

A NARRATIVE EXPLORATION: THE ROLE OF REFLECTION IN A GRADUATE
STUDENT'S ACCULTURATION INTO AN M.A. IN RHETORIC AND
COMPOSITION PROGRAM

by

Jeffery Downs, B.A.

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Committee Members:

Rebecca Jackson, Chair

Nancy Wilson

Eric Leake

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Annie Sullivan, who showed me what it meant to be a Teacher, to Helene Hanff, whose work helped me to become the writer I wanted to be, and to Shirley MacLaine, for giving me the courage not only to go out on a limb, but also to stay there.

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I. EXPOSITION

These are the questions that provide my point of departure, for more thinking about more reflection, for my reflective project.

—Kathleen

Yancey

Introduction—Framing My Narrative

All my life, my curiosity about the world has led me not only to reflect on it, but also to write about it. I still have the first story I ever wrote, all the angst-driven poetry of my teenage years, and I have been journaling since I was a boy. I have every one of those journals still. Journaling is the reason my writing has become a process of reflection, writing, then reflecting and writing some more. I come from a long line of storytellers and writers, and to me, journaling is also a form of storytelling, a gathering up of the narratives I encounter, recording them, and making them part of my own. The reflective practices of observation and journaling have served me in business writing, journalism, and inform my academic work to this day. Hence, this thesis.

Reflection is one of the most valuable tools a writer, or any “practitioner,” as Donald Schön would say, can use. I cannot separate reflection from writing; it is where my writing comes from. It is as necessary as a pen or a keyboard. When I reflect/write, I am in a conversation with myself, one that is running in the back of my mind, like mini-thought experiments. Much like the “experienced writer” Nancy Sommers writes about, my inner writer and inner reader weigh each decision and inform me of the results, which end up on the page or screen. My writer and reader are with me when I revise, as I constantly revise as I write. Even now they are trying to decide if I am describing their roles in this tale accurately.

You will quickly see, as the story of this thesis unfolds, that I offer it to my readers as a narrative. I present the chapters containing my research, my data, my findings and autoethnographic discussion, arranged within the elements of Narrative: Exposition, Complication, and Resolution. Chapter One: Exposition will provide the background information needed to follow the story of my investigation of reflection and its use in my acculturation into my own graduate program. Chapter Two: Complication, consists of the data I generated to study, a collection of papers from my own graduate writing, which are the basis for the reflective pieces I wrote about them and then examine in the autoethnographic analysis in Chapter Three. Chapter Three: Resolution brings it all together. It is the discussion of what my research revealed about deep reflection as a tool, how I used it to produce and then study my own work, a conversation with a group of my colleagues regarding how they feel about reflection, as well as the role it played in my acculturation into my program. It begins with reflection.

Reflection is part of the everyday lexicon in composition studies. Students, especially undergraduates, are taught to look back and ask themselves questions about their work to encourage critical and constructive thinking, to identify weakness or uncertainties in their writing and that of their peers, to foster problem solving skills, to promote deeper understanding of course content, and even lead to effective professional development. They are also asked to self-reflect, to self-evaluate, that they might learn about themselves as writers. I often give reflective writing assignments in the First Year English classes I teach for all these reasons. Reflection asks students to stop, back up, revisit, and think about what they have done, what they are doing, and what they will do. It is a skill that is generally instilled in freshman writers in their first semester, and is

reinforced by revision and peer review. There is a great body of work on the benefits of reflection, from writers in the field of Composition, such as Andrea Lunsford, Nancy Sommers, Kathleen Yancey, Peter Elbow, and more, especially as it applies to freshman writers. However not all of it is as current as it could be. My own thesis director told me that someone on the WPA listerv recently observed that there's some good work out there on reflection, but that research has pretty much stopped—we don't have much of it after a certain date. My research indicates that "that date" would be in the early to mid- 1990s.

As I stated before, and as the literature indicates, most of the scholarship on reflection in academic settings, its use in the classroom, and its benefits to academic writers, is all focused on undergraduates, especially freshman. I don't believe we know as much as we could about the role it plays in graduate students' writing development and, perhaps, their acculturation into their fields of study. Because, if reflection is such a valuable tool for a writer, one so heavily stressed in an academic writer's early career, a *foundational* skill, as Susan Pinako calls it, if "the ability to reflect... seems to be the essence of the difference between able and not so able writers from their initial writing experience onward (qtd. in Yancey 4), and, if graduate writing is more advanced, more polished, more informed, more scholarly than undergraduate, then might not a more skillful, deeper, intentional use of reflection not only serve a graduate student in his or her writing, but also be a window into a graduate student's acclimation into his or her own program (particularly one in Rhetoric and Composition)? I know it certainly was for me.

Therefore, to clarify, this thesis is not a general examination of reflection and its benefits to academic writers, but a critical narrative on the role reflection played in my

own graduate writing, and my acculturation into a graduate discourse community. In the process of writing this thesis, I have concluded that the deep and constant reflection on my writing, as well as my own scholarship, and place in the academy, is *how* I became acculturated into my graduate program. I analyzed selected works from my graduate writing, the reflective pieces I wrote about them, and my own journal entries regarding my experiences and observations on being a graduate student. And, by doing so, I concluded that reflection was a valuable writing tool I had been using for many years, that through reflection I could see the culmination of most of the discursive areas I had studied in the academy as well as developed on my own, and how this combination yielded new meaning as well as providing support for my acculturation. This culmination also revealed the need to value my own authority, my own perspective, as much as I did that of the scholars I studied. I came to find that while a large part of my acculturation revolved around issues of scholarliness and worthiness, that a shift in my perception of my writerly selves was key in assuaging them.

I did this by looking at the role reflection played in my writing, academic and personal, over a two-year period. As a non-traditional subject, an older, more experienced graduate student and writer, I chose a non-traditional approach in becoming a non-traditional researcher. As researcher, I investigated my own writing, in the forms of academic work I had produced in my graduate courses, reflections I wrote about them in a portfolio created to generate data for this thesis, and my own journals. This combination served as yet another sort of reflection—a staged reflection that involved reexamining my work from a current perspective (the reflections) as well as current reflections on my journal entries, and drawing conclusions about what all of them suggested about my

identity at the time. I then interrogated my work by analyzing it and discussing the results in the form of a critical, reflective narrative including an autoethnographical analysis, to see how my particular experiences might speak to the larger issue of the role deep and constant reflection might play in a graduate student's writing and acculturation into his or her graduate program. Just as Schön argued in *The Reflective Practitioner*, and Yancey restates so well, "by reflecting on our own work—by knowing it, by reviewing it, by discerning patterns, and by using such projections to hypothesize a new way of thinking about a situation—that we theorize our own practices; that we come to know and understand our work... In other words, reflection is *rhetorical*" [emphasis hers] (12). I also extended the scope of my narrative to include observations on the role of reflection, and graduate writing itself, from six of my colleagues, four from my program (two in my cohort, two in their first years) and two from the MA in Technical Communications program, in my English department. These conversations appear in *Interrogating My Narrative*, and serve not only to support my analysis of the importance of reflection in my writing, but also in a way act as a counter-narrative by offering different perspectives on their awareness and mindful use of reflect.

As I mentioned earlier, I gathered my data from three sources. The first source was generated by compiling a portfolio of select pieces from my four semesters of graduate work in the MA program in Rhetoric and Composition at Texas State University, and writing reflective pieces introducing each paper. In these I talk about the course for which I wrote them, the nature of the assignment, what prompted me to choose the subject matter, how I approached them, what they meant to me when I wrote them, as well reflections on them now, from a distanced perspective (some from my first year, one

from last semester, and two written in my current/final semester). The second source of data comes from the personal journals I have kept since entering my program. These volumes contain observations regarding the writing I did for my courses. Many are deeply personal, often highly emotional, reflections on my position within my program, which range from self-doubt to confidence, and musings over the worthiness of my scholarship, and the scholarliness of my work and my own self. I consider them primary research, smaller narratives that I combine with my other self-generated data in the portfolio reflections to form the larger narrative of my autoethnographic exploration of reflection's role in my writing and my assimilation into my program. In all of these sources, I also examine the context and language surrounding each piece. I look at the language choices I was making and the approaches I was taking (and question in my journals) at the different times that indicate changes in my writing, myself, and my acculturation.

I was inspired to add this dimension to my research by two other writers: Helene Hanff and Victor Villanueva. Hanff, most known for her *84 Charing Cross Road*, is a personal favorite of mine. While not an academic (she never went to college), she was a writer whose reflective works based on her own life experiences encouraged me to pursue my own path as a writer. Villanueva's *Boostraps* is inspiring, to be sure, but is also an exemplar of what I am, in my own way, attempting in this thesis. Just as he took to heart Freire's concept of praxis, and reflected on his own narrative, and those that became part of his, not to "provid[e] a self-serving story, either glorious me or woe-is-me," but to look at how his singular story might speak to that of many, and just as how he made his personal public and personalized the public, to examine the narrative of his own

academic journey of a person of color, I dug deep into my work and my own personal recordings of my life to look for what parts of my “personal” could be retold, exposed, examined, made public, and might shed light on my questions about reflection, graduate writing, and acculturation.

My narrative is not made up entirely of my own stories. As I mentioned earlier, I sought observations from other graduate students, asking them some of the questions I had asked myself about the role of reflection in their writing, their positions in their respective programs, and attitudes toward graduate writing and support for graduate writing. I added their voices to mine, presenting their respective narratives as parts of the conversation I was trying to participate in, rather than facts or correspondence. I was not pointing toward any measurable, objective (dare I say it?) “truth,” merely the thoughts and *reflections* of my comrades from my own, and another related, discourse community.

I then crafted an autoethnography/critical narrative of the discoveries I made that includes an analysis of the reflective introductory pieces from the portfolio, my own journal entries regarding my work and position in my discourse community, and those of my colleagues. I purposefully drew upon my writerly identities of journal keeper and storyteller. Why would I not employ my greatest skills for the capstone project of my graduate career? Like Villanueva, I used the personal to interrogate the social and vice versa, my own work to graduate writing in general, and a graduate program’s effects on my work and myself. And, even though I have spent the last four decades reflecting, observing, storytelling, and writing, I still made discoveries I had not anticipated. I knew that reflection was one of the strongest skills I had as a writer, but I discovered it was the deep, mindful, *intentional* use of reflection, especially in the very personal journal

entries, that made it the single strongest factor in my acculturation into my program and to my acceptance of myself as a scholar.

A Review of the Literature

I want to begin my discussion of the literature by looking at reflection in general, then talking about the professionals and scholars, such as Donald Schön, Kathleen Yancey, who wrote so much about reflection in the 1980s and 1990, as well as other leaders in the field of composition, such as Nancy Sommers and Andrea Lundsford. I look particularly what they say about reflection relating to teaching writing. I also discuss Yancey's perspective on reflection as a way of exploring multiple voices and identities, and even connects it to autoethnography and narrative. After this, I also talk about the attention graduate writing is receiving from educators and scholars. This forms the foundation of my own study of reflection and what reflections on my own work suggest, if anything, about my evolving identity as a writer, scholar, and researcher—an insider—as I strove to become a full-fledged member of the rhetoric and composition community.

Definitions and perspectives on reflection can vary slightly, but they all generally point out the benefits, and imply the necessity of, reflection as a tool for learning. M. D. N. Lew, and H.G. Schmidt, say, that reflection, “refers to the processes that a learner undergoes to look back on his past learning experiences and what he did to enable learning to occur... and... self-reflection on *what* was learned” [emphasis theirs] (530). They go on to write about the “positive roles that reflection might play in fostering students’ self-reflection [and] critical thinking” (529). The Learning Center of the University of New South Wales offers another that is clear and concise: “Reflection is a

form of personal response to experiences, situations, events or new information... a 'processing' phase where thinking and learning take place" (UNSW).

A great body of work regarding reflection and the role it might play in teaching writing already exists. Much of it is based on Donald Schön's writings from the 1980s and 90s. Schön, educated at Yale, then Harvard, began observing and theorizing on organizational concepts in the early 1960s. Among his contributions, which were widely applied in many areas, from business, to industry, and eventually education, was the "generative metaphor," or, the idea that social situations could influence the ways in which problems were dealt with. Schön also studied systems of learning, and how they worked. However, he is most known for his work on reflection, particularly what he called reflection-in-action. Schön examined the use(s) and effectiveness of reflection for any "practitioner," and how they can improve their practices through reflection-in-action. He describes the concept:

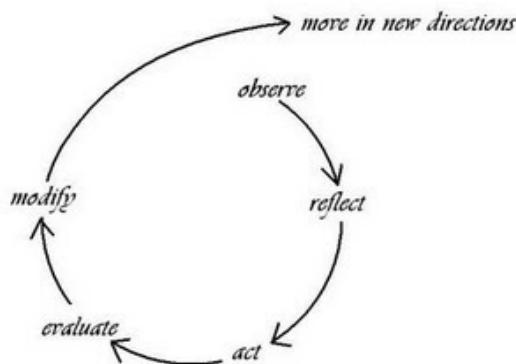
The practitioner allows himself to experience surprise, puzzlement, or confusion in a situation which he finds uncertain or unique. He reflects on the phenomenon before him, and on the prior understandings which have been implicit in his behaviour. He carries out an experiment which serves to generate both a new understanding of the phenomenon and a change in the situation. (Schön 68)

In his 1983 *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action*, he writes about a crisis among professionals in the knowledge industry from 1963 to 1981, and how they had become "loudly critical of their own failure to solve social problems, to keep from creating new problems, and to meet reasonable standards of competence..."

(12). Here begins the conversation where he first discusses reflection-in-action, one that is still going on today, one that inspired noted educator and author, Kathleen Yancey and so many others.

“A practitioner’s reflection can serve [to] surface and criticize the tacit understandings of a specialized practice,” and “[p]ractitioners do reflect *on* their knowing-in-practice... [b]ut they may also reflect on practice while they are *in the midst of it*” [emphasis mine] (Schön 61-62). This essential nature of reflection applies not only to learners, but to teachers, as well. As Freire said, we are all learners, whether student or teacher. I can say I believe this to be true. I would go as far as to say it is one of my personal truths; I am a learner, about myself, my community, my students, and my work.

Schön says that: “Reflection gives rise to on-the-spot experiment... [which may] work... in the sense of intended results, or it may produce surprises that call for further reflection and experiment... [and] [t]hus the designer [writer] evaluates his moves... in terms of the desirability... in terms of conformity to or violation if implications set up by earlier moves, and in terms of his appreciation of the new problems or potentials they have created” (29, 63). I mentioned earlier in this thesis how my inner reader and writer were in conversation, conducting mini-thought experiments. Schön’s description is virtually identical to what I experience when writing. The process is like a loop, but one that branches off once a conclusion is drawn (as opposed to continually re-cycling). This diagram describing reflection used in *action research*, which also owes much to Schön, helps to illustrate what I mean.



III. 1

Leonard Waks of Temple University refers to Schön as one of "our generation's most influential philosophers of design... [who] reframe[d] professional practice... [and] projected a new model for teaching and learning..." (1). As such, Schön has inspired many other writers, forms of pedagogy, and classroom instruction. Almost no one is as well-known and respected in the field of Composition Studies as Andrea Lunsford, formerly of Stanford University. She comments on reflection in a 2014 blog post:

My research shows that inviting students to reflect is a key element... in helping them to think productively about... writing ... We have known for some time that *reflection* helps to foster learning that can be transferred... not only in other college courses but indeed later in life. ("Why Teach Reflection?")

Kathleen Yancey considers many definitions of reflection in *Reflection in the Writing Classroom*. She focuses on reflection as *dialectical*, the act of "putting multiple perspectives into play with each other in order to produce insight..." (6). *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (1987), continues Schön's argument for "a new epistemology of

practice... embedded in skillful practice—especially, the reflection-in-action (the ‘thinking what they are doing while they are doing it’)” (Preface). He goes on to write about this skillful practice as one in which we “can execute... without having... to ‘think about it’” (26). He writes about how the use of reflection can lead to adopting more mindful habits, much like those of experts in a particular field, [such as teaching] writing that it “is a critical function... [that allows for] the thinking about the thinking that got us into this fix or this opportunity... [and we may thereby] restructure strategies of action, understandings of phenomena, or ways of framing problems” (28). Nancy Sommers, co-author of *The Bedford Handbook*, has been researching student writing, and studying the teaching of it, for over 30 years. Her work often focuses on the reflection/revision process(es): “We know reflection helps students understand both what they are learning and how they are learning... reflection is a writerly habit [and] plenty of... reflective exercises help students evaluate their learning and provide us with a glimpse into their writing processes” (“Building Reflection into the Writing Course”).

Yancey re-theorizes Schön for use in the classroom to “think about how [to] use reflection as a mode of helping students develop as writers,” (vi) and then posits that through reflection we ask ourselves to “*explain to others*,” and in doing so, “*explain to ourselves*” [emphases hers] (Yancey 24). She also discusses “knowing and learning—and therefore reflection” occurring in the context of a problem, what “Vygotsky might call the spontaneous and the scientific,” or what Carl Sagan calls a “‘co-habiting [sic] of dual modes of the mind,’” (qtd. in Yancey 11). Yancey goes on to explore what she calls *constructive reflection*, which is the “process of developing a cumulative, *multi-selved* [emphasis mine], multi-voiced identity” (Yancey 200). One can see how Yancey based

Reflections on Schön's work when she begins to see reflection as this co-habitation of multiple selves, like a conversation. Her knowing and learning is comparable to his reflection in knowing and reflection in action. In a talk she gave at the WPA in 1996, "Portfolio as Genre, Rhetoric as Reflection: Situating Selves, Literacies and Knowledge." She declares that "reflection is valuable in and of itself... and that reflection... is personal and is for the personal learner first, the academic learner second" (55). Reflection in various forms, such as reflection-in-action "invite writers to construct and verbalize... other selves... as they compose" (60). My inner writer and reader agree.

