TOWARD FREER WRITING:
A RECONSIDERATION OF AUDIENCE RELATIONSHIPS IN ACADEMIC WRITING

by

Frank Gaughan

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Abstract

TOWARD FREER WRITING:

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IN ACADEMIC WRITING

by

Frank Gaughan

Advisor: Professor Sondra Perl

This dissertation describes three audiences for writing in the humanities, generally, and in English studies, particularly: 1) the public, who is often either unaware or skeptical of academic arguments; 2) our colleagues, many of whom work for wages and benefits that are not commensurate with their responsibilities or experiences; and 3) our students, who sit with varying levels of interest in our classes. In each case, I describe reasons and suggestions for improving relations with these various audiences. I term the enactment of these suggestions "freer writing." In this phrase, many readers will recognize Peter Elbow's decades-long advocacy of "freewriting": writing without stopping for a set period of time *without* attention to one's audience (see, e.g.,

Writing Without Teachers). Elbow concerns himself, in part, with the development of a method that helps writers discover what they want to say before they begin the long and hopefully joyful but always difficult process of communicating with readers. By contrast, freer writing is not so much a method as it is a commitment to working with academic ideas in rhetorically flexible ways, ways that bridge the divide between specialized and general knowledge of our discipline. Broadly defined, freer writing involves the construction of intellectual frameworks by which the public, our colleagues, and most especially our students may better understand the critical and affective significance of our disciplinary concerns. Freer writing recognizes that "critical thinking," a mantra for educators of all levels, may be expressed not only in analytical and argumentative modes but in imaginative, narrative, and descriptive modes as well.

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Foreword: A Letter to a Young Dissertation Writer

> A proper introduction would tell you what each [essay or chapter] says, so you would not have to read them, but this is not a proper introduction. Instead I shall mention some common threads that I find in these disparate pieces, then try to stitch these threads into some sort of picture of our future.
>
> —Whither, or Wither, The Humanities?
> Robert Scholes

Dear Young Dissertation Writer,

Beyond the dissertation committee, one of the primary (maybe one of the only) audiences for dissertations is you—the writer of some future, half-imagined, half-defined work. By their nature, dissertations, like the mythical Ouroboros, tend to devour themselves only to be reborn in books, articles, and presentations. It is in this way that the spirit of the dissertation finds its audience. However, the dissertation, per se, is a lonely document, at turns loved and despised by its creator. Advice on dissertation writing abounds. Joan Bolker, for example, explains that one can write a dissertation in as little as "fifteen minutes a day." As one not even formally finished with the process, I am hardly in a position to dispute her

claims (however much I might want to) or to offer much in the way of advice, so I do not presume to do so here. Rather, it is my hope that these remarks will provide some company over the course of your composition. Yet mine is not a selfless act: I need you far more than you need me, and it is this recognition that led me to question the ways academic writers communicate with their audience.

I have borrowed the above epigraph from Robert Scholes' introduction to a 2005 forum titled "The Future of the Humanities," which advances a conversation that is increasingly central to work in English studies. As Scholes' wry humor indicates, the threads of this conversation are wide-ranging, but not without common themes and questions. Among the many such questions that come to mind upon reading phrases like "the future of the humanities," the following are of particular importance to the project at hand: what is it that English professors do, exactly? Why do we, said professors, do these things in the ways we do them? The answer to the first question seems apparent enough, if not to the general public then at least to those engaged in the field: we think; we read, write, publish; we teach—often in this order. We also perform other related, often unsung, but no less important

tasks that can be understood as subdivisions of the above categories. That is, we not only write and publish but also present work publicly, at conferences like the annual meeting of the MLA or at community centers, libraries, poetry readings and the like. In other words, we speak on issues that are (for the most part) relevant to our specialized training, be that training in Jacobean drama or post-Lacanian theory. Likewise, we not only teach, but we also administer, and in a university system serving over 14 million undergraduates, administration is no small task, as any administrator will readily explain. While the above list is by no means exhaustive, it is, I trust, representative of work in English studies and indeed of work in academe generally. The second question—why do we do these things in the ways we do them—is a bit more complicated, partly for its considerable breadth and partly because answers to such a question typically occasion substantial debate.

In constructing answers, I have continually compared two contradictory pieces of advice. The first from Rainer Maria Rilke’s Letters to a Young Poet (from which I have adopted the title to this introduction) and the second from a professor with whom I took a graduate course in English.

As readers may recall, Franz Xaver Kappus, the young poet under consideration, sends Rilke a collection of his poems, asking a question that nearly all writers at all levels of experience ask with regularity: Is this any good? In response, Rilke neatly sidesteps reductive value judgments, focusing instead on the intangible qualities of art and artistic production:

> With nothing can one approach a work of art so little as with critical words: They always come down to more or less happy misunderstandings. Things are not all so comprehensible and expressible as one would mostly have us believe; most events are inexpressible, taking place in a realm in which no word has ever entered, and more inexpressible than all else are works of art, mysterious existences the life of which, while ours passes away, endures. (15)

Rilke well understands what good teachers understand when responding to student writing: a balance must be struck between responding to the work, per se, and to the *writer* of the work. To make this balancing act more complicated, the center of gravity shifts depending on factors that range from the writer's experience to the state of the

draft (inchoate or nearly done) to the writer's relationship with the respondent (friend or authority figure). Thus, Rilke describes Kappus' poems in ways that are attentive and (I assume) honest and then offers this advice:

> There is only one single way. Go into yourself. Search for the reason that bids you write; find out whether it is spreading out its roots in the deepest places of your heart, acknowledge to yourself whether you would have to die if it were denied you to write. This above all—ask yourself in the stillest hour of your night: *must* I write? (Rilke's emphasis 16)

Rilke's words raise questions of integrity and quality, and disregard matters of expedience and pragmatism. That is, questions such as "Does this (poem, novel, dissertation) absolutely have to be written? Will I die if it does not get written?" are rejoined more often than not with answers like, "Well maybe, after I clean the closet, pick up the kids, cook dinner, answer the latest round of emails, and finally get some sleep."

In contrast to Rilke's words, the second piece of advice came to me during a conversation I had with a

spirited and well-intentioned professor during the course of my graduate training. We were talking about the dissertation: what is it, what does it need to do, how does one finish it? Can I use the first person pronoun? Is this any good? In response, this professor held a blank sheet of 8.5x11 paper perpendicular to the floor, such that we could see the full width and length of the page. “A lot of students try to write dissertations that look like this.” Then, turning the page parallel to the floor such that only the fine edge of the 8.5 inch width was visible to us, said, “What they should be doing is writing dissertations that look like this.” I understood the substance of the message immediately, not only for the visual aid but also for its correspondence to advice I had given students over the years: narrow your topic, sharpen your thesis, then narrow and sharpen it again. Like Rilke’s, this advice is sound. Beyond the importance of acute focus, the strategy here described has certain pragmatic benefits: sharp theses lead, more often than not, to finished dissertations.

Yet the shaper my focus, the more Rilke’s advice confounded me. That is to say, the less I was able to respond to another question we so often ask of our

students: So what? In perusing dissertation abstracts—"The Virtue of Sympathy in 17th Century England," or "Bringing Lived Cultures and Experiences to the WAC Classroom"—I found a familiar and accomplished academic voice, but I did not find in these and other texts any clues to help me figure out what it was that I absolutely had to write. The only questions that remained to me were those posited above: What is it that English professors do, exactly? Why do we do these things in the ways we do them? Hardly the fine edge of an 8.5x11 sheet of paper, but built into the "fine edge" metaphor of dissertation writing are assumptions about the conditions of our work, our available resources, our profession, and our audience that I contend are less and less valid with each passing year.

This is especially the case as two recent trends converge: on the one hand, work in the humanities (primarily teaching and writing for publication) is often perceived as at turns irrelevant or hostile to so-called "mainstream" American values; on the other hand, tenure-line jobs in academe generally and in English studies particularly have become increasingly scarce. The one trend reinforces the other, for the less the general public (e.g., students, parents, journalists, legislators)

understands and values work in the humanities, the less the public will care when funding for our work is cut or when the academic freedom to teach and evaluate our students is severely curtailed or when the available jobs shift from tenure-track lines to lines contingent on economic or ideological expedience. Hence the title of Scholes' introduction to the forum on the future of the humanities, "Whither, or Wither," and the question which has occupied much of his scholarship since his landmark work, Textual Power (1985): "Are we going somewhere—or just going away?" ("Whither" 7).

Consider the following: A 1999 MLA survey finds that approximately 37 (36.3) percent of faculty in English are tenured or tenure-track. As for the other 63 percent, the numbers break down as follows: part-time faculty account for 32 (31.9) percent of the instructional staff, with graduate teaching assistants accounting for 22 percent (22.2), and the remaining 9.5 percent, full-time but non-tenure-track faculty (Laurence 213). Many of the full-time positions in composition, tenured or otherwise, are designated for program administrators, or what many critics are now calling the middle-management class of faculty. On

the whole, these findings are consistent with those of the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES), which reports that university-wide the percentage of full-time faculty has steadily decreased from 77.9 percent in 1970 to 55.5 percent in 2001 ("Table 230"). Collectively, statistics like these inform an on-going conversation about the state of labor in academe, and this conversation coincides with broad cultural debates over the relevance of scholarship and teaching in the humanities.

James Piereson, writing in a 2005 issue of the conservative periodical The Weekly Standard, provides a representative example and reflects the views of various groups of non-academics who haven't been made to care or care enough about our labor problems and, in fact, resent academics for our seeming disregard for allegedly mainstream values. He writes: "When this year's freshmen enter the academic world, they will encounter a bizarre universe in […] institutions that define themselves in terms of left wing ideology. […] which is both anti-American and anticapitalist" (20). Piereson approvingly refers to trustees—such as those at Dartmouth, SUNY, CUNY, and the University of Colorado—who (in his words) contend that "if their institutions are to be rescued, they dare

not rely on faculties to do it” (30). Pierson’s variety of culture-war mongering and his apparent comfort with making outlandish claims without much more than scatter-shot anecdotal evidence testifies to the fact that academics need to attend more carefully to their public audience. The better we are able to communicate the value of our work publicly, the better we will be able to make the case that increasing reliance on contingent labor for teaching damages not only our profession, but also our students and indeed our culture as a whole (cf. Gaughan and Khost “Reading”).

This dissertation, as this letter, addresses issues surrounding the representation, production, and circulation of academic writing in English studies, at both professional and student levels. Particularly, I am concerned with the relationship between the need for specialized scholarship and the need to represent specialized work in ways that will be relevant to a public audience, broadly defined to encompass colleagues as well as students, parents, journalists, and legislators. In an age beset with information—from the latest celebrity breakup to the latest explosion to the latest environmental catastrophe, news regarding yet another crisis in the

humanities, much less the nuances of debates over the shifting subject positions in Toni Morrison's "Recitatif," do not often fall on sympathetic ears. Unless humanists take steps to make their work more accessible and relevant to the general public, the humanities, as we know it, will suffer from increasing marginalization in the public imagination. English professors think, read, write, publish, and teach. We do this with and among ourselves (and our students) of course, but we also perform these activities in a reciprocal relationship with the public. The better we understand the rhetoric of this relationship, the better we will be able to make the case for the relevance of our work beyond the typing of correct memoranda.

Unlike, let's say, engineers whose end products typically consist of tangible constructions—cloned sheep, energy efficient buildings, and small cars that analyze samples of Martian soil—those of us in English studies construct interpretations. Postmodern theory posits that everything (including interpretation itself) is the product of interpretation; thus, remote-controlled space buggies, like poems, are texts, all in need of interpretation if they are to be meaningful or changed for the better.

However, at the end of a project, engineers often point to a tangible and potentially profitable product, whereas English professors often point to an idea, a theory, or (inevitably) another interpretation. This is to say that the value of our work exists at least partly in an intangible space between the scholar and the public at large, between sub-specialists and colleagues with general knowledge of the topic at hand, and finally between the teacher and student.

Careful attention to our various audiences may help scholars in English communicate the intangible value of our work and thereby find direction for the humanities in the future and make the case for improvement of our deteriorating working conditions. The three chapters that follow proceed collectively and individually from the general to the particular. Each chapter describes a particular audience for our work: 1) the public, who is often either unaware or skeptical of what we do; 2) our colleagues, many of whom staff courses at the gateway to academe; and 3) our students, who sit with varying levels of interest in our classes. In each case, I describe reasons and suggestions for improving relations with these various audiences. I term the enactment of these

suggestions "freer writing." In this phrase, many readers will recognize Peter Elbow's decades-long advocacy of "freewriting": writing without stopping for a set period of time *without* attention to one's audience (see, e.g., Writing Without Teachers). As one of the major figures in the process movement in writing instruction, Elbow concerns himself, in part, with the development of a method that helps writers figure out what they want to say before they begin the long and hopefully joyful but always difficult process of communicating with readers.

By contrast, freer writing is not so much a method as it is a commitment to working with academic ideas in rhetorically flexible ways; in particular, freer writing refers to work that bridges the divide between specialized and general knowledge of our discipline. Broadly defined, freer writing involves the construction of intellectual frameworks by which the public, our colleagues, and most especially our students may better understand the critical and affective significance of our concerns. Freer writing recognizes that "critical thinking," a mantra for educators of all levels, may be expressed not only in analytical and argumentative modes but in imaginative, narrative, and descriptive modes as well. Given the state of our

discipline—the way the public understands our work in the context of the ongoing culture wars and the working conditions of the majority who labor among us—generalities regarding the presence of the "creative in the critical," have proven insufficient. While true, such statements do not go far enough toward helping academic writers imagine and communicate with an audience beyond the chorus of the initiated. In short, freer writing aims to expand the scope of academic writing to include personal, imaginative, even lyrical prose within the context of the traditional researched essay, so as to be persuasive and compelling to readers beyond an immediate coterie of specialists.

Freer writing has the advantage of already happening: the symposium, the satire (or the parody, see, e.g., the oft-cited "Sokal Affair[1]"), the open letter (like this

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[1] My purpose is not to discuss the Sokal/Social Text Affair here. However, since the phrase "Sokal Hoax" is often brought up with reference to the relevance of academic work in the humanities, interested readers may find the following useful in sorting fact from fiction: In Social Text 46/47 (1996), the editors devoted articles to the topic of the "Science Wars," an off-shoot of the culture wars. In this special issue, Alan Sokal, a professor of physics, published "Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity," which argues that quantum gravity qualifies as an "archetypal postmodernist science"(227), in part because it is "free from any dependence on the concept of objective truth" (226). In the context of the special issue, Sokal's article was presented as a serious statement regarding the political implications of cutting edge scientific thought. However, in the May/June 1996 issue of Lingua Franca, Sokal revealed his article to be a parody of postmodern theorizing. In this revelation, "A Physicist Experiments with Cultural Studies," Sokal writes: "I intentionally wrote the article so that any

introduction) are all modes recognizable, if not always typical, in academic and journalistic venues. So rather than delineate the various ways that academics might work more flexibly and fluidly with genre, I have chosen, where practical, to enact this model as I am describing it. Hopefully such enactments disrupt the unproductive pattern whereby intellectual work *about* the infusion of imaginative modes into academic writing tends to be valued by university presses, hiring and promotion committees more so than imaginative work itself (cf. Downing 61).

Pursuing a related point, Kurt Spellmeyer invokes the legacy of Cézanne in his argument for reimagining academic writing in the humanities. In Arts of Living, he writes that "art as an activity has been so thoroughly suppressed—especially in academic postmodernity—because it unfolds in an open space that no one can own or close down" (142). Unlike the aforementioned engineers, who often must rely on repeatable experiments and proven mathematical formulae,

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competent physicist or mathematician (or undergraduate physics or math major) would realize that it is a spoof. Evidently the editors of Social Text felt comfortable publishing an article on quantum physics without bothering to consult anyone knowledgeable in the subject." Social Text 50 (1997) devotes part of the issue to a discussion of the fallout from Sokal's revelation, and Sokal himself provides a detailed list of the various debates that ensued in venues such as Lingua Franca, Dissent, and Le Monde (see www.physics.nyu.edu/faculty/sokal/).

the work of English studies often proceeds in the context of evolving and overlapping cultures. There is no control group and no sheltered space in which to reliably study the shifting receptions of a poem or the development of writing abilities. Yet much of the language concerning the teaching of English continues to look longingly at our colleagues in white laboratory coats. We collect writing samples and issue diagnostic exams; tutors work in writing labs, and as Mike Rose has demonstrated, the language of remediation is replete with medical associations ("Language of Exclusion" 348-352).

During the course of my work with "remedial" writers in one such writing "lab," I noticed the following comment written across the top of a student's paper: "You're not making sense. See a tutor." Upon reading the paper, I saw clear signs of grammatical confusion and struggled to find my way through trails of arguments and analyses half-started, ill-defined, and then quite thoroughly abandoned; nonetheless, I did not see how this writer's paper could "not make sense," which would imply (if we take the comment literally and keep with the medical metaphors) that the student was potentially insane or at the very least subject

to bouts of hysteria. The paper, to say nothing of the student and her teacher, was apparently in the midst of a nervous breakdown. Teacher comments of this sort are not new, and the tone, style, and pedagogical value of such remarks (relatives of the jarring AWK and the enigmatic COH) have been so thoroughly critiqued that it is ultimately the comment, not the student, whose sense I question;[2] however, there ought to be empathy on both sides of this allegedly nonsensical document: most teachers know the frustration of responding to a large and too slowly shrinking stack of student papers just as students know the frustration of inadequate answers to their most basic of questions: “What do you want?”

“I want you to make sense,” might be one possible answer. “Sense” here may be defined as an essay, written in edited American English that develops a central idea with evidence and relevant commentary. The sensible college writer participates in what is usually described as academic discourse, where the adjective “academic” invokes a range of conventions on which student and professional

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[2] See, e.g., special issues of College Composition and Communication 33.2 (1982) and Assessing Writing 7 (2000) for excellent examples of the research in this area.

writers of all disciplinary stripes rely for argumentation and publication (or the student equivalent to publication, a good grade). On the whole, academic discourse concerns itself with critical thinking, which, for those of us working in English studies, the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) defines as, "a process which stresses an attitude of suspended judgment, incorporates logical inquiry and problem solving, and leads to an evaluative decision or action."

Critical thinking is more than sense: it is academic sanity. Yet as Gerald Graff points out in Clueless in Academe, the component skills of critical thinking—framing a problem, establishing its relevance, summarizing competing responses, evaluating these responses, and offering syntheses—are often presented to students in ways that make the process of academic writing and thinking seem opaque and onerous, despite the fact that the above list of rhetorical moves is common to many arguments, academic or otherwise (22-3). In the same way that the above student's paper did not make sense to her teacher (presumably because the teacher could not figure out what point the student was trying to make, how, or why she was trying to make it) many professional examples of academic discourse fail to make

sense to colleagues who do not share the writer's particular specialized interests, much less to our students, or parents, journalists, or legislators.

For this and other reasons, English studies is often perceived as a closed circle, wherein a select few "get it," and most others are left to struggle with questions like "What do you want?" and "What's the point?" Here, "getting it" refers to the nuanced processes of close reading, which lead to interpretive summaries, which lead to particular and then general claims about texts and contexts. Colloquially, students call the instantiation of this process an "English paper"—be it on Hamlet or the latest I-pod commercial—the general processes are similar. Graff refers to these processes as "intellectualizing" and points out that English professors often proceed as if the rhetorical moves of an English paper contained within them inherent value. Worse, assignments for such papers often assume that the "inherent" value is (or at least should be) apparent to the uninitiated (43). In The Rise and Fall of English, Scholes describes the effects of this insular process as follows: "The traditional English major is designed for young people entering the loop of English teaching, in which English teachers teach future English

teachers of future English teachers" (86). Advancing this point, Karen Fitts and William Lalicker speculate that high school sorts most of those who excel at writing English papers (that is, those who know when to use an off-beat construction and when to settle into the business of traditional analysis, those who, in short "get it") from those who do not via honors and advanced placement courses (429). Likewise, most experienced writing teachers will recognize the frustrating pattern wherein students who enter the class writing "C" papers leave doing the same and students who enter the class doing "A" work continue to do so with little prompting.

Evidence suggests that the closed circle of English is growing smaller, as the "C" students simply fulfill their liberal arts requirements elsewhere, and the "A" students find more interesting (or more lucrative) avenues of intellectual exploration. Citing findings from the NCES, Louis Menand points out in his 2005 contribution to MLA's Profession that between 1970 and 2001 the number of English majors has dropped, roughly by a third; however "the system is producing the same number of doctorates in English that it was producing back in 1970. These Ph.D.s have trouble getting tenure-track jobs because fewer students major in

English, and therefore the demand for English literature specialists has declined" (12-13). There are many theories about the causes of this decline (e.g., students who would have previously majored in English are now turning to interdisciplinary programs, in, say, cultural studies, or students are driven by the escalating costs of college education to focus on fields, such as, say, computer science, which have a reputation for more immediate financial pay off than does a BA in English).

In their study of the undergraduate English major for the Association of Departments of English (ADE), Margaret Schramm et al. examine these theories and, working with the same numbers as Menand, find cause for concern, but not panic. They point out, for example, that since 1987 English studies has attracted roughly four in every 100 majors, and there has been some growth from 3.6 in every 100 in 1987 to 4 in every 100 in 2000. However, the ADE committee contends that our profession will find it difficult to adjust to "new education requirements, pressures for outcomes assessment, and further cuts in public funding"—in short, the future—should the over-reliance on part-time labor for writing instruction and the replacement of retiring tenured faculty with full-time

renewable lines continue (85). The logic is easy enough to follow: if an institution does not invest in faculty (by way of job security, benefits, and fair working conditions), it is unlikely that the faculty will invest in the institution (in the way of extra time advising students, service to the department, and curriculum development). Here again, the one problem (a decline in English majors since 1970) exacerbates another (fewer available tenure lines relative to the number of Ph.D.s), so the closed circle of English studies closes in on itself.

One possible solution to the problem of insularity is often described with the phrase "going public": Linda Ray Pratt uses it in her contribution to the influential collection Higher Education Under Fire (1995). Peter Mortensen uses the phrase as the title to his article in the journal College Composition and Communication (1998). More recently, it has been invoked in a Duke University panel on academic publishing, and Henry Boyte makes "going public" the focus of his 2005 occasional paper for the Kettering Foundation. If the catch phrase for the late nineties was "critical thinking," the phrase for the early

years of the twenty-first century may just be “going public.”

This phrase, however catchy, raises more questions than it answers. Go public with what, exactly? And what venues qualify as appropriately public? Are blog posts to be valued by hiring and tenure committees in the same way that scholarly publications are valued? In considering related questions, Menand invites us to consider the possibility that going public may not be as easy or as desirable as it may at first sound:

> The last premise academic humanists should be accepting is that the value of their views is measured by the correspondence of those views to common sense and the common culture. Being an intellectual and thinking theoretically *are* going outside the parameters of a common culture and common sense. (Menand’s emphasis)

This is to say that the duty of academics, be they physicists or humanists, is not to the public, as such, but to knowledge. Menand concludes:

> Ignorance has almost become an entitlement. We are living in a country in which liberals would

> rather move to the right than offend the superstitions of the uneducated. As always, the invitation to academics is to assist in the construction of the intellectual armature of the status quo. This is an invitation we should decline without regrets. (16-17)

Here, Menand raises some valuable points of caution. In his line of argument, going public—or in my words, reconsidering the various audience relationships for academic writing— may mean caving in, stripping our ideas of nuance, and abandoning precision or critical thinking for the sake of public acceptance. Of course, most of us will agree that teachers who passively abide by common sense notions and status quo values are not acting like responsible academics, and none of us would endorse this behavior.

However, as noteworthy as such cautions may be, the distinction between the academic and the public seems overdrawn here. After all, there are nearly 5,000 college campuses in the United States, and undergraduate enrollments now in excess of 14 million students are projected to increase through the year 2014 (U.S. Dept. of Education). This is to say that the question of "going

public" has already been settled to a significant degree. At least since the G.I. Bill of 1944, academic work has been and remains quite thoroughly situated in the public realm. Going to college has become an integral component to working and middle class aspirations, so if the public considers ignorance to be "almost an entitlement," then we are at least partly to blame for this state of affairs. Going public, therefore, is a useful but not entirely adequate phrase, since it does not explain how more public exposure will improve the current state of the humanities or the public's perception of work done within it[3].

While chapter one takes up issues related to the production of academic writing and a public audience, broadly conceived, chapters two and three each focus on improving the work that is, far and away, the most public and the most popular—that is to say, our teaching. Chapter two focuses primarily on general education course work, particularly the often hotly debated mandatory course(s) in

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[3] The above discussion of Menand's argument appears in InsideHigherEd.com as "Reading, Writing, and Representing," co-written with Peter H. Khost, a valued friend, collaborator, and editor. Since we work so often together, it is difficult to say what work is one's "own," but after reading drafts of the article and of this chapter, Khost and I mutually agreed that it was not only appropriate but also important to include the above in the introductory material to this dissertation. For his work with "Reading," and for his insightful commentary on the dissertation as a whole, he has my sincere gratitude.

writing. Debates over the pedagogy and the staffing of mandatory writing courses are particularly important to understand because they demonstrate the material effects of poor public representation and academe's increasing reliance on flexible labor. These courses are overwhelmingly staffed by graduate teaching assistants, part-time, and full-time but otherwise contingent faculty. The work of teaching writing is labor-intensive, in terms of preparation, grading, and conferencing. However, despite the acknowledged importance and difficulty of the task, such courses are often not particularly well-regarded inside or outside the gates of the academy. In the former case, specialists often see little connection between their research and the general aims of teaching academic writing to a class of first-year students. In the latter case, the public (and public pundits) often lament the reading and writing abilities of recent college graduates and speculate that English professors, as a whole, are simply not doing their jobs. Often, this charge is coupled with that of ideological indoctrination: instead of teaching edited American English, we are teaching students to be good liberals—pacifists, Marxists, or feminists—under the banner of "liberatory pedagogy." The internal debates over

the pedagogy and staffing of first-year writing courses often prevent (or really preempt) faculty from speaking in collective and unified ways about the purpose and rationale for work in English studies. One could rightly claim that there is no readily available consensus regarding our work, yet this is no reason not to attempt to develop one and communicate it publicly.

In "The Many-Headed Hydra of Theory vs. the Unifying Mission of Teaching," Marshall Gregory argues that our disciplinary disagreements have reached a point where we no longer even agree on the standards by which a consensus might be reached: "If we cannot agree about texts and the ways we canonize them, cannibalize them, or cant about them, we need at least to agree about our obligations to our students. For their sake if not our own, we need a fund of disciplinary agreement that is as operationally functional as it is theoretically negotiable" (42). Thereafter, Gregory revives popular arguments about the function of literature: it inspires, provides succor, and gives shape to the imagination. Among the many contributions that English studies makes to students and by extension to our culture, Gregory counts aesthetic sensitivity as one: "No one can fully explain the causes that make us fall in love

or even explain fully how love works, but everyone knows what loving someone else feels like. The discipline of English not only validates this kind of sensitivity and responsiveness but helps students develop these capacities and gives them a language for talking about such experience, for analyzing it, and for sharing it with others" (55). Thus the aim of chapter two is to describe conditions that divide us from each other as faculty in a common, though wide-ranging discipline, and to suggest ways to speak collectively and publicly about those intangible qualities of our field, those qualities that very likely appealed to us when we were just beginning our studies.

While the public, in offices down the road from campus, and our colleagues, in offices down the hall (assuming they have offices), comprise major sections of the audience for our work, by far our students comprise the most significant section. Be they future English majors or engineers, our students bring meaning and substance to the intangible value of undergraduate study in English. I take up this issue in chapter three by describing cultural and institutional attitudes toward literary reading and writing and tracing the ways such attitudes often foreclose on efforts to work imaginatively in the writing classroom.

Freer writing means expanding the scope and variety of prose in academic writing, but the disciplinary tendency to marginalize affective aspects of reading and writing often leads students and critics alike to respond to rhetorically flexible writing with suspicion and impatience. For no small number of students, or teachers for that matter, writing instruction is book-ended by frustration and boredom—as was likely the case above with the student paper that was purportedly not making sense. T.R. Johnson addresses the point most directly:

> As Bart Simpson or Beavis and Butthead or any of the denizens of Wayne's World would put it, "school sucks." Everybody knows this. But how does this attitude impact the way students inhabit the composing process and the ways they come to engage the symbolic field of their culture? (623)

Embedded in the assertion that school sucks is the assumption that school-based writing is supposed to be boring, that "imaginative" assignments (e.g., a portfolio of poems, short stories, and personal narratives) lack the critical and analytical potential of traditional academic

prose. Even when teachers make efforts to actively deconstruct the binaries that privilege the critical over the imaginative, our existing disciplinary framework leads students to conclude that such work simply doesn't count in the same way that, say, a research paper or even a timed essay examination would count. As a result, it is often the *students*, more so than colleagues or curriculum committees, who make the case for the predictable routine of read, analyze, write, revise, revise, revise over other no less valuable activities such as read, imagine, explore, speculate, emulate, innovate. In this way a text that might be interesting or exciting in other contexts is rendered uninteresting by the "symbolic field" of the English classroom: the ivied walls, the desks, the anthologies, the entrance and exit exams, the figure (even the very title), "professor."

Audience is but one construct for understanding how to navigate our field. One could easily imagine others, so perhaps it is incumbent upon me to conclude with an explanation as to why audience is not just any construct, but a vital one for understanding what we do in English studies and why we do it. For this task, Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself" provides a useful point of departure.

Like the field of English itself, the work is sprawling and in an almost constant state of revision. At the conclusion to the 1855 version of the poem, Whitman writes:

> I depart as air…I shake my white locks at the runaway sun,
> I effuse my flesh in eddies and drift it in lacy jags.
>
> I bequeath myself to the dirt to grow from the grass I love,
> If you want me again look for me under your bootsoles.
>
> You will hardly know who I am or what I mean,
> But I shall be good health to you nevertheless,
> And filter and fibre your blood.
>
> Failing to fetch me at first keep encouraged,
> Missing me in one place search another,
> I stop somewhere waiting for you. (ll.1327-36)

I suspect that Whitman's hope was for the poem, as *poem*, to be forgotten by most readers—a curious goal to be sure, since most writers seek to be remembered. But once forgotten, and thereby freed from the symbolic field of poetry, the spirit of the work might best enter our hearts and cause them to grow. The critic Roland Barthes speculates that literature exists because we have literature classrooms that study figures like Whitman. In significant ways, he is correct. The symbolic field of English studies, from the mandatory writing class to the dissertation, structures and in many ways defines the texts

we interpret as literature. Yet as Barthes well understood, this is not the whole story (235-7). Literature, and I include good scholarship in this grouping, happens in the space between readers and writers, in the space one stops, somewhere, waiting. Encounters with our various and shifting audiences are meritorious to the extent that they occasion growth in our hearts and in the hearts of others. This is the vital and intangible work of English studies; this is the work that must be written, and in taking up the work of the dissertation this is my charge, as it is now yours.

