TEACHING UNDERGRADUATE CREATIVE WRITING: MYTHS, MENTORS, AND METAPHORS

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I find it useful to look at three problems in the area of undergraduate creative writing instruction. First, teachers in public schools and professors in graduate schools have radically different goals for creative writing instruction, but neither extreme offers an adequate pedagogical model for the teaching of undergraduate creative writing. Second, instructors of creative writing hold an uneasy position within an unspoken English Department hierarchy which values some types of writing over others and some types of instruction over others. In many college departments, creative writing instructors are also literature and/or composition instructors, and the problems they encounter shifting from one area to another are worth considering. Third, although creative writing courses have a workshop tradition and are generally perceived of as "process oriented" classes, teachers of creative writing may have fallen behind their composition counterparts in developing productive, student-centered classrooms. This paper describes the instructional and departmental forces that have conspired to create these problems.

MYTHS

Because English departments generally see areas of instruction as being separate from each other, instructors rarely discuss the ways in which literature, composition, and creative writing classes could be organized to reinforce student learning. For instance, undergraduate creative writing classes offer instructors an important opportunity to work with university students in the areas of reading and writing, but these classes are rarely viewed as such an opportunity. Three myths about creative writing courses help to keep this from happening:

1. Creative writing can't be taught.
2. Creative writing students show little of the reluctance to learn about reading and writing that composition students too often exhibit.
3. Creative writing classes are organized as writers' workshops where a successful collaborative learning environment is developed.

Before I discuss more fully the place and purpose of undergraduate creative writing instruction, I need to examine these myths.

Creative writing classes can't be taught. Creative writers often squabble over a basic question: can creative writing be taught? Those of us in academia have contracted ourselves to an affirmative answer. Because we offer classes, we must assume that something can be learned even if it cannot explicitly be taught. I believe sensitive instructors create learning environments which allow the greatest number of students to achieve the largest possible gains in the subject area. An instructor who is not interested in creating such an environment may well create the notorious "easy" creative writing class, one which demands little from the instructor or from the students. An instructor who has given up in this manner has succumbed perhaps to some corollary myths about creative writing: that it can be appreciated only by a few, elect students; that it is a lonely, solitary activity; that creative writers are special writers, and so on.

Speaking at a 1974 Conference on Teaching Creative Writing held at the Library of Congress, novelist Wallace Stegner identified irregularities in teaching excellence when he explained that many creative writing teachers either overtaught or undertaught their courses. He classified teachers of creative writing as authoritarians, mentors, abdicators, or true teachers (*Teaching*, 65-68). Unable to completely define successful teaching, he did identify a real but rarely articulated problem: the creative writing instructor who adopts a myth-informed, romantic stance to justify abdicating. Because this instructor believes creative writing can't be taught, he or she creates "easy" classes.

Creative writing students show little of the reluctance to learn about reading and writing that composition students too often exhibit. Undergraduate creative writing students do not come to us with attitudes which are radically different from those of our composition students. At my institution, creative writing courses may fulfill a general education requirement in humanities or social sciences and are often chosen by students in order to avoid other less appealing alternatives. Therefore, even elective creative writing classes may be viewed by these students as required.

Additionally, students have a variety of expectations as to what a writing course will mean to them. In terms of reading and writing abilities, these undergraduate creative writing students range, as in a composition class, from "basic" to "expert." Few, if any, students hold comparable views as to what it means to study creative writing, and their definitions of what creative writers are and what they do are often at odds. In essence, these students are not yet part of a creative writing discourse community. Like many students in composition classes, creative writing students have hidden agendas for their study, unexamined writing fears, and histories of poor instruction in English.

Creative writing classes are organized as writers' workshops where a successful collaborative learning environment is developed. In an article urging the use of creative writing strategies in composition classrooms, Randal Freisinger describes what I'll call an "ideal" creative writing workshop:

> Creative writing classes usually establish a workshop atmosphere. They are places where students write and talk about their writing. The writing process is more important than the product, in that students' stories and poems are never really finished. How these pieces were written, what problems were met along the way, what themes and stylistic effects were attempted—these are the issues that dominate creative writing classes. The teacher is a writer/friend who is there to offer advice, but generally not to dictate. (285)

Unfortunately, Freisenger's ideal creative writing workshop is seldom realized, for in most cases a truly collaborative atmosphere is rarely achieved. Too often, we instructors develop pseudo-workshop situations. Our comments are directive, whether given orally or when written in the form of editing imperatives on student work. Writing assignments can appear gratuitously experimental. Many texts are form and style-centered.

