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The role of shame in writing: How lived experience affects the writing process

Carol Kountz

University of New Hampshire, Durham

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THE ROLE OF SHAME IN WRITING:

HOW LIVED EXPERIENCE AFFECTS THE WRITING PROCESS

BY

CAROL KOUNTZ

AB University of Michigan, 1964

ALM Harvard University, 1991

DISSERTATION

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This dissertation has been examined and approved.

_____
Dissertation Director, Patricia A. Sullivan,
Associate Professor of English

_____
Thomas R. Newkirk, Professor of English

_____
Elizabeth Jane Bellamy, Associate Professor of English

_____
Paula M. Salvio, Assistant Professor of Education

_____
William L. Wansart, Associate Professor of Education

June 25, 1998
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Date

To

Dr. Sue Weaver Schopf

and the students, faculty and staff of Harvard Extension

iii

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iv

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v

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

Writing fluently without disabling apprehension requires an ability to control ideas despite the occurrence of censoring thoughts or shameful sensations. Such ability is characteristically lacking in apprehensive or blocking writers, who, therefore, have difficulty in composing. To understand the psychological and social factors that impede the writing process, and to give writers and compositionists insight into the features of writing that result in "writer's block," I held conversational interviews with twenty-four people who designate themselves as apprehensive writers about their literacy experiences and writing behavior. Analysis of these interviews shows that these people, in anticipation of a real or inward, imagined audience, behave so as to hide their writing, which is consistent with unacknowledged shame at a projected failure. Passive, engrossed reading appears to condition these people to set high standards for their writing performance. To tolerate writing and to acquire pride in it, the individual needs flexibility and sensitivity in the preparation and reception of written texts, and the university needs to accommodate writers' self-reproach through institutionalizing writers' coping mechanisms, such as de-emphasizing revision and using technology to reduce exposure.

x

INTRODUCTION

In our society, writing is inevitable, and people must write to function. For some people, this need creates an overwhelming tyranny that results in severe distress when they contemplate writing and in anxiety feelings that both interfere with composing and also prevent some from writing. Writing teachers may be aware of this condition or may have it to some extent themselves, yet few have a formal language for discussing this condition. In the classroom, therefore, the anxiety many writers feel goes largely unaddressed, and the erratic writing that people may produce as a result of their fears may look like a defect to the teacher, or even a personal character flaw, not a deviation from the norm or a different way of working. The academic environment values writing, yet the act of writing in the academy is sufficiently rulebound to make some people wish to hide or to escape, especially people prone to shame. When I first encountered such a student at a writing center where I tutored, I certainly had no clue to the emotions involved. I remember sitting in the corner of a library with the woman, a serious, intelligent graduate student, to discuss her writing assignment. No matter how many workable ideas we floated or how much we reviewed her class notes plus the dozen or so library books she had brought, she found nothing to write about. I realize now that she was paralyzed by writing apprehension and was displaying the phenomenon of the blocked writer who aborts a paper at the idea stage. My frustrating inability to repair the problem gnawed at me until I

began to research the matter, leading to this dissertation. As this anecdote shows, I originally took a utilitarian approach emphasizing intervention, but as I began talking to people predisposed to writing anxiety, my attitude shifted. I have discovered that large numbers of writers at all levels of the educational process and beyond the boundaries of academe want to bring this problem out in the open and discuss experiences that characterize and sometimes threaten their writing. I want to respond to that need and to offer hope to these often very motivated writers by representing their condition.

Today, writing anxiety continues to trouble people, but investigations of it have decreased. In earlier periods, investigators studied writing anxiety empirically with the tools of psychoanalysis and psychiatric treatment, like the mid-century work of the analyst Karen Horney. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, composition scholars John A. Daly and Mike Rose conducted cognitive studies to assess the attitudes and working methods of apprehensive and blocked writers using laboratory protocols and empirical methods. Daly, working with Michael D. Miller, developed a questionnaire in 1975 that identified writing anxiety and measured its intensity. Rose's results located writing block in specific cognitive functions; for instance, Rose reported that writers with a high proclivity to block applied needless "shoulds" or limiting assumptions and inflexible rules to their writing (*Writer's Block* 72-3). These investigators also recommended further study of non-cognitive factors, such as the classroom environment, the instructor's anxiety toward writing, and the writer's social-cultural background and educational level, all of which appeared to interact with cognitive operations to impede writing.

In the intervening years, however, researchers turned away from studies that appeared to objectify student writers as machine-like or to treat them like patients, and this decline in interest has created a knowledge gap within composition studies concerning activities of the mind. Yet new approaches to the study of the mind, as I report in the following chapters, allow us to reconceptualize writing apprehension and writer's block. Neurobiological research, an important area, has reformulated the interaction of emotion and intellect in the brain, as Antonio Damasio reports, with implications relevant to writing activity. Studies in biopsychology by Pinker, Goleman, Winner, and Turkle give insight into affective disturbances like shame, self-reproach, fear of imposter status, or self-aggrandizement that occur during intellectual activity and interfere with mental functions.

Recent cultural and psychoanalytic theories of dominant-subordinate patterns, especially the work of Jean Baker Miller, suggest that educational institutions and cultural traditions may curb writing; this field is ripe for investigation that explores life experiences of affected writers. Feminist learning theory has established *connectedness* as a developmental goal that rivals the traditional Freudian and neo-Freudian sexuality model, as Carol Gilligan and her colleagues report. Students' feelings as affected by education can receive more study as a result. Using the humanistic tools of ethnographically-oriented qualitative investigation, composition scholars can construct an individual writer's perspective. We can also study a person's life as a narrative, a research method that gives us insight into the uniqueness of experience.

Integrating these new approaches lets the compositon profession reformulate existing conceptions of writing apprehension and writer's block. For this profession, whose membership includes writing instructors and researchers at colleges and universities, the challenge is to understand how professional discourse creates an environment that has the opposite effect from what was intended, that is, stops some writers from writing. The goal, I would argue, is to dispense with a model based on disease, which means abandoning expectations of a cure or an antidote. Instead, composition can suggest alternate classifications of writers and writing and can adopt an expanded rhetoric to accommodate anxiety-prone writers' experience.

The broad aims of the present study are therefore to understand psychological and social factors that impede the writing process and to give insight into writing apprehension to writers and to instructors in all disciplines. Specifically, it is my intention to represent anxious writers and use their perspectives, habits, and strategies to propose a new "shameless speech" for the composition profession. Doing so also introduces the writing student's voice as an authority within composition theory, for, as Deborah Brandt writes, "composition studies would benefit from assuming more competence on the part of the people who are typically studied" ("Cognitive" 350). And Gesa Kirsch writes, "it is critical that we learn about our students, about their lives, literacies, and educational goals" ("Responds" 345). Reporting experiences, in the words of Min-Zhan Lu and Bruce Horner, can lead to "undermining the hierarchical relations between . . . teachers and students, redefining the differences . . . as fluid" (275), which is a goal that the study of writing and shame can help to accomplish. In addition to giving a writer's-eye view, this

project will acknowledge how almost all writers have self-reproach to a degree, and this knowledege should reduce the tension between anxious writing and the institutional/educational culture.

In order to work toward these aims, this research attempts to answer the following questions: What are the features of the writing process that result in anxiety or shame-related sensations? What experiences do writers recall living through as they became literate and how do those events align with their writing anxiety? How do writers perceive others' evaluations of their writing, and to what degree does this correspond to the actual evaluation? What regularities or patterns exist across the body of writers who participate in the study? To answer these questions, I sought writers who identified themselves as having apprehension or anxiety about their writing or who had experienced writer's block, and held conversational interviews with them to elicit accounts of their anxiety-based writing experiences. I recruited volunteers from two universities in New England, the University of New Hampshire, in Durham, a rural location, and Harvard University, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, an urban campus in Greater Boston.

Writing anxiety has connections to literary tradition and education, and in the first two chapters of this dissertation, I orient the reader to the background of the condition. Chapter I explains the leading terms, especially shame, anxiety and writer's block, and taxonomizes shame. Chapter II looks at the theoretical debate that takes place in psychology and in composition theory over the alleged inescapability of anxiety as a feature of writing. The methodology of the project and the method of analyzing the accounts that I collected are described in Chapter III.

In the perspective of the anxious writer, some apprehension and self-reproach *does* appear inevitable. When writers actually voice their concerns about composing, their accounts reveal underlying tension between self and ideal and between self and authority. Some people describe the wish to hide from others' sight, while others display anxiety about not being noticed. The patterns I perceive are categorized in Chapter IV, which also gives several individual portraits. Nearly every person I interviewed was enrolled in an academic program, and some were teaching as well as studying or writing professionally; as this activity demonstrates, they could cope somehow with their anxiety. It is through their coping strategies, as I see it, that writers show the disjuncture between their reality and "official" pedagogy. What they do to cope, as I explain in Chapter V, may be seen as successful or not, depending upon the standards of the person who is evaluating the performance or text. These unorthodox working approaches to writing form the basis, finally, for my conclusions in Chapter VI, where I offer a sketch of the rhetoric that I recommend and describe what it might mean to institutionalize such writing processes.

CHAPTER I

SHAME, A BOLD VILLAIN

You cannot imagine falsely.

— Muriel Rukeyser

A complex, mysterious process begins every time a writer, regardless of skill, starts to put ideas into words. When people are involved in writing, they may produce a text that satisfies themselves and their readers, yet even the best training, preparation, and skill cannot guarantee that the composing process will not founder. Often, writers distort the experience by being self-referential and continually aware of how their work and they themselves will be seen, which prevents them from perceiving their composition with disinterest and from appreciating it. The intellectual interest in understanding this problem is twofold: it lies in both the possibility of further theoretical knowledge about the operations of the mind and in practical measures that may restore writer and text to equilibrium. In this project, I approach this question from the direction of affect or human emotion and specifically by inquiring into the connection between the emotion of shame and the sensation of wishing to accomplish a goal. Within the writer, shame usually translates into the uncanny sensation of being physically as well as mentally prevented from writing, as if by external forces; this condition, widely known as writer's block or as a

related condition, writing anxiety, affects a proportion of adult writers at all levels, year after year, in any classroom or writing center. It is, however, underinvestigated by the composition profession.

Current composition theories see affect as parallel to cognitive skills and both as influenced by interaction with the environment. For example, in John R. Hayes's 1996 model of writing, affect, together with memory, motivation and cognition, comprise the individual, and interaction takes place between the individual and the writing task, which is situated in a social and a material environment (4). These theories make it important to look not solely at the mental activity within the writer (not) at work, but simultaneously at the outer environment, which constructs the writer but is also perceived uniquely by the writer. As a result, the investigation of text-production problems becomes complex; the system might go awry in any single area or in a combination of several. The profession of composition studies has been valuing corrective action more highly than foundational study, yet in so doing, the profession in fact ignores or represses its inability to present the technique of writing from a perspective that reaches every writer. As writing becomes more widely taught across the disciplines, the need is more urgent.

Composition theory now has the opportunity to synthesize its knowledge of performance problems with pathbreaking discoveries in empirically based disciplines like experimental and evolutionary psychology, genetics, and neuroscience, all engaged in investigations of how the mind works. Composition has much to gain. Yet if science is to brush composition, turnabout is fair play; these laboratory-linked domains stand to benefit from composition's humanistic antecedents and its interpretive, qualitative commitment to

close reading and deep understanding. For those reasons, this inquiry devotes itself to practices, habits and strategies of writing as perceived by one specific category, the anxiety- or shame-prone writer. Most of these writers are blocked, but not in the conventional sense: they are likely to continue writing intermittently in spite of emotional distress. They do not, that is, refrain altogether from writing, as the term "writer's block" suggests, with its now somewhat passé connotations of the professional writer at the portable Royal typewriter. Yet their apprehension often puts them at a disadvantage in quality and compromises their potential satisfaction. Their anxiety distorts their writing process: looming assignments dog them and remembered evaluations mock them. These people experience writing anxiety and writer's block in relation to authority and judgment; the conditions recur when a writer gets messages of self-reproach from an internal censoring function or gets a response from an audience that becomes distorted by her fears.

Writers with anxiety are influenced by cultural values that may distort reality. Values that misdirect writers by parading as fact include the fabled "might" of the pen and the U.S. constitutional guarantee of free press and free speech; these values make a patriotic (chauvinistic) hero of writing without accounting for the inevitable sequence of failure and correction involved in writing, as in all learning. Correct English spelling, which arises to mark an elite, does not make for virtue, as Linda Brodkey reminds us ("Bias" 32). Any writing symbolizes the Word, or the last word or autonomous authority. A poetic voice or personal mode of expression is of relative value, dependent upon class and context, rather than a transcendent standard of quality (see Bourdieu; Hoggart). Cultural approval

for argument in composition creates an often belligerent academic mode, one that silences (Schweickart 323). Unexamined dissemination of those values within writing distorts the real-world, interactive process of composing.

Some people claim that a block or impediment to writing is a natural part of the writing process and that it will evaporate when the writer has absorbed enough ideas to begin. These people believe that writers normally feel unable to write while they are planning, doing research, and preparing to get underway; this view corresponds to the attitude that because writing moves in cycles, slumps are inevitable (see Phelps). Other people suggest that writers may dry up if they feel anxiety about beginning in light of literary predecessors.[1] Still others advise that writing anxiety may in fact mask attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), bipolar depression, or another medical condition. Even a literacy crisis may be responsible, if we are to believe some social critics, e.g. George F. Will, who fear that writing standards and performance have eroded in colleges today.[2] It seems to be no accident that my study of paralysis or muting of writing coincides with such biased views that have an unwritten agenda to exclude unpolished voices (and unwashed bodies?) from education and eventually from socially influential positions. Any of these views may be true in some cases, yet the solutions they offer do not correspond to the phenomenological descriptions that anxious writers themselves give, so they can be only a partial depiction of a complex condition. What is more helpful is a picture of positions ranging across a continuum on which all kinds of writing forms and habits are arrayed.

Writing as Culture

Laden with tradition, lore, myth, ritual, esteemed models, and the promise of overnight success or the threat of failure, writing exists in present U.S. social structure as an environment or a culture. The separate area or sub-culture of academic writing has its own set of lore, ritual, and rumor: students may fear having their papers ripped apart; they may panic at meeting deadlines; they may struggle with writing "error-free" papers; they may confront opportunities for plagiarism; they may dread being "found out" as an imposter; they endure nightmares of having a paper read aloud in class. In academia, writers also may be challenged by the need to conform.

For all these reasons, the writer may perceive the emerging text as taking control or appearing to write itself; the text may even appear to generate an identity for the writer that takes precedence over other biologically or socially constructed traits. Writing can cancel gender identification, it can alter perception of measured time, it can manifest itself as physical sensations, it can facilitate serendipitous mental associations and images--or disastrous ones. These powers are not well understood; textual production as an activity of the mind should be a priority for investigation.

Writing can make writers feel fear, guilt, disgust, dread, or shame, emotions that are then reflected in a distorted self-image. Writers describe themselves as if they were "ants," at a great distance from authority (peers--teachers--parents) and looking at writing as if through the wrong end of a telescope; or they may talk of themselves as if they are flying monsters, physically and intellectually, intimidating teachers or others with flamboyant verbosity — scribbling with wild fingers —in a field that esteems logic, reason,

control. They may also be hermits, loving solitude, expecting ostracism or alienation from others, who may disapprove of their writing or fear that their condition is contagious.

Writers can be changed by their growing texts as much as by writing's lore and fantasies; for example, poet Adrienne Rich observes that if writers refuse to allow their creativity to transform their work and their lives, they will write very little (*On Lies* 43); that observation is echoed by analyst Susan Kavaler-Adler (*Creative Mystique* 43). Although writers cope with the problems and with their emotional reactions to the problems, their strategies may be ineffective or even emotionally destructive (as I explain in Chapter V).

Taxonomy of the Writing Environment

Writing, like other originary enterprises, is potentially exhilarating but dangerous. By bringing the self into the act of making meaning—bringing bodily knowledge to bear upon mind—writing has the capacity to set off fireworks. The intimate writing environment may have an anxiety-provoking effect on the emotions and mind, when a requirement to write sets this system into motion. Drawing on research in writing, psychology and psychoanalysis, on my personal experiences of writing, and on accounts that volunteers gave me in interviews for this project, I propose five basic aspects of the writing environment that engender characteristic writing anxiety:

1) the privacy of the writing space;

2) the perception of exposure to another's scrutiny;

3) the illusion of perfection;

4) the necessity of painful remembering;

5) the encouragement to self-aggrandizement.

Although most writers encounter these aspects of writing, many who are not overly sensitive to shame tolerate the resulting discomfort. The nature of the writing requirement also alters the writer's perceptions of distress. But this will vary from writer to writer; an innocuous subject for one will be distressing for another. Each aspect of the writing environment contributes to the overall effect.

Perceiving the Writing Space as Private

Conditions of privacy, secrecy and protection are historically, traditionally, and Romantically linked with the writing environment. Although this privacy is illusory in the philosophical sense that no one originates language, still, there is a retreat during which the writer is engaged with ideas and images. In the published accounts by writers, near limitless descriptions appear. For composition teacher and author Donald M. Murray, one is "listening to the text"; for Marion Milner, an artist as well as a psychoanalyst, "one had to maintain the kind of attention which created a gap ahead in time and a willingness to wait and see what was emerging to fill the gap" (104). During this hermetic period, interruption is not merely unwelcome, but represents a menace. Hélène Cixous says that private writing is "clandestine" (102). The writer alone, then, may sense enjoyment of something forbidden.

Conditioned by cultural lore, writers may aspire to a mystical state of creativity that may amount to a period of altered consciousness. Under inspiration, the poet, wrote Plato

in *Phaedrus*, is "beside himself." Yet writers may become distressed by such sensations and try to end their work prematurely or bring immature ideas under control. Working independently, rather than taking direction from others, challenges people; for self-effacing individuals, according to analyst Karen Horney, it increases anxiety given their habit of undermining themselves, which makes them aware of any defect in their writing (317).

The isolated situation in which writing often takes place corresponds, in counterproductive ways, to moments of feeling ashamed; daydreams, for example, might occur yet be concealed, according to Freud, because their content reveals to the dreamer certain grandiose ambitions and desires that the adult ordinarily cannot countenance ("Creative" 145). If a student writer believes that her or his writing can lead to academic achievement, it may seem so overwhelming a fantasy that the writer must defend against it. A writer might be shocked by emerging words or ideas that reveal previously hidden aggression or desire, and she may think that these ideas must be censored to prevent others from knowing this truth about her and from sending her into exile.

The Perception of Exposure to Another's Scrutiny

Writing can bring a situation of self-awareness, where the page seems to be a mirror or camera that reflects the writer. Anxious writers may perceive a distorted, funhouse mirror reflection that makes them want to "disappear" from the gaze of the text and flee its arousing presence. This "magical thinking" invests the text with power, like the power of the sun, to harm them unless they can shield themselves from it. The writers' need for protection or safety suggests that they imagine their writing as having power to harm

them. Being observed in the midst of writing also causes distress that is linked to shame; especially for those who are shame-sensitive, it threatens exposure of the writer's intimate being, as if one were naked in public. In her novel *A Thousand Acres*, Jane Smiley has a character express the sensation of exposure: "It seemed like my father could just look out of his big front window and see me naked, chest heaving, breasts, thighs, and buttocks jiggling, dignity irretrievable" (114-5). Writing can produce a sense of being naked in one's beliefs and desires. "Phenomenologically, to feel shame is to feel seen in a painfully diminished sense," writes psychologist Gershen Kaufman (*Psychology* 17). In addition to being seen, the person has a sense of being transparent to the watchers, resulting in self-consciousness that exerts a paralyzing force (Lewis, *Shame* 88; Kaufman, *Shame* 9). The greater the social controls, the more fear from personal exposure.

During private writing, the higher, intellectual center, usually thought of as being on top of the body in the head, may appear--shamefully--to merge with the lower regions of physical body, like the genitals.[3] But the writer might also identify with "dirty" or excretory orifices. According to Milner, the exuberance that the writer senses as she releases words and ideas may cause her to make an unconscious association between writing and the orgasmic pleasure she took as a child in elimination or sexual exploration (150). The great love that the writer feels for her words becomes dangerously conflated with her earlier pride in creating bowel movements. This pride may have been converted into shame by a representative of social values and public behavior standards, usually a mother or caretaker, but later, often an instructor of required composition (Susan Miller 46). For some, writing with the hand produces distressing links to external control of the

body, to conformity and to competition. Normal relief or comfort motions of the hand are denied, as they would be to an actor or similar public performer (Aaron 78). Handwriting, then, works to cancel the coping mechanisms that a troubled writer might normally adopt in a time of stress.

Disgust or repulsion at what a writer has written is not infrequent: Roland Barthes finds that his journal entries resemble spoiled food, "delicate foodstuff that 'turns,' spoils, becomes unappetizing . . . I am disgusted and irritated to find a 'pose' I certainly hadn't intended" (359). Psychologist David Perkins blocks when his writing seems "ugly" (*Mind's* 115).

Everyone imagines being watched, Freud claims, by conscience, the judgmental voices and values that the child has unwittingly internalized ("On Narcissism" 95). Those under outer or inner surveillance learn to see themselves through others' eyes, as they imagine that they are seen by others. In *1984*, Orwell dramatizes the phenomenology of the citizen under scrutiny by Big Brother and the state. The panopticon, in Michel Foucault's theory of surveillance, represents the power of modern culture to make people monitor themselves (*Discipline* 195; 249). If people find themselves repulsive and poorly judge their ideas or their work in progress, they may not have a freely flowing stream of ideas or may write for days to finish a project, then lose faith in it and destroy it.

The Illusion of Perfection

The muse may be the leading image of a writer's near-miraculous inspiration. To the writer, text sometimes appears to be a spontaneous creation of the mind/body, like

dreams, containing material that seems to be inspired, even divinely so. It may feel to the writer as if her wish to express something has magically caused text to emerge, and this belief may prevent her from revising the text. Accordingly, writing sometimes encourages writers to accept and to over-rely on universal concepts like the collective unconscious or the autonomous, unfragmented self. Aesthetic standards contribute to this attitude as well by engendering preferences. Shame-sensitive people, however, may be fused emotionally with nascent ideas and unable to make the aggressive act of wrestling these concepts into presentable form (Horney 320).

If writers feel aggression, they may often project it away from the text and onto authority figures instead. Their anger may arise at readers who apparently misunderstand what the writer conceptualized and tried to capture on the page. As Milner writes, the gap between ideal and actual leads to self-hate (92).

The ideal is bound to differ from the conscience. In Freud's view, the developing human personality forms an idealized view of desirable qualities it wants in itself--the ego ideal, in Freudian terms--while internalized admonitions make up the conscience. Yet Freud also saw that conscience could readily but unhealthily gain the upper hand; for example, in *Civilization and Its Discontents* he wrote, "In the severity of its commands and prohibitions it troubles itself too little about the happiness of the ego" (90). The writer who is trying to match her ideal standards remains watching her self as much as her text, and not just watching but frequently admonishing herself for what may seem excellent reasons. In Nietzsche's words, "When we train our conscience, it kisses as it bites" (qtd. in Lewis, *Psychic* 192).

The text itself is always subject to comparison with the ideal, the standard of perfection, yet its perfection of style, content, and purpose can never be more than relative. Writers may drive themselves crazy trying to finish a composition, when in fact they would do better to view writing as always capable of being transformed, as Perkins writes (*Mind's* 159). Mechanical errors of spelling, punctuation and grammar can be taken to an absolute standard, and so they may illogically come to represent a personal flaw. Some writers, as Linda Brodkey says of herself, "fetishize" rules and think they should know every rule, which in Brodkey's case means that "when a copy editor invokes an inhouse rule I feel shame, as if my not having mastered a rule that I could not have known even existed means I must not be much of a writer" ("Bias" 32). Since a fetish is a source of power over an otherwise dangerous being, rules may signal a power struggle between writer and text or may be like stored treasure, making a Midas of the writer who summons some obscure, unimportant rule. Yet like childhood admonitions, these rules push themselves into consciousness and vie for attention with images and concepts when the writer least needs to concentrate on perfection. Gershen Kaufman's discussion of the "disabling expectation" to excel or be perfect, which may be a parental message, explains how it also freezes performance by introducing the possibility of failing (*Shame* 25). The writer who wants to produce a working draft has to struggle to move the pen or the cursor past the misspelled word, the ungrammatical construction, or the awkward sentence; it takes confidence for her to believe that she will correct the errors later in an editing session. Self-minimizing writers, Karen Horney adds, berate themselves by seeing flaws in their work (317), making them hopelessly backlogged in trying to complete the

rough draft of a piece of writing (321). If fear of rules inhibits writing, the knowledge of rules may also impair writing by causing pride or instilling competitive aggression. During composing, Milner writes, the creator must forget her ideal and "throw the rules to the winds" (93), which corresponds to Mike Rose's analysis that blocked writers cling rigidly to unnecessary rules.

Writing seems potentially perfectible ("error-free," as the syllabi say), but in reality it accepts virtually limitless modification. This paradoxical feature of writing and of imaginative work in general can be seized upon by frustrated writers, and used obsessively to prolong or delay exposure to an external authority. In his book *The Culture of Shame*, Andrew Morrison points out the unachievable goals held by shame-sensitive people; to use the imagination, he feels, people must have flexible ideals that will accommodate failure to meet an ideal perfectly. Writers can use a deadline as an excuse for writing a less than perfect paper.

The Need for Painful Remembering

Often, the act of putting pen to paper taps into psychic baggage. Humiliating memories may loom when writing in privacy, although the memory may appear unrelated to the subject of the writing. Some writers link writing with childhood memories of punishment for writing on unsuitable surfaces, like walls (one writer recalled using a banana for this purpose), for using slang, or for making a grammatical error in conversation. Grade school writing experiences may likewise be indelible; writers may have had to write a repeated sentence as a punishment, or they may have failed to imitate

perfect Palmer-method handwriting, resulting in a "C" in "penmanship." The classic

psychoanalytic view describes these unintended, or imperfectly repressed, memories as

emerging from the unfulfilled nature of writing itself. In writing, individuals relive dreams

or wishes, such as mastery and ambition, that become presented to consciousness in a

changed or what Freud called "distorted" form ("Creative" 149) to render the wishes

acceptable to the conscience. These impulses then become stories and poems.[4]

Later psychoanalysis disputes the Freudian view. Silvan Tomkins claims that disgust

or shame reside within the human brain as one of the innate emotions or instincts (qtd.

Kaufman, *Shame* x). Current neuroscience confirms that some inborn or "primary

emotions" condition people to react emotionally and defensively to life-threatening size,

motion, or sound perceptions; an example would be a growling or rumbling sound that

warns of a tiger or an earthquake (Damasio 131). When a person sees an image, even in

the mind's eye, it can produce an aroused state that feels automatic or instinctive and that

in predisposed people registers as shame. Via image/thought or memory, shame can

overtake a person in isolation.

Encouragement for Self-aggrandizement

If the writer is susceptible to thinking in lofty extremes, the comparison of self to a

great model or a high standard can interfere with completing (or even beginning) a piece

of writing. On her first visit to London, New Zealand author Janet Frame expressed the

perils of competition when she wrote, "On Hampstead Heath, I did not know whether to

thank or curse John Keats and others for having planted their sedge, basil, woodbine and

nodding violets, and arranged their perennial nightingales to sing in my mind" (19).

Sometimes a writer refuses to write for reasons of complicated emotional tension in which

the writer wants to equal, or even to please, a literary master but fears failing at the

attempt. Fantasy lets a person expect greatness from her/himself, but failure to live up to

it causes intense shame (Ortony et al. 144); it is equally shameful, Kaufman suggests, to

find that the fantasy was wrong (*Psychology* 31). Writing can encourage a fantasy as

common as the graduate student's increasingly high standards for herself, or as complex as

the aspirations of the fiction writer whose dreams cast him as the next Hemingway.

Writers themselves may describe feeling separate from others and may enact this in

their behavior, perhaps by holding back their writing from others, instead of recognizing

their ambition as grandiose. The neo-Freudian psychoanalyst Heinz Kohut, who theorizes

about the narcissistic or self-admiring personality, refers to the "omnipotent and

omniscient grandiose self" as that individual who insists on control and power over all

details of life (*Self* 147). To take such control, the writer may decide to withdraw his

writing from the sight of authorities. Such a writer might wait months or years before

writing again. This abstinence, Kohut claims, protects the individual from the excessive

stimulation and exhibitionism writing causes; this person's exaggerated self-promotion, a

feeling he would normally conceal, may emerge in writing and cause him to panic

(*Restoration* 10).

Invoking the canon as a model may inhibit a writer with "anxiety of influence," critic

Harold Bloom's coinage for artistic impotence in the presence of literary tradition.

Literary tradition castrates new talent in the oedipal sense, Bloom proposes. Writers

heroically slay their predecessors to claim their own time in the spotlight. This scenario poses problems for writers whose relationship to tradition is one of attachment. Moreover, guilt may result; according to object-relations psychoanalyst Susan Kavaler-Adler, if a writer is tormented by her "own projected images of greatness," she may gradually cut herself off from others until she is "sealed off in a hall of mirrors" (*Creative* 43). Analyst Dominick Grundy claims that the non-responsiveness of the idol causes the aspiring writer to become vindictively outraged, then resentfully silent ("Parricide" 704).

These characteristics provide a rhetoric for dissecting writing itself as writers live it rather than discussing writing in terms of skills or tools or evaluation. Writers with anxiety reveal a unique phenomenology of writing. Yet perhaps it is less unusual than it appears, for any writer, in view of the social and cultural pressure to write, might be susceptible to these emotions.

Metaphors and Definitions

Writing culture has traditionally brandished the image of the mental block with considerable pride of ownership, yet there is wide latitude in precision of meaning. Language makes an analogy to the weight and density of wood in choosing "block" as the metaphor unique to unsuccessful writing and other frustrated mental endeavors. The possessive apostrophe in writer's block shows that the mental condition is attached to the writer, but the term, "block," connotes an object, material thing or commodity inside the writer: Alexander Pope's "bookful blockhead" has "loads of learned lumber in his head";

Dryden also used "blockhead" in 1693; Samuel Johnson gave "blockhead" the connotation of ignorance in a writer, specifically one who would *not* write for money.

Nothing about "block" conveys human mental operations--emotions or thoughts. Worse, the block is unchanging, a fixed or uncontrollable property, unlike its opposite, the much-desired "flow." Other related terms imply a source of the problem: "roadblock," for example, suggests that an outside agent has interfered with normal progress. "Stage fright" names an emotion and a place where it occurs (it would make less sense to speak of "actor's void"). If writers would refer to anxiety as "text fright" or "writing dread," it would locate the source of the anxiety in either the object produced or the process of producing it. By not doing so, the writer's emotion of fear is deliberately omitted or unsuccessfully repressed. It might help writers to introduce the image of multiple cubes or toy building blocks, often painted with letters of the alphabet, so that they can reconceptualize "block" as a temporary construction built of "many blocks" that the writer can rearrange, control, or even play with to build a pleasing shape.

But this confusion in nomenclature also demonstrates "entifying," or the English language's predilection for transforming behavioral adjectives, e.g. an anxious writer, a frozen writer, into abstract nouns that project attitude, e.g. writer's block (Dweck and Leggett 267). The language persists in labeling writers as wooden slabs, yet in Susanne K. Langer's words, "there are rather few elaborate lifeless mechanisms in nature" (*Mind* 108). The philosopher Ian Hacking introduces the idea that some acts are culturally permissible ways to express distress (16). Perhaps our use of "block" betrays the tension that accompanies the difficulty of being literate in an increasingly post-literate time.

"Writer's block," to borrow Ann Berthoff's dynamic definition in *Forming, Thinking, Writing,* "is a catch-all term used by non-writers to keep themselves from examining their difficulties; occasionally, though, it names something very real, a resistance beyond the reach of games and harmless compulsions, beyond what a method of composing could cure" (205). People recognize "writer's block" as a ready-made name that explains, or seems to explain, their confusing mixture of thought and language trouble. This ready acceptance by writers of the term is a phenomenon that Ian Hacking calls "semantic contagion" (255). I find it intriguing that among the people I interviewed, almost none used the term "writer's block." In our first conversation, a 25-year-old writer I call Beth, who has taken a leave from University of New Hampshire and is now working full time, reported an experience that is like a mental block: "I can actually feel it in my head, where I go ping, and I just don't even think about it anymore" (BL-A9).

How much does composition instruction at the college level address negative emotion? There are some existing resources for writing instructors, including Rose's books and articles on the subject, chapters in books for writers by Peter Elbow and Donald M. Murray, and, more recently, Robert Boice's *How Writers Journey to Comfort and Fluency: A Psychological Adventure* (1994). A few textbooks address emotional problems and suggest interventions, yet many textbooks do not cover anxiety or writer's block; this was also true of textbooks from the late 1970s, which Mike Rose surveyed (*Writer's* 13) in studying writer's block as a cognitive phenomenon.

The emotional component of writing is one way to define composing and distinguish it from more utilitarian labor. The work of Murray and Elbow acknowledges affect, but we

might go farther; as numerous writers have suggested, the "uses of the unconscious," in Janet Emig's phrase, belong within composition teaching. Writing is unlike handicrafts; people who make things, like seamstresses and carpenters, are not thought of as blocked or full of anxiety about their product or the process of making it. How can we explain the reason that we don't speak of "woodworker's block"? This question leads to some fascinating speculation into the meaning of writing and creativity. It is the presence of pieces of the finished product, according to Langer, that distinguishes a manufactured product from an artistic creation or illusion (*Art* 28-9). When the carpenter's product is finished, it is tangibly a table or cabinet made of wood; but the writer's composition, when completed, is more than the words and sentences of which it is made and it has abstract, intangible existence. The block, then, shows a kind of brute obstruction of the near-mystical inspiration.

If writers are responsible for what they create, a block may represent the revelation that their writing presents a view of themselves they find unacceptable, because of an unconventional quality or attitude or an apparent defect. The subjective impact of writing on the person performing it—self-revelation as a failure—is an important link in the psychodynamics of writing behavior.

Shame: The Savage Censor[5]

Here is John Bunyan's characterization of Shame in *The Pilgrim's Progress*: "But indeed this Shame was a bold villain; I could scarce shake him out of my company; yea, he would be haunting of me, and continually whispering me in the ear, with some one or

other of the infirmities that attend religion," Faithful tells Christian (108-09). The writer is

as vulnerable as the pilgrim Christian to being tempted and haunted. The feeling of shame

haunts the working process of an anxious writer and whispers to him or her of pitfalls that

attend composition. Also, shame is the natural opposite of education, as I will explore in

these pages, and this fact is underscored by Bunyan: Shame objects to "ignorance of the

times in which they [pilgrims] lived, and want of understanding in all natural science"

(107). What may have been lost as education became institutionalized is that a learner

accepts his or her innocence.

English speakers are constructed of ideas and expectations that anticipate shame. The

word *shame*, of Germanic derivation, comes from Indo-European roots meaning "to

cover."[6] The word names a concept that is historically constructed within English, like the

concept of emotion (Russell 430). It is a thought pattern based on the possibilities and

limitations of our linguistic background. Cultures vary in the terms they designate under

the heading of shame; western, Judaeo-Christian, English-speaking culture uses more

subtlety to explore shameful feelings than other cultures do. For instance, shame and fear

are expressed by the same word in the Gidjingali aborigine language in Australia (Hiatt

qtd. Russell 430). In English, shame refers to decency, to embarrassment and guilt, and to

iniquity, and a speaker may allude to any of these in the admonition, "Shame on you."

Some psychologists substitute the term "self-reproach," which can include social

embarrassment, for shame, to avoid restrictive moral connotations that shame conveys

(Ortony et al. 142).

Anthropologists Ruth Benedict, Margaret Mead and others, in the 1930s and 1940s, designated Eastern societies like China and Japan as *shame cultures*. External sanctions on individuals in these societies induced shame as a means of promoting social integration, a trait that anthropologists then saw as backward because it deferred individual progress (see Piers and Singer 63-65). Western nations, in theory, represented the opposite polarity and flourished industrially through application of the Protestant work ethic, which relied on an internalized sense of sin. A combination of forces, including revised anthropological methods, world wars, and transportation and communication technology, shows that this view of shame culture was not only self-serving but incomplete. Internalized shame could, of course, exist in China, as outward sanctions can in Western, "Protestant" societies. Current social and economic theorists, and even composition theorists, urge people to use rhetoric as an external sanction or means of encouraging socially motivated thought and action. The once despised shame culture is alive and well in the West; in fact, the institution of the household can manage the discipline of children as a small-scale shame-culture; students may bring the expectation of such public disgrace into a classroom.

Freudian theory associates shame with an action for which the motive is repressed. For example, during Freud's studies of women and hysteria in the last decade of the nineteenth century, he wrote to his colleague Wilhelm Fliess that the woman appeared to feel shame at "her own mental products," while the adolescent girl experienced a "flood of shame" at contemplating sex (qtd. Appignanesi and Forrester 399; 400). This suggests that memories of childhood sexual exploration disgust the adult woman and cause her

hysteria. The reader one hundred years later may discount the Viennese patriarchal context within which women were so interpreted, yet it is important to note the link between shame and reliving forbidden sexual arousal. Yet Freud in 1901 also uses shame somewhat casually, to describe the feelings of a person who has "made a slip of the tongue" or who cannot escape an "apparently indifferent memory," both of which are symptoms of an unconscious motive (*Psychopathology* 83). In that case, we should notice the association of shame with hitherto unsuspected motives of the mind.

Present-day popular psychology projects the reason for shame onto interpersonal relations. Psychoanalyst Robert Karen in a recent *Atlantic* article uses the phrase "deep personal shame" to distinguish it from milder social or situational shame, while psychologist John Bradshaw refers throughout his non-academic book *Healing the Shame That Binds You* (1988) to the same concept as "toxic shame" or to "shame as a state of being." The word shame is used by those writers in the connotation of iniquity or disgrace. Shame learned in family dynamics is villainized as leading to "spiritual bankruptcy" in John Bradshaw's 12-step program (22), and other "self-help" psychology books take a similar tack. In Bradshaw's book, the person who feels ashamed is taught speech techniques for self-defense, such as "Columbo-izing," that put the shamer on the defensive, and make the shamer see that her standards are subjective, not universal (the technique assumes an unexamined motive). Social behavior has become less uniformly shocking, as gradually people (speaking of the U.S. primarily) have lost the inner prompting for shame as the result of greater mobility, urbanization, medical arrangements like birth control, and access to popular media. Over time, an assertive public rhetoric has

taken shape, as does a defiant style of self-presentation that is said to be "in your face,"

supplementing the "face" theories of sociologist Erving Goffman. Present-day media

revelations of extra-marital sex ("adultery"), for example, are often made without a blush

(as Hamlet said of his mother with regard to her hasty second marriage), though

sometimes with a resignation.

