

JIM CORDER'S GENERATIVE ETHOS AS ALTERNATIVE TO TRADITIONAL ARGUMENT, OR STYLE'S REVIVIFICATION OF THE WRITER-READER RELATIONSHIP

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Traditional argumentation, with its privileging of *logos* and its emphasis on reasoned judgments delivered with speed, clarity, and efficiency in order to persuade an audience, is valuable in some rhetorical situations. One situation in which traditional arguments are valued is academic writing. I want us to imagine, though, a scholarly approach that values the presence of persons in argument. Imagine practicing a rhetoric and writing that asks for time, for care, for listening and understanding, a rhetoric that has the potential to be applied to scholarly writing, but more broadly, to intimate rhetorical situations which rely on person-centered appeals for identification rather than persuasion. As Richard Young has argued, rhetoric scholars need to begin to investigate and theorize dyadic and other intimate rhetorical situations in order to create a new rhetoric of argumentation, one that “breathe[s] new life into the ancient concepts of *ethos* and *pathos* and ... position[s] them within an enriched conception of rhetoric, which, like its ancient counterpart, addresses the question of how one invents arguments under the constraints of actual situations” (1992, p. 118). Many scholars in rhetoric and composition are interested in how writers and speakers invite readers and listeners into their inventive universe, especially when readers or listeners hold an opposing viewpoint and can be considered antagonistic; how writers and speakers create and foster empathy; how writers and speakers respond to informal scenes of rhetoric (e.g., among family and friends); how writers and speakers expose inquiry to readers and listeners through provisional reasoning; how writers and speakers can frame of an argument and the strategies they can use to minimize the potential threat for readers and listeners; and how writers and speakers utilize narrative in rhetorical situations.

When we begin to emphasize and value the various functions of *ethos* and *pathos* in argumentation, we realize how essential a well-theorized canon of style becomes to scholars of rhetoric and composition. We cannot begin to answer inquiries into non-traditional argument without understanding the styles that speakers and writers enact in these rhetorical situations.

This essay explores the work of Jim Corder as issuing a call to the scholarly community to value the presence of persons in making arguments. This call foregrounds ethos as fundamental and asks practitioners of rhetoric to create and embody a generative ethos, one that attempts to build time and understanding into discourse as a way to reach out and embrace audiences. This call also asks us to return to theorizing the writer-reader relationship. This relationship is fraught with complication, especially by factors such as identification and its lack, but as scholars and audience members we can begin to seek the traces of the author in his or her work; one way to do so is through stylistic analysis. Because of his focus on theorizing ethos, Corder's work opens a space in the field for a renewing interest in the teaching and learning of stylistics. It is through this type of inquiry and analysis that one's very personhood is fore-grounded as meaningful and relevant. The canon of style is connected in concrete ways to the recognition of sentence-level concerns that are essential to understanding and creating a rhetoric that closes the distance between readers and writers in a process Corder terms "enfolding." The idea of enfolding audience is a beneficial form of idealism that rejects speed, clarity, and efficiency as antithetical to generative ethos.

Enfolding, in many ways, is a performative act. As Holcomb and Killingsworth discuss in their chapter, stylistic performance is "not only [a vehicle to] present a self" but also is "an orchestration with readers, subject matters, and texts" (2010, p. 92). The authors believe that these elements, features in the rhetorical situation, relate through three arenas of interaction: the textual, the social, and the cultural. Although the framing of my essay is not organized through these three arenas, the reader can see in my analysis how Jim Corder understands his choices in unfolding his argument (textual), how he relates to his readers through his words and structures (social), and how he signals to his audience, the academic community, both his membership in, and critique of, its traditional discourses (contextual).

When scholars refocus attention on the sentence and word choice (as Holcomb and Killingsworth ask their students to do), it provides another dimension to rhetorical analysis which revives the long-lost, often-neglected canon of rhetoric: Style. Stylistics is an analytical framework that heightens scholars' awareness of language and allows us to talk about a writer's ethos in more concrete rather than impressionistic ways. Knowledge of style allows the

teacher-scholar and her or his students to see the writer's varieties of *choice* in prose, the intersections of content and form, and how invention and arrangement play out before us in compositions. Style, then, is one intersection between rhetoric and composition as the writer chooses the form through which to best communicate to an audience. Richard Young, Alton Becker, and Kevin Pike's *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change* supports this claim as they define rhetoric as "a creative process that includes all the choices a writer makes from his earliest tentative exploration of a problem ... through choices in arrangement and strategy for a particular audience, to the final editing of the final draft" (1970, p. xii). Young, Becker, and Pike's discussions of writer and reader relationships provide a lens through which to view Jim Corder's theory of enfolding and also his stylistic choices in writing.

Young, Becker, and Pike and Corder were all trying to define and create a New Rhetoric: one that emphasized the importance of communication among people as being essential for social change. *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change* was not merely a transactional textbook for its writers asked readers to discover and collaborate in the creation of a rhetoric that held cooperation at its center and asked practitioners to reach out to "people whose beliefs are radically different from our own and with whom we must learn to live" (Young, Becker & Pike, 1970, p. 8). These scholars all understood that confrontations often manifest between the readers of texts and the authors of texts. Style, as Corder and other New Rhetoricians believed, is a method writers use to invite readers into their inventive universes. Young, Becker, and Pike devote five chapters specifically to the writer-reader relationship; most importantly, they encourage writers to minimize any sense of threat to a reader by acknowledging opposing views and addressing the reader "as if he were intelligent, curious, honest, sincere—in short, as if he possessed the same qualities that the writer attributes to himself" (1970, p. 208). They also emphasize that the writer has a responsibility to make their image of the world visible for the reader. Corder describes writing as a process of emergence that shows a love and willingness between the reader and writer to "*see* each other, *to know* each other, *to be present* to each other, *to embrace* each other" (1985, p. 23). Style becomes essential as it is the only way for the writer to develop an ethos to be "present" to the reader, to enfold a reader into his or her inventive universe. The real magic is that the words on the page leave traces of the author who wrote them.

