

The Best of the AWP Pedagogy Papers 2009

The Association of Writers and Writing Programs

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Pedagogy Team

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Preface

The 2009 Pedagogy Team is pleased to present this collection, *The Best of the AWP Pedagogy Papers 2009*. Engaged with what points student writers toward creativity, the teachers here discuss the work they do every day in the classroom. Issues relevant to students at all levels—from beginning writers to graduate students—are considered thoughtfully, and ideas about teaching in varied genres—from making poetry chapbooks to writing with authentic voice in nonfiction—appear next to each other. Such ideas and issues explored in this selection of papers reflect the innovative work AWP members do in their classrooms. It is our hope they will also inspire the pedagogical work our readers will do in the future.

These papers provide evidence of the Pedagogy Forum’s vitality and represent some of our nation’s best teachers of creative writing, but the Forum’s scope reaches beyond this select collection. Each paper submitted and each participant in the roundtable discussions makes the Forum a success. Given the high quality of all of the papers submitted, selecting the twenty best for this publication was a difficult task. We are certain, though, that you will agree these are enlightening and offer a variety of perspectives and approaches for integrating cutting-edge pedagogical approaches into contemporary creative writing classrooms.

We would like to thank everyone who has supported and participated in this and past Pedagogy Forum discussions. Together, we all create a community of teachers and scholars engaged in the daunting, yet rewarding task of shaping the future of creative writing pedagogy in North America and beyond. We invite you to join us next year in Denver, where our lively discussions are sure to continue.

Making Chapbooks in the Advanced Poetry Workshop

A regular assignment in the senior level Advanced Poetry Workshop is the creation of a chapbook of poems. This assignment has a couple of dimensions worth noting. First, students are to work on writing and editing a *group* or *sequence* of poems; this is different from writing an unrelated number of poems over 15 weeks, as is the case in the junior-level Poetry Workshop. In the latter class, students are practicing craft across a collection of discrete assignments and exercises. The emphasis is on composing and revising in new ways, becoming familiar, through reading and practice, with a set of genre-specific techniques, and learning how to offer and make use of critique mid-process. These skills are further built upon in the Advanced Poetry Workshop—but not driven by technique-focused assignments. Students are simply responsible for producing new and/or significantly revised work each week, keeping in mind that they will have to produce not merely a stack of revisions at semester’s end, but a *book*.

What makes a book different? For one thing, arrangement and its intent. The poems are to be offered as a whole, not merely as discrete, unrelated parts. The poems are to be *arranged* (and, therefore, also possibly *written*) with a book-reader and a unifying theme (or voice, or project) in mind. Students are invited to imagine that a particular subject or theme might be best addressed across numerous poems, which is a new concept for most of them. Because of this emphasis on theme and arrangement, at least two workshop sessions are devoted to looking at whole manuscripts in draft form. Students practice talking to one another about the *whole*, which often helps them manage (writing, revising, recasting, rearranging) the individual *parts*. The other thing that makes a book different from a stack of revisions is its life as a bound object in the world, cousin to other books, a creature with a spine, born of paper and other materials for an audience other than oneself or one’s teacher. Students physically “publish” their chapbooks in an edition large enough so that everyone in the class gets a copy. Students are offered mini-tutorials on basic binding, folding techniques, and other related skills. They must also write and share a number of short reviews of chapbooks in preparation for writing and designing their own.

When students (reasonably) inquire about the possibility of doing an “online chapbook,” I explain that part of what I want them to do has to do with thinking about their work in new ways, and that the materiality of a bound book can help them get to this new way of seeing much better than even the most aesthetically pleasing online publication can. Students need not be *expert* book artists or graphic designers, and it helps to show them chapbooks created by previous poetry students.

In “Hamlet’s Blackberry: Why Paper is Eternal,” William Powers offers several intriguing possibilities for the usefulness of paper and wonders whether new media and technologies will “ever escape paper’s enormous shadow” (5). Among those possibilities: an “emerging strength” of paper is that “by virtue of being unconnected to other media, paper sometimes makes it easier to concentrate on the subject at hand” (10). Another: that paper “influences or shapes the information that . . . paper media produce” (13). Like Powers, instructors can invite students to imagine paper “not as just a container of content, but part of the content itself” (13). Even students who struggled through the production process have commented about how meaningful it was to see their work “fully realized” in the form of a chapbook, and how rewarding it was to share the work *in that form* with their peers, friends, and families.

Arts & Letters Revisited

Great pleasure and inspiration come from reading letters by the writers we admire. In *Letters to a Young Poet*, Rilke urges a discouraged writer to view his poetry “as your dear natural possession, a piece of your life, a voice from it”; and in one of her first letters to a literary agent, Flannery O’Connor writes, “I must tell you how I work. I don’t have my novel outlined, and I have to write to discover what I am saying . . . I don’t know so well what I think until I see what I say: then I have to say it over again.” Such missives offer keen insights into the creative process, the writer’s life, and literary culture.

With this model of literary expression and exploration before us, it seems only natural that writing students, too, should have a letter-mate with whom they correspond for the duration of a course. (Students should select their own letter-mates, though the teacher can, of course, do the pairing up if necessary. Five letters per student, with suggested dates and deadlines, allow the process to gain momentum, and also to deepen.)

Through these literary letters to each other, students are to muse over any aspects they wish from the course’s assigned readings and/or their own writings. One possible starting point for their correspondence: what are we doing here, and why are we doing it? Students may also wish to introduce themselves in their letters, and perhaps try to discover more about their letter-mate. However these letters begin, discussing literature and/or the process of becoming a writer should take up the bulk of any penned thoughts. Students are encouraged to respond to each other as if to a friend with whom they wish to share their thoughts—though, as with all friends, they may have divergent opinions and ideas.

Despite our turn-of-the-century time, when virtual communication has virtually eclipsed the art of letter writing, students should be asked to use the old “technology” of pen and paper. The slow process of writing a real letter (as opposed to an e-mail or text message) constrains the tendency towards rushed thinking, and so, lends itself to composing ideas in a thoughtful, creative way. Fortunately, the class invariably finds that due to their rarity, hand-written letters bring all the more pleasure to their recipients. Students may hand these letters to each other, or may choose to send them through the actual mail.

Through this process of letter-writing, as opposed to the burden of formal essays about class readings, students experience a certain freedom, and enjoy the more personalized “requirement” of committing ideas to paper. Further, the fact that letters involve an *exchange* of ideas provides a break from the more remote, introspective process writers immerse themselves in to nourish their art. In turn, the letters foster a sense of kinship and community—and one never knows where such alliances will lead. In a letter to a fellow boarding-school student who would become a lifelong friend, Elizabeth Bishop wrote, “Since you are so careful to assure me that you are writing, I must tell you that I am too. The writing market looks hopeful.”

