



CEA MID-ATLANTIC REVIEW

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and

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***CEA Mid-Atlantic Review* – Volume 32, 2024 Call For Submissions – Deadline: 1 June 2024**

The CEA Mid-Atlantic Review is a peer-reviewed scholarly journal published annually by the College English Association Mid-Atlantic Group. The journal specializes in literary and cultural criticism, discussions of pedagogy, public humanities work, reviews of scholarly books, personal essays concerned with the teaching of English, and creative writing related to the humanities, teaching, or the craft and art of writing.

The CEA Mid-Atlantic Review believes that scholars and creative writers should be paid for their labor. Authors of published pieces will receive a \$20 honorarium and a physical copy of the journal.

The *CEA Mid-Atlantic Review* seeks scholarly articles, position papers, short fiction, poems, and pedagogical reflections for its 2024 issue. We are also looking for original photographs or artwork related to the Mid-Atlantic region. *The CEA Mid-Atlantic Review* is indexed in the MLA International Bibliography and licensed through EBSCO databases. For those who would like a theme to inspire their writing or artwork, you can use 2024's conference theme: Transformations.

Research articles and essay submissions should be between 3,000 and 5,000 words; reviews of scholarly books should be limited to 1,000 words; poems should be limited to 500 words; and short fiction should be limited to 1,500 words.

All scholarly work must be prepared in accordance with the most recent MLA style manual and emailed as a Word or Google document to CEAMidAtlanticReview@gmail.com. Please remove your name, institutional affiliation, and any other identifying information from your document. The deadline for submissions is June 1, 2024. If you have questions about the journal or submitting to it, please email the editor, Dr. Horacio Sierra, at hsierra@bowiestate.edu.

Additional information about the CEA Mid-Atlantic Group and digital copies of Volumes 16-31 of the *CEA Mid-Atlantic Review* can be found here:

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Composition of a Career: A Reflection on Shame, the Grind of Teaching Writing, and the Discovery of My Voice

Marcy H. Nicholas

Composition teaching remains repetitive and routine. It also takes grotesque amounts of time. If you do it for long uninterrupted, it threatens to turn your mind to oatmeal. It is no good pretending this isn't so. One of the main problems of composition teaching is just this burnout. Richard Lanham

I placed a five-inch stack of one hundred composition papers on the right side of a dark, hefty wood desk my mother had scrounged up for me nine years ago from her employer, J.E. Baker, a family company with an office building of tin ceilings, milled woodwork, and marble floors. By this spring semester, I had been teaching freshman composition at Penn State York for six years, and like many weekends for those six years, if I wanted to return papers to my students within a week, I would have to grade at least sixteen papers a day. I slid the first paper from the stack to the cleared space in front of me like a unit of piecework. Although I wasn't paid by the paper, I calculated that if I graded six papers per hour, I would finish grading my self-imposed piecework goal of sixteen papers in only two hours and forty minutes. By lunch time, I would have hours ahead of me and would not have to look at another paper until tomorrow, when I would start my second shift of grading sixteen papers.

I never learned how to grade a student paper in ten minutes, and I rarely had hours ahead of me during any given semester.

During a typical fifteen-week semester, I commented on and graded about five hundred papers, circling usage errors, modeling how to revise dangling phrases, inserting transitional expressions, and noting irrelevant details with the questions, "What does this have to do with your thesis?" and "How does this connect to your audience?" This five hundred-figure did not

include “low stakes” writing: freewriting, outlines, and rough drafts from every student for every paper. This five hundred-figure and the low stakes writing did not include accepting and commenting on rewrites students could do for any of the first four assignments. This five hundred-figure did not account for the number of pages—outlines, rough drafts, finished papers and rewrites—I read by student writers in a semester.

For those six years, between the weeks I read three hundred pages of student writing and taught one or two summer classes for extra money, the surface of my desk was always a hash of student papers, opened textbooks stacked on top of each other, and lecture notes. When I could, I tried to make room for a writing life at the same desk where I prepared class and graded compositions. After all, I had two degrees in English, and I was teaching writing; therefore, I ought to be writing. I ought to be, by now, a writer. Yet after getting a master’s degree in English, when I spent two years not only studying the British and American canon but also teaching two sections of freshman composition every quarter as a graduate teaching assistant, teaching—not writing—was what I was prepared to do to support myself. Thinking that I could map out a writing route while I taught four sections of writing, I settled into a teaching career, but I struggled to realize any one writing project.

In my journal from summer 1989, I can trace my thwarted efforts to write. June 8: “the essay I’ve been working on for over a year.” June 15: “Haven’t worked on the novel since Monday.” June 22: “Began work on a short story.” Unlike my colleagues in English with Ph.D.’s who had narrowed in on Djuna Barnes, 19th Century American Literature, deconstruction, or American slave narratives, I was shuffling from one idea and one genre to another. Except when tracking my failures in my journal. On February 11, 1990, I wrote, “My voice is dying. My voice has been used up. It has disappeared.” Then, on February 23, I note that I shared a piece of my

writing with my students, but I also admitted, “I do not have a lot of finished work to share with them....” If had to produce a certain number of writing units to keep my job and get paid, I would not survive.

Whenever I did clear off space on my desktop to write before I had to reorganize it for grading, I did not have much material to work with. I had no poetry or short stories from my one and only undergraduate creative writing class, stuffed away in a filing cabinet, to pull out and polish for publication; I had no graduate school papers I could imagine committing to a revising process; I hadn’t produced, at the very least, a complete rough draft, of something, anything new, not even a simple essay in the belles-lettres tradition, a genre I thought even I could explore because the “essay” based on personal experience did not take years of research or entail situating a viewpoint within the current critical conversation. My writing life had deteriorated like old brittle newspapers, mere scraps, marked with a few words and phrases. I had some fragments of writing I shuffled around on my desk, but I could not synthesize them even into a rough draft. At least if I told myself all my problems with writing had to do with a lack of time and mental space because of teaching writing, I did not have to consider that my inhibitions about writing might be more complex.

This notion of mine to be a writer originated long before I began teaching, when Cathy, a sixth grader, praised me, a fourth grader, for an article I had written for our elementary school newsletter, or what was three mimeographed pages of three-paragraph stories by fourth, fifth and sixth graders. In that moment, when Cathy met me in the school hallway, holding out a copy of the newspaper, I felt recognized and affirmed for putting words down on paper. My mind scrolled through the possibilities, much like the controlled reader my teachers used that projected filmstrips of stories on a screen and scrolled through groups of words with blocks of light.

Could I keep writing? For the school newspaper? Could I receive praise for my writing?
Could I be a writer?

While my mind could display such groups of words, I couldn't execute any follow-up action. I didn't know how to ask my parents or my teachers about what I was feeling and thinking, and I certainly did not know how to translate this inchoate idea into the habits of a writing life. The irony is not lost on me. I could not express myself, and for whatever reason, it did not occur to me to start writing, as I would later find out, many writers were willing to do: to fill a blank page without knowing what they were doing in the moment of composing.

Over the years, I nurtured notions about writing without doing a lot of it besides mandatory assignments, first in high school, then in college, finally in graduate school. When I landed this full-time position teaching composition in 1985 after teaching part-time for a year, I thought I would have time to write. I could quit my four-nights-a-week part-time job at a party goods store, Quaker City Paper Company; I would have regular hours with a Monday-Wednesday-Friday schedule; I would have a semester break and summers off, sort of. Instead, I found I could not rise above the constant deluge of grading one hundred papers of novice writers every three weeks to be a writer. In fact, my own discourse often declined in quality, since I was reading more bad—or at least primitive—writing than good. Two weeks of reading one hundred pages of Toni Morrison's *Beloved* or two hundred pages of Milan Kundera's *The Unbearable Lightness of Being* could not counterbalance the one thousand pages of student work.

By the end of those six years of teaching composition, shame was eating away at me like a weevil larva in an acorn nibbles away at the nut from the inside out. I felt shame not only because I wasn't writing and I should be, because if you're someone with a master's degree in English, and if you are giving others instruction about writing, writing is what you're supposed

to do, but I also felt shame for feeling such shame. How did I have any right to feel shame when I had only managed to write regularly in nothing more than a journal after years of being immersed in reading and writing? While I had been telling myself that all my problems with writing had to do with a lack of time and mental space because of teaching writing, I now had to consider that these problems did indeed have a complex history.

As it turns out, such shame was not a new experience for me. Shame had long been intertwined with my ideas about the writing life. It was baked into formative experiences I had with words. My shame originated in two high school English classes where I found out I might not be smart enough, creative enough, or disciplined enough to lead a writing life.

In my sophomore English class, Mrs. Gold assigned us to write a description for the next class period. Out of what I would now call some romantic sensibility I had picked up from pop culture—think *Love Story* and the band *Bread*—and the standard school reading list, I chose the sunrise as my subject. True, I was (and still am) a morning person. But I had very little experience with sunrises. I grew up on a busy street and in a neighborhood crammed with houses like spices in cupboards. There was little space to view the sunrise. Nevertheless, I thought sunrises are what real writers describe, and because I wanted to be a writer, I should describe one. I handwrote a paragraph of description on a page of the chintzy, lined, yellow tablet each student received at the beginning of every school year since fourth grade.

