THE CONSTRUCTION OF SELF
IN THE CONTEMPORARY CREATIVE WRITING WORKSHOP:
A PERSONAL JOURNEY

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ABSTRACT

Dr. Sue Carter, Advisor

After receiving an MFA in Creative Writing, I continued graduate study in Rhetoric. Before entering this new degree program, the views I’d developed in respect to my writing process were shaped, primarily, by the conventional “rhetorics” of the MFA program. The construction of my identity—my “style,” or “voice,” or self—was one of a staid, concrete centeredness, oftentimes described as the authentic or autonomous self. For this reason, I viewed the formation of voice in writing as a practice involving the speaking of this authentic self. And since mine was a product-centered process, I viewed the rhetorical situation as somehow grounded in the poems I produced, as in, my writing had its own reason for being. Finally, this product-centered speaking of an authentic self relied wholly upon “inspiration,” and I viewed my creative processes as individual and autonomous. Ideas I’d formed concerning the writing process, the construction of the self through writing, the formation of “voice,” the rhetorical “situation” (as the impetus for creation), and the nature of creativity would soon be revised in light of research in contemporary composition pedagogy.

Pedagogical practices in the creative writing classroom must recognize the students’ processes, in the construction of the self in writing, in the construction of aesthetic perspectives, and in the ongoing growth all writers—both students and teachers—must assimilate during the writing process. The purpose of this
dissertation project is to define the workshop as a site for identity construction, and to illustrate how the construction of self is more complicated than has oftentimes been assumed. To do this, I will overview notions of self in Classical and contemporary rhetoric, and then explore ways these notions influence the teaching and practice of creative writing. The end goal of this dissertation is to suggest a pedagogical model based upon a revised notion of identity. This dissertation is written as a personal and intellectual journey and so many of its assumptions and conclusions are drawn directly from my own practice as a writer, and from my experience as a teacher.
I dedicate this work to my wife, whose love and patience have helped me endure some of the most difficult moments of my life.
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INTRODUCTION

Several years ago, I received an MFA in creative writing. To earn this degree, I spent two years writing poetry and attending workshops in a studio program that allowed a great deal of time and freedom to write. When fellow students and I met in weekly workshops, we scrutinized each poem in turn and offered revision suggestions when appropriate. Looking back, it appears that colleagues and I were nurtured, pampered, spoiled; all that time and encouragement to write, yet so much of it squandered at the movies, in the bars, watching TV, not to mention the reservoir of wasted breath between friends and I coming together to talk about writing, but most of all talking about not writing. As for myself, I hadn’t really grown into the practice of writing until near graduation, and so, week-to-week, I might sit down once or twice to write, and seldom for the sustained period I sometimes imagined. Sure, I’d learned the basics— settle into the favorite spot, make it just right for work (no distractions, coffee, cigarettes), stick with it — but in reality, I assumed I could always return to writing, without struggle, and I trusted my will to do so. Hence, my thesis was embarrassingly thin. One way of looking at it: I managed to be lazy with the craft I’d taken so long to establish, and even though this lack of regular practice led to frustration, guilty confessions to peers, and difficulty returning to the work, I still romanticized my occasional inspired process, and depended upon sporadic bursts of creativity. By the end of the degree, however, I’d found a sort of rhythm, and while writing daily and working hard to polish and publish new poems, I began to view myself as the writer I was supposedly training to be. After earning the MFA degree, however, I continued
graduate study by entering the doctoral program in rhetoric, and this transition from one type of study to another made the clash between assumptions painfully clear. The views I’d shaped in respect to my writing process were shaped, primarily, by the conventional “rhetorics” of the MFA program. Specifically, my former study was a product-centered process, one that valued week-to-week progress in the practice of making beautiful artifacts. This view, as will be argued later in this study, is much in keeping with the rhetorical practices fostered by the mid-20th century composition classroom. The construction of my identity—my “style,” or “voice,” or self—was one of a staid, concrete centeredness, oftentimes described as the authentic or autonomous self. For this reason, I viewed the formation of voice in writing as a practice involving the speaking of this authentic self. And since mine was a product-centered process, I viewed the rhetorical situation as somehow grounded in the poems I produced, as in, my writing had its own reason for being; admittedly, sometimes writing was also an effort to garner praise from my mentors. Finally, this product-centered speaking of an authentic self relied wholly upon “inspiration,” and I viewed my creative processes as individual and autonomous. Ideas I’d formed concerning the writing process, the construction of the self through writing, the formation of “voice,” the rhetorical “situation” (as the impetus for creation), and the nature of creativity would soon be revised in light of research in contemporary composition pedagogy.

Though I held guarded intentions of being a writer, I was also enraptured by a myopic sense of the writer’s life. Even then, I hesitated referring to myself as a writer, because the title seemed so self-indulgent, so lofty, so over determined—never once did I see myself behaving like I felt the writer should. There were inspired moments, sure,
periods of intense writing where drafts of new work came frequently and with relative ease. But there were also dry spells, where the practice seemed almost fruitless. The daily ritual of pen to paper would occasionally freeze like an unwound watch. With such a tentative relationship to the daily practice, I considered myself an undevoted artist, and my career was marked by constant conflict over the simple term “writer.” By the degree’s completion, however, I’d developed a real writing habit. You might even say I located joy in the on and off work of sitting quietly with a notebook and pencil. Occasionally, it seemed I’d tapped a great spring of energy: jotting notes, I’d pace the room, chew fingernails, read work aloud over and over. Other times, early drafts and journal entries seemed forced, cluttered, bland. But the enigmatic process of going back to the source has convinced me that something’s always drawn from this work, even when that something can’t be held in the hands. This reverence didn’t come all of a sudden, in a flash, as if I’d swallowed some mysterious potion and magically transformed into the darker other behind the scrim. In fact, this metamorphosis is incomplete, ongoing, never finished.

At present, I’m a doctoral candidate in rhetoric and composition, and though I’m comfortable in the field, I find less and less time these days for the work I feel impelled to continue. This scrabbling to set aside hours or even minutes each week to write makes the previously mentioned crisis all the more complex, because now that I’ve come to finally call myself a writer, I crave the freedom to act the part. Having been trained as a writer, I’ve come to relish time spent at the computer, especially when the work I do is impelled (“inspired”) rather than compelled (“forced”). Whether making notes in a journal, fiddling with a poem draft, or trying to work through an essay, my
mood is often at its healthiest when I’m composing. Sometimes when I’m writing, I even sense that time has vanished, and during these timeless episodes, my thinking sharpens. If I’m working on a poem when such a sensation arises, my judgment about word choices, sounds, connotations and structures seem finely tuned and natural. During such periods, I’ve drafted page after page of work, and have been driven to a frenzied state while pounding keys, pacing, and reading work aloud. Psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi calls such periods *autotelic* experiences. By his definition, the autotelic experience is a flow state, in which a person’s performance and mood have peaked. For me at least, the sensation of “flow” might be likened to romantic narratives pertaining to inspiration, and that feeling is a palpable experience, which benefits the writing process. Certainly other writers have achieved this pleasurable, almost addictive state, and so, it’s no wonder that dramatic, even romantic narratives of the writing process are so prevalent.

But a story detailing the flow state represents only one version of the writer’s work. And since I’ve failed to mention the host of cultural influences governing such an experience, recent composition theorists might refute my own process narrative as overly romantic. Their criticism is valid, and has served composition pedagogy by taking the writer out of the lonely garret. By recognizing the writer as an agent within a social setting, and within an historical moment, writers and teachers may investigate the processes through which composition is accomplished. Creative writing teachers must acknowledge the several subjectivities within themselves, as well as within their students. The goal, then, is to recognize the many subjectivities artists embody, while also giving credence to the roles of teachers and students in the work of exploration
through language. To me, the disparate trajectories of writer and teacher and researcher are bound to cross paths, and this crossing is what makes all three subjectivities vital.

Case in point: during the last weekend of September 2000, I participated in the “Craft, Critique, and Culture” conference at the University of Iowa. This conference was specifically aimed at theorizing notions of creativity and creative writing, and a number of enlightening panels focused upon the difficulties of teaching writing. The panel in which I participated was entitled “Creativity, Authorship, and the Workshop,” and I was delighted (and a bit intimidated) to discover that I’d already read and even cited the work of two of my fellow presenters. Paul Dawson, of the University of Melbourne, and John Parras, of William Paterson University, are both, like me, creative writers who’ve found themselves involved in continued academic study. In fact, Dawson’s previous work — “The Function of Critical Theory in Tertiary Creative Writing.” (1997), which argues for the incorporation of theory into the university creative writing workshop — was perhaps the first piece by a graduate student which showed me that perhaps I too had a place in this academic discussion. His conference presentation, entitled “From Imagination to Creativity: The Origins of Authorship in Creativity,” furthered an earlier study, and dovetailed almost seamlessly with my paper. Parras’s paper, entitled “Literary Theory in the Creative Writing Workshop: The Death of the Author,” followed, and continued Foucauldian notions introduced by previous papers. Is it coincidence that these papers are so closely related? Is this evidence of excellent planning by the conference chairs, or rather, does the resemblance between these studies illustrate a very real concern being raised by creative writers. Certainly, both answers are true, but
for my own comfort, I’d like to argue that the authorship discussions begun (or rather
continued) in Iowa show that certainly current theory hasn’t fully satisfied a great
number of writers.

As I suggested earlier, theorists such as Dawson offer an interesting account of
how theory becomes integral to, and, in some ways, has always informed the writer’s
creative writing’s dependence upon literary theory, and though he recognizes the
specialization of creative writing within academia, Dawson also contends that the
practice cannot be “conceptualized as a body of knowledge outside literary theory
because it is one that is fashioned within literary theory” (70). With this, he argues that
creative writing should be seen as “an intellectual work characterized by a dialogic
engagement with literature and literary theory” (71). Unlike other sources grounded in
the history of the creative writing program, this article shows that the study is not so
divorced from “the rest of the department” as we might be prone to believe. The change
in literature departments represents a shift in value from the “exemplary figure of the
author” to the “intellect-as-critic” whose work serves to examine and interrogate the
subjectivity of the author.

The purpose of the dissertation project is to chart a personal and intellectual
journey of my movement from a creative writing MFA program to a rhetoric and writing
PhD program. As suggested earlier, the assumptions of a creative writing program are
oftentimes unstated, and sometimes the politics of such a program are difficult to
decipher. This does not mean, however, that politics are not involved; instead students
in the program are left to unpack a program’s political and aesthetic leanings. In many
cases, a student enrolled in a creative writing program will work to understand how best to present work to the few mentors he or she will inevitably engage with, and this practice of “feeling out” one’s direction can dilute or restrain in such a way that the writer becomes mired in the daunting practice of “writing to the critics.” Of course, this practice may seem nothing new, and the same approach to writing prevails even in the rhetoric program, where achievement is meted out arbitrarily to those who perform in ways that are seen as beneficial to the program. However, my experience with the rhetoric and composition program has been quite different from my experience with the creative writing program. For example, my recognition of the politics involved in completing an advanced degree in rhetoric has enabled me to examine my own assumptions more critically. That said, I can’t admit that I am all together certain of what these assumptions are, but rather, must recognize that my own leanings are constantly changing as I continue research and writing. That said, the engagement with my own assumptions has been a fruitful one, a conflict that has led to deep consideration and valuable consideration of my particular stance in writing and teaching. Creative writing’s hidden agenda, however, was sometimes painful and confusing; I feel that it’s important to provide students the opportunity to grapple with the assumptions of a particular course of study, and to allow them to make informed decisions concerning their own desires and inclinations.

This journey wasn’t a simple move from one area of English Studies to another. Rather, it represented a transformation in my ways of conceiving such central concepts as writer subjectivity, authorial creativity, and the writing process. As a practicing writer of nearly twenty years now, I have often assumed that I write from a centralized notion
of what it means to be a writer. Aspirations of grandeur and fame have prevailed of course, even though those aspirations may have been informed by a myopic sense of what it means to practice the craft with little or no actual benefit. Additionally, my sense of the writing life, in poetry and in critical expository writing, has been delusional in the sense that I viewed the practice with Romantic sensibilities. What’s more, my views of creativity have been informed largely by these sensibilities which, for the most part, cloak the process in a veil of smoke and mirrors that hide the sometimes pain, sometimes heartbreak, sometimes frustration of writing for a living. Furthermore, my sense of identity as a writer has assumed that the writer functions autonomously, without any social engagement or input from a larger strata that governs production. And finally, my sense that writing takes place whole-cloth has been exploded to recognize that yes, a recursive process does take place in the production of new work. Editors, mentors, and even spouses become part of the engagement, to round out the sense of the individual acting autonomously.

This transformation highlights how these two disparate areas of English conceive of--and implement in their pedagogies--very different notions of the very basic act of writing. The creative writing program might be seen as insular in that it protects certain values and devalues others. In my previous study in creative writing, I was less informed about the various aesthetic possibilities of the craft, and was indentured to a certain set of criteria of what it means to make a readable poem. That said, through exploration, anyone can become informed about the many possibilities of poetry, and so I can’t fault my mentors for showing me a slim recognition of the field. What’s more, I was coddled to see certain poems of mine as more valuable than others, which, in the
larger sense, is perhaps a positive attribute of the creative writing program; certainly this vision has allowed me to write successful poems that have reached a wider audience through publication. That said, I was not encouraged to explore my own process and the aesthetic choices I’ve made, nor was I introduced to competing aesthetic criteria that may have changed my way of seeing. On the other hand, my study in composition has been both broad and deep. And the emphasis upon process has opened my eyes to many ways of seeing the work of the writer. But this praise of the composition program goes only so far. More and more of my reading reveals the same sort of conditioning that the creative writing program bears as criticism. Unfortunately, so much attention to the politics of language and process and pedagogy leaves one turning in an indecipherable cul-de-sac of questions, especially posed concerning one’s own practice of a craft “so long to learn.”

The relationships of Creative Writing and Rhetoric to one another are rich and deserve scholarly attention in a number of ways. The fact that poetry and prose have enjoyed a long lineage in rhetorical study is, of course, a fruitful area of study. In the creative writing field, a great deal of new research is being conducted, mostly because creative writing is such a burgeoning and profitable industry. Rhetoric, however, borrows little from its kissing cousin, a fact that I find reason for pause. In fact, there’s much to be learned about audience and rhetorical situation by positioning oneself as the writer of poems. Even though rhetoricians might balk at the idea of having students write sonnets, this area of study would be of great benefit to those examining the practice of rhetoric. It might also help rhetors become better communicators to examine their own language to become more fluid, more colorful, more imaginative. It is an
unstated thesis of this dissertation that all writing is "creative," but it would benefit all audiences to think of writing as a beautiful interplay of language and author, if only because the process has such potential.

The scope of this project, exploratory as it may be, is to focus on my personal and intellectual transformation as I’ve moved from Creative Writing to Rhetoric. Some additional research concerning specific rhetorics of the creative writing program, as illustrated by any number of schools across the country, might be helpful for those searching for the right "fit" would be helpful, though some schools’ pedagogy may differ from year to year as new faculty come into play. Additionally, conversation with other authors in the field, writers of composition and creative writing alike, might give a fuller recognition of the processes we so dearly love. My own exploration has been one caught in the middle of two camps, and is presented as one who refuses to give quarter to either camp completely. We all have much to learn from one another and so I don't intend to espouse one mode of writing over another. Instead, I believe that poetry and composition should trade spaces occasionally, to see with another’s eyes, and to make writing the gorgeous process its potential allows.

This dissertation is built upon several assumptions, many of which even I cannot detail. However, there are those assumptions I can annotate. For example, this work assumes that the Romantic narrative of the writer is a prevailing trope, one that reflects the dominant activity of the creative writing workshop. This Romantic mythos is damaging because it sidesteps any number of other additional narratives that may inform the writing practice of students. Additionally, this dissertation assumes that the self is much more complicated than has been narrated by any number of countless
practitioners; the self, in this view, is multiple, is fluid, and is constantly new with each writing situation. Also, when I refer the “the workshop” or “the classroom,” I am referring to the same writing setting. While it is true that writing takes place in any number of forums, from the community-based workshop to the artist colony, this dissertation refers only to the creative writing workshop as it exists in the contemporary university setting. Finally, this dissertation assumes that all critique is, for the most part, monologic, meaning that criticism in the creative writing workshop thus far (and, I think, in the composition classroom), aims to create a uniform type of product based upon an in-house aesthetic, in some cases not widely held by other institutions and practitioners. This dissertation does not hope to be the last word in the conversation. Rather, this work seeks to open up the conversation so that further inquiry can be conducted.

The following chapter will examine the mapping of these trajectories of writer, and teacher, and teacher teaching the craft of writing. The chapter will provide a general discussion of the ways students and teachers view the self composed through writing, and the situation that gives rise to the formation of any number of alternate versions. Thus far I’ve begun an examination of my experiences while earning advanced degrees in both creative writing, and later, rhetoric. This analysis shows a disparity between contemporary rhetorical practices and a conventional creative writing pedagogy. Most importantly, the discussion centers upon differences in how the two methodologies view the construction of the self through writing, attitudes toward the writing process, and the nature of creativity. The chapter will provide a brief examination of views concerning creativity in the creative writing workshop, and will work to show the conflict writers must inevitably engage when considering the
construction of a single, “uniform” self in the process. Finally, this first chapter will
examine why conversations about the construction of self are of eminent importance to
the creative writing classroom, and will show the places where conventional rhetorical
practices overlap with the teaching of creative writing.
CHAPTER 1: ENTERING THE CONFLICT

The following pages detail a conflict that continues to plague creative writing workshops nationwide. This conflict pertains to the teaching of creative writing, which has been seen as an artistic preoccupation wholly disassociated with academia, as an “unteachable” craft. My own experience as a poet already rooted in academic and theoretical pursuits, is that creative writing can be taught, but only if we as teachers re-examine some of our assumptions concerning the self involved in a writing practice. The narrative begins with experiences in the graduate creative writing program, and commences along the trajectory of my study in rhetoric and composition, a study which has politicized my awareness of what it means to be a writer. This study assumes that there have been relatively staid assumptions concerning writer who compose themselves in an ongoing process, assumptions which should, in my view, be overturned in service of progressive teaching of a craft that receives very little theoretical scrutiny. This examination, then, will consider conventional views of creativity compared to more recent explorations concerning the writer situated within a larger social environment. And finally, I’d like to consider the sometimes precarious position of what compositionist and poet Wendy Bishop has termed the Writer-Teacher-Writer, a peculiar subjectivity of one who practices writing while also teaching how others might critically engage the practice as a career as well.

Approaching a rhetorical study from the perspective of one trained in supposedly “creative” writing means examining assumptions of the first course of study, and then holding those assumptions in contrast with new systems of thought. Particularly, a course of study in “creative” composition emphasizes the autonomy of the individual,
and views the process of writing as an inner-directed molding of consciousness in the service of art, of beauty, of truth. Romantic terms such as “creative” and “individual,” and Platonic aims of beauty and truth are seldom questioned in the course of writing creatively, and their necessity is defended in much the same way our “values” are defended when war is waged. One might regard apologists for creative writing as stubborn-minded, contrary, and resistant to common sense. Indeed, whole conversations, whole conventions have been developed to overturn the hardheaded sensibilities of creative writers. Composition studies, particularly, has evolved from a Romantic terminology to recognize, finally, that the individual author does exist, but that writing takes place in response to any number of socio-cultural influences. What’s more, the “individual” is constructed in a variety of ways in response to her environments, so that writers can no longer view the self as a sort of fundamental wholeness, but rather, as a reciprocal hole to be emptied and filled.

One might assume that the self is not the solid rock upon which our identity is built; rather, the self is fluid, like magma, and the self is formed and reformed over time, through accretion. While conversations about the self are ultimately important, composition theory also suggests that writers construct an aesthetic—a groundwork on which the composition of the self is founded. This is in direct opposition to the conventional creative writing workshop’s assumption that artists create by calling upon a wholly given and already constructed aesthetic. Finally, contemporary views in composition suggest that writers of all stripes are engaged in a lifelong process, an evolution, if you will, and that these writers are always involved in a larger socio-cultural
dialogue; rather than enacting an isolated, autonomous, individual author, the contemporary writer composes in response to her several environmental influences.

Revising the Self

Unfortunately, the “self” that we so often refer to can be slippery and tangential — when we attempt to define the self, we find that the self dissolves, or rather, disappears behind numerous inexplicable versions. Specifically, two theorists in composition studies shed light on a revised notion of how the self is constructed through writing. First, as Mary Louise Buley-Meissner puts it, “every act of writing can be seen as an act of self-representation . . . ‘who we are’ keeps changing, keeps complicating. Our understanding of ‘who we are’ is always incomplete” (30). What’s more, there is an ongoing dialogue between self and audience, an interaction between the subject and the world, and these two loci are bound, are constantly forming and reforming. “At any given point,” writes Robert Brooke, our identity structure, both as we ourselves and others understand it, is composed of a conglomerate of stances we take towards the role expectations that surround us” (17) Students are asked, in essence, to play a role, and that role is inaccurately specified. In the composition classroom, as well as in the creative writing workshop, this means students must attempt to embody a way of speaking, or writing, which depicts a self to their audience, and deciding on how this portrayal is enacted is one very difficult step in the composition process.

So, what do we talk about when we talk about the self, and what are the implications for students? Self. Voice. Perspective. Point-of-view. Though these
terms are not interchangeable, they are all part of the pertinent conversation, and it is my hope to create a pedagogical model that brings these issues to the fore. Several cultural studies approaches, such as those proposed by James Berlin, Lester Faigley, and others, incorporate this conversation. By examining how the writer-as-individual is socially constructed, issues of voice and self become a prominent focus for cultural studies approaches to composition. For Kenneth Bruffee, social constructionist thought “offers a strikingly fruitful alternative to the way we normally think and talk about what we do.” In contrast to the subjective, Cartesian, I-centered metaphors for the self, the social constructionist view “accounts for the fact that so much of what we normally say about knowledge, scholarship, research and college or university instruction is confined within a frustrating circularity oscillating between ‘outer’ and ‘inner’ poles of ‘objectivity and ‘subjectivity.’” (776). Of course, attitudes concerning the social construction of the self are not the sole province of culture studies. However, the idea that an individual is shaped, in part, by her environments, and that one’s identity is an amalgam of race, class, sex, and so forth, is of eminent concern for Berlin, Faigley, and others. Additionally, though this dialogue is not the sole property of cultural studies pedagogies, all this concern about the self is key; cultural studies assumes that the self is constructed, and though the belief is not without its detractors, this assumption provides an interesting and useful foundation for teaching creative writing, as well as composition.

So now we have a self that is dynamic and constituted in response to a social milieu. Aligning Foucault’s revision of the author’s role in the performance of self, Kurt Spellmeyer reads two student essays and the manner in which they’ve been assessed.
He argues that a static performance of the self is generally validated by composition, while those performances that display uncertainty and inconsistency are deemed weak. However, the student writer is really supposed to become involved in the tangle, and where there are questions of voice, there gives rise a sort of rethinking of the universal I in writing. Spellmeyer writes: “While there is, of course, no transcendental subjectivity, every event of language reconstitutes a speaking self as the “I,” present implicitly or explicitly, which cannot ‘slip imperceptibly’ into the flow of words that precede it. Only this ‘I,’ this always ‘-exterior’ self with its ability to change, can furnish the inconsistency discourse requires” (721). Defining the self, then, is always a difficult task, especially when grappling the dichotomy between subjective and objective perspectives. In Spellmeyer’s view, and as it occurs to me now, neither position serves the writer fully, but rather, a critical engagement with both in the writing process is key to the evolution of an malleable and complex identity. This critical engagement, and the form it takes in the writer’s voice displays a resistance to formalized notions of both the subject and the world around. As Spellmeyer continues, “The central issue in Foucault’s work is not the tyranny of selfhood, but the potential for oppressive reification in all forms of knowledge, ‘objective’ as well as ‘subjective,’ collective as well as individual” (721). In recognizing that any representation is a version of the writer, students insinuate themselves into the study, work to undermine the power of dominant, fixed representations. Additionally, students can view their own artistic judgments as part of a larger, ongoing intellectual and creative practice. Moreover, since the construction of the self and the aesthetic are part of an ongoing dialogue, students can view themselves as citizens, as members of a community for which they are partially responsible.
It seems only fitting to bring this conversation into the classroom. As teachers, we already ask our students to consider audience, and so compose assignment sheets that offer a fictional rhetorical situation to ground student writing. Oftentimes, these assignment sheets will include guides; for instance, there’s the ever-present “college-educated readership” some teachers include in order to suggest that students choose the appropriate “tone.” In this case, “tone” implies a particular attitude and intensity of language directed toward the reader. Usually, noting that the readership is both enlightened and relatively stuffy, students perform a version of the self that is familiar, perhaps even cliché, in order to suit the assignment without appearing uncertain or conflicted. In essence, there are conventions for the composition classroom — many of them unstated — which students are expected to abide by. Geoffrey Chase suggests that we examine these conventions, decode what our classroom practices signify in the larger cultural construct, the university: “[B]efore we ask students to engage in certain sets of conventions, we need to know how these conventions operate on the larger, theoretical level, and the implications of those conventions for our student” (13). Chase’s suggestion that students’ investigate their own identity and ways to represent that identity given staid conventions for its representation, these are concerns raised in every creative writing classroom. The contemporary creative writing teacher must ask students to be actively engaged in their own processes, to investigate how they evolve as artists and as members of a community.

