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IN SEARCH OF COPIA: A RHETORICAL APPROACH TO TEACHING
CREATIVE WRITING

By Ryan Solomon

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Brigham Young University in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of English

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GRADUATE COMMITTEE APPROVAL

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ABSTRACT

IN SEARCH OF COPIA: A RHETORICAL APPROACH TO TEACHING CREATIVE WRITING

Ryan Solomon

Department of English

Master of Arts

James Berlin, in his book *Rhetoric and Reality*, points out that our disparate epistemologies lead to inevitable classroom practices, which mean that different epistemologies impact our pedagogical approach and enforce certain views about the role and function of writing in classrooms. This thesis highlights the impact of Romantic beliefs about writing on creative writing pedagogy, as well as exploring

how those beliefs hamper the critical function of the workshop. Romantic beliefs have enforced the idea that talent and genius is most important in creative writing, and that writing is spontaneous, organic, original, and expressive. Because of this, many creative writing teachers have come to believe that a structured pedagogical approach hampers creative writing, but this creates problems in workshop where the need for collaborative criticism conflicts with Romantic beliefs. The result is that students, who are assumed to know how to offer effective criticism, struggle to negotiate expressive ideals as opposed to critical response. This thesis therefore explores the problems of Romantic beliefs in detail.

This thesis proposes the classical rhetorical curriculum, supported by appropriate rhetorical theory, as a solution to the problems created by Romantic beliefs. This curriculum provides a detailed, structured approach to teaching writing, which is best highlighted by the way it combined stylistic analysis together with production; therefore, helping students use criticism as a way to develop their writing. In doing so, I look at a rhetorical approach to style as detailed by Richard Lanham and Winston Weathers who emphasize helping students with stylistic analysis by helping students understand the function of style. Also, because I recognize that creative writers are often resistant to any discussion of the links between creative writing and rhetoric, this thesis emphasizes the critical links between creative writing and rhetoric, thereby showing that the view of rhetoric held by creative writers is a substantially reduced view of a more dynamic discipline. The truth is the two disciplines share a fundamental critical purpose aimed at assisting student in the production of new texts, and therefore, because the two disciplines have a great deal

in common, there is a viable opportunity to build on their theoretical links in order to enhance pedagogy in both disciplines. Therefore, this thesis looks at some specific ways that the classical rhetorical curriculum can be applied within the constraints of the contemporary creative writing classroom.

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Introduction

Paul is an undergraduate student entering his first creative writing class. He is excited to be in this class. The teacher is well respected and has published a number of books, and Paul can't wait to draw on his experience and learn how to improve his writing. But he is also intimidated about working with someone so experienced, and in the back of his mind Paul is worried about finding out that he is not cut out for writing. Paul is an avid reader of fiction, and although he has never been in a formal creative writing class before, he has been writing fiction since his senior year of high school. He is planning a novel, and he really hopes that he can make it as a writer.

The teacher arrives and begins introducing the syllabus for the semester. He explains that the class will spend some time doing in-class writing activities and reading, but the majority of class time will be focused on working on the students' writing. Therefore, students will participate in regular workshops where each student will submit their work to be read by their classmates and teachers, who will then critique the pieces read. This seems like an excellent idea to Paul, and as Paul listens to his teacher talk about workshops his excitement grows. It will be great to get some response to his work.

The first week or two of class is everything he imagined it would be, and he really enjoys being in a fun and creative environment. The class does regular free-writes and some playful writing activities, and as they work the teacher encourages them to just write what they feel, to express themselves, and not worry about what other people will think and say. This encourages Paul, who for the first time really

feels like he is connecting with his writing, and he is writing more than he has ever done. Each day his journal fills up with new material, and every night he spends time working on his novel.

Then time arrives for the first workshop session. Paul is so eager about his work that he offers to be one of the first to be critiqued. He and two other students hand their work to the rest of the class, and the teacher goes over the rules of the workshop again. The students will read the pieces and make appropriate comments, and then they will discuss those comments in class. However, the student being critiqued is not allowed to talk; he must just listen and not try to defend his piece.

That night Paul eagerly reads the other two pieces, but he struggles to make comments. As he reads he is constantly comparing what he is reading to his own work, and in some ways these pieces seem better than his, so he begins to feel inadequate about his own writing. Worse, he doesn't know what comments to make. He feels that there are problems with both pieces, but he can't quite put his finger on what is not working, and he struggles to read the stories and comment on them at the same time. Because he struggles to describe the problems, he makes the same vague comments about both pieces because he knows his comments count towards his grade, but when he enters class the next day he feels far from prepared.

Paul's piece is the first to be critiqued. His stomach feels like Old Faithful. He waits pensively to hear what everyone will say. One student starts with a good general comment, and Paul perks up, but then another student jumps in and starts questioning Paul's story. Why did Paul choose this idea? Paul can't say anything, even though he wants to, and another student jumps in to share his opinion, and soon

critique begins raining down. The teacher is particularly hard on Paul's dialogue, which he feels is flat, and he tells Paul that he needs to make the dialogue come alive. But Paul realizes that he doesn't really know how to make it come alive. Paul is also amazed at how much the students disagree and how heated the discussion becomes, and by the time they finish he feels completely overwhelmed. He sits grimly and listens to the other pieces being critiqued.

By the end of class Paul is completely deflated and discouraged. He recognizes that some of the comments are insightful, but so much of what he has heard is contradictory, and many of the comments are as vague as those he made, so he doesn't know what to do. After reading over the comments again, he decides to ignore most of what is said, except for the teacher's comments, since he must know what he is talking about. Paul also makes a plan to listen more carefully to what the teacher says so that he can make sure that his work fits his teacher's recommendations. He convinces himself that if he works harder then he'll be able to make this class a success. But needless to say, he is no longer quite so excited about his class.

*

In some ways, Paul's experience is quite typical of the experience of undergraduate students in creative writing workshops. Creative writing classes are designed to provide a creative, open, expressive environment where students work with the kind of writing that they really care about, and where students can find the freedom to express their authentic selves in tangible and powerful ways, while both giving and receiving useful feedback on their developing works. The growth of

creative writing programs, and the demand for creative writing classes,¹ is testament to the desire students have to experience such a “creative” environment, an environment where learning to write is exhilarating and inspiring.

But unfortunately, the workshop experience can also be “critical, doubting, winnowing” (Bishop 288). This is partly because students and teachers are unconsciously invested in maintaining the Romantic identity of the isolated, inspired genius espoused by many writers. This identity underlies so much discussion about creative writing that this identity is just assumed to be a reflection of the way that creative writers work, and creative writing teachers and students generally don’t stop to think about the consequences of that identity. The most problematic consequence is that students want to have that identity validated because they think it will confirm their creativity, and they therefore struggle not to take comments personally and often become defensive of the critique they receive, or when they give critique, they are often overly negative and unsympathetic. Also, most students have received very little training or guidance in offering critique or talking about writing technique, and so they struggle to offer helpful comments. Therefore, some students struggle with the open structure and the lack of clear direction given in workshops. In this case, students instead find creative writing classes stifling and discouraging.

The extent of these conflicting experiences, and the challenge they create for creative writing pedagogy, are detailed in recent books² on creative writing pedagogy

¹ For some detail on the number of creative writing programs see the AWP Directors Handbook, pp. 39.

² Moxley, Joseph, ed. *Creative Writing in America: Theory and Pedagogy*. Urbana, IL: NCTE 1989; Bishop, Wendy, and Orstom, Hans, eds. *Colors of a Different Horse*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1994; Leahy, Anna, ed. *Power and Identity in the Creative Writing Classroom: the Authority Project*. Buffalo, NY:

that highlight problems such as the critical approach used in the workshop, the challenge of student identity, the impact of the disciplinary identity of creative writing, and the difficulties created by conflicting assumptions about creative writing. Underlying all of the concerns raised is an awareness that the workshop is not working as effectively as it could. But although these books raise some excellent questions and offer viable solutions, no one has looked in detail at the impact of Romantic beliefs in creative writing pedagogy, which have a significant impact on the tensions experienced in the workshop. Also, there has been little consideration of a possible rhetorical approach to the criticism encountered in the workshop, and instead writers have focused mainly on specific composition practices.

It is important to emphasize that despite its problems, the workshop certainly has benefits. It was first introduced as a teaching tool with the creation of the first creative writing program at the University of Iowa in 1936 in order to meet the needs of the institutionalization of creative writing instruction, and is modeled after the apprenticeship system used in the artist's studio.³ The intention behind the workshop is to provide a practical, critical venue where students are mentored by an experienced writer and where, through critique, students provide feedback on each other's writing, while receiving comments from the teacher. Therefore, the workshop introduces students into the professional world of writing, while helping students develop their writing skills with the guidance of a master writer.

Multilingual Matters 2005; Ritter, Kelly, and Vanderslice, Stephanie, ed. *Can It Really Be Taught? Resisting Lore in Creative Writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton Cook 2007.

³ Detail on the contemporary rationale for modeling the workshop after the artist's studio is given by the AWP in their Handbook, pp. 6 – 7, and Myers discusses the historical rationale for the adoption of that model on pp. 79, 81 - 88.

The workshop therefore provides the opportunity for students to work with accomplished professionals who have experienced some of the rigors of the publishing world, as well as providing them with exposure to a critical audience that functions like an editorial board. This helps students prepare for some of the challenges of being published. Additionally, because the workshop has a very flexible structure it provides teachers the room to improvise, which provides room for creative teaching instruction (Moxley xiii).

But creative writing pedagogy is infused with Romantic beliefs about talent and genius, as well as the belief that writing is self-expressive, natural, and spontaneous; that writing develops through inspiration and is individual and authentic; and that the writing process is organic. These beliefs have helped reinforce assumptions about students such as these: that students are naturally gifted and just need their gift for writing unlocked, or that students are naturally capable of offering critique, or that writing is best learned in an unstructured environment, or that the best writing is “authentic” writing. Unfortunately, these Romantic beliefs, and their accompanying assumptions, conflict with and hamper the functioning of the workshop. For instance, when Romantic beliefs about talent and self-expression are mixed with the practical, collaborative, critical approach of the workshop, the result is the ideological tension and conflict of identity frequently experienced by students, which is highlighted in the recent books on creative writing pedagogy.

This conflict is especially reflected in the criticism given in the workshop, where students, trying to manage their Romantic identity and without a theoretical basis for criticism, struggle to give helpful feedback. This conflict therefore creates

challenges for students and teachers alike: students struggle with the criticism required in workshops, while teachers have the difficulty of trying to teach what is supposedly unteachable. More importantly, Romantic beliefs conflict with the goal of creative writing pedagogy as laid out in the *AWP Directors Handbook*, which is a guidebook for creative writing programs. It states:

Because a writer must become first a voracious and expert reader before he or she can master a difficult art, a strong program emphasizes a wide range of study of literature and other disciplines to provide students with the foundation they need to become resourceful writers – resourceful in techniques, styles, models, ideas, and subject matter. The goal of an undergraduate program is to teach students how to read critically as writers and give students the practice of writing frequently so that, by creating their own works, they may apply what they have learned about the elements of literature. An undergraduate course of study in creative writing gives students an overview of precedents established by writers of many eras, continents and sensibilities; it gives students the ability to analyze, appreciate, and create the components that comprise the works of literature. (14)

This is a sensible and viable approach to teach creative writing, but how is this comprehensive, structured approach to creative writing pedagogy to be married with assumptions underlying Romantic pedagogy? So as long as these assumptions continue to be a fundamental part of creative writing pedagogy it would seem

difficult, if not impossible, to really implement the comprehensive approach encouraged by the AWP.

I therefore call into question the Romantic beliefs underlying contemporary creative writing pedagogy, and my purpose in this thesis is to look at how Romantic beliefs came to influence creative writing instruction, and show how these beliefs lead to many of the problems encountered by students like Paul. Also, rhetorical theory, especially the principles underlying the classical rhetorical curriculum, offer important support for the stated critical objectives of creative writing pedagogy, and so my second purpose is to detail how the classical curriculum, supported with rhetorical theory, can provide an alternative to Romantic beliefs. The classical curriculum was specifically designed to help students become resourceful writers and critical readers, and provided a constructive theoretical approach to criticism. More importantly, the classical curriculum effectively combined instruction in creative writing and rhetoric together in a structured, sensible curriculum that helped students develop *copia*, or the ability to draw on a variety of stylistic techniques.

Unfortunately, creative writing teachers are generally resistant to rhetorical theory and believe that a rhetorical approach can only hamper the creative work done in creative writing classes. Therefore, I will also counter the view of rhetoric generally held by creative writers by showing that rhetoric is instead a much more dynamic discipline that shares critical and theoretical links with creative writing, and that actually provides an important theoretical basis for understanding the work done in creative writing. By doing so, I intend to show that the critical skills needed by creative writers are the same as those needed by rhetoricians, which means that the

two disciplines are not separated by purpose so much as by genre. Actually, the pedagogical links between the two disciplines are much stronger than often considered, and as such, the classical curriculum provides excellent support for the objectives of the creative writing workshop.

This thesis will proceed as follows:

Chapter 1 examines the historical development of Romantic pedagogy, as well as some of the assumptions that underlie Romantic beliefs, in order to show the impact of Romantic beliefs on the teaching of creative writing, and to confirm how problematic they are.

Chapter 2 shows how the principles underlying the classical rhetorical curriculum can support the critical approach required in creative writing instruction, and how that curriculum counters Romantic thinking.

Chapter 3 provides a counter view of rhetoric, with the purpose of challenging the prevailing view of current-traditional rhetoric held by many creative writers. The hope is to disabuse creative writers of the belief of the inutility of rhetoric for creative writing, and by providing a broader view of rhetoric, create a context whereby they might be linked.

Chapter 4 focuses on the issue of criticism in creative writing. Building on the rhetorical theory introduced in Chapter 3, it looks at stylistic analysis as a basis for criticism in the workshop, especially in helping students develop a writerly approach to reading.

Chapter 5 finally explains how the principles underlying the classical rhetorical curriculum can be applied in the context of the contemporary creative

writing classroom, especially the workshop. The result of this proposal is not a complete reworking of the workshop, but a restructuring of it within an improved rhetorical context, and therefore it provides an alternative way of looking at the workshop.

1. The Problem with Romantic Thinking in Creative Writing Pedagogy

Romantic thinking has had a powerful effect on writers' identities across the world, and Romantic references are regularly found in discussion of creative writing, including the discussion found in the recent works on creative writing pedagogy. Many creative writers, in describing their writing process, also help maintain the Romantic identity of the isolated, creative genius receiving inspiration from the "muses," and sometimes can be quite protective of that identity.

Forms of Romantic thinking have existed since Plato's *Gorgias*, but Romanticism developed into a significant epistemology through the works of Romantic poets writing in the 18th and 19th centuries, including Coleridge and Wordsworth in England, and Emerson in America. Romanticism was a direct reaction to 18th century Enlightenment thinking, especially epistemologies that encouraged a reliance on positivistic, scientific thinking to uncover knowledge. This epistemology is best reflected in the scientific thinking of scholars such as Locke and Descartes,⁴ who argued that sensory experience and scientific experiment could lead one to discover truth in what they believed was an empirical, objective world.

Such thinkers, especially Locke, helped encourage the idea that language was clear and transparent –that language represented concrete, real things – and that the detached writer should aim for perspicuity. Locke, and other scientific thinkers of his time, therefore believed that plain expression should be emphasized in writing. Locke argued that language served,

⁴ For more detail on the impact of Enlightenment thinking, especially Lockean and scientific thinking, on the instruction of writing and on discussion of rhetoric, see Bizzell and Herzberg's *The Rhetorical Tradition*, pp. 791 – 813. They also provide interesting detail on the Royal Society's attempt to develop a scientific language.

First, to make known one's thoughts or ideas to another; secondly, to do it with as much ease and quickness as possible; and thirdly, thereby to convey knowledge of things; language is either abused or deficient when it fails of any of these three. (825)

Locke felt that language should clearly represent reality, and anything that hampered clarity of representation was deficient. Therefore, he believed that figurative language obscured the truth:

If we would speak of things as they are, we must allow, that all the art of rhetoric, besides order and clearness, all the artificial and figurative application of words Eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgment, and so indeed are perfect cheats. (827)

Thomas Sprat's *History of the Royal Society*, published in 1667, highlights that the clear expression expected by scientific thinkers was to be marked by "a close, naked, natural way of speaking; positive expressions; clear senses; a native easiness; bringing all things as near the Mathematical plainness as they can" (qtd in Covino 44).

It is no wonder that Romantic writers reacted against such ideas; after all, they appreciated the subjective, slippery nature of language and the power of figurative language, and they wanted an epistemology that represented that. Romanticism therefore provided a value system that recognized the complex, emotional and social nature of human beings, a value system that was heavily influenced by liberal movements in England and America in the 19th century. Because of those values,

Romantic thinkers recognized how subjective and creative perception is, and therefore encouraged self-awareness and self-criticism, as well as skepticism and iconoclasm. Romantic thinking therefore had a significant influence on modernist and post-modernist thinking. Also, Romantic thinkers encouraged creative approaches to writing and helped writers break free of some of the regimented approaches that were being used by certain writers at the time.

But attached to the critical approach that Romanticism encourages are the beliefs that writing is spontaneous, natural, organic, imaginative, expressive, and individual; that good writers possess a natural capacity for writing that is unlocked through inspiration; that writing is self-originating and self-organizing; and that good writing is authentic and sincere. These beliefs have led to a great deal of conflict in creative writing pedagogy as teachers have tried to mix these beliefs with some of the more practical elements of creative writing pedagogy.

James Berlin observes that different epistemologies have an impact on classroom practice because they indoctrinate students into specific assumptions about who they are as writers, and about how language works, which then makes certain ways of working with language inevitable. He remarks:

The noetic field underlying a particular rhetoric determines how the composing process is conceived and taught in the classroom. What goes into the process – the way in which invention, arrangement, and style are undertaken or not undertaken, as is sometimes the case – is determined by assumptions made, and often unexamined, about reality, writer/speaker, audience, and language. Each rhetoric,

therefore, indicates the behavior appropriate to the composing situation. Beyond that it directs the behavior of teacher and student in the classroom, making certain kinds of activity inevitable. (2)

Therefore, Romantic thinking, both through its conscious and unconscious influence, introduces students to particular assumptions about writing and writing processes.

The way students think writing is done, and how it is discovered, is tied directly to the paradigms that direct how writing is taught, which then significantly impacts the way students interact with writing. For instance, Romantic thinking has led some creative writing students to believe that they must create unique, innovative texts if they are to be considered talented, which limits their reliance on earlier texts. Also, students often believe that because writing is inspired, good writing comes out nearly perfect the first time, and then just needs to be touched up in revision. Of course there are more problems created by Romantic thinking, and some of these will be explored in more detail in this chapter, but first I want to look at Romantic beliefs, and where they came from, in more detail.