Yancey continues to examine different types of reflection such as constructive reflection where we "learnt to tell our stories... [and] without it, we live the stories others have scripted" (60). Yancey's constructive reflection that allows us "to tell lots of stories where we get to construct many selves for us to attempt" indicates a connection to autoethnography or what we might more readily call in rhetoric and composition "critical narrative." She states that it is "social as well as individual," and stories entail asking questions that are reflective as well as autobiographical, a kind of "*shaping self*" [emphasis hers] (60,61), that "reflection offers writers opportunities to tell multiple *stories*" [emphasis mine] (66), and from the "very multiplicity of those texts, combined with the invitation to construct a governing intelligence creating those texts, a reflection, makes plain a *writer* (63). This connection Yancey makes between reflection and the discovery of new and different selves (who tell different narratives) is one of the ways I believe reflection has worked so well for me; for by recognizing and identifying these voices, I am able to not only craft better, richer work, but also to analyze it as well. By reflecting on any given piece of work, after it is written, such as I am doing in this thesis,

I not only see the voices used in its creation, but add the voices of researcher and critic, giving the “story” of the piece yet another dimension, which itself can be studied again, as in the way I am reflecting on each piece to interrogate my acculturation and then also analyzing those pieces for themes that further reflect my writerly identities and what they have to say from yet another perspective.

These philosophers, educators, and writers, all reinforce the process I described earlier and the importance of reflection. However, most of them are talking about using it as a method to help beginners. Freshmen. Reflection absolutely should be instilled in these writers, but I am certain, as I am sure they would be too, it does not end there. What of the forgotten graduate student?

A Word on Graduate Writing

We come to graduate school to earn Master’s degrees, so that we may teach, go on to a PhD, or to enter a profession, but when we do we enter a new community. We aren’t just taking classes that are harder than undergraduate ones, we become academics, and we join communities, discourse communities. These are the spaces where we are bound by the same goals; we become skilled in the same jargon, the same discourse (it is one way we prove our commitment and that we have learned, by becoming fluent in our field’s jargon). Like Patricia Bizzell said in the 1980s, we share “language-based practices” (222). While this is true in any field, it is doubly notable in mine, Rhetoric and Composition, where we not only learn and use the jargon, but study its use, theorize its use, live by its use. This was exciting for me, in my first semester, when I was introduced to the history and theory of Rhetoric, and later Composition.

Learning to navigate, to negotiate these new practices is part of a graduate student's initiation into his or her community. My colleagues and I wanted to absorb the language of our chosen field, our new world, and our undiscovered country. We adopted the language, the practices, and the ways of knowing and making meaning; we learned what things had been named and how we could name our own and write about it, and later, teach it. But, the acceptance into the community, on the part of teachers, peers, and more importantly, one's self, is not as easy as learning the lexicon. I'll be trite-- it is a rocky road-- and there's a lot of stumbling and falling along the way. The emotional labor is high.

Tosha Ruggles wrote about such struggles in her dissertation, *Masters Level Graduate Writing Groups: Exploring Academic Identity*. In her action research project, she examined how "students were unable to perform the academic writing necessary... [and that they] struggled with the writing process" (4). She also observes that, "the importance of academic writing suggests that all writing, including academic writing, is intricately tied to as student's sense of self and identity" (6). Her study at Arizona State University, consisted of observing students in an interdisciplinary liberal arts program. She posits that: "Graduate student identity, then, is constructed in the classroom or other contexts" such as the graduate writing group she observed (32). Among Ruggles' findings were that the participants often attributed success in their writing to previous experiences, academic as well as personal, but "experienced struggles when they were concerned with producing writing of an academic quality" (63,65). As you will see later in this document, my experiences and those of the colleagues I talked to indicate the same concerns of scholarliness.

University of Cincinnati's Laura Micciche and Allison Carr, look at graduate-level writing instruction, and say that, "graduate education in English assumes that students learn how to write critically through repeated exposure and an osmosis-like process," and that "if students are good thinkers and readers, we sometimes interpret this as a reflection of writing ability" (485). As a graduate student, writing this thesis, I can attest to waiting for the osmosis-like absorption from the vast amounts of reading I have done to transform, or elevate my scholarship. "Graduate writing is receiving increasing attention, "according to Cecelia Badenhorst, et al, but that graduate writing can often be "seen as a problem in need of fixing," (Abstract). Again, I can confirm the feelings of inadequacy and "deficit" in my work, especially in my first semester when I was adjusting to my graduate program.

Part of this insecurity comes from the lack of any explicit instruction in the ways of becoming acculturated. Denise Cuthbert and Ceridwen Sparks take this up in their research on graduate student writing support. As one of their participants observed, "you're just supposed to know how to write papers" (Cuthbert, et al 83). Badenhorst, et al, echo this: "It's no secret that graduate students... regularly encounter academic writing as an emotionally fraught, privately experienced hardship," and that there exists a common "assumption that if we [students] can just figure out how to do these things... we will have jumped through all the hoops and will be certified and credentialed professionals" (479,483).

I now turn to a more detailed discussion of my methods, particularly as they relate to autoethnography and critical narrative in rhetoric and composition.

Methods- Arranging My Narrative

Doug Downs and Elizabeth Wardle in *Writing About Writing*, say that writing is relevant to us all, that writing has a measurable impact (as a journal keeper of 41 years, I wholeheartedly agree), and that “doing research on writing will give you the opportunity to *contribute new knowledge* about your subject” [emphasis theirs] (2). Laurel Richardson and Elizabeth Adams St. Pierre, observe that “researchers in a variety of disciplines... have...found that writing as a method of inquiry [is] a viable way in which to learn about themselves and their research topic” (473). I would echo this even further by reminding my reader that I am a writer and I am researching my own writing; therefore, I and my work *are* the topics of the thesis which I have written. As St. Pierre says “writing *is* thinking, writing *is* analysis, writing *is* indeed a seductive and tangled *method* of discovery” [emphasis hers] (484). Tangled indeed, but it has always bent the method I employ to interrogate and (attempt) to solve problems and answer questions. Plainly put, it is how I sort through things; it’s how I “talk” to myself. It’s how I figure things out. (As I write this thesis, I am journaling about the process, and excerpts may very well show up later within.)

“26 March 2015- Outside the box, outside the box... grad school was like most of my life; another story with me situated outside some “box” or another. In life, my friends were straight, I was gay. Or, we were all gay, but they were all coupled, well-to-do, and degreed. I was single, getting by, and still only self-educated. Now, I am older and more experienced, older than some of my teachers. My colleagues are people who could have been my children. Is it any wonder I reflect so much?” (Downs)

I've spent most of my life trying to figure out where I belong, what/where my "box" was, my groove, my niche... even in my academic work, I never felt quite sure where I belonged; not 100% compositionist, not a theorist (though I was actually told otherwise—twice!), and not a researcher satisfied with average studies based on more traditional methods. Being the "odd man out" is where I belong, because it forces me to be a constant practitioner; of observation, of research, of reflection. It's where my writing comes from.

In the beginning of my thesis process, I thought my groove, my niche, my method, would be autoethnography, especially considering my essay and storytelling strengths, I was sure I had found just the one right way to go about my research. It is still here, but not the way I originally envisioned. No, not exactly. It wasn't until I had begun my thesis in earnest that I, because of a class I took (am taking now), discovered narrative. I'll say it again (and again) I am an essayist, a storyteller, and a writer, who was inspired to become the writer I am by a writer who wrote about her own life by telling the stories that comprised it (Thank you, Helene Hanff, of *84 Charing Cross Road*). It only made sense that, while my thesis would still be researched, academic, and scholarly; while it would still be a *thesis*, it would be done so as a narrative, as a scholarly personal narrative, as Robert Nash, author of *Liberating Scholarly Writing*, would say.

So, if it is my right to go forth and name the world, I claim that right, and name this both narrative and thesis.

Positioning Myself

Gian Pagnucci talks about "telling your own story," in his *Living the Narrative Life*: "But we only have one pair of eyes. We're always locked into our own worlds.

Placing myself into my writing helps me figure out exactly where my vantage point is, where I'm standing, where I'm coming from, and where I'm going. We've got to figure ourselves out in order to figure other people out" (77, 78). I would say even more so when figuring out one's self.

Because I have crafted a narrative, including an autoethnographic examination of my own work (in the form of a portfolio), and used reflection and to "critically turn back" the texts within the portfolio, there are specific factors, elements that influenced my project, which I had to consider. Tami Spry's statement about was very applicable as I was both subject and researcher. She says that "autoethnographic methods recognize the reflections and refractions of multiple selves" (711). Therefore, I was mindful of the duality of my "selves," writer and reader/critic. In qualitative research, this is not bias, but a tool I used as I examined "the fractures, sutures, and seams of self... in the context of researching [my own] lived experience" as a graduate writer (Spry 712).

My experience and age were of immense value to me as the researcher. They help to yield richer, deeper reflections because I, as the subject, had had more time, and more occasions, to get to know who I am as a writer, and to know my own work. I have reflected on my own work for several decades. I have been journaling for many years, and still have every volume. I learned in my undergraduate career that my fortes are the personal essay and memoir, and because of this, a large part of the experience I brought to this study was that I have often researched my own writing for academic work. Again, I look to Leo Anderson, who writes about "various 'turns' in the social sciences and humanities," and one of them is "a heightened self-reflexivity in ethnographic research," and to Spry, who posits that "[a]utoethnography... does not occur without the... courage

to step out from behind the curtain and reveal the individual at the controls of the academic-Oz” (Anderson 373, Spry 714). I was the man behind the curtain.

I took into account the considerable influences of the worldly, non-academic writing experiences I have had and how they helped me grow as a writer. I worked in various jobs for 20 years before I returned to complete my Bachelor’s (I started as a Theatre major in 1981-83, worked, went back in 1986 for two years— still in Theatre, dropped out, went back in 1990—Theatre, went for a year, dropped out.) Eventually, I went back in 2009, and completed a BA in Humanities, with an English minor. However, during the long hiatus from my academic career, I not only was exposed to the business world (where I learned about writing business proposals, executive letters, company newsletters, ad copy, etc.), but I was also published as a freelance writer in magazines and eventually as lead writer for a small arts and entertainment newspaper. All of this not only relates to my writing, but also my use of reflection, and how I perform them both. I have practiced them for several decades. As I wrote in my journal:

01 April 2014-

I am...more invested in my own... research than just scholarship and others’ work... my expertise in journaling and personal essay, coupled with the fact that I have been journaling since 1974 (maybe this very thesis is, in part, why I have been doing so...) leads me to think, no feel, this is the better choice...

Narrative, Meaning Made in Retrospect

I would point to Villanueva again, as I discuss why I chose narrative, and not another more “traditional” research method. Just as *Bootstraps* is not just a memoir,

autobiography, or personal essay, but an interrogation of his journey, as a person of color, to find his place “within an institution that constantly seeks change and continually impedes change,” (xvii) so my thesis is a narrative of my own discovery, through reflection and interrogation of my own writing, of my place in a graduate program and how I got there.

I chose narrative for several reasons. As I have said many times already, I have kept a journal, told stories, and written essays for a major part of my life. Narrative’s ability to “offer a holistic view from the choices of the scholar-practitioner,” as Yvette Hyater-Adams writes in her story of using scholarly personal narrative, spoke to my already-formed writerly identities. I felt that “narratives, as many scholars contend, serve as ways of constituting the self, for the benefit of ourselves and others, through language,” as the Digital Archive Literacy Narrative (DALN) Consortium posits, and how they can be “crucial discursive vehicle[s] for identity formation and representation.” This thesis is an investigation of the use of reflection in my acculturation into my program, through the use of various forms of reflection on my own work, and, as David Schaafsma and Ruth Vinz say in *Narrative Inquiry*: “To engage in reflexive examination is to commit to including your ‘selves’ in the process of knowledge creation” (73), and it is through these voices, these “selves,” the student, the writer, the adult, the scholar, that I seek to add to the conversation regarding graduate writing and acclimating into a graduate discourse community.

Susan Chase says in “Narrative Inquiry,” that narrative researchers treat narrative “as a distinct form of discourse,” and this is certainly how I see it (64). As a non-traditional student, writing a non-traditional thesis, I resonated to a method that is still

considered by some to be... non-traditional. Chase also posits narrative as innovative and fresh. Thomas Workman, of University of Houston-Downtown, said in a speech at the 29th Annual Conference on Law and Higher Education that “Much of what we fear is based on our generational lens and the lens of those we are trying to educate.” I would add “educational” before generational to emphasize that part of my point of view, and what makes me feel narrative was the only way to accomplish my investigation in this thesis, is that while I am older, *my education is not*. I am a product of what I have been taught in the last two years, not the last two decades, and I concur with Helen Sword, who proclaims that, “elegant ideas [the author tries his best] deserve elegant expression [and] intellectual creativity thrives bet in an atmosphere of experimentation rather than conformity” (Preface). “Bravo!” to Robert Nash, who declares that narrative bestows to its writer, “the right to express their own, unique writer-scholar’s voice” (24) and that “personal narrative... enlarges, rather than undermines, the conventional canons of scholarship [and it can] transform the academy and the world” (22).

“Narrative is retrospective meaning making” (Chase 64). I wanted to make meaning out of my work and look for implications, from my small story that might apply to the larger story of all graduate writers. So, while I am interrogating my own story, and generalizability is not what narrative inquiry is really ever about, I do believe there are particulars from my exploration that will speak to other graduate writers. Narrative allows me to accomplish this, because it allows writers to “make meaning out of the events of their lives” (Chase 70) and in doing so can interrogate “how an individual’s narrative... represents a larger population” (Chase 78), as “the writing is specifically

organized around themes, issues, and constructs that link the personal to a larger worldview” (Hyater-Adams 39), just as Villanueva does in *Bootstraps*.

This thesis as a whole is a narrative, but the parts where I analyze the data I have created by writing my reflections on my work, my journal entries, and the conversation with others in my department, constitute the autoethnography within the larger narrative. What is the difference? Oftentimes, autoethnography and critical narrative are used interchangeably; I have heard *Bootstraps* referred to as both; however, Susan Chase makes the clarification, by labeling autoethnography as a type of narrative, where “researchers also turn the analytic lens on themselves... here researchers write, interpret, and/or perform their own narratives” (69).

Autoethnography, a Narrative Lens

I decided autoethnography would be a particularly appropriate and useful method for my analysis. In “Autoethnography: an Overview,” Carolyn Ellis, et al, contend that “autoethnography is one of the approaches that acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher's influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don't exist.” I “colored” the lens of autoethnography, with the same inwardness reflection requires to discover themes, patterns, and ideas about my relationship to my writing. I was making the “doing” (to borrow a term from Spry) of my thesis, a part of my thesis. I kept thinking of the image of the Yin and Yang as a way to visually describe what I was trying to say. The seed of one is within the other. It comes close, but part of it is still hard to articulate.



DeLysa Burnier, a political scientist, says something similar: “Personal

writing is a hybrid in character, in that it blends and combines an individual's personal story with his or her scholarly story," and that autoethnography, "provide[s] the methodological justification for embedding the personal within a scholarly article" (414).

This perspective, while challenging, provided me to the opportunity for a much deeper examination. Indiana University's Kevin Vryan looks at the potential of autoethnography, and states:

If anyone else sought to study my life... no amount of interviewing or observation of me by a researcher would have been capable of producing the depth richness, and fullness of data I was able to assemble via fully-immersed (and documented) self-observation, self-interviewing, and self-analysis. (Vryan 407)

Being both researcher *and* subject allowed me to discover results that are relevant beyond my personal experience (Vryan 406). I had access to data not attainable by conventional methods (who better to examine my own thoughts and inner processes than myself?), as well as experiences and maturity that enrich to self-examination of this kind. As Kathleen Yancey says, we call upon the cognitive, the affective, and the intuitive, and, "we can use those processes to theorize from and about our own practices" (6). This duality of researcher/researched also meant hours of "internal research" that can be reported, mostly in the forms of journal entries and observations on the reflections written for this thesis, will be seen in the following sections. Some, however, cannot. Hours of thought (reflection/contemplation/meditation) cannot go on a Works Cited page.

I knew the reflective nature of an autoethnography, would be appropriate for my analysis because of its inclusion of the researcher. It also allowed me to leverage my

personal strengths as a writer: those of a storyteller and an essayist. Tessa Muncey observes in, *Creating Authoethnographies*, that narrative inquiry overlaps with autoethnography, because human beings are natural storytellers; their stories make meaning, and that peoples' narratives are their identities, and as Donald Murray tell us: "We are autobiographical in the way we write; my autobiography exists in the examples of writing I use in this piece and in the text I weave around them" (67). I examined my identities as a writer, scholar, and graduate student, through reflection and then wrote their narratives.

Muncey also says that authoethnography, "may be done in the form of memoir, personal essays... journals... [and] highlights... a sense of self-consciousness... it is also a compelling weaving of both story and theory. (2) Tami Spry says much the same: "Good autoethnography is not simply a confessional tale of self-renewal; [*This reminds me very much of the Villanueva quote in my introduction*] it is a provocative weave of story and theory" (713). As a writer and storyteller, for whom the personal essay and memoir are specialties, the autobiographical component of autoethnography was decidedly to my advantage. Spry also says: "Human experience is chaotic and messy, requiring a pluralism of discursive and interpretive methods that critically turn texts back upon themselves in the constant emancipation of meaning" (727). I built up my data, the portfolio, with the newly written reflective segments that connect them, to analyze. Leo Anderson writes that authoethnography is research in which the researcher is, "a full member in the research group or setting" (Anderson 373).

In this project, I was a member on both counts.

Analyzing My Data: the Portfolio

To address my research questions, and to give myself something to analyze, I compiled a portfolio of six pieces, of varying length, taken from the work I had generated thus far in my graduate program. I worked on the portfolio as though I had chosen this option offered by my program. Per the guidelines of my program, I would be “required to develop a portfolio of selected work from [my] program,” and it would be “work written specifically for the portfolio—and a reflective introduction”. This introduction is one “that demonstrates your ability to think carefully and critically about your work in the program” (Dept. of English, Texas State University). I looked back at everything I had written thus far, and what I was writing this semester, for papers that I felt were the best examples of my writing, but ones that, when arranged, with reflections between, would express several things: what my writing, broadly construed, said about my movement through the program—my failures and victories— how I changed, especially in my perceptions of challenges and victories and of myself, and how my writing and approach to writing changed. The papers illustrate the story I wanted to tell, and how it “is simple narrative with the facts all true, but it is really not that simple; few things are in writing or in life. The details are selective”(Murray 69).

