A GRADUATE ENGLISH MAJOR'S SEARCH FOR MEANING: TOWARD A PEDAGOGY OF CREATIVE RHETORIC

by

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Abstract

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Building upon recent work by Gerald Graff, Tim Mayers, Douglas Hesse, and Graeme Harper and Jeri Kroll, I propose a pedagogical approach that integrates creative writing with rhetoric, much as the emerging "creative writing studies" is integrating creative writing with literature. As I demonstrate through a fusion of personal, academic, and creative writing, composition pedagogies that have ignored creative writing have alienated writing-disposed students such as myself, as well as failed to prepare them for basic and necessary writing and teaching tasks outside the university. As an antidote to these problems, I suggest Creative Rhetoric, a pedagogy that champions authentic communications for authentic audiences (the rhetorical consideration), while also engendering creativity both in process and product (the creative consideration). Such an approach, I argue, not only helps repair departmental fragmentation while better equipping students for the twenty-first century workforce, but it also raises satisfaction for English majors as it develops the whole person, writer *along with* rhetor and critic.

Table of Contents

Foreword

In *Reforming College Composition: Writing the Wrongs,* Wendy Bishop contends that while there has been plenty of composition pedagogy research into curriculum and program design, institutional politics, composing processes, and the workplace, there is a gross lack of research into actual student experiences in the writing classroom (5). In other words, "[O]ften we're researching at or on students when we could simply ask them and find out as much, or more" (6). Along with raising this primary contention, Bishop also criticizes the ways that composition research is typically reported or shared: "[T]o talk via publications to other teachers about what I [find] out require[s] that I switch from my classroom voice to the [academic] voice…to lose touch, to some degree with the very constituencies I [am] trying to share my work with: working teachers and their writing students" (5). She is frustrated, in other words, that the academic writing she has been "trained" to use is often "dull" and separates her from her audience. A third and final contention she adduces involves the uninspired process of research that academic publications often employ: Similar to how the research paper was "deadened when institutionalized in English classes around the nation, thereby obscuring the true and exciting research process all learners need to undertake," she says, "so too 'academic research' can become wooden, an albatross of a category, too often done for the worst reasons and under less than inspired conditions" (6). With these contentions, I couldn't agree more. It is in sympathy with and response to her concerns that I offer this thesis, a collection of experiences and reflections (and yes, some research) that I hope will prove friendly and helpful to composition teachers at the high school and college levels, with all degrees of experience

Chapter 1

How College Killed my Creativity

As a little girl, I remember writing stories and poems for fun and thinking I'd like to be a writer when I grew up. From third grade on, all my teachers told me I had talent, some of them even fanning the flames of my childhood dream, writing on my papers comments like, "You should become an author some day." As I continued nailing A's and wowing teachers throughout junior high and high school, I believed them, and the future of writing looked bright.

In eighth grade, in response to a Halloween story assignment, I wrote a thirty-page thriller that had Mr. O'Brien scribbling praise page after page. In ninth grade, a number of my teachers encouraged me to apply for a competitive regional writing mentorship, which I did, and I was awarded a mentorship with a local writer over the summer between ninth and tenth grades. My tenth grade teacher, Mrs. Dorholt, saw my writing and urged me to submit it to the *High School Writer,* a regional newspaper for teens, where I ended up being published twice. In eleventh grade I moved to a larger school, where I eagerly enrolled in Creative Writing (it had not been offered at my former school) and went on to publish two pieces from that class, a short story and a personal essay. Not surprisingly, that class ended up being my favorite yet; it allowed me the freest range of writing I'd ever had in a class, pushing me to explore genres with which I had little familiarity. Not only did we read stories by famous writers, but we were encouraged to write using the same techniques they used, as if we had the same rights to the language that they had. But soon, things changed.

My senior year of high school marks the beginning of a new era in my writing history: writing for college. That year I took the dual credit College English sequence from Mr. Carpenter at the high school. Although I enjoyed the course, with one semester of "modes" and

another of literary criticism and research writing, I look back and see the walls starting to close in, rules encroaching, limits being put on my creativity. Perhaps I had been lucky in my previous English classes, with teachers who valued invention and original voice. Teachers who wanted me to stretch limits, not remain within a box. Or maybe high school English teachers are generally less tainted by arcane rules and outmoded, ineffective practices than are college English teachers. Whatever the case, after entering the arena of college writing, and later that of the English department, I found myself resenting what seemed like unfair limits on my creativity, with esoteric instructions to "never use 'I' " and pointless-seeming assignments such as "use literary criticism to form a thesis about 'The Wasteland.'" Asked to sum up the writing I had to do for my BA, two words—literary analyses—would just about cover it. With the exception of a couple essays requiring me to take a position on tired topics such as abortion or gun control, nothing but literary analyses. Talk about a buzz kill.

I emerged with my bachelor's degree with my love for composition all but forgotten. Incidentally, the writing I remember enjoying the most during college was that which I did for the school newspaper, and I got paid for *that*. Although I couldn't have articulated then why I enjoyed that writing so much more than my college essay assignments, now I know it was because the writing I did for the newspaper responded to authentic rhetorical situations. That is, I was writing for a specifically defined purpose, a specific moment in time, and for a specific audience. Too, I was able to slip in just enough of my own voice—especially for feature articles—with the clever wordplay here, the snappy title there, that I felt I really *was* participating in a creative act. I was helping to bring to life for the first time a precise historical moment, not just commenting on a far-removed era as recorded by a famous author and already dismembered by hundreds of critics.

Clearly, college English has made some wrong turns—too many to be quantified, I'm sure—but with this thesis, it is my goal to unravel those things that have gone wrong in my own experience as a student. In addition to responding to Bishop's call for more first-hand research into students' experiences, with this work my primary goals are these: 1) to make sense of what went wrong in my own English education in order to 2) articulate a personal philosophy for my own writing and teaching as I move forward as writer and college professor. With these admittedly personal goals, I maintain hope that my conclusions might spur current or future professors of English to be more considerate of the needs and wishes of their writing-disposed majors.

Chapter 2

A History of Composition Instruction in American Colleges

In a 2009 issue of *College Writing,* Gerald Graff calls for a reintegration of creative writing studies with literature and theory in college English departments. As it is, he says, the two rarely communicate, so that they "resemble partners in a bad marriage, who long ago gave up trying to discuss their differences" (275). Employing a similar analogy, Kimberly Andrews, at once creative writer and literary scholar, laments that, "like oil and water, my two halves refuse to blend, no matter how hard I shake" (253), going further to define a threefold division between literary studies, creative writing, and rhetoric and composition (243-44). Douglas Hesse confirms Andrews's claim about the seemingly related fields of creative writing and composition studies, pointing to the respective disciplines' "[contempt]" and "[wariness]" for the other (32-33), while Tim Mayers contends that creative writing, in fact, resists association with all the other "studies" housed within the English department, including film studies, cultural studies, and others. (217-18).

When I entered graduate school in 2010, I had no idea of this ongoing conversation, but I knew of my own experience of feeling fragmented in the English department. By the time I entered graduate school, it had been a decade since I had taken a course in creative writing, and I wasn't thinking much about that missing piece in my English education. More recently, I had completed a bachelor's degree in English, for which most of my coursework had revolved around literary interpretation. If anything, I was frustrated that I was stuck studying too much literature. That, and the fact that I had recently realized I knew very little about rhetoric and composition pedagogy.

After my second year of teaching high school, my principal had asked me to teach an AP course for the juniors in language. When I attended a summer's training for the language AP test in 2010, I found myself adrift in a foreign world. Beginning with a basic discussion about how "everything's an argument," I struggled to grasp a paradigm that was entirely new to me—rhetorical writing. All the writing I had ever done, and all that I had ever taught, was either personal in nature, or literary interpretation geared toward an unspecified audience, except for the teacher. To be sure, the terms "rhetoric," "logos," "ethos," and "pathos," had no meaning for me before the AP training; and afterwards, they remained fuzzy. Luckily, I didn't have to teach AP English that year. The one result of the training was that I instituted a persuasive essay into my curriculum and put the preceding four terms on the board, explaining them as best I could to my seniors. I did not stress the importance of audience, though, as I still didn't understand it myself.

Once the persuasive essay was past (we completed that in September), I returned to my go-to mode of teaching: expressive writing. Both my juniors and seniors kept journals, and all the rest of their assignments dealt either with literary interpretation, narrative writing (because of the TAKS test), or personal exploration. The research projects I had developed for my juniors and seniors over the last two years even remained personal: I had the juniors research colleges they wanted to attend, and I had my seniors research possible careers. Looking back, in a way, those research projects *were* rhetorical, if only because I had the students engage those issues for themselves—they were their own audience. In my own way, in the only way I knew how, I was employing rhetoric because, for me, writing had always been about self-discovery. For the training I had had—almost entirely in expressive writing in high school and literary analysis in college—I think I came up with pretty relevant assignments. Still, when I resigned high school to

return to grad school, the AP training lingered in my mind. Rhetoric. This was something I needed to learn more about. As I headed off to grad school, my intent being to gain a PhD and teach college English, I focused on finding out how I could make my instruction more relevant. I focused on filling in those gaps I obviously had in composition pedagogy. Finally, I focused on finding out why, having completed a bachelor's degree in English, I even *had* those egregious gaps. Why, in other words, was there this split between what was taught—mostly literature—and what was most needed—writing skills?

In one semester, in just two classes, Composition Pedagogy and Foundations in Rhetoric and Composition, I was, for the first time, to learn about the vast field of research in, and the rich history of, instruction in writing and rhetoric in American colleges. And when I was to learn that I could have avoided much of the discomfort, pain even, of my first three years of teaching, merely with some attention to *audience* and *purpose* (bedrock considerations of rhetoric) on the part of my former English teachers, I would feel angry, betrayed, and let down. After spending four years—and thousands of dollars—earning a bachelor's degree in English, shouldn't I have been better prepared?

This is where the journey of this thesis' subject matter began. At this point, I wasn't ready to consider the place of creative writing in the composition course; I just needed to get my bearings. The first revelation for me was learning about the history of writing instruction in American colleges, and something called Current-Traditional Rhetoric—a pedagogy I immediately recognized in my own teaching and in the teaching of some of my predecessors. This was the first step toward my pedagogy of Creative Rhetoric: first, realizing where my former teachers and I had gone wrong.

The 'King Kong'[1] of College Composition: Current-Traditional Rhetoric

In the foreword to James Berlin's seminal monograph on the history of the American English department, *Rhetoric and Reality,* Donald Stewart claims that the "single greatest deficiency in the majority of this nation's English teachers" is lack of knowledge about the history of the profession, "particularly ignorance of the history of writing instruction." The problem that Berlin, with Stewart, claims this ignorance has propagated is Current-Traditional Rhetoric, a term first coined by Daniel Fogerty and adapted by Richard Young to represent what both they and Berlin have cited as the most "dominant" pedagogy of the twentieth century. Briefly, as Berlin describes it, and as a number of students of English might still recognize it, Current-Traditional Rhetoric teaches writing as a positivistic, scientific enterprise, in which writing is a rational, logical activity that involves merely recording "sense impressions," or already objective, external truths. Since the writer does not bring with or create his or her own truths—or engage in what classical rhetoricians called "invention"—he or she is left little more to do than record information, organize, and edit—or, in classical terms, to attend to "arrangement and style." Sound familiar? If your English education was anything like mine, they should. In my case, they describe Mr. Cassidy's class to a T.

In all my memories of my school years, Mr. Cassidy, my seventh- and ninth-grade English teacher, stands out as a monument to precision, control, and whiteout—or Current-Traditional Rhetoric. Besides the solid, stoic, and cement-like feeling I get thinking about his lectures, the picture I have of him in my mind really does look somewhat like a monument. That is, in class, he rarely moved. Every day seemed the same: I remember him being planted behind

[1] I take the King Kong metaphor from Anne Gere, who argues somewhat opposite my claims in this section.

his “lecturn” reading his lecture notes in a docile, somnambulant monotone as if tied to a script. Methodical in all his ways, always neat and tidy in dress, I would dare say his pedagogy was about as unchanging as the typewritten, yellowed notes from which he read.

Mr. Cassidy never wrote notes on the board, but he always read them out loud to us v-e-r-y s-l-o-w-l-y, enunciating every word. I remember wondering if he intentionally tried to use up extra class time by slowly reading information he could just as well have projected on a screen or distributed in handouts. In any case, we knew that just as long as we stayed quiet and waited for the answers, he would give them, all of them—and give them in the exact format in which they were to appear on the test. With frequent directions like “skip a space and then write…” or “leave a blank space here,” one got the feeling he wanted us to reproduce exactly his master copy, even for notes we would never hand in. Somehow, exact reproduction was important to him. I remember, too, that for all work we turned in, Mr. Cassidy required ink; and for any “stray marks” we made in our writing, he required whiteout, or, as he called it, “correction fluid.”

Indeed, precision and exactitude were important, seemingly more so than independent thought or creativity. For instance, Mr. Cassidy taught us the parts of speech by reading off a list of rules that we were to write down in our notebooks. He numbered each “note,” and left one blank space in each line. We knew that if we memorized the words in the blanks, we could ace the test. In our study of literature, we proceeded in like manner. Our literature “discussions” went something like this: “Label note-number-fifteen as ‘Miss Havisham.’ Underline it. Below, write the following…” To be honest, I don’t really remember any discussion of texts. Rather, our “learning” of literature, as was the case for all other subjects in his class, came in the form of neatly packaged “notes” about characters, plot, or symbols. We simply wrote down those notes and memorized them, as if our minds were empty banks waiting to be filled. (Freire would have

shuddered.) As far as writing was concerned, I don't remember receiving any instruction at all; although occasionally we were assigned short writing assignments, including a rewrite of the ending of *Lord of the Flies* and a fictional short story based on a small figurine Mr. Cassidy unearthed from his garage.

Although Mr. Cassidy's teaching style was about as bland as could be, he did like to make a joke once in awhile, and even share the occasional personal anecdote. Of course, his volume and tone never varied, so if students were spacing off, they were sure to miss those occasional asides. When he did insert the rare gem of humor, albeit in that whisper-thin voice and with a coy, almost shy look, it came as a pleasant surprise, and one could not but help but be endeared. But those didn't come often. The only joke I remember, because it was his favorite, had to do with prepositions: "Remember, when you're trying to figure out your Christmas gifts, pay attention to prepositions. Something *under* the tree is not as good as something *beside* the tree." The only personal story I remember him sharing was very telling of his teaching philosophy. The story had to do with the interview he "aced" to score his first teaching job, the same one he had retained for his entire career. As the story went, he said, at his interview, the principal asked him just one question: "Can you recite all eight parts of speech?" Of course he could, and he was instantly hired. As Mr. Cassidy relates, he found out later that no other candidate had been able to perform such a feat. Clearly, he was proud.

Not only did "Correction Fluid Cassidy" treat grammatical rules as God-given precepts, but he also treated all kinds of knowledge as objective, external truth. In his very method of disseminating "knowledge" to us, or having us record verbatim his teacher's notes as he read them aloud from his throne—from that famous lectern—he reinforced the notion that truth could only come from some lofty, already extant transcript. He taught that writing was not "thinking"

as much as it was "recording." He taught that the "right" answers could only be found by referring to the teacher's edition. And as to literature, he taught a single interpretation of texts, their characters and symbols. Whatever he was teaching on a given day, he recited his "truths" to us not, it seemed, to help us think, but so we could memorize and regurgitate them later.

Because we did so little writing in that class, some of my other teachers better represent other aspects of Current-Traditional Rhetoric that have filtered into the classrooms of quite good teachers. These aspects include "emphasis on the composed product rather than the composing process," "the classification of discourse into description, narration, exposition, and argument," and "preoccupation with the informal essay and the research paper" (Young 78). Although in chapter two I will laud another of my high school teacher's, Mrs. Dorholt's, efforts, I want to point out her over-reliance on a single "product," the five-paragraph essay. Today, I don't think five-paragraphs essays are always bad—they are quite useful for timed writing situations, in fact—but the problem with Mrs. Dorholt's class is that her repeated emphasis perhaps gave the impression that they were good *all of the time,* for *all writing situations.* Today, the research indicates that the five-paragraph essay should be only one tool writers might use to frame their ideas, but it should not stand for the one and only model that all writers must fill (Lindemann's chapter eight, "Shaping Discourse," offers superior approaches to structuring writing). Likewise, those stock essays in freshman composition that we have come to know as the "modes," description, narration, exposition, and argument, should not be seen as discrete discourses that operate independent of one another. I was first introduced to the modes by Mr. Carpenter, my senior English and dual-credit teacher. Again, since he was an engaging teacher, putting much more personality and thought into his classes than Mr. Cassidy, I willingly accepted a sequence of five essays corresponding to those modes plus one—a definition essay—without a problem.