At the beginning of the next class, Mrs. Gold, standing at the podium in her beige gabardine pantsuit and black turtleneck, asked for volunteers to read their descriptions aloud. I raised my hand, and she motioned me upfront. I walked to the podium, gripping the tablet paper scored with a paragraph in blue, Bic ink and anticipating the praise I would receive from Mrs. Gold and my classmates.

I read my description, a paragraph now lost to me—perhaps because I’ve expunged it from my memory after what happened next.

No one said a word.

I didn’t know yet what the silence meant, but I could feel the symptoms of embarrassment begin: my face was warming up. I needed to step around that podium and get back to my seat. Before my body could act on that need, Mrs. Gold filled the silence and cut off my retreat.

“Are there any comments for Marcy?” Mrs. Gold asked.

By now, I hoped my fellow students—my friends—would either say nothing at all or let Mrs. Gold know they were uncomfortable commenting with a multitude of non-verbals such as looking down at their desks or fidgeting with their pencils and books, so she would ask for the next volunteer to read. If she did drag out a comment or two from a couple of them, such comments would be non-descript: “It was okay,” “It was good,” “I liked it.”

Yet what happened was that Larry of the frizzy hair and wire-rimmed glasses—not the other Larry in the class who had been my friend since fifth grade and with whom I would meet up with at Georgetown University in about three years to visit another friend—raised his hand to respond to Mrs. Gold’s invitation for comments.

“Larry. What would you like to say about Marcy’s description?”

Larry leaned forward, his forearms pressing on his desk.

“That’s just a bad description of a sunrise. I mean what’s the point of describing a sunrise just to describe a sunrise?”

As Mrs. Gold tried to mitigate Larry's honesty, full embarrassment set in: my face flared hotter; moisture involuntarily collected in the corners of my eyes; my lips quivered. I was a glass vase, teetering on the edge of a high shelf about to fall and then shatter into fragments.

Indeed, what was the point? I returned to my desk.

Although in fifth grade I had been humiliated by Jody, a bully who threw the Christmas tree decorations I had cut out of green construction paper in the garbage, and although in sixth grade I had been embarrassed because my parents had separated, what began a feeding fest within me at this moment was shame. At least when I was bullied, my friend Jeff stepped in and mocked this girl's bossy behavior. "See, Jody. See how fast I'm cutting?" he said. He, then, exaggerated his movements—the outlining of the tree pattern and the cutting out of three trees at a time—making a joke out of her bullying and rescuing me from my discomfort. My parents did separate, but after a few months, they reconciled.

However, in this tenth-grade English class, I was a solo performer, auditioning for the respect of my friends. Yet, instead of earning that respect, I revealed my inadequacies. This time, I had no Cathy to praise me and no Jeff to cover for me. With my writing diminished, my voice dismissed, shame had more than enough decibels to let me know I did not belong at the front of the class. Larry was right about my sunrise description. It was not even age-appropriate sentimentality. I'm sure I mentioned something about the sky, the colors, and the light. Reading aloud what I had written revealed how naïve I was—not only about how to write a description but about what it meant to be a writer.

If this revelation didn't get through to me then, it did so the next year when I scheduled my school's single creative writing class. If I had any hope of arresting this gestating shame and replenishing the literary aspirations that had been stirred up in fourth grade, neither arresting nor

replenishing would happen here. This was not because of the teacher. It was because I had this dream of being a writer, except I still had no idea how to make such a dream a reality—but I learned that some students in the class did know how to do so.

On the first day of class, Mr. Stein ordered us to arrange the desks in a circle. Once we did that, Mr. Stein sat at a student desk in the circle too, the one near his teacher's desk, and we took our places, filling in the seats from that apex. Mr. Stein's cohort of cool sixteen-year-old boys—those who smoked pot, played guitar, drove to school, and partied with each other and who would schedule college classes during their senior year of high school—took the desks to his immediate right and left. The rest of the students, including the other not-so-cool teenagers and me, sat at the opposite end of the circle from Mr. Stein, on the outskirts of creative writing.

Once seated, I noticed what some of my classmates had that I didn't.

A few students were placing manila folders and spiral-bound theme books on their desks. One classmate, a friend I knew from choir, turned the lined pages of his notebook, stopping here and there to read whatever he had written. Another classmate spread open a folder, held up a sheet of white paper, scanned the writing, and then turned it face down on the left side of the folder. He repeated this process with a few more pages. In that nanosecond of flipping, I saw typing, not handwriting. Did he have a typewriter? In his house? In my house, my mom had a Singer Zig-Zag sewing machine, so she could save money by making clothes for herself and for me, the only extra appliance we had besides the washer and dryer, a toaster, and a vacuum. Inside of me, shame went to work again, picking up where it left off in tenth grade. These classmates of mine already had a writing portfolio, a collection of their stories, poems, and maybe even song lyrics. On the first day of class, I was already behind, and I would never catch up. I not only didn't believe I could catch up, but I also didn't know how to catch up. How had

others conceived to write beyond the sporadic journal entry before this class, and I hadn't? Why hadn't I thought to write stories and poems? Were they smarter than me? More creative than me? What did they have that I didn't? A typewriter! Even though I couldn't answer these questions, I realized years later that the answers to these questions were tangled up with class and privilege.-

I don't remember much of the rest of the marking period, except from week to week, any remaining sense I had of myself as creative and studious crumbled like horsehair plaster.

Unlike Mrs. Gold, Mr. Stein didn't single me out. In fact, as a second-class student, I just faded away from view for the semester. Unfortunately, I still didn't have the capacity to be a writer by actually writing, the one action which could insulate me from the shame of my inadequacy. Why didn't I just start writing? Why didn't I think to use the creative writing class to get connected with writing and my writing voice?

Even as shame hindered my connection with writing, I still nurtured a longing to be a literary arts insider. If I couldn't figure out the writing life right now, I could at least be near others who liked to read and discuss literature by majoring in English in college. A year after college, I applied to graduate school on a whim. "What does someone with a degree in English do," I joked with a friend. "She goes to graduate school." Since I was still not a stellar student in college, I was lucky to find a graduate program that did not require the GREs, admitted me based not on my cumulative but on my major GPA, and allowed me to go through the graduate teaching assistant program. For some students, this master's program was a path to apply to PhD programs at other universities; for others, it was a teaching training program to deploy students to the burgeoning community college systems around the state and the country. I felt I was not PhD material, so by default, I was in the latter group. I never wanted to be a teacher, but if I

wanted to stay close to literature and writing, teaching at the university level was a viable way for me to do that.

So many sunrises not described, let alone badly described, would pass, and so many outlines and papers—a few thousand—would slide from the right to the left of my desk, before I could address the voice of shame that lived within me, undermining my efforts to write and questioning my intelligence and my creativity.

Day in and day out, week in and week out, month after month, semester after semester, and year after year, I lectured about writing in my composition courses and graded the writing of student after student. Like yard debris going through a shredder, I was ground down by grading and by shame-generated assertions. “You’re not smart enough to be a writer.” “You’re not creative enough to write.” “Now, you’re too old and irrelevant to write anything that anyone wants to read.” While the notion of writing still lingered within me, shame did too. Even as I tried to encourage my students with positive feedback, I couldn’t inspire myself.

Then one September, a colleague, a few years older than I, announced his retirement. After almost thirty years of teaching composition, literature, and film, and writing four books, he was exiting a life in academia, and he and his wife would be moving to Costa Rica. With his announcement, my own exit from teaching came into focus, not to mention my final exit. I had a little more than a half dozen years until I retired, and then I would be in the last quarter of my life. I was melancholy about losing this colleague, but I was also melancholy that all this time had passed, and I was not only nowhere near living out that ten-year-old impulse to be a writer, but I also no longer had a lifetime ahead of me to write. I had to find a way to dismiss that voice of shame and amplify my writing voice.

Yet, I didn't know where to begin, since years ago, I had cut most of my ties to the writing life. I no longer bought the new yearly edition of *The Writer's Market*, if it even existed anymore, or subscribed to *The Writer's Digest*. I had been out of the writing loop for so long I had to be reintroduced to the ways of writing.

At the same time one colleague announced his retirement, a younger colleague who was actively publishing creative writing suggested I attend a writer's workshop to jumpstart my writing.

He was right.

I had to put myself out there, even if it meant sharing my lousy writing with strangers and revealing that although I had been teaching writing for decades, I was not a professional writer.

Three months after my colleague offered his suggestion, I was in the lobby of a hotel in Galloway, New Jersey, checking in before the evening meet and greet for what is known as the "Annual Winter Poetry and Prose Getaway." I would be spending this January Friday through Monday in the creative non-fiction workshop.

From the beginning of the workshop on Saturday morning, Laura, our creative non-fiction instructor, established the movement of the course: she would assign a prompt; we would write in response to that prompt; we would read our responses to the class and receive feedback. Prompt, response, feedback. For the first prompt, Laura listed off a group of words we were to include in our writing: "pomegranate" is the only one I can remember.

"You can stay here or find another place to write. We'll regroup in about two hours," Laura said. "When you return, you'll read your responses and receive feedback from one another." On hearing that word "feedback," I was back in Mrs. Gold's class, cowering at my desk, and in Mr. Stein's class, sitting in the back, shame ripping apart that fourth-grade micro-

narrative I had trusted for so long. I knew feedback was part of the workshop experience, but I was afraid some version of Larry would show up around those long tables in the small conference room in which we were meeting and ask me, “What’s your point?”