Analyzing My Data: My Journals

Why did I use my own journals for research? Well, if I was telling a narrative about my own entrance into my discourse community by examining reflections on my own writing, I felt that my personal thoughts, feelings, concerns, anxieties and celebrations, in other words, journal entries, would make for deeper, more revealing and spontaneous source for its telling. The two volumes I have kept since I began my

program in August of 2013, served as both primary and secondary research. The journals are primary research in that I wrote them as I negotiated my way through my program and the writing it required, but they are also secondary in a way, because I am researching them as the self I embody now. These entries were made by the selves I embodied during the last two years, through all the stages of my enculturation.

I went through both volumes, carefully looking for any reference to being a graduate student, to the classes I was taking, the writing I was doing, to how I felt about my position in the academy and my program, anything that would offer insight into my investigation. I marked them, and read them again, analyzing each entry as to whether it would contribute to my narrative, and constitute good, sound, clear evidence to illustrate the points I was making. I considered what identity or voice was speaking in every entry, finding sometimes more than one, and collaborated with these older selves, to re-story these small stories (entries) to tell the one that is this thesis. I sought to socially construct new meaning by conversing as a graduate student writing his thesis with the other identities I had performed while getting to this point in my academic career.

Robert Nash says that there are certain criteria a truly scholarly narrative must have; among them, “trustworthiness, honesty, plausibility, situatedness, interpretive self-consciousness, introspectiveness/self-reflection and universalizability” (5). I contend that this thesis, as a whole, satisfies these criteria, and that the journal entries on their own satisfy all of them, except perhaps universalizability, because they are revealing, honest, candid, reflective, analytical, and situated, because they demonstrate the positions I felt I was in in relation to my work, my identity as a graduate student, and as a scholar-practitioner over the last two years.

I would go even further to say that the works I have presented in my portfolio, the deep reflections on them, and the journals, all combined, meet these criteria even more so. And my analysis of them brings universalizability to my thesis as I have examined my “particular” to speak to a “larger general,” as “[n]arrative functions to open the investigation to perhaps better serve all of us” (Schaafsma and Vinz 12).

Analyzing My Data: Extending the Conversation

As my work progressed I began to think about some of the pitfalls of a narrative inquiry, particularly one that was an examination of my own work, my own reflections, and my own writing about it. Hyater-Adams mentions some of these: “excessive focus on the self in *isolation of others* [emphasis mine], overemphasis on narration rather than analysis and interpretation, and exclusive reliance on personal memory as a data source” (40).

Obviously, the nature of this thesis required an abundance of focus on myself, but I feel I have avoided this pitfall in that I am looking at my writerly “selves,” my writing, and my acculturation. It is not a story of me as much as I happen to the subject whose work and actions are studied. While the entire project is a narrative, and I insert/weave in personal journal entries as illustrations (and evidence), my overarching aim is to interrogate, not narrate.

I also came to realize that my voice(s) were not the only ones that should be heard, broadened my circle of one to include the others I have previously mentioned, to add more voices, more perspectives, and more insight, bringing a bit of that “larger general” to my enhance my “particular.” I have definitely avoided that third shortcoming

of relying solely on personal memory, or in this case, my own journals, as data. In fact, they were the last source I chose, well after the project had begun.

I was confident in what I was doing with the portfolio and my journals. The isolation of others concerned me more. I was mindful from the beginning that I should not allow myself to fall into letting my thesis become my memoir. Personal essay and memoir are seductive to me; they are the kind of writing I like to do best, but they were not the best methods for my thesis. So, by talking to the others in my cohort, program and department, six in all, I added a new data source, brought in fresh and different voices to my narrative, and deepened my actual analysis by doing so.

I contacted six other graduate students from my English department, two from my year and program (second year), two from my program, but in their first year, and two from the Master's in Technical Communication program. I examined their responses to my questions regarding their use of reflection, graduate writing in general, and how much support for their writing and being a graduate student they felt they had, in the same way I examined my own reflective pieces and journal entries. I looked for themes that emerged and compared them to my own. The details are in Chapter Three: Resolution, where I discuss my findings.

And so ends Chapter One: Exposition. I have given you all the background I have as far as what I did to interrogate the role reflection has played in my (life, really) graduate writing and my own acculturation into my graduate program, and how I came to see deep and constant reflection was the tool by which I accomplished it. I have discussed how I did this and why. I have explained that while this thesis as a whole is presented as a scholarly narrative, the analysis in Chapter Three: Resolution, will be more of an analytic

autoethnography where I examine and discuss my findings as well as the implications the investigation of my personal journey might have to graduate writers in general.

What follows next is Chapter Two: Complication where I present the collection of my graduate writing and the reflective introductory pieces as a mock portfolio, to create data to study in Chapter Three.

II. COMPLICATION

And so all I can do is just rest my case on my own personal experience.

—Donald Murray

Generating My Data

The following section is a portfolio of selected work from my program. The papers I have chosen are presented as artifacts, in their original forms, down to the dates and fonts. The only exception is the piece on the Trickster. This was a reading response, and for clarity's sake I had to revise it slightly to contextualize it.

The reflections introducing each piece were written as part of this thesis so that I might generate my own data to analyze. I introduce each paper with current reflections on the piece itself, including why I wrote the piece, what the piece itself (topic, goals, approach) suggests about the identities I embodied at the time I wrote the piece, graduate student, experienced adult writer, storyteller, and academic. I also draw upon journal entries written at the time each paper was written in order to refresh my memories, enrich the reflections themselves, and provide insight into my personal, private identity expressed in my journal. Just as I have found, upon reflection, that classes and subjects of study often come together to create new meaning and lead to new discoveries, so do my writerly selves come together to create new expressions from which new meaning may be found.

The Portfolio was the first of my sources for themes I used to interrogate the role of reflection in my writing, my acculturation into my graduate program, and, finally, the implications my research might offer to graduate writers and the teaching/fostering of graduate writing, all of which will be analyzed and discussed in Chapter Three:

Resolution.

The Portfolio

Introduction

Choosing the selections for this chapter, was in itself, a series of choices based on deep reflection. I wanted material I could reflect on, that I had referred to in my journals, which I would combine to further reflect on and investigate what it all said about reflection in my writing, my writerly selves along the way, and my acculturation.

A Rhetoric and Composition program calls for a *lot* of writing, so the field of choice was not as narrow as it might seem. I have selected not only papers, but also more informal writing, because I want them, and my reflections on them, to tell the story of the path I chose, as a scholar, and a writer, and what I learned about myself along the way.

One of the things I remember most about the last year of my undergraduate work, pursuing my degree in Humanities, especially the last semester, was how my classes began to “overlap.” I was using all the knowledge and experience I had gathered from my Theatre studies, and all my Liberal Arts courses, especially English. The same thing has happened with my graduate studies. At one point during my first year I felt as though I was simply in one big class because materials overlapped, allowing work in one to support and inform the other. I can say much the same thing about being an older student; my life experiences strengthen my academic work. Even the writerly identities I find have begun to overlap and strengthen each other, too.

I am a storyteller scholar now. My work as a graduate student is the culmination of my life's experiences, and because of this, my graduate writer's identity is a chorus of these different voices, of storyteller, writer, liberal, Texan, gay man, a man (slightly) over 50, a student of astrology and metaphysics, craftsman, and scholar-practitioner.

The pieces in this portfolio represent all of these voices, but in three, in particular. The first is my voice(s) of a graduate student, which changed with each paper, and as I

progressed in my program. It embodies the public me, the student who is represented in a final, finished work.

Next is the voice of who I am now, looking back on my work through a much different lens, that of a graduate student writing his thesis, analyzing his work, but from a distanced perspective; distanced so much that at times it felt as though I were looking at someone else's writing. In a way, I was.

And, finally, the personal, confidential voice of my journal entries, the private me who had no idea anyone else would ever read the entries; the unpolished, unfinished me, writing to find his place in his program, and the meaning in his work.

Reflection 1—My First “Real” Paper

This analysis was the first paper I wrote as a graduate student. It was for my *Studies in Rhetoric* class, an intense, foundational course for my program. We were learning about the nature of Rhetoric and the five canons, and had just been reading pieces from the Middle Ages, around 1141, C.E. I remember how thrilled I was when I realized I would finally be able to write something connected to Abelard and Heloise. This in itself speaks of how I felt confident relying on knowledge I brought with me into the program. My choice for the paper was valid, and reflected a grasp of the canons. Yet I also had misgivings. I wondered if I was using Abelard and Heloise to fill in some gap I had failed to fill with my class work: *“10 September, 2013- Am I taking the easy way out on this paper? Shouldn’t I be doing something more groundbreaking?”* (Downs).

I come from a long line of amateur storytellers, and am blessed with a long, long memory. I remember my mother first telling me about Romeo and Juliet, and then Abelard and Heloise, one sunny morning when she was hanging out the clothes. She told me how he was her teacher, and they fell in love, but were separated. Yet, in spite of the sadness they endured, they loved each other for the rest of their lives. As a Theatre student, and storyteller, I can say it was the dramatic nature of their love story that drew me; as a writer, as well.

I pondered whether I was being self-indulgent, whether or not I was going too far by bringing in Abelard and Heloise; I worried that somehow doing something I liked or wanted to do was... cheating, an easy way out, not really academic... I doubted my choice because I doubted myself. But I came to the conclusion that I was not cheating, this was a good choice, and that my instincts were sound. Ironically, it was not one of Abelard’s or Heloise’s letters I used for this project, but one by Peter the Venerable, on

Abelard's behalf, to the Pope. After having studied the formality of letter writing and Rhetoric of the period, it was exciting to realize I had a real letter, from that time, that actually followed the rules and customs, the canons. The analysis came easily; all the canons were included, making it a good exemplar.

I was also eager to write something "academic," something that only other scholars would appreciate. This is obvious from the beginning of the paper. The paper shows how hard I was trying to make the most out of what (comparatively little) I had learned so far. I liked the paper, but all along I feared that I was playing it safe, and even felt a little un-scholarly by doing what I thought didn't take much effort, really, by applying the canons to a letter written during a time when they were the standard. There was no question; the canons were all there. It would have been more of a "discovery" if some of them had been missing. I felt, and part of me still does (that questioning of worthiness never truly gets answered) that I should have tried to discover something bold and new, rather than just identify the canons in a thousand year old letter.

Still, this paper felt "scholarly" because I *understood* the canons. I recognized in them the roots of what I had learned in my voice and diction and oral interpretation classes from my Theatre days, another coming together of what I had always thought of as separate parts of my academic career.

My scholarliness would come into question quite often over the next year and a half, as I vacillated between feeling that I was on the right track and that I had no idea what I was doing, but this was my first taste of what I thought it should be. I was making intelligent connections, and believed that was evident in this paper, such as when I posit about the brevity of the Salutation, or when I was confident enough to use the word "believe," brave enough to draw my own conclusions: "I believe the major attempt of

Peter's rhetoric to persuade his Holiness to show mercy on Abelard is to be found in the remaining two paragraphs," all written with a firm, academic hand.

Including the actual letter as an Appendix was an added measure to make my paper look more academic, just in case it wasn't that good, a metaphorical last adjustment of necktie or lipstick. I also can see, because I know myself so well, that words like "epistle" and "missive," and phrases like "take the cowl," or "may have likely been employed," were me trying to sound scholarly, academic, and knowledgeable. They are perfectly good and accurate words and phrases, but were I rewriting the paper today, I am not so sure I would use them. If I did, it would be because I wanted to, not because I felt I needed to. I just wasn't sure then. Today, I would be more concerned with appropriateness and clarity, rather than impressiveness.

I remember after reading it aloud in class, part of me felt like I had taken my first step toward being a graduate student (even though I had no idea what that was supposed to feel like), another still worried: "*27 September, 2013- I read my paper in class tonight... [m]aybe it was lame, undergrad...*" (Downs).

Looking at the paper now, I can see why I had the doubts I did, but I can also see that I did a good job, that making the most out of what we had studied so far (It was only my first semester, in a very heavy course) was what I was supposed to be doing: "*04 September, 2013- I know that it is ridiculous for me to think I would already know something when I haven't had the class yet...*" (Downs). For all the flaws I can see now, I believe this paper was a very good start to my studies in Rhetoric and Composition. It shows that I was learning the discourse, understanding the history of Rhetoric, and setting higher standards for my writing.

The expectations I placed on myself were almost unattainable. Thank goodness, they were not the expectations of the instructor. I received an A, and good comments from my professor and my colleagues. My first big hurdle. Many more hurdles would follow, all of which I made higher than they actually were.

Jeffery Downs

English 5383

Deborah Balzhiser, PhD

An Analysis of a Letter from Peter the Venerable to Pope Innocent II

On Behalf of Peter Abelard

By the early part of the 12th century, letter writing was considered an art, the *ars dictaminis*. At this point in history it included any type of written composition, which was broadly defined as, “a setting-forth of some matter in writing, proceeding in a suitable order” (Anon 496). Because it was looked on as an art and a discipline the letters of important orators and rhetors such as Cicero, Augustine, and Paul from the Christian Bible, were often published. Official state writings and correspondence used for legal and political purposes served as guidelines and were widely copied as well (492). Cicero’s influence is particularly evident as his six parts of a speech were the model used by the cleric Alberic, who wrote two works on letter writing. The anonymous author of *The Principles of Letter Writing*, however, uses only five. These five parts are: the Salutation, the Securing of Goodwill, the Narration, the Petition, and the Conclusion. A close examination of a letter from Peter the Venerable, written to Pope Innocent II, during the same period, circa 1141, serves to illustrate these guidelines, as well offer an example of rhetoric of the period.

For the purposes of this paper I will refer to the letter, as translated by Betty Radice, in 1974, which I have included in its entirety.

Peter the Venerable was the abbot of the monastery at Cluny, France, at this time. His letter to Pope Innocent II asks for the Pope’s blessing and permission for Peter

Abelard to become a monk at the abbey. Abelard had long been surrounded by controversy because of his radical teachings, but a falling out between Abelard and Bernard of Cîteaux, who we know as St. Bernard, and his eventual condemnation by the Council of Sens in 1140 are what prompted Peter the Venerable to act on Abelard's behalf.

Abelard was also known (infamous), of course, for his affair and secret (though later publicly revealed) marriage to his student Heloise, years before. Both of them (Heloise, at Abelard's insistence) had taken orders, and by 1141, Heloise had become the Mother Superior of the Paraclete, an oratory and school built by Abelard around 1121. He had also been severely censured for his teaching methods, for trying to incorporate classical philosophy into his theological teachings. One critic even accused him of trying to make a Plato a Christian.

The letter begins, as it should, with the formal Salutation to the Pope. Peter's greeting when compared to the Universal Salutation set out in the *Principles*, appears a bit less formal. It is not lengthy or overly effusive, but manages to acknowledge the Pope's position over him (and everyone), when he refers to him as "father." This is also apparent in the Salutation's final sentiment of "obedience and love" (Venerable, 275). Also, Innocent II and Peter were not strangers. Peter was among the first to recognize him as Pope after the schism within the church over the papal seat between Innocent II and Anticletus II, in 1130. This familiarity may be one reason for the brevity of the Salutation as well as the letter itself.

The writer of *The Principles* treats at great length on the Securing of Goodwill, the *benevolentiae captatio*, and points out that, "very often the largest part of the securing of goodwill is in the course of the salutation itself" (502). Certainly this greeting

acknowledges the Pope's power and influence by referring to him as a sovereign and by professing Peter's obedience. But because the "securing," as the author tells us, is also a way of "effectively influencing the mind of the recipient," (502), it is also rhetoric. Here Peter has begun his effort to sway. He goes on to express his faith in the Church, viz. the Pontiff, when he writes that he "assured him [Abelard] that if he had real need of mercy he would find it with you" (Venerable 275). However, I believe the major attempt of Peter's rhetoric to persuade his Holiness to show mercy on Abelard is to be found in the remaining two paragraphs.

At this point it must also be considered that the letter was probably read aloud to the Pope, "declared by speech," and therefore had to have been an eloquent and well-crafted composition, "made harmonious and clear... like a flowing current" (496). A letter of this sort was not meant to just be read by the recipient; it was meant to be *to* the recipient, to be presented. With this in mind, the teachings of St Augustine regarding style and delivery may have likely been employed by the reader.

In the following two parts of the epistle, Peter the Venerable tells a story; he describes to the Pope how Abelard came to pass through Cluny, traveled with Bernard, reconciled with him, and, *inspired by God*, returned to Cluny to ask admittance into the order. Within his Narration Peter praises Abelard, and alludes to the Pope's understanding and support of his decision to take the cowl. He also points out the benefits the monastery will receive by Abelard's joining the brotherhood, demonstrating the sentiment from *Principles*, that, "goodwill will be secured from the matter at hand if the extent of its future importance is openly set forth," (502).

The final paragraph, consisting of only two sentences, serves two purposes: it contains Peter's Petition in its first sentence, and in the second, the Conclusion. The

Petition also serves to secure goodwill once again when Peter reiterates the benefit of Abelard joining the brotherhood at Cluny. He plainly states that he, the brothers, and Abelard himself “beg” the Pope’s blessing and that Abelard be permitted to, “spend the remaining days of his life and old age, which perhaps will not be many” (Venerable 276).

Peter’s Conclusion, like his Petition, and the entire letter, alludes to the power of the Pope (therefore securing more goodwill) to not only permit Abelard to stay, but place him under the Pontiff’s holy and far-reaching protection, “so that no one’s intervention shall be able to disturb or remove him” (Venerable 276).

This particular missive is fairly short and almost resembles a modern-day business letter, with the exception of its emotional undertone. All the information needed is included, the form is correct, and it makes its point without unnecessary detail or overly flowery language. Again, the effort to secure the goodwill of the Pope is clearly evident throughout the entire letter. According to the *Principles* there are five distinct ways to do this, one of which is to express, “not only the humility of the sender but also the praises of the recipient,” (502). Peter masterfully makes it clear that the Pope is “outstanding,” a term in this period meaning a man (in 1141 it would not have been a woman) without superior (498). Throughout the letter the ultimate power of the Pope is intimated. Yes, within the Church, especially in the Middle Ages, it is a given, but it is also a persuasive tactic. It shows respect for the Holy Office, but on a personal level it is... flattering. And the emotional thread within the letter also makes it a personal appeal; it speaks to Innocent himself, asking him to respond as a caring, fatherly sovereign, to watch over and protect one of his subjects.

