

Chapter 6. A Compositionist Teaches Creative Nonfiction

Bruce Ballenger
BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY

A few years ago, the M.F.A. and undergraduate creative writing programs unexpectedly left my English department, joining theater and several other programs in a new School of the Arts. The decision to leave was negotiated secretly with the president's office and stunned most department members. Among them were the rhetoric and composition faculty—myself included—who had for years staffed the creative nonfiction offerings, including the introductory undergraduate course and the graduate M.F.A. workshop. The graduate course would surely leave with the M.F.A. But what about the undergraduate class? Introduction to Creative Nonfiction was originally conceived by the rhetoric and composition faculty, who also taught—and cherished—the course. Unsurprisingly, the creative writing faculty argued that English 204 was a “creative” writing course, and therefore belonged with them as part of their new undergraduate curriculum. The department's appeal to the dean to keep our course in English had to address the obvious issue of duplication: How would the department's version of Introduction to Creative Nonfiction differ from the one that would be offered by creative writing? In other words, do compositionists teach creative nonfiction differently than creative writers?

This is the question I hope to explore in this essay. It's not simply a disciplinary question for me, but a quite personal one, since I've written and published in both creative nonfiction and composition studies, at times awkwardly straddling the two. It's a conflict I've always felt most keenly when I teach the graduate creative nonfiction workshop, which typically includes a mix of both M.F.A. and M.A. students—one group strongly identifying as experienced creative writers and the other as budding scholars and novice creative writers. As I gaze around the table at these students in the first few days of the course, each nervously eyeing each other, I also see myself, shifting from one foot to the other: Who am I? Creative writer or rhetoric and composition specialist? The answer, of course, is both, but the tension feels real and unsettling, and I've never quite sorted it out, even after all this time. I suspect some of these conflicted feelings come from what Zukas and Malcolm called “pedagogic identity.” What's mine? And to what extent is it at odds with my disciplinary allegiances?

In the crudest sense, those interested in the teaching of creative writing frame this identity around what is valued more: the writer or the teacher. While this is arguably a false binary, it does often figure into hiring decisions, as well as the

reward system for tenure-track faculty. Teaching positions in creative writing (including lecturer and part-time) typically prioritize applicants' publishing records over their teaching credentials, especially in M.F.A. programs. Kelly Ritter calls it the "star" system, where famous "writers are hired to teach; such teaching however is usually incidental by design" (283). Once hired, tenure-track creative writing faculty are typically promoted because of their literary publications, not articles on pedagogy (Fodrey). In many ways, this all makes sense. But the system does seem to reinforce an identity that favors writer over teacher, elevating expertise in craft over pedagogy. I can offer some local and anecdotal evidence of this: the creative writing pedagogy course in our M.F.A. program was designed by rhetoric and composition faculty and has rarely been taught. When it was, the instructor was almost always from rhetoric and composition.

I've long found this writer-teacher split in pedagogic identity uncomfortable. The foot I lean on most—the one firmly in composition studies—rests on studying and theorizing teaching. But I also have a graduate degree in creative nonfiction, and my training as a compositionist began as a student of Donald Murray, a Pulitzer Prize winner who often felt like an outlier in the field, in part because his credentials were as a practitioner rather than a scholar. Another composition studies luminary who struggled with competing pedagogic identities was, of course, Wendy Bishop, who wrote that "some days I am a writer-who-teaches (WT), and on others I am a teacher-who-writes (TW), but inevitably, always, I am one or the other." She adds, "For me, the first (WT) is represented by the figure of Donald Murray" ("Places" 14).