Exploring Romantic Thinking

Ralph Waldo Emerson is an important model of Romantic thinking because of his critically important role in the development of American Romanticism/ Transcendentalism, and because of his influence on literary scholarship in America. He influenced many of his contemporaries by calling for the development of “American” literature, and in many ways he was also an inspiration for the idea of the formal study of creative writing in America. As DG Myers explains, Emerson’s address *The American Scholar* actually introduces the idea of creative writing as a

body of study (31). In his speech, Emerson criticized the study of philology, a scientific approach to literary criticism that was prominent at the time, and he argued that the focus of literary studies should be on the literary act, and not the literary record. Therefore Emerson believed that English studies should include literary production, or creative writing (Myers 32).

Emerson also introduced important American beliefs about individuality and democracy into Romantic beliefs, as well as encouraging the anti-institutional thinking that was part of British Romanticism. Much of Emerson's thinking had a powerful influence on other American writers, extending well into the 20th century. Therefore, his thinking has had a strong influence on the identity of creative writing programs, and many creative writers still work to maintain this individual, anti-institutional identity today.

Emerson's essay *The Poet* is an excellent reflection of Romantic beliefs and highlights of some of the problematic assumptions behind Romanticism. For instance, Emerson argues that "writing is not so much about what you know, what skills you have, but a natural inclination to art" (205). His reference to the natural inclination for writing is a fundamental element of Romantic thinking, with talent considered the foundation of writing capacity. He continues, "The condition of true naming, on the poet's part, is his resigning himself to the divine aura which breathes through forms, and accompanying that [aura]" (198). Then he remarks, "As the traveler who has lost his way throws his reins on his horse's neck, and trusts to the instinct of the animal to find his road, so must we do with the divine animal who carries us through this world." (199).

For Emerson, because writing stemmed from a natural capacity, the function of the writer was to submit to inspiration, a reflection of Emerson's belief that the capacity to write lay beyond practice or effort. It was only necessary to find a suitably inspiring environment, and he therefore repeatedly discounted the effect of study in improving one's writing. For instance, he says, "For we do not speak now of men of poetical talents, or of *industry and skill in metre*, but of the *true poet*" (190 emphasis added). It was not work that made the writer, but rather helping "the soul of the poet come to ripeness of thought" (197).

Therefore, Emerson argues that the poet "who troubles himself about his ornaments or fluency is lost – the poet shall not spend time in *unneeded work*" (205). Again he emphasizes that "this insight, which expresses itself by what is called Imagination, is a very high sort of seeing, *which does not come by study*, but by the intellect being where and what it sees" (198).

Emerson calls on poets to "believe your own thought, to believe what is true for you in your own private heart, is true for all men – that is genius" (191). Therefore, Emerson argues that poets possess within themselves all they need to create poetry. Emerson even gave Romanticism an esoteric, even religious, face. He remarks that the poet is "the sayer, the namer, and represents beauty. He is a sovereign, and stands on the centre" (189).

Compare Emerson's comments to earlier British Romantics. For instance, Wordsworth declared that "poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings," which again reinforces the belief that writing is inspired. Similarly, Keats argued that "if poetry comes not as naturally as the leaves to a tree it had better not come at all"

(891). This obviously creates a predicament for writers experiencing writer's block. And then Blake argues that good poetry is produced "without labour or study," (12) which Shelley confirms with his belief that it is "an error to assert that the finest passages of poetry are produced by labor and study" (798).

It is possible to see from Emerson's comments, and the comments made by earlier Romantics, what influence Romantic beliefs can have in a classroom. For instance, the Romantic belief that writing is a combination of talent and inspiration results in an emphasis in many creative writing classes on identifying and guiding natural capacity. And because the good writer is the talented writer, students are encouraged to rely on natural insight. Therefore, the focus of invention is on seeking creative insight, which Emerson believed is best uncovered in nature, and when it arrives, students are encouraged to run with it. Also, because creative writing is supposed to be intuitive and unconscious, the result is an emphasis on imagination and talent, with the accompanying belief that writers are born, not made. As such, Romantic beliefs encourage solitude, spontaneity and expression of imagination, thereby encouraging the belief that writers receive creative inspiration from some mystical, unknown source. As Brent Royster, a creative writer who criticizes Romantic beliefs in creative writing, remarks, in creative writing classrooms texts are therefore "unpremeditated, and unconsciously formed by the writer who, until now, acts as the catalyst" (28).

But how did Romantic thinking come to take such a strong hold on creative writing? Well, as was mentioned earlier, Emerson, in calling for a new form of "creative" writing, had a strong influence on his contemporaries, many of whom

agreed with, and were encouraged by, Romantic beliefs. Emerson also influenced institutional thinking in English departments, and in some ways his thinking sowed the seeds for the idea of creative writing departments.

For instance, as was also mentioned, Emerson's essay *The American Scholar* was a reaction to the philological approach to literary studies, which many felt had resulted in "austere and uninspiring scholarship, obsessed with the ideal of scientific knowledge" (Myers 16), and which had treated literature as "mere material for analysis" rather than a creative art (16). Philology stemmed from the scientific thinking that arose during the Enlightenment, and many scholars involved in the study of literature, especially those who did "creative" writing, were interested in looking for new ways of studying literature. Therefore, they naturally turned to Romantic beliefs, especially those espoused by Emerson, to counter the scientific approach that was prominent in the study of literature.

Then, as important changes began to take place in literary studies, the advent of progressive education began to lead to changes in the teaching of composition, which had also been impacted by the scientific approach to the study of writing reflected in current-traditional rhetoric. Compositionists who were resistant to current-traditional rhetoric also began to turn Romantic beliefs to look for new ways to teach writing, and this resulted in the development of expressivist pedagogy, which was influenced by scholars like Barret Wendell and Hughes Mearns, who were in turn influenced by Emerson. For instance, Mearns expressed similar sentiments to Emerson, and he believed that creative writing was the best way to teach writing because it encouraged self-expression. Thus, creative writing could be used "to touch

some of the secret sources of [student's] lives, to discover and bring out the power they possessed but, through timidity or ignorance, could not use; to develop personality" (qtd in Myers 112). Mearns also believed that a writer could not be taught, but needed help "uncheck[ing] the flow of expression" (qtd in Myers 115).

The efforts to change literary studies and the efforts to change composition studies were both important motivating influences for the establishment of the first formal creative writing programs, especially the program at the University of Iowa, established in 1936 by Norman Foerster. Foerster actually established the workshop at Iowa as a forum to combine the criticism of literature with the creation of literature, just as Emerson had called for. Therefore, Romantic beliefs were prominent in the identity of this new discipline. Further, as workshops began to emphasize production over criticism, and stopped being a venue for literary studies, expressivist ideas began to influence workshop practice. As such, workshops became an important venue for Romantic resistance to current-traditional rhetoric and for the development of expressivist pedagogy.

Romantic beliefs are prominent in expressivist pedagogy, as shown by Mearns' comments. The expressivists, as previously mentioned, were resistant to the formalistic approach reflected in current-traditional rhetoric that was prominent at the time, and which focused on the Lockean belief that writing should be clear and efficient. Thus, expressivist pedagogy became an important foil for current-traditional rhetoric for a good part of the 20th century.

James Berlin provides an excellent explanation of the pedagogy that has been labeled expressivist. He remarks that expressivism emphasizes the "personal and

private nature of knowledge and composing” (73). Because students possess innate creative potential, they need an environment where they are free to unlock their unique capacities, and through writing students are provided a way to get in touch with the “source of all human experience and shape a new better self” (75). The belief is that this creative process is organic, with students attempting to express the “product of a private and personal vision that cannot be expressed in everyday language” (74). That is why expressivist pedagogy focuses on fresh, imaginative use of figurative, or metaphoric, language.

Berlin quotes Weaver, who comments that students “must catch the passing phenomena in all of its idiosyncrasy; must dive into the bodily stream of sensation, momentarily escap[ing] from the inertia and momentum of practical life” (75). Again we see the link of writing to inspiration and mystical experience, and the emphasis of creative writing as an escape from the monotony of life.

As Berlin explains, expressivist beliefs are a “union of patrician romanticism, aesthetic expressionism, and a domesticated Freudianism,” (74) emphasizing that creativity can help unlock the unconscious. Also, because expressivism developed as a reaction to “repressive” institutionalization, expressivism emphasizes a liberal, progressive, individual, anti-institutional, independent form of education that encouraged self-expression, in line with some of Emerson’s declaration in *The American Scholar*. The independent, anti-institutional component of expressivism is important to note, because it mirrors earlier Romantic thinking, and because it is an intrinsic part of the Romantic identity of writers that is reflected in contemporary creative writing instruction.

Expressivist thinking has changed over time, especially as it has absorbed modern rhetorical ideas, but it is still possible to see Romantic thinking in the work of contemporary expressivists like Peter Elbow. Although certain elements of his pedagogical approach are much more pragmatic than that of earlier Romantics, his focus on natural capacity and imagination, and his description of writing as mysterious and magical, is almost identical to early Romantics. Elbow remarks,

I seem to have drifted into a magical view of writing.... I am saying you must magically devour what you are writing about if you want to put a successful hex on the reader – you must enter into the thing or merge your soul with the thing.... It is almost as if I am saying you must purify yourself in a blameless holy rite or else your words will not have grace. (357)

His comments only help enforce the belief that writing is an esoteric process that cannot be understood. On the other hand, Elbow also includes viable compositional processes and techniques in his discussion of writing. This reflects the growing presence of pragmatism in creative writing, which is a result of the institutionalization of creative writing and the influence of composition instruction, and the impact of this pragmatism will be discussed shortly.

Another important example of modern Romantic pedagogical beliefs is expressed by Frank Conroy, who directed the Iowa Workshop for 18 years. He describes learning to write as “unconscious mimesis” (xi). This reflects a belief held by many creative writers that it is possible to learn to imitate writing unconsciously, as part of a natural, osmotic process, or learning by ear. Conroy does point out the

necessity of being “pulled into a deeper consideration of the function of language” (xii), and he emphasizes that students need to learn to fine-tune their use of language and become more precise in expression. The problem is that he undermines these considerations with Romantic notions like writers are “dependent upon forces that are not fully understood and usually impossible to control” (xii). Therefore, he argues that students must learn to be less afraid of the “mystical or Zen aspects of creative writing” (xii).

Conroy’s reference to unconscious mimesis is also interesting because in some ways it highlights the way Romantic beliefs have come to have such a strong influence on creative writing pedagogy. Most teachers don’t actively preach Romantic beliefs in an overt manner, but Romantic beliefs have worked into contemporary creative writing discussion in such a compelling way that they have been unconsciously absorbed into the discipline, and many creative writers don’t even think about the impact of Romantic beliefs. It is just assumed that Romantic beliefs are a valid reflection of what happens in the creative writing process, which is why it is so important to take a critical look at Romantic beliefs.

The examples provided help to show the influence of Romantic thinking in creative writing instruction, the main result of which has been to lead many of those who teach creative writing to believe that writing cannot be taught; teachers can only assist in unlocking latent talent. Myers describes this belief as “creative writing’s stutter of self-doubt” (112), which is an excellent way of describing the conflict between trying to maintain Romantic beliefs while still having a practical pedagogical approach. Of course, the same stutter of self-doubt can also be found in some

composition discussion, but it has been most problematic in creative writing pedagogy, where creative writing teachers try to compromise by creating an open environment for learning that encourages students to write. Unfortunately, that has resulted in the hands-off, unstructured approach to the workshop that is proving to be problematic. Therefore, the difficulty for creative writing teachers is to try and develop a pedagogy for something that supposedly cannot be taught, and it would seem like Romantic beliefs would only complicate this conflict.

The difficulty of trying to manage Romantic ideals is best reflected in the workshop. For instance, the collaborative criticism of the workshop conflicts with Romantic identity of the individual, spontaneous, and inspired writer; and the editorial process reflected in workshop criticism doesn't combine well with the spontaneous, natural process of writing described by many Romantics. Writing is supposed to come naturally to creative, imaginative writers, and if it doesn't, that would imply that the student or teacher is not a "creative" writer, thus threatening their identity. Also, because creative writers are supposed to be independent and anti-institutional, creative writers are supposed to be resistant to formal or structured instruction.

Actually, many of the professional aspects of writing and publishing would seem to conflict with the self-expressive beliefs of Romantic thinking, but perhaps the main conflict between Romantic ideals and creative writing pedagogy is the difficulties Romantic ideals present to the criticism done within the workshop. The workshop is intended to be an open, flexible venue where students can talk about and work on their writing, and where they can learn to read as writers, but because the

workshop is structured around Romantic assumptions about talent and genius, students are not given specific guidance in reading or criticism. This is because it is assumed that student writers are naturally able to talk about and criticize writing. Additionally, students often aren't given a specific methodology for identifying and talking about writing technique, and are often not led through the pre-writing stages of writing, because it is assumed that they already know what to do.

The result of trying to mix this complex Romantic identity with the practical, performative requirements of the workshop is the conflicting experience described by Wilbers in his book on the Iowa Workshop, where students either flourish or flounder, and where students either reap the benefits of a serious writing environment or are damaged by unsympathetic criticism and the loss of artistic identity (125). Even David Fenza, director of the AWP, in defending the workshop, described his own experience as “competitive, supportive, cruel, generous, and critical” (17), which again reflects the conflict of experience that can occur in the workshop.

Trying to manage this conflicting identity seems to be extremely difficult, and I therefore want to look in more detail at how the three assumptions that were mentioned above – the assumption that students know how to offer criticism, the assumption that it is clear what the craft of creative writing is, and the assumption that students don't need to be led through a writing process – make life more difficult for teachers and students in the workshop. Then the rest of this thesis will look at how rhetorical theory, and the classical curriculum, can provide solutions to some of these specific problems.

1. The problem with workshop criticism:

Student criticism is central to the workshop, and requires students to make value judgments about their own and their peers' writing, but students often can't do that effectively because they haven't been trained to analyze stylistic features of writing. The result is that students focus on what is said in a text, rather than how it is said, which in turn leads students to make vague comments in their critique. As Moxley explains, "The workshop presumes that students already know how to write, that they are capable of determining whether a piece of work 'works,' that they are familiar with traditional and contemporary literature, that all they need to master the craft is a little practice before a critical, peer audience" (xiv).

The reality is that most students aren't equipped with either some or all of these assumed capacities. Instead, students generally struggle to talk about writing issues, unless they have spent a great deal of time in workshops. Also, because they have not been trained in analyzing style they instead rely on unconsciously acquired writing skills, or personal impressions of what is good or bad, to detail what they see in writing. None of this is very helpful to students trying to make revisions based on the comments they receive.

As Amanda Boulter reminds us, in the workshop we see a reflection of a range of value judgments about "creativity, imagination, originality, and 'real' literature" (139). She also reminds us that students have "very different reasons for being in the classroom, and very different intentions as writers" (139). Therefore, without specific guidance being given to students, it is to be expected that students will have different approaches to texts. The result of different student approaches is

the subjective, genre-biased criticism of writing (meaning students favor their own genre) that is often encountered in workshops.

This is especially problematic when one considers how emotionally attached students are to their writing, and how students struggle to see comments made as a reflection of the piece of writing, rather than of themselves. Unfortunately, this is often an extension of students' need to hold to the Romantic identity of the writer, which reinforces the belief that their writing is actually a reflection of who they are, or at least, who they conceive themselves to be. Therefore, it is only to be expected that they should be defensive of, and resistant to, criticism. Mix the need for students to maintain their Romantic identity with their subjective approach to texts and the result is the "critical, doubting, and winnowing" (288) described by Bishop. Bruce Dobler, a graduate of Iowa, remarks that he was dismayed by "the bickering of students, the constant biting and clawing" (qtd in Wilbers 130). This is not a reflection of all workshops, or a reflection of the experience of all students within workshops, but again, we see another example of the inconsistencies that can occur in creative writing pedagogy.

Unfortunately, the Romantic focus on talent doesn't provide a very effective theoretical basis for considering and handling criticism. As Francois Camoin, a former professor of creative writing, argues, students want more from teachers than "Be like me. Write." (Which is not very useful advice, finally)" (5). Fortunately, there is plenty of good critical theory that can support creative writing criticism, especially in rhetoric, and that theory is certainly needed if students are to come to terms with Romantic beliefs. Chapter 4 will look at some specific ways rhetorical

analysis can support creative writing criticism, but in order to understand the value of rhetorical analysis for creative writing it is necessary to explore two more problems reflected in the workshop – the problem of identifying and teaching craft in creative writing, and the problem of lack of attention to pre-writing.

2. The problem with craft:

In proposing his solution to creative writing pedagogy, Moxley states, “We need to teach students to read like writers” (xii). Moxley then clarifies what this approach to reading requires: “The student’s focus should not be on themes or principles of literary criticism, but on choices authors considered when composing. Writing students need to become active readers – to study the point of view, the tone, the plotting and other techniques employ” (259). This is another pragmatic approach to writing instruction, and the belief that creative writing students should learn to read like writers, or acquire critical reading skills, is a recurring theme in creative writing pedagogy. The importance of reading as a writer is also supported by the AWP goals, but the workshop often doesn’t provide the right kind of support in teaching students how to do this because it is assumed that students know how to identify the strategies employed by different writers.

It is certainly true that a great deal of exposure to writing, supported by reading, will assist students to become better writers, and that is what the workshop hopes to provide, but is it enough to rely on unconscious acquisition of skills? How can students exercise choices in their writing when they don’t know what choices are available to them, or if they don’t know how to evaluate choices? Is it not possible for

teachers to make students aware of some of the range of options available so that students can become more conscious of how different techniques can be employed?

Tim Mayer's solution is for creative writing teachers to teach the craft of creative writing ("Figuring the Future" 3). But, unfortunately, here again Romantic beliefs create problems because craft is often made amorphous in Romantic discussions. For instance, many Romantics believe that creative writing is soliloquy, and believe that the aim of the writer is supposed to be reflection, not action (Bizzell et al. 995). But if writing is soliloquy, then what techniques make for successful writing? This is just one example of the tension that exists in Romantic discussion of craft. Also, because Romantic beliefs encourage a creative expression and a resistance to formal structure, creative writers are often resistant to any formal study of technique.

There is no doubt that students need a clear idea of what the craft of creative writing is made up of in order to understand what to look for in their reading, and also to know how to increase their own range of technique. But teaching specific technique would require a more comprehensive understanding of writing effects than offered under Romantic beliefs. Mayer also proposes a rhetorical approach to teaching creative writing craft in his book *(Re)Writing Craft*, but although he offers some helpful guidance, he draws on creative writers' discussion of craft rather than looking to the existing rhetorical tradition as a way to challenge Romantic beliefs.

Also, if students are to be taught to read as writers, they need to have specific exposure to a variety of reading in the workshop, rather than just reading each other's work. Students therefore need to be given the opportunity to develop their critical

skills by working with texts that identify different types of techniques, and once they develop those skills they can then identify technique in any reading they do.