Sincerely,

Frank Gaughan

Chapter One: Of Dubious Value to the Material Sublime, or Running with *El Duende* in the Academy of the Future

In 1993, having finished a bachelor's degree in English at Queens College, I matriculated in a terminal master's program at the University of Massachusetts at Boston. This was not a difficult decision for me: Jobs for twenty-two year-old former lifeguards with English degrees were scarce in New York City at that time; I wanted to write a novel, and as the 2003 film, The Hours, depicted Virginia Woolf's composing process, I knew I had the first line: "On a bright September morning, Wendell Livingston Wright jumped from the stern of the Staten Island ferry." The teaching of writing, therefore, seemed to me a natural step, both in my novel-writing endeavors and in my study of literature. As I sat down in the seminar that was a prelude to teaching my first college composition course, I was unaware of the, then, current events in the field that would shape my experiences in the years to come. I was unaware of the Lindemann-Tate debates, concerning the pros and cons of teaching literature in the first-year writing classroom; unaware of John Trimbur's College English review, "Taking the Social Turn," which describes a turn away from process pedagogy toward the "cultural politics of

literacy" (109); unaware of the Bartholomae-Elbow debates, which concern the conflicts between writing for the academy and for one's self; outside of the dictionary definition, "supplemental or auxiliary," I was unaware of what the term "adjunct" meant or implied; finally, having never taken a class that might be described as "first-year writing," I was unaware of what sort of writing should or could happen in such a class.

At the time, my idea of writing was clear: one wrote essays when asked to do so; one wrote for the school or local newspapers when so inclined, and one wrote poems and stories when inspired, when bored, when depressed, or when desiring a date for the senior prom. While essays on Shakespeare's sonnets and articles on the 114th precinct's purchase of seven new motor scooters offered mildly interesting diversions, "real" writing meant writing poems, stories, and a novel that described the aftermath of Wendell Wright's plunge into New York's Upper Harbor. With this idea of "real" writing in mind, I assumed a composition class involved the writing of fiction, poetry, and expository prose in fairly equal measures. I cannot say why I thought this. After all, having majored in British literature as an undergraduate, I had written numerous essays interpreting sonnets, plays, and

novels, yet outside of a lone elective in creative writing no English teacher had ever asked me to write a sonnet, play, or novel. Still, I assumed that a writing course would be of a different order. I was quite right in this assumption, yet never more spectacularly wrong.

I found it hard to express my confusion over the reading list that would introduce me to the field: Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Ann Berthoff's Forming/Thinking/Writing, David Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky's Facts, Artifacts, and Counterfacts, Mikhail Bakhtin's The Dialogic Imagination, and Kurt Spellmeyer's Common Ground: Dialogue, Understanding, and the Teaching of Composition. In perusing the back covers and skimming the introductions of these required texts, I paused midway through the first page of Spellmeyer's Common Ground:

> No one lectured me on the facts of professional life, but I somehow learned en route to the Ph.D. that freshman English was fundamentally distinct from the intellectual enterprise of an English department proper—distinct, and even antithetical. While I had hoped to become a proficient teacher […] it never occurred to me that composition might be anything other than absolutely straightforward:

> writing was a matter of "organization," "development," "correctness," and "clarity"—everyone knew this, and no one could reasonably contest it. (1)

From my point of view, writing was "absolutely straightforward" as well. It involved secretive journal-keeping, constructing wildly disconnected paragraphs that skirted the line between poetry and prose, hours of sitting around doing nothing punctuated by bursts of furious typing, sending material off to literary journals that neither I nor anyone I knew had even seen, much less read, and of course, writing involved the collection of perfunctory rejections from said journals in the form of pre-printed postcards. While the nuances of Spellmeyer's point were lost on me at the time, it was nonetheless at precisely this moment when I realized my idea of writing and the practices necessary for the becoming of a writer were fundamentally different from the university's idea of a writing course and the practices necessary for the becoming of a *student* writer; likewise, I would later learn that writing in and for English studies at a professional level was "distinct and even antithetical" to writing in popular venues. The distance between my own and the academy's idea of writing was, at the time, greater than I had ever

imagined possible. So great, in fact, that after the first fifteen minutes of graduate school I felt an almost overwhelming desire to stand up and see how much of my money the registrar would return to me, and I suspect that many of the writers whose works, letters, journals, and biographies I had studied may have encouraged me to do exactly that. So what kept me in the chair?

There is no easy answer to such a question. On one level, I stayed in the chair for the same reason I sat down in the first place: there were few viable alternatives. Many of my friends from high school and college were busy applying for jobs with the New York City Police Department, Fire Department, Sanitation Department, the military, and a few others had applied to law school. While these are all "good" jobs, as my family informed me—providing a stable paycheck, benefits, and a career path—they were not jobs I felt a burning need to perform. If nothing else, I had a feel for English, a desire for it—the writing, the reading, even the syntactic and interpretive contortions sometimes required by the field's disciplinary conventions. So on a deeper level, and despite my occasional complaints, I stayed in the chair for the joy of English—the texts, the field, the conventions, all of it. That said, it seems to me that somewhere between

the MLA convention and the committee meeting and teaching an eight o'clock class and grading sixty-four three-page papers on the Heart of Darkness, we (the collective of part-time, full-time, and tenured professionals known colloquially as "English Professors") have lost sense of the love that led most of us to keep sitting in the chair—listening to another seminar, writing another conference proposal, grading another paper.

It seems we have lost sight of what Federico García Lorca describes as *el duende*, which he defines, by way of Goethe, as a mysterious power "that everyone feels but that no philosopher has explained" (91). Lorca continues: "Every step that a man, or as Nietzsche would say, an artist, takes towards the tower of his perfection is at the cost of the struggle he maintains with a *duende* not with an angel, as has been said, and not with a muse" (92). Unlike romantic notions of the Muse, e*l duende* is located inside one's body, and "has to be roused in the very cells of the blood" (93). In this way, Lorca struggles to create. Likewise, when witnessing the performance of a particularly accomplished musician, dancer, or poet, one might say *tiene duende,* meaning that the performer has a certain magic or charm. The word can also be interpreted to mean elf, goblin, sprite, ghost, or even demon.

Thus, while preparing to push my chair back and leave the seminar room, it was my sense of the academy's *duende* that kept me in the chair. Was it ghost, sprite, or demon? What was this certain magic? I had to know, so I asked, with a gesture to the above-listed books piled on the seminar table, my first question in my first graduate seminar: "What does any of *this* have to do with writing?" The professor responded, as writing teachers are wont to do, with another question: "Yes. What's missing?"

The asking and advancing of answers to such questions are often the initial moves in reform proposals, or else reformist polemics. In the pages and chapters that follow, I hope to enact the best practices of the former, while keeping the latter in dry-dock for a much needed overhaul. In some ways, of course, all reforms are polemical since change is often preceded by controversial arguments—the neutral definition of the word "polemic." But in other ways, the word holds fast to its etymology, and is associated with war and hostility. Thus, some polemical practices—polarizing rhetoric, attacking straw men, and responding to differences of opinion with ad hominem attacks—tend to focus on winning arguments, rather than figuring out answers to the question at the heart of Plato's Gorgias: What is best? In keeping with that question,

I intend to direct some positive reformist energy at the ways we in English studies write to and for (and at) each other and the ways we teach our students to do the same. This chapter describes reasons and methods for making professional and student writing more accessible and compelling to a non-academic, public readership. The following section describes ways that professional and disciplinary conventions have led many in English studies to develop an insular sense of audience. In the next section, I argue that it is necessary to develop publicly accessible facets of our scholarship if we are to successfully negotiate issues like curriculum design and assessment practices. In the final section, I conclude by describing instances of freer writing, or what Geoffrey Sirc calls "the material sublime," moments where analytic and imaginative prose converge for academic purposes.

Inadequate, Inaccessible, and Boring:
The Crisis of Reform in English Studies

To assert that the writing and pedagogical practices of English studies are in need of reform is to imply the inadequacy of current practices. Very few people like to be called "inadequate," much less "inaccessible" and "boring," yet these terms are the ones that students along with non-academic friends and acquaintances often use to describe

literature generally and literature *about* literature—the bulk of our scholarly production—particularly. Herein lies the controversy: for a set of practices to change, a representative group of practitioners has to agree that the current ones are either not as effective as they could be or partly, if not totally, flawed. That is, a group of practitioners must agree to disagree with established conventions. If the causes for the dissent are recognized as valid, practitioners arrive at what is typically called a paradigm shift, with reference to Thomas Kuhn's influential The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. In this particular case, the difficulty of establishing a paradigm-shifting consensus is compounded, since the set of practices with which I am concerned involves the ways we write and teach others to write, for writing is not only associated with the creation and communication of knowledge in English studies but also with the ways that students will function in the workplace and in our culture. That is, good *student* writing and its attendant literacy skills—analytical ability, imaginative capacity, and fluency in edited American English—are associated with economic mobility, active citizenship, and a host of contested social and cultural values; likewise, professional scholarly writing and its attendant conventions

are associated with English studies' disciplinary identity and its professors' identity as a body of experts. Whether students or English professors, people tend to be very sensitive about their writing, so arguments for change are bound to meet significant resistance.

It is perhaps for this reason that reform proposals are often made to sound urgent with references to a crisis:

> During the last thirty years the purposes and direction of English studies have become steadily more confused, the teaching of English steadily less effective. […] the uses of language have become blurred, the function of literature forgotten. (30)

Sound familiar? It should. Even though G.F. Sensabaugh wrote the above for College English in 1943 and was therefore describing a thirty-year decline in the coherence of English studies that dates back to the dawn of the discipline (the MLA was founded in 1883), Sensabaugh was hardly the first or the last to voice criticisms of this kind. It is not difficult to locate similar appeals to crisis in every decade of the twentieth century and now in the first decade of the twenty-first century. If nothing else, we can say that there is an active, self-reflective, reformist tradition in English studies—either that or a deep-seated paranoia about what we

do and why we do it. Writing in 1884 and addressing the newly formed MLA, Th. W. Hunt explains that "there is nothing more trying to a sensitive English scholar than the attitude which many college professors in other departments are pleased to assume, relative to English. This attitude is at times one of indifference. At times it is patronizing and cynical" (120-1). It is a small wonder we write about literature in ways that seem at turns indecipherable and bizarre to the majority of the reading population: we have a long history of getting beat up in the schoolyard. The idea may ring of pop psychology, but it is not entirely false to claim that in the wake of the indifferent, patronizing, and cynical responses to our most basic practices—reading, writing, and interpreting imaginative texts—we built a school yard all our own, developed our own particular brand of reading and writing, and asserted it to be superior to the brand practiced in popular culture.

It is an assertion that is increasingly difficult to defend. For example, in a 1973 address to the Association for Departments of English (ADE) D.H. Stewart warns that if we "fail to repair the image and the substance of our teaching and research, we shall have trouble surviving as a profession

until the end of the century" ("Saving English").[4] In 1998, Robert Scholes would concur: the field seems to him "hollow, falling, though perhaps not yet visibly fallen" (Rise and Fall of English 18). In 2001, perhaps recognizing that the crisis trope has lost its urgency, Louis Menand inaugurates the new century of English studies reform movements with sardonic, rather than grave, intonations: "People say that the humanities disciplines have collapsed, but for the most part they do not say this with a huge amount of anxiety" ("Marketplace"). Indeed, references to the literacy crisis, labor crisis, financial crisis, and the relevancy crisis frame many conversations, especially those about what faculty in the humanities can and should do in their classrooms and in their research. The kids can't even read, never mind write; doctoral degree holders earn better pay waiting tables than they do shuffling between adjunct gigs; the university resembles a Wal-Mart more and more each day, and academic prose—particularly the sort produced by English professors—is popularly understood to be anything but popular (assuming, that is, one can find a consensus as to what constitutes

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[4]Here and throughout the dissertation, parenthetical references without page numbers refer to sources taken from databases, such as LexisNexis or electronic archives, such as the one maintained by the ADE or electronically published journals, such as Workplace. All citations are in accordance with the MLA Handbook, 6th edition.

academic prose beyond the tautological: academic prose is the prose produced by academics).

As I will remind readers periodically in both my usage and my disclaimers, there is a legitimate place for academic-speak, and specialists of any variety—be they Trekkies or Melville fanatics—ought to inhabit such places, writing about Captains Kirk and Ahab in ways common to a coterie of like-minded experts. If one has to pause to explain dilithium crystals or the pasteboard mask for every greenhorn reader, then it is difficult to advance the field. Specialized places hardly need defending, since they rise and fall of their own weight on interactive websites (e.g., online magazines, discussion boards, list-servs) all over the world. Instead, I am pointing to a marked—albeit difficult to quantify—loss of cultural capital[5] on the part of English studies. While acknowledging the vital role of such specialized venues, I want to suggest writing and discussing texts and their

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[5] In this affirmation of *accessible* language, I am aware that some readers may direct attention toward my own reliance on *specialized* language—in this particular case, Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron's term "cultural capital" in Cultural Reproduction and Social Reproduction. By now, however, this term has achieved fairly widespread circulation; further, while the term does have some affiliation with specialized theorizing, its component terms are, I would say, accessible, which goes a long way toward explaining the widespread circulation. The pained nature of this disclaimer points not only to the difficulty of the task at hand, but also to the question of audience: never mind who is speaking; who is *listening*? This is a question I will take up in depth in chapter three.

surrounding contexts in ways that are of concern to the non-academic reading public. Most academics, for example, enjoy reading intellectually-oriented periodicals such as the New Yorker or the Atlantic Monthly, and the relevance of such journalism is widely understood and accepted. Yet the assumptions of disciplinarity and the conventions of academic writing constrain our imaginative and compositional horizons to such a degree that, with the exception of a few academic celebrities, we no longer communicate the substance of our concerns with non-academics.

In The Last Intellectuals, Russell Jacoby traces the movement of intellectual life into the academy in the years following World War II and argues that the narrowing of audience to an elite inner circle is an inevitable by-product of the academization of intellectual life:

> To put it sharply: the habitat, manners, and idiom of intellectuals have been transformed within the past fifty years. Younger intellectuals no longer need or want a larger public; they are almost exclusively professors. […] Unlike past intellectuals they situate themselves within fields and disciplines—for good reasons. Their jobs, advancement, and salaries depend on the evaluation

> of specialists, and this dependence affects the issues broached and the language employed. (6)

For Jacoby, intellectual life has become isolated from the public, homogenized, and reluctant to take on topics that might not provide immediate career advancement: "As intellectuals became academics, they had no need to write a public prose; they did not, and finally they could not" (7).

The point that academic-speak is needlessly isolating and inaccessible, even to many academics, is of course a generalization and like most generalizations, a debatable one. Passages from Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, or the most recent volume of Social Text reveal varied and engaging prose. Similarly, one could turn to the op-ed page of The New York Times and find passages that range from the opaque to the inane. There is little need for another hackneyed lamentation over the excesses of jargon or for more shrill hyperbole, characteristic of culture warriors at both ends of the ideological spectrum. Such caveats notwithstanding, academic books are written by and for an academic audience, a fact that shapes what and how one writes. The risk here is that as the audience for academic work narrows, the writing loses its public face and its ability to affect the culture in positive ways. Likewise, academics lose leverage in arguments over

issues ranging from academic freedom and tenure to pay raises and class size. Previous critiques of the mass media's mis-portrayal of critical theory have depicted print and broadcast journalism as hostile to anything that is not sensational or easily summarized. Further, as Barry Sarchett argues in his critique of Jacoby, the bohemian, avant-garde, artistic, intellectual locale, outside the constraints of the marketplace and institutionalized culture, is more nostalgia than reality. Vibrant intellectual life often depends on an active marketplace and large institutions. Finally, the idea that the public does not care about literary criticism or academic debates is partly true (since most folks never did), but false in important ways. Sarchett cites the very existence of the culture wars as evidence that academic writing remains influential in the public domain, and traces Jacoby's argument to yet another version of crisis-talk, in which one must claim the university system is failing in order to write or speak with any authority (255-260).

While Sarchett raises points worth considering, particularly in reminding readers that crisis-talk rarely moves in positive directions, there is a reductive quality to the argument, which draws what strength it has from a variety of analysis that is by now more predictable than persuasive.

Well-known for his advocacy of utopic thinking, Jacoby may indeed be nostalgic for a condition that never was; he may well be naïve in his ardent demand that academics communicate more capably in public venues. However, the familiar charges of nostalgia and naiveté, with which Sarchett dismisses the broad outlines of Jacoby's point, fail to address or even acknowledge the "inner contradiction [to] academic freedom—the institution neutralizes the freedom it guarantees. For many professors in many universities academic freedom [means] nothing more than the freedom to be academic" (119).

If nothing else, it seems the profession, could collectively attend better to the recommendations of the 1996 MLA Commission on Professional Service, which finds that because of changes in "economic, social, and demographic conditions, along with technological changes in the production and dissemination of knowledge, […] the consensus on values in the academic workplace is eroding" (Denham et al. 1). Indeed, we as a field are no longer sure as to what counts as legitimate knowledge and as legitimate (think tenure-worthy) academic practices. Thus, while affirming the role of traditional scholarship, the commission also points to the undervalued place of service and teaching. The report

encourages a broad understanding of what constitutes intellectual work, which they characterize as follows:

- connecting knowledge to other knowledge;
- preserving, restoring, and reinterpreting past knowledge;
- applying aesthetic, political, and ethical values to make judgments about knowledge and its uses;
- arguing knowledge claims in order to invite criticism and revision;
- *making specialized knowledge broadly accessible and usable, for example, to young learners, to nonspecialists in other disciplines, to the public;*
- *helping new generations to become active knowers themselves, preparing them for lifelong learning and discovery;*
- *applying knowledge to practical problems in significant or innovative ways;*
- *creating insight and communicating forms of experience through artistic works or performance.*

(my emphasis 15-6)

Imagining Viable Alternative Spaces

Aside from the ease with which reform proposals slip into the worst instances of polemic, hyperbole, and crisis-talk, the trouble with proposals like this dissertation or Jacoby's Last Intellectuals or the collective efforts of well-intentioned MLA commissions is that they often lead to very little reform. It is one thing to write about reconceiving academic writing or re-valuing teaching and intellectual work, but it is quite another to take action. In part, this is due to the significant difficulties in effecting change in the practices of large institutions. This point seems especially relevant when suggesting ways to reconceive the production and reception of student and professional academic writing, since our particular variety of literacy is strongly associated with our identity as a professional (or professorial) class. Further, aside from its practical function of demonstrating, producing, and advancing knowledge about a particular subject area, academic writing—the ways in which one adheres to and breaks with conventions, and the venues in which such writing appears—is also an expression of one's place within an established hierarchy and an assertion of one's credentials. Therefore, those in a position to implement changes in the way

academic writing is produced and received (e.g., English teachers, admissions and personnel committees, editors, etc.) often have little cause or motivation to do so; after all, the current arbiters of academic acceptability have mastered a given set of codes—a style, or what David Bartholomae, building on the work of Patricia Bizzell, calls the "'distinctive register' of academic discourse" ("Inventing" 616). To challenge the style of academic writing is also to challenge the way those within the academic hierarchy interact.

Both Bartholomae and Bizzell argue convincingly that what we understand to be contemporary displays of academic discourse (e.g., a typical article in PMLA or College English) are more capable of fully exploring an issue, revealing logical inconsistencies, and airing competing viewpoints than are the rapid-fire, sound-byte driven, commonplace-reliant styles characteristic of an Ann Coulter editorial (e.g., Liberals are politically correct thought police and anti-American chicken-shits) or television shows like FoxNews' The O'Reilly Factor (cf., "Inventing," 602-3 and Bizzell, "Ethos," 351). Indeed, the assumption that academic discourse concerns itself, above all else, with truth and logic (even in its postmodern, contingent versions) is one of the fundamental

arguments in favor of the specialized style in which many academics have ensconced themselves.

Regardless of its validity, the image of the disconnected scholar—who conducts research that interests and benefits only a small inner-circle of colleagues and who at turns alienates, confuses, and neglects students—is as recognizable in America as it is persuasive. Those seeking limits on academic freedom, tenure, and funding to public education use this sensationalized image to their rhetorical advantage. As Gerald Graff points out in Clueless in Academe, academics have not been doing a very good job at communicating their insights to each other or to the public. The problem is not only the jargon and complex sentence structures characteristic of scholarly writing, but also an institutional mindset that often refuses to establish connections, what Graff describes as "bridge discourses," between popular culture and academic culture (106-9).

As a result, public perceptions of academic work are less than positive. It is interesting to notice that Henry Giroux, a critic of Graff's well-known "teach the conflicts" approach agrees with Graff on at least this point: "Academics have once again become intellectual eggheads who cannot communicate to a wider general public" ("Academics" 296). While Giroux contends

that the irrelevancy charge often singles out those who are most willing to interrogate our culture's common sense attitudes toward the implications of race, class, gender, and sexual inequalities (297), Graff contends that such is not necessarily the case. For this, he cites students who in responding to essays by Allan Bloom and bell hooks found little difference between the two. They were, in his words, "just a couple of professors conversing in arcane language about nonproblems" (6). One might argue, as I have elsewhere, that readers who fail to distinguish between Bloom and hooks may need to hone their reading comprehension skills, but Graff's point is still valid: even academic readers often fail to see the significance—the "so what?"—in academic prose (cf. Gaughan and Khost). Graff argues that in such cases the problem is often that academics fail to do what journalists and advertisers often do as a matter of course: lead with a compelling point in plainly stated language and balance the complexity of that point with simple, even reductive, summaries that provide controlling frames for readers. The poet Marianne Moore puts the matter succinctly:

> we
> do not admire what
> we cannot understand. (ll. 8-10)

In keeping with Graff's point here, I will summarize and reduce what I feel is a necessarily complex and debatable

reform proposal as follows: we need to incorporate our own imaginative productions into our theorizing and work with genre in hybridized ways. We need to do this professionally and we need to teach our students to do it as well because until we learn to interact with the public and our students at an imaginative level, sympathetic readers will be unlikely to grasp the nuances of our points and the less-sympathetic will dismiss us as irrelevant blowhards. As if that were not enough, we will continue to lose the ever-escalating plagiarism wars with our students. Consider, for example, the boom in websites offering “research” papers for sale and the academy’s subsequent embrace of surveillance technology like turnitin.com—a service to which universities or individuals may subscribe. Working like a specialized Google search, the service compares the submitted writing to all writing previously submitted, as well as a continually updated volume of work available for free and for sale on the internet. Some faculty use turnitin as an intermediary, requiring students to submit pre-screened essays; other faculty collect student papers in the traditional way and manually submit selections that seem suspicious. Considering the ingenuity with which students use the internet, it is not difficult to imagine that

they will soon figure ways to avoid having one's essay flagged by a typical turnitin search.

There are, of course, distinctions between analytical and imaginative writing, just as there are between scientific and artistic thinking, or journalistic and academic prose, but there are also vital connections that we have failed to leverage. Graff contends that rigid distinctions between these interdependent modes have "often been harmful to both arts and science education, to say nothing of modern culture, especially when it dissociates both art and science from critical rationality, leaving art to be seen as a kind of vacation from rigorous thinking while science becomes a moral imbecile with a calculator" (Clueless 102).

Aside from our collective preference for analysis over narrative, asserting over assenting, and our entrenched commitments to what Patricia Bizzell calls the academic "grapholect," i.e., precise and unemotional, argumentative prose, intended for the eye, not the ear ("Hybrid," 10), effecting reform—be it in professional or student academic writing—is also difficult because it requires the would-be reformer to take action within a bureaucratic system. Generating and publishing reform proposals, like this dissertation, earns one prestige and tenure in academe;

managing and negotiating the day-in-day-out procession of meetings and memoranda and advancing reformist arguments in curriculum committee meetings may earn one local respect but it just as likely may not. In his study of educational reform, As If Learning Mattered, Richard Miller points to similarities among the hypothetical student's claim that "I could have written a really excellent paper if my teacher had let me choose my own topic," one educator's claim that it is, "an outrage that this administration is treating education as if it were a business," and another's claim that "all the faculty cares about is product not process." Miller reasons that "in each instance, the parties imagine an alternative free space where a different kind of learning and teaching might go on" (7). Thus the practical difficulties and bureaucratic knowledge necessary to effect a reform "threaten to expose rhetorics of change as delusional or deliberately deceptive" (9). For Miller, the bureaucrat-reformer is not a contradiction in terms but the only figure capable of transforming a rhetoric of change into a necessarily compromised, but at least substantive, improvement.

I am sensitive to Miller's critique, since (like Jacoby) I do imagine "alternative free spaces," where academic writers interact with the laity, writing the sort of prose folks email

to each other and post on office bulletin boards. Particularly for writers, academic or otherwise, such free spaces are rich with imagination and compositional potential; they are the spaces in which *el duende* breathes; and they are the spaces in which we struggle to create the new. It is perhaps overly optimistic—if not "delusional and deliberately deceptive"—to imagine that *el duende* occupies a desk in an office down the hall from my own, attends faculty meetings, and responds to student papers. Yet it is this sort of optimism and idealism that motivates change. It is possible to be simultaneously aware of, but not unduly constrained by, academic grapholects, and bureaucratic difficulties and contradictions. For Miller, the challenge is to accept the lived reality of bureaucracy and to learn how to resist unwanted changes and reform existing problems with the knowledge that institutional practices, on the whole, are unlikely to change in a drastic way over the span of a typical career. (The point is that practices *do* change, and the development of composition studies is a good example of both the significance and the pace of institutional change.)

Meanwhile, for James Sosnoski the challenge is to recognize the extent to which we, as academics, constrain ourselves and our writing; limit the scope of our influence,

both publicly and institutionally; and effectively preempt positive change for the sake of adherence to a set of disciplinary conventions that ensure the development of what he calls "token professionals" and "master critics." The former group he defines as "professors who teach in mainstream universities, disproportionately evaluated on scholarly contributions while working mostly in service capacities" (3). Token professionals are a group from whom "exemplary productivity is demanded but to whom adequate research time is not made available" (4). The token professionals are those who have years of advanced training in a specialized sub-division—say, Jacobean drama—but whose job it is to teach, work, manage, develop, and direct the large numbers of introductory, service, and general education courses. For Sosnoski, most token professionals have bought into, or at the very least abide by, the illusion of an academic meritocracy, in which the master critics rise to stature based on the quality of their scholarship alone. This is not to say that the works of so-called master critics like Stanley Fish or bell hooks are not influential, or that such figures rose to prominence on a cult of personality alone. However, as David Shumway observes in his study of the academic star system, the resultant concentration of authority combined with current

practices in which most scholars in English studies write to and for like-minded scholars have eroded public perception and awareness of what we do and why we do it (98).

The institutional trap of token professionalism is characteristic of the working conditions for many faculty in English studies. For example, one might be a “part-time” teacher, despite teaching 16 or more credit hours a semester, plus summer, and even inter-session teaching. Yet this same person might be denied a “full-time” job because of insufficient or non-existent publications. Similarly, a composition specialist might be hired to fulfill administrative duties, say directing a writing center as well as teaching. These duties often involve working conditions similar to a 9-5 office job, which leaves little time for the researching, publishing, grant writing, and lecturing characteristic of master critics. From both personal and institutional perspectives, the gap between expectations and performance often results in an unproductive comparison between what the majority of the faculty can realistically accomplish and the ideal “career template,” which faculty are expected to embody and against which faculty are judged (Sosnoski 61-8). If only we worked harder, or if only we were smarter, then we would be able to write our way out of

Remedial Community College and move on to an elite institution and become the "master critic," who we presumably should be. The relevant questions here do not concern academic stardom—its causes or its very existence. In a culture filled with glossy and gossipy coverage of movie stars, television stars, even aspiring stars who willingly dip their heads in vats of cow blood for the sake of fifteen seconds (never mind minutes) worth of reality-show exposure, the development of the academic star is predictable. If nothing else, it makes good economic sense from a publisher's point of view: academics write books, publishers want to sell them, stardom sells books.

No, the real question is to what extent does academic stardom define disciplinary practices and expectations, which in turn limit the scope and influence of our collective work. Sosnoski's hope, like my own, is that knowledge of the ways we unnecessarily limit our own and our students' writing will inspire English faculty to imagine a different vision of the profession, one in which we act in ways that benefit the majority of the workers in our field as well as our students, one in which we become as Sosnoski puts it "more flexible in our conduct and less deleterious in our rhetoric" (xiv). Thus, the reform I am suggesting, freer writing, is relatively

straightforward and has the advantage of already happening—albeit in the minority of classes, assignments, and published scholarship: in short, I am suggesting that English scholars focus increased attention on teaching and producing publicly accessible prose by mingling literary, journalistic, and academic conventions. Such hybrid works are particularly important for the development of English studies since the field does not necessarily or exclusively concern specialized knowledge—at least not in the way that, say, organic chemistry or molecular biology does. Furthermore, specialized research in the humanities has not historically been associated with practical, profitable adaptations, as it has been in computer science or physics, for example; rather the humanities, and English studies in particular, concerns itself with interpretations, not facts. Arguments regarding, say, the interpretive nature of all factuality are likely only to result in reinforcing the perception that our grapholect is more about jargon-heavy, elitist, irrelevant pedantry than it is about improving the state of our culture, arguing for a common good, or advancing informed judgments about what is and what is not true, beautiful, or ethical in an increasingly complex world.

The relevance of what we do as a group of professionals must be better communicated to the non-academic world. It is ironic that English professors—whose specialty is typically literature, language, and communication—are not particularly well-known for their writing or their facility with communication. If anything, we are regarded with no small amount of suspicion, as with the familiar sequence:

> What do you do?
> I teach English.
> Oh, I better watch what I say.