Some participants in this writing workshop remained at those long tables, opened their notebooks or laptops, and began writing. I picked up my notebook and laptop and returned to my room. There, I had quiet and privacy and a desk, even if the desk was constructed out of a high-end tan-gray laminate instead of real wood. With my favorite brand of pen, I wrote my response to the prompt in a college-ruled, black and white composition book.

When I returned to the conference room, I took my seat next to Joyce, a middle-school English teacher, who like me, had been trying to free up actual and cognitive space for writing—for the one hundredth time during our careers—as we slogged through stacks of student work year after year. In a moment, we would read our writing aloud to our colleagues. With my own students, I talked about the importance of audience. Here, as a student myself, would I find an audience who wanted to read what I wrote?

What I found out was that sharing and responding to writing in this setting was an antidote to the earlier experiences that had undermined my confidence and muted my voice. Laura and the participants knew we were sharing writing in process, not works ready for publication. The feedback did not consist of what Peter Elbow refers to as criterion-based, the kind that “tells [writers] how [their] writing measures up” to certain standards. Our prompt responses weren’t ready for this kind of scrutiny. We were, though, ready to hear what words or phrases resonated with listeners and what they would like to hear more about. Someone said that what I wrote was an “incantation.” This bit of praise was enough feedback for me to keep working on this piece.

I wish I could say that when I returned home and to the classroom after that weekend, I found a way to rearrange my weekly agenda as efficiently as Marie Kondo can organize a sock drawer so I could spend less time on teaching and more time on writing.

The truth is teaching writing cannot be filed away in a cabinet at the end of a day or checked off a task list as completed. Teaching writing does take “grotesque amounts of time.” While I no longer slide hard copies of papers on my desk from left to right, I do click through hundreds of pages of student work online each week, pointing out comma splices, pronoun-antecedent agreement issues, and disconnected quotations, all with digital annotation tools. With teaching, there is always more to do: assign five points to a completed peer review; copy a URL of an article from *The New York Times* and enter it in an online module; respond to emails from students explaining why they earned a C on a paper instead of a B; call out a student for plagiarism. Twist together the time factor with shame, and for me, my creative confidence had been choked off like bind weed strangles bush beans until my impending retirement and aging gave me the urgency to figure out my insecurities with writing.

What I can say is that since that workshop, I have been writing regularly—not every day and not consistently—but when I can. It took me five years to finish the essay I began at that New Jersey writing conference. *Barely South Review* published “Words of the Day” in the 2022 spring issue. A year before that, another journal published “English Composition Rubric,” and in 2023, “The Gaps I Mean.” It’s been a slow process, yet I am finding an audience for my writing.

Granted, my writing life doesn't look like what I thought it was supposed to. Instead of spending several hours writing each morning until noon as I've heard many writers do, I squeeze in fifteen minutes of writing between grading papers, and more minutes during semester breaks and the summer. I am not writing the great American novel, but I have discovered the forms of

flash non-fiction and fiction and the publications that cater to submissions of one thousand words or less, a length I can manage while I grade three hundred to four hundred papers a semester. My desktop is less cluttered with the trappings of teaching and more outfitted for writing: a folder with my most recent rough draft, a collection of highlighters to track words and images in my writing, the pedestrian (and inexpensive) college-ruled composition book for journaling, and craft articles and books.

In tenth grade, Larry asked, “What’s the point?” I can answer that question now. The point is before I could believe in my writing and trust my writing voice, I had to stop hearing that voice of shame and accepting its projected outcomes about my writing life. While the conference in New Jersey could not extricate me from teaching, it did initiate my process of untangling my writing voice from my history with shame. I have found what I needed all those years ago in high school, what I didn’t know I needed but should have asked for: mentors, direction, encouragement. Although it took me a long time, I have found something to say, to write what is mine to write for an audience and for myself. Right now, that means digging around in my teaching life for scraps that I can synthesize into essays. Later, I can imagine what is mine to write will change. I know I need to write about my mother, her life of poverty in Richmond, Virginia, the loss of her mother, and her escape from the south to the north by marriage. I also know that when I write this and anything else, instead of hearing the voice of shame, I will be listening to my writing voice and the voices of those who care about me and my writing.

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Yoga and Emerson's "Nature": Connecting with the Divine Through Meditation

Landon Funk

Initially published in 1836, Ralph Waldo Emerson's "Nature" is a long-form essay about what it means to be truly in nature and to channel the divine. Throughout the text, Emerson, an ordained protestant minister, calls upon his knowledge of ancient Buddhism, specifically its spiritual influence on the practices of meditation and Yoga, to help understand his time walking around the woods of Massachusetts. Susan Dunston, in her essay, "'Light Out of the East': Emerson on Self, Subjectivity, and Creativity," describes Emerson's identification with meditation and Yoga when she writes, "Emerson developed a distinctly American version of creative and ethical self-expansion that is both predictive of and a precursor to contemporary American interest in Eastern philosophy" (26). Emerson used his knowledge of Eastern philosophy to inform his Transcendentalism through "creative and ethical self-expansion" (26). This self-expansion heavily influenced his writing in "Nature" and led him to encourage readers, through his own testimony, to rediscover their true self. To do this, Emerson argues in "Nature" that all natural beings share a divine spirit, which, in humans, can be accessed through mindfulness and meditation practices that mirror the practices of Yoga and heal the body and mind.

To Emerson, being in nature is akin to being surrounded by the purest form of reality. In "Nature," he writes, "We are as much strangers in nature, as we are aliens from God" (205). There are no external distractions, simply Earth and what she has to offer. He likens this experience to being with God and does so to link being in nature to being with God. In his transformative book *The Heart of Yoga* about how his father brought Yoga to the Western world,

T.K.V. Desikachar mirrors Emerson's words, writing, "Everything that happens in the external world influences us, and what happens within us in its turn has an influence on our relationship with the external world" (94). Like Emerson, Desikachar believes that humans in nature inherently belong there just as nature inherently influences each human being. It is the symbiotic relationship between the two that influences how they operate and cultivate their existence.

As a person starts to see themselves as a part of nature instead of its opposing force, they start to become more mindful. Emerson describes this in "Nature," stating, "Who looks upon a river in a meditative hour, and is not reminded of the flux of all things? Throw a stone into the stream, and the circles that propagate themselves are the beautiful type of all influence" (190). By describing a river, Emerson calls upon meditation theories deeply rooted in Buddhism. In fact, in Buddhist monk Bhante Henepola Gunaratana's book *Mindfulness in Plain English*, he describes this exact same type of meditation, "When getting started in meditation, one of the first things you will notice is how incredibly active the mind really is . . . The Tibetan tradition likens it to a waterfall of thought" (148-49). While Tibetan Buddhism discusses a waterfall and Emerson a river/stream, both discuss the movement of water and liken it to the movement of the mind. For Emerson, the water reminds him of "the flux of all things." This is then seconded by Gunaratana when he discusses "how active the mind really is." When looking at meditation, whether in nature or in an alternative space, the mind is filled with thoughts, to-do lists, and external pressures. Emerson summarizes the activity of the mind a few pages earlier in "Nature," affirming, "For every hour and change corresponds to and authorizes a different state of mind" (183). It is only when a person "throws a stone" into the stream as Emerson claims -- more literally, this would be bringing attention to the flux of the universe and a practitioner's thoughts -- that they are able to see how those thoughts and pressures influence them.

Emerson continues his discussion of meditative awareness later in “Nature.” He writes, “He [the practitioner] is its head and heart, and finds something of himself in every great and small thing, in every mountain stratum, in every new law of color, fact of astronomy, or atmospheric influence which observation or analysis lay open” (206). This passage perfectly outlines what Emerson believes to be his experience while in nature. It was never about being in opposition to nature but about being *one* with it. He describes how nature helps a person find new opportunities and realizations, cultivating that coveted form of independence: self-reliance. He adds at the end of the passage that a person must be “open” to what nature has to offer, indicating that a person in nature must be both aware of their surroundings as well as what their thoughts are thinking about those surroundings. Guarantana says that this form of mediation is called Vipassana, a “direct and gradual cultivation of mindfulness or awareness... We learn to listen to our own thoughts without being caught up in them” (Guarantana 25). Guarantana’s words are exactly what Emerson is trying to convey. Practitioners of mindfulness must continuously cultivate a relationship with nature in order to experience the “atmospheric influence” Emerson characterizes. He later adds, “The happiest man is he who learns from nature the lesson of worship” (204). Being in nature, according to Emerson, is worship because it is there where the lines of physical bodies start to disappear and the mind starts to connect with the living Earth. When this happens, a person can feel God in and all around them.

The idea that God and the Universe are one in the same carries throughout Emerson’s “Nature.” As a matter of fact, Emerson describes this within his first few paragraphs of the essay. He insists, “Philosophically considered, the universe is composed of Nature and the Soul” (182). Emerson capitalizes both nature and soul in this line to demonstrate how both entities are two parts of one whole. Dunston enhances this when she says, “Many Eastern philosophies,

particularly Buddhism, have long described self as relational, interdependent, and continuous with all; nothing is inherently separate or autonomous” (27). According to her, it was these Eastern philosophies of Yoga and Buddhism that led to Emerson’s claims that nature and the soul are equally part of the universe and that the universe exists within both nature and the soul.