Naturally, as a young writing teacher I wanted to be like Don, one whose authority came, in part, from his success as a writer. But as the years went on, I also began to recognize the limitations of the WT pedagogy (and Don's). For one thing, my writerly experiences might be peculiar to me and not necessarily helpful to my students, who often come from different backgrounds and social situations, and so my frequent classroom references to "the writer" began to feel uncomfortable. I knew it was often a coded reference to me. In *The Triggering Town*, the poet Richard Hugo's book about craft, he tells his student readers that "you'll never be a poet until you realize that everything I say today and this quarter is wrong. It may be right for me, but it is wrong for you. Every moment, I am, without wanting or trying to, telling you how to write like me. But I hope you learn to write like you" (3). I really admire this, and I've often shared it with my own creative nonfiction students at the beginning of the semester, but I also know that it's disingenuous. As long as we privilege the "master craftsman" as the source of pedagogic authority in the creative writing class, students will try to write like us, no matter what we say.

I think most compositionists who teach creative nonfiction identify as teachers-who-write, not writers-who-teach, either by necessity—they haven't published widely in literary journals—or (and I think this is more often the case) by training. Sensitive to issues of power and authority in the classroom, our training in rhetoric and composition makes us inclined to take a more constructivist

approach, seeing ourselves as “facilitators” or “co-constructors of knowledge” (Manery 208), and this has implications in how we teach creative nonfiction, beginning with the dominant pedagogic approach in creative writing: the workshop.

The Compositionist’s Creative Nonfiction Workshop and Its Dilemmas

Though there are many critics of the workshop, it remains a fixture in creative writing classrooms, often used with little variation from the original University of Iowa model. Throughout the semester, students generate drafts for “critique” in full-class workshop sessions. They are instructed not to speak during these discussions, allowing the work to speak for itself. The instructor plays a largely facilitative role at first, but at some point, typically offers judgments and suggestions. If he or she adopts the pedagogic identity of “master craftsman,” this is a particularly dramatic moment in the workshop, one that can elevate or deflate the student writer’s spirits. It is also a moment that commands everyone’s attention as the instructor narrows the focus to flag the key problems in the draft. I taught this version of the workshop for many years, bowing, I think, to the expectation that this was the way it must be done. But I always felt conflicted about it, especially after my training as a compositionist. As hard as I tried to facilitate full-class workshops so that they weren’t teacher-driven, including minimizing my own comments and trying to summarize for the writer the patterns I was hearing in the student critiques, I often felt vulnerable to the expectation that in the end it was my judgment of the work that mattered. It was in these moments, usually the final five minutes of workshopping a student essay, where I felt compelled to shift into the persona of master craftsman, putting at risk all my efforts to keep the discussion student-centered. In short, this was the moment when I felt most at war with my identity as a compositionist who teaches creative nonfiction.

The struggle here, one that is very familiar to those of us trained in rhetoric and composition, is how to manage the instructor’s authority. This is often less of an issue for creative writing teachers who assume the conventional pedagogic identity of master craftsman; in that case, the authority to judge artistic merit of student work is unambiguous. However, it’s much more complicated for the compositionist. Ben Ristow frames the problem like this: “The workshop leader functions as the ballast in classroom instruction, and this power brings forward the pivotal question: How do instructors maneuver their authority in a workshop without impinging on the artistic practice of the writer?” Ristow suggests that “creative writing teachers should imagine themselves as a fluid character, an almost amphibious figure that moves between roles as publishing writer, constructive mentor, workshop facilitator, and more” (95). Drawing on the sophistic tradition, he argues that the workshop should be founded on the principle that more than one idea about a draft can simultaneously be true, and discussion should be organized around the inconsistencies and contradictions in the workshop participants’ readings of the draft. In

this “neosophistic” workshop, the instructor’s role is to point out these contradictions and facilitate a conversation about them, expanding the writer’s choices for revision rather than narrowing them down (97).

What this requires is the willingness to listen intently to what students are saying in workshop; it also demands a tolerance for ambiguity. Instructors must resist the pull to assert their authority, and students must accept that the guidance they receive from workshop may complicate revision rather than clarify it. Because of its dominance as a pedagogy, any alternative to the traditional workshop like this one requires something that rarely happens in most creative writing classes: an interrogation of the workshop model itself. What are the critiques? How do conventional workshops confer power and authority? How does this affect the making of art? And especially, what are students’ and instructors’ experiences with it as writers? This is all familiar metacognitive terrain for the compositionist, and so creative nonfiction students in our classes might begin the course by reading and discussing articles like Francois Camoin’s “Reconsidering the Workshop: The Workshop and Its Discontents,” or Lex Wilford’s “Toward a More Open, Democratic Workshop.” When I’ve done this, it’s a rich conversation, and helpfully seeds a discussion about how we will agree to conduct the workshop that semester. I can also clarify the role that I hope to play.