In a more recent article, Virginia Chestek claims that formerly innovative creative writing classes have not kept up with theoretical and pedagogical developments in the field of writing:

> Thus, at a time when lower level composition courses are increasingly process-oriented and devoted to teaching students rhetorical mechanisms to generate, focus and organize their ideas, creative writing courses tend to stress final products only. Class time is devoted first to a study of the final products of published writers, and then to the final products of class members. The processes by which creative writing students initially develop their ideas and assemble them into these final products are largely ignored. (16-17)

If Freisinger's idealized workshop is rarely achieved and Chestek's creative writing course predominates, developed, perhaps, from a product-bound literature studies tradition, it may be time to reverse Freisinger's argument and point out how much undergraduate creative writing classes could benefit from a healthy borrowing from other fields.

THE INSTRUCTIONAL VIEW

Graduate programs in creative writing. As pointed out earlier, undergraduate creative writing courses hold on ill-defined position between graduate creative writing programs and public school programs. Graduate creative writing programs in the U.S. work, unabashedly, to identify the best writers in the country and to give them the training and support they need to become professional writers. In 1968, department chairs of English reported that their M.F.A. programs served one of two purposes, either "to help students understand literature by trying to create it" or to prepare students to become "practicing artist[s]" (Nelson, 14). These purposes still determine the course of many creative writing graduate programs and the number of such programs has increased yearly.

In a 1984 article, Deborah Churchman estimated that "today's figure of 303 creative-writing programs is up from 256 in 1980 and up from a mere 15 in 1967, when the Associated Writing Programs at Old Dominion University in Virginia started keeping count" (42). Not all graduates of these programs go into non-teaching professions. The job market permitting, it is inevitable that many wish to pursue academic careers: "An M.A. or M.F.A. from Brown, Columbia, Johns Hopkins, Stanford, Iowa and the Washington University at St. Louis will bring a student closer both to academic openings and the publishing profession . . ." (Churchman, 42).

Even as we see an increase in the number of potential teachers of creative writing, the truth of the matter remains that these instructors will often be teaching a large number of courses in composition, and they receive their teaching experience in composition while they are students holding graduate teaching assistantships. Generally, graduate teaching assistants are required to take a composition training course to fit them for this work. However, it is a rare school that allows graduate students access to undergraduate creative writing classes or that trains them for teaching such classes. The underlying logic seems to be that training is needed for teaching composition whereas only experience, talent, guts, and so on, are necessary for teaching creative writing.

Because of the competition among graduates from creative writing programs for jobs which include creative writing instruction, it is often assumed that the "best" students will go on to become the "best" instructors of creative writing. This may or may not be true. Additionally, departmental compartmentalization of writing classes into composition as distinctly separate from creative writing will discourage many from transferring skills from one area to the other. At the undergraduate level, this results in most creative writing classes being taught as the holder of the M.A. or M.F.A. degree was taught—as writing workshops driven by a mentor model of instruction.

Mentors and metaphors. There are three problems in the mentor system when it is imported wholesale from the graduate to the undergraduate level: it is elitist, often sexist, and falsely collaborative. Mentors can only work with the few, not with the many, and are, by the nature of their job, elite and partial. Mentors are looking for the best students. Deborah Churchman describes writer and teacher John Barth in a *New York Times* article:

> . . . he views his stewardship as a one-year master/apprentice relationship with a handful of students, helping them to hone and polish their craft.
>
> The 12 to 15 chosen few in Mr. Barth's classes are harvested from 10 times that number of applicants, he says, usually on the basis of a 'smashingly good writing sample.' (42)

In another article, Susan Chira reports on Pulitzer Prize winning author Annie Dillard's fifteen student seminar at Wesleyan University which "includes in the weekly 90-minute class, lessons on spelling and grammar, on how a writer should live and how a young writer should prepare himself" (B2). To enroll in this class, Chira says, "More than 70 students submitted writing samples in a competition for the chance to work with Miss Dillard, to absorb her criticism and praise, and to weigh whether her opinions should rule theirs" (B2).

