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TABLE OF CONTENTS

# Tribute to Dr. Naomi Caroline Chase

By SISTER ANN REDMOND
Elementary Curriculum Coordinator
Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis

Elementary students will never realize the influence a quiet, unassuming woman has had on their education. But, since her death from cancer on December 17, 1976, elementary teachers, undergraduate and graduate students, curriculum directors, supervisors, parents and authors are recalling the influence of Naomi Chase on English education in the State of Minnesota. Dr. Chase was a professor at the University of Minnesota where she had been a faculty member since 1950.

Her respect for each student as a unique person with abilities and insights to be called forth by the teacher and nurtured to full potential, was evident in her classes, seminars and conversation. Her students learned by experience that this concern and respect for the individual was the key to excellence in teaching.

Visiting her office was always a shortcut to hours of research because she held within her mind a fund of organized, comprehensive information ready to be shared. However, out of respect for the student, this help came only with the asking of the right questions; her views were never imposed.

Her highly successful creative writing workshops and courses brought together teachers with authors of childrens' books in an effort to help these teachers see what made successful writers want to write and what gave them the ability and confidence to do so. Teachers, chiefly from Minnesota, but from the other states and Canada as well, met and grew by working together under her leadership.

The influence of Dr. Chase was also felt throughout the country because of her active involvement and leadership positions



within N.C.T.E. At a recent meeting of the Elementary Section Committee in Urbana, Illinois, a frequent comment was: "Naomi would have known how to put this together to make sense."

To those of us who taught in various capacities at the University of Minnesota, she was always most helpful and generous. Both her ideas and her materials, acquired through years of teaching and research, were always available to be shared. New ideas were never discouraged, but always clarifying help was given.

Her students are found today throughout the United States in hundreds of elementary school classrooms and among the ranks of those who prepare and supervise elementary teachers. Separated though they are geographically, they are one in their praise of and gratitude for Dr. Naomi Caroline Chase.

# Our Friends Never Die

Our friends die
but we never lose them
My father, for example,
dead for over thirty years,
is more real to me now
than ever
He has never left my life
the older I grow
the better I know,
the more I understand him.

**ELMER F. SUDERMAN**

# The Problem in the Poem

By MARTIN E. GINGERICH
Western Michigan University

T. S. Eliot's famous image for "meaning" in some poems as "the bit of nice meat" the burglar brings along for the house-dog is too good to improve; but I wonder if the roles are not reversed when the reader approaches a difficult poem, the "concentrated" poem of the burglar-poet who brings no meat. The reader in this reversal becomes the burglar and looks for a way into the house of the poet. And though I do not wish to ruin a good image, perhaps the reader should supply himself with a "bit of nice meat" for the house-dog of the poem. The burglar-reader, of course, cannot quiet the dog with "meaning" because to a large extent it is "meaning" he wants to find in the first place. He comes instead with questions as his tools of entry, and among them perhaps are some that can quiet the dog. He comes, on the advice of several good critics and poets, believing that if he can discover "What is the poem?" and "How is the poem?" he can learn "Why is the poem?" I have approached Eliot's own poems often enough, however, to know that what and how reveal only the stuff the poems are made of; and after looking up all the allusions, translating all the foreign language expressions, and analyzing all the images, I still on those occasions did not know what is going on in the poems. The same statement, I am afraid, can be made of my experiences with other poems. Eric Thompson in an article in the Ohio University Review (1966) solved part of my problem by showing that the why of a poem involves whatever mutual concern the writer and reader have in it. Then, it occurred to me, beginning with the why and finding out what I am expected to be concerned with in a poem may be the way to enter the poem and gain what a reader comes to a poem for.

Coming to the poem from the direction of why naturally produces questions that relate to the what and the how; indeed



some explication and some acknowledgement of critical opinion are unavoidable. I do not intend even to try altogether to avoid them. For the question of what writer and reader have mutually at stake in the poem invariably raises questions like "What is the conflict?" and "What forces are arrayed against each other?" and "What stage in the resolution of the struggle is marked by this division of the poem?" Always, of course, too, the reader assumes by this approach that what is at stake is a human problem, not just a literary problem. For our interest in whether or not a poet can write a sonnet that does not sound like a sonnet depends, unless we are poets or prosodic technicians, upon the poet's ability to make the literary problem a human one.

The following poem is probably difficult enough and unfamiliar enough to test the success or failure of this approach. In addition, William Moynihan's assertion that analysis of this poem is not worth the trouble adds another unattractive feature to the poem. Still another is that only two critics, so far as I know, have written on the what and the how of the poem: William York Tindall in A Reader's Guide to Dylan Thomas and Elder Olson in The Poetry of Dylan Thomas. The poem, "When, Like a Running Grave," has then all the advantages of difficulty, unfamiliarity, apparent worthlessness, and relatively little critical comment.

When, Like a Running Grave

When, like a running grave, time tracks you down,
Your calm and cuddled is a scythe of hairs,
Love in her gear is slowly through the house,
Up naked stairs, a turtle in a hearse,
Hauled to the dome,

Comes, like a scissors stalking, tailor age,
Deliver me who, timid in my tribe,
Of love am barer than Cadaver's trap
Robbed of the foxy tongue, his footed tape
Of the bone inch,

Deliver me, my masters, head and heart,
Heart of Cadaver's candle waxes thin,
When blood, spade-handed, and the logic time
Drive children up like bruises to the thumb,
From maid and head,

For, sunday faced, with dusters in my glove,
Chaste and the chaser, man with the cockshut eye,
I, that time's jacket or the coat of ice
May fail to fasten with a virgin o
In the straight grave,

Stride through Cadaver's country in my force,
My pickbrain masters morsing on the stone
Despair of blood, faith in the maiden's slime,
Halt among eunuchs, and the nitric stain
On fork and face.

Time is a foolish fancy, time and fool.
No, no, you lover skull, descending hammer
Descends, my masters, on the entered honour.
You hero skull, Cadaver in the hanger
Tells the stick, 'fail.'

Joy is no knocking nation, sir and madam,
The cancer's fusion, or the summer feather
Lit on the cuddled tree, the cross of fever,
Nor city tar and subway bored to foster
Man through macadam.

I damp the waxlights in your tower dome.
Joy is the knock of dust, Cadaver's shoot
Of bud of Adam through his boxy shift,
Love's twilit nation and the skull of state,
Sir, is your doom.

Everything ends, the tower ending and,
(Have with the house of wind), the leaning scene,
Ball of the foot depending from the sun,
(Give, summer, over), the cemented skin,
The actions' end.

All, men my madmen, the unwholesome wind
With whistler's cough contages, time on track
Shapes in a cinder death; love for his trick,
Happy Cadaver's hunger as you take
The kissproof world

Our first task ought to be, in thieves' parlance, to case the joint. Probably our mutual stake in this poem involves the narrator, who in all poems is either the poet or a persona created by the poet. The narrator here almost immediately distinguishes himself from head and heart, who are his "masters." When time tracks down head and heart (you), their response is to create illusion, as the narrator inelegantly puts it, hauling love in all her trappings to the dome of an ivory tower; they presumably pretend that nothing has changed or believe that everything is now better. This act of head and heart leaves the narrator bare of love, barer than Cadaver's trap, which comparison brings a new actor on stage. Cadaver along with time seems to be the opposing force to head and heart and the narrator. Olson reads trap as "mouth," which has support from



parallels like love's "gear," "hauled," "sunday faces," and "dusters," all slang or colloquial expressions, and of course from "foxy tongue." "Robbed" implies that Cadaver's trap would not be bare of love if it had kept the foxy tongue. Cadaver's possessions in the poem, however, are a curious lot: It has a trap, a footed tape, a candle, a country, and hunger (It also speaks to the hero skull in line 30). Except for these, Cadaver seems to be the one actor of this drama most easily identified in its relation to the others. Without the capital letter cadaver simply designates a man's dead body; and a poet might extend this to body as a means of focusing a particular attitude towards it, i.e., of something inevitably to be dead. Capitalizing Cadaver, however, personifies this deathly potential contained in body and need not refer to any individual body. In addition, since Cadaver seems somehow allied with time against head, heart, and narrator, capitalizing tends to exalt it and make it superior to all the others. Cadaver may be the real hero of the poem. It is with the "I," however, that we are most concerned. The drama is his drama; the struggle is his struggle; and his concern is our concern. If Cadaver is his problem, Cadaver must be transformed. If Cadaver is untransformable, the narrator must be transformed. How, in any case, do the possessions of Cadaver relate to the narrator's predicament?

The actions of head and heart seem bent on idealizing love, which before tracking down time had some other dwelling than the dome of the tower, perhaps a fleshier one more closely related to Cadaver's country. It is not until the approach of time and "tailor age" that head and heart "haul" love to the dome. Though the verb is passive and the sentence does not explicitly give an actor, either these actors do the hauling or the actor's identity is not important. Time, tailor age, and Cadaver then seem to blend together, Cadaver taking on some of their attributes, and share the blame for love's move up the stairs to the dome. This move leaves the narrator in need of deliverance because he is left bare of love (does he dwell in the lower part of the house?), deliverance from "maid and head." At this point, heart becomes allied to Cadaver and head to time (lines 12 and 13). What is the nature of this relationship? As a result of time and Cadaver, head and heart are now in control of love; i.e., spade-handed blood and logic time now produce children painfully. Olson sees the blood handling a spade to prepare a grave; but in the mere aiding by its action the move towards the grave, blood may be said to be "spade-handed" with additional connotations of clumsiness. In any case, love, for the narrator at least, is in much worse condition after the move to the dome than before. It is now possible to see that these "possessions" of Cadaver's relate to love's new condition.