The problem with this paradigm, I now know, is that it misrepresents the true nature of discourse. It doesn't account for the fact that in real world exchanges, interlocutors mix and match description, narration, exposition, and argument to fit their given rhetorical situations. I will come back to this point later, as it is integral to my argument for my hybrid pedagogy of Creative Rhetoric. In any case, Mr. Carpenter was the first to introduce me to the modes; and in my second semester, he also propelled me into the arena of the all-too-common literary analysis essays I would be writing for the rest of my undergraduate career. While these teachers were very different from one another, collectively their teaching practices provide a good overview of what Current-Traditional Rhetoric is all about, and lend credence to the claim that too many instructors have assimilated outdated practices for no better reason than that this was how they were once taught.

For her part, Anne Gere states that the "traditional" composition class is not as "monolithic" as once thought, citing Current-Traditional Rhetoric as just one pedagogy emerging from a group of courses that also include the "formalist" and "discipline-centered" camps, first articulated by Richard Fulkerson and William Woods, respectively. The "differences" she notes between these types of classes are minor, however, and seem to link the various approaches together more than separate them. The single-most unifying feature of these subdivisions—or, as Gere notes, "What Fulkerson, Woods, Young, and Berlin share"—is "a failure to connect what Fogarty terms the teaching rhetoric with a philosophy." What she goes on to say is worth quoting at length:

> This is not a problem unique to these four theorists; it has been the continuing problem of composition pedagogy. Because the teaching rhetoric has remained separate from a philosophy of rhetoric, it has been vulnerable to the ravages of 'time and expediency.' The dominance of mechanical forms (syntax, spelling, modes, style, and punctuation) in today's instruction derives from the lack of a coherent philosophy guiding composition

> pedagogy. When a discipline lacks a coherent philosophy, it can be shaped by the most anti-intellectual forces, and this is precisely what has happened to composition pedagogy over the years" (14).

This "continuing problem" of composition pedagogy, or the lack of a "coherent guiding philosophy" for the teaching rhetoric, is simply the same problem noted earlier—that of teachers' lack of, or vague sense of, purpose. The point that composition teachers have failed to incorporate a philosophy of rhetoric—what, at its most basic level would be to respond appropriately to audience and purpose—is well taken, as is Gere's assertion that anti-intellectual forces have been allowed to shape, and indeed ravage, composition pedagogy. It is both lack of knowledge about the history of the profession, I argue, siding with Stewart, and lack of underlying philosophy, I argue, concurring with Gere, that had, as Berlin argued in 1987, for the "majority" of English teachers, made Current-Traditional Rhetoric so "compelling" that it was almost "impossible" to "conceive of the discipline in any other way" (*Rhetoric and Reality* 9). Of course, to bring things a bit more up to date, a wealth of research since 1987 has shown *many* English teachers conceiving of composition in *many* ways (Fulkerson, "Composition at the Turn"; Tate, Rupiper, Shik; Tate and Corbett, to name just a few, outline the common branches of composition pedagogy). However, considering certain teachers of the 1990s and 2000s (I'm thinking of the Mr. Cassidy types), clearly Current-Traditional Rhetoric remains, for some, a "compelling paradigm." To understand why Current-Traditional Rhetoric has remained prevalent for over a century—and to avoid perpetuating its mistakes—current and would-be teachers need to, as Berlin, Stewart, and Gere suggest, first, attend to the history of writing instruction in America.

A History of College Composition

In 1874 the first-year college English course was started at Harvard, the "leader" in curricular reform at the time (Berlin, *Rhetoric and Reality* 20). Unlike previous rhetoric courses, which had been patterned after classical traditions in oratory, now the aim of the English department was to "provide instruction in writing" (Berlin, *Rhetoric and Reality* 20). But, as the story goes, professors of rhetoric met this initiative with resentment and resistance: Gere tells us that Francis James Child, Harvard's Boylston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory, "resented the composition courses he was asked to teach and devoted his energies to finding a way to escape them." In similar manner, continues Gere, Child's successor, Adams Sherman Hill, "did little to unite the teaching of writing with a philosophy of rhetoric," even though, amid faculty resistance, Hill did help create the first required composition course (14), one that responded both to internal and external pressures.

Gere states that the prescribed full year of freshman English, along with a half-year sophomore course, came in response to President Charles Eliot's calls for reparation of what he saw as the neglect of "the systematic study of language" (qtd. in Gere 14). But this call would not have come without a growing cultural need for skillful writers. This growing cultural need for skillful writers, in turn, resulted from a changing landscape of professions—and a new middle class—brought on by the industrial revolution. As Berlin explains, "The 'new' university had arisen to provide an agency for certifying the members of the new professions, professions that an expanding economy had created" (21). Whereas the old university had been elitist, geared towards training "students of means and status" for the professions of law, medicine, and the church, now the university doors were open to anyone who could meet entrance requirements, "offering upward mobility through certification in such professions as agriculture, engineering,

journalism, social work, education, and a host of other new professional pursuits" (21). While the old university had not emphasized preparation for careers, but rather, aimed to mold well-rounded and refined individuals, the new university rallied around pre-professional training for a new middle class.

The spread and impact of science in the latter nineteenth century cannot be overemphasized. Whereas the classical curriculum had privileged training in classical languages such as Latin, Hebrew, and Greek, along with oratory and, increasingly, writing, now a call was made for a more "practical" education that would move the study of English to the forefront. Interestingly, prior to the new curriculum, not even the classics of English literature had been studied. At the same time, as English became the primary language of study, American universities were adopting the German model of the research university, which employed specialized departments in which faculty were expected to produce new knowledge and train graduate students to do the same. And so, as the shift from classical to vernacular language was made, the components of classical rhetoric also splintered into separate departments—oratory became the province of speech and communication, scientific language study the department of linguistics, and literary study the domain of English. Berlin notes that English teachers, striving to form their own new identity as "professionals" in the university, did not want to be identified with the old classical curriculum. As Berlin puts it, "[M]embers of the newly established English department were themselves a part of this quest for a certifiable, professional designation. They too were struggling to define a specialized discipline, one akin to those of their counterparts in the new science departments, in order to lay claim to the privilege and status accorded other new professions…" (21). As literature became "the specialized province of study," then, writing

instruction became almost entirely relegated to the first-year writing course (22), and promptly became, as Berlin puts it, "devalorized," or the subject that hardly anyone wanted to teach.

The explanation as to how composition instruction became devalorized is complex, but it begins with what Gere calls the pressures of "time and expediency" (14) and prominently features the lack of a "clearly articulated philosophical tradition" (16). As oratorical skills waned in importance in the modern workforce, writing came to be seen as a practical skill that everyone needed. As such, writing teachers were soon faced with the "monumental" grading demands (Berlin 21-22) of having to serve the entire college population, a population that expanded sixty percent in the 1890s (Gere 15). As if an unreasonable workload in composition wasn't enough to deter English teachers, a number of misconceptions about the nature of writing made professors all but "disavow" any responsibility for teaching it (Berlin 25). Towards the end of the nineteenth century, it was the disproportionate amount of money allocated to composition, Gere explains, that led "disgruntled faculty and administrators" at Harvard to appoint a committee in 1891 to investigate the first-year English course. The results of the committee, or "The Harvard Reports," would be catastrophic for composition.

Stating, "It is obviously absurd that the College…should be called upon to turn aside from its proper functions and devote its means…to the task of imparting elementary instruction," the reports proposed that preparatory schools should take full responsibility for writing instruction (qtd. in Gere 15). As an extension of this recommendation, the Harvard committee advocated for the raising of entrance requirements to bar students underprepared in composition, thus further suggesting that composition should not be the college's concern. As Berlin says, "establishing the entrance test in composition suggested that the ability to write was something the college student ought to bring with him from his preparatory school" (*Rhetoric and Reality*

23). But this disavowal of responsibility for teaching writing was not the only negative result of the Harvard reports. As Gere remarks, "Not only did colleges emulate the position that they should have little responsibility for composition instruction, they also accepted the committee's narrow definition of writing" (15). That "narrow" view posited, among other things, that writing was "merely the habit of talking with the pen instead of with the tongue," and that mechanical correctness should be emphasized above all else (16). Finally, it was that narrow view rather than any theoretical underpinnings, Gere maintains, that "fostered the development and maintenance of the Current-Traditional model," first in colleges and, later, as it filtered down, in secondary and elementary schools (16). After 1895, as Connors writes, among the "burgeoning group of literary scholars, philologists, and critics that controlled English departments," interest in theorizing composition or analyzing its history had fallen by the wayside. "In short, there simply never evolved a discipline of composition studies comparable to literary studies in English. Composition teaching was done, but no degree specialties in composition existed, and no real scholarship surrounded it." Echoing Gere's call for a "coherent guiding philosophy," Connors adds that between 1885 and the 1950s, "composition existed as a practice without a coherent theory or a developed history" (51-52).

Concluding Reflections

At this point in my career, after three years spent teaching at the high school level, and after studying rhetoric and composition for a master's degree in English, I feel the best nugget of wisdom I've gleaned, for either teaching or writing, is this: I must know my audience and my purpose. Sounds familiar. Audience and purpose are two of the principles first introduced in the modern rhetoric or writing class. Those informed by rhetorical scholarship teach their students to

"know your purpose for writing, and tailor your writing to fit your audience." In the popular textbook *Everything's an Argument,* the subtitle "Purposes for Argument" is found as early as page five; "Audiences for Arguments" is found on page twenty-seven. The authors state that "writers and speakers have as many purposes for arguing as for using language, including—in addition to winning—to inform, to convince, to explore, to make decisions, and even to meditate or pray" (5). Regarding audiences, they state, "No argument…can be effective unless it speaks well to others—to what we describe as the *audiences* for arguments" (27). This is great advice, both for writing, and for teaching. Indeed, how can one's teaching be effective if it does not "speak well" to his or her students? How can one's teaching be effective if he or she has not committed to a clear purpose? By the way, "to teach" is not a sufficient purpose for a teacher. We wouldn't let students get away with saying their purpose for a paper was merely "to write." We would make them tell us, *What are you going to write*? *Why*? Or, in other words, *So What? Who cares?*

In the following chapter, I will review the pedagogical theories of two compositionists who, like many others by the late twentieth century, had certainly developed coherent guiding philosophies. However, through reviewing how the two pedagogies had much to learn from one another over more than a decade of "debate," we will see that there is even more room to develop and grow.

Chapter 3

Blending Expressive and Rhetorical Pedagogies

To be sure, ever since its inception in the late nineteenth century, the American English department has been fragmented, with literature and composition camps emerging as the major divisions in the field (Bizzell and Herzberg 1183-1205), and each of these further splintering into their own divisions: literature into specific places and time periods, composition into at least two dominant pedagogies—rhetorical and expressive—and often a third—critical/cultural studies, or CCS (Fulkerson). Judging by the sparse, selective attention *CCC* has given creative writing since the journal's inception in the 1950s (Hesse), creative writing has never been a serious consideration in the field of composition studies, although at one time, it did find its place in literary study (more on that in chapter three). As far as composition studies, the closest creative writing has come to receiving "serious" attention in courses not specifically designated "Creative Writing" is a pedagogical approach that "by the 1990s was scorned as expressivism" (Hesse 39), a line of thinking that saw " 'creative composition' if not creative writing per se" to be helpful for shaping student identities and raising engagement in English to lead to higher order tasks (Hesse 38). As Hesse notes, these forms of writing—usually personal essays under the "guise of the narrative 'mode'"—have largely dwindled as the " 'rhetorical situation' has gained more pedagogical power, later morphing into theories of discourse communities and genre" (38).

The development of this contention between expressive and rhetorical writing/pedagogy, oft characterized by the debate between Peter Elbow and David Bartholomae in the 1990s, is instructive for those looking to reconcile creative writing's hazy place in the English department. Whereas in the 1980s and 1990s English professors were more likely to side with one camp over the other (Elbow or Bartholomae; expressive versus rhetorical writing), today most scholars and

teachers of English, if not teaching the two pedagogies in tandem, are happy to grant that the two can at times inform and enrich one another. As scholars and teachers have noted in the two decades since the debate, using personal alongside academic writing can be effective for a number of reasons. Personal writing, or "creative composition," has been documented to help acclimate students to the academic discourse community (Fulwiler, Mlynarczyk; Schwartz; Mendelowitz and Ferreira; Spigelman), it has been shown to encourage cultural analysis and critique (Schwartz; Mendelowitz and Ferreira), and it has been proven to encourage reflection needed for engagement in all types of critical thinking (Trupe; Elbow and Clarke).

'Majorly' Frustrated: Memories of an Undergraduate English Curriculum

Learning about the various branches of composition pedagogy, including rhetorical, expressive, and critical/cultural studies, characterizes the next step toward my pedagogy of Creative Rhetoric. As I progressed through Composition Pedagogy and Foundations of Rhetoric and Composition, as any informed composition scholar would, I quickly dismissed Current-Traditional Rhetoric and keenly looked for another, better theory I could call my own. When I first read about expressive writing, I felt at home. This was the theory that had most aptly characterized my own teaching, minus a few Current-Traditional faux pas such as too much grammar instruction and an insistence on the five-paragraph format. Moreover, the kind of writing it espoused was the kind that I personally prized. Writing in a journal had been a way of life for me since the age of fourteen, something you can read more about in the appendix. I had traditionally derived joy and clarity from personal writing—not only did it fulfill a need I had to express myself, but over the years it also had helped me make many decisions, large and small. The journal was where I worked out personal frustrations; developed my own philosophies, both

for teaching and for life; and sometimes, even worked out mundane academic or career-related difficulties. Who wouldn't want to keep a journal? Who couldn't benefit from it?

Now, granted the appropriate theoretical frameworks through which to analyze my English education, I better understood why college had so frustrated me. I understood why, after declaring English as my undergraduate major, I found myself resisting many of the essays I had had to write. In literature classes these were assignments such as arguing for or against Hamlet's madness, making connections among Kate Chopin's short stories, and analyzing *The Wasteland.* In writing courses, they included taking positions on issues such as gun control, multiculturalism, and abortion. As I would come to learn, all of these assignments were suffering from a lack of rhetoric. They had no practical exigence—provided no authentic audience and purpose. It's no wonder that I had found them irrelevant and boring. The other obvious omission in the assignments was attention to the writer, or to *myself.* I still remember my undergraduate advisor admonishing us to "never use I." Clearly *she* was suffering from a lack of rhetoric, probably stuck in the Current-Traditional mindset.

In my senior year of college, a new professor joined the crew, and I was relieved when he plainly instructed us to use "I." In his words, it was "stupid" to try to dance around the fact that we were the ones writing our own essays. "Just begin your essay with a straightforward statement such as, In this essay, I will be arguing that…,' " he said, boggling my Current-Traditionally-trained mind. It was too bad that the only class I took from him was a literature class; perhaps had I taken composition from him, I could have learned about rhetoric before having to teach what should have been comprehensive English classes. Perhaps I would have learned about discourse communities and had the value of learning to write "academically" explained to me.

As it was, I took the "I" for what it was worth, wrote a few more essays about literature using "I" in my thesis statements, and then graduated feeling frustrated that I had just amassed an entire portfolio of academic writing that would not amount to any real-world value. That is, I was no further along in my quest to publish creative nonfiction (see the appendix); I was not equipped with any journalistic or other practical publishing skills; and I had not gained a valuable framework for teaching writing to high school students. In my teaching, then, I resorted back to the last and best, writing instruction I had received. This had been from Mrs. Dorholt and Mrs. Prischmann in high school. The former had taught my sophomore English class, and the latter, a junior Creative Writing course. Both taught from the expressive model, which theory had flowered in the sixties and seventies and somewhat displaced Current-Traditional Rhetoric.

In Mrs. Dorholt's class, I knew I had found what I'd previously missed. In tenth grade, Mrs. Dorholt bolstered, if not revived, my love for writing. She was the first English teacher, post elementary school, who focused specifically on writing, and I loved her for it. Maybe she designed her class that way because, in Minnesota, tenth grade was the year students were tested in writing; either way, unlike Mr. Cassidy, she taught enthusiastically, displaying unmistakable passion for her subject.