There is also a tone, especially within the Narration, that seems to imply that the Pope, because he is the Pope, already sees this is the correct thing to do, and that surely

he will give his blessing to their decision. Furthermore, Peter never addresses any counterpoint or argument against Abelard's taking vows. He writes as though he has already succeeded in persuading the Pope. This underlying confidence is in itself a subtle method of persuasion.

Peter the Venerable manages to do all of this "between the lines" and without resorting to blatant flattery or being a sycophant. History shows that his rhetoric was successful. His intervention on Abelard's behalf secured a mitigation of the Council's sentence and Abelard remained at the monastery at Cluny where he taught in its school until he died in 1142. Peter Abelard was transported by Peter the Venerable himself and buried at the Paraclete where Heloise was still serving as Abbess.

Peter the Venerable's letter to Pope Innocent II is a concise specimen of rhetoric and an exemplar of "a discourse composed of coherent yet distinct parts signifying fully the sentiments of its sender" (497) as the anonymous writer of *The Principles* tells us a proper letter must be.

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Peter the Venerable: Letter to Pope Innocent II

To the sovereign Pope Innocent, our special father, brother Peter, humble abbot of Cluny: obedience and love.

Master Peter, well known, I believe to your Holiness passed by Cluny recently when on his way from France. We asked him where he was going. He replied that he was weighed down by the persecutions of those who accused him of heresy, a thing he abhorred, that he had appealed to papal authority and sought protection from it. We praised his intention, and urged him to make his way to that common refuge which we all know. We told him that apostolic justice had never failed anyone, and be he stranger or pilgrim, and would not be denied him, and assured him that if he had real need of mercy he would find it with you.

In the meantime the lord abbot of Cîteaux arrived, and spoke with us and with him and about a reconciliation between him and the abbot of Clairvaux [St. Bernard], the reason for his appeal to you. We too did our best to restore peace, and urged him to go to Clairvaux with the abbot of Cîteaux. We further counseled him, if he had written or said anything offensive to orthodox Christian ears, to take the advice of the abbot of Cîteaux and of other wise and worthy men, curb his language and remove such expressions from his writings. This he did. He went and came back, and on his return told us that through mediation of the abbot of Cîteaux he had made his peace with the abbot of Clairvaux and that their previous differences were settled. Meanwhile, on our advice, or rather, we believe, inspired by God, he decided to abandon the turmoil of schools and teaching and to remain permanently in your house of Cluny. We thought this a proper decision in view of his age and weakness and his religious calling, and believed that his learning, which is not altogether unknown to you, could be of benefit to our large community if brothers;

we therefore granted his wish and on condition that it is agreeable to your Holiness, we have willingly and gladly agreed that he shall remain with us who, as you know, are wholly your own.

And so I, your humble servant, beg you, your devoted community of Cluny begs you, and Peter himself begs this on his own part, through us, through your sons who bring this letter, and through these very words which he asked me to write: permit him to spend the remaining days of his life and old age, which perhaps will not be many, in your house of Cluny, so that no one's intervention shall be able to disturb or remove him from the home the sparrow has reached or the nest the turtle-dove is so happy to have found. For the honour in which you hold all good men and the love you bear him, let the shield of your apostolic protection cover him.

Reflection 2—Allowing Myself a Little Freedom

Connections between writing centers and Tarot cards? Astrology? Ancient Gods? What flapdoodle is this? Yes! I saw them, and went out on an academic limb, to discuss them.

The following short piece on the Trickster, and the Trickster mind, was a response I posted for my *Writing Center Studies* class. We were reading *The Everyday Writing Center, a Community of Practice*, by Anne E. Geller, et al. I enjoyed the book, but was particularly drawn to Trickster, who the authors describe as spontaneous, disruptive, fluid, paradoxical, and even chaotic. It is also a good example of the intersections and connections I talk about in my Foreword, as well as in the piece itself. In this response I drew upon my knowledge of mythology and metaphysics, but also that of an experienced writing center tutor. I was much more comfortable now with bringing in knowledge from disparate fields. I remember seeing this as a good thing, drawing comparisons, making connections, finding meaning, rather than falling back on a crutch.

I felt like I was *contributing* to the conversation, in my class, and perhaps to the body of writing center studies knowledge by making the connection between Trickster and the metaphysical. I felt confident when I wrote this, so confident that I did not worry about touching on the metaphysical. I knew that it was appropriate, fresh, and had meaning. This confidence is evident in the more glib tone I use (“the halls of Rhetoric and Composition... all gracefully managed... Trickster has enticed me”), one because it was informal, but two, because I was “on my turf,” metaphysics. I was drawing from real expertise, so much so I allowed myself to begin with myself: “I am always pleased and intrigued...”

I had fun with it. I saw an opportunity to do something a little different than the mini-papers the reading responses usually were, and to brighten it up, not just with what I discussed, but how I discussed it, by how I “jumped about in time and concept, all to introduce my position on this reading, my support of Trickster-ism, if I may name it for myself, [and] jump[ed] a bit more. In fact... to another text” so that my writing took mirrored the spritely Trickster energy (“Trickster Rules”). It also took me to write about something I still hold true, “It has always been my belief, based on what I have been taught and by what I have experienced, that there is no formula.”

Jeffery Downs

Dr. Becky Jackson

Position Paper 4

Writing Center Studies

14 March 2014

Trickster Rules

I am always pleased and intrigued when anything metaphysical or mythic intersects on my journey through the halls of Rhetoric and Composition. Imagine my delight to enter the writing center through the “eyes” of Geller, et al, and run into my old friend, the Trickster, a/k/a Loki, Coyote, Jester, to name a few. The archetype of the Trickster is the zodiacal sign of Gemini, which is ruled by the planet Mercury. The glyph for this planet ♿, somewhat resembles a jester in his hat. Trickster brings to mind the Two of Pentacles in the Tarot (see fig. 1), juggling and balancing as he dances, all at the same time, all gracefully managed.



Figure 1, The Two of Pentacles.

Just as Trickster always looks for gaps, holes and intersections, I see connections, like the one I found in Chapter 2 of *The Everyday Writing Center, a Community of Practice*, that of “recognizing moments of opportunity” (25). This sentiment, along with

this ancient symbol for an ancient concept, takes me back to ancient times, like ancient Greece, where Trickster was Hermes the messenger, and, finally, to the Greek word/concept, *kairos*. Who better to capture *kairos* than mindful, wily Trickster? So, perhaps there is a spiritual/metaphysical dimension to the writing center after all? (But, I see Trickster has enticed me down a path other than the one I intended, so let me retrace my steps and pick up my original intent).

And, since I have jumped about in time and concept, all to introduce my position on this reading, my support of Trickster-ism, if I may name it for myself, I will jump a bit more. In fact, I will jump to another text like Geller and company. They reference *Good Intentions*, where Nancy Grimm describes the old idea of a writing center as a place defined in “modernist terms” where a teacher’s guideline is law and students receive individualized, fix-it shop assistance (8). However, Grimm later goes on to say that the center can be a place of contact where students, “negotiate and understand the conflicts of differences” (14). This sounds like the kind of *kairos* Trickster seeks out, one of those delicious moments of “meaningful discomfort” (Geller, et al. 22) that can become teaching and learning, collaborative, moments, perhaps even instances of Hyde’s “deep-change” Geller, et al. talk about (15).

It has always been my belief, based on what I have been taught and by what I have experienced, that there is no formula; the best we can do in a tutoring situation is have a large body of knowledge upon which to draw, and hone our ability to sense what works, what is working, and what doesn’t, and to move forward in an attempt to have the most productive session we can. Like Trickster, we must be alert and ready to juggle as fast as we can, until we find the right answer, and then juggle some more when a new one

is needed, “employing a strength and intelligence capable of meeting the unexpected” (Geller, et al. 31).

By embracing the practice of “Trickster mindfulness” we can, as Geller, et al. write, cultivate that “readiness for mindful learning” (20).

Reflection 3—Something Old, Something New (or, really old, depending on how you look at Rhetoric)

The seminar paper... the penultimate work I crafted for my *Studies in Rhetoric* class, my first semester as a graduate student. This was a daunting, even overwhelming class, in the beginning, but, by the end, my favorite. It laid the foundation not only for my scholarship, and also continues to influence my teaching.

When I began my program, I had assumed that, as a lifelong writer, I would gravitate to Composition. However, the deeper we dug into the history of Rhetoric, and its theory, the more I realized I was not only responding to Rhetoric, but to theory itself. *15 November, 2013- Dr. B___ gave me a ride home last night. As I got out of the car, I pointed to our contemporary rhetorical theory text, and said I wanted to write like ‘those guys.’ She said I was on my way <smiley face>”* (Downs). I had gone from feeling panicked and unworthy, to feeling confident enough to analyze and discuss Bacon, Bakhtin, Aristotle, and the like. I never referred to myself as a scholar until this class. I embraced the canons once again, but not in the same way as I had before.

Another intersection. Just as I had been able to reach back into my previous life and connect with Abelard and Heloise, I decided to write a paper for my final project that would not only connect with my Theatrical training as a Costume designer, but to *reimagine* the five canons. I felt secure enough in my study of rhetorical history to rename the canons and redefine them according to Costume, in everyday dress and stage costume.

I approached this piece as a seminar paper, one I might present. I realized when I wrote it that it would probably be something that was too specific to be published, except perhaps as an essay, unless there were other scholarly costume designers somewhere,

looking for a connection between Rhetoric and costume design. And, even if there were, as far as I could tell, they published no journals. Nevertheless, I imagined myself talking this paper at a conference to an intrigued and amused audience. I will not deny the touch of whimsy that comes through in the voice of this paper, “layers of fabrics in different lengths spilling around her body and draping onto the floor helped to create a chilling tableau” (“A Rhetoric Unspoken”). I create characters to illustrate wear the clothing I describe, and create situations for them to wear them in. There is a very artsy and glib tone, but it is intentional. I had every intention of charming my readers to draw them in. However, it also shows my knowledge of rhetorical history and of my former craft as a Costumer: “A costumer in the theatre designs his or her costumes as exposition, to express certain information about a character, and sometimes to elicit reactions from the audience” (“A Rhetoric Unspoken”).

I include it in this collection not only for these reasons, but also because I believe it shows the confidence I had in myself to pursue it, rather than something “safer” and more academic in a standard sense. I spoke directly to my reader, in second person. I opened with: “Look at what you are wearing.” (Downs 1). I fully admit that I was quite pleased with myself for writing it. I knew what I was doing and I represented it in a way that was academic and informative, but entertaining, as well. I had expertise in these fields and I was combining them into something that did have meaning.

I wanted more than rearranging old bones; I wanted fresh ones that I arranged myself. I wanted MY voice, and my expertise, to count, to be what drove the paper. Maybe it’s because as an older man, I value my own voice and knowledge at least as much as I do the ones I find in books and journals. All I know is that it felt good to explore this and to make it clear that I was the expert. *“09 December, 2013- I don’t know*

why I kept second guessing myself over the seminar paper. Why not write about Costume? At least it's not stuffy, and it's something I know... something I own."

I wrote this paper; the people I quoted did not.

Jeffery Downs

English 5383

Dr. Deb Balzhiser

11 December 2013

A Rhetoric Unspoken: The Canons of Costume

Costume, in short, is the outward and visible sign of the inner spirit...

-B. Iden Payne

Costume

Look at what you are wearing. How much thought was put into your costume? What reasons, large or small, creative or practical, did you have for the choices you made? Helen Goodrich Buttrick, of the University of Chicago, in her 1924 textbook, *Principles of Clothing Selection*, writes, “Clothing is one of the primal necessities of civilization,” and that, “[t]he wearing of clothes did not originate primarily from the need to shelter the body... nor from modesty, but from a desire for adornment” (3). She continues to discuss the other motives such as sex attraction, physical prowess, and wealth and rank (3), and how these motives, “have governed the dress of all peoples” (4).

If we assign motive to our choice of costume, and by costume I mean to include both theatrical stage costume and the costume, or dress, we affect in real life, then we can safely say that our choice of costume is based on *intention*. The actor/director B. Iden Payne, for whom the University of Texas theatre is named, writes in his Foreward to Lucy Barton’s seminal text, *Historic Costume for the Stage*, that, “costume is not accidental and arbitrary but is founded upon a definite and psychological basis” (V). With this sentiment in mind, I would go further, deeper than intention, to, as Buttrick says

above, *desire*; and, I would argue that it goes further still, to a *goal*; for there must be a want, a need, a desire, an end result... a *goal* to give rise to a motive.

Certainly there are times when a person's choice of clothing is simply functional, to keep warm, or clean, or just to be dressed, because unless he or she is a nudist, people generally wear clothing. Instances such as these are mostly where the person is either alone, or in very familiar circumstances. No one else is present, or that is to say, no situation exists that calls for much thought or purpose, and no need for something from someone else, no exigency, no rhetorical situation.

Costume as Rhetoric

However, when the conditions for a rhetorical situation are present, and there is an intent, on the part of the wearer, to persuade someone else, someone who can, as Bitzer would say, affect or mediate change, then costume, though not spoken or written, indeed, becomes rhetoric. A costume or ensemble can function as statements, or pleas, to persuade an audience to see or accept the wearer in a certain light. The wearer, in attempting to make an impression, to affect, to persuade, even to manipulate, becomes a rhetorician.

This idea is nothing new. Whether we realize it or not, using costume as rhetoric is something we all employ, and something we have all learned to do. And as such, the costumes we wear onstage or every day are rhetoric. Emilie Gordneker, examines this in her paper, *The Rhetoric of Dress in Seventeenth-Century Dutch and Flemish Portraiture*:

The three main structural components of rhetorical theory, *inventio* (the choice of arguments to be used), *dispositio* (the arrangement of the material), and *elocutio* (the final polishing of the speech and its adornment with antitheses, metaphors, and rhetorical

figures) have analogies in artistic concepts of invention (choice and amplification of subject matter); composition; and personal style. (Abstract)

I would go further than Gordenker does, to include all the canons. To do this I would begin by using Lloyd Bitzer's theory to show that a rhetorical situation *does* exist (onstage and off, i.e. fictional and real life), and I would then argue the canons can be renamed and modified, to describe the rhetoric of Costume.

A costumer in the theatre designs his or her costumes as exposition, to express certain information about a character, and sometimes to elicit reactions from the audience. In 1983, Bette Davis wrote the Foreword to the biography of the famous Hollywood costume designer, Edith Head. Miss Davis posits that: "Through the work of a fine costume designer, an actor or actress can *become* the character" (vii). A character in a play or film does not choose his or her own costume, but the lines in the script do dictate in a sense what choices the Costumer makes. In real life, the wearer is his or her own designer and makes almost the same decisions a Costumer does.

In both cases, a rhetorical situation exists. And while in the theatre, a layering of situations occurs (the rhetorical situation of a play or film being produced as well as the diegetic one) the ultimate rhetorical goal of a stage costume or real life clothing is the same: to persuade. "Rhetoric always wants to achieve an effect," states Professor Gesche Joost of the University of the Arts Berlin, "in order to pursue its aim of intentional effectiveness... which aim[s] to move the audience" (9).

If we look to Bitzer for validation, we see in both "worlds", his three constituents of a rhetorical situation: the exigence, the audience, and the constraints.

The exigence for a costumer is that a work is in production and the characters require costumes, costumes for the diegetic exigence, whatever it may be. Off stage, in

real life, the same infinite number of exigencies can exist. But, to illustrate, I will use a particular rhetorical situation: a job interview. The exigency is that the person/character needs a job. The audience is the interviewer, or potential employer. The constraints could be almost anything, depending on a multitude of circumstances, such as unemployment or widowhood, in the stage world or the real world.

Allow me to clarify further by deconstructing, if you will, an example of an actual costume as rhetoric. Visualize a woman; I will call her Madame X. She could be a character in a play or someone in real life. She is dressed in a smart, dark, tailored suit, low heels, sedate makeup, her hair pulled back; she carries a small attaché and a string of pearls grace her neck. She is sharp, professional, and conservative. Her costume, as a finished unit, exudes professionalism and confidence from the navy of her suit to the height of her heels. She has considered each piece carefully to persuade a potential employer to see her as a capable and stable employee. It is, as part of her overall goal, a tactic to establish *ethos*, and is the rhetoric of her costume. Her ensemble signifies her intention: to impress and, therefore, persuade the interviewer, based on her need or goal: to get the job. The need gives rise to the goal which predicates the intent to persuade, and thus a costume functions as a piece of rhetoric, just as a speech or letter would.

The New Canons

The classic five canons of rhetoric, *inventio* (invention), *dispositio* (arrangement), *elocutio* (style), *memoria* (memory), and *actio* (delivery) which can be used to analyze a speech or letter, for my purposes, must be adapted. The basic ideas of each are the same, however, I propose that they can be renamed and redefined when specifically applied to Costume.

Describo, Latin for “to design” replaces *inventio*. Designing a costume, whether at the sketch pad, or pulling from ready-to-wear, is the first step; it is the creation of the costume, born from the combination of the exigence, the constraints, and the goal. Here rhetoric begins in the designer’s mind. Like a scientific thought experiment, different ideas are contemplated, every aspect, for color to fabric, to cut, considered as to how it will fit into the sentiment(s) the final costume will convey. As Michael Schrage writes in the *Power of Persuasion*, “In the first and final analysis, design is about effecting change in people’s choices and behavior... In other words, they are persuaded” (42).

Construo, Latin for “construct, build, arrange,” takes the place of *dispositio*. This re-terming is particularly apt because in the theatre vernacular, costumes are not made or sewn, they are “built”, and the study of building them is “costume construction”. *Construo*, of course, also applies to the real world where the wearer “puts together” his or her costume, auditioning one piece after another until the desired look (that which will effectively persuade) is achieved. The final concept resulting from the ideas in *describo* is now manifest and has physically come together.