The first two items are used as comparisons of the narrator's barrenness. Of love he is barer than Cadaver's trap robbed of the foxy tongue and than his footed tape robbed of the bone inch. Olson probably makes trap mean mouth because of the foxy tongue; but there are other possibilities. Two images established in these first stanzas are time as a hunter tracking down its prey and age as a tailor. If Cadaver has characteristics of both the hunter and tailor, we might interpret trap accordingly. A steel trap with which a hunter catches his prey has jaws and therefore may have a tongue, the analogy with mouth occurring in the open jaws of the trap having a "foxy tongue" that entices the prey with bait. Without the bait, of course, the trap repels or at least fails to attract, hence is bare of love. Sometimes the metaphorical qualities of a word are so lost because of common usage that the poet can turn the metaphor into a further metaphor. I admit I fail with Olson's mouth image because it seems arbitrary and wasteful of the "tracks you down" in the first line. For the second item, "his footed tape," Olson apparently reads, "barer of love than his footed tape is bare of love of the bone inch." Given the special kind of tailoring Cadaver does, however, his tape is as useless without the "bone inch" as his trap is without its "foxy tongue"? We may read instead, "barer of love than his footed tape robbed of the bone inch." Without the gradual preparation of the final garment implied by inch, i.e., revealing the tailor's progress by the foot in robbing his tape of inches, the grisly act is revealed for what it is, bare of love. All these images, are, of course, more than an indirect way to say the narrator is impotent; they suggest the significance of his condition and the attitude we are to assume towards it. We ally ourselves even more strongly with the narrator as a result of this rhetoric.

At this point also the narrator cries out for deliverance specifically to his masters, head and heart, and urges for special attention an aspect of the situation that apparently very closely concerns him, "Heart of Cadaver's candle waxes thin" (line 12). This concerns the narrator more closely than it does his masters, we know, because he believes they can help him; the adverbial clause (lines13-15) describes a changed condition or position for the narrator who once, it is implied, had a much greater role in such activity. Now that he is bare of love and cannot perform, he also has difficulty accepting that "Heart of Cadaver's candle waxes thin." His difficulty is focused by his need to be delivered from "maid and head" or as Olson says, from girls and thoughts of girls. The pun on maidenhead, according to Tindall, contains "feminine heart, masculine dome, and deathly love," from which, if true, the narrator pleads deliverance. Why should he want such deliverance? Tindall thinks it is because these bring about death, because



the narrator is a shy adolescent, "timid in my tribe" and "robbed of the foxy tongue." Such a narrator would only anticipate the condition described in stanzas one and two and want to forestall it by deliverance from all love. Though this sort of narrator is possible, I find a narrator already involved in the condition described, which represents a change from a previous condition when time wore some other guise than that of a running grave. In fact, who shares with head and heart a concern in Cadaver's country; who acknowledges (at least under the circumstances of the poem) the mastery of head and heart; who finds most fearful of all, heart of Cadaver's candle waxing thin; and who once held a position of greater prominence in matters of love; who but body? Or, if preferable, he is the poet as body and speaking for body.

Among the actors of this drama, body has most concern with the change in the guise of time; for head and heart have achieved some sort of readjustment by making of love and time an illusion, a foolish fancy. The impossibility of this course for body reveals the futility of his prayer to his "masters" and accounts for his timidity (tribe, country, nation, and state are all conditions of being) at the same time as it emphasizes his helplessness. Once, body's role in love was far more natural and realistic; body's response must have been acceptance of that role in "the lamb white days" before time wore a threatening aspect. Body now aware of time's destructive nature must somehow achieve deliverance from his intolerable condition. When in stanzas five and six he sees clearly his predicament and assesses accurately the futile efforts of head and heart, he knows that they are no help and that he must find his own deliverance. That of course will also be the poet's, and ours.

The actions taken by head and heart for their deliverance have left body torn and divided in stanza five by the necessity for body to respond to their morsing. In order that time may fail to bring off what it has threatened and is threatening, body has had to go about both "sunday faced" or "chaste" and with "dusters" or as "chaser." "Cockshut" aptly describes the condition of body tracked down by time. Freudian interpreters of this poem have explored the sexual over-and-undertones of cockshut, and it is very tempting. The plain meaning, however, has sufficient connotations of its own. Body, though not without his own "force," must "Stride through Cadaver's country" to defeat death according to the decisions of his "pickbrain masters," who, he sees now, are wrong and who produce the condition of stanza five.

Body has become aware by the end of this five-stanza sentence that head and heart are no help to him against time

and Cadaver; the eunuchs and nitric stain make that most emphatic. The complexity of the long first sentence derives from body's notion of the complexity of the situation. To gain further clarification he tries in several short and simple sentences in the remaining five stanzas various responses to the actions of head and heart already described. Ignoring time and Cadaver as foolish fancies will not help; Cadaver is in command over lover and hero (who are both, incidentally, working to overcome time). The stanza demonstrates the "actions' end" of the last lines of the poem, the actions of lover and hero. These are not the actions of body but efforts of head and heart to ignore time. This sixth stanza, beginning the second half of the poem, implies deliverance through acceptance of Cadaver, though it is of course only readying the acceptance expressed in the last stanzas. Stanza six expresses the facts of the case as body sees them. Stanzas seven and eight, if read together, give two different attitudes, one from the tower dome of head's and heart's air castle ("the house of wind," line 42) and the other (What is open to body?) from acceptance of Cadaver. Both pursue joy. "Joy is no knocking nation" or its appositives; "Joy is the knock of dust." Other identifications follow: "Cadaver is shoot of bud of Adam..., love is twilit nation and the skull of state...is your doom." One attitude fosters illusion; the other accepts reality. While stanza seven devotes itself to what joy is not, the first line of stanza eight promises to dispel illusion ("I damp the waxlights in your tower dome"), implying that what follows describes reality. What has been offered so far is escape by means of emotion or reason (logic), neither of which satisfy because they do not take body into account. Body wants to look at conditions as facts, and one of the facts is body himself. He is evidence against illusions; his existence in time and the changes working in him in time work against the illusions of head and heart. His only deliverance, and theirs for that matter, comes only by acceptance of body as body and of certain facts listed in the last four lines of stanza eight.

Tindall glosses these lines and the last two stanzas and directs us to Thomas's story "The Orchards." There Marlais the poet ends his world much as Thomas ends this poem, though for Marlais the nightmare becomes reality. Here acceptance of Cadaver is acceptance of end and a cure for the sickness of illusion, "the unwholesome wind." The image of time as runner on a cinder track, apparently first offered by Olson, is supported by Tindall. The usefulness of this interpretation rests in its accounting for the "virgin O" of line 19, and thematically time's rounding the track forms a zero which stands for the nothingness of death. Body, it seems to me, struggles with the "somethingness" of death' and the solution to the



struggle in the poem occurs through the ending of time and this "somethingness" of death. The text of "The Orchards" reads, "It is all one, the rain and the macadam; it is all one, the hail and cinder, the flesh and the rough dust." The cinder image seems so close to "the knock of dust" as to track; and "macadam" along with "Mac Adam" has as much to do with flesh and texture as with tracks (Cf. cemented skin, naked stairs, coat of ice, boxy shift, and the like). Time running in a circle, moreover, presents an endlessness that denies the conclusion of the poem; but even if time is on a cinder track, he nevertheless "tracks you down" ultimately to death. Love, ironically, aids time and shapes "Happy Cadaver's hunger"; and body concludes that the world is "kissproof."

We may by summarizing the various stages in the poem review our stake in the poem, for of course the poet finds his deliverance finally in getting head, heart, and body back together again. As in many poems, the initial awareness of the narrator brings horror, in response to which he casts about for various means of relief. In the drama of "When, Like a Running Grave," body as a persona for the poet expresses his awareness of the effects of time in the images of threatening hunter and tailor. He pleads for deliverance from two other actors whom he acknowledges as his masters, head and heart. Their response to the threat only intensifies the condition and divorces body from them, for their salvation lies only in ignoring body, who dwells in Cadaver's country and upon whom the threat of time is greatest. They choose, as it were, other places to live: the twilit nation of love and the barren state of logic, both of which presently appear to body as mere illusion and therefore of no help to him. Their action results for body only in division, not union; he, because they are his masters, must act two ways at once in an effort to "stride through Cadaver's country" and escape death. With the realization of the failure of this remedy comes the turning point in the poem. Though such action increases the threat of time and intensifies the effects of tailor age, body sees clearly what he must do. In the last half of the poem, he does it.

The poem in coming to an end accepts end not only as something to be tolerated but as something good. Head and heart have been wrong not to accept, for the mere existence of body ought to show them that their flights only worsen the condition for themselves as well as for body. Yet their actions too are perhaps inevitable; they only mistake body's role and try to make him live with them. If, however, love's "twilit nation" is heart's home and head's doom is the "skull of state," then "Cadaver's country" is the right place for body. Once body, and we, realize this, the last two stanzas do not express

failure; they express facts, acceptable, inevitable, perhaps joyous facts. Deliverance comes with end. The ending is all. Time shapes death; love takes for his trick (or turn) Cadaver's hunger (happy Cadaver now); as you, head and heart, take the kissproof world. Inevitably, "Everything ends,....The actions' end."

We may stop short of evaluating the metaphysics of the poem at this time, content that the narrator's struggle, which is the reader's stake in this poem, has been brought to a successful conclusion. Though it is perhaps true that the poem asks us to work harder than some other poems ask us, we discover upon our entrance that the poem has significant concerns which for their development need the externally difficult form. We discover ironically that the imposing structure erected by the poet was all along meant to be burgled.



# Fellowship: To Chaucer

Put thirty upright citizens on thirty horses and send them from Tacoma to Savannah; by Salt Lake City three will be murdered, four divorced, and six will have left in a huff. Crossing Kansas, there will be two lawsuits, a rape and a lynching. In Illinois, the police, the mayor and the minister from Vandalia will arrive to disband the rest of the group, with the exception of two Swedish Lutherans who never having been formally introduced, have not spoken a single word, and will proceed without incident to Georgia where they will promptly commit suicide in the Atlantic, out of painful regret that never having been introduced, they missed good sport and a fine lynching in Kansas.

Geoffry, you would tell me it is madness for a man to hate his own age, that even the Pardoner who was no worse than General Franco, was a man who could be loved into salvation, that the black plague was after all as deadly as Hiroshima and lakes bubbling with mercury, that mad kings devoured tiny countries for sport, and I would say yes Geoffry.

But now after these many years I know why we have invented the automobile and I will tell you; your fellowship was of the horse who sweats and shits and thrashes flies with his tail; Alice's tits bounce as she jabbers, and when it rains men get wet.