I think we need to become aware of the prevalence and force of our sorting metaphors. Is a term like harvest, with the implications of sifting and winnowing and implied elitism, appropriate when transferred, as I believe it often is, to student writers in undergraduate classes?

The mentor model of teaching writing has dominated the graduate creative writing scene in the U.S. from the founding of the Iowa Writers' Workshop in 1936 to the present day. The patriarchal and often times sexist roots of the model can be seen in Paul Engle's description of this enormously influential program. In the introduction to *Midland*, an anthology celebrating twenty-five years of workshop writing, he thanks:

> . . . the wives and children of the married writers who have been at the University of Iowa. While the husband and father kept his typewriter smoking with one hand and heated the pablum with the other, his family has stoically endured the fate of living with a writing man. (xxxii)

Although this is a dated example, the continued masculine dominance of the profession can be documented easily by surveying the staff of graduate programs and the Table of Content pages of contemporary anthologies. Women are gaining more access to and power in the system, but often they feel the need to model themselves quite faithfully on the mentor system rather than create a new instructional base.[1]

Paul Engle continues his discussion of the Iowa program by describing the traditional workshop:

> To have your work read by all the members of the Workshop, and *publicly criticized and praised by your instructors* in the weekly meetings, represents a helpful and at the same time less hazardous form of publication. [emphasis mine] (xxvi)

Here, as in the examples of Dillard and Barth mentioned above, the instructor has mentor rather than peer status and the workshops are not, essentially, collaborative.

Engle points out the usefulness of writing communities like Iowa, but "community" is used in a special sense. These are not necessarily collaborative communities where peer interacts with peer to share and develop every community member's writing. The traditional writers' workshop as community is a place where solitary writers commingle *after* writing in order to measure themselves against the work of other writers, in order to discover how they live up to their mentors' expectations, and, sometimes, in order to see if they have surpassed their mentors; in short, they go to compete.

Today, Johns Hopkins offers such a crucible for writers:

> In most programs, weekly seminars tear through students' works line by line, giving criticism that may or may not be constructive. 'You're generally naked here,' said Professor Barth, '. . . and if you've botched it, it's there for all to see.'
>
> 'It was fiercely competitive,' said Miss Robison of her year at Johns Hopkins, 'though now those students are like family. But it took pounds off me.' (43)

Imitation as a method of learning has some positive aspects. Mentoring is not necessarily a bad manifestation of this method, but it can have negative effects. For instance, when imitating, it is possible to divide form from content. Equally dangerous, it is possible to model ourselves on poor mentors and to pass on their beliefs and habits. I'd like to suggest that we have found an unproductive and romantically anti-pedagogical method when we use the mentor system for our undergraduate classes.

Public school programs and creative writing. From a public school viewpoint, mentoring is not an issue. Instead, primary and secondary schools are working hard simply to enhance the creativity of students who rarely get the chance to read or write, much less read or write in a creative environment. In her article "Literacy and Freedom," Janet Emig summarizes the work of several educators studying this problem who tell us that our students "read no more than four minutes a day" and "spend not more than ten minutes a day writing" (175).

Writing-in-the-schools projects funded by national and state arts councils or groups like Teachers and Writers Collaborative in New York work to increase creative writing opportunities in public schools (Reed, 42). Writers in these special programs are often well-trained specialists who view writing as a natural process, but due to the temporary nature of such programs, student writing processes can rarely be enhanced and evaluated over time. There appears to be a tendency to develop short-term, invention-based programs. Writer Alan Zeigler who works for the Collaborative explains: ". . . what the writers show teachers is that you don't have to be afraid to experiment, to create situations where writing is fun and exciting, when it opens the imaginations and emotions of students . . ." (43)

In some programs teachers come in for a day or a week or a month and help students get going on a piece of writing, but writing as a method of learning and a process to be integrated into every area of public school learning fails to infiltrate most core curriculums.

To add to the problem, those teaching at the graduate program level and those at the public school levels rarely seem to converse. Magazines devoted to writing professionals (*CODA*; *AWP Newsletter*) are concerned, primarily, with supporting affiliated writing programs and the professional writer. In such forums, writers discuss whether the appropriate terminal degree for their field is the M.A., M.F.A., or Ph.D., or support or attack the tendency of a few to switch genres (poets writing fiction, and so on). Theoretical and pedagogical issues are seldom raised. Conversely, those issues most discussed or shared at the public school level seem to be purely pedagogical: class plans and teaching techniques.