What are people ashamed to discuss — what do people censor from their

conversation? Intellectual inferiority or stupidity is one of the last failings that people will

admit. For example, students rarely tell teachers if they have feelings of inferiority, just as

they often refuse to discuss a learning disability. Ironically, classroom demeanor often

proscribes talking about failure, although the teacher-learner dynamic usually assumes a

need for correction. Also, with school writing, there is little incentive to make mistakes or

to be wrong while exploring techniques or working by trial and error (notable exceptions

exist; see Chapter II). In *Creating Minds*, Howard Gardner's theory of multiple

intelligences distinguishes seven types of domain intelligence, like spatial intelligence.

Exemplars like physicist Albert Einstein are contrasted with choreographer Martha

Graham to illustrate Gardner's theory. It is possible to express creativity in a given

domain without excelling in another, which explains the presence of differing ability, such

as poor math performance by a student gifted in social organization.

Yet some neo-conservative philosophers, many religious conservatives and some

AIDS activists, urge renewed reserve—more shame—in social standards. For example,

Gertrude Himmelfarb writes, "If work, independence, responsibility, respectability are

valued, then their converse must be devalued, seen as disreputable" (qtd. Weisberg 187).

Sociologists Thomas Scheff and Suzanne Retzinger believe that emotional isolation of many people in modern society actually causes unacknowledged shame that is both internalized and psychologically denied; "shame corresponds to threatened bonds (alienation)" (14). Significant cultural tension surrounds revelation of personal moral and ethical decisions. The ramifications of this situation extend into many life events, making it difficult to encompass in one book; for purposes of this study, I will delimit it as the (un)acknowledgment of felt inhibition and defect as revealed in the process of writing.

Just as different people have varying pain thresholds, some people have more sensitivity to sensations of inferiority related to shame, and more anxiety as a result. Although the latter has been shown to have a chemical and hereditary component, it can be culturally and familially relative and also individually conditioned through experience (Goldman). Humanistic analysts like Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, as well as neo-Freudians, like Karen Horney and Helen B. Lewis, deal with emotions in the context of ordinary life experience. For example, Lewis indexes shame-related feelings as the following: "ridicule, inadequacy . . . embarrassment, humiliation, overexposure of deficiencies or private detail, or the threat of such experience" (*Psychic War* 185). These theorists discuss shame in terms of the personality as it interacts with the demands and occurrences of the environment, and this psychological approach is the most pertinent to coping with the stress of composing.

Shame, specifically intense personal shame, comes from failure and a feeling of unworthiness, inferiority or deficit.[7] An academic setting, in which writing is virtually unavoidable, can create a unique shame culture: not merely as internalized personal

inferiority but in the three-way relationship between one's self, the written text, and authority—the projected or actual reader/critic who doles out external sanctions. Interviews for this project, as I will report, yield such accounts of shame in connection with writing experiences.

In writers I have taught or tutored, I have noticed behavior that was a gloss for shame, as, for example, in the feelings of being exposed by the text of a composition or short story. A writer at a writing center will discuss with a tutor her workable plan for a proposed assignment, like a seminar paper, receive encouragement from the tutor, but then announce that her ideas are worthless and have been abandoned (I have seen this situation several times). A similar impasse will occur in a writing conference between a student and instructor, with the student tentatively suggesting revisions to the draft of a paper, receiving approval, then unaccountably and pessimistically discarding the idea. The writing, or even the idea of writing, interacts with emotional forces to paralyze the writer. Stress and anxiety rise relative to how much is at stake and how much the writer tends toward anxiety.

In my observations, I include myself: sometimes, as I write, I feel a strong sensation that is like an inner pressure, but a quite unreasonable one, to guard or hide my words from others, though I am alone. If with others, I might react with sharp irritation at interruptions. In addition to this secrecy, I remember that I avoided rereading my marked and graded school papers and would feel anxious if I came upon one of my papers unexpectedly, even though comments were usually approving and grades above average. I have seen other writers show similar feelings of shame at completely acceptable papers;

Robert Madigan and colleagues, in a recent study, find the writing of apprehensive and non-apprehensive writers "indistinguishable" in quality (306). Often, we writers recognize the role being played by our emotions, yet we are not coming to terms with it, specifically, with our illogical sensation of shamefulness at writing. In a practical view, we waste the effort that went into planning and writing, which means that we do not grow intellectually and spiritually as we should from justifiable pride (satisfaction and joy) in our writing accomplishments.

Authority and Judgment

Authority and its power of judgment become replicated internally and readily yield shame. In academia, writing is often connected to the feeling of deep personal inferiority by appearing to reveal intellectual shortcomings. Academic writing performance apparently reflects on the writer as an individual in the eyes of the teacher and the classmates, with respect to intelligence as well as character. Although my study focuses on college age learners, accounts I have heard show that the child's initiation to grade school opens the door to shame. At school age, the writer may have a sense of the self as whole, having conquered some potentially embarrassing problems of toilet training and prepared or at least required to be temporarily independent of parent. Perhaps the writer is a blank slate in teacher experience. If or when a mishap occurs, the writer is unlikely to blame the teacher or to wish to harm her or him, as would be the child's wish toward a competing parent (in Freud's paradigm); instead, the child wishes to disappear from her or his gaze, which seems contemptuous and ridiculing. The gaze that the writer identifies

with knowledge and perhaps reveres or idealizes has bared the writer to the immediate world as lacking in that capacity, a failing that the writer must not talk about, to protect the self from contempt and from ostracism. Or, the authority's gaze may not single out anyone, but rather reduces each one to rough equivalency with all fellow students, however different from the others each one may be. Now, the writer is required to conform to the classroom behavioral standard. Judgment that s/he internalizes is taking place of "your" writing, "your" name, "your" letters.

Although shame and guilt are confusingly similar, in this sense, shame, not guilt, is at work. As Helen B. Lewis explains in *Shame and Guilt in Neurosis*, shameful feelings can be linked to writing behavior because the self-reproachful writer does not believe she has injured the teacher, as would be the case with guilt, but rather thinks that she and/or her written work is the object of the teacher's contempt or ridicule, which makes her feel paralyzed, helpless and defective (88). Guilt is associated with real or imagined injuries that the child causes to another, usually within the family; for instance, to the parent in the family.[8] These fine distinctions between shame and guilt are presented; Lewis also observes that pain of shame makes the person avoid facing the stimulus, amounting to denial (*Shame* 89). Such denial shows up when some writers feel revulsion for their completed work and refuse to revise it. But Silvan Tomkins points out the ambivalence of this averted look, for the person still desires the good opinion of the one whom s/he has disgusted (qtd. Schneider 27). Felt emotions are knowledge; the knowledge that a feeling of shame communicates to a writer is that the writing is inferior, that it fails to meet self-imposed standards, or that it makes an indecent display of oneself. A writer will hate her

work, doubt her ability, become angry at someone else, or avoid her assignments, in order to conceal some defect she believes she has but cannot reveal to others (or face herself). In his essay, "Shame," Robert Karen suggests that she must hide a truth about herself (42).

The way that I deduce shame in writers' accounts is not through a simple blunder or an embarrassing social episode (*faux pas*) in which someone unintentionally crosses a boundary or violates a convention (these things do not have an impact as a slur on the individual's intellect or character) nor through grammatical or spelling errors (though errors will commonly become fetishes for writers not otherwise anxious). The feelings described by writers in this study that I translate into shame or self-doubt occur in events such as a childhood memory of a teacher's "no, no, no," the failure to submit writing on time, or the refusal to face their writing; expressions of doubt; latent anger in their sensitivity toward the need to conform with grade-school requirements or their obsession with rituals and tools of writing. These feelings taught the writers that their behavior was somehow contemptible or indecent; they learned shame. These perceptions are certainties, for the writer, who may have distorted judgment; for example, one flaw may stand for failure of the whole work or the whole person and will cancel out a teacher or peer reader's favorable view. But in interviews I also detect signs or symptoms of unacknowledged shame; these feelings can be deduced from acoustic signs like laughter, vocal pitch, sigh, pause or silence, interruption. Through discussing highly charged subjects, the speaker experiences hidden shame-related sensations and inadvertently reveals them.

Offering your perceptions to others endangers you potentially, for you could be ostracized if you seem unconventional or irrational. Anxiety about writing exiles its initiates from membership in the classroom. Textbook norms sound alien to them: "It is trite to say that the only way to learn to write is to write, but it is true." "You will discover words that sound best to you when you relax and let yourself take in new ideas." "Students who write confidently and well learn more and earn better grades."[9] These textbook, syllabus, and classroom messages are perceived by them as the natural and therefore the superior view of composing, which makes any other outlook feel abnormal and inferior. If they use mainstream descriptive terms like draft, they know it will be a lie. Feelings that are real to them seem as if they are wrong. For example, one writer told me that another student always knows where she's going when she starts her papers, and, "I felt kind of humiliated, and I thought, there's something different about the way I write and the way other people write" (LC-A2). And although some physical and emotional infirmities are within social boundaries (wheelchair cut-outs in curbstones are a literal representation), intellectual deficits, regardless of origin, are not as fully redeemed. These experiences show the importance of understanding the psychological and social factors that hinder writing. Some students will refuse to write in the steps of prewriting, drafting and revising, because these stages result in unmanageable exposure. Resistance and boredom may be masking anxiety. The educational forum itself may oppress expression in the expectations that instructors convey to writers and the requirement of generally uniform writing performance. Educational authority struggles to fit the amorphous act of writing into limits, yet a contrarian writer can challenge the system.

A Phenomenological Approach: "A Sense of Dread"

Writers with writing anxiety allow themselves to be seen, here, in a manner that they would not permit for authority. Why is that? The interviews created a kind of "safe house" in the sense of a homogeneous retreat from the contact zones. Here was a space to take off the mask and to vent what Alison Jaggar calls "outlaw emotions" (qtd. Salvio 57). Writers rarely talk about these anxieties with their instructors or ask them for help. Their willingness to give interviews for this project despite the potential threat to their equilibrium defines what is often missing from academic writing: Room to admit self-doubt, to exhibit feelings of discomfort about writing, to request help with difficult reading or writing passages, to admit nonconformist procedures for complying with assignments. Uniting to offer mutual help might be beneficial, as the writers show through participation in this project.

I asked writers to explain their typical writing process and behavior while composing. Many people procrastinate by refusing to consider a writing assignment: in the words of one, "you never feel like you're ready to do it; you're never ready to have that happen" (LC-A1). Others overprepare with research and reading. To some, it is foreign to descend into a hostile realm of rewriting, correcting, revising, competing, and being graded; for example, one writer shows how alienated he feels when he says of himself, "I'm not an English type." When they write, their physical behavior often mirrors their mental discomfort and poor concentration, as they bob up from the keyboard or eat compulsively or search the house for the perfect place to write. Some desire the background noise of television; others must wear earplugs. Commonly, a paper is written

in one session, during which "it would just come right out at once." Finished, but out of time, writers usually hand in their first draft, sabotaging their potential ability to improve on it, as if it repulses them ("I'm sick of it by that time" [R-A2]) or can burn them. Instructors' corrections and comments are resented or feared as humiliating confirmation.

Yet at the same time, these writers do not lack motivation. Writers gave me accounts of their literacy, education, and social experiences that aligned with anxiety in complex ways. I heard stories of deeply engaged reading experiences and of dedication to writing outside school. Their commitment to education, and especially to writing, is evident: as one says, "we're so emotionally connected to it [writing], paradoxically, people who have the most problem for it" [FJ-A6]. Some of these writers are graduate students training to be English teachers or professional writers.

By describing their feelings to a concerned audience, the affected writers gain dignity and become seen as authorities who describe their experience in "the terms in which it is lived rather than to force it into the categories we have inherited," as psychologist Jean Baker Miller notes in a different context (*Women* xviii). Writers' accounts can also reveal that the writing process can harm the writer's equilibrium. Their symptoms may resemble illness, when they register anxiety on the body. A politically oppressed people may develop mental illness as a form of silent protest, one that the dominant group usually endures because it does the state no harm (e.g. the hysterical women that Freud and other practitioners treated at the close of the nineteenth century). Perhaps writing instructors (or any "normals"), frightened of admitting their own hang-ups, avoid talking about others' symptoms. Lad Tobin points to this avoidance in his book, *Writing Relationships*

(29-33). Tobin illustrates his own counter-transference as a writing teacher (pages 33 ff.) and shows that attention to repressed feelings as expressed in symbolic language can "cure" teachers' burn-out. From their stance. anxious writers understand alternative approaches to a writing task that help them resist the damaging results of anxiety. Compensations can result from block, like the ability to plan and compose writing in your head, instead of on paper. or the knack of maintaining sensory integration by such means as chewing a stick or food while composing. Intellectual compensations and advantages may accompany working differently from mainstream composing (Jamison 306). These intellectual differences from others have been hidden. Writers here authorize these undervalued compensatory mechanisms or adjustments. There has been a lack of opportunities for banding together socially and educationally to reconceptualize "defects" and deviations.[10]

To the extent that a pedagogical climate or culture presses anxious writers into marginalized or subordinate positions, I urge that emancipatory moves be made. The approach in this book is sympathetic to feminist and other theories of marginalized identity, such as sexual orientation, ethnic background. or economic privilege. In this project. I also view writing history, motivation, and treatment of writers with a humanist-feminist approach that takes a special interest in differences between feminine and masculine cultural positions as analogous to the unequal footing between writing and speech.

More often than we suspect, the negative emotions that I term collectively as shame play upon writers in the writing environment to create destructive interaction. These negative feelings have been explained in a variety of theoretical ways: a psychoanalytic theory of an idealized self to avoid feelings of failure, a neuropsychological theory that shame is innate, a family-dynamic theory that shame is learned from failure in the eyes of the parent. In writing, shame arises from within the writer's expectations for the text, whether or not the feeling is *also* outwardly triggered, as it might be in a self-conscious reaction to a classroom evaluation experience.

Whether anxiety over writing is inevitable, or even desirable, remains a debate within composition literature and in psychoanalytical and psychological literature. In the following chapter, I will review the debate that I perceive as having taken place between theories that find anxiety to be inherent to writing and rival theories that ascribe anxiety to either political or psychological forces and that would eradicate it.

CHAPTER II

THE DEBATE OVER THE BELIEF IN WRITING ANXIETY

What's the point of writing if one doesn't make a fool of oneself?

— Virginia Woolf

Composition theorists disagree as to whether writers' anxiety is advantageous, inevitable, or an inadvertent byproduct of cultural and educational forces. Although some writing authorities try to normalize anxiety or to call it innate or even essential, their belief may be conditioned by unacknowledged cultural influences. And even though some theorists see external causes for writing anxiety that originate in society, they do not dispute that individuals can have a hard time when they try to write as the result of social and culturally conditioned habits of mind.

On historical grounds, composition inherited an ancient belief that intractable pain accompanies the process of putting words on paper. As far back as ancient Greece, "madness" inspires poets. In the ideal *Republic*, Plato would ban poetry on grounds of corruption, in spite of regret at sacrificing work of inspired genius. As the Romantic vision of the solitary, tormented writer attests, suffering physically as well as emotionally enhances artistic creation, so to mediate or cure this inevitable anxiety would interfere with poets' production. In the early 20th century, an energetic emphasis on science

translates these poetic conditions into the medical discourse of mental health as "neurosis," yet the leading practitioner of the new "talking cure," Sigmund Freud, continued to make an exception of writers and to distinguish their mental operations from those of the ordinary neurotic patient. The strength of this belief was contagious, as the literary critic Edmund Wilson showed when he wrote of novelist Henry James that "genius and disease, like strength and mutilation, may be inextricably bound up together" (qtd. in Trilling 106).

Anxiety as Normal Writing Behavior

The question of whether writing anxiety is advantageous appears in the work of composition theorist Janet Emig. In 1963, Emig inquired into the importance that publishing writers place on the unconscious origin of their work, unexpectedly citing as evidence the atypical process of the modernist Gertrude Stein, who had been "accused" by the behavioral psychologist B. F. Skinner of producing her texts through automatic writing (see *The Web of Meaning* 3-43). Emig's study of the unconscious led her to question, in the conclusion of her groundbreaking case study, *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders,* whether enough time was being allowed for college student writers to develop their material, using their unconscious resources, if weekly papers were required by the syllabus ("The Uses of the Unconscious in Composing," *Web* 46-53).

The point for Emig, who admits that she is an "agonizer" in her own writing, is that writing cannot be accomplished without a painful period of struggle. As I interpret Emig's essays, sometimes the writer must break free from outwardly imposed restrictions to

accomplish necessary growth. She recommends flexibility in imposing deadlines, and she also daringly flouts convention by endorsing acceptance of assignments "on non-uniform sizes of paper and in puce-colored ink" (*Web* 52-53). Of course, she wrote prior to the invention of the multi-fonted personal computer and "bubble-jet" color printer, yet her empathy with the writer is evident in that statement, as is her exasperation with forms for their own sake. Her personal difficulty with college writing contributed to her sensitivity to writers' resistance, too; she wryly speculates that "putting down students is a necessary part of . . . graduate education" (*Web* 1).

At first glance, the approach to writing anxiety taken by Donald M. Murray appears similar to Janet Emig's. Terror of writing remains a leitmotif for Murray's dozens of journal articles and textbooks for writers and writing teachers. In his teaching guide published in 1968, he contrasted writing a rough draft to parachuting: "as much terror as I felt stepping out of an airplane, I feel more terror facing the empty page" (*A Writer* 8). Although this macho posturing is probably slanted toward 18-year-old male students, Murray candidly uses vertigo to embody the fear of the page. But he offers no techniques for reducing his terror beyond faith, derived from experience, that he can wait it out.

Murray's background in journalism, in which he was eminently successful and won a Pulitzer Prize, might have immunized him from writing anxiety in a way that academic writing did not for Janet Emig. Yet his successful writing has transformed him from writer to "author," in the sense of being "a victim of his own writing," as Michel Foucault describes it in his essay, "What Is An Author?" (117). His writing terror seems like the stage fright that occasionally afflicts a talented actor before leaping onstage. The reader

would judge it as a personality feature. Still, over 15 years later, Murray is writing about "the normal, necessary, always terrifying delay that precedes effective writing" ("Essential" 219). Because he calls this terror "normal," in his view it is inevitable, not unique to his life experience; and yet, when he refers to terror as "normal," he diminishes it, and "normal" with its echoes of medical jargon even seems consoling, as if terror is a healthy part of his physical body.

Murray's early writings have little of Emig's fascination with psychological terminology. In *Write to Learn* (1984), he remarks matter-of-factly, "Each day we receive conscious and subconscious messages. . . . I can't tell you what I'm not conscious of" (30). His recent books, however, advise students that "Writing often begins in darkness and despair, in hopelessness and need. Accept this emptiness" (*Crafting* 29). "Emptiness" and "darkness" are concepts that acknowledge the existence of an unconscious in the psychoanalytic sense, yet his language of emotions is concrete and free from technical jargon. Perhaps he uses familiar diction as a defense against the psychoanalytic jargon or perhaps it is the poet in Murray (Emig, too, has written poetry throughout her career). The gain is that these books and articles are accessible, but there may be a loss, too: Murray, a writer who is motivated by psychic events, settles for acceptance of "emptiness" instead of understanding the forces that initiate dark and empty feelings.

Both Murray and Emig share a notion that writing anxiety is an overdetermined category. For Janet Emig as for Donald Murray, as in many Vietnam-era voices, there is utter trust in the inward look, as if the inner self, like a room—the writer's garret—is kept pure from voices everywhere else; and yet, each reflects how writing imposes personality

traits or work conditions on writers that somehow set them apart from others. Writing is felt as making these demands because its workings temporarily disrupt somatic and psychic equilibrium, exactly like a disease. Each thinker describes the writer as moving bodily through time during the experience of writing. And each conveys the impression that there are universal laws of writing for anyone who undertakes composing.

These theorists approach writing as being free from social and political context, as many observers have commented. Revolutionary throbbings of the Vietnam War era bred anti-authoritarianism in colleges; this climate may have influenced Murray's and Emig's construction of writing as isolating and their encouraging writers to defy convention or ignore an institution's rules. Still, the decontextualized nature of writing-process pedagogy and their belief in prewriting as a virtually unexplained source of inspiration contributed to a certain amount of professional hostility to their ideas. Despite their hostile critics (or because of them), the influence of Emig and Murray as writing authorities who accept anxiety is potentially great. The trust they place in the writer's voice resonates with many who experience a Romantic yearning to express inward sensation, without questioning how these sensations are built. And since Emig and Murray believe that dread and delay are inevitable and normal, the question of need for emotional equilibrium is not addressed in their work. The possibility of using a rhetoric of writing emotions to break through the isolation is similarly absent. These strong advocates of solo writing may have nudged composition studies off the psychological track at a time when it was headed already down the social construction line.

A different composition theorist takes the shipwrecked writer on the desert island as the figure for his defense of inner struggle. Teacher and writer Peter Elbow defensively identifies with the castaway in positioning himself on the side of individual or private writing; his beliefs about ignoring audience stem from a conviction that internal audience (the mental critic in residence) is a cause of anxiety for writers and an inevitable inhibiting force ("Closing" 269). In practical terms, time spent worrying about whether a word is right derails the writing process just as much as worrying about a reader's potential objections to the chosen word. Like Emig and Murray, Elbow explains writing with a Freudian psychological outlook. His depiction of the self as audience sounds like Freud's "watchman" figure of the conscience ("On Narcissism"). This attitude will seem unorthodox to those social constructionists who think that a crowd of inner voices make up the writer's internal architecture, as Elbow admits, yet he also claims that the heteroglossic forces can exert silencing power equivalent to that produced by a solitary inner self. Here, Elbow is consistent with Bakhtin's depiction of the subject wrestling a personal language away from all the inner tongues of others that pre-empt private existence ("Discourse" 294).

When Elbow gives advice directly to writers in his book *Writing with Power*, he points to writers' decisions, that is, their behavior, as the cause of feeling blocked. For example, he explains that writers who struggle with but finally abandon their work are using a method that is dangerous: they put themselves under the pressure of trying to create a perfect first paper on the first attempt, rather than allowing themselves to "write things *wrong* the first time" (43; original emphasis). In trying for such premature

accomplishment, too much security is lost by inching nearer to judgment of the writing. Writers, he says, avoid distress and gain a secure basis by anticipating a friendly reading from an interested, sympathetic audience and especially by addressing themselves as they do in freewriting.

Elbow's method depends on the success of self-talk that lets writers span the gap between freewriting in privacy and performance writing intended for the public, which suggests that he thinks writers can avert anxiety. But his afterthoughts in the concluding chapter, "Writing and Magic," swing back to the notion that writing and even words themselves contain degrees of unavoidable anxiety. He thinks the location of this helplessness is in the resilient power of language itself to twist writers askew: "when we write something slightly out of tune with our 'real self' so that it goes against the grain of some thoughts and feelings in our unconscious—we are just the tiniest bit flustered and uncomfortable" (366-7). And although he counsels writers to believe that by practicing diligently they can get power over this magic, he thinks most writers are susceptible to being frightened by the unassailable appearance or reputation of unwritten words.

I find appealing Elbow's combination of practical remedies and disarming acceptance (at least in a limited amount) of nervousness. These steps to power and reflection seem to fit every writer, or that castaway on the remote island. These writers, after all, are situated in a vacuum, or so it seems from Elbow's descriptions, which omit any of the contingencies coming from the writers' age or gender, or from their educational and familial background. He's not addressing the possibility that outwardly created pressure, from the job-society realm or even from education itself, might be the hindrance.

Probably his book would be twice as long and without its focus had he done so. It is easy to take potshots at somebody well intentioned on such grounds; and yet, explorations beyond the duo of language-and-writer do turn up additional ideas about anxiety that reach conclusions different from Elbow's.

External Triggers of Writers' Anxiety

At this time, some texts boldly warned that societal forces of class, gender, ethnicity, or combinations thereof may be primary instigators of writers' silence and resistance. Although Emig and Murray had called anxiety and negative emotional states necessary, different theorists claimed that these emotions endangered writers by paralyzing their output. Anti-authoritarian movements among students at the time of the Vietnam War resulted in suspicion of academic elitism and a perception of low grades as "shaming" students, which resulted in grade inflation. Influenced by political uprising and by social analysis of feminine roles, Tillie Olsen and Adrienne Rich wrote strong political tracts concerning in part the inward as well as outward inhibitors of composing, which each illustrated with accounts of family demands, especially from children, and monetary pressure in Olsen's case, that combined to block them emotionally and physically from writing. Olsen's essay "Silences" was published in 1965 and became later expanded into a book of the same name, a veritable almanac of quotations, biographical information, and reflections on authors whose work included a silent period (the book also contains her landmark biographical essay on the 19th century American writer Rebecca Harding Davis). Olsen explains that in her silent periods she was not storing up material or

germinating ideas but became dry, an "unnatural thwarting" (6). By persuading women to drop the socially approved passivity and, as Rich terms it, "claim" their education (*Lies* 231), Olsen and Rich struck notes that reverberated with those who blamed social and political forces for the anxiety that writers suffered. Their work on writers' blocked periods has been published outside academic literature, in Rich's case through her career in poetry, and not always applied to composition instruction. Yet Rich taught writing in the CUNY open-admissions program directed by Mina Shaughnessy, whose classic study *Errors and Expectations* (1977) drew attention to basic writing.

While Olsen concentrated her analysis of blockage or "congestion" (20) on interruptions to a writer's routine, Rich wrote (1971) a deeply felt analysis of anxiety that accompanies the process of composing as she experienced it while a developing poet, a wife, and a mother (*Lies* 43). During the time that a work is being composed, she believes, the writer's imagination leads her to question what she writes and what she believes— indeed, every facet of her life is held up for examination, and she cannot avoid changing what she feels and thinks. Yet in her position as homemaker, she represents tradition, a conservative stance that is continually threatened by her writing. Since Rich, like Olsen, is opposed to passivity in such conditions, she presses beyond any faith that these conflicts will resolve themselves but urges writers to assert themselves. Her latest work maintains that poetry will foment social revolution by "keeping pain vocal so it cannot become normalized and acceptable" (*Found* 242).

With the strength of the feminist movement in the academic world, researchers continued in the trail blazed by Olsen and Rich to examine the disabling effect of negative

emotions on female students' performance. In an autobiographical paper, writer and feminist Catharine R. Stimpson describes herself as having "psychic insomnia" and speculates that its source is in "[t]he gap between the performance and the self-doubt of the performer" (75). Susan Miller in "The Feminization of Composition" defines the composition teacher as not only "Other" but, more specifically, maternal caretaker. In Miller's theory, college English resurrects anxiety in composition students by making them revert to public language learning as in childhood under the domination of the instructor, whose resemblance to mother/nursemaid transforms her into a "blurred" (47) figure, in eyes of student and institution alike. By applying association of "nurse" to the instructor's role, Miller introduces Freud's complicated view of the nanny position as a low-class substitute for the mother figure but also one who is sexualized partly through her work with the child's body, the opposite of the esteemed cognitive function. Miller advances this theory to urge reforms on the composition profession, reforms that would include the cessation of routine humiliation as a given, a kind of condition of employment. However, Miller thinks composition is a collaborator with the forces of society to blindly uphold arbitrary standards of correctness, which are the equivalent of society's norms for the emotions (48). Her claim is that teachers do slip into enforcing emotional uniformity, as they will if they expect students to feel guilty about errors. This scenario applies in certain cases; for example, some students are susceptible to self-blame, just as some teachers are attracted to monitoring language standards. The relevance of Miller's theory to this project is its applicability to anxiety-ridden writers, whose tendency may be the following: to detect even a trace of criticism; to deny the sincerity of any praise their writing receives

from teacher or peer, and to question the person's motives in giving praise; to expect to be unmasked as a fraud or impostor. Are these reactions evoked by a teacher's expectations, however? For example, revision, which writing teachers usually expect, may imply not improvement but failure to be good enough, on the first try, resulting in self-reproach.

Instructor and philosopher Sandra Lee Bartky describes her female students' comments and body language as apologetic as they handed her their papers (89). In her analysis of this classroom phenomenon, Bartky defines their feeling as diminished self-perception or shame, and attributes it to their receiving indirect messages of inadequacy in numerous earlier classrooms. As a result, she determines that the women expected punishment from her. Her conclusions in "Shame and Gender" (1990) include the characterization of the instructor as an Other before whom many female students are "cringing" in body and mind (90). Established belief in inferior status and treatment of women may encourage women automatically to expect failure and punishment.

If the classroom diminishes many women, it may have comparable effects on masculine personalities and on any members of groups that are subordinate in that context.[11] The metaphor to describe the blocked writer that David Bartholomae uses is the closed door. Student writers are "shut out," he explains in his essay "Inventing the University" (135), when they do not know the conventions of university writing, or "academic discourse." He describes "basic writers," those students who are put into remedial English classes, as well as the "underprepared," a euphemism that suggests socio-economic causes of a student's inadequate educational background. To be shut out is not precisely equivalent to being blocked or silent, because the writer has ideas and puts them into writing, yet the

unreadability of this writing makes it resemble the work of a blocked writer who cannot sustain a writing performance for any length of time. What's more, it can have silencing effects—if the writer becomes discouraged by readers' responses and stops producing—although Bartholomae does not discuss this outcome.

These blocks, unlike the "normal" blocks of "agonizers," can be overcome by writers through teaching methods that identify the linguistic features of academic discourse. Bartholomae's essay directs attention toward both underprivileged and minority students, like the writing of Lisa Delpit and June Jordan, and toward the instructor's role in reducing writing anxiety. Like Rich and Olsen, Bartholomae urges students (indirectly; instructors are the "we" of this essay) to take an active role—he wants them to appropriate the teacher's language—but unlike social activists, he does not justify why writers should adopt "our language," nor does he position writers in the context of their life experience. Apparently, he doesn't know the students who wrote sample essays that he quotes, and he refers to identifying nicknames for those papers themselves rather than naming or characterizing the student authors. He depicts students as a mass of "outsiders" whose fluency will improve if they imagine the "privilege of being 'insiders'" (143) and begin approximating academic language instead of channeling the voice of a parent or wise elder. It is easy to discount, reading these ideas, students' psychological writing problems. Motivation too is not questioned, yet as Pierre Bourdieu emphasizes in *Distinction*, students may be underwhelmed at acquiring dry academic writing genres that appear to deliver "useless, disinterested knowledge" (387). (Even critics in professional journals complain that scholarly footnotes are "vast and intimidating" [Bush 194].) The reader can

infer writers' fears and anxieties from knowing that writers were under pressure to perform in a placement test, and a reader understands that students face a conflict of values if they need to replace words of parents "lecturing at the dinner table" (136) with the college teacher's words. Moreover, writers often fear violating boundaries, especially in daring to display authority, yet authority is a writing characteristic that Bartholomae says writers should establish by experimenting with academic writing conventions. His confidence in academic discourse produces a formula for one ill that he promotes as if it is a cure-all for more diseases than the original one.

Socio-cognitive Writing Anxiety

If writer's anxiety is avoidable and prompted by unfamiliar ways of communicating, as David Bartholomae maintains, then the same view belongs to Mike Rose, judging from his books *Lives on the Boundary* (1989), subtitled "a moving account of the struggles and achievements of America's educational underclass," and *Possible Lives* (1995), which illustrates democracy in the classroom. The focus is trained on the outsider, the student without privileged background, and how such a student can be intimidated by academia. Yet to hold this tight focus Rose must make the psychological defer to sociological and economic realities. For example, in the autobiographical chapters of *Lives on the Boundary*, Rose describes ambivalence about education and about writing that resemble the normal writer's delay that Donald Murray believes in; he gives accounts of daydreaming in graduate school classes and of abandoning a college paper that a professor had encouraged him to polish for publication (75). These events, poetically told, might

have been shaped by a different thinker into a portrait of writing anxiety, but Rose uses

them to illustrate his conviction that the first-generation college student struggles to fit

into the esoteric projects and language of the university—in his case, an English doctoral

program.

And yet a biological or physiological view of writing problems consistent with the

cognitive psychology view of writer's block emerges in Mike Rose's earlier work,

especially *Writer's Block: The Cognitive Dimension* (1984) and *When a Writer Can't*

Write (1985). Early on, Rose wanted to apply the precision of scientific inquiry to the

imprecise topic of composition. As he explains, "I learned [from experimental

psychology] to be cautious and methodical. And I began to appreciate the remarkable

complexity of human action and the difficulty of attributing causality to any one condition

or event" (*Lives* 80). Through such an investigation, described in his book titled *Writer's*

Block, Rose identified certain features in the cognitive domain, the site of activities like

planning, as consistent with cases of writer's block. Specifically, a rigid adherence to

writing rules, misleading assumptions, premature editing, and faulty planning procedures

caused a writing impediment among students in his study (*Block* 4). Encouraged by this

result, which pointed toward an intervention, Rose urged teachers to treat such cognitive

blocks. The belief in successful remedies shows that he considers such problems to be

temporary, though they are linked to thinking, so he sees the condition as different from

ADD or dyslexia.

But Rose does not rule out sociological and psychological components; these elements

exist, slightly fuzzy, just beyond the focus of his study. For the future, he recommends

more study of several non-cognitive aspects, especially, personality characteristics and "predilections" in relation to writing, and the influence of the school environment or writing situation (101-03). These ideas advance his belief that causality can rarely be pinned to one facet of a situation; in the relationship to writers' life experience they interest me, in connection with the present project.

In addition, Rose speculates on the reasons for heightened blocking by advanced students: to summarize, the writer's involvement with her field grows, and she challenges herself to broaden her repertoire and improve her style; the lofty standards of English as a profession can also be inhibiting (104). This statement echoes Janet Emig's frustration, mentioned above, with graduate school. Here again, anxiety over writing is linked to a network of factors in the writer's life comprising environment, behavior, motivation, and chance, as well as others. By including the writer's "personal characteristics" as contributing along with cognitive issues to blocks, Rose accepts the view that writing anxiety is inevitable, but his sympathies clearly fall on the side of external forces as creators of block.

Alice Glarden Brand in *The Psychology of Writing* (1989) reports on a questionnaire she designed, the Brand Emotions Scale for Writers (BESW), to study the relation of emotions to the composing process. Brand developed a list of twenty emotion-based adjectives, categorized as positive (e.g. happy, inspired), negative-passive (confused, depressed), negative-active (anxious, disgusted) (69). In the first part of the study, Brand asked writers to rate how often they had such feelings when writing in general; writers were then asked to rate these feelings before writing, during writing, and after writing (see

68-74). She administered these tests to college writers, advanced expository writers, professional writers, English teachers, and student poets. As one might predict from research with such broad aims, the findings are extremely general; for example, Brand explains, "Writers felt the negative emotions loneliness, depression, shame, and shyness rarely and weakly" (200). Yet Brand notes that teachers and advanced writers had high post-writing anxiety; she views anxiety as natural to writing, especially in skilled writers, and attributes it overall to "the disequilibrium involved in creative activity" (201).

A discussion of intervention in anxiety occurs in John A. Daly's investigations into college-student writing apprehension (1975). Research into lowering writers' anxiety rests on the premise that it will be beneficial to do so, whereas Daly claims that such an assumption is unexamined and therefore cannot be said to be true ("Writing Apprehension" 64). In essence, he questions the movement to normalize writers, however surprising it seems for this figure to make such a claim. Daly is significant in the story of writers' relation to emotion for the quantitative methods he used to measure extent of anxiety in writers, including a questionnaire of sixty-three items he designed with Michael D. Miller ("Instrument"). In this test, volunteers rank from one to five a list of negative statements, like "I avoid writing," and "I don't think I write as well as most other people," alternating with positive ones, including "I would enjoy submitting my writing to magazines for evaluation and publication" and "I like to have my friends read what I have written" ("Instrument" 23). The questionnaire assumes a ground of writing pleasure and confidence. The anonymity of the questionnaire may be helpful, especially in measuring

the students who are confident about writing, since such students often feel pressure from peers to disguise this in the classroom.

Later, Daly's readable review of writing-apprehension research in Mike Rose's *When a Writer Can't Write* (1985) offered several new takes on the personality component of writing. For example, he distinguishes procrastination from blocking, explaining the former as avoidance behavior that can be managed with scheduled writing, whereas blockers, who need "forced writing," would find a rigid timetable ineffective ("Writing Apprehension" 71). In this case, he obviously understands how intervention would operate with actual writers and appears confident about using these methods. Yet Daly's projects also concern the relationship between the writer and the writing environment. He distinguishes between anxiety from a writer's permanent personality type and the variables of a given environment, such as how conspicuous writers feel or how much evaluation they perceive, that can temporarily disable writers by initiating anxious feelings ("Writing Apprehension" 72). Further, his research on writing apprehension in teachers at all levels suggests that a negative context for writing rubs off onto students, whose feelings about writing may come to resemble their instructors' anxiety (Daly, Vangelisti, and Witte 167). Daly's research also suggests that high apprehension of teachers in disciplines other than English may hinder the efficacy of writing instruction in programs for writing across the curriculum.

When Daly asks if it is desirable to alleviate anxiety, then, he raises the question with knowledge of practical therapies but also as a philosopher visualizing anxiety as a figure against an unexamined ground. As I read it, he sees that interaction between writing

anxiety and writing in increments can be fruitful. His attention to this issue, which he mentions only incidentally, is a singular case of stepping back to re-examine the epistemological premises of this concept. The decision not to intervene is a value-based one that may stem from regarding writing as a privileged activity and setting the writer above other types of workers. This situation turns out to be unproductive for some writers who idealize their work unrealistically. Moreover, it becomes likely that they will identify with their work and want to control its fate. But can they control its destiny? Ironically, that can only happen (in most cases) if the writer gets sufficiently detached from the writing to control its components, which would mean analyzing purpose, structure and language for the desired effect on a projected audience. These activities require cold-blooded detachment and discipline that some troubled writers, as I have learned in this research, frankly refuse to perform. In the research that Daly describes, however, this matter doesn't receive attention. Given his experience, then, why would Daly question the value of alleviating anxiety? Perhaps because the frequency of anxiety is high enough to warrant his doubt.

At the same time, the question of intervention turns the discussion in the direction of culture and the issue of writing as art. As personality interweaves with writing, artistic material can result or blocks can result! This effect is what makes me, for one, so interested in writers themselves. Every level of writer, as I have mentioned earlier, reports a brush with this condition.

