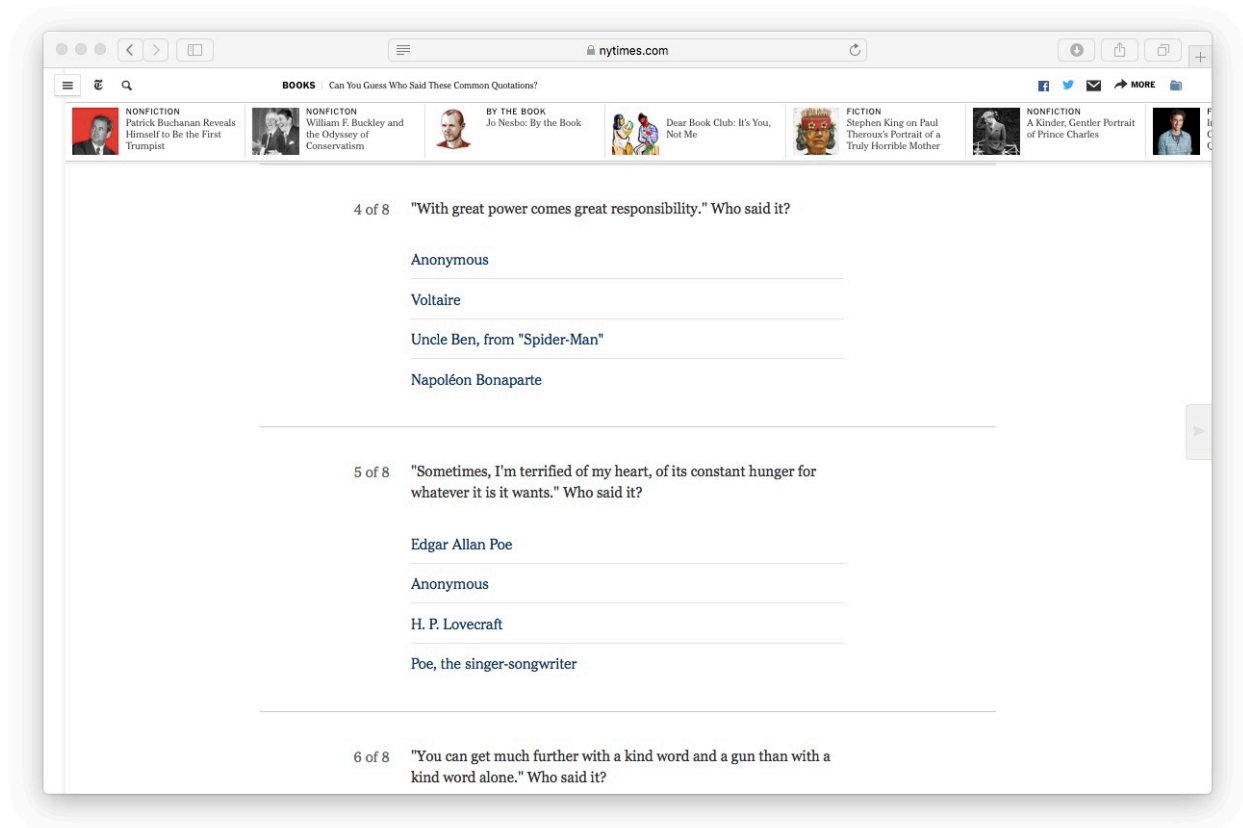


Figure 7. "Can You Guess Who Said These Common Quotations?" Niraj Chokshi, April 28, 2017.

Composition, Creative Writing, and Living in the Future (of English Studies)

In Todd Taylor's, "A Methodology of Our Own," from 2003, Taylor outlines how "composition researchers can stop feeling guilty about their lack of paradigm; they can stop worrying so much about having a room of their own because no one believes paradigms can hold up anymore within the postmodern landscape" (148). In order to fully individuate as an independent discipline, composition studies had to move past its reliance on lore, but once it was granted disciplinary space and a certain degree of status, the field could start to branch out again. While Taylor warns that the "discipline is being pulled (perhaps apart) in many directions," we see a consistent call, from Hesse and others, for the incorporation of creative writing into first-

year composition, even as creative writing's own theorists point out the problems inherent to the "traditional product-centered creative writing workshop [that] gives little to no attention to invention and creativity, to how poems, short stories, essays or places, are actually *constructed*" (Vanderslice, "Once More to The Workshop" 33). With this in mind, Tim Mayers suggests in *(Re)Writing Craft* that craft can serve as a bridging term for literary studies, creative writing, and first-year composition in a partnership that uses composition and rhetorical concerns (authorship, process, genre, and institutionality) to create a more unified paradigm.

The potential for crossover from creative writing into first-year composition seems to be centered around the move away from any composition pedagogy that solely teaches argument, and away from "standardized syllabi in which students have limited choice about what they write" in favor of "student-centered" spaces (B. Williams, "Dancing with Don"). Creative writing's consistent high enrollments should speak to that student-centeredness, as well as the potential for "expressive writing" to bridge the achievement gap. A recent study by Jordan Peterson, a psychologist at the University of Toronto, demonstrated that a course of writing exercises that combines expressive writing with "setting goals" brought about a near elimination of "the gender and ethnic minority achievement gap for 700 students" (NPR). A growing number of psychologists who study "the role that mental motivation plays in academic achievement—sometimes conceptualized as 'grit' or a 'growth mindset'⁵⁵ or 'executive functioning'" are performing similar experiments (Kamanetz). So far, many are finding similar outcomes to "experiments going back to the 1980s" when cognitivists showed that "expressive writing can reduce depression, increase productivity and even cut down on visits to the doctor." Christine Brophy used these expressive writing techniques as part the original University of Toronto study,

⁵⁵ Carol Dweck, author *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*, is most frequently associated with "growth mindsets" vs. "fixed mindsets."

and successfully fended off drug abuse and health issues following her completion of the writing exercises, specifically those where she, along with other participants, “[wrote] down their internal motivations and connect[ed] daily efforts to blue-sky goals. . . . [which] may have helped these young people solidify their identities as students.” We should wholeheartedly consider this experimental model for future studies, especially in relation to the way famous tidbits of author testimony invite student idealism toward the writing process, while simultaneously refocusing students’ “daily efforts” to smaller, more manageable tasks.

Any lengthy consideration of the future of English Studies eventually abuts the rhetorical concept of the “Scandal of Doxa.” Similar to Muckelbauer’s claim that we are always trapped in a dialectic when making inroads in pedagogical innovation, J. Robert Cox claims rhetorical discourse is trapped because it has become “constrained by its materials”—the commonly held beliefs that exist in the present (Jaskinski 186). How are we to precipitate what does not yet exist? The imitative, often intertextual model of invention relies on the act of “locat[ing] speakers and writers in a world of other texts and voices that help to shape the generation of discourse” (Jasinski 329). This mode of invention is also one with social dynamics—at play within the communal networked web of associated actors and also within the scholarly communities themselves, who share a common cultural memory. If actor-network theory takes a snapshot of the model of invention at one point in time, then so too are student identifies both forming and being formed by this network. Rhetorical invention is relevant to creative writing and still relevant to first-year composition. How will each field use what we already have? Regardless of what we may find in the future, the boundaries between “the critical” and “the creative” will, with a fair amount of certainty, be somewhere just off the map.

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