When in nature, Emerson suggests, “Every natural fact is a symbol of some spiritual fact. Every appearance in nature corresponds to some state of the mind, and that state of the mind can only be described by presenting that natural appearance as a picture” (190). Here, it is evident that Emerson is communicating to his English-speaking, predominantly Christian audience about the yogic concepts of *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*. Desikachar defines both: “*Puruṣa* is that part of us capable of real seeing and perception. It is not subject to change. Conversely, *prakṛti* is subject to constant change and embraces all matter, even our mind, thoughts, feelings, and memories. All *prakṛti* can be seen and perceived by *puruṣa*” (93). In a sense, *prakṛti* is all material things as well as our thoughts, and *puruṣa* is the part of our soul that is able to see *prakṛti* without judgment. Desikachar continues, “Our aim in practicing yoga is to bring about a change in the quality of the mind so that we can perceive more from the *puruṣa*. Yoga attempts to influence the mind in such a way that it is possible for our *puruṣa* to operate without hindrances” (95). Yoga quite literally means to connect, to yoke, and the work of a practitioner of Yoga, mindfulness, and/or meditation is to connect their mind to their *puruṣa* so that they can observe the *prakṛti*. Thus, when Emerson claims that every piece of nature “corresponds to some state of mind,” he is detailing how one’s *puruṣa* connects with the mind’s focus, specifically the “quality of the mind” that Desikachar describes.

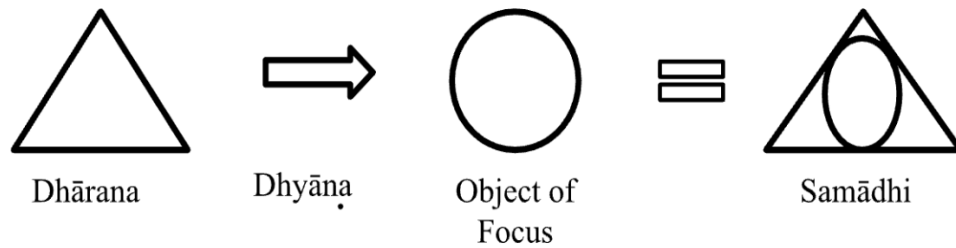


Figure 1: The process of samyama

Emerson goes on to say in “Nature” that “this relation between the mind and matter is not fancied by some poet, but stands in the will of God, and so is free to be known by all men” (193). He connects the puruṣa (the mind) and prakṛti (matter) with divine influence and urges anyone who wants to practice mindfulness in nature the same way he does to be open to a spiritual experience. In order to get there, like when he described the river and stream, one must focus completely on nature or a part of nature, like the river. In Yoga, this focus is called dhāraṇā. Desikachar says, “Dhāraṇā is...the condition in which the mind focuses and concentrates exclusively on one point” (109). The reason why a person would practice dhāraṇā is to achieve that divine connection Emerson discusses. The connection to the point of focus is called dhyāna, and “when we succeed in becoming so absorbed in something that our mind becomes completely one with it, we are in a state of *samādhi*” (Desikachar 109) (See Figure 1). Samādhi has often been described as the purest form of enlightenment, the truest connection to the universe and God. In this state, all judgment vanishes and a person is at peace with their body, mind, and spirituality. Entering a state of samādhi does not happen immediately and can only be achieved through mindful meditation and a connection to the “will of God.”

Nowhere in “Nature” is the convergence of dhāraṇā, dhyāna, and samādhi more pointedly illustrated than when Emerson recounts, “Standing on the bare ground, -- my head bathed by the blithe air, and uplifted into infinite space, -- all mean egotism vanishes. I become a transparent

eye-ball. I am nothing. I see all” (183). Emerson achieves the state of samādhi while in nature. He focuses on the air and the ground. When he achieves dhyāna with those objects of focus, Emerson is then “uplifted into infinite space.” He has an out of body experience, as detailed by the words “vanishes,” “transparent,” and “nothing.” In his state of samādhi, his puruṣa helps him to “see all” without interference from his ego. This entire process is called samyama, and Desikachar says that, “the true goal of samyama is to concentrate on one object and to investigate it until we know everything about it” (111). Emerson does in this sense know everything while in this state of samādhi for he is simultaneously all-knowing and nothing at all. Emerson continues, “More and more, with every thought, does his kingdom stretch over things, until the world becomes, at last, only a realized will, -- the double of the man” (196). In this passage, Emerson connects the thoughts and achievements of the practitioner to the Earth and the divine. “His kingdom” is what the practitioner sees as a part of himself once in samādhi. For Emerson, this is all of the nature that he experiences on his walks. The more dhyāna occurs, the more nature and practitioner bond together. Emerson claims this as “the double of man,” but he could have easily said that man was the double of nature as well. At this point in Emerson’s experience and in the essay, man and nature are equal parts of the same universe.

Emerson is able to access his puruṣa, and, when defining a higher power, Emerson stays away from defining it as a Christian God. Instead, he uses words like “soul,” “nature,” and “universe.” In doing so, Emerson comes from a more inclusive spiritual place. Towards the end of “Nature,” he discusses the divine directly using a similarly ambiguous term, “We learn that man has access to the entire mind of the Creator, is himself the Creator in the finite” (205). Emerson claims that, in nature, man and the Creator are one. Another way to put this would be that the Creator lives in man or that the Creator lives in every living thing. Taking the latter of

these options, it can be inferred that his puruṣa is the Creator within himself. Since Emerson is a human, his puruṣa is confined to him. Other puruṣas stemming from the same Creator live in other living things. Robert Detweiler, in “Emerson and Zen,” states, “Both Emerson and Zen have two similar concepts forming the foundation of their ontologies: God or Buddha as the One Mind, and the unity of the one and all is basically God or Buddha” (424). Detweiler’s words reinforce Emerson’s and further prove that Emerson’s concept of the divine living within each living organism stems from Buddhism and Yoga.

In Yoga, everything that is known about the divine is mentioned in *The Yoga Sūtras of Patañjali*. In book one, the concept of a Creator/universe/God is introduced as Īśvara. It says, “*Tasya vācakaḥ praṇavaḥ,*” which, according to translator Sri Swami Satchidananda, can be translated to, “The word expressive of Īśvara is the mystic sound OM” (1.27). Desikachar adds, “When we say OM we think of it as the aural representation of Īśvara. Whenever we chant this sound we must give ourselves time for our mind to consider what it really means” (131). While Īśvara is a name for a higher power similar to God or Allah, what is more important to take away here is the significance of the sound OM. OM, in its own way, invokes dhyāna and allows for a practitioner to focus on its sound in order to reach samādhi. Because the practitioner is repeating OM, they are going to directly and intentionally channel the divine. *The Yoga Sūtras* further define the power of OM in the following three verses: “*Tajjapas tadartha bhāvanam. Tataḥ pratyak cetanādhigamo ‘pyantarāyābhāvaś ca. Vyādhi styāna saṁśaya pramādālasāvīrati bhrāntidarśanālabdhabhūmikavānavasthitatvāni cittavikṣepāste ’ntarāyāḥ.*” Translated by Satchidananda, these verses mean, “To repeat it [OM] with reflection upon its meaning is an aid. From this practice all obstacles disappear and simultaneously dawns knowledge of the inner self. Disease, dullness, doubt, carelessness, laziness, sensuality, false perception, failure to reach firm

ground and slipping from the ground gained - these distractions of the mind-stuff are the obstacles” (1.28-30). Therefore, the ancient yogic text outlines how OM should and could be used in meditation practices. When a student repeats OM or achieves a connection with the divine, *The Yoga Sutras* and those who are regular spiritual practitioners of Yoga, meditation, and mindfulness claim that this incantation or point of focus can heal a person from mental or physical disease and help dissipate internal struggles.

Emerson, in “Nature,” is completely and totally submerged in the connection between his puruṣa and Īśvara, and his meditation practice as described in the essay has led him to this space. However, Detweiler argues that, “Emerson cannot participate spiritually in the identity of God and all because he has neither the whole constitution nor the method of the mystic that would enable him to do so” (427). His claim is fundamentally misguided and shows a lack of understanding of Emerson’s work, specifically “Nature.” A direct refusal of Detweiler’s allegation, Emerson writes, “And no man touches these divine natures, without becoming, in some degree, himself divine. Like a new soul, they renew the body” (“Nature” 202). Emerson himself has transformed from simple man to man within whom God resides. As such, the writer has realized his new spiritual potential that he could not have achieved elsewhere and has completely reinvigorated his mental and physical health along the way. For Detweiler to claim that Emerson does not have the constitution or the method to do so completely ignores the spiritual work he did while walking in nature and writing “Nature.” Emerson focused on the nature around him. He connected with it and was able to simultaneously connect with his higher power. One does not need to be a “mystic” to make these connections but simply has to be open to the possibility of a connection to the divine. Once that connection is made, the mind and the body begin to heal.