Bridge to Psychology

When psychologist Frank Barron visited a creative-writing class in the 1950s to recruit writers for research into creativity, he "was introduced by the instructor with this remark, 'So far as I am concerned I would like to see all psychologists buried with Freud and Jung in a boxcar a hundred feet deep' " (64). Apart from the obvious ridicule, fear, or dismissal of psychoanalysis in this statement, its noticeable anti-Semitism suggests one explanation for the chilly reception that some in humanities give to psychoanalysis. But like the subject matter of humanities, psychoanalysis examines human life at the level of the plan, the decision, the impulse, the emotion. Experiences, as Iris Young puts it, tell "the life activity that takes up the given and acts upon it" (*Throwing* 13). Clinical psychologists and psychoanalysts differ from compositionists in approaching writing as difficult and writers as susceptible to emotional disturbance; compositionists usually repress those observations and instead assume that writing will occur if steps are followed by writers and that emotional distress of writers is unlikely to interfere with writing. Psychology considers writers as types of potentially pathological yet creative personalities, while composition addresses the erratic only in terms of correction or remediation. This disjunction between the disciplines explains the taboos against counseling that composition theory has been wary of violating. For example, composition studies defines itself as other than a therapeutic profession, as it shows by its "othering" of writing centers and basic writing and its ostracism of creative writing. The existence of this split highlights the understudied but very real psychological aspect of the composing process.

The Role of Depression

In clinical psychology, anxiety is treated as pathology, that is, as an affective disorder related to creativity. Sometimes, it is classified as "neuroticism" (Goldman 1483). In psychological literature, affective disorders are also called mood disorders, bipolar depression, and cyclothymia. In bipolar depression, moods oscillate between depression of a week or longer and equally prolonged mania or exhilaration. Diagnosed people usually control these mood fluctuations with the medication lithium and use psychotherapy to understand the consequences of their previous behavior. Recent studies by psychologists pinpoint these anxiety disorders, such as generalized anxiety disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, panic disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder; their symptoms are described with great particularity (Foreman). As a result of increased knowledge of these conditions, individuals' self-esteem can improve, and some may discuss their symptoms freely, as for example in a support group, in a teacher-student conference, or on an Internet forum.

Some psychologists claim that a productive collaboration can exist between bipolar depression and heightened creativity; for example, psychologist Kay Redfield Jamison in *Touched with Fire* (1993) draws on contemporary research as well as case studies of Byron, Coleridge, Robert Lowell, and others. She finds high percentages of bipolar depression in writers that exceed the rate psychologists estimate in an ordinary population (5), a finding that earlier psychological work also documented (Richards; Andreason; Barron). Jamison contends that the tension between alternating high, low, and ordinary moods empowers writers who have mild levels of this condition (6). She imagines that

writers might create in a manic mood, revise in a low or depressed state, then edit and polish in their normal periods. Anxiety or writer's block corresponds to depression.

The description of mild manic state or hypomania is like "flow" or an optimal state of mind. For example, writers, dancers, or composers in flow are deeply absorbed or involved in an enjoyable and promising activity that feels effortlessly attuned to their talents or skills; as Reed Larson puts it, "people feel in command of the situation" (163). The bursts of writing under pressure that writers have reported to me are sometimes described as pleasurable or done with intense concentration, characteristics of a mild manic mood. In Jamison's description of mild hypomania, a writer's attitude is "self-confident," with feelings that are joyous or "elated," and "a sense of well-being, expansive and grandiose thoughts, and intensified perceptual awareness" (28).

Jamison's admiration for the writing of canonical authors leads her to claim that "No one understands" the function of the unconscious in writers' composing processes (105). This seems an overgeneralization, given compositionists' and experimental psychologists' productive research into writers' processes, including the use of thinking-aloud protocol during composing that was studied by Linda Flower and John R. Hayes and by Mike Rose in *Writer's Block*, and the use of thought-listing immediately after composing, used by Alice Brand and by Robert Madigan and colleagues (295). These studies illustrate how emanations from preconscious sources, including negative thoughts, influence writers. In addition, psychologists including David Perkins in *The Mind's Best Work* and Ellen Winner in *Gifted Children* maintain convincingly that creativity requires the application of personality traits and purposeful behavior.[12]

Instead of considering these results, Jamison appears to adopt a version of the theory

of Carl Gustav Jung, the Swiss psychologist and one-time colleague of Freud, that creative

individuals can be born with a gift and that such talent is incomprehensible. Jung has had

broad but largely unrecognized influence on writing behavior. In his essay "On the

Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry" (1922), Jung emphasizes spiritual and

mythological spheres over human reasoning activity; he permits himself to personify a

work of art and to describe the creative impulse as "a living thing" (788) that is "not

subject to conscious control" (789). Jungian theory, then, may encourage a researcher to

look for or accept evidence of non-rational behavior.

Jung wants to locate creativity in those words of an author's that "transcend[s] our

understanding" (788), yet in making this claim he attempts to speak for every reader,

which is clearly impossible. He chooses subjectively the works that he feels were created

unconsciously (Faust; Zarathustra), though as he admits he is arguing from a culture-

bound position. Jung asserts that the artist's material comes not from the personal

unconscious, which is closer to Freud's theory, but from a "primordial . . . collective

unconscious" (790) that can be expressed as archetypes, Jung's term for universal

mythological figures. He argues back from this formation to maintain that the mythic

inspiration is a requirement for any "effective" work of art (791).

The argument becomes distinctly linked to chauvinistic, nationalist philosophy with

Jung's claim that the artist (and reader or spectator) is one with the "soil" (791) that holds

ancestral spirits. Needless to say, peripatetic peoples are excluded from this inspiration.

The artist will make needed images to repair unsatisfactory conditions in the present time,

Jung says (791). Evidently, Jung can imagine only beneficent archetypes and primordial images.

Jung's idealistic attitude permeated writing of influential authors like Northrop Frye and Joseph Campbell (a celebrity on educational television), as Hazard Adams points out in *Critical Theory Since Plato* (783). In the work of Jamison, discussed above, and in popular books by analyst James Hillman, the Jungian influence is still felt. For writers, it carries an imperative to venerate creativity as the product of psychic power while subordinating stylistic control and disregarding diction and needs of audience. Because the Jungian philosophy is similar to expressivist or process writing theory, students could readily confuse the two philosophies. In process theory, the writer's conscious mind elicits latent material through patient inquiry and recursive work. Freewriting, for example, works by the association of a chain of latent perceptions, so as a writer freewrites, she may think she is tapping unthought-of sources of creativity.

It would be interminable to debate whether the collective unconscious inspires art, given the potential universality of many images from which one could deduce. It is more important to note the support that Jung's postulates give to the writer's belief in a magical or mysterious creative force (in Chapter III, I will present some accounts from writers who behave along these lines when composing). When a writer holds this belief, she must cultivate the creative force before she can produce effective text; lacking such inspiration, the writer will be stymied in any attempt to compose and will have subsequent anxiety.

Psychological studies prior to Jamison's work link writers and pathology and find that individuals drawn to writing also have an inherent tendency toward nervous or anxious

behavior. In 1968, Frank Barron reported that the 56 California student and professional writers tested and interviewed by his group were "as superior to the general population in ego strength as they are deviant on such pathological dispositions as Schizophrenia, Depression, Hysteria, and Psychopathic Deviation" (73). The writers' notable ego strength suggests, at least to me, that they use a sense of superiority or grandiosity to cope with "deviant" moods, which may lessen their involvement with others (as I will discuss in Chapter III).

Barron's investigation can be said to have a subjective prejudice in favor of writers; he observed in writers "more openness to feelings of awe and of oneness with the universe, as well as the counterface of these, feelings of horror, forsakenness, and desolation" (78). Would this investigator today choose such poetic, even mystical diction? Reading those comments, which reverberate with Jungian echoes, conveys the impression of the 1960s as a decade with greater cultural and intellectual interest in creative activity (including altered perception through hallucinogenic agents) and educational training methods than the present, thirty years later; the works of Janet Emig, Donald Murray, Adrienne Rich and Tillie Olsen (all described above) arose within this fertile period. And yet, in a recent essay Barron urges psychology to nurture creative potential through various steps, including the study of the influence of psychotropic drugs on creativity ("Putting" 97). Later in this project, I report on writers who adjust their writing tension with the aid of various substances (see Chapter V).

Another study of the possible relationship between psychiatric disorders and writing creativity was done in 1974. A group of fifteen writers associated with the University of

Iowa Writers Workshop formed the population of a study by Nancy Andreason and

Arthur Canter. Through investigation of the writers' first-degree relatives for mental

disorders, the researchers discovered that affective disorder—"cyclothmia" or alternating

depression and mania—was prevalent in the writers' relatives, as in the writers themselves

(129), yet they did not call these results conclusive and further qualified their report by the

admission that environmental factors were not separated from heredity (130). So, they

speculated that some feature of the literary climate in the mid-1900s brought on mood

disorder leading to writers' suicides, which their research showed to have been higher in

the 20th century than earlier. Erik Erikson says that neuroses change; these studies could

be taken as arguments for a new and morbid zeitgeist.

The Iowa writers studied were designated as "creative," an invisible dividing line from

the field of composition or, perhaps, from nonfiction at large, yet there really is no hard

and fast distinction between what is creative and what is mundane in words set down on a

page. Jamison, for instance, in *Touched with Fire*, defines creative temperament as

"fluency, rapidity, and flexibility of thought . . . and the ability to combine ideas" (104),

while Perkins believes that it "depends considerably on traits other than abilities" (*Mind's*

256), traits such as purposefulness and making unreasonable demands on oneself (*Mind's*

100).

In the field of neuroscience, genes and early synaptic (brain wiring) specialization

determine the degree or severity of mood or personality disorder. Antonio R. Damasio,

well known for *Descartes' Error* (1994), and Hanna Damasio study individuals with

localized brain damage resulting in loss of specific emotional capacity; in this way, their

results show that emotions have locations in the brain. Their studies also show how

negative emotions can create various brain-based obstructions to composing; for example,

when anxious, a writer reasons sluggishly or repetitively, having "overconcentration on the

same images, usually those which maintain the negative emotional response" (Damasio

164). Conversely, in elation, like mania, many images occur that move swiftly, while the

muscles work efficiently and there is "disinhibition." The activity of the neurotransmitters

and brain-cell nuclei seem to confirm psychologists' bipolar-depression theory, but in a

different key. Emotional states affect the brain, and "[M]ind derives from the entire

organism as an ensemble" (Damasio 225).

As the next decades rewrite existing knowledge about the mind, new discoveries about

mental language functions will give us more insight into now-mysterious aspects of

writing. Recent studies in dyslexia by Sally Shaywitz and colleagues, for example, point

to a disruption in neural systems in the brain of dyslexics. Steven Pinker in *How the Mind*

Works (1997) reports that the mind uses dedicated *modules*, the name given to

interconnected systems of brain circuitry that develop over time, in the area of

communication using language, as well as in motion and in perception of surfaces; as in

studies by the Damasios, these results are based on empirical tests that compare injured

and normal populations (27; see also Karmiloff-Smith et al.). Studies of dreams also add

to knowledge of the mind. Sleep studies by J. Allan Hobson indicate that dreaming is a

way to reorganize the contents of the mind, including memory, like de-fragmenting a

computer's disk, and to reinforce memory-emotion connections (Leonard 67). In

hindsight, the dreamer puts a narrative structure on a dream, but during the dream the

mind is chemically disabled from applying normal reasoning powers to the brain-generated, unsynthesized images (Leonard 63). His research makes Hobson cautious about the present trend toward prescribing psychoactive drugs for mental disturbance, however; he believes that psychiatry "has lost sight of psychology. Right now we need something more humanistic and all-embracing than neurobiology" (qtd. Leonard 66).

Behavioral Therapy

If the physical and cultural environment that surrounds writing contributes to writers' anxiety, then attention can shift away from the writer's psyche; this is the approach taken by Robert Boice, a psychologist who has written extensively on writer's block and experimented with techniques for treating affected writers. Boice acknowledges that mood disorders play a possible role in writing disruption, but he discounts it. Boice has a determinedly practical outlook and no patience for supposed mystery of creativity. As he writes, "Why does our society perpetuate myths that make writing seem so mysterious and difficult?" ("Psychotherapies" 214). He is skeptical about evidence for mood disorders as a cause of writers' distress, since proof consists, he says, primarily of surveys of well-known writers who have consulted doctors for depression ("Tacit" 27). Although rapid mood shifts may limit writing fluency, according to Boice this emotional condition can be manipulated by avoiding writing binges, which induce depression, and replacing overlong stints with systematic work habits, recommendations he bases on his research into faculty members ("Combining" 109). Boice often writes advice for professorial colleagues, whom he has also treated. He emphasizes the use of teachable skills to facilitate writing

fluency—"finding ideas, motivation, and momentum" ("Tacit" 22)—because he thinks that

higher education makes too many unspoken assumptions that students and professors

already know these basics. He calls writing blocks the consequence of poor "practical

intelligence" (Tacit 20). He limits his interest to academic writers, without regard to

gender, ethnic origin, economic background, those qualities that concern writers Rich,

Olsen, Bartholomae, Shaughnessy, and Rose. Yet Boice is sympathetic—he is not

"objective" in the hard-science mode—and in his chapter in Mike Rose's collection, *When*

a Writer Can't Write, he takes a practical approach to political problems of low-status

academics. He stresses their need for access to publication and need for mentoring, two

practices that he calls remedies for their diminished professional writing

("Psychotherapies" 213).

Although Robert Boice acknowledges a possible role in writing disruption for mood

disorders, he discounts them; he does so partly because in his view studies of mood

disorders used small samples of writers who were probably atypical. He does not consider

the accumulating evidence from several studies of mood disorders with similar results (for

a review, see Richards; see also Perkins, *Mind's* 262-269). What is more, Boice uses

atypical figures himself, making observations deduced from biographies of celebrities,

specifically Ayn Rand and W.C. Fields; elsewhere, he makes inferences about reticence

from an autobiography by prolific writer Isaac Asimov ("Tacit" 27; 22). While such

eminent sources may yield useful accounts, it is hard to gauge the reliability of information

published in celebrity biographies, not to mention that celebrity status is atypical in

comparison to the position of a student or even a faculty writer. Boice seems to ignore

the similarity of bipolar depression in non-writers to writing anxiety and block behavior.

Yet Boice appropriately, in my view, tries to demystify and demythologize cultural lore of

writing, and he has a long commitment to writing therapy. He takes a behavioral

approach, like Daly, that remains, despite its eclipse by other branches of psychology, a

potentially useful technique, like therapy and counseling, for management of disorders in

conjunction with medication. Also Boice has a scholarly interest in writing-therapy

history, extending to the work of Sigmund Freud. For example, Boice refers to Freud's

theories of superego in *Interpretation of Dreams*, in which Freud quotes Schiller on the

watchers set by intelligence at the mental gates to exclude ideas, as one explanation of the

block to writing ("Psychotherapies" 183-4).

Psychoanalytic (Freudian) Theories

Applications of Freudian theory often appear in writing psychology, yet in Freud's own

essays, he often sets writers apart from ordinary people and treats writing as a remedy for

neurosis, instead of a symptom. In *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), he stresses

the scarcity of the creative faculty (27) and distinguishes artists (along with scientists) as

individuals with a special disposition that "imperatively prescribes" how they will conduct

their lives (27 n.1). In this passage, as in "Creative Writers and Daydreaming" (1908),

Freud conveys admiration for and even envy of the artist's engagement with a piece of

writing or a problem to solve, and he suggests that this immersion, through sublimation of

libidinal, instinctual impulse, makes the artist impervious to ordinary suffering.[13] This

claim resembles the behavior equated with mania, as described in the writings of such

present-day authors as psychologist Kay Jamison and neuroscientist Antonio Damasio, but Freud sees this engagement not as pathological but as a practical tool, a neat trick, for evading life's inevitable pain, or "fate" (26). Is this sublimation an attitude that could, at present, be more widely promoted as a benefit of writing? At least, it an expressivist writing pedagogy, which some theorists call harmful for ignoring social conditions. Some psychologists today recommend writing about traumas as a means of healing (see Hayes 12).

From his admiration for creative "flow," it is fair to surmise that the prolific Freud felt author-ized by a demand for his ideas and expected little criticism of his writings. Did he rely upon a writing process of inspired spontaneity? Although it is impossible within the constraints of this dissertation to investigate the body of Freudian literature, Freud himself describes at least one experience of anxiety resulting in the temporary cessation of his professional writing. In 1897, he reports to colleague and friend Wilhelm Fliess that "my reluctance to write is downright pathological" (*Letters* 253). In a subsequent letter, Freud says, "I have never before even imagined anything like this period of intellectual paralysis. Every line is torture . . . . I believe I am in a cocoon, and God knows what sort of beast will crawl out" (253).[14] This mental block coincides with attempts to write a manuscript on hysteria, which he ultimately abandoned, and with his self-analysis, both of which he also describes to Fliess. In this manuscript, Freud claims that the female patient's hysteria was caused when her father or brother sexually assaulted her. In his self-analysis, he becomes suspicious of his father, whom he thinks may have molested his siblings. Yet, Freud concludes that patients' accounts of family "seduction" were indistinguishable from

fantasies. Did his belief in his own father's incest allow him to advance from a single incident to a universal theory, as his biographer Jones wrote (qtd. Gardner, *Creating* 307)? Or did it stimulate him to repress accounts of seduction and inhibit his writing, as George Vaillant suggests (92)? It seems possible, too, that the reflective mental activity of composing brought on a beneficial delay (or procrastination); some writers must erase what they have written, if they suspect it is false, before they can continue writing. In Freud's case, rejecting one theory led him to another, his influential theory of childhood sexuality, and within the same year of 1897 he had begun to write fluently again, producing the manuscript that became *The Interpretation of Dreams*.

In "Creative Writers and Daydreaming," Freud theorizes that it is the role of writing to be a vehicle for the playing out of the writer's fantastic desires—infantile wishes for mastery—for Freud assumes that most adults cease to play (145).[15] In a letter to Fliess, Freud tells his daydreams: "eternal fame . . . certain wealth, complete independence, travels, and lifting the children above the severe worries that robbed me of my youth" — all of which he abandons after discarding his hysteria manuscript (*Letters* 266). He further surmises that adults would find those wishes shameful without disguising them in the modes that literature offers ("Daydreaming" 146).[16] In this essay, Freud reveals his conviction that writing gives not only wholesome and beneficial work but also a guilt-free chance for personal superiority. I reach this conclusion by reading against the grain of the essay, which is one of those puzzles like Plato's *Phaedrus* in which Freud as author in effect removes himself from the category of writer, the group under scrutiny, by adopting the stance of observer, analyst, and reader.

The Freudian theory that desires or instinctual drives consciously and unconsciously motivate human activity is disputed by psychoanalysts who theorize about the self in its relationship to others, the school of object/relations psychoanalysis (the "object" that this graceless sobriquet refers to is the mother!). The motivation to write, such practitioners say, begins a destructive self-consciousness within the writer. Theoretically, the writer feels an obstacle that results from interaction between the writer and the audience—both the outer audience of imagined readers and an inner audience that represents a fragment of the writer's self. In analyst Susan Kavaler-Adler's view, for example, the blocked writer has an internal editor who makes the writer feel ashamed or guilty for wanting to write; exposure of her writing causes pain because she projects that inner censor onto her readers ("Object" 47-8). Instead, the writer must be able to suspend her primary self and to "role play," which means that she would read or revise her writing non-defensively with herself in a reader's position. When the writer acquires a loving internal figure who supports the writing effort, she finds relief ("Object" 48). Kavaler-Adler uses these techniques with groups of writers whom she counsels to express mutual trust and care. (In her books, she applies these theories to analyze well-known writers like Emily Dickinson or Virginia Woolf.)

In this analyst's creativity theories, mourning becomes a dynamic process necessary for wholeness. In mourning, the individual is experiencing previously unacknowledged feelings of grief and loss that occurred as the result of life events or decisions; for example, a person might express grief at having antagonized a child or parent. Feeling this regret, in Kavaler-Adler's view, enhances creativity by re-integrating hostile fragments of

the self, and in addition writing complements mourning by offering an expressive genre or vehicle ("Object" 56). According to analyst Dominick Grundy, the writing cannot begin until the writer undergoes guilt for having "murdered" an essential yet inhibiting internal figure, like a possessive parent ("Parricide" 701).[17]

Psychoanalytic literature also claims that writing conflict comes from the writer's idealizing of others' writing and grandiose expectations for writing of her own (Kavaler-Adler, "Group" 48; Grundy, "Writing" 195). The writer idealizes her written work and feels that her writing is as powerful as the societal father— it has phallic power, a strength that by extension reflects back on the writer her- or himself. This pride may produce superiority.

If the writer envies another's writing, either a work of literature or a paper by a fellow student, she may refuse to write. Unconscious envy looks like anger at the other person whose writing is successful. Competition with a successful author would require a writer to break with her internal object (inner audience), or to destroy or kill it, which is too frightening to contemplate (Grundy, "Parricide" 706). The writer builds the internal object from psychic material such as infantile longings or exaggerated recollections of a parent or caretaker and uses it to protect herself and to harshly criticize her creative impulse to write. If she tries to write, the writer risks being attacked by this shame-inducing part of her mind. It is safer to persist in envying the ideal and to refuse to attempt a comparable text.

Both Grundy and Kavaler-Adler look at advanced writers (dissertation writers or published faculty) as likely to have developed poor object-relations interaction. This view

corresponds to the upper-level students about whom Mike Rose observes that inhibition

increased with responsibility; Alice Brand makes a similar observation. Aspiring scholars

may feel an inherent discrepancy between the expectation that they will write original

material and the need to use published works as sources (works they probably revere); in

addition, as Patricia A. Sullivan writes, they may fear plagiarizing what has already been

published ("Myth" 23).

Although the parent-child model is basic in most psychoanalytic theory to explain

mental processes, it does not reflect social and cultural influences; feminist liberatory

proposals, however, try to restore the writer's social, political, and historical context.

Granted, feminist theory is political; it exists to change and reform a patriarchal world

order, so it establishes a new order made in its own image as relational, not heroic (cf.

Bloom's oedipal literary theory, described in Chapter IV). The relational mode becomes,

in Carol Gilligan's terms, a position of strength, not weakness (*Voice* 17). In the feminist

perspective on composition studies, as described by Elizabeth Flynn, writers' anxiety

results from the obliviousness of writing textbooks to the inequality surrounding women in

the masculine-grounded classroom (149). Feminist theorists also claim that writing

difficulty arises if classroom practices do not recognize students' subjective ideas formed

in the context of life experience, the "women's ways of knowing," to cite the influential

work by Mary Field Belenky and her colleagues. Present-day feminist theories influence

the domain of composition and its pedagogy when they claim that women's very capacity

for attachment to others creates a speaking and writing voice; if a woman's attachment is

not valued but seen as weak, her utterances can be stifled. The humanist/feminist

psychological writings of Nancy Chodorow, Jane Flax, Jean Baker Miller, Mary Field

Belenky et al., and Carol Gilligan present what women experience as members of a

subordinate group and adapt this psychological theory into a vehicle for emancipatory

education. But masculinist theorists find that the feminist view is not adequately sensitive

to the male experience. A boy symbolizes his readiness to compete and succeed by his

identification with the father or with male figures, not the mother, but boys' reading skills

lag behind girls'. Girls may be good readers, yet when a girl enters school, her personality

has significant drawbacks. For example, the female child's experience of being mothered,

which she learns in infancy, may condition her to expect an unrealistic level of attention,

by extension, from any woman, especially those who provide care, like teachers.[18] The

feminist relational model, in psychology, corresponds to the writing theorists (Rose,

Bartholomae, Olsen, Rich) who position writers' anxiety in a social and cultural context,

instead of an internal locus.

The complicated and often conflicting theories of psychology and psychoanalysis

approach writing as a problem instead of a skill. Although it may seem that composition

has correctly avoided the problem approach, a closer look suggests that composition, like

psychology, sees that social-cultural forces, sometimes represented in microcosm in the

family, exercise authority on members of subordinate groups to create disease that appears

self-created. The individual writer can be so affected. This analogy is persuasive, for me

at least, based on my experience in feminist activism and humanist political thought, and it

encourages me to interpret writers' experiences in a dominant-subordinate context. Yet I

also acknowledge the role played by an individual's disposition and neurobiology.

Disharmony in writers' processes is obviously more complex than any single theory will

explain. Even though some argue that writing anxiety is inevitable (Murray, Elbow,

Brand) and depression is desirable for writers (Jamison), those views should recognize the

power of cultural and social forces when writing is attempted.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Our informants are our truest colleagues.

— Mary Catherine Bateson, *Composing a Life*

The methodology in most previous research into writer's block and writers' anxiety

aimed to solve a problem. This project departs from that goal. Instead of looking for

solutions, this project is based on the assumption that composition scholars know less than

we could about writers' perceptions of their anxiety. To augment our knowledge, then,

the methodology used in the project emphasizes a minimum of control over the research

conditions. In other words, the investigator knows that she does *not* know what she will

discover. Toward that end, I collect material to analyze using an open-ended,

conversational interview in a near-natural, non-evaluative setting. Much of the material

from participants is biographical; the people I interview tell me stories about their lives in

relationship to others in the context of writing and reading. This method is the inverse of

most empirical studies, which usually follow a standard pattern, as in the administration of

a preprinted questionnaire. Here, participant and interviewer, as

we talk, develop a mutual experience that is thematic yet unpredictable in its content and quality. The knowledge I want will be drawn from the ordinary speech and recollections and anecdotes and even nonverbal behavior of the participants. Their freedom to gesture, to eat or drink, to choose the meeting place, will contribute to their comfort and sincerity, and their opportunity to talk at length and to make unanticipated associations between topics will be especially valuable.

This project assumes, too, that a broad-based population of writers can reveal more than we presently know about the range of anxiety and varieties of anxious behaviors. So the participants themselves decide who should participate, instead of being pre-selected or screened by the investigator. In a sense, this procedure resembles an ethnographic study of a church or a club; in such a study, membership would be the common factor for every person interviewed. In this project, the volunteers would have in common their knowledge of a mind-body state that each recognized as "anxiety about writing," or writer's block, yet these states might vary widely. To this end, I wanted participants of varied background and experience.

Participants

What should an investigator call the "others" who provide material for the research? Perhaps it is gallows humor to speak of research participants as "informants," as educator Mary Catherine Bateson does (see the headnote to this chapter), a word that connotes spies, whistle-blowers, or collaborators. And yet, composition pedagogy has recuperated collaboration as a form of dialogue among writers. As Bateson's remark suggests, the

informants I interviewed became the people most knowledgeable about my project and most invested in my interpretation, as I learned when I spoke with "Shirley," who read a draft of Chapter IV at my request and gave me her comments on it only a few days before I finished the project (see Chapter IV).

Many studies use undergraduates who are traditional students, that is, 24 or younger, while the average age of the people I interviewed was 35. In all, twenty-four participants met me for initial, 60- to 90-minute interviews, and I interviewed four again in depth, as I describe later. Participants' ages at the time of the interviews were 18-65; most were twenty-five and older through forty-five; six were in their forties, 8 were in their twenties, and five were in their thirties. Two participants were below the age of twenty and three were over the age of fifty; the oldest was sixty-five and the youngest, eighteen.

Eleven participants were students at the University of New Hampshire; ten were students at Harvard Extension. Of the remaining three, two are from Boston but were known to me before the project, instead of being students at Harvard Extension; the remaining individual is a New York resident who was referred to me by another participant.

In terms of educational rank, students in graduate programs make up the largest group, a total of thirteen. Ten are working for the master's degree and three toward the Ph.D. Seven students are undergraduates, including one, a woman in New Hampshire, who has interrupted her program. Three other participants had completed graduate training, and of these, two are college teachers; one man is in the Boston area and one woman, in the New Hampshire group. The third works as an editor in Manhattan. One

participant finished the bachelor's degree and now works in the Boston area. Of the New Hampshire group, there were six graduate students, and in the Boston group, I interviewed seven. Five undergraduates were from New Hampshire and four, from Boston.

Twenty of the participants were either enrolled or had been enrolled in the humanities, and four studed or worked in the sciences. Nine of the twenty-four participants teach or tutor at the college level. Eight teach in humanities while one teaches in the sciences. Eleven are men and women with full-time or part-time occupations, such as an accountant, a librarian, a computer programmer, an office worker who also attend classes part time, at night and on weekends. They are financially independent, rather than being supported by parents, which is sometimes the assumption for full-time college students. Some of these self-supporting students have returned to college after a gap of a few years. In the coming decades, colleges will be registering many more of these so-called returning adults (Heath, "Tackling"; Traub 120). Their work and life experience often makes them outspoken in contrast to many 18- to 22-year-old students, yet, as some told me, they feel trepidation about starting to write again after having been away from college.

I held in-depth interviews with four participants. Two, a man 38 and a woman 25, were from New Hampshire and two, both women ages 42 and 51, were from the Harvard Extension group. In these meetings, I took a long history and went into detail in the matter of comparing actual comments they had received from peers and teachers about their writing with how they perceived those comments, or, to determine what difference

they perceived between writing they had performed for college courses and texts written at work.

The participants expected to talk with me without compensation for about 60 minutes either in my university office (Durham) or in a public location, like a coffee shop, in Durham or Cambridge. Four participants who agreed to longer interviews received an honorarium of $50 each, thanks to a grant from the Graduate School of University of New Hampshire, my home institution.

I did not interview professional writers, partly because their accounts of writing behavior have been analyzed elsewhere (Boice; Jamison; Olsen) and also because the motivation for their work and the conditions of production and of approval differ from that of the adult writer who is a student or who is an amateur author, aspiring to have a writing career.

The participants varied in whether they had known me and in what capacity we were acquainted. Fourteen participants and I were not previously known to each other, so after some phone or email contact we met for the first time at the interview setting. In that case, our roles were investigator-writer. For example, two participants were told about my study by their instructors, who were my colleagues. In three cases, I remembered teaching certain students whose writing behavior showed anxiety, so I asked them to volunteer. In those cases my role in relation to them was more layered (incidentally, I liked those former students better after the interviews).

Interview Technique

The decision about question content and style in interviewing affects the outcome and

findings of the project, but it is also a subjective stamp that the investigator puts on the

research. The riddle, for example, an ancient question genre, lets the questioner try to

deceive; similar questions may take the upper hand and challenge the conversation partner.

For example, Plato's dialogues are noted for the irksome questions that Socrates addresses

to his Athenian colleagues. Twentieth-century interview technique is strongly influenced

by Freud's psychoanalytic meetings, in which question and answer between analyst and

patient was used as a treatment for neurosis. In Freud's famous Dora case, he

demonstrated a somewhat Socratic resilience (a technique that has alienated many). He

gives continual interpretations to the patient and rebuffs any objections; he suggests that if

a patient "brings forward a sound and incontestable train of argument" it is only

subterfuge, and "All that need be done is turn back each reproach on to the speaker

himself" (28). At another moment in the same case, Freud reports that he challenged

Dora by demanding, "'Whom are you copying now?'" (31). With these accusatory

questions, Freud's technique, which he reported from memory rather than transcribed from

tapes, remains a fascinating exercise; the absence of sympathy and generosity from the

interviewer is especially noticeable in the talks with Dora.

The present-day interview technique that developed from such historical antecedents,

e.g. Carl Rogers, usually takes a softer approach. The interviewer reflects or echoes the

words of the participant to delve into matters. I was interested to read accounts of

meetings conducted by psychologist John Mack with people who report the experience of

abduction by non-human aliens. Even though some have attacked this program, as Mack reports in his book *Abduction*, the phenomenon itself is of intellectual interest for its exploration of consciousness and mind. Like dream or writer's block, the abduction experience is undetectable by onlookers. Mack interviews these people following phenomenological principles, attempting to understand and interpret their perspective. Mack's queries to this unusual population, usually interviewed under hypnosis, include both inquiries that probe, e.g. "Why are you freaking out?"(225) and open-ended, empathetic questions, such as the following: "I [Dr. Mack] wondered about consciousness as a kind of 'continuous fabric' that allows you to go 'anywhere under certain conditions'" (228).

In the field of composition research, empirical studies that used interviews, those of Janet Emig (in part; see below), Linda Flower and John Hayes, and Mike Rose in *Writer's Block*, generally restrict question content to asking a writer about what the writer was thinking during the writing of an essay assigned for the project. In the Appendix of Emig's well-known book, *The Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders*, she shows the actual questions she put to her respondent, which are directed toward school writing but purposely open-ended. For instance, Emig asks, "You're talking in a way about ah the way teachers evaluate themes, ah I wonder if you'd share with me what you remember about what teachers ah wrote on your themes or what they said about them" (Composing 121). This type of question matches the advice of sociologists Herbert and Irene Rubin: "[interviewers] may summarize what they understood from the answer they just heard or refer in the next question to what they learned from the last question" (123).

The open-ended question about writing is intended to let the writers themselves introduce whatever occurs to them and any subject that arises by association, so it lets me collect information about whatever they deem significant. Also it permits a natural-seeming conversation to run throughout the meetings. In these talks I held with writers, I led each participant to only a few subject areas, primarily early childhood writing and reading experiences and writing habits and behavior. Usually, I asked only two general questions of each writer: first, I was curious to know the earliest writing and reading experiences that the person could remember.[19] Secondly, I asked for details of the person's behavior when writing.[20] The first questions were often about the writer's literacy history; here are two illustrations:

"Tell me everything that you can remember about learning to write and learning to read as early as you can remember" (NT-1).

"We were talking about eyesight and you said you wore glasses at six, so before that do you think you knew how to read?" (CR-1)

Sometimes, however, the meetings opened with a discussion of the writing-anxiety theme. For example, here I lead off by asking the following question:

"My general overall introductory concern is why you feel attracted to this subject; anything about anxiety or problems about writing rings a bell for you?" (RD-1)

To ask about writing practices and behaviors, I raised such questions as the following:

"What would your process look like of planning and writing a paper?" (DJ-4)

"What happens when you reread what you've written?" (LM-3)

When I asked about writing habits and composing activity, writers often alluded to anxiety, and I would try to draw out detail with more probing follow-up questions. For example: "Would you say you feel less public, less exposed as a writer, when you're doing a paper for one subject as opposed to another subject?" This writer answered, "I feel the most exposed writing an English paper. Here I am [majoring] in English, and I don't know why" (DJ-3).

I also tried to go deeper with questions when writers made references to writing habits that were inconsistent. For example, in one case the writer tells me at length that when she writes a critical paper for college she feels no emotional connection with it, although it feels safe— safer than writing creatively or writing in a journal, she says. Then, however, the talk turns to her youth, and she explains that it was easy and enjoyable for her to write as a child. Her attitude toward writing seems to change, which interests me, so I try to frame this in a long question:

> "So there's a point at which when you sit down and have an assignment something
> gets in the way of your being able to do it. In spite of this very well prepared
> groundwork you're describing, happy experiences, interest in words, lack of obvious
> difficulty. Can you tell me what that would be like?" (BL-7)

The result is a rapidly told, prolonged monologue about her working method, which relies on inspiration, and her frustration when no ideas arise. I write more about this type of disruption in Chapter IV on the impact of engrossed reading for writers.

The appearance of our meetings was usually casual and informal. When writers had not met me prior to the interviews, we had a few awkward moments trying to identify each other; usually I described my clothing, e.g. a multicolored scarf, and where I would stand, while I waited for them to arrive. After we met and were seated, often with coffee

or a snack, the writers read and signed the participation agreement with few questions or comments. Writers saw the tape recorder, which I put on a table between us, but fortunately no one seemed to be made nervous by it; in fact, most seemed to ignore it and to continue talking while I changed tapes when necessary. I had a notebook, but I wrote only a few notes, since I knew in advance that I would be transcribing the audio tapes of the meetings.

Setting

I publicized my request for writers to interview by making announcements, both publically and informally, at two campuses, University of New Hampshire, a traditional state university, and Harvard University Division of Continuing Education, a university extension in Cambridge, Massachusetts, that draws students from greater Boston and offers adult education classes leading to associate, bachelor and master's degrees. For example, I visited an undergraduate class in modern poetry at Harvard University Extension to describe my project and recruit volunteers by publicizing my phone number and email address. As these writers presented themselves, I scheduled them for informal, audiotaped interviews that I later transcribed and analyzed for the features relevant to the aims and intent of the research.

Most of the writers in the New Hampshire group met with me privately in my office, a large room with windows, a couch, bookshelves, artwork, and several desks and chairs. We talked informally for a few minutes and discussed the study, the participation agreement, and any questions, before we began the taped interview. I held a few New

Hampshire interviews in other locations; for instance, one took place in a small semi-private office at the shop where the writer works, and another meeting was in a restaurant. In the Boston area, where I did not have an office, most of the writers met me at public places they selected, like a neighborhood restaurant or coffee shop. We often went to Au Bon Pain, a busy café in the Harvard Square section of Cambridge that seats about two hundred people; it has a casual atmosphere that lends itself to intense talk and gives a feeling of privacy. Inevitably, we took advantage of the location to buy food or coffee during the interviews (usually each paid), which then resembled a social event as much as a working meeting. Usually, we were ignored by neighbors, although once in Harvard Square a man soliciting spare change broke into an interview. The converations usually lasted from sixty to ninety minutes. In most cases, I met each writer only once, although I held several longer meetings with each of four writers I identified as especially pertinent to this research (see below).

Description

The overall tenor of the interviews was lively and fast paced. Frequently, the participants talked at length without faltering. As I transcribed interviews, I wrote comments on the content and pace. One of my notes reads, "Her speech is slower as she starts to talk about her fears and she speeded up before when she described her job" (DJ-A9). The interviews feature simultaneous speech and frequent interruptions, but not what Deborah Tannen calls interruption as dominance (*Gender* 62). A participant might interrupt me, if one of my questions ran long, and occasionally I would interrupt one of

them, or sometimes, we both talked at once in agreement or excitement, demonstrating

the supportive style of "cooperative overlapping" that Deborah Tannen identifies as

creating solidarity (*Gender* 62). The following excerpt illustrates this:

> Donna: For me, the computer has been great.
>   I love writing at a computer.   It's like a whole new . . .
> Carol: I do too.
> Donna: So I just sit there and . . . (etc.)