When first introduced to the idea of social constructionism, during the first few semesters of my doctoral study, I balked. Even though I recognized the idea that an individual is not entirely individual, I felt there was some injustice done to the subject,
the agent, and the author. I grappled with the notion that I’d become a function of language and identity, constituted predominantly by environment. In this case, my resistance to the idea of social constructionism was rather an uninformed reluctance toward claims against my right to speak as an individual. And I shared this attitude with students who felt that all personal writing, even all professional or academic writing, is a manifestation of one unique voice. The word “unique,” here, is particularly laden because claiming a unique voice means shunning the disparate other voices a writer must, perforce, assimilate. My attitude shifted, of course, as it must. But the dispute between the singular voice and the unconscious collective of others always speaking has never quieted. I’ve come to acknowledge my own situation so much that I feel compelled to make this discussion a part of classroom practice. The divide between self and world, the “unique voice” against the caucus of disparate voices, is not a wrangle that I can easily overcome, nor do I wish to.

According to Joseph Trimbur, “It can be misleading to tell students, as social constructionists do, that learning to write means learning to participate in the conversation and consensual practices of various discourse communities. Instead, we need to ask students to explore the rhetoric of dissensus that pervades writing situations” (610). Though my students and I have not come to resolution over whether one’s identity is entirely a product of one’s culture, the quandary makes for interesting discussion. What’s more, those theorists who still recognize the self, the individual, the unique voice, as it interacts with a larger system or discourse, have only bridged my arrival at this point in my thinking. Moreover, when viewing artistic choices and values
as part of a larger system, it becomes important, and even necessary to view oneself as a participant in an ongoing discussion.

The social-epistemic rhetoric outlined by James Berlin, for instance, provides an adequate model for viewing my role as a writer in a larger system: an interplay, an interaction. Berlin’s *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures* details the individual writer as a matrix of subjectivities, an agent who constructs and is constructed by a culture. His cultural studies approach encourages students to analyze their own dialogue with issues of race, gender, class, and sexual orientation, and fosters an instrument for resistance through critical writing concerning these issues. He writes that, “the individual is the location of a variety of significations, but is also an agent of change, not simply an unwitting product of external discursive and material forces” (78). In short, students of all stripes, in workshops and in composition classrooms, can and should be directed to interrogate their experiences and perspectives. In so doing, they might place themselves within the wider social context, and this placement encourages active participation.

In fact, as my students’ perspectives and experiences grow more diverse, it becomes integral that they situate themselves within those narratives. One useful essay that depicts a struggle to articulate the self is Adrienne Rich’s “Notes Toward a Politics of Location,” in which she draws attention to the influences of race and sexuality and problematizes assumptions of universal whiteness and universal heterosexuality. As will be shown later, Rich’s treatise underscores the fact that narratives are always under construction; as new voices join the chorus and as old ones become muted, it’s become imperative that we seek ways to examine voice in writing. In doing so, we hold
a magnifying glass to the particularities of thought that inform ideology. L. Gregory
Jones suggests that each critical and/or rhetorical tradition is fused of particular
traditions, specific — or sometimes hidden assumptions — inscribed within the
narrative. Each “narrative,” or rather, the voice that is the mouthpiece for this narrative,
will belie a particular critical bias. “Once we recognize that there are diverse and
competing narratives, then we also need to recognize the interests and purposes
people have for narrating their lives, social settings, and the world in one way rather
than another” (12). The challenge lies in unpacking these various assumptions, aligning
their various politics, in order to “see” how a text means. However, the knowledge of
one’s situated-ness, and the desire to interpret the political agenda of what we read,
does not mean that voice is a stayed issue. Rather, the way that we write and even
function in the world becomes a sort of posing, a performance of ideology that can and
often does misrepresent all sorts of assumptions that an author may not wish to claim.
To recognize this rhetorical posturing, then, is to see the self and the act of writing as a
mutual engagement, an exchange of ideologies and practices between an individual
and the community she inhabits.

Students and I seem to recognize this as we grapple with voice. Crying one
theory over another, tumbling toward an understanding of what we mean and mistaking
each other’s agendas, teachers and students alike cannot help but remain a bit
confused. What’s needed— in this vast landscape of what teachers understand about
their students’ performance of self— is a topography of sorts. A roadmap, a compass, a
plan of action, a clear destination. Creating such a map necessarily involves
transcribing theory into practice. And doing so is never an easy business. One study
has translated theory into practice by combining theories associated with rhetoric, culture studies and creative writing in a first-year composition course. In an article included in the 1994 NCTE edited collection *Changing Classroom Practices*, Alan Kennedy and others attempt to assimilate and complement the many preceding voices that constituted the writing curricula at Carnegie Mellon University. In so doing, they encourage the blending of numerous genres, and the recognition that the writer’s position is ultimately formed from a matrix of influences. This thinking inevitably disrupts student “notions of individualism,” yet by implementing a methodology of argumentation, as instituted by Gerald Graff, these authors work to avoid students’ “new insistence on the ‘correct’ version of reality to be learned.” The combined classroom’s formation, however, produces an instrument designed “for students to experience a productive tension between individual cognition and social process, personal beliefs, and ideology” (252). Just as the above authors have used theories from numerous programs, so too can the creative writing workshop benefit from discussions held in composition theory. Particularly, self and voice are key subjects to compositionists, whereas practitioners hold little discussion of these topics in creative writing pedagogy. Perhaps this is because issues of self have voice have, for a long time now, been regarded as a given in the creative writing workshop. In essence, one way we can approach the uneven terrain of self and voice is to suggest to students that these ideas, these formations, aren’t yet fully formed.

The stance I hope students will take on is one of determined uncertainty. In this, I mean that we can frame our systems of belief with the knowledge that our thinking will inevitably change, and so thought is never felt to be static and immovable. Frank
Farmer voices these concerns in “Bahktin and Cultural Studies,” in which he defines a critical attitude toward what we think we know, what we think others know, and the chasm that lies between. His argument for a situated knowledge poses that “cultural critique needs dialogue to restrain its tendencies for authoritarian pronouncements, for ‘last word’ truisms and disabling certainties” (204). This disembodied questioning of what’s true about the self should lead students to examine how to speak and how to engage knowledge on every level. However, the theory does leave a sort of cul-de-sac for the teacher seeking pat answers: “Willing neither to silence our own commitments nor to require that the same be espoused by our students . . . teachers who embrace both dialogue and cultural studies find themselves inhabiting the always precarious territory of the between” (205). What I ask of my students is what I ask of myself: to remain engaged in culture, to question power structures, to assume that words and actions are not as fixed as they may seem.

Finally, I hope that students will call into question how they might act when shackled with the knowledge that even our freedom is situated, and that the fact of the will (to power) is held under scrutiny. In The Mythology of Voice, Darsie Bowden asserts that, “if we relinquish the idea that we are the ultimate arbiters of our lives and language, that we are prone in a large respect to the controlling influences of environments, contexts, and other people, we should also call into question a fundamental component of the Western self-conception: free will” (65). My students and I work to understand our role as traders in words, and yet, there are always the nagging concerns that, if we are a product of our environment, one might wonder what we are bound to produce, and whether we have any say in the process. To my mind,
students still play a significant role in defining and investigating their own disparate voices. Even though voice becomes merely one of any number of poses, and though writing from any one perspective belies the particular influence of environments and cultures, we nonetheless must recreate ourselves with each act of writing. It is my belief that writing is one way to draw these distinctions between who we are and how we’re influenced, and then to think about the outcomes more critically. My interest, then, is in how these theoretical perspectives in composition can influence creative writing pedagogy and practice, an area where I have experienced very different conceptions of self and voice.

Why Creativity? Why Conflict?

In his essay entitled "On the Relation of Analytic Psychology to Poetic Art," Carl Jung suggests that the preconditions for artistic production, as well as the artwork itself, cannot be analyzed systematically. His theory suggests that analysts adopt a different view of artistic production. Essentially, when examining an individual, psychologists use a sort of medical language that insists that any given condition can be better understood by examining its causes. However, when dealing with artistic production, the same sort of cause-and-effect-theorizing cannot be fully trusted, since there is no real, grounded equation for how artists go about their work. Perhaps a good example of such sketchy artistic process can be found in Frank O'Hara’s witty poem entitled “Why I Am Not a Painter.” The speaker, presumably O'Hara, visits his friend – the painter Mike Goldberg – and during several subsequent visits with the artist, O'Hara writes a poem. In essence, O'Hara begins writing after seeing the painter's work, and composes in
tandem with the painting. Though the two artifacts are conceived with a particular thematic unity, by the time each piece is completed their relationship to one another is marginal, at best. One might argue that the poem is, rather, an argument for causality in creative production, though a quick read of the poem will, I believe, prove otherwise. O’Hara’s process narrative, which is parcel to the poem, reveals that sometimes even the artist cannot understand why he or she produces in any given manner.

This brings us back to Jung’s suggestion that we must examine the artistic process without assuming that an artifact can be understood by decoding the artist's experience, social conditions, and so on. Jung writes: “Personal causality has as much and as little to do with the work of art, as has the soil with the plant that brings from it. Doubtless we may learn to understand some peculiarities of the plant by becoming familiar with the character of its habitat. … But nobody will maintain that therewith all the essentials relating to the plant itself have been recognized” (Jung 219). As a writer trained in a program that values the notion of productive, creative imagination, the metaphor in this passage rings true with me. Essentially, Jung proposes that artifacts are not encoded with an artist’s personal history, and so, they cannot fully emote to us what the author was feeling or seeing or experiencing at the moment of inspiration. Though Jung’s theories are, at least to some degree, dated, his argument here is central to discussions concerning creative production.

If we continue to badger Jung’s understanding of the artistic process, we must ultimately uncover a dilemma that deals with the construction of the individual. Jung argues that a subject can hardly propose to understand the sole cause or causes of any given event. In the case of writing, then, we cannot hope to understand which
influences cause the pen to move across paper, nor can we causally equate one line of reasoning with any definite sequence of events in the artist's life. The influences enacted to place me before this computer screen, for instance, are surely too numerous to count, and in attempting to devine my own deeper motives, I continue to recognize still more. The event called writing is a particularly complex scene, where all sorts of influences converge at once and appear, with the help of the author, manifest as text. Also, writing is a peculiar labor only inasmuch as it is mysterious and transformative; since reasons for the text's newly minted existence are both arbitrary and indefinite, the act of writing inhabits a convincingly mystical aura. Certainly, authors have been persuaded that since we cannot fully explain its causes, and since we cannot decipher its meaning, writing may be divine.

However, once convinced that the individual self is fragmented, we question whether creativity can be defined in Romantic terms that depend upon a limited view of creative imagination. Jacques Maritain’s “Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry,” for instance, furthers claims made by St. Thomas Aquinas by suggesting that “because the human person is an ontologically perfect and fully equipped agent, master of his actions, the Illuminating Intellect cannot be separate, but must be an inherent part of each individual's soul and intellectual structure...”(Rothenberg and Housman 107).

Clearly, this is the language of autonomy that seems, to a large degree, suspect. That said, the idea of the individual becomes suspect, and so creative process narratives seem both limiting and disingenuous. Rather, “selves” seems more apt when referring to the author, and ‘processes” better names the author’s diverse modes of creative functioning. But the nature of creativity seems to me to be a great deal more than a
semantic squabble. By simply renaming Romantic notions of creativity, and versions of inspiration, we gloss over the key issue: How artists define process is, in short, also how they define themselves.

The many questions raised mark a point where my creative training stops and my theoretical training begins, though I want to be careful not to divide the two inexplicably. Though polar opposites are anathema to the theory being described, two identities seem to predominate the writer’s condition. One identity is that of the mysterious and elusive self, the darker other behind the scrim--Mauritain’s Illuminating Intellect, or Jung’s rebel without a cause. The poststructuralists’ “socially constituted agent” represents the other identity--or rather, the opposing quorum of identities. If we recognize the writer involved in such a dynamic interplay, we reaffirm the existence of discourse communities that affect process. Viewing any representation as one of many “versions,” students insinuate themselves into study, undermine representations, and seek ways of narrating themselves counter to prevailing tropes.

Since familiar terms such as “voice” and “style” are largely dependent upon the “autonomous self,” this rethinking of the independent author is not an easy task. In fact the profession is perforated by arguments for and against creative writing, because something in the art seems to inherently privilege the individual over the social. Although workshop atmospheres are largely social in nature, as has been argued by Dawson (1977) and Parras (2000), literary production is still largely a solitary endeavor. Clearly, we see all the influences involved in the construction of text, though these influences are oftentimes discounted in the scene of the lone auteur. At once, we are being asked to resist the Romantic representation of the autonomous author, while
maintaining an awareness of the crisis between subjective agency and a dynamic creative process. Creative writing, in short, is both social and individual, and both identities are held within the self. As an alternative to the romantic ideal of the independent genius, the writer composes in response to specific environments and ideologies. To this end, creative writers should examine deep-seated, romantic representations, and then investigate alternative ones.

In every writer there are two identities, and there's value in both these selves. For some, a Romantic identity provides a sort of security blanket. My students, for instance, are skeptical when the origin of creative work is called into question – some learners argue that poems originate in the heart, of course, or in the soul. Culture, then, is merely an abstract environment, which leaves no impression upon the artist. Fine, I say. Fine. Especially since even professional authors are reluctant to deny the existence of self, or soul, or will, or that indefinite spiritual drive that allows each person to act. In a study of numerous remarkable artists throughout history, Benjamin Taylor asserts that, for all his Nietzschean tendencies, he cannot successfully unmask the notion of the Romantic self. “We are nowadays inclined to speak of Romanticism not just as a literary and philosophical movement but as a perdurable environment of thought and feeling to which we ourselves belong” (102). The total denial of a Romantic self acting in a meaningful world spells the death of freedom and will – two metanarratives which, for some at least, can never be entirely disrupted. Without freedom, without will, there seems to be no hope. Without hope only meaninglessness and despair. Modernism’s lovely mystery, the autonomous identity is still a part of many writerly fictions.
Just as the Romantic identity is still ingrained in the writer’s consciousness, so too the complicated multiplicity of self cannot be denied, and the social strata in which we are situated admittedly shape much of our identity. I want to explore these two poles. I want to test their icy regions. I want to map the archipelagos and mysterious untouched peninsulae that comprise one’s consciousness. I want to do this because I feel the pull of numerous identities even now, and the presence of all these wishes for what I write goads me to believe that nearly all writers are bound by a state of ineluctable conflict. Simply put, there is conflict between what some call the self — which, in terms of artistic creation, is manifest as the “autonomous author”— and the social situation in which the self is housed. Since the act of writing is, of its own accord, a way of figuring out what we know, and since the cause, the influence, the impetus, the call for writing is both diverse and mysterious, it appears to me now that writers, as a peculiar sort of inquisitive creature, must deal with this crisis, or must accept that some identities shelved in the body are at odds with one another. This acceptance, this very exploration, fulfills the role of rhetoric which Kenneth Burke sees as a sort of police action waged in the mind. There seems to be something very real about the issue of the writer claiming autonomy, claiming a very central focus, purpose, intent, and even direction for work being produced.

Perhaps it’s because I’ve been trained under a model which supposes all thinking is being done with some end result in mind. One thinks of certain Platonic models of grander, even isolated thinking, sure, but even when we consider the occasional think-tank atmosphere that abhors the vacuum, we still see the value of purpose in the rhetoric of production. The workshop can be such a think-tank
atmosphere, though there’s been such an emphasis upon critique in the workshop. I
cannot understand why it is that workshops have become such criticism generating
atmospheres. Why, if the workshop’s really supposed to be a workshop, where is the
work being done? I suppose it’s an opportunity for students to flex their analytic muscle,
to see and help shape the work of their peers, but at the expense of what? I see the
workshop as much more damaging than it should be, and I want to consider ways to
reverse this process.

The crisis of the writer is, to some degree, a product to the workshop’s rhetoric.
The workshop is at once individual (when considering the product of each participant)
and collective (when considering the various influences of the collective). For so long,
even in the workshop which presumes that something about creative production can be
taught, the teaching of writing has been tainted by the denial that creative production
cannot, in fact, be taught. Under this model, creativity is the result of the individual, a
product of raw talent, which is meted out arbitrarily and to varying degrees. However, at
the same time, I’m inclined to resist the notion that creativity is an individual
characteristic, but rather, is constituted. But I want to assert that even this thinking
(about the socially-constituted agent) appears too simplistic. Instead, the two models
exist as one. The individual is still an individual, and beautiful thoughts and artifacts are
still beautiful, but we should also give credence to the influences that allow an individual
artist to function. In short, if the author’s become merely a function at last, then even
the function must erase itself as some point. If the writer ceases to exist, then the
functioning of writing becomes lost. The function, the agent, the site of creative
production must, in my opinion, be redefined as a constantly revolving, amorphous complex.

It’s important to note that “creative” writing has been and must continue to be scrutinized. Of all the dichotomies that bear examination, the split between expository composition and creative writing is, to me, most perplexing. Whenever the subject of “creative” writing is breached between writers, someone’s bound to chime in, “but what is creative writing?” to which all participants in the conversation turn to one another, agog, and patently agree that, really, all writing is creative. The term is a misnomer, surely, and anyone attending creative writing workshops might be led to wonder where this supposed “creativity” takes place, and how it is different from the intellectual, introspective practices of other modes of writing. However, just as some people may be prone to destroy the dichotomy between creative and critical writing, differences between modes of writing still reassert themselves. Often, to the chagrin of the workshop critics, this nebulous creativity, this ritualized, esoteric something that happens in the writing of poems, fiction, and creative nonfiction, will be articulated, even by writers who question the fact of it.

The essential conflict has to do with the various roles, or masks, or fictions which a writer embodies, and the clash of assumptions within and without those identities. In terms of the many systems of thought that comprise one’s consciousness, I find there are never staid relations between the self, one’s aesthetic choices, and one’s behavior in the world. We might think of this conflict as a perpetual dialectic enacted by disparate manifestations of the self, a collusion or collision, an internal conversation. To approach conflict and make it a central locus where artistry occurs: this is the writer's ineluctable
wrangle. Among other topics, this study will examine the divide between creative writing (which depends upon artistic freedom and play), and expository writing (which calls for action and interplay between audience and author).

**Writer-Teacher-Writer (WTW):**

**Why All These Conversations are Important**

Writing can be a reflective mode of inquiry to explore one’s thinking about teaching. Like research where the teacher-scholar documents what’s found in the library stacks and bound periodicals, these “ancillary lessons” are concretized, made manifest. In essence, composing research, and perhaps seeking an audience, affects a teacher’s practice in the classroom. Clearly, writing, research, and teaching form a continuous circuit. Lessons taught (and learned) in the daily classroom affect the nature of one’s research, and sometimes guide a particular line of fruitful questions. For example, when I learn that my students don’t respond favorably to group interaction, I might examine how these groups are being formed, and how the dynamic interaction is influenced by my own teacherly practice. My research, then, may lead me to compare my own pedagogy with the practices of colleagues with similar circumstances. Though my teaching practices may seem unrelated to my scholarship, the subject matter of my research alters the way I think about writing, and this ideological shift must, perforce, influence my teaching practice. Hopefully, if my ongoing research is compelling and valid, the interplay between teaching and scholarship will enact a natural evolution between thought and action.
What’s more, if I’m dedicated to teaching, then answers I seek should, presumably, keep my students’ best interests in mind; my desire is to learn how best to teach, and research is one venue for improved thinking about teaching. For instance, my recent research in creativity theory and composition pedagogy has led me to believe that the writing classroom is at once individual and collective. For so long writing pedagogies seem to have denied the teacher’s ability to “teach” writing, to “instruct” creativity. One comparison might be made to the composition class of the nineteen fifties where, according to Berlin, the goal was to create “a new rhetoric based upon the scientific study of language” (Rhetoric and Reality 10). Like those classrooms, the product-centered pedagogy of some creative writing workshops denies the full benefit of process theory. Rather, teaching writing has been historically regarded as an instrument for refining talent. Under this model, creativity is individual--a product of raw talent-- and is meted out arbitrarily. My own research resists the notion that creativity is an individual characteristic. Rather, all sorts of influences constitute the creative person. However, for the writing classroom I hope to facilitate, even this thinking appears simplistic. Instead, I believe that two models of creative production should exist concurrently, especially when considering how writing should be taught. The individual is still an individual, and higher thoughts are still higher, but we can now give credence to influences that allow that individual to function. In short, “creativity” must be redefined, and the greater writing community must assimilate the revised perspective. The conclusions I’ve reached in my research affect my writing classroom implicitly. Inasmuch as I would like to suppose that teaching and scholarship are inherently separate, my practice in both only supports the notion that they are connected.
It's my intention to examine the rhetoric(s) of the contemporary creative writing workshop. To my understanding, the creative writing workshop has evolved dramatically since its formal inception mid 20th century. Since early on, it's been widely assumed that the workshop is an apolitical environment, devoted to a universal aesthetic. But as departments and programs become increasingly politicized, so too the workshop. As the workshop becomes tempered and the conflicts enter the classroom, we see a new set of creative writing rhetorics evolving. First, the contemporary creative writing workshop fosters an environment where students create identity. If at one time teachers viewed identity as a set of characteristics to be defined, traits and behaviors as recognizable as they are unique, it's now widely understood that one's identity is shifting and malleable. Today's workshop, then, encourages students to construct identity each time they engage the writing process. Also, the postmodern workshop is dedicated to the gradual accretion of varied and competing aesthetic values; whereas some workshops have attempted to unify and simplify an aesthetic, some latter-day workshops celebrate the differences of competing value systems. This means that workshop participants take on new perspectives by challenging their own ideas of what's good and beautiful and creative. Finally, contemporary workshops assume that the learning begun in class is an ongoing process, one that, for a dedicated writer, continues throughout the course of a lifetime. Drawing from classical notions of paideutic rhetoric, and from my experience as a creative writing teacher, I intend to illustrate how today’s creative writing workshops are unlike their former predecessors. The student in today’s creative writing classroom evolves an identity, an aesthetic, and
a process over the course of a semester, and it’s assumed that this growth and change will continue for as long as the student engages the process.

The second chapter, “Alternating Rhetorics: Exploring the Relationship Between Creative Writing and Composition Pedagogy,” will examine the assumptions and ideologies informing contemporary composition classrooms, and will hold these in contrast with those of the creative writing classroom. This chapter will include a brief overview of composition theory and pedagogy in American universities, in order to provide context for current approaches. Moreover, this chapter will examine how contemporary views in composition theory and pedagogy can and should influence the creative writing classroom. Specifically, the groundwork in rhetoric and composition concerning the writing process is particularly valuable in the workshop. Additionally, conversations about voice and style are useful for teaching poetry and fiction. Beyond these few areas where the conversations can overlap, there are a plethora of ways a classical rhetoric can benefit the creative writing teacher, especially concerning imitation exercises, recitation and memory, and invention strategies.

Chapter three will focus this discussion further, by examining the construction of the self, and how this construction positively influences the teaching of creative writing. Included in this conversation is an overview of contemporary psychological models for the writer, situated within a field and a domain. This dynamic model of creativity dovetails with composition studies, in that views of the self are seen as parcel to a social engagement of the individual with her environments; additionally, this social constructionist view highlights discussions of process that have been neglected in
conventional creative writing pedagogy. Furthermore, analysis of interpretation and lifelong learning in the creative writing workshop underscore ways the writer is constructed in varied ways. Chapter four will conclude this discussion, by providing a brief model for workshop facilitators to resist conventional pedagogies. The exercises and suggestions provided here are but a few of the many ways students and teachers can explore the construction of self, voice, and style, and these conclusions infer ways to “see” the ongoing dialectical process involved in proactive writing practices.
CHAPTER 2: ALTERNATING RHETORICS: EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CREATIVE WRITING AND COMPOSITION PEDAGOGY

“Not for all the golf balls in Palm Springs would I trade this humble joy.”

Campbell McGrath, Spring Comes to Chicago

Composition studies posit that a rhetor must examine her dialectical engagement with an audience, and within a particular rhetorical situation. To my mind, this aspect of a rhetorical study is no more evident than in a creative writing workshop, in which artists construct beautiful artifacts; in this composition process, workshop participants also consider how these pieces might be composed effectively to create a meaningful impression in the imagination of an audience. Much creative writing pedagogy, however, leaves the author adrift to her own devices, assuming that natural talent should inevitably drive the construction of successful work. Composition pedagogy, as suggested by the following chapter, can benefit the teacher of creative writing by helping the facilitator meet writers halfway in the process. After a brief anecdote of a successful writing engagement, this chapter will explore the crossover between creative writing and composition studies. This exploration will include the deeper lineage of creative writing within classical rhetoric, and will show how composition pedagogies, both conventional and postmodern, inform the creative writing workshop. But first, let’s begin with a favorite book that details a writer involved in the complicated processes of his craft.
The opening section of Campbell McGrath’s “The Bob Hope Poem,” contained within the award-winning poetry collection entitled *Spring Comes to Chicago*, begins with a scene of the writer garretted in his Madison Avenue apartment, busily describing the wealth of snow falling just outside his window. Becoming blocked and listless, the writer plays hide-and-seek for his material, admits to searching out the latest issue of *People* magazine, the text of which becomes material for the remaining sixty pages of this incredibly long and exhaustive study of culture, capitalism, snow, pregnancy, the diabolical nature of squirrels and other systems of varying complexity. Linda Brodkey’s *Academic Writing as Social Practice* problematizes this image, as she notes that such a scenario is a romantic notion of the writer, which demands that the scene of writing is one of isolation and independent genius. “Because such a picture prevails as the reigning trope for writing, we find it difficult to remember that the solitary scribbler tells only one story about writers and writing” (55). However, McGrath might insist that his writing is a montage of stuff, borne of a particular environment, filtered through the writer’s conglomerate experience, and that this long poem assumes that the writer effectively acts as an agent of the outside world while still maintaining (at least some) surface autonomy.

