

Wendy Bishop:  
A Feminist Voice at the Intersections of Composition, Creative Writing, and  
Ethnography



AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Alice L. Rosman for the degree of Master of Arts in English presented on June 11, 2013.  
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Wendy Bishop's lively voice and scholarly contribution continue to resonate and be important in composition studies. Bishop—poet, scholar, feminist, teacher, ethnographer, and compositionist—sought to blur the lines between creative writing and composition. This thesis argues that in challenging the boundaries that exist between creative writing and composition, Bishop also challenged the field-coverage model of English studies. Bishop's extensive work in ethnography demonstrates her commitment to narrative and to the voices of marginalized populations in academia. This thesis advocates for a reconsideration of Bishop's work by illustrating connections between her work at the nexus of creative writing and composition, ethnography, and her arguments for a more inclusive English studies. It draws connections between Bishop's work and the scholarship of third wave feminist ethnographers of the same period, pointing out the ways that others have successfully used creative writing to build bridges between marginalized and dominant cultures in academia. These connections re-contextualize Wendy Bishop's contribution to composition studies and creative writing and point to ways that her work continues to be important. The conclusion looks at some of the ways

that Bishop's legacy continues to be carried forward by important scholars in both composition and creative writing studies.

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Wendy Bishop: A Feminist Voice at the Intersections of Composition, Creative Writing, and  
Ethnography

By  
Alice L. Rosman

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes the release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Alice L. Rosman, Author

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## **Chapter 1: Wendy Bishop and The Best of Both Worlds**

### **Introduction**

“I have long been one who preferred to be among others *only* if I can choose my own way,” Wendy Bishop declared in “Against the Odds in Composition and Rhetoric,” her 2001 chair’s address at the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) (326). True to her words, Bishop carved her own path, weaving in and out of the supposedly impenetrable barrier that separates creative writing and composition studies in English departments. In doing so, she challenged the current field-coverage model and pushed towards a field of English that would embrace the new and diverse.

Since my first term as a graduate student and writing instructor, Wendy Bishop’s writing has inspired me as a teacher, writer, feminist, and scholar. I came upon Bishop’s 1994 essay “Crossing the Lines: On Creative Composition and Composing Creative Writing” while researching the role that creative writing might play in the first-year writing classroom. In this essay, Bishop argues that “the line that seems to divide composition from creative writing” is problematic and that it is essential to ask questions that “move into both territories from this disturbing spot in no-person’s land where we reside together” (235). She tells the stories of three students who express confusion at the seeming dichotomy created by the categories of creative writing and composition, a binary that Bishop grapples with in much of her own scholarly work.

As an MA in writing and rhetoric with a background in creative writing, I found Bishop’s argument in “Crossing the Lines” to be compelling. Like Bishop and her students, I have often found that navigating the line that separates creative writing and

composition is a confusing and challenging task. Bishop's student Fran expresses this in a journal entry: "Is creative writing stuff that is done for fun and composition stuff that the teacher makes you do?...Then I wrote a paper that was required, and it turned out to be fun. What??!" (221). Fran's frustration and surprise resonated in me. I often feel that perhaps I ought to have been an MFA in creative writing, and I can't help but be nostalgic about my workshops and the writing community of which I was a part during my time as an undergraduate.

Writing for me began as a creative act. For as long as I can remember, I have carried around a notebook everywhere I go. Growing up, I wrote at the kitchen table, in the back of my algebra class, on a blanket beneath a cherry tree in my mother's orchard, and in the hot leather seat of a wheat truck between driving loads to the grain elevators. Writing has been paramount in exploring my identity and in discovering my voice. Through writing, I am able to construct descriptions of spaces in new ways, draw multifaceted characters that reflect parts of my own personality, and build plotlines. I am also able to creatively and freely examine my experiences and belief systems, and to determine how I negotiate my identities of writer, teacher, scholar, feminist, reader, farm girl, etc. My joy in playing with craft and voice in creative writing is equaled only by the thrill of discovering an argument when writing a research paper—an assignment that typically falls within the perimeters of composition. And so I am constantly searching and, like Wendy Bishop, wondering if there's a way that I can have the best of both worlds.

Throughout her scholarship, Wendy Bishop attempts to make sense of the artificial boundaries that exist between creative writing and composition. In both her scholarly and creative work she challenges these boundaries in a variety of ways. As a poet-writer-teacher-scholar, she argues that creative writing and composition should inform each other more, and that creative, experimental writing can be valuable to first-year writing students. In “Crossing the Lines” she contends that “students are well prepared for future academic writing when they explore creativity, authorship, textuality, and so on, *together, all at once*. In fact...they are more prepared to think about and perform the complicated act of writing when they study in this way” (233). Furthermore, she argues that writing teachers should be crossing these lines themselves, using narrative and creative forms to share their voices and experiences, then teaching what they practice in their classrooms.

When I read “Crossing the Lines” for the first time, I felt as if, after pawing around blind in the dark for a pedagogy that made sense to me, I had uncovered the secret to the teaching universe. During the summer preceding my first term as a graduate instructor, I had developed grand plans of making my students fall in love with writing and of showing them the power of good writing. But in my mind, most of the “good” writing I envisioned was what most would consider creative writing, and I was teaching first-year composition. Bishop’s contention that the two could and should exist synchronously in the classroom inspired me to explore her works in more detail. Bishop’s scholarship captivated me in unexpected ways. I was quickly drawn in by her lively and

descriptive writing style, including her tendency to break from a paragraph of academic prose in a scholarly essay to explore a topic more deeply by writing a poem.

Integrating poetry into her academic writing is one way that Wendy Bishop dismantles the walls between composition and creative writing. Often these poems shed light onto Bishop's thought processes at a different level than her academic prose. Bishop defends her choice to do this in her essay "Places to Stand: The Reflective Writer-Teacher-Writer in Composition.":

I do my mixing, not to elevate genres but to intermingle them, not to venerate the poetic or belletristic but to point out that each brings us to our senses though in different modes and tones. Because styles, genres, and syntax seem both to prompt and predict thought, I need to think in and through them all. (17)

For Bishop, the poetic and belletristic are invaluable to understanding her thoughts and writing process. After reading this as well as many of her poems (some of which I have included in this thesis), I was inspired to explore my own thoughts on pedagogy in new forms, from short creative essays to free-form poetry. Like Bishop, I have found that formats considered nontraditional in composition often push my thinking and my writing voice into unexpected and intriguing directions.

Bishop demonstrates the value of mixing writing genres within her own works; she also takes care to bring the voices and experiences of other teachers and students into her scholarly writing. Students like Fran from "Crossing the Lines" become characters that come to life on the page. Often this results from the descriptive writing her students engage in. Take, for instance, Bishop's quote from her student Ben in her essay "Telling

Process Stories, Drawing Product Lessons.” The following is Ben’s narrative response to a prompt on when and how he writes:

It’s past two in the morning now; the hall is quiet. My roommate isn’t here; he’s out partying as usual. It’s better this way, no distractions. I sit down. My computer’s word processor is already running. I scoot my chair back from the screen, set the keyboard on my lap, and prop my feet on top of the desk. I stare at the screen, type a few words, delete a few words, and get up. It’s not right. (148)

Many of Bishop’s essays, especially those that appear in textbooks she authored, edited, or co-edited, include process narratives like Ben’s. She also includes students’ responses to assignments as well as their reactions to various classroom exercises. And, perhaps most importantly, she includes essays written by her students along with teachers, creative writers, and composition scholars in the anthologies she edits. Bishop does not simply condone creative and personal writing as practices for students to express themselves; she finds value in their contributions to scholarly conversations.

As a writing teacher, I have been strongly influenced by Bishop’s scholarship, and by my second term teaching, I was implementing many of her exercises in my classroom. It was not until I began to study Bishop’s work in greater depth, however, that I began to see her as more than a poet and scholar working at the intersections of creative writing and composition. Bishop began her career within composition studies by using ethnographic research methods, and although she did not continue using the methodology, ethnography became an important theme that she integrated into her scholarship. In her 1997 essay “Having Been There: The Second Ethnography and On,” Bishop comments on this:

I began to teach research methods courses in ethnography, I began to read post-modern ethnographic theorists, I began to push the boundaries of methods and writing style in smaller scale research projects. In that sense, I was more fully living the ethnographic life than I had earlier. Such a life was no longer “out there”—a project to be done for credentialing—but it was also “in here,” all mixed up, a part and parcel of my academic and writing life and I had to learn to accept and negotiate this new, seemingly boundary-less existence. (212)

Bishop’s ethnographic life and writing life also walked hand-in-hand with her teaching life, and as I read through her work, I began to recognize the rich ways they each informed one another. Bishop’s boundary-crossing conversations drew from her background in creative writing, her experiences as a teacher of writing, her sustained life as a poet, and her commitment to ethnographic research methods and theory.

In the late 1980s and 1990s, the time in which Bishop wrote the majority of her scholarship and utilized ethnographic research methods, postmodern and feminist ethnographers argued for changes in anthropology much like those Bishop advocates in composition. Bishop references the conversations and successes of postmodern anthropologists in several of her scholarly essays, including “Crossing the Lines”:

Ethnographers...are entertaining critiques of one hundred fifty years of field research, purporting to detail the “real” life of other cultures.... Certain anthropologists argue that ethnographic reporting involves “telling” the life of the researcher as much or more as the life of the studied culture. Influenced by current critical theory, these individuals acknowledge the subjective and ideological nature of their profession, based as it is on human experience.... Those exploring these views challenge anthropology’s original values, those of positivist research, an empiricism grounded in “true” facts and “pure” data. (228)

Bishop goes on to argue that English studies needs to follow postmodern ethnographers’ lead and to question the “self-limiting ideas of the ‘true’ relationship of fact and fiction” that it has previously fought to rigidly maintain (228).

Bishop's connections to ethnography, I believe, provide a rich and interesting perspective from which to view Bishop's scholarship. Bishop's self-definition as a feminist scholar makes this connection all the more intriguing. She discusses her commitment to feminism in several of her works, most notably in her 1990 essay "Learning Our Own Ways to Situate Composition and Feminist Studies in the English Department," and makes efforts throughout her scholarship to address populations typically on the margins of the discipline, including graduate students and classroom teachers. In "Learning Our Own Ways," she argues that "those from the dominant culture need to interact with and enter into the minority cultures' concerns" (345) and ponders ways feminists and those in composition can engage the dominant culture of literature faculty members in meaningful conversation. Here, again, she points to the connections between the marginalized cultures in English studies and multicultural groups of students who are excluded from the primarily white, male, middle to upper class canon in the field. These connections have expanded my understanding of her work and, I believe, are important in viewing Bishop's contribution to the field of composition, and to English studies as a whole.

In my thesis, I posit that Bishop's work in ethnography and alignment with postmodern feminist ethnographic theory provide a compelling and rich lens through which we can view her boundary-crossing conversations in composition and creative writing. In making this argument, I intentionally resist views, as Bishop did, that place her scholarship within a single taxonomical label, specifically those described by James Berlin in his 1988 essay "Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class." In chapter two,



“The Literature and Legacy of Wendy Bishop,” I provide an overview of her works during her prolific career in composition studies, including her first major contribution to the field using ethnographic research methods. I also in this chapter discuss the controversial taxonomy attributed primarily to James Berlin as it has been applied to Bishop’s work. As I discuss in further detail later on, Berlin’s labels do not adequately represent Wendy Bishop’s contribution to composition studies. Bishop’s work in ethnography in particular defied the limits of these labels and, in the end, Berlin’s taxonomy did not stop Bishop from becoming an influential figure in the field.

In chapter three, “A Commitment to Ethnographic Research Methods,” I examine the historical background and methods of ethnography, both in anthropology and composition studies, before describing in further detail Bishop’s ethnographic study and her reflections on the methodology. In my discussion of ethnography, I illustrate the ways in which it is by nature both social and personal, and therefore challenging of Berlin’s limiting labels. This chapter lends insight into how ethnography influenced Bishop’s scholarship at the nexus of creative writing and composition.

In chapter four, “Living the Ethnographic Life,” I illustrate the ways in which Bishop’s commitment to ethnography and ethnographic theory is evident even in her scholarship that does not explicitly focus on this research methodology. I look specifically at those of her works that argue for a field of composition more informed by creative writing as well as her texts that put this argument into practice. I draw connections between these works and the works of feminist ethnographers of the same time period, pointing out that they both question current field models that promote

exclusion. In order to build bridges between these field models and the diverse populations who increasingly inhabit the academy, both feminist ethnographers and Wendy Bishop advocate for more narrative and experimentation in writing. These connections, I argue, provide important insights into Bishop's scholarship and ways in which we may carry her legacy forward.

With this thesis, I hope to contribute to an ongoing conversation celebrating and interpreting Wendy Bishop's scholarship and the legacy she left behind. By viewing her work as not just that of a poet/writer/teacher, but also that of a feminist and an ethnographer, I hope to articulate a more in depth analysis of her scholarship. Finally, in gaining a more thorough and rich understanding of her scholarship, I hope to be able to use Bishop's pedagogy effectively in my own writing classroom to create an environment that embraces diversity and gives agency to student-writers.

## Chapter 2: The Literature and Legacy of Wendy Bishop

“I’ve only started—  
 but I have lived long enough to know that every past  
 has its own words, welcomes its own elegy.  
 Here’s enough work, then, for my small eternity:  
 I set out dictionaries on the hard wood floor—  
 resume my diligent earthly study.”  
 --from “A New Poem About Old Losses” (22-30).