These conversations about workshop conventions often lead us to examine the so-called gag rule, in which students presenting drafts must remain silent as the work is discussed. There are sensible reasons for this—it forces student authors to listen carefully to comments, and it mutes their influence on how readers construe the work’s meaning. This seems especially appropriate for fiction and poetry, which often feature ambiguous, implicit meanings. But the gag rule seems much less appropriate for nonfiction, which is typically distinguished by a more explicit purpose. One of the great challenges of writing creative nonfiction is trying to clarify one’s intentions in the work so that it can be made apparent to readers. While it would certainly be useful for nonfiction writers to test their success at communicating these intentions by remaining silent in workshop, I think it makes little sense to short-circuit this conversation entirely; to do so would be a missed opportunity to talk over possible meanings with workshop members. This is, of course, a discussion of the rhetorical dimensions of the work, and in particular, it examines the rich moment when a writer’s tentative purpose comes into contact with a reader’s initial understanding of that purpose. The basic script goes something like this:

Writer: *This is what I think I was trying to say.*

Reader: *This is what I understood you to be saying.*

Writer and Reader: *What might be said that isn’t in the draft?*

It is from this conversation that the nonfiction writer will learn the most from a workshop. While the back and forth about whether a scene is working or the

voice is appropriate can be illuminating, the real work, particularly in early drafts and personal essays, is hammering out the writer's purpose, and silencing this conversation with the gag rule makes that work harder. I've experimented with several ways to break this silence, including encouraging student authors to introduce their drafts before we discuss them, highlighting the problems they are trying to solve. I've also tried making space for this conversation in the final five minutes, after the work has been discussed. But I almost always allow workshop participants, at some point, to query a work's author, and this often sparks useful conversations that wouldn't happen if the gag rule were in effect.

Alterations like these in the workshop do make it more constructivist, and potentially more student-centered, but I must admit that I am still often disappointed in myself when I lead these workshops. The Iowa tradition, especially the specter of writer-who-teaches, haunts workshops, and despite my best efforts, I often feel that students are disappointed when I don't act like a Famous Author. I do my best to undermine this. I no longer sit at the head of the table. I try to keep my mouth shut and listen. I explicitly clarify the role I will take in workshop. In short, I try to behave like the student-centered teacher I've been trained to be. Then I hear myself taking over, usually in those last five minutes of the workshop: "I agree with what a lot of what you have said, that Emery's draft seems to be about two ideas, neither of which are developed sufficiently. The more significant idea to me is . . ." People nod, and I feel smart. Then a few minutes later I realize that I've surrendered my pedagogic identity again. Of course, it isn't that I'm giving bad advice, though I sometimes do. And I could have been much worse. I never behave like the "charming tyrant," a version of the Famous Author persona who offers pronouncements on the literary worth of the work (e.g., "I feel like I've read this story before") and who is determined to replicate themselves in their students (Cain 35). The problem is that I've been trained not to take over students' writing, and the full-class workshop is often an invitation for me to do exactly that. At some point, I asked myself what now seems like an obvious question: Should the full-class workshop be the center of my creative nonfiction course? And if it weren't, what would I replace it with? One answer seemed obvious: compositionists focus on the writing process.