In this chapter, I hope to demonstrate that Corder creates a discourse that enfolds its audience through his enactment of a personal, performative style. I will explore Corder's notion of the author leaving "tracks" for readers in texts, a concept that he articulates in "Notes on a Rhetoric of Regret." Corder speaks

to the writer's presence and permanence as he acknowledges that his thoughts will be referenced in future style scholarship. He admits "that if I exist, I exist over yonder, not in my own endeavors, but in other people's perceptions of my endeavors" (1995, p. 97). Although he sometimes expresses concern for the potential for his work and himself to be misread by others, Corder articulates that he is leaving his traces for future scholars to find, if we only have the patience to look hard enough.

In this sense, I agree with Wendy Bishop when she says that the end of Corder's writing is "personification" to create "a text with a real body" concluding that, "Jim Corder's essays are performative" (2003, p. 95). Corder is fully aware of his performance for readers, painfully and deliberately aware that every word he writes is in the spirit of cultivating a voice. As a speaker, he is accessible and inviting. In this same way, I am writing this chapter with an invitational tone, using the intimate pronouns "I," "you," "we," and "us" throughout. It is not my intention to interpellate and coerce you into my argument. Rather, I mean to allow for moments of identification between reader and writer, you and me; in this way, I mean to practice the style of enfolding that Corder envisioned and practiced. Corder's performative ethos, I argue, is an alternative epistemology to traditional argument that we can explore in writing; it is a way of knowing that is generative as he enfolds his audience in a discourse of his reflections.

To be effective rhetorical scholars, I believe, we must interact with the author's mind at work through a stylistic analysis of the body of the text, an analytical method I will demonstrate later in this chapter. First, though, a discussion of Corderian rhetoric is in order, one that attempts to consider his oeuvre as teaching us to see an alternative to traditional argumentation. Corder's theory of enfolding is essential in creating an alternative way to write discourse as he asks us to be cognizant of a reader of our texts; to create a space for a reader to enter a text; to create moments of identification with that reader; to hold that reader's perspective wholly in mind as we write. Corder attempts to accomplish the tasks of enfolding (no small order) through his stylistic techniques, specifically through his use of repetition, enumeration, and narrative. I then take a closer look at Corder's text "Notes on a Rhetoric of Regret;" this final section was written to both show the elements of a stylistic analysis and to further demonstrate my argument that Corder's performative style is a means through which he conveys his theory of enfolding. It is here that we see Corder's work as an answer to Young, Becker, and Pike's call for a writer who reveals his or her process of inquiry in order to create the *conditions* for cooperation and social change; Corder sees this exposure of his process of inquiry as paramount to his theory of enfolding.

WHEN THE STARS ARE RIGHT: THE THEORY OF ENFOLDING THROUGH GENERATIVE ETHOS

Jim Corder confesses a desire of displacement from traditional styles and structures of argument. In his book chapter, “Tribes and Displaced Persons: Some Observations on Collaboration,” he lays bare his vision for a “scholarly sort of work but to write in a personal sort of way” that engenders a hope that his writing style would “perhaps even help to stretch out the possibilities of prose” (1993, p. 281). His lyrical repetition of “I want to be displaced” in one passage is a refrain that reinforces his conviction in a “fanatic eclecticism,” a belief that through writing styles that allow for complexity and choice rather than rigidity and credo we can create voices that invite our audiences into our discourses (1993, p. 278). Many of us already practice forms of writing beyond traditional styles of argumentation, many of us want to be able to write beyond traditional styles of argumentation, some have yet to be convinced. I am of the opinion that many aims for writing are necessary—we need scholarly work that is referential and makes traditional arguments but we could also benefit from work that compliments that paradigm. And by extension, Corder’s work, and his theory of enfolding in particular, reminds us that as scholars we have the opportunity to *invent* ourselves through our writing.

In an effort to legitimize and rapidly professionalize the discipline of rhetoric and composition, some scholars recall and bemoan the loss of persuasive qualities in our writing that were hastily dropped, particularly moves in writing that establish personal ethos. This decision can be seen as ironic for a discipline almost entirely based on studying the available means of persuasion (Warnock, 2003, p. 204). Corder returns us to our disciplinary roots as he writes with the intention of expanding Aristotelian concepts of ethos. Corder, like Aristotle, understood that the character of the speaker is just as important as the content of the speech:

It is not true, as some writers assume in their treatises on rhetoric, that the personal goodness revealed by the speaker contributes nothing to his power of persuasion; on the contrary, his character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses. (Aristotle, trans. 1926, Book 2)

Corder’s focus on ethos stems from his desire to understand it as the central rhetorical appeal; he also understands ethos as Aristotle does in the sense of establishing character to induce belief through “good sense, good moral character, and goodwill” (Trans. 1926, Book 2). Corder’s writing; however, is

moving beyond persuasion to identification with his readers, as he searches to create a real connection that shows an openness to change one's perspective after listening to another. Hunting for ethos, both enacted through his theorizing of the term and also through his reflections of his own presence in the text as a writer, appears to be an obsessive quest for him. I think it's what draws me and others to his writings. His writing is like the speech of the prophet, Amos. It is as Corder wrote: "To own and guarantee one's words, I take it, means to be fastidiously and meticulously aware of their background, keenly thoughtful of your consequence and future; it entails giving one's words the backing of such a history of search and thinking as will stand scrutiny" (1972, p.8). His writings mirror his own philosophy of rhetoric, and this aim is to present himself as a writer who is aware of his stylistic choices in the process of creating meaning for audiences.