Although it does not accurately portray Mrs. Dorholt as a teacher, I would have to say that her famous "Burger" is what has been most monumentalized in my memory. By her "Burger," I mean the five-paragraph format that she taught us via a picture on the blackboard. That year, by way of buns, hamburger, lettuce, and tomato, Mrs. Dorholt drilled us with the five-paragraph theme, and since that time, the image has remained sizzled in my mind. The concept stayed with me so well, in fact, that I began my very first week as a high school English teacher with a lesson on Mrs. Dorholt's Burger; the first assignment I gave my freshmen was a five-

paragraph essay. Even though the five-paragraph is a standby of Current-Traditional Rhetoric, I'd like to give Mrs. Dorholt a pass, because, state testing considered, I think she had good reason for teaching it. (As well, I have successfully used her Burger method for SAT prep in my classes.)

Another fond memory I have of Mrs. Dorholt swirls around a particular lesson for which she let us eat fritos and candy. The point was to teach us to use similes in our writing. Using our senses, we created twenty-five sentences telling what the items looked like, smelled like, sounded like, felt like, and tasted like. (Another lesson I have sometimes recycled with success.) Mrs. Dorholt was also known for her lemon drops—she passed them out during writing times because, as she claimed, the "sour" helped us to think better—and her exhortation, borrowed from Mark Twain, to use the right word: "Choose the lightning, not the lightning bug." Another phrase I have often borrowed from Mrs. Dorholt, obviously not of her creation but that was new to me that year, is "Show, don't tell!" Still another phrase that continues to help me in my graduate writing career is, "Cut the deadwood [unnecessary words]."

While I could go on to describe my other teachers during high school, Mr. Cassidy and Mrs. Dorholt, representing two classes of teachers, adequately serve to illustrate my point. I have said that one was a Current-Traditional teacher, while the other was not. For the purposes of my argument, I would submit that, while Mr. Cassidy signifies Current-Traditional Rhetoric, Mrs. Dorholt represents a forerunner of Creative Rhetoric, whose principles I will tackle in the next chapter. Recognizing these differing schools of thought, even as demonstrated in my high school experiences, is important because they have shaped the kind of teacher I have been in the past, and they still influence the teacher I want to become in the future. More on that in chapter three.

Now that I know the history of composition pedagogy, it makes sense that (some of) my high school teachers were more up to speed with composition pedagogy trends than most of my college teachers. That is, they had been trained to teach after most of my college professors had exited college. Unfortunately, none of my teachers, it seems, had been trained much in rhetoric—so I missed that boat on all fronts.

The point of all this personal history, or what I am trying to say, is that by the time I got to grad school, I was recognizing the need for both personal writing and rhetorical writing. I still couldn't see the value of much of the literature study and critical writing I had done—that was not yet to be resolved. But now, I was taking another step toward thinking about a really useful pedagogy. At this point, I decided, it needed somehow to harmonize personal and rhetorical writing. As such, when I read of the famous Bartholomae-Elbow debate, I felt my present-time quandary well articulated. Little did I know that I was about fifteen years behind the discussion in actual scholarly circles—that the dispute had been largely resolved.

Still, as I looked into this discussion for a seminar paper in Foundations of Rhetoric and Composition, I found that my discontent in the English department wasn't totally outdated. While I found that a number of teachers had already been bridging the gap between personal and rhetorical writing (Fulwiler, Mlynarczyk; Schwartz; Mendelowitz and Ferreira; Trupe; Hesse; Spigelman; Bloom), others were clearly not (Allison; Baer and Mckool; Graff; Mayers; and Trupe note students' frustration over impersonal, impractical assignments). I also found that the debate had taken a backseat to newer issues in composition theory, such as the place of politics or technology in the classroom. For me, that meant that revisiting the relationship between theory and practice was not a waste of time; clearly, as the scholars cited just lines above have shown, some teachers still needed to be brought up to date. And in order for me to arrive at a pedagogy

that goes beyond just harmonizing the two sides, tracing the development of this debate was an indispensible step I needed to take. Here's what I found.

A Somewhat Settled, yet still Unsettling, Discussion

Today the discussions that do invoke or allude to the Bartholomae-Elbow dispute center less on personal versus academic writing than on the question of how to reconcile two sides of the same coin. Indeed, recent scholarship and even not-so-recent theory reveal less of a conflict than originally thought, so that one might even say that the dialectic is now reaching its synthesis. As Hesse observes, a growing number of comp teachers are employing dialectically the two forms of writing in their classes, so that the field itself "bobs and weaves between analysis (knowledge about) and performance (knowledge how), rhetoric and writing, concept and craft, critique and complicity, ends academic and ends civic, composing as an instrumental activity and composing as a socially ludic one" (34). As a number of scholars and teachers have noted in the two decades since the debate, using personal alongside academic writing is effective for a number of reasons. It works to acclimate students to the academic discourse community (Fulwiler, Mlynarczyk; Schwartz; Mendelowitz and Ferreira), it encourages cultural analysis and critique (Mendelowitz and Ferreira; Schwartz), and it encourages reflection needed for engagement in all types of critical thinking (Trupe; Elbow and Clarke).

In 1989, when the debate began, Bartholomae's critique of expressivist pedagogy, simply put, was that it situated students at the center of the universe and propagated a "lie" that they could live in a free space, unaffected by history, culture, or anything else outside of them. He said teachers should see the classroom as a "discursive space," "a real space, not as an idealized utopian space" (66). Opposed to divorcing students from the context in which they were living,

he argued "for a class in time, one that historicize[d] the present, including the present evoked in students' writing. Inside this linguistic present, students (with instruction—more precisely, with lessons in critical reading) [could] learn to feel and see their position inside a text they did not invent and [could] never, at least completely, control" (65). Although Bartholomae admitted that teaching expressive writing was "an extraordinarily tempting genre," and though it would result in better organized, better written texts, he repudiated the idea as "corrupt," saying he would rather "preside over a critical writing, one where the critique [of traditional humanism] is worked out in practice," a writing he termed, "for lack of better terms," "academic writing" (71).

For his part, Elbow plainly admitted fearing he invited first-year students into thinking that they were the originators of their thoughts and their writing: "No matter that even though others might have already written better about it—I invite them to write as though they are a central speaker at the center of the universe—rather than feeling, as they often do, that they must summarize what others have said and only make modest rejoinders from the edge of the conversation" (80). Elbow further incriminated himself by saying, "I don't push my first year students to think about what academics have written about their subject; indeed much of my behavior is a kind of invitation for them to pretend that no authorities have ever written about their subject before" (79). To deflect the insinuation that his classroom was not discursive, he adduced the example of his class magazine, an ongoing discourse among students in the class (79), which brings up perhaps the most interesting point about their "debate."

Although the two men obviously hold differing core pedagogical values, both, in their seminal position pieces and other works, have acknowledged valid aspects of the "opposing" pedagogy. In "Writing with Teachers," Bartholomae discussed the usefulness of employing personal narrative *within* scholarly articles, citing various instances of respected colleagues doing

just that. And even before his discussion with Bartholomae, Elbow, with Jennifer Clarke, talked of using personal writing—in this case, writing without regard for the audience—to figure out what one wants to say as a *precursor* to writing for a larger community: "*After* we have managed to write a draft or copious exploratory material to work out our own thinking…*then* we need to follow the traditional rhetorical advice: think about readers and figure out any adjustments that are needed to suit our words and thoughts to them" (20, emphasis theirs). Drawing on Linda Flower's cognitive theories, Elbow and Clarke concluded that a focus on "writer-based" prose in the early stages of composition leads to better "reader-based" prose in the end (26).

Yet, despite the scholars' decades-old admission that expressive and rhetorical writing are not mutually exclusive, a number of teachers have continued grappling with how to reconcile the two methods in their classrooms. The most obvious development in the dialectic between the pedagogies has been the trend of teachers using one to acquire the other in first-year writing or other introductory courses. Toby Fulwiler's textbook *College Writing: A Personal Approach to Academic Writing* exemplifies the theory that one skill may lead to the other, much as this observation from Hesse: "The belief in generally transferrable writing skills and processes has been alive and well in 'contentless' classroom across the country, not merely as the modes of discourse or even writing as process, but also through skills of summary and synthesis, audience analysis, structuring strategies, the management of logos, ethos, and pathos, and so on" (41). Drawing from past and present linguistic theories, teachers are increasingly using expressive writing as course reading material and for writing assignments, both of which they claim help students transition into academic writing tasks.[2]

[2] In *Personally Speaking: Experience as Academic Discourse,* Candace Spigelman traces the emergence of personal writing in the academy largely through the developing models of research in ethnographic and feminist studies. The former's methods "honor experience and recognize the importance of recording and examining the events that shape

Rebecca Mlynarczyk, an expressivist, argues that all students "need to reflect on their reading using personal, expressive language in order to acquire genuine academic discourse (5)," supporting her claims with research from linguists Edward Sapir and James Britton, the latter whose theories of language have been credited with forming the "theoretical center" of expressivism (Burnham 25). Preceding Britton, Sapir classified all language into two distinct orders that he said were "'intertwined in enormously complex patterns'": "'expressive language,' exemplified by everyday speech; and 'referential language,' exemplified by scientific discourse" (Britton 166). A 1934 literature handbook made this similar observation about the range of human discourse: "The peculiar quality of poetry can be distinguished from that of prose if one thinks of the creative mind as normally expressing itself in a variety of literary forms ranged along a scale between the two extremes of scientific exposition and lyrical verse" (qtd. in Graff 275). In 1970 Britton assimilated all three categories into a similar continuum, with expressive language in the middle. To distinguish the writer's roles for each position on the continuum, he described writers using scientific, or referential language, as participants—writers who were trying to accomplish a certain goal—and those using lyrical, or poetic language, as spectators—those who used language for no specific agency but for its own sake (Burnham 26). As Burnham puts it, expressive writing, a functional category, "represents a mode rather than a text. More important than its existence as a text, expressive writing achieves its purpose through allowing the text to come to existence" (26). In other words, expressive language allows writers to get their ideas on the page so they can proceed to more difficult writing tasks. As Mlynarczyk points

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the lives of social participants," while the latter's methods have been used to "counter discrimination, to encourage consciousness-raising, and to oppose and resist oppressive pedagogies, department politics, and research practices (10-11). See Spigelman's chapter one for a detailed list of seminal publications leading to the growth of personal writing in the academy. Particularly noteworthy are Lynn Z. Bloom's "Teaching College English as a Woman" and Karen Surman Paley's *I-Writing: The Politics and Practice of Teaching First-Person Writing*.

out, in the Bartholomae-Elbow debate, "neither scholar made an explicit connection with the role of expressive language in helping students move toward either end of Britton's language continuum" (11). But, as Britton noted:

> Expressive language provides an essential starting point because it is language close to the self of the writer: and progress towards the transactional should be gradual enough to ensure that 'the self,' though hidden, is still there. It is the self that provides the unseen point from which all is viewed: there can be no other way of writing quite impersonally and yet with coherence and vitality. (179)

Mendelowitz and Ferreira cite work from Bruner, Mayher, and Huberman, that builds on Britton and Sapir to support their use of professional personal narratives as literature as a viable entry point into academic discourse. Instead of using the terms "expressive" and "referential," Bruner labeled humans' two ways of thinking and speaking—corresponding to personal and scientific or logical functions—"narrative" and "paradigmatic," respectively. Mendelowitz and Ferreira further align themselves with Mayher and Humberman, who argued that the two modes were not always distinct, and, in fact, sometimes move fluidly back and forth—a notion that was "important to [Mendelowitz and Ferreira's] work as [they] consciously sought to use [professional] narratives that were at the cusp of narration, reflection and argumentation" (488). Specifically, Mendelowitz and Ferreira found narratives helpful because, as pointed out by McEwan and Egan, "narrative always locates its content, whether it is facts, theories or dreams, in the context of someone's emotion and from the perspective of someone's life" (489). In this case, getting students to *feel* something is the preferred entry point into various content.

Educators who agree with these theories have used the following approaches in their classrooms: writing in personal or critical response journals (Mlynarczyk; Fulwiler, *Journal Book*), using professional and personal narratives to segue into larger critical discussions (Mendelowitz and Ferreira 488), fostering critiques of cultural narratives (Schwartz), and

assigning personal reflection portfolios that follow students across the curriculum and through four years in college (Trupe). Mlynarczyk, who teaches mostly basic writers, employs expressive writing by asking students to write about their readings in informal reading response journals. Unlike Elbow, she goes beyond using student texts for reading material, but she maintains that, before students can successfully write in academic discourse, they must "explore ideas, often connecting with these ideas in a personal way, by writing about them in expressive language before being asked to write more traditional academic essays" (13). Her approach, which she admits has made some non-native U.S. students uncomfortable for requiring sharing of deeply personal information, certainly gets past the problem of mechanistic or inauthentic student responses, but clearly can constrain students in other ways. Mendelowitz and Ferreira also note a limit to strictly personal, or narrative writing; they heed the warning from Goodson that overusing personal narratives, privileging the local and personal, can " 'seal off' " political and cultural analysis; thus, they are careful to limit their use of narrative to providing an entry point into "broader material and social contexts" (489).

To facilitate their purposes, Mendelowitz and Ferreira designed a first-year sociolinguistics course that moved increasingly from the personal to the general. The course began with students writing personal language biographies, moved into reading other people's published language histories (such as Gloria Anzaldua's), and ended by examining broader linguistic concepts such as linguistic identity, language varieties, language attitudes, language hierarchies, and code switching. The last essay was a critical academic essay analyzing these concepts. For this particular course, taught in linguistically diverse South Africa, the instructors' goal was to improve upon a previous, less successful course. The challenge they took up was to "engage the [highly diverse] group as a whole," "to be inclusive but sufficiently challenging, and

to facilitate interaction across different backgrounds," all without sacrificing "academic depth" (490-91). The instructors note that they did not see the course progression as a linear process, but, like the writing process, a recursive one "where students would move between these different layers of knowledge throughout the course and that their own narratives and other narratives would later serve as 'mental hooks' to enable students to engage with complex sociolinguistic concepts" (491). Indeed, the instructors report that, as a result of this design, "lively discussions" about linguistics ensued, as the personal narratives had "introduced [the students] to a diverse range of language histories" and even "[generated] some of the key questions and key issues" (491). At the end of the course, which the instructors have since repeated, they concluded that personal, student-written narratives are "a powerful educational tool, generating the opportunity for students to engage with multiple voices and to (re)position themselves in relation to a multiplicity of perspectives and experiences (487)."

While a Mendelowitz-and-Ferreira-type course would especially cater to diverse groups of students, Schwartz provides an example that could be effective for similarly diverse groups as well as for less diverse, or even homogeneous, groups. Like Mlynarczyk, Mendelowitz and Ferreira, he uses the idea of narrative overall as an entry point into more complex, critical assignments. In Schwartz's estimation, Bartholomae's dismissal of "sentimental realism" and narrative rejects a fact of the classroom that should be especially important to English teachers: Narrative, by "the nature of writing, its tendency to reveal voice, psychology, experience"—and also the intimate, workshop-style design of the class in which students read one another's writing—"is part of the very fabric of the classes we teach" (435). English teachers, Schwartz contends, can capitalize on this setup by helping students to write about their own lives and read the world around them, not just the literature in front of them, as narratives that might involve

sentimental realism. Quoting from Robert Scholes, who says that sentimental realism is, in fact, a "linchpin" in contemporary American culture (437), Schwartz asserts that "students should be given the tools of 'ideological criticism' and taught to apply those tools not just to a traditional canon but to films, television commercials, and contemporary cultural mythmaking" (436). Since much of pop culture involves sentimental realism, and since it "may well be the genre our students are best equipped to understand when they arrive at college, thanks to Oprah's book club, talk radio, Friendster, and 'original' movies on HBO and Lifetime Television," Schwartz says this is an ideal place to start helping students separate story from critical reflection. Teaching students to "mine their own experiences and work within the conventions of sentimental realism" can lead to questioning and critiquing the dominant culture's "reliance on such conventions." At that point, Schwartz says, "[W]e can teach our students to see the limits of sentimental realism and the importance of other modes and genres of writing, more traditional academic writing most definitely (and most important) among them" (437).

While Schwartz's assertion that academic writing is the "most important" genre would not represent the thinking of the most ardent expressivists, his sentiment about the importance of other modes and genres of writing strikes a definite chord. As shown, many current writing teachers are engaging students with academic content (or trying to) through the use of personal, narrative writing; however, for other teachers, expressive writing, and expressivist-informed pedagogies, have roles to play beyond, or separate from, moving students into academic discourse. Of course, those goals beyond acquiring academic discourse are the same ones that were articulated by Elbow and refuted by Bartholomae in the 90s, but others that go beyond acquiring academic discourse—specifically, various kinds of reflection—begin to illumine how and where expressive writing might fit beyond the first-year course.