It is not hard to notice the imperfections of nature like a broken tree branch or a torn leaf, and Emerson acknowledges these as part of his spiritual journey and sees them as metaphors for the human condition. He writes, “Unfortunately, every one of them [living organisms] bears the marks as of some injury; is marred and superficially defective. Nevertheless, far different from the deaf and dumb nature around them, these all rest like fountain-pipes on the unfathomed sea of thought and virtue whereto they alone, of all organizations, are the entrances” (198). The marks of imperfection, the defects, are not issues but entrances for self-discovery and paths to healing. In his book *Waking the Tiger: Healing Trauma*, Peter A. Levine writes, “The same immense energies that create the symptoms of trauma, when properly engaged and mobilized can transform the trauma and propel us into new heights of healing, mastery, and even wisdom” (21). Like Emerson, Levine understands that the mind can both dramatically hurt and dramatically heal a person. He adds, “The healing of trauma is a natural process that can be accessed through an inner awareness of the body” (34). The inner awareness of the body that Levine highlights here is that same inner awareness that Emerson, Patanjali, and T. K. V. Desikachar examine in their respective works. Levine makes a point to say that healing trauma “is a natural process,” meaning that it is not one where medicine and other external Western healing practices can be applied. The only way to heal trauma is through the mind and dhyāna.

The cause of trauma and other defects, according to Patanjali’s *Yoga Sutras*, is the bond between the soul and the material world. Specifically, he says, “*Draṣṭṛ dṛśyayoḥ samyogo heya hetuḥ*,” which Satchidananda translates as, “The cause of that avoidable pain is the union of the Seer (Puruṣa) and the Seen (Prakṛti or Nature)” (2.17). In order to start the healing process, one must first find space where they feel like they can breathe. For Emerson, that is walking in nature. Desikachar and other yoga practitioners call the breath prāṇa, and starting meditation

with prāṇa is crucial to not only the practice but also to mental and spiritual transformation. Desikachar explains, “Various sources call prāṇa the friend of the puruṣa and see in the flow of prāṇa nothing but the working of the puruṣa” (55). The breath and puruṣa are actively working together, solidifying that healing through dhyāna is a truly natural process. This can only be done by accessing the breath and the process of saṁyama. Scientifically, Bessel Van der Kolk, one of the world’s leading trauma researchers, adds in his book, *The Body Keeps the Score*, “Lack of coherence between breathing and heart rate makes people vulnerable to a variety of physical illnesses, such as heart disease and cancer, in addition to mental problems such as depression and PTSD” (269). The lack of breath and its disconnection from the body’s life force, the heart, can quite literally kill someone either by physical or mental disease. Regulating the breath, therefore, is integral to the healing process. Desikachar further cements this claim by saying, “If we remember how the degree of clarity created by the power of the puruṣa within us is directly linked to our state of mind, then a close connection between our mind and prāṇa is obvious” (55). Breath is yet another way for Yoga and meditation practitioners to connect with their puruṣa. Once connected to their puruṣa, practitioners can achieve that divine connection.

When a person practices meditation, mindfulness, and/or Yoga, their mental, spiritual, and physical bodies start to heal. *The Yoga Sutras* state in Book Two, “*Yogāṅgānuṣṭhānād aśuddhi kṣaye jñānadīptir ā vivekakhyāteḥ.*” This translates to, “By the practice of the limbs of Yoga, the impurities dwindle away and there dawns the light of wisdom, leading to discriminative discernment” (Satchidananda 2.28). As one’s impurities heal, wisdom and balance emerge. In “Nature,” Emerson experiences a moment where he exhibits exactly this phenomenon. He says, “The currents of the Universal Being circulate through me; I am part or particle of God” (183). It is evident that Emerson notices and recognizes that the divine is within him in the same way that

the divine is in everyone and everything. Choosing the word “circulate,” Emerson encourages his reader to feel God through every vein in their body. When God is within a person, transformation occurs. Guarantana describes Emerson’s spiritual certainty as, “knowing that something is true because you have seen it work, because you have observed that very thing within yourself” (10). Emerson knows that meditation rooted in Yoga works and that spirituality is defined by the connection a person feels to their higher power. He knows this because he has experienced it himself. To the benefit of his readers, he wrote down that experience in “Nature.” Emerson continues, “Every particular in nature, a leaf, a drop, a crystal, a moment of time is related to the whole, and partakes of the perfection of the whole. Each particle is a microcosm, and faithfully renders the likeness of the world” (197). Emerson’s divine wisdom is part of “the perfection of the whole.” Moreover, he knows that he holds no more wisdom than that of an ant, a broken branch, or any other living organism. Each living being is, in and of itself, a part of God. The trauma from the prakṛti and the healing through the puruṣa-breath connection is, according to Emerson, a faithful rendition of the world’s likeness. There are no mistakes. Trauma and defects are a part of each individual, and healing those aspects is essential to the process of saṃyama.

Two years after “Nature” was first published, Emerson was asked to speak at Harvard University’s Divinity School. Instead of speaking on Christianity, clergy, and other aspects of Abrahamic religions, Emerson roughly summarized “Nature.” He told the audience, “The world is not the product of manifold power, but of one will, of one mind; and that one mind is everywhere, in each ray of the star, in each wavelet of the pool, active; and whatever opposes that will, is everywhere baulked and baffled, because things are made so, and not otherwise” (225). He reiterates his foundational belief that every living organism is connected through a divine spirit, a direct delineation from ancient Buddhism and Yogic texts. He knows this to be

true because he has experienced it himself. His focus on nature helped him access his Soul, his puruṣa. In turn, his puruṣa connected him to Īśvara. Īśvara then began its work on healing Emerson from the inside out. Had Emerson not attempted and succeeded in a serious meditation practice, he would not have been able to have a spiritual awakening, to write “Nature,” or to give this speech at Harvard. Emerson encourages his readers and his listeners to embark on his same journey for at the end of their practice, they will find self-acceptance, self-reliance, healing, and a meaningful connection with the. divine.

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Mirror with Menelaus and Helen in Silver

JZ Houlihan

Have you noticed, there's never
a mirror in a classroom? A poster
of an Etruscan mirror, maybe:
shadow-engravings of Menle and Eleni.

And what do mirrors hold, anyway?
Have you ever met one that wouldn't
return the heat of smiling mouths?
Forget the *mittelerdischer* mirror

that refracts what you want to be,
not the lipstick, sunscreen, imitation
flames—not the tangled electrons

mirroring each other in every
planetary sulfur-ash perfumed
step beyond grief or praise.

Traces of Orphic Poet

JZ Houlihan

As I was saying. We recognize
a mirror is filled with emptiness,
with time, with entering, with escaping.
Thus, the Dichter. His words

refract out from a polarization
of the last century, worming
whispers in your inner ear.
You're tricked by his explicable

faint stammer (echo in a valley,
mise-en-abyme) into believing his "song"
is your life rising from inside you

or at least your own mimesis.
But his voice is a bronze mirror painted over
with two sand cranes in oils and varnish.

Silent Feelings

Rebecca Ruth Gold

My father did many things during his life that were marvelous and beautiful. He invested his mental energy in elaborate ideas that had no commercial use. A lifelong student of many languages, he wanted to make the Arabic script learnable by anyone, so he dreamed of using cookies in the shape of the letters of the Arabic alphabet.

My childhood was filled with his dreams, none of which seemed to qualify as a job. No money was earned, and there was no expectation of implementation. And that was why I had no answer to that all-important question for which my peers, their parents, and my teachers expected an answer: *What does your father do?*

I felt that I should have been able to satisfy their curiosity with a single word, but I was never able to find out what that word was.

A few months before I learned of his death, I wrote a poem in which I reflected on my father's mysterious disappearance from my life. The poem brought together the best of my childhood memories: developing black and white photographs in our New Orleans basement, being hoisted aloft on my father's shoulders, hugging him in a backpack created for oversized toddlers like me, attending the violin and ballerina lessons that he felt were so crucial to my development.

The photographs evoked in that poem are of me, a five-year-old ballerina, dancing with my feet pointed upwards, as if the air would lift me up into heaven. For this brief period in my life, I was full of hope. The black and white images that my father created through his photography embed my memory with a permanence that eludes digital photography. I felt like a

princess as he lifted me upwards, towards the skies, and I tried to infuse that feeling into the poem.

Mid-way through, the poem takes a dark turn. My memory stalls over my teenage years, when I began questioning my father's authority, and our relationship changed. I began to blame my father for our family's financial difficulties, for my mother's stress at work, and for my adolescent angst. In the poem as in life, my father disappears, "practicing necromancy / in some foreign, mystical country." I will not reproduce the poem here. Even as it expresses one beautiful aspect of our early relationship, the circumstances of its composition fill me with shame.

Why did I write a poem about my father's disappearance, rather than seek him out, decades after the moments described in the poem had passed? When I wrote the poem, I was searching for my father through my own words, but an actual dialogue would have been better than an internal monologue. I sought him, but I did not address him, my father who was alive and well in another country.

I had his email address. Although we had fallen out of touch, we had ways of reaching each other. He emailed me, like clockwork, every year on my birthday, usually promising a gift that rarely materialized. I knew how to find him. I longed to understand what was happening in his life, yet I did not take the necessary steps to find out. Looking through my emails now, I see that I relied on my sister to look after my father, to make sure he was okay, and even to keep track of where he was in any given year. Yet another source of my shame.

My father did not live a normal life. But then, who does? And what is normal, anyway? He was born into wealth and privilege. Although he never would have phrased it in this way, I believe that his life was damaged by that apparent serendipity of birth. He was a good person who never figured out what to do with his life. The family in which he was raised was so wealthy

that the idea of working for a living seemed to him to pertain only to those outside their charmed circle. I don't know what transpired within his family, or how my father's father—who died when he was thirteen—prepared him for life. But I do know the result: he grew into manhood and then old age without any sense of vocation. Perhaps more importantly, he lacked the sense that he needed a vocation, or that it may have provided him with a path in life.