The desire to represent yourself for a reader is a part of the process of enfolding, a concept in rhetoric that Corder so wanted to encourage us to begin theorizing and performing; this concept is one that is only possible through a knowledge and awareness of stylistic choices. Corder's representation of self, though, is not one that assumes that a whole self can possibly be communicated through text; no matter how conscious an author is in his style, she must still slog through the imperfect medium of language. Instead, Corder shows his audience a self that is not fixed or whole; he is as an author that unfolds his personality. Unfolding is the means through which a writer can begin to enfold an audience, and style gives the author agency to begin a process of unfolding. As readers of Corder's work, for example, we learn something new about his personal life and gain a clearer understanding of his theories of rhetoric in each piece. The ideal ethos for Corder is a person who "lives in a space large enough to house contradictions" (1978, p. 79). The fragmentary self is not easy to grasp nor is it ideal. I do not know Corder the man, but Corder as an author is constructing an ethos for me as a reader. I think Tilly Warnock defines Corder's ethos succinctly and insightfully when she writes: "Through his personal, cultural, creative, critical, and ideological discourse, Corder teaches us to live with the messiness, uncertainties, and ambiguities of life [...] without denying them to make sound decisions about our *choices* of language" (2003, p. 205, my emphasis). Jim Corder is taking a risk through his presentation of self that is not "ideal," and he opens a space in scholarship where this way of being is validated and, in fact, it can be argued that it is closer to the reality of our lives.

The written act of unfolding a perspective, and by this I also mean exposing our process of inquiry for readers, through performative ethos is the *raison d'être* for Corderian rhetoric; he is risking himself before us because he believes so strongly in the possibility of one mind embracing another, even if this requires

a person to hold two contradictory ideas at once, equally valuing both. There is vulnerability in this subjectivity, a vulnerability which is not appropriate to expose in all rhetorical situations,¹ but one that can be effective in terms of speaking across to an audience member who is relatively equal in terms of power dynamics to a writer. Corderian rhetoric is idealistic in this sense as it engenders a feeling of hopefulness that our words can “reach and stretch for a new Jerusalem, while we reach and stretch to make a *new* language, a language that will let us define ourselves, speak ourselves fully into existence and into relation with the other” (Corder, 1977, p. 482). Our rhetoric can lead us to identification with the other and toward creating better interpersonal relationships, and perhaps even to a better social reality. We can see Corder's construction of an ethos that houses contradictions as allowing for a collaborative process between his readers which he calls enfolding.

Enfolding a reader requires that the writer take a risk by unfolding his values and narrative to others and a willingness to begin a dialogue, even if the writer experiences resistance from her audience. It is part of a recognition that we are standing in a narrative, in a rhetoric, and that we are trying to speak out across an ideological divide to another. In perhaps his most well-known article, “Argument as Emergence, Rhetoric as Love,” Corder defines enfolding when he writes: “Argument is emergence toward the other. That requires a readiness to testify to an identity that is always emerging, a willingness to dramatize one's narrative in progress before the other; it calls for an untiring stretch toward the other, a reach toward *enfolding* the other” (1985, p. 183, emphasis added). Emergence, as Corder describes, is a state of becoming; in the case of writing, he means to aim for the creation of an ethos that is developing on the page for a reader. A presentation of self as an emerging identity, in Corder's view, minimizes the potential threat that a confident, dogmatic ethos might impose on a reader. Enfolding is about vulnerability of self, a demonstration of mutual respect for the other, a coming together that is not coercive, but welcoming. One point that can be missed in “Argument as Emergence, Rhetoric is Love” is the critique that Corder is developing in response to practitioners in the field of Rhetoric and Composition who view and teach argument as a clinical, “neat” process with linear steps. Corder is challenging that anaesthetized view of argument because it often does not account for potential harm. This sentiment appears in his earlier works where we see him working toward his seminal essay. In both “Varieties of Ethical Argument” and “From Rhetoric to Grace” he includes the same passage:

it is possible for any of us—if the stars are right and we work
to make ourselves human—to enfold another whose his-

tory we have not shared. In this act of enfolding, the speaker becomes through speech; the speaker's identity is always to be saved, to emerge as an ethos to the other, whose identity is also to be cherished. Then they may speak, each holding the other wholly in mind. (1978, p. 98; 1984, p. 26)

This is a call for making inquiry visible to a reader, of exposing the process through which one thinks and writes. This quote also asks us to envision what it might look like to emerge as an ethos, an idea that I will later discuss in terms of stylistically analyzing Corder's writing choices as a means to emerge to readers and enfold them in his history. Some of Corder's first-time readers may find his repetition infuriating, his "hedges" on offering an opinion or argument exhausting, his conflicting, schizophrenic identity to be maddening, and his personal narratives to be leading us down a path in the middle of the night without street signs. But really, these stylistic moves are intentional; they are connected to exposing his process of inquiry. Corder's stylistic techniques of repetition, enumeration, and narrative story-telling, I argue, try to accomplish this visible inquiry for readers.