Otherwise, our profession is derided for favoring ideological controversy over the intricacies of sentence and paragraph design that might better enable our students to succeed in the world. Our profession, and by extension the people who work within it, are so often misrepresented because we fail to represent ourselves in accessible ways. As a result, our arguments for academic freedom, improved working conditions, "additional" tenure lines, and smaller classes, are often not as effective as they could be.

Thus I am proposing that we start to practice what we teach: effective, literary, humanistic writing that stands a fair chance of being read by an audience larger than ourselves, that we start writing in ways that shape the discipline rather than letting an outdated sense of

disciplinarity dictate what we consider to be acceptable, knowledge-producing, academic writing. I suggest, in short, that we start writing and training our students to write in rhetorically flexible and imaginatively engaging ways. To be sure, this is an ironic proposal, since the dissertation sub-genre is not widely regarded as an accessible, much less a flexible, venue. Further, I am unaware of any counter-proposals that insist on arcane prose and teaching students rhetorical inflexibility. Nonetheless, our practices sometimes belie our arguments, for I am equally unaware of any thriving popular venues in which English professionals represent themselves and their work in accurate and accessible ways. True Camille Paglia recently published a collection of accessible interpretations of oft-anthologized poetry (Break, Blow, Burn); Terry Eagleton often writes reviews for The Nation, and Louis Menand contributes to The New Yorker. I am sure that resistant readers will eagerly supply a longer list of similar examples. However, that list represents more the exception than the rule, and the above figures are also elite representatives of our field—the "master critics" of whom Sosnoski writes. Token professionals, by contrast, produce competent, but for practical purposes uncirculated, work that ranges from committee reports and memoranda to an occasional

paper in a journal with an extremely limited circulation. In "Education for Irrelevance," Spellmeyer contends that the audience for criticism of the sort that literature and composition specialists produce is often so small (by his estimate, a few hundred in most cases) that academic essays amount to "a symbolic gesture that no one, or almost no one, ever witnesses, which makes them autistic gestures as well" (80).

Yet the culture of academe tends to value such highly specialized publications over forms that might help to put a positive public face on the work of English studies. Founding and producing a small literary magazine, writing for a community newspaper, establishing a website, let's say, would not be valued by a tenure committee (if such acts of literary and critical production would be valued at all) in the same way as publishing an article, even one in a journal with an extremely limited circulation.

While academe may still turn its nose up at non-traditional publication, the corporate world certainly pays it careful consideration. Writing in The New York Times, Jeremy Blachman describes magazines that fired (in the case of Ladies Home Journal) and withdrew a job offer from (in the case of Seventeen) an associate beauty editor when it was discovered

that she was blogging about the workplace. It mattered little to the magazines in question that the blogger, Nadine Haobsh, was writing light, whimsical prose about as critical and incisive as a fourth-grader's love letter. (In one blog post, she wrote about the joys of receiving sample packets of lip gloss and conditioner as one of her job's perks.) Blachman notes that he "narrowly escaped" the same fate after being "publicly outed as the author of a Weblog called 'Anonymous Lawyer.'" Even though the blog was a work of fiction, he speculates that he would likely have been fired had he still been working at the firm at the time of the revelation. In reflecting on the reasons for the extremity of such corporate reactions, he notes: "If no one was reading, employers wouldn't be concerned. There's a demand for the first-person narratives people are writing about their jobs. There's nowhere else to go to create honest conversation about the working world."

Would not, for example, parents spending upwards of twenty-thousand dollars a year for each child's college education have at least a passing interest in what we do in English studies? If we cannot construct an argument that is simultaneously interesting to such an audience and relevant to our own research interests, how is it that we are teaching our

students to write, given the reality that most students will never come anywhere near advanced study in literature or composition? Would not returning students, prospective graduate students, as well as legislators voting on education policy find descriptions of debates and practices in English studies valuable? Why should the popular representations of our profession come from cinematic clichés (e.g., <u>The Dead Poets Society</u>) or else venues like <u>The New Criterion</u>, where James Bowman recently blamed English departments for the reported decline in reading rates in young adults with the following reproof:

> For if, by some fluke, [a young, avid reader] arrives at a university with some spark in him of love for literature, still unextinguished by his high school English courses, it is sure to be doused in short order by professors whose attitude toward their subject is not one of the reverence and admiration that even middle-aged people can remember in their own teachers, but one of mere contempt. He will be taught, if he persists in his literary studies, to feel the same contempt, the same sense of effortless superiority to the authors of the past, whose only use is to provide examples of the

> various sorts of diabolical encodings with which the oppressor-cultures of their times have been able to mask a naked power lust.

Over decades of work as a student and a teacher of English, I've not met one English professor who matches Bowman's profile, yet in the wake of the culture wars, Bowman feels confident in making the above claims, since flesh and blood English teachers are scrambling to write papers of the sort that appear in PMLA and Critical Inquiry. Even where critics like Bowman, Richard Kimball and others are addressed (see, e.g., collections like PC Wars and Higher Education Under Fire) the rhetorical position tends toward what Linda Ray Pratt calls "reactional countermoves." In other words, to the charge that the tenure system breeds departments filled with poorly dressed, shuffle-footed, mumble-mouthed academics who haven't revised their yellowed lecture notes in twenty years, which is about the last time they published anything, comes the rejoinder: "That's not so," and its attendant deconstructive pattern of argumentation. As Pratt notes, academics need to respond more capably than we now do to increasingly pervasive arguments for "accountability, cost efficiency and skills performance," which tend more often than not to manifest themselves in standardized tests, increased

class sizes, and an educational model that concerns itself more with marketable skills than with humanistic ideals like truth, justice, civic responsibility, and artistic engagement. What is needed, in other words, is an accessible, compelling, and public debate over what we do and why we do it (38). The trouble, however, lies not so much with such an idea, but with its implementation, since attempts to establish a public rapport are not valued in the same way that traditional academic publications are valued. Writing in publicly accessible ways is risky—particularly for the steadily increasing ranks of contingent faculty.

The Contested Space of Assessment

Given the increased public attention to issues of accountability and assessment, and the need to develop competing narratives that explain "what is good?" in compelling ways, Edward White provides a valuable perspective. He observes that academics are not particularly adept at understanding assessment as a "site of contention, where legitimate disputes over educational issues play themselves out" (316). He argues, for example, that just as we understand the meaning of a literary text to be debatable or even fluid, we need to understand that assessment concerns not only the

interests of students and teachers but also those of parents, administrators, accountants, and politicians. We can and should press our point of view, of course, but to do so without recognizing that there are "other legitimate interests" creates an insular conversation and risks isolating our position from those who might influence it in positive ways. For instance, White recounts a conversation with the Vice Chancellor of California State University, during which he was "waxing particularly eloquently about the obvious importance of writing." The chancellor interjected, "Will you stop acting like an English teacher!" From this exchange, White generalizes: "We cannot act as if our classrooms were the world and still expect to participate in the crucial decisions about assessment that affect our students and our classrooms so profoundly" (317). I am not writing about assessment, per se; instead, I am suggesting that composition and literary studies need a vocabulary by which to better understand the value of creativity, imagination, inspiration, and innovation. These are contested terms to be sure, and ones that compete for attention with other issues, like vocational applicability, functional and critical literacy, and academic rigor. The common ground to which Spellmeyer refers in the title of his 1993 study and which I will attempt to establish

in these pages refers therefore to an alternative freer space between individual and institutional understandings of writing instruction, between subjective and objective worldviews, between personal and political perspectives.

That education, particularly in literature, writing, and language arts, is a site of contention is not in doubt. Unfortunately, as White's argument suggests, the field has yet to adapt to current trends in education, particularly those concerned with accountability and assessment. The consequences of our failure to assert the value of a public and publicly accessible humanities-based education—one which is not always amenable to practices of standardization, high stakes testing, and pedagogies that confuse efficiency for profitability—are already being felt in material ways, as departments witness tenure-lines deteriorate via attrition and retrenchement, and ever-increasing classifications of flexible labor. In their study of this and related trends, Gary Rhoades and Sheila Slaughter argue that the ideology in the university has shifted from one of public good to private profit (13). One might rightly point out that education was never solely about a "public good," but this fact does not mitigate recent developments in which education is understood to be a product

and students consumers, customers, clients—or in Rhoades and Slaughter's analysis:

> With regard to students, the ideology of the marketplace rules […]. Promoters and translators of Total Quality Management (TQM) in higher education have the language right but the players wrong. Students are neither "customers" nor "consumers." They are the industry's "inputs" and "products." The purchasers of the products—private, corporate "employers"—are the customers. The push, then, is to improve (standardize) the product by "improving" the input. (14)

As a result of this thinking, all disciplines have been pushed to measure, demonstrate, and consistently improve results—a process that has come to be called "outcomes assessment." It is here that English studies encounters difficulties in ways that other fields do not, for English has traditionally had trouble articulating its values and goals with precision, and the process of measuring results (e.g., grading papers, identifying "honors" and "remedial" students) is a hotly contested and deeply subjective process. In his study of outcomes assessment, Paul Gaston notes that "some provosts, deans, and department chairs are learning in fact that the

assessment movement can provide a bully pulpit for those who have never attributed much value to literary study—or, for that matter, to liberal arts education itself" (12). Therefore, if the assessment process does not show results, or does not show them in reliable ways, universities, local, state, and federal governments may feel justified in redistributing resources (e.g., money, classroom space, tenure lines) to fields that apparently "work."

Recent events in the primary and secondary school systems offer an ominous instance of what may become of English studies if we continue to turn away from the public and thereby leave our mission, aims, and methods, and "outcomes" to be defined by others. Take the issue of "accountability," a key word for politicians and would-be reformers (and entrepreneurs) like Chris Whittle, founder of Edison Schools, Inc. and the creator of "Channel 1," the in-school television program that broadcasts digestible news segments with well-targeted advertisements to its captive audience of students and teachers. Edison and a similar organization, "Community Education Partners" (CEP), are among the largest and best known among the Educational Management Organizations (EMO's), many of which are seeking to benefit from the Bush administration's primary education program, "No Child Left

Behind" (NCLB). If the acronyms seem to be piling up, prepare. If nothing else, Edison particularly, and EMO's generally, have been popular both on Wall Street and in centers of conservative political power. During their terms as Governors, George W. Bush (Texas), Tom Ridge (Pennsylvania), and William Weld (Massachusetts) were all supporters of Edison, and when the stock went public in 1999, David Moberg, senior editor for In These Times, points out that the share value increased by one hundred percent in two years. Wall Street analyst John Rubino puts the matter succinctly, "Add it all up, and you get a $400 billion market that's ripe for the taking" (qtd. in Schrag).

EMO's rise and fall based on their particular version of results, accountability, and quality control, which typically translates to increasing test scores, administrative control of the teacher's classroom, and standardized curricula. Annette Fuentes, writing for The Nation, amends CEP's motto, "Be here, Behave, and Be Learning," to include "'Be tested,' because students spend much of their learning time at computers with Plato, a self-paced tutorial that tests and assesses achievement. CEP uses Plato data to prove its claims of student improvement, but assessment experts give Plato

mixed reviews, and some who've worked with it say cheating is not difficult.”

Those skeptical of claims that higher test results demonstrate that EMO’s educate students better than public school counterparts at a lower cost to taxpayers include not only liberal politicians but parents, students, and a broad spectrum of concerned citizens, which is to say that the audience for publicly accessible scholarship regarding viable alternatives to standardized, test-driven curricula is there and waiting. What is missing, however, is a serious discussion of what replaces the numbers, the pie charts, and the bar graphs reproduced in glossy brochures. Instead of articulating a positive vision for unique and heterogeneous pedagogy, most critics of the assessment movement and of EMO’s tend to focus on the questionable validity of the test scores. However, such criticism will do little more than facilitate another polarized argument. For every scholar, journalist, or parent who claims that test results do not necessarily quantify education, the marketing division of the EMO in question will produce one who counter-claims that such critics are politically motivated and statistically naïve.

The whole point of articulating a publicly accessible and coherent vision for the work and purpose of English studies is

to avoid exactly the sort of he-said-she-said brawl over test results and accountability and offer new and vital representations of our work. In any event, most EMO’s hardly need more criticism, as many of their failings are becoming apparent to school boards across the nation. Boston’s Renaissance school terminated its contract with Edison three years early (O'Reilly and Boorstin). The school board in Dallas, Texas did likewise with CEP, explaining its decision as follows: "the model of education provided by [CEP] was untenable from a pedagogical standpoint. The reliance on non-certified teachers for the bulk of the student-teacher interaction was useful for the company to save money, but was not a design in the best interest of the students. […] Students who attended Community Education Partners did not do very well academically" (Fuentes).

Despite such failings, outcomes assessment—couched in a rhetoric of accountability—and attendant drives toward standardization and the incorporation of education remain potent forces in our culture. It is not enough to lament or rail against these trends. While our disciplinary model insists on writing with and for a small audience of sub-specialists, assessment of our teaching and our field is increasingly moving into the hands of those outside the

university—consulting agencies or testing services, for example. James Slevin describes this process as "absenting the faculty" from the conversation ("Engaging" 289). While I share his concerns, I suggest that many faculty have absented themselves, yet it is in this debate that professionals in English can best make the case to control the content, direction, and purposes of the discipline. To exemplify the consequences of professional absenteeism, whatever its cause, Slevin points to an advertisement for a conference on assessment, noting that while words like "learning," "measure," and "portfolio," occurred with great frequency, words like "*intellect, intelligence, imagination, wonder, contemplation, truth, inquiry,* and *collegiality*" appeared nowhere in the conference program (Slevin's emphasis 291). Likewise, in their ADE-sponsored study of the English major, Schramm et al. develop a list remarkably similar to Slevin's, proposing the following as vital disciplinary practices: "critical judgment, intellectual inventiveness, perspicacity of observation, depth of research, the capacity to draw on a broad range of relevant materials, analytic shrewdness, and originality in making sound connections and distinctions" (80).

In early drafts of this chapter, and prior to locating the work of Schramm el al. and Slevin, I composed my own list of pedagogical and disciplinary practices, which called for increased attention to creativity, imagination, inspiration, and innovation. As should be clear, where there is not overlap between these three lists, there is ample room for common ground. I venture that the majority of the field would concur that these or synonymous words and phases aptly describe our practices in their finer moments. The debate, of course, occurs over what counts as a tenure-worthy expression of "wonder." What makes for pedagogically viable expressions of observational perspicacity? Do we, for example, allow a student in a remedial English class, who has yet to master edited American English, mingle poetic expressions or personal flights of fancy with an analysis of The Awakening? Or are prose-poems only for the smart kids?

Instantiating the Material Sublime

It is common—in academe, as in politics, and elsewhere—to accept what one already agrees with and to dismiss competing points of view as misinformed, misguided, naïve, nostalgic, reductive, or pig-headed. Those who are already convinced of the need to reform English studies in ways I

describe here will nod in chorus, and those who feel that many such conversations simply reproduce the very structures they seek to reform will roll their eyes, gloss the paragraphs, and say, "here we go again." As much as I admire and concur with Geoffrey Sirc's manifesto, English Composition as a Happening, I am saddened and deeply troubled by the divisiveness, which he capably describes and in which he readily participates:

> There was all this wonderful stuff [e.g., the artistic insights of the Dadaists, Surrealists, Abstract-Expressionists]—raising and reflecting on key compositional issues—that wasn't making its way into our journals, and yet an article on how a biologist writes was. Frankly, I don't care how a biologist writes. I assume it's pretty conventional stuff, thoroughly implicated in the traditional departmental divisions that stultify the academy. If the folks in biology want to get together with me and talk about how to re-evaluate the form and subject of biology, I'm there. The way such writing represents the entrenched disciplinarity of academia makes it of dubious value as part of a material sublime. (8)

I have incorporated Sirc's final sentence, above, into this chapter's title to express the admiration and frustration I feel with his position. English departments may well have lost sight of *el duende* that brings purpose, conviction, resolve, personality, charisma, and grace to our scholarship and pedagogy. Even if our students sometimes lack the vocabulary to express their sentiments with precision, they are quick to perceive what is missing. And it is on account of what is missing that their writing—and our reading of their writing—struggles to rise above the level of rule-compliance and task-fulfillment. As Richard Miller reminds us, there may be no "free space" where one's writing and one's goals are never subject to the demands of one and perhaps several institutions. However, in the academy, and particularly in the humanities, we need to find ways to value efforts to communicate in less insular ways and to bring a productive vision of the arts to the public. The imagining of such freer spaces is the first step toward inhabiting them.

It is fitting, therefore, that Miller provides what I understand to be both an instance and a critique of the "material sublime" in an essay titled "The Nervous System." Structurally, this work can fairly be described as a hybrid text—a collage essay that intermingles personal narrative

with academic analysis, both of which are at points interrupted, sometimes abruptly, by poetry as well as short paragraphs referencing illustrative classroom moments. Miller opens the essay with a description of his father's second suicide attempt and situates this sad and compelling anecdote beside an analysis of the now defunct television drama Rescue 911. At this point, Miller observes:

> If I'm going to follow the generic conventions which I have been working with and which have been working with me up to this point, I must now argue for a return to the 'personal' or 'non-academic writing' as a way to reclaim a form of expression that really matters—writing that reaches beyond the walls of conferences, that eschews jargon to make a bigger tent, that dismantles the sense that the writer is the master of her past or of all that she surveys. To head down this road to individualism is, perhaps ironically, to travel an increasingly well-worn path. (267)

Despite the increasing acceptability of such work in academic venues, and despite his own foray into the genre, Miller is skeptical of the personal: "far from finding such work a resource for hope about the possibilities of re-imagining what

it means to write in the academy, I am left with the sense that much of this work ultimately recommends abandoning" the project of mending or at least narrowing the gap between academic and personal writing (267).

Borrowing a phrase from Ann Berthoff, Miller feels that such work, regardless of its affective power, often fails to provide him with "an idea to think with." Indeed, this is part of the problem I wish to address: academic work in English studies involves thinking carefully and rigorously about texts—literary texts or the latest advertisement for Weight Watchers or the text of the classroom or even the text of the discipline itself. Personal narratives, memoir, fiction, poetry, and essays that intermingle these modes with analysis may help the *writer* to effect such thinking, but fail to help *readers* do likewise. Miller's critique of the personal is accurate, up to a point. I would imagine that many readers have been left flat and even vaguely irritated by personal revelations in academic work that seem at best tangentially related to the issue under consideration. Likewise, I imagine that readers have read collage essays and other varieties of fragmented texts that seem to be more like a transparent gimmick than an exercise in rigorous thinking. However, one could level similar criticism at texts that ring in the

standard academic register. What Miller seems to be critiquing with the remark that personal work often fails to give him an idea to think with is simply bad (or at best rhetorically ineffective) writing. The point being that there is nothing inherent to the academic register or to fiction, poetry, memoir, or hybrids of these forms that would lead readers toward the satori of an idea to think with.

Be the text academic or imaginative, fragmented or hybrid, Miller argues that the sense of (not so) vague irritation or frustration when reading, writing, and responding to academic work may help us to move closer toward understanding what makes writing matter, just as it may help in efforts to "escape the Aristotelian trap of proclaiming how one is supposed to feel during a tragedy, for instance, and to attend, instead, to the varying responses people actually have when they observe a given tragedy, read a given book, hear a given paper" (272).

Building on and in many ways directly responding to Miller's work, Jane Hindman recounts an incident at an MLA conference presentation titled "The Alcoholic Epistemology." This panel coincided with what was to be the seventh anniversary of Hindman's first alcoholics anonymous meeting. In an analysis that apparently could have used a personalizing

element, the presenter argued that the discourse of AA was a metanarrative that constructed the identity of alcoholics: "If not for the discourse of AA, [the presenter] implied, alcoholics would not know themselves as alcoholics" ("Making Writing Matter" 93). Hindman quite understandably had a very different point of view of AA narratives, which as she explains without exaggeration, saved her life (100). In a wash of emotions, ranging from frustration to fury, Hindman brings herself to ask a question that might have led the presenter to revise this fairly predictable "master narrative" thesis in ways that would make it relevant and compelling beyond a small cadre of academic postmodern textual theorists: "I'm curious about your view of what's at stake for you in analyzing AA's language?" (93). At this point, the chair of the panel "broke into academic smokescreen—nebulous, generic verbiage about discursive location of identity construction which included a sufficient number of multi-syllabic buzz words to dissuade further questions and use up the remaining time" (94).

In this and other work, Hindman calls for an "embodied rhetoric," which involves studied and continuous self-reflexivity and meta-reflection on rhetorical methods as well as personal and professional motives. In short, an embodied rhetoric is, like Miller's "Nervous System," an instance of

freer writing—one which makes the stakes apparent for a given text, be it polemical or personal or both (102, cf. Hindman "Thoughts" 10). In calling for such rhetoric, Hindman addresses the understandable charge that some students and professional writers "seem to think that personal writing frees them from the demands of professional academic writing, demands such as making new knowledge of relevance to English studies communities and/or applying existing knowledge and/or theorizing rather than simply relating personal knowledge, regardless of how clever the description" ("Thoughts" 9-10). Anne Herrington frames the problem this way: "When is my business your business" (47).

While Hindman's concern and Herrington's question are relevant in their local contexts (both were writing in special issues devoted to the uses and misuses of personal work) it is a mistake to frame debates over the relevance of academic work solely or even mostly in terms of personal anecdotes (which I do not believe was Hindman or Herrington's intention, although it may well be the substance of their reception). The question is not when a writer can draw on the conventions of confessional and autobiographical narratives; rather, the question is how one develops rhetorical strategies that bring the message or the argument to the audience in persuasive and

compelling ways. For this, Hindman argues that embodied rhetoric makes use of as yet “unfamiliar, ‘personal’ gestures [to] replace or supplement” the rhetorical characteristics of a particular group (“Thoughts” 10). In other words, one might draw on autobiographical experience as well as peer-reviewed publications to set up and synthesize binaries, respond to current threads of disciplinary conversation, and propose models for reform and progress.

On its face, such a “reform” hardly seems controversial, since many academic publications already include instances of embodied rhetoric. However, as Hindman points out, while academic writers have increasingly incorporated elements of creative nonfiction, fragmentation, and autobiography (to name but three strategies typical of embodied rhetoric), academic reading practices have yet to keep pace with such innovations. For this, she points to Joseph Harris’s essay, “Person, Position, Style,” in Publishing in Composition. In brief, Harris argues against excessive use of the writing style for which Hindman advocates. Thus we have here the type of academic debate with which we are all familiar: To use literature in the writing classroom or not (Lindemann / Tate), to write from an expressivist or social constructivist perspective (Elbow / Bartholomae), to write with an eye (or

hand) on the body or on a traditional reader's expectations (Hindman / Harris). Any first-year graduate student knows how these debates typically proceed: they do not so much resolve as they evolve, synthesize, or die of benign neglect, with occasional resurrections on the anniversaries of landmark moments. Therefore, my purpose here is not to retrace this particular debate, but to notice the rhetorical strategies that Hindman employs and that are characteristic of embodied rhetoric, a rhetoric which, I believe, may lead to a method for bringing academic matters to the public in accessible ways.

As noted, Hindman contends that readers' expectations have not kept pace with writers' innovations; meanwhile, Harris contends that innovations in writing have disregarded readers' expectations. With an eye toward synthesis, Hindman's rhetorical method emphasizes supplementing rather than flouting academic conventions. Thus, in a deeply conventional move, she critiques Harris' distaste for autobiographical writing in academic work "as a skewed, narrow, and patrician view of what our textual economy should be" (13). Even if one doesn't agree with Hindman's perspective, her above critique ("skewed," etc.) establishes a comfort zone for the reader. We understand her condemnation of Harris even if we don't agree

with it because we’ve seen such condemnations over and over again. Because we’ve seen this game played so many times, what we might not understand from the initial critique are Hindman’s stakes in the debate. That is, why does she disagree with him; moreover, why should we care that she does?

In responding to questions like this, Hindman uses the second half of her essay to meta-reflect on what led her to write the first half of her essay. That is, after critiquing Harris, she subsequently reflects on and critiques the readerly expectations that *require* her to critique Harris. This act of writerly reflexivity is the embodying act. While such a self-reflexive (some might say narcissistic) moment is, by now, a familiar facet of postmodern writing, I am interested in the ways that Hindman uses the practice to open rhetorical space, establish stakes, and write in ways that expand the borders of academic writing. For example, in developing her criticisms of Harris’s description of an appropriate academic style, she cites her own marginalia: “Bull____! Sexist, myopic crap!” (17). This marginalia is an example of the “quotidian circumstances” of our professional practice: as academics, we tend to read with a pen in our hand. By noting that such strong language appears in the margins of her copy of Harris’ work, she gives herself license

to write in ways atypical of academic prose. The effect is not only powerful, personal, and accessible, but also funny, which is, as any good rhetor will explain, a valuable strategy.

At this point, I am obliged by long-standing convention to write words of conclusion (or at least transition), to describe new directions for academic writing, to reassert the necessity of moving academic work into public venues, to summarize the polarizing dangers of crisis-talk and to emphasize the value of reform-talk. I am also obliged to remind readers of my affinity for *el duende* and to (re)articulate its value in our writing and our pedagogy. Finally, I am obliged to redirect my readers' attention to the question of audience: To whom are we writing and why should our words matter? I have suggested that the production of imaginative and rhetorically flexible texts will help to expand the scope and influence of academic work, making our various ideological and pedagogical concerns relevant to a non-academic readership, thereby assisting us in debates over issues ranging from curriculum design to working conditions.

While attending to these obligations, I also need to foreshadow curricular and disciplinary obstacles to reform.

Specialized and even contentious debates are necessary and vital to establishing and advancing knowledge in any field, yet it is difficult to communicate a public message without at least some consensus as to the *content* of that message. To invoke Peter Elbow's well-known question, what is English? Moreover, why should anyone care about the answer? Beyond the rudiments of grammar that allow one to compose a coherent letter and the cultural capital afforded by cocktail party knowledge of a few widely celebrated texts, why does English studies matter?

The question recalls the unease expressed by Th. W. Hunt over the "patronizing and cynical" tone used to describe the work of English studies by academics in fields other than English—as in the 19th century, so too in our own. Despite the establishment of English studies as a discipline, Hunt's concerns remain—having perhaps intensified over time and embedded themselves in popular representations of our work, as exemplified by Bowman's charge that English professors teach "contempt" for literature. This situation is cause for significant concern because we, quite correctly, no longer accept the superficially "positive" representations of our field, expressed, for example, in Hollywood films. Few English professors see an image of themselves in the Dead Poets

Society's aptly named Professor John Keating, who stands atop a desk and urges students to "seize the day." However, our profession has yet to respond capably to Bowman's charge, nor have we introduced representations that are more accurate, persuasive, or accessible.

In describing this problem, Reed Way Dasenbrock argues that "we've done it to ourselves"; that is, if academic discourse engenders critical thinking and its related benefits, then why have theorists found it so difficult to represent themselves in a positive light? Never mind persuasion, "why is it that that we have been able to make so few points" (173)? Dasenbrock asserts that postmodern theory has critiqued the idea of truth to such an extent that the idea of truth is "always already" (to use a postmodern cliché) tentative, provisional, and shifting. Given that, when pundits like Bowman wildly misrepresent our field, it is difficult to say, "That's wrong!" without sounding self-contradictory. Dasenbrock concludes that if we are to respond effectively to attacks against our field, we must develop a theory of truth that holds out for the possibility of a truth beyond a given community. To abandon the idea of truth is to abandon our most powerful language (182).

It is well beyond the scope of this or any single academic text to posit a theory of truth in English studies, never mind a truth that would hold sway beyond the confines of our profession. In my mind, the topic is best approached dialogically, in a conference and subsequent collections that describe the work of that conference in ways relevant and accessible to a non-academic readership.[6] However, it is possible to begin the process of re-presenting the field to the public by describing a few of the major obstacles to positive and—I would emphasize—*accurate*, depictions of work in English studies. Before we can be better writers for a public audience, we might focus on holding better audience for each other, for our colleagues, and for our students; we might focus on resolving the curricular and disciplinary fissures between composition and literary studies that have divided the field against itself since the late 19th century—fissures which have up to this point prevented the field from speaking with a collective voice. It is to these matters that I now turn.

[6] Descriptions of the Wyoming Conference on English, "Language and Social Context," and Peter Elbow's What is English? are two outstanding examples in this regard. I take up Wyoming in the following chapter, and Elbow's work in chapter three.

Chapter Two: What is Missing? Reforming Work in English Studies

Any attempt to suggest answers to the question "what is missing" from the contentious field of English studies is shaped by the fact that composition in the university is commonly perceived to be a requirement for first-year students, as opposed to, say, a field of study in which a student might major or a vital heuristic method by which students might approach their particular discipline—burgeoning doctoral programs in composition and writing across the curriculum initiatives notwithstanding. As composition continues to professionalize and reinforce its disciplinary credentials and as the idea of disciplinarity becomes evermore expansive—inter-, anti-, or post-disciplinary (cf. Menand, "Marketplace")—public and academic perceptions of what it means to teach and study writing are slowly but steadily changing, whether for good or ill remains to be seen. Despite efforts to expand the scope of writing instruction beyond required courses—known variously as English 101 and 102, Comp 1 and 2, or Introduction to Academic Writing 1 and 2 as well as their (often not-for-credit) stepchildren, English 090, Writing 091—such courses remain among the ones for which English is best known. Further, conflicting

public, professional, and institutional ideas about what knowledge, skills, and values a writing class should teach shape what reforms are possible for the course (even or perhaps especially when the desired "reform" is the elimination of the requirement altogether). Depending on whom one asks, required writing courses may be described as remedial, nurturing, explorative, transgressive, or even revolutionary. Throughout its history, critics of composition have also described such courses as ineffective or else the exact, if ominous, opposite: a course that is highly effective at robbing students of their home languages and exploiting the contingent faculty who continue to comprise the majority of writing teachers. For at least these reasons, an understanding of the controversy surrounding the work and the staffing of required writing courses is prerequisite to the development of publicly accessible representations of English studies.

Accordingly, the first half of this chapter describes major calls for the "abolition" of the writing requirement and subsequent calls to reform it in order to better understand what Wayne Booth describes as "the common aims that divide us." The latter half of this chapter identifies recent movements to reform the labor practices involved in the staffing of the requirement in order to frame my own answers to the question

“what is missing” from English studies. The scope of this chapter is admittedly (and I would argue necessarily) broad. While the history of English studies has been capably and extensively studied and while I draw on this body of scholarship below,[7] there remains much work to be done toward synthesizing the various aspects of English studies in America and putting such syntheses to use in descriptions of the present and suggestions for the future. This chapter carries forward the work of scholars like Susan Miller, Sharon Crowley, and James Berlin who have taken up this task, and advances reasons for faculty in English to better understand themselves as a collective audience with common aims.