I am sealed in my Chevrolet like the powder in a bullet darting over ribbons of stone while the heart hummed into obedience imitates the pistons and rises and falls with such seductive regularity that it is transformed into boiling steel; this wheel like a trigger grows up my arms, eating the fingers nail by nail until it grasps my shoulders with the loving embrace of an evangelist. Here I am safe; I cannot be gotten. Do they speak to me? Up with the radio-give me music. Do they touch me? One scratch and I will ignite my pistons and crush you. I will eat like an amphibious animal, surfacing for seconds to gulp the air, then plunging back into the watery darkness for days--for years.

The Coonipeepees who always live in Canterbury, for their whole life is a sacred journey from relic to relic, from stone to bark to water, when shown an automobile leaped up on it wildly and masturbated. Harry Bailey, had he the Pardoner's balls, would lock them in the cubby hole, and choose again his horse.

Since you died, Geoffry, or shortly thereafter, a man has had to go mad to go to Canterbury, and ride a horse.

**WILLIAM HOLM**

# Machined Humanities

By CURTIS WREN TORGERSON
Kellogg Junior High School
Rochester, Minnesota

Ada Augusta, Lady Lovelace, Byron's daughter,
Babbage's friend,
Inspire Us!

"...you want to throw out books because they were printed by machine before being typewritten? Back to the monks? Blood for ink?"

Minnesota, home of Robert Bly and Sinclair Lewis and Ignatius Donnelly; home of Control Data and Univac and Fabri-tek. (Look for no parallels, please.)

To Earth:

The Minnesota State Legislature has funded a program to extend the use of computers to public schools in the state and to provide a network serving these schools, vocational schools, colleges, the University, and the State Department of Education.

MECC (acronyms abound in computerland) or Minnesota Educational Computer Consortium is presently using a bunch (covey? pride? clutch?) of computers to serve schools. The major costs of the program are borne by the State: schools buy or lease a terminal to communicate with the computers. By April, MECC hopes to have one large Univac 1110 computer serve the statewide system.

Minnesota is the first state to provide schools with such a service.

The Problem:

$x^2+4x-y^2+y+7=1492$ didn't turn you on (idioms announce the merging of man and machine. If you wear glasses, a denture, a pacemaker, aren't you part machine?) and book-keeping meant buying a book you wanted for your own library



when you were in high school or in college. Furthermore, you keep getting billed for a magazine you never would have subscribed to in the first, second, or third places so computers are wicked, arcane, invaders of privacy; the domain of the clerks and algebraics. You are not alone with these feelings.

The unfortunate result has been, in my opinion, that computers have become the domain of certain disciplines. If you list the MECC library of computer programs, you'll find math programs, science programs, interest rate programs in profusion; but you won't find many humanities-language arts-English programs.

Computers "speak" and "listen" in special languages; a human must learn one of these languages to tell the computer what to do. Most of these languages are subsets of English with algebraic notation....FORTRAN, ALGOL, SNOBOL, LOGO....one could, must write a poem! Luckily, one of the languages can be easily learned; it's called BASIC (Beginner's All-purpose Symbolic Instructional Code) and allows one to manipulate words ("strings" in computerese) as easily as numbers.

Let's not think of computers as being dumb or stupid; instead, they are extremely obedient machines that do what their masters (the programmers) tell them to do.

CAI (computer assisted instruction) is one of the common uses of computers in education. They can be easily trained to deal with any answer rather than just right or wrong answers. I call this computer use Computer Imagination Assistance and will give an example.

The example:

Computer poem writing is one area where some language arts teachers have been interested. There are programs that pick words from a set in the computer's memory and arrange them randomly. There are other programs in which the user types in certain words which the computer will use as the flesh to clothe a skeleton, the form in which it is programmed to produce the words. Whether the resulting body takes foot or lies languidly on the page depends on chance, our input, and our critical susceptibilities.

The computer programs FREVER and FREVERZ fall into the latter category. The computer asks for certain parts of speech, chosen by the user. These are typed in and the

computer arranges them. Here are some examples of a run of each of these programs.

```
:OL  *DEL*
BYE

H5R1709     LOG OFF.  13.33.13.
H5R1709     CP        0.971  SEC.
 H5R1709/WOB7619
TERMINAL:       27,TTY
RECOVER/SYSTEM:BAS,OLD, FREVERZ
READY.
RUN

 75/02/24.  13.58.30.
 BASIC      PROGRAM      FREVERZ

     PROGRAM GENERATES FREEVERSE POEMS. TYPE THE PARTS OF
SPEECH CALLED FOR, EACH SEPARATED BY A COMMA.

FIVE SINGULAR NOUNS ? MONSTER, ANGEL, CHILD, MAN, WOMAN
FIVE PAST TENSE VERBS? SLEPT, DESTROYED, PRAISED, FELL,FOUGHT
FIVE PREPOSITIONS, PLEASE ? AT, ON, NEAR, ABOVE, BELOW
FIVE ADJECTIVES ? VAST, EMPTY, COLD, HOT, MOVING
(BE PATIENT) FIVE ADVERBS ? SLOWLY, ANGRILY, SLIGHTLY,
                            CAREFULLY, ICILY
     TYPE YOUR FIRST NAME ? ALGERNON


                ALGERNON'S ANGEL

          VAST AND COLD,
          THE CHILD SLEPT AT A MONSTER
          WHILE COLD WOMAN SLOWLY
          SOUGHT AN ANSWER ON TIME.
          ANGRILY, TIME PRAISED AND FELL
          WHO SLEPT ANGRILY WOULD WIN.
          WHO FOUGHT SLIGHTLY WOULD LOSE.
          ICILY, A MAN DESTROYED...
          EVERYONE FELL TOO HOTLY.

               IS THIS POEM MOVING?
```





```
          THEY DESTROYED AND DESTROYED:
          THE SKY WAS MOVING AND HOT
          CAREFULLY, CAREFULLY, CAREFULLY,
          SAID A VAST ANGEL: THERE
          CONSCIENCE FOUGHT NEAR THE
          EMPTY WOMAN THAT SLEPT ICILY
          REST, REST, HOT MAN
          A EMPTY CHILD SAID, 'WORK, WORK.'
          REST, REST, HOT MAN.

          THIS POEM IS VAST.


CP        0.262 SECS.

RUN COMPLETE.

OLD, FREVER
READY.

RUN

 75/02/24.  14.04.46.
 BASIC      PROGRAM      FREVER

     PROGRAM MAKES FREE VERSE POEMS.  TYPE IN PARTS OF
SPEECH CALLED FOR; USE SINGULAR NOUNS & PAST TENSE VERBS
IN ANSWERS.  NEED GRAMMAR HELP?  IF SO, TYPE HELP AFTER
THE ? NO

4 ANIMATE NOUNS ? RUNNER, JUDGE, DOCTOR, CRIMINAL
 3 INANIMATE NOUNS ? SHOE, DUST, STONE
4 TRANSITIVE VERBS ? CARRIED, APPLAUDED, SOUGHT, ENJOYED
 3 INTRANS. VERBS ? TREMBLED, RECLINED, ROSE
4 ADJECTIVES ? HOPEFUL, CANCEROUS, BLAND, TERRIFYING
 3 ADVERBS ? NOW, SWEETLY, SOFTLY
   YOUR FIRST NAME, O GREAT POET ? X.J.


               X.J.'S FIRST POEM

          CRIMINAL APPLAUDED HOPEFUL STONE
          WHILE DOCTOR SWEETLY RECLINED,
          AND RUNNER, LESS THAN BLAND,
          ROSE SOFTLY, UNKNOWING,
          THAT DOCTOR CARRIED A STONE
          THAT STONE WAS SOUGHT SOFTLY
          THAT LIFE TREMBLED SWEETLY
          THAT JUDGE APPLAUDED NOW
```

X.J.'S SECOND POEM

CANCEROUS, CANCEROUS, CANCEROUS, CANCEROUS
WHAT SHOE IS CANCEROUS ENOUGH
TO HOLD TERRIFYING JUDGES ?
WHILE MANY SOUGHT OR APPLAUDED
MANY ROSE OR RECLINED SOFTLY,
FOR DUST WAS HOPEFUL THAT YEAR
AND RUNNER, LIKE A BLAND SPIRIT,
CARRIED A JUDGE NOW, O SO NOW!

THE THIRD POEM

HOPEFUL CRIMINAL, HOPEFUL JUDGE . . . .
WHEN YOU SWEETLY CARRIED ALL THE DUST
AS SOULLESS AS SHOE, AND ROSE,
WHERE WAS RUNNER ENJOYED, BY A SWARM OF DUST?
BLAND CRIMINAL, BLAND JUDGE . . . .
WHEN GOD TREMBLED, SOFTLY, O SOFTLY.
AS TERRIFYING AS A TIRED STATUE, AND SOUGHT,
WHO WAS THE DOCTOR THAT RECLINED?
CANCEROUS CRIMINAL, TERRIFYING JUDGE.

```
CP          0.296 SECS.

RUN COMPLETE.

BYE

H5R1709    LOG OFF.  14.11.37.
H5R1709    CP        0.561 SEC.
```

Any teacher who has access to a MECC computer should be able to try his or her hand at these programs. The command that brings the programs to you is typed in this format: BAS,OLD,FREVER/UN=H5R1709. The author of this and the programs would appreciate any comment or "run" of these programs.

The Challenge:

Minnesota Language Arts teachers have a unique opportunity to make use of the computer for the benefit of their students. It will require some training. It should be a spark to the creative fires.

Since MECC encourages the use of programs devised by



by teachers for student use teachers have a great opportunity to aid other teachers in the state.

For further information, contact the building coordinator in your school . . . if it has a terminal or write MECC at Highway 280, Lauderdale, Minnesota.

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# The Rise of Western Civilization

It was the Renaissance. Around a table in a Spanish tavern sat three men. The scientist said, in the way of idle conversation, as he toyed with an orange: "It amazes me that the world is round, like this orange." He put the orange back in the bowl he had taken it from.

The theologian, never one for idle conversation, earnestly objected, as the politician reached for the orange and began to peel it. "Holy Scripture speaks of the four corners of the earth," said the theologian, "So it must be as flat as this table! He struck the table with his fist, for emphasis.