As a vignette of the writer’s process, the McGrath’s serves as an example for a larger study of creative writing pedagogy, and illustrates invention strategies that may be of use to the workshop facilitator. Pertinent to this study, however, is the writer’s creative process—from the very first idea (which may be romantically referred to as “inspiration”) and throughout the various stages of drafting and revising. In my research, I’ve come upon several key sources for studying invention. Perhaps most
important to this study has been Karen Lefevre’s *Invention as a Social Act*, which argues that much composition theory and pedagogy relies upon a Platonic notion of the writer divorced from social interaction. Contrasting this idyllic notion of the independent writer, Lefevre’s monograph presents the writer as a participant in what James Berlin (1987) has described as a “transactional” rhetoric: the writer, her topic, her audience, and language itself create a dialectical exchange always in play during the writing process. Also, Wendy Bishop’s *Released Into Language* provides excellent models for applying specific invention strategies in the creative writing classroom.

It is my belief, however, that very little research has been conducted to draw historical ties between an historical concept of invention and the daily practices extant in the creative writing classroom. Most importantly, the evolution of process theory has expanded to include social aspects that influence composition; Lefevre notes invention as one site within the composing process that is in continuous interaction with sociocultural forces, and the dialectical nature of invention claims rhetorical “roots” in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*. It may prove useful, then, to offer a brief history of contemporary creative writing pedagogy in order to fully recognize the significance of Lefevre’s assertion and its ramifications upon the creative writing classroom. Especially in beginning creative writing, teachers often present exercises to develop precise description, accurate character sketches, and encourage a rigorous writing discipline to “generate” skill; these skills are specifically referenced in classical rhetoric, though their history is seldom articulated. In essence, ancient interactive communities of student rhetors can be viewed as the precursors of creative writing workshops. Historical evidence of these communities also reinforces contemporary “social” ramifications for
invention. The final purpose of this dissertation, then, is to articulate a variety of very specific creative invention strategies that are rooted in classical rhetoric. Also, by briefly tracing the formal creative writing classroom’s academic evolution, I’d like to establish creative writing, and especially “creative” invention, as a social (rather than an individual) act. Finally, in considering invention as a social act, I’ll offer a few specific pedagogical strategies for invention in the creative writing classroom, strategies which reinforce the notion that writing involves a dialectical process between a writer and a real (or imagined) audience.

**Creative Writing’s History as an Academic Pursuit**

Lately I’ve read several articles detailing the antagonism amongst programs in the English department—all tales of woe involving isolation, or detailing unfruitful careers in the company of outcast colleagues. Unfortunately, a complex class strata paints technical writers as dunderheads, poets as reprobates, rhetoricians as academic jackals, and theorists as downright unapproachable. Though this segregation seems both arbitrary and divisive, it is certainly interesting to investigate why such a system exists. Katherine Adams explores this history in *A History of Professional Writing Instruction in American Colleges*. Adams begins with a description of higher education’s early reliance upon a classical curriculum model, which was organized with logic, grammar, and rhetoric at its core. From here, Adams details an evolution of the university writing program, which thrived during the nineteenth century with a broad-based liberal arts curriculum—including four years of rhetoric—but which was
transformed at the turn of the century to accommodate the culture's burgeoning, largely economic need for specific forms of writing.

Adams' book is an effort to trace the specialization of writing programs, offering at once a comparison between the earlier “college” model and the compartmentalized university, while also providing a rough sketch of particular programs developed for the new era. After the abandonment of the classical curriculum that relied upon rhetoric, critics claimed practical writing skills had floundered, and this criticism spawned the development of the advanced composition course. At first, this advanced course was heavily skills-based, depending upon grammar and recitation. Later, however, “literary social, and political subjects” were added to form composite courses—courses that would later divide once again to form the contemporary creative writing, journalism, social and “hard” science writing programs (39). After detailing this lineage, Adams offers a brief call for a “combined curriculum” and “blurred” distinction between studies.

In short, Adams' history offers a detailed narrative of advanced composition’s motley family lineage. Peppering this outline are numerous citations and descriptions of early textbooks, and specific anecdotes on early advanced composition instructors are frequent and illustrative. What’s more, the works cited page is thankfully an extensive resource for continued research. The chronology of the text focuses on composition's early years almost exclusively, and also this history lapses at some points—especially in the specific program histories (Chapters 5, 6 and 7)—which leaves room for further thinking on contemporary advanced composition. Finally, Adams' suggestion that boundaries be renegotiated is a bit vague, utopic, and may have neglected research that is (or, was at the time of this book’s publication) already underway (see Moxley).
Adams’ research illustrates these figures as passionate instructors quite devoted to the betterment of student writing. Especially poignant are the accounts of Hill, Wendell, and Fred Newton Scott, included in chapter 5, as well as the notable reminiscences by a few famous students of the early creative writing teachers. For instance, esteemed playwright Eugene O’Neill eulogized Harvard's George Pierce Baker thusly: “He helped us to hope—and for that we owe him all the finest we have in memory of gratitude and friendship” (81). Adam’s character sketches offer to these historical figures a substantial depth, and the work involved in “fleshing out” so fully these names reveals a substantial depth of research as well. While Adams does call upon the work of Joe Moxley and Eve Shelnutt—material derived from Moxley’s *Creative Writing in America*—to describe the current state of affairs in the creative writing classroom, few examples illustrate the transition between the pre-WWII and the post-WWII classroom. The “current state,” as it were, involves departmental isolation and the constant conflict between whether specialized writing (such as poetry) can, or even should, be taught. Adams concluding suggestion that the divisions between writing practices be erased, then, seems to be a call for the department to “get back to the way it was” a la the Wendell composite classroom.

The inception of the creative writing course, around the turn of the century, created a relatively new academic tradition fraught with internal conflict that has continued even until the present day, and this new classroom has evolved drastically over the past century. As Adams highlights, creative writing in the university was borne of an emerging emphasis upon self-expression, and although the creative writing classroom offered an alternative to the more restrictive composition curriculum, the
study was beset by the contradiction that supposed “genius” could not be taught (73). These seminal courses offered direct, formal criticism of craft in a lecture-workshop format. Even though the workshop format was quite different from standard composition classes—oftentimes meeting in the instructor’s home—early creative writing textbooks concentrated on form and tended to be quite prescriptive; Adams notes that some early books do offer advice on prewriting and planning, but provide little in the way of practical invention strategy (76). Seemingly at odds with values of “free self-expression,” these early texts, authored in the first two decades of the 20th century, maintained that true writers are born, not constructed. Nevertheless, the slowly burgeoning creative writing classrooms were breeding grounds for change, primarily in the structure and format of classroom meeting, and the traditional organization of lecture and discussion. One of the products of the evolution of the advanced composition course, then, was the modern academic creative writing classroom.

In short, the “study” of creative writing began as a “new” academic approach in Barrett Wendell’s advanced composition class at Harvard; decades later, the creative writing “program” was introduced, somewhat independent, admittedly isolated from the larger English department. Long after the split, varying critics have suggested that the creative writing workshop has become a stale environment for creation, and tends to foster a “cookie-cutter” approach to writing. During the nineteen thirties and forties, there seems to have been broad academic scrutiny as to how the new “creative writing” was to be taught, when the common assumption was that true genius was a matter of individual talent, and not some product of the university classroom—even in light of the opportunities for growth in the “creative” field of literature production. In an early
English Journal article entitled “Objectives for Creative Writing Courses,” for instance, Charles Hinton denies that such courses can “produce distinguished or successful writers,” and so bases a pedagogy specifically upon an outcomes assessment method developed to gauge a writer’s progress. He cites a “confused status” of the creative writing program, following much the same argument that other writers claim: the task of teaching creative writing is conflicted because, as Hilton puts it, "the creative process cannot be taught" (225). However, by adhering to several general objectives, the writing teacher may create an atmosphere "conducive to real creative effort" (presumably forged for those writers with innate ability). Hinton cites a "creative leaven" which resides within the innately creative individual, though there is little or no discussion as to how to activate this leavening agent (225).

Hinton’s criticism and suggestions for creative writing pedagogy are seconded by famed Fort Wayne, Indiana native Edith Hamilton, in another 1930’s College English article entitled “The Teaching of Creative Writing: A Paradox.” This early article continues the argument that the teaching of creative writing is paradoxical because teachers must at once subsume the role of “level-headed business manager” while also fostering creativity. Hamilton questions where best to seek “motivating forces for creative effort,” and finally asserts that vigorous reading is the most vital source for creative impetus (31). Given the lack of reasons why and, more importantly, how reading fosters creativity, it may be useful to suppose (and I believe this is part of Hamilton’s argument) that reading introduces the writer to a watershed of ideas. The writer not only keeps abreast of the study, but may also experiment through imitation. Hamilton cautions against textbook assignments, which may be “agents of inhibitions”;
as a model, she proposes an hypothetical textbook that might be constructed by reading Thoreau (32). She then spirals into a tedious extended metaphor that likens the student writer to a farmer, and guards the instructor against assignments that may make the writer “too conscious of the galling yoke with the plow tugging behind” (32). What seems most pertinent in this article is reliance upon reading (and imitation) for “situations that free the imagination” (35). Regardless, the poet is never constructed in the classroom, but is somehow birthed into the world by divine means. Though this thinking has long since plagued, and continues to stifle, the legitimacy of creative writing in the academy, there have been those who’ve devoted much thinking to how the writer engages in the process, and how the writer might go about developing the discipline to nurture whatever talent is either denied or applauded by editors and pedagogues alike.

Considering how best to give creative writing, and its teaching, some sort of credence, it’s likely best to start with bedrock. As already noted, poetry and fiction writing have been a part of the university classroom for a number of years--at least since the turn of the century, likely further. But its legitimacy has depended upon the assumption that only those already fitted with talent will thrive in the--pardon my saying it--business. Originally published in 1934, later revised in 1961 and then 1981, Dorothea Brande’s watershed *Becoming a Writer* successfully extends this thinking to assert that there are certain practices, which, with practice, can level the playing field. Or rather, a person might become a writer, rather than discover that they are a writer, by constant discipline and awareness of which practices are most fruitful (for themselves) in the process. Brande’s treatise is a benchmark sourcebook of practical and inspiring advice for the beginning writer who has been told that "genius cannot be taught" (22).
She effectively and painstakingly details many of the beginning writer’s anxieties about writing, most of which have nothing to do with writing techniques, but rather deal with writer's block, self-consciousness and so on. Brande works to de-mystify the "role" of the writer/artist by suggesting that one might learn the process by which the writer forms the creative product. Additionally, she encourages the beginning author’s spontaneity, asserting that immediate writing without over-consideration is sometimes the best method of sidestepping “writer's block”--which is mainly insecurity, and not necessarily a lack of material or talent. In order to make the writer’s “flow” of production clear, Brande recognizes two sides of the psyche, the crests and troughs, and encourages the artist to recognize both and learn to tap each independently. Replete with straightforward and relatively simple discussion of the unconscious and ways to "harness" it, *Becoming a Writer* offers a "natural" transition from not thinking of oneself as a writer, to doing the work, daily, regularly, sometimes joyfully and without effort. The sourcebook also provides a nice contrast to prescriptive handbooks, with their pronouncements and theories that still tend to stifle creativity by making the writer feel inadequate. But even though Brande’s work marks a shift in thinking concerning how the writer might construct the writing self, creative writing programs have continued to be plagued with conflict over how “individual” talent is meted out.

The very same conflict, dealing with the construction of a writerly self through a process-oriented practice, is evidenced in composition theory. Most specifically, as Brande’s book is designed to help the writer get past writers block through dedication, and exercises (like freewriting), and even meditation and guided imagery, so too have composition theorists drawn these same ideas for their classrooms. Scholars who have
drawn upon Brande’s techniques include Peter Elbow, Ken Macrorie, and Donald Murray. Specifically, Peter Elbow’s work in composition theory has helped evolve the notion that writing is a relatively complicated process that begins with prewriting--the contemporary analog for invention. He also notes that successful invention involves a community, rather than an individual. In *Writing Without Teachers*, for instance, Elbow contends that we may understand ideas more fully by using a group invention techniques he calls "cooking," a reciprocal process in which several people interact to "flesh out" ideas together. Composition text books echoed this thinking: Ken Macrorie’s *Telling Writing* depends upon the writer's observance of the unconscious drive continually active in the writing process. A reservoir of material for generating ideas is essential for invention, and Macrorie's text encourages writers to be aware of social groups, discussion "circles," as a source for generating material.

Invention strategies, like freewriting, have become a staple for many teachers in creative writing programs across the country. According to the Associated Writing Programs website, there are “over 25,000 writers at over 400 member colleges and universities” (awpwriter.org). Given the proliferation of creative writing programs across the United States, it is clear that an overwhelming population of students have became interested in poetry and fiction writing, and it's no surprise that composition theory has crept into the teaching of creative writing. Poet and creative writing teacher Don Bogen’s article “Beyond the Workshop” critiques the traditional workshop format for becoming mechanized, producing poetry which is “characterized surface proficiency without daring, content that is innocuous if unoriginal” (1). His criticism is that workshops have come to rely upon ritualized standards and values for writing, and
those alternatives for students’ voices have not been fully explored. A renewed focus upon classical invention strategies may be one way of addressing Bogen’s criticism, and may also answer to what Adams sees as the historical construction of ‘separate degree programs’ and disparate views of “academic rigor.” What’s more, there are numerous creative writers who refuse to believe that theory has much or any to offer the writer’s task. Poet William Stafford’s “Writing the Australian Crawl” is especially enlightening because the writer likens his process to the “natural” practice of swimming that seems to go against common sense. He offers a plea for a “face-down, flailing, speedy process in using language,” which belies his suspicion of over-theorizing writing. However, though Stafford reaffirms the dichotomy between creative writing and the university, he offers insight concerning the complicated and playful nature of invention. Perhaps a legitimate creative writing pedagogy could rediscover and articulate classical invention strategies, and then appropriate these methods for the contemporary creative writing workshop.

Along with these strategies, however, it will ultimately be of use to view the writer and her art as a socially constituted agent, writing in response to her specific environments and ideologies. If we can successfully view the writer as situated within an interactive community of discourses, we may also show how invention strategies are useful for exploring voice, audience, and style in the creative composition process. But this “rethinking” of the independent and autonomous author is not an easy task, partially because of the long history of such thinking. The last century, specifically because of the growth of the creative writing course, has been perforated with arguments for and against creative writing; many critics feel that “teaching” creative writing is paradoxical
because true genius is “born not made.” As one example against the traditional view of the artist as autonomous and individual, Lefevre argues not only that invention is itself a social act, but also that there is a continual and cyclical process involved with invention beginning with a socially-constituted writer interacting with a mutable audience. In order to prove the constructed interplay between audience and writer, she views the concept of invention through interrelated perspectives: invention as a social process, as a dialectical interchange between writer and audience, and as an act, an ongoing process. This process, she contends, is thoroughly grounded in classical rhetoric, as Aristotle’s three kinds of rhetoric depend upon specific audiences as well; she also notes that ethos is a particular proof arising “from the relationship between the individual and the community” (45). The “community” of Lefevre’s well-placed assertion is grounded, of course, in classical rhetoric, and that academic and social environment is directly related to the contemporary creative writing workshop.

Creative Writing’s Roots in Classical Rhetoric

I’d like to consider some influential classical thinking that combines the ideal rhetor and a sense of public responsibility; I will then discuss contemporary attempts to reinstate the “rhetor-citizen,” most specifically David Fleming’s articulation of a paideutic rhetoric. I’ll compare Fleming’s conceptualization with current-traditional rhetoric in order to illustrate epistemological assumptions and pedagogical strategies, and then I’ll close with a few questions that occur to me now — relatively severe questions that can’t fully be answered here, but which have been touched upon in previous discussions.
Rhetoric and citizenship take root in both Plato and Aristotle and are bound up in the nature of the “true” and the “good.” For Plato, language is used for conveying truth — a truth that already exists — though the rhetor can use this language to either deceive or coerce his subject. However, a rhetor that maintains an image of the “good” in mind strives to perform “good” rhetoric that does not deceive or mislead. Unlike the Sophists, Plato posited that truth was to be known before the rhetor might perform, and that this truth gave the speaker power to move audiences:

“A man must know the truth about all the particular things of which he speaks ... in the same way he must understand the nature of the soul, and must arrange his discourse accordingly, offering to the complex soul elaborate and harmonious discourse, and simple talks to the simple soul. Until he has attained all this, he will not be able to speak by the method of art, so far as speech can be controlled by method, either for the purposes of instruction or persuasion” (Bizzell and Hertzberg 142).

The above passage from the *Phaedrus* illustrates Plato’s mistrust of language, though he continues later that the rhetor’s ignorance of right and wrong is a disgrace, “even if the whole mob applaud it” (my emphasis). In this, Plato stakes a claim for the practitioners’ ethical involvement with his art and with those whom he attempts to persuade. For Aristotle, one of the chief purposes of the *Rhetoric* is also to gain access to the truth, and the rhetor can only expect to gain sight of the truth by enacting the good — through “good” behavior, judgment, and wisdom. To do this, the rhetor “observes in any given case the available means of persuasion” (153). After articulating the three modes of discourse — ethos, pathos, and logos — Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*
painstakingly outlines ways which a speaker might adapt his discourse to an audience’s concerns; it is important to note, however, that the rhetor molds his speech with the greater good in mind, which means, his aims for persuasion are in his audience’s best interest as well. Clearly, a sort of public duty drives both Plato and Aristotle, though Aristotle’s dialectic may better illustrate the range of political and/or civic responsibility.

The rhetor, for Aristotle, must strive toward the good, and must uncover the truth. However, neither Plato nor Aristotle explicitly connects the role of rhetor and citizen in the way that Cicero does: “[T]he wise control of the complete orator is that which chiefly upholds not only his own dignity, but the safety of countless individuals and of the entire State” (204). And similarly, in his Institutes, Quintillian defines the provinces of both grammar and rhetoric, then extrapolates the role of the orator. Following Cicero’s reasoning, Quintillian suggests that the rhetor must not only be essentially good — “he who would answer my idea of an orator, must be a good man, but that no man, unless he be good, can ever be an orator” — the ideal orator must be a good man “skilled in speaking” (347). Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, Quintillian: four classical rhetors spanning just as many centuries, whose ideas are all founded on goodness and truth. The important linkage between these four thinkers, and others, is 1) an insistence that the individual rhetor better himself, though the study of his art, and 2) that this rhetor thereby benefit others by applying his art in service of the community. The rhetor is responsible for both artistry and action.

If classical rhetors established a relationship between the speaker and audience, and if they were concerned, implicitly, with audience response (i.e. how the audience responded and/or acted upon rhetor’s discourse), the later 16th century Peter Ramus
took emphasis away from public responsibility, and placed emphasis solely upon the speaker and his art. In fact, Ramus so limits the idea of the rhetor as to sound scathing toward classical definitions: “[A] definition of any artist which covers more than is included in the rules of his art is superfluous and defective. For the artist must be defined according to the rules of his art, so that only as much of the art as the true, proper principles cover — this much is attributed to the artist, and nothing further” (Ramus 565). In short, though classical rhetoric split the emphasis between the rhetor and the situation, Renaissance humanist gave primacy only to the individual. Bacon later underscores this primacy with the idea that the role of rhetoric is to apply “reason to imagination for the better moving of the will” (Bacon 629). All of these attributes, the reason, the imagination, and the will reside within the individual; later 18th and 19th century rhetoricians (Campbell, Blair, Whately) continue to “improve” the individual rhetor by focusing upon arrangement and style. By the twentieth century, esteem for the belles lettres was transformed into an almost singular vision for the teaching of “composition.” There were precious few theorists who retained a notion of the “purpose of rhetoric, namely Richard Weaver, who suggests that “rhetoric at its truest seeks to perfect men by showing them better versions of themselves, links in that chain extending upward toward the ideal, which only the intellect can apprehend and only the soul have affection for” (Weaver 1065). Though such examples perforate twentieth-century composition, the flood of handbooks and rhetorics which followed emphasized skill, precision, and a rubric for “correct” production: the current-traditional rhetoric.

Clearly, the study of rhetoric has been transformed over time; ideas have been modified to suit the whims of prevailing ideologies, and whole swaths of the study have
been practically forgotten. If we assume that much of the twentieth century has been dominated by current-traditional rhetoric, and if Classical rhetoric is broadly conceived here as a groundwork for examining audience and the available means for persuasion, there have been attempts to re-enliven the rhetor’s public responsibility and ethical development. One particularly fleshy study, Berlin’s *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures* develops a democratic, politically charged social-epistemic rhetoric meant to empower the socially situated rhetor. Such a catalog of adjectives should indicate that I am enamored by the book, and yet I am also stifled by its sheer magnitude: political agency, social construction, critical awareness and a demand for action — all of these are Berlin’s provinces, and his postmodern take on the practice of rhetoric suits me just fine. For now. But one other significant work draws explicit connection between contemporary views on ethical development alongside the classical view of “a good man peaking well.” Namely, paideutic rhetoric focuses this definition to suggest that rhetoric is both a faculty and a discipline, and it is developed over a lifetime of study. Paideutic rhetoric seeks to marry artistry and action.

David Fleming’s article, entitled “Rhetoric as a Course of Study,” notes the institutionalization of rhetoric since ancient times, especially during the last century and a half, and bemoans the “simultaneous rise of rhetorical theory and continued decline of rhetorical education” (69). This disparity between contemporary rhetorical approaches and classical aims is contrasted by Aristotle’s notion of rhetoric as both “a technical art ... and a civic practice” (71). Robert Connors’ introduction to *Composition Rhetoric* defines contemporary rhetorical approaches as mainly sequestered to the first year of college study, and notes that the gradual mechanization of rhetorical study—which
began just prior to the turn of the century—is largely still extant in universities today. This period, dominated by the current traditional approach, has focused the study of rhetoric upon forms and styles, and has all but disregarded notions from classical rhetoric which insist that the rhetor also be a virtuous citizen. While the rhetorical strategies meted out in the current traditional composition classroom have few, if any, civic repercussions (aside from, perhaps, a certain acuteness for persuasion without appeal to ethics), the range, discipline and purpose of paideutic rhetoric form the student rhetor into an aware, sensitive, engaged and conscientious citizen. The end result of paideutic rhetoric is the growth of an holistic citizen with eloquent sensibilities and a commitment to the greater good.

Based upon Quintillian’s model of the rhetor citizen, Fleming suggests that rather than consisting of a single battery of skills drills, paideutic rhetoric evolves along with the rhetor; he cites paideutic rhetoric as a lifelong accretion of both skill and discipline in the art of interacting with other citizens, a “progressive acquisition of discursive competencies and sensibilities” (79) which may, arguably, never be fully actualized. Connors points out that current traditional rhetoric, as well as the task of teaching composition, has been subsumed into a hierarchy which demands “mechanistic solutions” to problems of grammar, correctness, syntax, spelling; these staunch strictures are “carried forward almost exclusively in textbooks, which represent the only organ of tradition in the field of composition teaching” (14). An holistic study of rhetoric is, according the Fleming, devalued in the contemporary university, partially because a student’s civic obligation is so often downplayed.
Fleming asserts that a rhetorical education involves all aspects of the student rhetor’s interaction with her environment. Also, paideutic rhetoric is based upon the assumption that there is a greater good which can and should be sought through the study of rhetoric, and the knowledge which the rhetor acquires over time is “attained only by a combination of extensive practice, wide learning, native ability, formal art, and love of virtue” (79). More philosophical than technical, in fact, this approach can be seen as a lifestyle inasmuch as it is an affectation of the rhetor; though rhetorical techniques are central to paideutic rhetoric, the purpose of the approach is to develop the rhetor’s sensibilities, to create a fully rounded citizen capable of “virtue and eloquence” (79). In short, the sensibilities and theoretical grounding gained through rhetorical study can be applied to all practice, and all practice becomes further study.

On the other hand, contemporary rhetorical traditions, especially as they are evidenced in the academy’s standard yearlong course of study in written composition, are largely based upon a limited grouping of selected skills. Connors suggests that current traditional rhetoric is often “subsumed into pedagogies that valorize formal and mechanical correctness ... and [is] given little credence or validity by scholars outside the field of freshman composition” (13). In contrast to current traditional rhetoric which aims mostly to improve the student’s product but not the student, Fleming’s version of paideutic rhetoric assumes that the study of rhetoric has larger social implications, and that sensitivity to one’s audience and the goal of finding the best, most valuable position serves to develop the student beyond merely a good speaker. In short, paideutic rhetoric engenders a social-epistemic stance that sustains a commitment to democratic engagement, critical involvement, and virtuous action. While ideas of virtuous action
are questioned broadly, in creative writing workshops as well as in other forms of composition instruction, Fleming's ideas concerning paideutic rhetoric are germane to ways students present themselves as artists. Rather than viewing the artistic process as a stilted, singular performance, Fleming's views concerning rhetorical practice help us see the artist involved in something ongoing, a process much larger than a page or two of line breaks and imaginative play. And the connection here to classical rhetoric is refreshing in that artists might view themselves as the recipient of a substantial tradition, one that respects the work of the writer, and one that views the writing life as important and merit-worthy. Though ideas of virtue may seem tainted and disingenuous, the idea that a writer strives toward something greater than the page provides the affirmation needed to continue work that oftentimes proffers very little reward. In the workshop, it's important to remember that the study does not end with final exams, and teachers would be well advised to establish this thinking in class environments; to be an artist, one must be willing to engage the craft continually, and to work toward the goal of perfecting one’s craft, even outside of the academic setting.