Wendy Bishop’s untimely death from leukemia in 2003 marked the loss of one of creative writing and composition’s most ardent and poetic voices. During her twenty-five years as a scholar, Bishop led what her colleagues Patrick Bizzaro and Alys Cuhane have deemed “a quiet revolution” (xi). Wendy Bishop, in many ways, was a pioneer in both creative writing pedagogy and composition studies (xii). As a poet with a master’s degree in creative writing and a doctorate in composition, Bishop sought to reshape the teaching of writing by blurring genres and breaking down the walls between the writing disciplines. A prolific and highly respected scholar and teacher, Bishop received several honors during her career, including the title of Kellogg W. Hunt Distinguished Professor of English at Florida State University in 2001. Towards the end of her career, Bishop was elected Chair of the Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) and Co-Vice President and a member of the Board of Directors of the Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP) (“Wendy Bishop”). In her 1999 essay “Places to Stand: The Reflective Writer-Teacher-Writer in Composition,” she reflects on her career in this way:

Years 1-5, I move from avid creative writer to creative writer who found the field treacherous, heart-breaking, unsympathetic to an engaged writer who teaches but is confused about this teaching thing.... Years 5-10 I spent in adjunct limbo—wandering, wondering where to go. Years 10-15

in novitiate's bliss, I engaged the imagined enemies, threw myself into the ring along with my hat, and tried to affect my profession by becoming a teacher who writes about teaching. I was waist-deep in the vernacular.... But then (insert if you wish a "lo and behold" here), slowly, the oracular re-ascended particularly during years 15-20, and I tried breathlessly to be not only tri-dialectical (literary, compositionist, and creative) but also thoroughly academic (and I am, but it's an every-day effort). When that paled, I found myself saying, I can survive. I'm lucky. I can be just a writer again. If I have to be. Most odd, all the years, 1-20, I'm teaching. Teaching writing. Teaching writing as a writer. Wondering how it could be any other way. (21)

Bishop's rich and diverse scholarship throughout her career reflects this timeline. During her lifetime, she authored, co-authored, edited, or co-edited twenty-two scholarly books, numerous articles, as well as several poetry chapbooks and short stories. In this chapter, I provide an overview of Bishop's work within composition studies. This literature review is by no means exhaustive. Rather, I focus most directly on her works at the intersections of creative writing and composition, including her textbooks and readers that bring these two disciplines together. Her scholarship in this area pushes at the boundaries of both composition studies and creative writing and demonstrates her commitment to student voices, experimental forms, and a more diverse and inclusive field of English studies. I also briefly discuss Bishop's ethnographic work here before looking at this topic in further detail in chapter two.

### *Literature Review*

Wendy Bishop's academic career began in poetry with her unpublished Master's thesis "Cat Killer" at the University of California-Davis in 1976. Her transition from creative writing to composition studies is perhaps best understood in the context of a

comment about the two fields from the introduction to her 1997 collection *Teaching*

*Lives*:

I see creative writing as a very competitive profession where each student is grooming him- or herself to be the *best* writer, thinking in terms of *service for* (oneself). I find the field of composition to be more collegial (although certainly there *is* competition), filled with colleagues who are trying to solve problems in writing classrooms; these are people who tend to think in terms of *service toward*. I find a better home in the latter. (viii)

Twelve years after completing her English Master's degree thesis in poetry, Wendy Bishop earned her Ph.D. in English from Indiana University of Pennsylvania and began her career in composition. In 1990, she published a revised version of her 1988 dissertation (originally titled "A Microethnography With Case Studies of Teacher Development Through a Graduate Course in Writing") under the title *Something Old, Something New: College Writing Teachers and Classroom Change*.

Her first single-authored book in composition studies, *Something Old, Something New* uses ethnography, a qualitative research methodology that examines cultural phenomena, to document a group of five teachers as they go from a low-residency summer doctoral seminar titled "Teaching Basic Writing" back to their writing classrooms at other universities. When Bishop began her research, very little was published on the ways that ethnography might be undertaken as a research methodology in the field of composition. Furthermore, according to Bishop, "Few research studies of teachers as learners [were] available, particularly at the college level" (*Something Old* xii). Although there were few case studies like hers published within composition studies at the time of Bishop's research, she was able to rely on the extensive ethnographic research in anthropology to inform and structure her research methods. Bishop's use of

ethnography plays an important role in my thesis, and I will discuss her use of this methodology in more detail in the next chapter.

Two years before beginning her dissertation project, Bishop had taken the same seminar at the same university as her research subjects and returned to her own writing classroom to implement what she had learned. In the introduction to *Something Old, Something New*, Bishop writes that she “wanted to describe what learning was valuable and how [reentry graduate student] teacher[s] of writing used [their] degree work to inform...subsequent college writing classroom[s]” (xi). To do so, she conducted five case studies over a one-year period, each comprising a chapter of her book. Bishop begins each case study by describing the subject’s teaching background, philosophy, and concerns as he or she entered the course on Teaching Basic Writing. Following this description, Bishop elaborates on the specific way the teacher changed or remained consistent during both the seminar and the return to his or her classroom in the fall. Next, Bishop discusses the teacher’s “home institution and writing class,” describing the curriculum, individual assignments, and writing evaluation and how these evolve to encompass techniques and activities proposed in the Teaching Basic Writing seminar. The final section of each case study is a discussion summarizing and analyzing the teacher’s experience.

Bishop weaves in the voices of the teachers being studied with detailed observation and analysis. For example, Peg, one of the teachers studied, is quoted several times throughout her case study as she grows more resistant and disillusioned to classroom collaboration, a practice encouraged in the Teaching Basic Writing course. In

the section of the chapter discussing Peg's concerns, Bishop writes that "Peg yearned for a 'true' connection to her students. She talked about 'reaching' students and achieving 'rapport,' which was an exhilarating feeling" (65). However, according to Bishop, Peg struggled with building a relationship with her students and often grew frustrated with them. In the discussion section of her chapter, Peg expresses this frustration: "Once again, my idealism has taken a blow.... This is a good group; however,....there are still many students who have not grasped the concept of accountability. This is the point where I lose patience with students" (77-78). Peg felt that much of this problem stemmed from the collaborative classroom that the Teaching Basic Writing Seminar had stressed. In the end, Bishop writes, "Peg did not...abandon her commitment to one-to-one instruction and the solitary nature of the writing act" (82).

Peg's resistance grew out of her personal preferences as a teacher. This marks a trend that Bishop recognizes throughout all of the case studies. Bishop's research began with the following questions: "What significant, affective, cognitive, or pedagogical changes will [participants] have undergone?" and "Are the changes short-term or long-term?" (xii). But the final chapter of *Something Old, Something New* focuses on how the case studies respond to a question that surfaced in the middle of the research process: "How do teachers, and individuals, create and maintain social, professional, and personal identities?" (129). Bishop answers this question by reviewing and analyzing each of the case studies and observing that teachers' identities and "personal constructs...affected the way their classrooms actually developed" (130) and that teachers' worldviews—both

those maintained and changed—are more influential in teacher change than individual research findings.

Each of the teachers Bishop studied adopted and discarded different aspects of the Teaching Basic Writing seminar based on his or her “complex belief systems and pre-existing attitudes” about students and teaching. Bishop concludes that the influence of individual personalities makes the process of teacher change a “taxing process of “(re)theorization and (re)identification,” and one that continues to alter over time (139). It is important to note that Bishop focused her case studies around only five teachers, calling her ethnography a “microethnography” due to its small scale. Throughout her scholarship, Bishop maintains an emphasis on the experiences of individuals and uses narrative to write about them. Michael Strickland, in his 1991 review of *Something Old, Something New*, referred to her case studies as stories that “tell us about our lives as teachers” (458) and, in his foreword to *Something Old, Something New*, Patrick Hartwell writes that the “narrative rings true, as we say of good fiction, and Wendy’s observations have the texture of felt life” (vii). Both of these aspects of her ethnography—a focus on the ways individuals negotiate identities and the use of narrative—play important roles throughout Bishop’s scholarship.

Bishop would return to ethnography several times throughout her scholarship. However, her early work following *Something Old, Something New* covered a wide range of topics. In the same year (1990), Bishop published *Released Into Language: Options for Teaching Creative Writing* as well as scholarly articles examining student tutors in writing centers and the positioning of feminists in the field of composition (an essay I’ll



discuss in detail in chapter three). In the introduction to *Released into Language*, Bishop characterizes the period in which she was writing:

Today, in English departments, lively controversies are afoot. There has been a rapid growth in literary theory and practice, feminist and Marxist critiques of English studies, and composition research and theory....These developments are changing English studies and thinking in these areas should inform our work as teachers of creative writing. Here is our opportunity to participate in the exciting (although contentious) academic growth we seem to be needing. (xviii)

Bishop responds to this opportunity by arguing in *Released into Language* that the field of creative writing needs to “be responsive to theoretical and pedagogical changes taking place in literature studies and composition studies (not to mention cultural studies, feminist studies, and linguistics)” and to question the current workshop model (xix).

Bishop attests that workshops are increasingly product-oriented and devoted to the examination of final products (12). This reflects the initial Iowa workshop model, one that assumes that “writers can be nurtured but not really taught” (xv). Bishop suggests that the field of creative writing examine cognitive, process-oriented research occurring in composition studies, citing important figures like Mina Shaughnessy and Patricia Bizzell. She also argues in favor of a “transactional workshop.” This model, according to Bishop, “puts writers in motion” by devoting class time to invention, process analysis, and revision strategies (1).

One exercise that Bishop describes in detail as part of the “transactional workshop” pedagogy is “guided journal writing” in class to help students explore process issues. Bishop remarks that these writing-about-writing exercises in creative writing classes often turn into “final portfolio pieces that show a great investment in time, energy,

and belief” (31). Bishop provides prompts such as “Writing is a...” and “Recipe for...” that require creative thinking as well as self-reflection. Bishop includes the following example from a student:

Writing is a Bear

At its worst, writing is a grizzly: a scavenger who makes ordinary garbage his haute cuisine. The grizzly can attack without warning, nibbling the soft underbelly of your conscience, tearing your heart and devouring your blood. Contrariwise, when you search for him he often flees into camouflage, eluding you, frustrating you for days, months or years... (32)

Bishop also invites students to share these informal writing assignments with their classmates, thereby creating an environment where both the writing teacher and writing students are learning from one another (34).

In 1992, Chuck Guilford praised *Released Into Language* in *College Composition and Communication* as being an “innovative and effective pedagogical package” (108). Bishop became known as a pioneer in the underdeveloped field of creative writing pedagogy, a field that has expanded considerably since *Released Into Language*. This is evident in Bishop’s extended bibliography in the 1998 second edition of *Released Into Language* where publications from both creative writers and composition theorists are listed. However, whether this pedagogical theory has had an impact on actual creative writing teachers in the university is debatable. In his essay “Because of Wendy” on the scholarship of Wendy Bishop, Ben Ristow contends that there has been a lack of response from creative writers in the university. Instead he cites scholars Patrick Bizzaro, Katharine Haake, and Tim Mayers—scholars at the intersections of creative writing and composition—as continuing to foster a collaboration between the two disciplines (217).

Bishop later reflects on her choice to mix creative writing and composition in her essay “Composing Ourselves as (Creative) Writers,” included in *Teaching Lives*:

Writing captured me and composition helped me understand that captivation. After unbraiding and uncomposing my selves within the academy in order to learn specialized skills and certain discourses, in order to participate in elect and select societies, I decided intentionally to rebraid and recompose my self through teaching creative and compositional strategies together.” (“Composing Ourselves as (Creative) Writers” 219)

Works such as *Released into Language* that blend creative and compositional strategies showcase Bishop’s willingness to challenge those who believe the two fields should remain separate. As a follow-up to this work, Bishop published *Working Words: The Process of Creative Writing* (1991), a single-authored textbook for creative writing students that enacts the process approach she advocates in *Released into Language*. The chapters in this book discuss how to break down and mimic a writer’s moves, how to give and receive feedback, how to revise, and other process-oriented exercises. Most striking about this textbook, however, are the copious number of student responses to the exercises included. Bishop invites readers of the textbook to add to these responses “by writing your own creative piece or imitation or journal entry, considering why a portion of their writing is successful or unsuccessful” (2). Bishop emphasizes the importance of the student responses that she includes in her textbook, observing that they made her “think more deeply about writers and writing,” and she challenges her readers to use them in the same way (3).

In 1993, Bishop began what would become a series of anthologies for students by publishing *The Subject is Writing*. Like *Working Words*, *The Subject is Writing* employed the writing of both students and teachers as well as Bishop’s own essay “When All

Writing is Creative and Student Writing is Literature” supporting this mix of voices. In this essay, Bishop argues that when students view their writing as literature, it has the potential to become “a supremely satisfying human activity” to share with others. Bishop cites student responses to a prompt asking them to define literature. Most wrote definitions that include involved writers who feel strongly about their work and take risks in their writing (197). Bishop pushes student-writers to care about their writing in the same way and to resist the belief that literature is only that which is published, a belief some students indicated in their definitions (197). *The Subject is Writing* was followed in 2000 with *The Subject is Reading: Essays by Teachers and Students*, *The Subject is Research: Processes and Practices* in 2001 co-edited with Pavel Zemliansky, and *The Subject is Story: Essays for Writers and Readers* in 2003 co-edited with Hans Ostrom. Each of these anthologies follows a similar organizational model to *The Subject is Writing*. I discuss *The Subject is Story* in more detail later on.

In 1993, Bishop also published “Crossing the Lines: On Creative Composition and Composing Creative Writing” in *Writing on the Edge* (reprinted in 1994 in *Colors of A Different Horse: Rethinking Creative Writing Theory and Pedagogy*, co-edited by Wendy Bishop and Hans A. Ostrom). In this essay, Bishop positions herself as a writing teacher moving between the “worlds of composition classes and creative writing classes, [her] pedagogy in each [becoming] more similar” as she did so (223). However, Bishop explains, this position was not supported within English studies where a clear hierarchy separates the two writing disciplines (223). Bishop agrees with the position that Robert Scholes takes in *Textual Power*:

Scholes describes how the institution of English studies has always valued the consumption of texts (interpretation and reading) over the production of texts (all writing) and that in the four-tiered hierarchy of the traditional English department, creative writing ranks as pseudo-literature (literature in the wings) and is valued over composition (pseudo-nonliterature). Both, in turn, are subservient to literature. (226)

Like Scholes, Bishop challenges this hierarchy. In her essay, she incorporates student voices who express confusion at the distinctions between creative writing and composition and suggests that perhaps students are confused because “English studies as a profession is confused” (227). The “wealth of issues and questions” (234) that Bishop raises at the division of composition and creative writing is important to her scholarship, and, as I explain later, directly related to her goals of creating a field that does not marginalize minority populations.

In 1997, Wendy Bishop published *Teaching Lives: Essays and Stories*, a collection of twenty-three of her major critical essays. The essays included all speak to Bishop’s “teaching life” and to her effort to write about and enact her commitment to teaching. In the preface to her book, Bishop suggests that one way she negotiates and serves her two identities—that of writer and teacher—is by fashioning “a teaching life through ... writing about writing and about teaching writing” (ix). The essays in the book are broken into six sections: “Composing Ourselves in the Writing Classroom,” “Composing Ourselves as Readers,” “Composing Ourselves as Department Members and Administrators,” “Composing Ourselves as Researchers,” “Composing Ourselves as (Creative) Writers,” and “Composing Ourselves Through Teaching.” In each section Bishop writes about how she negotiates academic identities and the liminal spaces created by juggling these various selves. These essays, along with the introductions in

each of the sections, demonstrate Bishop's commitment to teaching and to actively practicing the pedagogy she promotes in her classrooms. The last section, "Composing Ourselves Through Teaching," in particular includes essays that illustrate her appreciation for a well-rounded academic and teaching life. She discusses this final section in the preface to the book:

[The essays] investigate the pleasures of maturity, of endurance, of commitment, adding up what I've learned from being in the classroom and the department meeting, the administrative session, the writers contest, the conference panel, and again, and always, the classroom. After twenty years of teaching and writing—and an intensive ten years of writing about both—I've come to see that teaching is a way of life that I can't and wouldn't do without. (x)

Bishop was deeply committed to her teaching life as well as her writing life and ethnographic life. In "Having Been There: The Second Ethnography and On," an essay included in the "Composing Ourselves as Researchers" section of *Teaching Lives*, Bishop discusses her movement away from doing ethnography to living an ethnographic life by writing about ethnography and using the research methodology to interpret the field of composition in new ways. In 1999, two years later, Bishop published *Ethnographic Writing Research: Writing It Up, Writing It Down, and Reading It*. In the same style as her how-to essays, Bishop explores ethnographic research methods in the book by reflecting on her own experience as well as instructing others on how to use ethnography in their own research.