"There is no need to quarrel, gentlemen," said the politician, his words juicy with the sound of the orange. "If one of you will hand me a doubloon. Ah, yes. You see, the earth can be both round and flat, like this coin. All the oceans are contained within a range of mountains like the rim around the edge of the coina, and the lands of the earth are like the figure and inscription, raised above the seas." He paused and put the coin in his pocket. "So you see," he continued, "all your learned disputation comes to nothing when you look at things in the light of common sense and the palpable world around us."

Of course, the scientist knew that the politician had completely missed the point, and the theologian knew that the politician's explanation did not accord with the Bible. And the politician was sure that the important thing was not the reasons behind whatever solution they might agree upon, but that some agreement must be reached. So he kept suggesting one mindless compromise after another, while the other two ignored him and began to propose ever more abstract, abstruse, and esoteric arguments in support of their contentions.

When the tavern closed for the night, the theologian went home to bed alone, and the scientist and the politician went together to a brothel.

**JOHN REZMERSKI**

# From Chaos to Clarity to Communication

By ROBERTA BLOCK
Lindbergh High School, Hopkins

Perhaps you share my dilemma as I consider the question "Why teach Writing?" As a secondary English teacher, I feel besieged from all sides and points of view. Journalists, professors, school board members and parents are exhorting me to return to the basics. Students are interrogating me about why they should learn to write when many doctors, lawyers, politicians and plumbers are able to earn high salaries and/or to achieve social status without being able to write clearly. As if the bombardment weren't heavy enough, some colleagues are questioning whether our rationale for teaching writing reflects a hypocritical value system. Are we preparing students for college or for life, they ask. One self-confessed cynic points out that it must be for college alone because too few college graduates (including English teachers) continue to write once they have received their degrees.

I am not going to proclaim the importance of teaching good writing because our students must be prepared for college or because they need to know how to write clearly in order to become successful lawyers or plumbers. I'm going to discuss a reason for teaching writing which I feel is ultimately far more important. I believe that people should know how to write because it is through writing that we can validate, insure and preserve our humanity and our sanity. As we process our raw material, give it substance, name it, organize it, and inscribe it, we can exorcise demons that have haunted us, give order to our internal chaos and provide a means by which we can cope with and confront our experiences. The act of writing can provide access to the unconscious and enable the writer to communicate with the self and others. Writing is a means to know ourselves as well as to make ourselves known. We need



to facilitate this secret writing, hidden writing.

I base this conviction about the function of and necessity for writing on my sporadic attempts at composing poems, stories and journal entries as well as on my years of experience as a teacher of writing. The longer I teach and write the more convinced I become that the final written product is just one step in a complex and mysterious process through which the chaos of one's heart and mind is molded into a coherent form that can be experienced and understood by another human being.

This voyage from chaos to clarity to communication--from darkness to light--begins with an almost instinctual urge to label feelings and thoughts with words. That the ability to express oneself is essential and that the act of writing is therapeutic has been confirmed over and over again by my own students. Through writing, students can gain a knowledge of and perspective on themselves. As one student recently explained:

> "Writing in my journal has taught me that I cherish childhood and am scared to death of the future."

When given an open assignment or a journal to write in regularly, my students often describe personal experiences such as the death of a parent, the failure of a relationship, an attempt at suicide, or a recovery from alcoholism. Because I have been impressed and depressed by what they feel a need to write about, I recently asked some of them to describe their encounters with writing. About the motivation to write, one student said:

> "I write when I sense that I have to get a certain feeling out of my system. I guess it's my outlet to sanity."

Another responded:

> "To me, writing is more than arranging letters into words. I find that writing is a way in which I can let out all that is bottled up inside of me, without saying anything out loud. Sometimes writing a letter to myself helps me to straighten out my feelings, thoughts or problems."

A third student said:

> "Writing is a way in which I learn more about myself, my friends and my surroundings. It's a way in which I can sort out my thoughts and can share those thoughts with others. When I'm confused, it helps me to discover where I stand."

A fourth student added:

> "Pencil and paper have shown me solutions to problems that don't seem so well defined while contained in the limits of my mind. That pencil and paper have enabled me to paint experiences without a brush and easel."

These students are describing creative writing--not the title of an elective course--but a process by which they discover and create and validate themselves with words on paper. Although they are not as articulate as Robert Frost, my students are echoing his statement that "Every poem is a momentary stay against the confusion of the world."

One student, who recently wrote her third paper about the death of her best friend, which she had witnessed two years ago, was not able to face that loss until she could read her own words that describe it. She explained:

> "I kept seeing the accident in my mind and for the first time I could not write it down; it was too painful. About two months after it happened, my English teacher assigned a paper on a personal experience--writing that helped to deal with my friend's death."

This year, while writing her most recent paper, she chose to recreate that experience in detail--to vividly describe her friend being knocked down by a speeding car. Through writing she has begun to cope with that event--to detach it from herself through the use of words so that she can examine it. The experience seems less overwhelming and terrifying because she has named it, framed it and tamed it with words that she and others can read.

How does a person learn to impose order and coherence upon what David Holbrook, a teacher and writer, calls "the secret places of the soul?" Some learn to write well because they must; others learn that they must and can because they are given opportunities, encouragement and instruction by their teachers. A few experiences with the agony and the ecstasy of creating oneself with words can be enough to transform a student who writes to fulfill a requirement into a person who writes to fulfill him or herself.

We teachers must provide these experiences through assignments and supportive critical feedback which enable students to discover the power of, and therefore the necessity for, acquiring the ability to write. The following 12th grader's tribute to his teacher should reinforce all of us who have struggled with the question of why teach writing when it is



so time consuming for the teacher and may not be required beyond a college Freshman Composition Course.

> "In eleventh grade I had a teacher who at worst was supportive and at best was technically helpful. She accepted my most sloppy and nebulous poems, despite their disorder, because she knew there was something in them. She took my journal, my wild array of scattered pencil marks on paper, and poems written every which way, and helped me to make sense out of them. She commented, criticized and sent me whirling in a new direction; it was fabulous. After that, writing became very dear to me. My pen and paper were often my closest companions. I would often isolate myself and spend my time writing poetry instead of watching t.v., sleeping or partying. I realized how exhilarating it is to just sit down, write and see what happens."

With our help, students can progress from chaos to clarity and finally to comfort with external communication. As they determine the phrases, the organization, and the mode of discourse to be used, student writers can move toward a polished final product that captures and elucidates on paper a state of mind or a train of thought. Involvement in the writing process can also facilitate an awareness of writing as reading. Struggling to find the right word and the right form can sensitize students to the style and structure of the books, stories, poems and essays they read. Some are amazed and delighted to realize that a novel was once someone's creative writing that had to be revised and revised and revised before it was set in type and captured between two hard or soft covers.

To those students who besiege me with questions about why they should learn to compose and to those adults who entreat me to go back to the basics, I will answer that writing <u>is</u> basic. Without the ability to transform chaotic bits and pieces of thoughts and feelings into coherent forms, individuals will be haunted seekers of words instead of inspired creators and receivers of communication. To those teachers who would ask me why they should teach writing, I will quote David Holbrook in the foreword to his book <u>The Secret Places</u>. He writes:

> We need to be in touch with the secret places of the the soul; it is there that order may be found, and by what flourishes there potentialities may be released . . . The teacher seeks to help children to grow up into adults who have developed creative attitudes to life and who have a sense of order and meaning in

their experience. To train effective and efficient young people, we must foster their deeper needs. One of these is for a rich imaginative contemplation of the nature of human experience with the consequent gaining of insight, understanding and satisfaction. By their imaginative culture they may grow to become good lovers, good parents, good workers and creative people in the community, able to let their sympathy flow, to become sustained by self-respect, and possessed of a sense of purpose.

It is the ability to name and impose order on experience--to clarify and to communicate--that we must preach, practice and teach. Let us do for all our students what that aforementioned eleventh grade teacher did for hers; let us show them how to whirl in fabulous new directions and encounter that exhilaration that accompanies self-discovery and creation.

## Watching People Move in Their Sleep

People who make strange sounds in their sleep
as though someone is awake in them,
waging war or making love
or saying yes to hands that wave goodbye
or play with the hair of children.
How slowly they breathe!
Perhaps they have slid down the map
from Minnesota to Oklahoma or Louisiana,
regardless of rivers and mountains.
Whose arms do they put around themselves
in their sleep? Who do they tiptoe to avoid waking?
What food could keep them moving like this?
Perhaps it is a grave they are moving in.
Perhaps they have grown extra breasts
to suckle themselves.
Oh, what frightening music comes out
of the churches there! Oh, what people dare
to say to their mothers!
They mention flowers, and someone says No.
They rock themselves and chase each other
around each other. What laughter!
How they love to touch themselves
and each other with their hair.
They uncover their heads and become children
playing at giving each other flowers
and messages from important people.
No one ever sleeps alone. No one
ever comes all the way back.

**JOHN REZMERSKI**



# Good Writing: What Is It?

**By JOHN CALVIN REZMERSKI**
**Gustavus Adolphus College**

When a baby is born, we don't ask whether it's a good baby or a bad one--unless it's our baby, in which case we count the toes. Every time somebody writes something, new language is born. When language gives birth to more language, we should expect some pain and a little bit of mess. The pain and mess of a student essay is no more reason to call for a heavy dose of The Basics than the pain and mess of childbirth is reason to call for compulsory celibacy. It may seem at first glance that that analogy doesn't hold up. But I think it does. We have abundant evidence (if we ignore the anecdotes of teachers who rave about the way their students come back and thank them for making them learn to diagram sentences) that teaching grammar and formal composition just doesn't work. Study after study reports that when students taught formal grammar are compared with students who are taught literature, the result (in terms of writing ability) is "no difference." One can only conclude that The Basics is not intended to be a linguistic panacea, but rather a moral exercise. And in fact, how often do we hear appeals for The Basics coupled with demands for Better Discipline? Notice the word "Better." It's akin to the word "Good," as in "Good Writing." I want to make it clear that the question of Good Writing is more a question of values than it is a question of linguistics or a question of educational logic. So "Good Writing: What Is It?" is essentially a moral question. To say "Good Writing" is tantamount to saying "Virtuous Writing." And you can't teach Good Writing by emphasizing The Basics any more than you can teach virtue by enumerating sins, posting lists of regulations, and doing everything else you can to engender guilt.