Stylistic choices help an author speak and write themselves into existence; for example, Corder's use of repetition is connected to his development of ethos and presence for audiences. He writes, "I have wanted to leave tracks so that another might know where I imagine I am; for that reason, transitional passages and sections may be heavy-handed and repetitive" (1995, p. 94). Corder's repetition (sometimes of sentences, whole paragraphs and pages from one text to another), though irritating to some of his readers, is a part of his style and essential to his creation of ethos. Although Jim Corder says, "I don't expect to have too many ideas; I hold on to those I have, and repeat them" to display humility, he is fully aware that the repetition is connected to his thoroughness as writer (1993, p. 278). He wants his repetition to mirror the thorough ethos that he so admires in the prophet, Amos. He desires to make an impression on his readers, and to speak in a language that encourages understanding.

The stylistic choice of repetition can be performative; in the case of Corder's laments, he repeats lines about vanishing identities and memories in almost all his major works in order to emphasize this motif's importance. I sense that Corder is keenly aware of society rapidly changing around him, evidenced by his often nostalgic love for things past, such as the fountain pen and the typewriter. He felt that "the volume [of language] crowds our living space and our time, sometimes generating frenetic speed, sometimes a paralysis" (1978, p. 93). This paradox of speed and stasis often hinders our ability to communicate with each other, and certainly leaves little time for reflection.

Corder's awareness of the problem of time, or lack thereof, offers one way in which he can see a critique of his own theory of enfolding. He recognizes the failures that are often experienced in our communication with others. He seems to be asking in his works: What if we can't find love for another? What if all we have is really a self-love, a love that we think we feel for another but is merely a projection of ourselves onto the other? The biggest failure of communication is our inability to really hear each other, he believes. Again, this is illustrated by his repetition of the passage: "we may hear ourselves, not another; the other's words may act only as a trigger to release our own, unlocking not the other's meaning, but one we already possessed. When this happens, we are bound in space, caught tightly in our own province" (1978, p. 94; 1982, p. 134). When we do not listen to another's words, we are not able to reflect on what that person has said to us. We are not enfolding when we do not hear the other; instead, enfolding asks us to create situations in which people consciously, willingly, and trustingly allow themselves to be enfolded. This requires us to both talk across and out to another in explaining ourselves and listening to the other when they talk. In writing, since we cannot listen to our readers, we try to imagine their perspectives and to write with them in mind. As Corder says, "we have the habit of diminishing each other's words" (1978, p. 63). We not only diminish, but we ignore and talk over the other. Perhaps Corder feels the need to repeat himself because he understands our contemporary issues with listening and reflection in a world that often paralyzes us by its rapid speeds.

Another way in which writers can create ethos through their stylistic choices is through the use of enumeration in writing; in Corder's case, he uses enumeration to demonstrate his principles of enfolding. "From Rhetoric to Grace," "Asking for a Text and Trying to Learn It," and "What I Learned in School" all contain lessons that he wishes to impart to us about what he has learned as a teacher-scholar. These lessons, though, are often only parts of a whole, as he confesses to us that "there are yet other propositions I have not found" (1999, p. 57). By making his points on rhetoric tangible to readers, he offers "fragments" of truths that we can hold and reflect on about the nature of learning and life. Again, Corder argues that he cannot give us a whole, cohesive body of knowledge because such a product is an impossible ideal. He believes that "[l]anguage itself is synecdoche: we're always naming parts of things because we cannot at any given moment name the whole" (1984, p. 18). This microcosmic example of the synecdoche of language leads us to think about synecdoche in our disciplinary knowledge, and more broadly, in our self-identities. Corder is giving us parts of himself, leaving tracks and traces on the page that we need to piece together as readers. The whole, idealized body of knowledge and the whole, idealized "authentic" Jim Corder do not exist. He writes, "I have published a little about

rhetoric and hope to publish more, but the rhetorics of the world swirl around me, do not come together, and I am lost. I can't find my own inventive world; it is in parts, and some escape me" (1986, p. 36). Again, Corder repeats the last line in this passage later in the paper (1986, p. 37) for emphasis. Feelings of displacement, fragmentation, loss, and lonesomeness pervade Corder's works; we can see these themes as Corder expressing his process of coming to terms and accepting that the world is synecdochic.

The re-telling of narratives also makes a writer's ethos emerge toward readers; Corder creates his narrative universe through his story-telling (the inclusions of his idiosyncratic rituals, his failed memories, his attempts to describe his relatives and the past, his humility and hedges, and his Texan sensibility). There is an epistemology of self as text happening in Corder's writing as he interrogates his memory and first lessons learned. He often explains his use of the personal as the only epistemology truly available to him: "Besides, the self is the only center I have, and I think I must use the best evidence available to me, my own experience, however I manage to misinterpret it" (1989, p. 211). There is a real (dare I say) hunger behind these statements to search through the evidence of experience and yet to be able to admit that the construction of self through memory is always a "slippery" undertaking with room for misinterpretation. Again, he often repeats the sentiment that as he writes his memories they are vanishing from him and he is also vanishing in the process: "Souls disappear. I disappear. Not all at once: we are whittled away. I diminish before my own eyes" (1995, p. 97). This lack of closure and wholeness can certainly be frustrating to a reader who is seeking an ideal self in the writings of Corder. And yet, Corder as a character is endearing, he fascinates us; he is addressing and enfolding us as readers. We learn from him and about him in the traces and the tracks, as he "manifests his own humanness" in the hope of showing us a way (1982, p. 129).