Schema, which means in Latin: “figure, form, style, clothes, clothing,” here stands for *elocutio*. No longer the style in which something is spoken, or orated, *schema* is where we see the personal expression of the designer/wearer in the way the costume is arranged, his or her particular view of how the costume (rhetoric) will express what it is supposed to. To return to our example, Madame X’s feeling that the color navy would signify stability more so than the color black, is *schema*. Another interviewee, call her Madame Z, may have put together the very same ensemble, but to her, the best choice may have been the black. *Schema* is where the designer or character’s/wearer’s personal style, or lack of it, can be found. In fact, the way Madame X wears her navy suit is

possibly even more important than the suit itself because it has its own set of “signals” the audience will pick up on. *Schema*, as I will explain in more detail, is closely connected to the final canon. Here the designer/rhetor can establish *ethos*, and, depending on his or her goal, *pathos*, as well.

Memoria shall remain the same, in name and concept. An actor or actress in a costume, even the designer who created it, has no real need of memory of costume because, while it is rhetoric, it is not the elocution of words. This canon might carry a bit more weight for a real world person in the case where an outfit might be repeated because it had been particularly effective before, but again, an outfit is not made of words to be memorized and then spoken. So, while we do not forget memory, I must deem it the minor canon when compared to the other four.

Dictio, “expression, utterance, delivery,” in Latin the classical *actio*, and the final canon, is how the wearer, actor or real life, carries himself in the costume. It is the phase that takes place in the rhetorical situation itself, when Madam X is at the interview, presenting herself along with her resume to her audience, the interviewer. *Dictio* is closely related to *schema*, but there are differences such as the way she behaves in the suit, which dictates how the suit behaves on her. If she had chosen an ill-fitting suit, or one in poor taste (such as something too suggestive for business wear) she would not have the overall sharp and prepared appearance she desired, and her rhetoric would have been rendered ineffective.

The Stage

Now that I have been so bold as to rename, and reinvent if you will, the Canons of Rhetoric, I would like to draw from my own experiences to further illuminate why I believe that Costume can be rhetorical, and when this occurs, deserves its own canons.

Having been a costume designer for many years I am able to offer a theatrical example, and one from my own life as an academic.

As an undergraduate I worked on a production of Victor Gialanella's 1981 adaptation for the stage of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. In this instance we see again a layering of inter-connected rhetorical situations: one between me as designer and the production team, and one between me as designer and the audience.

I was a student and Costume Shop Foreman and, as a special project, I was allowed to design and build one of the costumes. I designed the wedding gown worn by the character Elizabeth, who was a distant cousin and fiancée to Victor Frankenstein. The gown was worn in only one, very dramatic scene. My own rhetorical situation was that I was to design one costume, the costumer and the technical director had approval, and many constraints were present such as being subject to both of their approvals, the costume budget, et cetera, as well as the demands of the story provided in the script and those stemming from the decisions of the production team, such as the actual time period, the actors' blocking and so forth specific to our production.

My need or goal as a costumer was not only to produce a fairly accurate historical costume, but also to influence the audience as to how it saw Elizabeth in this scene as well as the action of the scene on an almost subliminal level. As Robert Edmond Jones, writes, "Each separate costume we create for a play must be exactly suited both to the character it helps to express and to the occasion it graces" (41).

Though the play was set in the 1840s, the script stated the gown had belonged to the late Mrs. Frankenstein, Victor's mother, so I designed it as a garment from the early 1800s, the period known as Empire. The wedding dress also the costume Elizabeth wears when she is killed by the Creature. The wedding dress had the classic features of the

Empire period, the very high waist, just under the bosom, the low neckline, and small capped sleeves (*describo*). It was off-white; the skirt had two layers, plus a train. I wanted texture in the fabric and layers to give movement, to echo the tension of the characters. The train was made of a black and silver metallic lace, adding a dark, Gothic feeling (*construo*). The train trailed after Elizabeth almost like a shadow as she paced across the floor before the Creature appeared. She did not wear her veil; it was draped over a chair (*schema*). She never appeared complete; her wedding attire never finished, subtly reminding the audience that she was still a virgin, still innocent and vulnerable. She gathered her skirts and tried to run, only to be caught and strangled by the Creature, her lifeless body draped across a settee, much like her forgotten veil across the chair (*dictio*). The layers of fabrics in different lengths spilling around her body and draping onto the floor helped to create a chilling tableau at the end of the scene. All the parts of this costume's rhetoric intentionally placed there by me, the designer/rhetor.

The Real World

Now let us leave the stage and come back to the real world, our world. In this instance I was not only the designer, but the wearer. The rhetorical situation had many facets; on one hand it was *not* a rhetorical situation because the costume I chose for the day was simply for me, my only need or goal was to please myself, not thinking about influencing anyone. However, in another way it did serve a different purpose making it function as rhetoric at the same time.

I chose an outfit born out of my own desire for a certain look: slacks, a wool vest, a tweedy sport coat and a bowtie. This was a look I liked and all I wanted on this level was to dress the way I wanted to be dressed. Remembering Polonius' admonition that, "apparel oft proclaims the man", I had looked to like, and looking liking moved.

However, I realized it also made me look every inch the classic image of an academic. I could have been cast as a professor in an Agatha Christie play with no need for additional wardrobe. As I was teaching that day it served to let me appear in this role to my students (and faculty) as an organized, sophisticated gentleman, thus persuading them to see me as educated and as an authority figure, demonstrating *ethos* (and possibly enhancing my *logos* when I was speaking).

This was the “character” I had in mind when I chose, or designed, the outfit from my own wardrobe. It started with the bowtie (Bakhtin’s utterance?) and the rest followed (*describo*). As I began I found that I had several pieces, all bought and previously worn separately, that matched in color and fabric and all complemented each other. (*construo*). I was quite fastidious in the way I dressed, placates were lined up, ¼ inch of cuff showed past the sleeve of the coat, and the bowtie stood level and straight. Nothing was amiss or out of place (*schema*). I was “put together”; the ensemble looked as though it had been meticulously thought out. It was finished and polished, further adding to the academic and stylish statement I wanted to make (*dictio*).

All the World’s a Stage

Regardless of the world in which it is employed, either theatrical or real life, Costume most definitely is a powerful, yet often subtle (and often not) rhetoric. Designers for stage and film have made an art of using costume to sway and impact their audiences. “Great designs are persuasive. Great designers are great persuaders” (Schrage 44). And knowingly, or unknowingly, (I believe I can safely say) *everyone* who has ever dressed him- or herself has been a rhetor. He or she acted as his or her own designer, used costume as rhetoric, and, by extension, its canons, as a means to persuade an audience.

Costume is deserving of its own rhetoric, complete with canons, for many reasons, but one of the most compelling is its sheer ubiquity. Costume is almost as much a part of being human as our own skin. In a way more, because it is rhetoric of *our own choosing*; it allows us a way to express, communicate, and persuade in a way like no other (we cannot change our skin, at least not in the ways we can change our clothing).

Afterword

So why did I write this paper? Why does the rhetoric of Costume deserve its own canons? Yes, as a former designer, costume is important to me personally, and as such I drew upon my own authority, but it was more than that. I felt that at this time such a paper could be written (as well as an Afterward discussing it), one that reflects the current trends in academic writing that allow a student to bring himself into the work, and to draw upon his own experience and authority. As we become more and more inclusive in “alternative” forms of expression in academic writing, is it too far a reach to explore alternative, or specific, forms of rhetoric for individual fields of study? I don’t think so, not now. So I took the risk and not only had the temerity to alter the holy of holies, but also to take liberties with the very format in which they are presented by personalizing my paper’s style. (Here I compare my paper to Madame X’s navy suit; the chapter headings are her pearls, the italics their luster).

Like African Gods and Goddesses, “hidden” behind Catholic saints, in religions like Voudoun or Santeria, the classical five canons are still there, behind the new ones I have proposed. They are their foundation; supporting, informing, and giving agency to this new vision of the age-old rhetoric of Costume.

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Reflection 4—A New Year, a New Genre, a New Perspective

The second year in my program felt very different from the first. More and more, we, as scholars, were given latitude in what we wrote, while being expected to show, in our writing, the foundational skills we worked on the year before. *Digital Literacy* was unlike any other class I had taken. Rather than a conventional graduate class, it was a single, ongoing research project. We spent the semester compiling a database of facts and artefacts, and writing microhistories that looked at techno-cultural change from 2001 to 2011, as evidenced in YouTube, Wikipedia, Blogger, and Facebook.

We kept our research, and our work, within the strict parameters of our timeframe and subject matter. I had never participated in such a large collaborative effort. Everyone had access to everyone else's research and papers, including those with the professor's comments. It was challenging. I did not feel good about everything I wrote in the class. However, as the project moved forward, and the group collective gelled, I found myself become more invested, in the project, and the kind of writing I was doing.

I had never written a microhistory; I did not really understand what one was. It is very easy to confuse a microhistory a mini-history. I resented the genre; I did not understand it, or its purpose. This is evident by the terrible job I did on the second one I wrote. But (Ah, that wonderful signal for the light bulb to appear above a head, "*But!*") realizing that I had written what I was *not* supposed to write, and being able to analyze my mistakes is what made me understand how a microhistory works. The third, and final microhistory, the selection you are about to read, is the result. I ended up not only grasping what I was supposed to be doing, but enjoying it. I do not claim to have I mastered it, but I got close. I do not claim that it was easy, either. It wasn't. I had to maintain a tight focus. YouTube's "new direction, social media, was clearly expressed in

the layout of the new YouTube homepage” (“Homepage”) That was it; that was all I could write about, a moment, a snapshot, the story of one particular aspect of YouTube’s homepage—the layout, and how: “The rhetoric of the homepage layout is obviously meant to persuade the viewer to remain on YouTube” (“Homepage”). As a storyteller, I was used to painting vivid pictures; stories often begin with broad strokes of exposition, but microhistories do not. Reigning myself in this way was difficult, but by employing constant reflection-in-action, I was able to do it.

The work on this paper was intense. Most of it took place in long, long stretches at the keyboard, just two days before the deadline. Somehow, that tight, compressed timeframe was a key element in the paper’s creation. This microhistory was also not only part of the large class project, but of a smaller collaboration between me and two of my classmates. We chose a topic, and each wrote on one specific, aspect of it. This paper was not just the culmination of my work for the class, but represented a “growth spurt” in my academic writing. The challenge of the genre, along with the collaboration, required me to break from my usual habit of cloistering myself and hiding my work until it was ready to turn in. It was one of the most beneficial events in my academic career.

What started with a class I did not like, with work I did not want to do, became what Jerome Bruner might refer to as a turning point, a place where “presumably profound changes I Selfhood,” occur, in my academic writing (Ferrari 308). I felt a change in myself after writing this. I saw a change in my work. Rather than give up, or allow mediocrity to take over my work, I immersed myself in the research for his microhistory and the world of digital literacy, learning its jargon, its discourse, and blending it with my own voice, "... new interface design... navigate it... filters... sharing... platforms..." (“Homepage”). This was the first time I felt like I *really* deserved to be

called a scholar. I worked hard, collaborated, and changed who I was in several ways. I moved up a level (Is that what gamers say?) on this one. I actually want to write *more* of them. If my grad career had a biorhythm chart, this would have been a really high peak on the scale.

Jeffery Downs

Dr. Deb Balzhiser

English 5317

09 December 2014

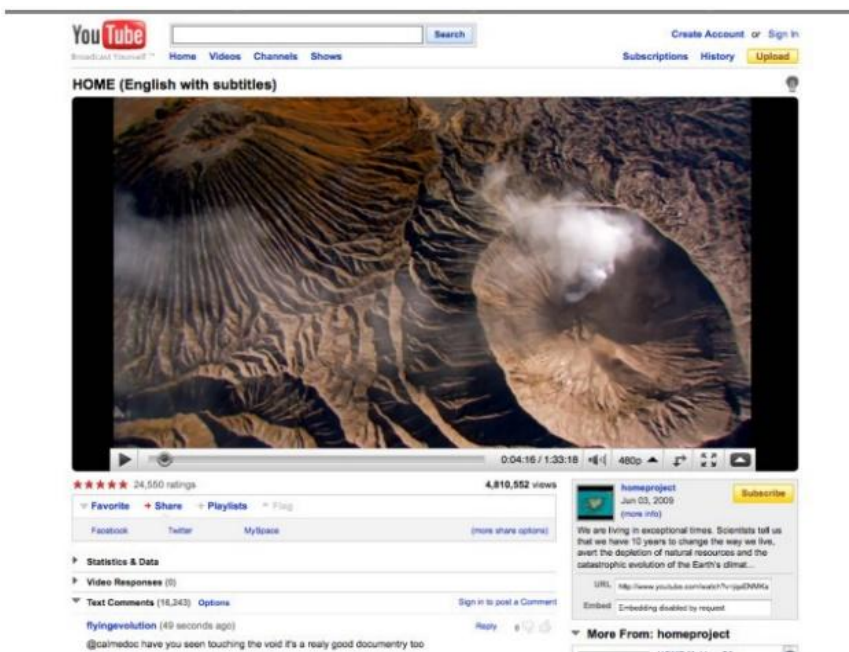
There's No Place Like Home(page)—Or Is There?

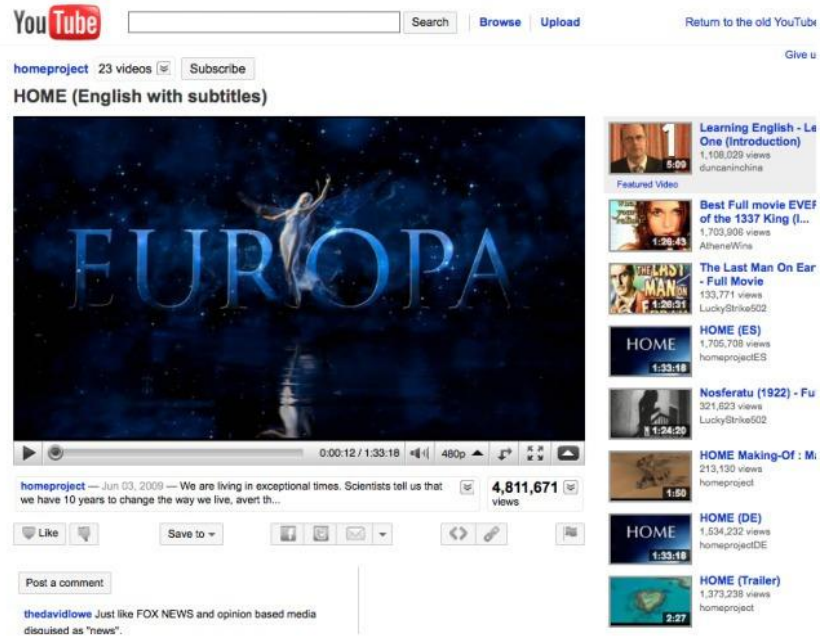
2011 was a year of changes for YouTube, big changes. In their 2009 book, *Youtube*, Jean Burgess and Joshua Green described YouTube as an entity that “launched without knowing exactly what it was for,” and “that it can be almost whatever its various participants want it to be” (110). In January of 2011, the YouTube team posted on their official blog that “the homepage in its current form doesn’t mean much to most of you, and could be more personally relevant” (YouTube Official Blog). A rather misleading statement considering the reconstruction, the largest, most dramatic interface redesign since its 2005 debut, drastically changed the way a content creator was able to express themselves on their channel. By the summer of 2011, Google, YouTube’s owner since the 2006 acquisition, had decided for them. And its new direction, social media, was clearly expressed in the layout of the new YouTube homepage.

Eric Eldon, of *TechCrunch*, reports: “The goal is better personalized video discovery and viewing, with a notable emphasis on social features. Think of the changes as the latest example of Google’s campaign to create a unified social layer for all of its products.” Other sources commented, too, on Google’s new mission for YouTube. Janko Roettgers of *GigaOm*, observed that the design, and therefore, the new homepage, was “YouTube’s answer to the rise of third-party curation through platforms like Facebook and Twitter.” YouTube estimated that (in 2011) they had around 200 million visits to the old homepage daily, but over 3.5 billion videos were viewed each day—from other

venues, mainly social media (gigaom.com). The videos were the same, but the way people were accessing them was not. This new interface design was a way to make YouTube more a part of Google, as well as respond to the way viewers were using the social media sites, such as Facebook, to watch videos. It was also a way to ensure users had to navigate it more like a social media site and for longer periods of time.

Compare the old version and the experimental. Many previous options, such as “Videos Being Watched Now,” have been removed. The column in the right lists recommended and related videos. Even the masthead on the top is slightly less busy (see Figures below).