The Rhetorical Situation and the Contemporary Writing Environment

Since language in ancient times was not deemed transparent or obvious, and since “truth” was generally regarded as “opinion” or “position,” speakers needed to construct a system that would aid in mediating dispute in order to discover the “most plausible” opinion in any given debate. Rhetoric is that system. Aristotle defined rhetoric as “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of
persuasion,” and then subdivided the study by three modes of persuasion via logos, ethos, and pathos (Bizzell and Herzberg 153). This faculty, or art, or discipline, demands that the successful rhetorician recognize the appropriate moment to speak, understand the wishes and desires of her audience, and make use of techniques to effectively draw upon “the storehouse of the mind.” All aspects of a rhetorical situation should be examined when working to construct effective discourse: the moment itself (kairos), an awareness of audience (addressed by appeals), and an effective means to call up effective arguments with which to persuade the listener.

An effective rhetor must first assess whether a moment is “right” for a particular argument, or consider whether tact and restraint might be in order. Also, the rhetor must be aware of arguments being made by all sides, in order to recognize where a particular argument might be insinuated. An audience, as well, may be prone to sway its opinion, and the rhetor’s recognition of this tendency only serves to bolster the chances of her argument’s success. In essence, the precise moment and locale and history and audience of an argument affect the way an argument develops, and the successful rhetor takes advantage of this knowledge in order to construct discourse. An essay addressed to one’s teacher, for instance, may not be the appropriate forum for knock-knock jokes. This assumption does not suggest that knock-knock jokes are not welcome by the teacher, nor does it suggest that a formal essay does not allow for levity. It simply means that such a specific kairotic moment does not call for jokes, no matter whose orange it is.

Beyond recognizing the appropriate moment and situation to speak or act, the rhetor must also recognize the interlocutor(s) of the particular utterance or action,
determine how the message will be received, and accommodate for the audience’s perception of the moment. Aristotle’s *Rhetoric* is “determined by three classes of listeners to speeches. For of the three elements in speech-making—speaker, subject, and person addressed—it is the last one, the hearer, that determines the speech’s end and object” (Bizzell and Herzberg 157). Once the rhetor effectively “reads” the position and desire of an audience, she may wish to appeal to the audience’s sensibilities by using the three appeals: logos, ethos, and pathos. Simply put, logical arguments depend upon a rhetor’s reasoning, ethical arguments draw upon the rhetor’s character, and pathetic arguments play to the audience’s emotions. The actual “activities that rhetors perform as they compose and present a piece of discourse” are subdivided into five canonized categories: invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery (Crowley 30). Invention enables the rhetor in her craft of constructing arguments, and the primary function of invention is to feed (as well as tap) the reservoir of ideas residing in the writer’s mind. Invention’s historical connotation embodies the “division of rhetoric that investigates the possible means by which proofs can be discovered” (8). In other words, invention comprises a compendium of techniques that the writer can call up in order to construct the most effective discourse for the given situation. Some of these techniques include stasis theory, the commonplaces, and ethical and pathetic proofs.

Briefly, stasis theory maintains as its goal the condition of stasis achieved when two sides come to mutual agreement concerning the topic being argued; it refers to a technique of reducing an argument to its simplest terms in order to discover to least common denominator between arguments. This state is reached through a series of questions about the nature and general perception of a particular issue by both (or all)
parties involved. “Ancient rhetoricians devised a list of four questions, or stases, that would help them refine their grasp on the point of contention” (Crowley 47). These questions lead from what is understood about an issue (conjecture), to defining the issue specifically (definition) and examining the issues’ importance or relevance to each party (quality), and finally to determining what action should be taken concerning the issue (procedure).

Effective persuasion, then, is constructed of sound arguments which cause a "gut reaction"—the recognition of a speaker’s accuracy as a result of empathy, reasoning, or the speaker’s perceived legitimacy—and the enthymeme is one form of persuasion that requires speakers and writers to consider the audience’s perspective. In so doing, the speaker can found logical appeals upon common topics that the rhetor and the larger audience mutually agree upon, and ethical appeals that improve the speaker’s credibility. Arrangement deals specifically with methods rhetors use to select and order proofs for an argument so that the audience might be persuaded (198).

The final three canons--style, memory, and delivery--have been the greater focus of contemporary textbooks and composition lectures. It would represent wrong thinking to suggest that these canons are also influenced by an audience’s reception to a text (appropriateness) and the rhetor’s recognition of the moment and the method in which to speak. However, style is centered upon how sentences are composed for flair and effect, and also involves an adherence to grammatical constructs and accessible, direct language. An adherence to correctness in language builds the rhetor’s credibility with her audience, and clarity bolsters the arrangement’s persuasiveness by making the message as lucid as possible. Certainly, stylistic flair is also important to composition,
and figures of speech such as metaphors and similes help ensure persuasion, as well as clarify arguments for an audience (Crowley 236). Finally, exercises in memory and delivery aid the rhetor in retaining information, on the one hand, to achieve a copious catalog of strategies for engaging an audience and to train the mind to recall this relevant information, and, on the other hand, a recognition of various modes of delivery establishes conventions and knowledge of valuable methods with which a text might be effectively presented and/or performed.

Of these five canons, the most valuable for the contemporary creative writing classroom seems to be the practice of invention. While students like myself may be comfortably aware of stylistic concerns as they’ve been laid out over years of writing and reading about grammar and syntax in composition classes, very little study prevails concerning how we might go about recognizing the most powerful methodology for argument and exploration. Perhaps one analog for invention exercises for the creative writing classroom exists in the prewriting stage of the writing process. Though students work to brainstorm topics and examples to bolster those topics, however, it is my experience that only minor emphasis is placed upon developing a broad understanding of the multiform ways artifacts can be created. By the same token, the emphasis upon style and precise imagery and description ever-present in the creative writing classroom detracts from the more significant need for students to recognize the audience being addressed and the ability to construct artifacts especially suited to that audience.

Just like other rhetorical situations, the impetus and inventive potential of poems and stories depends upon an artist’s ability to “read” an audience, and to direct work toward that aim. This awareness, it should be noted, is grounded in classical rhetoric,
and such a capacity is reiterate in contemporary composition pedagogy, practices which can benefit the instructor of creative writing. For instance, Aristotle’s foundation informs LeFevre’s assertion that all invention is indeed first a social act, and that reasoning through invention is dialectical, in that ideas upon a subject tend to accrue via a dialectical process which is dependent upon a particular audience. This very thinking is germane to an approach to invention strategies in the creative writing workshop because such an atmosphere is, at least in my own understanding, dependent upon a dialectical and reciprocal conversation. To my thinking, Lefevre’s monograph serves two distinct purposes for the study of invention and the creative writing classroom: the monograph offers an illustration of how process theory has evolved to fully incorporate an audience, and it also reinforces, at least tangentially, the communal interchange which I believe is particularly significant to the creative writing workshop. Also, it is important to note Bogen’s philosophy describing the creative writing classroom as always in process, never complete. His thoughts dovetail with Elbow’s in that classroom goals value the process itself, and from Lefevre’s viewpoint that process is dialectical.

Creative writing teachers present exercises to develop precise description, accurate character sketches, and to encourage a rigorous writing discipline; these strategies are specifically referenced in classical rhetoric, though their history is seldom articulated. Specifically, classical invention exists in contemporary creative writing and composition classrooms. For instance, beginning poets are often asked to read aloud and memorize model poems, and in some cases, teachers will require students to copy, paraphrase, and imitate the work of exemplary writers. These methods for developing copiousness are the groundwork of rhetorical study; in the pages that follow, I’ll trace a
lineage to illustrate how these practices have survived, and highlight differences and similarities between creative writing and composition pedagogies. Later, in chapter four, I'll detail a few exercises that center upon imitation as one avenue for the writer to develop her craft. While these exercises may be beneficial for the creative writing instructor, they are meant to be the starting point for greater exploration in the classroom. One cannot hope to catalogue all the ways instructors might foster this exploration; rather, exercises included in the final chapter should illustrate how facilitators can engender imaginative play, and ongoing work outside the classroom. As I see it, the two main commonalities between creative writing and composition are 1) an emphasis upon invention strategies, and 2) the function of group workshopping in the writing process. The main differences, however, reside in the supposed "natural talent" and authority of the writer. Regardless, creative writing and composition share similar classical heritage, and it is my belief that their respective pedagogies can and should influence one another.

The workshop format seems ideal for the open, interactive exploration that invention strategies facilitate. As a communal and interactive environment, the workshop classroom can provide ample space for discussion about projects already underway, discussion that leads, of course, to the next draft of the poem in process. In a typical workshop, the student is given a few moments to introduce the draft, noting possible areas for revision and particular concern. After the poem's presentation, participants offer revision suggestions, criticism, and praise; these suggestions can be noted by the writer for later use. This dialectical process reinforces the social nature of language by "sharing" the responsibility for revision, even though the final alterations on
the next draft are ultimately the writer’s decision. There is, however, a second viable reason workshops are excellent forums for invention: In-class exercises offer students an interactive avenue for developing new material, and the techniques often already used in workshops are grounded in classical rhetoric.

Aristotle defined rhetoric as "the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion," and then subdivided the study by three modes of persuasion via logos, ethos, and pathos (Bizzell and Hertzberg 153). Simply put, successful argument depends upon a rhetor's reasoning, character, and an audience's emotional response. All of these aspects should be considered when working to construct effective discourse, and invention strategies exist to fully enable the rhetor in her craft of constructing arguments. Wendy Bishop's *Released Into Language* illustrates these strategies in a contemporary workshop setting. Bishop's descriptive sourcebook highlights the "generation of material" as the most important and first step in composition, and recognizes the significance of invention strategies for the writing process. Perhaps the most obvious function for invention is to create or construct "new" ideas on a subject — to generate material (64). Since the writing of poetry and prose requires that a writer recall such strategies immediately, these collected methods are ultimately useful for a creative writing classroom. Of course, one may recognize classical invention, as well as invention strategies for the creative writing, as synonymous with the prewriting phase of process theories in composition. Bishop has arguably combined the classic meaning of invention alongside process theories concerning prewriting activities to create successful invention strategies for drafting creative writing. Bishop maintains that there are infinite invention strategies. In fact,
most writers give themselves "assignments" as one way of invention. Others choose to read and then mimic, parody, or parallel the structure of that material. Still others may rely upon a "commissioned" work for the exigency to write; one might imagine a continuum of ultimately "free" inventions, and by contrast, those that are more determined. Regardless, Bishop contends that any number of invention strategies can be constructed for particular classes and tastes. The author describes, in passing, a few easy "found" invention strategies, and claims to avoid genre-specific invention strategies (which may be too constricting). Invention strategies, she adds, tend to escape final categorization, aside from the common thread of exploration. She even notes how oftentimes strategies from composition textbooks (like the invention strategies we begin with in introductory composition courses) can be appropriated for the creative writing classroom (71).

Though classical invention’s influence upon the creative writing classroom seems evident, instructors may find these strategies somewhat difficult to implement as a pedagogical approach. In fact, some composition instructors have suggested that teachers mustn’t depend upon a single pedagogy, but rather should develop a lexicon of approaches that will prove useful in the classroom. Poet and creative writing scholar Stephen Minot, for instance, cautions creative writing instructors not to “proselytize” by projecting specific values about creativity and what should be considered “good.” Rather teachers should “draw on a full range” of tastes, and address particular student motives for coming to the creative writing classroom in the first place (Minot 393). In “Creative Writing: Start with the Student's Motive,” Minot asserts that students attend creative writing classes for various reasons, and so suggests that teachers work to
“read” these motives and address them through course design. “When we fail to do so, we begin to reward those whose approach to writing mirrors our own and unconsciously punish the rest” (394). By working to understand student motives, Minot suggests that we can successfully “tailor” (to use Wendy Bishop’s term) our creative writing classrooms to maintain a “creative” atmosphere where students work together as individuals as well as a community. Invention strategies, then, can be a successful approach to creating a storehouse of pedagogical approaches.

In my reading, I’ve recognized numerous suggestions for developing creative writing pedagogy; perhaps the most ubiquitous suggestion has been for teachers to encourage active and rigorous reading and imitation. Reading introduces a lexicon of forms and styles, while imitation allows practice and mastery of that material. Bogen’s alternative pedagogy incorporates classical imitation techniques, underscores the writing “process,” and encourages techniques that assume the “goal” of undergraduate writing is to engender functional writers, and to discourage innocuous “products.” This pedagogy lays the foundation of actual workshops, and concludes with a selection of process exercises; many of these exercises may be familiar for readers of both Dorothea Brande and Peter Elbow. Many exercises also assume a student’s voracious reading—not necessarily writing—and imitation.

It is important to note, however, that imitation has been all but excluded from the creative writing class, perhaps because it’s viewed as “copying” or mere parody. Quite the contrary, imitation helps develop a sense for language by familiarizing the writer with alternate and various structures. “Imitators may borrow the structures used in the imitated sentence, supplying their own material, or they may try to render the gist of the
original passage in other words” (Crowley and Hawlee 295). It may be constructive, then, for teachers of creative writing to read and closely imitate exemplary poems. Imitation can develop students’ copiousness, and the strategy may also diversify students’ familiarity with the work of other interesting writers. The more ways of generating material they undertake the freer they will become in their own invention (Bogen 8). Techniques of imitation and invention, Bogen contends, correspond and feed one another; indeed, after generation takes place, students can imitate styles of arrangement (drafting) in order to learn arrangement.

Reconsidering my research thus far, I’ll conclude by acknowledging the criticism I’ve received by creative writing colleagues recently. When I suggest to folks that there may be options for introducing and articulating classical invention strategies in our contemporary classrooms, I am accused of over-theorizing. Most of my colleagues rightly feel that to complicate the writing process is an injustice to students. And I agree. However, I see this research as an attempt to simplify, rather than complicate. It occurs to me that classical strategies help develop a student writer’s discipline—which is to say, these techniques foster “independent thought,” and they are perhaps the best method for exploration and discovery in language. In his essay collection entitled The Triggering Town, Richard Hugo recounts a story of passing through a town on a train, not stopping but slowing, then moving on; afterwards, an impression of the town crystallizes in his mind, and he finds an ability to write by embellishing the impression and fibbing when necessary. According to Hugo, we only need to know what we already know to begin writing about an image, and the more we feel free to lie, to
construct alternate fictions from what we know, the easier it is to compose: invention exercises provide options for searching out the fictions we know, wherever they are.

How Composition Pedagogy Informs Creative Writing

Studying discourse about writing, we discover a number of important trends concerning how theorists analyze their subject, how they refute existing models, and how they formulate new taxonomies concerning academic writing. Perhaps this academic cycle is most clearly evidenced in essays such as Maxine Hairston’s announcement that writing in the classroom is evolving through a Kuhnian “paradigm shift.” In this study, old product-centered pedagogy is overturned for a more streamlined cognitive process version. Following this evolution even further (by reading Marilyn Cooper), we discover that the diversity and sheer number of positions disseminates (or nearly decimates) the study. There’s the expressive view concerning the composition process, and within and without this camp there are divisions as to the agency of the individual, the verity of voice, the actuality of an audience. The cognitive view also locates its source within the individual, but is preoccupied with the cognitive mental processes of the writer writing. Finally, there are “post-process” theorists who are interested in social and cultural influences upon the writer. Considering the last three decades, one might say that the study of writing has been exploded to the point that no particular fragment is immediately recognizable or definable. This is not merely a complicated way of stating, “everyone has an opinion about writing.” Rather, I mean
to say that all these opinions (independently valid, independently arguable) have, in my
mind, shredded the study of writing pedagogy to ribbons. So where shall we start?

There are numerous taxonomies that are based on various systems of
classification. For example, Stephen North’s *The Making of knowledge in Composition*
examines the field in reference to its practitioners “modes of inquiry.” The two studies
that follow, however, are based upon the epistemologies of their constituents (ugh —
crumby sentence — must continue). Berlin’s taxonomy, in *Rhetoric and Reality*, begins
with 19th century epistemologies articulated by Blair, Campbell and Whately, and draws
a direct lineage to twentieth-century current traditional rhetoric. This broad swath of
practitioners are lumped together as “Objective” rhetorics, and they are noted
predominantly for their stance toward truth and reality: reality is based in the external
world, and the mind is capable — through and inductive, scientific method — of
grasping the truths which reside there. His second group is composed of folks who
believe that truth transcends the external world, and can be grasped within the mind of
the practitioner. This “Subjective” theory is often considered “romantic,” and rightly so,
as its adherents assume that “the student can discover truth, but that truth cannot be
taught” (Berlin 13). The last group, the “Transactional” theorists, “is based on an
epistemology that sees truth as arising out of the interaction of the elements of the
rhetorical situation: an interaction of subject and object or of subject and audience or
even of all the elements — subject, object, audience, and language — operating
simultaneously” (Berlin 15). Berlin’s transactional rhetoric will be reiterated and
discussed later, but first, let’s examine another similar taxonomy.
Lester Faigley’s “Competing Theories of Process: A Critique and Proposal” begins by nodding to theorists who’ve recorded a “paradigm shift” in writing discourse (a shift, of course, to the “process’ model); he then introduces, as a touchstone for the study, criticisms by Giroux which highlight the “technicization” of writing programs. Faigley notes, however, that theorists’ conceptions of this process differ widely. He divides the process view into three categories: expressive, cognitive, and social. In review, theorists holding the expressive view believe “teachers should stimulate students’ thinking by having them write in journals, construct analogies, and, in the spirit of the sixties, meditate before writing essays” (Faigley 529). The process view, on the other hand, propounds a heuristic model and suggests that the writing process is recursive— the model does not, in theory, focus upon the product, but rather the process that the writer uses in composition. Finally, the social view — the view Faigley champions — asserts that all writing takes place within a social framework (categorized as social science, language theory, ethnography, and Marxism). In each form of process theory, Faigley introduces Giroux’s (and others’) criticism to highlight the weaknesses of each theory. He closes by suggesting that writing theories take on a broader conception, to include “historical awareness,” which might help “integrate each of the theoretical perspectives” (537). The following pages will offer an overview of process theory during the pivotal era just before “social” theories took hold. Afterward, a brief examination of how these classifications have been helpful, and how they’ve been a hindrance.

It might be best to lump all the “Expressive” or “Subjective” theorists together, since they are more or less swept aside by both Berlin and Faigley. For Berlin, they
inhabit —because of their predilection toward truth and the primacy of the authentic self — his class entitled "subjective" rhetorics. For Faigley, it’s the “expressive” view. The classifications are more or less indistinct, and they thumb the same sort of practitioners for the same sort of reasons: Peter Elbow, Ken Macrorie, and others. Some might contend that the pedagogies of the expressivists are too touchy-feely and impractical; after all, G. Gordon Rohman and James Moffett suggested meditation exercises and group sessions as a sort of invention strategy. However, in light of Burke’s idea that any reading is also a misreading, it might suffice to say that the above practitioners are less alike than they are similar, especially considering the development of their ideas over time. For instance, Lisa Ede draws attention to Berlin’s possible misreading or oversimplification of Elbow thusly:

In *Rhetoric and Reality*, Berlin characterizes transactional theories of rhetoric as “based on an epistemology that sees truth as rising out of the interaction of the elements of the rhetorical situation” (15). Despite his recognition, Berlin himself fails adequately to ground his discussion of Elbow in a fully contextualized consideration of the actual classroom practices Elbow advocates and the way in which those practices may respond to the ideological and political situations of students and teachers. In so doing, Berlin may create an opposition between subjective and social-epistemic rhetoric that exists more strongly in theory than in practice” (Ede 128).

Regardless, since there are unapologetic Romantics that sing the existence of an authentic self and a reverence for transcendent truth, and since the validity of
whatever’s “higher” still hangs in the balance, let’s just say that for the most part, there are subjective rhetorics, which are a part of the process movement, but which aren’t valued all that much anymore. Folks have been critical of the rest of the process movement as well. Before we get to that, here’s some key cognitive process thinking:

In “Reflection: A Critical Component of the Writing Process, Sharon Pianko introduces two basic forms of writing pedagogy: “[A] product-oriented, content-conscious point of view,” and a “process-oriented, holistic point of view.” She suggests that a method of “guiding the development of the total writing process” (Pianko 275) seems most effective, and offers a study of the processes of “remedial” and “traditional” writers to bolster her belief that certain trends can be studied in the writing processes of traditionally “successful” students. Essentially, she finds that “successful” students spend more time prewriting and contemplating their own work — pausing, rescanning, “taking stock” of their work. Pianko concludes that, “teachers . . . must change their focus from evaluating and correcting finished papers to helping students expand and elaborate qualitatively the stages of their composing process.” Like Pianko, Nancy Sommers also refutes “linear models” of the composing process (suggested by both Rohman and Britton). In “Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Writers,” Sommers studies a group of University freshmen in an attempt to redefine the revision process as an ongoing activity, rather than a “cleaning-up” at the end of the writer’s process. In Sommers’ view, experienced writers enact revision as an integral part of the entire writing process, so that whole passages, and even ideas and arguments are held under scrutiny. Also, experienced writers maintain an idea of an audience; they are sensitive to their own malleable ideas as well as the potential wishes
of the reader. Sommers concludes: “revision is not just an isolated stage at the end, but rather part of the generative nature of the composing process” (Sommers 14). What’s more, Sommers feels that by adhering to linear models for composition, teachers foster the difficulties students already discover in the revision process. Ideas formed by both Pianko and Sommers might benefit the creative writing instructor who wishes to investigate the process of creative writing. Specifically, one might break the process down into stages, composite parts, instead of assuming that poems and stories occur fully-formed, without pre-meditation and planning.

In an effort to “provide teachers with an opportunity to see their own composing processes at work,” Sondra Perl asked a group of writers to make an audiotape of their work on an assigned essay (“Understanding Composing” 363). Perl advocates a “recursive” process where the writer “return[s] to substrands of the overall process . . .to keep the process moving forward” (Perl 364). Synthesizing the various threads of the process theorists, Linda Flower and John Hayes illustrate how linear models emphasize the final written product, rather than the “moment-by-moment inner process of composing,” (Flower and Hayes 67). To offer an alternative to these “stage” models for composition, they develop a cognitive theory of the writing process that accounts for the several inner and outer forces that guide the writer in her craft. This theory organizes the many “thinking skills” into a hierarchical structure of mental acts that occur during the composing process (367). Planning, translating, reviewing, and other processes are said to take place within an ordered mental framework. Essentially, though the cognitive model adequately succeeds the stage model, it seems some of the difficulties found with the linear process are still perpetuated. For instance, Sommers’ study of
revision strategies shows that revising processes occur throughout writing, and they may oftentimes occur simultaneously. In other words, we can frame an argument and concretize an image at the same time. For Flower and Hayes, the writing process is “composed” or “contains” a host of independently recognizable functions, a hierarchy of processes “embedded within other components.” Even for those who rely upon inspiration, this process oriented approach to creative writing can help to simplify and organize that daily practice of writing poems or stories.

To close up the process theorists, let’s consider the model sketched by Marilyn Cooper. She notes that the paradigm has shifted to highlight the process-oriented or “cognitive” model, but goes on to suggest that even this model is insufficient, since it presupposes a writer working independently without social interaction. She writes that “…the belief on which [the cognitive model] is based… obscures many aspects of writing we have come to see as not peripheral” (Cooper 365). In essence, she claims that we must understand that a writer interacts with a recognizable social infrastructure; Cooper adroitly finds rhetoricians (such as Bruffee and Reither) theorists, and linguists (Bleich, Jameson, and Labov) to support her analysis. From there, she defines an “ecological model of writing, whose fundamental tenet is that writing is an activity through which a person is continually engaged with a variety of socially constituted systems” (Cooper 367). Her definition, then, is an extension of the cognitive model — the writer is not only aware of an audience, she is in contact with and sometimes constructs that audience. Berlin’s and Faigley’s taxonomies intersect at expressive rhetorics, and both iterate the same sort of vector of composition studies, aimed outward from the subject and toward the social. The difficulty with articulating
taxonomies, however, is that divisions are always limiting, and the terms used to give
“props” to one mode of thought over another are always political. I’ll come out, now,
here at the end, and claim that I buy a social epistemic rhetoric. I see a need to develop
a democratic classroom, and I also place great value in the fact that the self is always
already constructed (in any number of ways). But I’m also prone to believe that
ideologies shift and blur, and attempt to capture one system of thought whole-cloth are
usually only partial, or contingent, or incorrect at their worst, and most always
disappointing. Does this mean that we stop drawing lines? Probably not. As long as
ideas are a social province, a shared body of shifting information, attempts should be
made to locate and define them. As far as teaching writing is concerned, this means we
should try to understand more fully what our colleagues are doing, in order to benefit
composition as a whole. For the profession, we should draw distinctions, but we should
do so with the following caveat in mind, in Faigley’s words:

If the process movement [or any movement for that matter] is to continue
to influence the teaching of writing and to supply alternatives to current-
traditional pedagogy, it must take a broader conception of writing, one that
understands writing processes are historically dynamic — not psychic
states, cognitive routines, or neutral social relationships” (Faigley 537).