To Do: List Poetry and Litany

1. Get out your notebook and pen
2. Look at the side of a cereal box
3. Write your poem

Every writer, new or seasoned, faces the blank page. There are times when this empty space is an invitation, a waiting canvass. Then there are those occasions when she worries that there is nothing to say, no reason to say it, it's already been said, nobody's listening. But, see? Listing is easy. We carry lists inside us. To do lists, grocery lists, top ten lists, lists of ingredients, itemizations on a tax form, taxonomies, menus, pull-down boxes, bucket-lists, wish lists. It is a biological imperative to categorize. It is the basis for what Aristotle calls "an eye for resemblances", and it can generate material and make for good form in poetry.

Examples of list poems—and their cousin the litany—abound. Homer's *Iliad*, Walt Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, Allen Ginsberg's "Howl", Andre Breton's "Free Union", Linda Pastan's "Because", and Denise Levertov's "Psalm Concerning the Castle" all contain cataloguing and litanic repetition. In these instances, listing acts as witness, archivist, case-builder, argument-enhancer, perspective shifter, and/or investigator. For the student writer, it can be an act of discovery that reveals material (opinions, feelings) she wasn't aware she held. Or if a poem seems disorganized, listing can provide rhythm and structure to an otherwise amorphous collection of language.

There are many in-class exercises that make use of the parallel structure of litany/listing. One uses excerpts from Joe Brainard's book length *I Remember* and asks students to write the first ten things that come to mind that "they remember." Another exercise uses Pastan's "Because". Ask students to think about a tough decision they had to make at some point in their lives and to list the reasons they made their choice using "because" to begin each line.

A third exercise uses handouts of biological or horticultural classification systems. After reviewing examples of such language and methodology, ask students to list reasons for a memorable relationship break-up. This alone will often provide enough material for potent poems, but an additional step asks them to "classify" their ex-partner as a species, complete with invented language of kingdom, phylum, class, family, genus, etc.

Lastly, *Unnamed Dragonfly Species* by Juliana Spahr provides an inventive and activist use of listing. Interwoven throughout the text are the names of endangered and threatened plant, fish, and wildlife species in NY State. For a class exercise, provide lists with brief explanatory material of victims of war, extinct species, chemicals in the Kyoto Treaty, or other provocative documentation. After reading excerpts from Spahr, ask students to generate their own writing inspired by *and including* the list of their choosing.

Feeling the Vibe: A Workshop in Atmosphere

Atmosphere is dynamic, a process rather than a state. Indeed, conflicts between the different nuances of atmosphere, as well as between external and internal atmospheres, breed much of the drama at the heart of a strong narrative. To deepen our sense of setting dramatically opens up the compositional possibilities of a piece. In the landmark *On the Technique of Acting*, Michael Chekhov writes that great actors and playwrights “instinctively look for the Atmospheres around them.” By his use and Platonic capitalization of “Atmosphere,” Chekhov wants to underscore that setting includes the “feel” of a place, the way in which a locale is colored by the collective emotions of those inhabiting it, recent or dramatic events, and such factors as the season, the time of day, and the weather. More significantly, he wants us to reconceptualize atmosphere to include the dynamic mutual shaping that takes place between individual atmospheres (people’s “vibes”) and larger, external atmospheres. Characters don’t react to an external atmosphere the same. In George Saunders’s “Sea Oak,” for example, the characters all live in a dangerous, poverty-stricken housing project. Yet, each responds to the environment differently. The protagonist’s grandmother adopts a stern fatalism. The protagonist’s sisters gleefully indulge in neck-rolling smack talk and programs such as “How My Child Died Violently.” As for the earnest narrator, to create a better life he suffers humiliation at a themed restaurant by dressing up as a pilot and wearing a penile simulator.

While students are sometimes warned away from idea or mood based stories and told instead to shape narratives around character, convincing characters, dialogue, and action must develop organically from a keen sense of atmosphere. This two-part exercise seeks to inspire students to think of setting more dynamically by exploring it as “atmosphere.”

1. The first part of the exercise increases students’ awareness of atmosphere. Instruct students to journal on the atmosphere of a place they are leaving and the atmosphere of a place they’re entering. They’re to note such details as the places’ emotional tones, weather, sounds, looks, textures, scents, and associational images or metaphors that occur to them. As well, they should observe both how they and others respond differently to the atmospheres.

2. The next part of this exercise involves students translating an enhanced sense of atmosphere into their creative work. Have students divide a story into atmospheres rather than scenes. Next, have them choose one section of their narrative, note the nuances of the atmosphere(s) in play, and then change the external atmosphere. For example, they might rewrite a blackly comic scene as a foreboding or melodramatic one or rewrite a chaotic hotel lobby as a semi-deserted or austere one. They should then make yet another change to the external atmosphere. Maybe they change the weather or the time of the day or the emotional tenor again. Students should pay particular attention to allowing characters’ individual actions, words, and other means of expression to grow out of the external atmosphere and the tension between it and characters’ internal atmospheres.

Chekhov’s work, while geared towards drama, increases the depth and nuance of all genres of narratives, and his idea of Atmosphere helps students realize that atmosphere is a verb rather than a noun, a pivotal verb that can help them achieve that elusive goal of crafting characters who seem to autonomously and organically act on their own as well as fiction that “breathes.”

Renovation and Innovation: Experimenting with Inherited Forms

Sonnet, ghazal, cento, ode... what do inherited forms offer a contemporary poet? Certainly tradition, such as the good fitting of love's sentiment to a Petrarchan turn. But if you are writing something more contemporary, inherited forms also offer a quickened limit. For "limits are what we're all inside," says Charles Olson, or "The bottle gives the genie strength," says Richard Wilbur. From either end of the spectrum, inherited forms are a capacious place to write; they are a conversation and the beginning of one's own elbow room. They presage our sense of increment, and foster understanding of our stanzaic imaginations. Yet how to make it new, make it jump, make it fun? Below are some approaches to various inherited forms. They are more strategies—ways of thinking—than things to do, and so can be applied liberally in various contexts. They encourage play, invite chance, and explore procedures as generative means, and so loosen the directives of an overly controlling self.

- *Recrowning the Sonnet*. A classic crown of sonnets is usually seven or fourteen poems long. It employs the principle of prolepsis, or "leaping forward," in which each sonnet after the first one opens with the last line of the preceding one. These make a "round" until the last sonnet of the cycle begins with the opening line of the first. And yet, beyond direct repetition, there is a great deal of variety in how one might leap forward. Consider the ways one might link the last and first lines: key word, homonym, idea, tone, chiasmus, tense, point of view, etc. This means of linking can be applied to numerous serial compositions; it is more a formal principle than a component of the sonnet form. How might you loosen the sonnet form itself? Some collections to look at: Karen Volkman, *Nomina*; Jen Bevins, *Nets*; Gerald Stern *American Sonnets*.