Despite cogent arguments for the interdependence of literature and composition (see, e.g., Scholes, Berlin, Elbow), the debate over first-year writing has been historically, and remains to this day, one of the most significant structural divides in English departments. As such it prevents workers in

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7 For general accounts of this history see: Laurence R. Veysey, The Emergence of the American University and David Russell, Writing in the Academic Disciplines.

For works particular to English studies see: Arthur N. Applebee, Tradition and Reform in the Teaching of English; Richard Ohmann, English in America; and Gerald Graff, Professing Literature.

For works particular to composition studies see Robert J. Connors, Composition-Rhetoric: Background, Theory, and Pedagogy; James Berlin, Writing Instruction in Nineteenth-Century American Colleges and Rhetoric and Reality; and Charles Payne, The Resistant Writer.

English from speaking collectively about the field’s aims and purposes. That is to say, the continued and escalating quarrel between literary and composition specialists negatively affects efforts to imagine and publicize positive representations of English studies. Writing in 1981, and with remarkable prescience, Wayne Booth asserts:

> We [professionals in English] are in danger of building two ghettoes: one of underpaid, undereducated, embittered menials, directed by “specialists in composition” who, though financially more fortunate than the hordes of part-time and non-tenure-track teachers they direct, feel defensive about isolation in a “service course”; the other of increasingly isolated, cynical, and ineffectual defenders of this or that critical faith, wondering where all the students disappeared to. The second isolates look more fortunate—or at least they did until recently. With higher pay and lighter teaching loads, they could claim to have chosen the better path. But we should not have needed declining enrollments to teach us that the divorce would be harmful, both intellectually and practically, to both “sides.” (“The Common Aims That Divide Us”)

The woeful condition that Booth describes has deteriorated since then. For example, the National Center for Educational Statistics reports that university-wide the percentage of full-time faculty has decreased from 77.9 percent in 1970 to 55.5 percent in 2001. This steadily decreasing availability of full-time work leads to conditions that Marc Bousquet, Tony Scott, and Leo Parascondola characterize as "tenured bosses and disposable teachers," where a small cadre of tenured teacher/administrators are hired to oversee a professionally insecure and underpaid contingent of ever-shifting teachers.

While the phrase "tenured boss" most often refers to composition specialists, faculty in literary studies can expect similar developments given well-publicized trends toward the privatization and corporatization of higher education (see, e.g., my discussion of EMO's above, also Edwards, ed. Day Late, Dollar Short). Therefore, in addition to philosophical, pedagogical, and ethical reasons to heal the fractures between literary and composition studies, we can now add a practical one: our jobs depend on it. As the field fragments, it becomes easier to define tenure in terms of effective middle-management (as opposed to, say, meaningful teaching and scholarship) and more difficult to represent the collective work of English studies to the public. Despite the practical appeal of

communicating the aims and purposes of the field, the task promises to be a difficult one. However, the difficulty of a task is not, in itself, a good reason for failing to undertake it. As Booth suggests, teachers and scholars in English do have common aims. Moreover, we have a responsibility to our students and to ourselves to establish and articulate these aims in publicly accessible ways.

Crisis Criers and Early Abolition

While the history of composition has been punctuated with calls to abolish the first-year requirement, such arguments have not gained much traction partly because the reformers and administrators in the field seem remarkably adept at what Robert Connors describes as "argumentative jujitsu," a historical pattern of reversals in which calls for abolition of the first-year course (in favor of, for example, strict admissions policies, improved high school instruction, writing across the curriculum programs and/or writing intensive courses) alternate with calls for the reform of the requirement ("New Abolitionism" 12). Further, as I've pointed out above, many reformist calls are bolstered by the rhetoric of a literacy crisis, as with the often-referenced "Why Johnny Can't Write" article in a 1975 issue of Newsweek (the title of which was itself a reference to

a 1961 article by George B. Leonard in Look magazine[8]). But one hardly needs to look back thirty or more years to find parents, politicians, educators, and employers on both the left and right sides of the ideological spectrum expressing frustration, concern, and at times a bit of hysteria over the perceived lack of literacy skills of recent graduates. In a 2005 New York Times op-ed piece, Stanley Fish confidently speculates that "we are at that time of year [May/June graduations] when millions of American college and high school students will stride across the stage, take diploma in hand and set out to the wider world, most of them utterly unable to write a clear and coherent English sentence" ("Devoid of Content"). In his short essay, Fish does not acknowledge, although I am sure he is aware, that old people have been complaining about the writing abilities of young people since the Golden Age, when there were no young people. As reform talk turns to crisis talk, narratives of decline fill in the logical gaps with an aura of urgency. To observe the ways this narrative works, to even acknowledge its existence, is to defuse crisis-talk, or at the very least open space to address certain overstatements.

[8] Frank J. D'Angelo references the Look magazine story in "The Search for Intelligible Structure in the Teaching of Composition" (142).

The similarity between Fish's words and those of Merrill Sheils, the writer of the 1975 "Why Johnny Can't Write" article, is illuminating:

> If your children are attending college, the chances are that when they graduate they will be unable to write ordinary, expository English with any real degree of structure and lucidity. If they are in high school and planning to attend college, the chances are less than ever that they will be able to write English at the minimal college level when they get there […]. And if they are attending elementary school, they are almost certainly not being given the kind of required reading material, much less writing instruction, that might make it possible for them eventually to write comprehensible English. Willy-nilly, the U.S. educational system is spawning a generation of semiliterates.

Some will find Fish and Sheils to be overstating their case; others will feel their all too tactful meioses fail to convey the problem's gravitas. The least we can say is that the above sentiments appeal to the widely-held, naturalized, common sense, and apparently indubitable perception that has been composition's faithful shadow since the Harvard faculty

discovered in 1874, much to their dismay, that their kids couldn't write either. It was in this year that Harvard implemented its written entrance examination:

> Each candidate will be required to write a short [the allotted time was one hour] English Composition, correct in spelling, punctuation, grammar, and expression, the subject to be taken from such works of standard authors as shall be announced from time to time. The subject for the 1874 exam will be taken from one of the following works: Shakespeare's _Tempest_, _Julius Caesar_, and _Merchant of Venice_; Goldsmith's _Vicar of Wakefield_; Scott's _Ivanhoe_, and _Lay of the Last Minstrel_. (_Twenty Years of School and College English_ 34)

Robert Connors points out that when more than half the students who took this exam failed it "a great outcry when up. Trumped throughout the nation in newspapers and magazines, 'the illiteracy of American boys' became an obsession. College freshmen could not write" ("Rhetorical History" 233).

The initial response to this early version of crisis talk, however, was not curricular change at Harvard, but increased pressure on high schools and preparatory schools. But five years later, the results of the 1879 exam showed little improvement:

nearly 50 percent (157 out of 316) of the students failed to pass (Brereton 49). Despite the poor showing, Adams Sherman Hill, the Boylston Professor at Harvard who eventually founded the required course in writing, resisted the idea of composition instruction at the college level. In that same year, he writes "An Answer to a Cry for More English":

> If [Harvard] does not succeed in giving to all her graduates the one mental acquisition deemed by her president the essential part of education, the fault is not altogether or mainly hers. For her to teach bearded men the rudiments of their native tongue would be almost as absurd as to teach them the alphabet or the multiplication table. Those who call for 'more English' in the colleges should cry aloud and spare not till more and better English is taught in the schools. (51)

Eventually, however, Hill found it necessary to retreat from his position and establish what he considered to be a temporary writing course, called Subject A (also known as English A) since, as Connors speculates, it "was not to be dignified with a title" (234). By the beginning of the twentieth century, nearly every college in America would have a similar course in writing.

It is interesting to notice that the vague and anonymous titles, like English A, remain to this day. Such titles allow for at least two complementary interpretations: 1) Beyond the teaching of standard written English, the course proceeds without professional or cultural consensus as to its content. If, for example, the course were titled "Introduction to English studies," one might rightly wonder why other courses from other storied disciplines might not also make legitimate claims for a university requirement. Would not "Introduction to Philosophy," be able to make such claims? Are not, say, biology, economics, and political science of at least equal importance? "English A," and its modern-day counter-parts at universities across the nation, implies that the course itself (and by extension its staff and its students) is an appendage to English studies proper, which serves to inculcate and certify skills prerequisite to one's "real" academic career. 2) The vague title also allows for the stop-gap hiring procedures common to such courses. Since the course can (and often is) about anything and everything that could pertain to reading and writing—some faculty use short stories, others use essays from <u>The New York Times</u>, others books of cultural criticism, or anthologies, or visual media—anyone and everyone with at least a bachelor's degree is presumed capable of teaching it (at least in the short

term). At many universities, this situation leads to prepackaged curricula, a sort of assembly-line course in academic literacy, with prescribed syllabi, readings, and assignment sequences, intended to standardize the content and ensure at least a base-line level of quality. From a particular institutional mindset, such standardization has clear advantages, particularly in terms of cost efficiency and assessment of students and part-time personnel. Underlying this chapter, and indeed this dissertation, is the argument that the humanities generally, and English studies especially, needs to make clearer and stronger arguments for the qualities of its practices that are not readily communicated in homogenized ways and not properly measured by standardized instruments. Recall, for example, Schramm et al.'s study of the English major, which offers a list of vital disciplinary practices that include "intellectual inventiveness, perspicacity of observation […] and originality in making sound connections and distinctions" (80), or recall James Slevin's frustration over the fact that words such as "*wonder, contemplation […]* and *collegiality*" appeared nowhere in the conference program on assessment (Slevin's emphasis 291, see chapter 1, above).

While I suspect that many scholars, students, and parents would endorse an academic environment that valued a studied

commitment to intellectual inventiveness and wonder, and while the public perception of the humanities may improve should the products of such a commitment be made known, the continued anonymity of the faculty in "English A" makes it difficult to communicate the intangible value of English studies in convincing ways.

By whatever name we call it, the institutionalization of the required writing course marks the beginning of what Leonard Greenbaum characterizes in the title of a 1969 College English article as "The Tradition of Complaint," in which he summarizes the major critiques of what might colloquially be called "theme-writing 101" (e.g., Describe a great idea in 500 words. What did you do over your summer vacation?). The article is valuable, since it provides an historical perspective for more recent calls to abolish the requirement, but it was out-of-date almost as soon as it was published. Greenbaum seems at turns unaware and unconcerned with the fact that by 1969, theme-writing was in decline, being replaced with expressive, process-based pedagogies. He thereby advances another tradition in which some of the fiercest critiques of students and faculty in composition come from those not actively engaged in its teaching. Nonetheless, Greenbaum quite accurately points out that "if

freshman English really began in 1874, the first complaint was probably registered in 1875" (175).

He then describes a series of calls to abandon the idea of mandatory first-year writing, finding most of his primary sources among the annals of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and College Composition and Communication (CCC). Much of his argument involves observing the ways that the teaching of composition is ineffectual and traumatic for both students and teachers. He cites, for example, a report on "The Need of Improvement in the Conditions Surrounding the Teaching of Composition" from the first meeting of the NCTE in 1911:

> Long continued criticism and correcting of manuscript is one of the *severest tests of physical endurance* to be found in any teaching, and the limit of full and continued efficiency in it is about two hours a day or ten hours a week. Much more than this results sooner or later in the *physical collapse of the teacher*. (emphasis in the 1911 original, qtd. in Greenbaum 176)

This dramatic language emphasizes the point that in 1911, with an average teaching load of a hundred and five students (not substantially different from faculty with a four/four teaching load today), writing teachers were tasked beyond endurance. Greenbaum then cites E.M. Hopkins' 1912 description of teachers

who “resign, break down, perhaps become permanently invalided, having sacrificed ambition, health, and in not a few instances *even life*” (Hopkins’ emphasis, 176). This drama is portrayed from the students’ perspective as well. After nodding to the few students who may leave the required course having learned something of value, he claims that “most often freshman English is remembered because it’s where a person learns that he can’t write, where his writing ego is deflated and ridden upon to a point beyond repair, where he becomes so self-conscious about writing that twenty years later he won’t risk a classified ad if he can help it” (186).

As his title suggests, Greenbaum had many predecessors: Thomas Lounsbury’s, “Compulsory Composition in Colleges” (1911), Oscar Campbell’s “The Failure of Freshman English” (1939), and Warner G. Rice’s “A Proposal for the Abolition of Freshman English” (1959) are among the three most frequently cited (see, e.g., Russell, “Romantics”; Connors, “New Abolition”; Roemer, Schultz, and Durst). Lounsbury’s 1911 argument, like Greenbaum’s, is a version of pure abolition: the very idea of a composition course, mandatory or otherwise, should be abandoned entirely in favor of strict admissions requirements. This argument finds its roots in the nineteenth century German university system, which as John Brereton points out, had no

composition instruction, favored research over pedagogy, and specialization (e.g., elective courses and early declaration of a major field of study) over a broad-based education in the arts and sciences (5-6). While Lounsbury focuses most of his ire on the now uncommon theme-writing course, he seems highly suspicious of *any* attempt to teach writing: "There is but one way of keeping certain persons from writing wretchedly, and that is by keeping them from writing at all" (281).

Oscar Campbell's 1939 assessment of the state of college writing instruction is similar in tone. He writes that students arrive in college with "pitifully meager intellectual equipment" and "almost no knowledge and very few ideas" ("The Failure" 179). He concludes by suggesting that faculty across the university should assume responsibility for writing instruction and that a few elective courses in writing be made available for a select group of students who have proven themselves to be good writers—by what measure Campbell leaves unclear (185). From his perspective, the proper business of English departments is the exegesis of literature, which seemed to him fundamentally at odds with writing instruction. He cites, for example, anecdotal evidence of English departments in which "mere grammarians," as he calls writing instructors, had not "been promoted" to a professorship in literature in "over ten years." In Campbell's

thinking, “this process is natural—yes, inevitable—because the work of Freshman English does not fit [writing instructors] for the teaching of literature” (182). Therefore—at least for those like Lounsbury, Campbell, and Greenbaum—calls for abolition begin with concerns over what English departments should be doing (i.e., studying literature, not teaching writing skills) and often conclude with the belief that some people will never and can never learn to write well.

Warner Rice’s argument (1959) is considerably more sober than those above. It rests on the not unreasonable premise that if students do not arrive at college knowing how to write effectively then a mere semester or two of instruction will effect little, if any, change. Therefore, Rice suggests that the quality of high school instruction be improved via summer programs, seminars, and internships and that English departments “cease to perform the function of admissions offices (as they now do by their passing and failing of Freshmen)” (362). Still, Rice clearly understands writing instruction in terms of proficiency and remediation, so once one can write “well enough,” one can go on to more serious and worthwhile concerns (i.e., studying literature, or economics, or biology). Additionally, Rice understands the teaching of writing to be, at the very least, an unpleasant activity: “Since Freshman courses

now account (in sum) for at least half the man-hours devoted to students in departments of English, their abolition will result in the diversion of teaching energies into different, and more attractive channels" (362).

Rice's characterization of work as "man-hours" was, of course, consistent with the conventions of mid-twentieth century American English. My intention is not to demonize him for his now unfashionable word choice. Still the phrase "man-hours" merits discussion, if only because teaching writing was not considered "man's work" for a considerable portion of the twentieth century. Sue Ellen Holbrook, for example, argues that composition instruction contributes to broad cultural and economic patterns that help define "women's work": in addition to the obvious—women's work is predominantly performed by women (e.g., secretaries, cashiers, kindergarten teachers)—such work tends to be service-oriented, to pay less than "men's work," and, by extension, to come with relatively little prestige. The teaching of writing was considered, as Holbrook puts it, "drudge work" (202), yet despite the fact that it might possibly leave one "permanently invalided," as E.M. Hopkins claims above, women were understood to perform this work more capably than their male counterparts. Eileen Schell describes the prevailing attitude as one in which "male writing teachers were portrayed

as reluctant composition teachers, imprisoned and often repulsed by their teaching duties. Women, by contrast, were thought to be less ambitious, more inclined to enjoy or endure the detail-oriented, self-sacrificial duty of reading freshman themes and tutoring the 'great unwashed'" (Gypsy Academics 32). Literature professors were idea men; writing teachers were either rank initiates, down on their luck, idiots, or else women.

Practically Transcendent:

Reverie meets Linguistic Status Anxiety

The assumptions of early abolitionist pronouncements should be apparent by now: Teaching the first-year writing course was ineffective, a dead-end for a young professor's career, unseemly (i.e., the proper business of primary and secondary education), potentially damaging to one's health, and "stultifying" to English studies' mission to uncover, preserve, and communicate artistic transcendence (or what Sirc, above, refers to as the material sublime) though literary exegesis. There are two competing influences at work here. On the one hand, Phyllis Franklin describes specialized scholarship and journalistic criticism of literature as an attempt to establish a "correct view of the relationship between art and the study of art" (26). Thus scholars and students of the field must take up the

difficult task of making and evaluating claims about the imaginative and interpretive (rather than the empirical) products of experience. On the other hand, the study of English is a deeply practical affair, influenced by the needs, demands, and anxieties of the surrounding culture.

For example, the mandatory writing course at Harvard was widely adopted by American universities not only because Harvard was often emulated but also because an increasingly industrialized economy demanded at least functional literacy skills of its workers, or what Richard Ohmann describes as a "generalized competence" in reading and writing (145). For this reason, David Russell portrays the development of mandatory writing instruction as consistent with the "rise of the comprehensive modern university," and points out that by the late nineteenth century, American tertiary (or "higher") education had taken on a "decidedly middle class, professional emphasis," which increasingly meant teaching students how to communicate, function, and behave in a corporate, bureaucratic, industrialized environment (133).

The conflict between the specialized demands of literary exegesis and the cultural/vocational demands of functional literacy places English departments in an awkward position. This conflict explains, in part, the motivation underlying many early

calls to abolish the requirement and the still-troublesome divide between literary and composition studies. David Russell points out that “for [many] abolitionists, the existence of composition courses in college English departments represented a challenge to their fundamental beliefs about the nature of both writing and of higher education” (134). Therefore, abolitionists tended to “portray composition in terms of corruption and enslavement—the very terms Romantics used to describe technology and business” (137). The mandatory writing course is one of the clearest signs that English departments are accountable to market demands, national identity, and vocational desires. In response, as readers may have noticed, as even the usage of the term “abolition” implies, and as Russell reminds us, English literature purists imbue their pronouncements with a sense of moral urgency. From their perspective, the very existence of a writing course is itself a crisis. Recall Lounsbury’s argument that there is but one way to keep some people from writing badly and that is to keep them from writing at all.

Underlying such rhetoric, one often finds idealized visions of the Romantic genius. One doesn’t teach genius because geniuses are not taught; they are born. It follows, therefore, that works of literary genius are studied, interpreted, aspired to (usually in private), emulated perhaps (for purposes of

edification), but not attempted, executed, realized, achieved, or produced—at least not by writing teachers and certainly not by students who have lived eighteen or more years without mastering the basics of sentence construction and paragraph design. Lines from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Kubla Khan" help to illustrate this attitude:

> And all who heard should see him there,
> And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
> His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
> Weave a circle around him thrice,
> And close your eyes with holy dread,
> For he on honey-dew hath fed,
> And drunk the milk of Paradise. (ll. 48-54)

Indeed, the full effect of such genius was not even realized by Coleridge, for the poetic fire does not come *from* consciousness so much as it moves *through* consciousness in moments of sublime reverie—or so the story goes. Even if we buy into this narrative of Romantic literary creation, the reverie is fragile, and easily spoiled by the everyday affairs of business. In the preface, which doubles as a disclaimer to "Kubla Khan," Coleridge describes his famous daydream:

> The Author continued for about three hours in a profound sleep, at least of the external senses, during which time he has the most vivid confidence, that he could not have composed less than from two to three hundred lines; if that indeed can be called

> composition in which all the images rose up before him as things, with a parallel production of the correspondent expressions, without any sensation or consciousness of effort. On awaking he appeared to himself to have a distinct recollection of the whole, and taking his pen, ink and paper, instantly and eagerly wrote down the lines that are here preserved. (156)

As readers may recall, at that moment, a person "on business from Porlock" detained Mr. Coleridge for "above an hour," and the coherence of his reverie fractured "like images on the surface of a stream into which a stone has been cast" (157). It is of course possible that Coleridge is telling the truth, and if so, the infamous man from Porlock stands as one of the most significant incidental idiots in the history of English literature. However, other interpretations are worth entertaining. The person on business from Porlock, real or metaphorical, represents the world outside the writer's study, complete with practical and material demands. From the reluctant prose of its preface to the poetic heights of its conclusion, "Kubla Khan," epitomizes the tension between the practical and the transcendent that has shadowed English studies since its disciplinary emergence in the late nineteenth century.

Yet tension between the practical and the transcendent can be used in productive ways, and the lowly person from Porlock may provide a useful model after all, since he embodies a reason (and a trope) for the poem to be communicated to its audience. The poet Stevie Smith, for example, suggests that this figure may not have been an interruption but "a benison" (l.43); thus "it was not right of Coleridge" to blame him for the interruption:

> …in fact it was wrong
> (But often we all do wrong)
> As the truth is I think he was already stuck
> With Kubla Khan. (ll. 5-8)

However for those who would wish literature and literary study to remain within the stately confines of the Khan Kubla's pleasure dome, composition faculty and their students are akin to the disparaged version of the man from Porlock—either too dim-witted or else corrupted by the business of the world to understand the material sublime.

While postmodern theory has done much (some would say too much) to identify and constrain the authority of this tale of creativity and genius, the underlying effect of the argument remains: writing instruction is often understood as a remedial, vocational, skills-based enterprise. Donna Strickland argues that the division of labor between literary exegesis and writing

instruction, particularly the latter’s attendant editing of manuscript, can best be understood as a division between the work of the head and work of the hands (“Taking Dictation” 460). In this light, writing instruction appears ideologically at odds with the university’s historical mission to preserve tradition, communicate values, and pursue truth. For Strickland, the writing requirement has been a vehicle for assimilating the increasing enrollments of middle and working class students throughout the twentieth century. Applying Foucault’s vocabulary of panoptic scrutiny, purification, and control, which has proved so influential to so many, Strickland contends that writing programs “were made possible not by the devaluing of student writing in the university but by its central function in an institution that depended on writing as a tool for surveillance and assessment” (461). It follows that neat and formally correct writing has been associated with, among other attributes: good business practices, personal character, national progress, and even racial purity (475). It is within this complex web of associations that one finds deep concern for manners, propriety, and social grace; and in this way, the required writing course becomes associated with processes of socialization and assimilation into American middle class life. The instructor’s nearly obsessive marginal scribbling, which

seems at times as much a nervous tic as it does a pedagogical device, remains the hallmark of writing instruction. The often indecipherable red-pen palimpsest that students receive (and typically *expect* to receive) in response to their work demonstrates to them that writing is at least as much about privilege and social refinement as it is about creativity, imagination, inspiration, and innovation.

Robert Connors describes the influence of class, power, and privilege on writing instruction as "linguistic status-anxiety," and speculates that as the American frontier reached its westward limit and as eastern cities began to grow in size and influence, class systems based partly on wealth and partly on education took shape: "where there are class distinctions, linguistic distinctions are not far behind" ("Rhetoric" 30-32). Such anxiety may be one of the sources for the elitist and sardonic tone found in so many abolitionist calls, particularly those of the late 19th and early 20th century: it is one thing to argue against the idea of mandated writing instruction and quite another to do so in a way that mocks the very idea that writing should or could contribute to the intellectual progress of students. For her part, Strickland compares linguistic status anxiety and the accompanying deep concern for standard usage to

a “discourse of hygiene,” which functions not only as a class marker but as a racial one as well:

> To evoke “hygiene” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was to call forth a chain of linked signifieds, including both personal health and racial health. […] To practice good hygiene was to keep the (white) body healthy and the (white) race “pure.” This practice was considered to be particularly important for white women, the potential mothers of the future members of the race. The appearance of a person’s writing, in the logic of hygienics, was a sign of the appearance of the person: mechanically correct writing was a sign of a correct person—a sign, that is, of a white, native-born American. (475)

However much one may want to amplify or qualify Strickland’s point here, arguments for more publicly accessible writing and for the teaching of imaginative and rhetorically flexible prose in the classroom must account for the still influential fact that writing instruction in colleges was never intended to foster anything like imaginative or rhetorically flexible writing. The course was, in short, designed in response to a

perceived crisis and remains tethered to deep-seated anxieties regarding race, class, and national identity.

While both Connors and Strickland capably argue this point, their analyses present the drive toward “correct” English as an impersonal force—a by-product of institutionalized thinking and cultural myopia rather than a felt and lived reality for the majority of Americans. That is, both Connors and Strickland approach the issue as an intellectual problem, one that we can simply get over if only we intellectualize (more) thoroughly, rigorously, and capably. However, neither analysis accounts for the fact that many people—students and parents of students in writing classes not least among them—strongly desire ways to cope with this anxiety. Correct (or “standard written”) English is often associated with material gain, career choice, and advancement. Regardless of one’s political orientation—capitalist, neoliberal pragmatist, or revolutionary Marxist—one’s family stills needs to be fed, the rent needs to be paid, and as anyone who has worked in a dead end, low paying job will tell you, it really is miserable to live without career options. Thus, anxiety over one’s degree of mastery of standard English is neither unfounded nor irrational. Much more than arguments about the linguistic coherence of all dialects, students want to know “correct” English because they perceive it to be one of the

main skills associated with material gain and social advancement.

Following Richard Ohmann's influential critique English in America—which argues, in part, that composition instruction "teach[es] the style, broadly defined, of the managerial and professional classes" (167)—Lynn Bloom contends that freshman composition is a "middle class enterprise." In other words, a significant part of mandatory writing instruction restates and reinforces a set of values, often associated with the American middle class, such as "self-reliance," "respectability," "decorum," and "order" (658-656)—subsets, from an employer's point of view, of the umbrella term "soft skills." For instance, Bloom suggests that the adage "a place for everything and everything in its place" applies as much to the maintenance of one's household as it does to the teaching of writing in the university. Handbooks popular in composition classrooms (e.g., Andrea Lunsford and Robert Connors' St. Martin's Handbook, Diana Hacker's A Writer's Reference) stress outlines and topic sentences while frowning on parentheses and tangents; similarly, teachers often respond to student papers that advocate, say, violence or drug use in ways that ignore or minimize content for the sake of word choice, sentence structure, and paragraphing (Bloom 660). In this way, the teaching, composing, and grading

of the thesis-driven, analytical essay operates as a metaphor for “successful” life in America. Those who do well in composition class tend to have soft skills in abundance. To put a slightly sharper edge on Bloom’s point here, success in composition depends on being a diligent, if docile, worker: showing up regularly and punctually, following directions, working with others, responding to criticism, and meeting deadlines. Teaching soft skills is certainly not all that composition does, but its ability to communicate (or indoctrinate) the importance of a work ethic may help explain its continued status as mandatory and maligned.

Process Reforms and Post-Process Critiques

Composition’s middle class, meritocratic associations in mind, the development of process pedagogy in the late 1960’s and early 70’s was the most significant and influential reform in the history of contemporary writing instruction, at least in part because process theory co-opted the vocabulary of romanticism and idealism with which composition was supposed to be at odds. That is, process intermingles transcendence with American values of democracy, individualism, and social advancement. Consider Donald Murray’s “The Interior View: One Writer’s Philosophy of Composition”: “My view of composing is frankly personal. The interior view of the writing act reveals

that writing is an individual search for the meaning in life. As I have written about the process of writing, my main resource has been myself" (8). Similarly, these lines from Ann Berthoff's textbook for college writers, Forming, Thinking, and Writing, emphasize the individual, creative mind at work:

> Keeping a journal of observations is one way to see how your mind works; since the active mind is a composer, there is something to be learned by observing it in operation. […] Poets are often addicted to journals, because they know that the composing process is going on all the time and that they need a record of the dialogue that is going on between them and the world. (5)

It was through this combination of romantically-inspired, internally-focused statements of compositional philosophy, like Murray's, and the practical methodology expressed in textbooks like Berthoff's (first write about your thinking, then write about your writing of your thinking, then…) that helped the process movement re-imagine itself from work of the hands—editing manuscript and correcting grammar—to work of the head. Even the titles of landmark texts from this era emphasize that the shift from product to process is, at least in part, a shift from teacher as proofreader to teacher as interpreter, from

manual to intellectual laborer, e.g., Marie Ponsot and Rosemary Deen's Beat Not The Poor Desk, Mina Shaughnessy's Errors and Expectations, and Peter Elbow's Writing Without Teachers.

Thus the reforms of the process movement affected more than pedagogy; they allowed practitioners in composition to assert themselves as something other than, well, practitioners—an assertion which would prove essential if writing teachers were to make a successful case for substantial improvements in their working conditions. In her collection of "polemical essays," which makes one of the strongest post-process era cases for the abolition of mandatory writing instruction, Sharon Crowley points out that the "theoretical discovery of something on which to do research" occasioned composition's claims to disciplinary status. There was now, at long last, an object about which to theorize, research, interpret, and debate. It had been before everyone's eyes the whole time: student writing (191). While the establishment of composition's disciplinary identity was a clear benefit—both to beleaguered, underpaid teachers and to harried, red-ink besmirched students—and while the efforts of process theorists did lead to substantive and much needed reform in writing instruction, Crowley argues that the sparks for the process movement came from neither professional aspirations nor

reformist inclinations but from the demands placed on teachers working in overcrowded classrooms. In other words, the most compelling reasons to focus on process not product and to disperse the teacher's authority by, for example, using writing groups and peer reviews, are found in the haggard reality of the adjuncts, graduate students, and otherwise contingent faculty who teach the majority of the required course sections. Process was a movement born of practical necessity, and it worked by providing a rationale and a methodology for distributing and minimizing the overwhelming workload (192-4).

However, as most teachers who have focused on "process not product" would argue, process methods create *more* work, albeit of an intellectual sort. It is easier and quicker, as Connors observes, to edit and correct a stack of products than it is to interpret and respond to a series of drafts-in-process ("Mechanical" 41-3). The amount and type of work that process pedagogy generates notwithstanding, Crowley's point repays consideration, since it focuses attention on the material conditions of writing teachers. Without question, some teachers, either out of naiveté, enthusiasm, or exhaustion, misapply process methods by taking the idea of "writing without teachers" literally, which would work fine in, say, an autonomous writing group; however, this idea proves problematic in the classroom.

