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TOWARD A MODEL OF READING
WRITING AS ORAL DISCOURSE

presented by

Cheryl Forbes

has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

Ph.D. degree in English


Major professor

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**TOWARD A MODEL OF READING
WRITING AS ORAL DISCOURSE**

By

Cheryl Forbes

Volume I

A DISSERTATION

**Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of English

1992

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ABSTRACT

TOWARD A MODEL OF READING WRITING AS ORAL DISCOURSE

By

Cheryl Forbes

Dissertation Director

Dr. Randal Robinson

This study presents a model for reading nonfiction prose essays that have as a major aspect of their style characteristics more typical of oral discourse than of written discourse, the characteristics of face-to-face conversation. The texts used for the study come from three unpublished student writers, four contemporary essayists--George Garrett, Stanley Elkin, Lewis Thomas, and Stephen Jay Gould--and a sixteenth-century pamphleteer, Thomas Nashe. Each text is read from the perspective of oral discourse and is compared with the other texts to explore the relationships between speaking and writing, rather than their differences. Such a model of reading inevitably changes the structure of the composition classroom, as well as the relationships among students and between students and teacher; it also changes the relationship of students to their own texts, their colleagues' texts, and the published texts they encounter. The model of reading proposed points to a written discourse that is as interactive as oral discourse. Therefore, this study offers a way for teachers to read socially, contextually, ethnographically, and holistically--taking all the ways we use language into consideration as we read. Such reading requires that teachers of writing make explicit the inseparability and interdependence of writing, speaking, reading, and listening, as these processes inform and reinform each other.

**“To read at all, we must read the book of ourselves
in the texts in front of us, and we must bring the
text home, into our thought and lives, into our
judgments and deeds.”**

Robert Scholes, *Protocols of Reading*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Marcie Williams began to teach me to read;
Geneva Smitherman and John Alford showed me their way to read.
And especially to Randal Robinson,
who insisted that I read for myself.
Thank you.

Prologue

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Prologue

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“...I was saying it to myself all the time as I wrote it; and if there are any passages in it that seem to be difficult, I recommend reading them aloud....for some people, at least, the meaning will stand out more clearly once the text is ‘heard’ in spoken form.”

M. A. K. Halliday, *Spoken
and Written Language*, xvi.

I love to write.

I have loved to write for as long as I can remember, almost as long as I have loved to read. Not that I wrote when I was young the way I read. Then, in grade school and high school, it seemed that all I did was read. Indiscriminately. It was nothing to move from Dorothy L. Sayers to Joseph Conrad, from Phoebe Atwood Taylor to Jane Austen. I even read cereal boxes and labels, long before nutritionists encouraged us to do so. If nothing else, such lack of discrimination gave me an eclectic education. It wasn't just the stories I loved, though I did love stories. I loved the sheer, physical act of putting my eyes on a white page of black type. I loved to smell what I was reading, even musty books too long in someone's basement (like my grandmother's). It seemed that all my senses were involved when I read, but most of all my hearing. I heard books--the loud voices of the characters as they talked, the suddenly quiet voice of the narrator as she interrupted my concentration. I came to read while playing the radio or the record player to prevent myself from being abruptly recalled by that too-soft voice.

I mention how I read because it relates to how I write and because I can't separate the two activities. I hear words--words, sentences, paragraphs. I hear them all the time. It's something I can't escape, any more than I can escape having a mother with one green eye and one blue. When I am not writing, I am writing. In my sleep, for instance. That began in high school. In the car. At dinner, or breakfast--or even when I'm reading, whether silently or aloud, the

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worst time of all to find myself writing, because my words tend to crowd out the other conversation I was having.

Just as a day can't go by without my reading, so a day can't go by without my writing, even if it is only a grocery list. But I prefer to write something, anything, more substantial--an essay, a letter, a paragraph, notes for a new book--so long as I am putting words on a screen or on scraps of paper. I've even been known to write on napkins or kleenex. When I fail to spend the first part of my day writing, as has been my habit for many years, I get grumpy, unfit to live with, and so my husband says, "You need to be writing." Yes. I need to be writing. I am consumed with literacy.

Yet, in a strange way, the literacy I am consumed with is not visual, not that of the post-Ramist and -Gutenberg era that has dominated the last few hundred years of discourse, but aural. I think about how words will sound, not how they will look, even though I enjoy looking at a page of type. Not only that but I try out every word I write by reading it aloud--and that habit includes every word of this study, several times. Because, just as I want to hear what I read, I want others to hear what I write. I've always thought of it as writing the way I talk. That is, I am interested, both as a writer and as a reader, in the combination of orality and literacy. The writers I enjoy--from scholars to mystery writers, from Deborah Tannen to Ruth Rendell--are those who talk to me, person to person.¹

Of course, these are merely personal preferences, idiosyncracies. They have nothing to do with scholarship--what to study or how to write it. But I have edited and interviewed enough writers, and read enough interviews writers and editors have given, to know that my experience is not so uncommon. Writers want to connect with readers; they want to talk to them. It is a passion, even

¹ The style of Deborah Tannen, which is naturally conversational, makes her a good model, just as it has enabled her to move easily from academic publishing to general trade book publishing. Her general publisher, William Morrow, is known in the business as a popular, "big book" publisher, unlike, say, Little, Brown, or Knopf, which often publishes more serious, quasi-academic titles, for instance, Daniel C. Dennett's new book, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1991). There are other models of course, the work of Wayne Booth and Robert Scholes, or the recent work by Jane Tompkins and Linda Kauffman.

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with writers like E. B. White, who hated to write but loved to have written.

How do I translate this passion and my experience with it into something acceptable in the academy? Long before I began teaching, Donald Murray took the title “A Writer Teaches Writing.” Something like that, though, was what I wanted. Or so I thought, until I thought about it some more and realized that what I really wanted was to understand language itself and why it fascinated me. I remembered my undergraduate introduction to Noam Chomsky, Kenneth Pike, and other linguists, which I enjoyed, but theoretical linguistics didn’t interest me enough to devote years to it. To apply linguistic theories to reading and writing--that was something else again. That would interest me. And to do it, writing from a personal perspective, as more and more scholars are doing, would interest me even more.

So I began to read what scholars, researchers, and teachers had to say about language, about literacy, about speaking and writing, about listening and reading, about teaching. I learned a great deal, some of which transformed my thinking, some of which confirmed my instincts, and some of which made me intransigent about my own ideas. Well, actually, what I read made me mad, because what I liked and knew about writing and reading was sometimes considered not only bad but wrong, almost immoral. I had the wrong values. I wasn’t supposed to like “talky” prose--and certainly I wasn’t supposed to encourage anyone to write the way she talks. Writing and speaking are different. Writing is permanent (sort of) and speaking is ephemeral. One uses print; the other vocal cords. One speaks to somebody who isn’t around; the other speaks to people in the room or across the hall. One is hard to do and unnatural; the other is easy, automatic. One is done in isolation; the other in a crowd, or at least with a couple. One is smooth, coherent, linear, organized, new; the other nothing but pauses, false starts, disjointed statements, circularity, and formulas. One you can study, think about, reconsider; the other can’t really be captured, tape notwithstanding, because of all the paralinguistic stuff that helps it along. Writing and speaking are different language systems. Writers do one thing, speakers another--and hardly ever do the two overlap. I learned that this view of the differences between writing and

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reading has been called by various names, the most colorful metaphor being the great divide. I also learned that the study of these differences is new--about two decades old--and that recently some scholars have suggested that we should focus on the relationships, the similarities, between speaking and writing, and not the differences. The dichotomist, or great divide, position, has been under review.

There are many ways to investigate the relationship between speaking and writing and many disciplines involved--everything from deconstruction and its insistence on the unreliability of all language, spoken or written, to anthropology, which studies oral, nonliterate societies for clues about the impact of writing, or literacy, on the human mind.² I have chosen to take the characteristics that linguists say define face-to-face conversation and read certain writers from the perspective of oral discourse: students first, modern essayists second, and then a sixteenth-century pamphleteer, before returning again to students. Writers of nonfiction at least from the sixteenth century have used oral discourse--have had conversations with readers--even if they had to do this, paradoxically, through the medium of print. Although we might have gone through a stage when writers wanted to sound as unlike speakers as they could, things have started to turn around; once again nonfiction writers are holding conversations with us. We find the characteristics of spoken discourse over and over, sometimes used flamboyantly, sometimes subtly. These characteristics allow for play, for risk-taking, for open-endedness. Nothing is closed or closed off when writers incorporate the characteristics of face-to-face conversation into their written texts. All the writers I will introduce to you have that in common--from students Mr. F and Ms. W to Thomas Nashe (the latter had almost no models for what he was attempting, unlike those of us trying to write nonfiction prose today³). And not only is their style playful, risky, and exploratory but so is their subject

² Several recent books and articles, *Reorientations*, for instance, *Reading and Writing Differently*, *The New Literacy*, or some of the recent issues of *College English* approach writing and speaking and reading using modern critical theory.

³ I am not implying, however, that had Nashe had models he would have written in a less-oral way. That would be to imply that an oral style is more "primitive" than a written style; such discussions of primitive and sophisticated have been laid to rest by the work of anthropologists investigating oral and literate cultures.

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matter, even when it is deadly serious. You can't pin it down, hold it tight, or grip it, any more than you can capture a meteor in flight. But it is possible to present a way of "reading" the flight the meteor is on, and that I intend to do.

The choice to emphasize the characteristics of oral discourse in reading takes into account perspectives from several disciplines--reader response theory, cultural and social anthropology, rhetorical theory, and not least feminist criticism. My goal is to present ways to read a certain kind of prose, which I am calling writing as oral discourse.⁴ I define "writing as oral discourse" as writing that has as a major aspect of its style characteristics more typical of oral discourse than of written discourse, the characteristics of face-to-face conversation. (I will preview these characteristics in chapter one). Underlying this goal is my assumption that such a model of reading inevitably changes the structure of the classroom, as well as the relationships among students and between students and teacher; it also changes the relationship of students to their own texts, their colleagues' texts, and the published texts they encounter, present and past. Such a model of reading causes us to make explicit the inseparability and interdependence of writing, speaking, listening, and reading, as they inform and reinform each other.

To read from the perspective of oral discourse has implications for the style in which I offer my suggestions; I intend my study to remain open and open-ended, a "what if we read like..." rather than a "this is the way it is." My study itself is an example of the melding of the oral and the written modes. Such a blending is, as we shall see, exploratory, participatory, playful, conversational--suggestive rather than authoritative. (As we shall also see, these adjectives describe characteristics of a feminist approach to academic discourse.) Although such a style can be repetitive, digressive, and even contradictory, what some would consider its drawbacks, I, following Erving Goffman and Ann Berthoff,

⁴ Some might argue that this is nothing more than James Britton's "expressive" discourse; to my knowledge, however, no one has suggested that such discourse is oral; nor has anyone approached the style that students use from the perspective of oral discourse--except insofar as such characteristics are errors to be corrected and removed, even from so-called "expressive" discourse. We are also lacking models for reading student prose.

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make no apologies for repetitions or digressions (I'm still deciding about the contradictions). Conversational play is repetitive, digressive, even contradictory.

Here is the point. My central purpose is to suggest ways to read writing that is oral. I am not trying to present a method for writing oral prose, any more than a critic who reads advertising, John Milton, or Henry James is presenting a method for writing beer commercials, epic poetry, or novels. However, to offer models of reading oral prose naturally involves me in a discussion of what I consider to be its appealing and significant characteristics; for some readers these characteristics might not be as appealing. However, we don't all need to enjoy John Milton's poems or Miller beer commercials to make them worth talking about.

One final comment. In the spirit of conversation and construction, the quotations at the head of each chapter encapsulate what is to come--just said in another place in another way by a writer other than myself.

Chapter O

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Chapter One: Introduction

“...the status of a text as text depends on a relationship between speech and writing....”

Martin Elsky, *Authorizing Words: Speech, Writing, and Print in the English Renaissance*, 112-13.

The phone rings. “Hi, this is Sue. Did you get my note?”

“Yes,” replies Jane on the other end of the phone. “I’ve got it right here.”

“I hope you could read my handwriting,” Sue says.

“Sure. It says, Get the widogrid for Tuesday. I’ve just got one question, though. What’s a widogrid?”

“The chart for the latest market research. Boy am I glad I called to check.” At that moment the narrator says, “Call. It builds relationships. And it’s good business.”

We recognize this as a commercial for the telephone, running in numerous variations on the radio--writing meant to be heard, something not quite a written text and yet not quite an oral text, either. The writing here depends on the oral for transmission and reception. We hear what we once would have read. On the semantic level this commercial presents another aspect of the relationship between speaking and writing, where the written depends on the spoken for confirmation. Sue uses her written note not as an end in itself, an isolated, independent, stand-alone slice of communication, but as a reason to call, to speak voice-to-voice. Sue’s writing is, as ethnographers would put it, a social construction necessitating some direct, personal, contact. Sue knew that she would call when she wrote her note; she didn’t need to worry about explaining everything. Her concern was to make the initial contact. As the narrator says, the phone builds relationships, not the written text, and relationships not incidentally turn our economy (to make explicit what he leaves implicit). Speaking, not writing, turns our world.

Let me shift the scene.
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Let me shift the scene to a publishing house, a business with which I am familiar. An editor prepares to recommend some new manuscripts for publication and, as part of his preparation, he writes a memo explaining why he thinks that each of his proposals has merit. He attaches it to the sample chapters and sends it a week ahead of the meeting to the publishing committee so each member has a chance to read and consider the material. He also asks that each member bring the material to the meeting.

The day of the meeting arrives. The editor enters the room to find that several people have forgotten the material, and that those who have remembered it have in any case not read it. "Just give us the gist of what you wrote," asks the marketing director. And so the editor, using his memo as a starting point, begins to explain the merits of the case. He knows that until the committee hears him talk and gets to respond to his words nothing will be decided. The written words--even the written words of the authors he is recommending--matter far less than his, and ultimately their, audible presence.

One more shift in scene. This time a classroom, freshman composition. A teacher sits quietly in a corner, writing observation notes. She may be quiet but the room is anything but. Twenty-four students sit in groups, reading aloud, talking, arguing, approving, asking for explanations, rearranging sentences and paragraphs, refocusing or redefining with each other what each has written. The teacher hears students make suggestions, disagree with each other, explain and defend--or sometimes discard--the written text. There's a lot more than writing going on. Or perhaps it would be better to say that without all the talking there would be no writing going on. No, that's the wrong way around. Without all the writing there wouldn't be all the talking going on. Or is that the wrong way around? Such a workshop composition class shows as much interdependence, or melding, of the written and the spoken, as do the phone commercial or the business meeting, both structurally and semantically, both within the written text and outside the text when readers, writers, speakers, and listeners get together.

I want to explore what challenges the melding of the two channels of

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speaking and writing offers to teachers by showing how oral our written discourse is and in so doing offer a model of reading, for reading serves as the essential intermediary between the two channels. By this I mean that reading functions two ways; it is bi-directional. It functions as speaker to a listener at the same time that it serves as writer to an interpreter. Reading is not one or the other, but is both simultaneously, when we encounter essays that include characteristics of writing and speaking.

Each scene reverses the situation that began in the early Middle Ages and has continued until the last few decades (perhaps beginning in the early '70s, though it's hard to date a cultural shift precisely): written texts were required to confirm orally transmitted stories or information, and so written texts became increasingly distinct, or separated, from oral discourse, as Brian Stock has so persuasively argued.¹ Written texts needed one interpretive model, oral texts another. Or, to put it another way, written texts required interpretation where oral texts had not. As the written came to have greater and greater value, the oral was seen as more and more suspect, less reliable, less truthful, inadequate to the demands of society. And yet as more and more people put greater and greater reliance on the written, helped along by the invention of the printing press, the oral mode did not simply disappear. Rather orality began to function within a new mode, the written mode, even if we have not always recognized the oral mode disguised within the written. Stock claims that we need to understand "The broader transition to a type of society in which oral discourse exists largely within a framework of conventions determined by texts."² Today, however, we're undergoing another transition to a society in which the oral is much more audible within written discourse than it has been since perhaps the eighteenth century. Such orality within written discourse asks for a model of reading other than that we use for written discourse that includes far fewer oral characteristics.

And so here is what I intend to do--to look at written discourse that has a high degree of orality within it to suggest ways of reading, beginning and ending with

¹ Brian Stock, *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983).

² *Implications* 12.

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the oral texts students write. Students value talk; they don't value writing, or at least not many students do and at least not often. For example, every semester I give students a questionnaire (sometimes formally, sometimes informally) about where they look for information--a questionnaire about research. Seldom does a student list "books" or "the library," even if I list both options on the formal questionnaire. Occasionally a student will cite "magazines." But most students say things like "talk to my friends," "call my parents," or "ask a teacher." Oral. Not written. There is nothing wrong with this kind of research; in fact I encourage it. But it doesn't replace library research--yet--for the college community. M. T. Clanchy notes about the eleventh century that "even when books and charters existed, they were rarely consulted at first, apparently because habits of doing so took time to develop."³ (The habits of doing so, as Elizabeth Eisenstein and Walter Ong, among others, have noted were encouraged by the printing press. And now habits of oral discourse blending with written discourse are being encouraged by other technologies, the radio and the computer the two I see as most important.) What Clanchy and Stock explore is the tension between speaking and writing; by tension I mean something integral, necessary to society, like the tension in a tightrope for the circus performer, not tension in the sense of conflict or the stress that pop psychologists write bestsellers about.

It is the former sense of tension that I wish to encourage among students, who often see writing as the adversary and destroyer of their speech, not as a way to explore and extend it, not as a way to look at what they are saying, certainly not as something they can use. As a student once said to me, shaking her head as she talked, "You don't want me to write like I talk. I don't think that would be too good." She was assuring me that if she really did that I wouldn't like what I read, because she was convinced that her speech left even more to be desired than her writing, which she had judged as none too great. What she found hard to accept at first was that she could sound like herself when she wrote or that despite her best efforts to hide herself in writing her oral speech patterns emerged anyway.

³ M. T. Clanchy, *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1979) 3.

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This matter of hiding is, of course, an important issue. Some students intuitively understand that if they allow their speech to be heard in print they themselves will be heard. And that is psychologically and intellectually risky. So some students choose to remove themselves from their own discourse as protection--at least until they become convinced that their colleagues and I will not look at them as if they had suddenly begun to talk to themselves in public or shown up in class in their bathrobe. Once students understand that it is socially acceptable to sound like themselves in writing, then they begin to take risks--and learning is underway. Allied to this is the issue of decorum, in the traditional rhetorical sense, or propriety, what is socially acceptable and under what circumstances. It does not show a strong sense of decorum to appear in class in a bathrobe; and equally it might not show a strong sense of social and rhetorical decorum to write in certain ways for certain audiences. However--and it is a big however--part of taking risks often means violating decorum, and as we shall see often the most oral writers are also the greatest violators of decorum. The more non-oral the demands of a particular discourse (in certain kinds of academic writing especially) the greater the risk for a writer of oral prose, but the greater its surprise and value.

So although students have strong oral habits, similar to Clanchy's eleventh-century citizens, and a great sense of what is socially acceptable within their own communities, they find it difficult at first to accept that their oral speech habits have any value within their written discourse and school communities. Speaking and writing, however, are not dichotomies or adversaries in some intellectual warfare, as I think students often believe, but they are part and parcel of one another. It surprises students how many "real" writers do not keep the spoken and the written separate. Students are encouraged when they discover that they can think about the same ideas and explore them in writing using a style similar to that of a Lewis Thomas or a George Garrett. I think the similarity between students and published essayists also shocks teachers. Or maybe I am only speaking for myself. I know that once I began to read in the way I will present in the following chapters I found that what I admired in modern essayists and in such an early prose writer as Thomas Nashe I also read in the work of students. It wasn't a matter of convincing myself in some make believe parlour game that

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they “were” writers--they were. Our theories of reading count. It’s hard for me to admit that I was a bad reader when I started to teach composition. That’s troublesome enough; but what bothers me even more is that by reading as I did I was showing students the wrong ways to read, under the guise of showing them the right way to write.

A Preview of the Writers

My plan is simple. I begin with essays by two of my former students, Mr. F and Ms. W, analyzing the oral elements in each (I will preview the oral elements I have in mind shortly). Although these writers are stylistically different from each other, the oral characteristics of their prose provide broad interpretive opportunities to stretch and test my approach. I also include several brief examples, again from former students of mine, that show additional oral characteristics.⁴

These students will serve as my models for reading four modern American essayists, George Garrett, Stanley Elkin, Lewis Thomas, and Stephen Jay Gould. I have chosen them because they are essayists, write for a generally popular though educated market, have quite different styles from one another yet share certain oral characteristics, and are academicians: Garrett and Elkin teach writing, Thomas and Gould are scientists. The latter two are, if not household names, at least quite familiar to a large segment of the small reading population (about 1 percent, according to industry figures) in our country. And they are bestsellers in true publishing terms. The essays I have chosen have also been published in the annual *Best American Essays* (published by Ticknor & Fields), with one exception. Only Thomas has not had work included in the series, which began in 1986, long after Thomas’s most popular book, *Lives of a Cell*, was published, from which I have taken the title essay.⁵ Each of the essayists chosen here, like

⁴ See C. H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon, *Rhetorical Traditions and the Teaching of Writing* (Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook, 1984), for the position that teachers are researchers in their own classrooms. There are numerous other researchers who support this view and who in their own writing use their own students, in fact too numerous to provide a complete listing here, though they are included in the bibliography.

⁵ It is worth quoting the requirements for selection: “works of respectable literary quality intended as fully developed, independent essays (not excerpts or reviews) on

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Mr. F and Ms. W, offer broad interpretive opportunities. In addition, less critical attention has been paid to these writers than others I might have chosen: for example, Annie Dillard, Joan Didion, Richard Selzer, Alice Walker, or Joyce Carol Oates (even though these writers would also stretch and test my model).

I next move to Thomas Nashe, who may seem like an odd British duck in a study of contemporary American writers and readers, but I include him to show that writing oral-based prose is a tradition of long standing. Although I might have used a writer of even longer-standing I would have faced the Middle English to Modern English hurdle. More important, though, is that Nashe is one of the first writers to publish in anything like the modern sense, since the printing press was finally gaining hold on the culture, and he is one of the first writers to try to make a living as a writer. Also, as a pamphleteer he was part of “popular” culture, the growing popular literacy, not a member of the belletristic culture (like Sir Philip Sidney, for instance); his first pamphlet, *Pierce Pennilesse*, qualifies as a “bestseller.” Nashe shows numerous oral characteristics and, again, offers a way to stretch and test my model. He provides a cultural precedent, and a cultural authority, for the way students and professionals write today.⁶ Reading Nashe after reading students shows how a different model of reading students can improve our reading of the past. But more than that. Showing students how to read themselves and their colleagues from an oral perspective helps them become more astute readers of the past.

subjects of general interest (not specialized scholarship), originally written in English (or translated by the author) for first appearance in an American periodical during the calendar year” (from the 1990 edition xi). We may disagree with the judgments of various editors about the essays’ respectable literary qualities (I do not), but the point is that several editors from several publishing concerns have considered my examples to be good writing.

⁶ Although it is not my point to present a history of prose, numerous literary historians, among them Morris Croll, Walter Ong, C. S. Lewis, and Timothy Reiss, suggest that in the late sixteenth century prose began to change from an associative, oral style to a linear, hierarchichal, “modern” style. With the exception of Reiss, each of the scholars mentioned gives Nashe as a major example of a writer during the transition who still used a highly oral style. In this way, he has affinities with both the students and the modern essayists I use as my examples.

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After I conclude my discussion of Thomas Nashe, I return to my two students, adding one other, Mr. M, a student who found the necessity of speaking and writing extremely painful, for reasons I think his writing reveals. He represents another sort of oral style and so makes yet another contribution to my model. I end, then, with students, as I began with students, to explore the benefits of reading from an oral perspective--reading that values the oral elements students use in their written discourse. I suggest that reading from this view reveals that such a style has many social, psychological, and intellectual benefits that we may have overlooked, or worse, squelched, because we have read from the assumption of the great divide between oral and written. I also suggest that writers of traditional academic discourse themselves have begun to understand the advantages of such writing, and so I also read two examples of academic writing from the perspective of oral discourse. Another way of putting it, to return to my brief comments about decorum, is to say that what is acceptable, and when and where, is changing for our society. The informality of radio talk shows and magazine articles, as well as discussions about gender and reading and female discourse style, have begun to influence our perceptions about decorum, even within the academy.⁷ Decorum is as socially constructed as are manners.⁸

But why include unpublished and published writers together and in the order in which I do? There are several reasons. First, I am suggesting that we read students as writers; to begin and end with them helps keep this focus. Second,

⁷ See Jane Tompkins, "Me and My Shadow" in *Gender and Theory: Dialogues on Feminist Criticism*, ed. Linda Kauffman (Basil Blackwell, 1989) 121-39. Tompkins argues for the personal, for concrete situations, for conversations. For a discussion of this issue from a perspective other than female discourse style, but which reaches some of the same conclusions, see, for instance, Daniel Mahala's article, "Writing Utopias: Writing Across the Curriculum and the Promise of Reform," in *College English* 53 (Nov. 1991): 773-89, in particular 781 to the end. He argues that we need "a radical reexamination of our assumptions about academic literacy," and that there is a gap between the kind of writing we "impose" on students and what we accept with other writers.

⁸ This is not a novel idea, for certainly a point Augustine makes about rhetoric and the low style in *On Christian Doctrine* and a point Auerbach makes in *Mimesis* is that social changes affect what we consider acceptable style for certain audiences, purposes, and occasions. Augustine defends using the low style for high matters, which violated ancient rhetorical rules of decorum.

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modern rhetoric handbooks include student and professional models; the practice, then, is common, though it is not common to begin with students, for students are never read as unpublished writers from whom we can learn. Rather, all learning moves in one direction, from the published writers to the unpublished writers. By my choice of writers and my arrangement, I suggest that this is a faulty model. Third, the oral characteristics I analyze are often those that these same handbooks have considered “wrong.” By showing that these characteristics can be found in the work of highly praised writers I am suggesting that there might be another way to read these supposed errors. More than that, however; we may even see how such a writer as Stephen Jay Gould began to learn how to write. I am also suggesting, following Robin Lakoff’s position, that oral prose “will enable us to communicate more beautifully and forcefully with one another than can be envisioned now.” She adds that “our more innovative writers”--her examples are Tom Wolfe and Thomas Pynchon--are developing “an oral-style-on-paper.”⁹ I am pursuing the idea by presenting an oral model of reading, using many more examples and much more detailed analysis than she had space for within an article.

A Preview of the Oral Characteristics

Michael Halliday explains that spoken language “is dynamic and intricate,” written language “is static and [lexically] dense.”¹⁰ A value of the intricacy

⁹ Robin Tolmach Lakoff, “Some of My Favorite Writers Are Literate: The Mingling of Oral and Literate Strategies in Written Communication.” Tannen *Orality and Literacy* 239-60; these quotations appear on 257, 259, and 260, respectively.