"I hope," Bishop writes in the introduction to *Ethnographic Writing Research*, "to open this methodology to scrutiny, discussion, and practice" (x). To accomplish this, Bishop breaks the book down into six subdivisions: "Defining It," "Understanding the

Process: A Global View,” “Getting There and Being There in Person,” “Understanding the Process: Local Views,” “Writing It Up,” and “Reading Ethnographic Writing Research.” Bishop also includes an afterword on how to take ethnography onward to new projects, as well as two appendices discussing ethnography with essays by authors Donna N. Sewell, Devan Cook, Ellen Schendel, and Patricia Hendricks. In 1999, Hamlett et al. reviewed *Ethnographic Writing Research* in *CCC* as “a practical guide to conducting, writing, and reading ethnography in composition” (312). Moreover, they observe that Bishop does more than tell readers how to conduct an ethnographic writing research project: “She also candidly and eloquently delves into the methodological, political, and ethical complexities of ethnographic writing research, which, more than fifteen years after its emergence, is still one of the most controversial research methods in composition studies” (312). Drawing on both skeptics (see *The Making of Knowledge in Composition* by Stephen North) and advocates of ethnography in composition, Bishop is able to paint a more comprehensive picture of the research methodology in the field and therefore provide context for her guide on using ethnography.

In the same year as *Ethnographic Writing Research*, Bishop also dived into the controversy surrounding the expressivist label in composition studies with her essay “Places to Stand: The Reflective Writer-Teacher-Writer in Composition.” Bishop takes the opportunity in this essay to discuss the stigma associated with expressivism and perpetuated by scholars such as James Berlin and Patricia Bizzell (11). She argues that a fear of the writer-teacher-writer, a figure she associates with Peter Elbow and Donald Murray, has caused so-labeled expressivists to be misrepresented and misread. Bishop

acknowledges that she, too, has been mislabeled as an expressivist, and she struggles to re-label herself as a “social-expressivist” while also resisting the notion of labeling at all (22). Undeterred by the negativity, or at least ambivalence, the controversy surrounding Berlin’s taxonomy generated—a topic I discuss in further detail later on in this chapter—Bishop continued to devote much of her scholarship to the shared space she saw creative writing and composition inhabiting.

At the 2001 Conference of College Composition and Communication, Bishop gave her chair’s address, “Against the Odds in Composition and Rhetoric,” which was published in *CCC* the same year. In this inspiring address, Bishop attempts to reinvigorate the field of composition by stressing the importance and hardiness of the individuals who comprise it: “I think many in composition are appreciators of the underappreciated, individuals who challenge the odds, take on large and difficult tasks, and make much of what is generally overlooked or undervalued. It is work and we do well to praise it” (324). Bishop embodies the figure she praises by amplifying the voices of individuals across the field of composition in her scholarship, from writing students to prolific scholars. Take, for example, the insights of Bishop’s student Sommer on primary and secondary research in her essay “The Researching Writer at Work; or, Managing Your Data Before It Manages (to Overwhelm) You”:

I was glad that I decided to use both for this paper because I learned some new things too. Research can add so much more substance to the paper. Otherwise, it would be my voice the entire time, talking about my experiences. Now there are opinions and also some facts. Initially, I was confused as to whether I was using primary and secondary sources correctly, but it turns out I was heading in the right direction. (106)



Bishop listens and reflects on these kinds of responses, using them not only to further her own argument but to provide context for her research suggestions and to provide real world examples to which students and writing teachers can relate.

In 2003, Bishop published *The Subject is Story*, the final addition to her *The Subject is* collection. This anthology has a stronger focus on creative elements of writing, though much of it falls into the realm of literary or creative nonfiction, a genre that Bishop discusses in her later scholarship as representing an especially strong challenge to the boundaries set up between composition and creative writing (see “Suddenly Sexy: Creative Nonfiction Rear-ends Composition”). *The Subject is Story* explores a “portable, flexible, and durable” definition of “story.” Bishop and Ostrom characterize the sections of the book as speaking to students and teachers in various ways—from applying narrative to one’s own reading and writing to provoking a discussion about the validity of narrative. These discussions are important to my thesis, and I return to them in more detail in chapter three.

2003 also marked the publication of *Composition Studies in the New Millennium: Rereading the Past, Rewriting the Future*, co-edited by Lynn Z. Bloom, Donald A. Daiker, and Edward M. White, in which Wendy Bishop’s essay “Because Teaching Composition Is (Still) Mostly about Teaching Composition” appears. Assembled in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks, the essays in this anthology attempt to, as Daiker writes in the introduction, “consider more thoughtfully where we’ve been, how we got there, and where we’re going....a significant challenge, especially...[because] the past is not easily read and...the future is even more problematic” (1). More specifically,

this collection attempts to chart the field's agenda as it moves into the twenty-first century. Bishop contributes to this conversation in her essay by reconsidering the limits of social versus personal, arguing that "we have to question the overly tidy polarizations of public and private, emotion and intellect, student and teacher that have been guiding composition studies discussions" (77). These questions exist for Bishop as part of an essential "self-examined teaching life" that is both public and private, and one that Bishop believes she and other teachers have the obligation to learn from and translate into the future of the field (77).

In the four years following Bishop's untimely death, a group of sourcebooks as well as her edited textbook *On Writing: A Process Reader* were published. Among these posthumous publications is *Research Writing Revisited: A Sourcebook for Teachers*, co-edited by Bishop and Zemliansky and published in 2004 shortly after Bishop's death. In this anthology, Bishop's interests in qualitative research methods, creative writing pedagogy, and boundary-crossing conversations converge into a collection of essays that revolve around alternative research methods and approaches. The anthology includes Bishop's essay "Creative Research for All Writers" with specific classroom exercises to get creative writing students thinking about types of research as well as essays on ethnography in creative nonfiction and collaborative research projects.

*On Writing: A Process Reader* anthologizes essays similar to those in Bishop's sourcebooks and *The Subject is* collection. This book presents a collection of essays by composition scholars, creative writers, and students. The book comprises nine sections, each containing an introduction, "consider this" sections before each reading, and

numerous prompts for reflection. Bishop's textbook invites students to consider the authors' backgrounds, includes readings that speak to them as fellow writers, and asks them to reflect and engage in writing exercises that assume students' innate ability to connect with a text and creatively write about it. The chapters in *On Writing: A Process Reader* not only echo Bishop's priorities and interests, but also the many facets of her career. Chapter titles like "Writers and Ways of Writing," "Form to Develop Your Thoughts: Modes, Topics, Genres," "Research and the Writer: Joining Voices," and "Examining Experience: Story, Memory, and the Essay" all speak to the extensive and diverse work Bishop did in the fields of composition and creative writing and the conversations she began and contributed to.

In her essay and Chair's Address "Against the Odds in Composition," Bishop reflects on her experience in the field:

My life in composition...often resembles moments on a convention elevator. Fumblingly, I press a handful of buttons as I enter and move faster or slower at the mechanical beast's whim. Others get on and off at different floors, I disembark and re-enter, multiple times, over time, and arrive at some point at a new floor, then another, then another: enough to keep me interested throughout a professional lifetime, if I so choose. But also much is seen partially, briefly, at a distance as often as close up. I've learned that after conversion, comes longer reflection. (326)

Composition as a building, particularly a convention center, is a rich description of the metaphorical spaces that Bishop inhabited in her career. It seems no accident that the floors of a building can also be described as stories, for Bishop became known in the field for her ability to weave her aptitude for storytelling and narrative into her scholarly conversations. Yet Bishop's scholarship also transcends the rigid structure of a building with enforced walls and ceilings. She recognized the overlap of theory and practice in

composition, creative writing, and qualitative research methods and spent much of her career devoted to dismantling the walls that had been built between these disciplines.

Bishop's contention that crossing the lines was important and beneficial to composition studies resonated with others, and in her lifetime she built friendships with many like-minded scholars. When studying Bishop's writing and scholarship, it is important to note these relationships she sustained. Not content to merely theorize on the ways composition or creative writing might be taught, Bishop's scholarship is peppered with observations and stories from her experiences with others in the field, particularly those "historically silenced in English departments" (Bizzaro & Culhane xi). She unapologetically focuses on the experiences of those often considered on the outer boundaries of English scholarship and places heavy importance on questions and issues raised by students. Bishop did not take her position as a writing teacher (and a teacher who writes) lightly. In the introduction to *Teaching Lives*, Bishop reflects on her years of teaching and notes, "My students taught me how to learn and how to write better" (viii). Her respect and genuine interest in her students is evident throughout her scholarship, as is her passion for the art and craft of writing.

Many of those who knew or were inspired by Bishop's work continue to write about her and to carry her legacy forward. This is perhaps most visible with the recent publication of *Composing Ourselves as Writer-Teacher-Writers: Starting With Wendy Bishop* (2011), a collection of essays co-edited by Patrick Bizarro, Alys Culhane, and Devan Cook. Many of the contributing authors in this anthology write about the ways they continue to conjure Bishop's pedagogy in their classrooms and to find new reasons

and ways to break down the boundaries between creative writing and composition. Their stories are powerful because they remember Wendy Bishop not merely as an influential writer and scholar, but also as a mentor and friend. Pavel Zemliansky perhaps sums this up best in his essay “‘Do You Want to Do a Book Together?’ or Mentoring Like Wendy Bishop” when he notes, “I knew, of course, that Wendy was a major figure in our field, but I had no idea that she would become not just one of the best teachers I have ever had at any level in my education but also my mentor, my ‘enabler,’ and my trusted friend” (166).

### *Resisting Labels*

In his foreword to *Composing Ourselves*, Art Young, Wendy Bishop’s longtime colleague and friend, writes that Bishop “offers us a disciplinary vision for merging and blurring boundaries within English studies and...imagines a teacherly-scholarly-writerly role for all who teach college English courses, particularly for those who teach writing courses” (vii). Bishop envisioned new ways that creative writing and composition might overlap, and she was recognized in composition for her work in this area. The voice that she employs in her writing communicates across the hierarchies of English departments and possesses the fluidity and descriptive texture of a practiced storyteller. Through her often playful language, Bishop stitches together case studies, composition theory, and personal experiences in ways that are effective and meaningful. Bishop’s accessible writing style extends throughout her scholarship, from her boundary-crossing conversations to her works examining the ways often marginalized populations situate themselves in composition studies. Her books and essays on writing pedagogy speak to

writing teachers at all levels, including new graduate writing instructors, who, like me, continue to shape their teaching philosophies and personas in first-year writing classrooms.

As noted earlier, despite being a prolific and well-respected scholar in the field of writing and rhetoric, Wendy Bishop felt marginalized by the expressivist label. Expressivism, also known as expressionistic rhetoric, was made especially controversial by James Berlin in his 1988 essay “Rhetoric and Ideology in the Writing Class.” Berlin argues that ideology is central to rhetoric and that “a rhetoric can never be innocent, can never be a disinterested arbiter of the ideological claims of others because it is always already serving certain ideological claims” (477). In order to support this claim, Berlin explores how ideology works in what he considers to be the “three rhetorics that have emerged as most conspicuous in classroom practices today”: cognitive rhetoric, expressionistic rhetoric, and social-epistemic rhetoric. As a proponent of social-epistemic rhetoric, which Berlin defends as being “self-consciously aware of its ideological stand, making the very question of ideology at the center of classroom activities” (478), Berlin is highly critical of expressionistic and cognitive rhetoric.

James Berlin characterizes expressionistic rhetoric as being “closely allied with theories of psychology that argued for the inherent goodness of the individual, a goodness distorted by excessive contact with others in groups or institutions” and argues that the harmonic growth that this implies is unrealistic (484). Berlin is wary of expressionistic rhetoric’s focus on the individual and its tendency to disregard “the reality of the material, the social, and the linguistic” unless they “serve the needs of the individual”

(674). In his discussion of expressionist rhetoric, Berlin pays particular attention to Peter Elbow and Donald Murray, both of whom Bishop aligns herself with in her essay “Places to Stand” as representatives of the writer-teacher who writes about teaching. As a result, Patrick Bizarro contends in his 2009 essay “Writers Wanted: A Reconsideration of Wendy Bishop” that “Bishop’s position on writing and writing pedagogy barely withstood attacks on expressivism when they were made” (260).

Patrick Bizzaro examines this issue at length in his essay, but he begins with a consideration of a stanza from Bishop’s posthumously published poem “Inside Out”:

At the public library, did the beribboned  
volunteer think I meant *this* as my fashion  
statement? Or did she consider me a variant  
on the slowly moving unhoused who wait for the tall  
glass door to open each day? Or just didn’t see me  
as me—someone who wears her clothes  
generally the right way. (qtd. in Bizzaro 256-257)

It is often easy to notice a fashion faux pas before paying attention to the person underneath the clothes. Similarly, Bizarro contends that “it is easy these days to see...the theory, but not the person who theorizes, and more critically to Bishop’s work, the pedagogy of writing, but not the person who writes” (257). According to Bizzaro, Bishop’s focus on individuals in her scholarship and advocacy for the writer-teacher who writes about teaching were the factors that often reduced her work to falling under expressivism (258).

Bizarro also points out ways in which Wendy Bishop employed cognitive research and its concern for what writers were actually doing when they wrote, particularly in her creative writing pedagogy in *Released into Language*. Berlin criticizes

the cognitive movement as having “refuse[d] the ideological question altogether, claiming for itself the transcendent neutrality of science” (482). He attacks Linda Flower and John Hayes in particular as implying that “the most important features of composing are those which can be analyzed into discrete units and expressed in linear, hierarchal terms, however unpredictably recursive these terms may be” (482). Bishop’s use of the cognitivist approach in *Released into Language* focuses on an analysis of what writers (she cites figures including Ernest Hemingway and James Michener) actually do when they write, arguing that an analysis of various writers’ practices can provide insights into one’s own composing process (*Released* 18). Bizzaro suggests that because of this association, Berlin’s criticism of cognitive research indirectly attacked Bishop as well and threatened to undermine her work in *Released into Language* (263).