Throughout my childhood and adolescence, I struggled to give a straightforward answer to the perpetual question: *What does your father do?* Or even worse: *What is he?* As if no parent could have any being, apart from their work. He did not, *do* anything, if doing means work for money, as in a job. But in fact, he did a lot. He baked bread. He read books. He studied languages: first Russian, then Arabic. He was always trying to find ways to make the world more logical, more user-friendly. His notes resembled mathematical equations. His handwriting was immaculate.

His books were exotic and sophisticated, on subjects that I dreamed of being able to understand some day. Douglas Hofstadter, *Gödel, Escher, Bach*. Louis Thomas, *The Lives of a Cell*. Anything by Oliver Sacks. He devised algebraic equations and travelled deep into the world of calculus. He played the keyboard beautifully as well as effortlessly, with a talent that he didn't use. He could play an entire song by ear, after having heard it only once. The musical abilities that came to him naturally were attainable by me even after decades of study.

I admired his intelligence and intellectual curiosity throughout much of my childhood. As I grew older, my wonder and awe came to be mixed with something like resentment. I began to suspect that the weekdays he passed reading at home had consequences for our family, and specifically for my mother. While my father read and dreamed, she worked overtime to keep a roof over our heads and food in our refrigerator.

Once, while sitting in the driveway after he had picked me up from school, my father told me that he didn't think that everyone should have to work. He had a point: American society worships productivity to a fault. Although he was more likely to read science than fiction, his patron saint was Bartleby, the office clerk in Herman Melville's story, who simply and assuredly insists to his boss, "I prefer not to." My father preferred not to work, so instead he dreamed.

As a libertarian, my father would have been intrigued by what anarchist David Graeber describes as "bullshit jobs." Bullshit jobs are those in which workers pretend their role is not as pointless or harmful as they know it to be. What these jobs have in common is that they serve no social good. According to Graeber, more than half the population of advanced societies is engaged in a bullshit job. My father was not someone who could tolerate bullshit, either from himself or others, and I can see why such employment had no appeal for him. I understand why he refused to buy into capitalist lies about production and consumption.

The biggest problem during my childhood was not however one of ideology: it was of money, and of finding a way to live when one income stream was not enough. We needed to pay rent and cover the bills. And since my father had no vocation, the labor of raising *and* providing financially for myself and my two sisters fell to my mother.

My father's lack of vocation produced a profound inequality between my parents. His preference for dreaming over a bullshit job mattered, not because a job is a sacred thing that everyone must have, but because it brought instability to our lives and precarity to our family.

This imbalance between my mother and father—with my mother working overtime while also raising us, and my father declining such labor, all the while sitting at home—became particularly acute during my early adolescence. It cast a dark shadow over life at home and shaped my views about marriage, gender, and—no doubt at some subconscious level—men.

After I left for college, the situation ended with my mother's long-awaited decision to divorce him—a decision I had campaigned for since the age of twelve—but my anger persisted long after that. It persisted much longer than it had to, until the day of his death.

Until my father's death, I was not aware of the extent to which he lived in poverty alone after we ceased to be a family unit. He lived in a car for several weeks because he couldn't afford to rent an apartment. To a man who grew up wealthy and who was raised to expect such wealth to last forever, this must have come as a shock. Yet I never heard him complain. Whatever anxieties he may have felt, he kept them to himself.

In an era when every child has a smartphone, he never bought one for himself. He died, alone, in a two-star hotel, in the beautiful city of Granada, Spain, just a short walk away from the famous palace and fortress complex known as the Alhambra. He had migrated to Andalusia with a grand plan to make the Arabic learnable to everyone. Of course, Arabic has not been the language of Spain for many centuries. He was more comfortable with Spanish anyway. But perhaps he lived as much in the past as in the present by that point, and the Islamic history of Spain was more alive for him than was its European present.

We only found out after his death that he had enough money to cover his expenses, even though he did not spend it. For someone whose adult life was dominated by money and its lack, his spartan lifestyle was an astonishing fact. He could have afforded a more comfortable existence. He simply chose not to spend it. For someone born into privilege, my father was strangely aloof from material luxuries. His mind was elsewhere, wandering with the stars, in the places where galaxies collide with another. I grieve that I will never fully understand him, that his dreams will always be mysterious to me, and that my lifelong anger stood in the way of my knowing his peculiar, brilliant, and unforgettable mind.

This is not a letter of complaint or even of lament. It is an attempt to come to terms with my failure to be there for my father when it would really have made a difference to us both. Why was I unable to let go of my anger, long after the circumstances that had made it relevant had passed? Why was my relationship with my father fixed by the time I reached thirteen? Why did I not allow myself to grow, and instead became stuck in the past?

People change, whether we like it or not. My father was no exception. They change in ways that we cannot predict or expect and most of the time do not even perceive. As we grew distant and our lives intersected less frequently, he became humbler, more peaceful inside, and more accepting when things didn't go his way. He was always a dreamer, and his eccentricity grew with age, which endears him to me. I mentioned that Bartleby was his patron saint, but Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* captures his world even more perfectly. Like Colonel Aureliano Buendía who passed his days carving golden fish, my father spent the final decades of his life weaving dreams. He was harmless and full of a love that my anger preventing me from seeing.

I write this to him now, to reckon with my refusal to let go of my anger, with my resistance to forgiveness, until it was too late. Few wrongs are so profound that they are worth holding onto forever, after we have outgrown the shells in which they were encased and shed our skins many times over. My father was not guilty of wrongs that could not be forgiven. So why did I hold onto my anger for so many years, long past the time when my anger had any relevance to the life that I lived? Why did I judge, when I could instead have loved?

Let me tell you a story about a conversation I had with my father, just after I had fallen in love with poetry and decided to become a writer. I had just turned 13 and was on the verge of becoming the teenage rebel that divided us from each other, in some respects, forever.

He had picked me up from school. We sat in the driveway silently, as we often did, too tired to go inside, enjoying the break in the daily routine. I had a book in my lap with the cover turned up. It was a collection of poetry by the Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, a cheap paperback Dover edition. My father scrutinized it cautiously.

“Do you think,” he asked me out of the blue, “that poets feel things that other people do not?”

To me, the answer was obvious. “Of course. Poets express their emotions in ways no one else can.”

“But does that mean that they *feel* more deeply?” he persisted.

I had no answer to that question. I had too little experience of life at that point to know what to say. So I let it hang suspended, silent, in the air.

At that point, my father’s question, like so many words that passed between us, became a wall that separated us. Keen to distinguish myself from him, I made our every conversation serve the end of mutual disassociation. In the aftermath of his death, the question connects us like a bridge.

I have often returned to my father’s question, whenever I think about poetry and the representation of feeling in language. At first, when I asked myself whether poets feel differently and more deeply from other humans, I sided with the self-interested poet, who is utterly persuaded of the superiority of her perception. She believes that experience is purified by language and that suffering is somehow, even if only in the most mediated of ways, redeemed through poems.

While at university, I found support for this faith in the redemptive power of art in Shelley’s famous declaration in his *Defence of Poetry* (1821) that “poets are the unacknowledged

legislators of the world.” Although the quote is attributed to Shelley, it is a close paraphrase of a statement by his father-in-law, anarchist philosopher William Godwin, who described the poet as “the legislator of generations and the moral instructor of the world” in his dense defense of philosophical anarchy, *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice and its Influence on Modern Morals and Manners* (1793). The very history of this paraphrase—or shall we call it literary plagiarism?—demonstrates my father’s point. Feelings, like ideas, are molded in language, and often the ones that seem most original are adapted from the words of others.

I deemed myself a poet-in-training when my dad first posed his question. I therefore naturally adopted Shelley’s elevated and self-aggrandizing stance. For the likes of Shelley, and many Romantics before and after him, poets are kings and akin to gods. They do not answer to human laws—in fact, by virtue of being poets, they are uniquely entitled to violate them—but they know, better than anyone else, what it means to feel.

Surely, I insisted, the emotions and inner feelings of the poet are deeper and more profound than that of the ordinary individual. Surely, poets are unique. *One’s vocation is everything after all*, I told myself. I did not feel unique at the time, and I could not express myself like a true Romantic poet, so I tried to turn myself into someone like Shelley, and soon afterward, Allen Ginsberg. As different as they were from each other, both of these poets set themselves apart from other humans by virtue of the risks they were willing to take and the laws they were willing to break. Armed with language, the Romantics and the Beatniks could endure anything. So I believed. What I didn’t know was that Shelley had simply mastered his father-in-law’s diction. Ginsberg’s achievements as a poet never extended beyond a few short poems.

Shelley may have been a great poet, but he was not a decent human being. He practiced infidelity as though it were his birthright, abandoned his first wife while she was pregnant and

drove her to suicide, and neglected the many children he conceived without the slightest forethought or consideration of their fates. His second wife, Mary Shelley, was lucky: he died within five years of their marriage leaving her free to mourn her husband in peace. Mary Shelley made the most of her position as Percy Shelley's widow. She published a definitive edition of his works and preserved his memory for posterity. Yet anyone who studied her life carefully is likely to conclude that she had a much easier life without him.