YOU CAN'T TEACH A KID TO WRITE WELL BY INTIMIDATION. And lest you feel inclined to deceive yourself, The Basics are

always intimidating--no kid will fall for the old "This may seem unpleasant but it's good for you" ploy, or the "This hurts me more than it does you" trick.

But how to teach good writing is not my topic. I just want to let you know the context in which I speak when I say that "Good Writing: What Is It?" is a question of values. It's a social question, not a technical question.

So, what is Good Writing? The simplest answer I can think of is, "Writing that communicates." That seems to indicate that clarity is important. And indeed it is. Clarity is all. But, as the poet William Stafford has said, watch out for people who think their clarity is God's clarity. We need clarity and charity for Good Writing. Good writing is friendly writing.

As one friend to another, let me point out the enemies. There are four of them: Habit, Obviousness, Complexity, Authority. They are the enemies of good writing. Let's look at them one at a time.

Habit. (N.B. not bad habits, but all habits). Habits prevent us from seeing and saying things in fresh ways. They get in the way not only of our modes of expression, but also in the way of our ways of perceiving things. A man who has never tasted a tangerine may throw it away as a shriveled orange.

Obviousness. Obviousness is saying what doesn't need to be said, or what everybody already knows. There's a rule in information theory that says you can't teach somebody what he already knows. And it can be shown mathematically that a totally redundant message communicates nothing.

Complexity. Complexity consists in trying to measure up to some hypothetical model that leads you to falsify the way things really are, when simplicity can falsify them much more directly. Call this the "X" factor--and let the "X" stand for "Excess." The world is complicated enough: the goal of meaningful communication is always simplification.

Authority. Trying to follow a set of rules (any rules), or saying what someone else tells you to say instead of what you know needs to be said; suppressing the truth out of fear or guilt, or false conscience; taking somebody else's word for it that your own perceptions are not as good as theirs; or believing that your own perceptions are superior to everyone else's--all these are manifestations of the authoritarian outlook.



excess or complexity. H-O-A-X, which spells "teacher of writing." Don't be too upset--I'm one, too. We have met the enemy and he is us. Think about it. How often have you been on the side of the enemies of Good Writing, even while trying to teach it?

Back to Good Writing--writing that communicates. With whom? In private communication or secret writing, that's not a problem. We can always check for ourselves how well we're communicating. But how about public communication? How do we handle the question "Who is the audience?" I always tell my students the audience for the kind of writing I want them to do is people we don't know and who don't know us. So if communication is going to take place, we must get to know the audience and give them the means to know us. How do we get to know them? Read. Listen. Watch. Think. Read. Listen. Watch. Think. Read. Listen. Watch. Guess.

How do we give them the means to know us? By giving them clues (in our writing) about our feelings (the emotions that affect us), our sensations (how we perceive things, the details), our attitudes (how we approach a subject, what ideas we have about it), and our beliefs (what seems to us to be self-evident, or at least impossible to explain). That's friendly writing. That's Good Writing.

There's one more thing: How do you recognize a friend in the dark? By his voice, naturally. Same thing with writing. Good writing should shine with the light of the individual human voice. A sensitivity to the way you talk and the way people talk with each other generally, can take the place of all the rules of grammar and usage. A sensitivity to talk. That's what's really basic.

Good Writing is a social activity, and the values that are involved are social values. Not abortion, energy policy, etc., but the social issues of language. Remember Virtue. Good Writing always chooses truth before manners.

The four enemies have special ways of operating in social situations.

Habit generates cliches--not just the usual old worn out tried and limp expressions like "quiet as a mouse," but also the educated cliches that most of us allow to pass for scholarship. For example, "My choice of measurement approach was made by a process of elimination. Observer ratings were excluded first because of the notorious difficulty in obtaining reliable ratings and, most importantly, because such ratings must necessarily be based on observable behaviors," as one researcher says in a report on his study of Good Writing and How to Teach It.

Obviousness generates the illusion of objectivity. Remember Stafford's warning about "God's clarity."

Complexity generates pedantry. The pedant is not simply a person who prefers indirect expression to direct, and who belabors every point, inflating things until they have no tangible surfaces whatever, but is also the father of the bureaucrat who says "no comment" in fifty words or less. He is the con man who seeks to equate grammatical nicety with wit, and who sincerely believes that vocabulary is the best measure of intelligence.

Authority generates snobbery. The snob is an advocate of "proper" English, or "correct" usage, or "standard" dialect, or "dignified" prose, or "elevated" style. Language snobbery takes many forms in our society, but they all have one thing in common: they make moral issues of linguistic questions, and ignore the real moral issues involved in the use of language, espeically those that touch on the right of one caste or clique to impose its way of speaking or writing on all the rest of us.

So the four enemies have new names: Cliches, Objectivity, Pedantry, and Snobbery. C-O-P-S--that describes the advocates of The Basics. And it describes too many of us in our weaker moments. It's about time we started acting like professionals. Instead of enforcers, we ought to become reinforcers of whatever good communication we see, whether or not it adheres to the rules of the snobs, the bureaucrats, the pedants, and all the other language-cops. When we act like language-cops, we do two things: We act to intimidate good writers, and we reduce our own ability to recognize Good Writing.

Good Writing is never language in uniform. It is never the product of an assignment diligently carried out. Good Writing is never the product of authoritarian intimidation, no matter how subtle. It is, rather, confident writing. Good Writing is never obvious; it is, rather, meaningful, saying something unexpected. Good Writing is not complex, but is straightforward and clear. Most of all, Good Writing is original writing. It comes from the writer--whether he be student or professional--because he has something personally worth saying, in his own voice, for that particular occasion. And no attempt to instill good habits will ever provide a substitute for that originality. Habit, of whatever kind, can only work against originality.

Good Writing is renegade writing, writing that takes risks, writing that is responsible to the audience and to the writer's sense of his own voice, rather than to the self-appointed cops and their rules.



Years ago, in the Harvard Educational Review, the linguist Martin Joos published an account of how he submitted a paragraph to a large group of English teachers, who were agreed that it was not good writing by any reasonable standard. Their reasons ranged from accusations of awkwardness and ungrammaticality to criticism of the paragraph's colloquialism. Only after a protracted discussion in which the teachers enumerated their reasons for giving the paragraph no more than a "C," he revealed to them that it was a selection (and a fairly representative one) from a prize-winning autobiography. Not only that, but an appeal to standard references on grammar, style, and usage, would show that there was only one technical mistake in the whole passage. And not a single teacher spotted it. Clearly a writer ought not to cast his lot with that kind of teacher. Not if he's interested in Good Writing.

Teachers, if they're interested in Good Writing, ought to cast their lot with writers. The way for teachers to learn to recognize good writing is to join the battle and fight the enemies, not just in the classroom or just through instruction, but also by writing themselves and showing their writing to their students. Good Writing is a social activity. If Good Writing is a gift, we must learn how to give it, rather than to demand it.

# Outsiders

Tonight we meet visitors
from another world.
The whole sky speaks of it,
though the government denies it.
Perhaps the government does not know
some alien Columbus
is disappointed that we
are not the galactic Cathay.
Sitting in council,
planning to spread democracy
through the universe,
we have forgotten
that travelers to islands
come only for treasure.
At first.
What kind of scalps
will they teach us to take?
What kind of dances
will we do to send them away
too late?

**JOHN REZMERSKI**

# Can't Write: 1956 and 1976

By ROBERT L. BROWN JR.
University of Minnesota, Minneapolis

Harpers says (Gene Lyons, "The Higher Illiteracy," September 1976) that we're all a bunch of lay preachers, moralists with no substantial doctrine to offer. Though I don't agree, I do intend to preach to a text, included here as an appendix. This text was written two weeks ago by a bright and generally able University of Minnesota freshman as his first assignment in Composition 1. The fellow is not retarded; he has no learning disabilities and he is not in a remedial class. He is, in fact, the recent product of a wealthy Twin Cities high school, and he graduated in the top 2/10 of his class.

Work like this gives my colleagues fits; some claim that such students are "not college material." Yet this man has been certified as a top student. It is true, of course, that eight or ten years ago writers like this who found their way to college--most did not--ended up in remedial classes. Most of my colleagues who are not writing and language specialists--and many, I suspect, of yours--are genuinely perplexed by this sort of writing. They can't explain it, and have no idea what to do about it. After filling the margins with prescriptions like "watch your tenses" and "avoid colloquialism," and marking or correcting the spelling, punctuation and cliches, they tell the student to review his composition text, and hope for the best. As we know, the best doesn't happen, and the student--who wouldn't have written the cliches had he known they were cliches, and who hasn't the least notion what tense is--is reinforced in his conviction that he's not very good at English.

As a theoretical linguist and language researcher, I'm not at all disturbed by writing like this. Unbelievable as it



might seem, this fellow is not so weak in language as his work suggests, and it's fairly easy to show why he writes like this. His writing is, however, quite different from weak student work in 1956, or even 1966. More accurately, it's different from the weak writing that most college instructors faced. The "new illiteracy" is not, to use a medical metaphor, a new strain of virus; it's not something we've never encountered before. The problem is simply that writing problems formerly typical of the lower few percentiles of a class are now typical of the majority. Writing like this is typical of about twenty percent of our 3500 entering students. Another ten or fifteen percent--the remedial ones--are worse, the rest variously better, with a few--perhaps ten percent--quite excellent. I shall return to this text for some close analysis shortly.

My major purpose here, however, is to describe the simple, modest, and largely successful basic composition program at the University of Minnesota. We teach only a part of the skills legitimately called "writing," namely exposition: writing which analyzes, explores, defines and solves problems, building new concepts and new knowledge. The program looks flagrantly old-fashioned: no remarkable texts (only a simple handbook and dictionary), no remarkable classroom techniques, nothing we can wrap up and ship off to solve the "writing crisis." We talk about such familiar things as the thesis, sentence structure, word choice and paragraph structure. But--and I can't emphasize this too strongly--our program is not part of the reactionary and theoretically indefensible "back-to-basics" movement. We give our students basic skills which, unlike, say, exercises in surface grammatical structure, are genuinely basic.