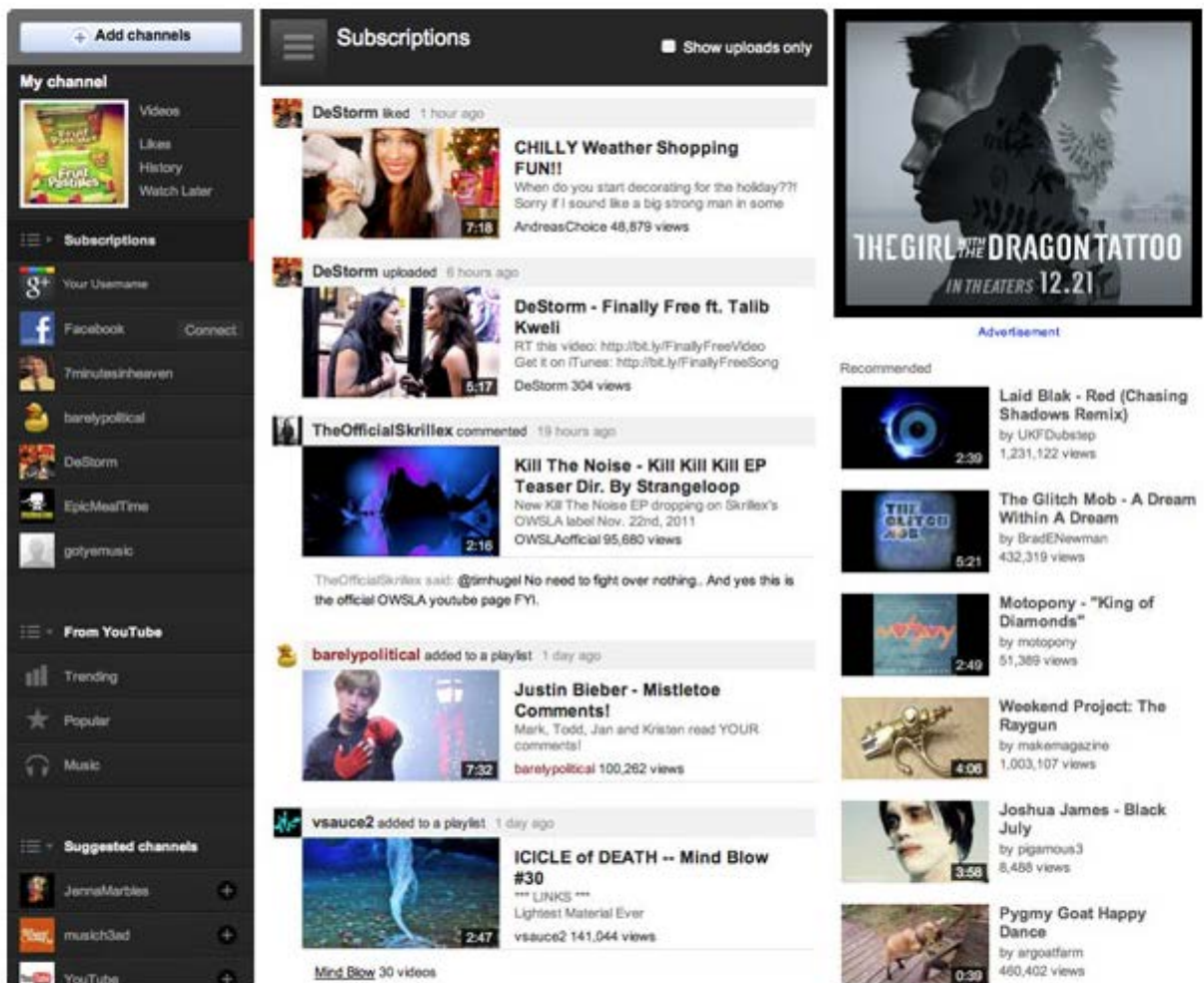




The new layout design is evidence in itself of the heavy emphasis on social media. It maneuvers the user into social media activity. “It’s interesting to notice that the new homepage and the new channels are built around feed views and activity streaming to make YouTube even more social,” writes Alex Chitu in a December 2011 post on his blog, *Google Operating System, Unofficial News and Tips about Google*. Part of Google’s plan was to make YouTube more “sticky”. While the video is smaller, the area below it is less cluttered with options, and rather than searching for the next video, the viewer has a pre-selected column from which to choose. With every video comes a new array of choices for the next, and the next, and the next. In theory, a user need never leave YouTube at all.

As seen in the figure below, Google+ and Facebook are prominent links in the left navigation column where various filters such as Subscriptions, Trending and Popular are available. User activity shows up in the middle of the page and recommendations

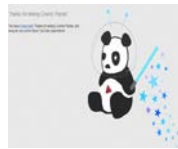
(rumored to be the results of an algorithm), appear on the right. Advertisements dominate the upper right hand corner as well. Considering that Westerners read from left to right, the strategy of social media at the beginning of an eye placement and an advertiser at the end, is obvi



The new layout is no longer a venue to broadcast, but to *share*, and like familiar social media sites such as Facebook and Google+ (strategically placed). *Wall Street Journal's*, Tom Loftus, notes that: "Making Google+ a prominent link on re-designed YouTube pages also integrate videos with G0oogle's [sic] social networking efforts.

Earlier this month, Google added a small YouTube icon to every Google+ page, making it easier for members to access and share YouTube videos.” Users now perform communicative acts often associated with social media from the Feed tab, such as Liking a video, Commenting on a video, Subscribing to a Channel, Favoriting a video, Uploading a video, and Adding a video to a playlist can potentially appear on a user’s homepage as well (Eldon). This change leads users to ask, “*What does my channel say about me, and how can it entertain and benefit you?*” and to then act accordingly.

YouTube’s new homepage was heavily influenced by feedback on the beta testing



of the design, code-named, Cosmic Panda, which allowed users to opt-in and try the new design.



This figure shows what Cosmic Panda looked like to testers in July of 2011.

Abundant confusing choices (the old version) replaced with fewer, slicker choices, reinforced the purpose of the leaner and more simplified look: keep the content creators' and viewers' focus on watching videos. According to Ben Parr, in a 2010 *Mashable* article: "The new design focuses on getting you to watch more videos, no matter what." The rhetoric of the homepage layout is obviously meant to persuade the viewer to remain on YouTube.

Another way the new homepage evidenced a more social media-orientation was the heavily promoted shift in focus from creator to content. Users could no longer personalize their channels with the random, free-for-all, decorative construction they had employed before. After the interface change was launched, they were required to set up new homepages (the new page was not nearly as customizable as the old one) which

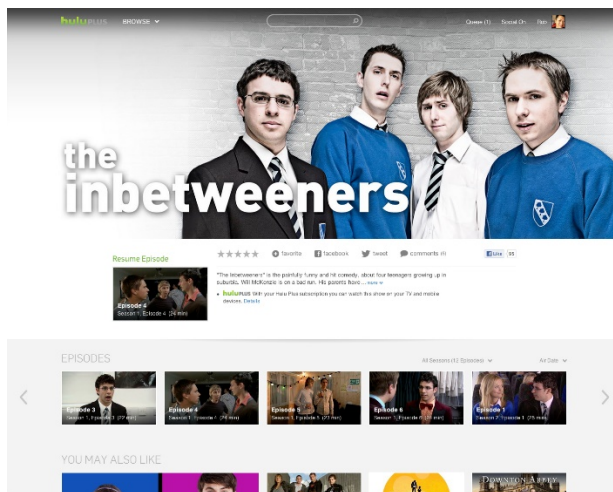
meant they would review their old page and possibly add or delete channels to which they subscribed. And, because uploads now appeared in the new layout, YouTube reminded content creators that viewers would “see how often you upload (your average number of videos per week), so remember to program consistently and regularly” (YouTube Creators Blog). Also, videos a user liked or favorited would show up in *their subscribers’* feeds. They were encouraged to “take care in your site activity and think about the overall experience you’re creating for them.” Rather than broadcasting yourself, the YouTube Creator’s blog admonished that “it’s about **more than just the videos** you upload” [emphasis mine] (YouTube Creators Blog). The tagline, “Broadcast Yourself,” was removed from the logo. YouTube had become a place where users created a persona based on content, created by others, which they uploaded. A user no longer showed who they were, or wanted to be perceived as, with their own pictures and graphics, but alluded to it by their upload and subscription choices. They were now known by what they offered their viewers, not what they told them. A more primary individuality was subsumed by a more secondary expression. The new layout offered no other choice.

The interface change also began to compete with another social medium. By “putting channels front and center in an attempt to become the Internet’s answer to cable TV,” posited Roettgers (GigaOm). (There was a reason they were named “channels” in the first place.) Proponents of the new pro social media interface asserted that any YouTube channel might make a good TV channel. Shishir Mehrotra, YouTube VP of Product Development, predicted at the time of the interface change, December 2011, “that distinctions between traditional TV channels and YouTube content channels would eventually become irrelevant” (GigaOm).

We can also look at the layouts of successful internet TV sites, such as NBC-owned



Hulu, and find similarities.



YouTube has the video screen, the Thumbs Up/Down button, Comments, and suggested videos along the right. Hulu Plus features an image from the TV show, which becomes the screen when the episode is watched, share options below: Facebook, Like on Facebook, Twitter, and Comments, a ribbon of other episodes, and below that another ribbon, “You May Also Like.” The caption below the video YouTube posted on December 1, 2011, giving a “tour” of the new homepage promises to show you how to create “your own, personal, customizable YouTube Channel line-up,” almost as though users will now become their own mini-networks (YouTube Creators Blog).

While the homepage was the result of feedback from research such as Cosmic Panda and earlier iterations of YouTube, for most users it was simply a new layout which they had to accept. Instead, the new layout predicated by YouTube's desire to stay in keeping with major social media sites required users to embrace their new philosophy of "content above all" manifested in the new layout. Many did not care for it at all. There was a considerable backlash against the new homepage. Blogs, articles, Op-Eds, and even YouTube videos railed against the new and called for the return of the old. The YouTube team, however, in a January 2011 blog post regarding the beta testing process, asserted: "While not everyone loved it, most people thought the new homepage was better than the old homepage" (YouTube Official Blog). And, Ian Maude, internet analyst at Enders Analysis, told the BBC: "The trouble with the kind of instant reaction is that most of the people who post their comments are those with extreme reactions, and their yearning for the old design will probably dissipate as they get used to it" (BBC.com).

Clearly, Google was not overly concerned with users' post-change reactions. Again, though beta testers had had some input, the choice that a major interface change would occur was made by Google long before testing began. Google/YouTube made the final decisions that predicated the overhaul, and then implemented them. In the beginning the new look was optional, but after six months, the roll out was global, and YouTube as a whole changed for good.

YouTube's 2011 interface change, from light-hearted, often unrelated, content creator uploaded videos, to the clean, streamlined, content-centered social media site was the single biggest change to YouTube thus far. It was a carefully planned, intensely researched maneuver to not only transform the look and function of the site, through its homepage layout, but also to alter the way content creators and viewers—or, at least the

way they navigated the site. It might even be safe to posit that YouTube's dramatic change was an indicator that all media was already social by 2011, and social media platforms such as Google, Facebook, and YouTube were collectively responding to this cultural shift by becoming more and more alike, and more and more connected.

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Reflection 5—Eureka! Discovering the Scholarly Narrative

This narrative is a very recent paper, the first one I wrote for my class, *Narrative Ways of Knowing*. The assignment was to tell the story of a teaching or writing moment. Mine came from a lesson I taught on “Students’ Right to Their Own Language”. Anyone in the field of Composition is familiar with this, especially the resolution issued by the NCTE in 1973, in which they “affirm the students’ right to their own patterns and varieties of language – the dialects of their nurture or whatever dialects in which they find their own identity and style,” and how “scholars long ago denied the myth of a standard American dialect” (NCTE).

So, while I was teaching them that Standard American English did not exist, but I still somehow had to hold them to a standard when I graded their papers, I was also trying to instill in them the (Hail, Freire!) knowledge that the world was theirs to name and to name it in the way they chose. (Freire’s influence is more than just overlapping; he continues to influence my teaching, and most likely always will). I wrote to figure out why it was important to me: “I do believe writing can empower and even liberate students, and that they should be able to do it in their own voices, their own language. I believe in this very strongly; but I didn’t necessarily believe that it was my place, my business, to teach it to them in a first year writing class” (“Marginalizing”). I wrote to explain to them why I was teaching it to them. I asked them to write responses to everything we talked about: marginalization, white privilege, discrimination, and othering.” We all wrote to explore and understand: “*13 October, 2014- I just don’t want my students to think I am pushing my own agenda on them. I want them to know how powerful language is and that they can control that, not the other way around (though that is often the case)*” (Downs).

It was important to include this current piece in this portfolio because it a story, a narrative, but it is one told from my perspective as a teacher, or, more to the point, a graduate teaching assistant in his first semester as teacher of record. The inner struggle I had regarding this lesson was also, in part, me adjusting to another identity, myself as teacher. *“06 September, 2014- My gut is telling me that I need to talk to one of my professors... and sort this out”* (“Marginalizing”). I wasn’t completing assignments anymore; I was giving them. The scholar-practitioner was practicing *for real*. Definitely another of Bruner’s turning points.

Writing in a genre in which I was so comfortable made a remarkable difference in the way I felt about the work. I wasn’t concerned with its scholarliness. I was more concerned with telling the story in such a way that it presented my struggles with the lessons. I felt secure in my position and my voice; I knew the scholarliness would follow if the narrative was effective.

Jeffery Downs

Dr. Becky Jackson

Narrative Ways of Knowing

27 February 2015

Marginalizing as Teaching: a Visit to the NEW University

Let me tell you about something, to try and make sense of it. Perhaps you will find something in it I am too close to see.

The truth is I wanted learning moments, and teaching moments, and creating and sharing knowledge. *Don't all teachers?* I never wanted to be, or expected to be, a hero or a savior. *Does any teacher?* So, why did I feel so adamant about my students realizing they were oppressed, or privileged? Why did I need to teach them something I had been adamantly against when I studied it in my composition theory class?

It seems so long ago, as I recall it to tell you about it, but it was only four months ago, last semester, also my *first* semester as teacher of record. I was teaching two sections of College Writing I, or first year English. I had studied about the issue of students' right to their own language, read the resolution by the NCTE in 1974, was a proponent of Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. I do believe writing can empower and even liberate students, and that they should be able to do it in their own voices, their own language. I believe in this very strongly; but I didn't necessarily believe that it was my place, my business, to teach it to them in a first year writing class.

I'd felt a lot of pushback about this when we studied it in my class. I said to my professor, "I don't know that I feel it is my place to teach them about these things I know

I wouldn't want someone to tell me what to think. It's not their business, and my students' business is not mine to meddle in, either," or something like that.

I realize now I was reacting as 1. Myself, who never likes to be told what to do, much less what to think, and 2. From a student's perspective. (If you know me at all, you know I can be stubborn.)

Over the summer, when I was preparing my syllabus, I began re-thinking the issue. Suddenly, I saw it as an opportunity to teach them not only about movements in Rhetoric and Composition, but also as a way to encourage the critical thinking that composition, and a college education, should foster. I also, began to resonate with, rather than resist, the empowerment I felt it would engender in my students, as writers, and as young adults. I responded in a very emotional way as a teacher, but more so as a member of an oppressed group. (If you know me at all, you know I sometimes do a complete 180 once the stubborn cools down.)

Do all teachers have these feelings, these questions, these doubts?

I spent a week on SRTOL. We began by talking about white privilege, dialect, language, race, and other marginalized groups, such as African Americans, Latin@s, members of less than mainstream religions, and LGBT people. It seemed to me that they were only getting it on the surface. My students understood white privilege, but only to a degree. They knew it existed, but didn't feel it was a "bad thing." I just didn't see the kind of impact I thought it would have. By my students, I mean my white students, who made up the majority of the class. The African American and the Hispanic students seldom spoke up. I never called on them. I didn't want to put them on the spot, to "other" them by asking them to speak on behalf of "their people." I never spoke out as a gay man. I did not feel it appropriate as the teacher. I also feared what they might say: "You're just

pushing your own agenda... I'm a Christian and I object to this; you are persecuting me by bringing up this topic...I don't want to talk about this stuff; this is an English class!" (The scars of growing up in the South, in the 70s, are still raw at times, despite the out and proud, vocal man I am today. I wish I could be more open sometimes, but ultimately, I shouldn't have to bring my personal life into it. *Should I?*)

I began the last day by discussing the definitions of **marginalization, hegemony, cultural assimilation** (I also talked about the willing suspension of disbelief because I was taking them to an imaginary place.)

That place was *The New University*.

Welcome to the NEW University

I told them they had all just transferred to a new school, with an explicit message:

"All students are welcome here, regardless of socioeconomic status, race, orientation, religion, or creed. We are here to support you in your educational goals.

The NEW University is where learning through dedication and study is paramount,"

But, the implicit one was very different:

“HOWEVER, if you are habitually tardy or absent to class, an athlete, a sports fan, male, a player of video/computer games, of drinking and pot smoking, a gambler, without a part-time job in addition to your studies, text more than a few times a day, live on the Internet, etc. be prepared to be remediated to a developmental class, sent to the writing center, graded more severely, and offered no support from this NEW University because these are NOT the values of the University, and by extension, its founders’ culture. Any or all of these things may be a part of your heritage, culture, personal culture, or belief system, but they do not reflect those of the majority of this academy’s creators/administrators. These things will be tolerated only in small amounts in social settings, but should never appear in, or influence, any of your academic work.”

I did my best to make them feel what it was like to be devalued and marginalized by “taking away” things they value, things that were a part of their everyday lives. I “hit them where they lived” to make them feel what it was like to be judged and devalued by a dominant culture. One student, a young woman, said she wasn’t quite sure what I meant. I explained that if, in this mythical place, she wrote too much about the unapproved subjects, she would be sent to the writing center for remediation, for *fixing*. I looked her in the eye and said, “You will be remediated. You will be sent to be fixed.” Her eyes, and mouth, opened wide with understanding. Her response was that one teachers relish: “Oooohhhh!” Her light bulb went off! Several light bulbs went off that day. The responses they wrote were good. Most of them expressed understanding of the issues, but sadly, most of them either said they had no solution, or that it was “just the way it was, so why not go with it?”

But I began to question why it was so important for *me* to teach them this. I had convinced myself because of my own experiences and what I have seen in the world (from the vantage point of a 50 year old man, not a young adult in 2015) that they were oppressed whether they knew it or not. And for some reason, I felt myself especially trying to reach the Hispanic kids. I could see in their faces of the African American students that they understood somehow more easily what I was trying to say. The Latin@ students either did not feel oppressed, or were just too uncomfortable to say so. Was I trying to save them, uplift them, open their eyes?

I know I was. I felt the same way I had felt while at a demonstration against bullying in schools. I needed to teach this lesson, just in case even one of them had experienced, or was experiencing, oppression or marginalization. I also remember thinking that if it wasn't happening now, then maybe I was preparing them for what would most likely happen later in "the real world."

Was I trying too hard?

Did I *need* them to be oppressed? Did I end up convincing some of them they were, when, in fact, perhaps they were not? *Was this part of what a teacher is supposed to do?*

After reading their responses I know I did not have that deep of an impact. I also know I wasn't wrong for teaching them, but I couldn't stop rethinking why something I had resisted so defiantly as a student, had become very important to me as a teacher. I guess what I was really wrestling with was whether I taught it for them, or for me. I was worried I might have been a villain rather than a hero. *I shouldn't be either, should I?*

But, I am not a hero or a villain; I am a teacher. *What, exactly then, is a teacher supposed to be?*

As I look back at the Power Point for that day, I see why I included the definitions of marginalization and hegemony. I also know I included cultural assimilation specifically for the Latin@ students. I think it was so important for me to tell them, without saying it outright, not to give up their culture, not to try to “be white.” (I also know I did it because I had to wait until I was in college, 18 or 19, to find my people and become a part of the LGBT culture.) I can look back now and see that I was learning, too, as a teacher in his first semester. We were both, my students and I, wrestling with the same issues, but from different angles.