¹⁰ M. A. K. Halliday, *Spoken and Written Language* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989) 87. His view that speaking and writing are both complex is not shared by all linguists. Although I do not want to provide a reductionist overview of the dense arguments of those in this field, some reduction is inevitable. In general, such scholars as Wallace Chafe, David Olson, Jack Goody, and E. A. Havelock, have taken the position that there is a great divide, or a dichotomy, between the spoken channel and the written channel. For these scholars, the two channels are “fundamentally different” (Wallace Chafe, “Speakers and Writers Do Different Things,” in *Fforum: Essays on Theory and Practice in the Teaching of Writing*,” ed. Patricia L. Stock, Upper Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook, 1983, 92; see the bibliography for additional papers of Chafe that present the same argument). Some

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and fluidity of conversation is that it involves readers in the discourse. Writers of oral discourse frequently digress, jump around, fail to provide transitions (or give

linguists, such as William Grabe, believe that speaking and writing are two different language systems (see “Written Discourse Analysis,” *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 5: 101-23). Recently, critics of this great divide position, in particular Harvey Graff, Brian Street, and Deborah Brandt, have argued, in Street’s words, “that the differences between literate and oral channels of communication ha[ve] been overstated” so that scholars have begun to study the “overlap.” Street continues, however, to show that the shift from “divide to continuum is more rhetorical than real” (see Street’s article, “Literacy Practices and Literacy Myths, in *The Written World: Studies in Literate Thought and Action*, ed. R.Saljo, Berlin and New York: Springer-Verlag, 1988, 60-72). In this I agree. Too many writers studying the relationship between speaking and writing continue to write from a great divide position. Among the writers who have been accused of perpetuating the “myth” of the great divide, Street would include Deborah Tannen and Walter Ong. Deborah Brandt in her recent book (*Literacy as Involvement: The Acts of Writers, Readers, and Texts*, Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1990) also criticizes Tannen and Ong as having a “strong text” view, her term for the dichotomist or great divide position. Although I think that Brandt and Street may be overstating the case in relation to Tannen and Ong, they make some persuasive arguments. Tannen ignores the paralinguistic aspects of written discourse; Ong insists that writing and reading are socially isolating acts, to be seen as distinct from speaking and listening. Akinnaso, who provides the best summary of what scholars have considered to be the distinctions between the two channels of written and oral, criticizes the conclusions of the great divide believers because they haven’t dealt with the contradictions in their data and have largely ignored purpose and context--the social aspects of writing and speaking. Street and Brandt also base their arguments against Tannen, Ong, and others, on the social aspects of writing and speaking. Akinnaso even goes so far as to assert that the differences scholars have insisted upon are “superficial.” He is only one scholar calling for a broader frame within which to read written discourse (see F. Niyi Akinnaso, “On the Differences Between Spoken and Written Language,” *Language and Speech* 25 1982: 97-125). Akinnaso, Street, Graff, and Brandt are joined in their attempt to focus on the similarities between speaking and writing by such scholars as Marilyn M. Cooper (“Context as Vehicle: Implicatures in Writing,” in Nystrand 105-28) and Gumperz, Kaltman, and O’Connor (“Cohesion in Spoken and Written Discourses: Ethnic Style and the Transition to Literacy” in Tannen, *Spoken and Written Discourse* 3-19). I agree with Brandt and Street that speaking and writing overlap; I agree with Akinnaso that we need a broader frame for reading. It is within this broader approach in studying the relationships between speaking and writing, and not their differences, that I place my own study.

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only the weakest pretenses of them), and repeat themselves. They circle back, circle back, circle back, like a hunter in search of prey. When we read, therefore, we need our wits about us, for we can never predict with great certainty where the conversation is going or where it has been. The writers who serve as my examples don't use maps--it's all so much seat-of-the-pants. The same is true for face-to-face interchanges, as we know from any number of dinner conversations in which we suddenly stopped talking with our companions to wonder, "How did we get on this subject?" We'll be tempted to ask it more than once when we reach Thomas Nashe, as we will for Gould, who has been criticized for including his readers in some strange conversations.

On the other hand, and seeming to contradict the unpredictability of oral discourse, we find those tired old phrases we call clichés. When we speak we use lots of them--ritual expressions like "Hi how are you" that have a greater social meaning than they do a semantic or propositional one, what scholars call phatic communication. We are usually alert to clichés when we read students, but it is startling to discover how frequently professionals use clichés. It's easy for us to overlook them, often because the clichés are so ordinary that they don't even impress us as clichés. Writers also create their own clichés or formulas, repeating them over and over, such as Elkin's "I'm thinking now" or Garrett's repeated use of sentence fragments, which becomes a controlling formula.

Along with clichés we find such expressions as "well," "maybe," "now," "I guess," "I think," "I suppose," "by the way," "for one thing," "OK," "now," and "why" occurring repeatedly. Some linguists consider such expressions as vocalized silences--the pauses so common when we talk.¹¹ They help us recover or give us a chance to collect our thoughts; they also tell our listeners something about us or are occasions for our listeners to make judgments--she is honest, he is a liar, he is articulate, she stumbles all over the place, she's got something to hide. Such expressions, then, are a way for writers to establish identity, or a way for readers to interpret or infer an identity from what the writer

¹¹ In particular see Anne Graffam Walker, "The Two Faces of Silence: The Effect of Witness Hesitancy on Lawyer's Impressions" in *Perspectives on Silence*, edited by Deborah Tannen and Muriel Saville-Troike (Norwood, NJ: Ablex, 1984) 55-75.

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has said. When we read such expressions we need to read them in all the ways we do when we hear them--as places of silence, as oral speech pauses, and as clues to the emotional state of the speaker, or her credibility, sensitivity, and so forth. Garrett and Elkin are fond of pausing; both writers also use typographic silence markers, for Garrett the ellipsis and for Elkin the blank space break. (Garrett uses the space break, too, but he--or an editor--filled each one with a roman numeral.) Other linguists call these markers metadiscourse,¹² a way the writer has of stepping outside the text to speak to us directly. Such metadiscourse is the written equivalent of what Erving Goffman calls response cries (like “wow” or “shit” or “oh, no,” or “hmm”), a socially acceptable form of talking to oneself--“our allowing witnesses a glimpse into the dealings we are having with ourselves.”¹³ Writers, though, can also use more than one- or two-word exclamations or comments and occasionally give extended passages that are nothing more than metadiscourse; Gould is fond of talking to readers in this way, as in the following randomly selected passage: “Why am I bothering with all this detail?...then this essay is as banal as the sentence I just wrote. But I would defend my effort....I would begin by asking....”¹⁴ In public such vocalized extended metadiscourse would probably prompt us to give the speaker a wide berth.

When we talk to each other, we naturally use first and second person pronouns, “I” and “you”; in fact, we often even leave out “you,” making it understood, particularly in questions--“I’m going to the store. Wanna come?” Pronouns are another linguistic means of asserting our identity, as they are another way for listeners to decide what we are like. We judge someone who refers to himself in the third person or with the objective “one” as pompous or stuffy. Writers who want to address readers directly, “I to you,” use these

¹² See Avon Crismore, *Talking to Readers : Metadiscourse as Rhetorical Act* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989) and William Vande Kopple, “Some Exploratory Discourse on Metadiscourse,” *College Composition and Communication* 36 (1985): 82-93.

¹³ See Erving Goffman, *Forms of Talk* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1981) 119.

¹⁴ Stephen Jay Gould, “Literary Bias on the Slippery Slope,” in *Bully for Brontosaurus: Reflections in Natural History* (New York: Norton, 1991) 250.

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pronouns, just as they use metadiscourse, though they use them not as mere conventions, a generic I and a generic you, but with a real person behind each one--for example, a person who speaks with a Brooklyn accent and once sang in his high school glee club (I have in mind Stephen Jay Gould, who tells us about his accent and his singing). In addition, writers of oral discourse frequently use the imperative, as if issuing commands to readers, something common in ordinary conversation, as in "Look it" or its equivalent when we want someone to pay attention or to think carefully about what we're saying. Along with first and second person pronouns and commands, we also usually use concrete nouns and verbs, paratactic constructions, and the active voice, rather than in abstract nouns and verbs, hypotactic constructions, and the passive voice.¹⁵

When we talk we don't usually need to fill in the context, for the talk is obviously and intimately situated in context--in fact, that is a central and defining aspect of conversation and what makes it so hard to jump into the middle of a conversation. We walk into a room where a group of people are talking, hear a few phrases, and think we understand the conversation, only to discover to our embarrassment after making a contribution that we have completely misunderstood the context. I have known teachers to become quite concerned about students when they hear them talking before class about Bob and Tammi, who are trying to decide whether to have an abortion, only to suddenly realize that the students have been talking about *General Hospital* or another soap. The teachers have mistaken the context. I have done it myself--and with a laugh have said, "Oh [with a rapidly rising and then falling intonation to show my stupidity but sudden understanding], you're talking about a soap [making the last word two syllables, with the first having a higher pitch than anything else in the statement]." Failing to provide a complete context for a reader is another kind of silence for the writer. Such a silence provides space for a reader to fill in

¹⁵ I am presenting how most of us talk in conversations, the findings of linguists and ethnographers who tape record and study the characteristics of everyday speech. This does not imply that when we speak we never use the passive or hypotaxis, to take just two examples, or that some speakers might not use these constructions more than other speakers.

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the context, a kind of turn-taking, the equivalent of the pauses a speaker uses to indicate that she has finished and now it's the other person's turn to talk.

But face-to-face talk is more than response cries, a particular vocabulary or syntax, or code-switching (moving from one dialect or register to another, what we might call tone shifts in writing). Nonverbal cues are as much a part of the context of speech as are the verbal cues. Pausing is a nonverbal cue. But there are others--for example, gestures, facial expressions, intonation, rhythm, turn-taking, ritualized exchanges, and roleplaying. Writers who use an oral style find ways to give their readers nonverbal or paralinguistic cues.

Writing as oral discourse has a different function for the writer and a different effect on the reader than conventional expository prose. A highly oral style asks the reader to become involved and to attend to particular events as they happen (particular as contrasted with the general). This place and this time become important as we read (or as we reconstruct this place and this time)--context, in other words. Context and identity are aspects of the "nowness" of writing that uses oral elements. We learn about a subject through coming to know the writer and her context. For example, Alice Walker's essay, "Coretta King: Revisited," is as much about Alice Walker as it is about Coretta King (there is a high percentage of first person singular pronouns).¹⁶ We learn about Coretta King through learning about Alice Walker.

To repeat what I said earlier, my purpose in studying the oral elements prose writers explore and exploit, such as the first person singular pronouns of Alice Walker, is to offer a model of reading. My purpose is not to provide a model for teaching how to write oral discourse, how to revise oral discourse, or how to grade oral discourse; for the most part I do not discuss how unpublished (or published) writers might improve what they've written, though this does not mean that I accept any of my examples as perfect (or even that I enjoy them equally). Not that this model of reading doesn't imply questions to ask, or that we should not discriminate, for of course we should and do. In the final chapter I

¹⁶ Alice Walker, "Coretta King: Revisited," *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens: Womanist Prose* (New York: Harcourt, 1983) 146-57. She wrote the essay in 1971.

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specifically suggest some questions to ask of writing that is oral, questions I will use implicitly throughout my analyses. Nevertheless, to present a method, a step-by-step procedure that any teacher could use with any student, would be to contradict the model, for I ask teachers to read socially, contextually, ethnographically, and wholistically--taking all the ways we use language into consideration when we read. I cannot decide for another teacher what that specifically means for each of her students, for that would be to know all the contexts, all the social structures. The model cannot be a prescription but is, as I said earlier, an inquiry into a way of reading that can affect what happens in our classrooms. We need to listen to the oral language our students use when they write. When we do, we help them learn how to read and listen to themselves, their colleagues, and the published writers, present and past, that we offer them.

Chapter Two

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Chapter Two: Reading Students

“...invention is meditative rather than systematic: it proceeds topically rather than methodically, follows courses of learning rather than of logic, and thus it is apt simply to stop rather than to end.”

Gerald L. Bruns, *Inventions: Writing, Textuality, and Understanding in Literary History*, 12.

I want to begin this chapter with the text of a student, Mr. F, who not only doesn't like to write but doesn't accept the notion that he needs to know how. In other words, he rejects the principles of a liberal education, being of a practical bent. “Just give me what I need to earn a good living, a big house, a boat, and season tickets to the Tigers”--that's his educational philosophy. He is, then, a typical, average student, a reason for choosing him. Mr. F wrote the essay I will use for analysis, “Hey Babe Hum Babe Hum Babe Hey...,” toward the end of the semester. I have included it in full here, since it is only 854 words, and have numbered the paragraphs; otherwise it appears as he turned it in. I have chosen not to add “sic” after every error, which would affect the reading experience.

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Baseball. For me it's as much a part of my life as sitting in my room on a Tuesday afternoon and trying frantically to get my English papers done on time. Soon spring training will be over and the regular season will begin. Why does this game hold a spot in most Americans hearts? Is it because the season starts while most Americans are overcome with spring fever? Is it the

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thoughts of sitting in the stands on a warm summer afternoon cheering on their favorite team? Or is it because the Russians can't play it? Try as they might they just can't seem to master the infield chant, which is something that needs to be perfected in order to be good. You need to have the chatter perfected before anything else. It's the great pastime of this game. A typical segment of infield chatter would be: (2)

Hey babe hum babe hum babe hey no batter no stick up there hey fire that ball hum that pellet whip that horsehide right in there c'mon dammit were really bored out here bored bored bored out here hunched over let's fling that sphere fire that orb you sum-bitch let's THROW that ball. (3)

As you can tell the chatter is about as professional as a little leaguers, but it's effective. It gets the pitcher so irritated that he deliberately throws the ball at the batter's face, which minimizes the danger that the batter will swing and thus put the infield in the position of having to stand in the path of a potentially lethal batted ball. (just kidding). Actually the infield chatter goes way back to the early 1900's when kids playing baseball in the street and lots started chattering in an attempt to distract the batter. (4)

Another reason why America is number one in baseball is the phrases yelled by shirtless, beer-drinking fans to encourage the players. We Americans generally use the three basic phrases:

- Boo
- You stink
- You really stink, you stupid jerk. (5)

These phrase of encouragement have dominated

baseball since the late 1910's when Ty Cobb made his appearance on the baseball world. Outside of Detroit Mr. Cobb was less than a crowd favorite. He regarded himself as being the greatest and had the obnoxious attitudes to back it up. This irritated the rest of baseball world, which was in love with Babe Ruth. Besides, being cocky wasn't the best attitude to have back in those times. (6)

In recent years the Major League has expanded past the Northern border, into Canada. Namely Toronto and Montreal. Although the Blue Jays have sold out every game the past two years, their fans tend to be a little less vocal. You could hear a pin drop even if they win on a bottom of the ninth home run. In Montreal all of their fans speak French, because there is nothing else to do in Canada after 5 P.M. This has led to some new and very competitive phrases, such as:

- Vous bumme, il y a un poisson dans votre bibliotheque.

(You bum, there's a fish in your library.)

- Boux (Boo) (7)

Yes, the game of baseball is best in America. The language of the fans and players guarantees it. If a player does good he is rewarded with cheers. If he does poorly he is rewarded with boos. Quite a fair trade. This is how the game has been on a professional level. It's a little harder to boo some 10-year-old playing little league if he or she drops a fly ball. For one the player is far from having the talent of a major leaguer. The player isn't being paid to perform, so he doesn't have to try and earn his money. And third and most importantly, the kids

father might be 6'5" and weigh 250 and be ready to kick your butt for causing further embarrassment to his kid. (8)

I love the vocalness of the fans. Sometimes it's better than the game itself. It's a natural instinct to cheer on a performer who's doing well. It's a reward of sorts other than money. The cheer of fans begging a player to emerge from the dugout after he hits a key home run. The support for the pitcher to get a strikeout. The player doesn't even have to play for the team you support. Cecil Fielder got tremendous support from the Yankee fans after he hit home run number 50 in New York. I can still remember the White Sox fans going nuts when Jack Morris threw his no-hitter in Chicago back in April, 1984. Though the players probably can't hear any individual cheers, the roar from the crowd is all of the language support that they need. (9)

Returning from a USO tour of Korea, Marilyn Monroe told her husband, Joe DiMaggio, then retired, "Oh, Joe, it was wonderful. You never heard such cheers."

"Yes, I have," was DiMaggio's clipped reply... (10)

Now that you have read Mr. F's essay, his first draft, I'd like you to reread it, this time aloud, preferably to someone, and not just to yourself.

The Orality of "Hey Babe"

When I first read "Hey Babe" silently, I missed much of what the author was trying to do. I also was distracted by the errors--errors of the ear and not of the eye. When we speak we don't worry about saying, "apostrophe s," which is one way English indicates the genitive; we just say, "Why does this game hold a spot in most Americans hearts?" We would never confuse Americans, no apostrophe, for the plural only. So I intend to ignore errors, unless they illustrate

the orality of the text, as they do in this case.

I've chosen one of Mr. F's essays because he is a typical student, as I said, and as such he illustrates so well the characteristics of oral discourse. He is colloquial, conversational, contextual. This is writing for radio or TV, not print as we have understood it since the seventeenth century. Erving Goffman points out that radio talk from printed texts or those ultimately to be printed is "transformed into utterances 'easy' to understand when read aloud. And it turns out that sentence structures easy to understand when heard are ones that give a sense of fresh talk," that is spontaneous, face-to-face discourse.¹ This is exactly the sense Mr. F's text gives, that of fresh talk.

Mr. F always used a computer and referred to writing as "typing," something common among my students who compose on the keyboard. Normally, we think of typing as copying something that is already written. Students who compose on computers mean it in that sense, as well, except that what is already written is mental, in their heads, but not yet written down. They are copying their mental speech, something a computer encourages. In effect, what they record is a kind of "fresh talk"; it simply occurs as fresh talk within and to themselves. Until his class with me, Mr. F had never tried to write, except longhand. Our use of computers encouraged him to experiment with his mental voice, because changing his text was so easy.

"Hey Babe" was part of an assignment to write a series of short research papers about some aspect of language that the students found interesting. That is part of the context for his writing, just as is his disapproval of having to take a writing course when an extra accounting course would have done him more good. At this point I don't want to provide additional information about Mr. F or his writing but make a few general observations about "Hey Babe" and then discuss its rhetorical and linguistic features in detail.

Mr. F. likes sports. That much is obvious. He is also writing about something going on when he sat down that Tuesday afternoon with a paper due in a few hours. Now he knows that I know when the thing needs to be turned in, so he

¹ Erving Goffman, *Forms of Talk* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1981) 239.

obviously isn't afraid that I'll get irritated that he waited till nearly the last minute. Or maybe he doesn't care if I do. Or he could just be an honest student. Whatever his reasons, and I don't know what they were so I am only speculating, he makes two concrete circumstances part of his writing: spring training is coming to an end, and it is Tuesday afternoon. The situation is important. It occurs to him that he could write about baseball chatter, which would be fun, and get one more paper done on time, part of his contractual agreement for a B in the course. In other words, he writes what's on his mind. Mr. F seems like someone who'd rather write about something he enjoys than fit some teacher's idea of what a good topic might be, regardless of the outcome. His essay isn't expository in the traditional sense, but it is fun and funny. Some things don't work quite so well as others, for instance the parenthetical "just kidding" in paragraph four, but overall I'd say he succeeds.

Mr. F has at least two purposes in this essay--the overt purpose to explain why Americans love baseball, his adaptation of a thesis (see the question in paragraph two) and the real purpose, to chat about baseball chatter. He's making an implicit connection between the two, that Americans love baseball because we're a chatty, opinionated group, and there's no better sport for people who like to go on than baseball. I arrive at this conclusion not because Mr. F logically and carefully develops this argument or anywhere says what I've just said. For instance he does not say at the end of the second paragraph "No, the reason why baseball holds a spot in most Americans' hearts is that we love its infield chatter." That would have made the connection explicit. He prefers to write topically, one idea leading him to the next (another essay of his, "Dem Bums," provides some even better examples of associative structure than anything here, which I will get to). In the end, he covers these additional subjects--the French, the play of little leaguers and the verbal response or lack of it, and the indeterminate noise of the crowds. I know how he feels about foreign language study, about baseball outside the contiguous forty-eight states, about baseball salaries and the "contract" between highly paid players and fans. I note that he ignores the Japanese, notorious baseball fanatics, which is as significant as his inclusion of Montreal and Toronto. Yet he mentions the Russians. Why Russians, except for

the political connotations? In short, I have a pretty good idea about his theories on politics, economics, and education. I also have a pretty good idea what he thinks about “the entertainment industry.” That’s a lot to learn from a mere 854 words. As I read, especially when I read “Hey Babe” aloud, I enjoy listening to the click of his thoughts.

I also notice right away that Mr. F has a good ear, not infallible, but good, especially for someone who has done very little writing and reading. If I hadn’t decided that by the time I finished reading the first sentence, if I can call it that (it also looks like a paragraph), I would certainly have come to that conclusion by the time I had finished reading the first page. “C’mon dammit were really bored...” and “fire that orb you sum-bitch” tell me he knows what baseball players sound like, both phonologically and lexically. I also know, from trying to read that paragraph with anything like the rhythm and inflections intended, that I need a lot of practice before I will perfect infield chatter.

Mr. F makes a lot of assumptions about his audience, the obvious one that his writing group and I know something about baseball. Without more than a little intimate knowledge, for instance, we might misunderstand his point about infield chatter, even thinking that he has contradicted himself. Why would a pitcher’s own infield want to distract and irritate him? (Of course, even to ask the question we need a little information about the game.) We need to know that, as paradoxical as it sounds, infielders don’t want the ball to come to them. They might make a bad throw or let the ball slide through their legs. Let the outfield take it. The proverbial infielder’s prayer is “Don’t let him [the batter] hit it [the ball] to me.” In paragraph nine Mr. F doesn’t tell us who Cecil Fielder is; if we aren’t reading attentively we might think the Yankee fans supported him because he is a Yankee. Or we might think Jack Morris pitched for the White Sox in 1984. I suspect that had I pointed out to Mr. F that not everyone would know Cecil Fielder or Jack Morris he would have disagreed, for the audience his text tells me he had in mind would know. In fact, they would be able to do more than identify Fielder or Morris as members of the Tiger organization; they would know the stats, why homerun number 50 was particularly significant in New York, and

what Joe DiMaggio has to do with the whole thing anyway. It has nothing to do with Mr. Coffee.

My general observations and initial reactions already begin to show the oral nature of “Hey Babe,” both rhetorically and linguistically. I’ve said that Mr. F is colloquial and informal. He consistently uses contractions, the indefinite “it,” for example, and clichés: “the crack of the bat,” “the roar of the crowd,” “hear a pin drop,” “does good” (a variation of “he done good”), “goes way back,” “kick your butt,” and “just kidding,” the latter in parentheses, a direct oral comment to the reader, but not one that works particularly well. He also includes, without overtly stating it, the infielders’ prayer. Nor can we overlook his folklore about the origins of baseball chatter (paragraph four) or when jeering started (paragraph six). Mr. F even sounds a lot like Yogi Berra (Yankee catcher from 1946 to 1963) in this phrase from paragraph two: “the infield chant, which is something that needs to be perfected in order to be good.” So I read that as another oral element, though it isn’t exactly a cliché or a proverb. His capitalizing on Yogi Berra lore is significant.

Jack Rosenthal says that “Yogi’s formulations”--both those the catcher said and those other people make up to sound like him--“while often inelegant and seemingly contradictory, usually are neither mistakes nor contradictions. They are common sense.”² And common sense is the hallmark in our day of everyday speech (Clifford Geertz suggests that anthropologists should not ignore common sense as a field of study). It is certainly common sense, though it may sound like a tautology, that if you want to be good at something you’ve got to perfect your skill. It don’t come naturally. Yogi-isms have become American proverbs, what people quote or attribute to the baseball catcher when they want to sound average, just folks, oral. So, as Rosenthal points out, Norman Schwarzkopf and President Bush quote Yogi, our quintessential common man, who speaks common sense--our version of the ancient and Renaissance *sententiae*. To quote Yogi, or to sound like him, then, is to invoke all of our most cherished American myths about the Common Man, and so Yogi or Yogi-isms are

² Jack Rosenthal, “As Yogi Says...,” *New York Times* 15 September 1991, Section 6: 24.

statements of ideology and power. Perhaps Mr. F. didn't consciously intend to sound like Yogi, but it came out that way because he's just talking on paper, one of the boys, and he has absorbed the cultural literacy of Yogi. In order to understand what Mr. F has written, we as readers need to bring these cultural assumptions to the text.

Mr. F's allusions to Yogi also raise questions about what constitutes being "one of the boys." Baseball and other team sports are rites of passage for males in our society, an important aspect of defining identity and masculinity. It is also a way of defining the feminine in opposition to what is masculine. Yogi-isms also are the way men talk, at least the man Mr. F wants to be and the kind of talk he approves of. Not only, then, is he projecting the political position that America is number one, but his political position is stereotypically male--the common man, the rugged individual, the bootstraps hero, who is at the same time a team player and who knows what kind of sense is the important kind (not the kind you learn in philosophy or art history). Clearly, America is number one because men who talk common sense are in charge.

Mr. F's oral style in this essay is, of course, perfectly in keeping with his subject, which is the oral language of baseball, though for a research paper his style might not be. He could have written about the prose writing of baseball, but Donald Hall has already done that to perfection. Nor would such a topic immediately occur to Mr. F, because, as he himself says, what he loves about baseball is its "vocalness"--its voice. Here may be his real purpose for writing, to say why he loves baseball. He reproduces the voice of baseball in paragraph three, which is yet another aspect of his oral discourse on paper, even to omitting the punctuation and capitalizations, except where needed for emphasis (see "THROW"). But he also reproduces his own voice, which shows how much he loves to talk, even if he doesn't much like to write. The voice I hear isn't consistent, and at times he lapses into non-voiced prose, as at the beginning of paragraph seven: "In recent years the Major League has expanded past the Northern border, into Canada." That sounds too much like school writing to me and doesn't fit the tone he establishes at the beginning. It would have been more consistent had he said "Ten years ago the majors moved into Canada"--or

invaded Canada. But the occasional shifts from oral discourse into written discourse may be nothing more than a writer still finding his voice; or it could be the awkward blending of the two, if not the fight for dominance of one mode over another. The traditional “written” discourse is much more jarring when we read “Hey Babe” aloud than when we read it silently. He could work on this in subsequent revisions.

I have already mentioned something about the audience I think Mr. F has in mind--baseball fans and me, his professor (the remark about Tuesday and English). But I also know that his audience includes his writing group, some of whom don't share his love or knowledge of baseball, though they do share Tuesdays and English. But it doesn't really matter whether his readers know who Ty Cobb or Joe DiMaggio is, since Mr. F can explain things as he goes along. If one of his readers doesn't get the anecdote about Marilyn and Joe, he can always elaborate. An essay written for a class, and in particular for a group within a class, automatically becomes less than completely decontextualized. Mr. F knew he would be reading his essay to his group. He assumed a hearing for his words. Occasionally groups opt to read silently, but discussion and oral rereading always follow. Mr. F never needed to make all his assumptions explicit, or to define everything. His essay was a springboard for conversation, not a text for silent, solitary study. There is something here of cultural literacy, though it may not reflect the kind of culture that E. D. Hirsch has in mind.

One other point about audience for Mr. F. During the semester he became friends with another student, who was also fanatical about sports; Mr. P made an annual pilgrimage to Arizona during the Chicago Cubs's spring training. Although he was not a member of Mr. F's writing group, he always read Mr. F's essays before class. As the semester progressed, it became obvious that Mr. P was really the audience whose approval Mr. F wanted. The response of the rest of us did not matter nearly as much as the support he sought from Mr. P. If an essay “worked” for Mr. P, then Mr. F left class feeling a sense of achievement and validation, even if he had not been entirely satisfied with what he had written. During the semester Mr. F became much more critical of what he wrote, trying in

his revisions to achieve a smooth melding of oral and written.

One of the things I appreciate about this essay is, as I said, its sound; Mr. F has a good ear for the language he is talking about. He naturally uses alliteration, not a rhetorical device we had discussed in class. I mention this because students seem to use alliteration automatically; it is a natural part of spoken language. When they write orally, they seem to automatically write alliteratively. The stylistic distinctions come with which particular sounds each student prefers. In Mr. F's case, at least at the beginning, we find a preponderance of words beginning with "s"--"sight," "slug-shaped," "saliva-drenched," "seeping," "soil-based," "sitting," "soon spring," "season," "spot," "season starts," "spring," "sitting," and "summer." This list, and I've not gone past the first three paragraphs, doesn't include all the words that end in s or contain an s. Perhaps the time of year for baseball, spring and summer, influenced his vocabulary.

Mr. F's first two phrases are clichés and only marginally alliterative--"crack" and "crowd." Without the rest of the paragraph we might only notice that he is using clichés, but coupled with the remainder of the paragraph with its repetition of "s" sounds, as well as "c" and "b" sounds, the first two phrases make rhetorical sense. They become noticeable, despite their ordinariness. Or it might be better to say that Mr. F highlights their ordinariness by contrast with what comes after. Once we focus on how average the two phrases are we notice their rhythm--"The CRACK of the BAT...The ROAR of the CROWD." Common speech rhythms for common phrases, and appropriate for his subject. If we miss, or ignore, the rhythm when we read, it doesn't create any problems. But unless we hear the rhythm of his segment of infield chatter we can't read it aloud. I have read the passage using different rhythms and tempos but am not satisfied that I have approximated an infielder's reading.

It is interesting that when he introduces infield chatter he calls it a chant, which is more rhetorically accurate. We need to read "hey babe hum babe hey no batter..." as a ritual chant, a part of the religion of baseball. If we have never participated in the religion, then we have an even greater difficulty in reading the chant, as I do. I may know something about baseball, but I have never played the game, which puts me at a disadvantage as a reader (age and gender are against

me). I can only overcome this disadvantage by hearing Mr. F read the chant to me. The word “chant” has further significance, in that it has roots in orality and so invites us to read Mr. F’s reconstruction anthropologically. We might read the entire essay from this perspective, which makes “Hey Babe” a fine artifact for sociolinguistics and a good way of reinforcing for Mr. F that language and culture reflect each other. In other words, when he and I and his colleagues reread his essay it becomes a text for his own learning. He discovers how much more there is in what he has written than he originally thought.