In addition to students' needing writing that connects classroom learning with personal experience, Trupe says students need writing that connects learning with "the formation of lifetime goals" (107). Specifically, in her institution, this happens through a portfolio requirement that obliges students to reflect on their education across the disciplines for the duration of their programs. In the expressivist tradition, portfolio evaluators call for students to use a "personal voice"; however, in an explanation that offers the field a new idea of expressive writing, Trupe clarifies:

> The personal voice called for is not meant as an 'authentic' self to be found within so much as an ethos to be developed through the course of the student's education for the specific occasions when public expression of reflection is called for, just as 'reflection' in this context does not mean introspection, nor is the 'personal' conceived as the confessional. (111)

Here, writing can be expressive without being sentimental, it can be personal while attending to an audience, and it can remain reflective while still rhetorically effective. As Trupe further explains,

> Writing that includes a significant dimension of reflection is writing that, ultimately, is personally meaningful to the student….Such reflection requires more than introspection and search for authenticity, as expressivist pedagogies have advocated, but at its best it does not require the student to substitute an academic voice or *ethos* for a performance of voice as a unique, individual subjectivity. (113)

The concept of writing that is personally meaningful to the student and occupies a "unique, individual subjectivity," yet that effectively addresses an audience, in theory, sounds like a pedagogical stance that both Elbow and Bartholomae could agree to, and, really, have. Need the discussion continue?

Insofar as the benefits of expressive and narrative writing in the first-year course have been documented, the discussion could end. However, that does not ensure that all teachers are using expressive writing to its potential, if at all. My recent experiences as a graduate student,

which has included writing all academic essays (with the exception of one) and being trained as a GTA to dispense mostly rhetorical assignments in the first-year class (with the exception of one), leaves me leery. But I'm not really bothered by the fact that first-year students at my institution don't write expressively very often—these are students from all disciplines who need to gain quick access to academic discourse before leaving the English department possibly for good. I am more bothered by the thought that, at my institution and at others, after that initial first-year assignment, today's English majors may not be doing any more expressive, or creative, writing than I did as an undergraduate; consequently, they may be feeling just as unfulfilled and fragmented as I once did, and still often do.

Insofar as the benefits of expressive, or creative, writing for the later stages of the English major are only just beginning to be documented—in the forms of creative writing studies as a lost, but formerly important component in the study of both literature and composition (Graff); creative writing as preparation for a changing workforce (Hesse; Graeme and Kroll); and both creative writing and creative writing studies as the links that could unite the opposing poles of literature and composition in the English department (Graff; Mayers, "One Simple Word" 227)—the discussion must continue. In chapter three, I argue that, for English majors, moving beyond personal writing into creative writing after the first-year course could enhance not only students' reflection and personal meaning-making, but also their rhetorical efficacy; and, as an added bonus, their literature study.

Chapter 4

Toward a Pedagogy of Creative Rhetoric

In chapter one we saw how the first-year composition course came to be taught with little thought to underlying theories of writing, especially after the Harvard reports of 1895; rather, it was allowed to develop and harden in line with external pressures on the university, and thus, Current-Traditional Rhetoric was born. Meanwhile, the English department continued to build its new identity around the study of literature. It was not until after World War II that the major divisions within composition began noticeably forming—expressive writing, rhetorical writing, and most recently, critical/cultural studies (Fulkerson, Gere). Over the next half-century, then, we can trace objective theories of composing (including Current-Traditional models) giving way to subjective theories (expressive pedagogies), and subjective theories to transactional theories (rhetorical models including the introduction to discourse communities exemplified in Graff and Birkenstein's *They Say, I Say*). As demonstrated in chapter two, the top contenders for composition pedagogies, expressive and rhetorical, have in the twenty-first century found *some* synthesis, and continue to develop in conversation with one another. The field of composition overall has seen healthy growth, and is continuing to garner respect in English departments where once it was spurned as an "elementary" subject. However, inequalities in the English department remain. With this final chapter, I'd like to point out and respond to two that I see.

One, within composition studies, creative writing—or more broadly, non-scholarly writing—remains on the margins. Two, within English departments as a whole, the study of literature still trumps composition of all kinds. These inequalities deserve attention because, as I argued in my introduction and in previous chapters, they have led to negative results such as English graduates emerging unprepared to publish in non-scholarly venues (a problem of number

one) and/or English graduates emerging unprepared to teach writing for the most common writing teacher exigencies, such as state testing or the AP exam (a problem of number two). As I will show, reintroducing creative writing into the department can help repair both problems. Following, I want to briefly nod to those connections between literature study and creative writing other scholars have made; and then I want to focus in again on my area of interest, composition, to explain some benefits of introducing creative writing into the study of rhetoric and composition.

The Missing Puzzle Piece: Creative Writing in the English Department

In his comprehensive history of creative writing, *The Elephants Teach*, D.G. Meyers asserts that Berlin's history of writing, *Rhetoric and Reality,* misjudged the split in American English departments. Like many composition scholars, Berlin characterizes the English department into a two-way split between rhetoric and poetic—rhetoric being "the production of written and spoken texts," and poetic as being "the interpretation of texts" (1); but Myers classes these activities as "different freeze-frame instants in the same continuous loop of activity." That is, he argues that interpretation helps us understand how texts are made, while the making of texts is, "from another angle, merely an interpretation—a version of how it might be written or spoken" (9). To produce texts, for Myers, is an act of interpreting reality. To be fair, Berlin granted that rhetoric and poetry were initially grounded in the same epistemology; he even pointed to a false dichotomy between "two separate and unequal categories: the privileged poetic statement and the impoverished rhetorical statement, the one art and the other 'mere' science" (29). Where Berlin's assessment failed, says Myers, is relating this continuous loop of activity correctly to the other, actual divisions in English.

Myers says the split was really three ways: between scholarship, social practices, and constructivism; or scholarly research in English, the teaching of practical composition, and the constructivist handling of literature (this third sector demonstrates the "continuous loop" or "similar epistemology" of poetic and rhetoric that both Berlin and Myers agree on) (9-10). In his article, "The Rise of Creative Writing," Myers clarifies this by saying, "My own argument is that composition was originally distinguished from *both* rhetoric *and* interpretation; historically, the 'creative' study of writing has represented a third way" (283). He goes on to point out that the teaching of literature (the way Berlin mostly refers to it) has come to represent a paradox: that of "[producing]" a certain kind of writing while "[consuming] another, different kind." He is talking about the paradox enacted when English professors read literary texts, yet produce scholarly books and articles. This is the same paradox reproduced, Myers continues, when those professors only ever assign critical essays in literature classes. In his very ironic words:

> [L]iterature as it is taught and studied now is two-faced. It chooses its materials from one set of texts but extracts its methods from another set….There is an almost comical incongruity about much of what calls itself literary study today. The true subject in most literature classrooms is not literature, but literary scholarship. (*The Elephants Teach* 11)

His point is well taken. The division in the English department is not just between writing for social audiences (as Berlin traces the history of writing instruction) and literature; but it is a division between scholarship, rhetoric as it is commonly understood (a civic and serviceable activity), and a creative/poetic enterprise, whether that enterprise is studying a text or creating one. In this model, scholarly inquiry and writing for social or rhetorical purposes are portioned off into their own separate fields, leaving literature and creative writing tangled together in one piece. In this model, literature is understood to be the product of creative writing, just as creative writing is understood to spring from studying literary craft. And this mutually inclusive

relationship—this "continuous loop"—Myers informs readers, was originally what creative writing as curriculum was meant to do: it was created not to produce creative writers, but to teach literature "from the inside," as "a familiar experience, rather than from the outside, as exotic phenomenon. It was intended to be an elephant's view of zoology" (*The Elephants Teach* 8-9). To build on this history lesson, Tim Mayers points out that to juxtapose the study of creative writing with the study of literature, for either the purpose of studying literature or for the purpose of improving writing, English teachers would be essentially repairing a fundamental split between the two, a split that Mayers dates from the late seventeenth century and the beginning of literary criticism as a discipline ((*Re)writing Craft)*.

Before this split, Myers writes, "the study of poetry was once a requirement of every student's education" ("The Rise" 279). Myers points out that the study of poetic was not originally intended to form writers, nor to provide an "initiation into the discipline of literary art." Rather, this requirement had a much broader aim: to promote "human self-understanding" (279). "The writing of verses was one means to achieve exactness in literary study. It was a method of enforcing precept by practical illustration. It was not a separate instruction in creative writing" (280). In other words, the practice of composing "creatively" (the term "creative writing" did not take hold until the 1920s) was meant to give students a fuller education by helping them experience their subject matter as participants in that subject matter. Much as Berlin laments the effect of the German research model on the practice of rhetorical invention, Myers laments the effect of the German research model on the "humanistic ideal" that had students studying literature from an insider perspective, that of an elephant studying zoology. Myers describes a decline in the quality of philology instruction as the result of the same "scientific impulse" that Berlin says destroyed the thoughtful study of rhetoric ("The Rise" 280).

Not surprisingly, Myers's citation of one student of English literature in 1888 reeks of the same Current-Traditional Pedagogy I described in Mr. Cassidy's class in chapter one:

> A small biographical history of literature served for a textbook and an interrogation mark for a teacher. The lesson was so many hard dry facts—dates, names, and titles—all to be piled up in the memory like bricks. Even the day of the month of the author's birth and death, no matter how unimportant his work might be, must be carefully memorized. The titles of all the works each writer had composed, with the dates of publication, must be religiously committed to memory….Why one man was called a better writer than another we made no attempt to find out. We memorized the opinion of our textbook with painstaking accuracy, and that always satisfied the question mark. ("The Rise" 281)

Commenting on this passage, Myers remarks, "In short, English literature was conceived as a body of knowledge—or perhaps of information—but not as a ground and context for judgment." In other words, once the discipline of English was formed, literary study became a "knowledge about," not a "knowledge of how" (Myers 282). Students could look as outsiders into literature, but were not encouraged to create it. And as the foregoing passage suggests, just as in Mr. Cassidy's class, students were not even encouraged to have original thoughts *about* the literature. While today it is a rare English teacher who doesn't want his or her students to form their own interpretations of literature, it is not so rare for English teachers to limit students' literary engagement to writing *about.* Indeed, it seems to be the norm, at least in my undergraduate experience from 2003-2008, for English professors to limit writing in literature classes to critical essays. But a pocket of recent research indicates that the field might be ready for a change.

A number of scholars (Hesse, Andrews, Graff, Harper and Kroll) are proposing *creative writing studies* as the theoretical counterpart to creative writing. Mayers suggests that exploring what he calls the "theoretical strand" of creative writing could open new doors to the study of literature as professors and students grapple with not only the meaning of texts, but the making of them. This approach would ask questions like "How can I make a text like this?" or "Under

what circumstances are texts like this produced?" as opposed to "What does this text mean?" or "Under what circumstances do readers understand the meaning of texts?" Some texts Mayers suggests that could work equally well as foundational texts to interpretive criticism as for creative writing studies are Wordsworth's 1802 preface to lyrical ballads, Matthew Arnold's "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time," Poe's "The Philosophy of Composition," Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, and Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent" (222). Kimberly Andrews, from her standpoint as MFA candidate and literary scholar, concedes that the study of literature and creative writing work synergistically for the *writer* insofar as studying literature logically must precede the practice of creative writing (252). Harper and Kroll make the similar point that the practice of creative writing creates knowledge that is the result of "sustained and serious examination of the art of writerly practice and might include not only contemporary theoretical or critical models but the writer's own past works as well as predecessors and traditions" (4).

For all these writer-scholars, a dichotomy between creator and critic ought not exist. But as long as English departments continue to pit these two subject positions (and "subjects") against one another, they argue, both sides smart. Andrews, like Graff, warns that for creative writers to exclude the critical literary element is to deny the discipline's origins (253). In like manner, as Myers has alluded, those who exclude the creative element from their literary studies must remain "outside the zoo." It is to prevent and repair these false dichotomies that these scholars and myself are calling for improved departmental communication, more overlap of sub-disciplines, and the reawakening of creative writing (studies). Mayers goes as far as saying that creative writing studies could become the "spark for the long sought-after unity among the several strands of English studies" (227):

> Because creative writing studies has points of overlap with both composition studies and literary studies, while maintaining a distinctive character of its own, it may harbor the roots of an institutional and intellectual compromise in which the union between composition and literature does not involve one side winning and the other losing, but rather both enterprises being transformed so they can meet on heretofore unimagined ground. (227)

As one of the many students/teachers faced with having to integrate seemingly disparate strands in my major (Graff 271-72)—and as one whose creativity has been stifled from courses "overburdened with theory" (Hesse 35)—I agree that it's time for English departments to re-connect a strand of language and literature study that should never have been severed. Clearly, the possibilities for the study of literature with creative writing are being reimagined, as scholars like Myers have shown. But less explored have been the possibilities bound up with integrating creative writing and rhetoric. For the remainder of this chapter, I would like to explore this "heretofore unimagined ground," moving ever closer to a pedagogy of Creative Rhetoric.

Creative Rhetoric—A New Development?

As I delve into a "new" strand of composition pedagogy, I take encouragement from one recent development in the field: that is, the recent institution of the undergraduate "writing major." The development of this writing major over the past decade (Weisser and Grobman) has called on teacher-scholars to ask, "What Do We Mean When We Say Writing?" (Peele). As Eldred notes, the term "composition" has come to signify a bevy of meanings, including grammar; argument; essays; personal narratives; or, for some, "that horrible stuff they are required to grade" (1). For their part, Balzhiser and Mcleod separate writing majors into two groups (here we go again with dichotomies): the "liberal arts" writers and the "professional/rhetorical" writers. According to their understanding, the liberal arts majors camp

in courses like creative writing and literature, while the professional/rhetorical majors stick with writing theory and praxis (qtd. in Weisser and Grobman 42). In reflecting on the contours of this new major, Peele too notes a conflict in goals between the creative writing faculty and the rhetoric and writing faculty. Creative writing faculty, for their part, argue for a creative writing emphasis, stating that this would help students get into MFA programs. The rhetoric faculty, on the other hand, argue that without creating a third option, a creative writing emphasis (which, Peele notes, has always been students' favorite—see my introduction for exhibit A) "would leave [the rhetoric faculty] and their courses marginalized." These faculty add that without a third option, students are likely to drift along with no knowledge of composition and rhetoric until they must enroll in a required course. I would add, referring to my own experiences as delimited in chapter one, that graduates are likely to drift along without this requisite rhetorical knowledge until their teaching positions require them to teach an AP course in rhetoric. But that's not all. As Peele reports, the "question of disciplinarity is also contested." He notes that, along with the creative writing faculty, the rhetoric faculty would like to teach poetry, fiction, and nonfiction, with the added genres of argument, grammar, and new media. But, alas, as Peele concludes, "Not wanting to hold the creative writing students hostage, yet unable to form an additional emphasis and unsure of the kinds of writing that that emphasis would entail, the composition and rhetoric faculty continue to feel uncertain about how to solve this conflict." It is perspectives such as these that Weisser and Grobman say indicate "the development and growth of an emerging subject" (42). Hmmm. Sounds like I've found a captive audience for my thesis. Can we not develop a writing major, or even a single course, that allows teachers to teach both creative writing and rhetorical craft, allowing students to learn and exercise both?

Similar to how rhetorical and expressive writing has been blended, as discussed in chapter two, I argue that this split within the new writing major can be remedied. As I demonstrated in that chapter, by blending methodologies in composition, teachers can significantly raise student interest and investment. Just as the debate pitting academic writing against expressivist writing has been somewhat resolved and has led to more effective classroom practices, mainly in first-year English, now rhetoric and creative writing faculty can continue to heighten student engagement and learning by blending their respective pedagogies in years two-through-four.

My main argument, developed as both a reaction to and remedy for my personal frustrations as English student and teacher, is that college composition teachers must strive to create authentic writing environments that fulfill authentic student communications for authentic audiences (for you, rhetoricians), BUT that will engender, and not kill, creativity (for you, creative writers). I am calling this as-yet idyllic—but, I believe, very do-able—type of course *Creative Rhetoric*. Within this framework, teachers strive for balanced composition courses that do not privilege literary analysis over the authentic creation of literature; but in the same fashion, teachers do not privilege the creation of literature for literature's sake over writing that meets a practical exigence, an exigence that originates at least partly from outside the student. With my term *Creative Rhetoric,* I want to make clear that I am not talking about *creative writing,* or what is commonly equated with products such as short stories, poems, or plays. Rather, I am talking about a course of study, be it applied to an entire writing major or in a single class, that primarily does two things most of the time.