The key to the program is that the graduate Teaching Associates who conduct the classes are carefully trained as language specialists; they can diagnose writing problems, and explain language structure and function clearly and simply. They can back up all of their recommendations with common-sense explanations in everyday language. The students trust them; they're pleased to have goals, almost relieved to be working on problems they know they have--even if their previous excellent grades do not seem to indicate this--and glad to be studying writing in the same un-mysterious way they might learn to set ignition timing or to make crepes.

The basis of our program is a very elegant theory of language; without it we would be working in the dark, as lost as physicians who knew nothing of biochemistry, or microbiology. Someone in or behind every writing program must know language theory. Unfortunately, little in a foreign language or English teacher's training provides the necessary theoretical information, largely because most of it was simply unavailable before now;

even now it's hard to find. The one or two basic linguistics courses required of teachers barely scratch the surface of the problem. At best, they suggest a way of thinking about language. Typically, they're too fast and too narrow, focussing on sentence-grammar, the part of language theory least useful to writing teachers. As Newsweek ("Why Johnny Can't Write," December 8, 1975) pointed out last year, most curriculum planners and text writers learn just enough linguistics to give the discipline a bad name. After teaching junior high school students to draw transformational-generative trees (or sentence diagrams, or Trager and Smith type immediate-constituent analysis, "Chinese boxes," or whatever) teachers still find them writing ritualized, incoherent, and dull essays. Any serious linguist would expect exactly this result.

The language theory motivating our course goes beyond sentence grammar into more mysterious areas of psycholinguistics--particularly language acquistion and change--and discourse pragmatics. We do not, of course, ever bring technical terminology into the classroom. I don't even use much technical language in training the Teaching Associates who, after all, are literary scholars for the most part. The point is simply this: to teach writing you must never give an unclear, under-described or false suggestion to your class. Nor can you hide behind traditional prescriptions delivered as law. Many teachers have acquired the ability to direct and explain language behavior clearly through hard experience or instinct. For the less lucky ones of us, a theory of language can guide our work, and keep us from repeating traditional nonsense, violating our students' intuitions, and thereby loosing their trust. Theory keeps you out of traps and blind alleys. I recommend, simply, that writing teachers be practical language experts. Work in language theory relevant to our jobs is just now starting to become available in University courses. More will be available soon. It saves time and agony to know enough about your own business to mind it. And most of us suffer tremendous handicaps in seeing why our students behave as they do.

I would like to take a fast but necessary detour through some rough theoretical terrain. I can say more about how we teach composition by discussing what constitutes the "new illiteracy" than by describing exactly what we do in the class-room. My major thesis is simple: they are not like us. And we are not like them; we never were. Intelligence, ethics, native analytical ability, and taste have nothing to do with this generation gap: a gap in linguistic rule-knowledge and text-processing ability. We're verbal folks--even the anti-intellectuals among us. We engage in lengthy discussion of issues. We're surrounded by people who question us, attack



our logic, present counter positions and question our evidence. Generally, we are inordinately fond of language ability and since we have been able readers and talkers since early child-hood, cannot conceive what it would be like to be otherwise.

Most academic speakers I've questioned deny that their normal language is any different--vocabulary aside--from that of other speakers. Nothing could be less true. Comparison of transcripts of teachers' conversations with transcripts of high school students everyday speech reveals great differences in discourse structure. Their language is situated, to use a term from my own theoretical work; its meaning is inextricably linked to contexts, and supported by vast mutual knowledge. The utterances are short with multiple deletions. Our students are, I think, more intimate than we. At least they have smaller circles of acquaintances. They speak most often to close friends to whom much can be communicated with a simple linguistic "gesture" toward a well-known fact. Typically, their speech is conversational, two or three sentences to a turn; long speeches are rare, and almost never is proof or evidence for assertions demanded or offered. One of our new freshman found it amazing, in discussing an essay with me, to find that I didn't know that "P.B.R." uniquely referred to Pabst Blue Ribbon, and that the phrase lacked all affective power for me. In Pittsburgh in 1962, I fondly recall, we called them "blues."

Another childhood memory, earlier and more telling: I am sitting in what now seems like a movie set for a 40's nostalgic film, but it is in fact my family's modern living-room, circa 1949. I'm on the floor with my ear against the huge radio console, listening to The Lone Ranger. The Lone Ranger rides his great horse onto a wooden bridge, twirls his lasso, and ropes the fuse atttached to a keg of gunpowder under the bridge, saving things in the knick of time. Crucially, what I recall is not a verbal text but a clear visual image, constructed of Pittsburgh scenery. By the time I was five years old I could easily and automatically process verbal narratives into visual images. I'd been practicing since I was eighteen months old, with stories read to me, stories told to and by me. Significantly, my visual image perfectly represents the viewpoint of third-person omniscient narration. I see the bridge from a point upstream; the visual field is exactly large enough to frame all of the significant action. It is exactly the perspective of story-book illustrations, which are drawn, of course, by artists entirely familiar with the rules or conventions of narrative fiction.

We are only now discovering that these abilities are culture-specific, learned, and rule-governed. Not governed, of course, by grammatical rules, but by more abstract rules

governing discourse structure. Conversation, and long discursive prose text are similarly governed. If, as seems to be the case, these same rules (operating in reverse) are the means by which writers turn visual or logical conceptions into coherent texts, then people unfamiliar with such language use--a television and conversation oriented student, say--would find these things quite mysterious. Even if they are competent interpreters of extended discourse--and this is by no means certain--they may lack the ability to produce it. Such things are simply not part of their lives. Most of us cannot conceive how anyone could lack such ability. It's like not being able to walk or talk--but, of course, we learned to do both of those.

Bad writers of 1956 or 1966--many of us as freshmen, say--had style problems; "vague," "wordy," no sense of elegant sentences, most often pretentious: heavily passive, nominal and latinate. Teachers could get by with a sort of linguistic "broad-spectrum antibiotic": tell the student to "simplify," to "be more precise," or, worst of all, to "write like you talk." These are virtually meaningless recommendations, but like tetracycline, they somehow cure things. We all read Swift, Vance Packard, essays in Atlantic, and Time, and our style problems, like our acne, eventually cleared up.

Todays students do write like they talk. Unfortunately, talking in everyday conversation is governed by rules generically different from those of written language, and today's students more often than not lack all familiarity with the rules or conventions of written discourse. They also have all of the old style problems, small vocabularies and even smaller ranges of experience to draw on, but these are the least of our troubles.

The new illiterate student lacks three types of linguistic knowledge which are basic to forming and understanding written texts:

1. Most cannot form extended discourse, except for simple narration. The idea of making an assertion and then giving the reasons for thinking it valid is quite foreign. That explicitly stated logical connections must link statements is even more so. And these text-creating abilities almost certainly have cognitive correlates: our students are simply unable to see how a problem can be decomposed into smaller units, examined, and solved. They stop after observing that working as a busboy is both boring and illpaying. They react to our pushing with puzzlement: "What economic, political, and psychological issues?" "What about



comparisons to other menial work?" "What do you mean 'say how could the conditions be improved'?" The students are neither stubborn nor lazy; they simply can't see these things as we do. And so much the worse for us as teachers: we can't see how things are with them.

Most crucially: they cannot set a point in time and space different from the present, and relate all elements of the text to it. This failure alone produces most of the organizational chaos. We know--in our bones--that text-time differs from real, or perceived time, and that the tense system, used consciously, links one to the other. In everyday speech, however, time relations are almost always clear even though speakers seldom use more than simple past, present and future tenses. Past perfect, for example, almost never occurs in conversation. "I went by Rick's but his mom said he left to get Lynn. They'll meet us at the game." Clearly we understand, as this speaker did, that Rick's leaving to get Lynn occurred before the speaker's arrival at his house. Why should the speaker say that Rick's mom said that he had left, when no additional information is communicated? Mutual knowledge, here, as in all situated language, fills in the gaps.

2. They have no conscious awareness of style levels and the affective consequences of style. They do, of course, style shift automatically in their speech and use stylistic variants for effect. But they know not what they do. In this case, the intuitive knowledge, the "knowing how" knowlege, is present. What they lack is the explicit conscious knowledge--the "knowing that" knowledge--which gives mastery of the process.

3. The most obvious and most intractable problem is that they lack the surface conventions of written language. They can't spell, punctuate, or form conventional organizational units. Most of the fuss focuses on these matters, since they are easiest to see; a computer can recognize a comma-splice. Unfortunately, these matters are hardest to teach, simply because there is no underlying regularity. Students must simply memorize their culture's tastes in spelling and use of orthographic conventions, and the process is slow and boring. At first they're amazed and amused to learn that the syntactically, semantically and phonologically unified forms "anotherwords,"

"alot," "alittle," and "doggydog"--as in "doggydog world"--are really not spelled that way, but when the work in the writing lab begins they tire quickly. It would, I think, have been easier for them to do this work in the lower grades.

Now to return to the text, which provides ample illustrations of all of these problems, but under the chaos reveals a complex and promising order. I shall ignore the largely phonetic spelling which is entirely self explanatory. Punctuation, however, is more interesting; it accounts for the greater part of what most teachers would call grammar errors. The second sentence, for example, is easily translated into written English by (1) inserting discourse-marking punctuation or an occasional and at the places where spoken pauses would have the same function, and (2) substituting the formal word emphasized for his rock/street culture verb-phrase brought down:

> "It is possible that education will continue much as it is: concerned only with words, symbols and concepts, and based on the role of the teacher--further (emphasized) by teaching machines, computerized knowledge and increased use of tests and examinations."

The sentence is still repetitive and vacuous, and shows his unfortunate subservience to his teachers' style--nominal, passive, and full of educational jargon--but it rivals Henry James for complex syntax. The one sentence contains: (1) three types of conjunction, (2) conjunction reduction, (3) appositives, and (4) embedding at three levels. A grammar lesson will confuse and bore him.