The “social relationships” that Berlin proposes are linked directly to the creative writing
workshop, in which students are required to engage with an immediate audience.
Additionally, students in writing workshops must consider how to frame an individual
persona for a wider audience, the audience of editors and readers who may eventually
read poems and stories in professional journals and literary reviews. And, if the student
is ambitious and forward-thinking, these individual pieces may be included in a larger portfolio or book collection, which means careful work for the artist intent upon a career as a writer.

**Postmodern Pedagogies**

Berlin and Faigley both place process pedagogies as a sort of foil for the “new style” which incorporates a social-epistemic rhetoric. In short, rather than focusing chiefly on the writer, or chiefly upon the style and arrangement of the writer’s language, the “synthesis” of the process-pedagogies’ glacial shift is toward the consideration of the entire rhetorical situation. As an aside, I might suggest that this rhetorical situation is nothing new: Aristotle’s rhetoric laid out the groundwork, and in more recent theory, James Kinneavy’s rhetorical triangle reinscribes the situation in terms of the encoder (subject), decoder (audience), and reality (object), all mediated by the signal (language). The rhetorical situation, for Berlin, Faigley, and many others, must be fully considered when examining writing and speaking. Discussions of the rhetorical situation call into question, then, the actual or supposed role of the author, the construction of a real or imagined audience, and the reliability of language. All of these conversations imbricate, but perhaps we’ll start with the author, since that’s where the self is supposed to reside.

Postmodern theorists refute this view of the writer’s isolated and/or isolatable situation as myopic, dogmatic, even delusional. In response to the Romantic notion of the autonomous author, Michel Foucault argues that the author — much like Nietzsche’s God — has died, has been erased, or rather, has never existed as
Traditionally defined. Rather, the author is a subject, an agent, a function that is forever invented, transformed, and disseminated throughout cultures through discourse. To counter the notion that the individual is the sole agent in the writing process, Foucault demands, "the subject (and its substitutes) must be stripped of its creative role and analyzed as a complex and variable function of discourse" (Enos and Brown 193). In fact, Foucault's philosophy lays the groundwork for many other critical theorists yet examined. In short, he questions the notion of the individual, and revises the definition of the author to include the vast reservoir of social influences. This "discourse" presumes that the writer is not singular, but rather, multiform.

Though polar opposites are anathema to the theory being described, two identities seem to predominate the writer's condition. One identity is that of the mysterious and elusive self, the darker other behind the scrim of a relatively complex inspired or cognitive writing process. The poststructuralists' "socially constituted agent" represents the other identity, or rather, the opposing quorum of identities. Linda Brodkey's poignant invective, "Modernism and the Scene(s) of Writing," for example, follows Foucault's thinking by suggesting that the narrative of the "solitary scribbler" has inordinately slanted all discussion concerning artistic production. She sees the narrative of the "autonomous author" as merely one of a number of possible tropes defining the author; the preeminence of this narrative limits the scope of the author by excluding all other valid representations, especially those which affirm culture's influence upon production.

Brodkey (1987) and Karen Burke Lefevre (1987) insist that composition is a socially constituted act in which writers are mediated by numerous identities. Brodkey
critiques romantic representations that sketch a scene of writing that depends upon isolation and independent genius. She argues that the romantic ideal is contrived, inaccurate, and damaging to both authors and texts. Complementing this thinking, Lefevre’s questions the Platonic notion of an independent writer divorced from social interaction. Rather, Lefevre presents the writer as a participant in what James Berlin (1987) calls a “transaction”: the writer, topic, audience, and language itself in a dialectical exchange. Other composition theorists join Brodkey in call for social and cultural influences to be included into the mix. Among others, Joe Harris and Linda Flower revise earlier process narratives to incorporate social attributes, and to define more fully how the rhetorical situation influences production. In A Teaching Subject, Joseph Harris suggests that there may, indeed, have been a paradigm shift (as suggested by Hairston), but the supposed benefit of this shift may have been delusional, and the actual benefit will be the subject of further discussion: Harris suggests that, “[W]hile it seems clear to me that the process movement helped establish composition as a research field, I am not nearly so sure it ever transformed the actual teaching of writing as dramatically as its advocates have claimed.” (16)

Harris effectively illustrates how researchers and theoreticians are driven by certain goals that oftentimes infect the way they take on “objective” research and study. It also helps reinforce my belief that objective study does not exist, a belief, which is bolstered by the social view, the ecological model, and other ideas, which hold that the writer acts and interacts within a social framework. Additionally, Linda Flower’s “Cognition, Context, and Theory” argues for “a far more integrated theoretical vision which can explain how context cues cognition,” a vision which she terms “Interactive
Theory.” Flower suggests that claims made for the earlier cognitive model still focused on “describing basic processes and the individual writer, and continues that a “grounded theory” involves “specific knowledge about real people writing in significant personal, social or political situations.” She divides the elements of this ‘interactive theory” into three principles: 1) cultural and social context provide direct cues to cognition, 2) context is always mediated by the writer’s cognition, and 3) the purposes of the writing process are meaningful rhetorical acts.

Reading this cacophony of perspectives, we can assume at this point that the author function is contingent, multimodal, and fluid. This rethinking of the independent author also affects discussions of voice and audience because, if the author is largely a fiction or fiction(s), the “voice” of the author is equally tentative, and the actuality of that author’s audience is constantly in question. First, the rhetorical situation. Classical thinking supposes that an effective rhetor must assess whether a moment is “right” for a particular argument (kairos), or consider whether tact and restraint might be in order. Also, the rhetor must be aware of arguments being made by all sides, in order to recognize where a particular argument might be insinuated. An audience, as well, may be prone to sway its opinion, and the rhetor’s recognition of this tendency only serves to bolster the chances of her argument’s success. According to Lloyd Bitzer, in “The Rhetorical Situation,” the rhetor can read this ideal situation and decide upon how to address it. Vatz, however, suggests that the rhetor plays a creative role independent of the situation, while Cosigny suggests that the rhetor is both creative and constrained. The relatively staid assumption that an author need only “read” her audience in order to address that audience appropriately is here and forever contested.
Walter Ong adds to this discussion by drawing a distinction between the orator’s audience and the writer’s audience, which, really, is not an audience at all, but rather an imagined construct, an approximation. He suggests, however, that that like the orator, the writer, too, must construct a variety of masks in order to address and given audience (Ong 21). According to Frank farmer, a writer does indeed respond to a “chorus of voices” which guide, for good or ill, the composing process; because of this “living dialogue,” teachers of writing must strive to “deliver voice from its long romance with the true self” (Farmer 318). All of these disparate voices in the composition process may seem confusing. However, once a student recognizes that there are a variety of modes for composing the self, that student might enact the difficult work of choosing how to represent that self to an audience.

Finally, Ede and Lundsford agree with Ong that “every writer must create a role for the reader,” but they also suggest that the constraints for the reader and the writer are more complex than have been articulated. “A fully elaborated view of audience,” they contend, “must account for a wide and shifting range of roles for both addressed audiences and invoked audiences” (Ede and Lunsford 171). If we recognize the writer involved in such a dynamic interplay, we reaffirm the existence of discourse communities that affect process. Derek Owens also refutes the idyllic and misleading notion of the "universal I," and asserts that the persona is a complex and infinitely untranslatable construct of selves. He points out that "style" is oftentimes an accommodation to comfortable and familiar norms, and the variety of styles present at any historical moment exemplifies the fluid and complicated methods by which individuals represent themselves to an audience. Viewing any representation as one of
many "versions," students insinuate themselves into study, undermine representations, and seek ways of narrating themselves counter to prevailing tropes.

Simply put, there is conflict between what some call the self — which, in terms of artistic creation, is manifest as the "autonomous author" — and the social situation in which the self is housed. Since the act of writing is, of its own, accord, a way of figuring out what we know, and since the cause, the influence, the impetus, the call for writing is both diverse and mysterious, it appears to me now that writers, as a peculiar sort of inquisitive creature, must deal with this crisis, or must accept that some identities shelved in the body are at odds with one another. This acceptance, this very exploration, fulfills the role of rhetoric, which Kenneth Burke sees as a sort of police action waged in the mind. In his treatise *A Rhetoric of Motives*, he writes:

> The Rhetoric must lead us through the Scramble, the Wrangle of the Market Place, the flurries and flare-ups of the Human Barnyard, the Give and Take, the wavering line of pressure and counterpressure, the Logomachy, the onus of ownership, the Wars of the Nerves, the War. It too has its peaceful moments: at times, its endless competition can add up to the transcending of itself. In ways of its own, it can move from the functional to the universal. But its ideal culminations are more often beset by strife as the condition of their organized expression, or material embodiment" (23).

Clearly, there are many objectives for the teacher and student outlined above. Of primary importance is the construction of a writerly self, for an audience. Classical and contemporary examples from rhetorical practice may help writers to think about this
quandary. In short, if we encourage students to think about self and audience, they may be capable of discovering inventive modes of representation. Additionally, Classical and contemporary approaches to writing can and should inform contemporary creative writing workshops by demonstrating the writing life as a construction unfolding. A discussion of self and audience inevitably leads us to the crisis between artistic practice and subjective agency, a conversation seldom engaged in workshops where individual identities and autonomy are valued over a collective environment of engagement. Chapter three will develop this conversation further, to fully expand upon the conflict between the two differing pedagogical perspectives, and to show how each can be of use. “Creativity and Crisis” will illustrate the disparity between these two opposing rhetorics, and will provide a lineage, in rhetorical history, for the synthesis of competing ideologies. Views of creativity will be examined to show how some contemporary theorists combine views of the individual and the collective. It’s my intention to examine the assumptions, stated and unstated, which inform the creative writing classroom. These assumptions focus upon how the writer views herself in process, and how the goals of the class are regarded during the course of the semester. The conclusions reached here will show how process theory, social constructionist attitudes, and a revised perspective on creativity all work to the benefit of the contemporary creative writing workshop.
Why is it that we, as writers, seem intent upon mystifying the process of writing, when really it’s a practice no significantly different from, say, plumbing, or automotive mechanics? The following chapter is an effort to explode some of our attempts to place writing on a plane beyond human understanding. That said, it’s my hope to continue the discussion concerning the construction of self, to unpack the delicious difficulties regarding how writers make themselves and then present themselves to the world. Recent studies in psychology, particularly Csikszentmihalyi’s “Systems Perspective” of creativity, might help us re-envision the writer in her precarious situation. Further, a brief examination concerning interpretation, drawing upon Rich’s “Politics of Location,” will illustrate the writer continually re-inventing herself, while further analysis of Fleming’s paideutic rhetoric might enable writers to see themselves upon a path with many turns and forks and fallen timber. This conversation, then, is meant to allow the writer to be a writer, without her asking permission to practice a very simple craft, and without sleight-of-hand tricks that make the process seem daunting.

Thumb through any issue of the Associated Writing Programs’ *The Writer’s Chronicle*, and you’ll discover the salient concerns of many professional writers. Alongside commentary on writing programs, interviews, and personal narratives about craft and technique, readers also discover competition deadlines, conference announcements, and advertisements for academic writing programs. On the one hand, there exists an emphasis upon the writer as professional, as artist; on the other hand,
there’s guidance and encouragement for the writer as student. The first narrative concerns being, while the second describes becoming. The tension between these two concepts, as well as the daily demands of the writer’s discipline, underscores the split within teaching creative writing in an academic setting and begs the recurrent questions implicit in professional discussions: Does real creative writing depend upon natural talent? Can creative writing be taught?

Any writing involves a substantial investment of both time and intellectual engagement. If only the very talented compose poetry, fiction, or creative nonfiction of merit, the very task of writing regularly—and of teaching creative writing—seems a waste of time for the insecure or uncertain novice. In light of a highly competitive publication market, the unlikeliness of being recognized for one’s contributions, and the great personal anxiety of peer criticism in workshop classrooms, one wonders why, or rather, how creative writing persists as a flourishing vocation.

One possible answer highlights the mythical presence poets have maintained for centuries. Specifically, the Romantic portrayal of the writer wholly disassociated from society invests the craft of writing with particular gift and purpose. Definitions of the Romantic writer are punctuated by such loaded terms as creativity, genius, and imagination. Even in literature courses, anecdotes of extra-worldly creative prowess permeate the history of literature. Consider two examples. Coleridge claimed “Kubla Kahn” came “all at once during an opium-induced dream.” The poem, however, was discovered in earlier, cruder drafts, proving that the poem changed over time, rather than being produced whole from the mind of genius (Weisberg 115). Similarly, Jack Kerouac is said to have written On the Road in a matter of weeks, furiously typed on
paper ingeniously taped together to form one long scroll. Though a modicum of truth may exist concerning the early drafts’ form and immediacy, the novel went through a series of revisions and editions before its eventual publication.

Unfortunately, the Romantic representations of inspiration are perpetuated by creative writing trade journals and workshops, and such dramatic narratives illustrate the real crisis still plaguing creative writers: the need to be individual, gifted, prolific. In other words, some writers hope to be talented before being taught, before developing discipline, even before becoming writers. Essays in *The Writer’s Chronicle, The Poet’s Market, and Poets and Writers* focus upon issues of ownership and competition in the monolithic publishing industry. We witness the talent-oriented machinery at work as other young writers are instantly legitimated with book deals, awards, and talk-show appearances. For students, the writer’s life must seem a schizophrenic tragicomedy of glitz on the book tour and loneliness in the garret, a life of euphoria and madness. The real work of writing, however, remains hidden from view. This split reveals an inherent conflict of interest found also in the creative writing classroom.

While we focus upon making poems-as-products in a system of gains and losses, we lose sight of what should be the real goal of workshops: our aim is to foster more dedicated writers. Compositionists will recognize this conflict from the process-not-product debate begun in the late seventies, a debate which still affects contemporary writing pedagogy. Rhetoricians such as Linda Brodkey and Karen Burke Lefevre have insisted that we view composition as a socially constituted act in which writers are mediated by numerous identities. Over the last decade, composition and creative writing studies have often traded modes, and some creative writing teachers
have applied recent process pedagogy in the workshop environment. Don Bogen’s “Beyond the Workshop,” for example, offers alternative pedagogical options for a workshop format. Bogen’s claim is that workshops have come to rely upon ritualized standards and values for writing, and alternatives for students’ voices have not been fully explored. Traditional creative writing workshops generally caution students against speaking about their process in favor of listening to peer criticism. A process-oriented workshop, however, assumes that writing is not a one-way performance, but rather a reciprocal engagement with audiences and selves; in other words, the process itself is a text. The written artifact, the life of the artist, and the culture play active roles in shaping artistry.

Other studies focus less upon the practices of creative writers and more upon the creative process itself. Specifically, Diane Marsh and Judith Vollmer study the personal narratives of artists to examine how process is internalized and communicated by individuals. By examining responses of artists, the authors repeal the “relatively narrow conceptions of the creative process” (106) and offer theoretical inquiry into the cognitive processes of creators in the midst of their work. Since creative acts are defined as multidimensional and fluid, Marsh and Vollmer’s study demonstrates how any single recognition of the creative process may be limiting and presents a broad, “comprehensive conception of the creative process” in order to take into account the varying influences and behaviors of working artists (106). Applying this thinking to the workshop means that facilitators must resist the Romantic representation of the autonomous author, while also maintaining an awareness of the crisis between subjective agency and a dynamic creative process.

Considering some recent research into creativity, students might engage a revised notion of inspiration as a psychological nexus of recognition, in which cultural influences, as well as those of the craft’s history, come into play during—or rather, preceding—composition. This understanding contradicts assertions that the poet is filled with the breath of God and that the creative work is, thereby, a product fully formed, unpremeditated, unconsciously formed by the writer who—until now—acts as the catalyst. With this revised definition of inspiration, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi’s “Systems View of Creativity” offers a persuasive model of how creativity takes place. His model, coupled with recent criticism of the creative writing workshop, can allow teachers to redefine methods used to teach such an unteachable discipline. If we accept that the writer is both social and individual, we then can look to applications that highlight the dynamic involvement each writer has already begun before taking up the pen. In so doing, we may revise staid assumptions about the craft, notions we have already accepted, by and large, and which we continue to bequeath the burgeoning writers in our creative writing groups.
Writers everywhere struggle against seeming pretentious when claiming the lofty role of the writer. The hidden assumption in dubbing oneself a writer holds that if we can define writing, especially good writing, then we can also perform it. Australian author Kevin Brophy notes this very real reluctance to call oneself a writer: “I am a creative writer. I do it, but I cannot easily talk about it or analyze it. More accurately, perhaps, I think I do it—though I might have borrowed some vain emperor’s non-existent new clothes—and who can I trust to tell me if I have?” (187). Since the writing process is in a perpetual state of flux, authors continually question their own performance of the craft—and others, too, question their legitimacy. With this crisis in mind, one might argue that a writer is a person in the process of becoming a writer.

To assuredly point to the writerly self and stake a claim in that esoteric territory seems to imply a moment of stasis never reached. Retellings of inspiration likewise limit our full recognition of the creative process and its attendant influences. Timothy Clark notes that authors often narrate an unrealistic scene of the inspired, or creative, moment. Writing and speaking about writing becomes a sort of sleight-of-hand trick, in which the author performs without showing the functions and underpinnings of that performance. Clark recognizes the illusion taking place and cites an early confession by Edgar Allen Poe: “Most writers—poets in especial—prefer having it understood that they compose by a species of fine frenzy—an ecstatic intuition—and would positively shudder at letting the public take a peep behind the scenes […]” (qtd. in Clark 1). Clark insists that the subjectivity of the writer is a site of inevitable conflict, and his theory of inspiration relies upon a “crisis of subjectivity at odds with any humanist mythology of
psychic power” (11). For the student writer, the workshop is the most immediate influence, and the forum often can be a psychologically grueling experience. On the one hand, when the class widely accepts the writing and its writer, the praise generated can indenture the writer to a life of solitude and dedication. On the other hand, seemingly immediate rejection and correction can be devastating.

As a result of the increasing drive for creative writing and writers to be legitimated in an expansive industry, critics question the growth of creative writing in the academy. D. G. Myers, for instance, delineates the creative writing program’s illustrious, dynamic history but notes the inevitable concern with teachability. Joseph Moxley’s collection bemoans the split between creative production and other modes of literary study. Greg Kuzma, too, argues that writing programs confine writers, which leads to the inevitable decline in academic and artistic standards. Some critics, however, defend the traditional antagonism between creative writers and the rest of the English department. Proponents of the current workshop format argue that the workshop serves to weed out untalented, unmotivated students. What’s more, some see the workshop as a way of tempering writers to criticism, while also providing lessons in audience expectation. Of central concern in this ongoing discussion is that this publication-oriented role of the workshop is at cross-purposes with the real goals of workshop pedagogy. In short, the workshop focuses too much upon the products of the writer, whereas too little is done to nurture the process of the writer.
Construction of the Self

We cannot hope to understand which influences cause the pen to move across paper, what causes the act of writing to take place, nor can we causally equate one line of reasoning with any definite sequence of events in the artist's life. The influences enacted to place me before this computer screen, for instance, are surely too numerous to count, and in attempting to dredge my deeper motives, I recognize still more drives. The event called writing is a particularly complex scene, where all sorts of influences converge at once and appear, with the help of the author, manifest as text. Also, writing is a peculiar labor only inasmuch as it is mysterious and transformative; since reasons for the text's newly minted existence are both arbitrary and indefinite, the act of writing inhabits a convincingly mystical aura. Certainly, authors have been persuaded that since we cannot fully explain its causes, and since we cannot decipher its meaning, some have suggested that writing — at least the writing of "literature —must be the sole propriety of the individual. Take, for example, the anecdotal stories of extra-worldly creative prowess that permeate the history of literature. In short, claims of "inspiration" oftentimes discount the vast milieu of cultural influence that define creative work. Especially in light of the influence of social constructionism on the teaching of writing, it has become difficult to overlook the limiting narratives of individual creative production.

Once convinced that the individual self is fragmented, we must question whether creativity can be defined in Romantic terms that depend upon a limited view of creative imagination. Alas, the idea of the individual itself becomes suspect, and so creative process narratives seem both limiting and disingenuous. Rather, "selves" seems more
apt when referring to the author, and "processes" better names the author's diverse modes of creative functioning. But the nature of creativity seems to me to be a great deal more than a semantic squabble. By simply renaming Romantic notions of creativity, inspiration, etceteras, we gloss over the key issue: How artists define process is, in short, also how they define themselves.

In essence, within every writer there are two definite identities, and there's value in both these selves. For some, a Romantic identity provides a sort of security blanket. My students, for instance, are skeptical when the origin of creative work is called into question — some learners argue that poems originate in the heart, of course, or in the soul. Culture, then, is merely an abstract environment that leaves no impression upon the artist. This belief is widely accepted by students and teachers alike, and with at least some basis. Since even some professional authors are reluctant to deny the existence of self, or soul, or will, or that indefinite spiritual something that allows each person to act. At once, writers are asked to resist the Romantic representation of the autonomous author, while maintaining an awareness of the crisis between subjective agency and a dynamic creative process. Creative writing, in short, is both social and individual, and both identities are held within the self. As an alternative to the romantic ideal of the independent genius, the writer composes in response to specific environments and ideologies. To this end, creative writers should examine deep-seated, romantic representations, and then investigate alternative ones.

While some critics see the creative writing classroom wholly dissociated from other programs within the English department, I believe that these pedagogies operate in tandem with other composition pedagogies. In fact, since all writing is creative, other
pedagogies may aid creative writing teachers in their sensitive role (of teaching the "unteachable"). Several composition pedagogies bring a wide variety of theories to bear in re-working how the contemporary writing classroom is taught; specifically, culture studies and social constructionist theorists insist that the writer is not alone when writing. Linda Brodkey demands that the myth of the "solitary scribbler" largely an inaccurate representation. In her chapter entitled "Picturing Writing: Writers in the Modern World," Brodkey shows that the scene of the isolated writer is only one of many tropes which describe the writer's activity. If we successfully view the writer as situated within an interactive community of discourses, we may also show how invention strategies are useful for exploring voice, audience, and style in the creative composition process.

Kevin Brophy mediates the dilemma between writer and the world in his essay collection *Creativity*. Noting the conflict between what the writer must see as the central purpose of the craft, the daily practice, as it were, Brophy states that "it is useful to come to some understanding of how tricky is the writer's part of the bargain struck between writer and reader. Perhaps too by spending some time writing creatively we can be moved towards greater awareness of what we are as readers" (99). In essence, this crisis of subjective agency melds writer with audience, makes the two seem less distinguishable, and reveals the integral parts they share. Problematizing the notion of the author in the creative writing workshop—by incorporating Foucault’s "What Is an Author?"—Brophy notes that when workshop participants insist upon being (or, becoming) creative, their experience of self is inevitably limited. By contrast, Brophy calls for a workshop environment that does not depend upon formalized and rigid
construction of authorial selves, but rather an environment which separates creativity and authorship. Such a workshop offers the "freedom" which a Romantic and illusory workshop limits in by its own expressivist rhetoric. "[I]t is possible to experience a model of writing which helps expose the illusions attached to the myth of the author as an original and individual source for texts" (47). Frankly, definitions of "inspiration," "creativity," and "genius" assume that the individual is the sole agent in the production of remarkable work, and in an atmosphere of growing distrust of such presumed intellectual autonomy, it should be our job as writers to refigure these terms.

Claims of inspiration discount the vast milieu of cultural influence that defines creative work. Compositionist Derek Owens refutes the idyllic and misleading notion of the universal I and asserts that the persona is a construct of selves both complex and infinitely untranslatable. He points out that style is an accommodation to comfortable and familiar norms, and the variety of styles present at any historical moment is testament to the fluid and complicated methods by which individuals represent themselves to an audience. These representations, or manifestations of rhetorical styles, can be "envision[ed] as relative fictions or 'masks' which writers present as one of many possible identities." In short, all writing is performance. Moreover, "To write (or paint or perform or compose) is to fashion not so much our identities but bridges that connect various facets of our experience within an incomprehensibly dense and unmapped personal landscape." (Owens 165) Owens’ assertion is key to the contemporary creative writing workshop, where students analyze dominant representations of style in order to offer alternate representations.
The crisis of subjective agency is certainly central to the stance writers take concerning both the production and consumption of creative writing. Brophy mediates the dilemma between writer and audience or between, in Csikszentmihalyi’s terms, the individual and the domain. Noting the conflict within what the writer must see as the central purpose of the craft, the daily practice, as it were, Brophy states, “it is useful to come to some understanding of how tricky is the writer’s part of the bargain struck between writer and reader. Perhaps too by spending some time writing creatively we can be moved towards greater awareness of what we are as readers” (99). In essence, this crisis of subjective agency melds writer with audience, makes the two seem less distinguishable, and reveals the integral parts they share. Brophy notes that when workshop participants insist upon being—or becoming—creative, their experience of self is inevitably limited. By contrast, Brophy calls for a workshop environment that does not depend upon formalized and rigid construction of authorial selves, but rather for an environment that separates creativity and authorship. Such a workshop offers freedom that the Romantic-driven workshop obscures by its own individual-centered rhetoric. "It is possible to experience a model of writing which helps expose the illusions attached to the myth of the author as an original and individual source for texts" (47). Definitions of inspiration, creativity, and genius assume that the individual is the sole agent in the production of remarkable work, and it is our job as writers to reconfigure these terms.