While I found consolation in language and cultivated the poet within, I suppressed my father's side of the argument. I forgot his probing questions, for which I had never been able to provide an adequate answer. It took his death for me to realize that he was right. We have no way to know—and no reason to believe—that poets feel what non-poets do not. All we have are their words, and the best poetry, as an Arabic saying goes, is that which lies the most. Poets express their feelings more eloquently than non-poets, but they also express the feelings of others, which they may never have felt themselves. They do this, paradoxically, in the service of truth.

Good poets are masters of language. They skillfully shape the medium through which we render life. Their shaping tells us something—but by no means everything—about their experience of life itself. We do not know what goes on inside the hearts of those who prefer to keep their feelings silent any more than we know the true feelings of those who call themselves poets.

My father was not a poet. He was not given to extravagant expressions of emotion, sympathy, or love. Sometimes he was not given to expression at all, although he did love a good conversation, pursued without any agenda other than curiosity itself. I never saw him cry. He kept his feelings to himself, just as I kept my anger stored up inside.

My father was a good man, a devoted father, and a decent human being, with a spark of brilliance, a twinkle in his eyes, and a gift for posing thought-provoking questions that have wrapped themselves inside and around me, like the diagrams by M. S. Escher that he loved to study. Escher loved the Alhambra, just as my father did, and that may have been another reason for why he chose to pass the final decade of his life in Granada.

My father is gone. I loved him, but too silently. I made the mistake of concealing my love from myself. Since I did not allow myself to experience it, inevitably I concealed my love from him as well. Now, as I enter middle age, I can finally see what I wish I had understood as an aggrieved and angry adolescent: his existence and its sudden cessation are of greater consequence than anyone's poetry.

Creative Writing in the English 101 Classroom

Emilie Scarchilli

This paper strives to shed light on the following question: Can elements of creative writing be meaningfully introduced into a standard rhetoric and composition class? Although English 101 courses focus on composition, creative writing is usually addressed in a separate elective course, if addressed at all. If teaching students to write necessitates focus on facts, then creative writing could be viewed as superfluous or unnecessary, since much creative writing is, at least to some degree, fictional. If creative writing enhances the standard English 101 experience, however, then steps could be taken to incorporate more creative exercises into the curriculum. The last section of this paper provides some suggested steps, while the first two sections connect personal experience with scholarly research to provide a provisional answer to this project's research question.

I was privileged to participate in an upper-level undergraduate English literature course focused on children's literature of the 19th century. From *Peter Pan* to *Treasure Island* and George MacDonald to L. Frank Baum, Laura led her thirty-odd class of junior and senior undergraduates through a bevy of our childhood favorites, bringing fresh historical and thematic insight to works that some of us had read many times as children ourselves. As an integral part of her course, Laura broke her somewhat unwieldy group into smaller sections via an entirely random system and assigned us discussion questions.

While some questions were entirely standard close-reading fodder, others were predicated on some form of creative assignment. One week, we were told to study the paintings in the classroom, then describe them in the style of the book which we were reading for that

class. Another day, we put on hastily improvised skits. Still another day, we were tasked with producing a completely metaphorical interpretation of a scene based simply on the colors in that scene. Challenging at best and quirky fun at worst, these outside-the-box exercises gave us keen ears for types of literary style and the ability to utilize various types of literary criticism—including archetypal criticism by Frye, Laura’s favorite—whenever we deemed useful. Creative writing cemented ideas and themes for us, much more permanently than a standard lecture might have done. Associated with fun, literary terms and other such facts took on a vibrant context of their own.

Mark, another of my stellar undergraduate professors, imbued our first freshman literature class with outside-the-box assignments. Initially, he instructed us to write an essay about anything we found interesting, so that he could get to know us as individuals and as writers. We could then choose to write standard essays for the rest of the term, or choose to style our assignments as dialogues between the characters in the Greek tragedies we were reading.

For students without training in formal writing, or students unsatisfied with the pedantic notions surrounding essay writing, dialogues featuring Agamemnon and Oedipus presented the chance to rethink and reframe ideas unhampered by the artificial restrictions of an essay or by deep-seated simultaneous hatred of but affinity to the five-paragraph essay. No student was pressured to be creative, but those who wished to be were encouraged to do so. Apart from release of a student’s creative energies, the dialogues also aided in general reading comprehension and critical thinking; the plays certainly needed at least a mental translation into modern English to be entirely intelligible. Mark provided that opportunity gladly.

Speaking generally, research of the last two decades promotes the idea that creative writing and composition should not be kept in isolation from one another. In the scholarship summary to follow, each author argues for integration of the creative work and the composition essay, but integration to a different degree. These defenses—of creative writing’s place alongside, even within, or above traditional composition—are passionate but increasingly despairing. If the two fields had been successfully integrated, there would be no need to write articles so strongly advocating their coexistence.

Historically, as D.G. Myers points out, creative writing was considered a way for current students of literature to extend the literary canon themselves. Creative writing was one side of a coin; even though that coin is metaphorically sliced in half at this moment in time, it need not and should not be separated. This coin, Myers effectively argues, needs to be whole to retain all of its value. Myers’s perspective could certainly have informed my professors’ decision to keep creative writing as an integral part of the classroom. Both Laura and Mark saw creative and academic writing as two sides of a coin, with Laura in particular utilizing creative writing as a way for her students to imitate the canon, and hence by extension to add to it themselves.

As one of the scholars in defense of the creative-composition blend, Wendy Bishop argues that the line between standard composition and creative writing is too defined as an obstacle. Teachers, she posits, need to learn how to write as much as their students do; many teachers are held back by the mistaken misconception that students’ writing, creative or otherwise, is not up to standard. According to Bishop, the exclusionary line between composing and creating is confusing to most students and stymieing to those students for whom the essay seems an insurmountable object. Many of the students in Mark’s class displayed such confusion when presented with the opportunity to write dialogues rather than a standard academic paper.

Even though writing an essay was psychologically perceived as more difficult, it was defaulted to as the safe or understandable option. Mark, however, did not hold that creative writing was less acceptable than an essay. He equalized the two styles of writing, implicitly inviting students to rethink their biases while simultaneously providing his so-called atypical creative writers the opportunity to improve their craft.

Similarly, Douglas Hesse advocates for learning creative writing, a process that should be undertaken by both teachers and students. Like Myers and Bishop, Hesse labels the two disciplines as complementary, not exclusive (Hesse 32-33). Hesse also adds the need to move to digital space texts as well, since the Internet is now ubiquitous; many possibilities exist to facilitate and distribute new digital, textual products. Although speaking for a different reason, Adam Banks also pushes for alternate methods of writing, taking the standard essay and humorously downgrading it from its place at the top of the English departments' unspoken gradient of worthwhile literary forms. While neither Mark nor Laura downgraded the essay in their classes, they at least placed creative writing projects on the level with it. In Banks's view, our culture is moving forward socially and intellectually; privileging other types of writing will help us to move forward as well.

Patrick Sullivan concretizes the larger goal that Banks outlines. Creativity, Sullivan asserts, helps students become well-rounded, intellectually and socially aware members of the world around them. Students who are creative writers also have a bent for analytical or critical thinking. Under these terms, the inclusion of creative writing is not only beneficial but "necessary and indispensable" (Sullivan 19). To achieve this fusion in composition classrooms, Sullivan promotes Hirst's modernized conception of the liberal arts. Laura and Mark also promoted a modernized version of the liberal arts—a program unique not only to their

department of English but also to their college as a whole. Christendom College, their institution, presents Sullivan's vision in a holistic context. Through study of English, Philosophy, History, and other humanistic disciplines, Christendom students learn to become Sullivan's ideal. They are critical thinkers with a sense of their place in the world and a desire to improve that world as best they can. By tapping into students' creative writing, Laura and Mark helped to bring Sullivan's ideal to life.

Although Tim Mayers wishes for a creative-composition connection as much as Bishop, Hesse, and the others, he recognizes that a total connection is nearly impossible. Since literary "interpretation" is privileged over literary "creation," creative writing will always implicitly play second fiddle to the soloist (Mayers xv). While this assessment is true, there is no reason why teachers who appreciate Sullivan, Bishop, and Banks could not work to equalize this balance. More than a decade after Mayers's book, Laura and Mark were working to lift creative writing from its place as second fiddle; Mark in particular had been embarked on this project for years, even before he taught me. If scholars and teachers can imitate Laura and Mark to successfully invert the value pyramid, working to restore the balance that Myers notes, then a creative-composition integration could be possible.

Given that historical precedent exists for creative writing to coexist with traditional literary criticism, I would advocate for an attempt at such coexistence. Like Bishop, Hesse, and Sullivan, I believe that the two disciplines should be treated as equals, intellectual spheres which have much to offer each other when they intersect—not just in the classroom, but in academic publications and conferences as well. At the same time, like Mayers, I am skeptical as to the success of this blending. Mayers's book was published nearly two decades ago; in that intervening time, creative writing is still very much treated as a subsidiary field. My experiences

with Laura and Mark, however, give me hope that creative writing can be treated, at least by some teachers, as an equal to the essay, and scholarship like Banks' leads me to predict that at some point in the future the two types of writing will be conceived of and treated as equals.