- *Shall We Go A'Centio'ing?* A cento is a work wholly composed of other people's verses, usually first lines. The term arises from Latin as a "cloak made of patches." More largely imagined, it is a form of sampling and collaging that makes use of a source text. It is also a form that is in conversation with history and with a subject. Think of a term or an emotion, say, Dolor. Now write a cento pulling from Virgil, Theodore Roethke, Ruben Dario, Hart Crane, Federico Garcia Lorca. Or take favorite lines from ten poems you love; organize them by chance, or perform an erasure of parts of each line to produce a new sense. Or write a self-cento, in which you draw lines from your own compositions to create a new poem. In a book such a poem might gather the key themes. See Ashbery's "The Dong with the Luminous Nose" & "SemiCento (MultiLingual!)"

- *Ode Addresses*. Classically speaking, an ode is a lyric poem of three parts that celebrates an occasion, a person or an emotion. Its principle device is apostrophe, or direct address. Yet it has been treated liberally over the years to suggest a way of exploring a subject. Think of thesis/ antithesis/synthesis; it is a dialectical way of working on an idea. Now renovate it: write an ode to yourself in which you work out a moral problem. Or write "Emotional Ode" addressing three complimentary emotions. Or "Letter Ode" in which you address three different people. We all have subjects and people in our lives. How can the Ode's inherent form of address be innovated? See Kenneth Koch's *New Addresses*, Ginsberg's "Plutonian Ode," Darell Gray's "Ode to Food"

- *Pushy Ghazals*. Ghazals are short couplet-form poems that repeat, as a refrain, the second line of the first couplet. Each couplet stands complete, but the whole is thematically unified. As such, the form invites what Gertrude Stein called insistence, or the evolving stress and function of words repeated. The opportunities for semantic and tonal shifts are profound. Try mining advertisements for refrains, or key phrases from politicians. Now try various procedures on the refrain, from n + 7 noun replacements to homophonic translations. Let the principle of repetition reveal new meanings. See Gertrude Stein's "Three Portraits of Painters," or Aga Shahid Ali's *Ravishing Dis-Unities: Ghazals in English*.

The Documentary Poem

Often young poets take the old adage to “write what you know” to mean to write from personal experience, as if writers were capable of knowing only what they have lived. Writing a documentary poem encourages students to use research to expand the material of their poetry and to develop their ability to understand and appreciate the lives of others.

As Philip Metres suggests in his article “From Reznikoff to Public Enemy: The Poet as Journalist, Historian, Agitator,” documentary poetry can draw from many sources and take many forms. As examples, Metres cites the work of a number of poets: Charles Reznikoff’s *Testimony*, which grew from his work as an editor for *Corpus Juris*, recounts stories from criminal proceedings, adhering as closely as possible to the original testimony, while omitting the judgments; Muriel Rukeyser’s *Book of the Dead* is a Modernist bricolage of court records, first-person interviews, and creative retellings of the lives of Depression-era miners in West Virginia; Denise Levertov’s “News Report, September 1991: U.S. Buried Iraqi Soldiers Alive in Gulf War” is a found poem crafted from the weaving of fragments and quotations from a newspaper article; Alan Ginsberg’s “America” draws on personal experience to capture the spirit and voices of the time; and Bob Dylan’s “The Lonesome Death of Hattie Carroll” recasts the murder of a black maid by a wealthy white man into a popular folk song.

Documentary poets have a number of considerations that should be discussed with students after reading Metres’ article and the accompanying poems, all available at the Poetry Foundation’s website.

Gathering Source Material. Perhaps the simplest form of research comes from engaging the news of the day. The website for the Pulitzer Prizes, pulitzer.org, maintains an extensive online archive of winning journalism articles since 1997. Additionally, poets can conduct personal interviews, travel to the sites of important events, and make use of traditional research sources.

Shaping Material into a Poem. Choices range from excerpting and arranging the language of original sources into found poems to using source material loosely as inspiration for new writing, while drawing details from the original accounts. Poems can be formal, experimental, or somewhere in between, and poets may choose to adopt the persona of involved personages or make take a “reporterly” distance. Poems may draw from a single source or multiple sources; likewise, they may present one or multiple points of view.

Ethical Considerations. Students should consider the ethical implications of their use of others’ histories. What is or ought to be the function of documentary poetry? Who has the right to speak for whom? What if anything do poets owe to their subjects? What kind of acknowledgement, if any, is appropriate for a documentary poem?

Ultimately, the documentary poem can be used not only to expand the material young poets’ source material but also to engage in a discussion of the poetic writing process: from gathering material and shaping poems to the ethical life a poem leads as an artifact that engages and enters a larger culture.

Thinking Past Traditional Process: Experimenting with “Automatic” Memoir

In crafting memoir, writers must ask themselves to reproduce images and experiences sequestered deep in the annals of their memories. When asked to write about their childhood, students will often protest that they cannot remember the color of the walls or how their mother looked. Certainly, the phrase, “I imagine...,” can be used as a sort of stopgap, but it is easy for a memoirist at any level to feel discomfort over not getting things “quite right.” Often, the villain in this circumstance is the dulling of memory by time. By experimenting with what will be called for lesson purposes “automatic memoir,” students have the opportunity to examine their own life experience assiduously and to write while experiences are unusually fresh.

To prepare students for the activity, have them read selections of explicitly diary-like works of nonfiction. Suggestions include “Assunta” from Bruce Chatwin’s *What am I Doing Here?*, “Something Valuable Given Away on the Street” from Abigail Thomas’s *Safekeeping*, and excerpts from *The Pharmacist’s Mate* by Amy Fusselman. Have each student choose one piece on which to focus and imagine what an entire day of the author’s life might contain, which should include the events described in the piece. Essentially, they will create a sort of annotated day planner. Discuss and share in class.

For the central exercise, ask students to bring in a small notebook, a shoebox, and, if desired, a disposable or personal camera. Gather the class at the start of the session and charge them with the assignment of documenting their own lives for twenty-four hours. The notebook will hold schedules, thoughts, comments on the day, reportage of dialogue, etc. The box will hold artifacts: anything from sugar packets from a café to a letter received in the mail to a phone bill. The camera may be used to document visual evidence, such as people and spaces. Encourage students to include transcripts of correspondence, such as e-mail and text messages. Ask them to return to the next class session with the notebooks and shoeboxes brimming. Then, let the students leave the classroom and begin their fieldwork.

During the next class, invite the students to share the spoils of their investigations. Have them talk about their experiences and ask them the following questions: What did you notice that you normally would have ignored? Would you describe your day as run-of-the-mill or exciting, or somewhere in between? Did you find yourself changing the day’s activities so that the day would seem more eventful, and if so, how? Did the mindfulness created by the mission lead you to any conclusions about your approach to memoir? Have them write in class, listing particularly impacting moments from the observed twenty-four hours.

As a homework assignment, have them write a two-to-five page automatic memoir about their day, centrally inspired by one or two of the objects collected in the shoebox or by an image captured on the camera. Students should rely mostly on the collected materials and be encouraged to write towards communicating a unifying thought, mood or theme.