Exposure to the other through enfolding, even if this involves emerging as an ethos in texts, is a complex and ambiguous phenomena: it is loaded with difficulties. Enfolding is problematic in the sense that when we risk ourselves to emerge toward another person, as writers or readers, we open ourselves to the possibility of change. Change can be transformative and wonderful for some, but change can also be painful, hard, and for some people, unwanted. We can feel lost, unsure of our own narrative. Young, Becker, and Pike also comment on this aspect of change when they write that a writer and reader who seriously wish to practice Rogerian rhetoric, or for our case a rhetoric that values this idea of enfolding one narrative with another, the prerequisite is a willingness to change. The degree to which change affects us is subjective as our authors acknowledge: "Other changes, however, may be strongly resisted, for they affect

values that we regard as essential to our identity, even to our survival. Values are hierarchically structured; some are more significant, more eminent, than others" (1970, p. 219). When two people, two families, two countries are in a conflict that spans over years for one reason or another (sometimes we often forget why we are in conflict), it may be hard to reconcile these differences, it may be too painful to approach the other, to try to understand the other. Reconciliation, in some cases, cannot be achieved for one reason or another; contrary to Corder's description of enfolding, sometimes the stars are not right and being human to each other is too complicated.

My experience reading Corder has, at times, been one of discomfort and sadness, especially reading his book, *Yonder: Life on the Far Side of Change*.² *Yonder* is a hybrid piece of writing, part autobiographical, part literary, and part scholarly, it is in this piece that Corder tries to write an account of what great change does to our psyche. Change, for Corder, is a battlefield that can herald great joy but also has the potential to harm. He writes, "Change is inevitable and necessary to life, but it also entails a continuous destruction and loss of worlds, great and small, a combat of old habit with new need. Identity is always about to vanish as old worlds go and new worlds come" (1992, p. 23). Corder is tackling both the changes that have happened in his personal life: a divorce, a conflict with his daughter, addiction, cancer, and public life in the twentieth century: the "dying" of Western culture, the Holocaust, the women's movement, technological advances, and so forth. This book is very difficult for me to read; it is difficult to see a mind suffering on the page; it is difficult to hear about how he lost time and memories in treatment; it is difficult to hear him give witness to the diminishing relationship between his children and his first wife. Sometimes, disclosure can be painful for a writer and a reader.

Yet, Corder's concept of enfolding is one that builds new possibilities. Its more positive facet constructs a rhetorical theory that allows scholars to practice critical reflection of self in their works, and it teaches us to reach out, enfold, and love others through our writing. We can read Corder as radical for espousing a theory of love in relation to argumentation. These writings are about compassion and reaching out to the other through encouraging an exposure to the narrative/rhetoric/argument that people compose (albeit imperfectly) through life experiences. Transparency is important to Corder, and ethos is one vehicle that we have in written expression by which we can represent ourselves (albeit imperfectly) to the other. Corder defines rhetoric as a process of love-making: "I'll still insist that argument—that rhetoric itself—must begin, proceed, and end in love" (1985, p. 185). An epistemology of inventing the self through language, risking the self through language, hearing and enfolding another through language, and perhaps even loving through

language is a hopeful, ideal endeavor. We can also see this epistemology as one that offers us an alternative to traditional argumentation.

In fact, this cycle of invention and structure through language invites us to be more reflective about our ways of being and knowing, to be more subjective. An epistemology such as Corder's allows us to talk about the things we value and how we came to value them through a personal ethos in writing. Corder explains, "Ethical argument appears to be contingent upon a presence emerging in discourse, the real voice of a genuine personality that becomes understandable to us as a style, a characteristic way of moving through and among experiences" (1972, p. 7). One way Corder's theory of emergence through discourse can be discovered and explained is through a close, stylistic analysis of his work.

HUNTING PROFESSOR FOG: A STYLISTIC ANALYSIS OF "NOTES ON A RHETORIC OF REGRET"

We can be critical of Corder's writing in part because his voice is often contradictory, self-effacing, and thus his work has the potential to be read as a confession of epistemological and moral failure (Yoos, 2003, p. 123). Yoos and other readers make excellent points about Corder's writing and style. At the same time, Corder's work may also be read as an example of Young, Becker, and Pike's "Provisional writing" which is writing that "focuses on the process of inquiry itself and acknowledges the tentative nature of conclusions," a style that minimizes the threat to the reader and allows her to both understand and critique Corder's prose (1970, p. 207).

In Corder's "Notes on a Rhetoric of Regret," I find that he is working towards developing a theory for writing, one that emphasizes the affective experiences of everyday lives and celebrates personal recollections of "domestic particulars," uniting writers and readers (1995, p. 104). Corder's writing style in this piece, more importantly, is an experiment or application of his theory of unfolding. In this same vein, it is also significant to note that his article captures a spirit of inquiry, and willingness to explore personal experience that Young, Becker, and Pike so valued in *Rhetoric: Discovery and Change*. They argue that "[t]o become an effective inquirer, it is essential that you develop sensitivity and receptivity to problematic situations... . It is the best student who sees the limitations of human understanding and the need for inquiry in every aspect of human affairs" (1970, p. 91). In this piece, Corder inquires into the definition of personal writing, and explores whether or not a writer really can present his narrative to readers, more accurately, what it would look like to emerge as an ethos to readers. Corder, I think, is unsure what this means as he finds

clashing viewpoints on the nature of personal writing and rhetoric. Because of this acknowledgement of a problematic situation, “Notes on a Rhetoric of Regret” has a feeling of contradiction in the opening as he asks questions about the rhetoric in which he inhabits and offers no definitive answers. Corder asks the reader: “Is there a luechocholic style?” and responds, “I expect that style can only be found by others, not declared” (1995, p. 94) and again asks, “Is there an audience for a rhetoric of regret?” surmising, “I don’t know” (1995, p. 95). The uncertainty of his voice can lead the reader to think that he is tentative about his ideas, even when he describes the claiming of a self as a “chancy ground,” (1995, p. 97) an interesting choice of colloquial diction for an academic essay. Yet, these moves of “tentativeness” can be seen not as a fault in argument, but as a means of identification with audiences—a presentation of ideas that is not dogmatic, but rather inviting; in other words, these are all stylistic gestures that comprise Corder’s application of his theory of enfolding.