De-mystifying Process

The conventional creative writing workshop is certainly a kind of process pedagogy. It draws students' attention to the draft as a transitive moment in meaning-making, one that involves the complicating influences of audience and purpose. Revision is obviously central, and classroom instruction does address the process through discussion of craft. In creative nonfiction, for example, we might talk about how to explode significant moments into scenes, how and where to make reflective turns, or where research might help. But the pedagogy of craft works around the edges of process, focusing attention on burnishing the product

not engaging in *how* the work is made or remade. I suspect some of this has to do with the view that the creation of art is not only idiosyncratic, but mysterious. Or maybe uninteresting. One of the things that strikes me when I go to readings by celebrated creative writers is how impatient many are with audience questions about process: “Where do you get your ideas for a story?” “How do you get started?” “Do you ever get writer’s block?” As a rhetoric and composition specialist, I find these questions fascinating. Some Famous Authors, perhaps finding them tiresome, do not.

My training as a compositionist tells me to use a problem-centered approach to analyze the writing process, and I’ve always focused much of my attention on invention. For example, students tend to write from scarcity. They struggle to find topics and generate material. They over-commit to an initial idea. When problems arise, they get stuck. Remarkably, invention is an aspect of composing that receives little attention in most creative writing classes, especially at the graduate level where it’s assumed that students have figured that all out. A focus on invention—the many ways to use a notebook, strategies for generating and using “bad” writing, and research methods—strikes me as an instructional approach that might most distinguish how I teach creative nonfiction from my colleagues who are creative writers. A few years ago, for example, I restructured my M.F.A. creative nonfiction workshop in two ways. First, I postponed any full-class workshops until mid-semester and replaced them with smaller peer groups, where students shared and discussed “sketches,” or relatively brief, often tentative experiments with material. Each student wrote four of these, hoping that two might be developed into drafts. I did not participate in these peer review workshops. The second innovation was to introduce a new set of readings about “writing practice,” which became the basis for writing and discussion that focused on generating material, finding subjects, and developing helpful habits. These readings included pieces from the world of composition studies, including Murray’s “Write Before Writing,” as well as more popular works like Natalie Goldberg’s “Writing as Practice” and excerpts from William Stafford’s *Writing the Australian Crawl*. We studied how writers use notebooks and journals. We told stories about how our writing methods have evolved, and the changes we hope to experiment with during the semester.

For many of the students, especially those enrolled in the M.F.A., this was the first time since their composition courses that they had engaged in a conversation about how they work, and our focus on invention challenged them to consider not only how to generate material for essays but how to choose the best material, and because I began the course with an introduction to some of the subgenres of creative nonfiction, students could also decide what forms seemed best suited to a particular project. There is little incentive for student writers to experiment like this in the conventional workshop course. Instead, they are captive to workshop deadlines where authors are expected to present full drafts to which they become committed, often prematurely. The process of how writers find and develop this

work is largely ignored. The making of art *is* mysterious in some ways, but no more so than how first-year writers try to compose an academic essay, and compositionists are inclined to take an equal interest in both.

What Do Creative Writers Need to Know about Genre?

In my inbox the other day was an email in which a published essayist offered—for a fee—to review manuscripts. In her biography, she noted that “I don’t believe in genre. I believe a work stands or it falls regardless of what it’s called.” This is a common sentiment, especially among creative writers, and it comes, I think, from the laudable conviction that good art doesn’t behave and shouldn’t be disciplined. Genre, especially if it’s seen as little more than taxonomizing, shackles the work to a category and is hopelessly reductive. Besides, what creative writer actually thinks much about genre except in the broadest sense—this is fiction or nonfiction—or more narrowly as a subcategory of work: lyric essay, short story, memoir, and so on? Even then, does it really influence the act of creation? As a result, creative writing courses typically sidestep much explicit consideration of genre, which is viewed as largely irrelevant to the real work of an artist.

As Amy Devitt points out (696), genre study is a common project for the disciplines in English studies, and with the departure of the creative writing program from English at my university, their courses are even less likely to consider genre theory. But what about the creative nonfiction courses that remain in English? Genre has been a major interest of scholars in composition studies since the 1980s, which moved theory well beyond the original Aristotelian categorization of forms to consider genre as a rhetorical concept (Devitt 697–698). This scholarship has inspired classroom pedagogies that often involve rhetorical and critical analyses of genre, and from this a whole range of new pedagogies for writing classrooms, some of them pioneered by Richard Lloyd-Jones, whose influence we explore in this volume. But the key question here is this: What do creative writers, and more specifically, creative nonfiction writers, need to know about genre?