Therefore the way reading supports the workshop is important to the effectiveness of the workshop.

3. The problem with prewriting:

The final problem that I will look at is the focus in workshops on the final product. Generally in workshops, students are required to submit complete, polished pieces for critique, and this means that students don't get to spend enough time working with and discussing their pieces in pre-writing stages. And because students don't get to discuss developing pieces, they don't get to discuss the thinking that went into a piece, and how the idea developed, and this costs them another opportunity to develop a critical vocabulary, as well as to see how writers make choices. They also lose an opportunity to experiment with different approaches to writing and try different techniques. Again, the cause of this situation is an assumption stemming from Romantic thinking, in this case the assumption that students "already know how to gather, shape, and revise material" (Moxley xiv).

Unfortunately, that is often not the case, and students, especially students in their first creative writing classes, need guidance in working through the different stages of writing and seeing how these different stages work together. Many students have also developed bad writing habits through earlier writing experiences, and these bad habits can be corrected if students are made to see what effect those bad habits have on their writing process. More importantly, working at different stages of writing, especially on the same piece, gives students the opportunity to experiment

with different approaches and explore new ways of writing. It also helps students see different ways of approaching the process of invention of ideas.

What is most troubling about the workshop focus on final product is that students often become afraid of being criticized for their work, so they protect themselves by specifically avoiding experimentation, and instead write material in anticipation of being critiqued. Of course this is another example of students trying to protect their Romantic identity. But what is especially interesting about students' concern with their workshop audience, and their attempt to mitigate potential criticism, is that it shows that students are aware of the impact of audience. Obviously, audience awareness counters the belief that creative writing should be expressive and not rhetorical, but the attempt by students to mitigate criticism also undermines the creative opportunities that the workshop aims for.

Conclusion

These three areas of concern are certainly not a reflection of all the problems experienced in creative writing classes, and of course, these problems are not a reflection of all creative writing classrooms. Actually, judging from some of the recent discussion on creative writing pedagogy, there are increasing numbers of creative writing teachers experimenting with innovative solutions. Even back in 1987 Gerald Stern remarked about interest in changing the workshop, stating, "Everywhere I go the workshop instructors are designing strategies to revivify workshops, to make them more exciting or more directed for students, to make them more bearable for instructors" (qtd in Moxley xi), and some of those strategies are detailed in *Creative Writing in America*, and the other recent texts on creative writing pedagogy. But

Stern also points out that “there is doubt about the procedure, almost a kind of crisis” (xi).

Stern highlights that there isn't a clear idea amongst creative writers of where to look for solutions, although a number of creative writing teachers have looked to literature and composition to find solutions. The problem is that many of the solutions offered are just integrated into Romantic pedagogy, instead of being solutions that tackle Romantic assumptions directly. Again, Berlin reminds us that epistemology has a significant impact on how we teach, and that is certainly reflected in creative writing pedagogy. Therefore, unless Romantic thinking is properly addressed, it may be difficult to implement broad changes in creative writing pedagogy.

The irony is that the workshop is a very viable pedagogical approach to using collaboration for critical learning of writing. It can be a very effective mechanism for combining criticism and production together, which probably explains why it is a pedagogical strategy that has attracted so much attention in composition pedagogy. Writing is, after all, a collaborative activity, and an environment that emphasizes collaboration can help students see that writing is not isolated from other people or isolated in time. The creative writing workshop also has the extra benefit of committed and motivated students who want to learn to write, as opposed to composition classes where students are required to take the course.

The principles underlying the classical rhetorical curriculum, which will be discussed in the next chapter, supported with current rhetorical theory, provide viable solutions for a number of the problems encountered in the workshop, as well as a much more sensible way of approaching the challenges of criticism and reading,

discussion of technique, and the writing process, than that offered by a Romantic approach to pedagogy. Most importantly, these principles support the critical goals set by a variety of creative writing teachers and the AWP, and these principles augment the critical purpose of the workshop, rather than requiring an overall change of creative writing pedagogy. But it is only by being willing to question Romantic assumptions and by being willing to look at creative writing through a new lens that these solutions will be seen as productive and viable.

2. (Creative) Writing in the Classical Curriculum

As was mentioned in the last chapter, Romantic beliefs hamper critical discussion in the workshop, and prevent students and teachers from identifying writing techniques. Therefore, a solution is needed that counters Romantic beliefs and that supports both the critical and the productive components of the workshop. Fortunately, a viable solution can be found in the principles of the classical curriculum. It is important to emphasize that Romantic thinking is defined by its opposition to certain Enlightenment thinking, but prior to the Enlightenment the ancients considered writing instruction in a different light, and they therefore developed a sophisticated curriculum that trained students in critical skills and helped students identify and assimilate writing techniques. Sharon Crowley and Deborah Hawhee explain:

Contemporary rhetors [and I would add creative writing teachers] sometimes assume that great writers are born with inherent creative ability that is denied to the rest of us.... We often think that authors or poets have found the best and only way to express anything. This is quite a modern notion, having to do with Romantic attitudes toward originality and the uniqueness of creative ability. The ancients viewed creativity in a far different light: they thought that craft played a large role in the production of fine writing, and that craft could be learned through practice. (312)

The philosophy that informed classical writing instruction contrasts significantly with Romantic ideas. For instance, Quintilian, an important Roman educator and teacher of

rhetoric, believed that talent needed to be combined with specific training, otherwise that talent could not be properly developed. He says:

The perfect [writer] cannot come into existence except by a combination of the two [talent and teaching]. Nature will be able to do a lot without teaching, and without nature there can be no teaching.... But the perfect [writer] owes more to teaching than nature. Similarly, an infertile soil will not be improved even by the best farmer, and good land will yield a useful crop even if no one tills it, but on any fertile ground the farmer will do more than the goodness of the soil can do by itself. (II 11.19)

Because Quintilian believed that talent could be augmented with careful instruction, he developed an approach to teaching that provided a focused structure within which students could become aware of style and technique. In developing his curriculum, Quintilian was heavily influenced by the work of Isocrates, who also believed that the teacher had a vital role to play in helping students learn to write. Isocrates stated that

In the art of [writing], credit is won not by gifts of fortune, but by efforts of study. For those who have been gifted with eloquence by nature and by fortune, are governed in what they say by chance, and not by any standard of what is best, whereas those who have gained this power by study and exercise of language never speak [or write] without weighing their words, and so are less often in error as to a course of action. (292)

Isocrates makes some interesting comments about the relationship between judgment and the exercise of choice versus reliance on chance, but more importantly, his comments point towards a sophisticated rhetorical system built on thinking that is consistently being supported by modern scholarship. The driving force behind this curriculum was the belief that in order for students to exercise choices in their writing, they needed to know what choices were available to them and understand the influence those choices have. The curriculum was therefore designed to help students become more aware of the different options available in various writing situations so that they could be more conscious of how to apply stylistic choices. Quintilian describes his goal as helping writers develop an “assured faculty, with which [they] use strategies and knowledge they possess” (X 7.8). Developing this faculty implies the need for certain kinds of knowledge in order to exercise the relevant strategies.

Edward Corbett, who has done extensive research on the classical curriculum, says that

[The curriculum] made students pay attention to the potentialities of precise, concrete diction, of emphatic disposition of words, and of figures of speech. They become aware of the flexibility of the language in which they were working, and learned quickly to extend their own range.... They learned that what was best for one occasion was not best for another, and the curriculum was intended to develop, in order, the powers of attention and observation, the imagination, and habits of reflection. (292)

Through careful reading, the curriculum helped students understand what language does. Therefore, because style was considered within a rhetorical context, students were made aware of the flexibility of style in influencing people – meaning they studied the role of style in rhetorical effect. Therefore students were asked to analyze different stylistic effects so that they could judge which effects would be most appropriate for a particular audience. Students were then assisted in developing the capacity to judge between effects in different contexts.

By providing students with a rhetorical awareness of writing, supported with specific, critical practice, the ancients helped students understand the craft of writing. Compare the structure of this curriculum with the stated pedagogical goals of the AWP quoted earlier:

Because a writer must become first a voracious and expert reader before he or she can master a difficult art, a strong program emphasizes a wide range of study of literature and other disciplines to provide students with the foundation they need to become *resourceful writers* – resourceful in techniques, styles, models, ideas, and subject matter. The goal of an undergraduate program is to teach students how to *read critically as writers* and give students the *practice of writing* frequently so that, by creating their own works, they may apply what they have learned about the elements of literature. An undergraduate course of study in creative writing gives students an *overview of precedents* established by writers of many eras, continents and sensibilities; it gives students the *ability to analyze, appreciate, and*

create the components that comprise the works of literature. (14
emphasis added)

The classical curriculum provided a sophisticated basis for addressing all of the issues highlighted by the AWP. Instead of relying on talent, it supported collaborative criticism by focusing on specific issues of craft and provided a carefully designed approach that not only taught techniques of writing but also helped students to become more aware critics of style by providing them with analytical vocabulary. Desiderius Erasmus describes this process as helping students develop *copia*, or “richness of expression” (1.8). As such, the goal of the curriculum was to provide students with an abundance of writing options, both in terms of language, figures, and stylistic strategies.

This pedagogical approach provides a solid basis for reading texts as a writer, by combining a wide range of reading with rhetorical analysis. Also, in contrast to the unconscious mimesis described by Frank Conroy, this pedagogical approach actually helped students to be very conscious of different writing choices, while training them in exercising those choices by using specific, conscious imitation. Therefore the curriculum helped contextualize writing by having students read good examples of writing in a variety of genres, encouraging them to consciously imitate writing strategies, and then finally helping students adopt those strategies through a variety of practice-based exercises that encouraged experimentation with different forms of writing. Students were therefore engaged in writing at all stages, from developing ideas through to the final product.

James Murphy, in *A Short History of Writing Instruction*, gives a good overview of this process of instruction. He explains that students “were taught precepts and then allowed to practice. These were not hard and fast rules, but they allowed students to know how language works, and helped them to apply judgment” (64). Murphy mentions the importance of teaching judgment, which was supported by helping students understand the rhetorical function of language. This is a reminder that style had a rhetorical context in classical instruction, an issue explored in more detail in Chapter 4.

The classical approach to writing instruction is markedly different from the conflicted approach of the creative writing workshop where students often don't have required, directed readings, but spend most of their time reading each other's work; and where they don't get much guidance in identifying different stylistic strategies, or in offering critique. Therefore, it becomes much more difficult for them to be critical judges of their own work – let alone the work of their classmates. As discussed previously, the intention behind the workshop model is to provide students the opportunity to become better critics and writers by helping them understand how writing works, but because of Romantic beliefs, the workshop often doesn't provide the necessary support to develop and apply critical technique. Moreover, the lack of a clear critical theory underlying workshops works against any standard of writing taught.

The ancients believed that effective writing required judgment as well as talent, and so the curriculum was designed to train and direct students in the exercise of judgment. They recognized that in order to help students make informed

judgments, as opposed to relying on intuition, students need to know the impact of different writing choices, which in turn requires a rhetorical understanding of writing. After all, many of the mistakes that writers make, whether it be in composition or creative writing, are a result of a lack of understanding about the results of writing choices, rather than a lack of ability, and critical judgment, together with other capacities, is therefore needed to help students make good writing choices. Unfortunately, this guidance is not always given in creative writing classes because it is assumed that talented students will pick it up by themselves.

Attempting to use the classical curriculum in its entirety would certainly not be a viable solution for the contemporary creative writing class; for one thing, the classical curriculum extended over a number of years of intensive training. But the principles behind the curriculum can certainly offer a viable approach to addressing the aims stated by the AWP, especially in supporting the critical function of the workshop.

The problem is that because this is a rhetorically based curriculum, most creative writing teachers will probably be resistant to it because of their belief that rhetorical theory is viable only for dry, practical, expository writing, or that it is only suitable for explicit argument, and most creative writers believe that their work is not a form of argument. Therefore, they believe that rhetoric can't offer viable alternatives for creative writing and would only hamper creative work. As long as creative writers continue to view rhetoric in that light it will be extremely difficult for them to see what rhetoric offers, so the next chapter will look at where the current view of rhetoric stems from, and by countering that view, will show that rhetoric and

creative writing actually share important theoretical links.

3. Revisioning Rhetoric

As was just mentioned, there are two major reasons that creative writers are resistant to rhetoric: firstly, they believe that rhetoric is only suitable for dry, academic writing, and is not “creative”; secondly, they believe that rhetoric is a theory of argument or persuasion, and because creative writing is expressive it is not explicitly persuasive, and therefore not rhetorical. But both of these views reflect problematic assumptions about both of the nature of rhetoric and the influence of creative writing. Therefore, this chapter will question these assumptions by examining the cause for these beliefs about rhetoric, especially the impact of current-traditional rhetoric in the development of those views, and then by examining some of the current scholarship in rhetoric that counters these prevailing views.

It is important to show that rhetoric is actually a much more dynamic discipline because doing so shows that creative writing is indeed rhetorical, and this creates a basis for identifying the important theoretical link between rhetoric and creative writing. This chapter will therefore confirm that a rhetorical approach to creative writing is not only viable, but appropriate, and that taking such an approach to creative writing can only lead to a greater understanding of the work done in both disciplines.

The problem with current traditional rhetoric

Because creative writers believe that their work needs to be creative (which usually means imaginative, expressive, original, out of the ordinary), creative writers are generally resistant to anything that runs contrary to that creative vision of writing, and unfortunately that usually means rhetoric. But the formalistic view of rhetoric

shared by many creative writers is a mark of the impact of current-traditional rhetoric – a substantially reduced view of rhetoric that became prominent in the 19th century and persisted as the main way to teach composition well into the 20th century. Berlin explains that current-traditional rhetoric “has been a compelling paradigm, making it impossible to conceive of the discipline [of composition] in any other way” (9).

As was discussed in Chapter 1, current-traditional rhetoric was heavily influenced by the scientific thinking that developed during the Enlightenment, especially the thinking of Locke and the Scottish Common Sense Realists, and focused heavily on perspicuity and correctness in writing. Creative writers were resistant to this scientific approach to writing, and they wanted a more expressivist venue for engaging with their writing. Therefore, as previously mentioned, the first creative writing programs were partly a reaction to the prevalence of current-traditional rhetoric in composition. It is therefore to be expected that creative writers would be resistant to this pedagogical paradigm.

Berlin points out that current-traditional rhetoric was based on a positivistic epistemology that asserted that truth is located in the material world (7). This positivistic view of writing was based on the idea that

only that which is empirically viable or which can be grounded in empirically viable phenomena is real. The business of the writer is to record this reality exactly as it has been experienced so that it can be reproduced in the reader. Language here is a sign system, a simple transcribing device for recording that which exists apart from the verbal. (7)

Further, teachers of current-traditional rhetoric believed that the mind is “equipped with faculties that enable it to perceive the external object directly through the medium of sense impression” (8), which is very different from the Romantic belief that sensations are beyond the range of everyday language. Consequently, because reality is easily observed by the objective observer, the writer needed to “avoid distortion, once truth is discovered,” (8) by “finding the language to describe one’s discoveries” (8). Therefore, the work of the writer was substantially reduced, and the objective of the writer was simply to be accurate and clear. And because truth was observable, the measure of good writing was the way it correctly and objectively describes that truth – thus the focus on correctness.

An extension of the positivistic beliefs underlying current-traditional rhetoric is the belief that language is “at worst a distorting medium that alters original perception, and at best a transparent device that captures the original experience” (Berlin 8). Therefore, just like Locke, teachers of current-traditional rhetoric encouraged students to avoid figurative language because it could distort reality and thereby “mislead the judgment” (Locke 827). This led to a great deal of resistance to “emotional” language amongst academics and teachers of composition, a concern that is still reflected in academia today. Of course this resistance ran contrary to the expressivist beliefs of creative writers, which is why they were determined to offer an alternative venue for the instruction of writing.

The result of current-traditional rhetoric is a pedagogy that is “purely mechanistic” (Berlin 9), and that focuses on arrangement and superficial correctness, with teachers fixated on helping students to conform to standards of usage. Rhetoric

was therefore reduced to suit the purposes of a scientific academic community, with its focus on objectivity and demonstration, and later also the needs of the business world, where writing served as a practical, pragmatic, business skill.⁵ The result is the pervasive influence of current-traditional rhetoric on the teaching of composition for most of the 20th century. Teachers today are still struggling to escape the impact of the regimented approach to the teaching of composition that current-traditional rhetoric encourages.

The conflict between current-traditional rhetoric and Romantic beliefs is quite apparent, which explains the antagonism that creative writers feel towards current-traditional rhetoric. But just as many of the Romantic beliefs in creative writing are problematic, current-traditional rhetoric reflects a number of false assumptions about knowledge and the way we engage with knowledge through language, again highlighting the impact that epistemology has on the way we teach writing. And just like the assumptions underlying Romanticism, many of the assumptions underlying current-traditional rhetoric can be questioned.

For instance, the attempt to portray language as a transparent recorder and avoid figurative language certainly complicated the teaching of composition. Current-traditional rhetoric is an extension the Ramistic⁶ view of style, which argues that style has no relationship to content, and is only useful for ornamenting existing content that

⁵ The move to make writing a practical business skill is another significant element of reduction of writing, creating subsequent problems for writing instruction, but rather than detail that here I would recommend that interested readers look at Russell's book, *Writing in the Academic Disciplines: A Curricular History*.

⁶ Further detail on Peter Ramus' argument that rhetoric is only concerned with stylistic embellishment, and is a decoration for self-standing ideas, is detailed by Bizzell and Herzberg, pp. 794. In many ways, Ramus laid the platform for the reduction of rhetoric that is reflected in current-traditional rhetoric.

was discovered through logic or scientific thinking. Therefore, good prose must be clear, brief, and objective.

Richard Lanham attacks this assumption. He refers to this as the C-B-S theory of prose (clarity, brevity, and sincerity), and he remarks, “The C-B-S theory argues that prose out to be maximally transparent and minimally self-conscious, never seen and never noticed” (1). But Lanham points out how vague these C-B-S requirements are, and how difficult they are to define because they are based on subjective values about what is clear or what is sincere. Therefore, he argues that these requirements “dehumanize human communication” (3) because they fail to recognize the subjective, social nature of writing. Russell agrees with Lanham, and comments that

The naïve, mechanical conception of writing which [current-traditional rhetoric] fostered contradict[s] the actual practice of academics, for whom writing [is] a very human thing, a complex social activity involving a whole range of rhetorical choices, intellectual, professional, and political, as recent research into the social basis of writing has shown. (12)

The failure to recognize the socially constructed nature of writing marks current-traditional rhetoric. Fortunately, as Russell points out, this reduced view of rhetoric contradicts the experience of scholars of rhetoric who have worked hard to counter the current-traditional view by looking at rhetoric in a more comprehensive context, thus allowing them to explore a whole new range of pedagogical options. Therefore, although creative writing’s criticism of composition and rhetoric may have been valid in the past, the current state of rhetoric and composition reflects a much more

dynamic approach to rhetoric, an approach that shares important theoretical links with creative writing, as will be shown below.