Finding the Right Voice: “Accuracy” in Nonfiction Dialogue

One difficulty that students express in writing Creative Nonfiction is creating, or re-creating accurate dialogue. Lee Gutkind discusses this in his article, “The Creative Nonfiction Police,” in *In Fact: The Best of Creative Nonfiction*. After several discussions about dialogue, students still ask, “How much dialogue can we ‘make up’ because we just don’t remember, and still be true to the genre?” Gutkind’s article, specifically his “checklist” item number two, offers some help: “recognize the important distinction between recollected conversation and fabricated dialogue.” Nevertheless, the beginning student wants something tangible.

Pre-Activity Preparation

Class Discussion: Prior to the dialogue assignment, students read work such as Mimi Schwartz’s “Memoir? Fiction? Where’s the Line?,” which questions the very authenticity of any memory recreated in writing. Specifically, we discuss the use of dialogue in terms of both accuracy and literary worthiness.

Discussion Questions: Virtually any selection of creative nonfiction uses dialogue as one of its central features, and so the students read a number of works and study the ways in which this dialogue enhances the accuracy of the work. They speculate on how they might use dialogue in their own works. I ask students to consider a few questions: Do you believe that the writer remembered this dialogue with such accuracy? What does this dialogue add to the writing? How does the author appear to make decisions on where to place dialogue? These questions help to provide both focus and awareness.

Writing Activity

Day One: As students enter the classroom expecting only another day of workshops, discussion, or some other ordinary aspect of creative writing, I announce that today, we will walk to the cafeteria in the student union. There are three rules for the assignment at this time: (1) that each student situate him/herself in the cafeteria “incognito,” (2) that each student focus on just one conversation (to keep up with the dialogue, perhaps the student will focus on only two people involved in a conversation), and (3) the student must submit a written record of the dialogue prior to leaving the cafeteria.

Day Two: When the students return to the next class, they have twenty minutes to render the dialogue they heard in the previous class as accurately as possible. They can close their eyes, envision themselves sitting at the cafeteria table, recall the scents and sounds, and let the dialogue flow. Students might be reminded: imagine the individuals speaking—in appearance, the sound of a voice, a mannerism, et cetera.

Day Three: After the in-class assignment, I return the written record of the conversation from the previous class. Their assignment for class #3 is to analyze the difference between the two renderings of dialogue. The students are encouraged to examine omissions and additions to their second writing and determine what factors might account for these changes.

As the class discusses the accuracy of dialogue, and dialogue’s place in creative nonfiction, students learn how re-created dialogue has a place in their work. Ultimately, we talk about scenarios where the student must re-create dialogue—namely, in work that is set years in the writer’s past.

Invented Cities: Creating Place-Informed Characters

Flannery O'Connor wrote, "To know one's self is to know one's region." Our environment acts upon us in profound ways, yet so much student writing is set in sterile, anonymous spaces that claim to be nowhere, anywhere, and everywhere. To battle the temptations of the all-place/no-place phenomena, students need to understand that a place, like its people, has a "character" that must be rounded and distinct.

Ask students, collectively, to invent a city. Among other details, they will need to discuss and determine the city's name, population, geography (considering the effect of geography on climate and industry), dominant cultural influences, economic conditions, major and secondary industries, local accents and language, and political issues and tensions. As they debate the attributes of one detail and another, they become increasingly aware of how profoundly setting affects their stories and characters.

Students often recognize communities within small towns, but they are less cognizant of communities in cities. Remind them that, regardless of a town's population, communities exist. Students inventing a large city should concentrate on a particular neighborhood and the culture that the neighborhood generates. For example, the television show *The Wire* is set in Baltimore, a metropolis, but the writers focus the narrative on one particular corner, a small community within a larger community, and each character is defined by his or her relationship to that corner and its other inhabitants.

Once students have created the town or city, each class member writes a short character sketch for one inhabitant. The characters often vary widely. Any trait is acceptable as long as students have considered how the setting has shaped the character. Some characters may be deeply connected to the values of a place; others may react against it; others may have more complex relationships still. Because there is no demand, as yet, for story, students find themselves unfettered by the demands of plot, and often give their imaginations license to express unprecedented creative thinking.

All character sketches are compiled into a single document that is distributed to the class. Next, each student writes a story using any three characters from the cast. Students should be invited to change details about characters to suit their narratives. They often invent additional characters as they write—an inventiveness that should be encouraged as long as place and character drive the plot and not the reverse.

This assignment releases students from a tendency to write characters that are simplified mirrors of themselves. The exercise, too, has a mimetic quality: students become forcefully aware of the influence of community on themselves as their collaboration creates a stronger classroom community. They are insiders to their collectively imagined place, which they take and mold for their individual purposes. They may reveal or withhold its secrets. Their characters, birthed in and moored to a fully imagined place, are vivid and rounded. Rather than relegating setting to mere backdrop, students understand place as a *generative* part of story construction, one that deeply informs their characters, voice, plots, moods, and themes.

Plotting Against Plot: Exploring Alternatives in Narrative Progression

For beginning fiction writers, “plot” is often indistinguishable from “story.” Rather than realizing that plot follows a teleological design, beginners frequently believe that plot is created simply by relating exciting events in chronological order. Eventually, however, writers learn that “plot” is more a counterpart to than a synonym of “story.” If story is the raw material, the mass of events to be related, then plot is the author’s careful arrangement of those events on the page. Granted, understanding plot is no mean task for the uninitiated. Writing a satisfying plot is even more difficult. However, as teachers of creative writing know, once beginning writers learn the basics, they’re ready to challenge them. They might ask why their fiction’s trajectory must be limited by verisimilitude or character motivation. Such a story structure is so *traditional*, they might argue. Well, they would be right. Without a tradition of conventional storytelling techniques, like plot, stories could be neither written nor understood.

What beginners often don’t realize, however, is that narrative progression is traditionally not limited to plotting alone. Narrative theorist Brian Richardson argues that quality narrative, in fact, *never* progresses by plot alone; all good fiction also utilizes alternative means of narrative progression. By examining James Joyce’s ultra-experimental work in his article “Beyond the Poetics of Plot: Alternative Forms of Narrative Progression and the Multiple Trajectories of *Ulysses*,” Richardson identifies twelve different means of non-plotted narrative progression. These include apologue (a thesis or worldview translated into story, as in *Candide*), dialectics (thetic/antithetic movement between ideologies bound to foil characters), and even aleatory progression (directed by chance, or an author’s random selection of events, as popularized by the Dadaists). More accessible to beginners—and useful for exercises—are techniques of what Richardson calls “aesthetic” narrative progression. These techniques range from simple repetition of words or images to the more ambitious modeling of narrative structure on musical compositions such as the sonata, fugue, or raga.