In addition to the rhythm, the chant is as alliterative as the rest of the first page, though here “h” and “b” sounds predominate. Only three words begin with “s,” but they stand out as a consequence: “stick,” “sphere,” and “sum-bitch” and probably should receive only a little less emphasis than “THROW”--toward which the whole passage is moving. And not only the passage but the game itself. Were we to put this into musical notation we would indicate a crescendo both in tempo and in volume.

Is all of this interpretation of what on first reading appears to be a straightforward student essay necessary? I think so. I’m trying to show that to do this essay justice we need to read it with a different set of assumptions and expectations.³ If we read it from the perspective of conventional literate (i.e., written), analytico-referential discourse, we will fault it from all sorts of angles. But when we read it from the perspective of oral discourse transcribed into writing (transcribed is close to what Mr. F means when he calls his writing “typing”) then we find many things to admire. Further, to read it silently, as most of us read what crosses our desk, student essays included, does an injustice to this essay and others just like it. We have to exchange silence for speech, if not physically, then at least with a highly active mental ear. “Hey Babe” is written to be heard.

Now I want to look at the additive, patterning structure that Mr. F uses. It

³ I am also trying to demonstrate that student essays need to be analyzed and interpreted, just as do essays by Gould or Thomas or Joan Didion or Henry James. The nature of reading always involves interpretation, whether we divide it into two kinds of reading as does Louise Rosenblatt or whether we try to read for pleasure and interpretation simultaneously.

relates to his purpose--or his focus, his thesis, his point. He begins by invoking the sounds and sights of baseball, as well as its context, the field, and moves to a large question, Why do Americans love baseball? He gives some possible answers in the form of rhetorical questions, but they lead him, not to the real answer to his question, but to talking about the infield chant. At the beginning of paragraph four, he introduces a different topic, "Why America is number one in baseball." He arrives at this topic associatively, not analytically; it relates to his mention of the Russians, who can't play baseball. Since he gives us no evidence for this view, we simply must trust his authority on this point (as I do), or we must bring to his text the knowledge that no Russian baseball team has ever done well in Olympic play (which I also do). Of course, his rhetorical, or semi-rhetorical question in turn relates to his original topic, Why Americans love baseball. Here again we can dispute his assertion, or accept that baseball reflects our culture, which seems to me what underlies his essay, that baseball in some sense defines "American" (the bootstraps hero, common man, number one in the world) and so defines Mr. F's own identity.

We can find a pattern to the structure of his first four paragraphs, but it is a pattern of association, not of analysis. At first Mr. F tells us that Americans love baseball because of its language; then he tells us that we're number one in the sport because of the language of the Common Man, those shirtless, beer-drinking fans. I supply the phrase "bleacher bums." So without the Yogi Berra types in the stands, yelling "Boo," "You stink," "You really stink, you stupid jerk," what the players do on the field wouldn't matter. In fact, the thrust of his first few paragraphs is to say that the real game isn't the play on the field but what the players and the fans say about the play that makes baseball what it is, the all-American game, and makes America (not the United States, note) the only country where it can legitimately be played. Not because we have better players; he couldn't say that since so many come from other countries. But because we have the best language. Baseball just isn't baseball without good-ole-American-slang. Without passing speech. Mr. F has, of course, cleaned up what shirtless, beer-drinking fans speak, just as he has sanitized the infield chant--his accommodation to me, I suspect, if not to one or two others of his

audience. Had he given it to us straight we would have gotten a good dose of polemical language, of ritual name-calling similar to what we find in Thomas Nashe, but American style. Having read this essay, no one should be surprised that he is hostile to those who don't speak English on American soil.

Mr. F next moves to a mini-history of the three phrases he lists, but he hasn't forgotten his real agenda, which is to continue praising American slang (and America) at the expense of other languages. And so he turns to the two non-American teams, which happen to be Canadian. He faults Toronto not because its citizens speak a language other than English but because they don't talk enough. They are too quiet, and he's already stated, if only implicitly, that to compete with American teams a franchise doesn't need great pitching and a good rbi man but loud fans. In discussing Montreal Mr. F returns to the specific language fans shout.

In paragraph eight we get an answer to the first question he posed. Or at least he frames it as an answer, "Yes...." But he is really answering a question he never explicitly asked, Why is baseball best in America? which he has stated in paragraph four. However, he has linked it, as we have seen, with the first question in paragraph two. Paragraph eight serves as a linking paragraph. He uses it to connect his discussion at the beginning with his final paragraph. He also returns to the theme of little league versus major league play.

Mr. F finally states explicitly what he had only said implicitly, that "the vocalness of fans" is sometimes "better than the game itself." We have no doubt how little he would enjoy baseball in Toronto. With the roar of the crowd he returns to the beginning, with the addition of the well-known anecdote about Joltin' Joe, the Yankee clipper. When his bat cracked, the roar was deafening.

As analysis Mr. F's structure fails miserably. His logic, if we can even give it that name, is flawed. He shifts topics with the quickness of a carnival shell man. Now you see it, now you don't. If we read "Hey Babe" traditionally, one of the first questions we would ask him is, "What is the main point? What are you trying to show?" And we might follow that with, "I don't find a clear focus in this piece; I'm not sure what you're really trying to say"--and so we would

continue. Should he rewrite, rearrange, rethink his essay to make it linear and analytical? Not for me, though that doesn't imply that he can't make the essay better; most writing can always be improved. However, I understand what he's doing, and it would be dishonest for me to tell him I didn't to make him conform to some arbitrary view that there is only one way to explore a subject and convey that exploration to an audience. I also think he knows what he's trying to do. In the words of Gerald Bruns, he's trying "to discover what can be said"⁴ about the language of baseball. Mr. F's purpose is nothing more nor less than rhetorical (I mean this in the Ciceronian sense), the occasion being English class, Tuesday afternoon. His essay is organized rhetorically, that is topically, not methodically or systematically; he is giving a public meditation on what constitutes baseball language, which is at the same time a public meditation about one reason he loves baseball. It doesn't require analysis; it requires amplification, copiousness. Each of his paragraphs merely amplifies, or adds to, or enhances, his first paragraph. *Copia* becomes his organizing principle. And when he thinks he is out of things to say, he stops. He gives us nothing like an end or a conclusion.

If Mr. F were talking to his friends about why he loves baseball, he would proceed in a similar fashion. His links and connections are associative or additive, not linear or step by step. Even his one attempt to number his argument, in paragraph eight, is only a disguise, and not a complete one, since he gives us one and three but leaves the number two unstated. What marks Mr. F as a novice rather than a professional is not that he wanders but that his wanderings are easy to follow, the initial path easy to find when we retrace our steps; he doesn't go far enough with what can be said about his topic. This is not a criticism we can make about the writers we will read in the next two chapters. So in a revision Mr. F might explore his topic even more than he does, for he has more to say about baseball language than he has yet realized. His essay provides an opportunity to discuss with him modern critical theories of the relationship between reader and writer, where a reader is not a passive recipient but an active co-writer of the prose in front of her. This would in turn open up other areas for discussion, for instance Mr. F's own reading and the co-productive work he needs to do when

⁴ Bruns, *Inventions* 1.

he reads. How does he go about achieving meaning from a text? How does he expect his readers to achieve meaning? What happens when he encounters a text from another time or culture? What happens when readers unfamiliar with baseball culture encounter his text? Although Mr. F wrote “Hey Babe...” for a freshman composition course, his essay provides numerous opportunities for rich and fruitful discussions that will prepare him for other courses, not least of which his literature courses. Such opportunities are what I mean in part by the open-endedness of oral discourse.

Another essay of Mr. F, “Dem Bums and Other Hazards of Using Poor Language,” provides an even better example of the topical approach, particularly the first paragraph. It is even more contextualized than “Hey Babe.”

Quick! Where did the term “Bleacher Bums” originate from? Ebbets Field you say? Hey! You’re absolutely correct. Although they should not be confused with the bums that were playing on the field. They weren’t that big of bums, but their fans thought they were. But what do you expect to be called when your two best players are named Zach Wheat and PeeWee (no not the guy with the red bow tie.) Unfortunately the number of people who think of Brooklyn when they here the word Dodgers is dwindling. At las count it was down to 873. Today when someone says Dodgers your first reaction is to think of Hollywood, palm trees, Vin Scully, and Tommy Lasorda, who in return has us thinking of Ultra-Slim Fast. If you have absolutely no baseball knowledge you think of Dan Quayle.

Here Mr. F moves from the bleacher bums in the stands at Ebbets Field to the players, to two particular players, with a nod to a Pee-Wee other than the one he

has in mind, Pee-Wee Reese (here recognizing that his audience may not know the ball player). Then he jumps to Brooklyn, which makes no sense if a reader doesn't know that Ebbets Field was home to the original Dodgers, though Mr. F finally names the team. The Dodgers lead him to talk about Hollywood and palm trees, another topical connection that is meaningless unless we supply the geography--Los Angeles, Southern California--which takes us to Hollywood. As it takes us to Vin Scully (announcer) and Tommy Lasorda (manager), who leads us to his TV commercials and the whole American schtick for the young, slim, fast, and fast-rising (note the pun), who lack substance or character. Slick, plastic, made-up, and so we reach Dan Quayle, another kind of bleacher bum (note, again, the pun as well as the political comment). One hundred thirty-nine words that cover about forty years of American cultural history. The paragraph and his humor depend on associative thinking. Mr. F would lose a lot if he gave us logical connections; nor do our memories work that way.

We need to bring much to "Dem Bums," just as we did to "Hey Babe," and we're no closer at the end of the eighth paragraph than we are at the first to what he announces in the title, "the hazards of using poor language." He gets there--in the last paragraph. In the meantime he keeps us guessing and laughing. Again, my point is to question the assumptions we bring to particular texts. Mr. F's discourse shows meaningful connections, just not the kind we might label logical. It is more like a quilt than a ladder.

What are the linguistic elements that reinforce my reading of "Hey Babe" as oral? I have already mentioned a few. Mr. F uses clichés and contractions, concrete nouns and active verbs. There is nothing cold, impersonal, or distant about the essay. When I read it (aloud), Mr. F speaks; I hear his voice. On the other side, I find that certain sentences jar me not because they sound oral but because they sound written. He hasn't prepared me to accept "These phrase of encouragement have dominated baseball...(paragraph six) or "In recent years the Major League has expanded past the Northern border, into Canada." It would be more in keeping with the audible voice he asserts at the beginning to have said something like, "We've been shouting...ever since Ty Cobb...." Despite such inconsistencies, I hear him talking, especially with his incomplete sentences:

“Namely Toronto and Montreal,” which follows “In recent years....” If we transcribed his essay to look like a text from the sixteenth century, we would end up with some very long sentences, rather than the short ones we find here. Mr. F uses periods where a sixteenth-century writer would probably put a colon or semi-colon, a place where we should pause to breathe. When we read “Hey Babe” aloud, we naturally run certain phrases together and separate others, regardless of punctuation.

Matching the additive structure I have noted is Mr. F’s use of coordination or parataxis, rather than subordination or hypotaxis. In sentence after sentence, with only a few exceptions, he uses “and” or “but.” In paragraph eight, which I have called his connecting paragraph, the paragraph where he begins to bring his loose ends together, he uses subordination: “If he does good [then] he is rewarded with cheers. If he does poorly [then] he is rewarded with boos.” He reinforces his subordination by repeating it, by parallel structure, by antithesis, and by putting the most important information last. Mr. F makes sure we notice that he has changed his pattern (paragraph seven also contains two sentences with subordinate clauses, though the second sentence puts the subordinating element last rather than first).

The most linguistically oral aspect of “Hey Babe,” apart from his loose, paratactic sentence structure, comes with his handling of context, so I will only make a few comments about his cohesive elements. He doesn’t use deictics, even when he might have, as in paragraph six: “These phrase of encouragement” versus “These...have dominated....” He does, however, use the ubiquitous “it’s,” a common aspect of orality. But it never becomes ambiguous, because it generally refers to whatever noun or phrase immediately preceded it, so that we don’t have to look several paragraphs back for the antecedent. Nor does he use ellipsis, at least not linguistically, though we might say that his assumptions about a reader’s knowledge of baseball form a kind of rhetorical ellipsis. I have already mentioned his use of “first...third,” which serves as a cohesive tie.

Mr. F’s personal pronouns stand out: “for me,” “my room,” “my English papers,” “I love,” “I can still remember.” They refer to the actual Mr. F, not the I,

the persona of the author. Mr. F also uses the second person pronoun, but only once to address his audience directly: “As you can tell...” in paragraph four. The other three times are generic, though “the team you support” in the last paragraph may be ambiguous. Perhaps this “you” is the oral version of “we” or “anyone.” In conversation we would say “you” instead of “anyone” or “someone”--a way of remaining personal and involved, even when discussing hypothetical people and situations, which is the case in paragraph eight. Mr. F is really saying, “anyone who is a real fan of baseball will cheer great plays and players regardless of team loyalty.” But that translates his oral statement into a written one; it becomes more objective, less personal. The word “you,” even used generically, still keeps a semblance of two people talking about baseball.

Although Mr. F wrote “Hey Babe” and “Dem Bums” as class assignments they serve a social function. His audience is not a fiction, nor is he simply present as implied author. He and his readers are actively, intimately involved with each other and what they write. “Hey Babe” gives him something to talk about in class, which merely continues the conversations he has outside of class. It gives him a way of making connections with his writing colleagues. It even gives him something to argue about, because he can read his essay aloud, which will naturally provoke any fan to ask questions that take the discussion beyond his written text. “What did you think of them firing Popeye? That guy didn’t know how to manage pitchers.” Or, “did you see that catch?” “Hey, what was the final score. I didn’t catch it.” Mr. F’s texts are never closed, as in closed off, final, leaving nothing more to say. There’s always a lot more to talk about, which is the way he uses writing and is probably the way he will always use writing. His is, as I’ve said, a rhetorical view, just as his discussion about baseball language is inherently rhetorical, even though he himself doesn’t, or couldn’t, say that. But as I noted about introducing modern reading theories using his own text to start the discussion, so too could a teacher introduce a discussion of rhetoric and its role in his essay, which would lead to the role of rhetoric in our society. (I have used this quite effectively with commercials that students have written and performed in class. Commercials are, obviously, oral.) The subject of his essay could also easily lead to a discussion of our value system, of gender roles, of

stereotypes, any of which would yield to further writing and exploration. (Again, I have watched students write out of a need to respond to discussions that have come from the essays their colleagues have written.) Baseball, of all our games, is a collection of sayings, of commonplaces, and Mr. F goes to those commonplaces of baseball to find things to say about baseball language. Thus, his structure: the place of the infield, the place of the batter's box, the place of little league play, the place of America versus Canada, the places of specific parks--Detroit, New York, Chicago, Brooklyn. "What are other common places and sayings that we think with?" a teacher might ask.

Mr. F's essays connect school with his world. He lets his readers in on something that plays a big part of his life. "Hey Babe" in particular also shows Mr. F exploring his identity, of asserting himself and his view of masculinity in a class (English) that he considers a waste of time for a male on the road to entrepreneurship and wealth, the great American male dream. As I tried to indicate earlier, his interest in baseball is part of a larger social context and cannot be read apart from that context;⁵ his essays reflect his political, economic, and educational views. As Bruns notes, rhetoric is "intrinsically political...for it requires the one who speaks to stabilize...the situation in which he finds himself and which he is called upon to take in hand by what he has to say."⁶ Because the occasion for speaking, or writing, in a class can be an unsettling, destabilizing experience, Mr. F attempts to control an occasion that a teacher, in this case a female, often controls, in a class that he saw as not "male." I read Mr. F's initial statement in "Hey Babe" as his way of answering a rhetorical occasion: "sitting in my room on a Tuesday afternoon and trying frantically to get my English papers done on time." His use of the adverb "frantically" and his pretense that he might miss the deadline, though he never did, reveal his attitude toward the class, helping him to maintain control, at the same time that the phrases become

⁵ Robert Scholes in *Protocols of Reading* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989) insists that we must always read in this socially contextual way. It is interesting that one of the "texts" that he reads is a beer commercial with a black umpire. He discovered the truth of this assertion when he showed it to some non-American friends of his, who found it completely incomprehensible, even with his explanations.

⁶ Bruns, *Inventions* 100.

part of his rhetorical persona. We shall see how close Mr. F's essay comes to the pamphlets of Thomas Nashe, who also adopts a rhetorical persona of the rushed writer meeting a deadline and speaking whatever comes to mind. Yet there is nothing frantic about "Hey Babe," nothing out of control. Mr. F merely pretends to lack control in order to maintain control of his own discourse in class. For Mr. F, as for Thomas Nashe, writing can never be decontextualized, abstract, and depersonalized because it is rooted in speaking.⁷

I have spent a lot of time with "Hey Babe" to develop the model of reading that I will use throughout this study. I have tried to read Mr. F carefully and thoroughly, using the perspective of oral discourse, to discover what such a perspective can teach us and how we can teach with it.

The Orality of "Black English"

Mr. F is a "typical" student, not much interested in reading or writing, though he does enjoy talking and was one of the most vocal members of his community of twenty-four students. Now I would like to look at an essay by a student from another class and another college whom I would consider atypical, only because she wants to be a writer. The essays of Ms. W were not only occasions for talk, as with Mr. F, or what she had to write to pass the course; they were her opportunity to practice under the guidance of an editor, as she saw our relationship. In addition, she reads books, something I consider atypical among college freshmen today. On the other hand, she comes from a culture that prizes

⁷ It is important for readers to recognize that what I am saying about the oral elements in written discourse have as part of their background the theoretical discussions of recent years about literature, language, writing, and speaking, particularly among deconstructionists and their opponents, as well as feminist and reader response critics. This issue doesn't concern only linguists or compositionists and rhetoricians. Scholes (*Protocols* 99 ff.) points out that Derrida disregards the distinctions between speaking and writing because he denies that there is such a thing as presence. If there is no presence, then whether an exchange is face to face or through print doesn't matter; in neither case is anyone really "present." This is not the position I am taking. I am not trying to deny that there are differences between speaking and writing, but that the differences are not as significant or deep as the similarities. Nor am I arguing against presence--in fact quite the opposite. I am offering a theoretical model of reading from the perspective of oral discourse that depends on the idea of presence.

talk for its own sake (as opposed to talk to convey information, like, “take out the garbage” or “don’t forget to pick your clothes up from the cleaners”). Is her written discourse any more or less oral than Mr. F’s?

Ms. W wrote the following essay in a first-year writing course, like Mr. F, though hers is a traditional, formal research paper. I have included “Black English” in subsequent coursepacks for other freshman writing courses, and it has served as background reading for discussions about language and race. Because it is much longer than “Hey Babe,” here I will only give excerpts from it, starting with the introductory paragraphs. The excerpts approximately equal the number of words I used from Mr. F’s two essays. I have included the entire text in an appendix and hope you will read it, both silently and aloud to someone. The numbers refer to the paragraphs in the full text, not to those excerpted.

Slaves didn’ be having no heirlooms tah pass on tah
they childrun; unless maybe you is countin’ black
English. Black English is a heirloom. It is a language,
though metamorphosed, passed down to millions of
descendants. Black English is a descendant. It is a babe
whose great grandmother was a pidginized English and
whose ancestors before that number from the tens of
tribes of the west coast of Africa. Black English has a
history. (1)

It is not the language of a lazy, inferior people. It is
not the language of an uneducated people, it did not
emerge and remain a major American dialect without
rhyme or reason. “Black English” is a bona fide language
system with its own rules of grammar, vocabulary, and
structure” (Haskings and Butts 40). Black English is the
language of a culture. “Black English is not just a
linguistic system; it is the expressive system of Black
Culture” (Abrahams 100). Black English has a present.

(2)

Black English has a future, but the future is possibility. One question answered or one decision made does not end all; it opens up endless other questions or decisions. This is progression, believe it or not. But progression also involves some looking back. Forward movement without an origin is no movement at all. (3)

You cannot evolve into a full person by skipping any stages of development. That goes for all of the variety of influences that shape you. One thing that has influenced me is Black English (BE). I never thought much about it until recently. It has been with me always, but those things common to me rarely seem interesting enough to write about. But it has got me wondering: what is the big deal anyway? Should I as a Black American choose BE over standard English (SE)? Or is it a matter of “taking sides”? How conscious should I be of it? Should one’s speech take effort? Questions came one after another. They poked and prodded at my thoughts. They persisted, petitioning for my attention. That’s why I want to look at the history so that I can make intelligent decisions now. I want to take a step back so that I can take two steps forward.... (4)

BE phonological speech patterns seep up between my standardized enunciations. Often I say “bof” instead of “both.” My roommate catches it every time. I barely notice it. A pattern in BE is that the “f” sound replaces the th-sounds at the end of words (Fasold and Wolfram 122-23). (12)

Sometimes I view my BE and my SE to be at odds with one another. The scenario starts out quite innocently. I finally find that scarf I’ve been looking for

all day and declare, "Here it go." The image of the tsking, reprimanding grammar teacher frowns inside my head, "Subject and verb do not agree." So I improve upon it, "Here it goes." That ain't it (I push her out of my head this once). I try again, this time with all of the "bad English" edited out, "Here it is....." (13)

Now that some of the history has been laid out, I can come back to the present. What significance does BE hold now? There have been unofficial debates on its values to blacks. When I was fifteen, my black friend remarked, "Alicia, you go that white high school and now you talk so proper." She threw down the gauntlet. I had to respond. My response was an awkward shrug of silence. And now when my speech is brought to my attention, I put on that same awkward, silent shrug. And I keep a careful watch on my tongue. One day I made a mistake; I did not leave my school language back in my locker.... (17)

So my "lazy tongue" gradually became industrious. I embroidered my speech with pretty and precise threads. It was a semi-conscious metamorphosis because I don't remember practicing words in the mirror or anything, but over my high school years my speech patterns changed, so much so that last year my seven-year-old cousin said to me, "You talk funny." Translated it means "Like white people...."(20)

Some of my white friends, and some black ones too, wonder what all the fuss is about. I've bugged many of them into a long vacation away from me. "Talk how you talk." "Just be you." Who am I? Who do I be? And on

the other side, some blacks, and some “culturally conscience” whites, say, “Don’t talk so proper,” or “Celebrate your culture.” What does that mean? And no, I’m not celebrating chitt’lings.... (22)

Still, those answers don’t satisfy me. Sure, I should just talk the way I talk, but it isn’t just talk. My friend in high school didn’t think so, some of the blacks at church didn’t think so, most people don’t think so. When it comes down to it, the judgments are made: this person’s intelligent, this one’s not, this one is to be feared, he tryin’ to be white by talkin’ so propah. It’s more than just talk.... (25)

I guess the dilemma has been with me always, but I never thought of the Black English debate, and what it meant for me, not in this way. Geneva Smitherman’s piece remains anchored in my thoughts:

“...the question of the moment is not which dialect, but which culture, not whose vocabulary but whose values, not **I am** vs. **I be**, but **WHO DO I BE?**” (Black Scholar 168).... (part of 26)

Today cotton fields don’t divide us, but sometimes language does. BE should not be scorned as an inferior language of the field. It is an heirloom, perhaps one of the few Black Americans have. We have a common ancestor, we have a common bond. Some whites also have a need not only to know BE, but also to understand its significance and its legitimacy. All whites and blacks alike need to act with knowledge and understanding, and not upon stereotypes and ignorance, for we have a common bond. We are all human beings no matter what color our tongue. (the end of 27, the last paragraph)

As I did with “Hey Babe,” I will give some general impressions of Ms. W’s essay, then look at it in more detail. The first thing I notice is the title, “Black English”--so ordinary, so prosaic, not only in contrast to Mr. F’s clever titles, but also in contrast to Ms. W’s own discourse. “Black English” gives nothing away, almost as if there is no title, nothing more than a filled pause, a spoken silence.

Impersonal and objective, it distances me from the writer and her essay and fails to prepare me for the first sentence, which upends the expectations I had. Her title and her first sentence contradict each other rhetorically. With the first sentence I realize that the subject means something to the writer, whereas the title is more like a generic label. From the first sentence I know that this is not just another assignment. The immediate impetus for the essay may have been to write a research paper, but Ms. W began to write this essay many years ago, long before she and I met, and she will continue to write it long after she and I have lost contact (which I hope doesn’t happen). This research project is merely an intermediate step in her life, her attempt to make sense of something that has crouched on the borders of her mind. Or, as she says, “It has been with me always.” This project was her opportunity to say something about how she talks.

As such, the essay tells us much about Ms. W’s character, the way Mr. F’s essays on baseball tell us about his character. “Black English” also reveals the political, sociological, and educational views and tensions in her life. Ms. W is concerned about the cultures and societies of which she is a part. Should she talk “white?” Should she talk “black?” Can she mingle the two together? What is the relationship between how you talk and how people judge you? What does your language have to do with the person you are or want to become? The connection between how you talk and how you are judged particularly troubles Ms. W, for if our society believes that a dialect like Black English indicates “a lazy, inferior people...and uneducated people,” then how can she talk that talk and still be recognized for who she is? Does she have to deny her identity to be recognized as having one? As having a presence? On the other hand, can she be who she is and ignore “the talk?” Beyond this comes her mother’s view that

the only language worth knowing is that of money, and if “the talk” leads away from money, then it’s best to keep silent. Silence, however, is yet another kind of language, as linguists and anthropologists have suggested. Silence pervades this essay. For instance, Ms. W answered her friends with “an awkward shrug of silence,” a silence that persists up to the writing of the essay (paragraph seventeen). Talking brings trouble, but no one can argue with silence. Ms. W, then, is dealing with values, with ethics, and with identity when she asks questions about her language and our society: “One thing I did not want them [white kids] to do was define me, to say I could not speak their language” (paragraph twenty). These are no small issues for a first-year student to tackle.

Where Mr. F doesn’t hesitate to give himself away, Ms. W holds back. She hasn’t made up her mind about herself, and so we can’t. About the only thing she lets us know for sure is that she doesn’t like chitt’lings. She has so many questions about culture--white or black--white school or black school, white friends or black friends. At the same time she questions the dichotomist position people put her in, which is her way of questioning the dichotomist position of our culture.

I also read this essay as an answer to a rhetorical question, a question of invention: Where does a writer look for things to say? Ciceronian rhetoric would answer that with the commonplaces. Mr. F found the commonplaces of baseball, even the common sense of Yogi Berra. But Ms. W says, “those things common to me rarely seem interesting enough to write about.” Part of her experience here is her discovery that the common can serve as subject for a rhetorician confronted with the occasion to say something, so she looks at her own history, as well as at the history of her race. For her, history is a common place to look for ideas, just as the comments of linguists become other common places; for every scholarly reference she makes a personal one. The word “common,” like the issue of silence, almost becomes a refrain (see paragraphs five and seven, for examples, as well as the final paragraph). We could compare her repetition of the word common with the repetition of Jesse Jackson in any of his speeches.⁸ Both Mr. F and Ms. W are interested in the common, the ordinary,

⁸ See Deborah Tannen’s fine reading of Jackson in *Talking Voices: Repetition*,

but how different is what constitutes the common for each one. Frantz Fanon, Ralph Fasold, Walt Wolfram, and Geneva Smitherman aren't merely talking about an object of study, they are talking about Ms. W's common life and experience. She has a personal stake in what scholars tell her about Black English.

Given the subject, the assignment, the quandary of Ms. W, I would expect to find some rhetorical and linguistic evidence that she also has a conflict about what she has been taught is the "proper" way to sound in a research paper. Part of her struggle as a writer is the same struggle that she has between white English and Black English. Can she just "talk the way she talks" on paper--or does she have to undergo yet another metamorphosis before her talk on paper is politically and socially (and religiously, given the school she attends) acceptable?

I know this writer; I know her attitudes. But the subsequent students who have read "Black English" do not know anything about her, nor do I give them any information before they read her essay. When I have asked them for a profile of Ms. W, almost without exception they have said Ms. W is bitter, angry, and frustrated--trapped between cultures and languages, in particular the demand that oral language sound like written, edited English. The first few times I read the essay I didn't hear what they heard, but, as I said, I know Ms. W. After several readings of this essay (perhaps a dozen) I'm not so sure they are wrong. The point is not that we might disagree about the voice but that her voice compels us to know her and to make some decisions about the conflicts she reveals.