It’s impossible not to at least *broadly* talk about genre, beginning with the nearly inescapable conversation in the first few days of class when someone asks, “what the hell is creative nonfiction, anyway?” This is a question that can easily be dealt with by explaining that creative nonfiction involves factual stories—accounts of what really happened—that are often enriched using literary devices like scene, dialogue, and description. An instructor might then inventory some of the sub-genres—lyric essay, memoir, personal essay, literary journalism, and so on. For the compositionist, this is a key moment. Does one go beyond the taxonomy lesson? Is this an opportunity, say, to crack open the discussion about the status of creative nonfiction, especially compared to fiction and poetry, and talk about how genre classifications are, as Daniel Chandler points out, neither “neutral or objective” (1)? What might be the ideological reasons that nonfiction

is sometimes viewed as less imaginative, less artistic, or to put a practical spin on it, less worthy of funding in a creative writing program? (When we founded our own M.F.A. program at Boise State, creative nonfiction was an unfunded third track. Almost 25 years later, it remains so.) In a course focused on students' developing and sharing their own work, is this discussion worth the time? I think that it is, and besides it's hard to avoid when the creative nonfiction class inevitably lands on the explosive topic of truth-telling.

Among the essayists writing about the American West that I most admire is Judy Blunt. The title essay of her 2002 collection, *Breaking Clean*, tells the story of her decision to leave her husband and the ranching life in eastern Montana that she was born into and cherished but had made her feel increasingly powerless and lonely, especially as she began to entertain a life well outside of the role of rancher's wife. In between preparing meals for her husband, Jack, and the ranch hands, Blunt began to write. She ordered a typewriter from Sears and wrote "in a cold sweat on long strips of freezer paper that emerged from the keys thick and rich with ink" (8). Towards the end of the first published version of the essay she writes this: "One day Jack's father, furious because lunch for the hay crew was late, took my warm, green typewriter to the shop and killed it with a sledgehammer." Soon after the essay was published, her father-in-law, the alleged sledgehammer-slinger, wrote a letter to the *Philips County News*, the local newspaper, contesting the account. "No such event ever occurred," he wrote. "This is her story as she chooses to tell it." Blunt later conceded that the typewriter incident was invented and intended to be "symbolic" (Harden).

For teachers of creative nonfiction, this story—or one like it—is also a familiar discussion topic, one that arises from the nearly unavoidable question about whether nonfiction writers can "make things up." More recently, the issue of truth-telling in creative nonfiction focuses on the debate between essayist John D'Agata and his fact-checker from *The Believer* magazine, which is reported in *The Lifespan of a Fact*. The two face off over factual discrepancies in D'Agata's narrative essay about the suicide of a Las Vegas teenager, with D'Agata arguing that creative nonfiction writers have artistic license to change some facts if it improves the story. The fact-checker, obviously, had problems with that. Stories like Blunt's and D'Agata's raise relevant practical questions—what factual matters can a writer play with in nonfiction narrative—as well as ethical questions—what obligations do nonfiction writers have to the living (and dead) characters that they write about? For those of us trained in rhetoric and composition, these stories also implicate genre theory in dramatic and interesting ways.