If process pedagogy was the primary reform by which composition responded to calls for the abolition of the requirement, it seems all too predictable that the next wave of abolitionist arguments would criticize the adequacy of the reform, and as we shall see shortly, question the very possibility of anything called a writing “process.” John Trimbur describes the motivation behind composition’s “social turn” toward critical theory as follows:

> When process pedagogy emerged on the scene in the late 1960’s and early 1970’s, process teachers and theorists sought to free themselves from the formalism of current-traditionalist rhetoric and return the text to the student composer. But the distinction between product and process, which initially seemed so clarifying, not only proved conceptually inadequate to what writers do when they are writing, it also made writing instruction appear to be easier than it is. (109)

Exploring this issue, many contemporary critics depart from their predecessors who argued that the teaching of writing does not belong with the college curriculum. Instead, most post-process critics contend that writing instruction is most effective when associated with a content-based discipline and/or

with an interdisciplinary project (a linked or clustered set of courses organized around a theme, for example), and that the mandatory writing course, while it may borrow readings from various disciplines, does not in itself provide the rhetorical context necessary for effective writing. In an effort to provide a general definition of what is a very diverse body of thought that tends to resist ready generalizations (roughly akin to efforts to "define" post-modernism, which usually open with a disclaimer regarding the paradoxical nature of the task), Thomas Kent proposes the following set of assumptions with which most post-process theorists would agree: Writing is 1) A public communication: thus, to teach a general writing process is not particularly helpful, since communication is always grounded in specific and local contexts. 2) Interpretive and uncodifiable: that is, writing involves "hermeneutic guesswork," by which writers respond to the unique and changing shape of the rhetorical moment. 3) Historically and culturally situated: therefore, effective communication requires interpretive acts that cannot be "choreographed in any meaningful way" (5). Taken together, these assumptions call into question the very possibility of writing instruction, mandatory or otherwise, since each writing act is unique and not reducible to a process. Post-process theory does not go so far as to claim that writing

is impossible to teach, but its emphasis on the ever-changing shape of the rhetorical moment challenges the logical consistency of a one or two semester sequence with learning objectives as general as "critical thinking" and "academic writing."

In "Stepping Yet Again into the Same Current" George Pullman provides a useful example of the implications of Kent's analysis. Pullman argues that process theory is best described as a narrative of progress—out of current-traditional rhetoric and into personal and creative expression—that supports composition's sense of itself as discipline. For Pullman, the writing process was not so much discovered as it was created to accommodate the institutional necessity to professionalize the field of composition (16). In his analysis, process methods advance writing not only as a way of thinking but as an ontological evolution that "teaches a set of values and attitudes about life and how to live it, the self-reflective, contemplative life that Plato held out to Phaedrus as an alternative to the life of political power that the young man thought he wanted" (25). The personal essay, with which process is often associated, takes a great deal of time to prewrite, write, revise, revise, revise, and edit. In many contexts, from journalism to business writing, such time is often not

available. Likewise, the rhetorical style of a lab report is markedly different from that of an essay, personal or otherwise. Thus to talk about the writing process is a misnomer: “The reason that the great paradigm shift never took place is that the paradigm is really a metaphor for a rhetorical situation, and both current-traditional rhetoric and the process theory of writing have an identical rhetorical situation: the classroom” (27). Pullman’s observation is worth keeping in mind; however, any time a writer is assuming the role of “student,” the rhetorical situation is almost always the classroom, and that fact would not change if writing instruction moved from a required course to, say, elective, writing intensive courses in biology, literature, and sociology. The challenge therefore is to imagine the classroom, required or otherwise, as a rhetorically flexible, innovative, and creative space, one that teaches students to address a variety of audiences in a variety of ways. In this light, the academic penchant for critical thinking expressed in analytical, documented essays is no more likely to demonstrate the value of rhetorical flexibility than would a process class’s affinity for personal narrative. Put succinctly, if current-traditionalist and process theories of writing rest on the same pedagogical assumptions, post-process

often fails to move beyond the rhetorical and institutional constraints it claims to identify.

Perhaps readers, who double as experienced writing teachers, will recall a particular assignment that their students enjoyed and that demonstrated both academic currency and rhetorical flexibility—perhaps a dialogic, web-based activity or a project that involved an element of field research or a variation of service learning. I too have such projects. The particulars of “best assignment” collections do not often translate well from one institution to the next (or even one class to the next, in some cases), and thus are more useful as a heuristic in imagining what works for a given class at a given time. The obvious fact that some assignments work better than others does not invalidate Sharon Crowley’s observation:

> Even the most inventive assignments cannot entirely disguise the fact that in the universally required composition class, the primary motivation for composing is to supply teachers with opportunities to measure student performance. In other words, *the fact of the requirement provides first-year Composition with an institutional motivation rather than a rhetorical one*. (my emphasis, 8)

She concludes that any writing in a required composition course is at best unmotivated and at worst a “simulacrum” of writing produced by institutional mandate. As with Pullman’s argument above, the point is worth bearing in mind, if only because it helps to explain student responses that sometimes range from occasional resentment and passive resistance to outright rejection of even our best intentions. However, removing the requirement is unlikely to imbue students with something other than “institutional motivation,” since students would still be students writing for teachers in exchange for grades and the credential that the university degree represents. Further, the larger cultural and institutional anxieties regarding writing would remain in place.

While removing the requirement would not be a panacea for what ails writing instruction, one should rightly wonder why, given the cogent arguments for making “Comp 101” optional, and the clear benefits of writing intensive course work in all disciplines at all levels, that the requirement has remained so steadfastly in place at colleges nation-wide. For this, Crowley argues that the perceived value of the requirement is so deeply entrenched in what she calls composition’s “ethic of service” and the culture-wide “discourse of student need,” that arguments to abolish the course are often dismissed before they are even

heard (257). While Crowley acknowledges several ancillary reasons for the requirement (e.g., composition introduces students to “liberal culture”; teaches democratic values; and provides a platform from which to discuss, write, and read about cultural and social imbalances), in the end, composition’s *raison d'être* has always been an instrumental one: the teaching of politically neutral, error-free prose (256). Thus composition teachers and their students tend to be used in service of the social, political, economic, and administrative agendas of others; what’s more, this situation has remained largely unchanged since the introduction of the requirement in the late 19th century. Composition, Crowley writes, “has nothing to do with students’ need and everything to do with the academy’s image of itself as a place where a special language is in use” (257). For Crowley, the mandatory status of composition results in a narrow understanding of the work that writing teachers do, so in the minds of many inside and outside academe, the teaching of writing remains fixed as the teaching of mechanics and usage. For example, even though composition has done much to establish itself as a discipline, its newfound status is not widely accepted (or even known, in some cases) by other disciplines (254). Therefore, while some composition faculty may have the privileges associated with other disciplines in the academy,

most[9] work on a contingent basis, either as graduate teaching "assistants," adjuncts, or non-tenure stream faculty.

This line of argument, which challenges the rhetorical viability of the first-year course and which is here exemplified by Pullman and Crowley (cf. Petraglia, Ed. Reconceiving Writing, Rethinking Writing Instruction for a collection of similar arguments) has been described not only as "post-process" but also as the "new abolitionism," the title of an article by Robert Connors. Unlike the pre-process movement calls for abolition (Lounsbury, Campbell, Rice and others), most post-process calls come from experienced teachers of writing and administrators of writing programs. Connors' phrase does have a certain historical logic to it, and as one of composition's foremost historians, it makes sense for him to establish the "new" in light of the "old." However the term "abolition" is too historically and rhetorically loaded to be of much use in current debates over what is missing from the writing class particularly or English studies generally. It lends itself more to crisis-talk than to reform-talk, and implies that the requirement itself is a moral aberration, which is not necessarily the case. At the very least, we can observe that the

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[9] A 1999 MLA survey estimates that 63 percent of English faculty teach in a position other than tenure-line (Laurence 213).

stakes of the "abolition" debate in composition are nowhere near as high as they are with issues like slavery, capital punishment, or abortion. In this regard, "abolition" is at best a polemical gambit, and more likely a polarizing and inaccurate term. From a practical point of view, the university degree is the sum of its requirements, and there is nothing inherent to a required composition course that makes it a moral outrage. Moreover, the term is strongly associated with calls to abolish writing instruction entirely, whereas most contemporary proposals are more accurately described as reforms, e.g., replacing the first-year requirement with a WAC-based or writing intensive series of courses (see, e.g., Brannon's "(Dis)Missing Compulsory Composition," which describes just such a program at SUNY Albany). Likewise, Crowley suggests refocusing composition on a "vertical curriculum" of writing courses for students throughout their progress toward the degree, while leaving the equivalent of English 1 and 2 in place as an option for students who felt they either wanted or needed to take it (254).

Work of the hands, work of the head: Just work, cheaply

While some critics of the requirement direct their attention to the rhetorical viability of the class, others have more recently focused on composition's heavy reliance on

contingent labor to staff the myriad sections of the requirement. It would be reasonable, but wrong, to assume the following: because most colleges require all entering students to take one or two writing courses and because such courses involve considerable resources in terms of staffing, support, and materials (e.g., classroom and office space, computers and phone lines for instructors, access to a copy machine), eliminating the requirement would also ease the pressure on university budgets; thus unencumbered, English departments might not be so reliant on contingent faculty. However, the labor issues described here and the concurrent threat to academic freedom (i.e., the fewer tenure-line faculty, the less a department will be able to design its own assessment models, evaluate its own faculty, and rebut arguments to standardize curricula) goes well beyond required coursework in writing. In "What Hath English Wrought," Cary Nelson argues that "English has in fact been an unwitting corporate partner in a project to defund, defang, and deform higher education as we know it." Undergraduate coursework, particularly introductory and survey courses are increasingly taught by contingent faculty:

> English departments above all have demonstrated that neither full-time faculty nor Ph.D.s are essential to lower-level undergraduate education. What's more,

> we've shown that people teaching lower-division courses need not be paid a living wage. We can no longer claim that such courses have to be taught by people with years of specialized training.

Nelson published the above in the 1998 inaugural issue of Workplace, an online journal that advocates for fair and equitable working conditions for all faculty. This in mind, one can only hope that Nelson's above sentiment is but one step toward revising his 1995 proclamation that:

> Although I have taught composition and enjoyed it, I would now find it demoralizing and intolerable to have to grade hundreds of composition papers each semester. There is no way I could do it as carefully and thoroughly as my graduate students do. ("Lessons" 21)[10]

The contradiction here is depressing, but the second-class status of writing instruction—and the attendant assumption that so-called "general education" course work is demoralizing and intolerable for all but the most intellectually disabled variety

[10] I am indebted to Joseph Harris' "Meet the New Boss, Same as the Old Boss," for emphasizing the continuity between Nelson's above statements. Harris forcefully dismisses the assumption that composition and lower-level undergraduate coursework is not intellectually stimulating and is the sort of work that Ph.D. holding specialists generally do not want to do (see 43-45 and 62-65 especially). Nelson's variety of argument (colloquially, "grad students do it better") recalls Sue Ellen Holbrook's description of work in composition during the late 19th and early 20th century, in which women were held to be better suited than men to the "drudge work" of writing instruction (202).

of professor—is established, naturalized, and reinforced early in graduate school.

For example, Eileen Schell points out that even the term "graduate teaching *assistant,*" cultivates the perception that writing and survey courses are but stepping stones to better, more specialized teaching opportunities. Not only are GTA's vital to the smooth operation of required and general education courses, they often design their own syllabi and lesson plans, grade papers, and conference with students—which is to say they are not *assisting* but already teaching. To call such faculty GTA's is symptomatic of the casual and unreflective way with which staffing issues for courses at the gateway to academe have historically been dealt. Schell speculates that GTA's internalize their bad treatment (e.g., lots of work that is unconnected with the specialized nature of their studies in exchange for wages that could be matched with a mildly ambitious bottle and can redemption regiment). From such treatment, they assume that entry-level coursework is either a scholarly dead end, or at best a noble (but self-sacrificial) activity with little status or opportunity for equality with faculty specializing in literary studies. With the increasing focus on post-secondary education that correlates more closely with a career and the decreasing practical and economic viability of a

course in, say, “The Poetry of John Milton,” (due apologies to Milton scholars here) the attitude that composition is an unpleasant layover before teaching Paradise Lost to like-minded graduate students may eventually change. However, if my own early-career experiences are any indication, the situation that Schell here describes is still current:

> [M]any GTA’s do not view teaching composition as a valuable experience—many regard it as drudge work, a stepping-stone or a springboard to bigger and better things like teaching literature. Those who like to teach writing and see it as an important activity are often scoffed at by senior faculty or looked upon askance by other graduate students. (166)

Despite composition’s move toward disciplinary stature, traditional attitudes toward its teaching remain in place: literary specialists tend to want to teach as little composition as possible; meanwhile, composition specialists often find their teaching load reduced to compensate for the time-consuming and significant administrative duties involved with a writing program. Further, as these specialists achieve tenure, it seems only reasonable for them to desire and teach advanced composition or rhetoric courses at the graduate level. Within the existing academic system, all of these developments seem

natural. Academe rewards specialization, which legitimizes itself in specialized publications. So while literary specialists aspire to a graduate course in John Milton, composition specialists might aspire to one in, say, Postmodern Applications of Kenneth Burke's Pentad. Either way, the general education courses, required or otherwise, that exist at the foundation of the specialization pyramid will likely continue to be taught by those at the margins of academe—unless, that is, we reform our understanding of what it means to teach English studies and cultivate humanistic thinking and writing.

Writing in the same inaugural issue of Workplace as Cary Nelson and developing what he calls the "Excrement Theory of Postgraduate Education," Marc Bousquet argues that graduate students are not so much the end products of a Ph.D. program as they are its "waste products," since graduate students provide a steady supply of cheap, easily replaceable, so usually docile labor. "The logic of the system [of graduate education]," writes Bousquet, "is replacement, not apprenticeship." However, while Bousquet was making this point to graduate students in the University of Louisville's composition program, he found that recent alumni enjoyed a placement rate of 100 percent into tenure-track jobs. It is not unreasonable to trace most of this good fortune to the required status of composition courses and

its attendant administrative function. Bousquet speculates that academe's increasing focus on "vocationalism, job training, and skills-based outcomes" will lead to an increase in the managerial roles filled by most graduates of composition programs: overseeing a writing program, a writing center, or graduate teaching assistants, for example ("Good Job Market" 3).

Given the attention paid to immediately applicable skills and outcomes assessment, it is reasonable to argue that the requirement is incidental to the situation that Bousquet and others describe. Were it to be removed, it is likely that the administrative and managerial aspects currently associated with the required course would remain in place. There would, for example, still be introductory courses to teach, writing centers to oversee; entrance and exit examinations would need to be designed, proctored, and scored. All of these responsibilities would likely fall on the shoulders of contingent faculty, supervised by someone very much like a graduate from the University of Louisville's composition program—someone, that is to say, very much like me. Donna Strickland describes these and similar aspects of composition studies as its "managerial unconscious." Akin to Pullman's observation that tales of composition's development, rise, and professionalization are often framed as a narrative of progress, she contends that the

metanarrative might more accurately be described as a "tale of the rise of management" ("Managerial" 47). As a result, the managerial nature of tenured composition positions tends to be understood as a fact of professional life, rather than a reformable position. Thus, for Strickland, composition studies, and the success that newly minted specialists have with finding jobs emerges from the "administrative function," on which the field depends, and which it therefore cultivates.

One particularly relevant story regarding the rise of the managerial unconscious and efforts to reform the work in English studies regards the events at the Wyoming Conference on English in 1986, which had as its title "Language and Social Context"; the subsequent Wyoming Resolution; and what James Sledd later calls its emasculation. The story is particularly useful to present purposes because it is simultaneously a tale of idealistic reformist efforts and a lesson that demonstrates the very difficult and seemingly insurmountable challenges involved with implementing change in large, institutional settings. The conference at Wyoming was noteworthy, at least in part, because unlike major conferences hosted by MLA and CCC, this was an intimate gathering. The 200 people in attendance met for a week straight—living, eating, and commiserating with each other at

the end of the day's activities.[11] The timing of Wyoming is also noteworthy. As James Slevin explained to the attendees, only 4 in 10 job candidates in English were finding tenure-line work; therefore, many PhD's trained in literary studies moved into composition teaching out of necessity, often cobbling together a living by teaching at multiple campuses, teaching in the summer, and over intersession. Stories of part-time faculty commuting a hundred or more miles to work in English departments that hire them on a semester by semester basis, of such faculty being denied opportunities for professional development, of having a teaching load so intense as to marginalize scholarship and in turn being denied a tenure-line job for not producing scholarship are by now so well-known and still so common that there is little need to recount them in detail here (see, e.g., Schell, Gypsy Academics and Sosnoski, Token Professionals).

Such conditions occurred at least partly in response to predictions of a significant decline in undergraduate enrollments in the late 1970's and early 80's. As a result of this perceived enrollment crisis, many tenure-line faculty were

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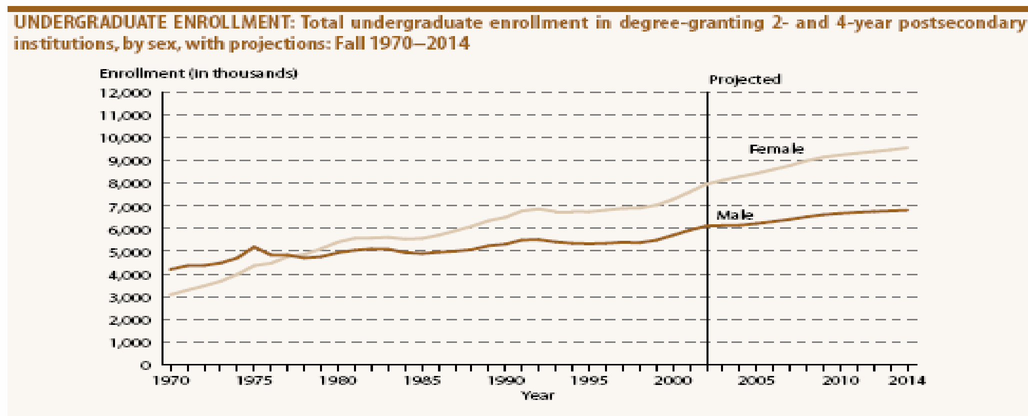
[11] The most widely read account of the conference itself appears in L.R. Robertson, Sharon Crowley, and Frank Lentricchia's opinion piece for College English. I draw on their work here for the narrative of the conference's events, descriptions of the speakers, and the reactions of the attendees.

retrenched—administrative-speak for laid off, fired, or moved into part-time positions. As many critics have pointed out, contrary to dire predictions, enrollments increased during the 1980's, albeit at a slower rate than during the 1960's or 70's, as illustrated in the chart from the National Center on Educational Statistics' 2005 report, "The Condition of Education":



(36)

The fact that the enrollment crisis never evolved into anything resembling a crisis, however, did not stop university administrators from cutting costs by nearly doubling their reliance on part-time labor. Gary Rhodes points out that "from 1970 to 1993, the proportion of part-time faculty nearly doubled, from 21.9 percent of the senior instructional work

force to 40.1 percent (*these numbers exclude teaching assistants*)." While the number of full-time faculty also increased during this period, the number of part-time faculty "increased by more than fourfold that number" (my emphasis, 134-135).

In response to these conditions, both James Slevin and James Sledd spoke in ways that demonstrated the necessity of collective action on the part of full and part-time faculty. Slevin pointed out that excessive reliance on part-time, non-tenure-track labor is a threat not only to tenure itself, but to the academic freedoms associated with it: syllabus and course design, textbook choice, assessment methods (276). In recalling Sledd's comments, Roberston et al write:

> We condemned the unfair and exploitative attitudes that have resulted from the creation of a privileged and protected class, while at the same time we sought that same status ourselves. [Sledd] chastened English faculty with the remark that, if we sought evidence to disprove the notion that the study of the humanities promoted more humane conduct, we need look no further than the way we treated graduate students and part-time faculty in our own departments. (277)

While Sledd was rousing, it was James Moffett whose words provided the spark for the resolution. In keeping with well-known tenets of process pedagogy, he explained to the conference participants that "writing teachers ought to enable students to discover the freedom of self-expression" (274). It is unlikely that Moffett imagined these words to be controversial at the time (even though ideas like "freedom" and "self-expression" have since received ample theoretical attention). It was not in response to theory—postmodern, post-process, or otherwise—that the attendees took action. Rather, Moffett's words gave voice to many, at Wyoming and across the country, who perceived an irony in the fact that while they may indeed teach others "the freedom of self-expression," they feared speaking freely about their own working conditions: thus the idea for the Wyoming Resolution, which calls on the CCC to develop, 1) "professional standards and expectations for salary levels and working conditions of post-secondary teachers of writing," 2) "a procedure for hearing grievances," and 3) "a procedure for acting upon non-compliance" (279).

In October of 1989, CCC Executive Committee responded to the Resolution with the "Statement of Principles and Standards for the Postsecondary Teaching of Writing." Similar to the reformist polemics of Sheils ("Why Johnny Can't Write") and Fish

(“Devoid of Content”) that open this chapter, the committee begins with a general description of what it calls a “crisis” and a “scandal” in higher education, that is, the over-reliance on contingent laborers who are often subject to working conditions far below that of their full-time colleagues. Like Slevin’s assertion above, the statement contends that over-reliance on contingent labor constitutes a threat to tenure and to academic freedom, and links writing ability with the “critical sophistication” necessary to function effectively in a democracy:

> All lose [by the mistreatment of contingent labor]: teachers, students, schools, and ultimately a democratic society that cannot be without citizens whose education empowers them to read and write with critical sophistication. (330)

The very first sentence in the statement uses a similar refrain: “A democracy demands citizens who can read critically and write clearly and cogently” (329). In this regard, not only do students “need” what composition teaches, as the statement argues and as Crowley caustically observes, but the nation does as well if it is to continue to function democratically.

This line of argument, never far from official defenses of the humanities, is also a harbinger of what Trimbur above calls

the “social turn” in composition, with its steady focus on critical sophistication, as opposed to the “freedom of self-expression” characteristic of process pedagogy and championed by Moffett at Wyoming. The authors of the CCC Statement can hardly be blamed for seeking the rhetorical leverage necessary to marshal administrative support and funding by giving their particular brand of crisis a national scope. However, the rhetorical appeal here is not to artistic expression and appreciation (much less to the value of imaginative and rhetorically flexible writing practices) but to critical sophistication. Democracies do, of course, need capable, sophisticated, and critical thinkers. However, in an effort to produce these thinkers, the CCC Statement fails to use the artistic and cultural leverage for which the humanities is well-known, and most-widely accepted.

With regard to part-time workers, the Statement allows that such faculty may be legitimately hired to teach a special course or to fill an unexpected gap in the teaching schedule, and suggests that part-timers not exceed ten percent of the department’s staff (333). As to wages and working conditions, the CCC Statement suggests that part-timers earn pro-rated salaries equivalent to a full-time faculty member with similar experience, that the “ideal” class size is 15 but no more than

20 students (335), and that no faculty member teach writing to more than 60 students per term, 45 students if the courses are remedial (335).

While these suggestions are clearly well-intentioned and designed to address the problems identified at Wyoming, the CCC Statement distances itself from the Resolution in at least two important ways. First, it focuses on the hiring of tenure-line faculty rather than establishing fair working conditions for all writing teachers: "These guidelines are based on the assumption that the responsibility of the academy's most serious mission, helping students to develop their critical powers as readers and writers, should be vested in tenure-line faculty. That is the standard to which every institution should aspire" (330). Second, and perhaps most significantly, the Statement does not include any enforcement mechanism for responding to institutions that ignore or disregard the above recommendations.

Thus the CCC "Statement of Principles and Standards" might more accurately be titled the "Statement of Suggestions and Hopes." Regardless of its title or its high-sounding rhetoric of crisis and democracy, most universities found little if any motivation to make the serious changes that would be required to reduce part-timers to no more than ten percent of the faculty, to pro-rate their salaries equivalent to full-time workers, and

to adjust class sizes to comply with the "standard." Also controversial, particularly for James Sledd, was the CCC's focus on developing tenure-line faculty rather than improving conditions for *all* faculty. Sledd's is a damning polemic in which he poses and then suggests answers to two questions: "First, in the five years after the once-so-promising Wyoming Resolution, why has so much talk produced so little action to check the exploitation of composition teachers? Second, what can be done, if anything, to right this wrong?" (271). In response to the first question, he feels that "administrators, literati, and eminent compositionists" are more motivated by self-interest than by a desire to reform work in English studies. That is, academics in a position to implement change benefit from the status quo; therefore, they are often ill-motivated to change. In response to the second, he feels that "organized agitation" and "really militant action" (280) are the only means to real change. Below I want to describe Sledd's call for agitation in some detail, not because I feel it is the best course of action but because the substance of his call and the energy of his convictions can serve as inspiration for counteracting the effects of the managerial unconscious in composition studies.

Sledd contends that a large underclass of exploited writing teachers is a "prerequisite to the existence of a professoriate

glorying in autotelic research and unread publication" (270). He then critiques the profession for the hypocrisy embedded in its standard labor practices: "one constant within the incessant changes of the supposedly fundamental liberal discipline of English has been the fundamentally illiberal exploitation of teaching assistants" (271). Sledd sees composition's drive for status and professionalization as a development related to the university's relatively recent shift toward corporate management strategies, in that both derive benefits from an underclass of contingent labor. Foreshadowing the analyses of Nelson and Bousquet, Sledd holds that the business as usual approach of passing required and entry level course work on to GTA's and other contingent faculty is short-sighted:

> The literati want to preserve their sinecures in the greatest possible comfort by continuing to evade the social duty of cultivating literacy; […] in the long run the use of contingent labor weakens the professoriate. It is hard to argue that tenure is essential to academic freedom when half the faculty will never be tenured. (274)

Suspicious of composition's recent drive toward professionalization, he takes special aim at the way the CCC Statement fails to develop 1) mechanisms for redressing

grievances or 2) enforcing any of its recommendations. These twin issues, he writes, "[pose] a threat to the system of exploitation without which English departments in the present state could not exist, the system from which administrators, literati, and boss compositionists have all sought to profit" (279). Sledd is also critical of the CCC's focus on research over teaching in making tenure decisions: "There is no suggestion [in the CCC Statement] that the best evidence of commitment to the teaching of writing is just its devoted teaching" (279).

Sledd's is an admirable position, but not one likely to be adopted or even respected by other disciplines in academe, devoted as they are to research and publication. Further, it is not necessarily true that the *best* evidence of commitment to teaching writing is just devoted teaching. It is not unreasonable to ask that college-level writing instructors, tenured or otherwise, not only write but actively move their writing into the public realm. The challenge, in my view, is to revise the type of writing that is considered acceptable and to reform the conditions under which such writing is expected to be produced. It is better to call for more compelling, publicly accessible writing than it is to advocate for a model of professional conduct at odds with every other discipline in the

university. Thus composition teachers can and should lead the way in bringing the concerns of the university to the public and demonstrating that the best research and writing need not be autotelic.

Additionally, while Sledd's passion is contagious, the notion of literature professors preserving their "sinecures" at the expense of the profession and "boss compositionists" actively seeking sinecures of their own no longer withstands scrutiny (if indeed, it ever did). There may be a few faculty positions that could be described in Sledd's terms, but my own experience as an adjunct and a full-time faculty member at five different universities and my experience as a student at five more have not led me to conclude that such positions are in any way typical. Most faculty juggle teaching loads, administrative duties, committee work, and scholarly production for compensation that hardly affords the lifestyle or elitism that Sledd indicates. While his commitment to education is inspiring and his frustration with labor practices understandable, his rhetoric is ultimately more polarizing than productive. Granted, Sledd likely set out to write a polemic and it seems clear that his intention was to agitate for change, and oftentimes change depends on such agitation. It is for this reason, in part, that I have dealt with Sledd's arguments in such detail, even though

I do not agree with many of his premises or conclusions. Still, Sledd would likely agree with my contention that the future of English studies would be far more productive than it would otherwise be if only professionals in English understood their work as part of a collective, public, and humanistic enterprise. For instance, both James Sosnoski (Token Professionals and Master Critics) and Evan Watkins (Work Time) describe the various types of work that have historically remained undervalued in academic settings: writing letters of recommendation and committee reports, participating in university and departmental governance, (re)evaluating curricula and assessment practices to name but three broad areas—the work, in short, of teaching and service that is vital to the smooth function of tertiary education. However teaching and service have yet to be valued to the extent that specialized scholarly production is valued, despite the fact that teaching and service represent a significant investment of faculty time and energy.

Others spoke out against the CCC Statement as well, although most often for reasons that differed markedly from Sledd's. In 1992, CCC published a symposium of opinions related to the Wyoming Resolution, the 1989 CCC Statement, and a 1991 follow-up "Progress Report." Robert Merrill's "Against the

Statement" is notable since his argument emerges from his perspective as chair of an English department at a large public university. Merrill's views therefore are representative of an administrator's response to the central tenet of the CCC Statement—that writing courses be taught by tenure-line faculty with part-time workers comprising no more than 10% of faculty.

Before imagining answers to what is missing and solutions to the ongoing labor problems in English, it is necessary to understand Merrill's position, or ones like it, if only because many who would concur with his assumptions are in positions to implement or impede reform. Additionally, Merrill describes in some detail the practical difficulties of staffing approximately 125 sections of required writing each term.

The numbers are illustrative: In Merrill's case nine full-time (but nontenure-line) composition lecturers staff forty of these 125 first-year courses. By his calculations, he would need to replace the current nine lecturers with twenty tenure-line hires, assuming that these twenty will teach two or three courses a semester, only one of which would be composition (155). Notice the assumption here: the people hired would not want to teach composition and the burden, like doing the dishes or taking out the garbage, needs to be spread around evenly. Merrill points out that one of the CCC Statement's not so tacit

goals is to encourage the hiring of composition and rhetoric specialists. However, beyond that "the idea seems to be to assign the unstaffed freshman sections to other tenure-track faculty. What else can be done if departments are not to exceed a 10% limit on courses assigned to temporary staff? At this point we have a whole new ball game, one in which people with PhDs in literature will teach at least two composition courses a year" (155).