Let's look at the first sentence from the perspective of the conflict between speaking and writing. Remember her definition of proper, "the tsking, reprimanding grammar teacher" insisting on subject and verb agreement, something we're all supposed to do when we write but many of us do not when we ask for another piece of pizza on Saturday night: "Slaves didn' be having no heirlooms tah pass on tah they childrun; unless maybe you is countin' black English." Obviously, this is black, spoken English, as Ms. W conceives that it would look in writing. It is both informal and colloquial--all except that semi-colon sitting in the middle, soaking up ink. It seems so much a part of

standard, edited, written English (i.e., white, in the context of Ms. W's essay) that it contradicts the sentence, a sentence we certainly can't appreciate if we don't read it aloud. But how are we to read the semi-colon? It is too easy to read it simply as an error, particularly in the context of such intentional writing. But it shouldn't be there, a yellow light to slow down the prose. Then I read the sentence again, approaching the semi-colon as I would a semi-colon in a sixteenth-century writer--a breath mark or a musical notation. What looks like a mark of written discourse in this sentence is really Ms. W's raised eyebrow, hand gesture, turned head, or emphatic voice. Her intonation changes the direction of her discourse: "unLESS MAYBE (equal stress on both syllables, but not quite on the same level as "less") you is COUNTin' black ENGLISH." But who would be doing that? She would. That's what her semi-colon indicates, which is why it isn't a comma or a period.

After her informal first sentence, she becomes formal--syntactically and lexically. We find the verb "to be" predominating, and words like "metamorphosed" and "pidginized." In contrast to Mr. F, she depends on stative verbs, not active verbs, and her nouns tend to be more abstract. Her sentences at first fit the "reference-proposition" convention of expository prose, rather than the "subject-predicate" form of conversation. She quotes sources, which Mr. F never does (though he was also supposed to include "research"); her sources use words like "bona fide" and "linguistic system." Even the use of sources is an aspect of a formal, written discourse, a paralinguistic gesture. In paragraph seventeen Ms. W shifts from formal to informal, from written to spoken: "It was a semi-conscious metamorphosis [written] because I don't remember practicing words in the mirror or anything [oral]. "Or anything" is a typical conversational tag.

Ms. W also uses numerous clichés and colloquialisms--"rhyme or reason," "believe it or not," "does not end all" (a variation of "be all and end all"), "what is the big deal anyway?" "comes down to it," "fuss," "bugged." Here are a few colloquialisms from paragraphs that I didn't excerpt: "laid out," the way a preacher would lay out a biblical text for call and response or a choir director would lay out a line of music; "talking the talk...with the homeboys";

“that’s where it’s at”; “turn my nose up at”; “money talks, so honey hush,” a favorite proverb of her mother and akin to the proverbs Nigerian novelist Chinua Achebe loves or the *sententiae antiquae* of the Renaissance commonplace books. In the same paragraph she writes “cannot,” which we would usually say as “can’t” (unless we were extremely exasperated) and “it has got me,” which she could only have made more oral by saying “it’s got me.” Most of the time, she uses contractions--“it’s,” “there’s,” “don’t” and “doesn’t,” which are becoming common even in academic writing--but she also uses “I’d,” “I’ve,” and “they’re.” A few sentences later she says, “Why does not using...,” a particularly written syntax. Throughout her text Ms. W consistently shifts between the spoken and the written modes of discourse, much more than Mr. F does.

Ms. W is also much more metaphoric than Mr. F, which is not something she was taught by the teacher who told her that nouns and verbs must agree. Her consistent moves into metaphor reflect the oral tradition of her culture. They reveal her voice, they mark her text as spoken. She often couples alliteration with metaphor. Here are a few examples. In the first paragraph she tells us that Black English “is a babe whose great grandmother was a pidginized English.” In other words, it came from somewhere, and not all that long ago. It isn’t a corruption of something better or more valuable but its own thing. Then come the questions, which “poked and prodded at my thoughts”--like the great grandmother using her knitting needles to puncture Ms. W’s complacency. “They persisted, petitioning for my attention”--the questions becoming questioners, citizens begging for a signature, litigants at the bar. Later she says that “West African influences run thick through BE’s veins,” which continues the image of language personified, with kinfolk and country. It also says that without West African influences the blood of Black English would be pretty thin (not to mention the blood of White English). To correct her own lazy tongue--and to connect herself with this heirloom--Ms. W says “I embroidered my speech with pretty and precise threads.” This is George Puttenham’s position on rhetoric and poetry exactly, though he objected to embroidering common speech, as Bruns

points out.⁹ Her embroidery reminds us of those poking and prodding questions. In case we can't quite hear her, she tells us that "BE phonological speech patterns seep up between my standardized enunciations." Something from deep within her gets caught between her teeth and out comes "bof," instead of "both." Each of her metaphors is alliterative: "great grandmother," "thick through," "poking, prodding, persisting, petitioning," "pretty and precise," and "speech patterns seep up." Ms. W uses both explosive and the sibilants favored by Mr. F.

The most striking aspect of her text, and what I find to be most oral about it, is her lack of a precise structure, despite her attempt to give it linear shape: past, present, future, or as she says in the first three paragraphs, "history, present, future." Within that overtly analytical structure, she digresses, repeats herself, and interjects stories. She is particularly fond of repeating certain syntactic patterns--from the first paragraph, "Black English is," "it is," "Black English is," "it is," and then finally "Black English has." The repetition could reflect orality, but the stative verbs assert the opposite. Is this simply lazy writing, akin to the lazy tongue Ms. W says she has tried to correct with embroidery? Or do we need to ask, Who is speaking here?

L. C. Knights points out that Thomas Nashe is difficult to read because we never know who is speaking. Sometimes we hear him and sometimes his enemies--and we get no clues from the punctuation. In other words, Nashe is, in Bakhtin's now-overused term, "dialogic," or multilogic. Let's reread Ms. W's opening paragraph of "Black English" with this in mind. If we don't hear two voices speaking when we read it, then we have missed the call and response, we have missed the reason for the repetition. We also miss the reason for her shift from "is" to "has." In the last sentence the two voices, or choirs, or preacher and congregation, come together in a shout. The pattern is so exact that we need to read it antiphonally to do it justice. Here she anticipates the verb "laid out" of paragraph seventeen, which provides the clue to her oral structure: the repetitions, abrupt shifts and lack of transitions, her occasional digressions from the main point into story-telling. She is laying out her subject; she is finding

⁹ Bruns, *Inventions* 162.

things to say; she is amplifying, accumulating, her text (as in scriptural text): “Slaves didn’ be having no heirlooms tah pass on tay they childrun; unless maybe you is countin’ black English.” Or, as she translates it into standard English, “Black English is an heirloom.”

In this context of call and response, of laying out, we can’t read her stative verbs as characteristic of written discourse. Here they characterize a particular kind of oral discourse and so become verbs of action, not verbs of being. They are action in disguise and partake of the same concreteness as of active verbs. In the social context in which her syntactic pattern is rooted, to declare something to be is to act. Just as George Dillon suggests that we need to look at the context of personal pronouns before deciding how “personal” and therefore how oral they make a particular text, so we need to look at how a writer uses stative and active verbs before drawing hasty conclusions about their orality.

There is another point about these sentences. Ms. W first states a fact metaphorically--“Black English is a heirloom”--the statement of the preacher about to tell a story. Her story is how Black English came to be an heirloom, as well as the story of how she learned this. First she lays out the statement. The congregation replies, expanding the statement, the first part of which seems like an abstraction--“It is a language....” But notice that the rest of the sentence is also a metaphor. Language metamorphoses, like a cell, but it’s more than something internal and unreachable by human hands, for it is “passed down,” handed on, touched and loved. Which then leads Ms. W to talk of Black English as a descendant, a babe, a very touchable creature but one who needs a lot of love and care. It can go wrong, do bad. So her personifying of the abstract thing “language,” her metaphors, her call and response, her alliteration, keep the paragraph vocal. Her repetition of the words “Black English” does the same--five times (if we also count the title) by the end of the first paragraph. In just the same way, Jesse Jackson in a speech to Democratic party leaders in the fall of 1991 repeated the words “When it’s dark.” As Deborah Tannen has shown, such repetition is common in conversation.¹⁰

Ms. W continues this repetitive pattern--“It is not,” “it is not,” “it did not”--

¹⁰Tannen, *Talking Voices*.

incantatory, mesmerizing, the style of the orator, the person of words--a fine example of *anaphora*, as common at the local shopping mall as it was in the Roman senate. Even the source she quotes continues the syntactic pattern she has established and helps establish her antithesis: it is not, it is; it is not, it is (as Jackson used the refrain "when it's dark" to show what Democrats need to do to prepare for when it isn't dark). This is in keeping with her own personal movement at the discourse level as well as at the sentence level--one of conflict and tension. At the conjunction of what Black English is and what it isn't, Ms. W finds herself.

In contrast to what we hear in Mr. F's text, we don't hear directly from Ms. W until paragraph four, and paragraph three is a strange, highly abstract (and highly confusing) transition from the first two paragraphs of call and response to the first mention of herself. I can only make sense of paragraph three as someone hemming and hawing to put off as long as possible what she knows she needs to do (or say). This is oral hesitating, a false start, a stumbling over words. Ms. W tells us she is tongue-tied--silent and unable to speak. Isn't that in part what she tries to tell us throughout the essay? She defends herself by showing that it isn't all her fault and that she isn't alone. Lots of African Americans are tongue-tied, thanks to our culture, and Ms. W thinks it is wrong. Wrong to make a people mute. Wrong to force a people into silence.

"You cannot evolve into a full person by skipping any stages of development," she says. But since in this paragraph she has decided to tell us why she is writing about Black English, why does she use the word "you?" This is the same kind of you Mr. F used, the oral version of the hypothetical "anyone" of written discourse. It also functions here as first-person disguise. Ms. W is really saying, "I have to talk about everything that has influenced me if I'm ever to figure myself out, and a big thing is Black English." Although she insists that she never thought about it much, she contradicts herself frequently. She alternates voices; she plays out "it is" and "it is not," only in the personal terms of "I am" and "I am not"; "I will" and "I will not"; "I have" and "I have not." As a piece about herself, we should expect state of being to dominate.

Ms. W's state of being accounts for the lack of internal structure. Paragraph four is a good example. She tells us that Black English has influenced her, though she's never thought about it much. Then she contradicts or corrects herself by tacitly admitting that she's always thought about it, so much so that it has become common and therefore uninteresting, unimportant, not writeable. Or not speakable, as she admits later when her only response to direct confrontation about the way she talks is that "awkward shrug of silence" (paragraph seventeen) I noted earlier. Then once more she contradicts herself. "What's the big deal?" So Black English isn't important? Nothing in this paragraph suggests anything like the coherence we expect in expository discourse. No, Ms. W is thinking out loud, almost improvisationally, like a jazz musician. Her theme is Black English...heirloom (theme, not thesis); each paragraph plays with that theme. The play just happens to be coming to us on paper, the musical score that we have to animate by reading orally. She's working out in dialogue fashion why she chose this subject to write about. Finally, she reaches a decision, and she uses metadiscourse to tell us: "That's why I want...so I can make...I want to take...so I can take...." (Note again the repetition.)

In paragraph seventeen at the end of her review of the history of Black English, Ms. W says, "I can come back to the present." But she doesn't entirely. She continues to give examples from her past in the section on the present, just as she gives examples of the present during her discussion of the past. Structurally she is conflating past and present tenses, just as she does from sentence to sentence, as in this paragraph, where she alternates between past and present tenses. Semantically, she is arguing both sides of the question, a version of the Renaissance *utramque partem*,¹¹ though she sees it in more personal terms: "my BE and my SE...at odds with one another." If she had put the BE side in BE and the SE side in SE, it would be easier for us to hear the conversation. But she didn't, which nevertheless doesn't let us off the hook, orally speaking, any more than Nashe's failure to punctuate his conversations as conversations excuses our deafness when we read him.

¹¹ See Joel B. Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1978).

Contributing to the orality of "Black English," enhancing the oral structure of call and response, is her additive syntax. She seldom uses subordination, favoring parataxis even more than does Mr. F. Unlike him, though, she uses a great many oral discourse markers, such as "still," "so" "sure," "And no," "I guess," each of which could be called metadiscourse (along with such expressions as "I can come back to the present," which concerns the plan of her discourse, not the subject of her discourse; it is a comment on her own working). They are also examples of conversational cohesion, as they are of Ms. W talking to herself: "sure I could..." or "still it may not be...." Or is she talking to someone else? Most of these oral discourse markers come near the end of her essay. The more she writes the more overtly oral she becomes, almost as if she is too conscious at the beginning of the proper way to write a research paper. Her voice, not that of the tsking, reprimanding school teacher, wins. Which is the point. She's struggling with her voice, or her voices, and wants all of them to be the best they can be. She wants to sound as black, and as white, as possible. Ms. W has too many stories to tell to be locked into any particular voice so soon.

I have said almost nothing explicitly about audience and the assumptions Ms. W is making, for I wanted to leave these issues for last, just as I have left her final paragraph for the end. Looking at it will finish the discussion on the alternating voices that control her text, and it will lead us directly into the issue of audience.

In the last paragraph, of which I have only excerpted the final third, Ms. W tries to come to some resolution. She tries to bring her voices together to sing in unison rather than antiphonally. She tries and fails, as her personal pronouns reveal. "So where does that leave me?" she asks. "Where does that leave us?" Which us is she talking about? Her and her fellow African Americans? Her and her fellow citizens, white and black? Her and me, her teacher? Her and her writing group? Her and her English class (all white except for her)? Or, as her text seems to indicate a few sentences later, her and her fellow middle-class African Americans who share her concern about Black English, or would if someone pointed out to them that they ought to be concerned about it? She says, "Two different societies are being formed, and I'm not talking about white and black." So maybe her text is aimed at those people of color who have

scorned Black English as improper, maybe as she once did subconsciously.

If I have trouble deciding who “us” refers to, I have just as much trouble deciding who “we” refers to in the closing sentences. “We have a common ancestor, a common bond.” Every time I read that sentence I stop. Does she mean me, too? No, because syntactically “we” must refer to “Black Americans.” And then, of course, I have the next sentence, “Some whites also....” So she must mean “we” to refer to “Black Americans.” However, the ambiguity of “us” at the beginning of the paragraph makes this “we” ambiguous, for she has been talking about several different groups of us’ns and we’uns, without always bothering to distinguish who is who. Her final we--“we are all human beings”--seems the least ambiguous of her first person plural pronouns. But then I note that she has just repeated what she has said above: “we have a common bond.” She can’t mean the same common bond as the first one she mentions. Or can she? Is she really talking about the common bond of speech itself, regardless of its roots? Is she saying that the ability to talk to each other, no matter in what dialect and accent, binds us, despite the problems language causes? But then how can a problem that divides also be the tie that binds? Ms. W doesn’t answer any of my questions; she doesn’t really answer her own questions. That would be analysis, not meditation on the text she lays out at the beginning and returns to at the end, this heirloom of Black English.¹² You can’t explain an heirloom, you can only appreciate it by talking about it and by making it part of what you value. You can’t be silent about it, even though she once tried.

Such unanswered questions can lead her into some further exploration of her subject and herself; they show that she has not exhausted the subject, that she has more to think about and so more to write. The questions also reflect that she cannot yet answer them and to force her to do so would be to insist on an artificial closure. Although my purpose is to present a way of reading this text and not to suggest how she might revise her text, I suggest that these ambiguities are positive, not negative, because they open discussions; they do not close

¹² In many ways, Ms. W might be faulted, wrongly I think, in terms similar to those white Protestants use about traditional black preachers--they lack system, method, and thus theology. Rather they approach theology from a different textual perspective, in my terms, an oral, which is to say social, perspective.

discussions. Had she written a “correct” expository research paper she would have left out much that makes her essay so productive of learning. For example, I could rewrite paragraphs twelve and thirteen:

BE phonological speech patterns appear even among Black speakers consciously attempting to avoid them. A person might say “bof,” for instance, rather than “both” and only realize the slip when someone points it out. As Fasold and Wolfram note, replacing the final -th sound with an -f sound is common among Black English speakers.

Such slips of the tongue can make an African American feel at odds with himself. He can unconsciously use a BE grammatical pattern, “Here it go,” when he finds an object he has been looking for. Then under the demands of noun-verb agreement correct it, “Here it goes,” without really correcting the error, which is with the pronoun “it,” which can’t go or goes. Finally, a speaker arrives at “here it is.”

We have the same “information,” but do we have the same text? At the very least, we have lost the person behind the text. Although it would have been easy for Ms. W to write such a paper, I doubt that she would have learned as much as she did.

As I’ve noted, her insistence on speech reflects Ms. W’s oral tradition and relates directly to the call and response structure she naturally uses. Most white Protestants (the Pentecostal tradition is an exception) have silence urged on them: “Let all the world keep silent” choirs intone as an introit. Only God and his representative in the pulpit should speak; the role of the congregation is unspoken response. But the role of the congregation in the Black tradition is the opposite--speech, involvement, response, a saying something or an adding to what has been said that may not be referential but may be encouragement to continue talking.¹³ The conflict that silence brings to her, for silence is not an

¹³ For a much fuller study of these issues, see Geneva Smitherman, *Talkin’ and Testifyin’: The Language of Black America* (Boston, Mass.: Houghton Mifflin, 1977). For the implications of black oral strategies in terms of structure, see Frederick Erickson, “Rhetoric, Anecdote, and Rhapsody: Coherence Strategies in a Conversation Among Black American Adolescents”(Tannen *Coherence* 81-154); John J. Gumperz, Hannah Kaltman,

appropriate response for a community that values vocal exchanges. Ms. W encourages herself to keep talking in the face of oppressive silence, which is how I read her discourse markers as well as her shifting personal pronouns. From the perspective of conventional written discourse, though, the result of call and response (on whatever level) can be highly ambiguous.

Ambiguity is a mark of an oral discourse, a contextualized discourse. We have read with ambiguity at our elbow paragraph after paragraph, and on all levels: the lexical, the syntactic, the cohesive, and the contextual. Ms. W is structurally ambiguous, she is vocally ambiguous, she is semantically ambiguous. I suspect that if she were talking about Black English with her black and white friends in the dorm it would be easier to know which “us” and which “we” she was referring to. It would also be easier to know her audience. At times she seems to be addressing herself, at others, her family or her black friends. Ms. W also addresses her white friends and the white members of her research group, who struggled with her for a month as she tried to determine what she wanted to say. Are they included in “some whites” at the end?

Although Ms. W may not seem to leave as many assumptions unspoken as Mr. F, nevertheless her ambiguity has that effect. Just as a black congregation participates in the sermon, in Erickson’s words helps produce it, so Ms. W assumes that we will participate in constructing her text. She assumes that we know something about black culture and how it differs from (or is the same as) white culture. She makes these assumptions because her essay is embedded in semester-long conversations about the relationships of language and culture, of written and oral modes of discourse. Her essay furthers talk that started before

and Mary Catherine O’Connor, “Cohesion in Spoken and Written Discourse: Ethnic Style and the Transition to Literacy” (Tannen *Coherence* 3-19); and Sarah Michaels and James Collins, “Oral Discourse Styles: Classroom Interaction and the Acquisition of Literacy” (Tannen *Coherence* 219-24). Erickson says that black speakers use “a logic of the particular, which is characterized by argumentation by anecdote, rhapsodic stitching together of topoi...and routinized speaker/audience interaction, which resembles that of black blues singing as well as the discourse style of the black evangelical preacher and congregation who jointly produce a sermon in a dialogue of call and response” (85). His description is reminiscent of the characteristics of primary orality. I know of little work applying these principles to writing, as opposed to speaking, among students (the speeches and sermons of both Jesse Jackson and Martin Luther King, Jr., as noted, have been studied).

she began to write and that continued after she had finished.

“Black English” serves the function of the preacher--her call to the congregation. We’ve got to respond and take over one of the voices. In the first paragraph we need to hear two voices, yes, but perhaps not--or not only--the two voices of Ms. W; rather we need to hear our own voice responding to hers. “Black English is an heirloom,” she calls, and we respond, “It is a language....” And together we shout, “Black English has....” She has made no greater assumption than that we can supply the second voice throughout her text, so that she doesn’t have to take both parts: thus the common bond she is trying to build. Naturally, then, the “we” and the “us” must remain, in part, ambiguous, for it isn’t up to her to decide who’s sitting in the pews; she only knows that those in the pews, whoever we are, form her community. Her text requires, or assumes, the same give and take of face-to-face conversation that “Hey Babe” does. Both texts require the co-production of their hearers; both texts, though in different ways, include several voices. Ms. W may begin as if she plans to proceed by reference and proposition, with a thesis she will prove, only to shift into story-telling to explore her feelings and experiences.

Some Final Examples

Now that I have read two essays in detail I would like to provide a few more brief examples of oral discourse from a wider spectrum of students. They include first-semester students enrolled either in a lower level, or basic, writing class, or in the standard first-year freshman composition class. I have also included upper-level students, some of them nontraditional, enrolled in a literature class that fulfilled a supplemental writing skills requirement (writing across the curriculum). The point of these additional examples is to show that the use of oral discourse within writing is not characteristic of only a few students or of any particular ethnic group. It makes little difference how old students are, what ethnic background they have, or whether they read books; all of them write orally because our culture is so oral. The differences come with the particular kinds of orality each

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prefers; just as no two of us have the same accent, the same timbre, the same rhythm, or the same vocabulary, so we each choose different aspects of orality to write down. For this final section, I will give examples that demonstrate oral features at the lexical, grammatical, and contextual levels, making only short comments about each one.

Ms. M, a freshman enrolled in the standard composition course, plans to be a lawyer. In this passage she uses concrete nouns and verbs, shifts between past and present tense, and expresses her feelings directly through a cliché. She is trying to work out her position on the issue of gender stereotypes in advertising and uses as the occasion for her remarks a poster that she found offensive. As she tries to “read” her position, she also tries to “read” the advertisement for those of us who haven’t seen it.

As I walk down the hallway of my dorm, I see a poster hanging on a door on the guy’s half. The poster is advertising beer, however, the implication it is using to sell this beer makes me sick....The poster reads....After looking at this poster....I thought to myself....

Not only is this excerpt highly contextualized--“the guy’s half,” “I walk,” “I see,” but the writer makes her voice clearly audible.

Mr. D., another freshman, was enrolled in a lower level writing course. Unlike many students who “failed” the placement test and so found themselves in this course, he showed no resentment, but pleasure and relief. He wanted to write like his girlfriend, who always found something clever to say, as he admitted to me at the beginning of the semester. He wanted to learn; he wanted to be able to get words on paper. As the result of an assignment to read the issue of *The New York Times* dated the day that he was born and write an essay about what he learned, he discovered how much he liked lists. (The assignment was intended primarily to introduce these students to research.) The following excerpt comes from an essay written as a follow-up to the original assignment.

Computers, Nintendo, VCR’s, CD’s, surgery with lasers, fiber optics communication systems, completely

digital, computerized automobiles. Modern technology will absolutely blow you away. It's amazing how far we've come over the years. Technology has taken on a totally different meaning from what it was yesterday.

Mr. D's love of lists is a way of amplifying, of being copious. He depends on clichés to give him something to say, to get him started. They serve directly as places of invention for him. For me, this paragraph represents phatic communication, the phrases we say to people as matter of social ritual, like "Hi, how are you. I'm fine, and you?" Such phrases are a way of opening a conversation or making a social connection. And here Mr. D's last two sentences function in the same way. They don't really say anything in and of themselves, though that doesn't mean they are unimportant or irrelevant. If someone refuses to answer our "Hi, how are you" with the appropriate ritual response, we would leave muttering about rudeness. Mr. D's last two sentences ask that we respond by saying "yes" or "that's right"; they help him to get going and make contact with the reader. For someone who had difficulty at the beginning of the semester coming up with anything to say no matter how ritualized, this paragraph, and his entire essay, represents an achievement. It also shows that he has a place to move from; his essay is not an example of someone who has arrived at his destination and so completed his education. He has become curious and any of the examples of new technology he lists could become a subject for its own investigation and writing. Or he could write an essay on the technology that is the common denominator among them.

Ms. C, a sophomore just taking the freshman writing course, constantly compared her spoken language with her written language, as she does here. What she often overlooked was how oral her written language was. The journal she refers to is one she keeps on her own, not one required for class. The following excerpt is part of her final examination essay, a 3,000-word analysis of the progress she had made throughout the semester in her spoken and written language.

I've spent this whole morning reading my own writing hoping to find enough information to come up with a 3,000 word essay. And I just can't get over how much I learned about language this term....Wow, what a special gift language and communication is! Now that I take the time to look at my own language, it makes me laugh! Essays that I write for classes aren't usually that funny, but my journal entries and spoken language suddenly appear to me as being hilarious. This assignment to study my own language has been a real eye-opener. Well....

Ms. C was one of the more vocally articulate members of our classroom community. I attributed some of that to her acting experience (a member of the Holland, Michigan, summer repertory company.) Her punctuation, her discourse markers, her clichés, and her personal pronouns make this excerpt oral. She tells a story of how she feels about her language, a meditation, not an analysis, though in the process she does make some astute analytical comments. The excerpt also reveals that she doesn't think her written language, her school language, represents her well. Throughout the semester Ms. C worked to bring her voices into harmony.

Ms. D is a nontraditional student in her late thirties or early forties who enjoys writing, as she showed throughout the interdisciplinary literature class in which she was my student.

Terms. Hmm. Here we are. We're at the end.

End of term. Terminate includes the word term.

Are we terminating our term? I guess that's one way to say it, but I think not. Something that stays with a person cannot be terminated by a schedule that says 'times up.'

She blends the oral and the written--"hmm" and "I think not," "that's" with "cannot." She proceeds associatively, letting "terms," "end of term,"

“terminate” lead her to a theme and a structure. Her thought patterns show that she is considerably older than the other students I have cited.

If a common thread runs through each of these examples, it is that of voice, of immediacy, of informality. Each of these four writers uses a paratactic sentence structure. They seldom use subordinate clauses; they often begin sentences with “and” or “but.” They prefer an adding style, which for some students (Mr. D. is a good example), results in lists. Their sentences tend to be on the short side, with frequent incomplete sentences, sometimes only phrases or one-word utterances. Occasionally, however, a writer will become caught up in what she is saying and, just like conversation, duplicate nonstop talk.

Ms. L, another freshman, an African American from an upper middle class home (her father is a doctor) represents this aspect of orality.

We criticized each other and encouraged and helped each other. We also learned about different types of languages. Our group was so special we became close and helped each other outside of class and spent hours trying to help on another. I really think that our community was a great learning experience also it ws a great way to get to know each other and learn together.

Note her insistent parataxis as well as the run-on sentences. Ms. L is also highly repetitive, just as she would be in conversation. Her highest praise for the course comes in the cliché, “a great learning experience.” Unfortunately, I don’t have the space to include the entire essay, her final examination, which she wrote as a letter to me. The form partly explains why the discourse is so contextualized. If I could include all of it, we would find that she uses the essay to explore her feelings, good and bad, about the class, and ends with the same words she used at the beginning, the kind of structural circling back that I mentioned in the first chapter. (Ms. W uses the same technique more successfully in her repetition of

the idea “It has been with me always.”) Ms. L’s repetition shows her returning to a fundamental of her identity. The group members she mentions are both women, one a white student from a farming community, the other an African American student from a poor neighborhood in Detroit. Each of the students spoke a different dialect and came from a different subculture; yet they formed a deep bond, as Ms. L indicates. Of all the groups I have worked with, theirs was the most impressive and had the most linguistic hurdles to overcome.

Mr. S is another nontraditional student, representative of the kind of student we will increasingly find in our classrooms. He comes from a working class background and had spent some years in factory work. Finally, bored and frustrated, he decided to return to college to become a high school history teacher. His grammatical skills were marginal, his spelling atrocious, but he discovered how much he loved to write, and he worked hard. He was justly proud of his sixteen-page paper, “The Weird and Wacky Side of Travel Language.”

Does it seem peculiar to you that we say get on an airplane instead of get in an airplane. I don’t know about you, but I don’t want to get on an airplane, getting on an airplane could be dangerous to your health....There are a lot of ways to travel. I’m going to talk to you about some different ways, and items that are related to them....For the person who hasn’t much money to spend on a car, he or she could always borrow a car permanently. I don’t recommend this method, as one could end up at the big house or up the river.