For one thing, the debate over truth-telling in nonfiction highlights the idea that genre has social consequences. No matter how deeply invested writers are in what Bishop called "the myth of free creativity" ("Crossing" 186), they work within a rhetorical ecosystem in which genre is weighted with social expectations. Readers of nonfiction form a set of assumptions about factual reporting, and when these are challenged, the authority of the work—and specifically the

ethos of the writer—is at risk. There is no more dramatic example of this than James Frey’s public humiliation on national television by Oprah over the fabrications in his memoir, *A Million Little Pieces*. “It is difficult for me to talk to you because I feel really duped,” Oprah told Frey. “But more importantly, I feel that you betrayed millions of readers” (Wyatt). Creative nonfiction writers can choose to ignore these social consequences, but they can’t escape them, and sometimes they change the work. Judy Blunt, for example, agreed to omit mention of the typewriter smashing incident in subsequent editions of *Breaking Clean*. For many years, I framed classroom conversations about controversies like these as case studies in the ethics of telling true stories. But as I began to understand them as episodes that also illuminate genre theory, I was more explicit about discussing it in those terms.

As writing theorists remind us, genres arise not simply to fulfill an artistic vision but to solve rhetorical problems. One way to understand, say, the personal essay is to analyze the work that it can do for writers and how it’s used by readers. This leads to a discussion about motive and purpose, one that I think is not only a natural move when analyzing rhetorical situation, but essential when working with nonfiction prose. While some critics like Jane Tompkins argued that the purpose of literary art is to “do nothing” (qtd. in Bishop, “Suddenly Sexy” 261), I think that creative nonfiction does work in the world, and it’s useful for writers to know what that can be.

A Case Study in Genre Theory: The Personal Essay

One way to explore this is to examine the historical contexts for a genre’s rise and evolution, and for the personal essay one might begin with Montaigne. Trained in the scholastic tradition, Montaigne, like many of his literate 16th century contemporaries, was a writer who typically composed in Latin and heavily relied on formal rhetorical structures and proofs for organizing his prose. At some point, he found these conventions utterly inadequate as a mode of expressing his personal experience of a world upended by the butchery of the French religious civil wars and the mass death of the plague. To write about this, Montaigne needed a language that was closer to the reality of his experiences, and vernacular French proved far more expressive than Latin. The argumentative proofs of classical rhetoric also proved inadequate as a lens for making sense of his turbulent, uncertain times, and so Montaigne adopted a digressive, looping structure, one that allowed him to seek to coordinate his experiences rather than subordinate them to some preconceived claim. He gave us what he called the essay—“an attempt” at understanding—and his motive was not to prove, but to find out.

What does a creative nonfiction writer gain by knowing all of this? For one thing, it’s helpful to see the work as part of a historical tradition, and this long view not only helps writers to place their own work in that tradition but to see the kinds of problems a genre is invented to address. For example, why write an

essay instead of a memoir? Beginning with Montaigne, writers turn to the essay when faced with personal uncertainty, when they want to want to think something through. While both personal essay and memoir, like most stories, are often organized around a significant event, the essay's concerns are often narrower, and even prosaic. One might write an essay about thumbs, for example. Because of its relative brevity, an essay's narrative is limited, especially compared to memoir, and sometimes essays rely more heavily on exposition than story because essays are designed to be vehicles of thought. All of this becomes clearer—and more compelling, I think—when viewed as genre history, especially when the record also shows how, when faced with new audiences and new modes of expression, a genre evolves and changes.

In the 18th century, the essay became shorter, and more focused on character studies, in part because the emerging middle class in England, anxious to learn more about the morals and manners of the upper class, began to read essays in periodicals while sipping coffee in cafes. The periodical essay was often a cup long. More recently, the essay has morphed into the blog, which not only found new audiences but democratized the form. The speed and relative lack of polish of the blog created a new medium for essayists to explore the meaning of recent events in especially tentative ways. Some of this genre history can be dramatized for creative nonfiction students by bookending readings in a course. Recently, I've taken to teaching several Montaigne essays alongside contemporary ones, an exercise that sparks lively discussions about the patterns in the genre that endure—and those that don't. It's an exercise that also lays bare the ideological orientations of the genre, one that historically relied on male authority but later made room for women's voices. But how, we wonder? And soon we're talking about the rhetorical power—and risks—of personal disclosure, and how men and women find different ways of dealing with it in the personal essay genre. In other words, we theorize.