In notes from this interview, I wrote, "Bond formed," but I noted too that such a bond

might prevent me or her from objectivity: "It might make her tell me more, but also maybe

talk as if she likes writing more" (DJ-A7). In a later section in this chapter, I discuss

transference and countertransference in the interview process. As this excerpt suggests, I

participated actively and spontaneously in the conversation and reacted to the subjects that

the writers initiated (in this aspect of the methodology I am following the approach of

Steinar Kvale and of Herbert Rubin and Irene Rubin). For example, sometimes I interject

reactions of surprise ("For Pete's sake! [SB-1]), unsolicited comments about my childhood

("That walking rhythm, like limericks, used to inspire me as a kid--I know exactly what

you mean" [FJ-4]) or my personal writing techniques ("My tendency is to get a paper

down any old way and read it over and truly dislike the style and sound and like

elementary school and let it sit a day or two and reread with a pencil and rework" [ES-

12]). Some writers asked me about the graduate school program or the dissertation

process. So I am often in a different role from that of the interviewer.

Sometimes, there is a reversal of interviewer-interviewee roles and I answer questions the writer asks me about graduate school or personal matters. For example, when Sue and I were talking about her process of composing, she explained that she can only write in absolute privacy. Then began to reveal something she had not tried to tell anyone before, which was how lines of prose or poetry come to her, which she thought was "bizarre"; at that point, she said to me, "I don't know if you feel like that too" (SK-A2). What follows on the transcript is a three-sentence comment of mine responding to her invitation to discuss my experiences as a writer; for instance, I say, "it's possible for me to really get into it, to feel great ease, but I will not have believed that it was possible before I started." Occasionally, personal questions arose. In a different conversation, I was asked by the conversation partner how old I was in comparison to her (I said, "I was born x years before you"). The immediate effect of this role reversal is to put the two parties on common ground, yet also it causes me, the interviewer, to live out the invasive experience of being questioned and to see how disconcerting and simultaneously self-indulgent it can be to admit one's private behavior. In other words, am I using shame to explore shame? In addition, my own process of arriving at an answer to Sue's question, above, reminds me of how individual and contextualized my answers, like every answer, must of necessity be. I distill dozens of memories, perhaps, to arrive at a single explanation.

The writers who volunteered impressed me overall as likable personally yet serious and motivated to study or to write, in spite of their self-reported nervousness and anxiety. Perhaps this is surprising, in light of the potentially embarrassing confidences I was requesting. Still, in most interviews, I found myself fascinated by what I heard. I might

attribute this engagement to the participants' response to my role, which was in most cases that of a fellow student (and/or fellow teacher) with the limited power that implies, who, like some participants, was returning to graduate school after a lapse. Yet the affection or frustration that I sometimes felt for participants is, according to some theorists, a marker of transference. for, as Jennifer Hunt writes, feelings appropriate to the social context can simultaneously be in the psychodynamic category (61).

A few times, perhaps twice, I lost interest; I attributed this phenomenon at the time to the non-voluble nature of the participant, who seemed to have little relevant information. Later, however, listening to the tapes of those interviews, I found I had been wrong, for there were many pertinent comments. Perhaps I was simply tired when the interview took place. or possibly the anxiety that the writer felt for the subject and for me as authority (teacher, writer, writing graduate student, etc.) communicated itself to me as counter-transference.

I was disappointed to have two extremely thoughtful women withdraw from the project after speaking to me once; the first asked to withdraw for fear of having her identity disclosed, while the second simply failed to keep an appointment for a repeat interview and did not return subsequent phone messages. In hindsight, I should not be surprised that some found it distressing to reflect on what the interview elicited. If I had tried to follow up more than those two, I might have discovered additional people with qualms. I wonder whether my personal appearances at classes and meetings to invite participation did not load the deck, so to speak, with people identifying with me personally; perhaps a blind ad in a newspaper would have led me to a different type of

population. At least twice, I was introduced enthusiastically and encouraged to speak at

length by a teacher, which may also have influenced participation (although those who

volunteered were, of course, unknown to her).

Transcripts

As I played and replayed the interview tapes I transcribed the words and also inserted

notes that reported my observations or reflections as I listened. Also, I inserted

theoretical and methodological comments (Schatzman and Strauss 99-100). I became

aware of the effect that it would have on a reader to see my preparation of the transcript.

For example, when I extract a quotation, I take the material out of context. But more

importantly, an extract often appears oversimplified because in print, on the page, the

living quality of speech is almost lost. To capture the spirit of the interview, sociologist

Catherine Kohler Riessman suggests arranging the transcript in numbered lines (58), using

a grammatical unit of the clause as the boundary, a method suggested by Labov (qtd.

Riessman 59). Laurel Richardson, another sociologist, claims that poetic representation of

transcriptions produces a more revealing result and one that engages the reader at the level

of language; in poetic form, the comments told to the interviewer have "a greater

likelihood of engaging readers in reflexive analyses of their own interpretive labors. . . .

Knowledge is thus metaphored and experienced as prismatic, partial, and positional' (143).

After I used poetic representation to present participants' words, I found that it was

successful in making readers take the quotes more seriously; I also saw that it highlighted

repetition. Repeated words and syntactic forms were an essential interpretive

element, but they are easily overlooked when a passage is set out in prose form. In this project, then, I often present transcriptions in poetic arrangement, clause by clause, and I include my own statements, if I spoke during a quoted excerpt.

I interpreted the transcripts by applying a thematic coding scheme to them (Kvale, Rubin and Rubin, Eisner). I took the first themes that I identified from existing theoretical principles in the fields of composition studies, experimental and developmental psychology, and psychoanalytic criticism; for example, premature editing, rigid application of grammar rules, poor self-esteem, and internal attribution of failure. New themes and categories continually emerged from conversations, also: for instance, problems with handwriting and sensations of time distortion. As I spotted such new themes, I added them to the coding themes and re-coded previously coded transcripts. Patterns and regularities formed across the interviews. Although I did not quantify the material, I saw that some categories became saturated, while others dropped out (see Chapter IV for illustrations).

In addition to the standard coding method of interpretation, I also interpreted several transcripts using systematic readings, a technique called the Listening Guide that Carol Gilligan and her colleagues developed.[21] With the Listening Guide method, a transcript is given a series of readings to listen for a particular thread of comments, including such threads as the following: the conversation's overall themes and thematic contradictions, the speaker's sense of self, her/his relation to authority, her/his feelings of well-being, and her/his feelings of confusion or uncertainty. Using this approach, I could detect a contradiction between changeless or immutable qualities (e.g., the writer states that she

feels compelled to write) and comments that contradict them (e.g., the writer who feels compelled to write also states that s/he is not good at putting ideas into language) [SK]. Such situations transform themselves into virtual dramas enacted by the writer and the various forces with which she interacts.

Also, I tried to note references to shame-related expressions of feeling, using an index based on a method of Gottschalk described by psychologist Helen Block Lewis: "ridicule, inadequacy, shame, embarrassment, humiliation, overexposure of deficiencies or private detail, or the threat of such experience" (*Psychic War* 185). For example, apologizing for their explanations was a pattern for certain writers; one, after telling me how she produced a paper, laughed and said, "I'm not trying to be evasive, I'm trying to make sense" (LC). To me, her account had sounded descriptive, not evasive, so my response was to say that I wanted to describe her way of looking at writing so that I could validate it. Yet her reference to acting "evasive" in my presence shows that she feels or has felt a need to conceal herself, which can be interpreted as an acknowledgment of shame, linked to anxiety at the exposure of writing.

Unacknowledged shame might take the form of laughter, sounds, noises, breathing, or stress in speech that breaks the normal pitch and conveys feeling unequal to a situation (as in inadequacy) or sensing that one is making oneself look foolish (as in ridicule). For example, one woman I interviewed spoke at length and impersonally about the difficulty of preparing to write. By using the second person (e.g., "You're not ready to start writing"), she put her description on a general level. Then, concluding that topic, she switched to a first-person comment: "And so I keep delaying the writing." Next, she did what I

transcribed as follows: "[*Starts to laugh*] This isn't going to help your data at all! Ha-ha-ha-ha-ha! [*Nervous, audible laughter*]" (LC). She attempts to interpret her writing method, shown when she uses "I," instead of "you," but she also shows by not choosing "I" for most of her comments that she feels helpless to control or master the emotions connected with writing. In Susan Kavaler-Adler's book *The Creative Mystique,* she explains how a person who is an "interpreting subject" uses initiative to dispel her helplessness and sensation of being persecuted by her thoughts (254). Both this woman's nervous laughter and her choice of "data" to describe our conversation and my research also suggest to me that she projects onto me an expectation of ridicule by a superior figure.

When I analyze transcriptions, I use my understanding of word association and of the unconscious mind and of imperfectly repressed wishes to interpret or understand the transaction or interaction between the person and what she or he is (not) writing, as I would with a student's essay or with a published text, like a poem. In other words, I author-ize the interpretation. A deeply felt, personal account of writing deserves to be studied with the respect and anticipation of fruitful outcome that a scholar automatically adopts to approach writing that is canonical or *enshrined* (to borrow a term from art critic Arthur C. Danto). Research in the theory of composition can use the powerful tools of literary hermeneutics and psychoanalytic theory to interpret emotion by inferring from what writers say and by reading between the lines or against the grain of the experiences that writers tell. I would like to find more such interpretive studies just as I would like to

read more studies that let me as the reader get acquainted with the writer or hear the writer's voice.

Transference and Counter-transference

Throughout the interpretation, I observed changes in my personal relationship to the interviews, the participants, and the project itself, all of which I tried to record and analyze; this type of self-analysis, too, became part of the project. When the interviewer-interpreter transfers or projects her fantasies and personal life experience onto the subject's account, the subsequent "result" bears strong coloring from the interpreter that may distort the content. As Valerie Walkerdine writes, "fantasies that come up on both sides are immensely important, and are not to be discounted even if they turn out not to be about the data in question. . . . [I]t is about time we recognised them, took them seriously and asked what they have to tell us about the research content and process" (67). For example, say that my interpretation focuses on the identification of Lewis with Hemingway because I too identify with Hemingway, or at least with the desire to be a renowned writer (see Chapter IV). My interpretation of Lewis's comments may work, but it may also obscure important ways in which Lewis is more complex than merely identifying with Hemingway. Using Walkerdine's approach, I would remain conscious of my writing fantasies of success as I interpreted transcriptions.

The people I interviewed speak for themselves in the following two chapters, in which I describe their experiences and their coping strategies.

CHAPTER IV

BROKEN ENGAGEMENTS: WRITING AND NEGATIVE EMOTIONS

The author owes a debt to truth and nature which he cannot satisfy at sight,

but he has pawned his head on redeeming it. — William Hazlitt

Experiences that people live through as they encounter reading and writing predispose

some individuals to react negatively when they think about writing (biology or genetic

inheritance may be causes, too, but they are outside my realm). People I interviewed

described a variety of mental and emotional obstacles to writing across a spectrum of

experience, of which the following are representative examples: being unable to plan or

even think about a demand for writing, feeling intense anxiety about the execution and

evaluation of impending writing, having restless movements and distracting thoughts that

delay a draft or prevent sustained attention to writing, and fearing the exposure of what

the writer believes to be defective or fraudulent writing and reasoning skills. I was

especially interested in the situations in which they developed their writing traits and what

they sense as they compose. Their accounts make it possible to see how the composing

condition appears to the writer. The most alarming writing events and encounters for

people I interviewed are the following: exposure of a text, and by extension the writer, to

an authority; the dissonance between writing and engagement with reading; uninterested

response of readers; ridicule of the text by another person; deviation from conventions and

standard usage in the text; confrontation with one's own text retrospectively; materiality of

a text; the writer's fear of inferiority; the writer's fear of exile from tradition.

1. Exposure to Authority

To reveal writing to an authority is one feature of the writing process that writers react

to with fear and shame. Often in the interviews I conducted people brought up this theme,

whether they saw authority as the figure of a parent, a teacher, a religious symbol, or an

author. In a psychoanalytically informed understanding, this subject would look like

oedipal anxiety, which would be a recurrence in an adult of a natural developmental

struggle of a child with an internalized parent or caretaker. Or we might understand this

tension with authority as a subordinate's response to the oppression of a patriarchal

culture.

People who associate writing with wanting approval from authority are liable to

overreact to the effects of the writing environment (as I described it in Chapter I—private,

exposed, demanding perfection, site of memory, encouraging grandiosity). The writing

situation will have the power to twist them and have an illusory effect on them, subjugate

them and minimize their skills, and to subject them to self-imposed shame or disgrace.

Their subjugated attitudes reflect their crippling beliefs that their writing must conform to

high or perfect standards and that authority will not be sympathetic to their texts. Once

they have produced a piece of writing, they cannot be persuaded to return to it at a later time—it is "set in stone." In these attitudes, shame and fear of writing unsatisfactorily restrict output even in those who love writing and whose work is superior. Often, this type of writer will refrain from speech in the classroom. The behavior pattern is usually gendered feminine, but men can display it.

Authority also poses a problem for people who have arrogant-seeming attitudes toward writing (often designated as grandiose). This type of writer may defensively exaggerate her or his skill. Her talent may prevent her from seeing a reason to cooperate with an authority figure if her work meets any constraint, as it might if an instructor requests a revision. Such a writer will find it hard to accept suggestions from a teacher or a peer in a workshop. The canon of existing literature will awe this writer, and he will similarly revere his finished work. This writer will prefer to speak rather than to write, because he can always amend his spoken ideas, whereas his written words leave his control. This behavior is consistent with masculine gender, but in my interviews I did not find it exclusively in men. Each individual is born with distinct qualities and develops still more differences from others, of course, so that a person may blend components of each attitude: for example, postponing work, or procrastination, may accompany various other symptoms of writing anxiety.

The writer who has anxiety about her or his writing usually resists exposing the text and the self to the sight of real-world opinion and judgment. Such a writer will often have a distorted perception of authority as someone who is liable to judge her writing negatively, and she may have an expectation of an inner reader or internalized critic as a

voice that predicts failure. This pattern goes hand in hand with reluctance to ask a teacher, tutor, or peer for encouragement, for ideas, for response to a draft, or to recall previous writing achievements. Writers might express this type of anxiety by discussing feelings of being naked or exposed. One interview I held with a writer I will call Donna made these feelings plain and also revealed the gap between this woman's solid background and her low self-estimation. Donna, who is forty years of age, works as a teaching assistant while she is studying for a master's degree in English. She has had extensive professional experience as an editor and free-lance writer at a book publishing house and at a professional journal published by a university in the Boston area, giving her superior language skills and experience. Before beginning her editing and writing career, Donna earned a B.A. and an M.A. degree in American studies. She was raised in a two-parent family living in an East Coast city; one influence she cites was her father's humor and personality, which she calls "iconoclastic." Much of her childhood was spent alone in such activities as reading, playing the piano, or sewing, and she felt fearful about talking in high school classes, a natural reticence that has continued into her academic and professional demeanor. Speaking to any group causes her such stress ("my heart starts pounding") that writing has been what she calls "a safety valve," yet she feels nervous about writing and afraid that her mind will go blank. Also she fears disappointing others and so puts herself under pressure to polish her writing until she makes it perfect. Her wish to write, specifically critical essays, memoir, and biography, took her to graduate school once more. Donna agreed to be interviewed for this project after one of her teachers recommended her to me, and she was unreserved in describing her qualms about

writing. As we talked, we found that many of her writing and reading interests matched

mine, giving us much to say with genuine enthusiasm.

Some emotionally charged statements in the interview with Donna were about

exposure. Because she made these comments when we were ending our meeting, it

emphasized their significance. After transcribing the interview, I found Donna's comment

on exposure striking in its diction and repeated phrases. I hope to impress readers with

the emotional power of her spoken words by giving them artistic representation. As

sociologist Laurel Richardson writes, this is "a poem masquerading as a transcript and a

transcript masquerading as a poem" (139). Inspired by Richardson and by Riessman, as I

wrote in Chapter III, I create the appearance of a poem by showing each clause separately

and by leaving spaces to show pauses, in this excerpt from Donna's transcript:

> I took a short story class last year
> I wrote a very emotional story
>   I identified with the character
> and some of what I wrote was very autobiographical
> sort of really exposing vulnerability
>
> I put some of myself into it
> and now I'm going to give it to this stranger
> where I've just exposed all these sad and somewhat negative . . .
> and I handed it in
>
> Jesus! what is he going to think of me?
> am I making a fool of myself?
> is it proper? is it wrong?
> am I imposing on this person?
>
> I felt very exposed.
> And I put my heart into this
> and after I handed it in, I felt, O my god
> what am I—
> I don't know these people
>   they don't know me

what am I doing?
Am I violating a boundary?

In everyday life, you don't pour out your soul
somehow this is like this outlet
I keep a stiff upper lip when I go to work
but this is a place where I don't have to keep a stiff upper lip

but then I worry about imposing on people
what do they want to hear all this outpouring of my psyche?

Many references to authority give this text its coherence. The teacher represents authority here, as do religion (Jesus, god, soul) and moral concepts (violating, imposing, proper, wrong, fool). A powerful layer of prohibitions surrounds Donna's act of writing. At the same time, her reference to heart and to stiff upper lip, a repeated phrase, locates the tension of writing in her body, yet she conceals that tension, and these references point to the exposure of the body that she, like other writers, fears in association with the situation of composing.

2. Dissonance Between Reading and Writing

Several writers I interviewed described their intense engagement as children with books that they read outside school and the private time that they spent in reading. Engagement with reading, especially in childhood, can produce a virtual reality that kidnaps a reader, creates desire in her to merge with the story, and may even remove her or his desire to relate to or communicate with anyone other than the sensibility of the beloved book. Such people can feel a powerful dissonance with writing when they begin to write, for the book can mute the neophyte's writing if she sees it as her ideal self. Even

though some may find this situation counterintuitive, it is supported by some people I interviewed.

Lewis, for example, reported being conscious of writing within the tradition of canonical authors who have been an inspiration and model for him but from whom he wants to break away to establish his unique identity as a writer. We talked at length about questions of writing and became close during four meetings, and I was able to study one of Lewis's workshopped short stories. He wants to write original fiction and is working toward that goal as a mature graduate student in a program leading to the master's degree, yet he is haunted by "noise," a kind of static: "the noise I hear is the history of writing. So I think, O.K., now, I don't want to write like Cheever and Carver and Hemingway, even though I do, and so it has to be my voice" (A2). For Lewis, the anxiety-provoking predicament is to "create something that hasn't been created" (A2), an emphasis on originality. Uneasy at the comparison of his stories to those by the masters, Lewis says, "it has to be my voice." This rivalry with the forerunner is theorized by Harold Bloom in *The Anxiety of Influence*. The struggle influences Lewis's writing technique by allowing him to dismiss criticism, as I illustrate later in this chapter.

The canonical author's influence motivates other types of writers, especially those who identify with a revered writer and possibly model their work (and themselves) on a specific writer's style. In section 8 of this chapter, I explore the contrast between this type of writer and the rivalry model that Lewis represents. If a novice internalizes the professional's creative force, she may write out of dedication. In this move, however, traditional culture is likely to absorb the novice writer and her writing may be a kind of

masquerade, ventriloquism, or even a near-plagiarism. In fact, this is the self-perpetuating system of graduate-student training, and a conservative writing tradition may be the end result.

Research with graduate students shows that, as Patricia A. Sullivan explains, the student unconsciously assumes that the professor is the audience she is writing to satisfy, although the student does not analyze the situation in this way ("Audience"). In this study, Sullivan found that professors, however, put little emphasis on students' writing and did not discuss writing in the literature classes or seminars that they offer. There was no sharing of student papers or exploration in classes of traditional or innovative essays that illustrate the professors' standards for academic writing. This omission of writing looks as if the faculty have evaded the indeterminate questions of standards for academic writing at the graduate level, and it is tempting to assume that the subject's absence signifies general uneasiness about writing and unadmitted feelings of shame in this context among instructors.

3. Uninterested Readers

The reader of a writer's texts represents authority. If a writer—even a badly blocked writer— has a trusted reader in mind, she is more confident; yet people I interviewed rarely mentioned such readers. More commonly, the shame-prone writer never considers asking anyone for a preliminary reading but conceals her writing. Perhaps this writer fears being ridiculed or even banished, as a person who reveals unconventional thoughts might be; this secrecy may be an actual or imagined cause of distress of which shame is the sign

or symptom. The image of banishment, like hiding and disappearance, enacts unacknowledged shame. The expectation of being unmasked as an impostor is a similar situation. Such dissociative feelings may explain a writer's reluctance to be read.

In describing early experiences with authority, many participants described reading experiences at home with parents, grandparents, and brother and sisters that were treasured memories, but others recalled that it was an effort and a struggle to read. A theme for some writers was the experience of presenting one's text to a reader who proved unsympathetic. Several writers remembered a moment early in their schooling when they proudly presented writing they felt to be of high quality to a reader, usually a teacher (occasionally a parent), only to receive an unappreciative response. Their vivid memories convey their ardor for those laboriously produced stories or artworks, and while perhaps no response to these beloved stories would be adequate, nevertheless the writer recalled the response as being unfeeling.

What is disturbing about these transactions is the writer's fixation on the reader's lukewarm response instead of a memory of the story. The writers do not praise themselves appropriately for their writing, as they might; for example, they might say, my poems were pretty good, or, I didn't write so badly for a child of six. Instead, they dwell defensively on the disappointing transaction, which (I infer) they see as an example of what might happen whenever they write. Their vulnerability and need for praise hints that they see themselves as having only a limited role or agency when they interpret the event. They blame the reader for insensitivity or lack of comprehension and become susceptible to feeling attacked by critical messages. Perhaps on the strength of their engaged reading

they believed that their author-identity had merged with that of a book character and would be enough to produce applause.

For example, Delia tells me about the response to one of her stories: "The teacher had criticized me because I had strayed from the topic, and I was so *hurt*, and insulted, and I didn't feel like I had been given any credit whatsoever, I was so, so proud of myself after I had written the story" [DA-A2-3; original emphasis]. Delia has feelings of pride as a writer who has accomplished her goals, and expects praise, which she is "*hurt*, and insulted" not to receive. What makes a child expect praise for her writing? This may originate with the family. Parents, Kaufman writes in regard to the development of shame, who urge children to excel may give them what he calls "disabling expectations" (*Shame* 25). Delia and some other writers in these interviews do in fact describe their parents as not just encouraging them to read but insisting that they adhere to high standards, such as speaking grammatically or avoiding slang. In some cases, parents enforced these precepts with physical punishment. But I may be asking the wrong question. Instead of asking why a child would expect praise, we might instead ask, what would be a reason for *not* praising, or encouraging, a novice? And why would arbitrary standards take precedence in a parent's mind over a child's imaginative writing? Responses to these questions have implications for teachers as well as for parents.

The larger body of writing itself may also be an influence on writers' fluency. For example, Delia, quoted in the preceding paragraph, had "warm, fuzzy memories" of her reading; Donna reports, "I was one of those kids happier being alone reading . . . it was what kept me going" (DJ-A2). Beth reported that she was "passionate and almost

obsessive" about reading, especially adult mystery novels, which she read as early as second and third grade (BL-A1). And Lois remembered being taught by her parents that "reading was precious" and to feel "snobbery about literacy" (LC-A5). The important books were sometimes issued in a series, such as a biographical set, or a mystery series, like Nancy Drew books, but they were not usually assigned in school. Families owned some of the books, but library books were equally meaningful; the child's first library card, fondly recalled by several adult writers in this research, has a metonymic relation to the books while representing the borrower by bearing her signature. Although these reports are from women, and this research is not quantifying the reports, I found the condition to be predominantly gendered feminine; still, not every woman I interviewed reported this memory, while some men had an avid reading experience. Important scholarship exists on the history of gender and reading (fiction reading especially) and the performance of reading by the late twentieth century woman; although full consideration of this topic lies beyond the scope of this research, it is obviously related.[22]

But reading itself was not only what they described, for reading can be done under many different circumstances, including public places; rather, they associated home, and privacy, with this obsessive reading, giving what Iris Young calls a material "anchor" to their identity ("House"). For example, in an interview for this research a writer I call Shirley, as the reader will see, below, remembers a specific place at home where she read as a child—on the porch after sunset by artificial light. Home, then, is a secure site for the reading self. The importance of her reading experience transfers itself to the material

surroundings, which symbolize herself to her (so, when a child writes on walls, that act makes sense). Privacy and security form a link with the child's intellectual operations.

Some critics, however, put a sinister slant on the reader's private world; for example, the critic Rachel Brownstein describes how a literary child reads "surrounded by well-intentioned uncomprehending others who foolishly imagine one is really with them there in the living room" (142); such children, she maintains, delude themselves by viewing their lives as narratives and themselves as characters, especially in the case of girls—and adult women—as heroines (140).[23] Approximately one hundred years ago, some physicians discouraged women's fixation on novels, fearing that women's overexcitement would lead to masturbation and hysteria. Does the young female reader allow reading to paralyze her as the object of a narcissistic, erotic gaze (Freud's scopophilia), or is she actively engaged through reading? Several viewpoints exist in the consideration of this question.

It seems counterintuitive that dedicated readers, the ones who would possess a rich store of literary models, would become anxious writers. Reading, however, is often secret, private, erotic, and linked with home instead of school, as the previous paragraph describes; also, reading makes the reader a passive partaker of vicarious experiences, according to several theories. For example, Robert Scholes writes that the initial stages of reading involve "a submission to textual authority" (*Textual* 39). Similarly, Mariolina Salvatori believes that students need training in hermeneutic and deconstructive methods of reading to de-emphasize a text's power to "restrain students" ("Conversations" 442); in addition, Salvatori suggests that many readers must learn to "accept and carry out the tremendous responsibility of giving a voice" to the text before they can examine their

uncritical assumptions (441). Although these theories do not discuss narcissism, they implicitly accept a narcotic function of reading.

There is a different view of reading, however, that sees it as actively engaging the reader's imagination. In this perspective, described by Judith A. Langer and co-authors Shelby Anne Wolf and Shirley Brice Heath, a reader who has interpretive conversations about her reading with a parent, teacher or peer can engage actively with meaning. At the same time, these theorists believe that reading involves the reader in a continually changing set of meanings that she makes as she shares her sensibility with a new reality formed while she read, which Langer terms "envisionment" (8). In addition, some children use the imaginary reading world to mediate events in their everyday milieu, by such methods as invoking magical words or assuming a different, book-based identity, as Wolf and Heath show in *The Braid of Literature*, their excellent case study of children's literacy (122). According to these theories, the book is not acting on a passive reader; rather, the reader's language is changed by the mutual transaction with the text, and she is able to speak on behalf of the text.

What happens in the classroom to these readers? If they encounter teaching that attempts to confront reading passivity through public dialogue in classroom discussions and in public writing, does this register as scrutiny or exposure and cause some writers anxiety? The writers I interviewed remembered love of private reading distinctly (that is, no one volunteered a dislike of reading), while their memories of childhood writing tended to vary. Some remembered unsympathetic parent and teacher "critics," as Deborah Brandt finds in her "Remembering Writing, Remember Reading," but others enjoyed

writing stories and playing word games. Wolf and Heath speculate that the conformity of the classroom calls for a type of task-based literacy—answering questions with simple facts—that is unappealing in comparison to imaginative, interpretive engagement with reading (191); children must struggle to separate the two techniques. In her memoir, critic Jane Tompkins recalls that school readers were not only insulting in content, "it was the *way* reading was taught that made it so boring: . . . everything uniform and predictable" (18; original emphasis).

Moreover, the profound experience of reading, with its sensation of intense, almost illicit pleasure, may inspire children to write. These writers may be imitating the literary excellence they found in the books they loved to read and see themselves as authors too, not beginners or amateurs, and as equal to those authors who seemed to speak to them. They have formed an identification with the experience of the book and idealize it as the model of what they wish to become through their own writing. This view is borne out by the perspective of Shirley Brice Heath on writers; as children, writers have a sense of themselves as different from others and may feel they can only share their experiences and hold conversations with the author of the books they read (qtd. Franzen). In Heath's view, such children need solitude to enter this meaningful communication with the world in their imagination. Some of these writers, "social isolates," are drawn to the profession of writing because it re-creates that imaginary world that is more comfortable than the communicative, public forum of school writing (qtd. Franzen). The bond between the child and her writing, then, is overdetermined. If the child reacts defensively to an unsympathetic reader, it reveals she has personalized her attitude toward writing and that

the page is her reflection, just as the imagined world of the book was the best self. If continuously recalled by the writer, these tales of injustice can cement an overstrong bond between writer and text in the writer's imagination. Her private reading and writing transactions with herself, those envisionments, to use Judith Langer's term, can make her afraid of failure and dissuade her from showing her papers to other people.

I want to illustrate the point with an extended example from my research, in this case a conversation with a writer I will call Shirley. An intense childhood reader, Shirley had a particularly gratifying writing experience with a favorite teacher in eighth grade English class, although looking back on those classes, she thinks of herself as more artistic and intuitive, more of a free thinker, than her classmates. After graduating from a New England high school and going on to college in that region, Shirley earned a bachelor's degree in music in 1968, but she was left with resentment after being falsely accused of plagiarism by a literature professor to whom she had submitted a final paper in her senior year. After that experience, feeling in her words "damaged," Shirley describes herself as having become more outspoken, for she attributes the professor's accusation to the contrast between the quality of her paper and her quiet demeanor in the classroom. She delayed entering any academic programs for 22 years (until 1990), when she enrolled in a continuing education master's degree program concentrating in fine arts. She felt tremendous anxiety for reasons she cannot explain when she began to write the proposal for the master's thesis, and is anxious again at the time of our first interview, as she comes close to completing the thesis.

At this point in our talk, we have been reminiscing about games and dolls. When I ask her where she would place herself on a scale of gregariousness, she says that she would be "kind of low," and this comment reminds her of an experience that she proceeds to tell me. She says, "I wrote a story in fifth grade that was about not liking school, actually forgetting to go to school on the first day of school." I ask if that was true, and she says that although it was not, she was "having difficulty with that particular class, because she—the teacher— there was a group of us she was teaching phonetics and phonics. She got out that book of phonics and it was going to be really boring." She thinks further about this and, beginning to laugh, says, "I think that [story] forced her—only in hindsight do I realize, but it [the story] was totally voluntary . . . I wrote it on my own, and I gave it to her to read, and she gave it back to me and said, 'very nice, dear.'" Shirley laughs again. I ask, "Did you like that?" She says, "No, it didn't seem like being particularly *special* about this, and it [Shirley's story] was." She goes on to tell me that she illustrated the story and wrote scenes that depicted herself living in an idealized house: "I always wanted an upstairs and a downstairs, so in my story I had an upstairs and downstairs." Again she laughs at the memory. I ask, "And you just got a pat on the back, and you should have had greater recognition?" Shirley says, "I think the message was, my thought was, she interpreted it as I didn't particularly like school. That I would rather be out in the salt marsh." And she laughs again, longer than before (SB-A4).

I would like to interpret Shirley's narrative in light of the problems that intense child reading can create for writers. To Shirley, first of all, the lesson itself feels boring, a term that describes the reaction of precocious, highly verbal children to lessons like

penmanship, as Ellen Winner writes (29). Tompkins, described earlier, also finds

classroom readers offensive and boring; I assume that the symbol system of phonetics and

phonics in Shirley's class had a similar effect. Moreover, Shirley's love for private reading

makes her unwilling to respond to task-based literacy or drill, while her preference for

being alone makes her uneasy among the group in the classroom.

So Shirley reacts imaginatively and artistically by producing her original story for the

teacher. Shirley uses the word "special" to describe her story; it is special in being a thing

of beauty, in Shirley's eyes. She depicts her imaginary perfect house in the story and

accompanying artwork and her idealized self as the heroine that Shirley feels herself to be

when she reads.

But Shirley not only remembers the story itself as special, she wanted the teacher to

"*[be]* particularly special" toward Shirley, and she says that the story "forced her—" a

fragmentary comment about her teacher that she does not elaborate on. In this sense,

Shirley asks the story to manipulate the pedantic style of the classroom on her behalf. She

draws on her reading repertoire, as Wolf and Heath write, to try to build a changed reality

for herself. Yet Shirley also uses writing to exert control over the teacher by indirectly

criticizing school and, by extension, her teacher. There is an interesting contradiction here

between the aesthetic wish for appreciation of the story as art and the rhetorical impulse

for the story's message to transform the schoolroom. The teacher appears to Shirley to

understand the criticism and for that reason to dismiss the artistic work as only "very nice,

dear." In the teacher role, women—as other people I interviewed also suggested—may be

described as unsympathetic by students to separate the female teacher image from the maternal figure, whose image needs to be preserved in the psyche as a loving one.[24]

Returning to the "salt marsh" restores Shirley to her preferred solitary state. I interpret the word "salt" as having an association with tears, as a reader of fairy tales would know, and this theme suggests that Shirley may be identifying with the melancholy fate of a storybook heroine. Also, it establishes Shirley's geographical context of coastal New England with its rich tradition of female fiction writers, including Alcott, Stowe, and especially the Maine writer Sarah Orne Jewett, whose character, Nan, in the novel *Country Doctor* (1884) models resistance to social expectations for women. Shirley may feel that with her idealistic offering she has ostracized herself from the formalistic realm of school.

After hearing this narrative, I suggested to Shirley that writing might be a way for her to stand out from others; she replied: "It's a way to be me, whether I'm speaking out or not, and it's like another memory I have that's absolutely wonderful is sitting on the screen porch in the summertime reading books, just with the crickets out there, just a single light, that's the time I really remember, really special" [SB-A4-5]. Readers already have a rich imaginative existence that leads them to employ writing in daily activities (Shirley kept a journal) and to fantasize about the effect of their writing as the expression of their idealized identity. When there is no boundary between the self and the idealized text, it is likely that the writer will be afraid of showing a paper to a reader for a critical perspective. In fact, Shirley recently wrote the proposal for her master's thesis "in tears the whole time" [SB-A5] because she was "afraid of it, afraid of how many drafts it was going to be and

how many times was I going to go back and forth, was it going to be good enough, what was acceptable, what wasn't" [SB-A6]. Here again, Shirley puts herself in the position of her text, saying, "I was going to go back and forth" but she also displays a part-time commuting student's tension.[25] In this writing project, as in fifth grade, Shirley does not imagine herself as able to negotiate with authority over the story's evaluation ("very nice, dear") or to defend its quality (as she might if she were "showing off"). Although it's nearly impossible to understand the complex environmental factors at work in that classroom, Shirley doesn't ask her teacher for emotional support, a characteristic, as I see it, of a writer whose solitude and reading condition her to withdraw from authority.

If the teacher praises a work by a writer susceptible to shame , a similar dynamic results. For example, a writer I call Ruth reports, "I remember handing in a paper and being very embarrassed to hand it in; the professor called me outside of class when I handed in my exam. I'm like, oh good God, it was that bad? And he actually liked it so much he wanted to tell me, and I couldn't—I also then lost some respect for him" [RD-A1]. In this case, Ruth distorts the evaluation of the authority figure. She rejects the ability of the reader making the appreciative reading, apparently because she perceived the paper, and herself too, as inadequate and therefore unworthy of a good evaluation.

4. Ridicule of Text

Shirley's situation describes one type of unappreciative reading. A similar situation occurs when the student is accused by the teacher or classmates of copying or cheating. The student's frustration arises in that case not only from doubt of the student's ability but

also because the finished product, ironically, is of high quality. Any pride that the student may feel becomes converted into isolation from the others. Here is an example of such an experience.

In this interview, Lloyd, a twenty-year-old sophomore, has been explaining that he dislikes writing in the same way he objects to making projects or building things for school art classes. I've asked him if he can remember an event to help me understand this better. He says, "One thing I did do well in art class was macramé. I did that with yarn and string stuff. I actually took something home to do it at home - I did such a nice job on it - it actually came out pretty nice - and then one of the kids kept trying to insist to the teacher that I bought it somewhere." Hearing that, I make a sharp intake of breath; I'm shocked. Lloyd continues, "I don't think she believed them, but it was just the fact that they would try to do that." I ask him, "What did you do?" He says, "Well, I was really young, and actually I think I [*He laughs embarrassedly*] cried. It was very upsetting."

Again, as with Shirley's book, the knotted string art project is idealized. Lloyd has imbued it with himself by taking it to the security of his home, a word he emphasizes. He has great pride in his new skill. Yet by working on his project outside school, as Shirley also did, he invites his classmate's accusation that he is an impostor, trying to pass off commercial artwork as his own. He hopes that the teacher believes him, but he is not sure that he was ever vindicated, since he felt upset and began to cry. The "very nice" macramé project becomes a source of shame. By being special, that is, better than the others, Lloyd must defend himself against their "taunting and teasing," as he puts it.

Lloyd has learned to hold himself back from showing his feelings or putting too much of himself into his written work. A computer science major, he prefers the "purist" subjects of science and math to humanities subjects, like English. His use of "pure" suggests a clean, antiseptic, almost holy quality that he wants to ascribe to intellect; the addition of emotion will stain academics for him.

Some people I interviewed convey feelings of isolation and a lack of support throughout the writing process. They almost never go to an instructor or tutor with a question or for encouragement. An internal standard keeps them in doubt about the quality of their writing, which puts them in a loop of self-criticism. Although a few individuals with anxiety report being able to rely on others, these people appear to live their lives as if they are on their own.

On the other hand, their solitary perfectionism reflects their keen sense of literary style and offers them a sense of security, however much they punish themselves ("give myself a hard time") for trying to meet those standards. With such perfectionist attitudes, writing itself often has the upper hand.

5. Deviation from Conventions

To make a written text perfect is a conundrum, owing to the different types of symbols used by people to create texts, which must be not only uniform as to spelling, etc., but also symbolic, representing the writer's unique expression of her imagination combined with memory and knowledge. While the excellence of the symbolic aspect can only be relative, the linguistic details can be made to conform perfectly to a code. In the latter sense,

writing can be *right* (as computer spelling and grammar checking show), but excellence of style, even though relative in terms of the piece's unique qualities, is regulated by an individually determined notion of what is *good*. The goodness of a text can only ever be contingent upon the reader's context, yet this can shift with time and also can be partly or greatly different from the writer's context. Given this unsteady set of conditions, it is no surprise that instructors find slavish imitation of the literary *dernier cri* coming from some writers, while others hold equally slavishly to matters of form that have no bearing on content ("a paragraph can only have three sentences").

Writers who want to make writing perfect, then, must blend mechanical flawlessness with aesthetic excellence in content and style. The creation of error-free text can easily be conflated with the subjective perfection of style. Corrections are labor intensive and may dominate the writer's attention, especially writers prone to work obsessively on corrections or revisions. A few writers may match the diagnostic category for obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). But regardless of how severe the writer's obsession may be at the outset, the writing environment offers fertile ground for cultivating absolute demands. In his study of the cognitive features of writer's block, Mike Rose determined that the rigid adherence to rules was behavior characteristic of students with blocking and low output (89-91). In the field of psychotherapy, Karen Horney observes that perfectionism depletes spontaneity and prevents the writer from finding satisfaction in her work (315). Social psychologists Carol Dweck and Ellen Leggett say much the same thing in a different way in discussing the "entity" personality with its fixation for being judged competent (see Section 6, below). These theories add up to a powerful assertion:

A writer's obsession with rules, with absolute standards, or with competence obscures the use of writing for making of meaning and for self-enhancement from one's writing.