Here again we note how highly contextualized the excerpt is. Ms. S’s pronouns are a clue, particularly “you,” which he uses just as he would in speaking. I have also noted the frequency of clichés, even in an atypical writer like Ms. W. Mr. S, though, is the master of the field. He recognized how his thinking, and most people’s, tends to come clothed in clichés. So he decided to use his clichés, to make them a positive, rather than a negative. (What would he have done with

Editor?¹⁴ Or what would E. B. White have done? He also played with clichés.) Mr. S uses every travel cliché he can think of as places of invention. Although his explicit topic is travel language, his topical invention leads him, just like Mr. F, to all sorts of strange places. As Mr. S said about this project, “I can just keep talking” (he wrote many more pages than he turned in). His project reveals someone becoming increasingly sensitive to language, with a growing curiosity about how we use words or how words can be used by advertisers to manipulate us. His essay made all of us more sensitive to how we use language.

I have hundreds of examples of student discourse that is fundamentally speech written down. Students directly address their audience, they are ambiguous, they pursue more than one point or focus, they argue topically not logically, they leave a lot for readers to fill in, they are more comfortable telling stories than explaining abstractions. They are, at heart, rhetoricians--speakers. Reading students as speakers allows us to understand what students are writing and to appreciate why they are writing as they do. We discover their intentions and their source of invention, as well as their connections with their culture. It reveals the attempts of writers to integrate and synthesize the disparate elements of their existence and their recognition that even in randomness we can find patterns emerging. To read from the perspective of written discourse risks missing the patterns. When we read from an oral perspective we show students how to read themselves, how to hear their own voices and the voices of others. Such a model of reading means listening and so participating in a different way to a different kind of conversation.

¹⁴ Editor is a software program recently published by the Modern Language Association and took eight years to develop. It finds more than 16,000 common errors of student writing, which fall into such categories as clichés, jargon, ambiguity, repetition, and improper word usage (see “Program Can Spot Mistakes Made by Beginning Writers, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, September 25, 1991: A24, for a report by Beverly T. Watkins). Its existence is evidence that teachers still generally read for mistakes; the report, however, doesn’t suggest that the published writers need such a software program, even though we can find the same “errors” in their writing, if we’re reading for errors, of course.

Chapter Three: Reading Four Contemporary Essayists

“ ‘Demons think in straight lines....Our stories, you know how they are all so tangled and thick, one story inside another....’

‘Yes,’ I said, prodding.

‘Humans love that. Demons can’t stand it.’

And thus I was taught one of the big lessons, that tangles should be welcomed as good news--they keep out demons.”

A. L. Becker, “Language in Particular: A Lecture,” 28.

When we turn from Mr. F and Ms. W to George Garrett, Stanley Elkin, Lewis Thomas, and Stephen Jay Gould, we find similar oral characteristics, the “oral-style-on-paper” that Lakoff refers to. We also find similar reasons for all six writers’ use of such a style--to explore identity, to explain his or her culture or worldview, to engage in conversation with a reader about what life means and where each writer fits, to provide integration and wholeness to reality.

As I explained in chapter one, each of my published examples writes for a popular audience but also is a scholar or critic. Garrett teaches at the University of Virginia; Elkin teaches at Washington University in St. Louis; and Gould teaches at Harvard University. Thomas at the time of writing his two best-known books was head of the Sloan-Kettering Cancer Institute. These four people don’t write for a living, not the way John McPhee or Joan Didion does, which makes them, in a sense, amateurs and so close to students, who are also amateurs. The professional lives of these four published writers do not depend on the popular essays they offer the average reader of magazines and bestsellers; in fact, popular writing is not considered thoroughly legitimate for scholars.¹ Popular writing always seems illiterate in some way, a watering down or pandering to an uneducated, unthinking public. Someone might interpret the oral elements in the

¹ *The Best American Essays 1991*, ed. Joyce Carol Oates (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1991) includes an essay each by Jane Tompkins and Marianna De Marco Torgovnick. Torgovnick, says the biographical information, wants to do “more of this kind of writing” (272).

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essays of these four writers as just that--an accommodation to an audience that is essentially a non-reading and so, such a person might think, a non-thinking audience, an audience accustomed to taking their language through the ear and not through the eye--the Mr. Fs of the world. On the contrary, these writers are not pandering to our culture but are interpreting our culture in a style they find necessary to such interpretation. Neither Mr. F nor Ms. W, nor the other four, can reveal and analyze his or her culture without using an oral, associative, multidialogic, style. Underlying what each says is the desire to make sense out of the world. What are these essential stylistic characteristics? Various sorts of informality; references to audience; rhetorical devices that depend on sound rather than sight; digressive, associative, or repetitive structure; personal pronouns; paratactic syntax; fragments or long, loosely constructed sentences; ambiguity (for example, through deictics, ellipsis, pronouns); oral discourse markers; and metadiscourse.

"My Two One-Eyed Coaches"

Annie Dillard chose George Garrett's essay, originally published in *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, as one of the twenty best essays for 1987, the edition focusing on what she calls "narrative." She prefers essays like Garrett's that mix "plain facts and symbolic facts, or that transform plain facts into symbolic facts." Dillard points out that such essays use an associative structure--"fragments linked by idea"² Essayists invent their structure as they go; every time and with every subject, just as in conversation, the structure moves as the subject wills. All but one essay in this collection uses an associative, digressive structure. Here, then, are the opening paragraphs of George Garrett's essay; I have included the complete essay in the Appendix.

² Annie Dillard, "Introduction," *The Best American Essays 1988* (New York: Ticknor & Fields, 1988) xx. Dillard goes so far as to say that "no structure is proscribed. You get to make up your own structure every time, a structure that arises from the materials and best contains them." This is a defining characteristic for her of the genre--that it is "all over the map" (xxii).

I came to reading and writing more or less naturally. As, for example, you might come to swimming early and easily. Which, matter of fact, I did; learning to swim at about the same time I learned to walk. I can very well remember the name of the man (he was the swimming coach at Rollins College near Orlando, where I grew up during the Depression years) who took me as a toddler and threw me off the end of a dock into a deep lake where I had the existential choice of sinking or swimming. And chose to swim, thank you very much. His name was, I swear, Fleetwood Peoples. Could I forget a name like that? More to the point, could I invent that name? For reading we had all the riches of my father's one great extravagance--an overflowing library of some thousands of books. Books of all kinds in bookcases and piles and on tables everywhere in the house. Everybody read and read. So did I. I remember reading Kipling and Stevenson and Dickens and Scott sooner than I was able to. And you could earn a quarter anytime for reading any one of any number of hard books that my father thought anybody and everybody ought to read. (1)

A few words here about my father. For there were many things, more than the love of reading and writing and the gift of the ways and means to enjoy both, which he taught me by example and which at least precluded the possibility that most teachers could ever be as influential as he was. But athletic teaching was the one great thing that he could not do for me, and this, now that I am forced to think of it, must have led me to seek out coaches as teachers. He had been an athlete and, I am told on good authority, a very good one, playing ice

hockey and rowing in school and college. And he had led, for a time, a rugged physical life, dropping out of M.I.T. to work in Utah as a copper miner. He wanted to be a mining engineer some day, but midway his money ran out; so he went to work in the mines out west; and he hoped to save enough to go back to school. He had a slightly mangled left hand, missing two full fingers, and bulked, powerful shoulder muscles and a sinewy eighteen-inch collar size to show for his hard years as a miner. He had his charter membership in the United Mine Workers framed and on the wall; and in the attic there was a dusty old metal suitcase full of one kind and another of ore samples he had dug out himself. But he was crippled, which was what he called it, not being ever an advocate of euphemisms. *Lame* was more like it, though; for he had a bad left leg and a limp left arm. Neither of which greatly impeded his apparent vigor and energy and, indeed, were scarcely noticeable unless he tried to hurry, to run, or to leap out of a chair. His lameness came in part from an injury and in part from a severe case of polio which had almost killed him. Now he could still swim--an awkward, but powerful sidestroke; and he learned to play a pretty good game of tennis, hobbling it is true, but overpowering many good players with a hard backhand and a truly devastating and deadly forehand. He also had a quality possessed by one of his tennis heroes, Bitsy Grant. Somehow or other, in spite of all awkwardness and all disability, he could manage to return almost anything hit at him. He was hard to ace and you couldn't often get by him. When I was a boy, he was a ranked player, fairly high on the ladder of the local

tennis club. (2)

By the time I was born, he was a prominent, controversial, daring, and, in fact, feared lawyer, Fearless himself. Together with his partner, he ran the Ku Klux Klan, then a real political power, completely out of Kissimmee, Florida. And lived to enjoy the victory. Took on the big railroads--the Atlantic Coast Line, the Florida East Coast, the Seaboard, and the Southern--and beat them again and again. Tried not one, but a number of cases before the U.S. Supreme Court. Yet, at the same time and always, gave hours and hours of time, without stint, to those who were once called downtrodden. Especially to Negroes who were more downtrodden than most anyone else. When black people came to see him at home, they came in by the front door and sat in the living room like anybody else. And nobody said a word about that or any of his other social eccentricities. Because most of them, white and black, respected him and depended on him. Those who did not respect him were afraid of him. With good reason. Once in my presence (for, by his practice, all the family were included in anything that happened at our house) a deputation of lawyers from the various railroads offered him a retainer, much more money than he earned, in effect *not* to try any more cases against them. He didn't wait or consider his reply, though he surprised all of us by being polite. He thanked them for their flattering interest. He allowed as how it was a generous and tempting proposition. (3)

"I would be almost a rich man," he said. "But what would I do for *fun*?" (4)

And, laughing, he more shooed them than showed them out the door. (5)

Naturally the thing I thought I needed and wanted most of all was someone who could teach me hopping and skipping and jumping. Someone who could teach me how to run and how to throw a ball without the least hint of awkwardness. That was, I suppose, my kind of rebellion. (6)

The rest of Garrett's essay explains what he learned from his two coaches about writing--a bare summary of a rich, complex piece of writing. To begin my discussion of Garrett I would first like to quote a few samples from other texts:

My parents are free and full people living inside a prison.
A fortress so deeply embedded that it is barely recognizable.

We would live off the earth, and nature. Living together to survive. You never had it so good, was often heard in my house, when things weren't going as well as they should. Especially when discussing such topics as unemployment.

My parents have always lived in a cold water railroad flat. Not knowing when we would have heat and hot water.

My mother had four children. Only because she had no choice.

These are a few examples of writing errors from Mina Shaughnessy. Let me add three examples of my own.

One who my grandfather always claimed owed him some modest sum of money. Didn't choose to repay it.

Went to the library instead. Or enjoyed the odd piece and quiet of an almost empty barracks. Without temptation and maybe without regret.

A trip to play another school. Where there might be a chance

to get a candy bar and a Coke, a Grapette and a Moonpie,
at a bus stop or country store. A chance to see girls, maybe
even, with luck, to speak to one.

These three are, of course, sentences chosen at random from “My Two One-Eyed Coaches.” What distinguishes them from the sentences Shaughnessy cites is the writer. We know Garrett; we don’t know whose parents live so deeply embedded in a fortress that it is hardly recognizable, though the anonymous writer--the “basic” writer who doesn’t know the difference between speech and writing (the context in which Shaughnessy introduces her discussion of fragments, students who don’t have “an analytical grasp of the sentence”)--is someone I would like to know. Unlike Shaughnessy, I consider the two statements she quotes to be sentences, and in them I find much to admire. In terms of the previous discussion, I note immediately the rhythm, the alliteration, the ambiguity (where is the fortress embedded, in them, or they in it?), the sudden twist, the antithesis, the irony of “free and full people” living in a fortress prison, as well as the theme of identity and relationship, a theme not dissimilar to that of Garrett, or to Mr. F and Ms. W. Here is a writer whose mind is awake, grappling with large ideas, trying to convey the psychological complexities and ironies many people feel today, not only the writer’s parents. We and the writer can learn much from these fragments; they offer opportunities. We could say much the same for the other samples she cites. In the third, we find the irony of never having had it so good yet being unemployed. And irony again in the fourth. Each writer needs the pause of speech to make the point, which translates in written form as a fragment. We hear each writer struggling to be heard, to communicate difficult, sometimes painful, experiences to others.

I quote these errors from Shaughnessy to indicate that Garrett’s style and that of her basic writers is not so dissimilar; nor are the themes. However, I doubt that she would accuse Garrett of lacking an analytic grasp of the sentence or of confusing speech and writing. He is well aware of the conventions of oral discourse; though I can’t make the same statement about Shaughnessy’s basic writers (only because I don’t have enough of what they’ve written to be so emphatic), I suspect that they knew better than she admitted the conventions

they were exploiting.³

When I first read Garrett's essay several years ago, his oral style bothered and distracted me--his fragments, his digressions, his lack of transitions. I found it difficult to understand him, meaning that I didn't know how to read him.⁴ I have used this essay with several different writing classes, both basic and introductory, and students respond initially as I first did. In particular, Garrett shocks students because he uses incomplete sentences; he writes "wrong." They find him difficult to understand--too choppy is how they talk about "Coaches"--until I ask them to read aloud his prose. Once they vocalize "As, for example, you might come to swimming early and easily. Which, matter of fact, I did..." they not only understand him they like him. And their appreciation for the potential of prose increases.

Garrett's fragments remind me, and students, of ads--in magazines, on billboards, on TV and radio. And ads are supposed to sound oral. So we have a circle--orality to print to orality to print. Within written discourse the melding of writing and speaking isn't so easily distinguished that we can say where one begins and the other ends, a reason for reading with oral characteristics in mind (we already read with "written" characteristics in mind), to bring us closer to a wholistic approach toward language use. We are accustomed to seeing, hearing, and speaking fragments: "Gotta go now"; "See ya"; "Later"; "Chill."⁵

³ Mina P. Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing* (New York: Oxford UP, 1977) 24-5. Shaughnessy interprets sympathetically and humanely the errors she categorizes, but nevertheless she still reads student essays from the perspective of error and remediation and disapproves of writing that is in any way oral, which she views as a matter for correction. I am trying to approach the oral issue from a more wholistic perspective. Nevertheless, because she was the first to try to interpret the writing of students, I will continue to use her examples for comparison. By using some of her examples, I am also therefore including students other than my own.

⁴ To avoid the circumlocutions necessary to distinguish between "he" or the author's name, the authorial persona, and "he" the real person, I intend to use he or the name to refer to both. In addition, it is a characteristic of writing that blends the oral and the written to collapse the distinctions between the real person and the authorial persona, in much the same way the distinctions between the two language channels are collapsed.

⁵ It is interesting that when Tompkins shifts from traditional academic discourse to

Someone asks us a question. We respond with a one- or two-word answer. We shorten words naturally, creating new words: airplane to plane, helicopter to copter, because to cause. Garrett appropriates this natural, spontaneous clipping of speech for his essay, which talks about who he is and how he came to be a writer, though he tells much more, as most storytellers do, in roundabout fashion. He is recreating for us a culture that no longer exists except in his memory, and in so doing trying to understand the culture in which he finds himself today.

Garrett's fondness for fragments is only one of many characteristics of oral discourse. Another is his use of clichés. Here are a few examples, also including near-clichés (where he plays on our expectations for clichés): "matter of fact," "off the end of a dock into a deep lake,"⁶ "sinking or swimming," "thank you very much," "I swear," "ways and means," "more like it," "allowed as how," "shooed them," "I suppose." Undoubtedly I've missed a few, as I will surely discover while I continue my reading. Such clichés directly address us, his audience. "I swear" and "I suppose" are about as conversational as anything we might say to a friend we stop to talk with in the hall on our way to class. The same with his question, "Could I forget a name like that?" He's answering our response, "C'mon. You made that up. Nobody'd name his kid that."

Garrett's use of the second person in his second sentence seems ambiguous. It's hard to decide whether he's using that conversational "anyone," or whether he really means you, that is me, the one sitting in the easy chair with my shoes off reading "My Two One-Eyed Coaches." Because of the conditional, I assume that he means a personal you, as he means a personal "I." In the last sentence of paragraph one he uses "you" again. Perhaps he is attempting to put us with him as he grows up, as much as to say, "If you'd been around you might have earned a quarter, too, just like me." Or, reading conventionally, we might say he's shifted pronouns here, for he really means "I," not "you."

Garrett seldom uses "you," because he has many other ways of speaking to what she considers a feminist, personal approach, she uses fragments. See "Me and My Shadow" in *Gender*, Kauffman 121-39.

⁶ Shaughnessy has a category of error she calls "blurred patterns," and this comes close. We want to read "off the deep end" to go along with "sinking or swimming."

his readers directly. Some of his clichés not only let us hear him speaking, but they also provide examples of his metadiscourse, which includes phrases other than clichés, statements like “I remember” (an invitation for us to remember our childhood reading), “A few words here about...,” “now that I am forced to think of it” (who is forcing him? us? the journal? himself?), “naturally,” “now.” These, too, directly address us, for they tell us how to take him, allow us to hear him voicing his thoughts. They also serve to keep us with him as he begins his journey.

Where does he start? “My Two One-Eyed Coaches.” A sports story. Because I like sports, I’ll accept the invitation to read his essay. But his first sentence confuses me. “I came to reading and writing more or less naturally.”

“Wait a minute,” I say mentally. “I planned to read about basketball or football, not reading and writing.”

“Fine,” Garrett seems to respond. “How about swimming?”

We have begun a conversation, for swimming is a sport, and he mentions a coach. But surely toddler Garrett wasn’t already on the swim team.

Notice how he moves from coaches, to reading and writing, to a brief digression about the name of the man who threw him into a lake when he was two. Is that really important? What happens if we delete it? For instance, what if we scrapped everything from the end of the first sentence to the sentence that begins “For reading we...”? The editorial change tightens the paragraph by removing the digression, which also removes the transition problem between “More to the point, could I invent that name?” and “For reading we....” But we lose a sense of the person, his origins and memories. We therefore lose the immediacy and presence that his digression provides.

The next digression comes in the section about his father, and occupies the rest of the passage I have excerpted. Although Garrett does mention his father at the end of paragraph one, he uses the brief reference to begin the section, with “A few words about my father” as transition (reminiscent of “and now a word from our sponsor”). “But isn’t this essay about your coaches?” I want to ask him. Without such metadiscursive moments as “a few words...,” I would wonder

what was going on or when he was going to get on with the story. Anyone who knows any southerners recognizes that he is getting on with the story; he can't tell about his coaches, whoever they are, without first giving the ins and outs of family connections and who said what, which reminds him of the time...now that he's forced to think about it, that is. These rabbit trails confuse students, both because they have never met anyone who tells stories in this way and because they skip the metadiscourse; they assume it to be unimportant--mere padding. Again, let me ask. What do we lose if we delete the passage about Garrett's father? Let me put it the other way round: What do we gain by keeping it? His father and family are the touchstones of Garrett's life. The essay would be considerably altered without them.⁷ Garrett returns to his ostensible subject with the word "Naturally" in paragraph six--as if what he next introduces would be natural.

Throughout the essay he uses metadiscourse and such oral discourse markers as "well," "so," "at any rate," ". . . Well, now, you are surely thinking" (another direct address to me in my chair with my shoes off), "Shall I, may I, say a word or two about..." "Do you see?" I don't know whether he's so much asking for my understanding as my approval, hoping I'm still with him three pages from the end when he asks that question.

Other readers who don't like talky prose, or digressions, or repetition may not be with him; Garrett is risking his audience, for he not only repeats words and phrases but structural patterns, as in his fondness for parataxis. After students read this essay, but before we begin to talk about it, we reread the first paragraph, circling or underlining every encounter with the word "and." I count thirteen, nine coming toward the end of the paragraph, where he begins to talk about books. "Books of all kinds in bookcases and piles and on tables everywhere in the house. Everybody read and read. And so did I. I remember reading Kipling and Stevenson and Dickens and Scott sooner than I was able to. And you could earn...and everybody...." Compare this with another example from Shaughnessy (these examples will be important to keep in mind as we also read Stanley Elkin):

⁷ I could also ask, "Do we need such digressions?" But that brings me to ask whether I need any of what Garrett has written, and so I am left with King Lear's speech about need.

The paragraph says that children like to see other birds sing and they want to know the names of the different kind of birds and then they don't hear or see the birds and the father comes to the son and says that one of the birds is a sparrow and the other one is a jay but the boy wants to know which is the jay and which is the sparrow.

This writer uses “and” more often than Garrett, and isn't clever enough to break the sentence into several short ones, even fragments, starting with “and,” as Garrett does. But when we read the two aloud the rhetorical effect is similar. It creates a movement and an increasingly quick tempo that no other construction can achieve. Garrett tells us in one big breath how quick and greedy he was when he swallowed books, even “sooner than I was able to.” But we already know this from his use of “and,” which propels us pellmell into the second paragraph, where he puts on the brakes a little, though he still uses “and” frequently.

Shaughnessy says that an overuse of “and” might be easy on the writer but hard on the reader and so suggests the following revision of the student's paragraph: “Children like to hear birds sing and to know the names of different birds, but when a father starts teaching his son the names of birds, saying, ‘This is a sparrow and the other one is a jay,’ the son gets more interested in knowing the difference between sparrows and jays than in seeing or hearing birds.” She adds that the frequent use of “and” is characteristic of talk but not of analytic writing, which we enliven by tone, gesture, pause but “tends to go flat...on the page.”⁸ For my part, though the student might have used a few more of the techniques Garrett uses, I prefer his sentence to hers. I feel the beat, I hear a voice, even if a young one, but Shaughnessy's revision dampens that voice and changes the beat. What happens if we rewrite the passage from Garrett as Shaughnessy did for her student?

My father was extravagant only in one respect--he
bought books, which he put on his library shelves

⁸ Shaughnessy, *Errors* 31-32.

and stacked in piles on tables throughout our house. Everyone in my family read, myself included, with my particular favorites being Kipling, Stevenson, Dickens, and Scott, all of whom I probably read before I could really understand them. However, my father paid me a quarter per book if it qualified as hard, one he thought everybody should read.

I have eliminated all but two “ands,” the fragments, and the repetition. I have introduced subordinate clauses and made explicit in the final sentence what had been only implicit (a reason why Garrett read what he couldn’t really understand), though I am not sure I have made the right inference. Although I have not removed the personal pronouns, I would argue that my version is nevertheless much less personal, as it is less messy. It lacks the energy of the original. No longer do I find myself stepping over books as I read; no longer do I see every nook and cranny of his family’s large, messy house filled with books or people reading them. The joyful, intoxicating, and confusing confrontation with another person in the form of words on a page is missing. In making it “better,” I have made it worse.

Garrett certainly uses “and” where he could easily, and more conventionally, use a comma. *Polysyndeton*, the name of this rhetorical device, conveys, as one rhetorician put it, “energy, emotion, headlong momentum.”⁹ Exactly. Shaughnessy’s novice was also trying to convey the energy, emotion, and headlong momentum with which she had read the paragraph she was supposed to comment on, as well, I suspect, as the headlong momentum she felt at having to write something about it in a short time (Shaughnessy’s examples come from placement tests). There’s more to the student’s use of “and,” just as there’s more to Garrett’s, than meets the eye. Or ear.

Garrett’s preference throughout “Coaches” is the oral “and”--at the beginning of sentences, in a series, in compound sentences, and in compound-complex sentences. He reinforces the oral nature of his writing not

⁹ John Alford, “Common Rhetorical Devices” 1.

only with concrete nouns and verbs (we find few abstractions, until near the end) but also with repetition. Note how often he repeats the word “books” in the passage I rewrote, or his repetition of the word “any” in the last sentence of the first paragraph--“any one,” “any number,” “anybody,” which he then follows with the parallel “everybody” (also another cliché--anybody and everybody). Like Mr. F and Ms. W, Garrett frequently uses alliteration; it’s hard to find a sentence without it. Read the first two sentences in the second paragraph: “few,” “father,” for,” gift” or “my,” “many,” “more,” “means,” “me,” “example,” “most.” He also uses “example,” “precluded,” “possibility.” And assonance in “here,” “reading,” “means,” “he,” “me.” What other reason could he have for including the word “ever” in this sentence in the middle of the second paragraph than to repeat the “v” sound: “...not being ever an advocate of euphemisms.” “Ever” also affects the rhythm, but it certainly doesn’t add much to the sense. He follows that with a syntactic inversion: “Lame was more like it , though [another cliché]; for he had a bad left leg and a limp left arm.”

Garrett’s oral style in this essay has several effects. First, it fuses the past and the present. Although he is writing as an older man looking back, he sounds as he might have when he served under his two coaches. Second, he wants to tell us what he learned from these two men--and, incidentally, what he learned from his father--but he doesn’t want to sound like a typical moralist, which might easily have happened had he chosen a conventional, analytic approach. He’s telling us some stories, some unlikely stories, about learning to think at the same time he learned to box. He’s making connections where most of us would assume there are none. Garrett reveals a particular cultural vision. He can’t do so without giving us what informed his identity. Like Mr. F, he deals with his identity through sports, but an even more masculine sport than baseball: boxing. The incongruity is disturbing--that he could have learned the humanities through a sport considered so brutal and inhumane, an incongruity he himself recognizes at the end of the essay. Yet, similar to Ms. W, he also deals with his identity through language: reading and writing. Third, his oral discourse demands our involvement. We should be prepared to enter a conversation that appears to

have been underway for some time.

Rather than introducing a topic, the first sentence responds to a question: “And what made you decide to become a writer and teach literature?” To answer it, Garrett must go back to the beginning, because it would have been too startling for him to answer “My boxing coaches did it.” We need to hear this unspoken, implicit question, as well as the other questions to which he responds, for it explains in part his abrupt shifts and lack of conventional transitions. We are reading his half of an interview, a transcription, a writing down, rather than writing. He maintains this impression throughout his four-part essay by his use of the oral discourse elements I have discussed, including one other, which we don’t find in the opening paragraphs--the long, syntactically complicated utterance that Halliday has found even more characteristic of speech than the fragment.

Significantly, such utterances come near the end of Garrett’s essay, where he begins to accumulate what his experiences have meant, his ultimate answer to that unstated opening question. I will end the discussion of Garrett with the following example of this sort of oral utterance, which includes some of the other aspects I have noted (use of “and,” repetition, alliteration). It serves as a warning to his readers and as an oblique statement of his critical position as a teacher of writing and literature. It also provides further understanding about Garrett’s identity and the parallels between boxing, writing, and reading :

I even learned, through the habits of this kind of professionalism [boxing] and the experience of trying and testing myself and my habits against others who also knew what they were doing, that nobody else, except maybe a critic-coach like Joe Brown who knew what was happening at all levels of his being, could honestly judge and evaluate your performance. I learned to recognize that the audience, even the more or less knowledgeable audience, never really knew what was going on. Nor should they be expected to.

“The Muses Are Heard”

Garrett’s warning is a good one to remember as we move to Stanley Elkin’s essay, a member of *The Best American Essays 1989*, which Geoffrey Wolff edited, his own introduction to the volume as good an example of writing as oral discourse as are most of the essays he chose to include. Nine of the twenty essayists, it is interesting to note, are also academicians. Yet the series editor, Robert Atwan, claims that university English departments have not been kind to the kind of writing included in the six volumes published so far (the series began in 1986), though he credits Donald McQuade with “helping to change the ways in which essays are read and taught.” McQuade is also attempting to bring together the disciplines of linguistics, stylistics, and the teaching of composition.¹⁰ To read “The Muses Are Heard” we need this multiple perspective.

Elkin pushes the boundaries of writing as oral discourse even more than Garrett does, and unless we are willing to wait for him to answer our questions, “What’s going on here? Who is this guy anyway?” we will stop reading almost as soon as we start. If with Garrett we came into a conversation already in progress, this is doubly so with Elkin. We haven’t so much walked in as stumbled in, fallen in, or barged in, and it takes awhile to get our bearings. The title gives us no clues, with the possible small exception of “heard”—a warning, perhaps, to listen up. But then I remind myself about Garrett’s warning and wonder how well I can decide what’s going on.

Because of the complexity of Elkin’s essay, I will provide a slightly longer

¹⁰ See Donald A. McQuade, ed., *The Territory of Language: Linguistics, Stylistics, and the Teaching of Composition* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1986). Carl H. Klaus, “Essayists on the Essay,” in Chris Anderson, *Literary Nonfiction: Theory, Criticism, Pedagogy* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1987) 155-75, supports Atwan’s claim. Five years ago when he decided to teach a graduate course on the essay, because he found that no one had investigated “its boundaries, its terrain, its deep interior,” he collected comments essayists themselves have made about what they do. He found that essayists speak against systematized writing. Rather, they define their work as ideas thinking and looking at each other—a conversation, then, not something that comes to conclusions. Klaus calls the essay uncharted territory.

excerpt, sections from throughout the essay, rather than just from the beginning as I did with Garrett. But like “My Two One-Eyed Coaches,” it is important to read Elkin’s entire essay aloud (included in the Appendix), for the excerpts I’ve chosen give only the most truncated notion of the whole, particularly of the structure. However, I’ve tried to provide examples of most of Elkin’s oral techniques, as well as to give a sense of what “The Muses Are Heard” is about. Even so, I will need to refer to sections of the essay I have not quoted here.