To demonstrate non-plotted progression, have your students choose from a well-known story two scenes that are importantly connected. They might, for example, choose a pair of scenes that, together, express dramatic reversal. In “Greenleaf,” by Flannery O’Connor, such a pair of scenes is the first and last: Mrs. May cursing a hedge-eating bull from the safety of her bedroom and later, Mrs. May being gored by that same bull out in the pasture in a moment of awe. Once your students have chosen two such dramatically connected scenes, ask them to rewrite those scenes, suffusing the first with new imagery and the second with equally new imagery that is similar (though not identical) to the first, in order to emphasize the scenes’ dramatic connection. Richardson gives an example of such paired imagery: dust coating a room and snow coating a field. One could use this pair of images to rewrite scenes of “Greenleaf.” Mrs. May’s bedroom rewritten as dusty in the first scene would suggest that her character is rigid, impervious to change for the better. In contrast, her gory death rewritten as occurring in a pasture of newly fallen snow would suggest that her character has been forced to undergo change and has been purified by violence. The purpose of such an exercise is twofold: 1) to teach students that plot is only one of many traditional, *complementary* (as opposed to mutually exclusive) methods of narrative progression and 2) to provide an opportunity for students to practice a modest use of non-plotted narrative progression.

Fiction Writers Take the Stage: An Exercise in Collaboration, Research, and Monologue-Writing

This exercise began as a collaboration with a drama professor/director. For a celebration of Asian-American theater, she needed monologues created from audiotapes in which individual Asian American immigrants told their stories of coming to America. The writers were to use the tapes as a jumping off point, but were encouraged to embellish and embroider the taped stories in order to create monologues with well-defined characters, distinctive voices and a range of feelings and behaviors. Indeed, the immigrants did not want to recognize themselves in the performance and asked specifically that all names be changed. The collaborative nature of this project grows out of the collective theatre process in which the efforts of playwright, director, and actors are combined to make a dramatic statement. Here, however, the process included the subjects who contributed their life stories.

The immigrants' stories gave student writers much to work with: the events of a whole life, a motivating desire, a particular manner of speaking, specific names and dates. What was missing—historical background and context—required library research. Students are often resistant to research for their fiction. While they can be persuaded to use research for their creative nonfiction, students rarely consider the value research can bring to their stories. However, this project necessitated research in a very concrete way. To write a one to two page monologue, they had to know their character well. In addition, the immediacy of audience, something which is less pressing in fiction, increased motivation to research. Research librarians helped the students locate relevant newspaper articles, photographs and letters, in addition to numerous secondary sources. Cookbooks and food magazines came in handy as well. Visits to Asian markets and restaurants also helped provide cultural context—the sights and smells and flavors of the characters' world.

Because the lives revealed on the tapes were considerably different than the lives of the mostly white, twenty-year-old students, the challenge was finding what Janet Burroway calls “an internal area in common” in *Writing Fiction: A Guide to Narrative Craft* (2nd Edition). After students listened to the tapes several times, they listed images or themes that cropped up repeatedly. Many of the immigrants spoke of a cherished possession brought from home, so this became a way to know that character. Others mentioned a person left behind who is never seen again. The students found that they could translate their attachments or longing for the immigrants' similar feelings. Ultimately, they come to understand that people are more alike than different.

The rewards of this assignment are many. First, it forces students to write outside their experience. In this case, students wrote about people who were different from them both in terms of age and ethnicity, and sometimes also gender. For best results replicating this exercise for the classroom, find oral histories or interviews with populations unlike your student demographic. Because of the research element built into this project, students avoid the pitfalls of stereotyping. Hopefully, students learn that research isn't dull and dry and will apply it to their writing in the future. In addition, this exercise prompts discussions of genre—how is a monologue like and unlike a first-person story? How do we come to know a character on the page versus the stage?

Writing Out Loud: Stage to Page

Confronting the need for subtlety and finesse in presenting exposition is one of the first hurdles in the beginning playwright's path. To the fictionist, weaving backstory seamlessly into the narrative can also prove daunting. An exercise that has proved useful to both playwriting and creative writing students is "The Empty Vessel." The exercise demands imaginative thinking and subtle verbalization. It comes directly from the process of training actors in improvisation which is, in essence, a writing-out-loud experience. Actors are not always playwrights, but to some extent, playwrights must always be actors—at the very least, they must be aware of the actor's process in order to create meaningful, effective dialogue. "The Empty Vessel" exercise is meant to do just that.

Two "actors" are involved in the initial process. One of the actors (A) has no idea who he or she is, thus the empty vessel concept. The other actor (B) knows both his/her character and the other actor's character. In the course of the dialogue, the knowing actor (B) must convey to the unknowing actor (A) both characters without naming either of them, e.g. Actor B can't say, "Hello, door to door salesman, I'm the harried mother of three children in diapers. Instead, she must speak until the other actor has a complete grasp of both characters.

The dialogue might go something like this, with actors facing each other:

B mimes opening a door: Oh, I didn't know—wait.

B looks over her shoulder and speaks away from A: Put that down!

B turns back to actor A: Sorry, it's so—come in, I guess. Wait, just stand there.

B (over shoulder again): I'm coming. Don't cry, I'm right here.

B (back to Actor A): I don't have time—can't you see? What do I need with...

B (over shoulder): Oh, for goodness sake, don't pull your diaper off—no—wait.

B (back to Actor A): You'll have to come back another time—I don't need a new vacuum cleaner anyway, what I need is . . .

At this point, actor A understands his character and speaks: Do you need another pair of hands?

B: Yes. Can you change dirty diapers?

The scene continues until the instructor ends it. It is essential that A, the vessel, not speak until he or she knows exactly who he or she is, thus placing a demand on B to fully deliver the information needed to realize Character A. The instructor must be firm and gently coach the students through the process until they fully understand.

When introducing the exercise, the instructor can provide simple relationships on cards to be distributed to students e.g. artist/model, policeman/offender, mother/child, husband/wife, etc. When they have gained comfort with the process, the students should determine roles themselves. In the beginning, students may feel slightly awkward, but they catch on quickly and the element of playing a game infuses the process with a nice energy and everyone benefits on a variety of levels.

Ways of taking the exercise to the page are determined by the instructor's goal and the writer's need. Students often write dramatic scenes depicting what happened before or after the enacted scene, for example, either as an in-class exercise or as an out-of-class assignment. Interestingly, a conflict usually emerges within the live enactment which can and has resulted in intriguing short one-acts. The exercise is very effective used as an introduction to exposition, as a remedy to clumsy exposition, and as a method of understanding the revelation of character through dialogue. It is also an excellent tool for assisting discovery and revision.

An Exercise in Local History: Beginning Playwrights Explore the Unfamiliar

Many beginning writers have difficulty creating characters that differ from themselves, but for beginning playwrights, the problem is compounded by the enhanced need for all characters' voices and speech patterns to be distinct from one another and for the play's setting to be unusual and visual enough to warrant attention. So what can be done to move the beginning playwright from the land of coffee shops and dorm rooms, from the emotional landscape of divorced parents and freshman romance?