Berlin’s essay fueled theory wars in composition studies and the taxonomy he created became rigidified. Peter Elbow perhaps best characterizes the weight of Berlin’s essay in a statement he made in a 1992 interview with John Boe:

James Berlin’s picture of the field and its history has become so definitive that his terms are sort of cast into stone. But I feel like I’m complicated....I’m always being portrayed as simple....I don’t get credit enough for being complicated because at some level, somewhere along the line, I became temperamentally a person who is going two directions at once. It sounds a little grandiose, but I want to define it as one of my life’s works to work out an intellectual justification for going in two directions at once, for maintaining things that look irreconcilable to be—if not reconcilable, at least both true, both deserving one hundred percent affirmation. (16)

Although Berlin acknowledges that “ideology is always pluralistic, a given historic moment displaying a variety of competing ideologies and a given individual reflecting one or another permutation of these conflicts” (479), he goes on to identify



specific scholars like Elbow as falling under individual ideologies. For instance, Berlin criticizes Elbow as holding the view that “power within society ought always to be vested in the individual,” and as consistently defining power in terms of the writer without acknowledgment of the reader (485-486). This kind of idealistic view, one Berlin (with tongue-in-cheek) compares to each individual “lighting one small candle in order to create a brighter world,” is one he views as inconsistent with “authentic human activity” (487).

As Lisa Ede notes in *Situating Composition: Composition Studies and the Politics of Location*, the lack of distinction between expressionist rhetoric and the scholars whose texts he analyzes “was hardly inevitable” (104). Ede points out that Berlin “does not take advantage of the opportunity to identify aspects of various scholars’ texts that might suggest a possible resistance to the rhetoric with which they are identified,” such as Peter Elbow’s advocacy of group work (104). Like Peter Elbow, Wendy Bishop resisted the implication that her works fit into a single taxonomy. Instead, Bishop referred to herself as a “committed social-expressivist” who was open to the various theoretical discussions and findings in the field (*Teaching Lives* ix). Her response to the labels that limited her are most evident in her 1999 essay “Places to Stand: The Reflective Writer-Teacher-Writer in Composition.”

In this essay, Bishop examines the controversy around expressivist figures like Peter Elbow and Donald Murray who, for her, represent the writer-teacher-writer. Bishop contends that the shunning of these dual roles and the rarity of writer-teacher-writer voices in the pages of major composition journals, including *CCC*, resulted from a “fear-

of-the-figure,” or in other words, ambivalence towards “creative” and expressivist writers who write about teaching (10). She elaborates on this line of thinking in her essay:

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 even goes so far as to suggest that as the field of composition has become more professionalized, figures like Murray and Elbow have been tucked-away and contained into “safe and marginalized places...a little like the nouveau riche habit of sticking the money-earning but foolishly-dressed grandfather in the back study, not introducing him to high society company where he might embarrass” (24).

This dismissal of expressivists stems, in Bishop’s opinion, from an oversimplified definition and a manipulated reading of so-called-expressivist texts. She argues that authors like Bartholomae and Berlin who critiqued expressivists “were reading Elbow in ways that furthered their own arguments” (11). This approach, according to Bishop, made it possible to ignore the “communitarian objectives of [Elbow’s] approach” (11). Like Lisa Ede’s contention that “Berlin’s discussion...blurs the distinction between expressionistic rhetoric...and the human beings whose texts he analyzes” (104), Bishop argues that critics of expressivists seem eager to ignore that individual teachers may embrace a wide variety of rhetorics and ideologies in their pedagogy.

As a “social-expressivist,” as she refers to herself at various points throughout the essay, Wendy Bishop advocates the writer-teacher-writer, a figure she says “has never really received a full and useful hearing from us [in composition]” (13). The writer-

teacher-writer for Bishop represents the figure who inhabits and negotiates two complicated identities at once: the (creative) writer who teaches and the teacher who writes. Bishop identifies with this persona and maintains that she “cannot imagine being a writing teacher who does not write any more than [she] can imagine being a writing teacher who does not read” (14). However, this approach to teaching writing is often associated with expressivist ideology because of the implied self-reflective writer at the center.

Bishop suggests that overcoming the fear of the writer-teacher-writer figure entails recognition of the value in reflective and narrative writing. According to Bishop, this writer-centered writing and blending of the belletristic and poetic with “ordinary language” have their own rhetorical purposes and often are essential for both professionals and students to explore and understand their ideas (17). The importance of this rhetorical choice and Wendy Bishop’s advocacy for it are made more clear when considering her work in ethnography. I discuss these connections in more detail in chapter three.

### *Ethnography as a Social Process*

The same writer-centered approach critiqued in Berlin’s discussion of expressionistic ideology is essential to ethnography. As I will discuss in further detail in the next chapter, ethnography often relies on the subjective, individualized views of the ethnographer. In so doing, it reflects the perceptions of the writer. But ethnography also aligns with Berlin’s favored category of social-epistemic rhetoric. Berlin describes this category in the following way:

The real is located in a relationship that involves the dialectical interaction of the observer, the discourse community...in which the observer is functioning, and the material conditions of existence. Knowledge is never found in any one of these but can only be posited as a product of the dialectic in which all three come together.... Most important, this dialectic is grounded in language: the observer, the discourse community, and the material conditions of existence are all verbal constructs....we cannot know them apart from language. Furthermore, since language is a social phenomenon that is a product of a particular historical moment, our notions of the observing self, the communities in which the self functions, and the very structures of the material world are social constructs—all specific to a particular time and culture. These social constructions are thus inscribed in the very language we are given to inhabit in responding to our experience. (488)

Berlin goes on to argue that in social-epistemic rhetoric there is no one authentic self and that “the self is always a creation of a particular historical and cultural moment....they never act with complete freedom” (489). This assumption is central to ethnography. In other words, ethnography challenges Berlin’s taxonomy in important ways. In the following chapter I support this claim more fully.

Although Bishop’s commitment to personal and creative writing was challenged as being “expressionistic” and therefore problematic, many also recognized her work as important and valuable. Patrick Bizzaro, Alys Culhane, and Devan Cook’s anthology *Composing Ourselves as Writer-Teacher-Writers: Starting with Wendy Bishop* is evidence of this. As Art Young describes in the foreword, the contributors to this book extend “Wendy’s call for boundary-crossing conversations about pedagogy and theory, about students and classrooms, and about individual and social purposes for writing and for teaching writing” (vii). In the introduction, Patrick Bizzaro and Alys Culhane add on to this by writing that “Bishop helped us reenvision the role of ethnographic writing research, the importance of writers’ self-reports, and the critical roles that the writing of

narratives play in the well-being of students and teachers, especially those from underrepresented groups” (xi). Bishop’s work in these areas was clearly influential and important to numerous other scholars who identified with Bishop’s figure of the writer-teacher-writer.

In the following chapter, I focus on how Bishop helped composition, as Culhane and Bizzaro put it, “reenvision the role of ethnographic writing research” (vii). I begin by examining the history and methods that define ethnography while providing instances of Bishop’s adherence to these methods with *Something Old, Something New*. I also posit that there are many similarities between ethnographic research methods and Bishop’s discussion of creative and narrative writing in her scholarship. Feminist ethnographers recognize these connections as well, and in chapter three I argue that their arguments for more creativity and experimental forms in anthropology might help us see Bishop’s contribution to English studies in new and intriguing ways.

### Chapter 3: A Commitment to Ethnographic Research Methods

In her posthumously published 2004 essay “Creative Research for All Writers,” Wendy Bishop argues that no matter the genre of writing, research—whether it be “conventional or unconventional”—is one of writers’ most important and creative tools (31). Bishop’s passion for research, especially field research that entails studying and interacting with the world around her, plays an important role in her scholarship. It is also what likely drew Bishop to her dissertation project of studying teachers as they transitioned from a pedagogy seminar they took as Ph.D. students back to their classrooms. Ethnography allowed Bishop to immerse herself in the “culture” she was studying and to engage in the teachers’ stories in a way that other methodologies might not have. Bishop describes her choice to use ethnographic writing research in the introduction to *Something Old, Something New*:

The world of the writing teacher is highly interactive. It includes many “players” and cannot be fruitfully understood out of context. To study teachers as they moved from their pedagogy seminar to their own classrooms, I turned to ethnographic modes of inquiry that allowed me to use both qualitative and quantitative data-gathering techniques. (xv)

Bishop’s use of ethnography allowed her to give texture to the lives and experiences of the student-teachers she studied as well as contextualize her own experience as an ethnographer.

Although *Something Old, Something New* is Bishop’s only formal published ethnography, she wrote about ethnography throughout her career. In “Because of Wendy,” Ben Ristow suggests that Bishop’s accessible voice in her writing “allowed her to contribute to the emergence of ethnography as a major mode of research in

composition” (221). In the ten years after *Something Old, Something New* was published, Bishop published three essays on doing ethnography—“I-Witnessing in Composition: Turning Ethnographic Data into Narratives” (1992), “The Perils, Pleasures, and Process of Ethnographic Writing Research” (1994), and “Having Been There: The Second Ethnography and On” (1997)—as well as her book *Ethnographic Writing Research: Writing It Down, Writing It Up, and Reading It* (1999), a text that Ristow refers to as her seminal work in the methodology.

In *Ethnographic Writing Research*, Bishop asserts that “ethnography as an approach is difficult to define because of the sweeping concepts involved: culture, language, symbol” (15). In several of her works, Bishop grapples with the meaning and the parameters of ethnography. Furthermore, ethnography in an education environment tends to be based on guidelines that may stray from ethnography’s original principles laid out by anthropologists studying other cultures. In the following section, I provide a brief description of the guiding principles at the foundation of ethnography while also discussing Bishop’s employment of the methodology in *Something Old, Something New*. I also look at how this methodology works in composition research. Finally, using Bishop’s works as references, I suggest that aspects of ethnography, such as its use of narrative and the subjective perspective, bear similarity to creative forms that Bishop argued for in her other scholarship.

### *Ethnography Process & Product*

At its most basic level, ethnography is a form of qualitative research that seeks to interpret and make sense of cultures through observation and interaction. As Wendy

Bishop puts it in *Ethnographic Writing Research*, the product of the research, an ethnography, “becomes a representation of the lived experience of a convened culture” (3). Unlike more quantitative forms of research, ethnographies recreate the culture studied for the reader through the ethnographer’s point of view, relying on what ethnographer Clifford Geertz refers to as “thick description” (6) and the researcher’s unique, individual perspective. As Judith Preissle Goetz and Margaret Diane LeCompte explain in *Ethnography and Qualitative Design in Educational Research*, “Whatever the scope of the study may be, the task is to reconstruct, in... loving detail, the characteristics of that phenomenon” (3). In this sense, ethnography has links to creative writing forms such as poetry and fiction, as well as to the social sciences. Because of this, it is not uncommon for the final product of ethnography to contain vivid, showing detail and a narrative structure, as is the case with Bishop’s *Something Old, Something New*.

Ethnography’s roots first and foremost are located in anthropology. According to R.F. Ellen’s 1984 *Ethnographic Research: A Guide to General Conduct*, ethnographic research “is generally traced back to Malinowski’s pioneering fieldwork among the Trobriand Islanders” in 1914. Bronislaw Malinowski is viewed as one of the founding fathers of modern social anthropology and its research methods and the first to professionally use participant observation as a way of generating new knowledge in the field (15). This, along with the acknowledgement that a researcher’s interpretations and perceptions of an experience unavoidably affect the results, became two of the building blocks of modern ethnography.



Along with his foundational practices in the field, Malinowski set up three “principles of method” that have carried over into contemporary ethnography. He first argued that the ethnographer must go into his research with “real scientific aims” and a thorough understanding of “modern ethnography” (qtd. in Ellen 49). Second, in order for the project to succeed as ethnography, he believed that the researcher must be fully immersed in the culture being studied and live among the people. Finally, setting up one of the most important principles of ethnographic research, Malinowski wrote that the ethnographer must apply numerous different methods for “collecting, manipulating, and fixing his evidence” (49). Although Malinowski is credited with establishing scientific methods to validate ethnography, postmodern ethnographers who advocate for alternative forms of ethnography point out that Malinowski’s findings were made most vivid in his posthumously published diary of his study. Ellen writes that Malinowski’s personal field notes were criticized as revealing a different story from his initial reports and as shattering “the image of a sympathetic observer of native life and an enthusiastic participant in native activities” (15). Since Malinowski’s time, ethnographers have taken on a more detailed and narrative approach in their formal ethnographies, with postmodern ethnographers incorporating creative elements such as changes in point-of-view. I discuss this shift more fully in the next chapter.

Ethnography has earned its place as an established research methodology within multiple fields and, more specific to my purposes, within composition studies. Since the late 1980s when Bishop began working with ethnography, the research methodology has been employed by numerous scholars in the field. For instance, the 1997 text *Voices and*

*Visions: Refiguring Ethnography in Composition*, co-edited by Christina Kirklighter, Cloe Vincent, and Joseph M. Moxley, features the work of both graduate students and faculty who self-reflexively explore their own uses of ethnographic research methods. As ethnography and other qualitative research methods have grown in popularity, so too have texts discussing ways to utilize these methods within composition studies.

A notable example of this is Janice Lauer and J. William Asher's 1988 text *Composition Research/Empirical Designs*. In this study, Lauer and Asher demonstrate ways that empirical research, including ethnography, can be a valid method of studying the writing classroom by looking at various examples of how such research has been conducted in the past. Lauer and Asher's discussion of empirical research sets up several qualifications similar to Malinowski's guiding principles in ethnography. Among them, two stand out as particularly important to the ways scholars approach and carry out ethnographic research in the composition classroom—"that measurement instruments are imprecise" and "the psychological and social sciences have a relatively large number of basic dimensions of human behavior....Attempting to keep under observation that many variables is a challenging task and subject to many problems" (7-8). I discuss each of these qualifications in more detail below. Both of these aspects of ethnographic research are important to understanding the scope and subjectivity of composition research, including Wendy Bishop's *Something Old, Something New*.