And Jesus, I’m thinking at the time, this snob of geography, this longitude-latitude fop, it can’t have been but three weeks ago I was living in a villa on Lake Como, taking the gelato, the customized pastas; servants were cutting my meat. And tucking in, too, feasting on the blood-oranges architecture folded into the terraced hillsides organic as agriculture, the lake’s thin gray porridge and lumpy Chinese mists. Well maybe, I’m thinking at the time, in spite of Missouri is my hometown, distance is only a different time zone of the head. Because I recognize nothing here, all jet-lagged out in the van, two or so hours southwest of St. Louis on I-44 deep--I see by the recurring billboards that keep on coming, popping up at us like an infinite loop of highway in some redneck video game--in the walnut-bowl belt, in roadside zoo land, cavern and cave country. Among fireworks stands. Live bait mines. And there’s a sense, God bite my high-hat tongue, of something so un-gun-controlled out there we may have fallen, may my swank wither and drop off, among a race of Minutemen. There’s billboards for the Passion Play, for Silver Dollar City, for rides on the Wet Willies. (1)

This ain’t any America of franchise and one size fits all; this is a time warp. Some live-by-the-tourist, die-by-

the-tourist figment of the imaginary bygones and halcyons, of fiddles and corncocks and jugs. We are, I mean, deep, real deep, in a hanger-on economy, in some landscape of the novelties, and I ask Ross Winter, founder and artistic director of the Mid America Dance Company (MADCO), the man who leads our troupe of modern dancers bound for Springfield, Missouri, where we're performing Friday and Saturday evening, what folks do hereabouts when they're not minding the bait stores and walnut-bowl factories.... (2)

The dancers, I think, are used to me by now. (We go back.) We are practically colleagues, these toned, flexible, almost jointless young men and women in their twenties and the crippled-up fifty-eight-year-old man who has to negotiate the high step up into the van by means of a high step up onto a milk case, a breathtaking piece of choreography in its own right, let me tell you. They call me by my first name, something which normally squeaks against my blackboard like chalk--I am, by ordinary, when not playing *la strada*, a teacher--but which, here, in these circumstances, oddly I do not mind at all, and even find flattering, though I must say it's a little difficult to keep *their* names straight, wait for others to say them first, only gradually constructing a private mnemonics.... (5)

Hi-diddle-de-dee, the actor's life for me! (12)

Only it isn't the boards I want to trod, it's the Road. Having been born with this J. B. Priestly sense of good companionship, some troupe notion of traveled kinship, a true believer--my pop was a traveling salesman--in lobby encounters, this vet of the shifting, shared geography, this

heart's perpetual reunionist, you see, this sucker for chums, this long-standing-enough guy on that pavement in Paris who eventually runs into everyone he's ever known--this, this *auld acquaintance*. Because it ain't really friendship I'm talking about, it's *Miller time*! And even today I imagine all sports announcers, men covering not only different teams but different games even, know each other, and are always bumping into one another in the best hotels in the different towns--though it's always Cincinnati--and going off together to the good restaurants to catch up, to do the divvied shop talk of their lives, speaking in a jargon so closed it's almost ethnic of the great patsies and fall guys--did you see *Broadway Danny Rose*? like that--doing the anecdotal schmooze and war stories, all high life's tallest tales. (13)

Still, not like last time. Because we really do go back. Well, a couple and a half years anyway.... (14)

And that's *one* muse. The Muse of Myth, of How It Was. There were hobos in the earth in those days, a race of fry cooks, of broke-mouthed old fellows, closed-jaw, and all wide, ear-to-ear, turned-in lip like Popeye the Sailor. And you know what? If you permit me to get ahead of myself, you know what? There still are. I saw them.... (the end of 23)

The women are similarly deceptive. Except for Ellen they're all relatively short, yet on stage they appear tall. In one of the dances Liz moves across the stage, apparently without effort, with Paul on her back. (*What's going on? Are you funny, are you in one of the high-risk categories?* No, of course not. *Of course not? Michael's powerfully built, Paul's the best athlete, Liz plays horsey with him? Of course not?*

Well, it's the fashions. *The fashions.* The way their clothes fit, all right? *Are you caught up yet?* The way their clothes fit, I tell you. My clothes never fit me like that. *You're fifty-eight years old.* Don't make excuses for me, they *never* fit. *Whiner, you're in mourning for a wardrobe?* Yes, sure, why not? Only not for a wardrobe, just that accident in the genetics that skewed my architecture and made me silly in caps, jeans, in Jockey and boxer shorts either, in all the extraordinary accessories of the rakish, wind-blown young down to the beaches in boats and scarves. The only equality is the equality of sexual style, the Me Tarzan's, You Jane's, all the level playing fields of dalliance. You bet your ass I'm in a high-risk category, the highest. I'm not cute! *The grass is always greener, eh?* Always. *All right, get on with it.)... (26)*

Ross didn't say anything for a while. I know that's what they all say, that they don't say anything for a while. Or that they blanch, go white as the unimpeachable testimony of Darla's clown-white pain, but that's what happened. Maybe there's a muse of the autonomic physiologicals for bad news, or when you've been let down, badly disappointed, some Muse of the Involuntary Facials, and a muse working, too, when he recovers, finally speaks. The Muse of At a Loss, Vamp 'til Ready....(89)

The irony muse which plucks my gig and leaves this crippled-up old soul hi-diddle-de-deeless. Until, at least, Life breathes on my life again, the all-embracing muse of lark and unexpected compensations. (102)

From the first sentence, Elkin drops us in the middle of something with no introduction or orientation, other than the title; and he uses the passive voice, which actually misleads us, for his essay is anything but objective and depersonalized. Elkin is in a geography warp and a time warp--as well as a cultural warp--themes that recur, but why or how or what he was doing in a villa on Lake Como we don't know, nor does he ever tell us. To find out, we must wait three years (the essay originally appeared in 1988) for the publication of his new novel, *The MacGuffin*, which *The New York Times* called "pleading for the power of talk."¹¹ We learn that he spent five of the happiest weeks of his life on Lake Como getting the novel going, thanks to the Rockefeller Foundation. So it's in that context, out of that situation, that he finds himself jet-lagged in a van, hearing quite another crop of muses than the ones in Italy, where Muses have been speaking for much longer than Missouri's been a state. It's also from the context of *The McGuffin*--a book not yet written--that we need to read "The Muses Are Heard." The novel provides commentary for the essay, or the other way round. Both "plead for the power of talk." Both put the issue of masculine identity (sexual potency, physical flexibility, and importance of role in family and community) at the center. Duff, the main character in the novel, is fifty-eight, insecure, and as physically unattractive in his Brooks Brothers suits as fifty-eight-year-old Elkin claims to be in "The Muses Are Heard." What we have here is the flip side of Mr. F's essay; Mr. F writes about masculine identity as a young man, Elkin about masculine identity as an aging man. Mr. F is an example of what Elkin wishes he were, as he satirizes the fact that he isn't. In addition, we have to consider the magazine in which Elkin publishes his essay, *Harper's*, for it helps define the audience, for him and for us. *Harper's* certainly has a different readership than *The Virginia Quarterly Review*--just as both are unlike a composition classroom.¹² Yet the essays we have heard share

¹¹ "Notable Books of the Year 1991," *The New York Times Book Review* 1 Dec. 1991: 64.

¹² I frequently ask my students to do a little audience investigation when I assign an essay like Garrett's or Elkin's. I ask them to find a recent issue of the publication, study it, read another essay or two from it, and then come up with a description of the typical reader. The research helps them on a number of levels, not least of which is thinking about the

a certain tone and style (I'm not saying they're identical, for obviously they aren't, but they are on the same playing field).

Mr. F made no more assumptions about his audience than Elkin does here. Not all written discourse is decontextualized in comparison to oral discourse, as an encounter with Stanley Elkin's nonfiction shows us. Mr. F assumes that his readers know a great deal about baseball. George Garrett assumes that we have some notion of the Depression, as well as of boxing, reading, and writing. Stanley Elkin depends upon our familiarity with Muses, even if the muses of middle America are as unlike those Spenser talks about as is possible, but of course so is the culture Elkin reveals. It's even different from the "America of franchise and one size fits all" that has come to dominate east coast to west, Dubrovnyk to downtown Moscow. The Muses that are heard are the muses of personal and cultural identity, all hi-diddle-de-deed together. And I can't help hearing, everytime I come across that word (which is often, for he says it over and over), "The cat and the fiddle. The cow jumped over the moon." Another of those associative assumptions he depends on, the clichés of our culture. Elkin can assume that readers of *Harper's* are interested in satirical comments on contemporary popular culture or on the problems of aging, middle-class American males; he might also assume that the magazine's readers believe themselves superior to, or separate from, that culture. But, Elkin implies, "if you can read this, then you're part of it--no us and them allowed." Satire catches everyone.

Elkin moves from cliché to cliché, anticipating those we know and twisting them, just slightly, as Garrett did with "off the deep end." Elkin, however, does this repeatedly, a characteristic of his oral style, a kind of malaproping, or blurring of patterns, in Shaughnessy's terms. Here are a few from the excerpt: "time warp," "live-by-the-tourist, die-by the-tourist" (live by the gun, die by the gun; or live by the sword, die by the sword), "bygones and halcyons" (add days, or add "let bygones be..."), "ear to ear"(grin), "Popeye the Sailor." "We go back" should include a long ways, or way back--ridiculous when he finally finishes nine paragraphs later what he started with that parenthetical remark, a long, twisting digression. His truncated version reflects and satirizes our sense of person they're trying to talk to and what assumptions they are making.

cultural identity and failed community. “Squeaks against my blackboard like chalk” provides us all kinds of connections and finally lets us know who he is (assuming that the average reader of *Harper’s* magazine doesn’t). “Hi-diddle-de-dee, the actor’s life for me!” launches him into the final digression before he returns to “we really do go back. Well, a couple and a half of years anyway.”

Throughout paragraph thirteen Elkin gives us all kinds of clichés, linguistic and thematic. Traveling troupes and traveling salesmen, auld acquaintance and auld lang syne, Miller time and high life’s tallest tales, sports announcers and all towns look like Cincinnati, patsies and fall guys--back to boxing--which leads to war stories, all right. This is the life of male identity and of male language, of women excluded, boys night out, the same kind of male assertiveness that Mr. F used, though in a far less subtle way. If we needed to know something about team sports, the infield, Jack Morris, Joe DiMaggio, and all the words Mr. F sanitized or left unsaid, here we miss the satire if we haven’t read a bottle of Miller lately: full title, or should I say title and subtitle, Miller High Life. Then all those beer commercials, and it doesn’t get any better than this. But, warns Elkin, just to show he doesn’t buy it even though he wants it, “it ain’t really friendship I’m talking about.” Mr. S, the student I mentioned at the end of chapter two who converted slogans, clichés, and ads into a piece on travel language, shares with Elkin an interest in writing down American speech (and thinking habits) to make us laugh.

Two comments by Ong are instructive here. First, he thinks that we are “in a dilemma, on the one hand driven to the use of clichés by [our] new orality and on the other driven to mock them because of [our] relentless literacy.” In the essays we have read so far this is certainly true, but no more so than for Elkin, who shows the tension in a culture that is oral yet still literate, what Ong calls the “literate orality” of popular culture--an at-times-uneasy alliance between the two channels of language. Second, the use of clichés reflects our desire for informality that, says Ong, is affecting fiction as well as other texts: “Today’s psychological structures and thought processes favor writing and print that are more ‘natural,’ which means impromptu and informal...”¹³ The rhetorical force of Elkin’s

essay is that of impromptu delivery and informality, but not, as Ong says of the issue in general, in an unprecedented way. As we shall see, Thomas Nashe traveled that road long before Elkin, Garrett, or Mr. F were called upon to say something.

Several other characteristics of oral discourse need to be mentioned: digressions and repetitions, which I have alluded to already; conversations; syntax; and metadiscourse. Elkin's use of digression is similar to the digressions in Garrett--the oral storyteller--except the voice is that of a Jewish narrator "noshing" and talking, not that of the Southerner whittling and talking (Elkin uses "nosh," which means to eat, or perhaps more accurately, "to graze," which is what most New Yorkers do nowadays). Even his first two paragraphs sound more like digressions than the beginning of an essay--as his foray into the world of dance is no more than a digression, the voice of the "muse of lark and unexpected compensations," as he tells us at the end of the essay. He's digressed in numerous ways: in time, in space, in culture. His cultural digressions occur on several levels, for it's a far cry from the classroom to high-stepping it into a van. So it takes him time to travel each of his digressions and thus give us the story. There is nothing linear, nothing logical about his tale. As W. Ross Winterowd says of another writer, we can't expect traditional cohesion.¹⁴

Elkin holds his essay together by a rhapsody, or stitching together, of clichés that lead him from digression to digression. For instance, "we go back" leads him to talking about first names, which leads him to the actor's life, and then back to "we really do go back," which, with no transition, propels him into a history of Ross Winter and the dance troupe, and finally "I come into it in 1986, about." Earlier during his first digression he has commented that the mood of the troupe now is unlike then. Several paragraphs later he picks up the comment--no transition from what immediately precedes it--by saying, "If the collective mood

¹³ Walter J. Ong, *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology: Studies in the Interaction of Expression and Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1971) 21 and 284; and "Reading, Technology, and Human Consciousness." Raymond 189-90.

¹⁴ W. Ross Winterowd, *The Rhetoric of the "Other" Literature* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1990) 64.

isn't like the last time, maybe it's because...." This is strictly conversational, what we all do every day when we talk to each other; we pick up a comment that someone has made several minutes before and discuss it for awhile before moving to another subject. The difference here is that Elkin speaks both parts, the way Ms. W did; at the same time we can pick up the response half of the conversation and so participate in the story. Both Elkin and Ms. W invite this by using direct questions to us, for instance, "And did I mention that Springfield is the world headquarters of the Assemblies of God?" or "And you know what?"

So, on the discourse level, Elkin digresses and repeats himself. On the sentence, phrase, and word levels he does the same. I've already pointed out his repetition of "hi-diddle-de-dee," and he also repeats "ain't," "deep," "I swear...," and "I'm thinking." Or his redundancies, like "recurring billboards that keep on coming," another Yogi-ism. Most of all, though, he loves to repeat words at the beginning of successive clauses or phrases (*anaphora*); he uses the device frequently, for instance in the following example, which shows his love of repetition as well as the syntactical nightmare of his sentences, Halliday's oral complexity duplicated: "Having been born with this J. B. Priestley sense of good companionship, some troupe notion of traveled kinship, a true believer--my pop was a traveling salesman--in lobby encounters, this vet of the shifting, shared geography, this heart's perpetual reunionist, you see, this sucker for chums, this long-standing-enough guy on that pavement in Paris who eventually runs into everyone he's ever known--this, this *auld acquaintance*." Not only does he repeat the word "this" at the beginning of successive phrases but the sentence itself is nothing but an accumulation of phrases--copiousness, the I-gotta-keep-talking of the rhetorician (like Mr. F). No matter how hard I try, I cannot find the conclusion of his initial clause, "Having been born with this J. B. Priestley sense of good companionship....," what? After the numerous accumulated modifiers of subsequent phrases, I want the word "I," as in "...I long for..." But the main clause never comes. Also notice the ambiguity of "this," which he attempts to overcome by a series of definitions. What really does this refer to? Does it point back to something in the text, which is the pronoun's usual purpose--or does it point ahead? Elkin's attempts to clarify merely make things more ambiguous.

Yet can I legitimately complain that I don't understand what he means, when I do? It means what it does in part because he has left out the main clause, because his demonstrative pronoun lacks an ultimate referent. Or, to be accurate, we get the main clause and referent in the next "sentence:" "it ain't really friendship I'm talking about, it's *Miller time!*" So we might rewrite the passage in the following way: "Having been born with this J. B. Priestley sense of good companionship, what I want, really, is what stands for companionship in our culture--a few brews with the boys." As with the other revisions I have suggested, we lose more than we gain, a great deal more. The revision also brings into focus what Elkin wanted to leave unfocused--his failure to define exactly what a "J. B. Priestley sense of good companionship" is, or even why J. B. Priestley. But assuming we know why, because we've read Priestley, don't we then need to ask "Would J. B. Priestley think Miller time is what he, Priestley, would call good companionship?" Elkin's syntax allows him to have his reference, without all the problems his reference raises. Another way of putting this is to say that sometimes vagueness is exactly the message someone intends to convey.

Shaughnessy considers Elkin's syntax an error of "subordinate consolidations" and explains that writers often lose sight of the subject with introductory adverbial elements, or the writer thinks she "has already provided one,"¹⁵ as with Elkin. The disguise is that Elkin makes his sentence much more complicated than students do, so that we fail to notice it, or disregard it if we do notice it, for we are caught up in the momentum of the rhetorical moment. In effect, that's what Shaughnessy says of students; they hear what they write. When we speak we don't always recall the beginning of an utterance and so become entangled in numerous syntactical thickets; in the same way students become entangled. Reading a transcribed conversation is no less difficult or syntactically intricate than reading Elkin or students. Elkin's punctuation doesn't help, either. His ubiquitous dashes represent all those pauses, false starts, overlapping voices, and the generally and happily chaotic nature of human beings getting in their two cents' worth. Somehow we make sense of it all.

¹⁵ Shaughnessy, *Errors* 59 ff.

Here is another examples of *anaphora*: “we’re talking leotards and leg warmers here, we’re talking spandex and muscle. We’re also talking...talking porno movies...talking blow-job discussions” (remember the issue of sexual impotency from *The McGuffin*). Or this, where he plays with near- *anaphora*, as well as traditional grammar: “Who is difficult to look at, on whom time, booze, and circumstance have worked their magic and whose colors are running, who, like some ancient benighted schoolboy, cannot seem to stay within his own lines” (this is specifically an example of *polyptoton*, a device of repetition using the same word but with different case endings). This example reveals another of Elkin’s expectations, that we know the grammatical traditions, just as we know “it’s Miller time,” “hail-fellow,” “downtime,” “good-time-Charley,” “it’s the real thing,” and “visions of sugarplums”--what cultural territories he travels while he travels. Another example comes from the opening sentence, “...I’m thinking at the time...I’m thinking at the time...” Nor should we overlook *anaphora* with “and,” as frequent here as in the prose of any basic writer or in George Garrett:

And because Darla, she of the reddish hair and supple face, has been in severe pain for eight months now and has either torn ligaments in her hip or a ruptured disk in her back, maybe both, which isn’t great for the leg extension and presents difficulty for her turnout, and has given her more downtime than a computer; and even if the company *is* family, unlike real families it’s forced to function, is burdened always--and unlike me with my merely hail-fellow, good-time-Charley, Miller-time intentions, all my visions of those sugarplums in a weightless world--and if that’s the case, what alternative did she have except to ask Ross if he had a minute and then offer her resignation?

This sounds like the student who wrote about the birds and the father and the

son, but I have no suggestions as to how Elkin ought to write his way out of this paratactic thicket. For instance, I'm not certain what he's comparing himself to, whether Darla or the family of the dance troupe; nor am I certain what "that's" refers to in "if that's the case"--Darla's injury? Where does the main clause enter? Where is the other half of "Because..."? I only know that when I read this aloud I'm glad that he punctuates for breathing, which seems, coincidentally, to coincide with the syntax.

Elkin's repetition, his redundancies, are inherent in oral discourse, where we repeat ourselves, or we repeat what someone has just said, as in the next example, taken from a conversation during a birthday dinner for my husband. I have not indicated where I and the other speaker overlapped; I am just trying to give an idea of how one person and I maneuvered through a conversation by repeating what each has said--similar, though not identical, to the call and response approach Ms. W used. Nor have I attempted to punctuate in any logical, print-bound way.

Judy: "It's just like our literacy trainer said. Literacy training. It's all a matter of encouragment. I think.

I think. I said, said, to Harry, you know, encouragement.

Don't worry about failing. Failing."

Cheryl: "Failing. right. Failing. I was reading. You know, I was reading my stuff on ESL, about language learning."

Judy: "Language learning. Right. Not worrying about failing."

Cheryl: "Failing, the books say, all the research says, I mean--I've noticed myself. And it's true. That people who don't care about making mistakes make the most progress."

Judy: "Progress, when you don't worry about making mistakes."

And from there we began talking about errors and conversation in learning mathematics, also a language, which provided the associative link.

Paragraph twenty-six reflects this back-and-forth repetition of everyday

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conversation. It also exemplifies a technique Elkin uses frequently, both in an extended way, as with this particular example, as well as more briefly. In case we can't supply our part of the conversation, he gives us our lines, in italics, as digressive commentary on what he's been writing: a way to help us out, to overcome the difficulty Garrett notes in his warning that even knowledgeable readers won't necessarily know what's going on. We must hear Elkin's essay as speech; the passage in paragraph twenty-six makes this obvious. We seem once more to be eavesdropping, unless we become the italicized voice--a conversation that is as cliché-ridden as the rest of the essay. Note that each turn-taking begins by repeating the previous comment of the other person: "No, of course not. *Of course not...Well, it's the fashions. The fashions....*" Elkin knows how we really talk.

Elkin also knows that we pause frequently, that occasionally we fill our pauses but not always. We find numerous pauses in "The Muses Are Heard," appearing as space breaks in the text. Sometimes the pauses occur after almost every paragraph (see 34--break--35 to 39--break--40--break), sometimes less frequently. His breaks often indicate a shift in focus, as they do in normal conversation, where after a particularly energetic discussion we find ourselves with a lull, a pause, a break, after which someone initiates another topic. Most students are adept at reading the social significance of conversational pauses but are at a loss when it comes to such silences as Elkin uses.

We can also interpret his repetitions as extended metadiscourse, the final oral characteristic that I want to consider, for Elkin is highly metadiscursive. As I explained in the first chapter, metadiscourse is commentary on conversation, and we use it all the time. It has nothing to do with the subject or theme but with the attitude of the speaker or speakers, and thus tells us something about the person we're talking to--expressions, from Elkin, like "I'm thinking" or "I think," "I swear," "I suppose," "you know what?" "if you permit me," "I mean," "I see," "Well maybe," "God bite my high-hat tongue" (not an insignificant choice of words for this highly oral essay), "I tell you," "We're really talking about," "and ah." If we rearranged sections of his prose to look like transcription, with the

explanatory symbols included so that we could read it, we would think we had before us a sample of recorded conversation.¹⁶ Part of what gives Elkin's prose this highly oral quality is his metadiscourse. He is always breaking into the conversation, stepping on his own toes, overriding what he's just said, trying to take his turn from the voice or voices holding the floor. He may be a one-man show, but he's acting out a complex script and a multiplicity of roles and singing a multiplicity of songs--everything from the overture to Swan Lake to the jingle for Coke. "It's the real thing"--as he says. But that's the way the muses are heard.

"The Lives of a Cell"

It is something of a shock to switch to the last two writers I will discuss in this chapter, Lewis Thomas and Stephen Jay Gould, neither of whom on the surface seems to bear any resemblance to Garrett or Elkin. If they are legitimate examples of writing as oral discourse, then I may be undermining my position by including Thomas and Gould and would be better off with Joan Didion, whose essay "Insider Baseball" was included as a best essay in the same volume with "The Muses Are Heard." The first sentence, six lines long, is an accumulation of identical prepositional and paratactic phrases:

It occurred to me, in California in June and in Atlanta
in July and in New Orleans in August, in the course of
watching first the California primary and then the
Democratic and Republican national conventions,
that it had not been by accident that the people
with whom I had preferred to spend time in high
school had, on the whole, hung out in gas stations.

Each sentence in the rest of the paragraph, with the last an exception, begins, "They had not," or "They had," and finally "They were never." A much less well known essayist, Ann Hodgman, is another example. "No Wonder They Call

¹⁶ See, for an example, 66-67 in Tannen *Talking Voices*--or any text of linguistic analysis of oral discourse.

Me a Bitch,” her account of a week spent eating dog food, ends this way: “I’m sure you have a few dog food questions of your own. To save us time, I’ve answered them in advance.” Lots of good conversation going.¹⁷

However, I am using Thomas and Gould because they are so unlike Garrett and Elkin in so many ways, as I chose “Black English” in part because it contrasted with “Hey Babe.” The surface of Ms. W’s discourse appeared as conventional and non-oral as do the surface discourses of Thomas and Gould, but we will find that Thomas and Gould write orally, as well, if not in such an extreme way. Although Thomas has become more oral--it is important to note that *Lives of a Cell* came out in 1974 and the essays were written earlier--I will use the title essay of his first book, which won the National Book Award. In many ways, to consider just one of Thomas’s essays from one of his books is like excerpting 1,000 words from a 10,000-word essay. The whole book, for Thomas, is the essay, each individual one like a several-paragraph section of something much longer. Only when we look at “The Lives of a Cell” in the context of *The Lives of a Cell: Notes of a Biology Watcher* can we appreciate his digressions, his repetitions, his relationship with his readers in *The New England Journal of Medicine*, his metadiscourse. However, to do that is beyond the scope of this chapter, though I will give here the title essay in full.

We are told that the trouble with Modern Man is that
he has been trying to detach himself from nature. He sits
in the topmost tiers of polymer, glass, and steel, dangling
his pulsing legs, surveying at a distance the writhing life

¹⁷ The essay, originally in *Spy* magazine, is a delight and can be found reprinted in *The Best American Essays 1990*, where it follows Gould’s essay on baseball, 112-16. Elkin also has an essay in that volume, “At the Academy Awards,” written in the same style as “The Muses Are Heard” and also originally published in *Harper’s*. Deborah Brandt, *Involvement*, in discussing Stephen Jay Gould’s use of metadiscourse, or direct address to the reader, claims that it is “unusual for being so direct and extended” (60), but I have found, by reading several collections of essays, that it has become as usual as it is in conversation. We’re always bringing “the subtext into sudden and radical view,” as she puts it (59).

of the planet. In this scenario, Man comes on a stupendous lethal force, and the earth is pictured as something delicate, like rising bubbles at the surface of a country pond, or flights of fragile birds. (1)

But it is illusion to think that there is anything fragile about the life of the earth; surely this is the toughest membrane imaginable in the universe, opaque to probability, impermeable to death. We are the delicate part, transient and vulnerable as silia. Nor is it a new thing for man to invent an existence that he imagines to be above the rest of life; this has been his most consistent intellectual exertion down the millennia. As illusion, it has never worked out to his satisfaction in the past, any more than it does today. Man is embedded in nature. (2)

The biologic science of recent years has been making this a more urgent fact of life. The new, hard problem will be to cope with the dawning, intensifying realization of just how interlocked we are. The old, clung-to notions most of us have held about our special lordship are being deeply undermined. (3)

Item. A good case can be made for our nonexistence as entities. We are not made up, as we had always supposed, of successively enriched packets of our own parts. We are shared, rented, occupied. At the interior of our cells, driving them, providing the oxidative energy that sends us out for the improvement of each shining day, are the mitochondria, and in a strict sense they are not ours. They turn out to be little separate creatures, the colonial posterity of migrant prokaryocytes, probably primitive bacteria that swam into ancestral precursors of our eukaryotic cells and stayed there. Ever since, they have maintained themselves and their ways, replicating in

their own fashion, privately, with their own DNA and RNA quite different from ours. They are as much symbionts as the rhizobial bacteria in the roots of beans. Without them, we would not move a muscle, drum a finger, think a thought. (4)

Mitochondria are stable and responsible lodgers, and I choose to trust them. But what of the other little animals, similarly established in my cells, sorting and balancing me, clustering me together? My centrioles, basal bodies, and probably a good many other more obscure tiny beings at work inside my cells, each with its own special genome, are as foreign, and as essential, as aphids in anthills. My cells are no longer the pure line entities I was raised with; they are ecosystems more complex than Jamaica Bay. (5)

I like to think that they work in my interest, that each breath they draw for me, but perhaps it is they who walk through the local park in the early morning, sensing my senses, listening to my music, thinking my thoughts. (6)

I am consoled, somewhat, by the thought that the green plants are in the same fix. They could not be plants, or green, without their chloroplasts, which run the photosynthetic enterprise and generate oxygen for the rest of us. As it turns out, chloroplasts are also separate creatures with their own genomes, speaking their own language. (7)

We carry stores of DNA in our nuclei that may have come in, at one time or another, from the fusion of ancestral cells and the linking of ancestral organisms in symbiosis. Our genomes are catalogues of instructions from all kinds of sources in nature, filed for all kinds of contingencies. As for me, I am grateful for differentiation

and speciation, but I cannot feel as separate an entity as I did a few years ago, before I was told these things, nor, I should think, can anyone else. (8)

Item. The uniformity of the earth's life, more astonishing than its diversity, is accountable by the high probability that we derived, originally, from some single cell, fertilized in a bolt of lightning as the earth cooled. It is from the progeny of this parent cell that we take our looks; we still share genes around, and the resemblance of the enzymes of grasses to those of whales is a family resemblance. (9)

The viruses, instead of being single-minded agents of disease and death, now begin to look more like mobile genes. Evolution is still an infinitely long and tedious biologic game, with only the winners staying at the table, but the rules are beginning to look more flexible. We live in a dancing matrix of viruses; they dart, rather like bees, from organism to organism, from plant to insect to mammal to me and back again, and into the sea, tugging along pieces of this genome, strings of genes from that, transplanting grafts of DNA, passing around heredity as though at a great party. They may be a mechanism for keeping new, mutant kinds of DNA in the widest circulation among us. If this is true, the odd virus disease, on which we must focus so much of our attention in medicine, may be looked on as an accident, something dropped. (10)

Item. I have been trying to think of the earth as a kind of organism, but it is no go. I cannot think of it this way. It is too big, too complex, with too many working parts lacking visible connections. The other night, driving through a hilly, wooded part of southern New

England, I wondered about this. If not like an organism, what is it like, what is it *most* like? Then, satisfactorily for that moment, it came to me: it is *most* like a single cell. (11)

I hope that as you read you began to note the oral elements and so have anticipated what I will say. As I typed, and reread, I heard more than I had the first few times through the essay. This time Thomas's achievement reminded me of sections of *Talking Voices*, because despite using what we would automatically label a literary, as opposed to an oral, style, he uses the characteristics Tannen found in her analysis of normal conversation. Her claim, of course, is that people talk in a "literary" way--we naturally use repetition, rhythm, alliteration, assonance, and metaphor, in even the most ordinary of conversations. My claim is that today we naturally write orally; and I suppose both positions come down to the same thing in the end,¹⁸ rather the way Thomas's essay does--looking at "Modern Man," then at a further particularity, a cell, and then going even farther down...only at the end to reverse things and look from the whole, the earth itself. Whichever way he looks, from down below or up on top, Thomas comes to the same conclusion: *Synecdoche*, the part for the whole.