Examining a more dynamic view of rhetoric

The current-traditional view of rhetoric is a major reason that creative writers are resistant to rhetoric, but another important reason for creative writers' resistance to rhetoric is the belief that because rhetoric's domain lies in explicit argument, and since, as far as Romantics are concerned, creative writers are engaged in "soliloquy, not argument, and the [writer's] aim is reflection, not action" (Bizzell et al 1995), there is no place for rhetoric in creative writing. The belief that creative writing is expressive and therefore not directly persuasive is an important Romantic belief, but this view can also be reframed with a broader understanding of rhetoric. After all, the study of literature is based on studying the powerful influence that "creative" texts have on people, and as Booth remarks, "The richest, most serious, the most important making of selves, communities, nations, and cultures has been achieved by the composers of great literary works" (79).

Part of the problem is that we often too narrowly define rhetoric as persuasion, thereby pinning rhetorical theory to limited kinds of argumentative texts. But increasingly, modern scholarship is expanding the realm of rhetoric by recovering its historical breadth. Kenneth Burke, especially, provides important insight into how rhetorical motives can be found in all forms of texts. In the *Rhetoric of Motives* he spends time analyzing rhetorical effect in a variety of forms of writing, from literary to scientific, as well as analyzing rhetorical effects in music, in images, in gestures, and even in clothing. He also highlights that rhetoric can be used consciously and

unconsciously, and he discusses how implicit rhetorical effect can be just as important as explicit effect.

In exploring rhetorical motive, Burke is especially interested in understanding how and why we create individual and community identities, and the function of rhetorical influence in maintaining those identities. He emphasizes the role of language in allowing people to associate themselves with one another, a process of association he refers to as *identification*, and he points out that we *identify* with one another through “common sensations, concepts, images, ideas, and attitudes that make [us] consubstantial” (18). Burke’s use of the term “consubstantial” refers to a uniting or joining of interests, which comes from our efforts to influence people to see things in the way we do. Because we need to connect with other people, symbols (language being one kind) allow us to construct or contextualize shared values in order to create communities or confirm identities.

Burke then highlights that “you persuade a man only insofar as you can talk his language by speech, gesture, tonality, order, image, attitude, idea, *identifying* your ways with his” (55). It is therefore through *identification*, whether in shared language, experience, or attitude that we are able to connect with and influence people. Based on the concept of *identification*, Burke provides the following more expansive definition of rhetoric:

For rhetoric as such is not rooted in any past condition of human society. It is rooted in an essential function of language itself, a function that is wholly realistic, and is continually born anew; the use

of language as a symbolic means of inducing co-operation in beings that by nature respond to symbol. (52)

Rhetoric is therefore the way we use symbols (language) to bring about co-operation, whether in terms of actions or attitudes, and is fundamental to the way we reinforce particular identities, or ways of seeing the world. Understanding that rhetoric influences attitude as well as action is vital to understanding the role of rhetoric in creative writing, because it is often the subtle influence of creative writing on attitude that is the most compelling component of the rhetorical effect of creative writing.

Burke therefore argues that any effect that causes people to share the same way of thinking, the same way of feeling, the same views or values, and which leads to co-operation, or identification, is persuasive, regardless of whether that identification is conscious or unconscious, explicit or implicit. Because story or poetry has a powerful influence on the way we engage with the world, and with other human beings, it is an extremely important way of creating *identification*, and therefore has significant rhetorical effect, whether we recognize it or not.

Nancy Christiansen agrees with Burke, and she contextualizes his broader view of rhetoric in the rhetorical situation, thereby confirming the role that creative writers play in the rhetorical situation. She explains:

In the irreducible context, there is always the speaker (who has been shaped by many environment influences, but who shapes self and argument) using a medium (signs) to comment on a subject (some aspect of “reality”) in a certain manner (behavior) in order to elicit a response from an audience (who has been shaped, but also shapes)

with whom the speaker shares physical, historical, cultural and moral experiences. (87)

Creative writers may believe that their work is simply self-expression, but someone is always being influenced by the construction of a text, even if it is the writer, and as Christiansen explains, any text that shapes our attitude and thinking is rhetorical. Creative writing actually influences people just as powerfully as explicit argument, if not more so, which means that creative writers need to consider the rhetorical context within which their texts appear. Further, if creative writing is rhetorical, then we can study creative writing just as we would any other rhetorical text, looking at all the “symbols” that influence people’s attitudes, behaviors, and ideologies.

Unfortunately, we often ignore the rhetorical impact of story and poetry in discussion of rhetoric, except in the case of discussing the role of narrative within the context of its support of explicit argument. But Walter Fisher provides an important explanation for the rhetorical significance of story in connecting people and ideas. He says,

Symbols are created and communicated ultimately as stories meant to give order to the human experience and to induce others to dwell in them to establish ways of living in common, in communities where there is the sanction for the story that constitutes one’s life. (242)

Therefore story (and similarly all creative writing) has a vital role to play in causing people to associate together, because story creates and confirms community and individual identity, which parallels Burke’s argument about rhetoric as identification. Fisher goes on to cite Goldberg, who argues that stories “can bind the facts of our

experience together into a coherent pattern and it is thus in the virtue of that narrative that our abstracted rules, principles, and notions gain their full intelligibility” (242). Because we can relate to characters and experiences detailed in stories, we often connect with values presented in stories in ways that we wouldn’t in more explicit forms of argument. Because of this, human values are often contextualized most fully in stories.

In Jeffrey Walker’s important work, *Rhetoric and Poetics in Antiquity*, he reframes our understanding of story and poetry within the context of the classical rhetoric tradition, and he argues that the ancients were very aware of the rhetorical impact of poetics and narrative. Walker believes that we have misunderstood the role of epideictic address, which is normally narrowly defined as the form of public oratory concerned with praise or blame. He argues that epideictic in the classical tradition is actually a broader category very much concerned with the production of poetry, drama, and narrative, and also concerned with creating rhetorical effect outside of the context of a direct public audience. Because of this, Walker argues that epideictic served the rhetorical function of establishing and confirming identity. He says,

In this view, “epideictic” appears as that which shapes and cultivates the basic codes of value and belief by which a society or culture lives; it shapes ideologies and imageries with which, and by which, the individual members of a community identify themselves; and, perhaps most significantly, it shapes the fundamental grounds, the “deep”

commitments and presuppositions, that will underlie and ultimately determine decision and debate in particular public forums. (9)

If you connect Walker's view with Fisher's, it becomes apparent that what we call creative writing serves a more important function than just entertainment, although entertaining people is also a rhetorical function, and that our personal and community identities are deeply tied to the stories we tell. If anything, this implies an ethical consideration in relation to creative writing that we generally don't consider. It is therefore easy to see why Walker argues that epideictic discourse "reveals itself as the central and indeed fundamental mode of rhetoric in human culture" (10), which means that creative writing should be a central concern in the study of rhetoric, and *visa versa*.

But current rhetorical theory is not only concerned with the rhetorical function of story or poetry on a broader level. Scholars have also explored the rhetorical function of the stylistic elements of different kinds of writing. For instance, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson claim that the human conceptual system is fundamentally rhetorical in nature and is centered in our use of metaphors. They explain:

People go through life understanding one kind of a thing, often a concept or event that is abstract or new, in terms of another, a discernible and familiar illustration.... People constantly look for coherences, resemblances, and order by using various types of metaphor, and metaphors are capable of uniting reason (categorization, entailment, inference) and imagination (innovative associations) in the formation of imaginative reality. (336)

These comments are similar to the comments made about the rhetorical impact of story, and offer us a very different way of thinking about metaphor, and figurative language. Because certain figures, like metaphors, are fundamentally associative devices that help contextualize human ideas in a variety of ways, these figures are not merely ornamental, but are vital for readers to understand and identify with material they are reading. Again we see another link to Burke's discussion of rhetoric as a process of using symbols (or figures) to influence people to identify with ideas or values. This certainly has significant impact for the way we think about poetry, and a rhetorical understanding of figures can also significantly change the way we understand style.

Further, Burke argues that all the elements of a text, including style and arrangement, influence the content, meaning, or effect of that text. In *Language as Symbolic Action*, he comments that "form and content cannot be separated" and a writer "can't possibly make any statement without it falling into some kind of pattern" (478). According to Burke, style is the manner in which a writer names a particular situation, and thereby gives that situation significance to the reader. Also, in *Counter-statement*, Burke details the rhetorical impact of the form of texts, when he defines form as "the creation of an appetite in the mind of the auditor, and the adequate satisfying of that appetite" (31). "A work has form in so far as one part of it leads a reader to anticipate another part, to be gratified by the sequence" (124). Therefore, the form of a text influences the way readers interact with the content of a text, and as Campbell and Jamieson argue, is a "stylistic and substantive response to

perceived situational demands” (408). The situational demand of the form of a text is best reflected in the conventions that make up different genres.

Unfortunately, as was discussed earlier, style is often discounted as decoration, as if the form of a text doesn’t matter. But that is certainly not the case. And because different forms create different effects, rhetorical theory provides a basis for considering those effects and evaluating the impact of different forms or styles. Rhetoric thus provides a basis for stylistic analysis – a way of analyzing how the different components of a text work together to create an overall effect. The benefit of stylistic analysis will be explored in detail in the next chapter.

There is just so much more involved in rhetorical effect than we often consider. After all, rhetoric underlies all our use of language, in its various forms and structures. Rhetorical theory therefore not only provides a critical understanding of texts, but also a productive understanding of texts, thereby allowing us to be more conscious of rhetorical choices we make as we create texts, rather than relying only on instinct or talent to guide us. As such, rhetorical theory allows students to understand why texts work in the way they do, and how writers can create effects, which is important, because as Richard Coe argues, “The belief that people should understand why they do what they do is a defining value of humanistic education. Only those who grasp theory, explicitly or intuitively, can adapt basic principles to new contexts” (206). And adaptation is a fundamental component of a creative pedagogy.

Most importantly, rhetoric helps us understand the social function of language, which then helps us understand the complexity of collaboration in writing,

thereby providing an important framework for considering the collaborative function of the workshop. Therefore, rhetoric offers a way for considering collaborative criticism while recognizing the communities we are constructing in the workshop, and the communities we are constructing through our texts.

Increasingly, many creative writing teachers are recognizing the importance of theory in pedagogy, which again can be seen in the recent books on creative writing pedagogy. Unfortunately, the focus in the discussion of theory in creative writing has been almost exclusively on literary theory, and rhetorical theory, outside of composition practices, has been largely ignored. The reasons for this are probably tied to the concerns about rhetoric that have just been discussed, but that resistance is disappointing because rhetorical theory is better suited than literary theory to the productive component of creative writing. But hopefully as the view of rhetoric changes, creative writing teachers will begin to recognize the value of rhetorical theory for creative writing. Therefore, the next chapter will examine some specific ways rhetorical theory can support the critical function of the workshop by looking at how stylistic criticism can lead students to exercise better judgment in their writing choices, and this examination will provide a basis for better understanding how the classical curriculum can support the workshop.

4. Reading as a Writer

The workshop is designed as a forum that combines reading and writing in a critical process, but as was discussed in Chapter 1, Romantic assumptions make criticism difficult because students often aren't sure how to approach criticism. The more expansive view of rhetoric outlined in the last chapter is especially valuable for providing a theoretical framework for the criticism done in workshops, and because it provides a way to combine reading and writing together in a critical process, provides a way to overcome some of the problems experienced in workshop criticism.

Therefore this chapter will explore the aims of workshop criticism as identified by Norman Foerster, who founded the first creative writing program at Iowa, as well as other creative writing teachers, and will then explore how rhetorical theory, and especially stylistic analysis, support that critical intention. Firstly, I will discuss the role of the workshop in teaching students to read as writers.

Reading as a writer: A rhetorical approach to style

Myers, in his book *The Elephants Teach*, explains that when Norman Foerster established the creative writing program at Iowa, it was established as a forum for literary criticism where students could both study and create literature, rather than just interpret it, because Foerster believed that “creation and criticism were one” (133). Foerster was therefore interested in developing a program that could produce writer-scholars, an aim that was an extension of Emerson's call for a productive approach to literary criticism. This is important because it highlights that the workshop was designed to be a critical forum, in addition to being a forum for instruction in creative writing.

Creative writing programs have since moved away from using the workshop as a venue for literary criticism, but that hasn't stopped creative writing teachers from emphasizing the critical function of the workshop. The relationship between critical reading and producing creative writing is highlighted by many creative writing teachers, most who emphasize it as a vital component of helping students to become better writers. For instance, Bell argues that "learning to write is done by learning to read" (11). Moxley believes that we need to teach students to read like writers (259), a belief supported by RV Cassil, who established the AWP, and who believed the workshop needs to teach "reading as a writer" (Myers 59). The relationship between reading and writing would seem clear, but what exactly is involved in such an approach to reading?

Myers' *The Elephants Teach* includes a range of comments by different creative writing teachers who provide some detail on what it means to help students develop of a writely approach to reading. For instance, Donald Barthelme argues that the workshop teaches students to be "critics of their own work," (158) and Ray B. West, who taught creative writing at Iowa, says that "every writer must learn as best as he can to distinguish exactly what it is in his work which succeeds from that which fails" (158). James K. Folsom believes this critical awareness is developed by student as they read the work of successful writers, asking, "How does this story work?" (158), which then allows them to think about how they could apply those strategies in their own work. Cassil adds that "a writing reader must be aware that the story exists as it does because the author chose his form from among other possibilities" (159),

which means that students read with the purpose of understanding different writing choices.

These comments reflect a very practical way of thinking about the relationship between reading, writing, and criticism. What is most interesting is that they reflect a similar approach to that used in rhetorical criticism. For instance, Jeffrey Walker, in his article “In The Sophist’s Shoes,” points out that in the classical rhetorical curriculum students analyzing a text were trained to ask, “*How was it done?*, or more to the point, *How can I do that?*, with the goal of acquiring a productive, performative capacity” (144). Again, this shows the link between the rhetorical curriculum and the creative writing curriculum, with both curriculums being concerned with helping students become active readers, and then using that reading experience to build their writing capacity. This critical link is to be expected, considering that Foerster based his curriculum at Iowa on principles taken from Renaissance humanists like Desiderius Erasmus, who were influenced by, and worked with, the classical curriculum (Myers 133).

But, unfortunately, in the case of the creative writing class, Romantic beliefs again create problems, because it isn’t always clear what creative writing teachers mean by reading as a writer, or how students acquire that capacity. As explained in Chapter 1, this is partly because it is assumed that this is a straightforward way to approach reading, and as long as students do enough reading they should be able to unconsciously pick up what they need from texts. But as the conflicting reading experiences of students in workshops reflect, reading as a writer is much more difficult than it seems, and it is therefore not enough to just engage in reading.

Instead, reading as a writer requires a specific critical approach, and students need to know what to look for; otherwise, they struggle to identify the strategies used by different writers.

The struggle to read as a writer is also a problem in composition classes. Lanham in *Analyzing Prose* argues that the reason students, whether in composition or creative writing classes, struggle with close, active reading is that they have been taught to avoid looking at prose because they are trained to read for information, and “are simply not trained to look at words on a page” (1). As a result students “often don’t know what they are talking about” (1).

Lanham believes that the solution to the problem of teaching students to analyze texts is to teach them to analyze style. But then, Lanham argues, “[Style] must be taught in the full matrix of human utterance, written and spoken, accompanied by a theory of style equally broad. A student bright enough to be taught style needs a context for it beyond didactic precept, an intelligible and sound context” (*Style: An Anti-Textbook* 19). Lanham’s concept of a broad theory of style is best summed up by Winston Weathers and Otis Winchester in *The New Strategy of Style*, where they define style as the “full range of rhetorical choices that are available to us in the creation of a given text” (1). Therefore, a student analyzing style would be concerned with all of the rhetorical elements of the text, which as discussed in Chapter 3, could include the structure of a text, the point of view used, sentence structure, figures, or a whole range of other rhetorical strategies. In evaluating style, students would also be concerned with understanding the effects of those strategies.

In this view, style is intrinsically tied to judgment, or as Quintilian explains, “personal decisions of what to add, or take away, or alter” (X 5.1), which coincides with Cassil’s comment that a writing reader recognizes that a text is a result of particular choices made by an author. Therefore, analyzing style could lead students to an awareness of the impact of their own stylistic choices in their writing, thus helping them exercise judgment.

But the problem with style is that it is normally narrowly defined, either as ornament or decoration, or as “voice” or “personality.” The belief that style is ornament is tied to the impact of scientific thinking and current-traditional rhetoric, as discussed earlier, and the belief that style is “personality” is an extension of Romantic thinking. Again, this highlights the impact that different epistemologies have on the way we think about writing, and these two important ways of thinking about style have unfortunately complicated the way we talk about and analyze style.

The view of style as figurative language, and therefore ornament or decoration, has been partly detailed in the discussion on positivistic thinking and current-traditional rhetoric. The importance of this view is that it enforces the belief that style is something extra, added on, and is therefore not necessary for meaning, but is used to “dress up” (in the negative sense) writing in order to make it “pretty.” Because a text should be clear, the writer needs to be discreet and avoid use of figurative style or emotional content so that content is not distorted. Therefore, style is often considered to be a deviation from the normal way of writing, although that implies that we know what normal writing is, or that it is possible to communicate without the use of figurative language. Again, this relates back to Lanham’s

discussion of the C-B-S theory of style and the value we place on “transparent” writing. But as Lanham points out, if style is supposed to be transparent then how can you describe or analyze what you can’t see?

On the other hand, the Romantic view of style as intrinsic to the writer, a “dynamic representation of his personality” (Milic 442), also makes analysis difficult. Because writing is self-expression, every text is unique to that writer and style is a component of self-expression; therefore, a writer cannot help the way they write. Their style is their “voice,” and is therefore tied to the writer and cannot be copied. But if style is only “personality,” and intrinsic to the writer, then what would be the value of reading a text in order to analyze the choices that writer made?

Both of these theories of style make stylistic analysis difficult, and because creative writing students are generally exposed to both views as they learn to write in school and college, this leads to confusion about what style is and how they are supposed to evaluate it. Also, students are normally trained to read what a text says, rather than how it says it. Winston Weathers argues that the result of this reduction of style is that students often fail to see its relevance and think of it as an aesthetic luxury, rather than a necessary part of writing (“Teaching Style: A Possible Anatomy” 368). But when style is placed in a rhetorical context, students can see its value as a component of rhetorical effect, and students can begin to evaluate the impact of stylistic choices in the creation of specific effects.