The validity of field research is often subject to the efficacy of the tools and strategies used to collect data. In the case of ethnography, the primary research tool is the ethnographer and his/her data collecting methods. According to Lauer and Asher,

The assumption behind this design is that to understand human behavior which occurs in a natural setting, one must view it as a part of that environment. The researcher often becomes a *participant observer*, a member of the classroom or other situations being studied, with a minimum of overt intervention. (39)

The ethnographer relies on these experiences and observations to generate detailed accounts of the culture being studied. In many ways, this is what makes ethnography so fascinating. Through detailed description, the researcher is able to present qualitative data while also telling the compelling story of his/her interactions with a culture and often foreign environment. Observations are analyzed in an attempt to recognize patterns, experiences are recounted in significant detail, and often the ethnographer is as much a subject of the ethnography as the people with whom he or she is interacting. In *Something Old, Something New*, Wendy Bishop makes clear in her narrative the ways in which she interacted with her research subjects, using signposts like “in an interview” and “it appeared” to differentiate between what the teachers were actually saying and doing versus her interpretations as the ethnographer.

Although the ethnographer’s intimate relationship with his/her research subjects has raised a few critical eyebrows in the past, Lauer and Asher emphasize that “no ethnographer can be ‘objective,’ nor is that the goal. The researcher’s perspective becomes an important part of the environment studied” (42). Goetz and LeCompte see the inherent subjectivity of ethnography as beneficial, particularly when it is used in educational research. This subjective framework, they suggest, can provide a deeper of understanding of the research than other approaches:

This practice facilitates a more self-conscious attempt to control for observer bias and reactivity of participants. Ethnographers record and

report both their initial assumptions and their subjective reactions, often presenting audiences with both preconceptions and postconceptions. (9)

In other words, ethnography allows the researchers to go beyond quantitative research and to reveal the assumptions and subjectivity of their findings, resulting in a more thorough understanding of the research process. In the composition classroom, this illumination of context is essential. Like any other culture, teachers and students in the writing classroom share common experiences while also varying greatly. Wendy Bishop found this context essential to her own research studying individual teachers. In the introduction to *Something Old, Something New* Bishop asserts that this model allowed her to “*describe* writing teachers’ lives rather than...*prove* a theory of teaching” (xvi).

Lauer and Asher’s second concept, that keeping track of the many variables of human behavior has the potential of being overwhelming and problematic, is one of the primary reasons ethnographers rely on triangulation to verify their data. In geometry, triangulation is the process of finding the location of a point based on its distance from two other known points. Similarly, in ethnography, triangulation is the process of crosschecking data from one process (such as interviews) to other research processes conducted (such as field notes from participant observation). In her case studies for *Something Old, Something New*, Bishop relied on “interviews with all thirteen seminar members, participant-observer field notes, and teachers’ extensive seminar learning logs and final class projects,” all of which she cross-checked with each other (xviii). When the teachers returned to their classrooms after the Teaching Basic Writing Seminar, Bishop also included “phone interviews, teachers’ journals, classroom surveys, classroom documents (student papers and teachers’ handouts), and classroom videotapes” (xviii).

Bishop writes that “by analyzing and triangulating data from multiple sources and reconfirming data with the teachers themselves during follow-up interviews...[she] was able to describe the ways in which these teachers changed or resisted classroom change” (xviii).

The effectiveness of triangulation, according to Lauer and Asher, relies on ethnographers “varying their observations and gaining multiple perspectives by mapping the setting, selecting observers and developing a relationship with them, and establishing a long period of investigation” (40). These guidelines bear resemblance to those that Bishop lays out in *Released into Language* as being essential to a productive workshop. Specifically, Bishop emphasizes that a workshop relies on writers gaining multiple perspectives into their writing from a variety of methods, including peer response, revision, and invention exercises. Lauer and Asher also emphasize that in order for ethnography to produce valid results found reputable within scholarly communities, there needs to be “a continual reciprocity between developing hypotheses about the nature and patterns of the environment under study and the regrounding of these hypotheses in repeated observation, further interviews, and the search for disconfirming evidence” (40).

This checks and balances system limits the subjectivity of ethnography and prevents the ethnographer from relying too readily on assumptions or first impressions. Triangulation also provides a way for the investigator to uncover and dispel possible biases he/she may have had going into the project. This is especially important when considering Bishop’s previous experience as a student of the Teaching Basic Writing Seminar where she conducted her study, though Bishop asserts that she was “careful to

‘make the familiar strange’ [and]...not assume that these teachers’ experiences would at all reflect [her] own” (xix).

Ethnography in the writing classroom tends to be subject to the preset time constraints of the school where the research is taking place and therefore typically covers a briefer period of time than many traditional ethnographies. However, the scope of behaviors being studied is also significantly reduced. Rather than attempting to attain a holistic view of an entire culture, ethnography in the writing classroom takes place on a smaller scale and often “attempts to give a rich account of the complexity of writing behavior....to show the interrelationships among multifaceted dimensions of the writing process by looking closely at writing from a new point of view” (Lauer and Asher 46). In the case of Bishop’s ethnography, the goal was to give an account of teachers’ learning behaviors, and she does so by looking at the various stages of the learning process.

Like other forms of pedagogical research, ethnography does not seek to reach a closed conclusion, but to discover findings that will prompt further research to be done. This reduced scope ethnography is often referred to as “microethnography” (this term is also associated with video-based ethnography), and, as Wendy Bishop writes in the introduction of *Something Old, Something New*, it “can report on the culture of the single classroom, the single learner, and even the single learning event” (xvi). This methodology is ideal for studies within education, but it also requires the investigator to be painstakingly diligent in creating categories and noticing patterns and relationships among data (Lauer and Asher 43).

Bishop's final chapter of *Something Old, Something New* lays out the results collected on each research subject in an attempt to find patterns between them. The following is a summary of these results:

Susan [Research Subject 1]

TBW [Teaching Basic Writing] model is seen as believable but not appropriate. Stored for future use.

Rosalyn [Research Subject 2]

TBW model is seen as believable and stored in previously developed categories, broadening and widening categories. Previous practices/beliefs not necessarily abandoned.

Peg [Research Subject 3]

TBW model is highly desired. Previous classroom model abandoned and new model adopted. However, it may not be possible to abandon previous practices/beliefs and unexpected previous teaching practices/beliefs reemerge.

Nick [Research Subject 4]

TBW model is highly desired and enthusiastically discussed.

Implementation of new activities based on affect as much as on long-term cognitive pedagogical planning. If energy drops, more taxing pedagogical practices may be dropped.

Julia [Research Subject 5]

TBW model is approached, evaluated and found believable. Initial integration of activities results in sudden new affect and practice and deeper cognitive understanding of model. (137)

These findings led Bishop to the conclusion that the teacher learning process remained highly individualized and that the teachers' personalities, belief systems, and preconceived ideas about teaching determined how much they adopted the seminar practices in their own classrooms.

#### *Beyond Ethnography's Conventions*

Although ethnography relies on specific conventions in order to be effective, it is a methodology that relies heavily on the environment and context of the research, and therefore is necessarily molded and even reinvented by each researcher. Bishop

articulates this in the introduction to her book *Ethnographic Writing Research*: “In 1987, when I commenced my research project...I felt I was inventing ethnographic writing research on my own” (x). In general, most definitions of ethnography discuss five major governing themes: a focus on context, the establishment of rapport and immersion into a culture, the use of multiple measures for data collection and triangulation, the importance of participant-observation, and the acknowledgement of the ethnographer’s subjective interpretation of the experience. However, postmodern anthropologist Clifford Geertz in his essay “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture” contends, “it is not these things, techniques and received procedures, that define the enterprise. What defines it is the kind of intellectual effort it is: an elaborate venture in...‘thick description’” (6).

“Thick description,” a notion borrowed from philosopher Gilbert Ryle and repurposed by Geertz, is what gives the final product of ethnography texture. Rather than merely writing out brief observations of experiences, the ethnographer uses thick description to write a detailed, extensive discussion of cultural signifiers and human behaviors. By situating thick description at the core of ethnography, Geertz is implying that the process of writing it up is what is most important (as opposed to the process of collecting and organizing the data).

Bishop’s commitment to the writing process can be seen in her transactional workshop model in *Released into Language*. Bishop expresses this with statements like, “By looking at our own processes and by studying current writing research, we can build a foundational understanding of composing that will help us to choose and evaluate our



own pedagogy” (15), and with her use of cognitive, process-oriented research to support a workshop model that stresses invention and revision. Bishop lays out several exercises that get students writing about and sharing with peers their writing processes. These exercises, like the process of ethnography, bring up new ideas that can be beneficial to the teacher and students (32).

The process of making sense of often foreign concepts and using thick description to translate them into something meaningful is affectionately referred to in ethnography as making the strange familiar. Inversely, ethnographers also make the familiar strange when, as Wendy Bishop did in her ethnography, they reexamine a familiar culture or concept through a different lens (*Something Old* xi). For Bishop, this entailed returning to the Teaching Basic Writing seminar she had attended with new eyes, taking care not to influence her research results with her predisposed notions of the course.

Geertz’s definition of “thick description” bears similarities to the standard creative writing lesson of showing versus telling. The descriptive narrative that results from this ethnographic method led Bishop to recognizing similarities between it and creative writing and asking questions like

Why did ‘doing ethnography’ seem to have elements of ‘doing literature’ and ‘doing creative writing’ that no one and no methods book was mentioning? Or, how could research that seemed more and more to rely on my subjectivity, interpretations, and, finally, storytelling skills be a vehicle for reliable and valid results?” (*Ethnographic Writing Research* xi).

Questions like these prompted some controversy in using ethnography within composition studies, as Bishop discusses in her works on ethnography following *Something Old, Something New*.

*Controversy Surrounding Ethnography*

Ethnography uses the unique, individual perspective of the ethnographer and thick description to construct a vivid, author-saturated narrative that, if successful, is both informative and interesting to the reader. In this way, it is strikingly similar to creative nonfiction, the benefits of which Bishop discusses in her 2003 essay “Suddenly Sexy: Creative Nonfiction Rear-ends Composition.” It is worth noting, however, that despite the aforementioned benefits and methods of validating ethnography, these attributes also prompt controversy surrounding the cogency and function of ethnography both in and out of composition studies. Wendy Bishop grapples with this issue extensively in her works on doing ethnography, particularly her 1992 essay “I-Witnessing in Composition: Turning Ethnographic Data Into Narratives.”

Reflecting briefly on her process of doing ethnography for her dissertation project, Bishop examines the different sides of a controversy surrounding the validity and effectiveness of ethnography both in and out of the classroom. In particular, she cites Stephen North as being skeptical of ethnography as an appropriate research methodology in the field of composition, claiming that “the community of ethnographic research [is] one with edges but no center” (147). Bishop admits that in her own process of doing ethnography—of copious field-notes, personal memos, video and audio recordings, and so on—she too doubted her own credibility and the reliability of her data. Bishop suggests that the ambivalence, and even at times hostility, towards ethnography is a product of a positivist culture that does not invite questions. This position, in turn, stems from what Clifford Geertz argues is “a confusion, endemic in the West since Plato at

least, of the imagined with the imaginary, the fictional with the false, making things out with making them up” (qtd. in Bishop “I-Witnessing” 148).

However, in reconsidering the ways that all research relies on human observation and interpretation, Bishop argues that the very aspects scholars like North are criticizing are those that give power to ethnography:

Just as scientific writing gains power from the use of cool style, the writing of ethnographic stories has often been viewed as lacking in rigor and validity when writers indulge in what I’ll call its “warm” style—vivid subjective narratives that are, inevitably, meditative and interpretive. (150)

“Warm” style, however, is not an easy feat when it comes to writing up data. Although an experienced creative writer with a passion for storytelling, Bishop struggled to integrate the results of her research, the narrative of what occurred, and her authorial self as researcher: “It was impossible to move from the hard data of interview transcripts to the ‘warm’ shaped descriptions I was weaving, without seeing the subjective nature of my enterprise. I worried that my stories and narratives while ‘convincing’ would be suspect” (150). In the end, she found that the validity of an ethnography hinges on the ethos of the writer and making the self, the author, palpable on the page. Geertz labels this as becoming a reliable “I-witness” by first becoming a “convincing ‘I’” (qtd. in “I-Witnessing” 151).

The author-saturated text that results from an “I-witness” writing up of ethnography, Bishop contends, is more likely to engage readers and allows the author to reveal more of the subjective claims that are essential to ethnography. Bishop argues that an ethnography should maintain subjective authority from beginning to end, a move that she links to the social-epistemic ideology and as moving away from more cognitive

psychological ideologies. Later in this chapter, I examine how ethnography defies these ideologies in more detail. First, however, I return to Bishop's own ethnography and how it led into her other work within composition studies.

*Something Old, Something New: Ethnography at Work*

In order to construct her ethnographic research project, Bishop adopted the narrative and rhetorical frames established by anthropologists like Clifford Geertz and shaped them to her specific educational context, creating what she referred to as a "microethnography." Her version of this small scale ethnography relied on case studies of a small focus group, yet it upheld the validity of ethnographic data analysis that stemmed from a "fully developed scheme of data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification which takes place recursively, with steps being repeated and refined until conclusions may safely be presented" (*Something Old* xvi).

Bishop's carefully transcribed field notes and interpretations led to a fuller understanding of the ways that a group of individual teachers learn and how they integrate new information into their classrooms. Furthermore, Bishop's ethnography stimulated interest in ethnographic research and prompted others to follow in her steps. Ethnography became a well-established research method in composition studies in the 90s and early 2000s, a time when the field of composition too was securing its place within English departments. Devan Cook argues in her essay "Shaping a Field" that "Bishop's contributions to [ethnography] cemented composition's claims to equal status with literature in English departments; her work helped to build the foundation from which we work today" (134). While this claim may be somewhat hyperbolic given the

overall hagiographic tone of *Composing Ourselves as Writer-Teacher-Writers* in which this essay is featured, it is likely that Bishop's early works within ethnography helped those in composition see it as a useful research method. Bishop's use of ethnography was relatively novel within composition when she wrote her dissertation, yet most people with experience in education would probably find her results in *Something Old, Something New*—that writing teachers' identities and world views determined what they got out of the Teaching Basic Writing seminar—to be fairly commonsensical. What I see as most intriguing about Bishop's project is how her commitment to the method of ethnography and the practices that define the methodology carry into other works.

Patrick Bizzaro, in his 1999 essay "What I Learned in Grad School, or Literary Training and the Theorizing of Composition," examines how key composition scholars' early work in literature influenced and carried over into their later work in composition. Bizzaro is able to draw several connections between the dissertations and early work of scholars such as Linda Flower, Lisa Ede, and Peter Elbow and their later interests in the field of composition despite the seemingly large discrepancy in the types of work. He notes, "When we study the history of composition studies by examining the careers of individuals, we are sensitized to their individual dilemmas" (739). Bizzaro's interest in the individual causes him to suggest further research of those who are trained in similar fields as well as new scholars with training in theory and creative writing. "In doing so," he contends, "we may see how changes in individuals recapitulate changes in the institution as a whole" (740). A critical look at Wendy Bishop's dissertation and early work in ethnography achieves just that. Bishop's employment of ethnographic research

methods within composition and her use of thick description to relay the stories of individual teachers are clear markers of the directions her scholarship would go.