I’m not arguing that brilliant creations do not exist. After attempting to critically unmask great works of science and art as mere cultural constructs, essayist Benjamin Taylor deduces, “what was ‘higher’ turned out not to be a cover for something else; what was ‘higher’ turned out to be higher” (2). His assertion, then, is that while we can
certainly see that social, cultural, and economic forces bear influence upon the creative act, the act itself contains no less measure of genius. In fact, he continues, the current concept is one grand delusion which humankind would suffer to dismantle: “Genius, the Romantic idea of man transcending himself, is what we cannot not believe in” (2). In the same vein, Timothy Lensmire and Lisa Satanovsky explore the impact of Romanticism upon contemporary writing workshops. The Romantic mythos, they argue, is attractive to new writing students, who face a creative process that is difficult to describe and investigate; the Romantic view of the artist as an autonomous agent, performing unconsciously, relieves artists of certain burdens. Recognizing the conflict between Romantic individualism and postmodern decentering, though, Lensmire and Satanovsky still rely upon terms such as freedom, which reiterates the Romantic notion and which is, for the most part, a lie to students itching to effectively express. So, it’s not necessary to refute the concept of creativity, but we should assume that our definition of creativity must be expanded to include the vast matrix of influence that determines any creative act.

A Dynamic Model of Creativity

Csikszentmihalyi’s model, simply put, refutes the idea that solely the individual generates a creative work. On the contrary, though his dynamic model of creativity still illustrates the individual’s role in the creative process, equal agency is distributed among the social and cultural systems influencing that individual. Csikszentmihalyi’s model names three interrelated loci of activity functioning all at once in the creative
process, and these points of contact are what he terms “dynamic links of circular causality” (329). According to his theory, “each of the three main systems—person, field, and domain—affects the others and is affected by others in turn. One might say the three systems represent three ‘moments’ in the same creative process” (329). What’s more, Csikszentmihalyi articulates time’s significant role in determining the creativity of any act or artifact. Although some consider particular literary values to be common sense, a systems view of creativity illustrates how the passage of time and the evolution of taste affect the creative process.

Here’s a recent example of the system at work: A few years ago, I assigned a collection to my creative writing workshop that I felt was an example of remarkable work. That collection, Campbell McGrath’s *Spring Comes to Chicago*, is a delightful exploration delivered from the perspective of a blocked writer, sitting at his computer, near his window, reading *People* magazine, and thinking about the snow falling outside and the diabolical squirrels chattering nearby. What feels at first like a joy ride through oblivion turns out to be an accurate indictment of culture, money, the monumental task of excavating snow from one’s sidewalk, and, of course, the egg rolls at Ho Wah Garden. I requested that my students read the book because “The Bob Hope Poem” blends poetic genres, from haiku to Whitmanesque catalogues, in sharp, precise, and elegant language. Moreover, I felt that the work represented some powerful ideas, and, for this reason, I suggested that my students keep track of McGrath’s destined greatness. Several months later, I discovered that McGrath received a MacArthur genius grant—$380,000 over the course of the five years and one of the most prestigious awards for creative persons. While I must admit I felt redeemed, having
aptly judged McGrath’s work, I also winced at the economic strata that McGrath himself had called into question in *Spring Comes to Chicago*. The disparity between the have and have-nots in the American literary scene is almost as stark as the larger economic system in which such generous patronage is made possible.

It is, indeed, difficult to reconcile the fortune of a few gifted individuals with the squalor, isolation, and even suffering of countless other talented folks, but Csikszentmihalyi’s model does offer an explanation for the way these influences function. Essentially, a caucus of esteemed individuals (the field) decides that McGrath (the individual) exhibits attributes of genius, his oeuvre is selected and instantly legitimated as a valid poetic achievement, and then his clout and the final editorial stamp of approval is transmitted to a larger collective readership (the domain). Given the element of time, this readership influences and is influenced by a set of working writers and is continually altered by past writers whose work is finally validated by the field. What we also see by this example is that fields vary, according to criteria for determining creativity and genius. Kenneth Hope asserts that the MacArthur fellowship program’s “conception of creativity…is closely linked with the human attributes of curiosity: the love of exploration and discovery, a passion for making things, for seeing things anew, for tackling intractable problems, and the quest for growth, mastery, quality, and beauty” (117). The system works because there is social agreement upon the relative greatness of each selected (or refuted) work and, in this case, a defined set of criteria for assessing potential geniuses. Though one may assume that great work exists and should be revered, the key issue, however, is how we view the creative process that spawned the great work.
This rethinking of the creative process does not discount the creative works that continue to be produced and discovered. In fact, some Romantic views of genius still work within the constraints of the dynamic model. For instance, when Benjamin Taylor asserts that the Romantic ideal of genius is “something we cannot not believe in,” his main concern is that we do injustice to the keen faculties of individuals if we neglect to view excellence for what it’s worth. Taylor relies upon an antiquated model of genius which gives sole possession of creative ability to the individual, but the model of the creative person to which he refers is not at odds with a dynamic view of creativity. He quotes from Diderot’s eighteenth-century encyclopedia entry to describe the creative individual “whose ranging soul occupies itself with all that is in nature, receiving from her no idea that is not roused by [a] distinctive play of emotion” (qtd. in Taylor 13). A striking resemblance exists between this definition and the MacArthur Foundation criteria. Yet, neither definition suggests that the individual is not acted upon by a host of significant influences. Rather, the individual and a host of other influences together define the creative process.

We see the process taking place at every level, but certain behaviors of particular individuals seem especially keen, and usually these are behaviors claimed to have been performed unconsciously: stories composed in an afternoon; poems that transfix the mind in wonder; portraiture leaping from the paintbrush, stunningly alive and with depth of feeling. Though the individual claims to have been inspired, these moments of heightened intensity illustrate a psychic state in which all three fields interact simultaneously. Consider the inspired moment when a poem leaps from the writer’s
imagination. Rather than claiming that this inspiration came from somewhere beyond the writer, it seems more apt to suggest that the mind of the artist has reached an opportune moment in which rhythms, sounds, and connotations seem to arise unbidden from memory. And yet, understanding that all these poetic constructs rise from memory, then memory and the knowledge within the individual are bound by a particular field, a particular domain, and a particular time period.

The workshop, then, is a hybrid classroom. The work of the class is the daily practice of writing, and the shared process of that practice. The shop, on the other hand, represents the daily critique that validates (or invalidates) the writer's work. The individual, the field, and the domain are evident. Each workshop participant is, of course, an individual charged with altering the transmitted codes from the domain; this newly organized information is then transmitted to the field—fellow workshop participants, including the workshop facilitator; the attributes of the new information are assessed, suggestions for alteration provided, and, in some cases, work may be immediately legitimated or devalued. If we view all three influences as equally affective in the system, the workshop can thereby foster the creative process and alternatives for investigating this process.

What, then, is at stake if a dynamic model is never implemented in the creative writing classroom? If creative writing workshops are growing in popularity, why is a revised notion of creativity and a restructuring of the workshop necessary? Simply put, a product-centered pedagogy stifles growth. Such a system places too much emphasis upon subjective agency, too much emphasis upon particular, validated modes of writing, while devaluing other valid, though unfashionable, styles and voices. Equally important
is an awareness of those students whose abilities are driven by an intense need to know or, rather, to explore. Writer and teacher Stephen Minot cautions instructors not to proselytize by projecting specific values about creativity and what should be considered good. Rather, he suggests that teachers “draw on a full range” of tastes and address particular student motives for coming to the creative writing classroom (392). Many students delight in tinkering with language or are fascinated by the writerly mystique, some value current trends in writing and theory, and still others wish to explore writing as an extension of political aims. In other words, if we place too much emphasis upon individual poems or stories submitted to workshop, we might neglect to consider the real reasons students enroll in workshops and the variety of benefits they might gain. To this end, Minot suggests that teachers read these motives and address them through course design: “When we fail [to consider students’ motives,] we begin to reward those whose approach to writing mirrors our own and unconsciously punish the rest” (394).

Wendy Bishop addresses one student motivation in a brief article entitled “Poetry As a Therapeutic Process: Realigning Art and the Unconscious.” She describes a classroom that encourages students’ exploration and personal statement but that also recognizes the academic and aesthetic motivations that demand students resist Romantic and altogether disingenuous representation. A confessional mode, then, allows students to develop authentic voices; such an authentic voice involves the reader in the writer’s felt personal experience and offers the author an avenue for therapeutic healing. Most importantly, Bishop calls for fresh ways of talking about writing that enliven the workshop environment: since “poetry is the stuff of the self” (262), the workshop should offer an environment where authors exist without presumption, without
undue influence because motives for writing are varied and dynamic. The workshop environment, while not a therapy session, should foster continual writerly process and growth, rather than expect and reward finished products.

One effective way to reiterate this growth process is to underscore the assumption that all writing is culturally mediated and that ideas are shared, even in their most inspired forms. In a brief study of creativity, Fern Tavalin articulates several key assumptions for the workshop that examines the constructedness of a writer’s position. First, writers and their works are never fully formed, especially not in draft form—and talking through drafts offers an avenue for student writers to recognize the impression their work provides for a diverse, live audience. Additionally, one’s knowledge and performance of any craft is cumulative and infinite; since writing is a continual process, young writers may avoid stylization and stagnation of craft and may look to innovative ways of constructing new work (140).

One major criticism of the workshop atmosphere is that it is often passionless and uncreative and, therefore, engenders disengaged, even mechanical writing. A way to revitalize of the art is to give back to the creative writing student what is most desired: an individual perspective. While the assumptions here figure the writer as constructed by a larger cultural context, the individual is a necessary component of the becoming matrix. Moreover, creative writing teachers can promise a great deal of rigorous, active writing and thinking; we can also point toward a wellspring of energy for writing and thinking about our perspectives and offer ways we might engage and resist various constructions. The creative writing workshop can facilitate the formation of self and
voice—not by deterministic frames for authenticity and not by Romantic illusions of the writer's life, but by multimodal, multivocal exploration of text and craft.

However, to assert that writer must engage her own constructions of self is to also insist that the writing subject investigate her own literary values and aesthetic tastes. For the individual geared toward a career in creative writing, this means interrogating intellectual spaces which are generally considered the province of literary theory. Again, though some may believe that creative writing is apolitical, the questions raised in teasing out aesthetic values underscore the conflicts inherent in constructing the self through creative writing. An essential conflict arises when suggesting that certain theories limit the richness of text as a result of single-sighted political motivations, and this conflict is a direct result of the assumption that some theories are either more or less politically motivated than others. I'd like to first define why ALL theories must limit the richness and specificity of text—because of political aims—and then I'd like to explore ways in which theories since the sixties have worked to de-limit interpretations.

Interpretation in the Creative Writing Workshop

All interpretations are political, no matter which theoretical constructs drive the reading of a text. When a critic interprets a text, a particular agenda, based upon assumptions concerning texts, must be applied in order to limit the study and generate a uniform, unequivocal evaluation. To accomplish such a focused reading, particular textual aspects must be valued; along with these oftentimes rigid values, a critic also
maintains an attitude toward literature and its situation within a larger cultural or political context. New Criticism, for example, has been most concerned with discovering literature’s “intrinsic worth” through close analysis; since the theory concentrates on a work of art as an object in itself, the validity of any other agenda—relating to the artist or the texts’ situation within an ideological/political framework—is, perforce, denied. But even these terms break down under scrutiny. New Critical aesthetics represent a “political” bias based upon taste. In fact, it can be argued that no approach to literature is purely formalist because language always tends to refer to a contextual framework. By contrast, gay/lesbian/queer criticism places a text within a cultural framework—a context—that accounts for gender struggle against compulsory heterosexuality. It would be absurd to contend that formalist assumptions are not always already political, or to further assert that political approaches such as gay/lesbian/queer theory unduly “limit the richness and specificity of literary texts.” Regardless, all approaches are political, and all approaches to literature limit interpretation by adhering to certain assumptions while discounting the merit of other agendas.

However, as a rebuttal against the idea that the more politically overt theories reduce texts to a specific social platform, it can be argued that these theories, in focusing upon contextual issues as well as textual issues, have worked to de-limit interpretations. Rooted in Marxist ideas of struggle against ruling ideologies, feminist criticism has shed light upon [this definition is oversimplified] an otherwise accepted though consistently oppressive patriarchy. And unlike more formalist interpretive strategies, queer theorists work to explode binary oppositions concretizing gender, refuse supposed universals such as compulsory heterosexuality, and even attack
supposed gender “norms” as—in fact—abnormal shams, Emperor’s clothes, performances. Most political theories functioning since the sixties have denied the existence of “metanarratives.” These theories strive to reinforce the idea that all texts are subject to slippage, and that even the most widely accepted attitudes about interpreting texts are largely oversimplified.

To locate oneself within a cultural and political framework is similar to retracing an immense historical structure, just as time-elapsed camera footage documents a reef’s slow accretion in reverse; an undersea video re-envisions one generation after the next melting away to reveal a seminal living organism—an iridescent, medusa-headed globe—thriving beneath countless teeming fathoms. Adrienne Rich’s “Notes Toward a Politics of Location” is an effort to reconstruct her own socio-political situation a priori, by noting, questioning, searching, paring away abstraction along with ages of dead wreckage. I was drawn to this essay in particular because I’ve studied Adrienne Rich’s poetry, to some extent, and appreciate her impassioned struggle to speak with language she claims is not her own. Just as her poetry is challenging, this essay also intrigued me because its multifaceted style resists interpretation. By employing a method of noting endless signification, her essay embodies the complicated nature of its subject matter—to locate oneself within the world and within a purpose in the world. In recognizing the countless dependencies and interdependencies between reflections, memories, and observations, Rich aligns herself with various and sundry political movements inextricably tied to feminism.

Perhaps most telling about Rich’s “Notes Toward a Politics of Location” is the
style in which it is written. True to the title, the essay’s form remains a series of notes, thoughts penned of a moment and without censure. Rich begins by groping for reasons to speak, and works to reveal the source of her own political self by employing a method of peeling away layers of context—geographic location, race, and even gender. She writes of an “absolute necessity” to question “where, when, and under what conditions have women acted and been acted upon?” The notes ensnare the author in a web of signification; trapped by so many ways of seeing herself, Rich recognizes the multivalence of her condition as a white, female, Jew, lesbian feminist. In many ways, the essay is a way of capturing the limitations of even these monikers. Deliberately left as brief jottings, the writing displays Rich’s ambivalence while composing what she feels should be said clearly and honestly about herself and her struggle as a feminist.

To me, the real force of these annotations lies in the fact that their focus is, at times, so shattered. Each short paragraph becomes part of a somewhat fragmented pastiche of thematically inconsistent ideas. Situated in Europe in 1984, Rich realizes that her own thoughts are displaced to some degree by being the result of thinking which took place years ago and on another continent; realizing that her own ideas have evolved to a great degree, she asserts “I come here with notes but without absolute conclusions” (637). A significant lack of conclusion is the muted refrain of the entire essay. Each segment within the notations defies immediate correlation to the next. Rather, Rich’s method is to draw tenuous connections between immediate observations, and she refuses to offer conclusions. For instance, she writes from a struggle to pare away abstractions: “Abstractions severed from the doings of living people, fed back to people as slogans.” The line, though resonant, becomes a slogan
itself, and hardly falls into a linear argument or progression. Might this non-linear collage be another central concern of the essay, then? An effort to locate oneself by way of a circumlinear progression? A felt veldt not immediately captured for display as animals of logic? In fact, a lack of conclusions is central to the process of note-taking, and just as the practice will not allow closure, Rich reveals a dilemma in struggling to locate oneself within an “ever widening landscape.”

She writes: “I need to understand how a place on the map is also a place in history within which as a woman, a Jew, a lesbian, a feminist I am created and trying to create” (638). Perhaps this effort to locate oneself as the creator of a place and also the subject created by a place is key to Rich’s method in continually noting her own existence within a matrix of contexts. Perhaps the final locus, then, is within one’s own body, the body which is gendered but is still no mapped terrain; what’s more, and perhaps most importantly, is Rich’s suggestion that endless re-signification within her one body means more than having “a vulva and clitoris and uterus and breasts. It means recognizing this white skin, the places it has taken me, the places it has not let me go” (640). Rich is defined, or located, as a woman, white, of Jewish descent though privileged to have been born “three thousand miles from the war in Europe,” and she recognizes her own struggle against the patriarchy—the false male universal—in the company of several additional groups.

Aside from geographical and biological location, Rich also aligns herself with various incarnations of feminism. A cumbersome and recurrent influence in her essay, Marxism rears its familiar, mustachioed face: *The German Ideology* “happens” to be on hand, and merely dredging up the name is a signification in itself. Though Rich does
not pause to puzzle through the book’s influence here, resonances call out from the text— “definite individuals,” “ruling ideas”—like an idiot twin long in hiding behind a scrim. Marxism appears to represent one ideological phase which the author has turned away, or evolved away from, in order to relocate herself within her own body, rather than attempting to escape from the body by applying a Marxist struggle of “lofty and privileged abstraction.” “Perhaps this is the core of the revolutionary process,” writes Rich, “whether it calls itself Marxist or Third World or feminist or all three” (638). Rich continues to document various feminist incarnations; she uses the term “we,” then wonders who this “we” refers to, as no single individual, group, or movement embodies all women. Rich’s is a constant struggle against abstraction, to adequately name and locate an identity, to name the company kept and the mission which activism should aspire to.

As suggested earlier, the method driving Rich’s “Notes Toward a Politics of Location” might be [inadequately] compared to the work of an undersea documentary. What is true about both the underwater camera-eye and Rich’s essay calling for a particularly active feminist political awareness? Both rove through murky matter while focusing upon images or instances that seem most striking. From Cold War fixations of a primarily white patriarchy of sameness to a divergent and often reductive system of categories for feminist action, racial codification, geographical sense of place, Rich’s essay meanders to some degree from one politicized element to the next—with the intent, it seems, to expose what may be laid bare: beneath each question of race, gender and class still remains an oppressive hulk begging to be explored. The creative writer, as Rich might suggest, should be willing to enter into a dialogue with her own
situatedness, since that subject position inevitably influences how the self is portrayed to oneself and to one’s audience.

**Paideutic Rhetoric and The Creative Writing Workshop**

Whereas a general definition of Classical rhetoric is broadly conceived as a sort of lexicon of techniques for examining audience and situation, and then recognizing how best to react, speak, and mediate, paideutic rhetoric focuses this definition to suggest that rhetoric is both a faculty and a discipline. David Fleming’s article notes the institutionalization of rhetoric since ancient times, especially during the last century and a half, and bemoans the “simultaneous rise of rhetorical theory and continued decline of rhetorical education” (69). This disparity between contemporary rhetorical approaches and classical aims is contrasted by Aristotle’s notion of rhetoric as both “a technical art ... and a civic practice” (71). Robert Connors’ introduction to Composition Rhetoric defines contemporary rhetorical approaches as mainly sequestered to the first year of college study, and notes that the gradual mechanization of rhetorical study—which began just prior to the turn of the century—is largely still extant in universities today. This period, dominated by the current traditional approach, has focused the study of rhetoric upon forms and styles, and has all but disregarded notions from classical rhetoric which insist that the rhetor also be a virtuous citizen. While the rhetorical strategies meted out in the current traditional composition classroom have few, if any, civic repercussions (aside from, perhaps, a certain acuteness for persuasion without appeal to ethics), the range, discipline and purpose of paideutic rhetoric form the
student rhetor into an aware, sensitive, engaged and conscientious citizen. In other words, the sensitivity that is availed to the rhetor is parcel to a more virtuous mode of behavior: paideutic rhetoric couples rhetorical technique with disciplined daily practice. The end result of paideutic rhetoric is the growth of an holistic citizen with eloquent sensibilities and a commitment to the greater good.

Fleming notes that perhaps the largest philosophical distinction that marks paideutic rhetoric specifically is its long-term scale in comparison to other forms of rhetorical indoctrination. Fleming suggests that rather than consisting of a single battery of skills drills, paideutic rhetoric, based upon Quintillian’s model of the rhetor citizen, evolves along with the rhetor; he cites paideutic rhetoric as a lifelong accretion of both skill and discipline in the art of interacting with other citizens, a “progressive acquisition of discursive competencies and sensibilities” (79) which may, arguably, never be fully actualized. This form of rhetorical study may be more aptly modeled by the four-year rhetoric curriculum present in colleges over a century ago, but since current-traditional rhetoric is indelibly linked with a limited introduction to skills in the contemporary freshman composition course, few if any examples of a paideutic approach are institutionalized today. Rather, Connors points out that current traditional rhetoric, as well as the task of teaching composition, has been subsumed into a hierarchy which demands “mechanistic solutions” to problems of grammar, correctness, syntax, spelling; these staunch strictures are “carried forward almost exclusively in textbooks, which represent the only organ of tradition in the field of composition teaching” (14). An holistic study of rhetoric is, according the Fleming, devalued in the contemporary university, partially because a student’s civic obligation is so often downplayed.
Paideutic rhetoric, then, is an extensive study not easily encapsulated into a single curricula of exercises. Rather, Fleming asserts that a rhetorical education involves all aspects of the student rhetor’s interaction with her environment. Also, paideutic rhetoric seems to be based upon the assumption that there is a greater good that can and should be sought through the study of rhetoric, and the knowledge, which the rhetor acquires over time, is “attained only by a combination of extensive practice, wide learning, native ability, formal art, and love of virtue” (79). More philosophical than technical, in fact, this approach can be seen as a lifestyle inasmuch as it is an affectation of the rhetor; though rhetorical techniques are central to paideutic rhetoric, the purpose of the approach is to develop the rhetor’s sensibilities, to create a fully rounded citizen capable of “virtue and eloquence” (79). In short, the sensibilities and theoretical grounding gained through rhetorical study can be applied to all practice, and all practice becomes further study. The practice of paideutic rhetoric is only achieved through discipline, and the discipline achieved manifests itself in practice. On the other hand, contemporary rhetorical traditions, especially as they are evidenced in the academy’s standard yearlong course of study in written composition, are largely based upon a limited grouping of selected skills. Facilitated by a basic skill and drill pedagogy, Connors suggests that current traditional rhetoric is often “subsumed into pedagogies that valorize formal and mechanical correctness ... and [is] given little credence or validity by scholars outside the field of freshman composition” (13). Perhaps most notable about the distinction between current-traditional rhetoric and a paideutic approach is the fact that the former study is mandated by the university and is then apprised for its effectiveness through examinations and essay drills, whereas the
paideutic approach is loved and chosen by its practitioners. A paideutic rhetoric enables the student to work toward the goal of virtue, which manifests itself as civic duty.

Finally, paideutic rhetoric has as its aim the creation of a “certain kind of person,” one who consistently acts in accordance with the understanding gained through rhetorical study. The rhetor’s achievement in rhetorical study, then, could be gauged by their level of awareness of rhetorical traditions, forms and techniques on the one hand, and in the actualization of a certain ethically situated character on the other. Though disciplined study and rigorous scrutiny of rhetorical situations do not necessarily produce such an honorific citizen, they are one way of inculcating the student rhetor through her constant analysis for the best option in any given situation, and virtuous skill keens the rhetor’s sensibilities. According to Fleming, this citizen with “certain ethically framed, action-oriented, intellectual capacities” can discover the “right” position in any case, and is driven by virtue to pursue the best argument. By contrast, current traditional rhetoric is theoretically closed-ended, and serves little greater aim than to implant certain skills into student rhetors without also directing them toward a beneficial end to their study. Rather, current-traditional rhetoric’s skills-based approach was to be the end of composition study in itself. Essays students submit are assessed for mechanical correctness and canonized modes of discourse, “marked up in red ink for the perceived problems each one evinced, and returned to students, who were either expected to repair all of the marked errors or merely move on to the next assignment and do better” (Connors 13). In short, current-traditional rhetoric was epistemologically anesthetized, removed from any social awareness or larger purpose.
Clearly, the differences between current-traditional rhetoric and paideutic rhetoric are alarmingly and increasingly significant. The dangers of a mechanized and purposeless approach to composition can be recognized with each two-dimensional essay we read during portfolio evaluations. Where once rhetoric whetted the appetite for greater understanding in service of a greater good, composition skills sometimes fail to reveal the search and struggle that make rhetorical study worthwhile. In contrast to current traditional rhetoric which aims mostly to improve the student’s product but not the student, Fleming’s version of paideutic rhetoric assumes that the study of rhetoric has larger social implications, and that sensitivity to one’s audience and the goal of finding the best, most valuable position serves to develop the student beyond merely a good speaker. In short, paideutic rhetoric engenders a social-epistemic stance that sustains a commitment to democratic engagement, critical involvement, and virtuous action.