In arguing for a rhetorical approach to style, Lanham reminds us that “to perceive the world is to compose it, to make sense of it. To write is to compose a world as well as view one” (*Analyzing Prose* 3). Lanham, like Burke, recognizes that

style and content are related, and the way we compose or arrange a text constructs a way of interacting with a text; therefore, texts serve a greater purpose than just presenting information.

When we talk we are communicating attitudes as well as facts, redefining and reaffirming our social relationships as we go about our daily business. Language always carries an enormous amount of contextual information, information about human relations. (3)

Lanham also reminds us that we are not “essentially purposive creatures,” (5) which is why our writing is so important in helping us maintain and develop our identities and communities. Lanham sees style as an extension of rhetorical identification, as defined by Burke, which means that it is representative of human motive and behavior, and therefore intrinsic to a text. Thus, understanding the rhetorical function of style helps us to appreciate the relationship between style and content. Lanham says:

Style does not provide a peripheral cosmetic accompaniment to the exposition of self-standing ideas but choreographs the whole dance of human consciousness, a dance in which practical purpose and information play but one role. The real practicality in prose analysis lies in the intuitive grasp of motive which analysis can impart to us.

Analysis can teach us what kind of message a message is. (8)

Style is therefore fundamental to the identity of a text, and as such, represents our ideas just as our identities are representative of ourselves. But a rhetorical view of style recognizes the constructed nature of that identity, just as our own identities are

constructed. A rhetorical view of style recognizes that style can sometimes be ornament, or sometimes tied to our own identity, but a rhetorical view of style also highlights that style is not peripheral, but is a necessary component of our attempt to influence, or identify with others. Stylistic analysis is therefore concerned with how we consciously or unconsciously arrange a text for rhetorical effect.

Classical teachers of rhetoric did not see style as superficial, but as vital to the way we present ideas, depending on the context. For instance, Quintilian believed that style is related to eloquence. He says, “The verb *eloqui* means the production and communication of all that the rhetor has conceived...and without this power all the preliminary accomplishments of rhetoric are as useless as a sword that is kept permanently within its sheath” (viii.14). Quintilian also compares style to the armor a soldier wears, which means that to an extent it is “adornment,” but it is “adornment” that is necessary for the function a soldier performs.

Because of this awareness of the viability of style in communicating ideas, classical rhetoricians spent a great deal of time analyzing the different components of style in order to understand how they worked. Part of the result of this work is the detailed and extensive list of figures and tropes that have become fundamental to our discussion of style. Such lists are by no means comprehensive, and new stylistic strategies are repeatedly discovered by writers, but within a rhetorical context, they provide an important framework for identifying how and why authors employ stylistic effects.

For instance, some figures, such as simile, allow us to set up comparison, similarity, or agreement; other figures, like oxymoron, set up difference or contrast;

some figures, like synecdoche, set up contiguity; and various schemes use repetition, subtraction, and other linguistic techniques to rhetorically influence readers. Classical rhetoricians also studied figures as forms of argument and identified the ways that they were used in supporting arguments. It is possible to explore the figures in more detail, but for now it is enough to emphasize the way figures assist the finding and expression of ideas; they do not merely ornament. Therefore, they are key to understanding the rhetorical impact of texts of any sort, and understanding their use provides a basis for analyzing stylistic effects.

In summary, because style influences the way that the reader interacts with, and is influenced by, a text, a rhetorical analysis of style provides a means for understanding why writers make the choices they do, and provides a means for evaluating the effect of those choices. Additionally, an awareness of the dynamic, social function of style provides an important opportunity to understand why writing does what it does, which then allows us to apply stylistic choices more effectively. Therefore, stylistic analysis provides a specific way of helping students to learn to read as writers, which is help they need, because as was mentioned earlier, students struggle to pick up analytical skills by themselves. They must be instructed in what they are looking for because this is not a normal way for them to read, and they have very little experience analyzing style.

James Boyd White uses an excerpt from Mark Twain's "Life on the Mississippi" (Appendix A) to show that reading is a way of seeing the world, and that we need to be trained in looking at texts in particular ways; otherwise, we don't understand what to look for. In this excerpt, Twain details his experience trying to

learn to read the Mississippi as a river pilot. He describes how at first he can't pick up on important clues about dangers on the river because he lacks experience recognizing the subtle clues the river offers to those who know what they are looking for. He then explains how he learns to read the river through mentoring and through experience. This example contextualizes the principle that specific kinds of reading require specific training, and unless students know what to look for in their analysis, they might not recognize the factors they need to consider in their evaluation. Therefore, it is not enough for students to read; they must learn to read in specific ways.

The value of stylistic analysis is that once students appreciate the rhetorical value of style, it becomes easier for them to analyze what it is doing and they can start questioning the kinds of stylistic decisions they and other writers make. Then, as they gain experience in analyzing texts, they learn to better judge stylistic effects, which then helps them as they try to apply stylistic strategies in their own writing.

One of the main benefits of the classical curriculum is the way it trained students in stylistic analysis, and the way it combined reading and writing in a way that led to production. In the classical curriculum, students were given specific guidance on how to read from a writerly perspective, and the curriculum provided a structure within which contemporary students could practice doing analysis. Therefore, this curriculum offers a structure within which students can gain experience in doing analysis, and where they are provided help in using what they learn from analysis to produce better writing.

In order to help creative writing teachers see how stylistic analysis works in practice, and show how it might aid workshop practice, the next section will look at some specific ways that students and teachers can use stylistic analysis as a way to look at a text from a rhetorical perspective, and then I will provide an example of an approach to stylistic analysis.

Stylistic analysis in practice

So how can stylistic analysis help student be more critical and more productive? First, students must be taught to analyze existing, published literature for stylistic effects so that they can be led to the “storehouse of materials from which they can make acquisition” (Weathers “Teaching Style: A Possible Anatomy” 370). Doing analysis therefore provides students with new writing techniques that can be used in their own work, but it also develops their critical vocabulary, and the skills they develop in analyzing literature will help them as they offer critique in workshops. As always, the goal, as Walker explained, is to help students develop a productive, performative capacity (144).

Lanham describes analysis as knowing how to assemble and take apart a text (*Analyzing Prose* 9). This requires students to identify particular stylistic strategies and then discuss what style does in rhetorical contexts. Finally, they need to learn how to adapt those techniques in new writing situations by experimenting with those techniques. There is no one correct approach to stylistic analysis, but there are some specific rhetorical elements that would need to be considered.

A close stylistic analysis is framed by one important question – how do the stylistic choices the writer made impact the way the text is experienced by the reader?

There are a number of textual aspects that can be evaluated in the context of this question. For instance readers can explore ways in which readers might identify with the text (in the Burkean sense), and then talk about what components of the text allow for that identification. For instance, the reader could look at what common values, symbols, or images the author uses to connect with their audience.

Students can also look at specific rhetorical effects in the text, and discuss how those effects are created. For instance, students could evaluate the structure or form the writer chose, and consider why that form was chosen. Or students could look at the point of view used in a text and compare that to other possible points of view that the author could have used. Or students could investigate how the author sets up different scenes; represents characters; uses dialogue; uses images, metaphors and figurative language; or structures sentences, always trying to understand how and why these choices impact the text.

Another important area of style that students can look at is genre. As Campbell and Jamieson assert, the form of texts is a “stylistic and substantive response to perceived situational demands” (408). They are highlighting that particular genres have certain conventions that arise out of audience expectations and rhetorical contexts, and therefore, if a writer is to meet with the expectations of the audience, they must comply with those conventions. Therefore, students could identify the conventions of different genres and talk about how they fulfill audience expectations. For instance, if a student is writing a piece of science fiction, then there are conventions that readers expect, and students could analyze how those conventions encourage genre-specific rhetorical effects, and discuss ways that those

effects could be used to improve the text. Then students could look at how certain authors play with genre conventions, or break with them completely.

Once different stylistic strategies are identified, it is important to examine the effect of that particular strategy. It is possible to drill down further and further into the text to see how it is composed, but as mentioned, students should always be focused on understanding how and why a text is composed. Students should also be concerned with understanding how the parts make up the whole (e.g., looking at how Faulkner uses complex sentences to play with point of view) as well as identifying the patterns of stylistic choices that make a particular text one kind of text, as opposed to another (e.g., by comparing Hemingway's modernist style to Twain's realist style). The teacher should assist the student by not only providing effective examples of different strategies, but also by modeling this analytical approach so that students don't feel lost as they attempt this new approach to reading. Chapter 5 will discuss in more detail how modeling can be used to help students move from analysis to production.

It is also important to remember that the text needs to be considered in a rhetorical context; therefore, it is important to consider the purpose of the text, as well as the audience that the author is writing for. This requires students to recognize the importance of genre constraints, as well as recognizing a particular text won't work for all audiences because some readers will identify more with certain experiences and stories than others. This will help students to recognize that it is possible to write texts that are more appropriate for certain audiences by considering how the style and content fit together in a particular genre. For instance, students can consider how

different themes, ideas, scenes, or characters, suit particular genres, and how those elements can be used to identify with different readers. This discussion could also help students recognize the different kinds of audiences that exist in the workshop, thereby helping them to understand some the different reactions that occur in workshop critique.

A rhetorical analysis of a text can also help students consider creative text as an argument, but not in the sense that we normally consider arguments. Christiansen explains this approach, “When examining the [creative] text as an argument, the reader sees it as a response to an issue and looks for the central proposition, stated or implied, that offers a judgment on the issue, and identifies the course of action the speaker/author wishes the audience to take” (90). Students can therefore look at the ways authors try to influence the view or attitude of the reader, either explicitly or implicitly, through a text.

Students can also consider the implication of the author’s views or character’s views, so that they can become aware of the different ideologies reflected in texts. Then students can begin to consider the way their own ideologies influence the way they write. In relation to considering the social impact of a text, Walter Fisher argued that we should analyze a text to evaluate narrative probability, what he considers the consistency and coherence of a story, as well as its social convergence (255). This means evaluating how the arguments underlying the text align with human experience and behavior in order to see if the view being presented is a consistent, ethical argument.

In short, there are a variety of things that could be considered in a rhetorical analysis of style, but the goal is always to look at how texts create effects, and how readers are influenced by those effects, so that students can be better judges of their own writing. Students can also draw on the detail on style developed in the classical curriculum, especially as it relates to figures, in order to give them a framework for considering rhetorical effects because they are usually familiar with the major figures. Students can then evaluate the effectiveness of the texts they analyze by considering the appropriateness of the rhetorical effects employed by the writer in light of the purpose of the text and the audience who would read it. As I mentioned, an example of this approach to analysis is given in the next section, so teachers can see how this approach might be applied.

The stylistic analysis I have described here allows for a comprehensive and detailed analysis, but it is not an analysis intending to restrict the possibility of a particular text, or provide a narrow categorization of effects. Instead, stylistic analysis is interested in identifying the range of possible options and effects that might be available to writers, and so stylistic analysis has an important pluralistic component to it. The purpose of stylistic analysis is simply to help students to be aware of the effects their different writing choices create, and by providing a language to describe those effects, help students be more critical of different writing choices. Therefore, stylistic analysis provides a specific way for students to read texts as a writer, and once students can describe style, they can use it, can imitate it, can experiment with it, and finally, can adopt it. Chapter 5 will look in more detail at how the classical

curriculum used analysis as a way to lead to production, but first I will go through the example analysis.

“How We Wrestle Is Who We Are” – An example analysis

I have chosen to analyze a short essay, “How We Wrestle is Who We Are,” written by Brian Doyle, a Catholic essayist. The first reason I have chosen this particular essay is that it has a wealth of rhetorical strategies, but since it is also short, it allows for a reasonably quick analysis. The second reason I have chosen it is that I have two versions of Doyle’s essay, an early version that appeared in *Orion* magazine⁷ (Appendix B), and a later version that appeared in his collection of essays, *The Wet Engine* (Appendix C). This allows me to highlight some of the changes made in the text between the two versions, although I will be focusing on the early version because it is shorter. Finally, because essays are the most overt form of argument to be found in “creative” works, it is also possible to look at how the stylistic components of the text support the argument proposed by the text.

Doyle provides an excellent example of the impact of style because of the way he invites his audience to connect both with the experiences that he is sharing, as well as with the argument he is making. He experiments with a range of stylistic technique in order to create specific effects for his audience, but the overall effect of the text is owed to the combination of different stylistic features he uses. He also invents some new stylistic effects, thus confirming the ability of authors to be creative in their stylistic choices. As I discuss some the effects Doyle uses, I will refer to certain

⁷ <http://www.orionmagazine.org/index.php/articles/article/15>

effects by their classical names in order to again confirm the viability of the classical curriculum.

In this essay, Doyle recounts some of the emotional difficulty he experienced as his son, who had a serious heart condition at birth, went through various operations that attempted to correct his condition. Doyle explores his own internal struggle as he tries to come to terms with the risks involved in the operation, and the impact the operation might have on his son. But Doyle also uses that turmoil to ask deeper questions about our own hearts, and building on the allegory of an imperfect, or damaged heart, he calls on us to consider our behavior as human beings, and prompts us to consider our capacity for productive, compassionate change. The piece is also extremely personal and revealing, and Doyle opens himself up for inspection by the reader and allows us to climb into his life. But it is exactly that personal, very human approach that makes his essay a compelling example of the rhetorical principle of identification.

The first part of the essay introduces some of Doyle's thoughts and feelings about his son's heart condition. The first paragraph has an interesting structure: it provides us an introduction to the problems that Liam has with his heart, but also puts us inside Doyle's head. The first six sentences of the paragraph are short and staccato-like. Here, Doyle uses the repetition of the first word of the sentence (*anaphora*), in this case the word "He," to build emphasis, almost like a drum beat, and set up evocative contrast. "He looked like a cucumber on steroids. He was fat and bald and round. He looked healthy as a horse. He wasn't." The short, choppy sentences certainly grab the attention and reinforce the difference between Liam's

appearance at his birth and the reality of his condition. This contrast is also emphasized by the detail Doyle provides, especially the similes – “looked like a cucumber on steroids” (a delightful and provocative comparison), and “healthy as a horse.” The first few sentences therefore create a palpable tension that pulls the reader into the essay.

Then Doyle launches into a run-on, breathless, almost Faulkner-like sentence that extends for the rest of the paragraph. “You need four rooms in your heart for smooth conduct through this vale of fears and tears, and he only had three, so pretty soon doctors cut him open and iced down his heart and shut it down for an hour while they made repairs, and when he was about 18 months old he had another surgery, during which they did more tinkering, and all this slicing and dicing worked, and now he’s ten, and the other day as he and I were having a burping contest he suddenly said, *explain to me my heart stuff?*, which I tried to do, in my usual Boring Dad way, and soon he wandered off, I think to beat up his brother, but I sat there remembering.”

This sentence is stuffed with brief details of two surgeries, and some engaging detail showing interaction between father and son, interaction that is the provocation for the argument in this essay. Doyle is using a technique often used in essays, jumping from thought to thought as his mind takes hold of an idea, the purpose of which is to replicate the jumbled, rambling way humans think. In this case it also helps to confirm the turmoil that Doyle experiences as he thinks back on the difficulties of the surgery, which then helps the reader feel as if they are inside Doyle’s life. This is enhanced by his conversational style, and the way he uses this

touching moment between father and son to contrast with the depth of his turmoil as the surgery was being performed.

Doyle also uses rhythm and pacing very effectively in this first paragraph, from the short sentences that pull the reader in, to the rush of the run-on sentence building to a breathless climax. He cleverly speeds up the pace of reading through his use of *anaphora*, *alliteration* (“healthy as a horse”), and *assonance* and *rhyme* (“vale of fears and tears,” “slicing and dicing”). The reading effect is important because it creates tension and anticipation, as we are pushed to the final word of the paragraph – “remembering” – and then we stop with Doyle as he reflects.

Doyle then uses rhythm and pace to create similar effect in the second paragraph as he reflects back on his time spent visiting the hospital. For instance, he uses alliteration as he described “pacing hospital and house and hills” to amplify the sense of the repetitious movement he is making, and this not only helps us picture his pacing, but helps the reader feel as if they are there with Doyle, not only in his physical pacing, but also as he mentally circles through his thoughts.

We also encounter one of Doyle’s most vivid *metaphors* – “There was a certain clarity there; I used to crawl into that clarity at night to sleep.” This image is vivid because of the sense of desperation that it invokes, and because it is a compelling image that any troubled parent can identify with. And Doyle contrasts that clarity with the confusion he feels, which is reflected in the stylistic choices we encounter in the text, especially in the long list of questions that he bombards us with. “What if his brain gets bent? What if he ends up alive but without his mind at all? What then? Who would he be?” The questions are evocative partly because they are

presented in this overwhelming, relentless list (12 in all), but also because of the brutal honesty reflected in the questions. The continuous list of questions leaves us breathless, almost overwhelmed, just as Doyle felt.

Doyle consistently bares his soul, and we see his doubt, both his self-doubt, and even the wavering of his religious faith. But by being so honest, and by letting us in his head and heart, Doyle is also building his *ethos*, or his credibility with his readers. Although Doyle is provocative in his honesty, he is so genuine and conversational that it breaks down the barriers between him and the reader. This is important; he needs us to connect with him and feel if we are going to be captured by the argument that he is building. Part of his argument is that it is okay to be a person of faith and have doubts and be afraid; and that it might be possible for us to change our hearts if we recognize and come to terms with our failings.

Doyle also builds his *ethos* by his use of religious *allusion*. In the first paragraph he alludes to Psalm 23 (“conduct through this vale of fears and tears”), which Doyle plays with by adding the references to “tears” (a Keats allusion to the world as a place of suffering), and which hints at Doyle’s own internal suffering. But his reference also hints at the encouraging component that readers usually associate with this psalm, and therefore not only foreshadows Doyle’s discussion of his crisis of faith, but also foreshadows the moral/religious argument that forms the climax of his essay.

The religious component of the essay is very important for the third paragraph, where Doyle reflects on the result of his emotional turmoil. Here, Doyle plays with an interesting *personification* of his thoughts, where he takes the

abstraction of thoughts and gives them a tangible physicality. “I just tell you that I had these thoughts and they haunt me still. I can’t even push them across the page and have them sit between you and me unattached to either of us, for they are bound to me always, like the dark fibers of my heart.” This is such an interesting strategy because it engages the reader directly with his own thoughts, and by giving them a physical presence they become a kind of challenge that can’t be escaped and must be faced. It is as if by engaging us with his own turbulent thoughts, he is engaging us with our own. Of course, he is again confirming his ethos, but in a way he challenges the reader as well.

In paragraph three he also begins to transition to the second part of his essay, where he builds on the *allegory* of the damaged heart in order to cause us to question our own hearts. “For our hearts are not pure; our hearts are filled with need and greed as much as with love and grace; and we wrestle with our hearts all the time.” Again we see his clever use of pacing, but here our hearts become *symbols* of our emotional and moral struggles, and the image of wrestling is extremely appropriate. By comparing our internal moral struggles to wrestling, with its connotation of a difficult, slippery, hands-on, one-on-one battle, he makes concrete the difficulty of coming to terms with ourselves as human beings.