Obviously, theory has long dominated literary study, but creative writing courses largely avoid it, and I think I'm arguing here for the relevance of theory in a course focused on the creation of literature. An understanding of how genres are used, how they evolve, and their ideological and rhetorical orientations seems like useful knowledge to creative nonfiction writers. If nothing else, genre theory helps writers to recognize that recurring patterns in the work aren't accidental nor are they necessarily mysterious. The study of craft—which will always be a central concern in any creative writing course—also becomes a study of genre. For instance, the balance between showing and telling in a work—a question of craft that consumes a lot of the creative nonfiction courses I teach—could be viewed as arbitrary or idiosyncratic. “I'm really into story,” a student might say, “and I don't much care for telling readers everything that they should figure out on their own.” This is a student who might be naturally drawn to lyric essays, many of which rely more heavily on implicit meaning, but who then struggles when asked to write a more traditional personal essay, a think piece. “I'm just not into that kind of writing,” he might decide.

As instructors, we could leave it at that (“let him follow his own muse”), but as compositionists, we see this as an opportunity to have a conversation about genre. A lyric essay and a think piece are doing different kinds of work, and therefore use different conventions. The drama of the personal essay for readers is watching a writer think something through, so exposition—the language of thought—is often more central than narrative. “It’s fine that you prefer story-focused nonfiction over think pieces,” we might say, “but don’t ignore the power of expository prose to help you discover what you think.” In other words, pay attention to genre conventions because they do work that might be useful to you.

While creative writing curricula, particularly at the graduate level, try to cultivate single-genre specialists—“I’m a fiction writer” or “I’m a poet”—I think compositionists are more interested in creating flexible writers who can fluidly move between and within genres, making conscious decisions about what genres are appropriate for a particular project or recognizing what the conventions might be and whether they’re useful. This flexibility seems especially important in nonfiction, a particularly large tent, with subgenres that range from investigative work to essays that read like prose poems.

I wonder if, in the end, the thing that most distinguishes how a compositionist teaches creative nonfiction from a creative writer is differing positions on artists’ agency. If you believe that all writing is rhetorical, it’s impossible to see the creation of literary texts as any different, especially if those texts are intended to do some work in the world. If you believe this, then you must also believe that while creation is an imaginative act, and the artist has considerable freedom to invent, it is a freedom that is always constrained in some ways, and that knowledge of these constraints—we usually call this rhetorical knowledge—is extremely useful for writers. It increases their freedom to invent by making the choices clearer. And so when those of us trained in rhetoric and composition teach creative nonfiction, we are likely to see the artists in our charge as writers quite like those in our advanced composition and argument courses. They are still trying to work out writing processes to generate and shape material. Some are entering a discourse community with which they have little experience, and they are trying to find the authority to speak their truths. The traditional workshop model, for all its strengths, isn’t enough to teach what these students need to know.

The English department got to keep its undergraduate courses in creative nonfiction, and the creative writing program created their own workshop-focused versions. This is good for all sorts of reasons. It short-circuited any potential animosity between creative writing faculty and compositionists, assigning pedagogical value to both approaches to teaching the subject. The classes provide students with different ways of understanding how to write (and read) creative nonfiction. The crisis over whether the courses would stay or go also gave our writing faculty an opportunity to better articulate the claim that the rhetoric and composition discipline has over the teaching and study of creative nonfiction. Richard Lloyd-Jones, writing about the future of the profession, suggested that

“what we can expect to have is what we value enough to fight for and what we can get others to value as we do” (202). Many of us trained in composition are deeply committed to the teaching and study of creative nonfiction. We need to say so, and to keep imagining all that we can bring.