Although this chapter does not reproduce the full text of Corder’s article, I encourage you to read this essay in its entirety. Indeed, there were many pieces of Corder’s I could have chosen for this analysis; this is not, in fact, one of his well-known or oft-quoted works like “Argument as Emergence, Rhetoric as Love,” for example. But this article has a different quality than the others in his oeuvre; I can only venture to explain this difference through a series of suppositions. Perhaps it is his desperate need to recover what might (and will) vanish. Perhaps it is his defense of personal writing that he categorized as self-serving and sinful. Perhaps it is his admission of the futility of capturing people with words. Perhaps it is his lovingly detailed descriptions of the lives of those that were long gone: his grandmother, his mother, and his father. Perhaps it is because, as a reader, I knew that he wrote this article in 1995 and he would die of cancer three years later. For all these reasons, the piece elicited a strong emotional response in me. And, perhaps, this was because Corder envisioned this piece to be one where he specifically applied his theory of enfolding. I begin my stylistic analysis, in section V, where I believe that Corder recognizes how readers, like myself, may appropriate his words for their own uses, that this appropriation was “all right: troping, I’m troped” (1985, p. 102). As a scholar sensitive to the potential for being misread in conversations and writing, Corder in his own way is telling me it is okay to hold his prose under the microscope.

Corder begins section V with a story of his mother who often represents, for him, the self-effacing attitude encouraged by the Southern Christian tradition. The assertion of the personal is identified as a sin; for example, when he asks his mother what color his hair is, Mrs. Corder tells her son it is the color of feces. He tells his audience, “It was her way of reminding me that I shouldn’t be occupied with my own existence” (1985, p. 102). We know that Corder sees

section V of the essay as a blasphemous assertion as he opens contradicting a preacher that his mother is with the Lord, the first simple sentences appear here puncturing the audience with self-assertion: “That may be. I think she dwells in my memory” (1985, p. 102). The argument that memory and the re-telling of experience becomes a central theme for Corder, a way of self preservation and survival in a world where we are constantly in the throes of change.

The complex sentence that follows to end this paragraph is repeated at the end of other paragraphs in variation: “If I don’t remember her, and try to get her down right, she will vanish” (1985, p. 102); and when he writes of his father, “If I don’t remember him, and try to get him down right, he will vanish” (1985, p. 102); and when he writes about various towns in West Texas, “If I don’t remember them all, try to get them down right, they will vanish” (1985, p. 102); and when he writes of his grandmother, “If I don’t remember her, and try to get her down right, she will vanish” (1985, p. 103). This repetition draws the reader to the urgency of his writing project as he begins these complex sentences with a dependent “If” clause, and completes them with an affirmative independent clause of certain extinction unless he is able to avoid their fate by completing the dependent clause of “get[ting] them down right.” The brevity of these clauses also makes the reader more aware of the need to speak his relatives into existence and the stake that this section holds to his overall argument on personal writing.

Corder’s real metaphor for invention and writing begins with the story about his grandmother’s quilt-making which he feels scholars have misinterpreted—this stance is similar to the one he adopts toward theories of deconstruction as they view the self in writing as a fiction. A strong periodic sentence positions the reader for his critique of both sets of scholars, art historians and English: “They argue that the image of the poor needlewoman painstakingly constructing quilts out of scraps left over from important projects and stumbling upon a pleasing visual effect is a fiction” (1985, p. 103). Corder will continue to use his grandmother’s quilt-making as a metaphor for the writing process as writers are often piecing together scraps of their life’s experiences to form a beautiful whole.

In the following paragraphs Corder’s sentences are deliberate and planned but they read in a way that seems natural and spontaneous, as if he is really speaking to us. Firstly, Corder uses an elaborated complex sentence as a stylistic device to speed the rhythm of his grandmother’s life so that we will remember the image of her more: “She lived on another twenty years, lost in a world that no longer made much sense to her, entirely dependent on her children, with whom she lived, moving from one family to another every six months or so” (1985, p. 103). The next sentence is its own paragraph and slows the reader

down through the repetition of the word quilt: “But she made quilts, stunning quilts” (1985, p. 103). And the next paragraph is also one sentence in which Corder uses the stylistic device of anaphora and an elaborated complex sentence as he strings together clauses repeating the phrase “to be sure that.” Here he emphasizes that although these scholars believe they are empirically correct, they had no hand in the artwork of his grandmother: “She did so without the aid of authors who want to be sure that the world gets corrected, to be sure that we know how artistic artists of the quilt were, to be sure that we define the quiltmaker’s art in their way” (1985, p. 103). He contextualizes these scholars as antagonistic interlocutors who only want to define his grandmother’s art (literally) and personal writing (metaphorically) in one way—theirs. Yet, Corder wants to offer us an alternative to the dictates of scholarly thought on personal writing and he does so in the next paragraph through his honest, detailed, and loving description of his grandmother’s quilt-making process.