His tense-time relations are the worst problem: he writes "like he talks," forgetting that in writing the time relations must be set by carefully controlling tenses and other markers. The first sentence of paragraph three--"I think the teacher or professor should be mostly disappeared"--sounds crashingly ungrammatical and a bit hostile. It is neither. What he means is that after the revolution in education he predicts teachers as we know them will be obsolete. Be and have are close cousins, used as semantically empty auxiliaries, and often free vary in conversation, as they do in his naive writing.

On close and generous examination, we can see the time and modality structure he intended but failed to express. Basically he uses two fictive times: the present, the time of his writing, and some future point, the utopia after the revolution. All future, and some present statements are



modally hypothetical; some of the present statements are intended as full-fledged certainties. In the first paragraph he is anchored in 1976, looking ahead speculatively. He sees two possibilities: more of the same or big changes, and--unlike most naive writers--tells us why the big changes are most likely. He has a thesis, and states it as his ostensible second paragraph. Then, in the third paragraph, the big confusion: mentally, he is in the future thinking about the role of teachers. The switch lasts only for one sentence, however, since the future tense he uses through the remainder of the third paragraph indicates that he is back in 1976 again.

The last paragraph reveals another great leap. Inspired by his thoughts about students of the future, he shifts there again, at the same time changing point of view. We are now observing the thoughts of a hypothetical student who looks back over his education and likes what he sees, then looks ahead to years of continuing studies.

It would have been nice if this student writer had told us about these time shifts, instead of assuming that we had privileged access to his mind. Crucially, though, he has the syntactic resources he needs, and he has a rough and ready sense of how arguments are assembled. To force him "back to basics" with grammar drills will bore and anger him, and convince him that English teachers are fools. He needs to have the mental and linguistic operations of writing explained to him systematically. He needs extensive directed practice in spelling and punctuation. He needs a chance to write a great deal under skilled guidance and on intellectually rich topics. Perhaps most, he needs to be allowed, encouraged, even forced to stop trying to please the authorities. This essay is ironically two-faced. He predicts revolution with words and phrases like "learning experience," "pleasurable," "stimulating individual and group initiative," "skilled," and "in depth": the language of his oppressors used to call for freedom. A genuine course in writing will also raise his consciousness.

So, as we see it, writing teaching succeeds if a few simple principles are followed uncompromisingly. We try to do four general things in our course:

1. We treat our students as intelligent, if uneducated, adults who can understand things clearly explained.

2. We teach a course whose subject matter is language, not studied as a linguist or psychologist studies it, but as a language user does. All information is practical. A rule must explain problems writers actually face. All instruction is by example. We begin with texts--

often the students' own work--explore their intuitive responses, define the linguistic basis of the intuitions, supply or elicit further illustrations and assign practice in the skills centering on the linguistic or rhetorical phenomenon under examination. Where the students lack the necessary knowledge--as in the case of conventions of writing--we provide it and insist that they master it, however much drudgery it takes.

3. We give the students intensive directed practice. They write a lot. They receive comments on all they write. They rewrite all major work.

4. We refuse to apologize, to retreat behind prescriptions from authority, or to enforce a taste in ethics, style, politics or academic disciplines. We also refuse to accept alienated, ritualized formula papers. For example, we use writing conferences to allow students to comment on their own work. At first, as you might expect, they are politely deferential, but after some encouragement from the teacher they readily admit that boring work is boring. Within a few weeks they are rigorous critics who will not allow their classmates to pile words on top of words without information, envolvement or interest.

The response is consistent. Students find the course hard--writing is hard. But they are not bored, and at the end may feel they have changed.

## APPENDIX

Student Essay--Fall, 1976

In the near future learning will have to be changed. It is possible that education will continue much as it is, concerned only with words; symbles concepts based on the roll of the teacher further brought down by teaching machines, computerized knowledge and increased use of test and examinations. this is possible because eductors are showing a greater resistance to change than any other institutionalg group. but i think this is unlikely because a revolution in education is long over do. the unrest of students was only part of it.

I think schools will be greatly deemphasized in favor of a more open, broader learning experience to be more pleasureable to the student.

The teacsher of professor should be mostly disapered. His place will be taken by a stimulator of learning, chosen



for his learning attitudes as well as his knowlege. he will be skilled in stimulating indivual and group initiative in learning, skilled in handiling discussions indepth of the meaning to the student in what is being learned. he will be focusing his major attion on the prime period for learning, from infancy to age six or eight. the child will learn to be an individual not a faceless conformist. i dont think it will be like a preparation for living it will in its self an experience in living.

Because learning has been exiting, because he has participated heavily and responsibly in choosing the directions of his learning, because he has descovered the world to be a fantastically changing place he will wish to cintinue his learning into adult life. comunities might set up centers which are rich environments in learning, the student will never be graduated. he will always be part of the commencement.

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# Keeping in Touch

By ELMER F. SUDERMAN
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In this very practical article, dealing with a very down-to-earth and unpoetic topic, I would like to begin with a poem, perhaps after all not inappropriate for my discussion of the English teacher as writer. It was published in the Fall, 1973, issue of the Kansas Quarterly (p. 32) and written by Robert L. Tyler. Its title, "Tradition."

It gives me a silly security to be immortalized
in the Library of Congress
and possibly a few university libraries.
Even if all those words I struggled with
end up as electronic codes on tapes
or whatever
in any case I am somehow still sending.
Chances are somebody years from now
will stumble across the words.
Tonight for example I heard Whitman
on this very theme
somebody reading "crossing Brooklyn Ferry"
on a scratchy phonograph record.
Through even more dubious and difficult translations
I have run across messages from
Plato, Jesus, Augustine, many others.
Apparently it's always been a tough life
and basically a lonely mystery.
Somehow it's good to be in touch.

The poem makes a point our profession may be in danger of forgetting: that the urge to communicate is still extremely strong in all of us. No matter what the technique, we like not



only to hear from others but also to be able to say ourselves, to achieve a distinct and recognizable voice, life being basically tough and a lonely mystery. Still "Somehow it's good to be in touch."

Addie Bundren may have felt that the switch was the only way she could make her students understand "Now you are aware of me," and Lifebuoy may feel that TV ads are the best way to help people keep in touch by suggesting that you need to smell clean before you can keep in touch but most of us try words even if they are as blurred and out of focus as the pictures of an amateur photographer. We need, therefore, to remind ourselves that it is one of the most important, if not the most important function of the the English teacher to teach students that it is good to be in touch, even when we touch with very tentative tongues, and that one of the most fundamental ways of being in touch is to write. Important as more mundane professional and organizational concerns may be for the profession, we cannot forget that English teachers teach writing and that one of our major concerns must be to facilitate the teaching of writing.

But writing is agony, though it may and certainly can be an alluring agony, even an addictive one. And it is agony for me, even though it may, at least in the end, also be delightful. I had to learn the hard way that English teachers write, and I had to learn the hard way what little I know about writing.

I grew up in an immigrant home speaking a language, Low German, that was not even a language, only a dialect. It had no formal grammar, at least not codified, no dictionary. It still doesn't. Indeed, in retrospect it sometimes seems to me that in the linguistic community in which I grew up we really needed to know three basic utterances: When do we eat? How much will it cost? Do you love me? On the other hand, I may have overestimated the linguistic sophistication needed because there were more effective nonverbal than verbal ways of asking and answering at least one of these questions. My students have suggested when I have used this illustration that I have ignored one other important question, namely, where is the bathroom? And they are probably correct, except that in my community we didn't travel enough so that that became an important question. We didn't have to ask. We knew where the bathroom was. Only it wasn't a bathroom, rest room, john, comfort station, biffy, powder room, or even a privy. It was an outhouse, readily visible.

It soon became apparent that in the world in which I wanted to live I needed to know more about language than was encompassed by those simple questions and the answers they required. They were not adequate to keep me in touch. There was something

more to life than eating, buying and selling, and making love. And even if there weren't, the last of the utterances was a problem, because the language I learned did not have a statement equivalent to "I love you," or "Ich liebe dich." We could only say "Ik zie die goat," literally translated meaning I like you, and that did not satisfy me. Nor did the stronge affirmation "Ik zie die zea goat." Much later in life I tried to make that inadequacy clear in the following poem:

I LEARNED A LANGUAGE

Low German, that couldn't say
"I love you," only "I like you,"
plowed Oklahoma clay from five
in the morning until ten at night.
Watched turkey red wheat grow,
helped harvest it,
went to college to learn
a new language, studying Chaucer
and Shakespeare with the same care
my Father studied clouds,
reading Faulkner, Hemingway, Dreiser
as carefully as Father read wheat fields,
found students' minds as tough
as Oklahoma's red gumbo
and learned how hard it is
to say "I love you"
in any language.

The poem brings me to another point: writing, keeping in touch, is difficult. These three assumptions--English teachers teach writing; English teachers write, and writing is difficult--will dominate the ideas I wish to present. I do not, however, wish to take them up in a particularly systematic manner.

I can illustrate the difficulty of writing and the frustrations of writing and teaching writing by another poem, again autobiographical, indicating how I decided to become an English teacher, to teach writing, to write, and how painful and frustrating that task often is:

A DIRTY PROSE POEM

I was fifteen and the chicken house needed
to be cleaned and you can guess, without
me telling you, who was elected: me, of
course, and unwillingly I went to work
thinking in the middle of all that chicken
shit that there must be better ways of
earning a living and decided, then and



there, to get out of all that shit and
be a college English teacher and maybe
even write a poem now and then and I went
to graduate school where I ate, much to my
surprise, more shit than I had ever cleaned
out of any chicken house or cow barn either,
for that matter, and now that I'm a teacher
I guess I shovel out the same shit I learned
in grad school, adding some of my own, and
when I think about it, which I don't very
often, which is a good thing, I sometimes
wish that I were back on the farm
cleaning chicken houses.

No I don't want to go back to cleaning chicken houses, not really. I'd rather teach and write, shoveling and eating our kind of crap, than cleaning chicken houses and reading or writing for the Poultry Breeder's Gazette. We are all aware of the difficulty of writing and the sometimes frustrating elusiveness of words. We all remember T. S. Eliot's comment that words "slip, slide, perish," that they "decay with imprecision" and often break under the burden.