It may be strange to talk about social structures, political systems--that word "colonial" bothers me in paragraph four--local communities, the family unit, and, so, finally, individual identity, but his theme is ultimately no different than Elkin's or Ms. W's. Isn't he asking, for himself first, and then for all of us (or maybe it's the other way around, *synecdoche* again), Who do I be? What are we? Are we what we were raised to think we were? How can I make sense of what's happening to and in my world? Of course, we get none of this, and no help at all, in the title, which is as ambiguous and misleading as Garrett's or Elkin's: plural

¹⁸ In the "Afterword" to *Talking Voices*, Tannen says, "analysis of involvement strategies in conversation [repetition, prose rhythm, dialogue, imagery, turn-taking, negotiation], and how other genres (particularly literary discourse) take up and elaborate these strategies, seems to me a kind of work which needs doing" (197). My study is in part a response to her suggestion.

and singular together in a startling way. We're used to thinking of the lives of a cat, but how many lives can a cell have? As I recall from my biology courses, I was taught that I have many cells living in me, which is not quite what Thomas seems to mean in this title.

But I am willing to continue, though the first sentence doesn't seem to connect with the title. Thomas is providing platitudes, truisms, clichés--"the trouble with Modern Man is...." That's about as predictable an opening line as the last political argument down at the local diner. Redneck, reactionary talk. Anytime someone says, "The trouble with you is..." we know what to expect, a tirade of glittering generalities, unsubstantiated and insubstantial accusations about whatever the person dislikes. Of course, Thomas lets himself off the hook by enlisting us against them, because he isn't the one saying "the trouble..."; no, someone else has said it. "We are told," the we being he and us, or he and his original readers in *The New England Journal of Medicine*. His use of the first-person plural as the first word sets up a conversation, though in effect he is saying, "You know, the trouble with Modern man is that we are told the trouble with Modern Man is....And don't you agree?" He's asking us to agree with something we find difficult, because he's putting the ecological shoe on the other foot. We and his original readers, anyone, in fact, likely to pick up a book with the subtitle "notes of a biology watcher," is also likely to believe that Modern Man is indeed "a stupendous lethal force" and that the earth is "something delicate." Upon closer scrutiny, Thomas does sound like that reactionary redneck we'd rather not get into a political debate with. He fails to alienate us, though, because he sounds too much like a poet--"pulsing legs," "writhing life," "rising bubbles."

So he begins, then, with antithesis, for really we've got the whole thing backwards. We, Modern Man, are the fragile creature, always hovering on the edge of death and extinction, whereas the earth "is the toughest membrane imaginable in the universe," though I've never thought about the earth as a membrane. But anyway, I thought he was writing about cells, though they do have membranes, as I recall. Doesn't food (or whatever) pass through the membranes? Thomas is asking a great deal of his readers and explaining very few

connections, as uncommunicative in this respect as Mr. F. And I know much more about baseball than biology. Immediately I notice an incongruity between Thomas's seemingly traditional expository prose and his failure to fill in the context, for me, at least. My impression grows stronger as I find that he seldom defines anything; "prokaryocytes" and "eukaryotic cells" sit side by side with "primitive bacteria" and "the improvement of each shining day." I can see that the first two words are somehow related and that "pro" and "eu" are prefixes, "pro" meaning before but "eu" I don't know. Yet even to figure out that much I need to come from a particular category of people, and I only know what mitochondria are because I've read *A Wind in the Door*, by Madeleine L'Engle. Thomas is presuming that his readers are as conversant with the biological details as are his colleagues at the Cancer Institute. He doesn't fill in the background; he doesn't write "decontextualized" prose. Such lack of context may be the problem Thomas talks about in "The Scrambler in the Mind." Something happens, he says, when he tries to read criticism of poetry: "It is not like blanking out or losing interest or drifting off, not at all. My mind is, if anything, more alert, grasping avidly at every phrase, but then the switch is thrown and what comes in is transformed into an unfathomable code."¹⁹ The scrambler in his brain. But maybe writers of criticism fail to fill in all the contexts, like Thomas himself in "The Lives of a Cell."

For the first four paragraphs, Thomas is speaking of "we," he and his readers who have a certain level of education and interest; since it is "we" and not "they," then the assumption of his pronoun is that he and his readers are alike. In commenting on "The Medusa and the Snail," Jay Robinson says that "the role Thomas assigns us is a flattering one. We are his colleagues, not his pupils; we are assumed to be as able as he is in identifying significant observations and in drawing important conclusions."²⁰ Why, then, does Thomas abruptly shift from

¹⁹ *The Medusa and the Snail* (New York: Bantam, 1979) 100.

²⁰ From the chapter "Literacy in Society: Readers and Writers in the Worlds of Discourse" in *Conversations on the Written Word: Essays on Language and Literacy* (Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1990) 147. Here Robinson explores the idea of implied reader and implied writer within the decontextualized space of an essay; so he approaches

“we” to “I” in paragraph five? Throughout the next three paragraphs we read nothing but “I,” “me,” and “my.” Don’t my cells work in my interest just as much as his cells work in his? Why not “our cells work in our interest”? Then in paragraph eight he shifts back to “we” and “our,” only toward the end of it to return to speaking for himself. Clearly, Thomas shifts because he wants us to hear a conversation among several people, not simply the lone voice of Writer. The “we” in the first paragraph is not the same as the last “we” of the essay, the we who “must focus so much of our attention in medicine” on viruses. I will take up the question of how we arrive at viruses from the earth as a membrane impermeable to death shortly when I consider his oral discourse structure.

First, though, I want to consider the words I do understand, which keep me part of the conversation. Those are his clichés, a surprising element of Thomas’s essay. They aren’t as blatant as Elkin’s, but they serve to connect with oral discourse and to demystify science for the non-scientist readers. This is perfectly reasonable considering the broad audience his books have reached, but when Thomas first wrote “Lives of a Cell,” he had no idea that eventually it would be the first and title essay in an award-winning book. His original audience would not have needed clichés to make it comfortable with the author or the subject, as his audience wouldn’t have needed definitions of prokaryocytes or genomes (nor did he rewrite the essays for a broader audience). Yet, his clichés and idioms serve to give the essay a colloquial, conversational tone, despite the relative formality of his punctuation and syntax; we find no fragments or run-ons here (though we also don’t find many hypotactic constructions). From a man who has written fondly of the major stops in written English (see “Notes on Punctuation” in *The Medusa and the Snail*), we would expect him to punctuate carefully within the conventions, as he does.

Thomas’s first sentence is, of course, a thematic cliché, as I said, almost guaranteed to make readers groan and say, “Oh, here we go again,” until we reach “detach himself from nature,” which probably wasn’t the kind of trouble we had been expecting to hear about. In paragraph three he uses “fact of life” and “dawning...realization,” and “old...notions,” but in each case he twists it by

Thomas from quite a different perspective than I do.

adding an unexpected modifier: “more urgent,” “intensifying,” and “clung-to.” In the first two cases, the modifiers aren’t, strictly, logical. How can a fact of life be “more urgent,” or a dawning realization also be “intensifying?” Although these modifiers remove the clichés from the category of banality, they also make them sound like the impromptu intensifiers of speech, rather than the deliberation of writing. And the third modifier, “clung-to,” is quite colloquial, turning the past tense form of a verb into an adjective. He is improvising from given formulas in much the same way that Albert Lord says Yugoslavian singers improvise their performances using the standard themes and epithets.²¹

In paragraph four Thomas tells us that “a good case can be made...,” a standard opening line for the presentation of an argument. But Thomas has no argument to make, despite his disguise. However, we are inferring that he is the agent behind the passive construction, which is unusual in an essay written almost entirely in the active voice and in the first person. The passive construction is his escape route, if we refuse to accept the view that we don’t exist as entities. Is this his thesis? Is he trying to prove that human beings don’t exist as entities, or is it something more abstract--a rhetorical look at complexity, diversity, and simplicity in man and nature? To refer again to the epigraph of chapter two, he is meditating, not attempting to make a case for anything. By that cliché he disavows his responsibility (which may be, after all, his point?) for whatever strikes us as illogical and disorganized.

Thomas explains that mitochondria “send...us out for the improvement of each shining day,” a cliché but also an unusual way to think about what goes on inside us without our awareness of it. Then in that same paragraph we have “strict sense” and “move a muscle, drum a finger, think a thought,” the final cliché one that becomes a formula repeated throughout the remainder of the essay. And, as he says, it is “in my interest” that mitochondria work so responsibly. At the beginning of paragraph seven Thomas tells us that green plants are “in the same fix” and “as it turns out,” a construction he repeats in the following paragraph in “as for me.” “As it turns out” is also a narrator’s formula

²¹ See Albert B. Lord, *The Singer of Tales* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1964).

for summing up, an explanation that he's going to make a long story short. Several of these clichés are also part of his metadiscursive apparatus; Thomas constantly comments on his comments. He lets us know, colleague to colleague over coffee, how he feels about the whole discussion.

Moving from mitochondria and green plants to the uniformity of the earth, we learn "that we take our looks" "from the progeny of this parent cell." He startles us with his comparison of grasses and whales, the result of "shar[ing] genes around," the preposition making the expression spoken, and so leading to "a family resemblance." Paragraph ten proceeds via a series of metaphors that have also become clichés--gambling, dancing, partying--and they take him to his final thought. "But it is no go," he tells us, his attempt to think "of the earth as a kind of organism," which seems to erase what he's spent ten paragraphs trying to say. He snatches his essay from the edge of extinction in the final line, with his "I've-got-it" cliché: "then," he says, "it came to me." And he concludes by returning us to the beginning, a near tautology.

Implicit in what I've been saying about his use of clichés is that he has structured his essay as brief meditations, or topics, and that he shifts from one to the next by means of his clichés and metadiscourse. They hold his essay together. His repetition provides the cohesive tie, just as repetition does in conversation, where we repeat a phrase or idea or category of statement (here cliché, though Thomas also has other kinds of repetition) as a way to introduce ourselves into the conversation, a way to say, "Now it's my turn to say something about...."

I want to look specifically at "think a thought," the cliché that becomes, as I said, a formula or a refrain. In a sense, the idiom summarizes what Thomas is trying to do--how he thinks a thought, though he doesn't do it, apparently, so much as his mitochondria. The thoughts he's thinking, then, may be his mitochondria's thoughts, though he does make a conscious decision: "I choose to trust them," he tells us. Which is fine for them; but, he asks, what about all the rest of the creatures wandering around inside me? Can I trust them? And here comes the refrain. "I like to think..." he says, another way of repeating "I choose to trust them." Then, again, "thinking my thoughts," which leads him to

another topic, green plants, “the thought” of which consoles him that he may not be alone in being occupied territory. This idea forms a topical, cohesive tie with his discussion of “colonial posterity” a few paragraphs back; it certainly isn’t a logical one. Not many of us would think that the biology of human beings somehow relates to green plants. This is associative, oral thinking--because the square block is red it reminds us of tomatoes, and since they’re sort of round we think of the circus, because of the balloons, of course, and the round noses of clowns, who also wear red paint on their faces. Which takes us back to the beginning. Or as Winterowd says about the title essay in *Late Night Thoughts on Listening to Mahler’s Ninth Symphony*, “only the unsayable, the lyric, makes sense; the discursive, the expository, is madness.”²²

Thomas’s discussion of green plants and human DNA remind him, once more, that he “cannot feel”--another variation of “think”--like a separate entity. Here he refers us three paragraphs back, where he told us that his cells “are no longer the pure line entities I was raised with” (another metaphoric colloquialism). If he can’t feel that way, nor should anyone else. At least, he can’t “think” so. His change of mind, the result of a story someone told him, then moves to further consideration of uniformity, for when everyone thinks along the same lines we have uniformity. The real connection, though, is not with what he’s just said but with what he said quite a bit earlier. He returns to “the colonial posterity of migrant prokaryocytes, probably primitive bacteria that swam into ancestral precursors of our eukaryotic cells and stayed there” (note the alliteration, the phonological repetition, a frequent device). These prokaryocytes, he now tells us, were one cell at the start, which “a bolt of lightning” caused to reproduce and migrate. We’re merely occupied territory. This bolt-of-lightning idea is rather the way Thomas seems to say his thoughts come to him, as he implies in the last sentence. How else to account for his sudden introduction of viruses as the concluding section of this particular meditation?

²² W. Ross Winterowd, “Rediscovering the Essay,” *Journal of Advanced Composition* 8.1-2 (1988): 151. Gregory Bateson in *Steps To an Ecology of Mind: Collected Essays in Anthropology, Psychiatry, Evolution, and Epistemology* (San Francisco: Chandler, 1972) uses a similar associative structure for his “Metalogues.”

Nevertheless, we are still pursuing Thomas's "thinking" refrain, which he picks up again for his last paragraph, the shortest meditation, or "item," as he calls it, in an attempt to give some semblance of structure to an otherwise unstructured essay, using print conventions for what we now see is quite oral. His "item" is a paralinguistic gesture, the raised and pointed index finger. So in his final item, he says "I have been trying to think of the earth as a kind of organism, but it is no go." Why has he been trying to do this? What has it got to do with viruses and medical research? Somehow all this talk about lives, cells, multiplicity, and uniformity leads him to define earth itself--the place he began. Or perhaps he is really trying to define the nature of "system" itself, as he does in "The Medusa and the Snail" or in "The Scrambler in the Mind." From various perspectives, Thomas always seems to be trying to define that abstract concept, whether it is the system of language, the system of societies, the system of insect colonies, or here, the system of systems--the earth itself. Such an attempt cannot proceed by analysis, logic, or linearity. As he says, the whole thing "is too big, too complex, with too many working parts lacking *visible connections*," a theme he also considers in "The Medusa and the Snail"; it serves as commentary on his own discourse. The working parts are connected, regardless of our ability to see the connections.

To make sure we get the point, Thomas repeats, in a conversational turn-taking, "I cannot think of it this way," an unnecessary redundancy, since he's just said "it is no go." Redundancies, however, serve a social, relational function, as do such phrases as "I like to think that...", "I am consoled, somewhat, by the thought that...", "As for me...I cannot feel as...." Yet these are, as Shaughnessy notes, empty fillers, a common problem for students.²³ They function also as "filled" silences or pauses. We could easily delete them, and so tighten the sentences. For instance, the first sentence in paragraph six might read, "My mitochondria make it possible for me to enjoy my morning walk, the smell of sweet balm, Mahler, and the latest novel I read." That saves many words, as it also points up that the paragraph is only one sentence. Or I could rewrite the first sentence in the next paragraph: "Our situation is analogous to green plants,

²³ Shaughnessy *Errors* 86.

which could not be plants, or green, without....” I could rework every sentence that contains “filler” metadiscourse, with the rhetorical effect to silence Thomas’s voice, to cut off the conversation, to remove the storytelling quality, and to make “The Lives of a Cell” much more conventionally expository--and much less oral. Shaughnessy correctly diagnoses the origin of all the “I thinks” and “I feels” in her examples as coming from students’ oral discourse; she thinks such phrases serve no purpose, and I think they do serve a purpose.

So I wouldn’t remove all the redundant sentences in Thomas, for I want to hear what he’s “wondered about,” another word for thinking (or at least in the same semantic field); I am interested in his descriptions of the earth. Nor would I remove or clarify his demonstrative pronoun in the first sentence of paragraph three. Usually his demonstratives clearly refer to the immediately preceding noun or noun phrase, but here “this” seems to refer to all that he has previously said, as well as anticipating all that he will say: “The biological science of recent years has been making this a more urgent fact of life.” (Elkin frequently uses the demonstrative deictic elliptically, as well, as in paragraph forty-one, “This is it, all right. By *God*, it is!” There is some ambiguity about “this” and “it.”) Thomas’s urgent fact of life is not simply that we are embedded in nature but that a single cell isn’t really single; the whole issue of individuality and independence is up for grabs.

The idea that the earth is “*most* like a single cell,” is so startling that it could only have come from a bolt of lightning, only from a topical, not a logical movement. And it seems so oxymoronic that something so complex should suddenly be reduced to a single cell, though he has shown how un-single a cell is. We’re caught up in contradictions and circuitous pathways, so long as we read this from the perspective of expository prose, which is the disguise. Once we ignore the disguise--as Thomas asks us to ignore the idea that something visibly unconnected really is unconnected--and enter his essay as we would a conversation, then the contradictions no longer trouble us. We’re fumbling our way toward an understanding of “man embedded in nature,” or the other way round, which takes collective discussion and thinking. We’re fumbling together,

this society he and I and you are part of, a community after all and on every level. His oral style reflects the theme of all his essays--this "dawning, intensifying realization of just how interlocked we are"--even if, as he says, we can't see the connections. His point is as true for conversations conducted over space and time, paradoxically through print, as it is for medusas, snails, or the lives of a cell. It's a point that students learn when they write and talk together.

"The Creation Myths of Cooperstown"

Stephen Jay Gould has one subject, as he himself admits--evolution. The subject concerns identity at its most fundamental level, for evolution asks questions about who we human beings are and where we came from, as it asks these questions about everything on earth. We have moved from Garret, who talks about his childhood identity, to Elkin, who questions his aging identity, and so to Thomas and now Gould, both of whom consider sociological and scientific identity and their interaction with individual identity. Yet with Gould we have not really moved that far from Mr. F, who also uses baseball to talk about social and individual identity.

Gould's readers know that his theme is evolution; we also know that we're going to come to evolution by very odd, unmappable routes, rather like evolution itself. He warns us to expect the unexpected. "The Creation Myths of Cooperstown" is no exception. Not only was it chosen as one of the twenty best essays for 1989, but Gould included it in his new book, *Bully for Brontosaurus: Reflections in Natural History*, part one, called "History in Evolution," where it is the third of four chapters. The other titles are "George Canning's Left Buttock and the Origin of Species," "Grimm's Greatest Tale," and "The Panda's Thumb of Technology," any one of which could have served equally well as an example of oral discourse. The titles are deceptive, of course, because they only seem to indicate what they are about. For instance, the Panda's Thumb is really about typewriters and QWERTY--or is it how QWERTY is like all of history, a rather sweeping assertion but something to think about. It begins with the Old Testament story of Jephthah and his daughter.

The first essay is particularly interesting from the perspective of oral discourse because of Gould's linear, hierarchical disguise. He begins, "I know the connection between Charles Darwin and Abraham Lincoln...." This answers a question I have trouble imagining anyone but the makers of Trivial Pursuit or Double Jeopardy asking. After giving us the answer--they were born on the same day and year, which reminds him that John Adams and Thomas Jefferson died in the same year, conveniently fifty years after the United States became a nation--he then asks, "But what is the connection between Charles Darwin and Andrew Jackson?" And we want to know why there should *be* one--why not ask, What is the connection between Charles Darwin and Robert E. Lee or Ulysses S. Grant? Gould has already written two paragraphs, and writes quite a few more, before we ever hear a word about George Canning or his left buttock. We don't find a thesis, not even a phrase that tells us what the essay is about or why we should bother to read it.

Gould admits, "This more difficult question [the demonstrative is somewhat ambiguous for we're not sure which question he's referring to; he asks two] requires a long string of connections more worthy of Rube Goldberg than of logical necessity. But let's have a try, in nine easy steps." The nine steps are anything but easy and certainly unlinear. They are as associative as anything we have seen thus far. Or, as he says at the end of "Grimm's Greatest Tale," "the path is tortuous and hard to trace..."; the path he's referring to here is "inferred pathways of change." Gould knows that his "long string of connections" doesn't fit conventional exposition; nor does his colloquialism, "let's have a try."²⁴ What he claims for this essay I would claim for most of the essays in his book. The contraction for us in let's implies any readers. He wants us to walk along the path to see what turns up.

²⁴ We don't, of course, need to wait for the essays themselves to figure this out, for he tells us right away in the "Prologue" what to expect: "I also record, as I must, our current distresses and failures...(approached, as is my wont, not tendentiously, abstractly, and head-on, but through byways that sneak up on generality...)" (12). The Prologue is important, because in it he defends the kind of writing he does--"pop" writing, which I have been arguing is oral writing.

Winterowd, however, in analyzing “Natural Selection and the Human Brain: Darwin vs. Wallace” from *The Panda’s Thumb*, calls it an example of syllogistic argumentation and “engages only the specialized reader, not the common reader,” despite its publication by a trade house for a general market. And despite Gould’s own assertion that he writes for “Americans eager for intellectual stimulation without patronization.”²⁵ Winterowd adds that it “contrasts starkly” with essays by Joan Didion, Lewis Thomas, and Loren Eiseley; we may come to doubt his conclusion.

Gould begins “Natural Selection” with a discussion of Chartres Cathedral and the stained glass windows depicting the four great Old Testament prophets. Winterowd appears to rationalize this seeming irrelevancy to the stated topic by saying that “Gould needed to establish his *ethical* argument by setting a tone and taking a stance.” I would read the introduction differently. However, Winterowd may be right that Gould is writing conventional, expository prose in this essay, “the prevailing dogma,” according to Winterowd, being “a clear-cut topic,”²⁶ but this is not generally true of the essays in *Bully*, a collection that Gould himself says “is the best of the five. I think that I have become a better writer by monthly practice.” The monthly practice has come by writing a column, “This View of Life,” for the last eighteen years in *Natural History*, a slick magazine for the general, educated reader interested in science. Its four-color photography and advertising are only two of the contextual facts to note that make it closer to *Harper’s* than to *The New England Journal of Medicine* or any other academic publication. Gould comments on his skill as a writer to defend himself “against a potential charge of redundancy.” If he has become a better writer, it is (paradoxically) in part by becoming more oral, a fact Gould acknowledges implicitly when he says of his favorite essay in the collection, Essay 21, that it “best illustrates my favorite method of beginning with something small and curious and then working outward and onward by a network of lateral connections.”²⁷

²⁵ “Prologue,” *Bully* 11.

²⁶ Winterowd, “Rediscovering” 149 and 147.

²⁷ “Prologue,” *Bully* 13 and 15.

With that introduction, here is an excerpt from his thirty-two paragraph essay, significant not merely as the final example I will use of orality in the modern essay but also significant because thematically it considers the larger issues of which this study is merely an aspect: literacy, textuality, community, interpretation--a modern version of the subjects Stock explores so compellingly in his study of the medieval understanding of these issues. We could read "Cooperstown" as the age-old argument of orality versus literacy, speaking versus writing, or folktale versus fact. In the process Gould has much to say about the social construction of history and knowledge.

You may either look upon the bright side and say that hope springs eternal or, taking the cynic's part, you may mark P. T. Barnum as an astute psychologist for his proclamation that suckers are born every minute. The end result is the same. You can, Honest Abe notwithstanding, fool most of the people all of the time. How else to explain the long and continuing compendium of hoaxes--from the medieval shroud of Turin to Edwardian Piltdown Man to an ultramodern array of flying saucers and astral powers--eagerly embraced for their consonance with our hopes or their resonance with our fears. (1)

Some hoaxes make a sufficient mark upon history that their products acquire the very status initially claimed by fakery--legitimacy (although an object of human or folkloric, rather than natural, history; I once held the bones of Piltdown Man and felt that I was handling an important item of Western culture). (2)

The Cardiff Giant, the best American entry for the title of paleontological hoax turned into cultural history, now lives on display in a shed behind a barn at the Farmer's Museum in Cooperstown, New York. This gypsum man,

more than ten feet tall, was “discovered” by workmen digging a well on a farm near Cardiff, New York, in October 1869. Eagerly embraced by a gullible public, and ardently displayed by its creators at fifty cents a pop, the Cardiff Giant caused quite a brouhaha around Syracuse, and then nationally, for the few months of its active life between exhumation and exposure. (3)

The Cardiff Giant was the brainchild of George Hull, a cigar manufacturer (and general rogue) from Binghamton, New York. He quarried a large block of gypsum from Fort Dodge, Iowa, and shipped it to Chicago, where two marble cutters fashioned the rough likenes of a naked man. Hull made some crude and minimal attempts to give his statue an aged appearance. He chipped off the carved hair and beard because experts told him that such items would not petrify. He drove darning needles into a wooden block and hammered the statue, hoping to stimulate skin pores. Finally, he dumped a gallon of sulfuric acid all over his creation to simulate extended erosion. Hull then shipped his giant in a large box back to Cardiff.... (4)

Why, then, was the Cardiff Giant so popular, inspiring a wave of interest and discussion as high as any tide in the affairs of men during its short time in the sun? If the fraud had been well executed, we might attribute this great concern to the dexterity of the hoaxers (just as we grant grudging attention to a few of the most accomplished art fakers for their skills as copyists). But since the Cardiff Giant was so crudely done, we can only attribute its fame to the deep issue, the raw nerve, touched by the subject of its fakery--human origins. Link

an absurd concoction to a noble and mysterious subject and you may prevail, at least for a while. My opening reference to P. T. Barnum was not meant sarcastically; he was one of the great practical psychologists of the nineteenth century--and his motto applies with special force to the Cardiff Giant: "No humbug is great without truth at bottom." (Barnum made a copy of the Cardiff Giant and exhibited it in New York City. His mastery of hype and publicity assured that his model far outdrew the "real" fake when the original went on display at a rival establishment in the same city.) (8)

For some reason (to be explored, but not resolved in this essay), we are powerfully drawn to the subject of beginnings. We yearn to know about origins, and we readily construct myths when we do not have data (or we suppress data in favor of legend when a truth strikes us as too commonplace). The hankering after an origin myth has always been especially strong for the closest subject of all--the human race. But we extend the same psychic need to our accomplishments and institutions--and we have origin myths and stories for the beginning of hunting, of language, of art, of kindness, of war, of boxing, bow ties, and brassiers. Most of us know that the Great Seal of the United States pictures an eagle holding a ribbon reading *e pluribus unum*. Fewer would recognize the motto on the other side (check it out on the back of a dollar bill): *annuit coeptis*--"he smiles on our beginnings." (9)

Cooperstown may house the Cardiff Giant, but the fame of this small village in central New York does not rest upon its celebrated namesake, author James Fenimore, or its lovely Lake Otsego or the Farmer's Museum.