Doyle also builds his argument about the relationship between our hearts and wrestling by using *gradatio*, a ladder-like progressive argument, where one step builds on another. “We wrestle with our hearts all the time. The wrestling is who we are. How we wrestle is who we are. We’re verbs.” Doyle builds off his claim that we wrestle with our hearts to argue that the way we wrestle with our hearts defines who

we are. The implication of his argument is that all people struggle, so the quality of character is not determined by our struggles, but rather how we deal with them.

Whether or not you agree with Doyle's argument, it is hard not to be caught up in the compelling structure of progression he builds into his argument.

And then we come to the fourth paragraph, the *climax* of Doyle's essay. The final paragraph is full of powerful images, and Doyle cleverly contrasts religious allusions with evolutionary allusions, which in his own subtle way, questions evolutionary thinking. Doyle is asking us to evolve, to change our thinking, and more importantly to change our behavior, and these images are extremely important in helping us identify with his argument. And that is why the controlling symbol of the heart is so vital to the overall structure of his argument, especially the way he ties his son's condition, and the challenge of trying to repair his heart, to his son's innocent claim that he will make a new heart. This innocent thought launches Doyle into considering the intriguing possibility of us changing our own hearts. And Doyle builds on such a possibility with powerful contrast, using strong allusions such as, "What might we be if we rise and evolve, if we come down from the brooding trees, if we unclench the fist and drop the dagger, if we emerge blinking from the fort and stockade, if we smash the shells from around our hearts, if we haul the beams and motes from our eyes?" This contrast powerfully highlights what is with what might be.

Yet, as powerful as those images are, it is the climactic structure of the paragraph, and the way it pulls the reader towards the conclusion that is most worth noting. Doyle continues, "What might we be.... If we do what we say we will do, if

we act as if our words really matter, if our words become muscled mercy, if we grow a fifth chamber in our hearts and a seventh and a ninth, and become as if new creatures arisen from our shucked skins, the creatures we are so patently and brilliantly and utterly and wholly and holy capable of becoming...”

Doyle repeatedly increases the pace of reading by either using run-on sentences or by playing with punctuation, and the result is that his essay is forceful even though it is short. The best example of his clever use of pacing is his final rushing sentence. The sentence is packed full of images, and again Doyle uses *anaphora* (“if” repeated at the beginning of each clause) to build repetition and pace, as well as *alliteration* (“drop the dagger,” “smash the shells,” “muscled mercy,” “shucked skins”) to enhance the rhythm of this sentence. Then after marching us towards the conclusion, he sends us sprinting towards the climax with his wonderful run-on list of adjectives (“patently and brilliant and utterly and wholly and holy”), and Doyle uses *polysyndeton*, the repetition of “and” between adjectives, to amplify the effect of the adjective list and speed us to his final question – “What then?” And because the question is broken off from the rest of the paragraph, it stops us hard, breathless, and leaves us to ask ourselves what we could do if we are willing to change and become new creatures. Further, as its own paragraph it becomes a fifth “chamber,” adding on to the four chambers preceding it.

Of course there are more stylistic components of the essay than I have looked at, and there are certainly other ways to look at the text, but what I have analyzed is enough to show how carefully and purposefully this essay was constructed, and to see how Doyle’s stylistic decisions shape and inform the different elements of the text.

There are different ways of evaluating why Doyle made the choices he did, but it is clear that Doyle made those choices with purpose; this essay wasn't just thrown together.

One of the best ways to see the impact of his stylistic choices is to compare those choices, with aspects of the essay Doyle changed in the later version. Rather than go into those changes in detail, I just want to highlight a few of the changes that were made and leave the reader to consider the impact those changes have on the text. For instance, Doyle makes the essay longer. How does that affect the reading? And Doyle also separates the paragraphs. What is the effect of that decision, especially on the climactic effect he created in the earlier version? Doyle includes more of the actual dialogue with his son (152). How does that change the impact of the essay? He includes a paragraph of detail on what he packed for his son the night before the operation. Why? He also breaks up his long list of questions from paragraph 3 into separate lines (155). Is that an effective strategy? What about the way he calls on both his readers, and God, as he asks his question in the final paragraph? What genre is he referencing, and how does that change the way we read the essay?

Doing such a comparison confirms again the impact of different of stylistic choices. Also, this example analysis shows how easy it is for students to do a stylistic analysis if they know what they are looking for. It also confirms the value of a rhetorical consideration of style, and it shows how a rhetorical approach to analysis allows readers to not only identify stylistic elements, but also helps readers to look at how and why the stylistic elements identified work. If students understand how and

why particular effects work, then they can use those effects in their own writing, and this turns other texts into a storehouse of material.

Doyle has certainly influenced my own work, and I have enjoyed experimenting with some of the stylistic strategies he regularly uses. For instance I wrote an essay describing my passion for mountain biking, and I borrowed Doyle's run-on sentence paragraph structure for my closing paragraph in order to engage the reader in the rush of speeding down a mountain trail on a mountain bike. Here is that paragraph.

“.....the thrill of conquering that dominatrix bitch of a hill, my heart still intact, and then when I reach its peak I look down and comprehend the sweet descent, and then putting my life in the hands of the gods of speed I burst down the mountain, exploding down a twisting, stony path cut from stone, on a lightning bolt carved in metal, my teeth chattering inside my bouncing body as the distance disappears before me, and as I look back to see my tires kicking up a cloud of grey dust, I imagine that just for a moment that I am traveling so fast that it is smoke and not dust, and in that moment of delusion I think I can hear a sharp crack as I blast through the sound barrier. In that moment I am a bolt shot from the hand of God. In that moment I feel truly alive.”

I used a run-on sentence to emphasize the sensation of speed as I charge down the mountain, and the way all experiences compress into one as I explode down the trail. The contrast between the run-on sentence and the two short final sentences also create emphasis for those two final sentences, and the emphasis is also supported by the use of anaphora. Also, in other essays I have written, I have borrowed Doyle's

strategy of throwing four or five coordinating adjectives in front of a noun, purposefully discarding the commas in order to emphasize the effect of the adjectives. These are just a few examples of how a student writer can use the work of a more experienced writer to develop their own writing. But it was only when I understood what Doyle was doing that I was able to borrow effectively from his stylistic choices, and it is exactly in providing this understanding that rhetorical analysis is most useful. Stylistic analysis is therefore a critical part of the way the principles of the classical curriculum can help support students.

Some final comments about stylistic analysis

Rhetorical analysis is helpful because it encourages a rational, sensible approach to criticism, one that recognizes how writing works on readers and helps students to read as writers. It is important to emphasize that this is not a critical approach that tries to reduce style to a simple set of rules, but instead, as has been mentioned, encourages a plurality of perspectives. which is important because it helps students to see the range of possibilities available in texts. As Booth points out, “the variability of judgments, far from indicating mere subjectivity or non-rationality, is the very mark of rationality” (97). Therefore, “we should not only expect, but welcome a variety of appraisal” (98). Such variety can only increase students’ options.

On the other hand, this critical approach also recognizes, as Booth points out, that authors create possibilities in texts “by framing well-designed doors and openings” (Booth 64), which they do through using specific stylistic techniques. As such, each text has “horizons of potentiality” (91). So, although there are a variety of

responses to a text, those responses are limited within the context of rhetorical effects, which are reflected in the stylistic choices an author makes. Therefore, because certain identifiable effects exist, and because authors intentionally choose from among those effects, Booth argues that readers have a certain ethical responsibility towards the texts they criticize, which means it is not enough to impress our values on a text without evaluating it in the context within which it was created. According to Booth, this means that we must reflect on and be able to defend our judgments about texts, rather than simply assert them (70).

Christiansen supports Booth's claims about reader responsibility. She argues that "if a reader misses the writer's intentions, the reader misreads" (94). Therefore, critical readers need to have a "sense of responsibility for the readings they write" (94). Her comments are very strong, especially when you consider that intention in a piece of creative writing is not always clear, but both Booth and Christiansen are hinting at the fact that sometimes students' readings are sloppy or inadvertent readings resulting from a lack of experience or analytical training, or because students are engaging in impressionistic or cursory readings. Potential misreading is part of the reason responses to pieces in workshops can be far ranging, and sometimes conflicting, which then makes it difficult for a student-writer to know whose advice to follow.

As was mentioned earlier, part of the reason why students struggle with critique is because they lack experience doing analysis and rely on intuitive reading skills developed through their own experience reading texts. As was shown with the discussion of Twain's "Life on the Mississippi," students who haven't been trained to

know what to look for may miss important stylistic clues in texts as they focus on content rather than structure. Therefore, it is vitally important that students are provided with training and guidance in offering analysis, as well as being given appropriate opportunity to practice doing analysis or critique.

Another significant problem with workshop critique is that students often have to read two or three longer pieces for a single workshop session, and as a result often skim through the texts, which makes it difficult for them to do the necessary close reading that would make for effective critique. This isn't helped by the fact that students sometimes don't give as much attention as needed to the comments they make in their critique because they are focused on their own writing. Hopefully, by helping students to see the importance of critique, and by teaching students what they need to do in critique, student attitudes can change, and they will see the value of their critique, both to their own and others' work. More importantly, giving students the necessary critical support they need will help teachers to maximize the advantages of the collaborative and critical structure of the workshop.

In short, the workshop can be an excellent forum for teaching creative writing and encouraging diversity of perspective, but a rhetorical approach to workshop critique better supports the structure of the workshop by helping students to recognize the context within which language works and holding students responsible to the limits of that context. Further, the classical curriculum provides a way to use stylistic criticism as a means to train students in close reading, so that they can build their reading ability and become more competent in their critique. Unfortunately, this

critical support is generally not being given in workshops because of Romantic assumptions about students' natural capacity to offer critique.

Also, because this approach to criticism helps students recognize the effect of different writing choices and helps them exercise judgment in the application of those choices, it can empower students by helping them be more conscious and more critical in the exercise of writing choices. Therefore, a comprehensive approach to stylistic analysis is actually a democratic approach to writing, giving students the capacity to make choices, and then in a democratic way, engaging them with other readers in order to consider the viability of their writing choices. This will hopefully help them to feel more confident in their ability as writers, and will engage them more directly in the critical work of the workshop.

5. Using the Classical Curriculum

Stylistic analysis is an extremely important part of the critical function of the workshop, and helps students develop necessary resources for expanding their own capacity as writers by giving them direction in reading as a writer. But stylistic analysis is only part of the rhetorical solution that the classical curriculum can offer creative writing teachers. After all, as Weathers observes, “Cognition of stylistic material is not the same as the practice of it; the knowledge must be converted into performance. Surely one needs, in addition to contemplation, a great deal of involvement” (“Teaching Style: A Possible Anatomy” 370). Therefore, this chapter will deal with the most important component of creative writing instruction – production – and will look at how the principles underlying the classical curriculum combine analysis and production in a pedagogical approach that supports the objectives of creative writing pedagogy as laid out by the AWP. That objective, again, is to help students become resourceful writers through frequent, directed practice in writing, as well as providing students the ability to analyze, appreciate, and create the components that comprise the works of literature.

This chapter will focus on how the classical curriculum used imitation and specific exercises to help students to use what they pick up in analysis to assist them in the creation of their own texts. The chapter will first provide some detail on the structure of the classical curriculum, and the way exercise and practice were used to support analysis. Then the use of imitation in the classical instruction will be discussed, and finally, the chapter will look at some specific ways the principles of the classical curriculum can be used in the contemporary creative writing class.

It is important that teachers recognize the principles behind the approach used in the curriculum, because those principles are flexible, and can be used by teachers to augment workshop instruction. After all, there are a number of constraints within the contemporary creative writing classroom that need to be considered, and that didn't exist during the classical period, but the principles that I will be discussing can be used to effectively support the current structure of the workshop. Inventive teachers who understand these principles can find a variety of ways of using these principles in their own classrooms.

From analysis to practice

Weathers argues that to make style viable, students need some specific skills: “(1) how to recognize stylistic material, (2) how to master this stylistic material and make it a part of a compositional technique, (3) how to combine stylistic material into particular stylistic modes, and (4) how to adapt particular stylistic modes to particular stylistic situations” (369).

Stylistic analysis serves the function of helping students recognize stylistic material, but the real work for students is learning to master that material, and then making that material part of their own compositional technique. Writing is work, hard work, and mastering the different elements of creative writing technique can only be done through discipline and effort. What made the classical curriculum effective was the fact that it made the work a little easier and freed student to be more creative by helping them feel more confident in their skills and their judgment by providing specific opportunity to practice what they had learned. “Style is after all, the most imitable of the skills that cooperate to produce effective discourse” (Corbett 51).

Classical teachers of rhetoric also presupposed that the ability to compose fluently and efficiently results from a lifetime of study and practice, in addition to talent; therefore, the curriculum was designed to steer students in the right direction and was not intended to be a place where students learned all they needed to know about writing. The curriculum was designed to help students pick up important skills that could then be built on outside the classroom.

Cicero, one of the most renowned Roman rhetoricians and writers described the process of developing rhetorical skill as careful work, which includes “mental concentration, reflection, watchfulness, persistence and hard work” (II. 35). Quintilian believed that capability in writing could only be attained “by hard work and assiduity of study, by a variety of exercises and repeated trial, the highest prudence and unfailing quickness of judgment” (II. 11. 15). Quintilian also believed that “the art of [writing] depends on much effort, continual study, varied kinds of exercise, long experience, profound wisdom, and unfailing strategic sense. Rules too are an aid, if they indicate the main road” (II.13).

These quotes emphasize that classical rhetoricians believed that good writing required a critical awareness or strategic sense; they also believed that carefully directed practice was an extremely important part of their curriculum because it helped students develop a habitual writing capacity. This would then help students to apply their skills intuitively and responsibly. As quoted earlier, Quintilian described this intuitive capacity as an “assured facility, with which writers use strategies and knowledge they possess. This facility is mainly the result of habit and exercise” (X 7.8).

Therefore, the classical curriculum focused on carefully designed writing activities that worked in conjunction with analysis and progressively developed students' skills. James Murphy explains that classical teachers used a "carefully plotted sequence of interpretive and recreational activities using preexisting texts to teach students how to create their own original texts. Each phase in the sequence has its purpose, but takes its value from its place in the sequence" (53). Notice that the curriculum included peer criticism. The curriculum aimed to develop students' critical thinking, which is why the analytical portion of the syllabus was so important, but it was also designed to help students develop the range of writing skills through exercise and experiment. Students were also given specific guidance so that they knew which mistakes should be avoided, and so they could judge which approaches were more effective.

So, just as the ancients recognized that students needed specific training in reading, they also recognized that students needed specific training in writing. This is different from the contemporary creative writing class where most teachers rely on the work done by students on their own writing as the basis for providing them the practice they need to become better writers. In the classical curriculum, students were taught specific principles of writing that were confirmed by analysis, and then students experimented with those principles before using them in their own work. Of course, this was a recursive process, because students were usually working on their own pieces as they are learning new principles, but the intention was to help the students practice with new skills in specific contexts so that the students could become more confident in applying the techniques they were learning.

Desiderius Erasmus, the renowned Renaissance Humanist scholar, was heavily influenced by the classical curriculum, and drew on the curriculum for his own work, *Copia: Foundations of the Abundant Style*, which provides some excellent ideas for writing exercises. As I mentioned, his work also influenced Norman Foerster in the design of the creative writing program at Iowa. Erasmus believed that one important way to help students writers to be more creative was to help them find new ways of expressing old ideas, helping them develop a kind of abundant eloquence that relieves “the tedium, and monotonous color, and delights in variety, and fresh object of interest” (1.8). Erasmus therefore encouraged students to challenge themselves to develop a variety of expression, or *copia*, by playing with language in structured ways. For instance he developed a range of transliteration exercises where students would write the same sentence or paragraph in multiple ways, or he would have them convert a poem into a story, or a story into a poem. Amongst other things, this helped students to see the impact of form and genre, and also helped them to see the range of options that were available to them in their writing. Erasmus’ exercises will be discussed in a little more detail later in the chapter.

Much of Erasmus’ thinking stems from Quintilian, who defined *copia* as “capital,” a “storehouse of ideas and of words.” In relation to *copia*, Quintilian remarked,

Words differ in exactness of reference, ornamental quality, power and euphony; they must therefore not only be known but be ready at hand,

in full view, as it were, so that when they present themselves to the speaker's judgment the choice of the best is easy. (X 1.1)

Quintilian's approach to helping student develop *copia* was to engage them in doing analytical reading of a variety of texts, having them copy techniques they admired, and then having them practice with the techniques they had discovered. In helping students develop *copia*, Quintilian was also interested in helping his students exercise judgment, and he believed that the more resources in language his students enjoyed, the greater their capacity to exercise judgment would be. As Weathers remarked, "Style, by its very nature, is the art of selection. In the art of choosing, one can and must choose from something" (369). Therefore, in the classical curriculum students were encouraged to read widely from a variety of genres so that that they could fill up their toolbox. Then through imitation, experiment and practice, students made those resources part of their compositional technique.

Quintilian and Erasmus also recognized that the ability to express ideas eloquently, or have appropriate language resources, relates to students' capacity for invention. After all, if students have access to an abundance of expression, or *copia*, they will also have access to necessary resources for invention. In this case, invention is tied to students' ability to looking at existing ideas in new ways. Having a range of writing resources also allows students to think more critically because they have more resources to bring to bear in their critical discussion.

So, in summary, in the classical curriculum students analyzed texts in order to understand how different techniques were employed. Then students imitated the techniques they identified. Then they experimented with those techniques through

specific exercises, like transliteration. Therefore, students worked with smaller pieces, either sentences, scenes, or paragraphs, in order to practice with specific techniques, and as they developed their repertoire of techniques, they progressed into longer pieces. Then the students joined with the teacher in peer criticism of the pieces that were written. Again, the aim of classical writing instruction was to help students understand the impact of writing choice, as well as develop student eloquence and creativity within a supportive structure.

More detail will be given on some specific ways this approach can be used in the contemporary creative writing class shortly, but because imitation was an important part of the way that the classical curriculum helped students bridge the gap between analysis/theory and production, I first want to look in more detail at how imitation can support creative writing instruction, and how it can help students to work with new techniques they learn.

Creative Imitation?

One of the most difficult parts of writing instruction is moving students from principle to practice. Students often understand principles discussed in class, but then struggle to apply the principle in their own writing. In the classical curriculum, imitation was an important way of bridging that gap. As Dale Sullivan observes, imitation was “placed strategically between theory (and sometimes precept) and practice as a method that enabled students to see how theory is applied in a concrete instance” (11).