The writers I interviewed who identified themselves as having perfectionist standards are even more emotionally involved with making their work correct than the theories suggest. From what they say, I would generalize that people can use correctness against the best interests of the writing self. An extended example from a conversation with Donna, described earlier in this chapter, demonstrates the point. Despite her proficiency, she told me the following: "I do get nervous . . . part of the fear is I do have a high standard." I asked her, "You used the phrase, 'high standards.' Where do you think they came from for you specifically?" Donna said, "I think some of it is innate, no matter what a teacher was like, involved or distant, high or low standards, there's I don't know if it's even a neurosis, but [there is] something in me that makes me feel like I have to be perfect, and I know this is kind of sick. But my mother thinks she has to be perfect; I come from a long line of perfectionists. I don't think this sense of high standards is something I picked up from my schooling, I just tend to give myself a hard time, and I don't need somebody else to do that to me, I do it to myself. I think a lot of it is self-imposed." [DJ-A1]

In using the words "something in me," "self-imposed," "do it to myself," and "give myself a hard time," Donna implies that she has the feeling of a division or splitting within her inner world, and that a fragment of her inner self functions to edit, correct, and even torment the other aspect of herself. Various psychological theories speculate on a similar mental phenomenon, including Fairbairn's designation of an "internal saboteur," by which

he means an internal anxiety-causing force that attacks the desires of the person, such as the desire to create a work of art, which can exist as the counterpart of an internalized authority figure (104). Unlike the figure of the superego, which Freud believed to cause guilt, the internal saboteur provokes distress that disrupts the desired activity. This concept has been elaborated on by Susan Kavaler-Adler in psychotherapy with inhibited writers, for whom it causes, in her view, feelings of shame and guilt in response to creative urges and the risk of exposure through writing ("Group" 47). The distress that a censorious audience can create may be unconsciously aimed at the writer by an inner part of herself, cutting away at her desires. Both Kavaler-Adler and Fairbairn explain the saboteur logically, yet each one blames the biological mother for the aggressive qualities that are mimicked by the inner censor. So, by blindly assuming that mothers may own these qualities, each analyst accepts unexamined cultural positions about women and motherhood that were never tenable, given a sophisticated understanding of female development.

Although "mom" obviously is not a universal ogre, nevertheless the writer's wish for the text to be perfect is a defensive move that some part of the mind issues, prompted by the memory and the threat of criticism, in anticipation of the process that ultimately leads to producing a piece of writing. Further, the actions of making the writing perfect create an environment of comfort in which the writer can soothingly touch, tidy, clean and otherwise "mother" the developing text, in the sense of psychologist D. W. Winnicott's transitional object (4). This use of a text is consistent with Kavaler-Adler's claim that a word can become a person's transitional object, standing for the lack of the "mother," and

can provide fulfillment (*Creative* 34). The sources of internalized authority figures may

be, of course, culturally derived not only from actual parents but also from media, from

school, from acquaintances. To return to Donna's conversation, her comments that would

accord with these theories concern her reference to her mother's perfectionist behavior,

above, and her mood while actually immersed in writing, a time when she says, "it's really

enjoyable; I'm happy in that phase" [A7]. Moreover, she associates the exacting chore of

correct punctuation with music, specifically with observing note values in musical notation

[A6], and this might suggest that she is as soothed by correcting her writing as by the

pleasure of playing a musical instrument. Could these theories about perfect writing

operate simultaneously? If so, it would mean that the desire for perfection not only gives

a person security but also undermines her self-confidence. Writers who belabor each

sentence until they are satisfied before proceeding display this dual function.

The perfect writers I interviewed often describe college writing as an "assignment,"

not as, say, "my paper." If writers are more fixated on meeting the requirements of the

assignment than on using writing to learn or explore, they will take few risks with their

papers, get minimal satisfaction from their writing, and be unable to measure their growth

or learning without outside approval. For example, Lloyd told me that writing is "not a

concrete subject, it's very subjective. There's no right or wrong. You can't check it in the

answer key to see if it's right. At least with a computer assignment you can check it, you

can learn to program, you can be sure it works and hand it in and know you did a good

job. And if it's a math assignment you can check your answers and make sure you got the

right answers before you hand it in. But with writing you have to hold your fingers and pray to God that the person next to you likes your *assignment*" (LD-A3; emphasis added).

By mentioning God, Lloyd suggests an emphasis on the ethical dimension of "right/wrong" that influenced several writers. For example, Cheryl describes the sense of being wrong as "apocalyptic. I don't mean the end of the world, but it's like there's this really awful image of what it's going to be, like, wrong, everything is wrong, my analysis is just wrong." Words convey the precision and the supernatural power of documents like the Christian Bible, the Torah, the Koran, or the U.S. Constitution. Psychologist Gershen Kaufman claims that fear of being somehow deficient can recreate the experience of a previous failure to satisfy an authority, usually a parent (*Shame* 88-89). But the school situation, as I wrote in chapter 1, can produce a distinct failure experience without family-imposed guilt. Sandra Lee Bartky and Susan Miller have each written that failure is less an echo of a past event than the ongoing consequence of the hierarchical classroom, which virtually requires students to be wrong or be "awful" to demonstrate that they are learning.

Just as it is intriguing that writers emphasize the ethical dimension, it is equally striking that they consistently used the verb "get" to explain being "right." For example, Nate says he wanted "to get it right the first time I write it down." Delia uses "get" in the context of a mark or letter grade ("get a good grade") and also in the sense of comprehension; both she and Cheryl remember instructors saying, to quote Delia's version, "'no, no, you're not getting it, this isn't right.'" Of course, they may have said or written something that misconstrued an essential feature of a text. But their use of "get" suggests that they think

of meaning as a fixed thing that the instructor has, rather than a dialogically constructed understanding. In their view, then, the teacher is the parent/caretaker/mother figure who, in psychoanalytic parlance, reforms and redeems the student (cf. Sullivan's research into the professor as audience). Another interpretation of these comments ties "get" to the state of being given something. For instance, "what did you get?" for a test or writing grade can easily be associated with a child's question, "what did you get?" for your birthday. Again, in the language of the unconscious, this meaning of "get it right" is the fantasy of mastery said by Freud to motivate the writer ("Daydreaming" 147). Understood in this sense, the composition becomes more than an illusion, in Suzanne Langer's sense; it becomes a moment or place that stands for the childhood wish to be whole or powerful. The anxiety created by being wrong, then, is the equivalent of denying subjective dreams, or of having someone reject the emotional arousal and physical stimulation the writer experienced as the composition formed itself.[26]

6. Confrontation with One's Text

Another pattern in the interviews concerns the writer who refuses to return to a completed paper or perceives the finished paper as impossible to change. Some educational psychologists would argue that the source of this feeling is a lack of learning-based motivation. If a person expects to learn something from writing a paper, she has motivation, in the view of Carol Dweck and Ellen Leggett. These psychologists study people's attitudes toward learning and suggest that people who need approval for their work will view that work as done or as an "entity" (256 ff.). In contrast, learning-oriented

people are able to change their work; they view their texts as malleable, like soft clay, whereas the opposite, finished texts are like clay that has been fired. In her book *Notes on the Heart*, compositionist Susan McLeod underscores the importance of this entity personality for writing instruction and urges teachers to teach motivational strategies and the reasons for using them: "We can instruct students to take challenge or failure as a cue to increase effort" (65). My observations suggest that motivation is not always missing, for writers can be anxious and still motivated. In fact, motivation to learn can intensify writing anxiety. The writers I interviewed who were in graduate programs studying for the master's degree have learning-based motivation, yet some perceive their work as "stone." Although they write to learn, they may nevertheless dread revision.

Various writing environments too can change the motivation of the individual writer in a real-life context. The genre of the text writer can vary the writer's anxiety. For example, impassioned writing inspired by a mood or a conviction, like a rant, or "raving," as one writer [FJ] depicted his argumentative papers, may escape the writer's censor if it carries a deeply felt message. And in exploratory or discovery writing, the writer apparently escapes making a commitment to "get it right," unlike personal narratives, which Daly has linked to high apprehension ("Writing Apprehension" 58). It is not simply a genre question, for writing beyond academic circumstances, such as business and social writing, can still be highly charged with fear of failure.

In one case, a writer I interviewed used the figure of *stone*, which has a significant resemblance to the "block" image (and perhaps to a tombstone), to explain how she felt about her finished papers. A writer may even think her finished paper is disgusting; one

woman I know illustrates that perception in a humorous pantomime of holding an imaginary paper at arm's length while looking pointedly in the opposite direction and holding her nose in a gesture that conveys a rank or foul odor. While it is an effective coping strategy to poke fun at oneself, the evasive movement coupled with the bodily response suggests that she feels unacknowledged shame at a paper not up to her expectations.

A related subject is the amount of control, if any, that the writer has over the growing composition. For example, a writer I call Ruth tells me, "I don't have 100% control over what gets in the paper, usually." She laughs. I ask her whether something else has 100% control, or if it's impossible to have 100% control. Ruth says, "I think it's impcssible, because when you get going there's a momentum or a rhythm that doesn't take over, obviously, because it's you doing it, but it feels like it takes over." What's noteworthy is Ruth's simultaneous perception that she is controlling and being controlled. Several theoretical positions are in debate over this perception. For example, one interpretation of her experience comes from Jung's assertion, which has influenced prominent critics, of a collective unconscious, a primordial trace lodged in the human brain that provides effective, healing subject matter to the writer (see Chapter II). A quite different interpretation, based on neuroscience, also locates in the brain the feeling that writing is taking over, but in this case it is the conjunction of positive emotions and associations that speed up the flow of connections and elevate the mood or arousal. In composition pedagogy, however, it is rare to discuss the mechanics of this perception, although a class, or a tutorial, could survey this perception for its pros and cons or contrast it to the

rhetorical and socio-cognitive principles of composition. Without such discussion, the writer may not feel able to interact with the text.

To add further nuance to this discussion of writing control, the experience that Beth reported is relevant. Beth explains:

> What ends up happening with things I write that I like, it's almost as if I don't have control over the ideas coming into my head. Like I'll read a story, like I'll say to myself, something will tell me in my head that about [or] through reading this story I'm going to find something that I'll like to write about, so I'll read it and read it and read it and over and over again and oftentimes I'll read it a number of times and I'll sit somewhere and I'll think about it, I'll let it flow in and out, and a lot of times I'll even have parts of stories memorized just because I've read them so much, but other times then all of a sudden if something's there all those thoughts will come in, like things will kind of start to leak in, and I'm like ooooh! . . . But other times I'll feel like something will come from a story or should come from it and I'll sit there and nothing will come, and I'll read it and read it and read it and I'll get no ideas at all, and that's really frustrating. (A7)

Historically, others, like medieval mystic Hildegard von Bingen or Harriet Beecher Stowe, believed that writing is given, or that when they write, they take dictation from God or a mystical source. Also, people may associate compositions that feel "given" with the connotation of *gifted* and having a writing talent, as Michael Palmquist and Richard Young describe in showing how students see "genius" as necessary for writing success, which creates anxiety in those who believe they lack it, or with the verb "to get" in the phrase "*get* it right," which people use regarding diction and error but which they may also associate with getting a gift.

People who want to write but who are not under pressure of academic or professional deadlines may put off revision for years. A writer I interviewed, "Ryan," told me that he stopped writing for six years, after an editor asked him to make changes in an essay-style

book review that he had submitted for publication. Ryan has a master's degree and has

taught composition before starting to work for a newspaper on the East coast. He speaks

with intensity and punctuates his monologues with knowledgeable references to European

literature and Western classical music. When the editor asked for changes in his review,

Ryan told me, "I didn't want to do it, one, because I felt it was the best thing I had ever

written, and I was angry and I didn't want to change anything, so I withdrew it, and

haven't written anything since" (RL-A2). The reason to bury the text, for Ryan, can be

explained as a gap between the ideal that Ryan perceived his finished text to be and the

potential ideal text that the publisher envisions, which Ryan fears his text failed to become.

He has greater investment in having the original text accepted than in discovering what he

might have done with the publisher's suggestions. Within the context of Ryan's life as a

whole, however, this attitude comes as no surprise; he describes repeated attempts to use

intellectual performance and products to get approval from authority, and he has high

standards for his written work. There would always be tension for him in someone's

evaluation of one of his texts. In other published accounts of writers' long silences, one

finds similar patterns of living; I recommend Pamela Daniels's autobiographical essay,

"Birth of an Amateur" and Roger Angell's obituary piece on Joe Mitchell, a staff writer for

The New Yorker.

7. The Materiality of a Written Text

Speech-loving or "phonocentric" writers I interviewed fall into roughly three

categories: those who hate to hold the pencil or pen and by extension hate all writing-

related activity; those who dislike their handwriting and have unpleasant memories of being taught to slant and connect loop-shaped letters in script; and those who believe their speech is superior to their writing and therefore avoid committing their thoughts and words into a fixed form on paper. The term "phonocentric," meaning roughly speech-centered, is taken from the French philosopher and theorist of language, Jacques Derrida, and I use a concept from Derrida deliberately to suggest that the writers' speech preferences are backed by rich stores of associated ideas and experiences, or memory traces, as Derrida's deconstructive philosophy proclaims. At its core (although the notion of a core would be antithetical to that theory), Derrida's theory holds that Western tradition values the spoken word over writing because speech is (mistakenly) thought to be closer to the speaker's mind or consciousness than a written page and consequently more trustworthy at conveying meaning. In fact, written texts hold endless ambiguities.[27] But Deborah Tannen in "Ordinary Conversation" convincingly argues that oral language has the effect Derrida reports because of its interactive character; by analyzing conversations, she shows how speech engages listeners by requiring them to fill in meaning and otherwise join emotionally, so they identify and feel with the speaker (the rhetorical quality of *pathos*). Poetic rhythms and repetition natural to oral language also create an emotional response in hearers. In "Literacy and Language Change," Shirley Brice Heath sees present-day writing as taking on oral language patterns, a feature that could make education more democratic. If Heath is right, the phonocentric writers I interviewed may be the vanguard.

Handwriting

In recollections of learning to write, some participants show precocious ability, that is, they believe they knew how to write letters at age 3 or 4 or to sign their names to a library card before beginning school. Some, however, make their earliest writing association with going to first grade. And one writer told me that he had no memory of writing earlier than learning cursive handwriting. Writers' negative comments about the physical writing situation suggest that from early experience onward this encounter is one of considerable tension. For example, Nate tells me, "I really hated the physical act of writing." Also he believes that "cursive handwriting was sort of a traumatic thing for me" and that eventually he went back to printing. Today, he does computer programming exclusively on the keyboard; "the longest thing I normally write is a message for the phone." Nate is not the only writer who hates physical writing; writing as bodily struggle is a theme that has emerged across various conversations. For example, several writers I interviewed remembered bad marks in penmanship and difficulty learning cursive handwriting. In phenomenological terms, they found writing outwardly imposed and unavoidable, whereupon it became a site of struggle with authority and a sign of conformity. It is boring to many students, according to Winner in *Gifted Children* (29). Resistance to adopting cursive handwriting seems entirely logical. In the world we live in, the powerful, authoritative writing that we see and obey is in print, in upper- and lower-case letters, exactly as children first learn to form letters. Informal writing, like a memorandum, a list. or a friendly letter (but not email), is the only occasion for adults to use cursive handwriting. A few types of handwriting retain an association with prestige, but mainly

handwriting is no longer a mark of status. Writers, however, may see handwriting in a more personal way, as when they are convinced that their handwriting symbolizes them, or if they deliberately change its appearance, which suggests that they identify themselves with the actual mark of writing on paper.

Dislike of physical writing instructs by making the familiar strange; for example, I am alert to my own make-up as a docile writer. Submission to the rules of handwriting, as Foucault writes in "Docile Bodies," disciplines the individual to the regimentation required by the modern state (*Discipline* 152). The admired writing state of immersion, flow, or deep concentration, appears to be a *disembodied* condition, but it may be, instead, passivity or submissiveness to the institutional standards. As if in rebellion against these strictures, numerous writers do not disembody themselves but find it distasteful to use the materials and tools of composition; nevertheless, educational conventions require them to produce papers as routine parts of their school training. In the 70s, Daly and Shamo showed that anxiety causes some writers to choose college majors requiring little or no written work ("Academic Decisions"). This is consistent with Nate's perspective that computer programming, in college and as a profession and recreation, allows him to escape the task of writing.

In adult writers, childhood experience does not necessarily determine a writer's anxiety. For example, Beth enjoyed writing and reading in the early grades and learned quickly; she recalls, "I used to love to write stories. I used to try to make them as long as you could" (A7). Yet as an undergraduate, under pressure to complete a take-home exam, she describes acute embodied anxiety:

I actually ended up just moving around my house and going to different areas of my house to try to find where I was the most comfortable, like, or where I felt like, It's almost like I felt like if I was sitting in different positions, the thoughts would shoot out of somewhere? Like I went down to the basement and I sat on the—like on the concrete. I sat there and I had a cigarette and a cup of coffee and I just sat there; it was pitch black and I was just staring.

Beth narrates her movements from the basement to the bedroom, from the bedroom to the computer room, and from there to the kitchen table. She laughs; "I try just a hundred different things. I found that the concrete floor works best, actually" (A8). This episode illustrates mesmerization (that is, counter-transference) of the interviewer; I wish, now, that I had had the sangfroid to have recorded Beth's body language during this conversation, but while I was actually listening to her, I was hypnotized and didn't take notes. I did, however, ask, "What are your emotions, while you're walking around the house?" Beth replies that she feels frustrated, upset, and that she can't do it. "I get tired fairly quickly, because I'm trying to get my mind racing to get things in, so I get very frustrated . . . . People I talked with in the class . . . would say, just write something, who cares if you like it, who cares if it sucks, just write something and bring it in, but I have this phobia, if . . . it doesn't make sense in my head, it's almost physically harder for me to write" (A9). I asked her, "When you are frustrated and upset, is there a focus? Do you feel it's your issue? Do you get angry at the school, the teacher, the book?" She answers, "No, this is why I shut down, I think. I get really mad at myself. I get disgusted, because I know as soon as I hit that frustration level, I know what I'm going to do to myself" (A10). She continues by explaining, as above, that she will not be satisfied with writing that does not express what I interpret as an important, connected thesis. This intense, dramatic story of Beth's may seem unusual, yet several other people described repeated

body movement stemming from frustration during a writing period. For Beth and others like her, every writing project equals the finest realization of herself and her ideals, so she becomes enraged with herself for the evidence her false starts offer that she cannot become her ideal.

"To Write It in My Head"

When people avoid the act of handwriting, they may talk (which I discuss in the next section) or move inward, toward structured thought, planning, and inner speech. These discussions are symptomatic as much as illustrating an anxiety-managing strategy. When Nate tells me, "I really hated the physical act of writing," he comments further, "so I would try to get it all kind of *in my head* as much as I could and just write it out once." I ask, "How would it look in your head?" Nate says, "I would try to figure out what each sentence would be at least vaguely. Uh, I would try and stay a couple sentences ahead in my head as I was writing." When we discuss composing email messages, Nate admits he writes these mentally, too; then he adds, "I even sometimes edit *in my head* to make it as short basically, to get all the thoughts into the fewest numbers of words" (A4; emphasis added).

The head is the site of intellectual operation and is commonly seen in this metonymous usage by writers as the biological source of writing. Nate values his head or his thoughts above his words on paper; he keeps many thoughts "in" but uses his hated hand "just . . . once." Head is opposed to hand as thinking is to physical writing. In a gender-sensitive interpretation, "logocentric logic," which Nate values, and which is a trait associated with

power and by association with the masculine, is opposite to ambiguous, poetic texts associated with the feminine. Nate tries to set boundaries for the type of text that he will accord authority to; he perceives indefinite texts as being less influential, yet in fact he continually struggles to repress them.

It is one thing to produce writing in the head, however, and quite a different matter to store one's writing there. Several people I interviewed told me that they "think" their writing into existence: they described being able to brainstorm mentally, to outline a paper mentally, to write section headings in their minds, to write whole sentences and even sections of a paper mentally and memorize these words before committing them to paper.

This phenomenon receives little recognition or consideration from the composition profession. To me, initially, the revelation of memorized writing was astonishing (I can be heard to gasp on the tape recording). Even though I heard about mental writing often enough afterward that the subject no longer surprised me, I believe that it raises unresolved questions. Until then, I had taken it as natural, even universal, that writing was only possible when it was done on a sheet of paper, since the act of the writer involved the forming of letters, words, lines, pages. The sources of this belief for me are my parents' occupations and recreation, which included teaching, journalism, reading, and letter writing, and my childhood training in printing, cursive, printing neighborhood newsletters with a rubber-stamp set of letters, writing personal letters and thank-you notes, typewriting, and piano playing. Tablets, notebooks, reams of paper, pencils, pens, typewriters and personal-computer keyboards innocently surround the intellectual activities of college, as they do of professional and amateur nonacademic writing, making

their use seem normal. Just as the act of writing seems natural (to me, at least), so it seems natural, even "best," in the pedagogy of composition to write successive versions of a text over a time period. With each different version, the mind through its associative properties adds more information that complicates and enriches the text. The long-term memory is used to best advantage when it is called on over time; it would be unreasonably taxed if it had to recall and display each known connection to the subject all at one given time, as the one-shot writer is attempting to do. Vygotsky's notion of "inner speech" suggests that the mental writer produces a kind of writer-friendly text, to adapt Linda Flower's term. Even if inner speech is derived multiply, as Bakhtin's concept of heteroglossia determines, it is hard to see how it can include the depth and richness of recollected knowledge pulled from memory—and from research into external sources.

These speculations, however, repress the contradictory observations of people I interviewed. As they report, a person can have access to both the text being composed in the short-term memory space and also the resources of long-term memory and can think about both at once, or rather, shuttle nearly instantly between them without using notes on paper as reference points. As long ago as Plato, after all, this permanence of writing was seen as its virtue if also its danger to powers of memory.[28] Writers who compose mentally may be pioneers. In an analogy to hypertext, the associative writing method, these writers may be downloading, so to speak, their "links," when they transcribe what they have written in their heads, and their technique may be a step beyond the draft-revise method.

Often, the phonocentric writer either does no revising or revises inwardly prior to producing a paper text. For example, Sue said, "I really struggled with revising this piece,

and I ended up keeping it pretty much the same way that I had it when I wrote it in a burst one weekend, and . . . I thought, well, I didn't really revise this piece, but I did really revise the piece. I just did so much of it *in my head*" (SK-A4; emphasis added). Another writer (AE) says that she quickly does a mental outline of a paper, but as soon as she finishes it, she no longer cares about doing the actual writing of what she has planned; the labor of writing it out has become dull and anticlimactic.

Talkers

Some writers I interviewed view their writing as secondary to their verbal spontaneity. To such a person, writing is not-I because only when speaking do I believe that I am real. For example, Fred comments, "My self-image does not have to be attached to what is written. That's why talking is fine, because I can always talk myself into contradicting something that might have sounded stupid. There's got to be a point at which what's written is a living—has to stand on its own" (A5). He distrusts the presence of his personality in writing, which is the crux of his anxiety.

This attitude suggests the metaphysical preference for the voice as a vehicle of mind or consciousness, or as what is living about the person; in that sense, to have written one's ideas is to have written one's epitaph. Derrida's theories illuminate the control that the vocal language appears to give to the speaker. It is the sensation of conveying precise content to auditors. For instance, Fred explains, "Talking about it [an idea] to somebody, I'll be able to circle around that original statement and amplify and illuminate what I was saying and add to it and go on to another point in a fashion that if written down would just

be incoherent" (A4). As Derrida claims, however, such precision of meaning is illusory,

given the shifting nature of language, whether spoken or written, and its inevitable

tendency to scatter what it signifies across a network of related concepts. Also, the

power of originating sound from within, by the passage of air through the larynx out from

the mouth (in the head), gives instant physical gratification to the speaker. For example,

Fred describes his polemics as "foaming at the mouth" (A5). It is common to say that the

speaker responds to the audience's reactions, yet some monologists who enjoy talking may

be unaware of auditors' signals. To speak reinforces the physical sensation of being alive,

while to write is to accept the closure that "the end," sleep and death represent. More than

one person I interviewed told me, "It's not endless," referring ambiguously not only to the

supply of material to write about but also, less consciously, to the consciousness in which

writing takes place.

People may use speech to convey the contents of the nonverbal imagination efficiently

and in a less laborious style than writing would demand. Nonverbal processes are hard to

represent to others, as Roger Shepard discusses in studies of scientists' imaginative

thought. Creative thinkers may choose talk over text for this reason.

Phonocentric writers who see themselves as having been fast-talking bullies in the

schoolyard overlap in some of their writing dilemmas with the arrogant or grandiose

personality. In a recent case study, psychologist Robert Galatzer-Levy speculates that

grandiose behavior in the adult creative person can originate in failure to use language in

playful ways as a child; words were not used for play, for symbol-making, or to repair

feelings of distress, as one might if one could name the emotions felt, such as anger or

sorrow (101). For example. Fred often snowed his teachers with an impressive

vocabulary and felt ''in class my speech was making it apparent that I was a great thinker,

but this is not really the case" (A6). Fred described his attempts at writing graduate-level

papers as ''couched in such contorted language.'' He went through a frustrating period of

unsuccessfully imitating academic discourse, ventriloquising the style of deconstruction.

During this period, he also persisted, however, in struggling with revision, so that he

underwent a kind of apprenticeship in academic writing. Also, he accepted writing

recommendations that made sense to him and finally arrived at a writing strategy that was

effective.

8. Inferiority

Earlier in this chapter. I discuss subjugated writers who perceive authorities as

unsympathetic readers, but now I want to address an opposite thread of attitudes among

people I interviewed. These people have a somewhat hostile, defiant approach toward

others, what we call, informally, a chip on the shoulder, yet they combine it with an

earnest intellectual outlook that I see as a potential asset in the classroom. Yet as writers,

these people feel insecure and set apart from or different from others. In addition to

defiance, they may indirectly express the wish to manage the effect that their writing has

on others, although they may feel unable or unwilling to change their texts to please an

audience.

Such behavior is termed "grandiose" in psychoanalytic literature, referring to a

superior self-opinion that dominates the personality, but that diagnostic sense of the term,

which would be applied by a disinterested observer of an "object" (a person; a client), is not the way I use it in this project. I want to communicate the interior perspective of a particular writer and the consciousness she or he has of experiences in the world; people speaking of themselves would not normally choose such an unflattering description of themselves and their behavior. To call these writers "arrogant" or "grandiose" would distort their perspectives unless the observer, who in this case is the reader, can see their subjective world in context and witness how they make sense of their experiences. Also, I should say that the "grandiose" designation never occurred to me during my participation in conversation with these people, who appeared to me as I believe they would to many others as engaging, reflective adults with serious, wide-ranging interests. In writers I interviewed for this project, then, I judge that the traits often described as grandiose or arrogant feel to them like the quality of being intellectual, or of being set apart or different from others; the writer may express defiance or hostility toward others and the wish to control others' response to her/his writing (to make them see it as she/he does). Although such people are ambitious, and often have high ideals about writing, they report great difficulty with writing that ranges from getting started through completing and revising a written work; occasionally they abandon work altogether for months or years.

To give two brief examples, Fred perceives the world as a group of people to keep at bay, to fence with so as to defeat, to deceive with quicksilver speech, to ridicule, and sometimes to charm. Lois is critical of unprofessionalism, especially in a professor whose education she judges as not worthy of her respect; she believes there is "a source" (A8) of knowledge in the world that she will recognize; she has "snobbery" about books (A5) and

sees fine writing as "spiritual . . . sacred" (A6). Like Fred, Lois perceives the world as including groups of people who are her enemies and from whom she protects herself with "verbal skills flying" (A5).

To give depth and context to this situation, I will sketch a writer, Lewis, whom I see as having aspects of this component in his personality, and show him in contrast to Donna (previously limned in this chapter). I will use each writer's form of anxiety about writing to illustrate the kinds of psychological or psychoanalytic explanations and cultural theories offered by various writers to account for these types of behaviors. Lewis is a graduate student working toward the master's degree and teaching writing courses at a university. In his thirties, he is dedicated to writing fiction as a career. He held teaching positions prior to this and also wrote professionally for entertainment publications. Before beginning to study for the present master's, he earned a B.A. and a previous master's degree (in education). Writing, however, distressed him so much as an undergraduate that he decided against graduate school at that time. He grew up and went to public high school in a suburban town outside a large, East Coast city in a two-parent family surrounded by liberal papers and magazines and by jazz. His motto, as I understand it, is summed up by the *New Yorker* cartoon he clipped when he was about twelve years old. It showed, in Lewis's words, "a rumpled guy looking despondent at a desk and his wife or some woman saying, . . . 'James, being an intellectual has made you nothing but unhappy'" (A1). He tells me that he thought it was clever then and that he hasn't moved that far from it in his way of avoiding writing, especially writing fiction, which gives him the most trouble.

The anxiety-provoking dilemma that Lewis contends with is, in his words, to "create something that hasn't been created" (A2), an emphasis on the principle of originality that according to some theories lies at the heart of grandiosity problems. The novice writer, uncomfortably conscious of working under the shadow of talented authors who have gone before, wants to break away from the influence of those writers to claim his or her place. In the case of Lewis (as I wrote earlier in this chapter), he has become increasingly self-conscious about originality in writing and is haunted by "noise," a kind of static: "the noise I hear is the history of writing. So I think, O.K., now, I don't want to write like Cheever and Carver and Hemingway, even though I do, and so it has to be my voice" (A2). Imitation is a threat that alarms him, to judge from his comment that he does not want to "just ape all the other stories I've read" (A2). I see his comment as referring to the value of a Hemingway's work as a lesson and as the source of a sustaining relationship with a kindred spirit, yet at the same time an influence that he wants to escape, being uneasy at the comparison of his or her writing to that of the "greats." As Lewis says, "it has to be my voice."

Anxiety of Influence

The novice and the pro, Lewis and Hemingway, are in a contest or duel that only one player can win. This type of battle in literary tradition impressed the critic Harold Bloom as a near-law of creativity; he presented it as his theory of the anxiety of influence, the title of his 1973 book which became the first of four to explore rivalry among successive generations of authors.[29] His theory uses the model of the Oedipal father-son struggle,

explored first for its psychoanalytic implications by Freud, to understand the novice

writer's need to repress the literary father figure by rewriting earlier, classic work (Bloom's

term for this is "misprision"). Unless this contest is fought, the novice is in danger of

becoming silenced by the father's power; yet for Bloom, overweening desire to achieve

demarcates the novice who attempts that identity struggle. (Karen Horney also identifies

identity as the chief dilemma of the mastery-seeking personality [192].) Bloom writes of

literary tradition that "it is now valuable precisely because it partly *blocks*, because it

stifles the weak, because it represses even the strong" (1184; emphasis added), so that

literary tradition emerges the ultimate victor by assimilating newcomers who challenge it.

As an example, Bloom refers to the canonical poet Wallace Stevens, whose modernist

poems reinterpreted the themes of Whitman's romantic poetry.

Bloom's arrangement leaves all writers (students too) ensnared in a Romantic narrative

in which the only role is to adopt the heroics of a Davy Crockett assailing the frontier and

the only outcome not a happy ending but an ironic conclusion. He sees the writers' grail

as a reworked version of a classic, not unlike a thriftily remodeled hand-me-down, in

which the writer merges with the rival precursor. Bloom rationalizes, however, that no

true originality is possible; one can be only partly free from tradition by compounding with

it (1188). An unmistakable masculinist ideology of course underlies this narrative. By and

large the feminist ideology rejects heroics: in *Sentimental Modernism*, Suzanne Clark

describes the feminist view that a fallacy lies behind the Romantic adventure. The less

macho writer may have identity problems at times, if she or he has been inscribed by

culture into an heroic epic. Bloom's theory also maintains or even perpetuates a literary elite (as he readily concedes).

In terms of the influence of writer-role models on Lewis, the Bakhtinian theory of the struggle to claim one's own language, which Bakhtin theorized during the approximate period of Freud's theories of development, offers a revealing counterpart to Bloom's scheme. In "Discourse in the Novel" (1930s), Bakhtin explains that the writer must appropriate others' words and force them to submit to his or her intention (294). New words must interact with others' words, he claims, which exist as a tumult of overheard fragments in the mind's interiority. As with Bloom, Bakhtin uses bellicose figures.

Bloom's and Bakhtin's theories offer a partial interpretation of Lewis's anxiety at sitting down to write, specifically his obsession with breaking free of literary models, yet additional features about writing that disturb Lewis are not so neatly accounted for. He is reluctant to accept any view of his writing other than his own, a belief I see as emerging from the emotional power of the experience he endured during the time of writing, which he began only with difficulty and consequently feels to him like a "thing unto itself" (A3) and a "trance" (A5). When he finishes a piece of writing, Lewis describes himself as feeling elated ("this is really something") and knowing that the characters he has created are real, in a sense, because he didn't plan them or know them before he started writing. The means of the text's creation appear pure to him. He says that "It's very difficult to then look at that and hear someone say, 'I don't really buy this' or 'This is a problem'" (A3).

In our conversation, he and I look at a particular composition of his that was presented to a fiction-writing workshop as a draft for peer comments and which he then revised, incorporating some suggestions. The instructor had what Lewis feels was a personal reaction to the overall story that made him (the instructor) dismiss it. To Lewis, such a response was a matter of taste and "absurd." He says, "It did work for me." Although Lewis agreed to make some changes that the instructor recommended in the story's structure and in the sequence of events, he seemed to think that such changes were only minor improvements, for, as he said, "the core of it is still real." Lewis disagreed with a marginal comment that a line was wordy; Lewis interprets this comment as, "a way of saying, I don't like the story and I'm going to have to find some stuff" to criticize. Lewis dismissed the instructor's end comment, which praised the improvement in the revised version, saying that the comment refers to "things I don't think are problems; it doesn't matter to me, that he thinks it's structurally improved." He added, "He [the instructor] doesn't mean that; it is a way to say, I still don't like it." He will not revise further; he feels the instructor is "disconnected" from the story.

Peers' comments ranged typically, Lewis felt, including noncommittal responses, which he interpreted as afraid to give offense, inquiries about technical details, which meant to him that "it didn't work" for the reader who had stepped outside the constraints of the story, and "foolish" suggestions such as an arbitrary change in a character's occupation. Comments show respect for the story, yet any suggestion that the story is not perfect can be wounding and deflating, Lewis reported (B1). He stresses that the story lacks artifice, which is the ingredient that the workshop suggestions may impose upon it. The overall

tenor of Lewis's reactions is one of resigned disappointment. He analyzes the students and instructor to explain their various responses to the manuscript. Throughout, Lewis does not lose faith in the story; rather, he maintains his viewpoint as the accurate evaluation. The alterations he made at others' suggestion he considers to be trivial.

I interpret Lewis's unwillingness to consider any defect in his story psychologically as a reaction against threats that changes pose to his identity (ego ideal), which is allied to his near-spiritual belief that he has received a pure invention. Theories of Horney suggest that for a self-important person to admit failure, which might mean in the case of writing to do a substantial rewrite of one's draft, is a deeply unsettling admission of unworthiness (192). Despite the parallels I am drawing, I need to emphasize that Horney writes as an analyst about people who are not functioning as capably as Lewis; nevertheless, were Lewis able to explore the suggestions further, he might produce still more revision. Also, however, I can see that Lewis perceives these suggestions as lowering his story from the level of aesthetic to the space of craft through introducing artificial matter; he conveys a sense that he composed the story spiritually and that he can "tap into collective unconscious," the Jungian concept I explored earlier in this project. In that frame of mind, he will resist performing "work," which is, after all, the function of the workshop. Madeleine Grumet, however, recommends the concept of the *studio* as an alternate to the workshop; studio connotes the ever-changing performance of the artist (89-94). His creation was not, in his eyes, made for a purpose, so it has a permanent quality of truth. Some ideas that peers gave him, such as changes in a character's occupation or name, and the instructor's recommendations for sequence or structure, appear to him as arbitrary yet inevitable when

he submits a story for review in an educational setting, where the student or novice is assumed to be inadequate and every paper can be improved. To Lewis (and others like him), whose personality and psychic defenses guard against accepting reproach or unworthiness, the corrective nature of the classroom can foster a need in him to keep his composing in aesthetic terms, even though his remote attitude can prevent readers from connecting with his writing.

Vengeful injury is another way to understand what a writer gains by resisting change. Of the psychological theorists who discuss mastery behavior in writers, Karen Horney has evinced a theory that this self-aggrandizing personality needs vindictive triumph (197). The artist may believe that the readers deserve punishment for failing to appreciate what they see: psychologist Galatzer-Levy writes that such a creative person will demand that an audience interpret his or her writing as he or she does (96). Psychoanalyst Dominick Grundy affirms both Horney's vindictiveness theory and Bloom's anxiety of influence theory; silence, Grundy claims, is a way for a novice to punish a canonical author for failing to confer success, in the form of approval or a good grade or publication, as his/her inspiration and reputation seemed to promise ("Parricide" 704). Writers who fail to defeat the precursor or who are not yet ready for battle may fall into this category. In a conversation with Ryan, a published writer who undergoes dry spells several years in length, I asked if he had ever felt such a letdown. Ryan bitterly told me how a particular poet had inspired him but ultimately failed to mediate for him.

To look again at the cartoon (*"being an intellectual has made you nothing but unhappy"*) emblematic of Lewis, and in fact a virtual self-portrait, I see that it is also

possible to understand his self-regulated distance from the writing workshop, his aesthetic

composing process, and even his writing anxiety, as marks of his status as an artist and

writer, like the unhappy man in the cartoon. He feels obliged to display those marks to

symbolize his difference from those who are not members of that group or class. The

promotion of the artistic writer type through cartoons and profiles is accomplished by

popular magazines like the *New Yorker* and the old *Saturday Review*. Hollywood films,

too, predictably depict the writer filling wastebaskets with rejected, crumpled pages to

show endless frustration, and sometimes portray the writer as obsessive-compulsive or

clinically depressed.[30] Lewis, possessing the ability to tap a mystical source of inspiration,

as he describes his writing procedures, may feel, perhaps unconsciously or with modest

self-awareness, that he has something more than others. The French sociologist Pierre

Bourdieu refers to cultural capital as the distinction (in his book by that name) between

the educated haves and have-nots; the cultured, he claims, have "self-assurance, the

certainty of having which is grounded in the certainty of having always had" (329).