The following paragraph on his grandmother is perhaps one of the most poignant in “Notes on a Rhetoric of Regret.” Here he builds the prose from simple sentences to a sentence that uses the stylistic technique of asyndeton as he describes his grandmother: “She was mostly silent, withdrawn into herself, often ill-tempered” (1985, p. 103). He balances this rhythm with sentences that slow the reader down through the use of conjunctions, or polysyndeton: “She salvaged scraps of all colors and shapes and sizes,” and “Then one day she’d get out her bundles of scraps and feel of them and look at them” (1985, p. 103). These sentences stylistically mirror his grandmother’s process; the reader can almost feel her biding her time and rifling through the scraps and searching for the quilt that would emerge. And then, his grandmother has that moment where invention cycles into structure and she begins to work the scraps into a larger idea—a beautiful quilt. Moreover, in Corder’s extended metaphor on personal writing, we can think of her work as drafting toward a beautiful composition. In fact, Corder stylistically brings us through her creative process with more elaborated complex clauses: “Then after a while, she’d start cutting, though she had no pattern. After a while, she’d start sewing. And then there would be a quilt of intricate design, beautifully rendered, lovely to see” (1985, p. 103). After that, we get three simple sentences that are arresting: “Without design, she made design. Without art, she made art. Her children are all dead” (1985, p. 103). I believe the repetition of sentence structure (from negative to positive) and words (“Without,” “design,” and “art”) in the first two sentences adds to their affective quality (especially since they follow so many complex sentences!). We are compelled to stop and see the quilt—the completed composition—as if Corder is holding it up to the reader as a model of his theory of personal writing.

If the subtextual metaphor was not enough for some readers, in the following paragraph, Corder lays bare his opinions on personal writing. He uses a complex-compound sentence to admit that although he is aware of the then “new” and various theories of post-structuralism, just as he is aware of the scholarship on quilt-making; yet, he wants to continue to think of both his grandmother and his writing in his own way. He writes, “I know that there are other ways of thinking about personal writing and the recollection and rendition of ourselves [another example of polysyndeton here as well], and I try to honor these other views, but I’ll go on thinking in this way as well” (1985, p. 103). Here, we see Corder’s ethos as one that houses two thoughts on personal writing: a contradiction, but this also reveals an acknowledgement of other perspectives. Perhaps this confession can be seen as an admission that Corder was set in his ways of thinking and unable to see another perspective. But, his inclusion of the qualifier “as well” at the end of this sentence shows how he is indeed holding all these perspectives in his mind at once. In this paragraph we also experience a tone shift from first to second person when he begins to ask rhetorical questions: “Who else will tell what you remember and try to make it real but you?” (1985, p. 103). I believe these choices were made as a way to identify with the audience, to turn the essay from his familial recollections to a conversation with the reader; indeed, this is a move of enfolding his reader into his discourse.

As readers, I think we can identify Corder’s position as one that is born of much reflection, and as such, we are likely to listen to his voice that speaks from experience, even if that voice is one of a maverick. In fact, he has built so much credibility in his argument thus far that his “radical individualism” is not necessarily a threatening project for us as readers. Corder is not afraid of his opinion, embracing his own heresy as he flippantly absolves himself of the sin of individualism when he utters: “I was planning to go to Hell anyway” (1985, p. 104). Yet, the note of regret creeps into his discourse just after such a brazen declaration, “I know that in trying to hold things, I too will vanish. I had hoped to be real, but I am only a vacancy in the air” (1985, p. 104). These positive-negative complex sentence constructions can be seen as undermining the previous comment about hell-fire; yet, it is not so much a subversion of the original sentiment but a way of housing contradictory feelings in one speaker, in one composition. The reader is left with a feeling of sadness as our author’s hopes are not realized.

But, just as Corder has taken away any hope, he has to work to build the audience’s morale to carry us to the end of the piece; the truth is, he has not yet “vanished” from the page. The following paragraphs turn into vignettes of daughters and fathers that he sees on his weekend visits to the public library.

Both these paragraphs are very descriptive as they contain a majority of complex and compound-complex sentences. Yet, he uses simple sentences to close these paragraphs such as, "She had made it" (1985, p. 104) when the girl climbs the small hill. And when he reflects on these experiences he writes a one sentence paragraph, "Not bad for early on a Saturday evening" (1985, p. 104). We get the distinct feeling from Corder that he wants to value these stories as significant, that his experience of viewing these parent-child relationships is something to be valued in writing. He implores his readers that "[we] ought to look at them. They ought to go on their way. The domestic particulars of their lives ought to be examined" (1985, p. 104). The repetition of "ought" and the string of simple sentences force the reader to slow down. His words, like a ritual on a Saturday morning, create a feeling of comfort and care—the complete opposite of hopelessness. The simple sentences that end the stories, too, offer a sort of satisfaction for the reader; they convey the message that the affective experiences of our lives are precious.

And then, Corder wants to set us right as readers; he wants to complicate our notions of authorship. He writes: "We won't, however, trap them in their words, and I won't be caught, either" (1985, p. 104). Just when we think we "know" Corder in these passages, he again wants to vanish from the page; he insists that no matter how much we analyze his words, he will never be "caught."