One way to ease the transition into unfamiliar territory is to assign an exercise early on in a semester to require the students to step away from the familiar, to require the students to conduct specific, local research. This exercise works best if it occurs near the beginning of a semester, but not as the first exercise, so that the students have at least a basic grasp of character, dialogue, conflict, and stage directions before beginning. First, start by introducing the exercise's parameters. The students should conduct library research and/or interviews in or near the university's city or town. The goal of the research is to generate enough material for each student to produce one scene, not an entire one-act or full-length play, though, of course, the exercise might lead to a longer project for later in the semester.

Potential, broad research areas might include one of the following topics on the local level, either from the past or present: crime; government or politics; legends or folklore. The list certainly may be more extensive than this one, but the idea is to limit topics to those with the most potential for conflict. Once the student selects a broad research area, he or she will then narrow it down to one, specific incident or event.

Second, the student will start the process of researching and may need guidance or advice on everything from the very basics of journalism, the "who, what, when, where, why, and how" to the more nuanced topics of how to make a subject feel at ease, of how to mine an archive.

Third, once the student has selected an incident and completed some research, he or she will start the process of dramatizing it. It's important to emphasize the editorial nature of this stage—how the playwright chooses what to include and what to exclude and how these choices shape the characters and the conflicts into something dramatic or something static. Some questions to help the student make these choices might include the following:

- To which person or character do you feel the most connection?
- Which character would hold the most dramatic potential on stage?
- Which character is in the most trouble?
- Which character has the most memorable speech or dialogue?

Answering questions such as these should help the student sort through her material to get at the core of the conflict or tension.

Last, have the students bring in scenes from previous plays or exercises. By hearing selections from their previous work read aloud, followed by the scenes generated from this exercise, the students will have the differences in diction and voice made concrete. Afterward, they often have difficulty returning to their old territories.

Benefiting from the “Unearned Increment”: Kenneth Burke and the Image-Ending Poem

Many beginning poets over-write their poems' conclusions, thinking they must explain what they had spent so much time and care creating instead of trusting they have presented a narrative, lyric, or meditation any reader can appreciate and connect with. By writing this apology for “not getting it right the first time” at the end of the poem, they negate everything that has come before it. This calls to mind one of the most useful pieces of advice I ever received from a workshop mentor: a poem is best off when ending with an image. We must remember this is an important mantra to repeat in beginning poetry workshops, even though sometimes we may feel uncomfortable supplying the right justification for beating students over the head with it.

But plenty of theoretical bases for this strategy exist. In “Image and Idea” from *A Rhetoric of Motives*, for instance, Kenneth Burke presents a thoughtful argument for my professor's “end on an image” decree. There is an obvious aesthetic advantage in refusing to conclude with an explanation that only serves to deflate the poem for the audience and instead turn to something “pretty,” but ending this way also allows the audience to empathize more readily with the poem's core. For the most part, image-ending poems are more memorable because they, unlike their counterparts, do not “shut down” or narrow the reader's interpretation of the intensely personal world the writer created. Why should a poet bother to summarize all those deftly-crafted lines and demand the reader “get” the poem in only one, very particular way? At some point, the writer has to hand over the poem and trust in what she has said, though certainly she can still at least *suggest* an interpretation for her audience through a concluding image.

Burke uses the abstract idea of security to illustrate this point: “if [a speaker] could translate [security] imaginably into terms of, say, the mother, he might profit not only from this one identification, but from many kindred principles or ideas which, when approached in this spirit, are associated with the mother-image” (87). By translating abstraction into image, the speaker profits from the “unearned increment” of any number of concepts which are also associated with mother and have the audience identify with five different concepts associated with the mother-image, like security, affection, tradition, “naturalness,” and communion (Burke 87). Instead of closing down a poem's rhetoric, the poet can use the audience's own experiences to her benefit and generate a richer, better poem. A poem's power hinges on its ability to remain with the reader, to have it open up more avenues for its audience. Instead of Philip Larkin ending “The Whitsun Weddings” (ed. Anthony Thwaite, 1989) by simply saying “love turns to disappointment” or however someone chooses to understand the ending, the audience's reading is enhanced as they interpret the end-image and make their own connections to this intensely beautiful conclusion:

...and it was nearly done, this frail
Travelling coincidence; and what it held
Stood ready to be loosed with all the power
That being changed can give. We slowed again,
And as the tightened brakes took hold, there swelled
A sense of falling, like an arrow-shower
Sent out of sight, somewhere becoming rain. (Larkin 116)

Make Your Characters Work: Jobs and Three-Dimensional Plots in Short Fiction

In the lives of breathing, bleeding human beings, the consequences of actions ripple out, chains of event intertwine, multiple narratives intersect. Why should our fictions be different? In fiction workshops, we place a great deal of emphasis on fleshing out characters, giving them three dimensions, and allowing them to experience contradictory emotions. So why let our plots remain as flat as our credit cards?

One way to help flesh out a story's plot is to give the main character(s) a job. We spend much of our lives working, often at jobs we don't enjoy. Yet to look at much of contemporary short fiction, one might come to the conclusion that most Americans are either unemployed or seeking a bohemian experience (largely a semantic distinction). Making our characters work helps combat a key danger in character-driven fiction: writing stories in which nothing happens. Employment gives characters something to do with their hands and feet while their minds are churning with things more literary.

Giving your characters jobs will also add to a story's voice. Most forms of employment carry with them an entire lexicon all their own, those words and expressions unique to the work at hand. Take an infantryman's slang, for example—the fifty pounds of gear becomes “battle rattle”—or police radio jargon—“Code thirty, shots fired, suspect is number one male, no shirt, and dude is yolked.” Sometimes it's useful to explain the jargon, while other times it serves the story best to let it stand, adding to the text's suspense and authenticity and thus the author's ethos.

Placing a character under multiple pressures is often just the thing to get a story moving. A narrative thread involving marital infidelity, for example, can be complimented by a secondary thread involving competition at work over a new opening. A story about a middle-aged man whose elderly mother commits suicide can be compressed and wonderfully complicated by giving the middle-aged man the occupation of mortician, or psychiatrist, or Baptist preacher. Often, the heart of the story will beat in the space *between* the primary narrative and the work narrative.

The book *Gig: Americans Talk about their Jobs*, edited by John Bowe, Marisa Bowe and Sabin Streeter (New York: Random House, 2001), can be a writer's friend in the project of employing her characters. The book compiles descriptions of dozens of jobs, from Slaughterhouse Human Resources Manager to Adult Webmistress, all in the original words of a person who has worked that specific job. The language is rich with the diction unique to the job. The details are plentiful, often technical, sometimes juicy.