Lewis's self-consciousness of the artificiality of writing might represent shame at having

taken an undemocratic stance as one of the elite.

9. Exile From Tradition

The people I interviewed give a more nuanced picture of a superiority personality than

Lewis's story alone makes plain. A different writer reveals a variation on the crunch

between personal writing ambition and the difficulty with accomplishing that writing.

Lewis, it will be remembered, saw writers as personal heroes when he was as young as

twelve and struggles as an adult to disentangle his writings from the influence of the idolized authors, yet my interviews suggest that it is also possible for admiration to prompt an adult writer to become inspired by a century-old author in a way that results in a non-competitive creative achievement. The adult writer Donna, the independent professional and part-time graduate student whom I previously described, illustrates such a writer. Donna spoke with me at length and permitted me to read several of her compositions.

For Donna, it has never been a dream to be a fiction writer, yet after several years of preparing others' writing for publication in her work at a book publishing house, she became impatient to do some writing of her own. This desire has led her to change jobs more than once, moving to positions in which she could compose work-related documents, and also stimulated her to seek a graduate degree, x years after earning her baccalaureate degree. Without noticeable hostility to co-workers, Donna sees herself as superior to them in her mastery of grammatical and syntactical conventions and speaks authoritatively on questions of language usage. Her recreational activities indicate intellectual striving: for instance, she returned to music lessons to perfect her earlier knowledge of her instrument, which she thought had been faulty, and practiced diligently for her own satisfaction. Her standards for herself are sufficiently high to bring on occasional panic attacks in connection with the performance of writing, and she is prone to "going blank" when circumstances force her to write in public, as she might in an examination, or to brainstorm ideas with a group of co-workers. Being put on the spot and being judged as to her ideas and her writing threaten her with intellectual failure that is unacceptable to a person with this masterful identity. I believe she demonstrates a

personality that has elements of superiority or grandiosity but without undue arrogance, possibly mediated by social conventions for women 's behavior, like modesty, and by respect for education.

A graduate psychology course offered Donna the chance to write a major essay on an American woman writer of the nineteenth century (this name is concealed for reasons of privacy) whose books had been a staple of her childhood reading: "She was my first image of a female writer," Donna said. Anxious about writing the paper, afraid she might "go blank this time," she researched the author's life and historical period exhaustively and identified strongly with her creative aspirations. She told me, "I could understand the feelings of perfectionism and keeping parts of yourself hidden away and finding this outlet where you can—and I said in the paper that there were—she could express her personality." Also, Donna responded empathically to the repressive social and familial conventions of the past. About moments when the author defied convention, Donna said, "A part of her accepted [repression] and thought she was the bad one, the wrong one" (A2). In her comments, Donna shows sympathy for the subject that possibly extends to herself and that overcomes her initial fear of having to compose.

The kinship Donna felt to this author bridged her alarm at the assignment and eventually fueled her completion of the paper. Women as writers may have an advantage at forming a sympathetic attachment of this nature. Women's psychological development, according to theories of Nancy Chodorow (which I have outlined in Chapter II), specifically their lack of need to separate emotionally from the mother, results in an innate connectedness. But psychologist Carol Gilligan believes that this very sense of connection

complicates communication, for many women, at least, when they sense a disjuncture between their ideals and the reality of day-to-day living; an inner division forms between these women and their companions or co-students (co-workers) that literally takes away their voice. The connection between this theory and writing fluency may seem obscure, but in fact adolescent girls whom Gilligan and colleagues study do sometimes break off their writing as a way to protect themselves (*Between* 196-7). They have heightened sensitivity to objections that authorities might raise to their opinions, were they to voice such beliefs. Like these adolescents, even at her mature age, Donna easily drops into anxiety about exposing herself emotionally and what an instructor will think of her personal feelings.

Habitual dread of being graded seized Donna after handing in the paper: "Until I got the grade, it was sort of this cloud hanging over me. What if I did this wrong, what if I didn't get the assignment right?" [A4] This personality, according to psychologist Galatzer-Levy, finds it hard to believe that anyone else can understand the work that he or she has produced and will not be able to empathize with an audience, but instead will demand that they see his or her work as he or she does (96). Yet her increase in knowledge from writing the paper existed independently of its fate. Donna's conversation about this paper and a careful reading of it persuade me, at any rate, that the older author's influence did not hamper Donna's composing process or cause her to worry about unconscious imitation of the author's themes or style, as was the case with Lewis and as Bloom's theory holds. Rather, Donna's dedication to her subject allows her to internalize the earlier author's creative force and even to compose in the sense of a tribute, the

obligation that a priestess would perform, not a rewriting or reinterpretation. Her paper appears flawless; the difference between it and Lewis's short story is not only one of genre but of convention, since Lewis decided not to make his story match his workshop's goals, while Donna complied with academic expectations. Through this author Donna willingly assimilated herself to academic writing standards.

What I see in Donna's superiority or complacency toward writing is a need she has to use imagination to mediate the tension she feels surrounding potential failure of her identity. I mean that she carefully takes herself to a point of identification with a classic author or with the point in her life when she feels empathy toward her topic and relies on it to give herself ample material to write about. She told me, "I compare it to what a method actor does" (I will have extensive comments on writers' strategies for coping with anxiety in Chapter V). Once she has assembled a stock of information and opinion, her assurance about writing can take over. She has great confidence in her ability to shape a rough draft into a polished work; she is not afraid, as Lewis is, of artifice, nor does she expect to receive inspiration from a muse-like source.

People who see themselves as intellectually superior and who have formed a bond with writing, through early identification with authors as models, are repeatedly and frustratingly drawn to make something of their desire to write; but by whom or what are they drawn? According to Bloom, they are drawn by the tradition itself and instinctual rivalry with it. Social critics, however, claim that occupational choices like writing are promoted by received cultural conditioning, so that an educational elite is formed (one that perpetuates unequal social class systems). Bourdieu proposes that an ideology of

charisma encourages people to believe in themselves as possessing "natural gifts" that make them entirely responsible for their "social destiny" and that people legitimize hierarchies, like the levels within the academic system, because of this belief that some are naturally superior (390). For example, Donna is encouraged by her achievement within graduate school to ally herself with the classic authors, not to unseat them, yet her professionalism raises the importance of writing by making her status increasingly dependent upon turning out a number of papers of standard academic form and quality. The idea of writing as a liberating pastime will probably be inconsistent with any academic career she might obtain. My observation of writers suggests that one byproduct of their cultivation is the maintenance of higher education and the cultural figures it endorses. By and large, Donna's case describes the manner of assimilation that exists in higher education, especially in training at the graduate level, where students often must learn to virtually reproduce existing forms and styles of writing, even though their quality may be questionable, to be rewarded.

Participants revealed to me that writers' expectations of being held to a standard, and evaluated or judged, exert control over their bodies and minds. A reader's involvement with canonical literature, I was surprised to find, can have an lasting effect of stifling and silencing that person's writing, yet an individual's wish to join the "literary mind" is a force that impels many to compose. These controlling forces operate even if writers perceive the judgment figure inaccurately or if they are reacting to an internal message from a censoring "superego." In some situations, the censoring message triggers panic in the

person that blanks out ordinary common-sense information, such as a writer's previous

successes. Voices surround the writing act, as do pressures both inner (conscience or

Freudian superego; memory; inspiring models) and outer (the time-driven academic or

business environment).

CHAPTER V

"DRIVING MY BRAIN:" WRITERS' MANAGEMENT OF ANXIETY

Women create little trouble when they tell about themselves.

--Luce Irigaray

One summer day when I was talking about my dissertation with some friends in my backyard, one man I've known for some time began expressing interest in volunteering for an interview. We kept on talking, and in the course of our conversation this man, Nate, an intense person of about thirty with a frequent, nervous laugh, told me that he hates writing. His anger seemed plausible to me, as his nature is mildly combative, and he sometimes provokes or extends argumentative exchanges in social settings. He never describes himself as having any close relationships and appears bookish: slightly built with a sparse beard and longish hair, he habitually dresses in jeans and T-shirts. His use of "hate" stayed with me, so when we had a private interview, later, I reminded him of it. On this occasion, we were sitting alone in a den or home office, a quiet room crammed with bookshelves, a typewriter, and elaborate computer equipment that he shares with others in the house where he lives outside Boston. Our preliminary talk had been about his earliest memories of reading and writing, a question I have put to almost all the participants in this project. His memories were so gloomy that I asked him to comment on his statement that

he hated writing. He laughed at that and questioned it by saying he didn't remember

telling me he hated writing, but he added the following comments (I arrange them here in

poetic form, as previously discussed):

> My general memory of early school was I didn't like anything much,
> in general I didn't like school,
> and uh   I think it was
> it wasn't until fifth grade at the earliest
> that anything really seemed at all interesting to me,
> I guess,
> and it was usually more math or science type things,
> so,   it's sort of like from the very beginning
> almost
> I didn't like writing very much.

Nate's description of writing and school uses a repetitive pattern of verbs, *didn't, didn't,*

wasn't, didn't, that are negative. The phrase *I didn't like* is repeated three times. The

words *anything really seemed at all interesting* imply a negative (nothing was interesting).

The qualifiers, *I guess, sort of, almost,* and the pauses, indicate that he would prefer to

evade the subject. The emphatic position of very, in *from the very beginning,* stresses and

intensifies the final use of very, *I didn't like writing very much.* To me, then, he appears to

be explaining once more that he hates writing and aligning this dislike with the early years

of school. When he has to write, as I described in Chapter IV, he copes by doing "the

minimum possible," and he mentally prepares every word he is going to type, according to

his self report, to "get all my thoughts into the fewest numbers of words." Basically, he

avoids any activities that will involve him with the need for writing. He reacts emotionally

to the tension by escaping from it into other less agitating activities, which is one way of

using the emotions to manage stress. He might, of course, adopt a different strategy, one

that directly addresses the tense situation, if he were to look for help from external

resources, like a teacher or writing tutor, or if he tried to minimize the importance of the

need for writing. Yet those actions would be governed by what resources were available

to him and his past success, if any, in trying to get help or treat his writing realistically. He

attended at least two different colleges in the Boston area. The college writing courses

that he mentioned appear to me to have been the traditional first-year composition. He

told me about enjoying only one of his college writing courses, technical writing, one

where the instructor was "fun."

Yet this writer, in the same interview, describes his optimum performance as "driving

[my brain]." I had been describing concentration or "flow" to him and illustrating this

with the example of a writer who told me that she looks forward to writing to enter this

zone of comfort when she is removed from present-day concerns. Nate said:

> What you describe is what happens to me often when I'm programming.
> I'm using a totally different part of my brain,
> I'm thinking,
> I'm like sort of driving it,
> I'm deciding what to do,
> it's sort of a challenge,
> as opposed to reading,
> kind of follow along in a book.

Unintentionally, the rhythm of participles parallel to the word programming, *using,*

thinking, driving, deciding, reading and the rhyme of the -ing endings, propel this lively

statement. He uses action verbs without negative constructions. He drives his brain

when he "writes"computer programs, not when he is composing/writing a paper. His

metaphor makes a distinction between being the driver, the one doing the driving, as

opposed to being the passenger. Perhaps being the driver is awareness of the "I" while passengerhood is absence of self-consciousness or the "it." In the case of this man who describes himself as "driving my brain," it is also a distinction between the unpleasant state of writing, analogous to enduring a ride in someone's car, and the animated, engaged sensations of piloting and accelerating a car or a computer program. But the metaphor is even more telling. It conveys the writer's idea that he can compartmentalize his sense of self (mind) from his brain yet can realize that his brain is reasoning, that is, making connections (like the spark plugs, pistons, drive shaft, etc., in an automobile's drive train) upon command. His auto metaphor is applied to the computer, a workspace that is usually teacher-free and automatically self-evaluating, for the program with imperfections will not operate. Moreover, the computer environment began as a masculine precinct. Programming language is constructed of symbols, free from the emotional or imaginative content of literary genres and from intensifiers or sentiment, and is not intended to be inherently rhetorical, unlike most written discourse. Programmers, however, have tight-knit social organization, and socialize in content-based clubs, which suggests that emotion is associated with the activity if not written into the actual words and symbols. For example, Nate has held programming jobs at universities in the Boston area and belonged to a society to promote interest in computers. This "driving" metaphor implies control, mechanical sophistication, and a visual 20th century image of the person who successfully manages anxiety-provoking circumstances. Also, it has unconscious connections to Freudian "drive," connoting volition, and to the (road)block image. By contrast, his perspective of reading is following along, as if he has no control over reading. Not

surprisingly, this man just does not read for pleasure. I felt horrified by his comment about reading, "follow along," when I saw it as I studied the transcript, for it is the complete opposite of my own active engagement with reading, so it revealed to me that reading is a primary motivation for my own writing and one that unconsciously I expect to detect in the people I interview. What should also be noted is that his view corresponds to powerless reading described by Mariolina Salvatori (given in detail in Chapter IV). Would he regain control if he tried active engagement with reading—hypertext; MOO or MUD game- and role-playing that use reading and writing?

Nate has two identities, one who struggles and one who succeeds, two selves that oscillate between two types of communication. This situation is characteristic of other people I interviewed. As they describe writing, I notice that they hesitate, stammer, laugh nervously or change the pitch of their voice, whereas in talking of their jobs or other non-writing matters, their voices, to me, convey competence and confidence. Of course, I must acknowledge the potentially embarrassing influence of my presence in the authoritative role as interviewer, complete with small yet visible tape recorder, permission forms, and absent-present authority as researcher, teacher, etc. Often, I sucessfully defused my perceived authority by signals of informality and conversational discourse in these interviews, as I discussed in Chapter III. The kitchen setting of my talk with Ellen, later in this chapter, is a further illustration. Nevertheless, people may find the topic itself alarming. Even those people who can cope with writing well enough to get by remain in an ongoing struggle. So what does it mean to cope or adjust? To return to Nate, if he were to enter an anxiety-reduction program, a counselor might encourage him to apply his

driving metaphor to his writing process as a cognitive strategy to mediate stress. For instance, driving in unfamiliar terrain, experiencing engine failure, or running out of gas, are all potential driving problems that drivers can overcome; programming analogies, too, might work as analogies to writing distress (computer apprehension exists, for example). With practice, this man might find that his writing process, like programming, also works on "automatic pilot."

In this case and others like it, it is tempting to think of remedies for the writing stress. The individual who can imagine applying the role of driver to writing could approach the recurring problem of delay or procrastination with greater efficiency and optimism. Just as driving imagery could help, writers could also use the familiar imagery, as Peter Elbow has shown in *Writers Without Teachers*. In either driving or cooking, it is possible to talk in practical terms of the need for repairs or for new parts, to expect a long waiting time to get results, and to add raw material at various times. It may seem as if this suggestion is merely fancy rhetoric footwork to say old advice in new language, but that is not the case. In fact, the driving/cooking models implicitly include 1) joint mind/body performance; 2) working with and for others; 3) combining knowledge, lore (even folklore), and hints ("internally persuasive discourse"). The unknown side of coping remedies is the person's willingness to accept them. Writers' behavior often serves a defensive purpose, yet it is advisable overall to reduce stress, a condition that can contribute to disease and can even be fatal.

Coping: A Review

The ego or self in traditional psychoanalytic theories of Anna Freud and more recently George Vaillant is usually described, in the common-sense language of popular psychology, as using a variety of defenses to ward off threats and maintain harmony with its surroundings. The most recent "discovery" in psychoanalytic theory of defense or coping strategy, which I will explain in due course, should be understood in historical context. Psychoanalytic theories have been and still are applied in psychotherapy to diagnose writing problems; for example, as I reviewed in Chapter III, some psychoanalysts address writers' inhibitions in the counseling milieu (see Clark and Wiedenhaupt; Grundy) and in therapy groups for writers (see Kavaler-Adler, "Group Process"). Timothy Anderson in holding writing conferences applies a variation of psychoanalytic theory that he calls psychodynamic "hermeneutic dialogue." In such problem-solving, the therapist interprets the writer's troubling behavior to the writer. In long-term therapy, a therapist could attempt to peel away a person's history of a behavior like avoidance.

Historically, behavioral and cognitive therapy was a breakthrough for anxiety-reduction programs. These ideas do not rely on classic or applied psychoanalysis but descend from the era of behavioral psychology, with its theories of stimulus and response. The technique of behavior modification amounts to learning through reinforcement of a desired action. Robert Boice sometimes uses an approach to writing apprehension that relies on behavioral psychology. Boice uses a daily regimen of scheduled short writing periods to break writers of their procrastination (and related mental blocks against working). He counsels writers to stop at the end of a sacheduled writing time. The

release from writing becomes a reward that reinforces the writing action (*Journey* 33).

Apparently, when a writer has the foreknowledge of permission to stop a hated task after

a finite time period, the person will consent to try the work, which eventually becomes

bearable. Boice reports success, yet the long-term benefits of this approach to writing are

not given. This method treats the blocked writer as one who reacts to a learned pain

stimulus and must be re-introduced to the formerly avoided environment.

As a teacher, I have suggested timed writing periods to students and told them that I

sometimes bargain this way with myself to get started on an unalluring assignment,

although I also mention that I do this to trick myself into writing past the time limit, which

I almost always do. Although it is a productive way for me to prime the pump, I

deliberately refer to the method as a bargain or trick, because I object to treating writing

as a sterile and efficient event. However, there are other views. John Daly, the pioneer of

writing apprehension research, reports in *When a Writer Can't Write* that time-

management schedules are appropriate for procrastination, which he defines as avoidance

of writing, but that blocked writers, in his view, should have different therapeutic

treatment. According to Daly, the blocked writer is willing to write but finds that

"nothing comes," so therefore would benefit from being required to write anything,

regardless of whether it makes sense, as in freewriting and brainstorming (70-71). His

definition of block does not match up with self reports I received (e.g., some blocked

writers are not willing to write). Daly also is vague about how this technique would

produce writing, but he seems to say that nascent topics are present but hidden and will

aggregate as the pace picks up. According to Peter Elbow, however, freewriting "feels as

though I can see more clearly what I'm thinking *about* and also experience more clearly

my mind *engaged* in the thinking" ("Phenomenology" 204, original emphasis); also, he

reports, freewriting feels like letting go ("Phenomenology" 206). Elbow's self-report

suggests that the writer who is blocked or stuck already has partial access to inner speech

(the mind) but needs privacy and spontaneity to remove the distortion from inner speech, a

distortion she believes that surveillance has imposed. Theory exists to support Elbow's

method, based on published autobiographical accounts by several writers who narrate the

success of freewriting and timed-writing therapies. For example, one instructor writes in

the anthology *Nothing Begins With N* : "Thesis and dissertation writers I work with are

becoming accustomed to freewriting the first draft rapidly and spending a greater and

greater amount of time on editing, realizing that editing has always been a neglected part

of their writing" (Cheshire 154). But how practical is this advice? Graduate student

Sonja Wiedenhaupt, when she was advised to write an entire thesis in this manner,

despaired: "What could I do with my 180 pages of freewriting?" (Clark and Wiedenhaupt

63).

Desensitization trains people to consider the situations that cause them anxiety, then to

practice relaxation, as in treatment of air travel fears. In studies done at Yale University in

1980, Michael Barrios and Jerome Singer tested three methods for reducing creative block

in such individuals as architects, professors, and fiction writers who reported impediments.

Volunteers were taught either waking imagery, self-induced hypnotic dream, or task-

focused discussion as a method for reducing impediments to creativity. In both the dream

and waking imagery procedures, participants have sensory and imaginative experiences in

a lab setting and after leaving the lab try to recall any vivid nocturnal dreams they have. In

contrast, the participants in the discussion experiment were coached in focusing on a

project without distraction. The results, based only on subjects' self-reports, were more

positive for waking imagery and self-hypnosis than for rational discussion (104). These

self-directed techniques are similar to Gershen Kaufman and Lev Raphael's method of

changing inner dialogue from devaluing to self-affirming thoughts. In the inner-dialogue

approach, which would be undertaken by a psychologist or counselor, a shame-prone

person learns to be aware of his or her existing, destructive inner voice (believed to be an

internalized parent's, according to these authors) and learns to use a positive thought to

counteract that persecutory message. The person works actively every day on

remembering this affirming utterance (246).

While anxiety may be reduced and writing produced, behavior therapy doesn't

guarantee that writers will change their outlook, that is, enjoy writing. In his book

Emotional Intelligence, Daniel Goleman underscores how persistently the feelings of

alarm survive in people, even after they have relearned, in psychotherapy, how to manage

their emotional reactions to problems and new ways of approaching others (214). The

initial fears are not erased, even if the amygdala, the part of the brain that panics, becomes

inhibited by the reasoning mind-brain. Other objections to behavioral procedures might be

that they do not grant freedom to the individual. Lack of freedom applies to all

experimental empirical research, which is based on proving or disproving predictions, or

hypotheses, and ignores actions that fall beyond the scope of the testable prediction.

Carol Gilligan's gender research in effect exposed such limitations when her book, *In a*

Different Voice, told how girls' responses to values tests, in contrast to boys', fell beyond parameters of the tests, so testers judged them to be amoral and excluded their answers. Apart from theoretical questions of research protocol, however, we could criticize behavioral methods of stress management for treating writing as involuntary rather than purposeful and self-conscious. The ideal, perhaps, is spontaneity—for people to be free to decide how they will write through the use of their consciousness; then, a writer can expand a text potentially limitlessly. Education rarely allows time for ideal conditions, however, so writing counselors may still recommend behavioral remedies, like those of Boice, mentioned above.

Math and sports differ from writing in having, to put it colloquially, winners and right answers. Composition, among the humanities disciplines, appears to encourage multiple approaches, styles, and forms. Yet in math, Frank Richardson and Robert Woolfolk advise that they explain to math-anxious students that "overwhelming uncertainty" is characteristic of first steps to all problem-solving (284). Math-anxious students learn to tolerate "temporary uncertainty and ambiguity" by comparing math processes to a familiar activity that is at first unclear (Richardson and Woolfolk 285). In this way, writing has been compared to swimming across a pool underwater (Newkirk, personal communication); another parallel might be the activities of travel and tourism, like deciphering a map, asking for directions, translating a menu. Behavior therapy can lower math-anxiety levels, but few students report increased pleasure in taking math (Richardson and Woolfolk 283). To respond to unpopularity and also avert math anxiety, math departments adapt their approach to offer alternatives: some colleges offer non-remedial

classes at the precalculus level that instruct students in how math applies to other domains, like music, design, and graphics; at other schools, remedial math is supplemented by psychological workshops and counseling sessions to reduce anxiety (Richardson and Woolfolk 281-2). It is also enlightening to read Sheila Tobias's description of non-scientists who took college physics classes as an experiment into patterns of thought.

Basic writing classes are more likely to be remedial than to "sell" writing applications. Innovation, however, is possible. In Vermont, Marlboro College lets students choose between a writing course or a writing test to omit the required writing component. The writing program at Grand Valley State University (Michigan) gives a measure of control to students that may alleviate some symptoms like procrastination. In this program, entering students choose between 2 options— a no-credit writing class for skill enhancement, or a for-credit college writing and research class. At University of South Carolina, the Writing Studio, described by Peter Elbow, addresses students with inadequate writing, as judged by their teachers during the first weeks of the term. In groups of four, these students have required meetings to share their writing histories and difficulties as well as to talk over their regular assignments. Teachers who formerly saw these writers as "basic," according to Elbow, now begin to describe writing and writers with particularized definitions that lead to individualized pedagogical approaches: "Some teachers do not mind working with deeply tangled, incoherent thinking—but some do. Some teachers don't sweat massive blockage and fear—but others do" ("Writing Assessment" 91; see also Grego and Thompson). This teacher response is reminiscent of John Daly's study showing that teachers who fear writing can initiate apprehension of

writing in some of their students. Later in this chapter, I describe the experience of one writer with his instructor to provide a variation on this theme.

It can take more than learned behavior and will power to begin writing. As I described in Chapter II, some authorities are not opposed to the use of non-prescription mind-altering drugs by writers, and some writers use nicotine, alcohol, and prescription medications to alleviate tension. Some people I interviewed take such drugs or use substances to overcome their initial reluctance to start writing or to improve their concentration. Given the health fixations of much U.S. culture, a writer can be bombarded with suggestions for medical and semi-medical crutches; indeed, it is hard to avoid these references. An advertisement I saw on television recently promotes pills "proven to provide a healthy emotional balance" that contain the herb St. John's wort. The mood-altering and anti-depressant prescription drug paroxetine (brand name Paxil), a drug like fluoxetine (brand name Prozac), was recently tested on people who were not depressed, and the drug was found to reduce hostility, decrease aggression, and improve cooperation (Kong). Predictably, the psychological community is split on the question of such "cosmetic" administration of mood-altering medications. It is reasonable, according to some psychologists, to adjust personalities using drugs to reduce a minor personality trait like shyness. Others object and claim that loneliness, sorrow, timidity are inevitable and should be accepted in the course of life. There is also the knowledge that personality traits can be adjusted without drugs; Goleman reports, for instance, that long-term behavior therapy that teaches people to identify and question their fears can be as effective as drug treatment with fluoxetine (Prozac) in decreasing obsessive-compulsive behavior (225).

What effect does the present pill-taking climate have on pedagogy? Without realizing it, composition pedagogy may be echoing the culture of healing, no matter how antithetical this may be to writing qua writing, or to the individual writer's propensities. Or certain teachers through social osmosis may begin to believe that they should make the content of students' writing display values of cooperation, civility, and docility.

Sports Psychology Strategies

Long-distance running illustrates coping with pain through a cognitive strategy called divided attention, that is, distracting oneself from the experience of pain while monitoring the pain as a signal of the body's needs (Laasch 322). Runners apparently evolve an acute self-awareness that permits them to switch between distraction and attention to the body. When athletes use kinesthetic imagery to preview their performance, that is, imagine the actual sensations of performing the feat, it is more effective than observer imagery, or watching oneself mentally, to enhance performance (Wine 377).

In *The Inner Game of Tennis*, W. Timothy Gallwey observes, "After they have played tennis for a year or so, most people fall into a particular pattern of play from which they seldom depart. Some adopt a defensive style . . . When players break their habitual patterns, they can greatly extend the limits of their own style and explore subdued aspects of their personality" (62). For a writer to apply this theory, she would identify one of her writing process habits and deliberately alter or reverse it. For example, it would mean that a writer who edits every sentence as she composes it would purposely type new sentences without correcting any previous errors. A writer has the choice of telling herself, later I

will be a perfectionist in the way I address this material, this page, this sentence, but for the present I will braintorm, or, I will rough out my draft to the end. To me, such breaking of habits has always been congenial; teachers make a valuable contribution, I believe, when they present novel techniques and encourage students to practice them.

Also, Gallwey comments on the identification of the player with the play: "The trick is not to *identify* with the backhand" (52; original emphasis). Something about writing, like the fine arts generally, encourages a similar type of self styling. A writer may identify herself with a type of writing behavior—as a "procrastinator" or "perfectionist"— or with her tool: writing in my head, writing everything out first in a notebook, etc. As soon as the writer identifies with her method, like the tennis backhand, she loses the ability to see it as a voluntary act or a choice. Hollywood films offer some insight, since when films show writing, the surface activity is all an observer can see. So movies show writers crumpling drafts, pacing, scratching out lines, and the like—relatively few depict a satisfied writer!

In tennis, players focus on the moving body, its strength, its agility, but they may not recognize that emotions are a complementary aspect of the game; so in writing, writers focus on the thinking mind and the growing text, but they may not be aware of their need to cope with emotional demands, which may manifest themselves in restlessness, tension, and fear.

Two New Approaches

Stress management can have internal as well as external factors, like the following: abilities, perceptions and personality traits; the resources of people and institutions in the

household, work, and social environment. In a review of the literature of stress management, psychologists Susan Oakland and Alistair Ostell find many contradictory recommendations. For example (and here I am substituting writing illustrations), avoiding an assignment or minimizing the importance of a paper would be examples of emotion-based strategies that many studies view as ineffective; a problem-based method of dealing with stress, generally seen as effective, would be asking a trusted source for feedback on the idea for a paper. Yet when someone faces a psychological or physical loss or threat, avoidance or other emotion-based methods of adapting are what people turn to and benefit from. Oakland and Ostell asked how participants coped with stressful work situations; they also asked, however, whether the coping method improved the problem, since coping is no guarantee of success, given the complex relationships in which human problems arise. It turns out that people's attempts to cope with one problem can produce other new problems; for example, a student might seek advice from a writing center, revise a paper accordingly, then learn that the instructor disagrees with the decisions, accelerating the student's apprehension. The psychologists conclude that no wholesale stress-management measures can be termed effective or ineffective, but that individuals are in dynamic relationships with lived situations and that each case has unique logic.

Since anxious writers often expect failure, they will tend to avoid external help transactions, i.e., to approach peers, tutors, counselors or instructors for shop talk or to discuss the subject matter of the course or get feedback on an opinion or idea. While I find that some do request or receive such discussion, only rarely do they trust it. Instead, they often rely on untested information, time, substances, inspiration, and meditation, to

deliver aid. But these sources might mislead people. For example, a science bulletin on a television news program might convince a student that some permanent defect in her brain will always prevent her from successfully writing her papers. Neurobiological explanations for language behavior, e.g. dyslexia, are increasing as scientists do brain scans and explain individual differences by locating anomalies or "glitches" in neural processes. For example, Scott and Baron-Cohen speculate that the neural wiring in a particular brain may cause a reduction or deficit in ability to imagine. Genetic researchers, too, promise to define inherited personality traits. Ideally, this type of knowledge would lead to particularized treatment for a condition. Yet years and years might be required to produce such help, and in any case the condition remains a factor in the individual's life that requires daily personal adjustment. When the media widely publicize results, they create impressions that could damage people who are or think they may be affected.

"To help them go places they can't go by themselves"

A new book by psychologists Jean Baker Miller and Irene Pierce Stiver, *The Healing Connection: How Women Form Relationships in Therapy and in Life* (1997), offers revised views of defense theories and coping. Although focused on women, like Miller's earlier book *Toward a New Psychology of Women*, this book's central concern is the effect on everyone, male and female, of the behavior that results from the hegemony of a two-tiered, dominant-subordinate culture. Miller's and Stiver's technique attempts long-term transformation through mutual empathy and mutual empowerment (26). It is the opposite of the objective, distanced response to the individual by the traditional analyst (a similar theory, though not from a feminist orientation, was originally proposed by Carl Rogers).

The authors propose that a break between people who have a mutual connection becomes a disconnection that makes an affected person feel isolated, ineffective, or unable to act so as to change the unsatisfactory circumstances, however much they may long to do that (40). For example, they write, "People who have phobias are often very avoidant of others since they become anxious in certain circumstances . . . yet they need other people to help them go places they can't go by themselves" (123). An individual's defenses, according to these authors, deserve to be honored because they are "life-saving—or mind-saving— strategies" (150) that it is terrifying to change.

What this approach would require, if applied to the situation of the anxious writer, is a new understanding of the ways that the writer relates to herself, to the text, and to the reader. For example, she or he may have developed a behavior pattern in which she feels disconnected from her goals of becoming a good writer. Indeed, that situation seems to be true of several writers here, including the short-story writer Lewis, whom I profiled in the previous chapter. It is also operating in the writers whose inner critical voices admonish them as they write. Others feel disconnected or cut off from their text and maintain this split as long as possible, even after completing the text. In regard to readers, it seems often obvious that writers have taught themselves to feel unable to have a desired effect on their readers. When their readers report enthusiasm, a writer may, as Ruth earlier described, be unable to accommodate it. The loss of these protective attitudes would make writers vulnerable—even more vulnerable or exposed than they feel already.

The Miller-Stiver statement that anxious people need someone to take them where they are afraid to go touches elements of interaction and compassion that many people I

interviewed seem to need or lack. For that reason, this theory remains provocative. As enthusiastic as I am about this Miller-Stiver model of growth through human connections, it is important to observe how this theory points to an inherent aspect of writing and the arts, in general. The work that the writer engages in has a basic requirement of inwardness, and those who find this component of the activity to be congenial are prone to solitude, even to painful isolation. Miller and Stiver acknowledge this, in a way, when they recognize that people need the ability to represent themselves and their feelings with a sense of personal authenticity (55). But the value of connection is assumed. By emphasizing connection, however, the empathic school conveys to me a negative view of writers in their chosen solitude; this connection theory makes writers into "individual actors" (37) who come dangerously close to holding patriarchal values; in that view, writing would promote a social evil, instead of the ethos of sharing that Miller and Stiver endorse. Do I propose an essential nature in writing, and does this return the discussion to the debate I reported in Chapter 2, between innate anxiety and culturally imposed anxiety for writers? Writing instead of a biological essence might be an activity that holds shifting positions along a continuum of affect. Then writers, like the starlings on the telephone line outside my window, could imagine themselves as able to shift from perch to perch as their relative anxiety levels dictate.

How People Cope With Composing

Getting writers' perspective on coping required me to interpret what people told me about specific ways that they approach writing. The writer who often feels inadequate or

ashamed of her writing procedures is rarely aware that what she does actually protects her from uncomfortable feelings. I observed the following coping strategies: Delaying, or, procrastination; soothing the body; distancing oneself from the text; using external support.

Tomorrow or Never? Delay as Coping

The perennial fact of procrastination brings to the surface some mental activities linked to writing and makes it possible to talk about the interaction of personality, mind, and environment in connection with the process of writing.

The writer who believes she procrastinates (the word is derived from the Latin *cras*, meaning *tomorrow*) feels shame, that is, blames herself for behavior that she thinks is inability and refusal to produce text. In fact, I observe in this research that self-reported procrastination is a protective action that apprehensive writers use to cope with distress from the overall composing process. (Interestingly, the word was introduced into the conversation by the writers themselves, not by any question or comment of mine.) It can be seen as a promise and a threat that the writer offers to both internal and external authority. What actually happens during this time, as I interpret what writers tell me, belongs to the category of preparation. They describe activities, like thinking or brooding about the class material on which they are going to write, that are actually reflective. Others take notes, read, or talk to another person about the forthcoming paper. Often, this technique can be fruitful. In this sense, procrastination is a promise the writer makes to her incipient text; it is a way to postpone or to exercise caution about the task. This intepretation is backed up by psychology.

In psychoanalytic terminology, reflective preparation is suppression, that is, oscillation between giving attention to the problem and postponing such attention (see Vaillant). Suppression corresponds to the activities that composition theory refers to as prewriting or incubation. Cognitive psychology also studies incubation; for example, David Perkins sees its benefits as "physical refreshment, fruitful forgetting, losing commitment to an ineffective approach, and noticing clues in the environment" (*Mind's* 57). Mental associations begin to travel increasingly quickly (see Damasio). Occasionally, a writer deliberately builds reflection time into her preparation and internalizes such reflection to make it part of herself, which lets her be free from the guilt others describe at waiting. For example, a writer described to me her build-up in the following words: "I have a really long percolating stage too. I need to be wandering around and thinking about things in a daze before I sit down and do anything" (SK-A2). I see significance in her identification of planning with feeding herself, one sense of her term, "percolating," and I also see from terminology of "wandering" and "sit" that preparing to write requires an adjustment of her body into a quiescent mode. Yet to be persistent is a theoretically desirable personality trait and one that enhances a verbal talent or gift (Gardner, "Creative" 317), which argues for procrastination as an act that lets those who are anxious approach a writing task in installments while managing their anxiety. In general, the coping theories reviewed by Oakland and Ostell call it mature or healthy to use coping strategies that focus on problems; on the other hand, strategies that relieve the emotions, e.g. to escape, are called ineffective. Coping by delaying addresses both the problem and the emotions. The stress of doing mental and written preparation is balanced by the emotional relief of pausing.

Despite these theoretical claims that delay has value, some writers I interviewed do not describe this fallow period as part of their work. If they delay their composing performance, they feel guilty for being, as they see it, unproductive. Until the writer sees herself typing linear prose, she feels that she is refusing to fulfill her assignment. Accepting the blame, they willingly label themselves as procrastinators, which is a way to show themselves and others that they cannot (yet) live up to their ideals. Ruth, who is a part-time graduate student at Harvard and an account manager for a local business, says she feels guilty when she "delays things," but what she says also shows that she spends the time to think productively about selecting a subject to write about. She says, "I tried to narrow it down to a couple of areas or books that I happen to have read a lot of . . . I made some choices without knowing I'd made them" (A2). Also she uses this time to assemble a series of notes ("Paper rules my life") and a set of tools (cards, folders) that she will use to store her material. These activities themselves offer sub-categories of delay. Also, Ruth gives herself the assurance that at the actual time of putting ideas onto paper she will perform a personal music-and-food ritual, one she established as an undergraduate for her writing. This ceremony attends to her body's comfort needs and signals others to stay away from her while she is writing. (Again, how much of this behavior has Ruth, for one, been socialized to perform because of writing lore, and how much from feminine messages and models? And does my interpretation and descriptive language also respond to gender? Would Lewis, for instance, attend to his bodily comfort, or would I describe his working habits in such language?) Other writers tell me of similar rituals, involving such props or tools as earplugs, cigarettes, and chemical

substances. These strategies are relatively effective, for Ruth, at least for completing a short paper. For another writer, the procrastination period feels like complete denial, at least consciously. She says that she tries not to consciously contemplate the looming assignment in order to protect herself from the panic that it will cause: "Even before I sit down to write I'm extremely nervous about [the assignment]. I can't **even think** about the paper, I can't **even think** about the poem or book [on which the assignment is based] because **even thinking** about it makes me really nervous" (CR--A3; emphasis added). This writer emphasizes thinking as less ("even") than writing. An instructor might want her to see that thinking is interrelated with writing, yet for her to do so, she would first need to learn that her fears can inhibit her thoughts.

Delay-prone writers, besides being unaware of the productiveness in delay, embody a reasonable objection to the institutional work schedule, in that their refusal may be a way of recognizing that no piece of writing can ever become completed, given the basic ambiguity of language and of its users. Writers I interviewed express this: for example, the writer quoted in the preceding paragraph also told me that she perceives "the end is farther away or the right answer is farther away or the correct way to write is farther away" (CR-A3). Time feels abstract and writers see it both literally and figuratively. For example, a humanities course may ask for a level of reflection and original thought that the writer may think will take years or decades to accomplish, while in practical considerations, she must juggle writing deadlines with those of other classwork, private life, budget, part- or full-time work, and health. In addition, by avoiding writing temporarily, the writer may turn a delay or silence to her own benefit. For example, when

she allows time for reflection, she may acknowledge her ambivalent feelings about authority or competition, which might cause her to sift through suggestions from a peer or an instructor, exploring some and discarding others.