Works Cited

- Bishop, Wendy. “Places to Stand: The Reflective Writer-Teacher-Writer in Composition.” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 51, no. 1, Sept. 1999, pp. 9–31.
- . “Suddenly Sexy: Creative Nonfiction Rear-ends Composition.” *College English*, vol. 65, no. 3, Jan. 2003, pp. 257–275.
- . “Crossing the Lines: On Creative Composition and Composing Creative Writing.” *Colors of a Different Horse: Rethinking Creative Writing Theory and Pedagogy*, edited by Wendy Bishop and Hans Ostrom, NCTE, 1994, pp. 181–197.
- Blunt, Judy. *Breaking Clean*. Vintage, 2002.
- Cain, Mary Ann. “Revisiting Charming Tyrants and Faceless Facilitators: The Lore of Teaching Identities in Creative Writing.” *Can Creative Writing Really Be Taught?: Resisting Lore in Creative Writing*, edited by Stephanie Vanderslice and Rebecca Manery, Bloomsbury, 2017, pp. 35–43.
- Camoin, Francois. “The Workshop and its Discontents.” *Colors of a Different Horse: Rethinking Creative Writing Theory and Pedagogy*, edited by Wendy Bishop and Hans Ostrom, NCTE, 1994, pp. 3–7.
- Chandler, Daniel. “An Introduction to Genre Theory.” *Media and Communication Studies*, Jan. 1997. *ResearchGate*, www.researchgate.net/publication/242253420_An_Introduction_to_Genre_Theory.
- D’Agata, John and Jim Fingal. *The Lifespan of a Fact*. Norton, 2012.
- Devitt, Amy J. “Integrating Rhetorical and Literary Theories of Genre.” *College English*, vol. 62, no. 6, July 2000, pp. 696–718.
- Fordrey, Crystal N. “Teaching CNF Writing to College Students: A Snapshot of CNF Pedagogical Scholarship.” *Assay: A Journal of Nonfiction Studies*, vol. 2.1, fall 2015, www.assayjournal.com/crystal-n-fodrey-teaching-cnf-writing-to-college-students-a-snapshot-of-cnf-pedagogical-scholarship-21.html.
- Goldberg, Natalie. *Writing Down the Bones*. Shambala, 1986.
- Harden, Blaine. “Writers in Place: Suffering and Creativity.” *New York Times*, 28 May 2002, www.nytimes.com/2002/05/28/books/writers-in-place-suffering-and-creativity.html.
- Hugo, Richard. *The Triggering Town: Lectures and Essays on Poetry and Writing*. Norton, 1992.
- Lloyd-Jones, Richard. “What We May Become.” *College Composition and Communication*, vol. 33, no. 2, May 1982, pp. 202–207.
- Malcolm, Janice and Miriam Zukas. “Constructing Pedagogic Identities: Versions of the Education in AE and HE.” *Kansas State Adult Education Research Conference: 2000 Conference Proceedings*, New Prairie Press, 2000, newprairiepress.org/aerc/2000/papers/49.

- Manery, Rebecca. "Revisiting the Pedagogy and Theory Corral: Creative Writing Pedagogy Teachers' Conceptions of Pedagogic Identity." *New Writing: International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing*, vol. 12, no. 2, 2015, pp. 205–215, dx.doi.org/10.1080/14790726.2015.1040030.
- Murray, Donald. "Write Before Writing." *The Essential Don Murray: Lessons from America's Greatest Writing Teacher*. Heineman, 2009, pp. 28–38.
- Ristow, Ben. "Performances in Contradiction: Facilitating a Neosophistic Creative Writing Workshop." *New Writing: International Journal for the Practice and Theory of Creative Writing*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2014, pp. 92–99, doi.org/10.1080/14790726.2013.871040.
- Ritter, Kelly. "Ethos Interrupted: Diffusing 'Star' Pedagogy in Creative Writing Programs." *College English*, vol. 69, no. 3, Jan. 2007, pp. 283–292.
- Stafford, *Writing the Australian Crawl: Views on the Writer's Vocation*. U of Michigan P, 1978.
- Wilford, Lex. "Toward a More Open, Democratic Workshop." *Poets and Writers*, vol. 26, no. 2, March/April 1998.
- Wyatt, Edward. "Author Is Kicked Out of Oprah Winfrey's Book Club." *New York Times*, 27 Jan. 2006, <http://www.nytimes.com/2006/01/27/books/27oprah.html>.