Mistrusting what they feel is an art-as-therapy tendency of public schools, some professional writer/teachers view themselves as guardians of quality, a perhaps natural spin-off of the mentor system. Such an attitude is evident in a talk by John Ciardi, also from the 1974 Conference on Teaching Creative Writing:

> I worry about one thing in the public school classroom. I don't have an answer. There seems to be a need to praise the young, no matter what they've done, at least the public school system is dedicated to this. It starts when you have them put their grubby little fingers into finger paints in kindergarten, and then you tell them how wonderful their smear is. You don't point out to them that its impossible to do a bad fingerpainting and therefore it's impossible to do a good one. I don't know the balance in this, but there's also a need, it seems to me, if we are going toward the arts, to begin to develop criteria much sooner than they appear in the public school system. I think it's lack of criteria that sends freshmen into the college illiterate. (*Teaching*, 64)

Ciardi's insight into instructional issues seems equally ill-informed at the public school and at the undergraduate level.

It might appear that I am building a position that would denounce excellent teachers already ably performing their work or to quote relaxed writers out of context, but that is not my intention. Rather, one of my aims is to allow more instructors of undergraduate creative writing to see that decisions *are* being made and positions *are* being taken. Do we teach creative writing as a specialized, inaccessible, elite activity, or do we support all writing? Similarly, do we teach to increase the creativity and productivity of only a few students or of many "potential" writers? As responsible instructors, we can and must learn to see the positions that are being taken; for they are reflected in our rhetoric which is, by nature, often metaphorical: we harvest our crop of writers and, as we shall see, we go to war.

THE DEPARTMENTAL VIEW

Janet Emig can help us to understand the place of undergraduate creative writing instruction within the English department. In "Literacy and Freedom," she explains that most English departments have "a hierarchy with four levels of written matter": 1) texts (literature), 2) psuedo-literature (creative writing); 3) non-literature (criticism); and 4) psuedo-non-literature (composition) (173).

I find her distinctions useful although I'm not sure I agree with her ranking for rankings would depend on viewpoint. Traditional literature professors would probably downgrade creative writing to the level of composition, or lower, while elevating criticism. Department and division level administrators might raise composition (as a support system for other educational programs and as the "bread and butter" of the English Department) to a higher position. More important than ranking is the problem developed by seemingly artificial departmental compartmentalization of writing based on a non-explicit system of value judgments.

Divisions: literature and rhetoric. It does not take a very thorough investigation into the roots of literature study in England and the U.S. to discover the value system of traditional literature programs. In his book *Literary Theory*, Terry Eagleton devotes an entire chapter to what he terms "the rise of English." His reading of the invention of what we now call literature studies is made from a British and, admittedly, Marxist viewpoint. "Literature," he says, "in the meaning of the word we have inherited, *is* an ideology" (22).

In England, the canonization of certain texts was socially expedient and certainly this holds true in America today. We may identify many members of the Modern Language Association for whom the preservation not only of texts but of particular critical methods for explicating texts and adding to the canon is equally socially expedient. Eagleton is not the first to demonstrate how arbitrary such a canon is and to explain the difficulties of defining the term literature. Over time, there has been a narrowing from a broader field which once included essays, sermons, histories, letters, journals, poetry and novels to a literature which includes only what we know term "imaginative" (Eagleton, 1-16).

For most rhetoricians also, literature studies is a construct. In America the arbitrary division between rhetoric and literature has been traced by Donald Stewart to the year 1876, for "that year Johns Hopkins, the first American university to imitate the German universities in methods and goals (offering elective courses and training research scholars), offered a chair in English literature to Francis Child, Harvard's fourth Boylston Professor of Rhetoric" (119).

Child, however, was not interested in rhetoric but in literature studies. Stewart offers, secondhand, a story told about Child in which Child "angrily kicked a chair across a room, complaining bitterly about the years he was wasting correcting student themes" (120). Chairs are still being kicked in English departments across the U.S., for many in literature studies still hold the prejudice against rhetoric and composition which was clearly authorized during the reign of Child and which continued to be incorporated into American universities as they modeled themselves after Harvard. (124-25).