Assignment: distribute copies of a selection from the book *Gig* to workshop students. Ask them to craft a scene, two-to-four pages, in which a character with the job described in the reading acts upon a desire wholly unconnected to the job. In fact, the more contradictory the desire in relation to the job, the better. For example, a Heavy Metal Roadie could make a down payment on the suburban, two-bedroom home in which he spent the first ten years of his life. The scene should be written in first-person, and the narrative voice should imitate the voice in the reading. By the end of the scene, hopefully the writer will find a way to bring the circumstances of the job into conflict with the circumstances of the character's central desire. The goal of this assignment is to let the writer practice working between multiple narrative threads, specifically involving work.

On Scaffolding: Talking about Process in Poetry

To construct a building, you need a place outside the building to stand. We call this structure scaffolding. It is easy to forget scaffolding exists when walking among the immaculate, mirrored buildings of the financial district, just as it is often easy to forget that a finished poem once had the scaffolding of countless drafts in its creation.

Richard Hugo, in his book *The Triggering Town*, suggests that a poem has two subjects—the *initiating* subject which starts or causes the poem and the *generated* subject which is discovered during the writing. Hugo notes that beginners have a hard time reaching the generated subject—“One mark of a beginner is his impulse to push language around to make it accommodate what he has already conceived to be the truth . . .” (4). As experienced writers, we have long-since trusted our language and vague inner promptings to lead us to subject. Maybe a few lines about azaleas turn into a poem about autoeroticism, or vice versa, or some such thing. Yet in workshop do we even talk about process? As a way to help students re-think the subject-to-language idea of process, the metaphor of “scaffolding” can be useful.

Scaffolding is the initial language or impulse of a draft poem that we stand on to create the eventual subject and form of the finished poem. It stresses, as Composition theorists have long-since realized (adapting the term from Vygotsky), that drafting has heuristic value. Instead of the romantic ideal of divine inspiration from above being translated through the conduit of the poet, the idea of scaffolding places the generative power in language itself.

Though we may not be aware, we already take this more sophisticated process for granted. When we make a comment like, “this is the heart of the poem,” we are saying, “build around this.” When we say, “expand on this,” we are noting that the identified language has some spark of vital energy that might lead to a secondary subject matter. These implications, however, may not translate to the student, who may take them as purely descriptive or as a prompting to change their subject. Talking in terms of scaffolding stresses workshop as tool of perspective—a way to re-imagine our original impulses of subject, language, and form.

Of course, if we can talk about scaffolding going up, we can also talk about it coming down. Sometimes a draft has already hit home except that it still contains some vestiges of the original impulses. Of course, we may need to translate our cuts to our students as well. For example, in undergraduate workshops, did it feel arbitrary when your professor always cut the first and last stanzas of your draft? Though we may know why we are suggesting cuts, the idea of scaffolding helps translate to our students why they have to occasionally “kill their darlings.”

Without talking about process, it is likely that many of our suggestions in workshop are being misunderstood. Discussing process and scaffolding reminds us that workshop is a place to conceive of the endless structures and spaces of what poetry—this most daring form of writing—allows us to build.

Closing Eyes, Shaking Head, and Exhaling Slowly: Gesture in Prose and Verse

Dear creative writing teachers in every genre: Furrow your brow no more. It's not that your creative writing students are unable to recognize gestures as way to express emotion; in fact, even infants are able to decode a person's facial expressions (according to a study published in *Child Development* by Weinberg and Tronick, 2001). The problem is that college students too rarely *use* these gestures as a means of conveying emotion in their own creative writing—it's almost as if they've lost the connection to their childhood, to the basic communicative building blocks with which we come stocked. One way to get them to reignite this primal instinct and stoke up their writing is the following exercise for workshops of all genres. As soon as students pinpoint gestures as a means of showing emotion, they begin to go beyond their own narrative voice to convey meaning; they will move into the complex system of symbols that makes a great story or poem out of mere prose and verse.

The exercise has multiple parts but is simple:

- Tell students to write freely for ten minutes. This should be about an occasion when they knew exactly what someone was thinking or feeling even though the other person didn't tell them with words. Students should be as descriptive as possible.
- After discussing these events as a class, students are asked to identify the exact gesture that shows what the character being described is feeling.
- Next, split the students into groups. Have each group choose one student's paper to act out in front of the rest of the class. Before each group goes up to present their skit, you stand in front of the class and act like a character that simply *says* what they're feeling, saying blandly, "I am sad," or "I am frustrated." Then have the students discuss what is more effective: acting out the emotion or simply telling a reader what the emotion is.

Once the students have discussed the difference between emotion being shown by gestures and by a narrative voice, you should read aloud from a published model in the genre of the workshop. (*A Silver Bullet* by James Allen McPherson works for fiction; "Aubade for Brad," by Mary Jo Salter works for poetry.) Discuss how much more powerful it is when a reader discovers a character's emotion for themselves. Discuss how the stories that you have just read relate to the skits that you just performed showing gestures.

Students will see that a reader figuring out emotion is not the same as a reader being told something, and that it is the action within the piece—not the voice intruding into it—that creates a literary catharsis.

Students are to incorporate the gesture that they wrote about into the genre of the workshop (tying together this gesture's memory and a later, more recent memory if it is a creative nonfiction workshop; working this into a short-short story if it is a fiction workshop; having this be the genesis of a poem if it is a poetry workshop).

A follow-up assignment for fiction or poetry can be used to reinforce this concept, such as having students trade gestures and use their new gesture as one of the last five lines of a poem or short story.

Trust the Turn: Focusing the Revision Process in Poetry

One of the very difficult aspects of poetry writing pedagogy is trying to encourage students to revise so that their poems begin to embody the power, mystery, seductiveness, and grace of great poetry without either becoming unclear and lapsing into disarray or else becoming overly clear by incorporating excessive explanations. One way to address this difficulty is to help students recognize the presence and importance of turns in poems, understand that the lyric poem (largely) is a linguistic unit the goal of which is the successful enactment of its turn, and then learn to trust the turns in their poems and revise with those turns in mind.

A poem rarely ends in the same place that it began—in “Levels and Opposites: Structure in Poetry,” Randall Jarrell notes, “A successful poem starts from one position and ends at a very different one, often a contradictory or opposite one; yet there has been no break in the unity of the poem.” Turns—rhetorical shifts in a poem’s progress—are the places where a poem changes its positioning. Well known as a part of the tradition of the sonnet form, the turn is actually a vital part of all sorts of poems. In fact, just as many poems can be categorized by their forms, many poems can be categorized according to the kinds of turns they take—for example, to name just a few kinds of poems that employ a single turn, ironic poems turn from set-up to punch line, emblem poems turn from description to meditation, and retrospective-prospective poems turn from past to present or future. (A more complete list may be found in my *Structure & Surprise: Engaging Poetic Turns* (NY: Teachers & Writers, 2007).)