Most creative writers would feel uncomfortable with the idea of actively trying to imitate another writer’s work because that would be “un-creative,” and we

are also beholden to the idea of the “Canon” and “Masterworks” that we often feel that the great writers of the past are untouchable. But Berry argues,

The modern tendency to regard familiarity with a model as a hindrance to originality or to equate imitation with lifeless replication may tell us more about modern anxieties – especially in an age of mechanical reproduction, print culture, and information technology – than about any conservatism inherent in repetition itself. (59)

On the other hand, Aristotle believed that imitation is natural to man, and the truth is that imitation is a fundamental element of the way we acquire any skill, including writing skills.

For instance, as children, we constantly learn by imitating our parents and peers, especially in the use of language. The same principle is true for learning music, where students begin learning notes and practicing chords, and then practice playing the work of various composers. Then, as the basic elements of music are mastered, students start composing their own work. And in dancing, a dancer learns the specific movements and positions they will need to effectively compose their own dance, and after learning the various moves available, the dancer can then pick from among the various, memorized positions in order to create and compose a dance of their own. This process of imitation is also used in sports, where athletes learn basic principles and skills through imitation and practice, and as those skills become habitual, athletes start developing creative approaches with those skills. Imitation is actually a very natural and comfortable way to learn.

As previously mentioned, Frank Conroy recognized the impact of unconscious mimesis or imitation in the way creative writers learn writing, and it is generally recognized that we develop as writers by observing the work of other writers. After all, the main reason students are required to read the work of accomplished writers is to provide models that the students can draw from. But as has also been discussed, it is not enough to learn to write by an unconscious osmosis. Instead, conscious imitation combines well with analysis to help students contextualize the principles they are learning. In that way, reading is like metaphor, connecting students with abstract ideas of writing and helping students to see different ways to apply various techniques.

Therefore, imitation, together with analysis, forces students aware to be aware of what they are already doing intuitively and helps them to be more critical of their choices. By copying stylistic strategies they observe and then applying those strategies in their own work, students can also better understand and recognize the effects they are observing. In this way vague discussions of style can be made more concrete, which then helps students begin to see how to move from abstract principles towards specific application. Imitation also helps them pay closer attention to what they are reading, and more importantly, helps them understand the choices made by the writers they analyze.

As Erasmus explains, students must “store [stylistic technique] in [their] memory once observed, imitate it once remembered, and by constant employment develop an expertise by which [they] may call upon it instantly” (X 1.9). Quintilian

provides an excellent explanation of imitation as a teaching tool, and its relation to *copia*:

It is from these and other authors worth reading that we must draw our stock of words, the variety of our Figures, and our system of Composition, and also guide our minds by the pattern they provide of all virtues. It is a principle of life in general that we want to do for ourselves what we approve in others. (X 2.1)

Quintilian is partly interested in the moral instruction imitation can offer students, but he is also pointing out that imitating good examples of writing can help students improve their own work. In the classical curriculum, students were therefore taught to copy the stylistic strategies they found in the good examples they read in a range of genres, either through close or loose imitation.

Imitation is certainly not easy, despite what we might think. In my experience, students want to prove that they are creative; therefore, they don't like to assiduously copy a style. Instead, they want to master it and improve on it, so they try to test themselves. The result is that students can be very creative in the way they imitate texts, and they usually try to play with the style they are imitating. The ancients recognized the value of such creative imitation, so students were encouraged to challenge themselves in their use of it, and they were encouraged to move past the texts they read and imitated by experimenting with the strategies they uncovered. Imitation therefore served as a platform to achieve new modes of expression, not as a chain to past ways of writing. As Quintilian reminds us,

If there were only one way in which anything could be satisfactorily expressed, we should be justified in thinking that the path to success had been sealed to us by our predecessors. But, as a matter of fact, the methods of expression still left to us are innumerable, and many roads lead us to the same goal. (X 7.8)

In the *Panegyrics*, Isocrates also confirms the need to use imitation as a way to develop new forms of expression. He says,

It is possible to discourse on the same subject matter in many different ways. The ability to make proper use of [style] at the appropriate time, to conceive the right sentiments about [style] in each instance, and to set [style] forth in finished phrase, is the peculiar gift of the wise. We should honor not those who seek to discourse on subjects on which no one has discoursed before, but those who know how to use discourse as no one else could. (8-10)

The interest in the classical curriculum was always on looking for new stylistic roads to travel, and imitation not only provided students with a bearing on which roads had already been explored, but also gave them a clear sense of what new directions they could take. As Berry observes, because the intention in using imitation is to go beyond resemblance, “imitation becomes, within the horizons of Bakhtin’s poetics, the difference between merely repeating another’s words and actually becoming answerable for them” (61). Isocrates’ comments also highlight that new creative works are very dependent on the work of earlier writers; therefore, the challenges for

students is not to disregard that work, but rather to find new ways of expressing old ideas. As such, imitation helps students consider originality in a new light.

But the ancients recognized that imitation had its dangers and could be abused by lazy students, and Quintilian was therefore concerned that the pedagogical purpose of imitation be maintained and that students not engage in rote or slavish forms of imitation. In Chapter 2 of the 10th book of *The Orator's Education* he highlights a number of things that teachers who use imitation exercises should consider:

- Imitation is insufficient on its own;
- It is a disgrace to be content to merely obtain the effect you are imitating, because “the follower is inevitably behind”;
- Whatever resembles an object too closely is bound to be inferior to the original;
- Imitation is a subject of most careful judgment;
- Imitation should not be restricted to words, but “we must fix our minds on the propriety with which great men handle circumstances and persons, their strategy, their arrangement, and the way in which everything is aimed at victory.” (X.2)

Quintilian's comments highlight that imitation has its limits and must be supported by the right pedagogical intent. If misapplied, imitation could easily create problems for a teacher and could turn into a bad form of drill. But if it is used properly, imitation supports students as they transition from analysis to implementation.

Also, in order to do imitation well it is vital that the student understand how style works, which is why analysis and imitation go hand in hand. For imitation to

have value it must be used within a rhetorical framework; otherwise, it would make no sense.

But imitation is used properly it is an excellent way of helping students to acquire new techniques, and since students don't require a great deal of time spent doing imitation exercises, imitation can be balanced with other pedagogical needs and can be used to support reading and discussion in class. With these principles in context, it is now possible to look at how the curriculum might be used in a contemporary creative writing class.

Transferring the classical curriculum into the contemporary creative writing classroom

The main components of a possible rhetorical curriculum for creative writing are as follows: Teachers would introduce students to the important principles of style that are suitable to the kinds of writing that will be focused on in class, whether it be fiction, poetry, or essay. The teacher would explain the rhetorical effect of those stylistic principles, and would provide models of those principles from appropriate texts. In doing so, the teacher would also start introducing students to elements of stylistic analysis, so that students know what to look for in their reading. Then students would work with class reading, or their own reading, and they would practice the principles of analysis discussed in class, and they would work to identify specific stylistic techniques. After students had analyzed specific texts, they would then be encouraged to imitate or experiment with the techniques that are identified. Students would also be taken through exercises that let them apply specific principles of style that are discussed in class, and then students would work with the principles

in their own work. During this entire process, peer evaluation could be used to support instruction, and as students practice with techniques and work in developing their pieces, the class could discuss how the work is progressing. Then once pieces were finished they could be workshopped by the class.

What is important about this approach to creative writing pedagogy is the way the different elements are integrated as a whole. Teachers could break up elements of the curriculum, but the value of this approach is that the different stages of learning to write are developed sequentially, thereby leading students through a process of progressive development and experimentation. Each part, from analysis to practice, builds on the other, in order to keep students oriented as the curriculum progresses. But despite the interlocking nature of the components of the curriculum, they are flexible, which means that creative teachers can find a variety of ways of using individual components in their own classes. After all, students need a certain amount of flexibility in their learning and writing, especially if the students in the class have different levels of experience. But it is important to emphasize that teachers have a great deal of freedom with which to approach this proposed curriculum, as long as they recognize the purpose of its design – to help students exercise judgment in writing – and as long as they recognize the importance of the theory that underlies this particular curriculum. In the hands of creative and thoughtful teachers, this curriculum can be a creative and thoughtful curriculum. Nevertheless, here are a few ideas for implementation.

1. Teach the principle

Students need to understand some of the theory of writing in order to understand why they write what they write. Again, as Coe pointed out, only writers who understand their writing choices can adapt basic principles to new contexts (206). In my experience, students enjoy understanding the “whys” of writing, and it gives them a sense of empowerment. They begin to feel like they have control of their choices.

It is important to combine theory and practice in a way that doesn't turn the principles discussed into abstractions, which is exactly why analysis and imitation help students contextualize principles. The easiest way to bring theory into the class is to encourage students to talk about the why and how of style in what they are reading and writing, and in doing that the teacher can guide the students with specific thoughtful questions. This discussion can then become the base from which to build an awareness of how to approach analysis.

There are a number of different questions that could be used to provoke students' thinking about style, and some of those questions are those discussed in Chapter 4 in the section on stylistic analysis. These questions, as mentioned, are focused on helping student to understand why and how they write, and therefore direct students to think about the possible effect of their stylistic choices. For instance, teachers could ask students to think about why do texts do what they do, and how readers identify with texts. Or teachers could discuss how different genres work and why, and the difference between genres; or teachers could discuss the relationship between plot and story; or the different structures of creative text; or importance of climax, tension, suspense, mystery, conflict, excitement, escape,

entertainment as effects; or many other stylistic issues. Because of the variety of issues that could be explored, it is important that teachers direct students in a structured way.

Teachers could then reinforce the principles being discussed by having students analyze examples of the principles in their reading. After that, students could try and imitate those techniques, or work with exercises that help them to practice the principles they have identified. Then students could use this experience to work with these new techniques in their own writing.

2. Read and analyze models

Discussion of principles or theory should generally be combined with appropriate reading. Good examples allow teachers to contextualize and reinforce the principles of writing being discussed in class and allow students to see different stylistic elements being applied by experienced writers. Teachers should therefore provide specific examples that confirm the principles that are being discussed, or that provoke questions about the principles. But teachers can also encourage students to find their own examples of the principles being discussed in order to help students recognize that they are just as capable of discovering writing techniques themselves.

Quintilian argued that “correct reading is a prerequisite of interpretation” (II 1. 4). The problem in the workshop is that good examples of reading are sometimes pushed aside to make time to focus on student writing, leaving students to do their own reading in their own time. But, as has been discussed, leaving students to do their own reading will not necessarily help them to acquire the critical skills they need; therefore, students need guidance in learning to read as writers, and that needs to be

modeled by the teacher. Fortunately, it doesn't take long for students to master close analysis; after all, most creative writers are omnivorous readers.

The Doyle example hopefully gives teachers a sense of the way that texts can be approached from a rhetorical perspective, and how easy it is for students to engage in this kind of analysis if they are given some specific guidance. Again, the critical concern for creative writing students would be trying to understand the impact of the stylistic choices authors have made in their texts, so they could think about how to use those strategies in their own writing.

In the classical curriculum, students were also encouraged to read aloud because it helped students pay closer attention to the sound of writing and the way sentence structure and other stylistic devices affected the pace and flow of reading. Reading aloud is also valuable because it helps students with their own revision, and shows them how easy it is to pick out their own mistakes if they are careful.

The value of a writerly approach to reading is simple: it shows students that writing is not a mysterious art, just a careful art, and helps them recognize the judgment being exercised by experienced writers. Teaching students stylistic analysis also helps students to become accustomed to close reading and helps them develop a high degree of linguistic sensitivity, as well as developing a vocabulary of analysis and critique. But the best part of teaching critical reading is that in class discussion students will notice different aspects of style in the texts they analyze, and the plurality of their responses will only emphasize the range of options available to them, thereby unveiling new possibilities for approaching writing.

3. Copy and Imitate

As discussed, an excellent way to help students move from analysis to production is through imitation. But before they work on imitation, it is helpful to have students copy out examples from what they read. This also helps them pay closer attention to what they are reading, and helps them build a record of techniques. An excellent strategy to assist in copying is the keeping of a commonplace book, a tool that was used during the Renaissance and through to the 18th century, by writers such as Milton and Wordsworth. The idea is for students to have a book where they keep copied examples, so that they can have easy access to them and can refer to them again in the future. Students would then use the copybook as a way to write down thoughts about techniques used in material they are reading, both for class and in their own reading, and students could copy material at their own leisure. The copybook can also be a place to record ideas of writing and can therefore serve as a resource for invention.

Keeping a copybook is a helpful tool for creative writing students because instead of just reading material, students can develop the habit of closely observing what they read. Each item they copied would also add to their storehouse of techniques, and students could then use what they copy as the basis for imitation exercises. But teachers would need to be careful of forcing the use of a copybook on students, because they might become resistant to its use and see it as unnecessary work

Copying prepares students for imitation, but imitation is the more valuable exercise. Once the teacher has identified a particular stylistic techniques in a text, the teacher can then have the students imitate the technique, either in a close syntactical

imitation, where students would try and copy the passage as closely in style as possible, or in a loose analysis, where students would just try to imitate the principle of a stylistic effect. Imitation allows students to get to see the nuts and bolts of the technique, and more importantly, allows them to see how easy it is to pick up techniques if they are willing to practice with those techniques until they master them. In doing imitation, students could work on sentence level techniques, for instance the use of passive sentences for rhetorical purposes; or students could focus on a figurative level, for instance the author's use of metaphor, alliteration, personification, or antonomasia; or students could work on the level of structure, for instance imitating different poetic or essay forms.

In the classical curriculum, the examples imitated were usually shorter pieces – paragraphs or portions of paragraphs. It was also important in the classical curriculum to vary authors, in order to get a variety of examples and learn different techniques. Before imitating the example, student need to read for understanding, otherwise they will lose the context for the use of the technique, and students need to be encouraged to be as careful and accurate as possible. As discussed, the purpose behind imitation is to help students develop *copia*, or as Quintilian explains, an abundance of the best words, phrases, and figures for use later on (X.2).

4. Exercise and experiment

Once students have imitated stylistic techniques, the next step for students is to employ those in their own writing. Only by experimenting is it possible for students to internalize the principles, and until the principles are internalized they will not be much of an aid to students. Students can certainly experiment with the

strategies they discover in pieces they are working on, but it is usually better to set up exercises where students work on shorter pieces in class, preferably scenes, or portions of a story or poems, that give students a specific framework within which to experiment. Then, once they feel comfortable with particular principles, they can start applying those principles in their own work. Students are also more likely to experiment with shorter pieces rather than experimenting with something they are preparing for a workshop.

The best thing about making them experiment with different approaches to a text is that they stop relying on their intuitive writing ability and are therefore encouraged to broaden their range. It also helps new, inexperienced writers in the class feel more comfortable. The aim of these exercises is to help students become aware of the variety of structures of which the English language is capable, and show that there isn't a perfect approach, but rather a variety of good ways of saying something. Finally, experimenting prepares them for workshop critique by making them aware of what they need to look for and developing their ability to analyze texts.

In using exercises, Erasmus encouraged students to “transform the basic expression into a Protean variety of shapes,” (1.10) and this is the basis of transliteration – encouraging students to play with new techniques of writing, while considering the effect of the different techniques. Transliteration exercises can work in conjunction with imitation exercises, but can also be used to support principles of style being discussed in class. As teachers introduce a particular principle – plot, scene, dialogue, rhyme, etc – they could then engage the student with the particular principle by having them experiment with different kinds of plot, scene, and so on.

Erasmus recommended a variety of approaches to transliteration exercises, but an inventive teacher could devise a whole range of such exercises in support of the principles being discussed in class. Here are three examples:

- Challenging students to see how many ways they can write out a particular sentence, paragraph, or scene. This could be done by changing the point of view of the scene, the tone of the piece, the characters, etc. The goal is to try a variety of approaches and to see how changing language or style changes the effect of a scene, sentence, or paragraph.
- Show not tell – having student develop the detail of a piece, and experimenting with developing and fleshing out detail in a scene, or trying different figurative approaches. The intention here would be to amplify or build up, expand and develop specifics of the scene, thus highlighting those elements.
- Taking a story, or a scene from a story, and writing it in the form of a poem, or taking a poem and converting it into a scene for a story or writing it as a narrative.

Transliteration exercises can be a great deal of fun, but more importantly they help students connect with principles discussed in class. Through the exercises, students begin to see what works and what doesn't, which hopefully makes them more critical, and they can then begin to evaluate which effects are more appropriate for their own work. Students can also better appreciate form, as well as the salient differences

between genres, and the rhetorical purpose for the conventions that exist in particular genres. This then helps to confirm the discussion of style that takes place in class.

The best thing about transliteration exercises is that there are multiple ways to use them in the classroom, and they can be made longer or shorter as needed.

Therefore, creative writing teachers can introduce them where necessary and can also come up with a variety of different exercises that teach specific principles, whether it be figurative language, characterization, or dialogue. In the end, the exercises serve the need of the students and help orient them in their classroom discussion and criticism, thereby making writing seem a little less mysterious. Students will therefore hopefully feel a little more confident in their own abilities and will feel more committed to and engaged in the class.

Some final comments about the curriculum

The curriculum that I have proposed takes the principles of the classical curriculum, and combines them with modern rhetorical theory, in order to support the critical purpose of the workshop and provide solutions to some of the problems encountered in the creative writing classroom. The main value of this curriculum is the comprehensive, structured, rhetorically aware nature of the curriculum, and it therefore provides excellent support for some of the objectives of creative writing that have been discussed in this thesis. The curriculum assists students in learning to read as writers, helps them to be more adept critics, and provides a way that they can transfer what they read into their writing through directed practice. Further, the curriculum ties these different objectives together in a sensible and sequential framework that gives students a clear structure within which to develop their writing.

But I recognize that this curriculum is not a panacea for creative writing pedagogy; it is just another way of approaching creative writing pedagogy. Also, despite its benefits, it has its own problems, and often what makes the curriculum effective is what can also make it ineffective. Firstly, because it is a methodical and thorough approach to the teaching of writing it can easily be turned into a class that offers a formulaic approach to writing. Analysis and imitation can be turned into drills, and teachers and students may attempt to narrowly categorize certain forms of writing or stylistic effects. Therefore, without a thoughtful, creative approach to the curriculum, it could easily become restrictive rather than empowering. On the other hand, despite some the “formulaic” elements of the curriculum, such as imitation, this is a curriculum that encourages creativity and flexibility, and the structure of the curriculum can help students to feel more comfortable experimenting.

The other problem with this curriculum is that because it is based on the classical curriculum it is large and comprehensive. The classical curriculum worked because students devoted a great deal of time to learning rhetoric, actually a period of about 10 years of intensive training where they focused largely on rhetoric. Obviously, such a comprehensive approach is not viable in the context of the pressured contemporary creative writing class, so teachers need to consider how best to fit the curriculum into their own classes, while considering the restraints they face. That is why I have focused on the principles underlying the curriculum, because it is the principles that are most important, and those principles are flexible enough to be used as a teacher sees fit and can be adapted to the shortened curriculums found in contemporary classrooms.