The philosophical division between literature and rhetoric continues to the present day, leading Maxine Hariston, 1985 chair of the Convention on College Composition and Communication, to propose that the division between composition and literature programs is unbridgeable. She suggests that it may be time for composition faculty to withdraw from English departments, taking English composition courses with them. (281)

Divisions and realignments: literature, creative writing and composition. Clearly the division between literature and composition (non-literature) began early and for ideological reasons. The split between literature and creative writing (pseudo-literature) is not as clear yet equally problematic to live with, for psuedo-literature must exist in order to be properly "harvested" and processed into the literary canon. In order to survive a rather schizophrenic division between "real" and "psuedo" literature, academically affiliated creative writers claim a unique status for themselves, that of writers of "imaginative" pieces which may someday be adopted into the limited canon of "imaginative literature." As literature is special, their work is also special for in it reside the seeds of future literary works.

Thus, creative writing becomes divorced from other types of writing and made, somehow, more valuable. By forgetting to consider the inter-connectedness of reading and writing activities within the English Department, writers align themselves with a literature tradition which is slow to accept them and ignore similarities between what they do as creative writers and what they do as writers-in-general or teachers of composition.

Arguing against a departmentally fostered division between reading and writing, John Gerber contends that English academics are *all* concerned with these areas, are *all* teachers of reading and writing, and that our proper texts should include a broader spectrum that those offered by imaginative writing. He claims that as a profession:

> . . . we have been at pains to cover up the fact that we are basically teachers of reading and writing, probably because we find it more assuaging to the ego to call ourselves Romanticists or Johnsonians than teachers of reading and writing. Writing we have called "composition," "rhetoric," or exposition" and have assigned instruction in it largely to graduate assistants and staff members low on the scale of prestige. (20-21)

Undergraduate creative writing instructors maintain an uneasy position in any English department hierarchy since their interest in literature, their engagement with creative writing, and their employment as composition instructors are often placed in conflict. It is, therefore, no surprise that instructors might find it hard to feel comfortable about the place and purpose of undergraduate creative writing instruction.

Creative writers: trying to feel comfortable in academia. It is interesting, at this point, to look at the stance creative writers are developing toward their English Departments in the forum of professional journals. In a recent *AWP Newsletter* article "What Happens If We Win," author Bruce Cutler claims that the problems and conflicts I have outlined are nearly all resolved: we creative writers are about to win the departmental battle. Let us add the metaphors of war to the metaphors of harvesting and gleaning.

Cutler feels that any English department with foresight has *already* accepted and even values creative writing programs in that such programs attract good graduate students; create a new curriculum and a populace to fill unpopular classes; improve the morale of students and teachers; and create a more meaningful departmental social life (5). As he sees it, departments are already doing an adequate job of training teachers of writing and should stop worrying about such a commitment which was accepted only because creative writing programs were latecomers to the academic scene (6).

Nothing much, however, has really changed. His insistence that we are winning lets us know we are still at war, in Maxine

Hariston's sense. Instead of offering a unifying vision for our departments, he claims that creative writers should be the new arbiters of the canon:

> . . . we should achieve our goals in writing according to what we see as the best standards of contemporary letters as well as the best abilities we possess, including the intuitive. In this respect we are like those who teach in the performing arts; we are practitioners who know a good performance when we see one and through experience and the application of reasonable criteria we can estimate both the latent talent and the degree of development of a student. (6)

Having been successful in our rebellion, we should take over the functions of those we deposed. *We* know a good performance and *we* apply reasonable criteria. In doing so, Cutler believes, we will have completed our mission, "to find talented persons, and then bring them into writing programs" (6), which will result in an improvement in society as a whole. For when our students leave the academy, "those same students dispersed in society, would constitute the informed audience for their [our] arts" (7).

For me, these arguments are the old arguments of the mentor-based M.F.A. programs, steeped in traditional literature training. These are old arguments, but they include a new, romantic pitch for "intuitiveness," which maintains an elitism so essential for creative writers' sense of self-worth and upon which writers base their right to be mentors.