In addition to being an act of preparation and of self-blame, procrastination is activity that signifies autonomy and negative response to authority. Among writers, the reputation of procrastination is so pervasive that it tends to elicit automatic sympathy and to be treated as an occupational disability that is inevitable and even prestigious. To refuse to comply with authority is a passive threat and an act of defiance. Some writers become defiant through the politics of their classes and workshops. For example, several described workshops with pervasive critical atmosphere in which each student expects to tear apart the other students' papers. Although students privately might find little to criticize, in the public space of the classroom they would utter judgmental, negative comments. In Chapter IV, I describe the reactions of Lewis to the recommendations for arbitrary and often irrelevant changes he received from peers and, more important, in his view, from the writing instructor. Basically, Lewis described how he minimized these suggestions. Yet marginal notes he made on a draft but had forgotten show that he did give thought at one time to making some of the workshop's revisions. To me, there is a direction connection between Lewis's habitual delay of writing and this reception of his story, which obviously felt painful to Lewis. I could see how irritating the triviality of the ideas would be, yet I also see how easily one might overlook a valuable hint by wholesale dismissal. Some motivation for delay, then, can be a byproduct of the educational system itself and the culture of writing it supports. Writers signal their resistance by their

negligence. In effect, they temporarily disobey their instructors' authority, all the while intending to comply with it, and in this way take back limited control over their writing. As James Scott writes in *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, authority cannot prevent a subordinated group from an act like grumbling or foot-dragging, which does not disrupt the establishment yet achieves a small symbolic victory (139).

When it takes the form of tardiness with assigned work, procrastination usually leads to admonition by the instructor, and total default may result in a failing mark, yet those situations reflect on the individual, never on the institution. From the viewpoint of the instructor and institution, delay causes a problem within the overall schedule of the degree-granting educational process. (It would similarly cause trouble within professional writing, for example, as when a writer was late in complying with a legal contract for a manuscript.) Authorities may be inclined to tolerate procrastination from groups of alienated writers rather than attempt reform because many students do not appear to have excessive writing anxiety. The educational system of awarding grades for completing a term's work relies on discipline and cooperation. If it is an uneasy fit for writing to be wedged into this system, if the emphasis on discipline and persistence raises an economic or moral issue, still, the procedure works for many (Erving Goffman makes comparable judgments in his book *Asylums*). On the other hand, writing instructors, unlike medical doctors, have themselves endured the actual experience that they observe in their students; they have a range of possible acknowledgment of this difficult relation between time and schedules. Should educational authority be forced to consider the threat represented by

procrastination, educators might relax the way they administer academic writing programs.

Soothing the body

Just as elementary schools relieve stress by giving children a recess for movement and play, writers may manage discomfort by promising themselves a break or a time limit. This stress-management technique has already been described (see above) as remedy for procrastination by Boice and Daly.

When a writer finally sits at the composing desk, he may adjust the amount of composing stress by fidgeting, scratching, stretching, slumping, standing, and even walking away from the desk for a break at frequent intervals. For example, Delia tells me that she finds herself rising approximately every twenty minutes ("my body naturally does that, I don't have to look at my watch"), which helps her to "rest my brain" (A6), and she is able to persist until she finishes a draft. This example illustrates a principle called automaticity that is used to relieve stress and physical pain, according to some theorists, by long-distance runners (Laasch).

A different writer may feel too restless to compose in one location; Beth, for example, describes (see Chapter IV) how her frustration at having to write a take-home essay-style exam caused her to carry her notebook from the cellar to the bedroom, then to the kitchen, and eventually back to the cellar. On a different occasion, Beth carried her typewriter from room to room. Other people have the following rituals:

I have to have utter silence. Absolutely silent or I go nuts. I wear earplugs to the library . . . . I have to have my environment just perfect before I sit. (CR-A2-3)

I work in a frenzy, I work obsessed, and I'm very protective of my space when I'm working, I can't have any interruptions, like [a TV set], that would make me insane. (ES-A4)

I've ritualized the process [of writing a draft] a bit. A can of frosting and a six-pack of Coke . . . also lets you obsess about it if you don't have it. (RD-A2-3)

Cigarettes and writing. Ahh . . . . What more can I say? except that I am/was an addict and that cigarettes for me are/were clearly related to "flow" and I haven't experienced that kind of oneness with my work since quitting smoking . . . . Going to the library smoking room with two packs of Winstons (probably several cans of Diet Coke too) and ten books and then emerging half a day later with a paper written. I truly loved it, the concentration, the immersion, the productivity, the sense of accomplishment. Kind of like speed. A rush, yeah, an intellectual rush. (BB-B1)

Actually sitting down and doing it—it almost always involves, I'm trying to think of a fancy way to say it, drugs of sorts. Certainly involves caffeine. I've started smoking, bucking the trend, and I also take other drugs that I feel enhances—I don't really feel that it enhances my performance, but it certainly brings me to the table. (LM-A2)

The alarm and fear perception in the mind, then, needs to be dulled by calming the body

with such techniques as chewing and swallowing food and drink, licking spoons, biting

pencils or fingernails, smoking, grinding teeth, or smoking cigarettes—all oral actions that

pacify as well as stimulate. It can also be seen as management of a feeling that the body is

out of control just as the text is out of control. Perfect quiet also attempts to manage

stress by removing the fear of being startled; startling sounds are one of the "primitive" or

innate fears, as Damasio writes (131). The unprotected state, being offstage, as Goffman would say, is equated with the writing mode, then; to me, this indicates that only an intensely personal definition of writing is operating, or, it suggests that the writer is trying to take dictation from inner voices, even if the writer's aim is persuasive or expository writing.

Actors' anxiety theory claims that stage fright is related to the requirement that the actor, when onstage, must muffle involuntary gestures or movements that would relax the mind and relieve the body. For example, the actor onstage may not scratch an itch or move a stiff limb (Aaron). These theories refer to proscenium theatre productions but would be less applicable to the informal theatre.

Also, acting refers to another writer's way to regulate writing tensions. If Donna has to write a paper about something "foreign to me," she copes by using imagination to mediate the tension surrounding potential failure of identity. She told me, "I compare [writing] to what a method actor does." She identifies with an author or with a topic by using empathy. She told me, "I tried to bring up some sympathy . . . I try to summon up a similar type of emotion." This strategy gives her something to say.

In Chapter IV, I wrote about the painful experiences some writers described of learning cursive handwriting in the elementary grades. Lessons in handwriting are a species of control emblematic of educational discipline. In summary, these writers prefer to perform planning and writing activities internally, the idiom for which is to write in their heads, and claim to compose and memorize long passages. From my observations, it appears to me that many writers, pencil-phobic or not, commonly use internal writing. I

was interested to be approached one day by a woman I already was acquainted with who heard me talk about this project and volunteered for an interview, saying that she could identify with all the manifestations I described. The quality that had already intrigued me about this woman, Ellen, who is about thirty, was her trademark of meticulous handwriting, which she used to carefully inscribe quotations and reflections in exquisite, handmade notebooks. Her handwriting is as regular as typeset or machine-made lettering, which also gives it a teacherly or schoolbook appearance. Before our interview, I was aware that this woman sometimes does free-lance writing and has taught English, but at present she wants to finish a graduate degree in humanities. To allow privacy for our conversation, Ellen invited me to her apartment to talk, and we sat in her kitchen drinking herb tea as our conversation took place. Throughout the talk, I asked several times for clarification as to the type of writing she was explaining, that is, did she write by hand or was she referring to the word processor? It turned out that she used to write out all her assigned work by hand, often throwing away spoiled sheets and beginning again. She has begun to type on the computer of necessity because she was pressed for time and she finds that it frees her to concentrate on her wording.

What surfaces again in the talk with Ellen is the mechanism of using the mind to alleviate the distress associated with actually moving to paper. Ellen is afraid that whatever she writes will be condemned by her inner voices, which she perceives as being internalizations of authority figures who criticized her in childhood. She manages this fear by handwriting copious notes from research, a folder of notes an inch thick, saying that when she writes down the quotes, "then they're mine, so I can work with them in my head,

even though I don't have the paper in front of me." Simultaneously, she is "constructing"

her entire writing assignment inwardly, for days before she transfers her ideas to paper.

More detail about inward writing and anxiety emerged when I asked, what would it look

like when you're writing? What would I see if I watched you writing? Ellen tells me,

> What my actual writing looks like is nothing for a long time, because I do
> so much of it in my head. I just carry around my ideas. I start with an idea
> or something, a connection, and I'll steep myself in reading. I go on this
> depth project of research, and I write down everything, even extraneous—
> and I gather an enormous amount of information every time I write
> something, so that when I go to write the paper, I have loose connections,
> and it's painful for me because I believe that I had a good idea and I see
> roughly how all these pieces are connected, but there's this long time in
> between where I'm just carrying it all around, like a pregnant woman,
> where I haven't actually given birth, and that's the tensest time for me, and I
> self— I doubt myself, and it's just torture, and finally I (*exhale with humor*)
> write it, and then inner voices like oh that's not good enough, so a lot of
> my process is internal. You know. Um, so I feel a lot of stress, because
> I've always been pressured to hand something in, and I feel like sometimes
> I cut my process short because there's this external deadline, and really I
> need a little more time to have my material cook inside. (A2)

The handwritten research notes Ellen takes could be seen as rational, instrumental actions

that address the problem itself, and such coping measures are usually relatively effective,

at least more so than those that release emotion, as anger or self-blame could do. This

reading appears to be supported by the analogy Ellen chooses for her paper in progress of

pregnancy and eventual childbirth (yet these images may suggest pain as easily as

pleasure). The sheer quantity of note-taking she does might lead to the observation that

these notes amount to distraction and escape from the problem, measures that react to the

cause of the stress instead of focusing on it. There would be support for such an

interpretation in Ellen's comment that despite her admirable preparation to write, she feels

tension and torture from it nevertheless. Since she does not finish "cooking" her paper,

she may equate it with a stillbirth. She can cope by displacing the anxiety onto those figures who pressure her with unwelcome deadlines, but in her overall process she doesn't describe negotiation or appeals for external support. .

To gain access to their inner selves, writers apparently try to make themselves vulnerable when writing. Eating or pacing could be especially meaningful to those writers who rely upon the mind's undirected output and believe in a connection between their phrases and their unconscious. Alternatively, attending to the body points to the struggle to prevent mental activity from splitting mind away from the lived-body. "Writing the body," as Cixous urges women, proposes a different subject from the traditional one. To eat or to pace or to kick a hole in the plaster while composing may show that a writer wants to sense an intimate connection between her body and what is taking shape at her fingertips. There may even be a link between a writer's reliance on cigarettes and a cultural message to fast or reject eating. Is this writing behavior gendered? It could be said that certain female or male writers with a humanist or feminist perspective, alienated from an institutional and cultural system they perceive as patriarchal, try to break out of constraints of linear writing conventions (including thesis-driven essays, impersonal voice, agonistic argument). They need to color outside the lines. Writing often uses analogies to the body that favor a specific body type: spare, skeletal, virile, not flabby, etc. (and cf. "seminal," "thrust"). To bring the body into the performance of expression that writing represents, then, is a detour (to use a French word deliberately) around a cultural writing impasse that French philosophers ("French feminists") have envisioned.

Distancing

Writers use a number of strategies to put a protective distance between themselves and the words on the paper. One is perfectionism, procrastination's twin in the taxonomy of stymied writing. It has been said, by Mike Rose notably, to operate as a blocking mechanism in those who follow rules rigidly. Obsessive correcting and editing correspond to the pattern of rigid-rule adherence that Rose identified in his cognitive study, described earlier. In my study, there is a greater spread of anxiety types, since this project did not screen the writing population, while Rose's study investigated only so-called blockers. This difference may partially explain why this rigid-rule method of coping with anxiety is not universal among writers I interviewed. For example, a writer I call Delia "hates" making corrections at the computer, which she finds unintuitive and mechanical; it represents judgmental authority gazing upon her manuscript. Instead, she prefers to handwrite voluminous lined pages of draft, and she uses these sheets both as an information stockpile and as a space in which she is invisible from authority ("it's not in any final form; whatever I'm going to submit is going to come out of the computer, so I can scribble" [A6]). The use of "scribble" in this context suggests that a method for adapting to writing anxiety is to infantilize oneself and to identify in this way with the text, treating it, too, as if it were a helpless infant, and soothing and cleaning it. Making minor corrections in spelling or punctuation offers some writers an emotional distance from the paper in progress. They derive similar relief by interrupting their draft to take handwritten notes of a new idea. Correcting and editing as they compose appears to bring writers

closer to completion; in fact, it also relieves stress, I find, for writers to attend

meticulously to their drafts.

The coping method of perfectionist corrections can represent more than a reaction to

time or to a need for control, however; in some who rely on the unconscious as a source

of ideas and phrases, perfection functions as a contradiction. To take one example, Sue is

unable to compose until she has wandered in a daze that encourages concentration and

enhances the unconscious. Thereafter, struggling to avoid distracting sounds and

interruptions, she allows a manuscript to spill out in a messy condition, words that suggest

a child's behavior, because she believes that the writing contains deep ideas given by the

subconscious and a voice or rhythm of language. Yet in the same composing session, Sue

follows an indecisive pattern of choosing and rejecting words:

> There are two selves at war here
> Because I usually write all over the place
> And I don't really understand what I'm trying to say
> But yet I'm trying to still make that sentence perfect and figure it out—
> And I think that's part of what takes me so long
> Is that I need to just spill all this stuff out on the page first
> To figure out what it is I'm going to say
> But I'm blocked
> Because I want that last sentence to be perfect before I move on. (A3)

Such indecisiveness is not unusual nor is it limited to an anxious writer, like Sue, but the

co-appearance of the two processes in her working process may suggest that the she trusts

the subconscious less than she describes. Sue manipulates words as if she wants to

control the material provided by the unconscious. It may be that theories of mind or the

unconscious need to be explained to writers: for example, mind may contain overheard

fragments of language, in accord with Bakhtinian theory of heteroglossia. Such fragments

seem "deep," yet why? The quality of a thought as relatively deep may refer to its uninterrogated origin. If this material springs from mental associations, it may be random, rather than deep or thoughtful.

Writers appear to exclude potential readers from their subconscious writing. The choice of a perfect word, as Sue illustrates, is made to convey her voice, which can also be called her personal style, yet she does not refer to the attempt to communicate with her audience in making that choice. In the laborious drafting process, she tries to capture what has occurred to her and to convey it in her idiom. Although she ultimately wants the reader to understand her writing, she explains her language choices in terms of voice and not of a reader's comprehension. Again, there is a gap between her writing process and her desire to be understood. Sue expresses anger at readers who propose changes in her wording, and she tries to resist such suggestions; I understand this anger as directed at the censoring or interruption of her intimate identification with the composition that emerges from the unconscious. The characteristics of anxious writers magnify certain behaviors that any writer may be subject to, at a lower level, and one of these traits is to fetishize the episode of writing itself for the struggle it entailed; James Britton's essay, "Shaping at the Point of Utterance,"describes this identification of writer with writing.

Writers may escape emotionally from a paper in progress by minimizing its importance to them, as they do by referring to it with language or gestures that express feelings of disgust. For example, Ruth says that she does a paper in one burst because she's sick of it. A different writer holds her nose with one hand and with the other she holds the (imaginary) paper at arm's length.

Editing and Revising Strategies

Those writers in this research who do not complete a draft "in one burst" are few. Revision means returning to the viewpoint of the unsympathetic authority figure, carried internally, and the distress of having failed to meet one's standards. Yet adopting an attitude of emotional detachment can permit the writer to look at the problem alone. For example, consider Lois's recent discovery that her rough draft can be rewritten, or that it is, as she says, "disposable." She repeats this word in order to milk its humor, which is an effective defense that she employs often in our interview, and to minimize the draft. As she edits, Lois talks about the paper as if someone else had written it: "I can't believe she used that word," etc., putting distance between herself and the writing. Although rewriting gives her security, the time that this procedure requires makes her worry, and as a result it has been only partly effective. Whether the computer insulates from anxiety depends on a variety of variables. One of these is attitude toward writing by hand. Nate, profiled at the start of this chapter, obtains a transcendent mental condition at the computer keyboard; on the other hand, Delia associates the computer with making corrections, which she hates and finds unintuitive and mechanical. She believes that the computer represents an evaluation of her manuscript and prefers to handwrite or scribble.

External Support

The people I interviewed reported that they used the following types of help, or external support, to cope with writing stress: peers; friends and family; instructors; counselors; writing centers; peer groups; extracurriculum groups. The extent of their

willingness to ask for help is sometimes limited by their low self-esteem in relation to authority; often, such people expect disappointment.

Cheryl, a young woman completing her undergraduate degree part-time, has received a diagnosis of herself as having an anxiety disorder, a condition for which she sees a counselor. This therapy has changed her writing process. Previously, her method of writing was, "for the most part I was basically editing while I was writing, which makes me really nervous. I couldn't let go of having things right. For some reason I thought that if I didn't do it all right right now I wouldn't have time later to go back and fix it." She has gained writing confidence from therapy, from a self-help book on writing (she brings this to our meeting to show me), and from succeeding with the first paper she wrote for the class she is taking. Now, she has insight into the problems of her previous writing practice:

> What I didn't realize was that if I stopped worrying about not having enough time, I wouldn't have to work so slowly and nervously and I would have had enough time. Also I would have been able to— if I realized that pulling away from my fear of being perfect (*sic*)-- if I pull away from that and let my fingers go and fire my editor, do a rough draft and just kept plowing through even if I was unsure, I would have found out that I would have reached the end sooner and been relieved sooner and then felt satisfied. So I would have gone back and been able to edit and it would have been a better paper. (A5-6)

Another effective technique for Cheryl's drafts is to postpone decisions about a punctuation mark or a word. Instead of taking time to consider, she puts the item in brackets so that she can attend to it after she finishes her draft.

Fred, enrolled in a part-time graduate program, is confident when he talks about his daytime profession and his avocation of writing songs. But it seemed almost impossible to him to transfer his professional competence and status gained over years in occupation and

avocation into the writing experience. This compartmentalization suggests several possibilities: that the authority of his chosen subject, a contemporary poet, intimidates him, or it positions him into an unaccustomed identity as "expert." It might help a student cope with such intimidation by changing the sense of authority in the classroom, that is, by recognizing that a workable alternate model would be collaboration, in this case, between the novice and the recognized poet. In Fred's account, such a working partnership does in a sense propel him into composing repeated drafts of his thesis proposal. Any student-author collaboration might be in isolation from the classroom, however. There would be a sense of community with the pro within the student writer's subjectivity during the episode of writing, though none with teacher perhaps or the classroom community. This situation would offer a kind of apprenticeship that would possibly erase the mysticism from some students' processes. On the other hand, rivalry and resentment may surface if the student expects to derive success or even fame merely from thoughts of the distinguished author. When the pro fails to "help" the aspiring writer, the latter may go mute in a show of defiance (described also in Chapter IV). All in all, literary tradition has a powerful yet potentially dangerous influence over writing.

It is also possible that when Fred writes, he overlooks or does not recall cognitive strategies and defenses that he knows. Fred became badly stuck when he tried to write the proposal for his master's thesis. In fact, he produced multiple versions that all required retooling. He told me:

> I'd read so much
> and I'd really been trying
> and what was hell for me—
> I'd been trying to write like I used to write,

using a lot of heavy words
and a couple dense theoretical adjectives,
abstract nouns,
practically German sentences,
so that would give me—
I was writing something important—
and I finally realized—
could —
a hundred times—
but if you can't hear it, you can't hear it—
Just finally heard my advisor saying,
"You are an expert on what you know,
just write what you know"
So I started again
and it was wonderful
because there was so much there. (A7-8)

His remark *if you can't hear it, you can't hear it* refers to the meaning he wanted his

language to convey, yet also it shows how attuned he is to the sound of words and to

music. He told me, "I've always connected music with verbiage. They have always been

entwined to me" (A3). Yet *you can't hear* changes to *[I] finally heard* when he describes

the meeting with his advisor. From Fred's point of view, her suggestion was a

breakthrough. He had been trying to get help with writing problems by asking his wife,

then his father-in-law, but those attempts had been relatively unsuccessful. He tells me

that it was surprising for him to have a positive association with an English instructor who

stresses writing. In previous literature classes, he always felt terror of being exposed as an

impostor who was faking knowledge, which caused him exhaustion. The fact that this

instructor, however, has a syllabus with "remedial [writing] assistance" in it shows him

that "I'm not all alone." It is natural that he would try to mediate stress by seeking

support, though, since it is a technique he uses when he writes music collaboratively with

a band. The fog of discourse in the oral style obscured his meaning and raised his anxiety

level around attempts to master a written style. Yet he perceives that the meaning was in a sense there, waiting to be heard.

Bev's blocks to writing occur after she experiences a "beautiful, complex" array of "layers" of images [A3] but becomes "overwhelmed" by the enormity of the topic and loses the connections between those images. A graduate student, Bev solicits exceptional treatment from her instructors. In one case, she attracts notice by challenging an instructor: "He's a Chomskyite and I was going to fight Chomsky at that point in my life and he gave me a B+ in graduate class on that paper" [BB-A8], she says. Then she adds, "but by the end of the course, once he had found out where I was coming from, he reread that paper and broke all the rules for me" [BB-A8]. That comment shows that Bev is identified in her mind as "coming from" the ideas in her text, yet she recovers from failure enough to pursue a re-evaluation of her writing with her teacher. Bev is the type of writer who, as she tells me several times, wants a reader for her writing [A3; A5; A9]; in a recent class, she found it troubling that "we weren't getting any attention [from the instructor] for this [writing]" [A5]. Similarly, she recalls in grade school "nobody [on the faculty] caring to ask why I was so reticent" [A2]. Although she is not a talker, she exemplifies coping by asking for help from external sources.

Life-patterns and Coping

Do dispositions change? Among writers I interviewed, ten had found academic writing painful enough that they removed themselves from degree programs and coursework, either entirely or intermittently, over a period of years or even decades.

Eventually, however, most returned to school. During the hiatus, writers' lived experience included some forms of writing, often related to the workplace, and these events gave them added dimensions; their growth changed them in their readiness to re-encounter writing. Many now have developed various literacy skills, like facets in a jewel, although in writing for evaluation they may armor themselves with a shell. As a group, the writers who went back to degree programs continued to feel writing apprehension, yet they seem to me to have self-knowledge from their experience of living through various relationships and situations. When writing clicks—and by this I mean the context of the writing, its audience, and the conditions for it, its results—the mind experiences transcendent satisfaction. I would like to believe that this satisfaction can be especially important to a person who has spent significant time in self-doubt or self-blame about her writing. In her book *Composing a Life*, Mary Catherine Bateson describes growth and relearning throughout life as "unfolding" (56), an attractive image that conveys the inherent human potential.

For example, the traumatic experience that Shirley endured as the time of graduating with her B.A. (a false accusation of plagiarism made against her is discussed in Chapter IV) had the effect of keeping her away from degree-granting programs for the next 22 years until she entered a program for the master's degree. During her years away from school, however, Shirley was actively writing. In this extended excerpt, which is taken from our second interview, she chronicles her literacy experiences:

> I've always pursued the humanities in one form or another.
> I've always kept journals from like 7th grade.
> Just a place to put my thoughts.
> I didn't know whether the good times were when I was writing or when I wasn't.

you know, I've begun to - I mean I guess uh
I've accepted both
but I thought there was a time when if I was writing I was too lonely—
I was *lonely* and I wasn't out with people and so
[ME: Umm]
umm so that wasn't good.
###
In 71 I joined a poetry group,
 and I participated in that group for 7 years,
and we met at [*place*] on Tuesday nights
and for me it was—
 I mean a lot of the people were lit majors, and studied lit.,
for me I was very much interested in writing poetry,
and I did write poetry,
and I really became a poet in that workshop.
CK: This is neat, I'm so glad I asked.
S: I had this genuine unders— intuitive understanding of the ambiguity of language,
the play of language,
that I played with language through the support of this group.
Like all groups it was very incestuous, so there was good and bad. . . . .
≈ ≈ ≈

[Responding to question about method of group]
We handed out copies of our poems.
We had some delightful-there was a core group of us over the years.
So we - some poems are unforgettable.
There were those nights when someone brought in a really great poem.
It was like, We don't think you're being honest in this poem,
and you need to be more specific,
and — we're really interested in the details here, those kinds of things.
So it did provide a good catalyst. . . . .
###
The group had a magazine
and I was a contributing editor of the magazine
and I was published in several other places.
###
[Discussion of work] I did secretarial work full time,
but there was no investment;
I could leave whenever I want to kind of thing;
they were short term jobs.
I went for career counseling and got into business (in 78).
Not using language skills; doing more on the math side.
I score higher in math than I do —
I was doing, I did well in accounting and econ courses,

and at that point, I was painting;
I started painting because in 76 Georgia O'Keeffe celebrated her 90th birthday
and I was inspired by her work.
I've been in financial business for 20 years now.
Along also doing art of one kind or another.
Painting, crafts, and some poetry.
I have another poetry group that I've been a member of.
###
[*Responding to question about writing for master's program*]
I — um didn't want to go to school full-time.
It wasn't a question of that;
it was a question of being able to pursue my interests at my own pace . . .
I had no um I mean I plodded along, one course a semester.
Period.
And um and really loved doing that,
but I will say, I did have some difficulties with some of the professors,
situations that threatened me quite a bit, while I was there.
###
I had difficulty formulating my um my thesis, my paper.
And I had to practically spend a weekend rewriting it after I got the first draft
   back.
I learned a lot from that
and I viewed it as a learning experience
I got positive insight about the difficulty people had understanding what I was
   writing
and it really fleshed things out for me
and it really did improve my writing.

I beg the reader's indulgence for the length of this story; its appearance is justified, I

believe, by the picture it paints of Shirley's remarkable persistence in relearning or

adjusting her life to adapt it to poetry, painting, and literature, despite feelings of

loneliness in relation to writing.   By the time she decided to risk going back to the

university, she had proved something to herself, through accomplishments in poetry that

involved exposing herself to others' evaluations for seven years in her poetry-writers'

group. The part-time schedule of the graduate program at Harvard University Division of

Continuing Education, with evening and Saturday classes, let her retain her occupation

and personal activities while studying, and this balance presumably further stabilized her to cope with the demands of rewriting the paper that she describes above, as well as her master's thesis, which she has now completed (and for which she won a prize!). Another strong motivation for Shirley was her passion for the fine-arts subjects on which she did research and wrote seminar papers and her master's thesis.

She encountered professors' criticism or what she saw as insensitive treatment, creating echoes of the earlier plagiarism trauma, yet she somehow prevented this from ruining her chances. Partly she did this by focusing exclusively on her fascination for the topic. An observer might say that she could have managed the stress with more connected methods, or that this behavior is symptomatic of a disconnected personality; Shirley appears resigned to the hierarchical nature of education and all but seizes her seminars as an opportunity to indulge her wish to learn all she can about a new subject. In this way, she gets her assigned writing done. Nevertheless, her relational behavior with instructors reverts to the protective pattern of silence that she adopted as an undergraduate. For example, she told me that she did not complain to the graduate school about one of her professors who, as she said, raised loud objections to Shirley's writing in a fine-arts seminar paper, an expisode that felt to Shirley like "abuse." She told me, too, that one fellow student, after reading a paper by Shirley, expressed surprise that someone with such ability had not spoken often in the seminar.

Another writer I interviewed, Lewis, said that difficulty at writing forced him to abandon plans to go to graduate school after earning his undergraduate degree. Instead, he took a job in the entertainment industry and became knowledgeable about motion

pictures. Eventually, he tried writing for artistic and experimental publications in this field, and was pleased with the response to his columns. Then, after a few years, he changed jobs to begin teaching, which finally drew him back to graduate school. As a student, he developed a close relationship with an creative-writing instructor that was instrumental in his decision to write fiction.

Each of these writers underwent some anxiety about writing in graduate work, yet each was able to keep the disruptive emotion at a distance. For example, when Lewis received a reader's criticism of a story, he handled it by analyzing the reader in order to deduce that this reader's taste in fiction was simply not the same as Lewis's own. This systematic procedure of analysis keeps him in control of his work and protects him from feeling personally criticized (whether he might have benefitted from accepting the critique remains moot as long as it requires accepting criticism). In Shirley's case, when she received what she terms "abuse" for a paper, she said her desire to remain in the graduate degree program was passionate, and that this motivation held her to the task. Before this particular course ended, she felt that she was successful in improving the instructor's opinion of her written work.

"I love it!"

Beth and I sat and talked in a coffee shop for our second conversation. She carefully covered both halves of her bagel with equal amounts of cream cheese before she began eating. We were both relaxed in contrast to our original interview nine months earlier, a talk that had been conducted in the store Beth manages at a shopping center. And we

were getting used to our changed relationship from the teacher-student setting in which we first got to know each other, when I led a class in which she had enrolled. Beth is a mature-appearing 25-year-old woman who has interest in and talent for writing, but whose writing performance in our class had been frustrating for her because of problems with completing her work. Obviously, she had desired to do extremely well, yet her tendency was to self-criticize and virtually demolish a perfectly good working draft of an essay and then to agonize over a new version. Beth is independent, now, self supporting, developing a career in merchandising, and interested in studying business management. She is recovering from years of undiagnosed and untreated bipolar depression. When she enrolled in my course, she had just been diagnosed with this condition. Today, after several years of counseling and medication, she believes that she is beginning to decipher the aspects of her life that her bipolar condition distorted and other experiences that may have been uncomfortable but unrelated to the disease.

I wanted to ask Beth about how she gets along at work when writing becomes necessary. From a paper by Deborah Brandt, "Pressure to Write in the Public Sphere," I have learned how occupational demands on a person bring about significant changes in literacy. It seemed as if the practice of professional writing might give Beth some of the same anxiety she had felt in college classes, yet it might also be possible that she could adjust differently to writing within the professional setting. I knew that Beth had held her job successfully for over two years (in fact, she tells me, it has been over four years altogether) and was about to receive a promotion. I decided to ask her about this indirectly, so I asked if she would tell me about how she uses language in her job, and

gave her some invented illustrations that used spoken as well as written communication. Beth launched into this subject enthusiastically and produced a long, detailed description of her professional reading, her various job writing activities, and oral communication she does face to face and by phone. As the following illustrations will show, Beth uses language comfortably at work and her literacy skills function in support of her role, rather than becoming a source of tension as they did in her college writing performance.

As a manager, Beth reads books that will improve her performance. For example, she read the book, *The One-Minute Manager* (Blanchard), and applied it to instructions she hands out to employees. She wrote details to clarify the employee packet that each worker receives to explain company policies. Her intention was to head off performance problems by explicitly stating her policies, such as attendance and conditions for termination.

The type of writing that Beth produces for her job sometimes entails writing a problem-solving plan or projection, which can involve a process of several stages over a period of days. She might begin by identifying the problem with a co-worker, then each would agree to write privately about the solutions they envisioned. Later, they would meet to compare their written ideas and discuss them in a focused conversation. Beth eagerly takes on these activities. She said, "I love it!" in answer to my question. She uses her time off-duty to do this writing; she told me in answer to my question that she prefers to write out by hand her ideas, not to use the "typewriter" (her word).

What becomes obvious to me, though not to Beth, about her account is its resemblance to writing process pedagogy, which, as I described with excerpts from her

conversation in Chapter IV, all but defeated Beth in her attempts to write as a college student. Before matriculating at University of New Hampshire, Beth had enrolled as an undergraduate in a small Boston liberal arts college, where she was encouraged by a particular English instructor to write short fiction as well as narrative and criticism. This teacher's nurturance contributed, as I see it, to her belief that writing itself is a force that must overpower her, that she has to be "struck" before she can produce a "good" school paper Indeed, she tells me that despite this successful job performance, she still thinks of academic writing in near-mystical terms.

Toward the end of our conversation, the server takes away our plates, and Beth and I step out of our roles somewhat and start to speculate as if we were both deans (or department chairs at any rate) about whether it would ever be possible to change college curricula to make writing authentic or even give it the semblance of authentic writing conditions, and whether a teacher could ever toss out deadlines, toss out grades. This rather wistful talk is a kind of unspoken acknowledgment of the tough time we both had when we were trying to get Beth through a difficult semester; yet at the same time we are able to talk as we do because of Beth's achievements since that time. Then Beth gets ready to go, and I think I will pat her or hug her but refrain because I remember how she told me, when our talk began, that she is too uncomfortable with body boundary issues to manage her employees "by touch." There is a delicious irony and counter-transference in the former teacher's desire to have the student-turned-manager's success rub off on the teacher, who, in terms of income, at least, now is definitely lower in the hierarchy.

But Beth's talk shows far, far more about bringing students' voices into the larger conversation about composition. The concept of writing has several distinct definitions, for Beth, one of which, professional writing, is within her control, but the others, academic writing and creative writing, seem to Beth to control her. How is she coping with writing on the job? Several strategies or defenses combine effectively: first, she has status in her store, where she is in control, unlike the classroom; then, she has guidance, coaching, and support from a single supervisor that has extended over several years, unlike the school semester-long arrangement; also, she has been medicated for mood swings and counseled in psychological adjustment; and in addition, the professional writing has a novelty factor for her, compared to the standards of canonical reading and writing that she venerates and has done since childhood (as I have written elsewhere in this project, belief in the greatness of literary tradition overshadows many writers' attempts to surpass those standards). Beth's lack of inhibition at writing on the job may reflect an escape from the burden of literature, yet it consists too of her unique personal abilities and preferences, such as an aptitude for detail and concentration, a powerful memory, and a sense of responsibility. Also essential in understanding Beth's changes is the absence of any reference to failure. Earlier, she describes how she tried to apply problem-focused strategies to college composition (I illustrate her method in Chapter IV), yet simultaneously her account shows that she was defending herself by escaping mentally and physically from what felt like an impending failure. It remains uncertain whether Beth will carry over the benefits of coping experience at work into future academic writing, whether she can erase the taint of failure from the assigned sheet of writing. In our talk, her words

about reading for pleasure make it clear that she still worships such books and wants to believe that they are written by "magic."

I have already described how feelings of shame cause writers to in effect hide their work from themselves and authorities. In long-term coping, they can develop greater comfort in viewing their own work, so that an anxious person can manage writing alone, on her own terms. Such a writer, in Shirley's case, for instance, seems able to accept and cope with the stressful wish to make her work as good as her ideal. She does not appear to increase her ability to relate to others through writing, however. The role of external support, beyond the classroom, that is, was important for Shirley in her poetry group meetings and to others from counseling. A group of poets supported Shirley in the extracurriculum (a word from Ann Gere), yet some workshops or studios may be harmful environments for writers, as Lewis and Sue make clear. Discursive practices at work can be another source of support. The role of the workplace teaches Beth, for example, a new set of literacy skills.

What does it indicate that Shirley, for one, does not feel entitled, say, to relate to others or to influence others through writing papers and a thesis for college classes? Entry through the gates of the academy appears to make writers perceive the writing self differently from their everyday reading or writing identity. They may perceive college as denoting a sanctification of writing. Once in college classes, people often judge that they should wait for mystic inspiration for subject, content, and style; and set aside their willingness to expose texts to workplace colleagues or to poetry-group members.

Reputation of learning or of knowledge causes some of this effect; another cause could be the appearance on the page of such "dry" devices as words in foreign languages, documentation; one could point, also, to the absence of oral cues and signals in written prose style, even the occasional failure to use a rhetorical mark, like a rhetorical question. Remember Bunyan's characterization of shame as the bold fellow, the one who whispers to the pilgrim that he lacks education! Something no louder than a whisper may indeed tell writers as a group that they are inadequate. Years ago, Janet Emig suggested that paper size and ink color of writing assignments were irrelevant and that college should open its doors wider in accepting papers. Such relaxation is still remote, however, given the pressure on academics themselves for formal writing . Only a few rebels, like Stephen Jay Gould, dare to risk their scholarly credentials by being a "popularizer." In practical terms, what would it mean, how would assignments look, if college writing were to relax its form and style standards? What controls would still remain in place? In the following chapter, I sketch answers to these ideas.

Writers adjust tension and soothe anxious sensations by dulling the body through food, drink, and other substances. These strategies appear to give writers access to what they describe as internal voices or subjects. From accounts in this research, I suspect that the faith writers place in the un- or subconscious is received wisdom or cultural conditioning that work of highest aesthetic standard must be produced unconsciously (alluding to Jungian collective unconscious). Perhaps writers cling to this trust in unconscious partly to free themselves from apprehension. Yet critical theory would raise objections to these beliefs of students and attempt to raise problems for the students about believing them.

To the writer, however, the eating or note-writing rituals could create a fetish, or a transitional object, that can reduce anxiety.

Although as an interviewer I was sympathetic, as a composition teacher this discussion of coping with anxiety was threatening. In discussing procrastination, I said that it passively threatened institutions' schedule-based pedagogy and discipline. What I heard overall, I now realize, could undermine the organization of the classroom and constitute a disruptive presence, if instructors choose to acknowledge it. For example, writers I interviewed represent a percentage of students for whom the classroom is a cause of apprehension. If instructors listen to individual writers' distress, as I did in this project, can they respond to a particular student whose anxiety interferes with paying attention, or to one who cannot handle evaluation? Experimental writing pedagogy, as I reported earlier in this chapter, suggests that innovation has begun; also it appears that teachers can find it satisfying to address writers' anxieties directly, rather than ignoring or disguising them.

CHAPTER VI

SPECULATIONS FROM THE DEAN'S OFFICE:

REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Re-examine all you have been told at school or church or in any book, dismiss

whatever insults your own soul, and your very flesh shall be a great poem.

— Walt Whitman (1855 Preface, *Leaves of Grass*)

Paradoxically, the potential impact of composition's tongue is to silence tongues. This

silencing happens for many reasons, of course, but one of the prime causes is the gap

between writing-instruction precepts and the actual practices of people when they write.