Finally, as has been mentioned previously, this curriculum is not intended to be an alternative to the workshop, but a support of the workshop. Criticism is a vital and necessary part of being a better writer, and the greatest value of this curriculum is that it can help students to be better, more conscientious critics. Therefore, by augmenting workshop criticism with specific theory and reading, and with imitation and transliteration exercises, students can grow in their critical awareness, grow in confidence, and grow in their ability as writers. This curriculum can therefore assist creative writing teachers in using the workshop for the function for which was designed – as a place where criticism and production are combined in a structured, collaborative environment that supports and directs students' efforts. In such a pragmatic, democratic learning environment, students can be empowered in their writing, and they will be given an opportunity to develop whatever writing capacity they might have.

Conclusion

Part of the purpose of this thesis has been to highlight some of the real concerns that exist in creative writing pedagogy, and Chapter 1 detailed a number of those concerns. But as I conclude I want to refer back to the narrative that was provided in the introduction, and by detailing how that narrative came about, again confirm the reality of the problems that exist in creative writing pedagogy, and thereby encourage creative writing teachers to see the importance of addressing these problems.

The purpose of that narrative was to highlight some of the specific challenges that students in a creative writing class, especially those in their first creative writing class, experience. Of course, some of the details of that narrative are reflective of some of my own experience as I tried to deal with the lack of structure offered in the graduate creative writing workshops I attended. But I have also talked to numerous graduate and undergraduate creative writing students, and many of those I have spoken to have expressed similar concerns about workshops they have participated in. Then, as I have spoken to various creative writing teachers at conferences I have attended, I have heard more of the same complaints. Finally, in preparation for this thesis, I had the opportunity to team-teach an undergraduate creative writing class and I was able to see some of the student's struggles first hand. All of these experiences have reconfirmed for me the challenges underlying creative writing instruction; therefore, the narrative I provided was designed to reflect some of these problems in a concrete way, so that teachers might be aware of the need to find productive solutions.

Yet, despite these concerns, I also want to emphasize that I am resistant to some of the stereotypical criticism of creative writing that has appeared in some of the articles written about creative writing pedagogy. For one, I recognize the difficulties and stresses for creative writing teachers who are attempting to write and publish in the current market. Therefore, I disagree with those who say that creative writing lacks rigor; it is just a different kind of rigor than that required in other areas of English studies. Although creative writing doesn't produce research, it certainly produces social and intellectual capital for English departments, and this contribution is reflected in the growth of creative writing departments.

I also recognize that there is an increased interest in the issue of creative writing pedagogy in the discipline, and an increased interest in theory, and therefore the "monkey in the hall" (Camoin 2) criticism directed at creative writing teachers may no longer be as valid. As I have participated in various forums on creative writing pedagogy, I have been impressed at how more and more teachers of creative writing are exploring different ways of teaching creative writing, and although these new approaches are often still informed by Romantic thinking, many teachers are trying to offer new solutions. Certainly, there are still teachers of creative writing who fit some of the stereotypes and who continue to use the staple workshop approach, but increasingly there are teachers who recognize the problems that exist in creative writing pedagogy. It is those teachers that this thesis is directed towards.

Also, it is easy to forget that the structure of the discipline of creative writing as reflected in American universities is not the only way to approach to the teaching of creative writing. As Graeme Harper, a creative writing professor at the University

of Portsmouth, reminds us, the discipline of creative writing in countries like England and Australia have a very different make up (205). For instance, in England, where English departments are not segmented as they are in America, creative writing and literature are still part of the same curriculum. Recognizing the different approaches taken in different countries is important because it reminds us that there are different ways of teaching creative writing if we look past the distinctions that have been put in place over time.

My criticism, however, is certainly directed at the Romantic thinking, and the Romantic identity, that has a strong hold on creative writing departments. There seems to be a strong, unconscious need in creative writing to maintain the Romantic identity of the writer, as if the curtain of creative writing were to be pulled back, everyone would lose faith in the creative abilities of writers. But I don't believe that is the case; instead I think that looking back behind the curtain actually makes creative writing more interesting.

The problem with Romantic thinking is that it is marked by contradictions, and those contradictions conflict directly with many of the pragmatic aims of creative pedagogy. James Berlin highlighted that current-traditional rhetoric has been a compelling paradigm for composition, "making it impossible to conceive of the discipline [of composition] in any other way" (9), but the same has been true of the influence of Romantic thinking on the discipline of creative writing. Maybe it is time for some change, or at least a willingness to question Romantic thinking.

Burke provides an excellent metaphor detailing the way that particular paradigms or distinctions take hold of our thinking, as well as detailing the viability of questioning those distinctions once they become fixed in place. He says:

Distinctions, we may say, arise out of a great central moltenness, where all is merged. They have been thrown from a liquid center to the surface, where they have congealed. Let one of these crusted distinctions return to its source, and in this alchemical center it may be remade, again becoming molten liquid, and may enter into new combinations. (xxi)

Unfortunately, Romantic thinking, despite some of its benefits, has congealed and hardened over time, and people now seem unwilling to question the viability of that paradigm. The historical detail that I provided on Romantic thinking, as well as current-traditional rhetoric, was an attempt to show how and why the Romantic paradigm has become fixed in place. Understanding this history is important, because if creative writing teachers are to challenge Romantic thinking, they need to recognize the source of Romantic thinking and be willing to ask which elements of Romantic thinking are valid and which are not. After all, Romantic thinking is marked by its reaction to certain parts of Enlightenment thinking, and it is therefore important to ask to what extent the pedagogical approach used in creative writing is reactionary or critical, and to what extent the epistemology underlying Romantic thinking conflicts with the aims of creative writing pedagogy.

The solutions offered in this thesis are one way of taking some of the problematic distinctions that exist in Romantic thinking and making them into new

combinations by adding a rhetorical perspective. But why should creative writing be willing to draw on rhetoric as a way to support its pedagogy? For one thing, I believe that the solutions that have been offered here are viable and appropriate for the objectives of creative writing instruction. Students need tools to explain how their writing works so they can be more aware of the choices that they have, thus empowering their writing. The benefit of a rhetorical approach to writing is that rhetoric exists exactly for the purpose of understanding what writing does, and therefore rhetorical theory has some important insight to offer the discipline of creative writing, just as creative writing has important insights to offer rhetoric. Rhetorical theory can therefore help creative writing students consider the why of writing, and therefore does not serve as a means of overcoming the creative purposes of the discipline of creative writing. Instead, a rhetorical curriculum is a support of the aims of creative writing pedagogy.

Also, the classical rhetorical curriculum is an especially viable option for teaching creative writing because of its sophisticated and structured approach to teaching writing. The curriculum supports both criticism and production, and because the curriculum reflects a deep appreciation for the rhetorical impact of style, it is a curriculum that can help students become more conscious of stylistic choices, as well as helping them learn how to exercise judgment in their choices. As James Boyd White explains, “Part of any art is knowing one’s materials well” (81), and it is in helping students come to know their materials that this curriculum is most valuable. Hopefully, if they know their materials well, then they will be able to control their language rather than be controlled by it (81).

Another benefit for creative writing in drawing on rhetorical theory, whether it be the discussion of rhetorical theory taking place in composition studies, or discussions of rhetorical theory taking place on a broader scale, is that there is a whole body of research to draw on that can offer solutions to some of the problems in creative writing pedagogy. Because creative writing teachers have their own publishing requirements, they don't have the same amount of time to devote to research as composition scholars, so rather than reinvent the wheel, it would seem sensible for them to draw on a body of knowledge that is tied closely to some of their own theoretical and pedagogical concerns.

Finally, rhetorical theory provides another perspective on the issue of epistemology and its impact on creative writing pedagogy. Because rhetorical theory recognizes the socially constructed nature of reality and the impact that has on the writing process, rhetorical theory helps balance the extremes of the isolated individualism expressed in Romantic beliefs with the extremes of the positivistic beliefs in current-traditional rhetoric. Also, rhetorical theory provides an important way of looking at the impact of the social structure of the workshop and its role in assisting students in developing their writing.

Of course there is a great deal more to discuss about creative writing pedagogy, and the place of rhetorical theory in that pedagogy. This thesis is just a dip into a more far-reaching conversation, but the extent of the conversation should remind creative writers of how important it is for them to engage in their own pedagogical concerns, as well as looking to the ongoing conversations in other disciplines in order to get new perspectives on the problem encountered in the creative writing classroom.

Hopefully, such conversations will provide an opportunity to reconsider some of the crusted distinctions that have prevented creative writing, rhetoric, and literary studies from working together.

Personally, I think that it is important to engage in such conversations because they help us think about writing in truly creative ways, and a critical approach to thinking about writing can only expand the horizons of our understanding of and our interaction with writing. Therefore, I hope this thesis will not only help creative writing teachers think about their pedagogy in new ways, but will also add to the broader critical conversation on the teaching of writing, thereby prompting further productive discussion about how we can help our students to experience writing as a “topos of joyful playfulness and an infinite source of pleasure” (Poulakos 176).

Appendix A

Life on The Mississippi – Mark Twain (Chapter 8) 1883.

The face of the water, I time, became a wonderful book – a book that was a dead language to the uneducated passenger, but which told its mind to me without reserve, delivering its most cherished secrets to me as clearly as if it uttered them with a voice. And it was not a book to be read at once and thrown aside, for it had a new story to tell every day. Throughout the long twelve hundred miles there was never a page that was void of interest, never once that you could read without loss, never one that you would want to skip, thinking you could never find enjoyment in some other thing. There never was so wonderful a book written by man; never one who interest was so absorbing, so unflagging, so sparkingly renewed with every reperusal. The passenger who could read it was charmed with a peculiar sort of faint dimple on its surface (on the rare occasion he did not overlook it altogether); but to the pilot that was an *italicized* passage; indeed, it was more than that, it was a legend of the largest capitals, with a string of shouting exclamation points at the end of it, for it meant that a wreck or a rock was buried there that could tear the life out of the strongest vessel that ever floated. It is the faintest and simplest expression that the water ever makes, and the most hideous to a pilot's eye. In truth, the passenger who could not read this book saw nothing but all manner of pretty pictures in it, painted by the sun and shaded by the clouds, whereas to the trained eye these were not pictures at all, but the grimmest and most dead-earnest of reading matter.

Now when I had mastered the language of this water, and had come to know every trifling feature that bordered the great river as familiarly as I knew the letters of the alphabet, I had made a valuable acquisition.

Appendix B

“How We Wrestle Is Who We Are” – Brian Doyle, Orion Magazine Version

My son Liam was born ten years ago. He looked like a cucumber on steroids. He was fat and bald and round. He looked healthy as a horse. He wasn't. He was missing a chamber in his heart. You need four rooms in your heart for smooth conduct through this vale of fears and tears, and he only had three, so pretty soon doctors cut him open and iced down his heart and shut it down for an hour while they made repairs, and then when he was about eighteen months old he had another surgery, during which they did more tinkering, and all this slicing and dicing worked, and now he's ten, and the other day as he and I were having a burping contest he suddenly said, *explain to me my heart stuff?*, which I tried to do, in my usual Boring Dad way, and soon enough he wandered off, I think to beat up his brother, but I sat there remembering.

I remember pacing hospital and house and hills, and thinking that his operations would either work or not and he would either live or die. There was a certain clarity there; I used to crawl into that clarity at night to sleep. But nothing else was clear. I used to think, in those sleepless days and nights, what if they don't fix him all the way and he's a cripple all his life, a pale thin kid in a wheelchair who has Crises? What if his brain gets bent? What if he ends up alive but without his mind at all? What then? Who would he be? Would he always be what he might have been? Would I love him still? What if I wasn't man enough to love him? What if he was so damaged that I prayed for him to die? Would those prayers be good or evil?

I don't have anything sweet or wise to say about those thoughts. I can't report that God gave me strength to face my fears, or that my wife's love saved me, or anything cool or poetic like that. I just tell you that I had those thoughts, and they haunt me still. I can't even push them across the page here and have them sit between you and me unattached to either of us, for they are bound to me always, like the dark fibers of my heart. For our hearts are not pure; our hearts are filled with need and greed as much with love and grace; and we wrestle with our hearts all the time. The wrestling is who we are. How we wrestle is who we are. We're verbs. What we want is never what we are. Not yet. Maybe that's why we have these relentless engines in our chests, driving us forward toward what we might be.

Eventually my son will need a new heart, a transplant when he's thirty or forty or so, though Liam said airily the other day that he's decided to grow a new one from the old one, which I wouldn't bet against him doing, him being a really remarkable kid and all, but that made me think: what if we could grow new hearts out of old one's? What might we be then? What might we be if we rise and evolve, if we come further down from the brooding trees and out onto the smiling plain, if we unclench the fist and drop the dagger, if we emerge blinking from the fort and stockade and the prison, if we smash the shells from around our hearts, if we haul the beams and motes from our eyes, if we do what we say we will do, if we act as if our words really matter, if our words become muscled mercy, if we grow a fifth chamber in our hearts and a seventh and ninth, and become as if new creatures arisen from our shucked skins, the creatures we are so patently and brilliantly and utterly and wholly and holy capable of becoming...

What then?

Appendix C

“How We Wrestle Is Who we Are?” – Wet Engine Version, Ch X

When my son was little, and all of this was happening to him, all this editing and twisting and icing and stitching and worrying and weeping and beeping and not sleeping, I used to lie awake thinking about what I would tell him about this time. Someday, if he lived, he would ask me what happened then, and I would have to answer him with all the honesty and eloquence demanded of love.

This finally happened a month ago. We had a moment alone, which is rare, and we were sitting at the dining room table having a burping contest and he suddenly said:

Explain to me my heart stuff?

Well, essentially you were born with three chambers in your heart and you need four.

What’s a chamber?

Like a room for pumping blood. They’re little but if you don’t have four you lose.

Where did the other room go?

I don’t know. Good question.

So Dave fixed me?

Dave and some other people.

How did they do that?

They opened your chest and moved things around so your heart worked better. They couldn't add a fourth chamber so they tinkered with veins and things and built you a new engine. Essentially.

Did they take my heart out?

No. They kept it hooked to a machine and the machine kept it going during the operation, while they worked on things around the heart. Essentially.

How long was I plugged into the machine?

Ninety minutes, twice.

Which is how long?

Figure it out.

Pause.

A hundred and eighty minutes.

Yup.

Which is three hours.

Yup.

So am I three hours behind everyone else?

Pause.

Dad. Am I in a different time zone?

Yup.

Cool.

Yup.

*

A few days ago he and I were sitting at the picnic table out front in the roaring light of a summer morning here, and I asked him what hearts do.

Well, dad, he said, they pump your blood. They help you run. They slow down when you're sleeping. They make a really deep sound like the bass guitar in a band. When I'm like thirty or forty years old I'll get another heart, maybe with a San Antonio Spurs logo on it. I don't think about my heart unless I'm sitting down. Sometimes I think about my heart when I am in bed trying to fall asleep. To be honest I think my heart is pretty much the same as other guy's hearts. It's not all that different. I have a certain kind of heart, that's all. If I don't get into professional basketball I might be a heart doctor like Dave. Or maybe I'll be an artist. I could do all three. I could play ball during the winter and then be a doctor and artist in the summers.

You could do that, I say.

Yah, that'd be cool, he says.

*

One time when he was about five years old he shuffled down to breakfast, his stuffed pig under his arm like a football, and we got to talking about our dreams, and he noted that he often dreamed of heaven, which he figured made sense because he had been in heaven before he was born.

You remember heaven? I ask.

Oh yah, I remember that heaven, he says. God is there all the time. He is a really big guy. He is naked. He has a black beard. He laughing all the time. He funny

guy. He have really big hands. He really big guy. He bigger than you, dad. I was not scared. No. Because he was laughing all the time. Yah, I remember that. O Yah.

*

I remember packing his bag for the hospital. First surgery. If all goes well he will be there about a week, says Dave. I pack for a week: One air cotton pajamas with flap. One pair cotton socks. One blanket, cotton. One blanket, wool. One bag of diapers. One bag of wipes. One Junior Policeman badge form local police force. One Zuni bear fetish with two magic pebbles. He is sleeping as I am packing. He is snoring like a walrus. My wife carries him out to the car in the pelting rain. I carry his bag. The bag is black and the sky is black and the street is black and my heart is black.

*

I remember thinking that the operations would either work or not work and he would either live or die. There was a certain clarity there. I used to crawl into that clarity at night. I spent a lot of time thinking about him dead, about his small coffin, about what I would miss, about the extra bed, about his clothes, about his favorite stuff. Would I put his stuffed pig in his coffin with him or keep it so I could hold it sometimes?

I used to think, what if they don't fix him all the way and he's a cripple all his life, a pale think kid in a wheelchair who has Crises?

What if his brain gets bent during all this and he ends up bad retarded?

What if he ends up alive but without his mind at all?

What if his brain and his body never grow up at all?

What then?

What would he be?

Who would I be?

Would he always be what he might have been?

Would I love him still?

It's easy to love someone healthy and happy. What if I couldn't love him?

What if he was so damaged that I prayed for him to die?

Would those prayers be good or evil?

I don't have anything sweet or wise to say about those thoughts. I can't report that I found new courage in God, or that God gave me strength to face my fears, or that my wife's love saved me, or anything cool or poetic like that. I just tell you that I had those thoughts, late at night, in the dark, and they haunt me still. I can't even push them across the page here and have them sit between you and me unattached to either of us, for they are bound to me always, like the dark fibers of my heart. For our hearts are not pure; our hearts are filled with need and greed as much with love and grace; and we wrestle with our hearts all the time. The wrestling is who we are. How we wrestle is who we are. It never stops. We are never complete. We are verbs. What we want to be is never what we are. Not yet. Maybe that's why we have these relentless engines in our chest, driving us forward toward what we might be.

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We love so helplessly. We can't control our love or understand it or even articulate it much beyond the banal. And there are so many forms and levels and shapes and flavors and speeds and depths and topographies and landscapes and colors

and musics of love that the default cultural concept of love as romance only is a willful cultural addition to microcosm. Romance is a small sea in a vast ocean. The heart leaps in so many directions at once.

*

What might we be, as a species, in the years to come? Oh what, o God tell me, o people tell me, o friends and lovers tell me, o enemies tell me, o come clear to me in the entrails of birds and the fleeting tails of stars, what might we be if we rise and evolve, if we reach and leap, if we deepen and sing, if we come down further from the brooding trees and out onto the smiling plain, if we unclench the fist and drop the dagger, if we emerge blinking from the fort and the stockade and the prison, if we smash the bricks from around our hearts, if we cease to stagger and swagger, if we peel the steel from our eyes, if we yearn and learn, if we do what we say we will do, if we act as if our words really matter, if our words become muscled mercy, if we grow a fifth chamber in our hearts and a seventh and a ninth, and if we become new creatures arisen from our shucked skins, creatures who become what we are so patently and brilliantly and utterly and wholly and holy capable of...

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What then?

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