I question the effect of these views on the undergraduate creative writing student who has enrolled in a class where the teacher abdicated, where the teacher only rewarded what he or she intuited to be "latent" or visible talent, or where the teacher made explicit his or her prioritization of texts and presented them as the new "last word." What is that student going to think later in life when asked to contribute money to an arts program or support a poets-in-the-school residency? I would suggest such a student would have already been made to feel enough of an unimportant outsider, a writing dunce, ever to want to involve himself or herself in the arts again. Seeing what is at stake, instructors of undergraduate creative writing classes may want to look beyond the mentor model and the literature studies model when developing sound undergraduate instructional programs.

TEACHING WRITING WITHIN THE CURRICULUM

Teaching writing well at the undergraduate level will require more departmental cooperation. Rather than align themselves with a creative writing establishment which wants only to win an artificial battle between what should be viewed as the interconnected arts of reading and writing, creative writing instructors should try to join with any like-minded colleagues in composition, criticism, and literature to discuss and revise departmental goals.

Currently, many English departments are attempting such dialogue in order to be the reference point for Writing Across the Curriculum programs. But they cannot be the guides they are expected to be for other disciplines until, as English departments, they have come to understand themselves. Truly intra-departmental efforts would be based on sound writing and reading theory, grounded in a practical pedagogy, and evaluated as thoroughly as possible over time. To aid in this effort, departments and writing instructors should explore the body of research and theory being amassed in fields like criticism, composition, rhetoric, reading, linguistics, and psychology where a great deal is being discovered about how children and adults learn to read and write and to grow as readers and writers.

To describe the usefulness of such research, let me return to the creative writing classes I described early in this discussion. I claimed that I had a variety of students with a variety of abilities and a variety of motivations for taking creative writing. When teaching such a course, I am interested in developing the most truly collaborative classroom possible. I use small and large groups, writing journals utilizing reader-response techniques, natural process activities that emphasize a holistic rather than a fragmented view of writing, invention techniques, readings about writing or writers to increase students' metalinguistic awareness, and portfolio grading. That I often have similar goals and methods for my composition classes should not make my intentions suspect. I have found that there is no lack of resources for improving my classes, but there is a lack of support for intra-disciplinary work and few models for such endeavors.

In creative writing classes, I want to view my students as writers first and students second. To create a successful writing environment for them, I need to know many more things about the nature of writing for all writers. I need to know if it is of more use to introduce poetry or fiction first in a semester; if I should teach these genres at all, together, or separately; if I am better off broadening my definition of literature to once more embrace journals, letters, biographies; and so on.

Exploring writing and reading research, I learn to be interested in a creative writing course based on Britton's taxonomy of transactional, expressive, and poetic discourse which is the model for many WAC programs. I can design a course based on a rhetorical model, or one based on natural process.[2] To increase students' awareness of writing process, I could teach a course which uses the journals and drafts of expert writers to develop discussions and enable a student writer to access his or her own model of writing.[3] There is still much to be learned about collaborative writing.[4] There is room for discussions of creativity in the creative writing classroom and discussions could be based on research in the field rather than on a sharing of hunches.[5]

I would like to see more textbooks designed as a result of such exploration or to design one myself.[6] Anthologies could be enlarged to include writers on writing: my students can benefit from reading Donald Murray on writing as much as they can benefit from reading Hemingway in *The Paris Review* interviews.[7] And *at least* half of my students need to have more access to texts by women writers.

As I improve undergraduate creative writing courses, I would need to discuss my exile from the literature and the composition programs. I would question the division of undergraduate composition sequences into pure composition, composition with literature, composition with language, technical writing, and so on. Currently, writing appears to be viewed oppositionally, poetry *or* fiction, creative *or* non-creative writing, and so on. I don't believe in the binary myth perpetrated by these divisions. Given a chance to explore and study, I might for practical purposes return to some of these divisions and find them functional, but I would have developed a curriculum based on information not on pure idology, tradition, or myth.