A significant portion of the power and mystery of so many poems comes from the successful enactment of a turn. A good metaphor for this is the joke. Jokes work—that is, they please, thrill, and astound—largely by successfully enacting their turns from set-up to punch line. On the one hand, this means that jokes do not, on top of their setting up and delivering their punch lines, additionally feel the need to explain themselves. On the other hand, this also means that (good) jokes are not muddy/sloppy—that is, while working for the whole effect of the joke, the constituent parts of the joke each do their own separate, and even often sharply-divided, tasks. The same is true of poems, and not just funny poems. If the poem is, as Wallace Stevens says, the “cry of its occasion,” it is often best to simply and powerfully arrange the occasion and cry that emerges from it rather than messily mixing up such elements, or tacking on an explanation.

Thus, as a part of the revision process, it is important to:

- Identify where and how a poem turns
- Identify and assess the specific work undertaken on either side of the turn(s)—is the turn clean? what needs to be moved, expanded, condensed, or excised to clarify the turn?
- Identify and cut unnecessarily explanatory language
- Suggest how the impact of the turn might be modified to create a more powerful, surprising, and/or revealing poem.

Considering the poem an enactment of a turn acquaints students with a feature of a poem that T. S. Eliot (in his essay “Andrew Marvell”) calls “one of the most important means of poetic effect since Homer” and offers a concise way to encourage crafting sophisticated lyric experiences.

Exploring the Sound of Sense: Broadening Students' Sentence Vocabulary

One of the greatest stumbling blocks for new students of poetry is the belief that poems should *sound like poetry*. Their poems suffer because they sound nothing like how speakers emotionally communicate through speech. Just what new students believe poetry *sounds like* may differ, but they often arrive in class assuming poetry is both grand in tone and image and orotund in its rhetoric. By instead turning students into collectors of tones of speech and drawing rigid rhetorical structures from everyday conversation, an instructor will demonstrate that emotional communication in poetry is less about grandeur than the treatment of spoken English as an instrument, one suited to a careful performance.

To prepare students for this exercise, ask them to read Robert Frost's letters from 1913 to 1920, selected in Library of America's volume, *Robert Frost: Collected Poems, Prose, and Plays*. One of Frost's key insights in these letters is that spoken sentences are like laundry lines: "a sentence is a sound in itself on which other sounds, called words, may be strung" (letter to John Bartlett, 1918). The implication, invaluable for poets, is that sentences themselves communicate. A listener through a wall unable to distinguish words could still decipher the significance of and feeling behind sentences like "Forget about it!" "Sure, sure," or "You mean to tell me you've lost our directions?" Sentences of this sort do communicate facts, but are primarily about emotion.

To begin this exercise, brainstorm with the class twenty commonplace sentences rich in tone—possessed of a sound in themselves. If students are reading poems as well as completing writing assignments, students are free to add to the list lines from poems read over the course of the semester: for instance, "I'm nobody! Who are you?" (Emily Dickinson, "I'm Nobody!") or "Great God, I'd rather be a pagan suckled in a creed outworn . . ." (William Wordsworth, "The World is Too Much With Us).

Then, as homework, ask students to become lepidopterists of speech: to comb poems and everyday speech for thirty sentences rich in tone. This exercise is cumulative as well as accumulative—each example the students discover will suggest others, and each example will demonstrate the way tones create narrative. To invent one example, the tone audible in "go ahead and knock and see if they're ready!" brings a possible scene, as well as a relationship, to life.

For the next step of the exercise, bring a receptacle to class (a cowboy hat is ideal). Ask students to write eight favorite captured or overheard sentences on scraps of paper. After each has added hers, shuffle them, and assign students to draw eight at random from the receptacle. As a homework assignment, ask them to use *all eight* in a poem that's otherwise completely of their own devising.

This stricture seems impossible before students realize it's actually easy: familiar speech is self-propelling, and the diversity of tones each student will no doubt receive will create a multiplicity of possible narratives or emotional arcs for their poem.

The revision and workshopping process for these poems is suggested by its inception. Before photocopies of the students' poems are shared with the group, each student stands outside the classroom and, through a wall and shut door, reads his or her poem to the class. The remaining students should take notes: What emotional tones did the poet make use of? Did any portions of what they hear confuse them or fail to communicate? Were any sentences ("sure, sure" is one example) completely decipherable through a wall? The reader then returns to the room and passes out the poem—clothes for the laundry line—and workshop then proceeds normally.

The final consequence of this exercise is that students will be forced to give up poems that consist mostly of grandiloquence, or of pretty words in toneless sentences, strung together like (as Frost would have it) "clothes tied together by the sleeves." Instead, the students learn the importance of tone in emotional communication in poetry.

Observing the Four A's: An Exercise in Crafting More Three-dimensional Characters

Creating characters that are both convincing and memorable is one of the most challenging responsibilities young fiction writers face today. Overwhelmed by their task of constructing a fictional universe—for perhaps the very first time—undergraduate creative writing students regularly submit stories in which one-dimensional, largely indefinite characters abound. Whether a narrative's protagonist has been improbably cast as the faultless hero or the mannerisms of an ethnic character have been delivered via the use of worn-out stereotypes, the problem is clear: regardless of a student's writing ability, a short story lacking in effective characterization does not stand a chance. Though practiced fiction writers will cite the crafting of authentic characters among their chief concerns, relating this sentiment to an introductory-level workshop is often easier said than done. Thanks to their greenness, students often fail to see that one of writing's greatest and most fundamental challenges is the articulate transfer of an idea from the mind to the page. As such, many of their characters' quirks and complexities—so clear in their own imaginations—are lost in the shuffle, leaving readers with mere sketches, blurred out of focus and easily forgotten. In order to remedy this all-too-common problem, and to encourage students to begin thinking critically about their characters, the following in-class exercise should be employed.

Once students have submitted and received criticism on their manuscripts, they should be provided with a worksheet which asks them to perform an in-depth study on one of their characters. This worksheet can be organized any number of ways, so long as it contains the following four topics: 1. Attitudes; 2. Actions; 3. Artifacts; and 4. Accounts. Concerning section one, attitudes, a student should list their character's various views on life in general, their opinion of their situation within the text, as well as their thoughts on other characters. In section two, actions, the student should write down major behaviors the character ought to display over the course of the narrative. In section three, artifacts, students should consider the clothing, jewelry, and other possessions that reveal something about their character. Section four, accounts, deals with other characters' opinions of the central character and what can be learned about him/her through the proxy of an ensemble. Once students have completed their lists, the information can be used as a helpful resource for revision; the uniqueness of their characters, which they have always grasped at the conceptual level, now appears in bulleted lists on the page that can be efficiently used to fill the gaps in their characters' verisimilitude.

This in-class activity, albeit simple, can be of great benefit to young fiction writers. Not only does it demonstrate that a serious writer must make painstaking efforts in order to craft three-dimensional characters, it also affords students the larger-scale insight that successful prose is never achieved without the use of revision. Once students are satisfied with fleshing-out their protagonists, this exercise can be repeated for a piece's supporting cast of characters.