1—The Rhetorical Consideration) A course in Creative Rhetoric should offer well-thought-out assignments, assignments that ask the student to connect learning to his or her life,

or assignments that have demonstrably practical value—i.e. they engage a topic or task that the student has some stake in beyond having to write about it to pass their composition course; that is, they propose topics and tasks that students have dealt with or likely will deal with. Additionally, assignments in Creative Rhetoric should build and refine skills that will prove valuable to students beyond the writing course, and, hopefully, beyond the university.

2—The Creative Consideration) A course in Creative Rhetoric should allow the student to exercise an individual ethos[3] in writing—that is, while the student may conform to some overall disciplinary conventions, he or she should not be taught to excise his or her personality, voice, or however you want to define it, from the writing. Rather, Creative Rhetoric seeks to cultivate a writer's unique subject position. More than this, Creative Rhetoric sees assignments and real-world communiqués as problems to be solved creatively (not formulaically). This creative problem solving can and should include both thinking creatively to develop solutions (dealing with both form and content) that are "outside of the box," and carrying out those written solutions by using sophisticated techniques such as metaphor, dialogue, symbolism, narration, or other literary, "poetic," techniques that great writers have used for rhetorical effect.

All told, not one element in this pedagogy is brand new, but I believe that the bundling of all the above skills and goals—especially teaching rhetoric as a vehicle for creative writing or vice versa—is an emerging idea. Indeed, in the tradition of integrating personal, expressive, or imaginative writing with the academy's goals, more compositionists are starting to tout the benefits of creative writing, creative nonfiction especially, for composition classes (see especially Bloom's *Seven Deadly Virtues* and *Composition as Creative Art*, as well as Eldred's *Sentimental Attachments* and O'Connor's *This Time It's Personal*). Hesse has said that the

[3] See Trupe discussion in chapter two to understand the ethos I am applying here.

identity of composition studies needs to "find a good mix between being 'about' writing/composing (that is, as focusing on interpretation on analyzing texts or literate practices) as being 'for' writing/composing (that is, focusing on production, on making texts)" (34). Erring too far on the side of only being "about" composing, to the exclusion of considering "writing for wider audiences and purposes is marginalizing," Hesse, says, "especially when digital tools and networks expand the production and circulation of texts" (35).

The Rhetorical Consideration: Practical Assignments with Real-Life Transfer

To be sure, the digital age seems lately to be one of the major motivations for teachers becoming more "creative." It is these new contexts and possibilities for writing that have led others to make basically the same argument as I have made in pillar one: that assignments need to have practical value and application in the real world. As those in the field can't help but notice, not only have new technologies created new types of communication, but they have created new types of jobs, requiring new types of skill sets. Harper and Kroll note that, even though fulltime students of creative writing seldom end up becoming fulltime creative writers, the "bedrock" skills of the subject, creativity and communication, lend themselves to the growing "communication industries, fed by new technologies." They go as far as saying, "[O]pportunities for creative writers in the media-related sector, or more broadly, in the Creative Industries, have never been greater. Creative Writing graduates thus have acquired knowledge important to economies increasingly interested in the promotion…of creative endeavor" (8). But how can scholars such as Harper and Kroll be so sure that creative skills have occupational transfer? Weisser and Grobman, offering what they hope will be a launching point for the next

wave of research into undergraduate writing programs,[4] surveyed recent graduates of their own writing program in 2009 and 2010 to find out how their students' writing instruction had benefited their careers, or not. The results of those surveys, though limited to those students choosing to respond, is instructive to writing program developers.

Although creative writing as such accounts for just a small slice of the curriculum at Penn State Berks, the program's overall goals overlap largely with my pillar one goals, so I will take some space to review the program's vision for writing major graduates. In the Professional Writing Major at Penn State Berks, the primary goal is "to enable students to communicate effectively and ethically in a wide range of workplace and academic situations" (42). According to their web site, the program aims to marry "a strong liberal arts foundation with practical writing experience" to prepare students for a broad spectrum of "effective language use." Not only does the curriculum prescribe five intro courses covering everything from theory to the rhetorical tradition, but it also requires students to take eight other courses in seven categories, including Rhetorical Theory, Writing for Publication, Workplace Writing, Visual Design, Advertising and Public Relations, Creative Writing, and a grab bag of other interdisciplinary writing courses. Other key components of the program are a capstone class that "integrates academic coursework, co-curricular activities, and internship experiences through design and development of print and electronic professional portfolios" (44). Lastly, their program incorporates a "rich extra-curriculum," which they say first-wave researchers had not considered. This extra-curriculum calls on students to interact with writers "outside of the academic setting

[4] Grobman and Weisser are building on what they call a "first wave" of scholarship about the undergraduate writing major that they say was enacted over the past decade. They cite this "first wave" as a time when scholars (Shamoon, Moore Howard, Jamieson, and Schwegler; O'Neill, Crow, and Burton; Yancey; Estrem; Giberson, Greg, and Moriarty; and Balzhiser and McLeod are a few) started discussing the effects of the undergraduate writing major on professional writing, technical writing, rhetorical writing, among other things, which, they note are "markedly distinct from the traditional 'English' major" (39).

and to apply their writerly knowledge in tangible ways," such as peer reviewing and proofreading undergraduate journals; assisting faculty in various disciplines with course writing tasks in workshops, peer tutoring, and mini-lessons on writing; and earning credit while writing for the school newspaper (44-45).

Already, this curriculum sounds great to me. I can think of numerous ways such a curriculum could have helped me in my career thus far: the writing workshops and peer tutoring would have prepared me for my job as a high school English teacher; the work on the school paper, along with the advertising and PR classes, would have informed my pedagogy in the high school journalism classes I was unexpectedly assigned; and the Writing for Publication classes would have helped me with a freelance career I have timidly launched in the last few years, not to mention helped with my position as a church communications secretary, wherein I am responsible for all press releases. As I have said, my bachelor's degree in English, and much of my master's, has been made up of literature and theory classes, and though these have certainly developed my critical thinking skills, I am still looking for more tangible benefits in my career and personal writing endeavors.

Thankfully, writing major graduates from Penn State Berks have another story to tell: in their cases, they *have* found their education directly relevant to their careers, even as many of those careers are not typically considered writing intensive. In general, Weisser and Grobman found their alumni using writing often in the workplace, with a shift away from traditional and print-based forms and toward "electronic, new-media, and promotional forms of communication" (49). More specifically, only 10.7% of respondents reported having to write essays frequently, with 71.4% noting they "never" use the essay genre. Relatedly, only 29.6% reported work-related communication as "thesis-driven: focused on evidencing one or more key

arguments." By contrast, 85.7% of their respondents reported writing "frequent emails"; 46.4% said they communicated by other online documents, such as websites and blogs; and 28.6% reported writing advertisements and other promotional materials (48). Two conclusions Weisser and Grobman have drawn about their alumni are their "rhetorical awareness and savvy" and their "adaptability to a difficult job market and their *creativity* in carrying out career paths" (50-51, emphasis mine). They cite specific responses from former students who have gained jobs; advanced in positions because they were able to assess the rhetorical situation, audience, and purpose; and find creative ways to respond. One graduate, Elizabeth, markets herself on LinkedIn.com as an "energetic and driven marketing professional and talented writer who seeks to use her *creative* mind in marketing, communications, or writing role…" (51, emphasis mine). Although Penn State Berks seems to side with the professional/rhetoric type of writing major, clearly, the attributes of poetic and creative writing have their place in the curriculum, and prove important to their graduates. In short, it is a combination of both "rhetorical savvy" and "creativity in carrying out career paths" that have made their students successful.

As I am arguing, and as this study from Penn State Berks shows, rhetoric and creativity seem to work best hand in hand. And although this has not been an explicitly stated goal of many writing classrooms or writing programs, this idea was asserted even as both creative writing and rhetoric were challenging Current Traditional Rhetoric in the seventies and eighties. As I neared the end of my research for this project, I was thumbing through current rhet/comp journals and was surprised to find references to two articles, both written before I was born, that contained the two key terms in my argument: Rhetoric and Creativity. Building on psychologist Rollo Mary, John H. Patton, in an article entitled "Causation and Creativity in Rhetorical Situations…" argued in 1979 that creativity emerges out of a rhetorical situation. According to Patton,

creativity comes in the collision of subject with something in the world, and the subject's response (qtd. in Newcomb 608). Using this work to support his own research on using design principles in composition, Matthew Newcomb added that, for Patton, "rhetorical creativity and…real exigences and constraints function as complementary—not contradictory—entities" (608). In a similar argument, Charles Kneupper, who wrote an article entitled "Rhetorical Creativity: The Reason, the Situation, and the Art," believed that rhetoric and creativity must work in tandem. "The untaken task of modern rhetoric," he wrote in 1980, "is…to respond to situation and to persons with an appropriate balance of rhetorical creativity and rhetorical conformity" (qtd. in Newcomb 608). According to these theorists, creativity is indispensible to the most effective communication. Granted, these men were not talking about what we think of as creative writing, per se; more accurately, they were talking about the habit of mind of creativity, which habit has been under recent discussion since the CWPA, NCTE, and NWP listed "creativity" as one of eight "habits of mind" in their 2011 "Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing." So it would seem I need to define what I mean by "creative" in my title, Creative Rhetoric. As I have said, I do not mean students should necessarily be creating those products usually taught in creative writing courses, such as poems, stories, and plays. My final section before I conclude, then, will tackle pillar two of Creative Rhetoric: the Creative consideration.

The Creative Consideration: Thinking and Writing Creatively with Ethos

The short explanation to this portion of my proposed pedagogy is this: in Creative Rhetoric courses, creativity should be employed *both* as a habit of mind in students' approach to writing, *and* in the writing itself. That is, as students approach an assignment (one that we'll

presuppose the teacher has creatively designed to meet a real world exigency), they should feel free to develop their own "form" within stated limits (if the teacher assigns an essay, students can't develop a web site), as well as to draw on common techniques from creative writing, including conflict, plot structure, "flash forwards" and flashbacks, characterization through action and detail, dialogue, summaries and scenes, and settings, among others (*The Portable MFA in Creative Writing*). What is the benefit of using these poetic techniques to writing majors, most of whom will never become bestselling authors, much less publish any nonacademic work? First, let's draw on Myers's abbreviated catalogue of creative writing program developers to see where they located value in the practice; then, let's flash forward to a more recent thinker's, Matthew Newcomb's, ideas about the value of "design" in writing and writing instruction.

Myers describes the institution of creative writing in the American college as a reaction to that scientific movement that turned not only rhetoric and composition, but literature study, into merely "knowledge about," not "knowledge how." He says that by the last quarter of the nineteenth century, "Literature was approached as an order of hard dry facts…abstracted from any recognition or mastery of the skills by which meanings are formulated and facts given value," and "[t]his was the milieu from which creative writing emerged" (282-83).[5] Myers says that originally, creative writing was designed to "mend" the split between literary practice and literary study. But in the beginning, it was not called creative writing, it was called "English composition," not to be confused with the first-year rhetoric and composition course described by Berlin.

[5] Unless otherwise noted, all quotations from Myers henceforth with be from his article "The Rise of Creative Writing."

To document creative writing's development as a subject, Myers cites three key players, Barrett Wendell, who began teaching in the 1890s; Hughes Mearns, who began teaching in the 1920s; and Norman Foerster, who directed the University of Iowa's School of Letters—where creative writing was first instituted as a university discipline—from 1930-1941. While each of these gentlemen helped to develop creative writing as its own subject, which became increasingly professionalized from the forties to the sixties, none of them made the leap into bridging creative writing with rhetoric. But each of them, trying to integrate a study of literature with writing to some extent, wanted to repair that composition/literature dichotomy discussed earlier in this chapter. As we have seen above in the literature section, the scholars who are talking about creative writing's place in college English are still mainly focusing on its reintegration with literature. For my purposes, I am concerned only with those characteristics their various pedagogies can offer my proposed pedagogy of Creative Rhetoric.

Wendell's contribution is his emphasis on cultivating curiosity, personal experience, and perception. His institution of the "English Composition" course was originally an "experiment" designed to help average students write with "habitual and unpretentious skill" and "exceptional pupils" to "become skillful creative artists" (qtd. in Myers 285). In his view, education should "stimulate curiosity, aspiration, a willing, almost spontaneous effort"; in addition, the purpose of studying any art, he maintained, was "the production of some piece of work" (qtd. in Myers 285-86). Wendell was the originator of the "daily theme" that soon became central to creative writing's ancestors. A guideline for these themes was to produce something akin to literature, meaning a piece of writing that was "descriptive writing full of sensory detail." Although this sometimes included poems and stories, it was not a certain form of writing that Wendell was

after, “it was the personal experience” of “[cultivating] perception,” or learning to think like a creator that Wendell valued (Myers 286).

Mearns, a product of the Deweyen era of progressive education, was the first person to teach a course in “creative writing,” albeit at a high school, and added to Wendell’s “thinking like a creator” an even more personal dimension. As he saw it, writing should be used in education as a vehicle for personal growth. The educational value of literature, for him, was that it provided “the best means that humans have devised to touch the secret sources of their lives.” Echoing Myers’s thoughts about learning from within, he goes on, “It is not to be learned *about,* but experienced firsthand” (289). His was a pedagogy of learning by doing. Mearns believed that if students were grappling with their own works of writing, then they could turn to contemporary writers—his choice for curriculum—for answers. Therefore, like so many teachers discussed in my chapter two, Mearns was using a personal practice as an entry point into a larger context. His goal was not to create writers as much as it was to create better readers, better thinkers, better human beings.

Foerster, whom Myers credits with the actual founding of creative writing in the university, wanted to make creative writing a comprehensive study of literature. He wanted to bridge criticism and creative writing to prepare critics, writers, scholars, and teachers. To him, creative writing should never be the “whole” of a literary education for writers; it should not just be a series of workshops, but should be combined with the study of theory to develop these powers in writers: “aesthetic responsiveness, the ability to handle ideas; in sum, the critical sense” (Myers 294). Foerster reacted hostilely to Mearns’s focus on creative self-expression, believing that writers must join their creative expression to “a discipline of ideas” or a “critical power.” He wanted both teachers and critics to be prepared for their careers: writers and critics

should have a firm grounding in "humane learning," and teachers and scholars a "firsthand awareness, from the inside, of the technical problems of the subject they expected to study and teach" (Myers 295). In a way, then, Foerster was thinking rhetorically by aiming to prepare creative writers for their chosen fields.

From these three anchors of creative writing instruction, then, for my course in Creative Rhetoric I take Foerster's attention to preparing students for their future careers (though I am thinking more broadly for twenty-first century students), Mearns's attention to helping students make personal meaning of their education, and Wendell's cultivation of curiosity for creating real "works." Of great value for my purposes is the personal investment Wendell aimed to incite in his students. I appreciate how Wendell did not privilege certain forms in his class, but instead aimed for students to exercise certain habits of mind, chief most creativity; and it is this feature that is most informative to Creative Rhetoric. In my ideal, students would approach rhetorical situations with curiosity, creativity, and personal investment, crafting responses that not only allow them to better understand their subjects, or "themes," but that resonate with their audiences as well. I'm with Mearns on the count that education should spur personal growth. In my understanding, this growth would not so much prepare students for specific job skills as it might help them to become reflective, thoughtful individuals who know how to problem solve (in this context, he has them solving problems in their writing). Of course, I dare say most teachers want this for their students; I do, and so I appreciate Mearns's special attention to this inward growth. Where the pedagogies of these teachers fall short, especially Wendell's and Mearns's, is their lack of attention to the rhetorical situation. For my purposes, their courses can be improved by designing assignments to respond to exigencies further outside the writer. In my ideal of Creative Rhetoric, students find a balance between molding effective poetic craft that leads to personal

meaning making while simultaneously responding to an outside audience. Their productions should not only communicate inwardly, but communicate outwardly to do some work in the world.

We can leap from Foerster's pedagogy to the present by summing up creative writing instruction as having become what Myers calls "The Elephant Machine" (see chapter seven of *The Elephants Teach*). Post WWII, Myers characterizes creative writing instruction as concerning itself primarily with reproducing writer-teachers for the university. At this point, he says, creative writing instruction has become isolated from the other strands of English with its solipsistic "workshop" method, and functions mostly to produce more teacher-writers to perpetuate this system in the university, not to produce real-world writers. (It seems to me that similar criticism could apply to many literature or theory courses and departments.) Hence the need to wed creative writing to rhetoric, or to practical concerns.