Much of what’s done in the contemporary creative writing classroom can be seen as an outgrowth of this sort of lifelong engagement, an active practice of self-discovery and self-creation. Though some might insist that the creative writing environment is designed to mold and shape young writers and their work, a broader view as proposed by Fleming will show that the construction of oneself is constantly evolving. What’s more, though terms such as “virtuous action” and “greater good” may be held suspect by contemporary practitioners, there’s still the broad-based awareness that students are striving toward the goal of personal betterment through writing. If the poems and stories created in the contemporary creative writing workshop are considered a mouthpiece of this best self, it becomes clear that a paideutic practice is in keeping with workshop
practices. Finally, though the goal of civic action is to be broadly conceived, we might do well to investigate how our classroom practices dovetail with our engagement as citizens. The closing chapter, entitled “Facilitating Resistance in the Creative Writing Workshop,” will develop a cultural-studies based creative writing workshop, in order to integrate the above conversation. This chapter will include several practical implications and exercises, for the teacher interested in incorporating the findings of this dissertation. Again, these exercises are not meant to be an exhaustive compendium of skills exercises a teacher might implement, but rather illustrate ways workshop facilitators might open up the process for students willing to engage the process of becoming writers. An extensive bibliography will follow, to offer a wealth of additional sources for creative writing teachers, as well as composition teachers interested in incorporating creative writing in the classroom.
CHAPTER 4:

FACILITATING RESISTANCE

IN THE CREATIVE WRITING WORKSHOP

How well you know this fastidious monster, reader,

--Hypocrite reader, you--my double! my brother!

Baudelaire: Au Lecteur

trans. Stanley Kunitz

If it has been established, thus far, that workshop facilitators must consider the construction of self in the creative writing workshop, by helping students see themselves in a larger socio-cultural enterprise embodied by the writing life, then how are teachers to practice the work of teaching creative writing? First, it’s perhaps best to answer the prevailing question preceded by the simple word “if.” If we examine our own assumptions as writers, we might help others in their own processes. If we revise our notions of creativity, we might demystify the process of writing and show how daily practice and constant attention develop talent. And if we teach writing from approaches developed by successful rhetors throughout history, we might serve the greater good of helping writers see themselves in an evolution toward “becoming” writers. This concluding chapter addresses romantic illusions of the writerly practice, and develops a few methods to approach the widening gap created by narratives of creativity and talent. Also included is a brief discussion of a cultural-studies based workshop, which helps students see themselves situated within a larger strata. Finally, I’ve annotated a few of
my own practices in the creative workshop, practices that are to be seen as starting points for the teacher involved in facilitating the creative practices of students. As suggested elsewhere in this dissertation, all writing should be viewed as a creative enterprise; “creative” writing is simply an unfortunately misguided attempt to delineate the writing of poems, stories, drama, and any other genre now being attributed to writing courses outside of conventional rhetoric classes. That said, there are exercises that seem suited to the creative writing workshop, and so I’ve included a few of these here. Beyond these simple approaches, however, the teaching of creative writing, and the devotion to a creative practice, are mostly a decision made by teachers and students. An attitude of acceptance, if you will. This attitude, perhaps, is the inescapable something else that cannot be taught, but that can be acknowledged and encouraged.

One brick wall outside City Lights Books in San Francisco celebrates the impassioned life of famed French poet Charles Baudelaire. The brightly painted mural depicts the nineteenth-century writer as a visionary: an oil lamp burning, the poet’s wild eyes gazing forward, an active pen upon paper, and at the center of the composition, the image of a heart engulfed in flame. Such a romantic portrayal is not at all uncommon, as so many honored artists are historically viewed as somehow removed from an “ordinary” life; such a portrayal presents the writer as an isolated genius sensitive to a realm of understanding not immediately accessible by others. Not ironically, this image of Baudelaire is flaunted by the very same bookstore that is also the locus of yet another romantic and idealistic passel of poets. The San Francisco “Beat” poets might be seen to illustrate a common representation of writers who are
both visionary and resistant to culture’s status quo. While the trope of the cool-headed hipster poet is largely viewed as hackneyed and somewhat familiar, at mid-century folks like Alan Ginsberg, Lawrence Ferlinghetti and William Burroughs represented the lunatic fringe of contemporary American poetry. Student writers consistently romanticize their beatific, drug-induced image even today, and poetic styles perpetuated by the Beats are often mimicked in the creative writing classroom. One student in my recent “Imaginative Writing” course, for example, spent the first four weeks of the semester writing metric anaphora in the style of Alan Ginsberg’s “Howl.” While I appreciate methods which celebrate and recall Ginsberg’s famous work, I also hope that my students will experiment further, rather than reiterate tropes such as these which, after fifty years, have lost much of their radical edge. What’s more, I encourage my students to look beyond the single representation of the romantic writer, and to examine how writers are constituted by their specific environments. In so doing, students may discover techniques that may effectively resist inaccurate representations, and may develop a more engaged writing process.

As suggested earlier, Brodkey’s Academic Writing as Social Practice problematizes representations such as these of Baudelaire and the Beats, noting that such scenarios are borne of a romantic notion of the writer that casts the scene of writing as one of isolation and independent genius. She argues that such a scene is entirely contrived, is largely inaccurate, and that such thinking objectifies not only the author, but also the texts they have produced. “Because such a picture prevails as the reigning trope for writing, we find it difficult to remember that the solitary scribbler tells only one story about writers and writing” (55). Brodkey contrasts the romantic scene of
writing with a resistant one exemplified by modernist Virginia Woolf’s *A Room of One’s Own*, which, she claims, creates a “scene” for writing that is removed but also in contact with an environment. For Brodkey, Woolf’s room for writing accentuates process and a company of other writers, rather than the autonomous and romantic loner. Completing this thinking, Karen Burke Lefevre’s *Invention as a Social Act*, argues that much composition theory and pedagogy relies upon a Platonic notion of the writer divorced from social interaction. Contrasting this idyllic notion of the independent writer, Lefevre’s monograph presents the writer as a participant in what James Berlin (1987) has described as a “transactional” rhetoric: the writer, her topic, her audience, and language itself create a dialectical exchange always in play during the writing process.

To recognize the writer involved in a dialectical interchange with an audience and subject, then, is to reaffirm the existence of particular discourse communities that affect the writer’s process, and evidence of these communities reinforces contemporary “social” ramifications. In closing, I’d like to reiterate the notion that creative writing is a social (rather than an individual) act, and the brief glance to the creative writing classroom shows how this idyllic notion has been perpetuated. Because the dialectical process is always at play, creative writers can examine deep-seated romantic representations, and investigate alternative representations. Finally, the following specific pedagogical strategies for the creative writing classroom reinforce the notion that writing involves a transactional interplay between a writer, language, and a real (or imagined) audience.

As an alternative to the romantic ideal of the independent genius, then, let us picture the writer as a socially constituted agent, writing in response to her specific
environments and ideologies. If we can successfully view the writer as situated within an interactive community of discourses, we may also show how writing strategies can be useful in the creative composition process for exploring resistant and/or alternative representations of voice and style (terms which are, in fact, largely dependent upon the “autonomous self”). But this “rethinking” of the independent and autonomous author is not an easy task, partially because of the long history of such thinking. Many decades after creative writing began as a fledgling academic approach, the creative writing "program" has become somewhat independent and admittedly isolated from the larger English department. In “Notes from a Cell,” Eve Shelnutt laments this isolation as divisive, and mourns the passing of a once unified study of both the production and interpretation of literature. Rather than flourishing as a discipline, Shelnutt adds, the creative writing program has become embroiled in an unhealthy antagonism with theory and composition studies, a destructive relationship that leaves creative writers separated from and disregarded by other academic approaches. This remove has created an homogeneous program, largely bare of theoretical basis, though Shelnutt recognizes the “worthy considerations” for writers, when the craft of writing seems diminutive. “More difficult,” Shelnutt comments, “are considerations of a writer’s attitude to language and form as carriers in themselves of political and social assumptions as well as methods by which social and political effects are or can be expressed in imaginative writing” (19) Hence, all writing has agency, though the creative writing program’s isolation may have undermined otherwise powerful resources for study.

“Resistance,” as Henry Giroux argues, “redefines the causes and meaning of oppositional behavior by arguing that it has little to do with the logic of deviance,
individual pathology, learned helplessness (and, of course, genetic explanations), and a
great deal to do, though not exhaustively, with the logic of moral and political
indignation” (Theory and Resistance 107). A resistant creative writing pedagogy, in
essence, reworks the thinking that has otherwise formed the isolated creative writing
workshop. By reevaluating the purposes of the poetry workshop, writers can inevitably
manipulate supposed assumptions concerning the poetic genre. Additionally, poems
produced become part of a process continually being formed, and the workshop
environment itself mediates each author’s process, so that writing poetry becomes an
investigation, and the (un)finished product represents a variety of modes the writer has
moved through. A poetic of resistance, then, insists that writers be politically situated,
so that their unique perspectives become an invigorating force in each “writing
initiative.” Either abstractly through persona, or more concretely via open, personal
revelation and exploration, each author must eventually locate a political stance, its
construction, and its agency. Assumedly, the "situated" author becomes aware that the
writing process itself is constructed. This awareness allows writing to become a site for
active resistance, by revealing cliché and abstraction, decoding the constructed
reasoning behind text, and discovering fissures where cultural codes can be analyzed
critically.

Creative writing workshops which I’ve taught, observed, and attended over the
past several years have tended to mystify the writer’s work and have oftentimes
disregarded or neglected with suspicion the impact of theory upon the writing process.
In fact, some poets and colleagues defend the rigid borders between "creative" writing,
composition studies, and literary criticism. As a result, the creative writing workshop
has become, in some cases, an isolated star chamber, and discussion being waged
concerns practices within creative writing which are not commonly perpetuated
elsewhere—controlling metaphor, concrete imagery, rhythm, etc. Other composition
courses I’ve taught and observed, however, make use of a variety of techniques
designed to draw out the writer’s immediate thoughts about the self and about
experience; particularly, the expressivist mode of writing championed by folks like Peter
Elbow and Ken Macrorie require the writer to speak directly from her own perspective.
Even though this mode of writing assumes an “authentic” voice, expressivist writing
serves as a conduit to analyze and challenge one’s own experiences. For this reason,
contemporary critics continue to defend expressivist writing as a valid tool for engaging
the student writer. According to Thomas O’Donnell, “expressivism’s unguardedness
about political matters is part of its appeal to teachers of writing who embrace its
practices or spirit; this same unguardedness, however, leaves a lot unsaid that I think
can be said about what an expressivist epistemology might look like and about how
expressivist practices facilitate investigations of political issues in unique, sometimes
necessary ways (424). By contrast, the “confessional” style in contemporary poetry,
brought to the fore by writers such as Robert Lowell, Anne Sexton and Sylvia Plath,
may be seen as an analog to composition’s expressivist writing. Though such poetry is
still widely mimicked in the current workshop environment, the theoretical exigency for
such writing is widely undervalued, oftentimes viewed as a scapegoat for “real” writing,
and workshop environments regularly foster androgynous anti-writing in lieu of revealing
personal material. Specifically, “traditional” poetry workshops demand the writer not
explore subject positions through criticism and peer interaction: though the confessional
mode in the poetry classroom is certainly well established, students are generally cautioned against speaking about their process. Usually, a student reads the product aloud in workshop, then remains silent while the class critiques the work. To my mind, this practice can be stultifying for a writer striving to be understood. The poem produced becomes a riddle an entire classroom works to decode—readers often conflicting largely, the poet casually reduced.

A culture-studies based poetry workshop, which I suggest here, still depends upon scrutiny of technique, and still values “poetic” language—precise imagery, concrete detail, lyrical resonance and conscientious construction of the poem’s form. However, in a culture-studies based workshop, the author, involved in an interactive construction of creative work, assumes that her craft is imbued with ideologies borne of a particular subject position—the poem is, perforce, codified. In his book *Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures*, James Berlin details the individual writer as a matrix of subjectivities, an agent who constructs and is constructed by a culture:

> [T]he subject is the point of intersection and influence of various conflicted discourses—discourses about class, race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, religion, and the like. Of equal importance, the subject in turn acts upon these discourses. The individual is the location of a variety of significations, but is also an agent of change, not simply an unwitting product of external discursive and material forces (78).

In other words, the writer—the subject—transacts with “external discursive and material forces,” rather than merely being produced by these forces, in order to construct artistry. This means that a workshop participant must examine her “constructedness” critically,
to discover how poems produced are parcel to the writer’s particular position within a discourse community—or indeed to her positions in multiple discourse communities.

To this end, workshop facilitators must strive to engender this critical consciousness amongst writers, to encourage active and sensitive dialogue with their environment. Culture studies—which blends aspects from sociology, philosophy, history and political science—addresses the needs of an otherwise stale creative writing classroom. A culture studies based workshop demands that each writer maintain particular subject positions for defensible reasons. A culture studies approach to workshopping encourages students to analyze their own dialogue with such issues as race, gender, class, and sexual orientation, and may also foster an instrument for resistance through critical writing concerning these issues. Additionally, the culture-studies based poetry workshop requires writers to analyze a host of alternate subject positions in terms of deep-seated conflicts identifiable within culture. A writer may then turn this reflection inward and consider her own subjectivity, to look at her process and poems derived from that process as a manifestation of this position, and, most importantly, to speak and write openly from this perspective. Furthermore, in light of the restrictions of a creative writing pedagogy mired in the defense of the independent genius, it may be useful to interrogate alternate meanings of “culture” which construct, alter and absorb a host of ideologies and subjectivities. Such an investigation may lead to the recognition that the cultural matrix from which an author writes is multivalent and fluid, and that the influence of this environment upon the writer enters into the writer’s text by force. A writer writes through an environment, is constructed by that environment and by the language that mediates the writer’s relationship with her
environment. What’s more, the writer’s perspective is a product of an intense and ongoing dialectical relationship with the history of her particular craft and the stylistic constructs that are always evolving and at play in the text being constructed.

As noted earlier, one major criticism of the workshop atmosphere is that it is oftentimes passionless and “uncreative,” and that such an atmosphere engenders disengaged, even mechanical writing of predictable poetry. One might suppose, then, that such an atmosphere should be revitalized if it is to continue to be meaningful to the student and the craft of poetry as a whole. Some suggest that a way of accomplishing the revitalization of artistry is to give back to the creative writing student what is most desired: an individual perspective. Unfortunately, part of the theory underlying the pedagogy described here is that the writer is always already constructed by culture. For this reason, we can hardly promise students that they can develop a unique perspective, even though this seems to be the objective of so many creative writing workshops. However, we can promise a great deal of rigorous, active writing and thinking about culture, and through this process we might also lead students to discover a wellspring of energy for writing and thinking about perspectives, by offering techniques designed to engage and resist “inaccurate” and “unjust” constructions.

Examining my daily practice as an instructor, I discover a few key principles form my pedagogical groundwork. Perhaps the most fundamental of these is a commitment to a democratic classroom that provides a forum for open and engaged learning. Illustrating such a classroom, Berlin describes an environment of freedom and active participation, where students are respectfully considered partners in the process of education, and where an instructor’s role is one of facilitation and mutual involvement.
Berlin’s philosophy demands that a commitment to praxis — the fusion of theory and practice — is essential to maintaining a successful and rewarding classroom. I strive to create such a venue by making course objectives and criteria clear immediately, and by encouraging truly active student interaction with my syllabus, materials and discussion. The classroom is a forum for creative development of writing skills, but it also serves as a socializing environment where students learn to critically analyze themselves as dynamic citizens. Though we’ve never discussed our agenda together, the real power of the classroom seems clear. I hope to enhance the potential of each student’s involvement in the attendant world while also teaching appropriate critical analysis and “active” writing.

Highlighting rewards the writing process offers, I work to illustrate that jotting quietly in a journal, or composing clear sentences, or perfecting one’s craft can provide immense personal fulfillment. For example, we oftentimes perform writing exercises to develop our writing skills. Exercises work for writers just as they do for athletes — the writer, wishing to keep “in shape,” must constantly practice the craft and constantly fine-tune her work. These impromptu assignments require the mind to function immediately, without preparation, and work to “tone” one’s critical and creative thinking. Aside from timed writing and free-writing exercises, my students and I also perform various writing exercises used to spark creativity and, perhaps, to generate material for later use in upcoming work. These exercises are important because so often students are reluctant to take the time to simply sit down and write, for no reason other than to keep the hand, and the mind, in motion. It’s a worthwhile tradeoff, then, to take ten minutes of class time and ask students to carry out simple exercises. I enjoy teaching writing because I
enjoy the act of writing; I also enjoy helping students become better communicators and more imaginative participants in the world they inhabit. That said, my “honest” intentions are to be an engaging and compassionate teacher. To accomplish this goal, I draw from Friere’s liberatory pedagogy, outlined in The Pedagogy of the Oppressed, a teaching manner that seeks to undo repressive teaching structures and foster trust, mutual involvement, and, yes, even love. To me, Friere’s thoughts lend a sense of empowerment, a sense of hope, and a sense of possibility to my teaching practice. This influence is illustrated most, perhaps, by our review at the beginning of each semester, our daily discussions of writing exercises and class-selected reading, and our frequent conferences student-teacher conferences.

As a practice and as a fundamental and influential tenet, I facilitate my creative writing classroom with student needs and desires in mind, a technique grounded in the belief that a teacher’s purpose is to serve students. Perhaps because my own teachers regarded me with respect and compassion, I intend to be an active recipient of each student’s work, and I strive to take an interest in classroom progress. For example, each day in class we spend class time actually writing — rather than simply talking about writing, which seems to me twice removed from the process — and then we discuss our work together in a session I call briefing; these sessions are fast-paced workshops in which we offer immediate impressions about each other’s work. When the students write, I write. I invite them to talk openly, with decorum, about the group’s work, so our class sessions are always lively and very productive. Also, midweek, we hold discussions concerning assigned writing. Like the exercises, our discussions are vital and enlightening, and when I’m engaged in the knowledge-making process with my
students, they, too, become engaged. Lastly, I hold frequent conferences with students to discuss work completed for class. During these brief sessions, my students and I examine drafts of poems they’ve written, but we also talk about the headlines, or the soup in the cafeteria, or a roommate’s constant loud music. Regular conferencing maintains a beneficial line of communication with students, and when folks visit my office without a draft but with some other greater concern, we sometimes chat while playing with Legos or listening to music. Conferences also help me improve as a teacher, because students often bring up exercises and discussions that have been particularly effective.

It is important to me to maintain a friendly, respectful classroom. I feel that the classroom can become an open arena for learning, where the teacher is as involved in the process as any other member of the group. I’ve observed several instructors — both colleagues and mentors — and have found that the most successful of these have worked to relax classroom tensions that tend to stifle learning. These teachers possess the courage to be kind to their students; they recognize that students generally desire to learn, and that the process can be a relatively friendly and mutually beneficial exchange. What’s more, these teachers are generous with their “wealth” of knowledge, and offer it to whoever will listen. This is the sort of enthusiasm I hope to bring to my classroom each day. Like many teachers, I believe that students cannot be forced to learn; however, I also believe that a teacher’s enthusiasm for the subject can successfully cause the student to want to learn, and to be willing to work toward understanding the subject. To do this, I try to set an example for my students as an active, growing writer; I share my own work with students — including all of the
frustrations that accompany the process — and encourage them to present their own work to the class.

Beyond my bearing as a facilitator, several postmodern theories inform my attitude toward language, and thereby affect my practice as a composition instructor. My conflict between being a writer and being an academic mirrors Peter Elbow’s conflict along similar lines. But more importantly I often remain unsure of what I think, what I know, and I rely upon the study to help shape my thinking on a daily basis. What’s more, the enormity of rhetorical study appears, at times, daunting, uncertain as well, and contingent. Having visited a number of professional conferences, recently, I’ve noticed a trend among fellow colleagues also entering the profession; it occurs to me now that to be welcomed into academia, one must be positioned within a school (or schools) of thought. It’s sexy and viable to pronounce allegiance to Bahktinian poststructuralism, or to soapbox a post-Fordist social-epistemic pedagogy. Also, short black hair seems to be in vogue. My dilemma, however, is that I don’t find myself solely within any single camp. Rather, I’ve drawn piecemeal from a host of divergent ideas, and though I try to draw correlations between various sets of abstract thought, sometimes I remain divided. Though these contradicting ideologies may make me seem uncertain, I’m still reluctant to take up the banner of any formalized mode of thinking. What’s more, I find the structure of so many “camps” to be frail and fragmentary as well. And there are central problems in “staking a claim”: at the very least, if an academic is worth her salt in any sense, the activity of intellectual engagement ought to play some role in shaping and transforming thought. Simply put, the ideologies one espouses are bound to change. To “take on the mantle,” as it were,
is to assume a stasis in one’s consciousness that does not, cannot exist. Finally, I
didn’t sign on to this rig to be cool or sexy (you know, like all of those other cool and
sexy rhetoricians). I got into this gig because writing’s captured my imagination, has
held my attention, has helped me grow. I suppose you could say I felt “called.” But
there’s one drawback I should mention. The theories of writing I’ve summarized in the
above questions have wrenched my thinking in ways I never dreamed; I’ve become
skeptical of language, and I mistrust prepackaged ideas. This makes it tough to be a
teacher of language and ideas. At any rate, I still take the advice of Julie Kearney and
“trust the process.”
Implications

The primary business of poetry is to offer evidence of what is really in the world, or what is there before our eyes and what is within us — those double theaters offering us their tragedies and comedies, their grand guignol and slapstick — and we have to be recalled again and again to the difficult knowledge that not only are there two theaters, but that each of us is at once the tormented and exalted and valiant hero, the rapacious and licentious villain, and the spear-bearer in the dumb-show chorus. . . . It is perhaps all of this that poetry must take into account now, and what is most astonishing, as always, is that poetry is not merely to offer evidence for all of this, but to sing that evidence.

C.K. Williams, *Poetry and Consciousness*

To my mind, poetry and composition are likened in any number of ways. Not only does a good essay delight in its singing of evidence, a good poem moves its reader with a powerful rhetoric. Those essays that I hold as models are those that maintain a dual function to record and to sing. Take, for instance, Italo Calvino. In his collection entitled *The Uses of Literature*, he writes: “The author is an author insofar as he enters into a role the way an actor does and identifies himself with that projection of himself at the moment of writing” (111). Calvino’s language is simple and unadorned, a recording of the function of the self in writing, and yet its rhythm and tenor are poetic. Calvino’s simple elegance is illustrated later, in his essay collection *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, a series of essays that outline the literary values of lightness, quickness,
exactitude, visibility, and multiplicity. In his essay on "lightness, he describes the "clarity and immediacy" in the work of Milan Kundera:

His novel *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* is in reality a bitter confirmation of the Ineluctable Heaviness of Living. . . . For Kundera the weight of living consists chiefly in constriction, in the dense net of public and private constrictions that enfolds us more and more closely. His novel shows us how everything we choose and value in life for its lightness soon reveals its true, unbearable weight" (7).

I chose these examples from Calvino, as well as the above C.K. Williams passage, simply because I find the language beautiful. However, there’s also another theme always playing in the margins that deals with the writer’s complicity in any number of narratives. This "other theme" may be the more important one, because it deals not with simple craftsmanship, but rather the content of the writer’s craft. In her essay entitled "The Art of Finding," poet Linda Gregg recognizes a scission between form and content when she writes, “I would not have worked so hard and long at my poetry if it were primarily the production of well-made objects, just as I would not have sacrificed so much for love if love were mostly about pleasure" (34). The writer plays a dual role, to record and to sing, to narrate both inner and outer lives, but with care. During any form of composition, the writer is simply the vessel in which consciousness travels, a function, a typist, a tool. But awareness of this complicated role can lead to something more than simply taking notes. This something more is what I usually term poetry, and it happens even when we’re not breaking lines.
In her essay entitled "Places to Stand" (1999), Wendy Bishop outlines the role(s) of the Writer-Teacher-Writer. Recognizing the political arena within academia — the drive to valorize literature over composition, the conflict between expressivist and social-constructionist theories — Bishop advocates a sort of dual role for the writer who finds herself teaching writing, and finally, the writing teacher who finds herself writing about teaching. Her idea, which rings true with me as well, is that the Writer-Teacher-Writer must navigate these intellectual straights while also clearing a path for a writing career as well. Like Bishop, I too began my graduate study in the MFA program, then moved on to composition. Before starting the Ph.D. program, I had no idea what a complicated, politically charged environment I was to enter, and now, afterward, I admit that I have just as many questions as I do answers. As a writing teacher, I allow these questions to guide me further, and treat classtime as a wide-eyed inquiry into the daily practice of writing. As a practitioner, and as an artist, I trust that the lessons I’ve learned thus far will enable me to guide my students. And when I cannot answer my students’ concerns, I have some hope that through the writing process we’ll figure out where we stand.

One of the most challenging aspects of composition, as I see it, is deciding how best to compose an identity, and then how to address that identity to a particular audience. Even as I write this passage, I am imagining the self I hope to construct; I consider what I know about the topic, I consider how the reader might interpret my explanations, and I judge how to compose the self accordingly. As James Berlin writes:

[T]he subject is the point of intersection and influence of various conflicted discourses—discourses about class, race, gender, ethnicity, sexual
orientation, age, religion, and the like. Of equal importance, the subject in turn acts upon these discourses. In other words, the writer — the subject — transacts with “external discursive and material forces,” rather than merely being produced by these forces, in order to construct artistry.

For my ongoing discussion, Berlin’s rhetoric insists that a writer must examine her “constructedness” critically, to discover how writing is parcel to the writer’s particular position within a discourse community. This “discourse community” is crowded with competing narratives, none of which are the last word.