From a more personal perspective, I and my colleagues keep our creative work squirreled away, to be brought cautiously out among friends and never to be mentioned among faculty—unless they express interest first—for fear of compromising our scholarly reputations. Such an attitude is misguided, however. If J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis and T.S. Eliot could all write both literary criticism and creative works, there is no reason that we should be deterred. Laura and Mark taught me in undergraduate work that such a fusion was possible; this fusion continues at the graduate level. Our creative writing skills cross over into our academic writing and vice versa, so there should be nothing holding us back.

To study this collaboration of creative and academic writing, I would conduct my own wide-ranging survey of college English classrooms and also explore the impact of creative-writing-oriented changes on Catholic University's English 101 curriculum.

This curriculum is divided into four units. In the first unit, students analyze preexisting speeches by Patrick Henry, Fredrick Douglas, or Martin Luther King Jr. in order to learn the basic parts of the rhetorical triangle and the methods by which each speaker aims to convince his audience. The second unit looks at two voices in conversation, often turning to the meatpacking industry to spark ethical debates among students. Students then craft a fully-formed research essay for the third unit, building on skills they learned in the first two. For their final unit, students reflect on their personal journey as writers in a first-person literary biography. Each of the following creative-oriented suggestions would remain simply that in my project: suggested.

If students are more comfortable writing standard essays, they would always have the opportunity to do so. For students who wish to work with the creative assignments outlined below, the option would likewise be open.

As data points, I would introduce into all classrooms a modified version of Unit Four’s literary biography; while the objectives of the assignment remain the same, I would encourage students to adopt some other genre beyond the straight first-person account (e.g. to format their biography as a news article, a scene from a play, or a piece of flash fiction). Since the assignment rubric already suggests that students write their biography in non-traditional genres—in other words, not a standard five-paragraph essay—incorporating more direct experimentation with forms of writing is especially conducive to Unit Four. As in Laura’s class, creative writing processes could be seamlessly integrated into the biography assignment.

In Unit Two, students would still learn how to identify points of an opposing argument, but they would be encouraged to reframe them as dialogue (e.g. an original conversation between David Foster Wallace and Jonathan Foer outlining their respective positions on the meat industry). Such an assignment would reflect Mark’s encouragement to reframe an argument as dialogue. Unburdened for the moment of the need to construct paragraphs, students who write dialogue can focus more clearly on points of argument rather than thinking and rethinking topic sentences. The exercise of distilling an argument by means of dialogue would allow students to identify both sides of an argument in sources that they read for their next assignment. This dialogic process would allow Unit Three, though it would remain a so-called standard essay, to be informed by previous creative work.

In addition, students would “translate” their chosen speech from Unit 1 into their own personal idiom while remaining attentive to points of the rhetorical triangle. Like the dialogue

exercise from Unit Two and the updated biography from Unit Four, this reframing exercise allows students to understand an argument while removing the pressure to write in what may be wrongly perceived as a sophisticated manner. Too often, students are told not to write as they speak, but writing in one's own voice is a necessary step to more polished levels of academic writing. Students first must understand an argument in order to write about it; most often, the effective and efficient method for doing so is connected to allowing so-called colloquial writing among students. Granted, this type of writing would function as a stepping-stone to more conventionally academic discourse, but it remains a necessary step.

I would then introduce these data points into one or two sections of Catholic University of America's English 101 setting, from which the curriculum I've outlined above is taken. For the sake of a broad sample size, I would also solicit large state universities, online universities, and smaller liberal arts schools so that students exposed to the practices from which I would draw data points would come from a variety of backgrounds. Hypothetically, the introduction of my data points would improve student performance in any type of composition across the board, no matter the setting. Ideally, the fusion of creative assignments with more traditional composition assignments would form students into more effective writers overall.

Assuming my hypothesis is confirmed, there is hope for creative writing within the sphere of academic writing. Adam Banks and Wendy Bishop can rest assured that creative writing can and should have a legitimate place in composition classrooms. Patrick Sullivan's model of an educated student is in fact a reality, proving Tim Mayers's prediction—thankfully—wrong. Teachers who secretly wish to emulate the likes of Mark and Laura will have empirical data points to support their wishes. Creative writing need not be consigned to a dark and dusty corner of the classroom—it can and should be brought into the light.

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The Jobs of the Poets

Dawn McDonald

The poets are scrubbing out the university toilets at 6 a.m. before the start of classes and the poets are doing the professors' taxes.

The poets sell insurance to the people whose lives are valued at \$100,000 to \$1 million and the poets cook eggs five ways.

The poets administer the arts grants for the other poets.

The poets deliver each other's rejection letters along with the bills and the drug-store flyers (for those who are so old-fashioned as to prefer a self-addressed, stamped envelope in which to receive personalized feedback on their rejections).

The poets drive the taxis that take the business travelers to the airport and then on to the South East Asian Economic Region;

sometimes the poets also travel on business but usually not on poetry business.

A lot of poets work in banks.

The poets tell you Enjoy, have a nice day.

The poets tell you your call cannot be completed as dialed.

The poets ask you to please have exact change handy, move along, keep right, and put your hand up if you feel any pain.

The poets call your name across a cup of coffee.

Some poets type 60 words per minute

and other poets type DECLARE myvar AS BOOLEAN.

The poets have dirt on their hands;

the poets bury dead people and sometimes pets and grow

world-girdling cucumbers and also synthesize the fertilizers that make the cucumbers grow so big; the poets are internationally renowned experts in *cucurbit* biology.

The poets point out the typographical errors in the *Annual Report to the Customer*.

The poets work straight through their lunch break

but then leave ten minutes early to catch the Number 12 bus which is one of several specific routes that are driven by poets.

Poets, as you go about your day, be very quiet:

the poets are working.

How to Work

Dawn McDonald

I want a writer's retreat.

But what will I do on my writer's retreat?

I expect I will retreat from writing.

First I'll retreat into reading.

Then I'll retreat into listening.

Then I'll fall asleep.

When I wake up I'll feel confused about what room I'm in.

The curtains will look like something that isn't curtains.

The curtains will look like Saran Wrap or sheets of bacon hanging in Saran Wrap or very thinly sliced toast.

I won't know what sunlight is anymore and I'll cry when I see my own hands.

It's going to be a masterpiece.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Kevin L. Cruz is a student and aspiring academic at DuVal High School in Lanham, Maryland. He maintained a pandemic blog that focused on philosophy and psychology. He's performed with the Prince George's Philharmonic, taught with Latino Student Fund and Global Language Network, and founded a reading and humanities-advocacy club at his high school.

Lili Fuentes is an avid photographer of nature and lover of the outdoors in general. She spent her adolescence traveling with her family and preferring to view the world through a 35mm lens. As a software engineer, she spends most of her day behind a computer screen, taking her artistic eye and using it to envision a tailored user experience for the applications she creates.

Landon Funk is a feminist, film, gender, and sexuality scholar, educator, and professor with a focus on American Literature. Based in Nashville, Tennessee, she received her bachelor's in English from Princeton University in 2015 and master's in English Literature from Mercy College in 2022. She teaches writing, film, and literature at Columbia State Community College and is the Director of Education at Granite Education while simultaneously working toward her PhD in English Literature at Middle Tennessee State University. She has presented her research at the South Atlantic Modern Language Association's conference, the Pacific and Ancient Modern Language Association's conference, and Mercy College's Writing, Image, Text symposium. Her personal and academic work can be found in *The South Atlantic Review*, *The Tennessean*, and *Red Hyacinth*, among others. Funk also teaches yoga, specializing in how trauma manifests in the body and mind-body connection through movement and meditation.

Rebecca Ruth Gould is a writer, poet, translator, and scholar. She is the author most recently of *Erasing Palestine: Free Speech and Palestinian Freedom* (Verso, 2023). Her essays have appeared in the *London Review of Books*, *Prospect Magazine*, *Middle East Eye*, and *Index on Censorship*, among other venues.

JZ Houlihan has translated the works of the Portuguese poet Jorge de Sena. These translations can be found in *The Poetry of Jorge de Sena*, *Art of Music*, and *Metamorphoses*. His original poetry is published in a chapbook, *Driving Cabeza*, and in *Thirty-One Superior Poems of Our Time*. Houlihan's original verse in Classical Latin is included in *The Vates Anthology of New Latin Poetry*. His translations of Fernando Pessoa can be found in *Metamorphoses*, Vol. 20, Issue 1 and in *The Ravens Perch Literary Magazine*. He has original poetry forthcoming in *Eunoia Review*. JZ Houlihan lives in Houston, Texas and has taught Classics for decades.

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Emilie Scarchilli received her B.A. in English Language and Literature from Christendom College and her M.A. in the same discipline from the Catholic University of America, where she is currently a doctoral student. While she is primarily a Victorian studies scholar, she also maintains an interest in creative writing studies.

Horacio Sierra is a Professor of English at Bowie State University, Maryland's oldest HBCU. His research and teaching interests include Renaissance literature and culture, gender, sexuality, popular culture, and Hispanic literature and culture. Dr. Sierra's academic work has been published in *Comparative Drama*, *The Sixteenth-Century Journal*, *Early Modern Women: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, *Women's Studies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, *The Journal of Florida Literature*, and *Theatre Journal*. His creative writing has been published in *The William & Mary Review*, *Gulf Coast Magazine*, *Peregrine*, and *The Journal of Florida Studies*. His journalism has been published in *The Washington Post*, *The Baltimore Sun*, and *The Miami Herald*. In 2023 President Biden appointed him to the President's Committee on the Arts and Humanities.