First Steps Toward a Pedagogy of Creative Rhetoric

To begin melding creative writing with rhetoric, we can invoke Matthew Newcomb's recent research on "design principles for composition," as well as his findings on "situational creativity as a habit of mind." In his article "Sustainability as a Design Principle for Composition: Situational Creativity as a Habit of Mind," Newcomb links composition to design, as in the design of a 10,000-year-old clock tower, by arguing that the concept of "sustainability" can similarly and effectively be applied to both. By sustainability, he is referring to creating products that will stand the test of time long after those products' creation. Prospective creators can think in terms of sustainability by "[prioritizing] long-term relationships between actors involved"; that is, by considering the effects their creation will have on the rhetorical situation

long after creation. Newcomb goes on to say that design is a rhetorical process because design work

> is always in relationship with a situation full of constraints, competing possibilities, audience factors, and purposes…design is a process in terms of having to try out different designs and reshape previous ideas, so it is more about thoughts and activities than about products. Creating, with design, is important here in two ways: first, the creation is not basically one of expression but rather an innovative response to a perceived situation and need. (594)

What I find so useful about this explanation of creating a product, whether the 10,000-year clock tower or creating a piece of writing, is that it values an individual's creativity, or innovation, for the purpose of meeting an extra-individual purpose.

From this standpoint, the creativity of the work may not show itself as much in the actual product as in the process of arriving at the product—however, he says design can simultaneously value "beauty and use" (594). For composition, I take this to mean that a text could include elements of metaphor, flashback, dialogue, or numerous other literary devices to work rhetorically, or to make an argument. Applying design principles, we can define Creative Rhetoric by a *process* of composing creatively and rhetorically, as well as by a *product* that is creative while being rhetorical. Both process and product can represent Creative Rhetoric—one the intrinsic progression to the goal, and the other, the outward result of the effort. This dual nature of the "work," in turn, is another attribute composition shares with design, Newcomb says. In both fields, he notes a debate about where to place the focus—"on the product or on the situation that brought about the product" (595)? In my pedagogy of Creative Rhetoric, I am arguing that emphasis should be placed on both. Ultimately, a design mentality should attend to both beauty and use; moreover, Newcomb points out, this mentality should help shift student emphasis from texts to the relationships surrounding those texts (607).

One main element design can add to composition, Newcomb says, and I agree, is situational creativity. This would mean that students are not just "doing creative work that is based on the self or writing responses to situations based on audiences" (609); they are being creative while they think beyond themselves to the effects their rhetoric will have on others. In the appendix, my practical demonstration of Creative Rhetoric, I have written an essay that employs situational creativity as it couples creative writing with rhetorical exigence. In this case, the exigence is a required writing sample for my MFA application to Seattle Pacific University.

For said essay, I could have submitted a sample of my older creative writing—the program stipulates only that the writing sample fall within the applicant's chosen genre (creative nonfiction for me)—but for reasons you can read about in the appended essay, I felt I needed to produce something new. Moreover, because I had such a big stake in getting into this program, I wanted to give my application an extra punch. I wanted not only to demonstrate my creative writing ability, but also to tie my sample directly explicitly, and skillfully to the rhetorical situation. In other words, I wanted to talk directly to my readers. I wanted to convince them not just that I was a good writer, but that I was a good writer who was perfect for their program. As such, I felt Creative Rhetoric was an ideal course of action.

While the ostensibly creative essay employs multiple literary devices, including metaphor, flashback, flash forward, and dialogue, I employ these devices always with my audience, and my purpose, in mind. Seattle Pacific University is the only MFA program I could discover in the U.S. that bases its curriculum from the Christian tradition. My purpose, obviously, is to convince SPU that I am a ready candidate for their program. Obviously, this is a unique situation in which creative writing is especially prized, more so than in most other real world writing situations. However, I have exploited the rhetorical nature of the situation by

addressing my essay directly to my readers and making the subject matter of my essay the thinking, reasoning, and history behind my decision to pursue creative writing in their program. In my essay, through both rhetorical direct address and literary flashbacks to various stages in my development as person and writer, I am able to employ logos, ethos, and pathos.

I develop my ethos as a committed writer by including plenty of evidence for my longtime commitment to writing. One of the main images I use to develop this ethos is an old manuscript of mine that has morphed into new manifestations at each major stage in my adult development—and that continues to haunt me after one naysayer/antagonist, my older brother, questions the morality of publishing the project. I aim to provoke pathos primarily in my flashback scenes, where I point to my historical exigence for personal writing—where I describe the kickoff event to my family's long and messy demise, offer a snapshot of my subsequent young adult struggle with depression, and portray the residual scars from childhood that remain after marriage and moving one-thousand miles from home. In these narrative flashbacks, I further develop my ethos by describing what writing has meant to me at key stages of my maturation, hoping to showcase the deep reflection I've given to my development as a writer. Finally, I attempt to clinch my case by appealing to logic, logos, primarily in the beginning and end of the essay. At these crucial rhetorical points, I speak openly to my audience about certain urges, an old "writer's bug," that has always followed me, and recently plagued me, as I've neared the end of my master's degree. "Why do I keep having these urges to write?" I ask. It's a rhetorical question. In fact, I want *them* to answer that question before I do, in the last lines of the essay.

To lead them to the answer, as I near the conclusion, I describe a series of recent events that, considering my Christian audience, I feel comfortable explaining as providence, as God,

telling me to pursue my writing. Only after stating that God, through that series of events you can read about, has convinced *me* that I need to pursue my writing, I drop the ball in their court, rest my writing future "in [their] hands." I avoid placing all the weight for my future on them by invoking God's will as being at play. However, I hope to place enough of the responsibility on their shoulders that they will feel compelled to accept me. This final argument, of course, is no good without the foregoing literary demonstration, which, I hope, makes its own argument. In the end, I am hoping that all of the above, the creativity along with the rhetoric, work synergistically for unprecedented effects—and most importantly, an acceptance letter.

While it would be nice if these situations offering the chance to showcase both poetic and rhetoric presented themselves so easily to teachers of composition, I believe we can work creatively to design assignments, and curriculum, that will challenge our students to use both in their writing. Because rhetorical creativity must begin with the teacher, the assignment "designer," I will leave it to my readers to imagine the possibilities for a class, or a course of study, in Creative Rhetoric. To get started, though, I think it is enough for composition teachers to ask themselves several questions at the heart of Creative Rhetoric's two pillars. For the rhetorical consideration: Does the assignment speak to a need, or an exigence, that the student perceives in real life? Similarly, does it ask the student to write for a real-world audience that the student actually engages with, or *might* engage with? Does it invoke a topic that the student cares about, or has some stake in beyond having to write to pass the class? And for the creative consideration: Does the writing situation allow the student to retain his or her own voice, albeit in a more or less formal register? Does the assignment avoid prescribing a single "right" or "correct" way to complete the task? Does it allow the student to invent multiple responses, and does it allow for the use of literary techniques that great writers and orators have used to move

their readers to action, tears, or simply engagement, even immersion? If composition teachers are willing to start with these questions, they will be well on their way to a pedagogy of Creative Rhetoric; and, perhaps most importantly, moving ever closer to a pedagogy that a greater number of students will not only enjoy, but also be able to employ beyond the walls of the university

Afterword

In her collection of creative nonfiction essays *The Seven Deadly Virtues of Scholarly Writing*, scholar and creative writer Lynn Z. Bloom tells a story that parallels mine—well, parallels it as far as I've lived. Incidentally, I stumbled across this book in the university library after submitting the first full draft of this thesis for review. Bloom describes herself as a "representation of all students who majored in English because they loved to write, aspired to become Famous Authors, and who wimped out, ending up instead as English professors." Like me, Bloom was a "chronic reader and writer" from childhood, with plenty of affirmation throughout twelve years of public schooling, through teachers' accolades and literary prizes, that she was a "good writer." Like me, she headed to college hoping to refine her writing, to become prepared to make writing a career—but alas, like me, she "wimped out" with her plans and pursued graduate work in the name of professing (41).

Here's where the similarities end. Bloom persevered through both master's and doctoral programs to become an English professor and widely published composition scholar, ultimately to become dissatisfied with the stultifying effects of academic discourse on her creative nonfiction writing, while I have decided that the bus stops here, at my master's degree. If I do pursue a PhD, it will be kept in proper balance with my other interests (say, one course at a time); I will not let it eclipse my passion for creative writing.

Funny, but it was only days after I made my gut-wrenching decision to apply to SPU's MFA program, that I discovered Bloom's book in the university library, and, for the first time in a long time, some pleasure reading—now I was going to read for enjoyment and the writer's "craft," not just to apply critical theory. As I skimmed through Bloom's book, I found myself justified in my recent decisions to suspend, or at least severely cut back on, work on a PhD and

pursue my creative impulses. *Yes*, my heart throbbed, as I read these particularly poignant sentences: "Yet aspiring writers, in as well as out of academia, should not feel obliged to wait half a lifetime to write their heart's desire [like Bloom did]. They should not need the compulsion of a major crisis, or perhaps even the security of tenure, to lay their lives on that taut line" (53). *Yes!* My mind reverberated. Exactly! I should not need to work out every last detail of my financial security and work plans before I write.

As for my teaching? When I teach again, I would like to teach creative writing, and I wouldn't mind teaching rhetoric. If I get to make the rules, though, I would prefer to teach Creative Rhetoric. I have little interest in perpetuating modes and forms I've been taught most of my life in most of my English classes, both graduate or undergraduate, because these modes, much more than any rhetorical or creative writing skills that I could teach, represent a fiction of conventions to be found nowhere, it seems, but the academy. Regardless of what kind of writing courses I'm assigned to teach, I'm sure I'll find a way to slip in both rhetoric and creative writing. As you can see, I'm not good at fitting in a box. My thesis advisor said that this effort was "not a model" for a thesis, but a "postmodern blend of personal reflection with academic and creative writing"—and for that, it was the most memorable thesis he has ever read. That statement, in and of itself, is a weighty argument for my methods. And I hope it also means that I'm "back"—that graduate school has somehow, maybe by way of reverse psychology or simply by creating the exigence for rebellion, restored my creativity. If comments like these are any indication, I once again seem to have a "bright future" in writing.

Appendix A

MFA Application Essay

MFA Application Essay

I'm not who I was, a Christian singer sometimes croons on my radio. I can relate. Since early 2010, I've thanked God every day that *I'm not who I was*. Still, in early 2012 I was finding it hard to stay off the long beaten path. And I felt I couldn't trust myself.

Especially this past summer. I was finally really considering your MFA program after discovering it two years ago, and I was afraid I might be messing up. I wondered: would I be pursuing my writing again for the wrong reasons?

I think sometimes when a person has a conversion experience, all the old habits become suspect. And if not suspect, they remind you of old times when you lived in darkness. *Is it okay to do this?* A person wonders. I wondered this about my writing.

Writing—and I mean that writing I had done for over a decade in journals and writer's notebooks, scrawled in glorious abandon as ink, and often tears, flew across the page—used to bring such relief to me. But sometimes, now, it brought guilt. Maybe I didn't realize it before my brother, hearing of my publishing plans, balked, but I was writing to wallow. Writing in the wrong.

That describes some of my writing history. But not all of it. My reasons were not always wrong, I have to believe. At first, they were just survival reasons, like at age fourteen, when I couldn't talk to anyone. Or at age nineteen, when the ink substituted for blood. But after that I healed a little. And healed a little more each year. And soon, writing was wallowing, and then even revenge. From twenty-two until twenty-six, I think, that's what it was. But after my conversion in 2010, I didn't know exactly what my writing was.

For a time I had tried to just forget about it, but during this past summer, I felt the old urge creeping up on me again. Despite the newly instituted seminar papers and thesis writing for

a master's degree, now it was starting to flow out into magazine articles and opinion pieces for the church newsletter and, of course, as always, my journal. I'm on journal number twenty-five since 1998.

But none of it was enough. None of these outlets was fully satisfying my urge.

And still, at the beginning of the summer, I felt I couldn't trust myself. Not yet. Before I really pursued this creative writing bug, I needed to be sure that the voice telling me to write was not just my own. As a born-again Christian, I didn't necessarily believe I should just "listen to my heart," as the popular mantra goes. After all, the Bible says, "Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander" (Matt. 15:19-20).

And so the questions on my troubled mind this summer were these: What of the rejection by my brother two years ago, when he told me that publishing my manuscript would embarrass the family? What about the fact that academia, with all its scholarly writing and theory, was starting to chafe? What about that campus counselor's recent encouragement to go ahead and write because maybe it *was* God's plan for me? What about the last ten years of frustrated publishing plans? What about that manuscript that had sat collecting dust in a drawer for two years now? And what was I to do with my simultaneous career and family desires?

Nearing thirty, a realization was starting to sink in: I didn't have forever to get a PhD, or to have kids, or to finally publish that book I'd always wanted to publish, much less do all three! What was I to make of these conflicting messages, and the confusion in my own heart?

I was at a crossroads. My master's degree would be completed soon, and then what? As of last spring and a sort of depression that had settled in, I wasn't quite sure that my husband's and my long-laid plans of getting a PhD fit the *new me*. But if not the PhD, and if I still wanted to teach in a college, then what? Clearly, I needed to work through these questions.

Over my summer break, I did.

What you see in the rest of this essay is my justification for applying to your MFA program—the only MFA program I have ever applied to and ever plan to apply to, first, because your philosophy of literature fits mine and, secondly, because if I don't get in now, I need to move on with life in other ways.

If you, dear readers, are not convinced that I belong in your program after reading this, then I'll trust God that you are right. But I had to write this justification for myself, so I could know whether or not this business of creative writing really fit the "new" me.

****

This July I mentioned, gingerly, to my husband that I was thinking of applying to your MFA program after all. It had been almost two years since I'd brought up the idea. I was expecting the explosion that came.

"Isn't that just another master's degree? You'll already have your master's in December; what benefit will that add? How will it make you more marketable?"

He's so pragmatic. After the post-conversion writing urges had started, I had had a hard time explaining to him about my writing. Whenever I made comments about how I needed a long block of time to write—I needed to be uninterrupted—I needed to be able to write at whim without an overly imposed schedule, he rolled his eyes. Guffawed. Made some comment about people in the real world. Those with real jobs. What if *he* just didn't go in to work because he felt the urge to do X that day? In effect, *Get real.*

In his eyes, my getting real meant finishing my PhD and getting hired on at my alma mater, Southwestern Adventist University in Keene, TX. For years now my husband had been making jokes about the day when *I* would support *him.* That day when *he* would be the "house

husband" and get to pursue *his* dreams. This because, for the eight years we've been married, minus three when I taught high school English, I've been the housewife, allowed to pursue *my* past dreams, bachelor's and master's degrees in English. Used to be, anytime I brought up the MFA, which I first did in 2010 when I was still teaching and had just begun my master's, he got nervous. Thought it meant I suddenly wanted to throw caution and all financial planning to the wind. Did I mention that he's a financial planner?

When I brought it up again this July, he seemed to think this meant I was throwing all of our carefully laid plans aside. He seemed to think that this meant I wasn't interested in teaching anymore—that all I wanted to do for the rest of my life was stay at home and live in a fairytale.

"What can you do with an MFA that you can't do with an MA?" His tone was threatened.

"Well, these people either become writers"—impatient look—"Or, or…" I stuttered, "they teach in college English departments. Writing classes."

"Can't you already do that with your MA?" he snapped.

"Well, yes, but…"

"Then why the hell would you waste another three years of your life—and my money—on this? Where does it get us?" I feel compelled to say here that he's been awfully patient with me all these years.

I gulped. I wanted to explain how I'd resigned myself to the idea of being in graduate school for at least another three, four, five, or six years anyway, in the name of professing. But how I was miserably unhappy with grad school so far. I wanted to explain how the theory-based education was so far from what and how I wanted to teach, and how I found it only logical to seek an education I felt I could use in the classroom. And, dare I hope to dream, I wanted to say that, with three years of my life carved out for writing, I wanted to fulfill a lifelong dream. I

wanted to take the last chance I had before having kids to finally write my book—the book that has haunted me since even before our marriage.

****

Below is the first chapter in its latest manifestation. Prior to the latest edition, when still in the melodrama of my early twenties, I had titled my manuscript *Teenage Tragedy*; a few years later when my grief gave way to bitterness, *A Family Affair*; and when a fledgling high school teacher just becoming aware of other people's (like my students') pain, *I Am the Ashes*. With *Ashes* I was also just becoming aware of the book market, had been reading up about the publishing business, and so was thinking to market my tale of woe to poor, misunderstood teenagers, like some of my students.