There are several points at which my teaching practice is replicated in both the composition classroom and the creative writing classroom. As I see it, creative writing and composition are both forums for developing craft, and class time is a great venue for trying out creative strategies for writing. Though the disciplines overlap, each mode has its vernacular. Clearly, a writer cannot learn about paragraphing by writing a semester’s worth of sonnets, nor can a poet develop an ear for rhythm by rechecking her grammar. So, in each class, there’s a general reservoir of common terms that inform class discussion. To give shape to our key terms, I offer numerous models. In the composition classroom, this usually means we’ll select a few good meaty articles — I usually gather a packet together and let the students choose a few models early on. In the creative writing classroom, we’ll rifle through a few journals and anthologies for good examples. As my mentor would say, it’s better to be overfed that under-full. So, in both creative writing and composition, I like to engage lots of conversation and reading of useful models. What’s more, I try to import aspects of one discipline into the other. To
my mind, examples of contemporary poetry should be used in the composition classroom to effectively teach various general composition characteristics, and to dispel the myth that all poetry is self-absorbed confession. Another Writer-Teacher-Writer, Marvin Bell also encourages the crossover between disciplines. Maintaining that "poetry is not, despite certain definitions and credos which imply so, a spontaneous outpouring of language" (1). Bell defines numerous characteristics of poetry which prove useful in the composition classroom: to illustrate aesthetic subtlety, an awareness of objective and subjective positioning, powerful persuasion, the construction of thought through language, concise language, effective organization, clear effective purpose, style, diction and so on. Bell refers to these characteristics as poetic "techniques," and though I do agree that such traits can and should be illustrated in the classroom, in both class forums I foster idea of writing creatively. To illustrate models, we read and even write poems in the composition class, and read critically and write theoretical work in my poetry class.

Beyond this common language, this storehouse of models for continued study, I suppose both classes share two other common denominators: imitation and invention. Though the term "imitation" bemoans a negative connotation, my students enjoy weekly parodies and recitations. In the composition classroom, this means we take a brief passage from an example, and rewrite it from a slightly different perspective while mimicking the style of the piece. Imitation does more than simply entertain, though. Phrasing, pace, and language use are all lessons learned through parody exercises. We perform similar exercises in the creative writing classroom, by re-writing poems or passages of fiction, paying close attention to line-breaks and turns of phrase. Yet
another way that we enjoy imitation exercises, the recitations students perform weekly are an excellent way to become familiar with the sounds and patterns of a poem or short fiction. Lately, for instance, we have recitation “slams” during class time; students prepare and read selected poems the class has studied, taking liberties with voice and presentation. These are oftentimes very lively performances, where students “get inside” the voice of the poem, and we select a few readings for a final round of presentations. Recently, the class awarded a 1970’s KISS album and a dog-eared volume of Nietzsche to the award-winners. The exercise served to get student involved in the making of the poems, and allowed all in attendance to hear works read aloud.

Finally, I offer a plethora of daily writing exercises, mainly because through these I’ve learned a great deal more about writing by writing, and then by going back to see what I’ve done and how to improve. Ron McFarland’s "An Apologia for Creative Writing" draws a connection between the teaching of creative writing and other forms of composition, and goes on to suggest that “though we all have one gimmick or another… what we ‘do’ comes down to how we can help a writer with his or her work once it is underway” (37). Though I share this belief, I try to emphasize the validity of writing exercises for their own sake, writing just to be writing, to start something, to get the mind in motion, to make a move. The "final product" may not be prize-winning material, but the process is worthwhile. Also, these exercises work as a way to begin thinking about essays, and show students the value of invention in continued writing.
Exercises

"Kelly’s Game" — In his collection of brief lectures entitled *Six Notes for the Next Millennium*, writer Italo Calvino suggests that in order to make an object "visible," an author must cause her reader to "hallucinate" an experience with the subject. This vision then makes imagery within a composition ultimately palpable and therefore meaningful. In order to provide an adequate impression of objects and environments in our narrative essays and profiles, it is oftentimes important for us to include accurate, detailed description. This means taking specific notes about our observations (i.e. the "critique") so that we can later recount these observations more fully in essay form. This exercise is a way that we can concentrate and hone our descriptive abilities. It also provides an example of group work in action.

To play Kelly’s game, I bring to class a collection of 30-50 small personal artifacts (I have an old bale-clasp Ball jar with trinkets I’ve collected over time), and two dark-colored handkerchiefs. Before group members arrive, I lay one handkerchief on a table in the center of the room, and arrange all artifacts on this first handkerchief so that each object is clearly visible. Next, I place the second handkerchief atop the first so that all objects are concealed. When the students arrive in class, I announce that we are going to try an experiment that will require close observation and a good memory. Each student will need a pen and tablet. We all gather around the table and, after everyone is set, I lift the scarf to reveal the menagerie. When the first scarf is lifted, students are to briefly note as many objects as possible within a one-minute period; when the time is up, the kerchief is replaced and all students should stop writing. Next, students are
asked to select an object, from memory, and work to describe it in as much detail as possible, noting physical characteristics as well as personal and cultural significance. The idea, here, is that students can use an imagined object as a sort of "trigger" for freewriting. Finally, students gather in groups and develop a "plan" for recording the objects. Again, when the scarf is removed, group members record as many objects as possible.

Afterwards, I list on the board all the objects noted by individuals. Sometimes, objects stand out to most everyone. There also a few objects that few people noted, or which were so unfamiliar that they were overlooked. Rarely, a few artifacts are entirely overlooked. Students then share their detailed descriptions. We talk about how writers can provide accurate description necessary to "see" each object, and then exhume each described artifact from the pile for closer inspection. Lastly, open-ended questions allow the class to imagine the usefulness of our play: What use is the "larger significance," either personal or cultural (i.e. does the object spark a particular memory or recognition) in description? How did the groups' "plan" help facilitate a fuller recognition/identification of the objects? How might such detailed descriptions add depth and flair to our narrative and profile essays? How might such description also prove useful in upcoming critical essays?

"The Exquisite Corpse"— One way to highlight the social interaction always at play in creative writing is to offer group activities in which several students can construct a single piece of writing as a group. "The Exquisite Corpse" is one such exercise coined by surrealist Marcel Duhamel; his idea entailed a single artist approaching and
beginning preliminary work on a clean canvas. After a brief engagement with the unknown composition, however, the painter was to stop, cover the work in progress, and leave the studio. Another artist would then come to the canvas, adding freely to the composition. Duhamel's exercise allowed any number of artists to "work together" to construct a single artifact. A similar exercise for the creative writing classroom begins with the first writer in a small group writing three "lines" of material at the top of a clean sheet of paper; the top of the paper is then folded down so that only the last of the three lines is still visible. The paper is passed to the next participant, who, in turn, uses the remaining line as a springboard to write three additional lines. The sheet is again folded so only one line is showing, and the cycle continues. Once all group members have added to the composition—or if all the lines on the sheet are filled—the paper is unfolded, and all the participants work to revise this raw material into a poem draft. Oftentimes, a quirky, shared narrative strain evolves in the writing, and in revision, narrative apparatus and additional detail can be added to clarify the poem. In some cases, however, the material's interesting, imaginative and unexpected juxtapositions work as a poem draft even without further revision.

Other exercises are found close at hand in any number of collections. Natalie Goldberg's Writing Down the Bones is an example of a text that's worthwhile for both the composition class as well as the creative writing class. A favorite poetry workbook of mine is The Practice of Poetry, edited by Robin Behn and Chase Twitchell, a collection of exercises from working poets who've shared their ideas as writers and teachers. The editors refer to the practice of writing as an apprenticeship, one that is
ongoing, and the writers who’ve submitted the exercises consider themselves as students as well, always learning. The two exercises I’ve included above illustrate ways that I try to encourage the continued learning, tinkering, discovering in my class. The exercises don’t, necessarily cause this process, however. According to Behn and Twitchell, exercises help the writer "articulate and solve specific creative problems." Writing exercises enable the student writer to learn by doing, and to be a part of a group of fellow writers who are doing the same. What’s more, exercises can "undermine certain assumptions you might have, forcing you to think — and write — beyond the old limitations. If an exercise leaves you better equipped to write the next poem, then it has done its job" (xiii). In my composition and creative writing classes, I try to show students that exercises are a way to find out; rather than being the end result of study, exercises are a way to construct a body of knowledge from which writers continually draw new ideas.

Stephen Minot has suggested that one of the primary reasons students enjoy the creative writing atmosphere is its inherent return to a (childish) delight in language. Also within the traditional creative writing workshop, there exist therapeutic aspects within writing that are continually, but unsuccessfully, explored. Such explorative writing has been criticized because it forces the instructor to become an untrained therapist, of sorts. The culture studies-based creative writing workshop is one effort to risk exposure for the sake of vital engagement with writing. In this proposed classroom, students are asked to work thorough “writing initiatives.” Each initiative includes an introductory heuristic, a thirty minute concentrated writing exercise which I’ve termed “burning” (after
Natalie Goldberg’s *Writing Down the Bones*—as in, burn through three pages in half an hour), then a series of debriefing questions to engage the writer in further thinking about the draft just created. After the initiative, the writer is asked to form of this raw material a poem borne of a distinct position within conflict. Before workshop the writer must also complete a checklist detailing a number of basic “workshop” questions, then submit the entire process for consideration.

The workshop format seems ideal for the open, interactive exploration that invention strategies facilitate. As a communal and interactive environment, the workshop classroom can provide ample space for discussion about projects already underway, discussion that leads, of course, to the next draft of the poem in process. In a typical workshop, the student is given a few moments to introduce the draft, noting possible areas for revision and particular concern. After the poem’s presentation, participants offer revision suggestions, criticism, and praise; the writer for later use can note these suggestions. This dialectical process reinforces the social nature of language by “sharing” the responsibility for revision, even though the final alterations on the next draft are ultimately the writer’s decision. The following are a series of brief writing initiatives which introduce the beginning writer to exploration techniques designed to develop style—first, two introductory exercises highlighting description and character, followed by three initiatives (persona, revelation, and group activities) to pique the writers’ awareness of their social and cultural interaction already at work.

**Precise Description** —Many times the most immediately recalled passages in poetry are those imbued with precise and emotive description—specifically those images that
cause the reader to “hallucinate.” Certainly parcel to the maxim “show don’t tell,” specific, luminous, evocative imagery draws a reader into a poem, and also serves to provide a material touchstone for “what the poem is about.” Sometimes, poems are all image—take, for instance, “The Red Wheelbarrow” by William Carlos Williams, which is constructed to force the reader’s imagination upon a barrow, chickens, rainwater.

One strategy I’ve developed to help students stretch their imaginings when describing objects is to work to de-familiarize the object itself. For instance, during the second week of class a few years ago my class met in a computer lab; I asked each student to take off a shoe and place it atop the computer monitor. From there, each student was to describe the shoe in as much detail as seemed possible: texture, color, odor, heft—the works. Then we traded shoes and took turns describing the shoes of other folks. What we found was that descriptions are seldom exactly the same, and are often disparate, entirely different. In essence, students come to understand not only that the images are important to cement the shoe in the reader’s mind, but also that specific images may present the subject of study in a particular light. One student’s description of her leather loafer, for instance, read: “dark brown like new soil.” Another description of the same shoe read: “Dry and scabby, its sole curls upward like seared beef.” The last step of the exercise is perhaps the most important. I offered a tagmemic problem such as, “If your shoe were an animal it would be a _____.” In this exercise, students were required not only to consider the physical attributes of the shoe, but also something beyond. Let’s say the shoe’s significance, its nature. But most surprising were the vivid rationales students composed describing the shoe as a squirrel, a tiger, a beached whale. This final stage of the description exercise allows
students to defamiliarize the image, to place understanding of the image into another contextual framework and explore what sense can be made of the new situation.

**Character Construction**—Next, students in creative writing classrooms, especially fiction writers, benefit from exercises focusing upon characters. One exercise I’ve experimented successfully with in class is based upon a sociology workshop I attended several years ago. One group project during this workshop was a study in how notions of gender have been largely constructed and, oftentimes, conditioned. Our group had been given a handout with two unfamiliar shapes, one formed like the outline of a splatter of paint, the other like the outline of a jagged hole in a pane of glass. Beside these forms, two words, “GRAK,” and “SPRILLY” in a single column. The proctor explained that these words were the names of the two objects, which we were told to imagine as two extra-terrestrial beings. The objective of the study was for each group to assign each of these unfamiliar forms a name and a gender. We found later that most groups attributed the name “GRAK” to the hard, angular form, which was perceived as male, and named the amorphous, liquid-like female form “SPRILLY.” I believe a similar exercise can be offered to creative writing workshops, not only for students to explore how gender and identity are constructed, but also to allow freedom for alternative narratives to be created. To my mind, even before students read gender in the unfamiliar form, they will read character. If for instance, the angular form were to be read as male, would we also attribute character traits such as violence and power to its personality? Why so? What happens when these two interact? How do they
interact? When students begin to offer narrative answers to these and other questions, they begin to develop the characters of the two.

**Persona: Power Initiative**--For many of us, power only reveals itself outright via stop signs and jury duty and the six o'clock news. We sometimes live our lives completely unaware of the power play involved in purchasing a pair of Nike sneakers at the local strip mall; we may never pause while coining a parking meter, seldom consider the ramifications behind electric bills daily distributed in the United States mail. Perhaps we assume that any power relations formed by these familiar occurrences are "common sense," that what we call "liberty" and "justice" and "citizenship" are the proper mode of behavior. Some say that there are victors, and there are spoils. There are men wearing combat boots writing home with ergonomically correct pens, beneath corrugated tents, within a sprawling desert fortress of the same, and there are countless thousands, even millions, nameless, faceless, naked and craving nourishment. We can draw distinctions. We can even take sides occasionally, as long as it doesn't interrupt our regular sitcoms, but what about our vote? Or, much smaller, what about our right to choose between Eggo waffles and the generic brand, simply because one is cheaper and presumable less tasty than the other? Are there power relations at play that we seldom, if ever, realize or confront?

Imagine yourself or a persona involved in a situation involving power. This can be any relationship at all, large or small; you might imagine yourself a prisoner, or a prison warden. You might consider situations of civil, material, or familial control. Write freely and exhaustively from this perspective, taking care to include sensory details that
might help an audience recognize the perspective fully. For example, if I were to imagine myself as a captive in this computer lab, I might make note of the stark light flooding through the East window, which is, in my captivity, a mockery of freedom. Where do you stand? Write for a long while--three pages or so--then pause, reread, make alterations and additions as you see fit.

**Storytelling/Point of View Initiative**--Think of a friend you know fairly well, maybe a person with a distinctive personality, or charming, unique attributes. Now imagine you are the host of a birthday dinner for this friend of yours, and it is your job to introduce the guest of honor. Write a fictional narrative presenting a humorous vignette of your friend to the audience of nearly drunken partygoers. You may create a persona for yourself as well, an alternate perspective from which you might speak. Think of the audience: what might be of interest to them? How can you establish credibility, or convince them of your story. What details might you use to portray your friend clearly to the audience?

**Imitation Exercise #1**--As suggested earlier, several classical practices associated with the imitation of models were designed to help the student rhetor develop copiousness. Imitation exercises can be viewed in all sorts of preliminary exercises designed to help writers fill their imagination with fresh ideas, which may be drawn upon later. One very simple exercise is to select a passage or poem that seems particularly evocative—either stylistically, or through its content—and to copy the passage, word-for-word, into a journal. Doing this requires the student writer to flex all sorts of critical and analytical
muscles. First, the practice requires close reading, to develop a keen sense of what “feels” right; this sensibility is different for everyone, but the ability to make aesthetic judgments keenly, to recognize what one values and why, is a decidedly advantageous capacity. Also, sense we often memorize and read aloud passages that leap to the imagination, the practice of “jotting” inevitable hones the memory and enables writers to recognize the “mouth-feel” of given models. And last, the practice of note-taking enables us to take a holistic view of the malleable self as it changes over time, as aesthetic choices shift and evolve.

**Imitation Exercise #2**—The second imitation exercise is an outgrowth of the first. Oftentimes it’s a good idea to begin this exercise by copying a passage or poem as directed above. Then, the writer can re-write, or paraphrase, of change the content but keep the rhetorical structures. This practice has all the benefits of copying—mainly to develop copiousness—and it also helps student writers pick apart the work they most admire, to “see” how professional writers have constructed work.

Unfortunately, a resistant pedagogy is ultimately fraught with conflict. First, it is important to note that these closing applications do not necessarily function, in and of themselves, as a resistant mode of pedagogy. In fact, these strategies are quite familiar to the creative writing classroom. I’ve facilitated using these strategies during the semesters I’ve taught creative writing, I’ve introduced the exercises to composition students in order to begin engaged thinking about the writing process, and I’ve made use of these techniques in the workshops I have attended in the past. In short, these
exercises largely accommodate current approaches to creative writing pedagogy. Second, it seems that once we attempt to “teach” resistance, our methodologies are immediately subsumed by dominant ideologies, and whatever radical edge a resistant pedagogy offers is immediately dulled. What is important to note, however, is that the exercises included here are meant to defamiliarize the writer’s approach to language and writing, in order to generate alternate versions of style. Such an approach to language allows the writer to wage in all directions, to counter the resistance with resistance in a continually and constantly evolving and reflexive metamorphosis of perspectives and perception. Approaching these heuristics with the assumption that all writing is a part of the writer’s transaction with language and her environment, then there might be opportunity for continued engaged critique concerning how the writer constructs a text, which may also lead to increased exploration into and involvement with language.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

The purpose of the dissertation project was to chart a personal and intellectual journey of my movement from a creative writing MFA program to a rhetoric and writing PhD program. As suggested earlier, the assumptions of a creative writing program are oftentimes unstated, and sometimes the politics of such a program are difficult to decipher. It seems just and right to reiterate that politics are certainly involved; unfortunately, students in the program are left to unpack a program’s political and aesthetic leanings. In many cases, a student enrolled in a creative writing program will work to understand how best to present work to the few mentors he or she will inevitably engage with, and this practice of “feeling out” one’s direction can dilute or restrain in such a way that the writer becomes mired in the daunting practice of “writing to the critics.” The same approach to writing prevails even in the rhetoric program, where achievement is meted out arbitrarily to those who perform in ways that are seen as beneficial to the program. However, my experience with the rhetoric and composition program has been quite different from my experience with the creative writing program. For example, my recognition of the politics involved in completing an advanced degree in rhetoric has enabled me to examine my own assumptions more critically. I’m still uncertain as to what all these competing assumptions are, but rather, must recognize that my own leanings are constantly changing as I continue research and writing. That said, it’s important to provide students the opportunity to grapple with the assumptions of a particular course of study, and to allow them to make informed decisions concerning their own desires and inclinations.
I have accomplished the purpose of this dissertation by exploring my personal journey as I experienced differing conceptions related to writing between Creative Writing and Rhetoric. Creative writing values, or has valued, the experience of the individual as an autonomous experience of the world devoid of interaction with others. Rhetoric, and contemporary composition studies, value the work of one embodied by a collective of influences. The difference between the two concerns the author seen as a social agent, or as an individual calling out to the world. This Romantic ideal is troublesome because it privileges a singular voice over one that is multiform. Also, I've called into question various views concerning the creative process. Since creative writing practitioners oftentimes draw upon a universal and singular voice, poets and writers of fiction are left to their own devices when producing new work. Rhetoricians, on the other hand, have developed a theory of process, which is conflicted as all good theories must be, but which instructs its subjects to view the work in an ongoing schema. And new work developed by creative writers is held to monologic scrutiny according to the prejudices of the mentor and class to whom the work is directed. Rhetoric, however, views the process of writing as more prescient than the product itself. Additionally, creative writing holds as its flagstaff a universal aesthetic actualized in the poems and stories of its practitioners. Rhetoric values competing aesthetics and differing perspectives, discussion amongst a community of writers. And finally, since the workshop has thus far been based upon the grading of artistic work, creative writing practitioners have assumed that certain lessons must be learned by the close of class, that artists should display a certain level of mastery, that lessons learned of a semester
should be quantifiable. Alternate views in contemporary rhetoric assume that one’s education is ongoing, perhaps never-ending.

Each of these chapters has addressed a central issue related to the construction of self in the creative writing workshop. Chapter one focused upon visions of self and provided theoretical groundwork for the resulting chapters. In that discussion, issues concerning creativity, specifically as it relates to the autonomous author, were investigated, to reveal places where further revisions of contemporary notions might prove fruitful. Also untangled were the various intertwining roots of the writer who chooses to teach her craft. Chapter two further complicates this last issue by exploring creative writing’s history as an academic pursuit, and considers the study’s roots in classical rhetoric. This literature review illustrates that further exploration of the rhetorical situation reveals ties to classical study where there has been little research. Finally, chapter two explores ways composition pedagogy can, and should, influence the creative writing workshop, and then continues with various postmodern pedagogies that may be helpful for creative writing teachers. The heart of the study, chapter three examines the construction of self in the contemporary creative writing workshop. This chapter has provided a view of creativity that may be useful for contemporary teachers, a dynamic model that takes into account the individual’s activity in tandem with a field and a domain. Viewing the artist thusly situated in a social structure leads us to consider how interpretation is affected in the workshop environment. And finally, the workshop is further explored as a venue where lifelong work is engaged, where always more development is viewed as a positive approach to the writing life.
The subsequent implications and exercises presented in chapter four are meant to provide a brief model for teachers to engage students while also fostering a process-oriented pedagogy. The exercises in chapter four are not meant to be an exhaustive compendium of ways creative writing teachers might engage their students. Rather, the chapter is meant to offer ways teachers can decentralize and demystify the process of writing, to allow students to explore ways they construct themselves and to offer alternative views of this process. That said, the exercises are valuable in that they represent but a small cross-section of inventive techniques to engage the writing process. The implications of these exercises and the dissertation as a whole is that students and teachers can engage process, aesthetic, and overall goals of writing more completely, more effectively, and more productively.

The relationships of Creative Writing and Rhetoric to one another are rich and deserve scholarly attention in a number of ways. The fact that poetry and prose have enjoyed a long lineage in rhetorical study is, of course, a fruitful area of study. In the creative writing field, a great deal of new research is being conducted, mostly because creative writing is such a burgeoning and profitable industry. Rhetoric, however, borrows little from its kissing cousin, a fact that I find reason for pause. In fact, there’s much to be learned about audience and rhetorical situation by positioning oneself as the writer of poems. Even though rhetoricians might balk at the idea of having students write sonnets, this area of study would be of great benefit to those examining the practice of rhetoric. It might also help rhetors become better communicators to examine their own language to become more fluid, more colorful, more imaginative. It is an unstated thesis of this dissertation that all writing is “creative,” but it would benefit all
audiences to think of writing as a beautiful interplay of language and author, if only because the process has such potential. This study might also benefit from the voices of other writer-teacher-writers. Further research into the views of others on their own journeys might allow a fuller recognition of ways composition studies and creative writing imbricate. One way of doing this might be to analyze the responses of peers, to offer a variety of perspectives on this issue and to highlight ways that these two very different modes and practices can benefit one another.

Even though the creative writing workshop has evolved dramatically since its formal inception mid 20th century, it's been widely assumed that the workshop is an apolitical environment, devoted to a universal aesthetic. But as departments and programs become increasingly politicized, the workshop has taken new shape in the contemporary theoretical landscape. As the workshop becomes tempered and the wrangle enters the classroom, we see a new set of creative writing rhetorics evolving. It's been my intention to examine the rhetoric(s) of the postmodern creative writing workshop, especially concerning student identity construction. Additionally, since theories informing creative writing pedagogy are relatively new, my research has included contemporary views in composition theory, literary theory—especially culture studies—and psychology. This cross-disciplinary approach has lead to a broad conceptualization of the creative writing workshop, and conclusions reached here have been developed as a result of several varied influences.

The contemporary creative writing workshop fosters an environment where students create identity. If at one time teachers viewed identity as a set of characteristics to be defined, traits and behaviors as recognizable as they are unique,
it’s now widely understood that one’s identity is shifting and malleable. Today’s workshop, then, encourages students to construct identity each time they engage the writing process. Also, the postmodern workshop is dedicated to the gradual accretion of varied and competing aesthetic values; whereas some workshops have attempted to unify and simplify an aesthetic, some latter-day workshops celebrate the differences of competing value systems. This means that workshop participants take on new perspectives by challenging their own ideas of what's good and beautiful and creative. Contemporary workshops assume that the learning begun in class is an ongoing process, one which, for dedicated writers, continues throughout the course of a lifetime. Drawing from classical notions of paideutic rhetoric, and from my experience as a creative writing teacher, I’ve worked to illustrate how today’s creative writing workshops are unlike former classrooms of the same ilk. The student in today’s creative writing classroom evolves an identity, an aesthetic, and a process over the course of a semester, and it’s assumed that this growth and change will continue for as long as the student engages the process. The implications and exercises I’ve included here at the close should provide a brief suggestion of possible ways teachers of creative writing might engage their students, to demystify the process of writing while encouraging inventive exploration through the writing of poems and stories.

Students are our future teachers, and current teachers should be reminded of this periodically. If we, as teachers of creative writing, continue to espouse a process that is beyond our students’ grasp, then we do a disservice to the students, and to their students to whom they may impart such false wisdom. What’s more, if we continue to neglect how writers are constructed, in and of themselves, and in response to any
number of influences, the prevailing trope of the “inspired” artist will remain, and will continue to drive students’ desire to embody the romantic ideal. Inasmuch as we should want our students to latch on to writing as we have, we do no favors to those who may see the romantic ideal as the only narrative of the writing life. Finally, if the romantic trope is the only trick we teachers keep in our bag, what are we to do with students who come to writing for what it gives, other than fame, other than soothe, other than cash?
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