In advancing what he characterizes as this "common sense" argument for economic and curricular realism, Merrill leaves unchallenged the assumption that literary study and teaching are more appealing and in almost every regard better than work in composition. He also leaves unquestioned literary studies' specialized and privileged status, which positions English departments as *literature* departments, with a logical, but nonetheless incidental, association to writing instruction. It is only fair to point out that Merrill understands the over-reliance on part-time labor to be a serious problem, which he is making a good faith effort to address; however, his suggestions are implicated in the attitudes that caused the curricular and labor divides in the first place: for example, Merrill supports the tenure of writing instructors—so long as the existing model in his department, wherein writing instructors teach four

writing courses per semester, while literature faculty teach two or three upper level courses, remains in place (157).

While Merrill does sound a bit elitist, at least to my ear, his point is sound: faculty who do not want to be teaching composition or introductory courses ought not to be doing so, since they probably will not do the job nearly so well as the staff Merrill has in place, who probably like their job, if not their pay or the working conditions. But unless those in English studies want to endorse a system where staff teaching four classes of writing per semester subsidize the work of those teaching two specialized literature classes a semester—a system, which is increasingly unsustainable, as well as a threat to the long term health of storied principles like academic freedom, then some compromise is in order. As Joseph Harris points out, the economic logic is hard to deny: if a course can be staffed by contingent faculty for roughly twenty-five percent of what it costs to staff that same course with tenure-line faculty, and if "the profession not only fails to object to such staffing but encourages it through its system of professional rewards" then no one need wonder why tenure is going the way of the dinosaurs (61).

One way to reverse the extinction process would be to adopt a share the burden model with the understanding that specialized

courses assume entry level courses, so if one wants the former, one needs teach the latter. However, this argument leaves unchallenged the idea that entry level course work is uninteresting, undesirable, or as Nelson would have it "demoralizing and intolerable." A better idea would be to start making and implementing proposals to change the perception of general education course work. We might begin by abandoning the idea that English courses need to teach students how to think and write like English professors, as if such thinking were a paragon of intellectual achievement. (It may be, at least in certain instances, but it is certainly not the only model to which students should aspire.) We might refocus our efforts on communicating the richness of a literary worldview, of demonstrating to students a joy for creative expression, of modeling and teaching the sort of passion for reading and writing that attracted most of us to the profession in the first place. This is not to say that English studies should turn itself into a general education teaching factory or to say that research and specialized publication should not be part of our ethos, but research and scholarship need not exclude teaching and public accessibility. English studies, after all, does not only teach critical thinking skills through the interpretation

of texts; it also teaches the possibility of creative, imaginative, and innovative alternatives to life's choices.

Filling in what's missing

English is an *approach* to subject matter as much as it is a subject in its own right. Fully defining this approach and articulating its social value and intellectual relevance is one of the most vital tasks confronting English studies today. The better we attend to it, the better we will be able to argue successfully in the labor and curricular disputes surrounding required and general education course work. If the field is divided, with the interests of tenured faculty at odds with those of part-time faculty and the interests of literary scholars at odds with those of composition scholars, then very little progress on these fronts will be possible. While disagreement and contention are central to academe's idea of intellectual progress, it is equally important to locate and build on areas of consensus. To do otherwise risks a rhetorically ineffective level of fragmentation. In developing an argument for curricular and disciplinary unity, Marshall Gregory points out that our teaching, more so than any other activity, brings reality and presence to the intangible aspects of our field: for the most part, "it is our students, not us,

who take our disciplinary work into the world" (43). Therefore, while consensus may not be forthcoming on the composition / literature divide or on the best way to correct the field's historical reliance on contingent labor, we might begin, as Gregory suggests, by identifying, "a common set of objectives that […] create for us the possibility of a common and unifying disciplinary mission" (43). In this concluding section, I suggest three related answers to the chapter's opening question: "What is missing?" While any answers to such an open-ended question are as tentative as they are contentious, I posit them in hope of building a viable rhetorical platform from which to advance arguments that would improve work in English, for both students and faculty. First, I suggest we need to redirect the insular nature of academic discussions and invite the perspectives of non-academic readers. Writing and literary studies need to be conceived and discussed in publicly oriented as well as specialized ways. Second, faculty in English studies need to openly discuss and come to terms with what I will call, following Jeff Smith, the "gatekeeping function" of our discipline. Third, in our teaching and our writing, the profession needs to describe a vision for work in the humanities generally and in English studies particularly that involves creativity, imagination, inspiration, and innovation.

A (more) public audience:

All the writing that we publish with regard to English studies need not be at the level of a newspaper article; however, if we are going to argue successfully for tenure, for the academic freedoms necessary to assess students in ways that are consistent with our educational values, for the freedom to design and implement curricula, to write and conduct research as we see fit, then we need to open lines of communication to the non-academic world. For this, Gerald Graff offers both a valuable perspective and a point of departure:

> The complaint that research and publication have displaced teaching has always resembled the parallel complaint that technology or bureaucracy has displaced more human or communal relations. Whatever its justifications, such a complaint leads nowhere, for it envisages no role for the professional interests of the scholar except to extinguish themselves. The diagnosis on which the complaint rests blames the problems of the institution on the process of professionalization itself, not distinguishing between professionalism as such and the specific forms professionalism has taken under the peculiar circumstances of the new university, forms which—it

> must be stressed—need not be the only forms possible. (Professing Literature 5)

Thus the question is not one of specialization, per se: from post-colonialist Chaucerians to post-feminist compositionists, English studies already is specialized to an extraordinary degree and this is not likely to change. However, we can change the way specialists in the field interact with the public and with one another; we can start to value academic work that explains and situates literary texts, pedagogical, and theoretical issues for a general readership. Doing so may help to bridge the unproductive divide between professional and public understandings of what it means to teach and write about English studies. As Peter Mortensen observes "journalists, essayists, polemicists, policy analysts, and others are writing about the same literacies we study"; therefore to write about literature and literacy in predominantly specialized ways excludes the field from conversations which we could inform in ways beneficial to both our students, the public, and our own material circumstances (183).

A complete understanding of English studies' gatekeeping function:

Writing instruction has often been critiqued, particularly by those seeking to abolish the requirement, for its role as a secondary admissions department, certifying those students who

are ready to read and write in the academy, while directing the legions of those deemed "unqualified" to remedial classes, or else directing them out of academe entirely. This process is part of what Jeff Smith calls composition's "gatekeeping function," and he argues that there is nothing wrong with gates—the problem is with the unethical ways in which they are sometimes kept. Universities, like the employers who will eventually hire our students, need some way of identifying those who meet and exceed standards. To borrow the spirit, if not the content, of his many examples: Would you care to fly in a plane with a pilot who has not passed through one if not several gates? Would you prefer for your child an average or an excellent teacher? How about a surgeon? (309-315). In short, first-year writing and general education coursework play roles in the credentialing function of the academy. This is not in dispute; however, gatekeeping is often framed as a critique of such courses and listed as a reason why the teaching of them is at turns undesirable or even unethical. However, as teachers we voluntarily work within and for a credentialing system. Students apply and pay money to participate in this system under the assumption that hard work toward a degree today earns one a broader career horizon tomorrow. As a general rule, this assumption is correct. While a college degree is not a guarantee

of anything, the Department of Labor reports that in the year 2003, the median weekly earnings of those without a college degree was 554 dollars, compared to 900 dollars for those with a bachelor's degree—a difference of over sixty-two percent (U.S. Dept. of Labor, "Education Pays"). Which pay check would you prefer?

Further, as Smith notes (and as students will readily tell us), doctors, lawyers, business executives, and college professors work in desirable fields, and "attractive social roles will have over-supplies of aspirants. That fact, combined with our common interest in future professionals' ability to perform, requires that someone keep at least some gates" (319). Therefore, the second answer to "what is missing" may be found in a complete understanding of the gatekeeping function of our field. The more we openly and publicly discuss our standards and our assessment practices, the more likely it will be that our gates will be kept rationally and ethically.

In this regard, Richard Ohmann's critique of composition is only partly correct: Writing instruction does teach and certify students in the language of a professional, managerial class. Not only do we teach this language, but we also fail those students who do not demonstrate at least a base-line mastery of it. This is not likely to be a fact that English teachers,

regardless of their political or pedagogical orientations, count among their blessings. However, there are three important amendments to Ohmann's observation: first, while composition does teach a writing style amendable to white collar management, the same could be said for the entire process of earning a college degree, since the majority of the college curriculum requires students to show up on time, meet deadlines, respond to authority, and interact with bureaucracy in ways that move from casual (e.g., a relatively small writing class) to formal (e.g., the defense of a thesis). Second, Graff suggests that some of the abilities we might associate with bourgeois managers—organizing material, drawing conclusions from it, responding to critiques—are valuable across a range of vocations: Revolutionaries, the resistance, and the status quo elite all need to meet deadlines, and (almost) all operate within a hierarchy of one sort or another (Literature 107). Third, it is necessary to develop and publicly communicate the rationale for the keeping of our gates, because at the very least, if we do not attend to this task, others whose agendas may be markedly different from our own will attend to it for us.

Positive representations of the university:

While the practical and economic value of a postsecondary degree is not in question, English studies can more capably

demonstrate that there are alternatives to what has been called the consumer model of education, which views the college degree as valuable to the extent that it enables one to successfully compete in the marketplace.

Today, students I meet are focused on the practical. When asked, they will tell you, “I am going to college because I want a good job.” When asked to elaborate, one student in my class described “a good job” as one where, “You don’t have to work outside in the rain or out in the cold all day delivering Chinese food.” Higher education is bound up with the American Dream; it is the ticket out of the neighborhood and into law school, medical school, business school, and professional status. There is much that is commendable about wanting a good job, at least partly because such jobs often have the potential to affect the world in positive ways: doctors cure diseases, lawyers protect our rights or go on to become lawmakers. And English professors? At least presumably, we work with young people and help prepare them for such jobs. We also help students to see the world and its ideas in context, to see the ways one’s life choices affect and influence others, to respond to life’s choices in artistic and imaginative ways. If we want a functioning society, we need people who capably occupy the “good jobs.” We also need a higher purpose. We need meaning, a reason

to get up in the morning, and a reason to care—about others, ourselves, our world, our culture. We need to be inspired, and this is where English studies may help to articulate in compelling ways what André Breton describes in Nadja, Mad Love, and elsewhere as "convulsive" or "marvelous" beauty: "It alone has the power to enlarge the universe, causing it to relinquish some of its opacity, letting us discover its extraordinary capacities for reserve, proportionate to the innumerable needs of the spirit" (Mad Love 15).

In tending to the marvelous, albeit intangible, aspects of the field, Jeffery Williams argues that we also need to develop a better understanding of "the idea of the university" as it is represented in popular culture (e.g., in books, films, interviews) and to communicate "new images or fictions of the university, to reclaim the ground of public interest, and to promote a higher education operating in that public interest" (750). Until we have this task firmly in hand, very little in the way of sustainable reform will occur because a number of issues will interfere, not least among them: underlying linguistic status anxiety, the equation of writing with skills, and literature with erudite but seemingly impenetrable texts.

In short, we need to make the case for the work of English studies in ways that will prove persuasive to those who may not

already agree with our premises, share our penchant for academic discourse, or our concerns for the disciplinary status of English or composition studies. We can, for example, demonstrate for students that tertiary education is more than a launching pad for one's career—presumably that's why the metaphor "higher" is so often used. English studies might, as Williams suggests "offer a safe space and time for students to imagine other prospects for their lives than being consumers, to examine critically the social world they had no part in making, and to envision a different world they might choose to enter" (748). Students and parents already want to believe that the university is a place not just of preparation but of exploration, innovation, and inspiration. As I describe in chapter one, resistance to Educational Management Organizations (EMO's) comes from parents as well as legislators from both the left and the right. We can demonstrate the marvelous beauty of our field in more compelling ways. One of the best ways, and one of the few that will not sound like a hollow public relations campaign, is to refocus the profession on the way it interacts with students. English professors might take the lead in demonstrating to the public and to students that writing is as much a heuristic method as it is a skill, and thereby demonstrate that the work

of English studies is flexible, responsive, and vital—in any context.

Chapter Three:

From Fake Writing to The Joy of English

> We could, for example, look to the model of the liberal arts college and find there an understanding of disciplinarity that saw teaching and intimate intellectual conversations with students and colleagues as the center of life in that discipline. It would be possible (though let me stress, too, very hard) to imagine this work as primary, with research and publication valuable as they nourish the education of students and extend the collegial conversation to a larger audience.
>
> — Disciplining Students: Whom Should Composition Teach and What Should They Know
>
> James Slevin

I suspect that many of the most compelling accomplishments of students, teachers, and scholars go unrecognized, or at the very least unpublished, because the details of these accomplishments cannot be accurately described in ways that would be acknowledged or understood as appropriately academic. One of the central arguments of this dissertation is that we, as faculty and as scholars, need to broaden our conception of what counts as scholarship and learn to attend more carefully to audience relationships—particularly those with the public, with each other, and with our students. If English studies is to demonstrate its relevance into the 21st century, we need to widen our audience, because doing so will help communicate our purpose

and rationale. If disciplinary conventions unnecessarily foreclose on the ways that powerful experiences with literature and pedagogy are communicated, then our discipline is not as rhetorically effective as it could be. The relevance of our discipline can be expressed as forcefully with affective and joyful renderings of experience as it can be with critical and (traditionally) academic ones, and the distinction between the two has been needlessly overstated. It is possible to discuss and debate reasons for this, but I believe it is more important at this historical moment to focus on doing, on writing in accessible ways, and on encouraging a variety of academic writing that understands argumentation and analysis as interdependent with narration, description, and other imaginative modes. Good writing, as we all know but sometimes forget, goes beyond polemics and finds residence in our hearts.

By invoking metaphors of the heart and referencing “joy” in this chapter’s title, I assume certain risks. Some readers may consider such issues irrelevant, naïve, solipsistic, or else important but too subjective or idiosyncratic for serious consideration in an academic text. Other readers may describe a hierarchy of concerns and find that the joy of English simply does not rank as high as other matters, like literacy, critical thinking, and social justice. Consider the 2003 National

Assessment of Adult Literacy, which finds that "the percentage of college graduates with proficient [prose] literacy decreased from 40 percent in 1992 to 31 percent in 2003" (15). Since this rather startling statistic is all too easy to take out of context, it is important to linger for a moment. The study included 19,714 adults (16 or older) and required them to answer questions based on a variety of prose texts. "Prose literacy" was defined as "the knowledge and skills needed to perform prose tasks (i.e., to search, comprehend, and use information from continuous texts)" (2). "Proficiency" in prose literacy was defined, in part, as "reading lengthy, complex, abstract prose texts as well as synthesizing information and making complex inferences" (3). As a sample task indicative of proficient prose literacy, the study lists "comparing the viewpoints of two editorials" (3).

I would not characterize the typical editorial as lengthy, complex, or abstract, but this only makes the findings of the survey more distressing. If only 31 in every 100 college graduates can successfully compare and contrast the op-ed pages of <u>The New York Times</u> and <u>The Wall Street Journal</u>, then perhaps my resistant readers, real and imagined, are correct and educators ought to be focused on issues other than the joy of English and finding writing that takes up residence in our

hearts. Yet “proficiency” ought not to be anything other than a short-term goal, and it ought not to be a term around which we define the work of English studies, lest our work be consigned to task fulfillment. In short, proficiency is not an end in itself, but is best understood as a by-product of powerful experiences with reading and writing.

Thus in focusing my readers’ attentions on the joy of English and in advocating for a freer writing, I seek to instantiate the intangible aspects of our discipline that give vitality, purpose, and direction to our work. As with previous chapters, this is a considerable undertaking, and I do not presume an exhaustive study of the joys of English. I doubt such a study would be possible, or even desirable. My goals here, while lofty, are measured: I seek to provide readers with a framework by which to advance conversations about the ways our disciplinary conventions affect (and effect) the production and reception of student writing. For this, I use a 2002 study on the reading habits of American adults as well as influential descriptions and critiques of curricula in English studies, notably those of Peter Elbow (What is English?), James Berlin (Rhetorics, Poetics, and Cultures), and Robert Scholes (The Rise and Fall of English). In other words, the first half of this chapter explores prevailing cultural and institutional attitudes

toward literary reading and writing, and traces the ways that such attitudes often foreclose efforts to work in imaginative and rhetorically flexible ways in the writing class and in professional scholarship. The second half of the chapter describes how such attitudes have shaped (and at times confounded) my own efforts to enact freer writing in classroom settings. I argue that the disciplinary tendency to marginalize imaginative aspects of reading and writing often leads to fake writing, the extreme instance of which is the plagiarized paper. In the conclusion of the chapter, I narrate the events of a student-teacher conference, which approaches the problem of plagiarism as a symptom of rhetorically ineffective audience relationships.

Psssst. There are secrets in poems.
Psssst. Who Cares?

Since 1996, the American Academy of Poets has promoted and celebrated April as "National Poetry Month." The primary purpose of NPM, as it is sometimes called, is to raise awareness of poetry generally and to promote contemporary (i.e., living) poets particularly. As one might expect, the month features readings, festivals, workshops, events in bookstores, interviews on National Public Radio, and poet-focused biographies on television. Knowing well that "National ________ Month" is a

siren call to teachers of all ages, the American Academy of Poets also provides a "tip sheet" for educators wishing to design lesson plans and activities:

- Attend poetry readings in your community.
- Reread some favorite poems.
- Post favorite poems in faculty and staff lounges.
- Write at least one poem before beginning a unit on poetry.
- Preview audio and/or video tapes for use in class or a special school-wide assembly.

Artsy happenings, good television, book sales, and pedagogical advice notwithstanding, it is easy to be dismissive of NPM, its very conception, its execution, and its TLA (three-letter acronym). Charles Bernstein, a poet whose wallet and reputation might benefit from the publicity, had this to say:

> As part of the spring ritual of National Poetry Month, poets are symbolically dragged into the public square in order to be humiliated with the claim that their product has not achieved sufficient market penetration and must be revived by the Artificial Resuscitation Foundation (ARF) lest the art form collapse from its own incompetence, irrelevance, and as a result of the general disinterest among the broad masses of the American People.

I grant that Bernstein's distaste for NPM is genuine, but I suspect him to be taking a deliberately controversial stance

here: symbolically or otherwise, no one is *dragging* poets into the public square (if anything, I suspect many poets would line up for the exposure), and the American Academy of Poets' intentions seem focused at least as much on edification and accessibility as they are on marketing and public relations. At least they claim as much on their website: "Since its inception, the goal of National Poetry Month has been to increase the visibility, presence, and accessibility of poetry in our culture." However, for Bernstein and others, efforts to make poetry "visible" and "accessible" more often than not result in a corruption of the form.

One of Bernstein's compatriots in this matter is Richard Howard, who in a keynote address at the 1996 PEN Literary awards found it necessary to address this latest assault on poetry's integrity: "I have no hesitation in calling [NPM] the worst thing to have happened to poetry since the advent of the camera and the internal combustion engine, two inventions that W. H. Auden once declared to be the bane of our modernity." After all, why should poets have to hawk their wares in the streets among the peanut vendors and ticket scalpers? Poetry shouldn't need a month; it ought to be as essential as air. In response, both writers critique NPM by way of inversion, where less public poetry leads to increased poetic appreciation, just as the

sudden lack of air might lead one to appreciate that which had hitherto been taken for granted. Bernstein proposes "International Anti-Poetry month," in which all public displays of poetry would be shrouded or silenced, no church hymns or *any* music for that matter, only silent games of hopscotch and patty-cake. Howard, for his part, is more staid:

> My proposal is simply this: to make poetry, once again, a secret. For we have failed in our modern--our postcamera, post-internal-combustion-engine-effort to make poetry known; we have merely made it public. If we are to save poetry, which means if we are to savor it, we must restore poetry to that status of seclusion and even secrecy that characterizes only our authentic pleasures and identifies only our intimately valued actions.

In their own way, both critics advance a view of what poetry, and by extension poetic reading, ought to be: thoughtful, personal, sublime, bordering on sacred—or, in Howard's words, secret, secluded, and intimate.

By contrast, with its focus on accessibility and its "bring poetry to the people" aesthetic, NPM seems more like a pep rally than it does a call to poetic contemplation. As interpreted by Bernstein and Howard, NPM's efforts to make poetry public and

accessible simultaneously marginalize, or at least benignly neglect, the very traits that make poetry capital "P" Poetry: its tendency to layer meaning upon meaning, hence the need for re-reading; its exalted status as a special, if not sacred, language; and most of all, its capacity to portray a truth that is beyond the minutiae of our existence. Recall, for example, the teaching tips that exhort would-be poetry teachers to put poems on display, write at least one poem, and show poetry-focused media, e.g., Def Jam Poetry videos. I suspect that the gripe here is not with the poetry displayed, created, and performed, but with the type of creative production and reception such mechanisms might encourage. Imagine a lesson and assignment sequence inspired by NPM from the perspective of an admittedly uninspired and hypothetical student: after an afternoon snack of Fruit Loops and Pepsi and before an extended game of Vice City IV, read some Charles Bukowski and jot down a few derivative lines regarding last Friday's hangover; print the "poem," and fold it into the English notebook, thinking "not great, not bad, at least a B, maybe a B-minus." Anyone can be a poet, all one needs is thin(ner) margins and five extra minutes.

In making what I see as the best case for Bernstein and Howard, I have almost convinced myself. By failing to "make poetry known" just public (Howard) and "promot[ing] not poetry

but the idea of poetry" (Bernstein) some manifestations of NPM miss the point. It is likely that any of my readers could analyze the events of Aprils past and find a way of wryly alluding to the opening line of Eliot's Waste Land (as both Bernstein and Howard do). Yet in locating what I understand to be specific instances of the *idea* of poetry made public (as opposed to poetry, per se, made known), I recall poems I've heard recited at weddings, refrigerator magnet poetry, yet another performance artist smashing a cheap acoustic guitar on stage, and the lugubrious moments of films like Sylvia, which portray the angst of the poet with stylized intensity. In such instances, the distinction between poetry as "just public" and poetry made known, between the *idea* of poetry and capital "P" Poetry is apparent but perhaps not particularly useful. Arguments like Bernstein's and Howard's describe poetry, and I would extend this to all works identified as literature, as a language so privileged that the poet need not be concerned with issues like "market penetration," another word for which is audience.

The similarity between Bernstein and Howard's views that poetry should not and in fact cannot connect with a public audience, broadly conceived, if the form is to remain pure or true or beautiful (or elitist) is remarkably similar to the view

that academic writing is special, where "special" implies more capable, nuanced, or appropriate for the communication of complex ideas and the development of critical consciousness. There is a case to be made here, of course. Complex ideas may require complex writing, just as the intricacy of the moment may require a poetic form more elaborate than linear narrative told with "see-Spot-run" sentence structure, punctuated by car chases and sex scenes. However there is a false dichotomy at work between simple and difficult, publicly accessible and intellectually orientated, where the latter terms are valued for the myriad opportunities they offer for exegesis and the former are derided for an apparent lack of sophistication.

As one who works regularly with students of traditional college age (18-25), I am primarily concerned with the ways that young adults accept and resist the cultural and institutional assumptions about difficult and intellectual texts. My students tend to like, Fruit Loops, Pepsi, and Vice City IV. Poems, novels, Shakespeare, and analytical work about such texts are indeed, they tell me, precious—just not especially useful, sometimes hard to understand, and very often boring. It is my suspicion that students feel at turns dismissive or confused by literature because they typically do not consider it to be a participatory activity. Thus, I am going to proceed from the

following assumption: many students do not regularly read literature because they do not regularly attempt to write it, nor are they typically encouraged to affectively respond to it in situations where grades are most directly at issue: final exams, proficiency tests, and essays. For these reasons, literature begins and ends at the classroom door; it is, to borrow a line from another of Eliot's well-known poems, "full of high sentence, but a bit obtuse" (l. 117). Thus, while NPM may not be the most effective strategy to engage students and the rest of our culture in literary activities, at least it attempts to bridge the divide between intellectual and popular culture, and thereby attempts to move beyond arguments for literature's innate value, which no longer hold sway for much of the American population.

In 2002 for instance, the National Endowment for the Arts released its "Reading at Risk" report, which studied trends in leisure-time reading (i.e., not for school or work) during the period 1982-2002. The study found that literary reading—defined as "any novels, short stories, plays, or poetry" (ix)—declined approximately fourteen percent over the last twenty years. In 2002, 46.7 percent of the 17,000 surveyed reported having read any literature in the last twelve months. "Non-literary reading"—e.g., current events books, biographies, essays, non-

fiction—fared slightly better with 56.6 percent having read *any* book, a decline of seven percent in the last twenty years (3-5). The reading rates among young adults, ages 18-24, are particularly relevant for my purposes, since this age-group is characteristic of individuals who fill the rosters in English courses at the undergraduate level. In 1982, young adults were the most likely of any age group to read literature in their leisure time; in 2002, they were the least likely to do so, "with the exception of those 65 and older" (ix).

Despite the overall drop in reading, it is interesting to observe that "the number of people creatively writing—in any genre, not exclusively literary works—increased substantially from 1982 to 2002. In 1982, about 11 million people did some form of creative writing. By 2002, this number had risen to almost 15 million," an increase of thirty-six percent (22). This point would seem to contradict my above assumption that students tend not to read literature because they tend not to write it or affectively respond to it; however, given the steadily increasing popularity, importance, and accessibility of the internet, the type of creative writing represented by the above increase is most likely represented in blogs, personal websites, and other multimedia productions. While such work has garnered

scholarly attention,[12] and while it may engage students in creative, meaning-making activities, blogs and the like are not often understood as "literature," and have yet to significantly influence the way in which student writers approach the teacher as audience in the majority of classroom settings. Additionally, wherever this creative writing is taking place, and in whatever form, it seems not to be taking place in school, since "the number of people who indicated that they had ever taken a creative writing class or lesson decreased from 30 million in 1982 to 27 million in 2002" (22). This ten percent drop is even more telling when one considers that the college population during this same period rose thirty-one percent (U.S. Dept. of Ed., "Condition of Education").

In fact, the increase in creative production described by "Reading at Risk" is more likely to be dismissed, if not scoffed at, by cultural and institutional representatives to the extent that it attempts to bridge the chasm between popular and academic writing. For example, in a response to "Reading at Risk" published in the conservative periodical The Weekly Standard, Joseph Epstein finds the *decrease* in regular readers

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[12] See, e.g., Literacy Theory in the Age of the Internet, eds. Todd Taylor and Irene Ward, and Passions, Pedagogies and 21st Century Technologies, eds. G.E. Hawisher and C.L. Selfe, for two recent and valuable additions to this area.

easy to dismiss because a “statistical style of thinking” does not and cannot accurately represent national reading habits. This may be true; however Epstein’s statistical skepticism is selective, since he finds the thirty-six percent increase in the number of creative writers a “mildly depressing finding of the survey.” This rise, he speculates, may be attributable to “the increase of falsely inflated personal self-esteem, in which altogether too many people feel, quite wrongly, that they are artistic.” In context, Epstein is making a joke, one that keeps with the tone of the article as a whole and the wry, if a bit curmudgeonly, humor one often finds in The Weekly Standard. Nevertheless, for Epstein’s dry humor to work, just as for Bernstein’s “National Anti-Poetry Month” satire, it must contain some grains of truth, and the truth is that as a culture we do not currently understand the writing of fiction, poetry, plays, lyric essays and so forth to be the sort of activity engaged in by ordinary folk. The great unwashed can produce blogs and such, if they must, but this work like NPM’s efforts to popularize poetry, is often sneered at in intellectual and academic circles.

As a result, literature has more of an exalted place than it does a functional place in our cultural psyche. Ironically, this statement is nowhere more true than within the discipline

of English studies itself, where to be a professor or student of English practically assumes that one does not write the sorts of texts one studies. One could, for example, receive an advanced degree in Renaissance studies without ever having been asked to write a sonnet. Is this a good practice? Even where imaginative writing is valued, it often sits uneasily beside literary or theoretical exegesis. In September 1999, for example, the journal College English discontinued its long-standing tradition of publishing poetry alongside critical and analytical work. I asked the editor, Jean Gunner, to explain this decision, and she responded, in part, that due to budgetary considerations, which led to a decreased per-issue page count, poetry seemed the most appropriate feature to cut because it "[…] was not contextualized in any way and did not seem to meet the journal's stated mission in an articulated way either." Gunner's position is not entirely unreasonable, and in fairness, College English has since devoted several special issues to creative and imaginative aspects of writing. For the moment, however, I want to notice the irony in the stated mission of a journal for and by English teachers that is at odds with a few pages of subscriber-penned poetry (decontextualized or otherwise). In our journals and in our classrooms, when space or money or context is at issue, imaginative work is often considered superfluous.

We lack the vocabulary and criteria by which to value the creative work produced by our students and our colleagues. Therefore, it seems natural to cut or eliminate it when time or budgets or issues of coverage, to name but three common concerns, exert pressure on curricular and editorial decisions. Such pressures will always exist, so if imaginative and other varieties of rhetorically flexible writing are not prioritized, it is unlikely that they will ever naturally reside as a vital part of our classes, our journals, or the lives of many of our students.

(Un) Learning to Hate English

It is ironic that some of us in English studies, who build careers on the value of imaginative works, find it difficult to explain the value of the imaginative work being produced in the here and now. This irony negatively affects the way in which students approach literature just as it negatively affects the way in which they understand the English teacher as an audience for their work. Because we lack the vocabulary and criteria to value here and now imaginative work, it is difficult to respond in a convincing way to the type of student who sent me the following email during the first week of a required writing course, which like many mandatory English courses across the

country, functions as both a writing requirement and an introduction to literature:

> Why do I have to take this course. I hate English. Its such a waste of time! I'm too smart to be in your class. I know how to write well enough to stay out of this class, so just give me the damn proficiency exam and Ill get a A. [sic]

The sources of this student's negative opinion of English are likely as personal and cultural as they are institutional, but one source must be given serious consideration: this student learned to "hate English" in English classes. By the time students leave high school and enter the academy, many are either pre-disposed against writing and literary reading because they feel themselves to be "too smart" for yet another discussion of topic sentences or else they feel themselves to be inherently "bad" at writing and decoding texts. In other words, the very courses where students might learn to appreciate and even produce the sort of literature that Bernstein and others so cherish has had, at least in the above case, the exact opposite effect.