Have a look. It's been about two years since I've touched this, since I was really serious about publishing it, and was in fact preparing to send it off to agents. As I've alluded, my plans came to a halt when my older brother, Kyle, got wind of my activities and urged me to reconsider. Publishing this, he said, would hurt our family; plus, would it really bring glory to God?

When he came down on me, I was hurt. Crushed, really. At the time, all I could perceive was another attack on my art; another naysayer trying to squelch my decade-old need to tell "my story." I guess he felt "my story" intersected too closely with his. After reluctantly backing off my plans, I've questioned more and more the ethics of publishing a story that would invite the public into my family's deepest pain. But I can't decide if such an intrusion of privacy is overshadowed by the good it could do.

In my latest preface, written after's Kyle's criticism, I argued that my experiences could help other families and teens avoid some of the pain we, I, endured. But the more thought I gave

it, the less sure I became. Maybe I was manufacturing a "godly" reason for carrying forth my plans, just because I wanted them to succeed so badly. This is why I still have questions about publishing this book, or a form of it.

Anyway. Since you don't know my family or me, and since the only benefit that I could get out of you reading this is an acceptance letter (not money or parental sympathy), I think it's okay to show you. I'm sharing this piece, which is now more than six years old, not so much to showcase my writing as to explain the origins of the pain that has shaped me as a writer and as a person over the last fourteen years. So here it is. A peek into the God-forsaken day that changed my life.

Hidden Tears

One Teen's Journal through Adolescence

Chapter 1—The Secret

The worst shock is over now; it happened six months ago, but even in retrospect, how do you describe something like this? I still can't help but think, "If only something could be redone." At the beginning when you first find out it's like a dream. It's just unreal. It's a feeling of hopelessness and despair. You feel like your whole world has just come crashing down around you. You've never felt this way before. You feel like, am I hearing this right? It gets hard to breathe and as it sinks in it feels like daggers piercing slowly through your heart. At first and you wonder how anything can ever be the same. How can anything ever work out? How are you even going to face the world?...

Journal Entry, March 5, 1999

Several days after my fourteenth birthday in early August of 1998, I found my mother sitting on the floor in the new spare bedroom, surrounded by partially unpacked boxes from our recent move. I couldn't imagine why she was digging through stacks of old schoolwork that she probably hadn't even glanced at since high school. As she sat there quietly, legs folded beneath her, hands placidly clasped on knees, I felt that this was the calm before the storm.

My dad, older brother, and I had just returned from a day of fun at the Valley Fair, Minnesota's major theme park. I was still reliving the thrills of the day—that delicious lurching in my stomach as the Wild Thing plunged straight toward the ground at ninety miles per hour, the slight burn on my cheeks from the blazing sun, the giddy car ride home.

That whole week in the back of all our minds, I'm sure, we'd known that something wasn't right. But we hadn't been ready yet to confront it. After seven years of living in a ninety-year-old country house overridden with mice and other rodents, we had finally escaped to a wonderland; well, we had a newer home, anyway, and our spirits were too high to search out anything wrong with our new home, or our household, just yet.

For me, who had avoided inviting friends home for embarrassment—I thought that from here on out, life could only get better. My social life, anyway, was going to get better.

Aside from my less-than-perfect social life, up until that point in life, my biggest concerns had been getting good grades, making the volleyball team, and occasionally my mom's mental health. Aside from those few times she had gone off her meds and had to stay in the hospital, life was relatively predictable—even easy. But on that summer night in 1998, that was all about to change.

The guys and I had noticed that Mom had been acting a little "off" lately, and we had planned to confront her about it as soon as we got back from Valley Fair.

At about 11:00 that night I found her, as I have described, upstairs. Back from the amusement park, it was time to face the music, time to see if mom would admit to being off her meds. It was an old drill—Mom had upset the family like this numerous times before—but it had been about three years since the last time, and I had never been the one to confront her.

This time, I got the job because both Dad and Kyle had the tendency to get short with Mom when discussing her meds. Maybe, they'd reasoned, she would respond better to my soft-spoken femininity.

"Hi, Mom," I started lightly, peeking my head through the doorway. Her back was to me as she crouched on the floor.

"Oh, hi, Linds," she said, looking up.

"Hi…" I trailed, not moving, just taking in the stacks and stacks of papers strewn over the floor. I didn't bother to ask what she was doing. Whatever it was—something non urgent like reorganizing or sorting—I knew it was something my mom wouldn't normally do. At least not at this time of night.

"So did you have a nice time? Was it fun? Did you get sick on any rides?" she asked, suddenly peppering me with questions.

"Ah…yes… yes…and no? I think…"

"Oh, good. And how were Dillan and Toby? Did they have a nice time, too? Were the boys nice to you and let you hang out with them?"

I was starting to remember how Mom was always so good at getting off subject, or getting into a million subjects, when off her meds.

"Can you believe all of this stuff?" she continued, not waiting for my response. "I can't believe I had forgotten about all these goodies. Did you know that I wrote for my high school

newspaper? Look; here's an article I wrote one time during homecoming—and here's some photos from my graduation—and look, here's a picture of me with my sisters. Can you believe these hairstyles? You know, I was thinking I should gather all of these pictures together and make a family tree of hair history. Tracing our lineage through our hairstyles. What do you think? Wouldn't that be interesting? It would make great gifts for the family…"

"Uh, Mom?" I interrupted, resting my hand on her shoulder. The physical touch made her pause.

"Mom—listen to me. I'm worried about you. I've noticed that you haven't seemed like yourself the last couple of days."

"Oh?" she murmured, surprising me by actually pausing, ostensibly to listen to what I had to say.

"Ummm, yeah. Like, take right now, for instance. It's late, Mom. Usually you're in bed by now. But you seem really hyper—I mean, why are you sorting through this stuff right *now*? This looks like it could take a whole week. Don't you want to wait until later? Does this have to get done right *now*?"

She shrugged flippantly, letting out a slight laugh. "Oh, don't worry about me, Linds. I'm not tired. I feel like I could stay up all night. In fact, why don't you stay up with me? I could really use some help organizing this upstairs. We can make some hot chocolate and popcorn and make a night of it. What do you think? We can consider it an extension of your birthday!"

Knots were beginning to form in my stomach.

"Mom—please, don't change the subject. Did you hear me? I said I was worried about you."

She must have seen the pleading in my eyes, for suddenly she stopped, took a deep breath, and wilted a little. With an edge to her voice—she knew what was coming—she muttered, "What, Linds? What do you want to ask me?"

"Mom…did you stop taking your medicine?"

When she answered in a monotone, single syllable, I let out a breath of my own, relieved.

"Why Mom?" I asked, defaulting to the next logical question, even as I was sure I already knew the answer. Every time before, Mom had stopped taking her medication because she felt that she didn't need it; she felt like she was invincible, a hallmark symptom of bipolar disorder.

When, quietly, calmly, simply, she said, "I'm pregnant," I disbelieved my ears.

How? My mind raced. How, when I knew that, years ago, my dad had been "fixed"?

In stunned silence I began to wrestle with a fact that I have been wrestling with since 1998. My mom, a Christian, the bedrock of my moral and spiritual development, my role model and hero, had cheated on my dad. And with a baby on the way, there would be no way to ever forget, or pretend it hadn't happened.

Rebuilding From Ashes

My family is a house that's been raped by a fire:

My father is the framework, collapsed and smoldering.

My mother is the quilt that kept us warm, singed now forevermore.

The baby is the flower bud that blew in with the smoke, now growing strong in the aftermath of ruin.

My brother is the lawn that was scorched into blackness, but that is sprouting again, greener than ever.

And I am the ashes, yet swirling in tumult, not knowing when, or where, to come down.

December 2001, for my high school Creative Writing class

There it is. That's (part of) the piece of writing I've been sitting on for over ten years now (if you include all the journal entries included that started in 1999). And I've looked at it so long that I can't tell if it's good or not, much less moral. This is my dilemma. Rather, this *was* my dilemma until recently. I could've just submitted that chapter, along with the next two, for this application. But for two reasons, I didn't.

First, as I've said, *I'm not who I was*. Secondly, after completing a BA and an MA in English, and after working on my craft for years, I'm not the same writer I was. To demonstrate both of these truths, I experimented with writing this essay primarily in flashback to show you who I was, as a person and as a writer, at ages nineteen, twenty-two, twenty-five.

In the age nineteen scene, I depicted myself in the distance of third person language as a suicidal, hopeless college dropout, wishing for death in her dingy one-bedroom apartment. Here is an excerpt of that:

2004

…She was nineteen now. Nineteen still. Nineteen only, as she sat in the dingy one-room, angry to be alive.

I have no future. I want no future. There <u>is</u> no future, she thought over and over again in her mind.

Kept alive against her will, she'd been pulled, puking pills, from the cold metal of her black Chevy Corsica just months ago. It had sat forlorn, shrouded in midnight, a lone vehicle at

the Pebble Lake Golf Course, several miles out of town and buried behind a small forest. She had driven there, lain down in the backseat, to never wake up.

After that, forty days in a wilderness, the state hospital, where they'd succeeded in killing off the violent impulse of death—succeeded in, if nothing else, numbing her into a sort of complacency.

Okay, I won't kill myself. Okay. I will remain. Okay. I will be. But *living*—they were so stupid and couldn't understand—was out of the question. They didn't realize—couldn't get it through their brains that *life* was over.

"Nineteen years only!" They marveled.

"So young and talented. So much to live for!" They couldn't understand.

Nineteen only! She thought. *If life's treated me so badly already, imagine what I have to live for—sixty, seventy, eighty more years. Just imagine.*

An endless road stretching into eternity—dark, terrifying, no destination on the horizon—only murky swamp all the way, like trying to swim through a thick, black tar. Forever flailing arms, struggling just to keep head above water, struggling just to breathe. No hand outstretched in help. Only an unshakeable doom—dark sky hovering, rain clouds bursting to brims in inevitable collapse.

No, it was too much to imagine. She couldn't think about the future. All she could do was to keep repeating: *I have no future*—even as she tried to deny—be numb—to her past. And so, what was there?

No home. No college. No friends. No family. A job, but not a career. She couldn't bear to think of a career, because careers lasted lifetimes. And she had no future.

Why God? What, God?

Even as she tried not to think, these questions pulsed through her pores.

Almost unconsciously, something came. She picked up her pen. It gushed, as, in that moment, tears would not—as, she had promised, blood would not.

What came out didn't matter—that it came, did. Something she could do. Something she had always been able to do—always something, even when all was wrong with the world. At least one thing—something—was *write.*

****

It seemed good when I wrote it earlier this summer. I was trying to demonstrate how writing has always been my outlet, like a lifeline for me. Only, upon a rereading, it seems a little melodramatic. Maybe that's appropriate, considering the period of my life I was describing. I'm not sure.

The point is, when I started thinking of applying to SPU again this summer, I just wasn't sure about my writing anymore. At least not my writing about myself. Was it time to give up the dream of telling "my story" and find something else to write about? In any case, I didn't think this writer's urge was going to go away. I had tried to deny it, and it just kept coming back. Kind of like the pain I thought I'd buried that used to come up in ugly moments of remembrance.

If I'd included chapter two of *Hidden Tears*, you would have read of how illegitimate baby Caleb was half black, so our family, German and Finnish, couldn't just pretend he was my dad's. You would have also read of the ugly year and a half where my house became a hellhole of family fighting over "what to do" while we kept my pregnant mother, and later, Caleb, in hiding. After that, my mom finally took my baby brother to pursue her relationship with his dad, an unemployed alcoholic. These facts aren't relevant to the task of this essay except for how they have shaped my development as a writer—at times, my ability to even write or not.

After all of that mess happened, memories of my family's prolonged and messy demise would come back, sometimes really unpredictably. Sometimes they would be triggered by a song, or a smell, or a phone call, or by reading my old journals. Was this revisiting of journals, this desire to write more about the mess, self-induced torture? I'm not sure. I just know that the latent desire was there for many years after the breakup. Whether or not I acted on it, it was there.

Sunlight streaming through the curtains
Pierces through the pane
A figure slumps, sits, in the corner
Imagining again…

A foggy mist like ocean spray
Weighs heavy on her mind
So long ago, it seems to say,
So long it can't rewind

Numb—like a tooth
With Novocain
Numb—like an ankle
Sprained

Her thoughts retract,
Recede,
Refrain…
Like Curtains over pain
--April 20, 2010

2006

I remember one time when it came fierce. I sat in a bright, two-bedroom apartment, the married student apartment where the university had placed my husband and me. He was at that time doing what I've already said he's been doing for most of our marriage: supporting me while I earned one of my degrees in English. Have I mentioned that I really do appreciate him?

Anyway, on this day I'm remembering, I sat at the kitchen table, laptop open before me, journal number three propped up on my left. I leaned forward eagerly, biting my lower lip in concentration. I was twenty-two.

That day *The Great Gatsby* would just have to wait. The writer's bug had caught me again. That day, instead of working on my literature paper, I had typed up an outline for my book—my book! I was finally going to write it!

Oh yes, there was no stopping me now, I thought. Look how far I had come. Married now for almost two years—one-thousand miles from the carnage of broken vows, a broken family, my broken heart (or so I thought). I was in school again, taking literature classes. Maybe I would get a degree…I wasn't really sure. It was still hard to plan very far ahead.

But now I was married; there wasn't the same pressure. My husband, knowing I was still recovering from years of depression and suicidal impulses, had kindly said I could even stay home—just stay home and be a housewife—if I wanted. How had I gotten so lucky? (Note to self: I really need to appreciate him more.)

I knew I had scared him more than once. For most of our marriage, he had been used to me moping around, crying, cleaning or exercising excessively. There had been that day several weeks before our wedding that he had come home to find me lying on his bed, huddled in the fetal position. Seeing my tear-stained face—I'd been lying there for over six hours—he'd waltzed in and tried to joke: "What, were you sad that I was gone all day?"

I know he was more scared than he'd let on. Probably he'd made the joke because he didn't know what else to do. He wouldn't know until a few months later, after we were married, that I had come within one trigger pull of suicide again that day. He'd exploded at me after finding the shotgun loaded; it must have been fear.

There was that other time when we had visited my dad's house—AKA, the battleground of my family past—for the first time since being married, and I had collapsed into sobs.

It was times like this that Buc stepped into my panic and told me that leaving Minnesota and moving to Texas was the best thing I could have done.

It was for the same reason that I'd felt compelled to leave that home at age sixteen, when I followed my mom to her new apartment, across the street from the home wrecker, that I had, since age fifteen, felt I had to write. But suddenly I wasn't sure how to go about it anymore. After the wedding day up until now, my days had been more about filling the time, staying busy, active, and exhausted so I couldn't think. During that first year of marriage, I would wake at 4 a.m., or 5, with knots in my stomach. Unable to go back to sleep, I would run in the dusk of day, trying to exhaust a measure of the anxiety that poured through my veins. Back at the apartment, the first of three we'd call home before buying our house, I would eat just enough food to sustain me: oatmeal for breakfast and salad for lunch. Coffee in between, to suppress the rest of my appetite, because coffee didn't have calories. Somehow, at some point after leaving the hospital in 2004, it had become important to control what I ate. It was at least one thing I could control, anyway. And I was gaining that victory—down twenty pounds from the depressed, fat slob I had become when in the hospital. Life, for that first year out of the trenches, was all about survival. I wrote this in my writer's notebook.

Suddenly, God, it doesn't seem to matter…
This, a realization that was long in coming:
That yes, I'm here and
Yes, I'm just going through motions

Day after day the very same ones
And I will be till I die…

Meeting and greeting people and every day eating,
Cleaning up only to make new messes,
Planning only to complete plans and then make more,
Back and forth, morning to night,
Into bed, out of bed
Makeup on, makeup off
You forfeit a day?
(To laziness, gluttony, greed)
That's okay…
Many more days ahead
And the world won't end
(Although you might wish it would)
If you make someone mad or
Don't deliver on your plans or
Complete your list to-do…
People won't give up on you;
They (think they) know what you're going through.

Who hasn't wanted to quit at one time or another?
But just don't quit—
If you have to, just sit
And eventually the storms will pass
And for a time, while you're hindered less,
Be happy, and enjoy.
--June 5, 2005

Now in 2006, a year after that fit of sobs in his arms, that tear-jerking first visit "home," and that last suicide attempt, I sat at the bright kitchen table, a hopeful tingling in my fingers. In less than an hour, the outline had come spewing forth in rapid clicks on the keyboard.