Teachers in a expressivist-process pedagogy commonly train students to plan and write in

steps, to talk over papers with peers in workshops, to return to sources for additional

material, to incubate and then revise their papers, to imitate model papers, to use fresh

language, to remove all error; sometimes, writing teachers in an social-epistemic pedagogy

encourage students to criticize their traditional beliefs; and there are writing teachers who

counsel students to write only from inspiration. But when people susceptible to doubt or

shame actually begin a piece of writing, they may recall those instructions but feel unable

to comply with them, because they have trained themselves to cope with the stress of the

writing situation by escaping or by defying an instructor's authority. Still, they treat

themselves as failures and reproach themselves for not following those precepts. The persistent, severe distress that writers undergo as the result of this gap between practice and theory feels self-inflicted. To the individual, the anxiety seems to come from within. Writers report many inward anxiety symptoms, including a distortion of time; a dread of exposure; persecutory messages about one's writing; a lack of trust in authority; pessimism; obsessive postponing or editing.

But writing anxiety is more than the consequence of inward events. It blends such factors as the following: the potential uncertainty and identity crisis in the university teaching profession, especially the composition teacher's anxiety over subordinate rank to literature; the ambiguity in the relationship with the student, which shifts from coach to examiner; personal inadequacy feelings regarding writing in one who must produce texts for professional survival; nagging questions about the relevance of the subject or the effectiveness of the approach. That is why it endangers writers and puts blinders on education if we imagine that altering the individual alone will end writing anxiety. I am frequently expected to offer individuals a novel antidote for block or a recipe for writing flow, yet to do so would probably exacerbate and not eradicate the condition. Instead, this project shows that from a writer's perspective, it is effective to counter anxiety with flexibility and sensitivity, to allow space and time for students to overcome prior experience, and to balance writing criticism with concern for maintaining connections between the writer and the teacher.

Ideas for Individuals

When we discover these needs, whether we do so as a writer or as a writing instructor, we can address the symptoms in the individual (the self, if need be) as well as in the educational system. Let's look at the individual first. In the process of creating, the text and the writer form a strong interactive relationship; it is a private engagement like love that "takes over" the writer and changes her; she secretes this relationship and the text from others. Writers who are prone to shame enter writing as a space where they are free to play, experience, express, create, imagine, explore the mind, recollect, and form deep attachments to the product that represents their changed identity (in that sense, the text is a transitional object). Temporarily, they may lose their consciousness of authority as a censorious audience. In interviews with me, such people describe a daze they undergo before they begin to write. After writing, their fear of exposure and wish to protect their text from authority might be understood as a sign of shame they unconsciously feel for performing this intimate act, which appears remote from grown-up, mature, responsible behavior yet is simultaneously motivated by a drive to succeed and to excel.

But other writers prone to shame see writing as a reflection of their ability relative to others, including exemplars, peers, and recollected authority figures who evaluate and approve or disapprove the text that takes shape. Writers show this when they describe to me feelings of torture and dread at confronting their writing or make gestures signifying disgust in connection with their writing. Their fear of criticism and rejection by authority might be interpreted as a sensation of shame they undergo for becoming a failure in their own eyes. These writers might stage a mental or physical escape from demands and

constraints as a way to cope with stress feelings that shame causes. They might even drop out of writing for years.

Reading conditions students to value the intimate bond with a written work and the role of author. Even though Robert Scholes writes in *The Rise and Fall of English* that the present culture has abandoned the near-religious zeal for literature that formerly characterized "English," I disagree. A sizable number of writers, both in this project and in classes I have led, think reading is a precious refuge, and they are motivated to write by their bond with beloved books, either traditional "literature" or contemporary authors. An observer might say that a novice inspired by reading communicates erratically and lacks self-esteem or confidence. "[True writers] do have a subconscious confidence, I think," the book editor Maxwell Perkins once wrote to novelist Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings, "But when they begin a big piece of work they have vastly less confidence than these men who just follow the trade of writing and who always know just where they are going" (179). It would be more accurate to describe the writer's difficulty in communicating as one characteristic of a nonverbalizable process associated with creative thinking, as Roger Shepard writes (181), and one not easily regimented, as it might be in formal education, and not easily shared through expression (to talk about it or to show drafts would be premature). This reluctance is intensified by any prior objective experience with adult authority the writer may have at home or in school that persuades her not to expose her relationship to her writing and teaches her that others may not value it as she does. Habits of this importance are durable. Experience may make some shame permanent.

By now, the reader may wonder, how would individuals address their own symptoms and sensations of shame? Isn't this impossible if the sources of the emotions are hidden? Writers in this project show that acceptance and identification (that is, naming) are powerful tools. A writer like Sue, for example, is frank about her need to prepare by being in a dazed state. Writers also acknowledge the solitude that they, like other artists, prefer to work within, even though they also collaborate or discuss work in progress with others. The artist Robert Rauschenberg claims to works in the gap between art and life (Danto, "Rauschenberg" 34). Inwardness, as I use it here, refers to individual thought in contrast to public communication. Engrossed reading draws writers inward; many types of writers, not merely engrossed readers, depend on inward life—perfectionistic writers, for example.

Confiding in others adjusts the writer's stress level. It might be a spouse or a close friend to whom the anxious writer habitually explains a problem paper. Writers may also find consolation in reading. For example, Cheryl showed me a writing self-help book that she often used.

If a writer becomes disturbed by the inwardness of writing, she needs to let herself stay in limbo or in retreat, that is, to "hover," until she decides to write. In talking with Shirley, I learned that she waited for five months, from March to July, before submitting the first section of her master's thesis to her advisor. She told me that he gave her "space," except for one phone call, to work at her natural pace.

To avert fear, guilt, or shame, the writer may try to take a transgressive attitude and flame or rant to resist capitulation to the instructor or the dominant cultural forces. In

talking with Lewis, I noticed that he used mimicry and sarcasm to deflate the instructor's image. Lois used her natural sense of humor to mock herself in her tense situation.

This gap or inward period echoes with imagined and remembered speech, of course. For writers susceptible to anxiety, critical and censoring voices and messages can speak inside the mind. Composition pedagogy recognizes the inner world to the extent that it encourages students to use associative techniques—freewriting and brainstorming—to mine that gold. Although writers can benefit from using these techniques, the inner world also potentially endangers writers. The more I listen to writers with anxiety, the more I believe that this harm is very real. Writers hear whispered voices—some voices give praise, but others send critical messages. These sensations may be driven by chemical changes within the brain, as biopsychology research into nightmares suggests (Leonard).

Writers can defend against such messages by expecting them. The writer may need a rhetoric of common sense that helps her escape a censorious consciousness and resume her ordinary powers of judgment ("Nonsense. Professor So-and-so will understand these ideas."). Instructional discourse could alert writers to the danger that inwardness can pose to them. A conversation or confrontation with a writer's mental faculties could be staged as a drama in the classroom. Talking with others about critical messages weakens their impact. If writers approach mental "storms" as being fairly common in writing, some of their disruptive power diminishes. In Buddhist philosophy, a practitioner tries to watch such negative thoughts without judging or identifying with them and without letting them dominate one's attention. Such thoughts are seen as mental "waves," like the endless waves of the seas, and they are inevitable. The stress-reduction psychologist Jon Kabat-

Zinn writes, "you can't artificially suppress the waves of your mind, and it is not too smart to try" (31). Yet Buddhism, which counsels acceptance of everything, may prove incompatible for some Western confrontational or transgressive attitudes. Instead, the writer could take energy from the tension that brews in a self-image reflected from a text or in an uneasy relationship with inner voice, teacher, peer or curriculum. Sometimes, they might use their tension to find footholds in these relationships or draw on that energy to fire the inward engine and power a process of writing.

Writers who are prone to anxiety may benefit from mutual support. People with severe anxiety already use Internet discussion groups; also, they might join public organizations, like the Anxiety Disorders Association of America, or form new alliances to encourage each other and to lobby for an improved image among the press and public and for favorable conditions in education or employment.

Ideas for Education

When composition focuses on particular writing practices, like shame-related behavior, this specialization enhances the status of the profession by showing that the profession has a particular role that is vital throughout the curriculum and society. By teaching students to use imaginative faculties, teachers would improve their self-image. In the following pages, I make several recommendations based on the writers' experiences and coping methods. My ideas include restructuring of the writing curriculum and coining some "shameless" speech to liberate writers and to nudge composition theorists and teachers into critiquing our professional discourse.

In the school setting, writing is especially susceptible to promoting shame among students through comparison with others and by failing to meet the individual's and the instructor's expectations. This dilemma is far from education's aim; if the aim of education is to train students to make meaning and to imagine, clearly the mind cannot perform these activities if it must reproach itself. Some writers I interviewed speak of mind and self as a machine: One describes his anxiety as static or noise; another explains how her mind will shut off; another speaks of driving the mind; perfectionists struggle to make a text appear machine-made. When writers are expected to conform, or are subjected to criticism, as they often are in education, is it surprising that they sometimes couch their perceptions in the impersonal language of the machine? Block and anxiety are figuratively the pressure valve that blows. After all, society today expresses its millennial anxiety in terms of the computer fiasco predicted to occur on 12/31/99+1. But even though writers may describe the mind in mechanical terms, they often read with passion, as many of them show by their loyalty to literary masterworks. Indeed, writers' attempts to equal the quality they attribute to those masterworks often results in frustration. The impersonal, machine representation that writers use is a way that they can express their anxiety upon the body.

Writers' anxiety suggests that the discourse and management of writing at the university level need to be more sensitive to the effect on individual differences. In my interview with Beth, I report that we "speculate as if we were deans (or department chairs, at any rate) about whether it would ever be possible to change colleges and college curricula . . ." Perhaps our move was more apt than we realized, as it is the faculty of

writing, faculty both in the sense of ability and in the sense of educational rank, that we had been discussing and dissent that we had toyed with. If some composition faculty tend to ignore writers' faculties, it suggests that the profession wants to bury the recurrent, sometimes intractable, dilemma of anxiety and block, as if compositionists feel some shame and repression in relation to writing and instruction methods.

But when troubled writers unearth their experience, as when "the repressed" returns, some underappreciated strategies become evident. To manage their stress, writers delay or procrastinate, compose in their heads, or sometimes try to summon inspiration. These behaviors may frustrate and irritate teachers; they can make faculty burn out and can turn some teachers against writing instruction. I want to propose to educators that there is much to learn from modifying the traditional writing curriculum or even adopting alternative methods within it. Even though some may frown on adopting these strategies, the shame-prone writers interviewed here suggest, to me at least, that teachers and students gain nothing by insisting on mechanical conformity or correctness as a composition pedagogy. At the least, the range of possible experiences can show instructors what kinds of questions to ask (and ask of oneself, as well) and ways to frame a relationship with a shame-prone writer. The instructor may have anxiety about writing herself or may dread having to grade, which puts her in the role of umpire or even timekeeper, when she has been coach, trainer, and cheerleader for the term. The following suggestions will be described:

1. Let unorthodox writing habits be "legal"

2. Affirm last-minute writing

3. De-emphasize revision

4. Use alternatives to "write"

5. Use technology to reduce exposure

Let Unorthodox Writing Habits Be "Legal"

Shame-prone attitudes toward writing lead writers to use such habits of mind as the following: perfectionism; delay and procrastination; phonocentrism; inspiration; . . . The categorizing of the mind by activity makes sense. Stephen Toulmin breaks down "inwardness" into varieties that are identified by the uses a person finds for the inner life: secretive; reticent; reflective; imaginative; introspective; autonomous (12). Even though education has typically demanded uniform behavior that adheres to a given structure, these writer-origin traits provide realistic identities. The profession might accept the possibility that writers can deviate from convention in such ways. Teachers could then work with individual differences determined by the writer's mental habits, instead of a broad general emphasis. It offers hope, as I see it at least, by making it legitimate to be a postponing writer, a perfectionistic writer, an inspired writer, or a phonocentric writer. A writer could then try to stop being protective and trust that others will accept and appreciate the text. She would try to believe that she can show another person why she wrote what she wrote the way she wrote it. She would trust the reader to see what she loves about it and how it changed her. Of course, she would need courage to believe that teachers/readers could employ greater nurturing and understanding to decrease potential fear and humiliation and overcome historically entrenched critical approaches.

Affirm Last-minute Writing

Since we know that some writers delay or procrastinate to cope, the institution might acknowledge that delay has value for some writers and discuss the pros and cons of last-minute writing. Some instructors might suggest it as one option for writers who need to manage anxiety. After all, writing for a job is usually performed under the gun.

Now, many short, pro forma assignments are typical of composition, yet these lead to last-minute work, especially in light of most students' schedules of coursework and jobs. Instead, courses might provide assignments that let students practice planning in steps to design and accomplish a big project, as Heath suggests ("Tackling Hard Undeniable Truths"). Students might choose from an array of options, like a cafeteria-style menu. Some universities give students the chance to choose between two writing courses, one a brush-up with extensive mentoring, and other schools let students prepare a project to demonstrate their writing ability without taking a required course. The individual course might let students choose to delay the portfolio or other final-grade piece over a variety of time spans, such as an academic year, instead of completing the class within a semester or quarter. This plan mimics the incomplete, but blurs two courses. A capstone project at the conclusion of undergraduate work, as urged in the Boyer Commission report, directly influences composition. What if every student expected to produce a senior thesis, or a four-year writing portfolio, at graduation? What if students learned to plan the proposals for their senior paper and began that planning activity early, then continued it with changes and amplification through coursework?

Deadlines can make most writers panic. While many eventually comply, a few, see a deadline as a red flag and appear incapable of meeting any date. When they withhold a text, they satisfy themselves by dealing out their own punishment. Still, their refusal to perform causes potential failure. Some instructors see benefit in observing a cut-off date, while others prefer to be more elastic. No simple answer will satisfy every situation. However, we could encourage writers to identify themselves as procrastinators, explain the relative value of delay compared with punctuality in view of the expectations of the course, then negotiate with them over what rules they will observe. These writers should take responsibility for their decision by agreeing to a contract at the outset that clarifies conditions. Then if there are lapses, we are prepared for that behavior and can focus on the contract stipulations rather than the person or the missing paper. This may, I admit, sacrifice writing quality and accuracy, yet it may be worthwhile if a few badly damaged writers benefit from such kid gloves.

De-emphasize Revision

Since writers with anxiety often resist revising their texts, composition might veer from its present strong emphasis on requiring revisions of compositions. This would in effect postpone the critic. Self-correction, unreadiness, or submission to authority are the hidden impact of revision and may backfire, if a writer is already anxious about failing.

Bias for revision can be professionally embedded in teachers, especially composition teachers. To give a personal example, my "pilgrim's progress" has taken me some distance from the belief in revision that I held at the start of this project. Writers' accounts

of subconscious or unconscious inspiration made me skeptical. From the results of this research, however, I see that many writers sense such inspiration and may feel transported like visionaries or prophets while composing. Such writers relate so intensely to their writing that they appear alienated from ordinary experience. This attitude has a long history. Medieval mystic Hildegard von Bingen wrote: "Let no man be so audacious as to add anything to this writing . . . brought forth by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit simply" (qtd. Petroff 157). It is legendary that a great writer flunks college writing. Milton and Coleridge claimed to have received their poems in dreams; though unusual, dreaming is a method that some psychologists, described in Chapter V, find practical for blocked writers. The work of revision is less the problem than the request itself, which to the writer implies that the reader fails to appreciate the writing "as is."

How did I become conditioned to view inspiration negatively? My training as composition instructor, coupled with my personal writing practice, cause me to be invested in the process writing method that is recursive—revising, returning to investigation, rewriting, amplifying, dialoging with peers. My process is standard; noted English professional Wayne Booth writes, "I revise many, many times, as many times as deadlines allow for. And I always feel that I would have profited from further revision" (Waldrep viii). Even before I trained in composition theory, my occupation as an editor gave me license to shape others' manuscripts through correcting, deleting, and rewriting. Revision, then, is my "sustaining fiction." During the project, I valued revision and thought it was an appropriate standard for the methods of individuals I interviewed. In hindsight, how should this be interpreted? Perhaps revision seems to be a remedy for a

text that is "ill" and by extension writers appeared ill, to me, so their work "needed" that

treatment. It is more useful, now, to see their anxiety as a distress code or a symptom of

the physical and mental effects, which might strike any person who writes, on the

individual of writing in connection with shame.

The mentality of the healer looks for quantum change; as I enlarge and rewrite my

texts. I apparently rewrite writers and bestow approval on those who, like me, try to

"read" their work critically, while writers who defend their pages earn fewer laurels in my

eyes. We teachers may think we can not have taught unless the learners change. Within

the medico-psychological and popular culture, writing, especially in vein of disclosure or

confession, is viewed as a form of healing by some professionals and teachers of writing.

For example, psychologist James Pennebaker calls writing, "an inexpensive, simple and

sometimes painful way to help maintain our health" (qtd. Fain C3). Change as

improvement underscores this trope. Improvement tropes lead composition, as it

professionalizes itself, to see its work as being like housekeeping; other visions suggest the

coach, or even the umpire, referee, or timekeeper. Sometimes, the role of the classroom

instructor begins to blur with that of the professional counselor. Teachers may believe

that they are responsible for healing or even for injecting social values of cooperation and

docility into the content of student writing, which may be a response to the historical use

of language by some to control and to oppress. Alternatively, and I think preferably,

teachers may believe that the power to write clear, strong prose empowers a student.[31]

Use Alternatives to "Write"

As wrongheaded as it sounds, I wonder if the profession might invent various words to describe communicating in a printed text and not solely stress *write*. Some individuals associate "write" with regulation and conformity, in the form of penmanship, posture, and lack of movement. The student probably also was subjected to needless competition and correction. As technology developed, "writing" began to imply "typing" and now the term often refers to keyboarding on a word-processing computer with a television monitor. The very act of searching for more accurate language addresses the problems inherent in "write."

In light of the Internet and the World Wide Web, visuals, words, and sounds are blurring, which further changes the meaning of writing. Even though the printed page (of a book, a magazine, etc.) as a material object and an industry will continue, writing style may resemble oral language more than written, as Shirley Brice Heath points out ("Literacy"), and may include more visuals. "Writing" as a moniker lingers through inertia and nostalgia, and as the inspiring symbol of a prestigious profession, but it may be needlessly shaming to those people who equate "writer" with "scribe" in the sense of punitive method and content (cf. Melville, "Bartleby, The Scrivener"). Perhaps "writing" might be reserved to think of in connection with "authors." In shameless speech, neophytes might be better named by their raw material, like painters and woodworkers, and so become "phrasers"; after all, "programmers" are named for their programs.[32] Also, one who produces *images* and *ideas* might think of him- or herself as an *imagineer*, a word that lends itself to the blurring of text, icon, and picture that technologies are

producing. Possibly, then, an alternate rhetoric of composition might encourage visual

powers through the "imagining" and "envisioning" of a composition; another option

would be "scrawling" to emphasize scribe or script and draw ("scrawler"). And one new

term for the composition process to replace the word writing might be *ideation*. To speak

of ideation is to refer to the workings of the mind and by association with *idea* to draw on

creative powers as well as the visual dimension and the power of graphic images.

Imagining and having ideas are among the mental powers that some "writers," in their

anxiety to avoid exposure and to be perfect, underutilize. Then it would possibly help to

instruct students that they are the *faculties*, and that their faculties are the source of their

ability, like the ability to imagine. and power. The product of mental composing might be

a printed text or it might be a rhetorical product, a file online, or a hand-made object, not a

text in the conventional sense.

To cope with severe apprehension and avoid the toxic properties they associate with

somatic composing, some individuals compose mentally and even memorize a mental text,

as I described earlier in this project. If some anxious writers develop the use of their

mental faculties not just for planning but also for actual recording of text, these skills

challenge the designation, "writing." The extent to which they record or memorize is

unknown, but it would be worthwhile to test such writers further to discover more about

this ability. After all, memorization is defended as superior to writing by Plato in

Phaedrus, although that dialectical inquiry into rhetoric undercuts its own message by

being a text itself.

In Internet multi-user groups and virtual gatherings, strangers or repeaters unknown to each other who exchange written words in "real-time" create the sensation of a spoken exchange or a conversation. Robert Scholes describes using this type of discussion group with undergraduates in a Brown University classroom and reports "their writing improved, without any specific attention to their prose by the instructor" (*Rise* 33). As Sherry Turkle reports in her recent book *Life on the Screen*, the opportunity to send messages and "talk" anonymously over the Internet reduces anxiety for some individuals, who may assume various trial identities. Instructor Susan Jaye Dauer reports that the Daedalus Integrated Writing Environment (DIWE) and similar systems offer classes of writers "a synchronous, or 'real-time,' discussion tool" that can be used anonymously to "discuss controversial subjects without causing students embarrassment or anger. Debate addresses statements, not the status of the commentators." In fact, mind-writers show a way to discard the robotic effects of keyboarding and similar technology. Voice-recognition software may replace the need to use the keyboard.

Word-processing equipment and the Internet are no panacea. Access is a problem; many writers do not own these tools, of course; this unequal access is parallel to lack of funds for public education when budgets depend on taxes. Some writers who see the mind as mechanical may balk at the keyboard or fear that computers will encourage mass-produced writing. Still, the concept of a "processed" word recognizes that software now can perform mechanical grammar, spelling, and editing work. As elementary schools adopt this cyber-age technology and replace literacy with "cybercy," one hopes students will communicate, imagine, and scrawl more than they "write."

Then what role remains for the writing instructor without the tasks of correction and revising? Some attitudinal changes might emerge, to predict from the result of encounters with writers' use of computerized spelling software, or "spellcheck," and related software for grammar correction. Teachers might interpret technology and the meta-discourse of mechanical composing, e.g., explain overview of using the word processor, redlining, the spellcheck distinction between *then* and *than*, *it's* and *its*, etc. Actual systems, like the system of taste and of canonization, and the system of English spelling, including its history, evolution, purpose, maintenance, and future, become material for instruction. One does not, of course, have all this information at hand; the instructor might undertake research, new readings, interdisciplinary help from other faculty, and the like, ending perhaps by engaging class members too. In addition, instructors, once relieved of correction, might face writing with a greater amount of appreciation.

Constraints are automatic by entering the gates of the institution; choices are deceptive, of course, in that they can never be fully free. Even though some may object that institutionalization of delay would encourage malingering or sloth, masked as delay, who is qualified to decide, given the ambiguous nature of the mind? The responsibility rests with the author. The teacher can endorse the existence of types of writing method among the student body rather than imposing a standard type and can reveal the differing costs and benefits to individuals of choosing the various approaches, depending on working habits and proclivities; for example, advantages and drawbacks of last-minute papers.

Reduce Exposure via Technology

The computer might mediate for the author. Improved communication with email encourages impromptu question and answer. The remote location and informality of online communication reduces the trauma of confronting authority that inhibits some anxious writers. Writers who dread exposure are doing performative rhetoric—they often have a sensation that they themselves, intellectually and bodily, are what will be judged; their writing makes them feel as visible as if they were in a performance onstage. Even those who become engaged during the task itself might revert to such an identification-performance obsession after finishing and submitting their work.

The present discourse of *dead-line, submit, hand in* (self), *tear up, rip up, clean up,* or *correct* shows the underlying assumption that whatever writing is received will almost always be inadequate. When a teacher asks writers to hand in a paper, there is an inevitable role change from coach to judge, making teacher as perturbed as many a student. Sandra Bartky writes in the essay "Shame and Gender" how her students "behaved as *they handed me* their papers. They would offer heartfelt apologies and copious expressions of regret for the poor quality of their work—work which turned out, most of the time, to be quite good" (89; emphasis added). She writes further that "it would not be unusual for a student just to say, 'I'm really ashamed of this paper,' while *handing it to me*" (89; emphasis added), again juxtaposing the sensation of shame with the proffering of the composition in person to the teacher. Tradition leads teachers to request papers in this way, yet it is neither the most efficient means, since it takes classroom time, nor the only one. Mailboxes, online or in department offices, provide a

democratic way to exchange comments about papers in progress and to avoid face-to-face confrontation when a paper is turned in.

Software for discussion and collaborative writing online is in production and at use in some colleges. Technology can be taken a step farther to permit anonymity in working with an adviser. A counselor could establish an alias-name online community, or multi-user domain (MUD) that would permit a writer to assume an invented identity for the purpose of role-playing real or imagined anxieties about writing, as Turkle says in *Life on the Screen*. Such virtual communities could be monitored by a supervisor.

Some anxious writers ignore or avoid being seen by the authority who reads and evaluates writing. Judging from interviews, anxious writers are reluctant to trust the teacher (e.g. Lois's opinion that TA comments are insincere and self-serving); they might tend to discredit a reader's ability to judge, evaluate or grade writing. In Chapter V, Beth and I wistfully discussed how "to make writing authentic or even give it the semblance of authentic writing conditions, and whether a teacher could ever toss out deadlines, toss out grades." Modiying evaluation methods deserves attention. Grading responsibility could be shared by teams of instructors, which would liberate the instructor from sole responsibility. At some universities, such systems already exist, but their efficacy regarding anxiety remains a research question. If a teacher knows ways that previous teachers responded to a student's anxiety, as Beeman Phillips and colleagues write in a review of text-anxiety research, it will help the teacher understand what conditioned the student's response to comments and evaluation (336-7). Ideally, the instructor could mentor so as to form a working partnership with a student. What if every student had a

faculty writing advisor or mentor (and a writing lab or studio), where they took genuine writing questions and concerns, throughout the undergraduate years? Some colleges already have faculty attached to writing-intensive classes; for example, Carleton College (Minnesota). Those writing advisers would be available, also, to consult with faculty in all the disciplines on the evaluation of student advisees' writing performance. Years ago, the composition scholar Janet Emig, in *Twelfth Graders*, recommended that all writing teachers be writers themselves and practice "inescapable" journal keeping and other reflective writing tasks (100). For teachers in the university, who write professionally, the chance now exists to talk to students about every aspect, from how they go about conceptualizing their writing projects to the nuts and bolts of moving into print in professional venues.

Students sometimes elect fine arts and humanities subjects late in the course of life, like maturity or middle age, a time when reflexive activity can take precedence over establishing family and career. Shirley Brice Heath calls this preference "a fact that college English teachers have long wished to push under the rug" for "only when they [students] had leisure and security could they take the time to read for pleasure, write in journals" ("Work" 238). If writing were an elective, instead of a requirement, it would let students take the subject when they are ready, but the anxiety many students feel about writing would go on in other subjects where papers and reports are required. If students signed up for writing voluntarily, the attitude of the writing faculty might improve, yet students' writing problems would continue if other disciplines did not make their approach to student writing more flexible.

If we are to understand this subject, we should learn what result alternate grading schemes, like grading by teams, will have on students' anxiety. We should perform a project like this one in a different setting with a different investigator and a changed population of writers. An experimental syllabus should be tailored to anxiety-prone students. And texts composed with voice-activated software should be studied for what they may reveal about people's phonocentrism claims.

In New Hampshire, hiking trails crisscross the forests of the White Mountains. When I hike these steep paths, I know I am gaining altitude, but the thick cover of beech and oak is too frustratingly dense to let me see the view. When the cover thins out and I finally begin to see white birch, I know that the summit is close. Then suddenly there's a scramble across a granite ledge to stand on the exposed summit and discover the vista of hills and lakes and distant peaks that the trees had hidden. With other climbers, I point to the peaks and try to identify them, although from that unaccustomed height it's hard to name them. In a similar way, this project has arrived after a long journey at a fresh vantage point for understanding the intensifying role that shame plays in writers' anxiety and apprehension. One can gaze at noteworthy features of a remarkable landscape, such as the censorship that writers detect in external and internal authority and the inhibiting effects of engagement with reading on writers. This view of composition is all the more interesting because our professional decorum has concealed it; indeed, you risk disequilibrium by looking at it from this vantage. Granted, this view of composition can be puzzling, given the reconceived notions of revision and procrastination and other

standbys. Nevertheless, writers' emotions and behaviors are undeniably visible in the open

for us to observe, discuss, and even, like astronomers, invent new names for the terrain

not previously mapped. More significantly, though, the project has illuminated aspects of

composing that lie beyond the original scope of the research, including the matters of

writers' inner sources, the integrative role of the writer's body, and the beneficial

interaction of extracurricular, professional and academic writing.

REFERENCE NOTES

1. Harold Bloom is associated with this viewpoint, but Edward Said also writes in *Beginnings* that writers find that their predecessors "block their view" (21).

2. For viewpoints related to Will's, see Jacoby; Leo; and MacDonald. Linda Brodkey gives an opposing view in "Writing Permitted in Designated Areas Only" (*Higher Education Under Fire*, ed. Michael Berube and Cary Nelson, New York: Routledge, 1995, 214-237).

3. Edward Said endorses this view in *Beginnings*, saying, "A writer's writing . . . is the result of daring to apply sexual energy or attention to the act of writing" (263).

4. An alternate theory arises from classic American ego psychology, which emphasizes physical perceptions of the individual: the hand and arm motions of writing stimulate a condition of divided attention, a condition in which unpredicted associations to lived events present themselves to the consciousness. For a review, see Koutstaal. Late-nineteenth-century studies of divided attention, which writer Gertrude Stein among others conducted while a Radcliffe student, focused the mind on reading or reciting so that no conscious direction would reach the hand. For details, see Gertrude Stein, "Cultivated Motor Automatism," *Psychological Review* 5 (1898): 295-306.

5. "And for a writer, the most savage censor is oneself." This phrase from Susan Griffin at MLA in 1975 is quoted by Adrienne Rich in "Conditions for Work: The Common World of Women" (*Working It Out*, ed. Sara Ruddick and Pamela Daniels, New York: Pantheon, 1977: xx).

6. Schneider comments at length on implications of this derivation on pages 29-30.

7. I have derived insight into shame from numerous works: for a tight focus on the personality and its disorders, I found Karen Horney's work useful in *Neurosis and Human Growth*. Carl D. Schneider gives a broad survey of history and ethics of shame in *Shame, Exposure and Privacy*. Gershen Kaufman's extensive writing on shame, especially *Shame: The Power of Caring*, approaches the subject from a counseling stance, as does Andrew P. Morrison in *The Culture of Shame*, which also surveys recent work in psychology. Robert Karen makes valuable distinctions among shame varieties. To understand how shame influences classic women writers, it was stimulating to read the psychoanalytic interpretive works of Susan Kavaler-Adler, *The Compulsion to Create* and *The Creative Mystique*. Feminism also influences Sandra Bartky's reflections as a teacher in "Shame and Gender," a chapter in her *Femininity and Domination*. Donald L. Nathanson's *Shame and Pride: Affect, Sex, and the Birth of the Self* is strong on shame as transformed by cultural history, also a theme in Thomas J. Scheff and Suzanne M. Retzinger's *Emotions and Violence: Shame and Rage in Destructive Conflicts*. Gershen Kaufman's *Dynamics of Power: Fighting Shame and Building Self-Esteem* addresses the reader directly, offering "self-help," as does John Bradshaw's *Healing the Shame that Binds You*.

8. My contention of school and shame flies in the face of several recognized theories of shame formation, notably parent-child pattern. Gershen Kaufman is the best-known proponent of it. To Kaufman, shame operates through recalled interpersonal incidents in which the primary actor, one's self, somehow fails another. The prototype is a failure of the child to the parent; if the parent represents the power of authority, the one who commands obedience in the child's eyes, and the parent acts in an authoritarian manner, the child responds wih shame.

9. Sources for these quotes are Warriner and Griffith (446), an anonymous syllabus, Axelrod and Cooper (2), and writers I interviewed for this project.

10. Ethnographically oriented investigations and qualitative research interviews are also similar to the procedure described in *Abduction* by John Mack, made controversial by its subject, which begins by taking ET-abduction experiencers at face value, then theorizing from the common features of their stories. Mack's methodology resonates with my concern that teachers often do not hear writing students' problems.

11. For viewpoints on masculine development, see Robert J. Connors, "Teaching and Learning As a Man," *College English* 58 (February 1996) 137-57, and Lad Tobin, "Car Wrecks, Baseball Caps, and Man-to-Man Defense: The Personal Narratives of Adolescent Males," *College English* 58 (February 1996) 158-175.

12. Ellen Winner lists the traits that predict later creativity as involvement, focused attention, persistence, dominance, confidence, tolerance of competition, independence, introversion, and risk taking (301).

13. Young women have erotic, not ambitious, fantasies, Freud proclaims.

14. For an extended discussion, see pages 87-92 in *The Wisdom of the Ego*, by George E. Vaillant (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993), where I first learned of Freud's writing paralysis.

15. One effect is to illuminate a striking contrast between Freud's world and the automobile culture of the late twentieth century in the U.S., in which recreational vehicles allow a fantasy getaway Freud never imagined. And other objections to Freud's scheme come to mind quickly: Even Freud's contemporaries could have indulged their child-like dreams by other means than writing—climbing the peaks of the Alps was a popular recreation.

16. It is worth noting that Freud forces the desires of all young women into the erotic, not ambitious, category (147), based on his belief in women's sexual narcissism, yet he avoids taking the tantalizing logical step of using this theory to analyze women's novels.

17. This murder is reminiscent of Virginia Woolf's well-known statement that she murdered "the angel in the house," the Victorian female ideal who was preventing Woolf from writing.

18. In this project, writing-psychology theories that rest on gender-linked behavior have not been my focus. For example, I do not categorize each woman or man in terms of voice theory. On the other hand, I record histories that include important family anecdotes. Participants seemed to have individual characteristics that often did not align with a feminine or masculine type. In Chapter IV, I discuss patterns of reading and reflect on gender there.

19. The experiences included pre-school reading and writing at home self taught or taught by siblings and/or parents, grade-school reading and writing experiences, parents' coaching and/or criticism, school peer pressure to conform to handwriting and reading standards, school discipline and evaluation experiences, extra-curricular reading, high school classes and activities, undergraduate writing assignments and evaluations, experiences with plagiarism accusations, workplace writing, writing for publication, and writing of the graduate-level thesis.

20. Participants I interviewed show a range of writing-environment behavior, including restlessness, crying spells, kicking the wall or similar frustrated or angry physical activity, and panic attacks with hyperventilation and tachycardia.

21. See the explanation of the Listening Guide in *Between Voice and Silence: Women and Girls, Race and Relationship*, Jill McLean Taylor, Carol Gilligan, and Amy M. Sullivan Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1995, 28-38: "Psyche Embedded: A Place for Body, Relationships, and Culture in Personality Theory," Carol Gilligan, Lyn Mikel Brown, and Annie G. Rogers, in *Studying Persons and Lives*, A.I. Rabin, Robert A. Zucker, Robert A. Emmons and Susan Frank, eds. (New York: Springer, 1990, 86-126): and *Interpreting Experience. The Narrative Study of Lives*, Vol. 3, Ruthellen Josselson and Amia Lieblich, eds., Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995.

22. For in-depth essays, see *Gender and Reading* ed. Elizabeth Flynn and Patrocinio Schweickart (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986). For century-old warnings against reading, see *Medical Gynecology*, Howard A. Kelly (New York: D. Appleton, 1909).

23. Wolf and Heath's book, *Braid of Literature*, led me to Rachel Brownstein's study of heroines.

24. According to "Shirley," who has read this material, I have written a viable interpretation of the experience, as far as it goes, but it was more complex than that. My representation of Shirley's relationship to the teacher is inaccurate. Shirley says, since she did not imagine the teacher as a villain. She was a good person and a surrogate parent, in a sense. Shirley now remembers that in her story, no one could find her that day, which she believes gave the teacher some information about her somewhat troubled mother. In that case, the pat on the head that the teacher gives Shirley may have been in sympathy, Shirley feels. Shirley describes herself as a good, responsible student, but one who was a behavior problem in the classroom because she was often bored and talked a lot.

25. I am delighted to report that Shirley went on to finish her thesis and to receive her master's degree. Even more exciting, her school awarded her a prize for the best-written master's thesis.

26. To be "right" is as close as the student may come to having rights. Although politically each student is granted constitutional rights, within the educational institution a much more autocratic system is at work that does not make decisions democratically. Is this obsession with being right unconsciously a desire for suffrage? Being right—getting all As—looks to students like the way to be granted one's rights within the educational institution: in fact, however, being wrong often gains faculty attention and attendant privileges (e.g., extensions on deadlines) for students, while being right is taken for granted. Being right, then, is being processed by the system.

27. See Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences" (*Critical Theory Since Plato*, Hazard Adams, ed., Fort Worth: Harcourt, 1992, rev. ed. 1116-1126); see also Barbara Johnson, "Writing" (*Critical Terms for Literary Study*, Frank Lentricchia and Thomas McLaughlin, eds., Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995, 39-49).

28. I experiment with mental composing, now that I have discovered its possibilities, and have trained myself to "write" at least one sentence or rather the jist of it in the early morning several hours before I transcribe it onto paper. The limitations of this technique still await quantitative investigation.

29. The tetralogy by Bloom includes *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (1973), *A Map of Misreading* (1975), *Kabbalah and Criticism* (1975), and *Poetry and Repression* (1976).

30. Jack Nicholson has the part of a successful author with hand-washing rituals of OCD in "As Good As It Gets" (1998); Harry, played by Woody Allen, suffers from writer's block in Allen's "Deconstructing Harry" (1998); director Jane Campion shows author Janet Frame being given electro-convulsive "therapy" (ECT) in "An Angel At My Table."

31. In Chapter 2 of his recent book, *The Rise and Fall of English*, Robert Scholes frames the debate between these viewpoints.

32. At Boston's Computer Museum, however, programmers can buy a T-shirt that appears to support writing; it bears the message, "I'm a pogrammer/I'm a programmor/I'm a programmar/I write code." I'm grateful to Tony Collins for bringing this to my attention by wearing that very shirt.

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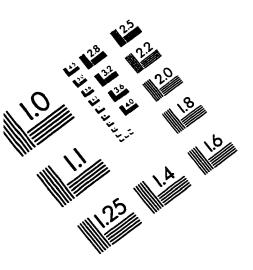
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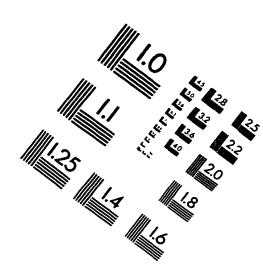
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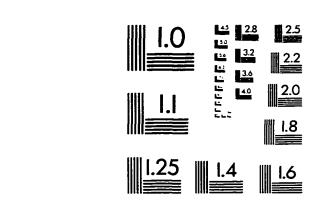
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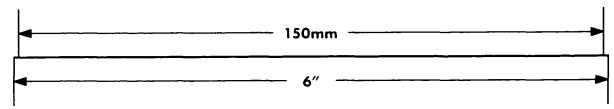Worsham, Lynn. "Emotion and Pedagogic Violence." *Discourse* 15.2 (1992-93): 119-148.

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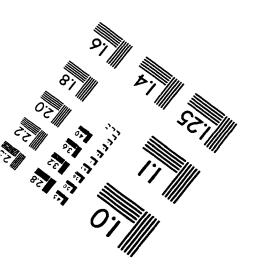
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