I have been journaling since 1974. I recall, record, and reflect on everything in my life on a daily basis, so I know all these things about why the lesson was so important to me. What I don’t know is if I was right to teach it the way I did.

Shouldn’t my life experiences give me more to offer my students?

At one point, the day we were navigating the halls of the New University, I overheard one of my students, in a very perturbed and angry tone, say under her breath, “Why would you even teach something like this in a writing class?” I know the student well. She didn’t mean me personally; I could tell she just wondered why this subject would be brought up in a writing class. This prompted me to write a response to explain why we read the essays from the reader, as well as some of the others, such as “Coalition Pedagogy,” by Dr. Octavio Pimentel, of Texas State University, and why we covered topics such as SRTOL and white privilege, in a writing class.

This is what I wrote:

1. *Why does the reader contain essays such as this?*
2. *Why do we read them?*

3. *What do they show us about the power and uses of language, and in particular writing? (It's not just the subject matter, but also the WAY in which the author crafts the piece, that we as students studying writing must consider).*

Ultimately, because your writing and critical skills will improve only when the challenges you are given are higher, broader, and ask you to stretch your thinking and widen your view, to look at a reading from more than one point of view. Your personal beliefs and position to the writer's thesis/argument are not being challenged or questioned, only how you, as a writer, approach the work, and then, in turn, your work.

To examine a work critically then asks you, the reader-soon-to-be-writer to consider your options more objectively, and then begin to craft your writing (in our case, answering a prompt based on the readings) from an informed, thought out, supported place, not just a surface, emotional reaction.

This is NOT, however, to say that your passions, beliefs, and experiences should be abandoned or are devalued, far from it (at least in expository writing). These are the things that inform and predicate your writing, just as they are/were for the authors in the readings.

The things we covered in the first few weeks of class (e.g. page 109 in the BH [the section of the Bedford Handbook on reading and writing critically]) are there to be used and built upon, not read and forgotten. They are tools to employ every time you read a new work and, therefore, craft better work, as you become better writers. Look at page 109. Did you ask these questions as you read and annotated? Are you using the tools the BH gives you?

I meant everything I wrote. But again, I asked myself if I was trying to enlighten them as to my reasoning to explain the lesson so that they would understand its

importance and why we were covering it, or to convince myself I had done the right thing, or, more to the point, in the right way.

Should I have told them I was a graduate student and this was my first semester?

Would it have made a difference if I had explained to them my concerns about these issues and how maybe we could figure them out together?

Will I teach the lesson again next fall? Yes, I believe I will, but I also think I will go about it differently, more explicitly, and less fearfully. Because, after reliving it to retell it to you, after reexamining my actions and my motives, I can say without a doubt, that while I will make alterations, the lesson is still important to be learned. (If you know me at all, you know I'll stick with it until I feel I come as close to right as I can get.)

So, tell me; now that you've heard the story. What do you think? Do you see something I missed?

Am I asking too many questions?

Reflection 6—A Storyteller's Gift

This final selection is the most recent paper I wrote for *Narrative Ways of Knowing*. It is based on an interview, and connected to the class's first paper, the one you just read regarding my teaching "Students' Right to Their Own Language." This piece mimics the recursive nature of my thesis in a way. Much like I reflect and write about my own writing, it winds back on itself; it is a narrative based on an interview that is a story about telling a story (a play), storytellers, and storytelling itself.

At this point, it occurs to me how *Narrative Ways of Knowing*, is so aptly named, because while deep and critical reflection on my writing, my constant writing about my writing, was the tool by which I became acculturated into my program and discourse community, narrative is the way I came to know it, and to tell it.

This piece yields yet another writerly voice (one that, too, is part of this entire work) that of narrator. Like autoethnography, I, as the interviewer/researcher/writer, and a "character" in the narrative, but it is not my story. It is Judy's story of something that happened to her, but at the same time, my expectations and observations are there as well. This is overlapping of a different kind. I am writing as a different self, even exploring myself ("Where I had been uncomfortable with my own inner issues... the *idea of a story* I was hoping for... I wonder if all teachers go through this kind of thing") but it is not the main narrative; it is one of several that support the overall exploration of conflicts teachers often encounter.

It also represents a more acculturated overall voice in my writing as a whole. Whereas my previous papers are examples of my studies and experiences combining in my writing in ways best described with words like "braiding," or "weaving," a bringing together of still separate strands, this paper, (and this thesis, I believe) reflect a more

complex synthesis of all the voices I have embodied up to now. The singularity of voice my earlier papers suggest has been replaced with a richer voice, one of writer who is more seamlessly scholar, essayist, educator, and interviewer (I will remind my readers I used to interview for a living). The piece is like this, too. It is a blend of my history with Judy, our respective backgrounds, when they were the same, but how they very now very different, of teaching, of doubt, of conflict, and all these elements, these stories, synthesize into the narrative that follows.

I make no claim to perfection, but in this last piece I can see a writer, a rhetor, who knows who he is now, even though he still doubts, and reflects, and writes about it: “10 April, 2015- *I’m a good writer. I enjoyed writing the last time I worked on this. And still, I’m sabotaging; I’m full of fear and anger*” (Downs). I see a scholar who is making meaning, who is contributing, whose work has value to his field and to the academy.

Looking at this piece through this lens makes me wonder, to hypothesize?, that maybe stories and reflecting on them is all there really is; maybe all writing is just a way to re-story-- which requires reflection-- the world to make sense out of the narrative of ourselves and the myriad selves with which ours intersect, within ourselves and without. I could say this about *Bootstraps*; I could say this about the articles I have researched; and I could certainly say this about my own writing.

Jeffery Downs

Dr. Becky Jackson

Narrative Ways of Knowing

26 March 2015

A Storyteller's Gift

We went to some places I wasn't expecting, but I was hoping for that, so thank you. (End of interview)

I am a storyteller. I have a Theatre background, but it really comes from my family tradition of "visiting." If you grew up in the South, you know what I am talking about. Friends and family gather, usually over or after food, and talk. They catch up, they gossip, but eventually, the short, raveled comments and bits of news begin to spin into yarns, and stories are told.

I have a dear friend, my oldest friend actually, whom I have known for, well, let's just say a bit over thirty years. We met in junior college, in the Theatre, we are both from traditional Southern families, and we still, to this day, get together at least once a month to "visit." She's a storyteller, too. In fact she has a PhD in some sort of textual criticism, or something, I could never remember the exact title. She also owns and directs her own children's theater. This is not a company that acts out fairy tales, or happy musicals that introduce children to the letter "A," or reek with outmoded moralities. They produce new and innovative children's plays that teach through the stories they tell. She has also taught at colleges and universities. She's a very accomplished woman.

So, here we are, she a doctor, I, a grad student (we were both over-achievers, but she always achieved over me), and we are both teachers, who have taught classes involving writing. Like fine yarn, our separate strands have come back together and still

share many common threads (permit me to be a bit trite). And, because we are both teachers, I thought perhaps she might have a story similar to the one I last told...

That last story was about a time when I was uncomfortable with a lesson I had taught, one that caused me to question not only the subject, but also my motives for teaching it. Judy had some discomfort, some moments of consternation, too, but hers turned out to be quite different otherwise. This delighted me, because I didn't really want to hear my own story again. Where I had been uncomfortable with my own inner issues, she had been uncomfortable due to outside pressure. Where I was admonishing my students to stand up for their right to tell their own stories in their own voices, she was defending her position to tell a story not her own, from a culture not her own...

However, she began with another story altogether, one that I suspect still "bothers" her to an extent. It was a place we needed to traverse before we took another trail (one I will confess appealed more to the storyteller in me). She had told me about trouble in the classroom, about an overeager TA, whose zeal had caused some strain in the classroom.

Well, no... uncomfortableness in the classroom... Your situation was very different from mine. Mine was one where I was uncomfortable with whether or not I should be teaching the lesson, the actual lesson—

Um hmm...

But... yours wasn't so much the lesson, but how you navigated it through the classroom with this other teacher, so... my broad question, yes... uncomfortableness—
(from the interview)

In a broad sense, it covered what I was looking for, in that it was "uncomfortable" and she had questioned herself as the teacher, but, I must be honest, it wasn't exactly

what I wanted. I didn't really have any expectations that she would have a story exactly like mine, but, this was... well... I wanted more, as a listener, you know? But, I don't feel I was so much biased, as much as I had created a story, or the *idea of a story* I was hoping for. I didn't expect it, but I *did* hope for it.

Because this is, uh... I'm looking for teaching stories...

The tale that followed, was a story about telling a story, and agency, and ownership of stories. It was delicious. It was far better than what I hoped for or anticipated. It was then I realized that Judy's first story was something she needed to talk about, to get off her chest. It was important to her because it was hers. What came next made it worth the wait. By being patient enough to let her talk through her struggle with the TA, we got to a place where that was better for me, and better for her, I think, because it was one of discomfort and conflict, but one with a—yes, I am going to say it—happy ending.

Well, now, I did... there's... the one thing I can think of when I was REALLY uncomfortable with the subject matter, um... We did a piece—

It's only a half hour show, so... No. please continue...

We did a piece a few years back about the Trail of Tears.

Yes, I know, the Cherokee trail of tears.

Yes. And, um, there were quite a few people that said we didn't really have the right to do that because we ourselves, uh, were not... actually, the specific story we were working with was a Choctaw story, and, um, so, you know, I did have some moments when we would be leading classroom activities in elementary schools around that subject matter when, you know, people didn't think we had the right to do that...

Because?

Because we were a bunch of white women.

Because you weren't--

Yeah—

... Native American you didn't have the right to tell that story...

Right. It wasn't---

...to interpret that story.

Yeah. So, um...

How did you feel about that?

Um... <pause> I felt... I did worry about it, until I went to visit with one of the Choctaw storytellers...

Um.

And asked about it.

Oh! Tell me about that, tell me about that!

And I got permission. Basically, he said what—he said, he said the Choctaw tradition is once a Choctaw storyteller tells you the story the story is yours.

Oh! They gave you agency...

Yes! That... that the story becomes yours, and because they want the story told. The story is more important than the teller in their tradition. So, what he said we need to do, to get around that is I need to formally gift the story to you.

Oh! Tell me about that!

And, so, we had a—I got-- I borrowed a theatre, and we had an evening where all of our board, the people on our board of directors, all of the actors, as well as some of his—his name was Tim Tingle, is the Choctaw storyteller, some of his friends.. We all came together, he brought his drum, he wore traditional clothing, and, um, he told the

story, which is the heart of our play and, um, did a lot of really beautiful drumming and singing that went with it, and at the end of it, gifted the story to us. And said, this is, you know... now that you have heard the story, the story must be retold. And it is yours to retell. And so, I never felt uncomfortable anymore after that because I could honestly say, “Well, you know, I used to feel that way; I used to feel like maybe I didn’t, um, have the right to tell this story because it’s not of my culture, I’m not of that culture, but, um, Tim Tingle gifted it to us, and um, charged us basically to go forward and tell the story. Then he also took us to, um, the Choctaw reservation in Oklahoma, and we participated there for a two-day—

Who is we?

It was me and the playwright, and one of our actors... went and did a two-day workshop, um, with some of the members of the tribe, talking about the stories that we were using. And they taught us some dances that we could use in the production.

So, you really became bona fide...

Yeah!

...after that.

Yeah, yeah!

Um, and, when I first called Tim, and said Tim, I’ve got this problem. People are saying this isn’t my story to tell, he’s like, “Arrgh! Oh, my God, are they a bunch of multi-culturists?” And I was like, I think they might be... but, you know, they’re everywhere! You know, and you do want to be respectful; you don’t want to co-opt someone else’s story. And, I think sometimes in multi-cultural teaching, um, you can get into that, you know? Um, but he said no, that’s not the Choctaw way. He said, now if you were dealing with some other tribe, maybe, but we just want these stories perpetuated.

Well, I guess if they didn't, they wouldn't tell them... to you.

Right. They would only tell them to other members of their tribe. (30:00) But, um...

That's a wonderful way that that pushback... look at what it led to for you—

Yes.

--the learning experience that it led to for you. So, how will you... So, it didn't make you uncomfortable anymore... I just wonder, uh... how you think of yourself before as a director, who is the big storyteller—

Umhm...

--in charge of the storytelling as a director and as a teacher, um... how you felt before and after in that role, how you positioned yourself to the story, after you went through that process. Did you feel like you really owned a part of it?

I did. I did.

Because they gave you that permission.

Yeah, and, and, because... I always feel like if the production is good there's something of me... in it.

Invested?

Invested in it...

So, there we were; she a doctor, I a grad student, sitting at the table, going over schoolwork, just like we did about 34 years ago. The interview was over, and as usual, we ended our "visit" with laughter.

You think you go so far in life, you think that things change so much, but when you step back, you can see that in many ways they don't change at all, or the changes are only on the surface. We were still friends, sitting at the table, laughing over something

ridiculous that I said, and though our stories were different in so many ways, they were both stories of teachers who were learning through their teaching, navigating our separate journeys, through different waters, but somehow with experiences that spoke to both of us... maybe to all of us teachers. I wonder if all teachers go through this kind of thing, and if they do, does it change. How? When?

We learn to become teachers, but we're really all just learners. I think everything we teach to our students contains a lesson for us. Everything circles back on itself.

III. RESOLUTION

To get to the fruit of a tree, you have to go out on a limb. –Shirley MacLaine

Interrogating My Narrative

As I write this narrative of my acculturation into the discourse community of my program, I think of all my studies as stories really, small stories that are strands of the larger one. And here the strands are gathered up in this thesis. My work, my writing, represents those strands; analyzing my reflections is how I draw them together to make meaning from them. Murray states that: "Those of us who write have only a few topics" (67). Well, I found four prominent topics, or themes, within my reflections: the importance of reflection itself (to my own writing and that of colleagues), issues of self-doubt and worthiness (for my own writing and that of colleagues), the overlapping, or combining of knowledge from all my areas of study, and a shift in the perception of my many writerly "selves."

Reflection Itself

The importance of reflection to my work, this thesis, and my life, really (as in keeping a journal), should be evident by now. And it shows in my reflections, and now my reflections on them, as I analyze them. I have stated numerous times that reflection is the tool by which I acculturated myself in to my graduate program. The constant revising and writing to answer my own questions became the impetus for this thesis. It is the most constant phenomena that occurs in my data. I was very aware of the benefits of this deep reflective process, and what it meant to me, and allowed me to do in my coursework, my teaching, and my thesis. My research indicated that the academy considers it an important skill, but for mostly beginning writers. I knew its importance to *this* graduate writer, but

could not speak for others. Because of this, I inquired about reflection among my colleagues. Their differing perspectives on the importance of reflection, in a way constitute a counter-narrative that helps illustrate its importance in mine.

I wanted to make my narrative richer by extending the conversation. I had become very close to others in my cohort, and students from other programs within the English department, especially Technical Communications, so I decided to ask them some questions about reflection, acculturation, and support.

I contacted several members in my cohort, my program, and another program within the English department. I received six responses. Five of the respondents were female; one was male. Four were from my program, MA in Rhetoric and Composition, and two were from the MA in Technical Communications program. Both are two-year programs within the English department at Texas State University. Three students were in their second years; three were in their first.

I asked them about the role of reflection and their awareness of it when writing. All but one stated they were not aware of it during writing, "...once I begin writing, I do little reflection," but usually before, such as brainstorming, or before and after, such as when revising, "I rarely reflect except on the sentence-level," or "Reflection for me is more of a before and after the process of writing situation. I don't usually metacognitively [sic] think while writing because then I become too bogged down in trying to "get it right" that I end up not being able to write at all" (correspondence).

Only one stated: "Reflection has a role in everything I do... I'm almost constantly reflecting... I can't help but reflect." Another responded, "I'm constantly reflecting upon what I write... I don't edit as I go, but once I'm done writing, the wheels start turning and

I begin to reflect on what I just wrote... I never stop working in my head”
(correspondence).

I thought about everything I had written about learning to “be” a graduate student, what my friends had said about their use of reflection and their writing, and what it all might mean to other graduate students, navigating their ways through programs and trying to figure out what kind of writers they are, they should be, or even could be. With only a couple of exceptions, most of my colleagues did not perceive themselves as having an awareness, a mindfulness of, reflection as part of their writing processes. They seemed to be expressing what Schön would call reflection-in-knowing, not reflection-in-action. I tried to imagine myself doing this, or not doing it, I should say, and found I really couldn’t.

I believe, based on my own experience and this investigation, that constant reflection is vital to a graduate student’s evolution, as a writer, but as a member of his or her particular discourse community. Patricia Sullivan feels: “Graduate students must be able to reflect on their own work as developing scholars and critics, as members of a community who have an active role and stake in the knowledge generated” (298). Reflecting (continually questioning my work, and myself) on the work I was doing in my program, was the single most contributing factor in my acculturation to graduate school, because, as David Nentwick writes, “scholarship *is* writing, and the process of becoming an advanced-level academic write is simultaneously an acculturation into the discourse community of the academy” [emphasis his] (57).

I am reminded again of Tammy Spry’s sentiment that the doing of a thing is a part of the thing. The benefits of reflection certainly played a role in the construction of this

thesis; for as I analyzed what I had written, the study of my reflections was yielding deeper, thicker results, especially in light of my investigation of acclimating to a graduate program. I was stepping further back, and making more, what I believe to be, scholarly observations, not only about my writing, but also about the way I was approaching my thesis. My inner reader was becoming more objective, my inner writer was becoming sharper, and my thesis itself was becoming more than I had anticipated. The reflection involved in writing this thesis has shown a change in my concerns and what I look for when analyzing. I went from discussing reasons for choices I made in my writing, to theorizing about why and how I made them, and by extension, how other grads do as well. I felt I was performing the kind of reflection on reflection Schön talks about: "Clearly it is one thing to be able to reflect-in-action and quite another to be able to reflect on our reflection in action so as to produce a good verbal description of it; and it is still another thing to be able to reflect on the resulting description" (31).