Oh, how good it felt to make a plan; how proactively cleansing. Best lose no time! Now, where had I left off? Some months earlier I had started typing up my journals for this book. Since our days of long distance dating when I had read journal excerpts to him over the phone during four-hour conversations, Buc had always told me they would make for a great book. Who wouldn't be intrigued? A book about a mother's betrayal and illegitimate baby brother written in the unscripted voice of a real teenager. The raw journals from a fourteen-year-old who is having

to hide her new baby brother because the family is too embarrassed to tell the community. The story was not only compelling, Buc had told me, but the writing was *good.*

Why had I waited even this long, I wondered, flipping through journal number three, to craft these into a book? This was the first thing I'd felt genuinely excited about since before meeting Buc, my white knight, and packing up my car overnight to move from Minnesota to Texas after only four months of phone conversation and three breathless weekends of pleasure. We married within two more months on March 1, 2005. (In case you're wondering, we met through a mutual friend, a setup.)

June 29, 1999, brings us back to the scene at hand. That was where I had left my book project some months ago. About a month before my fifteenth birthday. About three months after the baby was born. I started typing, eager to see where I'd left the story, little considering just how implicated my emotions might still be.

Yesterday Mom and Dad decided to go see a counselor in the twin cities that someone at church had recommended. Mom was all smiles when I asked, "Was it worth it to drive all that way?"

She replied, "Ask Dad."

When I did, he half laughed and said, "I guess so." Then he asked if it would be all right with me if we kept Caleb.

I was amazed that he was so positive about the whole thing, let alone his finally submitting to Mom's wishes. Then he picked up Caleb and started asking him questions like, "Do you want me to be your dad?" And he laughed when Caleb nodded his head to each question.

Dad seemed to be assuming his role of "Dad" pretty well. I was amazed at the turnaround.

Wow. That counselor must have done some job of convincing.

So now here we are, two days later. Nobody's told Kyle yet—it's still somewhat peaceful around here for the time being. I just hope Dad will hold to what he said. He seemed cranky yesterday when Caleb wouldn't stop crying. I hope it was just his job working him over. I think I love Caleb already. He's so sweet. And now that my brain is thinking we're keeping him, I can tell I'm already making a role transition. I'm starting to think of him as my brother. And I'm okay with that. I want Dad and Kyle to accept him, too. He's a neat little guy to have around. Even though he barfs on everything and everyone, and he cries sometimes, and he takes a lot of monotonous work. But he's worth it. So keep your fingers crossed.

I had to stop for several minutes. I had not expected this, the watery pools gathering in my eyes. They had come at the memory of hope, that memory of my dad playing with little three-month-old Caleb, the smile on Dad's face that I hadn't seen for so many months. Caleb had been born on his birthday, of all days. It had been so ironic, I was remembering, grimacing. As Mom had come closer and closer to delivery, Dad had said, "I just know he'll be born on my birthday." Sure enough. March twenty-second. D-day. What a sick sense of humor some force in the universe had. As if an affair and a mulatto baby weren't hard enough for Dad, Caleb had to be born on his birthday. Well, maybe someday Dad could laugh at the irony.

Maybe. *Oh, Lord,* I thought, *when will I be able to laugh about this?* Suddenly I felt weak. My fingers slackened on the keyboard. My lower lip quivered and my hands trembled as I

reached for Kleenex. I hadn't expected the memories to come back so strongly. *Oh, Lord, why didn't the story end on June 29, 1999? Why couldn't it have worked out?*

I sat for a moment letting feelings wash over me. The story was building to Mom's abandonment. I closed the mottled, black and white composition book for a moment, fingering the binding wistfully. In a way, it was like inviting temptation. In a way, I was like an alcoholic who'd been clean for a few months deliberating over a bottle. Should I drink? Or would drinking unleash too many emotions? Would it set me back two years, back to the gray dinginess of a one-room apartment and a death wish?

I should be able to handle this by now, I scolded myself, wanting not to be who I'd been. Telling myself I was okay now.

I continued with journal three for one, two, three hours, typing through tears as they came and went. Stopping every now and then when the pain came on too strong. A few times I cried out loud, painful, gasping sobs, like those I'd poured into my husband's chest a year ago.

When he got home from work that afternoon, he found me in front of the computer, red-eyed, crumpled tissues surrounding me.

"Honey! Why are you doing that to yourself?" he exclaimed. He recognized the notebook. He knew what I was doing. He knew better than I did back then what I was doing. Dropping his keys, he stooped to embrace me. I was exhausted.

It would take another four years for me to reopen that book. It would be after my conversion experience (although I had always been a nominal Christian).

In the 2009-2010 school year, when, at twenty-six, I would be a second-year teacher, would have another one of those painful relapses when my mom went off her meds and then-ten-

year-old Caleb would go to foster care and I couldn't do a thing about it because I was one-thousand miles away, finally somewhat of an adult because I now had adult responsibilities.

Then, becoming incapacitated over my family's problems would not be an option—not unless I wanted to forfeit the first accomplishment I could really call my own in Texas—for I would have over 100 other young people to tend to. Then, I would learn to fall on my knees and pour out my pain to the Lord. Then I would learn to start my day in the Word. Then I would start to write happier things in my journal—having found, for the first time, real peace in the face of the storm. Then I could face these memories without going to pieces. Then I could cry with hope.

And then, a few months later, I would pick up that manuscript, well-intentioned, now wanting to write for a real audience, my high school students. Poor students I saw who needed understanding.

Then, it wouldn't be long before my older brother, well-meaning too, would kill off my writer's desire. That would be the summer right after I'd leave teaching and right before I'd return full-time to grad school, 2010. I would pack up my journals, put away my two-hundred-plus page manuscript, and resolve to focus on grad school. My writing would have to wait…because I just didn't know what to do with it.

Life rushes on
A fast-forward song
Notes chasing one another

And I, the singer,
The poor note-flinger,
Cannot keep together

Rolling downhill,
Picking up speed
Like a fearful rider
On a frightened steed

I'm running a race
In which I can't breathe…
This is the time for artistic release

I feel an unceasing clash
Of the notes as they crash,
Tumble and bounce, skipping
Off of the page

As I try to follow,
My voice comes out hollow
As if it is straining from inside a cage

I must drown out the song,
My lungs increase,
If only for a moment of artistic release

Measure moments that pass
By bells ringing for class
But the school day is never done

A constant parade
Of papers to grade
Which I can't outrun

So I'll duck and cover for a moment of peace
My survival depends on artistic release
--October 17, 2010

2012

It was last February, at age twenty-seven, when that old bug cropped up again. Was it possible my professional plans were misplaced? The old feelings were gaining on me day by day as I slugged through my third semester of literary theory, a couple rhetoric classes providing my only respite. I found myself sitting in classes feeling impatient and depressed, longing for something more. This was not right—this was not the new me—neither the subject matter in theory classes, nor my depressive feelings.

At the same time, I was growing restless for doing some "real" writing again, not just this arcane scholarship that the average non-academic would never read. I started to worry that a PhD would sap my best years before I could return to my dreams. If I were to complete a PhD, yet I wanted to also publish a book sometime soon, how could I manage to have kids, too, before my biological clock ran out?

I remember the day last March when I was sitting in my home office—by now we'd graduated to our first house—writing a twenty-three paper on Gide's *The Immoralist* that I broke down in tears. Yes, more tears.

How exasperating. By *now* I was sure I should have been done with all this crying.

Still, newly converted Christian or not, I had to face the fact that something felt very wrong. In a word, I felt trapped.

It wasn't just the thought of four to six more years researching and writing about theories and literature from men and women who, many of them, scoffed at God. But it was also the thought of forcing down my intrinsic desire to write about that very God who had recently become so real to me, who had freed me from debilitating depression, who had given me dreams and goals again (even if I didn't quite know how to fulfill them).

Even though I had returned to grad school with vigor, even though I had placed my recent hopes and energies into gaining a PhD and a job at my alma mater, even though my husband had finally granted me yet another grace period for my third degree in English, the truth was…dare I admit it to myself?

It all felt wrong.

What did it mean, this ironclad resistance to class discussions about Foucault and Freud and Faulkner, this attitude of revolt growing out of the pit of my stomach? And what was this

completely opposite desire to write again—not scholarly papers, but…something else? What was the something else?

By now I had moved past Kyle's criticism of my confessional *Hidden Tears.* I'd had time to think about it, and I had decided I sort of agreed with him. If I were even to publish an account of what had happened to our family now, it would look a whole lot different than the manuscript Kyle had seen. I didn't know exactly what it would look like, but I knew I would paint the situation differently. I would paint myself differently. And God.

I would not just be the victim, left in a godless, postmodern state of crisis. God would not be the thunderbolt-wielding or, worse yet, nonexistent, force leaving me to fend for myself. He wouldn't be the object of ridicule into which many of the "biggies" in my Norton Theory and Criticism book made him—theorists like Freud, Marx, Nietzsche, Foucault, Butler, Anzaldua, seemingly gods in their own eyes—theorists who were at the core of my graduate education, an education I was hoping to one day take into a Christian classroom.

Oh, my God, I thought—I prayed. *How can I take this?* Literally, *How will I be able to use this education—and another five or six years of it, nonetheless—to inform any of my life goals? Teaching composition from the seat of Christian values. Writing for God's glory. Raising my kids to fear the Lord.*

It had been seven years since I'd last sought counseling. But I needed to sort this out, and I didn't know where else to turn.

During two sessions that I met with a campus counselor—a Christian counselor, per my request—I raised all of these questions, plus one other, very important one: What of the old writing bug that had again cropped up?

The two things keeping me from pursuing it, I explained, was my husband's inevitable resistance to this change of long-laid plans and, more troubling, the thought that I might still wish to write for the wrong reasons. Wallowing. Maybe revenge?

And yet…I had this urge. This dream. "What am I supposed to *do*?" I lamented out loud, truly stymied.

What that counselor came back with baffled me even more. But with just two questions, he made the whole visit worth it.

"Have you considered *why* you keep having that desire to write?" he asked, gazing intently into my eyes. "Who do you think put it there?"

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Who indeed put this desire in me? I pondered as I headed into my summer break, and the last leg of my MA degree.

I was definitely willing to consider that God had planted this recurring dream in me, like a seed that wanted to grow, but I still didn't know what to do with it. So, God wanted me to write. But what? How could I be sure I was ready to tell my story without starting and ending it with "Poor me"?

As the summer wore on, I desperately wanted to apply to your program, as its marriage of Christian values with quality literature and creative writing instruction seemed to speak perfectly to every single one of my major goals—teaching, writing, maybe even parenting. But I still felt I needed permission, somehow. I needed some validation that this was what I was supposed to do. I needed to know that writing could be different than it was before, because *I* was different.

And then, I met Paul Coneff.

To make a long story short, Paul came to my church to facilitate a week of prayer in March, around the time I was feeling desperate. In five nights, he unfolded a message he calls *The Hidden Half of the Gospel*, or the message that Christ died not only for our sin—to give us a "happy ever after" in eternity—but that he also died for our suffering—to give us a happy life while on earth. An indispensible part of the message revolves around individuals finding their true, God-intended identities—restoring the identities that Satan strives to pervert, often through traumatic childhood experiences like mine and much worse.

Using a plethora of scriptures, Paul unfolded the story of the Suffering Messiah; Jesus had to suffer, die, and rise for our sins to free us. Because he was "tempted in all points like as we are, yet was without sin," he is able to help us when we are being tempted. Because he has suffered like us—he was mentally, verbally, physically abused, plus he suffered depression and struggled to surrender his will—he can offer us healing for our pain (Heb. 2:17, 18; 4:15, 16). Because he was attacked at the very core of his identity, he is able to restore us to our true identities, replacing lies from Satan, the Father of Lies (John 8:44), with his truth.

When I heard this message, I was being attacked with lies. I was hearing messages like *I'm trapped; I will never be able to write; I'm not good enough to write; I don't deserve to get to follow my dreams. I have to be stuck in a graduate program that I hate for five years, and then it will be too late for me.*

But when I heard Paul explain how Jesus had died not only for our sins, but our suffering, to restore us to our God-given identities, to enable us to follow and fulfill our God-given dreams, I began to feel hope.

At the end of the week, Paul announced that he was going to be holding discipleship training in our church for three men and three women. This three-month-long training would

prepare participants to embrace their God-given identities, enabling them to become disciples who could, through personally testifying to God's restoration, lead others to Christ.

This sounded hopeful to me. At least, I thought, *How could it hurt?*

After I began discipleship training with Paul, he mentioned he was writing a book. He said it with a grimace. The writing was coming hard; he was no writer. But he *had* to get this book done. As a prolific public speaker, he needed a resource to offer listeners.

At hearing this, I felt another glimmer of hope. But I waited. I took this home with me, too. Now it was June, and I was struggling more than ever over my future, my graduate school plans, my teaching plans, my parenthood plans. I couldn't find peace. Where was there room for the desires of my heart? More importantly, were those desires even valid?

Later in June when I received prayer for the first time—in this ministry, a prerequisite to discipling others is receiving prayer and healing in one's own life, first—the prayer time revealed that I had not fully surrendered my will.[6] Paul sent me home with a sample prayer to pray for myself, with scriptures to pray day after day to further unfold this issue.

And so, in June, July, and August, I prayed. I cried. Yes, again (and often)! I read my Bible with fresh eyes. And once more, I surrendered my will.

The other noteworthy thing that happened this summer is that I published an article in *Insight Magazine*. It was just a small thrill, but, *What the heck*, I thought. I'd show it to Paul.

The day after I gave him the article, he called me back, excited, saying, "This was really great; this really flowed. I want my book to flow like this." Would I consider helping him write his book?

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[6] In *The Hidden Half of the Gospel: Connecting your Story to Jesus' Story*, to be published in 2013, you can read about how this prayer process works…and how I responded to it.

The rest is history. As you read this, *The Hidden Half of the Gospel* should be going to press, published sometime in April or May of 2013. And it's not about me.

Well, it is a little bit. Paul actually asked me to share part of my testimony in one of the chapters. I was a bit leery at first, wondering the same old question: Would I be writing this for the wrong reasons? But the more time I spent in prayer, both on my own and with our small group, the more peace I found about my career plans, my family plans, my writing.

A few months ago I picked up one of those Bible verse cards with my name and my name's meaning on it. This one says "Lindsey—Peaceful Isle," and it has Psalm 37:4 printed below: "Delight thyself in the Lord, and He shall give you the desires of your heart." This verse, among others I've studied recently, has led me to believe that the more I surrender my will to God, the more I actually *can* "listen to my heart."

Anyway, after finding the card, I set it on my desk at home, where I was co-writing Paul's book and my master's thesis for most of the summer. As the weeks went by, as I continued to look at that card and ponder its message, I could only marvel at what God had done for me. Several years ago I had not been a "peaceful isle." I had been a suicidal basket case with control issues, intimacy issues, and for a time, an eating disorder. But as I continued to delight myself in the Lord, he was slowly giving me the desires of my heart: chief most being the published book that would soon bear my name.

November 2012—Conclusion

This September I mentioned, resolutely, to my husband that I felt it would be a mistake for me not to at least try to get into your program. I wasn't expecting the answer that came.

"Honey, I think you should go for it."

What? How had his perspective changed in two short months? I don't think I'm half as convincing in person as on paper. But, come to think of it, God doesn't really need *me* to make his point.

It's been my project with Paul, Buc has since told me, that has really changed his mind. Because of the daily writing schedule the book has imposed on me, Buc has gotten to see how happy being a "real" writer makes me. And because of the paychecks I've been getting, he's now willing to admit, financial planner though he is, that a writing career might make "cents."

So, now my husband is convinced I'm meant to write. I'm convinced.

And I've decided. Even if it has to happen in the crevices of life, between seminar papers and theory, professing and parenting, I *will* write. My story, battered and bruised, but becoming more beautiful all the time (kind of like my writing and me), can wait another ten years for publication if it has to because, at this point, it's in God's hands. Well, and yours.

I guess that leaves just one question, then.

Are *you* convinced?

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Lindsey Gendke earned her bachelor's degree in English from Southwestern Adventist University in 2008, after which she taught high school English for three years before resigning to pursue graduate study in English. Her research interests include various aspects of composition pedagogy, but especially the blending of expressive with rhetorical pedagogies, as well as the teaching of creative writing with rhetoric as preparation for real world tasks. As of the conclusion of this project, Lindsey has decided to forego pursuing her PhD in favor of pursuing an MFA and a freelance writing career.