I'll end with a story which I hope ties together all the views I have been looking at. It is told by the poet George Garrett, another speaker at the 1974 Conference on Teaching Creative Writing held at the Library of Congress:

> I also have come with a sense of confession, a badge of shame and failure, as a teacher of writing. A little story goes with it, something to do with our subject. This was a young lady—you know, sometimes in the course of a semester, writers develop blocks of one kind or another or simply can't do anything—and we were both reading and writing which is what it's all about, and this lady never could write anything. . . . This young lady was one that I failed with completely, because she finally had written nothing. I said: "all right. If you can't do a story or a poem, we really ought to do something in a writing course. We've been reading some books, along with our writing—how about doing me just a little paper, your impressions of one of them?" She said, "Okay, I'll write a paper on *In Cold Blood*," which was new and which we'd been reading, and I said that sounded fine, and then she came back and couldn't write the paper. So finally we reached a compromise. I said, "Well, do whatever you do best," and waited to see if it would be singing, dancing. . . . What happened was, I got it wrapped up in tissue paper and a little note, this necktie with a label on it, since lost, which said, "This is a Nancy Clutter original." It was worth it. She got an A in the course. (*Teaching*, 15)

I quote this not to attrack Garrett for telling tales on himself, for we all have our teaching disasters. But I do firmly believe that the Nancy Clutters of creative writing instruction deserve a better chance. Let's use what we know about writing blocks to identify her problems and what we know about invention to get her writing again.[8] Perhaps she needs an expressive to poetic writing sequence or a supportive peer group which can help her to her subjects. It may be that writing about why she can't write and discussing this with her peers will help her understand how the writing process works (and in her case doesn't work). Finally, let's not let Nancy pass a writing class without learning and without experiencing writing. Stopping to help her, we help other students and our profession as well. Perhaps we could start by debunking myths, by refusing to be mentors in inappropriate contexts, and by changing our metaphors from war to peace and harvest to cultivation.

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NOTES

[1] Although not always the case, this separation between graduate and public school programs is often underscored by the gender of those at each level. Traditionally, primary/secondary teachers are females while graduate level faculty are predominantly male. In an interview which prefaces each essay in her book of collected essays, *The Web of Meaning*, Janet Emig suggests an interesting correlation between teaching methods and gender:

> I think this is the first time I'm going to talk about men and women as teachers. In my experience, and it may or may not be representative, men teach as a revelation, as an expression of ego. Ego teaching has no use at all if you're trying to teach writing and rhetoric, from any other than a historical aspect. The only ego that should be of interest in the teaching of writing is the ego of the writer, which means that the ego of the teacher has somehow to stand aside. In my experience, most men aren't capable of getting out of the way. I think that's the reason there is very poor teaching of writing. I think women, in my experience, are often very, very good teachers of writing because they're willing to put their ego aside. It seems to me the purpose of the teacher is to enhance the writing process so the student can find something to say. By the way, it's not self-abnegation. To me, it's extremely arrogant to decide not to participate. (131-133)

[2] Britton's work is available in *Prospect and Retrospect* and *The Development of Writing Abilities*. Gorman, Gorman, and Young have used poetry in a psychology class based in part on Britton's taxonomy.

In "The Value of Rhetoric to the Creative Artist," Weathers argues for a rhetorical based creative writing classroom. It is interesting to speculate about the manner in which rhetorical elements (invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery) might be newly organized to support a creative writing class which ended in a public reading of student work. See Shiflet for a description of the Story Workshop method which emphasizes memory and delivery and the relationship of speaking to writing with an emphasis on the development of authorial voice.

A process based curriculum is outlined in Bogan's "Beyond the Workshop."

[3] Many collections are available to support discussions of writers' revisions and explore the opinions of writers as teachers. Baumbach, Cowley, Kuehl, Todd, and Turner's represent only a small sample.

[4] A brief introduction to collaborative writing can be obtained by reading Beaven, Bruffee, Hawkins, and Johnson and Johnson.

[5] Murray's "Writing and Teaching for Surprise," and "Why Creative Writing Isn't or Is" are good starting points.

[6] Burroway, in the second edition of her often used textbook *Writing Fiction*, has added a useful chapter "Whatever works: The Writing Process" to a generally form-centered work. However, the insertion of a process chapter only begins to indicate the possibilities for developing a more effective creative writing textbook.

[7] Bulman discusses planning for a creative writing course in Great Britain which included a specific course section devoted to discussion of creativity. Ghiselin and Perkins offer useful introductions to creativity. Although there is little research available, Amabile's paper is a sample of beginning work in a very open field.

[8] See Rose and Boice for relevant material on writer's block and Parris for a dissertation exploring the use of invention heuristics in the creative writing classroom.

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