Corder is preparing for the conclusion; it is here where he feels he needs to reiterate his vision for the future of personal writing. Corder asserts his argument through a compound-complex periodic sentence that also has a three-part serial comma and a negative-positive construction. He writes, "The de-centering project of our time that will find us re-located after a curious, glorious, disastrous five-hundred-year journey at the center of things might lead to a new collective in which we are lost, but it needn't" (1985, p. 105). Corder establishes a tone for the reader that piques our curiosity as we wait to hear his alternative world for personal writing. Again, Corder shows us what the writing of the future will not be like: "The epic of our time, the drama, the story, the song, will not, I hope, tell of war and of the hero's triumph with the spear or gun; and surely it's unlikely that it will begin with fallen angels" (1985, p. 105). In a way, Corder is tentative about his conclusions at the beginning of the sentence entering the caveat of "I hope" but he seems more confident in the second half of the semi-colon with the qualifier "surely." Milton's fallen angels, those who are exiled or banished from heaven, could relate to his earlier references of hell and blasphemy. Corder's rebellion against the gods of academia perhaps is an unforgivable sin, and I think in a way, he understood that the revolution for personal writing and non-traditional argumentation may not be fully realized in his own work or readily accepted by academia in his time—perhaps this

realization is one note on a rhetoric of regret for Corder. He reiterates his statements on the essential project of recording the present, of bearing witness to the everyday. Again, he uses polysyndeton: “We sing or tell or show or chant in the languages of the echoing past, shaped and transformed now to our uses in the forms that we can make or learn to make” (1985, p. 105). The article before us is Corder’s attempt to expose the memories and the languages of his “echoing past,” this dramatization before the reader is Corder’s way of emerging to us in his discourse, of showing us the ways in which we can begin to view, understand, and perform the genre of personal writing. By including us in his statement, Corder reminds readers that his project extends beyond him and his thoughts on rhetoric—it is a project of inclusiveness, a project of enfolding.

Corder chooses to end the last four sentences with anaphora as he repeats “It will tell” at the beginning of each sentence. The stylistic effect is one of prophesy as he leads us to his culminating idea on writing and rhetoric. Yet, his last sentence certainly reads as a final confession as he writes: “And it will tell how, at last and after all, we came to vanish” (1985, p. 105). This prophesy leaves us with an eerie feeling as he repeats his earlier motifs of his relatives vanishing, only now he posits the idea in relation to all of us (1985, p. 105). Corder, too, has vanished but these notes remain. They are one side of the conversation Corder invites us into through his personal, performative style. He asks us to see his process of inquiry; to see how he collected scraps to create a quilt, sentences to create a whole, canons to create a rhetoric of regret.

SOME CONCLUDING THOUGHTS ON INVENTIVE UNIVERSES

Academic writing, both our own scholarship and the work we ask of students, can have many ends. One of them, as displayed in the life works of Jim Corder, is to enfold the reader into our discourses. This end is only accomplished when we work in our writing to expose the rhetoric on which we stand, where we stood, and where we hope to stand. Corder encouraged our discourse community to poke and prod at traditional writing styles because “when we set out to talk or to write about anything—about rhetoric, about writing, about anything—we are already inside a rhetoric and in fairness, we ought to show that rhetoric, even if it is sometimes as hard as learning to see and to show the back sides of our own eyeballs” (2003, p. 37). The process of enfolding is one in which we make a disciplinary rhetoric that is personal, visible, and a work in progress through writing that invites the audience to follow and collaborate in our meaning-making.

Unfortunately, I do not know Jim Corder. However, I think we have been able to speak to each other across texts largely because of his generative ethos. His voice that we as readers hear as we read; his words that translate so well into a dialogue, a commodious conversation.³ “Generative language,” Corder writes, “seeks to shove back the restraints of closure, to make in language a commodious universe, to stretch words out beyond our private universes. Extension in time and space seems to be one effort that makes this possible” (1978, pp. 94-5). Style is the means through which a writer can create this commodious universe. For a brief moment, Corder and I inhabit the same universe, enfolding toward the other, trying to work out the ideas of what it means to practice and to write in a style that creates a rhetoric of spaciousness: a place where writers and readers can think and live together.

NOTES

1. See Lassner, Phyllis. “Feminist Responses to Rogerian Argument.” *Rhetoric Review* 8(2), 220-32. She provides a valid critique of a rhetoric that exposes vulnerability in the case of women speaking out against patriarchal oppression. Rogerian rhetoric, and its revised form Corderian rhetoric, would perhaps not suit a speaker or writer in a position where a power differential between audience and writer is wide as this may create a larger potential for manipulation on behalf of the dominant speaker or group. I am sure there are many other examples of critique beyond the one that Lassner forwards, and it is important to be aware of these critiques in understanding the limitations of this theory of rhetoric in action.

2. When George Yoos critiques Corder in his article, “Finding Jim’s Voice: A Problem in Ethos and Personal Identity,” I believe he is really concerned with the ways in which the process of enfolding can sometimes be problematic for audiences. Yoos only cites Corder’s *Yonder* as evidence for his claims, asserting that Corder’s style and ethos are ineffective ways of knowing. He writes, “To question one’s own personal identity, to fail to find it, to lament not having it, to me is an epistemic failure of sorts. And it is also a kind of moral failure” (2003, p. 123). Yoos’ fault-finding with Corder may be a result of the book’s confessional qualities that draw the reader into a discourse that can elicit emotions of sadness and despair.

3. See Theresa Enos’s “Voice as Echo of Delivery, Ethos as Transforming Process” for a discussion of ethos in relation to the rhetorical concept of delivery. She claims that ethos is dialogic in nature as it allows for role-playing and audience identification with the speaker; its dialogic qualities also wed it to delivery (1994, p. 188). Enos wishes to show through case study a modern-day transformative ethos: one that relies on stylistic technique to relate to their audience. She uses the writing of Jim Corder to discuss how a writer can achieve identification without sacrificing conviction through voice

(1994, p. 194), and she claims that Corder has a dialogic voice that, “is talking to us, an audience that he believes is committed to the speaker / writer’s values, to his logos and pathos” (1994, p. 189).

4. I thank Theresa Enos for introducing me to Corder’s work in her seminar class, “Beyond Post-Process and Post-Modernism: A Rhetoric of Spaciousness,” and I am also grateful for her kind mentorship and thorough feedback.

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