Yet, the student's comment should not come as a surprise to anyone involved in the teaching of English at a secondary or tertiary level. In their study of the curricular hierarchy in

English studies, a hierarchy that values critical over imaginative work and literary studies over composition studies, Karen Fitts and William Lalicker argue that by about 9th grade

> many who will become college English majors have been identified by this point as "honors" students, having demonstrated to their teachers the ability to read literary texts with enthusiasm and imagination and to write personal essays and research papers that reveal an understanding of how to use and when to avoid the expressive, idiosyncratic "voice" privileged by school literacy. (429)

In this way, students who enjoy writing English papers continue to do so, and those who "hate English" find that the process of writing papers and reading their teachers' responses only reinforces their opinion. For example, by "too smart," it is likely that the above student did not mean to imply she was a genius or an award-winning writer, but that she had already been, in her opinion, sufficiently acquainted with the thesis / point-sentence driven essay; literature, including some Shakespeare; and MLA format. To her, the writing classroom represented an initiation or the occasion to refine a set of skills one has rather than a space in which to develop writing as a practice. The assertion, "I know how to write *well enough*"

(my emphasis), later in the email supports this interpretation and signals belief in a minimum proficiency that qualifies one to move on to other pursuits or at least that enables one to "stay out of" what seems to be some kind of detention or punishment. Not coincidentally, this line of thinking is akin to the attitude of many faculty in English departments who understand the teaching of writing to be burdensome and disconnected from their scholarly interests. The opportunity to work toward freer writing, that is to write in imaginative and rhetorically flexible ways outside the scope of the traditional school-based essay, would not be a panacea for such students and faculty, but it may at least help students to conceive of themselves as writers rather than conscripted laborers and faculty to conceive of their classrooms as spiritually and intellectually engaging spaces.

Therefore if one feels as I do, that students and teachers would benefit from composing imaginative and analytical prose in roughly equal measures, it would seem that the most direct solution would be to design writing assignments that maintain

this balance.[13] Unfortunately, the ideological and institutional foundation of the English classroom often causes student-authored creative work to be read with a suspicion so deeply entrenched that it is the students who raise the most strident objections. Even when students accept the invitation to write imaginatively, they may suspect our motives and resent a departure from the uninspired but at least predictable routine—read, summarize, analyze—as with the student below, who began an end of semester, reflective essay in which I encouraged narrative and anecdotal writing as follows (the underlined, bold-faced type in the title is the student's emphasis):

> **Slave Writing: The many ideological and industrial constraints that a writer must endure every time he/she picks up a pen.**
>
> There is no such thing as creative writing in the classroom, it is simply a ploy to get students to use their "imaginations". Every time you are writing in any kind of institutionalized situation you are a

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[13] I understand the "assigning" of creative work to be an unfortunate paradox. In an attempt to address the embedded contradiction here, Ann Berthoff designed not "assignments" but "invitations" in her influential text, Forming, Thinking, and Writing. While I laud her efforts as well as her invitations, my point, in part, is that regardless of what a teacher calls a particular project, and regardless of the project's scope or intent, students will very often *perceive* the work as an assignment—that is, as a task to fulfill rather than an invitation to create.

> slave or a prisoner of some sort. In some cases your bondage is more oppressive than in others. As soon as you pick up the pen you begin to wonder in the back of your head "I hope they like this." [sic]

The student's assertion that creative writing is "simply a ploy," points to reasons why efforts to intermarry creative and critical work often do little to alter pre-existing negative attitudes toward school-based writing. I understand the student's use of "ploy" to mean that in the composition classroom, creative work amounts to little more than a gimmick because the "real" writing—e.g., the writing that counts toward a grade—is critical, analytical, and argumentative. As in College English, so too in the English classroom: when teachers are under pressure to complete a unit, cover a particular area, perform effectively in an observation, or to establish "proficiency," imaginative work is often the first to go.

Since his influential study, Textual Power, Robert Scholes has been one of the most vocal critics of the disproportionate divide between literary consumption and production. In his analysis, student writing labeled "creative" is not read with the same level of care, commitment, and deference as is, say, Paradise Lost. One might justify this practice by pointing out, rightly, that most students simply do not achieve Miltonic

quality writing by the standards of critical consumption and that they do well to learn from and about the best. I do not dispute this; however, the academy's continuous favoring of already existing texts over those yet to be imagined diminishes the status of imaginative writing to "pseudo-literature," as Scholes puts it, or a "ploy" as the above student frames the issue. In English studies, an emphasis on great books, or what Scholes describes as a privileging of "sacred" texts, may not always be the cause of student discontent, but other factors often lead to the same result such as the (over)emphasis on revision of students' own compositions, an overwhelming focus on analysis, and an at times nearly neurotic concern for "proficiency." By the same reasoning, Scholes describes the writing done in English composition classes as "pseudo-non-literature" (Textual Power 1-17), which is to say that such writing not only lacks the authenticity of published or professional expository writing but more importantly lacks a legitimate audience. The audience for such pseudo-writing, mostly teachers, does not read it except to grade it; no one is aware of this more than the student writers, and this awareness negatively affects their approach to writing (just as it affects the teacher's approach to reading and assessment). Having been compelled to favor others' texts over their own for many years

and having their own texts not so much read as evaluated, students come to English class expecting to continue the process of passive (or else quietly resentful) consumption and pseudo (or else entirely plagiarized) production.

For these reasons, some students simply shut down and decide to “hate” English, as with the student author of the email above. It follows that such students’ desire to write withers and their compositional imagination atrophies, which helps explain why they so often respond to writing tasks with apathy or resentment and why the quality of their writing suffers. Any assertion that English classrooms produce “desire-less pseudo-writing” is bound to meet significant resistance. This is particularly true in required composition classes, since they demand so much time, effort, and money to run and maintain. Indeed, the idea that English studies not only tolerates but prescribes fake writing is disturbing, to say the least, yet the very structure of our discipline practically ensures that the writing produced within its confines will often lack as much imagination as it does urgency.

As I have argued above, it is not sufficient to balance argumentative and analytical work with imaginative writing because the latter is perceived to lack currency in the academy. Thus addressing the production/consumption divide requires a

different understanding of what English studies can and should be doing. For this, Peter Elbow's account of the English Coalition Conference at New Wye, "What is English?", provides several illuminating moments and a useful narrative by which to understand a few of the major obstacles to reimagining academic writing in its student and professional manifestations. In one chapter of Elbow's account, "The Question of Literature," he lays out a case for understanding English studies as "language arts," akin to our elementary and secondary school colleagues because the term disrupts many of the disciplinary boundaries that have developed in the 20th century between speech, communications, linguistics, rhetoric, composition, and literary studies. Language arts implies that studying English (or any language) involves more than the study of literature but also reading (generally), writing (critically and imaginatively), and speech (oratory and rhetoric) (WIE? 95-6). However, disciplinary conventions of "higher" education often insist on strict boundaries between high school and college. Given the ferocity with which the high-school/college boundary is defended, the idea of understanding college-level English studies as "language arts" is interesting to think about, but unlikely to effect more than superficial change even if it were widely adopted.

Elbow dramatizes the practical effects of this pedagogical and ideological divide via an instance where the postsecondary teachers at the New Wye conference were charged with writing three reports: "one for the freshman-year course, one for general education, and one for the English major" (200). Each report was intended, in one way or another, to help answer one of the central questions of the conference: What is English? That is, what are the goals and purposes of education in English studies? As the group set to writing these reports, three postsecondary teachers—Betsy Hilbert, Marie Buncombe, and Eleanor Tignor—left the large group and formed what came to be called the "wholistic subgroup" [sic[14]], which set down goals for the teaching of English that were, they felt, unrepresented by those in the majority:

> Literature is the honest and eloquent re-creation of experience through language.
>
> Literature encompasses the body of linguistic texts of the world, including print and nonprint.

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[14] Elbow notes that many members of the college section pointed out the misspelling here: "Their 'wholistic' title not only said, 'We refuse to analyze"; it also said, 'We refuse to use the right word.'" Elbow argues that the title "evok[es] an anarchist tradition and insist[s] on language they knew the majority of the college section could not endorse" (202), but Marie Buncombe claims that statement and the title of the group simply came out of an effort to communicate enthusiasm and joy for language to students. It is, of course, possible that the term "wholistic" was simply a mistake, which (once made) stuck.

> When we teach students to write, that which they write is itself a literary text and an introduction to the literary community….
> *Whatever the text being studied, the teacher's communication of the joy of literature, of a sense of discovery and freedom in approaching the material is crucial*. (my emphasis 201)

The idea that it was crucial for the teacher to communicate the "joy" of English studies seemed problematic to the members in the college section, which is to say, in our field, terms like "joy," "personal," and "emotional," are often viewed with suspicion—despite the fact that literature is very often born of strong emotion and personal experience. The majority agreed with the statement, in general, but felt that if it was to be included in any of the formal proceedings, it needed to be revised and given "'cognitive leverage' rather than *just* 'affective leverage'" (my emphasis 201).

The modifier "just," which I understand to be synonymous with "merely," "only," and "simply," is illuminating, particularly since it recalls Robert Pirsig's account of his narrator's struggle to locate, define, and teach Quality to his students in an English class at Montana State College. In <u>Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance</u>, one of the main

characters, Phaedrus, advocates for the teaching of Quality to his students. Faculty members asked him to define Quality. Did it reside in things, which would therefore make the term measurable and objective, or did it reside in the observer, therefore making the term imprecise and subjective? The question is important to answer, reasons Phaedrus, because if Quality is objective, one should be able to design instruments to do the measuring; if subjective, then Quality is "*just* a fancy name for whatever you like" (my emphasis 229). Likewise, one might wonder how to measure the "joy of English." For if the concept is little more than a collection of individual (perhaps even solipsistic) preferences, then the skepticism of the majority of the New Wye committee is not only understandable but correct. As Phaedrus realizes, he was facing a dilemma: "Greek for two premises, […] likened to the front end of an angry and charging bull" (229). In short, there was no good answer to the subjective/objective split, just as there was, at first glance, no appropriately academic way to incorporate an imprecise term like "joy" into the formal proceedings of a conference intended to posit answers to the question "what is English?"

Phaedrus considers a number of logical and rhetorical responses, including that of the mystic, who might claim that Quality is undefinable by rational means. While such an answer

has a certain appeal, it does not, as Phaedrus observes, have *academic* appeal, and he was attempting to make an argument to an academic audience regarding the purpose and pedagogy of a writing class. Phaedrus begins his response to the dilemma of defining Quality by deconstructing the word "just": "Why should Quality be *just* what you like?" (232). The word is "purely pejorative," and adds little, if anything at all, to the logic of the question but adds considerably to the ideological assumptions underlying it:

> Little children were trained not to do "just what they liked" [but] [w]hat others liked. And which others? Parents, teachers, supervisors, policemen, judges, officials, kings, dictators. All authorities. When you are trained to despise "just what you like" then, of course, you become a much more obedient servant of others—a good slave. When you learn not to do "just what you like" then the System loves you. (233)

While this analysis is illuminating, Phaedrus knows it won't take him very far. At best, it leaves one with two "Qualities," and merely restates the public versus private dilemma I alluded to by way of Bernstein's and Howard's dissection of National Poetry Month. On the one hand, there is the Quality of immediate appeal, e.g., the large doses of Fruit Loops, Pepsi and <u>Vice</u>

City IV preferred by my students. On the other hand, there is the quality of what Phaedrus calls underlying form, e.g., the intricacy of Paradise Lost preferred by many English teachers (cf. Zen 235-7). Thus, Phaedrus reasons that Quality cannot be found in subjective or objective positions "*but in the relationship of the two with each other* [...] Quality is not a thing. It is an event" (Pirsig's emphasis 239). Phaedrus' final statement (at least at this point in Pirsig's career) is worth reproducing: "The sun of quality [...] does not revolve around the subjects and objects of our existence. It does not just passively illuminate them. It is not subordinate to them in any way. It has *created* them. They are subordinate to *it*" (Pirsig's emphasis 240).

By extension, one might reason that English studies does not exist in response to market forces (Berlin, Ohmann) or the cultural pressures of "linguistic status anxiety" (Connors) or the "discourse of hygiene" (Strickland). Such positions are not unreasonable, and they clarify the unease with which attendees at New Wye met the "wholistic" sub-committee's statement: "Whatever the text being studied, the teacher's communication of the joy of literature, of a sense of discovery and freedom in approaching the material is crucial" (201). However, the positions of Ohmann, Berlin, Connors, and Strickland do not

adequately account for (or even acknowledge in some cases) the joy of English studies and the Quality of our experiences with reading and writing.

This is a predicament of significant consequence for writers, both student and professional, in English studies: The work of our discipline depends on articulating and demonstrating the value of intense and not readily quantifiable experiences with imaginative texts, yet we often distrust imaginative renderings of such experiences as a source of authority and knowledge-making. Building on the influential work of Richard Ohmann's English in America and Raymond Williams' Literature and Marxism, scholars specializing in composition who have explored this deeply rooted problem often point out what James Berlin does here:

> English studies was founded on a set of hierarchical binary oppositions in which literary texts were given an idealized status approaching the sacred. Against these privileged works, rhetorical texts and their production were portrayed as embodiments of the fallen realms of science and commerce and politics, validating in their corrupt materiality the spiritual beauties of their opposite. (Rhetorics xiv)

As literary study came to be defined in terms of poetic texts, it also came to be associated with ideas of taste, refinement, propriety, as well as social divisions of race, class, and gender (Berlin 6). In this line of argument, the role of literary exegesis is to maintain and reproduce a particular set of cultural values. Like writing instruction, literary study has historically been a conventional activity, despite occasionally "radical" claims on the part of some of our more prominent theorists. Thus if the goal is to revise, transgress, or disrupt a status quo value set, the production and consumption of only literary texts may be of limited use. For this reason Berlin finds rhetorical texts, those from the "the fallen realms of science and commerce and politics" (xiv), deserving of at least, if not more, attention; therefore, Berlin takes issue with Scholes' advocacy of student literary textual production. For Berlin, the teaching of imaginative/poetic texts—whether by interpretation, creative production, or both—is insufficient to provide students with the full range of rhetorical skills necessary to function effectively and ethically in contemporary culture. For Berlin, there is a "political timidity" in Scholes' analysis, since he not only avoids calling explicitly for refocusing English studies on rhetorical (that is, nonliterary)

texts but also avoids explicit discussions of identity politics (15).

It is true that Scholes does not articulate a revolutionary stance and the pedagogy for which he advocates does not address what Freire-inspired pedagogues often call false consciousness as directly as Berlin might wish. For example, Scholes writes:

> [English faculty] are not artisans shaping the impressionable minds of our students. We are—or should be—masters of our craft helping others to master it, and human beings of integrity helping others to achieve it in their own ways in their own lives (Rise 67).

However, this is not to say that Scholes is unaware or dismissive of the legitimate ethical and cultural problems that concern Berlin. Scholes' follow-up to Textual Power, The Rise and Fall of English, outlines a curriculum that focuses on the theory, history, production, and consumption of *textuality,* not literature per se, which suggests that rhetorical texts would be valued in equal measure with literary texts (see, Rise 103-27 and 147-80 for a complete description of this proposed curriculum). Despite Berlin's focus on the differences, the similarities between his position and that of Scholes seem more significant, not to mention more useful, especially since the

goal of both these theorists involves a substantial reconsideration of some of the founding assumptions of the discipline: What counts as literature? What counts as scholarship? Why? Who gets to say? The distinction between critical and imaginative work is often said to be needlessly rigid, as perhaps best exemplified by the burgeoning field of creative nonfiction, yet rhetorically flexible modes have yet to find their way into the day-to-day practices of literature and composition classes, where words like creativity, imagination, inspiration, and innovation tend to receive more theoretical than curricular consideration. Thus while some may assume expository writing, particularly in its academic manifestations, to be of lower caliber than literary fiction or poetry, such writing is nonetheless understood to be more appropriate for scholarship and for developing and assessing critical thinking. The divide between critical and imaginative work is embedded in our understanding of what counts and does not count as serious work.

Put simply, English studies does not understand itself to be a creative field. In responding to Scholes' work, David Downing contends that the "institutional mechanisms of disciplinarity" within English studies have thus far prevented a full consideration of academic discourse that embraces hybrid,

imaginative, or rhetorically flexible practices. For Downing, a discipline requires a "specific body of knowledge" and agreement on methods necessary for making and validating or falsifying claims about that knowledge (59). These requirements serve well the fields where there actually is a specific body of knowledge—about say tree rings, sea sponges, or glaciers—and the results of one's methodology can be demonstrated and verified. Even when the object of study is not tangible (one cannot touch the process of socialization for example), there is still general agreement about what counts as legitimate practices of observation, experimentation, and argumentation (cf. Ohmann 10-15). However diligently practitioners in English studies may try to define a body of knowledge and establish a set of critical methods, the imagination unfolds in a wide open space. As writers down through the centuries would attest, imagination is not containable, not readily observable, and as unique as a personality; its products are often not reproducible and hardly ever reliable. In English, our primary "object" of study is the imaginative process and the textual results of that process.

This disciplinary conundrum—we study a process and its textual artifacts, the meaning of which tends to shift over time and space—compounds itself when our primary and secondary source material intersects a reader, whose response will also be unique

and may shift capriciously, depending on prior knowledge of the author or subject, the weather, or even the relative quality of that morning's breakfast. In place of consensus, English studies maintains a coterie of legends both literary and theoretical (e.g., Milton and Melville, Marx and Freud), and of present-day academic stars (e.g., Stanley Fish, Judith Butler). Membership in the field assumes at least passing knowledge of what these names represent. Thus, in constructing this text, I can assume that most of my readers will understand a reference to Paradise Lost or performativity without lengthy explanation. However, even in constructing the above two parentheticals, I was well-aware that the list was hardly representative (five men, one woman, all white) and therefore highly debatable. For this reason, Downing argues that long-standing discomfort with imaginative and rhetorically flexible approaches to textual consumption and production is best understood as a by-product of anxiety over the content of the discipline:

> Academic value accrues to those practices that can more fully specify the primary objects of study, such as literary or cultural texts, as well as the secondary critical methods for producing knowledge about those objects through expository prose. It simultaneously devalues the rhetorical practices of

> poetic, aesthetic, and imaginative forms of discourse and artistic production. (61)

Thus regardless of whether one agrees with Scholes (the field ought to focus on the theory, history, production and consumption of textuality) or with Berlin (the field needs to reconceive literary texts as a subset of rhetorical ones), Downing argues that such reconsiderations may "alter the content of the discipline, but [they] will not significantly alter the conditions of disciplinary discourse" (65). In other words, even though Scholes argues for bridging the divides between readers and writers, consumers and producers, readers of literature and writers of it, the reforms he suggests will not establish a method by which we might understand and value such integration, since the disciplinary ethos would tend only to value expository prose *about* such integration, not the integration itself (66). A full reconsideration of English studies would transform this perceived weakness (or anxiety) regarding the content of English into a strength. As Elbow points out in What Is English? (and throughout his career), the discipline has a responsibility to teach not only analytical thinking but affective thinking, as well as the interdependence of the two. It is by learning to value manifestations of this interdependence in professional and classroom settings that English studies will be able to best

make the case for its relevance in an increasingly competitive, bottom-line driven university.

Tracing Cool in English Studies

Like many critics, Downing is better at identifying a problem than he is at suggesting what a solution to the problem would look like. And, as one who likes to identify problems, I am sensitive to committing the very same offense. If we are to learn to value the integration of imaginative and rhetorically flexible writing with traditional academic analyses, it is important to do so within the context of a classroom situation, since the students, the class, the relative authority of the teacher (e.g., tenured or adjunct), the particularities of the English department and its institution, as well as local and national opinions significantly constrain the range of acceptable answers to “what is missing” from the writing classroom. For example, one may want to make students more socially aware, more critically sophisticated, more imaginatively inclined or all of these, but attempts to do so in ways that do not directly attend to institutional and public receptions of these efforts as well as anxieties regarding edited American English will likely only result in confusion, resentment, or revolt on the part of students, parents,

administrators, and legislators, as was the case with Linda Brodkey's well-known effort in 1990 to establish a theoretically and culturally diverse first-year writing program at the University of Texas at Austin.

The UT Austin curriculum had what appears to be obvious academic heft: Brodkey and the committee that she led proposed focusing, at various points in the semester, on issues of difference and diversity with reference to "antidiscrimination law and law suits" (Brodkey 236). However, representations of the program within UT Austin and in the media cast the program in a decidedly negative light, since from one perspective, this first-year writing course would be focusing on issues that it was not qualified to teach (i.e., legal matters), while marginalizing other matters, like grammar, which are traditionally understood to be the purview of an English class. Brodkey and subsequent commentators on the debacle in Texas (see Harkin, Crowley) described UT Austin as a conflict between experts and laypersons, with the latter group interjecting misinformed opinions. On the surface, it does seem odd that those without training in pedagogy and English studies felt qualified to critique the work of those with extensive training in these matters. For this reason, Brodkey feels that academic journals, rather than the popular press, are the proper place

for debates regarding academic work (253). The issue here is akin to recent debates regarding intelligent design and evolution. How is it that folks with no scientific training feel qualified to disregard the results of over a century worth of scientific research? On the other side, some parents, journalists, and legislators wonder why scientists feel comfortable eviscerating the faith of their children. Which is more important: one’s relationship to the divine or understanding how monkeys learned to walk?

The results of the polarized conflict over the UT Austin curriculum demonstrate that academic freedom, like freedom of speech or the right to privacy, is an abstract concept, requiring institutional and public consensus for it to be effective in real world circumstances. The public, even many members of the UT Austin administration, did not understand the curriculum that Brodkey proposed, and therefore misrepresented it, precisely because the method and ideology underlying that curriculum had been developed, to a large extent, in academic settings (e.g., journals, conferences) that were and remain foreign to the public. Given the disciplinary context, I suspect there was very little that Brodkey could have done to alter the reception of the curriculum in question, since its theoretical underpinnings had been worked out over the course of many years

of debate regarding process and post-process pedagogy in journals like College English, CCC, and The Journal of Advanced Composition. The public, having never even heard of, much less read, such journals was only cued for the final act, titled "Here's how we're going to teach your children." The public did not see the curriculum in its larger context, because no such context had been provided for them in the previous years. In other words, if we, as a profession, disregard issues of public representation, we have no rhetorical leverage when our work ends up *mis*represented in public venues.

It is not difficult to contend, in accessible ways, that if students are to learn to write well—persuasively and correctly—that they need meaningful subject matter about which to write. One can demonstrate with or without references to a body of theory that students do not translate the following:

Paragraph 1:
Topic Sentence
Detail # 1
Detail # 2
Detail # 3
Transition Sentence
Paragraph 2:
Topic Sentence…

into real world writing, partly because professional writers disregard as often as they follow this schematic. Thus while the above model, still common in writing textbooks, offers superficial comfort, it does not offer developing writers a

method by which they might access their own or their audience's imaginations. If the public were to be persuaded of even this preliminary point, then advocates for the UT Austin curriculum might have stood a fair chance at representing their work in a more positive light. However as I have argued at the opening of this chapter, our most compelling work often goes unrecognized or unpublished (or in this case misrepresented) because it cannot be described in ways understood to be appropriately academic.

Therefore, the remainder of this chapter will describe significant events in the design and implementation of a syllabus for a required English course—which, like many required second semester writing courses in English studies, doubles as an introduction to literature. Pedagogically, I developed the course with the following four objectives in mind: 1) Close the consumption/ production gap by balancing interpretive acts (e.g., writing about the writing of others) with imaginative writing (e.g., fiction and poetry as well as blog-like posts and internet chats). 2) Pre-empt or at least convincingly address the students who will understand creative work to be a "ploy." 3) Apply Scholes' dictum: "stop 'teaching literature' and start 'studying texts'" (Textual 16). 4) Balance critical with affective thinking in ways that demonstrate that academic rigor

is not necessarily exclusive of pleasurable reading and writing experiences. In practice pursuing these objectives meant reading a range of texts from the traditionally literary (fiction and poetry) to the expository (historical and journalistic pieces) as well as writing a required documented essay along with book reviews, personal interviews, presentations, poetry, and short fiction. However, imaginative and rhetorically flexible writing assumes and requires an audience willing to read imaginatively and respond flexibly to a text. Therefore achieving the above goals meant reevaluating my own and my students' role as audience, lest the above efforts appear suspect.

Since academic culture tends to value the critical over the affective, many students, in their writing and in their interactions, tend to ignore, suppress, or at best strategically reveal their affective responses to the course content. If students and teachers are to reimagine their role as audience, this tendency needs to be addressed, or at the very least identified. It was in this spirit that I developed the theme on which the course was based: "Cool, Envy, and Longing: Explorations in Cool Personae." In this particular instance, students were unaware of the theme as they registered for the class. This itself is a significant constraint, since the theme needs to be specific enough to provide a frame of reference and

general enough to allow for a range of texts and student interests. The syllabus began with the following description:

> The phrase “be cool” once meant something along the lines of “act normal so the cops won’t search our pockets.” There’s more to cool than meets the eye, however. The word often implies a posture of emotional indifference: cool is not so much an emotion as it is a way of dealing with (concealing or strategically revealing) emotions, particularly envy and longing. That is, the cool personality acts indifferent so as to improve the chances of achieving a desired object or response. Thus, one might act indifferent toward the prospect of a police stop and frisk procedure so as to improve the chances of not having one’s pockets searched in the first place. To play it cool assumes control, of the situation and of one’s emotions.

When understood in this way, cool is a pose of affected indifference that denies the presence or relevance of all other affective responses. (At least with regard to its selective disregard for affect, cool is akin to the disciplinary motif of English studies.) Likewise, the cool persona is typical of the “so what, whatever, who cares?” posture of students in a variety of classroom settings.

The course theme therefore was intended to bridge many divides—critical and affective, academic and popular, literary and pseudo-literary—which I felt to be interfering with learning and with quality writing. I noticed, for instance, that many students write emails, instant messages, and text messages with such frequency that this type of writing must be at some level pleasurable to them. Therefore, it seemed reasonable to use variations of such texts as a way to demonstrate that writing can be both critical and creative in academic settings. However, attempts at cultural and textual interpretation via unconventional writing (in this particular case a chatroom interchange) did not prove compelling to the majority of students. As with the student above, who views creative writing to be a ploy, deviations from business as usual will often be viewed with considerable suspicion by those who quite reasonably approach coursework in English as one in a long list of courses and requirements to complete prior to graduation and a career. Innovation is difficult, in part, because students sometimes perceive such attempts to be a mid-game rule change, with unknown consequences for their end of term grade.

In the instance I cite below, I had asked the students to discuss a reading from Dick Pountain and David Robbins' study, Cool Rules, which traces the word "cool" as a concept and a

counter-cultural stance from Africa to chattel slavery in America into blues, jazz, film and finally into modern American mainstream consumer culture. I had asked the students to discuss this text in light of a previous reading, a chapter describing Cold War culture during the 1950's from Howard Zinn's The People's History of the United States. In the following exchange students discuss possible essay topics in a chatroom, which I had set up on our course webpage. We spent approximately 20 of our 85 minutes on this activity, which was introduced and concluded with face-to-face discussion. The section below represents 15 of 220 lines and occurs about halfway through the chat:

1. **AW>** my question is we learn all these ridiculously hard vocab words all throughout high school in english classes, and now we are back to talking about a word like "cool"...
DT > rebelling relates the 2
5. **NH >** do you still like the engagement of your reader, or is like that only from last semester
Frank Gaughan > what about Cool as a culture engine?
DT> the time periodes are close too
AW> i feel like it is a degresseion in my learning career
10. **NH >** thats a good topic.. culture engine
NH > what is a culture engine? the drive behind it or something
SR > good point AW
Frank Gaughan > and the "it" refers to?
PK > are we going to have to compare zinn w. cool?

15. **AW>** thanks SR [sic[15]]

In this short passage, four conversations overlap, in order of appearance: (1) AW asserts that inquiry into the word "cool" is a "degresseion" from one's university education because education, especially English education, involves "ridiculously hard vocab words." She receives support for this position from SR, "good point AW" (*ll*. 1-3, 12). I find it telling that these "vocab words" are not even specified, much less contextualized. (2) DT suggests "rebellion" as a possible connection between the two readings (l.4). (3) After citing a mantra from the previous semester, "engage your readers," which refers to my request that NH anticipate and respond to potential counterarguments when composing his essays (ll. 5-6), NH and I begin to discuss a potential essay focus: "cool as a culture engine" (ll. 7, 10-11) (4) As the scope of the assignment dawns on PK, she asks for a re-explanation of the task, "are we going to have to compare Zinn w. cool?" (l. 14).

While class chats of this sort occasion a break from the formulaic essay (i.e., a thesis statement and three to ten paragraphs buttressed by quotation and commentary), they do not disrupt formulaic essay writing in any meaningful way. In fact,

[15] The misspellings, lack of punctuation, and loose adherence to rules of standard written English typically result from the speed at which chatroom discourse occurs and not from a lack of rule-based knowledge.

the chatroom (and, in this case, the entire course theme) may seem like a “degression” to students like AK. Despite follow up class discussions reflecting on the content and substance of the chats and invitations to summarize, describe, quote, and respond to the chats in their essays, students were often reluctant to do so. When asked why, the most common answer was that the chats did not seem appropriate or serious and that the observations of fellow students did not “count” as much as my words or those of Howard Zinn, or Dick Pountain and David Robbins. Additionally, many students felt that the chats lacked the mysterious and symbolic meanings that were (apparently) inherent to our traditional course materials. As such, students tended to feel like there was not much to say about the chats, and any effort to demonstrate otherwise was subject to charges of “over analyzing,” “beating a dead horse,” or “thinking too much about things.”

Many of my more technologically adept readers will likely point out that chats and other forms of synchronous and asynchronous electronic communication (e.g., posts to a discussion board, blogs) can be and have been successfully used in the writing class. Albert Rouzie, for example, points out that chatroom discourse has the potential to bridge the often stultifying division between work and play in the English class,

thereby helping students to develop meaningful and significant relationships with texts and ideas (254). Geoffrey Sirc describes chats in light of Marcus Greil's discussion of situationalist art and the *dérive*, "a matter of opening one's consciousness to the (so to speak) unconsciousness of urban space; the *dérive* meant a solo or a collective passage down city streets, a surrender to and then pursuit of alleys of attraction" (Greil qtd. in Sirc 195-6). I do not intend for my own discussion of chatroom-based writing to constitute an indictment. Despite the difficulties that I describe above, students generally reported enjoying the activity and did, after some confusion and resistance, acknowledge the effort to move beyond chalk and talk. Finally, despite the problems I describe above, students were willing to try the chat again (which we did, with similar results). In the end, the activity could be construed as a limited success, if only because the conversation about what makes some texts (e.g., critical essays) seem appropriate and others (e.g., chats) less so is valuable, since it demonstrates for students the existence and the influence of genre, propriety, and convention.