Many of the defining characteristics of ethnography, as well as their connections to creative writing elements, became integral to Wendy Bishop's later scholarship.

Bishop's own discussion of the methodology in *Ethnographic Writing Research* sheds light on some of the themes that Bishop carried through her scholarship:

Ethnography challenges the dominant positivist view of making knowledge. It demands attention to human subjectivity and allows for author-saturated reconstructions and examinations of a world. Equally, it is generative and creative because writing research ethnographies are overtly rhetorical; they are producing informed stories and arguments about the world. (152)

In "Shaping a Field" in *Composing Ourselves*, Devan Cook examines this excerpt and hones in on three of the adjectives: generative, creative, and rhetorical. These descriptions, according to Cook, allow us to better understand why Bishop adopted ethnographic research methods and continued to integrate them throughout her scholarship. *Something Old, Something New* is thick with Bishop's detailed and metaphor-rich stories of the five teachers she diligently studied. The honed in, descriptive nature of ethnography provided Bishop a medium for translating her background in and commitment to creative writing to a scholarly dialogue. The descriptions of each of the teachers' backgrounds and classrooms as well as Bishop's deliberate inclusion of powerful dialogue from her research subjects speaks to this. Furthermore, her focus on the specific experiences and challenges of five teachers is rhetorically effective in shaping her research subjects as human beings with whom readers both sympathize and relate the way they might with characters in a novel.

Bishop herself attributed much of her success in honoring the stories of individuals to ethnographic methodologies. In her 1997 essay “Having Been There: The Second Ethnography and On,” Bishop reflects on *Something Old, Something New* and the results of her getting “hooked” on the research methodology (209). In the process of “textualizing” her research data, Bishop found similarities in the processes of ethnography and the “textualization taught in English literature departments and followed by creative writers who composed fictions and factions” (209). Bishop thrived in both of these environments, making ethnography a way of integrating the best of both worlds. Naturally, her newfound passion for the methodology led her, like many other ethnographers, towards repeating the methodology in new contexts.

In “Having Been There,” Bishop discusses her attempt at a second ethnography and the two fundamental flaws that undermined her second use of the methodology: her failed attempt to too closely replicate her original research design and her subsequent disengagement with the project as a whole. She unpacks how these failures in fact led to her having a better understanding of ethnography and to her having a better sense of what living the ethnographic life meant for her. Despite losing interest in the process of writing up her second ethnography, Bishop remained very much in the thick of ethnography, and instead of completing her second ethnography, she found ways to write about the research methodology and to continue implementing its strategies into her other scholarship.

“Conducting a first ethnography,” Bishop writes in the introduction of “Having Been There,” “changes our relationship to the field, to research methods, to our own

authority, and, often, to our research subject(s)” (208). These “changes” were powerful in shaping Bishop’s later work in composition studies and appear in various and sometimes unpredictable ways in the various facets of her scholarship. In particular, ethnography’s blurring of the personal and social, the narrative and hard data, and the belletristic and “ordinary” encouraged Bishop to continue to breach conventional boundaries. This blending of ideologies is important in looking at the ways it challenged James Berlin’s taxonomy.

As I discussed earlier in the chapter, at the center of an ethnography is a subjective writer who is making sense of his or her experiences, observations, and perceptions. These insights become meaningful and valid qualitative research through triangulation with what Berlin refers to as the “discourse community” and “material conditions of existence.” Furthermore, ethnography, like social-epistemic rhetoric, grounds itself in language to study and interpret a culture. Yet, ethnography, according to Bishop, is also cognitive (*Ethnographic Writing Research* 4). The ethnographer spends time attempting to understand and record the practices, rituals, and processes of the culture he or she is studying and does so by both interpreting and gaining insight from the research subjects’ points of view. This “complicated hybridization of research traditions” (4), as Bishop refers to it, defies the inflexible nature of Berlin’s ideologies.

Bishop, throughout her career, was committed to a variety of practices and ideologies. She defends her ability and right to be multifaceted in her 2003 essay “Because Teaching Composition Is (Still) Mostly about Teaching Composition”:

I do not believe I can have a smorgasbord pedagogy, but I do feel entitled to range widely, as a teaching generalist, as a writing specialist....I am



obliged to define, refine, name, and explain my practice and to build new knowledge from which to set out again. It is the building and the appreciating and the setting out strongly that matter to me. Writing teachers who get up each day and do their work are doing their work; they do not have to apologize for having values and beliefs, for coming from one section of a field and for moving—perhaps—to another section—from one understanding of instruction to another understanding of it—as long as they are willing to talk, to share, to travel on in company.

This section of Bishop's essay speaks to her commitment to sharing teaching narratives, an important part of her scholarship that I also believe was strongly influenced by her commitment to ethnography. Feminist ethnography in particular advocates stories and narratives that allow the authors to examine their experiences and share them with others.

In the following chapter, I look at feminist ethnography in more detail in hopes of illustrating the uncanny similarities in these conversations with Bishop's boundary-crossing conversations in English studies. I also examine Bishop's work in which she discusses her position as a feminist scholar and argue that the agenda that both she and feminist ethnographers pursue lends a rich and productive perspective of Bishop's scholarly contribution to composition and English studies.

## Chapter 4: Living the Ethnographic Life

In her 1999 essay “Places to Stand: The Reflective Writer-Teacher-Writer in Composition,” Wendy Bishop argues for the importance of the writer-teacher-who-writes in composition and tries to make sense of why this figure tends to prompt disregard and uncertainty on the part of scholars such as James Berlin. In doing so, she considers the other side of the issue, or those who teach writing but do not regard themselves as “writers” (15). As a creative writer herself, Bishop writes that “to talk about those who don’t write, who teach writing yet don’t consider themselves writers, or do much writing at all—takes a leap of imagination for me as large as any I ever make.” Following her natural tendencies, Bishop attempts to make sense of the “other” with a poem:

### *Othering*

Once, I tried to imagine it—

*not reading*—nothing—not clouds, nor the inky residue  
of night; not the pages of sheets rumped at bedside;  
not squirrels chattering on weathered fences,  
responding to the inquisitions of winter; not  
typescripts of age, skin of children tightening  
into more serious play; not summer sun hurling out flames  
until the day’s hammocks melt into their seasonal plots;  
not ever to enjoy the novelties of spring;

*not sleeping*—no singular cocoon of escape  
while oceans and winds beat the planet out of perfect orbit;  
no swimming deeper to grasp air bubbles of hope  
and ride them to the surface; no clasp of sweaty terror  
redeemed by daylight; never to enter the broadest texts  
of stillness, to recount genealogies into darkness;  
no begats or regrets; no blinding luck, no tomb, cave,  
diurnal stone-tumbled renewal; no luck;

*not eating*—never coming sweetsour to one’s senses  
playing across the tongue; no luncheons on lawns

under canopy trees; no Italian terraces and cheese rinds  
of nostril-fluting delicacy; no seeking, no Braille  
of spice and salt, ocean-scent of body's luck; no reason  
to stroke the belly, flat or convex; simply existing within  
the absence of—; no tides of flesh, green howls  
of unrooting; no blame, no satiety, no animal ease;

*not loving*—fingers rude and blunt—mere digits, bland  
instruments; not waiting or wanting; no breath of moon  
in the ear of dawn; solitary and unaware of absence,  
or absent and not missed; featherless, wings furled;  
untouched by cataclysm; earthbound on an empty road; no attitude  
toward sunset; chorus of frogs lost on infinite jetstreams  
where blue sky reclines, a lonely god; not made in anyone's image—  
literate, impervious, dull; and rarely, if ever, heard from;

if other, so little then to make of life, of this, of life, this—this. (15)

Bishop's list-style poem relies on sensory-based descriptions that she connects with a life spent writing. As the title of the poem suggests, the non-writer remains an "other," a figure that Bishop can only make sense of by describing what it is not, or what it would be like for her to not be a writer. Bishop's teaching life and writing life were inextricably linked in a harmonious and symbiotic relationship. Those who opposed this identity were perplexing to her. In putting them in the place of the "other," she—somewhat defensively—turns the table on those who exhibited skepticism of the creative writer who teaches writing (and writes about it).

Bishop's interest in and criticism of the concept of "other" takes shape in many ways throughout her scholarship. For instance, what happens if we look at Bishop's interest in the "other" as speaking to her interest in ethnography, a research method designed to study and make sense of the "other"? In "Having Been There: The Second Ethnography and On," Bishop discusses another identity that she claimed, one just as

mutually dependent on her writing identity as her teaching life: her life as an ethnographer.

After struggling and not completing a second ethnography, Bishop turned to writing about the process of ethnography and reflecting on her use of it as a methodology in composition studies. At this point, I would like to return to a passage from “Having Been There” that I cite in the introduction to this thesis in which Bishop reflects on this transition in her career:

I began to teach research methods courses in ethnography, I began to read post-modern ethnographic theorists, I began to push the boundaries of methods and writing style in smaller scale research projects. In that sense, I was more fully living the ethnographic life than I had earlier. Such a life was no longer “out there”—a project to be done for credentialing—but it was also “in here,” all mixed up, a part and parcel of my academic and writing life and I had to learn to accept and negotiate this new, seemingly boundary-less existence. (212)

Bishop acknowledges that ethnography changed her as an ethnographer and scholar. Her commitment to the methodology led to her reading contemporary anthropological theory, including discussions in postmodern anthropology that pushed toward more informal, narrative, and experimental forms in ethnography. Bishop writes that “learning about these discussions accelerated [her] move to cultivating an informal, narrative research writing style that allow[ed] [her] to investigate ethical, political, and writerly concerns more freely” (216). Thus, in many ways, ethnography helped in shaping the writing style that defined Bishop’s scholarship. However, the connections between Bishop’s work in ethnography and her other scholarship do not revolve solely around style.

As I noted earlier, a consideration of Wendy Bishop’s interest in contemporary ethnographic theory, I believe, sheds light onto much of her scholarship within

composition studies. In fact, the connections between much of Bishop's scholarship and feminist ethnographic theory of the same period are uncanny. In this chapter, I examine the connections I see between feminist ethnography and Bishop's work integrating creative writing elements into the composition classroom. In viewing Bishop's work in this way, it is not my intention to argue that she was directly influenced by feminist ethnography, though that may have been the case, but instead to begin to understand one facet of Bishop as an ethnographer living the ethnographic life, sharing in the kinds of concerns other feminist ethnographers battled for in anthropology. In doing so, I hope to deepen my own understanding of Bishop's positions in a historical context as well as to posit an alternative lens through which we might view and critique her scholarship at the nexus of creative writing and composition.

It seems important, to begin with, to clarify my view of Bishop as a feminist. Bishop's concern and frustration with labels is a common thread in much of her scholarship, one often discussed by those who write about her. Yet, "feminist" is not a label often brought up by those discussing Wendy Bishop and her scholarship in composition. This, I think, is interesting for a couple of reasons. First, she is often referred to as a writer battling on the margins of the profession and as writing about and for others on the margins, including women (see Bizzaro and Culhane). Second, as a woman in academia writing during the current feminist movement—a movement defined by feminists who embrace diversity—Bishop sought to alter old perceptions of gender, sexual identity, and ethnicity and to persuade others to adopt classroom practices that welcomed a wider variety of students.

In 1990, still at the beginning of her career in composition studies, Bishop authored an essay entitled “Learning Our Own Ways to Situate Composition and Feminist Studies in the English Department.” In this essay, Bishop considers the limitations of labels in the hierarchal system she sees existing within English departments, including the label of “feminist”:

When we label ourselves in this way, we agree to the dominant method of distinguishing areas in English studies, what Gerald Graff calls the field-coverage model, a model that isolates and elevates the literature scholar and critic and isolates but devalues the generalist...By creating separate women’s studies programs, designating fields like “composition” and “feminist studies,” or allowing only minimal authority for writing program administrators, the establishment is free to conduct department business as usual. Meanwhile, marginalized cultures within or beside the department’s dominant culture, alienated, co-opted or about to be co-opted, sit silently around that meritocratic table, feeling concerned. (339)

It is important to note here that Bishop was not only questioning the lines existing between creative writing and composition, but “business as usual” within English departments. Bishop indicates in “Learning Our Own Ways” that the current field-coverage model is problematic and that it embraces a hierarchal system that excludes those not in the “dominant culture.”

As a woman entering into graduate school, Bishop says that she was not expected to have a voice. She indicates that much of the literary canon was provided to her under “paternal guidance” from male professors who believed “the critical wars were not...suitable for seminar discussion” (340). Like the woman ethnographer placed alone in another culture far from home, Bishop posits that all too often, in labeling and distinguishing ourselves under single identities, “women travel nervously, alone, with

few maps or guidebooks, while the current-traditional ‘body’ of English studies is very able to absorb our nervousness and discontent” (339).

Bishop resists the limitations of singular labels and declares, “For me, to be only a poet, or a feminist, or a compositionist is not enough” (341). These labels, for Bishop, threaten to result in deracination, or the belief that minority students “must forget where they come from in order to survive their journey through the academy” (341). According to Bishop, women in the academy are at risk of deracination as well and are often being denied voices and offered limited choices. In other words, Bishop argues that women are denied access to the academy in many of the same ways as minority groups. Rather than seceding and forming a separate discipline, Bishop seeks to encourage an active approach to changing attitudes and practices within English studies while still acknowledging feminists’ position as a “formidable challenge to the status quo” (344). One way of proceeding to change attitudes within the field, she posits, might be to further consider the notion of deracination and to learn from classroom practices that revolve around multicultural students (344). For instance, Patricia Bizzell suggests that teachers “offer [multicultural students] an understanding of their school difficulties as the problems of a traveler to an unfamiliar country—yet a country in which it is possible to learn the language and the manners and even ‘go native’ while still remembering the land from which one has come” (qtd. in “Learning” 344).

Rather than advising that feminists “go native,” Bishop suggests a discourse with the dominant culture—literature faculty members—that promotes a transactional relationship between them and the “other” (344). She considers various ways of how to

build bridges that support this relationship and focuses on three: encouraging personal narrative both in classrooms and scholarship, engaging in connected teaching and ethnographic participant observation, and acting neighborly (345-346). These same methods could be used to describe the goals behind the majority of Bishop's scholarship. In her goal to implement these methods into English studies, Bishop recognizes the challenge of insisting that the most powerful—and therefore also often the most at risk of losing it all—change their views. Instead she proposes the following:

We need to pay close attention to our “young,” those temporarily (and sometimes permanently) marginalized male and female TAs, the next generation in the changing department of English, the people that we may come into contact with in exciting and valuable ways (346).