The inward, recursive study and theorizing about my own work was yet another step in my acculturation. And, because it is at the end of my program, the capstone, I am sensing that it is the beginning of another stage, or stages. I have observed recently that teaching my classes, informal mentoring of first year students in my program, have taken on a new air. I think it also indicative of the potential (inevitable?) enculturation into a doctoral program. This reminds me of something else Patricia Sullivan says:

Composition scholarship has shown that to become a practitioner of a discipline, one must not only learn the discursive terms of that discipline but must participate in its discourse as a rhetor, as an author whose texts have the power to alter knowledge in that field." (298)

As I was writing my notes the other day, I considered the old phrase, “Practice makes perfect.” Could it really be as simple as that? I believe it is true. I think Schön would agree. However, I amended it slightly to reflect a lesson I have proven to myself in the construction of this project: “*Practiced* practice makes perfect.” At this point I can only say that I am doing my best to become just such a practitioner.

Fear and Loathing

I have discussed at length the issues of self-doubt and worthiness, most of which hinged on that word, “scholarly,” and all the frantic, unrealistic at times, expectations I placed upon myself. This theme shows more in my private journal entries and the reflections. At least, these are the most obvious sources, because I discuss them plainly. However, when I look back at the conclusions I drew about why I chose the topics I did, and even the lenses through which I crafted the papers at the beginning of my graduate studies, I see that the consternation over “playing it safe,” and “cheating” were motivated by these plaguing doubts and desire to be “scholarly.”

I experienced these self-doubts on October 3, 2013: “*It just doesn’t seem like I’m asking the scholarly questions,*” and later my first year, in March of 2014, “*I feel so inadequate because I don’t have a \$1M vocabulary and spout theory and drop names [of theorists] every time we cover something new*” (Downs). I had this idea of who I should be, and how I should perform that identity. I held myself up to this image. I equated not being able to be this person with failure. I had created an impossible narrative and fallen victim to it. I only began to see myself as a scholar (which I equated with success) who belonged in my program after talking to some of my instructors and reflecting on how they saw me and my work.

All of my misgivings, pitfalls, self-doubt, and eventually confidence stemmed from a single word, one I grappled with from the first assignment, in my first class, my first semester. That word was “scholarly.” The “S” word.

My first encounter with “scholarly” was in my Rhetorical Theory class: “30 August 2014- Everyone was so afraid of the Rhetoric class... it’s going to be a challenge... I think I’ll be a lot smarter for having taken it” (Downs). We were required to write “scholarly” responses, posts, on the week’s readings. We began by reading Aristotle. How was I supposed to respond in a scholarly way to *Aristotle*? I didn’t know what scholarly was, only something I was supposed to be doing: “04 September 2014- I couldn’t sleep, I’m so worried about these posts for my class. I’m afraid I wrote about what she doesn’t want; and I’m really afraid I’ll be embarrassed or look foolish in front of these kids.” (Downs). I stressed over this one, relatively minor, assignment for the entire week, something I was to repeat quite often, especially at the beginning of a new class or topic. I had all these textbooks, and mentors, and teachers, but (even at 50) felt like I was floundering. I didn’t know how to do what I needed to do, so I wrote about it in my journal, to try and figure it all out, to try and calm down, to try not to feel so inadequate:

“04 September 2014- ... the old anxiety of not being perfect from the beginning still haunts me... I’d better step back, calm down, take a breath, and realize that I got my BA two years ago, not 30, and the I do have plenty to offer, and that I am smart enough. I just wish I had someone to encourage me... to tell me that they believe in me.” (Downs)

I went on that entire September, writing about how I felt up and down, especially about being “scholarly,” about Rhetoric class and how I felt like I wasn’t doing enough, didn’t know enough, how I was physically ill, nauseated, many times. By the end of the month, when I began writing my first paper, the one about Abelard and Heloise, that appears in my “portfolio,” in Chapter Two: Complication, I felt better, more confident, because that paper gave me a chance to “*demonstrate my understanding of persuasion and rhetoric by using it*” as I wrote on September 18. I also spoke with my instructor about the posts, and that relieved a lot of the anxiety—for a while. Talking with my teachers and colleagues helped, but in all honesty, sometimes I just had to suffer alone, and constantly reflect on it, and write about it to work it out. I don’t think there is an easy answer to this grad school crisis of faith thing. So much of the confusion and anxiety came from the writing, the expectations, as well as the personal interpretations I applied, or tried to apply, to what those expectations meant, like that word “scholarly.” Talking about the writing, how to approach the writing, what to demand of myself in the writing, and what to look for in the writing often helped.

Instances of self-criticism and issues of self-worth came up for my peers, too: “I’m sure that reflection plays a big role in my writing, but it always feels like the immediate role is that of self-criticism,” a first year student commented, and that she “was extremely nervous about my writing at the beginning of graduate school.” Elizabeth Garza, Teresa Shellenbarger, and Diane Hunker examined scholarly writing in nursing PhD students in their 2012 study, “Developing as a scholarly writer: The experience of students enrolled in a PhD in nursing program in the United States.” They conclude that, “writing is an emotional process that triggers highly charged reactions... students express

doubts about the quality of their work... feel exposed and vulnerable... and suffer through the difficult work of writing” (273).

One colleague thought she was “reasonably certain [she] could do this,” when she entered graduate school, but in her second year said: “I did not realize how much actually engaging in graduate writing would change my brain and how I write. It really is different... a lot more structure and planning... tons more flexibility... everything around you is informed by the writing you are required to do. It's... life changing?” Another of the second-year students echoes this: “I thought I was an okay writer at the start of the program. I didn't think graduate writing would be that much different. It was drastically different and made me think about things like I never have before.”

Others were not quite as self-doubting. They remarked that “the writing I do is much more scholarly,” and “it wasn't the writing that I was concerned with; it was the reading;” or “I was worried about the load” (correspondence). Garza, et al, on a higher note, posit that the “cycle of pain leaves a lasting impression, but with eventual success, students begin to focus on the positive outcome and their accomplishments” (273). In a 1995 paper, “Learning to Write, Writing to Learn: a Study on Process-Oriented Writing in Graduate Education,” Peter Oliver observed that “students reported that they felt relief to know they were not the only ones with concerns about writing.” He also suggests that: “Providing students with an opportunity to voice their concerns (and listen to others)... appears to empower students... and may serve to motivate and increase students’ confidence in their writing skills” (7).

Connecting the Old and the New

As I studied my portfolio reflections, I saw was an awareness and appreciation of intersections and connections, of overlaps of knowledge from previously unconnected areas of study, such as Rhetoric and Costume History (which came together in my seminar paper). Being able to pull from, and make new meaning from, these different subjects was empowering. As I saw a larger purpose for all the seemingly unrelated subjects, I began to see myself in a different way. I was no longer just a student, a collector of knowledge, but a maker of it.

I discovered how these areas of academic work combined with other knowledge from my personal life informed my writing as a graduate student. I saw meaning in (a use for?) all my years of study and hard work when I was able to make new meaning for my graduate work. This awareness gave me a sense of stability. Realizing I had a knowledge base to pull from helped ground me in moments of doubt and insecurity about my scholarliness. I even doubted this though. As I have discussed previously, I felt almost like relying on previous knowledge was somehow cheating, that it wasn't worthy because it wasn't some astounding "new" discovery. Astounding? Perhaps not, but through later reflections, including these for this thesis, I was able to see how very valuable my other studies were to my new scholarship and that I *was* making discoveries and finding new meaning.

A Single, Confident Voice

Chase posits that "a central question revolves around which voice or voices researchers should use as they interpret and represent the voices of those they study" (58). As I observed the connections and new knowledge I was making by drawing upon

heretofore unrelated areas of study, such as metaphysics and writing centers, a thesis and a personal journal, I began to feel that the writerly selves I had embodied, that I had seen as separate, either as indications of where I was at in my own writerly evolution, or just to satiate a need for organization and separation to analyze, had blended. In fact, at this point, I would say that they are *aspects* of my overarching writerly identity, the storyteller, the metaphysician, the former journalist, journal keeper, and even the elusive scholar, were now one voice. The lines are no longer so distinct. The more situated I felt, the more secure I felt with my scholarship, the less I needed my “chorus”. Now, I employ them rather than embody them; they are not separate personas. I credit this to the shift in my perception of my acculturation.

Resolved

I place my discussion of this last theme, here, at the end of this section, as a way of rounding them all out, because it is another product of reflection. It is the conflict between growing as a scholar within the academy, by adhering to its imperative to draw so heavily on the scholarship of others, and my desire to grant myself authority in my own work. I believe this struggle is born out of the constant reflection and writing I have practiced for over four decades, making it an aspect of my age, as well as previous life experience. Having made use of it professionally compelled me to do the same as a student.

Throughout this paper, especially in my analysis, I quoted from my papers in the reflections preceding them to illustrate what I saw. In this instance, a single line from one of the reflections expresses this theme of friction: “I wrote this paper; the people I quoted did not” (A Rhetoric Unspoken”).

Concluding My Narrative

In this thesis I have investigated the role of reflection in my own acculturation into a graduate program and presented it to my readers in the form of a scholarly personal narrative with an element of analytical autoethnography. To look for answers to these questions, I examined three sources of data: reflections on my work, my personal journals, and informal observations from others in my program of Rhetoric and Composition, as well as a sister program within my English department, Technical Communications.

I created the first source specifically for this study by compiling a portfolio of work that I believed represented my best writing in graduate school and also served to help tell the story of my acculturation into it. To further tell this story and to generate data I could analyze, I crafted an Introduction to the portfolio and reflective pieces before each paper within it. As I looked at the use of reflection for my thesis, I was using reflection to do so with these introductory pieces; then reflected on them again in Chapter Three, where I looked for themes that emerged about my writing and my acculturation.

My second source of data came from the personal journals I have kept since entering my program in August of 2013. I used excerpts from them throughout the thesis for several reasons. Mainly, I inserted them in strategic places to support the points I was making, as illustrations, of what I was experiencing as I wrestled with issues of worthiness, scholarliness, and success in my program. I say I used them strategically, and by this I mean that I did not put them in chronological order, like the papers in my portfolio are arranged, but pulled entries that help make my point regardless of date. Some were complete; some were excerpts.

Even though this was a personal narrative, an autoethnography of sorts, I felt it was necessary to bring in other voices. This resulted in the third source of data, observations from the others I mentioned above, from my program and another within my English department. I asked them very informally by email actually, about their use of reflection in their writing, its importance, how they felt about graduate writing, and what kind of support they felt they had for it.

Out of all of us, I was the only one who used reflection the way that I do. Like the Trickster, I am ever mindful of it, observe it as I write, I am doing it now, and try to leverage it to make my writing better. It never goes away; I am writing in my head whether I am at the keyboard or not. We all seem to share those common concerns of worthiness, situatedness, and confidence. From all the reading I have done for this thesis, I can say it seems to be common among the majority of graduate students. Perhaps my readers can validate this, too? I also see the value of journal keeping because it is the method that honed my reflection; it is how I reflect, it is “a dialogue of thinking and doing by which I become more skillful” (Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner*, 31).

Implications and Recommendations

Susan Chase, whom I have quoted several times, says that, “[c]ontemporary narrative researchers occupy a different social and historical location. Under the auspices of the narrative turn, they reject the idea that the small number of narratives they present must be generalizable to a certain population” (78). In other words, she is saying that narrative researchers do not necessarily need to look for implications; it’s not that type of research. But, in this instance, the rhetor in me would argue. I, as a non-traditional scholar, writing a rather non-traditional thesis, have a non-traditional response to this. I do see

implications in the analysis of my reflections, especially regarding reflection itself and the issues of worthiness. I believe these implications could be of benefit to academy and graduate students.

My first recommendation stems from the application of reflection itself. Nowadays, we seem to take it for granted. We need to pick up where we left off in the 90s, and do more, detailed, more specific research on its uses beyond first year composition. Re-examining the benefits of reflection-- constant, mindful, deep reflection-- such as I have done on my own, could lead to better acculturation, as well.

There are all kinds of support for incoming freshman. Dissertation boot camps are growing in number and popularity for doctoral candidates. But, the Master's student, the grad, seems to be left behind. Perhaps it is because a master's degree is only seen as a stepping-stone, or a hoop, to get into a PhD program. Whatever the reason, there is a lack, a gap, that could be addressed in the acculturation of graduate students into their discourse communities, a gap that might be addressed by *writing about it*. There are definite implications for mentorship, as well as pedagogy to be explored. I urge that they be explored. Purposeful reflective writing could be of great benefit, "[e]specially for graduate students... the educational experience is a process of acculturation into the conventions of knowledge produced within... the academy... [and] [m]uch of this happens during the writing process"(Nentwick 63).

And by purposeful, (required?) *constructive* reflection, I mean constructive reflection, the way Yancey talks about it when she proclaims, "[c]onstrutive reflection is like autobiography, where... the self divides, not severally, but into... a *shaping self*..." that practices the deep and constant reflection about which I have written, "the kind of

reflection... that we ask of our students when we ask them to think about who they are as writers, when we ask them to discern patterns among subject position they have taken, when we ask them to plot their own cumulative development as an increasing accretion of writing selves" [emphasis hers] ("Portfolio as Genre" 61).

One possible solution to the painful self-doubts and issues of worthiness so many graduate students face alone might be a practicum designed to address acculturation into a discourse community. I don't mean just writing support groups, or colloquia, though they are certainly beneficial, but perhaps practicums in how to deal with *being* graduate students. At the beginning of my first semester, I was told how different graduate school was and that nothing I had done before would prepare me for a grad program and the writing I would do. Some support was offered, at the beginning of our first semester, but it was not ongoing, mostly because we didn't pursue it. We got caught up in our isolated bubbles of anxiety. There were mentors to be found in colleagues from the year ahead, but that kind of support was sporadic, and usually only sought out when the graduate student in question was in crisis mode. We need an environment specifically dedicated to this and only this; it could be so valuable, because, "many graduate students must build and rely upon a support network of instructors, colleagues, writing tutors, and editors to help them meet these challenges successfully" (Nentwick 57).

Mindful observation of how I used the resources in my wheelhouse from different areas of study informed my work, and the awareness of this, through reflection on my own work (i.e. I had to discover it on my own), helped me with my writing as well as my sense of accomplishment and, thus, acculturation. It provided me with a sense of validation, of purpose, and was of immense value in finding my own scholarly voice.

Yancey muses that "reflection is so important because without it, we live the stories others have scripted for us... it's important to tell lots of stories where we get to construct many selves..." ("Portfolio as Genre" 60). Deep reflection on my writing, and the writerly identities I performed, led me to the realization I mentioned earlier, that all along I had been constructing, layering, building what has become a more unified, sophisticated scholarly writerly identity.

These last three themes, the overlapping of knowledge from all my areas of study, the shift in my perception of my many writerly "selves," and valuing my own authority in my work are more on a personal level than the first two, and therefore, do not have obvious possible implications, *per se*. So while they did emerge from my reflections for this thesis, they are, more to the point, results of reflection. The implications I see are that these changes in awareness, through reflection, of a student's work can occur and can likely aid in his or her acculturation, especially by alleviating some of the self-doubt, as they did mine, through mindful awareness of shifts in his or her writing as well as in his or her position in a graduate program.

Susan Chase talks about "the role of narratives and narrative research in small-scale, localized social change." I believe the narrative of my acculturation applies to the small discourse community of my graduate program. She also says that narrative can help to create "public spaces in which marginalized people's narratives can be heard" (81). I think graduate students are like a marginalized, forgotten minority group, which is why I felt narrative, was a fitting method for my investigation. It didn't just allow me to use my skills as a storyteller, it served as a place where I could talk about how reflection and

writing and reflecting again were my “bootstraps,” and to offer my story to my comrades possibly/hopefully to help them discover bootstraps of their own.

IV. AFTERWORD

Storytelling is my currency. It's my only worth. The only thing of value I have in this life is my ability to tell a story... —Kevin Smith

Even though I have been writing since I was very young, I didn't know what kind of writer I wanted to be, or even that I was a real writer, until I met Helene Hanff. I met Annie Sullivan and knew I wanted to be a teacher. Later, I met Paulo Freire, and realized the kind of teacher I wanted to be, especially after becoming a tutor in a writing center. He also taught me about praxis. Donald Schön and Kathleen Yancey introduced me to reflection-in-action, and it wasn't until then I realized the valuable tool I had been using all those years in my own journals.

Reflection-in-action and praxis (reflection + action) are so connected. These basic concepts are what launched all the far-fetched theoretical pseudo-concepts I toyed with when this thesis was just a bunch of ideas, surrounded by terms I heard inside my head, like "meta-reflective praxis." At first, they sounded so fancy, so "academic," but I realized they were just overdressed ways to describe something very simple.

Yes, as writers we know the value of reflection; that part of this thesis is nothing new. Neither is looking at graduate writing. None of it is new; none of it is really very complicated. What makes it all work, at least for me, is my *awareness* of my deep reflection, and its purposeful use to look at what I know best-- my own experiences and my own identities.

As a nontraditional student, a still not-so-traditional method such as Narrative made perfect sense. It was the platform I needed to reflect on reflection, to lay out and examine all the intersections and overlaps of so much of everything I had studied

in all my classes. It even offered a way to being together the influences so many other writers have had on me, forging them into the set of tools I used to build this project.

Helene Hanff inspired me to write about my own life; Annie Sullivan inspired me to teach; Yancey inspired me to apply reflection-in-action, and look what I did! I achieved praxis, praise Freire! This thesis is praxis. It is my story, my examination of my story, and my strategic telling of it. it does not so much speak of anything new, but I believe it speaks to the old that remains with us: the struggle a graduate student has with being a graduate student, the work he or she must do, the often crippling expectations he or she places on his or herself, and for (hopefully) most, the realization, the catharsis, the epiphany of acceptance, of acculturation, of the praxis needed to be successful in a graduate program.

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