However, innovations in *how* students write are no guarantee of improvements in *what* they write, and it is what students write that counts when it comes time to grade their performance

or to demonstrate proficiency or to address concerns regarding linguistic status anxiety. In other words, despite my efforts at bridge building and foregrounding pleasurable writing practices, when it came time to write hard copy essays, narratives, and meta-reflections on the chat itself, the student writing remained, in Wayne Booth's phrase, "boring from within." Whenever and wherever students write with the teacher as the audience—be it a chatroom, a pen and bluebook examination, or an invitation to compose spontaneous poetry—they do so as students, and this simple fact profoundly shapes their experiences with writing as much as it shapes the writing itself. The idea of reflecting on an informal chat in a formal essay seemed like a pointless exercise to students, even if the chat was focused on class readings and connected to previous face-to-face discussions. As Gerald Graff argues in his study <u>Clueless in Academe</u>, many classroom activities fail to answer the question teachers often ask of their students, "so what?":

> As teachers we often proceed as if the rationale of our most basic academic practices is understood and shared by our students, even though we get plenty of signs that it is not. We take for granted for example, that reflecting in a self-conscious way about experience—"intellectualizing"—is something that

> students naturally see the point of and want to do better. (43)

Just as students do not necessarily see the value in thinking like an intellectual (in fact, such thinking is often perceived by them to be “overthinking,” as when students described the post-chat discussion as “beating a dead horse”), Graff points out that they do not always see the relevance of problematizing either. Why, after all, would one want to take a straightforward, unproblematic text and interpret it in problematic ways (45)? School work rewards correct answers with good grades, but the process of critical thinking assumes that the answers are most likely not “final” or “correct” in the traditional sense. In fact, good “answers” are almost always debatable. What we understand to be a valuable dialectic and an enjoyable habit of mind seems to many students like a process of creating problems for the sake of creating problems—or at best for the sake of fulfilling assignments.

Despite efforts to balance consumption and production and to approach convention from an unconventional angle, many students in the “Cool, Envy, and Longing,” course still viewed most activities as a task to fulfill, rather than an occasion to communicate in imaginative and intellectual ways. Likewise, Joseph Petraglia argues that “[g]iven certain commonsense

constraints on writing instruction, rhetorical-writing curricula invite what has been called 'pseudotransactionality' or the illusion of rhetorical transaction" ("Spinning" 21). Elsewhere, Petraglia contrasts this idea of fake writing to Britton et al's description of transactional writing which gets "things done or participate[s] in the world's affairs" (Britton 218, cf. Petraglia "Unnatural" 81). That is, for many students the motivation for writing is not to explore, innovate, create, or communicate—not even to problematize or intellectualize— but to earn a grade. Most English faculty will be familiar with the student remark, "Just tell me what you want and I'll do it." Arguments to persuade the student that such an attitude often results in formulaic writing (and subsequent poor grades) are often unconvincing. From the perspective of many teachers, writing is a way of thinking; as such, it is an open-ended process. From the perspective of many students, writing is a test to be passed and a task to fulfill.

As with most polarized debates, the arguments from one side are simply not recognized as valid by the other. In this case, Petraglia argues that students may well have the better argument: the writing that occurs within the confines of what he elsewhere calls, "general writing skills instruction," (see Reconceiving) is more often task fulfillment than it is a way of

thinking—critical or otherwise. He concludes that English classes, particularly ones in required composition, fastidiously avoid confronting the implications of pseudo-transactionality for at least three reasons: 1) an unduly narrow interpretation of postmodern theory has led some to question whether any talk of authentic writing is possible; that is, to identify one type of writing as “pseudo” requires one to at least admit that another type would be actual, genuine, authentic, or true; 2) an eagerness to use the composition classroom as a platform for shaping cultural and political controversies has led to the denial of the fact that writing instruction has been and continues to be a deeply conventional activity; thus as long as composition assignments invite problematizing, making the strange familiar and the familiar strange, they are perceived to have some value since this variety of critical thinking is often understood to be a prelude to challenging status quo value systems; 3) lastly, and as I have observed in chapter two, composition instruction continues to be perceived as *inherently* valuable to students, hence its continued position as a required course in the university (“Spinning” 27-30).

Taking into account the combination of practical, institutional, and disciplinary contexts that lead many students to focus on moving through a writing project in the most time-

efficient way possible, what can realistically be done to change the pseudo-nature of writing in the classroom? The caveat “realistically” points to what Petraglia describes as “commonsense constraints” to university writing instruction, which are unlikely to change on a broad scale in the near future. For example, if teachers were to design a writing pedagogy free of any constraint, except that the method be of highest quality, I doubt we would design the present system in which one teacher asks sixty to a hundred students to compose four to six projects of 750-1,500 words over approximately thirty short meetings in fifteen weeks. Yet, this model has been widely adopted at American universities in the form of the required course. The “realistic” caveat also points to the difficulties I describe above, wherein students tend to look with grave suspicion on efforts to innovate on the existing system, whether through so-called “creative” writing, or through the production and interpretation of unconventional texts, or contextually sophisticated projects, like Brodkey’s proposed curriculum at UT Austin.

While no one theory, argument, or suggestion for curriculum reform will fully resolve the complex problem I am here describing, it is my hope that attending more fully to the audience relationships involved in the student / teacher paper

exchange will help counter the pseudo-transactional qualities of writing instruction and allow both parties to better see the value in their own creative and critical expressions. The goal here is to imagine opportunities for authentic experiences with textual production, by which I mean that the goal is for the student to experience writing a text in which the purpose of writing it is something other than to be done with writing it. The goal for the teacher is to read student texts in heterogeneous and imaginative, rather than predominantly evaluative ways. Here again, commonsense constraints are ever-present. First, evaluation is almost always present in classroom interchanges, regardless of the level of formality. Second, while it may be possible to apply a full range of critical and imaginative reading skills to one or three or ten student texts, a pile of sixty to a hundred such texts, which need to be read in a few days, is numbing almost by definition. Under these circumstances, it is difficult to effect any positive change in student writing or teacher reading or even to imagine sustainable reforms to the existing system. Yet such change must be imagined if English studies is to remain vital in the 21st century.

If a not insignificant number of students enter and leave our composition classrooms with negative attitudes toward

English studies, then English curricula must accept at least part of the responsibility. Many students dislike writing in school-based settings because—as any student will explain—their writing is subject to an unusual degree of criticism. Joseph Williams' memorable article, "The Phenomenology of Error," provides a dramatic, and humorous, example here. Briefly, Williams argues that teachers actively search out errors in student prose but often gloss over errors in published prose. To prove his point, Williams filled his own essay with "about 100" grammatical gaffes (165). As a result of the scrutiny that Williams dramatizes, student writers lack what successful writers are often granted: a degree of good will and a measure of authority. Peter Elbow describes the issue this way:

> [w]hen you [a student] write for a teacher you are usually swimming against the natural flow of communication. The natural direction of communication is to explain what you understand to someone who doesn't understand it. But in writing an essay for a teacher your task is usually to explain what you are still engaged in trying to understand to someone who understands it better. You seldom feel you are writing because you want to tell someone something. More often you feel you are being examined as to whether you can

> say well what he wants you to say. (Writing with Power 219)

As Elbow would likely point out, writing is not simply a means to communicate information; it is also a heuristic method, a practice, and a way of making meaning. The challenge is to demonstrate the reality of this statement (and the benefits of believing it) to students within the context and constraints of a university writing course.

When Teachers Read

When asked the question, "Who is the audience for this paper?" students will most often point to the teacher. This is a correct, if incomplete answer. Writing for a teacher is somewhere in-between writing to a general, unknown audience and writing to a specific, familiar one, since the teacher is both an individual known to the student writer as well as a representative of academic and cultural conventions. The in-between status of the teacher as audience places the student writer in a difficult rhetorical situation. In his influential PMLA article, "The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction," Walter Ong asserts that a writer's notion of a collective audience need not be—and often is not—representative of actual, embodied readers. Ong claims that the writer fictionalizes an

audience in order to “fire the […] imagination. If [the audience] consists of the real persons who he hopes will buy his book, they are not these persons in an untransmuted state” (58). In this way, the student writes to a known teacher at one level, and also fictionalizes a conceptual teacher-as-audience based on recent experiences with the current teacher and on past experiences with other teachers. As Ong acknowledges, the fictionalization of an audience, derived from a set of “ideal,” “implied,” or “mock” readers,[16] is not an easy task. To illuminate his point, Ong invites his readers to imagine a student who has been asked to compose a personal essay on the oft-satirized theme: “How I Spent My Summer Vacation.” He describes the student’s problem as follows:

> The teacher makes the easy assumption, inviting and plausible but false, that the chief problem of a boy and a girl in writing is finding a subject actually part of his or her real life. In-close subject matter is supposed to solve the problem of invention. Of course it does not. The problem is not simply what to say but also to whom to say it to. Say? The student is not talking. He is writing. No one is listening. There

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[16] The terms “ideal”, implied”, and ”mock” reader are Wolfgang Iser’s, Stanley Fish’s, and Walker Gibson’s, respectively.

> is no feedback. Where does he find his “audience”? (59)

After considering and rejecting several possibilities in response to the above question (a classmate, a parent, a grandparent), Ong settles on the only plausible answer: the student is writing a response to “How I Spent My Summer Vacation” to the teacher. Yet, the problem remains: the teacher does not make for the best audience; in fact, “there is no conceivable setting in which he could imagine telling his teacher how he spent his summer vacation other than in writing an essay in school, so that writing for the teacher does not solve [the student’s] problems but only restates them [...] the subject may be in-close; the use it is put to remains unfamiliar, strained, bizarre” (59). As Petraglia might put it, the situation is pseudo-transactional. Ong, however, proposes a solution to the problem by imagining a student who is familiar with The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and who decides to write about his summer vacation not to a teacher-reader but to an imaginary version of Mark Twain’s readership for Tom Sawyer. Ong’s student realizes that the teacher, also familiar with Tom’s adventures, will know how to read like a Mark Twain reader and effectively apply this skill to the essay at hand.

Even though contemporary writing assignments often eschew theme-writing on summer vacations, they suffer from many of the same audience problems that Ong describes. My own assignment described above, which invited students to use the content of their chats as a text that described cool's influence on popular culture, is a case in point. The subject matter is, for example, "in-close," at least in that students at this particular university are very familiar with the conventions of chatroom discourse. However, the only instance in which students would intellectualize the word cool by problematizing a chat remains a pseudo-transactional one. I suggest that writing for a teacher is "unfamiliar, strained, [and] bizarre" because teachers, as a general practice, do not engage at an imaginative level with student texts. Even when one particular teacher may strive to do so, students' expectations based on past experiences often pre-empt the effort.

For example, most teachers have had the experience of writing a question in the margins of a student paper (e.g., "But what about…?" " Have you considered…?") only to see that the student answers the question in the next paragraph or on the next page. Granted, the distance between the teacher's marginal question and student's answer could signal an organizational problem; however, it is also possible, as Susan Miller argues,

that teachers, "actively seek explicit answers to questions to which readers in other settings receptively await answers" (17). For his part, Richard Miller provides a compelling example of just such a moment wherein one of his colleagues took offence at a student writer's repeated references to queers, "rather than 'gays and lesbians,' only to have to scratch the comments out when she discovered, on the final pages of the student's essay, the student writer's own coming out story" ("Nervous System" 279). It is in response to this and related problems that Susan Miller advances Ong's concept of a fictive audience and modifies his title to read "The Student's Reader is Always a Fiction." Here, she deals directly with the curious circumstances under which students write and teachers read. Susan Miller calls the reading of student papers, a "special instance of reading" partly because teachers do not choose to read student writing for the same reasons they might choose to read other works: newspapers, novels, poems, magazines (16). Even the best conceived assignments tend to be pseudo-transactions because, as Miller puts it, "[t]he teacher who is reading begins with a semi-Platonic model: each text to be read is preconceived as only a shadow of the Ideal text, but any embodiment of that Ideal in practice would be a surprise to the teacher who was the

first cause of the text" (21). (Cf. Brannon and Knoblauch, "On Students' Rights to Their Own Texts," 157-66.)

Because of the influence of the Ideal text, Miller argues that the teacher is engaged with a student text to a degree unusual in any other reading circumstance: first, the teacher very likely brought the writing into existence via the assignment, and second, the comments in the margins and at the end of the paper constitute a response unlike that of a general reader's idiosyncratic scribbling on a published text. Teachers read, as Miller says, to "normalize" a student text (18), and this process "anticipates […] deviations from fluency and invites interruption" (19).

If teachers are to learn how to value freer writing—imaginative and rhetorically flexible texts that integrate the critical and the creative—and if students are to see such work as more than task fulfillment, then both parties need a vocabulary by which to understand the shaping influence of the embodied and fictionalized audience. In responding directly to Ong (and indirectly to Miller), Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford hold that the fictive audience— i.e., Ong's model or what they call the "invoked audience"—describes only part of the rhetorical situation. Thus in addition to the fictive/invoked audience, they posit the "audience addressed," that is, the

"actual or real-life people who read a discourse" (156). In their analysis, the audience addressed model does not adequately account for the writer's inventive, creative, and imaginative role, just as the fictive/invoked audience model (i.e., Ong's model) does not adequately account for the readers' role in shaping and defining a discourse (165). When writers communicate successfully, they most often move fluidly between an embodied and a fictive audience until they arrive at a rhetorically effective synthesis. This synthesis seems particularly relevant in the case of writing for a teacher, since the teacher is both an embodied reader (i.e., a real-life person with tastes and preferences) and an invoked representative of cultural, institutional, disciplinary literacy conventions. Therefore the student must both address the real teacher and invoke (imagine) a fictional teacher to construct a successful essay.

For the process of addressing real teachers and invoking fictional ones, Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading may offer a valuable perspective. Briefly, Rosenblatt holds that readers respond to texts along a continuum from efferent to aesthetic. Citing the Latin etymology, *effere*: to carry away, Rosenblatt holds that when interpreting efferently, the reader mines the text for "publicly verifiable" information; when interpreting aesthetically, the reader "lives through" the

text by focusing on the affective and evocative aura of the words. She argues that depending on the circumstance and the reader's intention the same text may be read efferently or aesthetically or with varying combinations of these two positions and that, "traditional teaching—and testing—methods often confuse the student by implicitly fostering a nonliterary, efferent approach when the actual purpose is presumably an aesthetic reading" (Literature as Exploration xvii). Rosenblatt was for the most part describing the process of reading literature but reading as transaction can be extended to the reading of any text. As she argues, affective reading is often marginalized in school settings, despite its importance to the development of sound interpretations. Given the commonsense constraints that Petraglia identifies, the pseudo-transactional qualities of the writing class may never be fully eliminated, but they can be mitigated, and more careful attention to the aesthetic qualities of student writing and to faculty's affective responses to this writing would be one such mitigating step, a step toward freer and more authentic student writing.

The plagiarized paper is both a symptom and an effect of pseudo-transactional writing, one that most writing teachers will confront during the span of almost every academic year.

Most handbooks, textbooks, and university websites address the issue of and the penalties for plagiarism, and much scholarship has been devoted to its causes and theoretical complexities. Despite such attention, Rebecca Moore Howard points out that English studies has not reached a consensus on a definition of plagiarism, yet “students were and still are being upbraided, reprimanded, given F’s on papers, flunked in courses, and expelled from universities for doing this plagiarism thing, this indefinable thing” (“Sexuality, Textuality” 473). Of course, many teachers may define plagiarism as Justice Potter Stewart defined pornography in Jacobellis v. Ohio (1964): "I can't define pornography, but I know it when I see it."

Wooden-sounding papers downloaded from websites are fairly easy to spot and clear instances of academic dishonesty. But what about patchwriting—the process of (too) closely paraphrasing one’s source and using a word or a phrase that is not one’s own? Moore Howard contends that this practice is more properly understood as a bridge discourse than an academic offense (“Plagiarisms” 788-9). Further, as Moore Howard notes, “contemporary theory rejects the possibility of original, uninfluenced writing and even the possibility of fully acknowledging one’s sources” (“Sexuality, Textuality” 474). For example, M.M. Bakhtin, whose influence is widely acknowledged in

both literary and composition studies, argues that development of one's own language patterns, voice, and style—even the totality of one's beliefs—is a long process of incorporating and revising the words of others, and "the boundaries between [one's own language and that of another] are at first scarcely perceptible" (345). These considerations in mind, Moore Howard suggests that we abandon the problematic term, "plagiarism," altogether and use instead more descriptive terms like "*fraud, insufficient citation,* and *excessive repetition" (*emphasis in the original, "Sexuality, Textuality" 475).

While such vocabulary is useful for distinguishing between minor problems (insufficient citation) and full-blown offenses (fraud), the underlying problem that drives plagiarism in its various forms will likely remain. For Moore Howard, these underlying causes are to be found in cultural and gendered perceptions of writing and authorship that associate intellectual acumen and originality with masculinity while associating correctness and plagiarism with femininity ("Sexuality, Textuality" 475-9). Citing descriptions of the writing process from Quintillian to Harold Bloom, Moore Howard makes a compelling case. However, my intention is neither to quarrel with nor advance this particular line of analysis. Instead, I want to pick up on her general point—the field lacks

a sufficient definition and therefore understanding of plagiarism; as a result, our approach to a student plagiarism (or fraud, insufficient citation, and excessive repetition) tends to focus on surveillance (e.g., turnitin.com) and reprimand rather than developing more effective pedagogies. In short, teaching students how not to plagiarize involves more than teaching them about signal phrases and paraphrase and reminding them of punishments for failing to employ such conventions.

If the plagiarized paper is the premier example of fake writing, and if students habitually understand themselves to be pseudo-writers in pseudo-transactional situations, then fake writing is a natural development—from the voiceless, excessively repetitive papers that are "boring from within" to the fraudulent ones purchased in bulk quantities on the internet. It follows that careful attention to the audience relationships in an assignment, particularly its affective and aesthetic qualities, may provide students with a more authentic rhetorical context, and thereby teach students how to work with the ideas and language of others in legitimate and compelling ways.

The following and concluding example represents both the potential and the limits of reforming audience relationships at the classroom level. Understood realistically and pragmatically,

there is nothing that a teacher can do to alter the rhetorical context of a writing class where grades are involved. As one student put it in a conference, "You're asking me to innovate, but it's a little like asking me to innovate while rock climbing, and I don't want to fall off the mountain." Thus what I will describe here is not "radical" in any way. It is, to borrow a phrase, a modest proposal, which involves teachers attending to their own conflicted role as a fictionalized yet embodied reader of student work. For the student and me, it was a compelling pedagogical moment, yet one difficult to render in academic language; nonetheless, it is my hope that students, teachers, and the public will understand this narrative as representative of both the challenges and the joys of English, its teaching and its study at professional and student levels.

I had asked students to write essays in response to class discussions of Toni Morrison's novel, The Bluest Eye and the course theme, "Cool, Envy, and Longing," described above. In short, this novel dramatizes social and familial conditions leading up to the rape of Pecola Breedlove by her father. Even before the rape, Pecola's home life is far from idyllic. This combined with her abject poverty and the fact that she is a young black girl in a racist town makes it difficult for Pecola to form friendships or even to simply communicate with her

classmates. Pecola concludes she is ugly and finds plenty of evidence to support this conclusion in her social world. She reasons that if she had blue eyes, and later the "bluest" eyes, she would be popular, accepted, even "cool." In this way, Pecola embodies aspects of the cool persona not often seen in typical characterizations—the brooding machismo of a young Marlon Brando or the dry-witted violence of a Quentin Tarantino film, for example.

In the secondary readings for the course, Pountain and Robbins contend that the American brand of cool is partly a coping mechanism for those confronting oppressive circumstances. While the cool personality is often rebellious, it is also associated with a process of studied indifference in an effort to avoid a confrontation with authority, hence the phrase "play it cool." The cool worldview, with its muddle of contradictory impulses to simultaneously rebel from mainstream mores while courting the acceptance of one's peers, provides a mechanism by which to understand what drives Pecola and her father to act in the ways they do. In this particular instance, I asked students to describe cool's influence on one or two characters in the novel. In short, I wanted students to intellectualize a common word, "cool," and in so doing, problematize the social conditions Morrison describes. However, as Graff points out in

Clueless in Academe, these activities, which are second nature to academics, often seem strange or pointless to students. Graff's observation is particularly relevant in the case of a student, whom I will call Tai, who submitted an essay of disconnected, decontextualized quotations from the novel, glued together with bits and pieces of work widely available on the internet. At best the work was patchwriting and at worst, it was a fraud.

While Tai freely admitted to me that she hated writing, I was surprised to see a paper of this sort, as she seemed to genuinely like the novel, and often spoke well of the story in class discussions. Applying Ede and Lunsford's terms, Tai was struggling to invoke an audience. As such, Tai felt there was very little she could write about cool's influence on the characters in The Bluest Eye that would be interesting or rhetorically effective. Who was she writing to besides her teacher and what was the purpose of intellectualizing about this or any novel? With these questions unanswered, the fragmented, decontextualized, and patched together qualities of the paper come into focus. While the authorized and most common response to Tai's essay may have been some form of administrative reprimand (e.g., a failing grade for the paper or the course, a letter to the Dean) and while this response is reasonable,

considering the offense, it would have minimal educational value for Tai: Reprimand would teach her only that plagiarism has negative repercussions (a fact that she likely already knew), but it would not teach her how *not* to plagiarize. In my mind, the problem was not so much with rule-based knowledge and conventions of MLA citation (with which Tai was familiar, but not adept) but with the pseudo-transactional nature of the task, and with Tai's ability to anticipate the demands of her real and fictionalized teacher-as-audience. Despite my efforts to provide context for the reading by way of the course theme, Tai's rhetorical problem remained akin to the problem of Ong's fictional student attempting to write about his summer vacation.

To address this problem, it was necessary to address not only Tai's relationship to audience, but also my own role as a reader of her text. Even if Tai's essay was revised for coherence and academic honesty, I did not feel myself capable of embodying anything other than an evaluative role for her text. For example, had I asked for a revision of her essay, I would, in effect, not be reading for information and certainly not for pleasure, but only to confirm a minimal standard of proficiency. If Tai was pseudo-writing, I would be pseudo-reading, since neither writer nor reader would have any aesthetic investment in the text.

Given commonsense constraints (e.g., reading and evaluating 60-100 papers every few weeks over the course of a semester), it is impossible to reinvent oneself as a teacher/reader for each student. However, in cases of student plagiarism (however we define it), individualized attention and one-on-one negotiation are practical and effective. In this particular case, Tai and I agreed that she would write an entirely new paper to replace the previous one. In it, we agreed that she would not so much respond to the assignment as she would reflect on her experiences in our conference regarding the original plagiarized work. A process piece with a twist, her new essay, titled "The Joy of English," was partly a narrative reflecting on her writing process, partly a satiric comment on the state of the student fulfilling an assignment, and partly a revision of her previous essay. In this way, it stands as a student example of imaginative and rhetorically flexible writing in an academic context. The text began as follows:

> It was a lovely Thursday morning here on Long Island. The sun was shinning brightly and the birds were chirping away. There was a slight breeze in the air and a strong smell of the harsh winter that was about to come. However, for some this morning did not seem as pleasant. I unfortunately had come down with a

> horrible case of strep throat and tonsillitis. I knew that dedication to my schoolwork was much more important then staying healthy, so I covered my mouth and went to class. Fortunately, there was one thing that would brighten my day. I had a 12 o'clock appointment with my favorite English teacher Frank, of course. He was delighted to see me and seemed extra happy today. Good thing I did not hear his words of excitement. We got right to work, of course reviewing the perfect papers I produce.

Notice the audience relationships being developed here: while I am mentioned by name in the opening paragraph, I am not directly addressed (as would be the case in, say, a letter (e.g., I had an appointment with you, Frank). Instead, I am reinvented as a character in the unfolding drama of a sick student in a conference with her English teacher about her "perfect" papers. Sarcastic references to the flawless quality of her writing and the absolute importance of her school work, which was "much more important then staying healthy" [sic], allow the student to establish tone and build a rapport with her readership. Sarcasm also allows Tai to respond to my discontent with her patch-written, fraudulent paper: "He was delighted to see me and

seemed extra happy today. Good thing I did not hear his words of excitement."

Had the narrative stopped there, it would be an improvement over a plagiarized paper, of course, but it would not go very far toward analysis and close reading of a text. In other words, the paper may have had aesthetic value, but it would not have had academic value by the disciplinary standards for critical writing in English studies. Aside from the obvious problems with the previous paper, I wanted to address Tai's reading of Bluest Eye's conclusion. At the novel's end, Pecola's mental state is rapidly declining. After her rape, which has caused her to become even more of an outcast in the town than she already was, Pecola falls under the influence of a confidence man, Soaphead Church, who convinces her that her wish for blue eyes would be granted. In Tai's original paper, she interpreted the ending as unambiguously happy, since Pecola did, after all, get her wish. The fact that her blue eyes were at best an escape fantasy and at worst a serious delusion, was unaddressed. As with writing, the act of reading had been defined by task fulfillment. While Tai had read the novel, and could describe its characters and the main events, she had not experienced the novel and remained unaware of the significance of the unfolding events. Tai was, in short, reading at a strictly denotative level, wherein a term

like "irony" was a phrase for a quiz and little else: Pecola wanted blue eyes and she got her wish; therefore, the novel ends happily, just like most Hollywood movies (the narrative conventions of which she was most likely unconsciously applying in her reading).

In Rosenblatt's terms, the "literary work of art" does not exist until the reader allows for a personal "lived through" experience. Thus any writing, imaginative or otherwise, regarding The Bluest Eye, would fail to be much more than words on a page, until Tai engaged with the story on an affective level. Her revised piece allowed her the space to do that, and the conclusion demonstrates a significant shift not only in audience awareness, but also in critical ability:

> I had written [in the first paper] about how Pecola was happy in the end because she got her blue eyes. Although to the reader she seemed happy and excited, you need to look deeper. She was a traumatized little girl. She was crazy, she had no friends, everyone talked about her, and now she was alone. She had faced so many harsh things throughout her life, despite the fact that she was still so young. Her father raping her, the neighbors talking about her, everyone disliking her; how would you react? I know I would not

> be "happy", even though I am a very optimistic person. I guess there is just so much a person can handle mentally.

This passage, like most of the paper, resembles a modestly formalized sort of journaling. In this regard, the essay stands as one variety of hybridized academic discourse, as discussed in chapter one. What is good about this essay is not easily measured with the bottom-line mechanisms of schooling: How does one grade a "plagiarized" paper (or a patchwritten one) that has been revised to an essay-journal hybrid paper, when most of the other writers in the class are neither patchwriting nor journaling? Is the paper a B or a C? Or a C marked down to a D because of the initial offence? As soon as one starts to quantify the paper in this way, one loses sight of the learning that did happen.

Above, I posited that Tai had such difficulty writing because she could not yet capably negotiate between an audience addressed (a real teacher) and an audience invoked (a fictionalized representative of the culture, the university, and English departments). While the revised paper is a step in the right direction, the writer has a considerable distance to traverse before she uses audience as a positive influence in her writing. Yet critiques of student writing reach a point of

rapidly diminishing returns, with the student translating the teacher's comments as little more than the scribbling of an impossible to please curmudgeon. Sensing we had reached this limit, I focused on what was positive in the piece: Sentence-level refinements, the satiric humor, the revised interpretation of the novel's ending, for example. In Tai's mind, however, this was not so much an "English paper," or a piece of fake writing, as it was a funny story *about* an English paper, starring fictionalized versions of herself and her teacher. For these reasons, perhaps, Tai showed her writing to her mother, not because she wanted advice (the paper was already done and graded) but because she thought the piece was funny, that it communicated something about her as a person, a student, and a writer. The fact that Tai wanted to show her work to someone outside the class for such purposes suggests a level of investment not seen in her previous work. Upon reading the essay, her mother's responded, "I don't get it," as one might respond to a joke that has gone over one's head. This gap between intention and reception is familiar to all writers. At least in this regard, Tai was at that moment a writer, confronting a common rhetorical problem rather than a student fulfilling a task.

At the end of the semester, Tai approached me with this problem as if it was the strangest, most extraordinary thing to have a “real” reader, one who was not only known, but liked and respected, one’s own *mother*, “not get it.” As opposed to a teacher who assigns tasks to fulfill, I was in this case an experienced writer in a position to provide answers to a question of some consequence to a less experienced writer: “Why did my story flop?” It was at this point that the class conversations about audience, context, and convention began to resonate for her, and (I hope) appear relevant in situations other than writing in an English class.

The sort of learning represented here and Tai’s interpretation of academic writing are all too easy to dismiss. I could well imagine my own invoked and skeptical reader “not getting it,” summarizing the argument as follows: “A student revises her plagiarized paper into a note that not even her own mother could appreciate, yet this is the sort of learning that academics need to value?” While critical assessments of this sort are at least superficially accurate, they do not acknowledge the very activities that English studies ought to value, for intellectualizing, problematizing, critical, and affective thinking manifest themselves in conventional and unconventional ways. These activities occurred within the

context of Tai's own wants and purposes; as such, they do not necessarily or fully embrace academic norms and conventions. If academic writing is to have relevance beyond its own community, then it is necessary to expand its scope and to recognize when academic moments happen in non-academic ways. In discussing the way that writers interact with audience and convention, James Britton and his colleagues point out:

> Two factors are likely to influence the kinds of planning and incubating that go on in a writer's mind. There is the need to get it right in terms of the facts of the case and what is generally known or accepted […]. There is also the need to get it right with the self, the need to arrive at the point where one has the satisfaction of presenting what is to be presented in the way one thinks it should be done. (26)

Getting it right, in this sense, is a transaction between self-satisfaction and public acceptance. Paradoxically, *self*-satisfaction often involves satisfying an audience beyond one's self—herein one finds the joy of English.

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