By implementing changed perceptions of marginalized groups in the graduate student classroom, Bishop believes that “English studies can begin to offer graduate students important contexts and a forum for question-making” (348). She imagines a mandatory “participatory seminar” that includes practices similar to those in the multicultural classroom, including “change-active” narratives. She also advocates increased mentorship of graduate students by women, an opportunity she says is often restricted (349). For Bishop, enacting change in English studies almost always begins in the classroom. It is an environment where questions can be encouraged and where different voices can be heard. Bishop argues that in order for these things to occur, the teacher must act as a participant-observer and allow herself to be changed by the classroom and the stories that come out of it.

“Learning Our Own Ways” illustrates Bishop's commitment to feminism and to giving a voice to those she felt were marginalized within English studies, including



graduate students and scholars in composition who were restricted to lower rungs on the discipline ladder. Her contention that storytelling and narrative are powerful ways to build bridges between these marginalized cultures and the dominant ones is one that carried through the entirety of her scholarship. Her commitment to creative writing no doubt stemmed largely from her background in poetry and natural tendency to make sense of dilemmas by “writing informally, in mixed genres” (“Teaching Lives” 317). However, Bishop also acknowledges connections between her creative approach and theories in anthropology and feminism:

Postmodern anthropology and feminist theory suggests alternative ways of reporting both practice and research—honoring story, testimony, observational anecdote, informal analysis, regularized lore and so on—and these movements may connect some of us back to our humanistic roots as writers and readers of fictional and factional texts. (“Teaching Lives” 319)

Here Bishop separates feminist theory and postmodern anthropology, yet the combined field—feminist anthropology—is concerned with many of the same issues. At the same time Bishop was advocating for more narrative in composition, third-wave feminist anthropologists were working to redefine their own field and to promote the value of experimental and creative ethnographies. In the following section, I briefly look at this discourse before drawing connections between it and Bishop’s scholarship promoting many of the same practices.

### *Feminist Ethnography*

In “Histories of Feminist Ethnographies” (1997), Kamala Visweswaran discusses the evolution of feminist ethnography since the late 1800s and observes that in wake of the third-wave feminism movement, the field of feminist anthropology has moved toward

changed understandings of “gender” where it “cannot be separated...from the categories of race, class, or sexual identity that determine it” (592). This view moves away from earlier essentialist assumptions in feminist anthropology that gender comprises the core of all women’s experiences, a view that Visweswaran and other contemporary feminist ethnographers criticize as ostensibly promoting solidarity, but in fact turning all women into an “other.” Visweswaran argues that “if we learn to understand gender as not the endpoint of analysis but rather as an entry point into complex systems of meaning and power, then surely there are other equally valid entry points for feminist work” (616). One of those entry points, according to Visweswaran, is through the woman’s point-of-view and use of experimental ethnography. She elaborates more on this view in her earlier 1994 text, *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*.

In the introduction to *Fictions*, Visweswaran asserts, “whether the bracketing maneuvers that established anthropology as science in Malinowski’s day are still necessary is debatable” (2). She goes on to suggest a re-exploration of the relationship between ethnography and literature. In doing this herself, she looks at feminist ethnographers, such as Zora Neale Hurston, who have blurred ethnography with autobiography and fiction and argues that these works are powerful in their ethnographic explorations of race, gender, and class. These ethnographies, she argues, are made all the more powerful by their intended “popular audience” (4). Visweswaran also discusses how Malinowski, an essential figure in legitimizing ethnography as a scientific anthropological pursuit, blended his love of creative writing (the novel in particular) and his ethnographic experiences in his posthumously published diary that revealed a much

more vivid picture of his experiences. Malinowski, she says, recognized that the novel, like ethnography, presents a perspective on life (5).

Visweswaran, like many ethnographers including Wendy Bishop, ponders Geertz's contention that there is a confusion in the West "of the imagined with the imaginary, the fiction with the false, making things out with making things up...lead(ing) to the even stranger idea that, if literalism is lost, so is fact" (qtd. in "Fictions" 2). This confusion has acted as a barrier for feminist ethnographers who, like Zora Neale Hurston, blend the autobiographical and fictional points-of-view with ethnographic research methods. Ravina Aggarwal, in her 2000 essay "Traversing Lines of Control: Feminist Anthropology Today," supports this notion:

Women of color such as Zora Neale Hurston and Ella Deloria, who were creatively blurring distinctions between ethnography, autobiography, and fictional prose to redress representations of minority communities by dominant groups, could not achieve the status of legitimacy in a discipline that was committed to distinguishing those observing from those being observed. (22)

Following the postmodern rebellion against claims of "authority, objectivity, and transparency," feminist ethnographers in anthropology experimented with form and voice (22). For instance, Erika Friedl, in her 1989 ethnography *Women of Deh Koh*, took on the voices of the women she studied to tell their stories. Aggarwal describes the power of Friedl's ethnography in her essay:

Friedl skillfully crafts conventional plot props--a stormy night, a social gathering around a warm kitchen fire, and talk of dervishes and demons--to negotiate lines between history and legend, to recount and debate local and national political histories, and to probe the conventions of morality and justice. Truth and lies are both prevalent in the composition of reality, the tale suggests, and words from the mouths of women are passed on to

others in Iran, to be further carried and read by those of us who live in other parts of the world. (23)

Feminist ethnographers fought vehemently for the use of experimental forms, particularly those that would reach wider audiences than the isolated community in academia. In 2000, Aggarwal indicates that these battles had been largely successful and that “in spite of their conflicting positions as both marginal and central figures in... anthropology, there remains little doubt that feminist anthropologists are now at the forefront of radical and innovative anthropology” (21). Much of this path to success, Aggarwal attests, is due to Ruth Behar’s and Deborah Gordan’s 1995 anthology *Women Writing Culture* (23).

Ruth Behar writes in the introduction to *Women Writing Culture* that it came together, in part, as a response to the 1986 anthology *Writing Culture*, edited by James Clifford and George Marcus. *Writing Culture*, according to Behar, ignited debates about cultural representation in anthropology. In the introduction to *Writing Culture*, James Clifford advocates for more “innovative, dialogic, reflexive, and experimental writing in anthropology,” and a field more “self-conscious of the workings of power and the partialness of all truth, both in the text and in the world” (Behar 4). Although women anthropologists had been among those who pioneered experimental ethnography, only one woman writer—Mary Louise Pratt—was included within *Writing Culture*. Clifford, in an attempt to account for the absence of women in the text, infamously claims in his introduction that “women anthropologists were excluded because their writings failed to fit the requirement of being feminist *and* textually innovative” (Behar 5).

Behar points out that Clifford's statement exposed a troubling perception:

"Women who write experimentally are not feminist enough, while women who write as feminists write in ignorance of the textual theory that underpins their own texts" (5). To counter this claim, Ruth Behar and Deborah Gordon collaborated to put together an anthology by nearly all women who defy the canonical, critical style predominantly used by men. Behar says the following about how these intentions paid off:

Our book initiates another agenda that goes beyond *Writing Culture* in its inclusiveness, its creative processes, its need to combine history and practice, its humor, its pathos, its democratizing politics, its attention to race and ethnicity as well as to culture, its engendered self-consciousness, its awareness of the academy as a knowledge factory, its dreams. (6)

*Women Writing Culture* refuses to separate creative writing from critical writing and reconsiders the predominantly male canon of anthropology by considering work of ethnographers like Margaret Mead, Zora Neale Hurston, and Ella Cara Deloria who had an "impatience with the flat impersonal voice that was becoming the norm in the ethnographies of their time [mid-twentieth century]" (18). These women, like Wendy Bishop, sought to blur the lines between critical and creative writing, finding power in creative writing's ability to reach wider audiences outside of academia.

Feminist ethnographers bring to the surface important questions, not only about anthropology, but also about the dominant and marginalized cultures within the academy. The postmodernist and third-wave feminist movements caused "intense public scrutiny," according to *Women Writing Culture* co-editor Deborah Gordon, of academic research and publication (qtd. in Aggarwal 16). It is during times like these, Gordon says, that "we need to articulate why and how feminist research matters" (17). Feminist ethnographers

challenged the canon in anthropology and put their energy towards creating a field open to those who had been kept on the margins due to their ethnicities, social classes, genders, and/or sexual identities. Giving these populations a voice required a shift in the ways anthropology thought about scholarly writing.

Ethnographies about identity and belonging had been deployed in the past in the forms of personal narrative, autobiographies, memoirs, literary nonfiction, and other unorthodox forms. These creative ethnographies became widely read outside of academia. A shift to accepting them within the academy and in teaching them as part of the methodology occurred as a result of the work by figures including Visweswaran, Gordan, and Behar. These groundbreaking women demonstrate that the creative and critical can coexist in writing and that the two working together can spread political awareness to a broader audience. The mix of craft and even fiction with critical writing and data may even lend a more honest narrative of the research process. As Aggarwal writes in “Traversing the Lines,” “Truth and lies are both prevalent in the composition of reality” (23).

*Bishop & A Shift in Perceptions in English Studies*

In “Learning Our Own Way to Situate Composition and Feminist Studies in the English Department,” Bishop pushes back against critics who advise scholars “stick to their knitting” and not cross boundaries when it comes to their scholarship. “Cross-disciplinary work,” she reminds us, “challenges the existing field-coverage model” (341). Like feminist ethnographers, Bishop saw the powerful rhetorical potential of storytelling and narrative, both in their ability to reach a larger audience and in providing an outlet for

the voices of writers from the margins to the middle. In this section, I look at the ways in which Wendy Bishop's scholarship embodies the same political goals as the work of the aforementioned feminist ethnographers. I look first at "Crossing the Lines: On Creative Composition and Composing Creative Writing," Bishop's 1993 essay in which she makes the argument that the lines between creative writing and composition should be crossed more often. I then examine claims made by Bishop in the introduction to the book *In Praise of Pedagogy* and in her essay "Preaching What We Practice as Writing Professionals." Each of these essays situates Bishop as a scholar at the intersections of creative writing and composition arguing for an overlap that, like creative ethnography, promotes identity formation and political and gender awareness within the university.

In *Women Writing Culture*, Ruth Behar argues that *Writing Culture* was a "sullen liberation" for women to "write culture more creatively, more self-consciously, more engagingly by male colleagues who continued to operate within a gendered hierarchy that reproduced the usual structure of power relations within anthropology, the academy, and society in general" (5). Bishop recognizes a similar power struggle and politics within composition in "Crossing the Lines." Despite creative writing's and composition's common history in the university (see D.G. Myers' *The Elephants Teach*), an increasingly professionalized version of composition studies often excludes personal, creative writing. Bishop asserts that this movement is a political one where "fundamentals precede art and art writing is for the elite (endlessly, the white, literate, at least middle-class kind), and composition writing is for those who need nothing more than *basic* literacy (although what that is no group has yet been able to agree upon)"

(226). Both feminist ethnographers and Bishop disagree with such an analysis. “Art writing,” or creative writing, they argue, allows diverse populations of students to use their innate narrative and storytelling abilities to communicate across the hierarchy. The polarization of the creative from the critical, both in anthropology and composition, has resulted in the marginalization of those who do not fit neatly into the white, middle-class, primarily male canon of language.

In building her case in “Crossing the Lines,” Bishop contends that English studies is “laboring under, have actually even helped to establish and maintain, similar self-limiting ideas of the ‘true’ relationship of fact and fiction” as those existing in ethnography, as discussed by Clifford Geertz in his essay “Thick Description” (228). Why should fact be devalued or believed nonexistent when fiction is present? How do we respond to writings, like ethnography, that necessarily make use of both? These kinds of questions prompt Bishop to declare that “whether we sanction it or not, when fact and fiction do blend we need other ways of looking at and of teaching writing” (229). Bishop goes on to argue in “Crossing the Lines” that students already write imaginative and creative essays and that “the old, limiting distinctions [between creative and critical writing]...were given primacy because they helped keep our selves and our academic territories well and safely sorted” (232). She contends that creative writing should be a part of the first-year writing class and that it can be without devaluing critical theory and research.

Bishop understood that in order to change classroom practices, she also had to alter perceptions of creative writing in writing teachers. One way of doing this was to



encourage writing teachers to embody the figure of writer-teacher-writer and to write about their teaching. In the preface to her 1997 essay collection *Teaching Lives*, Bishop returns to the notion of voice, writing that it was by sharing and publishing her teaching stories that she “learned to have a voice and a place in the composition community” (viii). Personal narratives, Bishop felt, were important in sharing these stories. And, according to Bishop’s argument in “Learning Our Own Ways,” “Telling stories is a neighborly act that can illuminate the academy’s ways.” Many of Bishop’s essays throughout her career reflect her goal to encourage teaching narratives, and she features several narratives by teachers in anthologies that she co-edited, including *Colors of a Different Horse* (1994) and *Genre and Writing* (1997).

*In Praise of Pedagogy: Poetry, Flash Fiction, and Essays on Composing*, co-edited by Bishop and David Starkey in 2000, demonstrates that the teaching narrative can cross genres. A compilation of creative writing by teachers writing about teaching, this book showcases the writer-teacher-writer figure that Bishop embraces as well as her influence on writing teachers in the field. In her introduction to the book, Bishop reflects that her battle for the values of creative writing both in and out of the classroom has been challenging: “I found myself making an uphill argument: that poetry can do more work than it has been allowed to do in the academy. It can argue; it can commemorate; it can explore, critique, and complicate our thinking” (2). The poems, stories, and essays in the book grapple with topics in teaching, reading, writing, linguistics, and politics of the classroom and academy. Bishop’s own poems featured in the introduction are reflective

and expose her thinking about political and gender issues within the academy. The following excerpt from her prose poem “Workshop Memory” speaks to this:

I thumb the *Norton Anthology of Modern Poetry* to figure out what poets write about. I am embarrassed by the women—Sylvia and her anger and Anne and her body. I mention loudly that I never want to be called a woman poet. I never mention that I have bought all of Anne Sexton’s books and read them, yet rarely buy the assigned others: Wordsworth floated outside my experience—a young man’s life, what was that to me? I say none of this in class, although I write a lot. Although I didn’t know I couldn’t be a poet, I did know I felt terrible when it came to my voice. I stumbled if I read aloud. Attending poetry readings, I’d see real poets: How could I impress in the manner of William Everson, Robert Bly or Gary Snyder, low vibrant voices seducing audiences with words? As a fellowship student at a summer writer’s conference, I was momentarily mentored. The poet reviewing my manuscript suggested that I not use the name “Wendy” to publish under. I obeyed him, using W.S. Bishop for five years in my insecurity. And during that time, I wrote about my family. My young loves. A chapbook compiled for me by a willing small-press editor seemed to be composed primarily of those of my poems that had the word *thigh* in them. (18)

Sections of Bishop’s work such as this provide insight into the forces that drove her towards feminist scholarship. Bishop indicates here and in other works that she felt her voice was limited because of her sex, and much of her work at the intersections of composition and creative writing seeks to give voice to students and academics who share this experience. Whether a lyrical poem or a short story, Bishop says in her introduction to *In Praise of Pedagogy* that story and memory help her “explore [her] pedagogical beliefs as do research and primary and secondary research” (18). For Bishop the creative and critical always exist in a both/and relationship, and she spent her career in writing, teaching, and ethnography fighting for this view.