But I was saying, before poetry broke in with all her vulgar insistence that words strain, crack and sometimes break, that English teachers must write as well as teach writing. And that's hard to do. There is too little time. We have preparations. It is more exciting to talk than to write. Nevertheless, I am convinced that the teacher of writing, if he wishes to keep in touch with himself, his students, must practice, what he teaches.

As I write this paper my students are taking a test in a course in the American Novel. The test covers Frank Norris' The Octopus, Willa Cather's My Antonia, Ernest Hemingway's Farewell to Arms, and William Faulkner's As I Lay Dying. The students are writing during the course of one hour, an essay on the following question:

Vanamee, Frederick Henry and Anse Bundren (sometime after the events narrated in the novels in which they appear) meet with Jim Burden at Antonia Cuzak's farm when he returns to see her after twenty years. What would these five characters talk about after every one else has gone to bed and they are alone? What would they have in common? How would they differ? Choose carefully some one topic they would be likely to discuss. How would they react to Antonia's situation in the light of their own and how would Antonia react to the situation of the others?

I should either be writing the paper with them at this time or, better yet, I should have tried writing the paper before I made the assignment. Allowing myself only one hour. A fifty minute hour. In either case I would have learned that imagination and the ability to write on a somewhat difficult question does not come easily, and I would have been more able adequately to prepare my students for this test. I might also be more lenient and a little more practical in marking their papers if I had written such a paper with them. An English teacher writes so he can understand the difficulties his students face.

I once made a plea in an article entitled "A Brief for the Incomplete Theme" published in volume five of the Winter, 1972-73, issue of the Journal of English Teaching Techniques for the incomplete theme, arguing that while the old traditional assumptions that a theme should be complete, have a beginning, a middle and an end, should have a thesis clearly stated and substantiated with instances, examples and arguments and should be wrapped up in a conclusion growing naturally out of the arguments set forth, all loose ends neatly tied together, while important and valuable, such assumptions often lead to over-simplification and a sense of accomplishment which is not justified. Though such concerns need to be kept in mind, I think there is a place for the theme in which all the ideas cannot be neatly wrapped up. An idea worth dealing with can never be completely examined. There is always a mysterious reminder. Too great emphasis upon coherence leads us to conclude too quickly that we have finished with an idea, that its ramifications have all been explored and that we need not bother with it any longer.

I once had one of my students tell me that he had heard me teach John Updike's Rabbit Run before and after I had written an article on it. Before I had written the article I was groping, searching, open to new ideas, sometimes indecisive, often hesitant, even halting and not quite sure that I knew what the book was all about. But after I had finished the article and used it as a class lecture, my conclusions tended to be final, and my tendency, even though it was not my intention, was to ask my students to walk an intellectual road the direction of which I had already determined. The steps were carefully measured, the arguments were cogently mustered, and the conclusion was certain. It was better, he said, when I was still open to other interpretations, to new ways of looking at "Rabbit."

Now I can't believe that my mind was that closed; at least I am certain that it is necessary, even possible, to leave the door open for another word that needs to be said. Just as it is possible and desirable in fiction to create the sense of an expected future, so it is possible in exposition to open up new



ways of interpretation. But unfortunately that is too often not the case. Once we have shaped and organized an idea, it tends to become cemented in and hardened. The door should remain open for a continued excitement in the chase for ideas rather than for organizing ideas and setting them down in a dogmatic, correct and effective manner. Teachers write but not to close doors to ideas but to open doors to further reflection.

Another of my students once taught me to keep doors open. It was apparent that he was intelligent. It was also apparent that there were so many ideas in his head that didn't fit in any kind of pattern that he found it almost impossible to write any kind of paper. At least he could not organize his thoughts in the expected ways. He was so concerned to follow the expected pattern--and of course, he could never find such a pattern, at least such as satisfied him--that he had difficulty getting started. His paper for the course was overdue. Each day he promised me that it would be the next day. Each day he told me that he was working--but stuck. Nothing made sense. Then came the last day of class. It was a summer school class and lasted two hours. The first hour he was not present. The second hour he came in halfway through the class, and at the end he apologetically handed me twenty-five sheets of paper which he said were just plain chaotic hell. He had tried, he told me, to write down everything that he had been thinking about during three years of college concerning poetry, not only romantic poetry, the subject of the class. The sheets were of different sizes, some were perforated (my pet peeve) and the scribbling was difficult to read, especially since there were interlinear comments, asterisks telling me to turn to page nine (on the back) where the idea was continued and then I had to turn back to page five where I left off.

The ideas were just as chaotic. He had written a jumble of ideas he had thought about, some of which he liked and said so, others of which he dismissed after he had tried them out on paper. There were a number of false starts. All were dismissed as inadequate. In the end he knew he had been defeated: he had attempted a task too difficult for him. I gave the paper an A. Why? For two reasons, mainly. In the first place, it was obvious that the student had tried hard to think as thoroughly as possible about the subject and that it had turned out to be too much for him. He simply discovered that he had not yet developed the sophistication and skill to read a poem from any clearly developed point of view. Still he was searching. I find that refreshing. He had learned that right often has a long and intricate name. In the second place, he had achieved a voice which for all its confusion was his own. He had been a very quiet, taciturn, often skeptical student. Here he had become himself; he had discovered his chaotic condition. He

had created a voice that was different from any of the others more conventionally acceptable papers. There was no question that there was a human voice here, an anguished, confused, chaotic, tired, disillusioned voice, yes, but a human voice, nevertheless.

At this point I find myself somewhat in the same dilemma as my student. I am more sure than he was what I wanted and still want to do, but I am less sure that I have discovered my voice in which I want to do it. Nor am I absolutely sure that what I have tried to do hangs together or that I can tie it together. I am not sure that I care so long as my basic concern is felt: that teachers should teach writing and should write. We need to keep in touch because life, apparently, is tough and a mystery. And Dr. Johnson has reminded us that "The only end of writing is to enable readers better to enjoy life or better to endure it." He could have added that writing also makes life more enjoyable and more endurable. And we ought not to expect writing to be easy, just as enjoying and enduring life is not easy.

When I was a teaching assistant our supervisor once assured us that we should not be alarmed if our students or we as teachers found writing difficult. He reminded us of an old and revered professor of his, the author of many books and articles, a stylist of some repute, who had told him one day that after almost daily practice of the art of writing, it was still difficult for him, after almost forty years, to construct a well honed sentence and to say what he meant. It isn't easy, never was, never will be. But we must try again, and again.

For it is joyful agony. J. Mitchell Morse in The Irrevelant English Teacher argues that "the contemplation of a well-made sentence is the second greatest pleasure in life. The greatest of course, is to write such a sentence oneself. What did you think it was?"

I think perhaps that I better not push my point much farther. I might repeat myself again. And I will. English teachers should teach writing. English teachers should work to become good writers. At least they should write. Incessantly. Every day. Everywhere. Good writing requires incessant practice and indefatigable zeal. But writing is an important way of keeping in touch.

As the editor of an affiliate journal whose function it has been to serve as an outlet not only for the practical concerns and issues facing English teachers today but also of the creative works of the members of that state council served by the journal, I conceive of the affiliate journal as an important instrument--the most important instrument--in giving



to the teacher of writing a viable outlet for his concerns both practical and creative, of keeping in touch.

We are all aware that we work better if we are doing real things under real conditions, rather than doing things artificially. Most of us are not going to write just for the sake of writing. We are going to write only if there is an outlet for our writing. Affiliate journals should, I think, be such an outlet. I hope the Minnesota English Journal has been. I hope it will continue to be. There is a security--and it isn't silly-to be read by a few. Most of us won't be immortalized, but we can be in touch, if only by a ditto machine. And that's good.

I can think of so many things that high school and college English teachers have strong feelings on that I can't conceivably imagine a situation in which affiliate journals ought not to be indundated with materials for publication, materials worthy of publication. Yet I haven't been. I would want to go on record as saying that there is no excuse that I can see for people who believe in the importance of writing not to make use of the affiliate journals as a forum in which there is constant and lively discussion about writing. Even more important these affiliate journals ought to exemplify the best writing that English teachers and their students can achieve. Editors may have to go into the highways and byways, may have to cajole, coerce, perhaps even force their members to write. But write we must. Write not only because we need to learn the craft but to show our students that writing can be lively, invigorating and interesting.

I began with a poem in which I suggested that there is in all human beings--and in spite of what some people may think that includes both students and teachers--a desire to send messages no matter how garbled or incomprehensible they may be in the sending and the receiving. We may not know why, but it is still true that "somehow it's good to be in touch." I would like to end with William Stafford's comment in "An Introduction to Some Poems" in Someday Maybe that no life is complete which is not somehow told, which is not in some way formulated into the exact shape needed to round out that life. Our efforts at dreaming the exact dream, at finding the precise curve that makes our life authentic may be fuzzy, may be wavery, but we should dream the dream and follow the line that leads to the authentic. We may not be able to sing, but we can moan, and we can hold the dreams we shape into stories among our most valuable experiences and teach our students these values.

A Postscript: My term as editor of MEJ is over. This is my last issue. In a way I'm glad. I will be able to spend more time

struggling with words that someone may some day stumble across. But is has been interesting to read the words of others who have tried to get in touch with others, with themselves. I will miss those words.

I won't miss seeing that the manuscripts come in, that they are typed and delivered to the printer--usually late--and mailed. That's boring. A time-consuming job at best.

I would add once more my old plea: send in articles, poems, satire, short stories, helpful hints, anything. Keep the editor busy. Force the new editor to edit, not to print whatever is sent. Force the editor to discriminate, to choose. The new editor will enjoy that, I'm sure.

## Old Family Pictures

I

Great-great Grandmother Gislason
Looks out fiercely
From under her Icelandic bonney
Like an owl who has just discovered
She is a mathematical prodigy.

This is not a woman
To be monkeyed with!

II

Great-great Grandfather Gislason
Points toward the earth
With his whole body;
His long white beard
Like a sad Old Testament prophet's
who no longer believes in God
Seems made of lead
Not hair--

The farmer's shoulders
The great heavy nose
Droop--

He has accepted the unfairness of the universe
With good humor.

He lives with
Great-great Grandmother Gislason.

**WILLIAM HOLM**


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