In her 1997 essay “Preaching What We Practice as Professionals in Writing,” featured in her and Hans Ostrom’s co-edited book *Genre and Writing*, Bishop writes, “I

find that sometimes telling teaching stories isn't enough, and I need to return to the class context, collecting more data" (3). This essay examines the ways genres continue to evolve within composition studies and, as feminist ethnographers did, argues that new and experimental genre forms are important to the evolution of the field. Genres and lines within the existing field, Bishop contends, "are still hard to breach for they trade in power, authority, and gender roles" (4). Yet there has been progress. Upon reviewing the journals on her office shelves, Bishop admits that she has begun to find "rich veins of both/and, convention-making *and* convention-breaking in alternately organized work" (4). However, although scholars in composition have broadened their own writing and thinking, Bishop insists that "we're still too often failing to share these opinions and alternate styles with our own students: graduates and undergraduates" (4).

Bishop asserts throughout her scholarship that the classroom is the ideal location of change. By insisting that students master formal academic writing before they are allowed to experiment, we continue to support a model that idolizes the dominant discourse and ignores the values of the kinds of discourse with which students are familiar. In "Preaching What We Practice" Bishop proposes several innovative and alternative genres we should be integrating into our classrooms more. Among those she discusses is the literacy autobiography. For those in composition studies or marginalized populations in the university, Bishop posits that literacy autobiographies provide a medium to assert values and agency (7). In sharing these narratives, according to Bishop, "we create narrative selves able to survive (and even transcend) within our complex society with its complex architecture." (7).

Kamala Visweswaran discusses the benefits of autobiographies similarly in *Fictions of Feminist Ethnography*. She posits that Malinowski's diary revealed a mix of autobiography and ethnography. This entanglement of genres, according to Visweswaran, led to ethnography's movement towards an exploration of the "culturally constructed self" (6). Autobiography, whether as a literacy narrative or an account of one's ethnographic experience, brings the subject of identity to the forefront. Bishop argues that this genre can initiate important discussions about writing essential in the writing classroom ("Preaching" 14). She makes similar arguments about creative nonfiction and story in her other scholarship, and these discussions become part of her pedagogy that she constructs in her textbooks such as *The Subject is Story* and *Research Writing Revisited*.

Among the women who Visweswaran discusses as pursuing feminist anthropological study and ethnography are Zora Neale Hurston, Ella Deloria, Ruth Landes, and Ruth Underhill, all creative writers. Each of these women anthropologists and authors used ethnography in the mid-1900s to study other cultures. Deloria, Landes, and Underhill, all mentees of renowned anthropologist Ruth Benedict, became known for their ethnographies that centered on the feminine experience. Visweswaran argues that "to note only that these women anthropologists also produced novels is to lose sight of the ways in which each came to literature, and the conflicting currents of race and class that marked their textual production" (3). In the same strain of thought, it seems to me that to look at Wendy Bishop as *merely* an expressivist who also wrote about and used ethnography is to lose sight of ways that the research methodology might have affected and influenced her other work.

Like Ruth Behar and Deborah Gordan in their anthology *Women Writing Culture*, Bishop refuses to segregate the creative and personal from the critical and analytical. In doing so, she calls attention to the fact that the professionalization of composition studies has had diverse results, not all of them positive. In particular, she suggests that it sustains a field controlled by the same dominant culture and that continues to exclude and silence marginalized cultures. Creative writing elements such as narrative and poetry, she argues, are valuable ways of giving these cultures a voice. And they can do so without devaluing the critical. In the end, it always comes down to a both/and relationship, never an either/or one. This relationship of learning both simultaneously, Bishop insists, is the way we “we gauge and understand limits, boundaries, centers, edges, entry, and exit” (“Preaching” 3).

## Chapter 5: Continuing Wendy Bishop's Legacy

### Conclusion

Nearly ten years after the loss of Wendy Bishop, her work continues to be powerful and important in English studies. Her scholarship is still cited by those committed to crossing the lines between creative writing and composition, as indicated by the scholars included in the 2011 anthology *Composing Ourselves as Writer-Teacher-Writers: Starting with Wendy Bishop*. The essays in this book recognize and honor Bishop not only for her extensive scholarship at the intersections of creative writing and composition, but also as a scholar who practiced what she preached. As I noted earlier in this thesis, Bishop published poetry, pedagogy, and composition theory throughout her writing career, served as Chair of CCCC as well as Vice-President of AWP, and taught a variety of courses that braided together her commitment to research, composition theory, and creative writing. She also was, and continues to be, a teacher, mentor, and inspiration to those who knew her and who, like me, read and became captivated by her work.

Included in *Composing Ourselves* are powerful essays from the perspectives of writing teachers who engage in the crossover of creative writing and composition in the same ways as Bishop. One especially worth noting is Tim Mayers' "Revolution Number Three: Wendy Bishop and the Emergence of Creative Writing Studies." In this essay, Mayers argues that Bishop's scholarship on creative writing pedagogy such as *Released into Language* (1991) made her one of the pioneers in the emerging field of creative writing studies. He describes the new discourse of creative writing studies as revolutionizing the field of creative writing; for the first time, creative writers in the

university are concerned with and publishing scholarly articles and books on their discipline (156). These writer-teacher-writers, like Bishop, question the traditional Iowa workshop model as the end-all creative writing pedagogy and suggest various other classroom practices that often apply theory and research from composition studies. Mayers admits in his essay that in the past he has argued for a writing department separate from English studies, something that Bishop would likely oppose:

She understood the negative effects of English studies' relentless division into specialties, subspecialties, and sub-subspecialties, and...she was committed to thinking a way out of these negative effects, no matter how difficult they might be....This is the thinking not of someone who was merely content to help establish a new scholarly subspecialty like creative writing studies. This is the thinking of a true revolutionary. (162)

Mayers' analysis aligns itself well with the argument I have made in this thesis.

Bishop articulates her feelings about the division of fields in her essay "Learning Our Own Ways as to Situate Composition and Feminist Studies in the English Department":

In some cases, separation has resulted in strength, allowing marginalized cultures to circumvent the tendency of the English department's field-coverage model to absorb their interests in isolated intra-departmental pigeonholes. In other cases, secession has resulted in further alienation and erasure of any campus profile. (343)

Rather than suggesting that composition and creative writing separate from English departments, Bishop took on the hierarchy in English studies and argued vehemently for ways she believed it could evolve. The emergence of creative writing studies is an important contribution to this goal. Taking after Wendy Bishop, those now writing about creative writing pedagogy continue to build a bridge between the writing disciplines.

Some of those writing in and about creative writing studies knew Bishop personally and often cite her work. Among them is creative writer, scholar, and teacher

Katharine Haake. Haake has published both creative writing and scholarly books and articles, including her book *What Our Speech Disrupts: Feminism and Creative Writing* (2000). As Haake indicates in her introduction to the book, *What Our Speech Disrupts* “argues for a shift within the discipline that would respond to student difference and allow for reconceiving creative writing as a practice that may take many forms of value in the lives and educators of our students” (18). Haake achieves this by formulating a pedagogy based around questions of language and discourse and that gives students agency in their writing and in their classrooms. It perhaps goes without saying that this book is a powerful contribution to Bishop’s agenda.

In 2000, Wendy Bishop, Katharine Haake, and Hans Ostrom co-authored *Metro: Journeys in Creative Writing*, a creative writing textbook with prompts and exercises that guide students through the writing process. Katharine Haake also wrote the introduction to Bishop’s posthumously published collection of poetry *My Last Door*, in which she calls Bishop one of her “closest friends” (xvii). In this heartfelt introduction, Haake describes Bishop as a lifelong poet from whom Haake learned that “writing is not something one does, but a way someone lives—acutely, perpetually present and observant in language” (xvii). Bishop’s love for language and form come through in both her poetry and scholarly writing, and her commitment to personal writing style across genres has inspired writer-teacher-writers like Haake to carry Bishop’s legacy forward.

Recently published anthologies such as Dianne Donnelly’s *Key Issues in Creative Writing* (2013) and Ph.D. students Chris Drew, Joseph Rein, and David Yost’s *Dispatches from the Classroom* bear striking resemblance both in organization and



subject matter to the anthologies Bishop edited during her lifetime. Scholarly essays such as Douglas Hesse's "Imagining a Place for Creative Nonfiction" (2009) and "The Place for Creative Writing in Composition Studies" (2010) continue conversations in which Bishop's voice is still an important part. Hesse suggests that these conversations may be more important than ever in an increasingly digital age when students are composing more texts outside of the classroom than they are in it ("The Place" 31). For many of these scholars, Wendy Bishop acted as a real-life mentor and friend. Others' relationships with Bishop are based on her colleagues' accounts and through the lively and impassioned voice in her writing. Like these scholars, I feel a connection to Bishop through her work, and in writing my thesis, I have found it difficult at times to not refer to her the way her friends, students, and colleagues do in their scholarship—solely as Wendy.

The essays in *Composing Ourselves* seek to demonstrate the profound influence Bishop had on composition and creative writing. Like the contributors to this volume, I hope to illustrate with my thesis the ways in which Bishop's work can alter the ways we think about conversations at the nexus of creative writing and composition. I believe, as I have discussed in previous chapters, that Bishop's work in ethnography and her alignment with postmodern and feminist ethnographers can help us view these discussions in new and productive ways. As a graduate student in writing and rhetoric, I have been fortunate to study in a program in which students of composition, creative writing, and literature work in close alliance, and as a result I have seen firsthand the vested interest students, instructors, and professors continue to have in Bishop's

scholarship. For instance, Wendy Bishop has played an important role in my Current Composition Theory course—a graduate-only class with MAs in literature, writing and rhetoric, and MFAs in poetry and fiction. At least five of the twenty-five students in the course are writing about or using Wendy Bishop’s work in their seminar papers, and still others in the class are writing about feminism and voice in composition studies. It has been a pleasure discussing and sharing Bishop’s work with these like-minded colleagues.

I believe that Bishop also continues to be important in the larger picture of composition studies. Earlier this year I attended the annual Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) and was able to sit in on two of the four sessions on creative writing. One of the presentations in a session on creative nonfiction in the composition classroom discussed Bishop’s scholarship at some length. And although only four out of the several hundred sessions were labeled as creative writing, numerous others discussed topics at the intersections of creative writing and composition such as personal narrative and storytelling as academic discourse. Several other sessions grappled with topics of identity, feminism, and voice, invoking many of the important points Bishop makes in her scholarship.

Ben Ristow, in his essay “Because of Wendy” in *Composing Ourselves*, writes that he hopes that “future scholars will investigate [Wendy Bishop’s] work along the thread of their own research interest” (213). In writing this thesis, I have investigated and become immersed in Bishop’s work. The experience has led me down unanticipated paths—such as research in anthropology—and has provided me with new interests that I am excited to pursue further—particularly feminist ethnography and feminist theory. I

began writing about Wendy Bishop and her scholarship by freewriting. As I read, I wrote, and I did so in narrative. Like Bishop and many creative writers, I understand my ideas best once I have written them down. Writing about Bishop's work while reading it reminded me how important the relationship between process and story is. I hope that this thesis exposes the story of my research—of going from an interest in Bishop's scholarship arguing for the importance of creative writing, to then seeing the connective threads between her ethnography and this argument, and finally to recognizing that this connection demonstrated ways in which Bishop challenged much more than the line between creative writing and composition.

As any good story should, this process has also left me with renewed passion and interest in several aspects of my topic. I now see the crossover between creative writing and critical writing as speaking to important issues within the university, specifically issues of inclusion and diversity. This understanding has driven me to continue to find ways to integrate creative elements into my writing classroom and has given me valuable discourse to back up this pedagogical choice. Like Bishop, I want to be a “sneak-thief at the boundaries between prose and poetry, fiction and nonfiction. . . . [to] steal from the seemingly richer genre (at any given time) and give to the poorer, plying boundary territories for resources” (“Preaching” 3).

The feminist agenda has also become increasingly important to both my academic writing and my creative nonfiction. I am excited to continue to gain a deeper understanding of feminist theory and to do further research into ways third-wave feminist scholarship argues for forms that promote a wider range of voices in the university. I am

also excited to read works by others who see and argue for the connection between creative writing and feminism and to gain a deeper understanding of the impact feminist ethnographers have made on ethnography and anthropology.

As I move forward as a scholar, feminist, writer, and writing teacher, I feel a responsibility to carry Wendy Bishop's legacy forward by continuing to promote a synchronous relationship between the creative and critical and to share my teaching, writing, and research stories with others. Bishop has inspired me to continue to be reflective and to write about my teaching and writing lives. In her 2003 essay "Because Teaching Writing Is (Still) Mostly about Teaching Writing," Bishop writes that she wishes there were "as large a bank of teaching poems and shared and analyzed teaching narratives as...historical, experimental, and naturalistic research" (75). I, like the many others who carry Bishop's legacy forward, hope to contribute to this goal.

As my writing and teaching journey continues, Wendy Bishop will continue informing and inspiring me to always question, challenge, and explore what I believe. The relationship that I have formed with Wendy and her scholarship in writing this thesis, I believe, is expressed by considering one of her poems featured in her book *In Praise of Pedagogy* :

I thought I saw you  
 over my left shoulder,  
 out the study window,  
 down the centipede grass lawn,  
 just brushed on the forehead  
 by the cabbage palm fronds.  
 As I counted out syllables  
 on my lips, I was sure your lips  
 moved. You waved, as I turned  
 a line, enjambed myself

into the evening.  
For I can sit working  
as long as the city sleeps  
and stars float  
like separate spyholes  
in the sky's humidity.  
Deciding there is a door  
for each star,  
I open each to see what is really  
just outside this picture.  
And only after such euphoria,  
do I notice that you are gone. (15-16)

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