Cooperstown is “on the map” by virtue of a different origin myth--one more parochial but no less powerful for many Americans than the tales of human beginning that gave life to the Cardiff Giant. Cooperstown is the sacred founding place in the official myth about the origin of baseball. (10)

Origin myths, since they are so powerful, can engender enormous practical problems. Abner Doubleday, as we shall soon see, most emphatically did not invent baseball at Cooperstown in 1839 as the official tale proclaims; in fact, no one invented baseball at any moment or in any spot. Nonetheless, this creation myth made Cooperstown the official home of baseball, and the Hall of Fame, with its associated museum and library set its roots in this small village, inconveniently located near nothing in the way of airports or accommodations. We all revel in bucolic imagery on the field of dreams, but what a hassle when tens of thousands line the roads, restaurants, and Port-a-potties during the annual Hall of Fame weekend, when new members are enshrined and two major league teams arrive to play an exhibition game at Abner Doubleday Field, a sweet little 10,000-seater in the middle of town. Put your compass point at Cooperstown, make your radius at Albany--and you'd better reserve a year in advance if you want any accommodation within the enormous resulting circle... (11)

The silliest and most tendentious of baseball writing tries to wrest profundity from the spectacle of grown men hitting a ball with a stick by suggesting linkages between the sport and deep issues of morality, parenthood, history, lost innocence, gentleness, and so on, seemingly *ad*

infinitum. (The effort reeks of silliness because baseball is profound all by itself and needs no excuses; people who don't know this are not fans and are therefore unreachable anyway.) When people ask me how baseball imitates life, I can only respond with what the more genteel newspapers used to call a "barnyard epithet," but now, with growing bravery, usually render as "bullbleep." Nonetheless, baseball is a major item of our culture, and the sport does have a long and interesting history. Any item or institution with these two properties must generate a set of myths and stories (perhaps even some truths) about beginnings. And the subject of beginnings is the bread and butter of these essays on evolution in the broadest sense. I shall make no woolly analogies between baseball and life; this is an essay on the origins of baseball, with some musings on why beginnings of all sorts hold such fascination for us.... (13)

And here I will stop, reluctantly, for although we are now several pages into the essay, Gould is just getting around to the subject. After paragraph ten, I always expect to hear an imitation of Garrison Keillor say "Well, I knew I'd get around to it somehow," as he wanders his way into what he really wanted to talk about. That's Gould's approach exactly. In fact, he spends a good bit of time saying he isn't going to do what he really does. The last sentence of the excerpt is as good an example of dwelling on a subject you claim to be ignoring, or *occupatio*, as we are likely to find from a modern essayist. For the point is that Gould does make all kinds of analogies between baseball and life, society, class, culture, science--and of course he's "suggesting linkages between the sport and deep issues of morality...history..." and so on. Why else would he include "Cooperstown" in a section on "History in Evolution?"--a highly ambiguous part title. Does he really mean history *as* evolution? or that history is in an

evolutionary process? or that what we think of as history is nothing more or less than evolution, so that “new” history or “rewriting” history is a redundancy? It’s as hard to decide answers to these questions as it is to decide what is his “clear-cut topic,” which we supposedly need for writing to make sense. It seems much easier to decide on a topic with Garret and Elkin than with Thomas or Gould, even though Thomas and Gould seem much more conventionally expository than do the other two. I might reduce Gould’s topic to a statement like the following (paraphrasing the final paragraph of the essay): “I don’t approve of people who accept a creation story over the facts. In the end we don’t have the truth and we don’t have thought or wonder.” But this sort of reduction is impossible, because this isn’t what the essay is really about. He is not abstractable.

Gould is, to use his own metaphor, evolutionary. I call it a metaphor because he uses evolution in so many different contexts that he can’t always mean it in its strict, scientific sense (or maybe such a definition doesn’t exist). Gould evolves his essay by wandering here and there, picking up bits of this and bits of that, spreading them out on a table, and asking, “Well, now, what do all these bits have in common?” To read a Gould essay is rather like visiting a Renaissance wonder cabinet, where all sorts of cultural artifacts lived side by side with no attempt on the part of the collector to categorize or connect each one. They shared a basic characteristic, strangeness. Gould never really categorizes all the bits he collects in his essays, either--doesn’t really answer my imaginary question other than to spread his collection before me and then turn to ask, “Well, what do you think this jumble means? I do notice one thing--they all seem fake.” Or he might say, “they all seem to have evolved from one thing to another.” Yes, all his bits are strange, and certainly to be wondered at. He wants us to wonder together; nothing in his discourse tells me that he’s writing for a “specialized” reader, unless in this particular essay we need to be as knowledgeable about baseball as is Mr. F.

Consider the first sentence (to use the imperative, which Gould himself uses in paragraph eight: “Link an absurd...). “You may either...or you may”--not “we

may” or “I may.” He is directly addressing me (or us), an opening conversational gambit, but with a good bit left out. For the construction should rightly refer to something he’s already said, but here he’s referring to everything he intends to say, all the way to his last paragraph, mostly a series of rhetorical questions, the answers to which, in effect, come in this first paragraph--all reminiscent of Thomas. “Well, look at it this way,” he says, except that we don’t know what it is, the only clue coming from the title.

It is interesting that Gould begins by so directly addressing the reader as “you,” for throughout the rest of the essay he usually uses “we” when he wants to refer to his readers, that is the “we” of the average American for whom he is speaking and with whom his pronoun indicates he is identifying. Paragraph nine provides a good example of this. “We are powerfully drawn...” and “we yearn to know.” I can accept that he honestly includes himself as part of this we; I suspect that his yearning to know is a reason why he became a scientist, a reflection of his identity. He probably yearns much more than most of us to know the origins of human beings. His “we,” then, might more exactly be “I,” except that if he had used “I,” it would have caused problems almost immediately. “We readily construct myths when we do not have data (or we suppress data in favor of legend when a truth strikes us as too commonplace).” Here he can’t intend to include himself. His stance in the essay, from his opening “you,” indicates that he, not the rest of us schmucks (he is from New York, after all, and he does refer to his New York accent in the Prologue), think this way and he is here to set us straight by talking about what we understand--baseball. He, Stephen Jay Gould, scientist, evolutionist, does not construct myths or suppress data; yet he continues to use “we” throughout the paragraph as if to include himself. When he really means himself, he uses “I,” as we shall see when we consider his metadiscourse.

But to return to the first paragraph and the way Gould suggests we look at whatever this essay concerns. We find a striking series of clichés--“the bright side,” “hope springs eternal,” “suckers are born every minute,” “Honest Abe,” and “fool most of the people all of the time” (a paraphrase)--all of which reflect a national, a cultural, identity. Americans look on the bright side (or we’re

supposed to, just as the British keep a stiff upper lip). We fervently believe that hope springs eternal. But we are also cynics and know that suckers are born every minute, no matter what Honest Abe--the phrase itself a cliché of American historical mystique--says. Finally Gould gets to the subject--hoaxes--with a few suggestions of prime hoaxes and prime suckers, and we may be among them. Because this could antagonize someone, he clearly puts himself in the camp of suckers, though reformed, by telling us that he felt some awe about the bones of the Piltdown Man. However, he is ambiguous since we have to decide whether his feeling was the result of believing or the fact that our society is filled with so many fools and dupes. Our decision influences our response to him. Is he superior or supercilious, or is he one of us, a sometimes gullible observer of human nature? His clichés and his choice of opening pronoun tell us one thing, his formal syntax tells us another. Throughout the essay we find these mixed signals, a blend of written and oral discourse, more striking than in Garrett, Elkin, or Thomas.

For example, Gould often undercuts his formal syntax by his word choice, as in this sentence from paragraph three: "Eagerly embraced by a gullible public, and ardently displayed...at fifty cents a pop, the Cardiff Giant caused quite a brouhaha...between exhumation and exposure." Yet the sentence also includes quite a bit of repetition, as well as an informal, colloquial vocabulary that inverts the normal speech pattern (where we would put the modifier last). Or we might say, "The Cardiff Giant was eagerly embraced... and ardently displayed..., and it caused quite a...", which is probably the way Elkin would have said it, or Mr. F. The repetition--"eagerly embraced" to "exhumation and exposure"--provides a nice phonological frame for the sentence. Gould also includes some semantic redundancies. Doesn't the word "embraced" embrace within it the idea of "eagerly?" Does Gould really need the word "quite" in "caused quite a brouhaha?" It seems that brouhaha would have been quite enough without it. His desire for alliteration leads him to his semantic redundancies.

Gould is interested in how his words sound, even though he probably doesn't assume that we'll read his essay aloud. Yet, as I mentioned, in my Prologue,

Gould comments directly on how we should hear a particular sentence, saying, "Read this sentence with my New York accent as a derisive statement about our false sense of might...." We need to keep the comment in mind as we read his essays, even in looking for phonological repetition, particularly with vowels. (The comment also assumes that every reader knows how New Yorkers sound, and someone who knows that knows they don't all sound the same.) We find a repetition of both consonants and vowels in this sentence from paragraph one: "the long and continuing compendium of hoaxes--from the medieval shroud of Turin to Edwardian Piltdown Man to an ultramodern array...and astral...." Again, do we need the word "continuing" or the word "medieval" to modify a relic that his readers know is far from modern? They seem as redundant as the words noted in the previous paragraph. Throughout "Cooperstown" Gould follows this pattern; it might not be too great an exaggeration to say that we can find examples in nearly every sentence, where certain redundancies seem included simply for their sound effects.

The tone Gould sets at the beginning with his clichés, his colloquialisms, and his repetition continues, often juxtaposed with highly formal and learned expressions, quite in keeping with Thomas Nashe, as we shall see. This, too, starts in the first paragraph where, after Gould's collection of clichés, he concludes, "eagerly embraced for their consonance with our hopes or their resonance with our fears"--alliterative, parallel, learned, somewhat redundant (though he attempts *antithesis*), and an abbreviated *homoiooteleuton*, which repeats words with the same endings (not easy to achieve in a language largely lacking case endings). So Gould talks about "the brainchild of George Hull" and "Cardiff Giant fever" that "swept the land." What else do fevers do? "Debate raged in newspapers." Of course. How else do we conduct debates in this country but by raging? Then, in that same paragraph (six), Gould says that Hull "was ready to recant...", a lovely and fitting choice in an essay on creation myths, but still not the vocabulary of brainchilds and sweeping fevers, or of what follows: "Hull was ready to recant, but held his tongue a while longer." Gould, however, does not, asking "Why, then was the Cardiff Giant so popular, inspiring a wave of interest and discussion as high any any tide in the affairs of men during its short time in

the sun?” Because it touched “the raw nerve,” a redundancy with “deep issue,” as well as being a cliché. These are enough. A thorough catalogue of his, or of Elkin’s, Garrett’s, or Thomas’s, clichés could easily substitute for the list of “Clichés to Avoid,” which modern rhetoric handbooks always include. A writing teacher would have a heyday--or is it a field day--writing “trite,” next to every sentence. It is possible to argue that Gould, unlike students, redeems his clichés by embedding them in unusual contexts, and this is true. However, a student cannot learn to play with clichés as Gould does if she is told “Never use clichés.” A student cannot learn to duplicate her voice on paper if she is never allowed to write the way she talks, as Gould writes the way he talks. It is analogous to telling a child she cannot talk until she knows the difference between strong and weak verbs. How can she learn except by trying them out? Trite is the stuff of everyday conversation, one way we reflect our cultural solidarity with each other. Clichés and colloquialisms are akin to the proverbs of primary orality. They are the hardest idioms to learn in a foreign language. We know a native by her intents and purposes, the acid test and the bottom line.

We tend to overlook the clichés in Gould for several reasons. First, his reputation. We don’t expect to find what we label lazy writing among students in the work of a well-known and respected scientist, even when he is writing for a popular audience. Second, he is clever in the way he uses his clichés, as I said. Because his ideas are anything but predictable and trite, we skim right over what would bother us in yet another essay on “My New Roommate.” To connect Cooperstown and all that it stands for in the American psyche with fraud, hoax, or evolution keeps us reading despite such expressions as “the subject of beginnings is the bread and butter of these essays in the broadest sense,” whatever “broadest sense” means, though he seems to use it to excuse any bizarre connections his mind might make. Third, he occasionally calls attention to his clichés, as here: “Cooperstown is ‘on the map’ by virtue of a different origin myth.” The quotation marks around the cliché serve as a paralinguistic gesture, the tone of voice that says “I know I’ve just used a cliché. Isn’t it awful? But I know you won’t hold it against me.” It’s a way of denying all the other times

he's used clichés. Finally, we overlook the clichés in Gould because they *are* clichés, so common, so much a part of the way we talk, that unless we're reading for them, we don't notice. Only when we begin to read Gould the way we normally read students do they impress us. On the other hand, only when we begin to read students the way we normally read Gould do their achievements impress us. We begin to glimpse the connections they are making among the various, sometimes contradictory, parts of their world. A significant way is through their use of ritualized expressions, just as it is with Gould.

Gould shares with Garrett, Elkin, and Thomas a copiousness of colloquialisms. He also shares a fondness for another aspect of oral discourse: metadiscourse, the direct or sometimes parenthetical comments to the reader. It is a way of commenting on his own comments. Nearly every paragraph in "Cooperstown" contains at least one parenthetical comment to the reader. That is a restrained use of this oral technique, for in many of his essays nearly every other sentence is commentary on his commentary, which can irritate some readers, as the reviewer for *The New York Times* pointed out. A good example comes in "The Panda's Thumb of Technology." I have underlined the phrases I want you to particularly notice:

This odd reversal, from frank acknowledgment to unreasonable acceptance, reflects one of the greatest biases ("hopes" I like to call them) that human thought imposes upon a world indifferent to our suffering. Humans are pattern-seeking animals. We must find cause and meaning in all events (quite apart from the probable reality that the universe doesn't care much about us and often operates in a random manner). I call this bias "adaptationism"--the notion that everything must fit, must have a purpose, and in the strongest version, must be for the best.

In four sentences Gould uses two parenthetical comments and much repetition.

My favorite examples of metadiscourse in "Cooperstown" come in paragraphs nine and nineteen. In nine Gould tells us to "check it [the motto] out

on the back of a dollar bill,” three aspects of orality in one, a command to the reader, a cliché, and a parenthetical remark, his third parenthetical remark in this paragraph. He also tells us in the first sentence of paragraph nine that “for some reason (to be explored, but not resolved) we are powerfully drawn...”; the parenthetical metadiscourse lets him off the hook to be logical and linear. Gould is telling us not to expect any conclusions. This example of metadiscourse marks the essay as rhetorical, because it doesn’t presume to conclude but to meditate. Gould is not really arguing a case.²⁸

In paragraph nineteen Gould says “I must say that I have grown quite fond of Mr. Chadwick...” Again, we have colloquialisms, “I must say” and “grown quite fond of,” within a parenthetical statement directed to the reader as metadiscourse about the person whose views on baseball he is reporting. He comes to know and grow fond of Mr. Chadwick as a result of the research Gould has done. His metadiscourse always lets us know what are his attitudes, but then so does his discourse--so that we can view his metadiscourse as yet another aspect of redundancy and repetition. His essays are nothing more or less than his opinion, his views on a particular subject, here how the myth of Cooperstown reflects his understanding of evolution. That’s the reason he’s grown quite fond of Chadwick, to complete the quotation, “who certainly understood evolutionary change and its chief principle that historical origin need not match contemporary function.” To appreciate what Gould says we have to appreciate Gould himself. In any writing that is highly oral, we must always return to the identity of the writer.

Gould’s metadiscourse falls into the “filler” category of Thomas’s “I think” and “I feel” statements--talking about talk. Most of Gould’s parenthetical or nonparenthetical, metadiscursive comments are unnecessary, redundant, repetitive, as in the section from “Panda’s Thumb.” For example, consider paragraph thirteen of “Cooperstown,” which includes three parenthetical statements: an oblique reference to a book by Tom Boswell (*How Life Imitates the World Series*), an assumption about his audience as contextualized as any

²⁸ In this essay, at least, Gould fits Bruns’s definition of rhetorical discourse referred to earlier.

Mr. F makes, and several metadiscursive remarks about the essay in progress: "When people ask me how...", "I shall make no...", and "I thank Tom...." Does he need most of that paragraph? He could easily shorten the first sentence, delete the parenthetical comment and the sentence that follows, and move to baseball and culture. So I might suggest this rewrite: "The most ridiculous baseball writing tries to make the sport a commentary on culture." To include "silliest" and "tendentious" in the same sentence seems to violate decorum. However, even my suggested change is no good, because then we've got a contradiction with "Nonetheless, baseball is a major item of our culture..." for an item of culture also reflects--says something--about culture.

And now that I'm looking closer at the paragraph I have to wonder why he mentions baseball writing at all. What does it have to do with the issue of evolutionary change? Or even of baseball myths? Why comment on the texts of baseball? (This question relates to the larger theme I noted at the beginning of this discussion on Gould.) Where is his transition from the crowds of Cooperstown during the annual Hall of Fame weekend to stupid baseball writers? His structure seems as associative and illogical as Mr. F's. Their purposes might also be similiar--to explain the hold of baseball on the imaginations of so many Americans. The "mystique" as Ted Williams said, in commenting on John Updike's beautiful story about Williams's final game, final at-bat, final home run in Fenway Park.

Taking a closer look at Gould's metadiscourse and his direct comments to the reader returns us to his structure and to the assumptions he makes about his readers. Like Thomas, Mr. F, and Ms. W, Gould doesn't always bother to fill in the details. Nor does he bother to make his connections clear or obvious. One thing leads to another, with him making offhand comments as he goes along. At times the comments are not entirely offhand, however, but correct an impression we might have gotten--for instance, Gould's opening remark about P. T. Barnum being an astute psychologist. Seven paragraphs later he returns to Barnum, to remediate our reading. "My opening reference," he says, "was not meant sarcastically; he was one of the great practical psychologists of the nineteenth

century....” He did not need this statement; it interrupts the subject at hand, a momentary digression, occasioned by his previous statement, which reminded him of Barnum and the impression his opening remarks might have left. Another “oh by the way.”

What if Gould had begun “Cooperstown” in the following way? I am dropping the first nine paragraphs and the Cardiff Giant, to which he never returns, and so removing many of his digressions:

The fame of Cooperstown, this small village in central New York, does not rest upon its celebrated namesake, author James Fenimore, or its lovely Lake Otsego, or the Farmer’s Museum. Rather, Cooperstown is the sacred founding place in the official origin myth of baseball.

By this revision we lose the storytelling and conversational tangles that the Cardiff Giant provides; we lose the branchings of knowledge, in Gould’s own words the “network of lateral connections.” We delete the cultural vision Gould has.

“The Creation Myths of Cooperstown” is as conversational as expository prose gets--well, nearly. Compare Gould’s discourse (which is largely metadiscourse) with the following, keeping in mind the “fillers” Shaughnessy objects to in basic writers:

In fact, I think, the only way for me to explain....My purpose here is to discuss the nature of....Years ago, I read....As I recall..., and I think...It turns out, I think....In this ingenious (and to me, at least....) I am hinting strongly, of course....”

These examples come from four short paragraphs of an academic essay by Winterowd, which I will return to in the final chapter. My purpose here, I think, is to hint strongly, of course, that what is objectionable from a conventional view of expository, written discourse changes when we use another model of reading, an oral model.

But more than that. I am suggesting that we read published and unpublished

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writers from the same interpretive and analytical perspectives. I am also suggesting that we offer students the opportunity to grow into the kind of writer and reader that Gould is by encouraging them to use their voices and their language to make sense of their world. Only by making associative connections, those lateral branchings, does Gould make sense of his world--a world that includes evolution and baseball and origin myths of all kinds. These subjects may not seem related, any more than baseball and identity seem related, but Gould allows us to see their connections as he thinks and writes associatively. Our reading of him is deepened when we consider all the processes of language, and not merely one or two. Our reading of students undergoes the same deepening when we approach their texts from the same multilingual processes. Perhaps more important their reading of themselves and other writers broadens and deepens, too. Gould gathers the disparate elements of his culture into a whole for us; students do the same for their culture.

And all of them are keeping out demons.

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**TOWARD A MODEL OF READING
WRITING AS ORAL DISCOURSE**

By

Cheryl Forbes

Volume II

A DISSERTATION

**Submitted to
Michigan State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of**

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of English

1992

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Chapter Four: Reading Thomas Nashe

“A conversation can be like a walk through the woods, an unmapped meander with no goal beyond the activity itself, certainly not undertaken for the purpose of coming out on the other side. The only thing predictable about the ground to be covered is that the participants will stay within arm’s reach of each other.”

Frank Smith, “A Metaphor for
Literacy: Creating Worlds or
Shunting Information?” 201

Were Mr. F a citizen of the late sixteenth century rather than of the late twentieth century, he might have become a Thomas Nashe. He certainly shares rhetorical impulses with the the sixteenth-century pamphleteer. Neither he nor Nashe really wants us to think about what he’s saying so much as he wants us to be caught up in the rhetorical moment, just as each becomes caught up in the rhetorical moment of invention. Although I have no idea what Mr. F’s dorm room looked like, I can see him, hulking over his computer, and hear him muttering to himself:

Write. I’ve got to write something. Let’s see.

I need about five pages, on language for crying
out loud. Well, baseball’s got a lot of language.

She likes baseball. I like baseball. Spring training
is in full swing. Why not? What time is it? Oh, shit,
it’s almost two o’clock. Only two hours left. I’d
better get busy.

Mr. F even provides some of his mutterings at the beginning of “Hey Babe.”

I can also see and hear Thomas Nashe, because he lets me see and hear him; in fact, he insists upon it. His letter to his printer, which opens *Pierce Penilesse*, provides a vivid picture of him, scratching away on foolscap, muttering, throwing copy to be typeset or galley proofs to be corrected at a typesetter, before rushing off to the local chop house to join his friends in some Gabriel Harvey-bashing. But more than the front matter of his pamphlets allows me to see and hear him. Nashe keeps himself the center of his discourse. His personality, his identity,

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carries us along, as he repeatedly calls attention to himself and his verbal pyrotechnics. If we're going to read Nashe, we've got to be prepared to listen, and we've got to be prepared to participate, for he asks us to respond.

Although four hundred years separate Mr. F from Thomas Nashe, to me they are kindred spirits, writers cut from the same cloth. I might not have come to this conclusion had I read Mr. F from the perspective of traditional written discourse. But reading him as I have suggested helps me recognize the similarities when I turn to Nashe. Reading Mr. F, and other students, prepares me, then, for reading certain writers of the past, writers whose oral speech habits characterize their written discourse. Both men are mutterers and satirists, who write out of an immediate social need and who make their mutterings the subject of their discourse. Mr. F wants to pass a course, and to enjoy himself at the same time. Nashe wants to make a living, and to enjoy himself while doing so. Mr. F chooses baseball, a common topic in the early spring, one he can play with. Nashe chooses his subjects in a similar fashion. What's everyone talking about? What's the latest gossip? Whose pamphlet can he pounce on? Whom can he excoriate? "What fun," I hear him saying, "to give it to all those pompous jackasses in Oxford." Both write out of their culture and write about how their culture and their identity fuse.

So Mr. F might become a Thomas Nashe, just as he might become a Stephen Jay Gould or a Stanley Elkin, another writer who sounds like an updated version of Nashe. Mr. F prepares me for Nashe--or Elkin--when I read him from an oral perspective. And by learning to read himself and learning to hear what he has written, Mr. F prepares himself to read other writers, present and past, and not just a writer like Nashe. However, I have chosen the pamphleteer as my historical example because of his affinities with students like Mr. F and with modern essayists like those I analyzed in the previous chapter. The model of reading I am proposing asks for reciprocity between unpublished and published writers: student essays prepare us to read some writers of the past, like Nashe; reading Nashe makes us appreciate what our students might come to be; students by reading themselves learn how to read writers from other cultures and eras; and

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students reading themselves, their colleagues, and published writers present and past come to see for themselves the possibilities inherent in their work.

Nashe was popular during his day, when a writer who published was considered socially unacceptable; now he is a figure on the margins of literature. Popular writing then as now was suspect. Gould addresses this dislike of popular literature in the introduction to *Bully for Brontosaurus*. His words could easily be applied to Nashe: "adulteration," "simplification," "distortion for effect," "grandstanding," "whizbang,"¹ especially the last three. Students, too, might be accused of grandstanding or whizbang prose. Nashe certainly is a grandstander first and last.

When scholars and critics try to define Nashe--try to answer the question, What is he? or What is he doing?--they usually conclude that he plays to the audience; he is a performer, an actor, an extemporizer, an orator, a debater, a polemicist. Here are four brief examples from a few articles on *The Unfortunate Traveller*: "...this text, unlike most written texts, is subject not to the laws of the written word but to the laws of oral discourse"; "oral imagery" predominates; "Nashe...maintains the effect of close reciprocal contact between speaker and audience"; and "Nashe's style has close affinities with a language meant to be spoken rather than perused in silence," and his rhythms are those of speech, not "consciously created literary rhythms."² These comments could have been made about Mr. F or Ms. W, or about Garrett, Elkin, Thomas, and Gould.

Oral rhetorical play, which may be all we have with Nashe, whatever character or persona he adopts at any moment in the production of his pamphlets, irritates some critics, for instance deconstructionist critic Jonathan Crewe, who says,

¹ Stephen Jay Gould, *Bully for Brontosaurus: Reflections in Natural History* (New York: Norton, 1991) 11.

² See, respectively, Cynthia Sulzberger, "The Unfortunate Traveller: Nashe's Narrative in a 'Cleane Different Vaine,'" *Journal of Narrative Technique* 10 (1980): 5; Margaret Ferguson, "Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller*: The 'Newes of the Maker' Game," *English Literary History* 11 (1981): 169; David Kaula, "The Low Style in Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveler*," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 6 (1966): 48; and E. D. Mackerness, "A Note on Thomas Nashe and 'Style,'" *English* 6 (1947): 199.

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about Nashe, that “where rhetoric prevails, the Word is absent.”³ In other words, Nashe doesn’t say anything, for all his talk. He’s all phatic communication. Nashe is everywhere and nowhere, without center, without focus, without an argument. So not only is Nashe himself reminiscent of the writers we meet in our classes, but so are the criticisms of Nashe reminiscent of the criticisms of students.

Here are some examples. Nashe doesn’t always make much sense; he has a “defective” sense of order.⁴ He fails to fit our notions of what written discourse ought to be. He is illogical, inconsistent, ambiguous, and irrational. He never seems to get to the point, or he has so many points that we don’t know which ones to focus on--much the same complaint we make about students. Mina Shaughnessy insists that students are restricted “to oral strategies for elaboration” and have “difficulty with framing and holding on to a central or organizing idea.”⁵ There are other complaints, other similarities: Nashe rambles, he shifts direction without warning or transition, he makes grammatical errors, he directly addresses his readers, he refers to himself, he uses pronouns

³ Jonathan Crewe, *Unredeemed Rhetoric: Thomas Nashe and the Scandal of Authorship* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins UP, 1982) 65. Crewe pits rhetoric against logic, the oral against the written. For other studies of Nashe, see, for instance, C. S. Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1944); Ronald B. McKerrow, *The Works of Thomas Nashe* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958); G. R. Hibbard, *Thomas Nashe: A Critical Introduction* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962); Kiernan Ryan, “The Extemporal Vein: Thomas Nashe and the Invention of Modern Narrative,” in *Narrative: From Malory to Motion Pictures*, ed. Jeremy Hawthorne (London: Edward Arnold, 1985) 41-54; Neil Rhodes, “Nashe, Rhetoric and Satire” in *Jacobean Poetry and Prose: Rhetoric, Representation and the Popular Imagination* (New York: St. Martin’s, 1988) 41-54; Stephen S. Hilliard, *The Singularity of Thomas Nashe* (Lincoln and London: U of Nebraska P, 1986); and Sandra Clark, *The Elizabethan Pamphleteers: Popular Moralistic Pamphlets 1580-1640* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson UP, 1985). The renewed interest in rhetoric, and the new interest in discourse analysis among literary critics, seem to be leading scholars back to Nashe, at least *The Unfortunate Traveller*, the most frequently studied of Nashe’s works.

⁴ Kaula, “The Low Style” 57.

⁵ Mina P. Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing* (New York: Oxford UP) 236.

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with no clear antecedents, he favors concrete nouns and verbs over abstractions, he repeatedly uses parataxis, he writes to be heard, he frequently uses oration, conversation, or slang as part of his exposition, he writes situationally and rarely fills in the context. But just as our understanding and appreciation of student writing changes when we read from the perspective of oral discourse, so, too, does our understanding and appreciation of Nashe's pamphlets. Mr. F (and Ms. W to a lesser degree) have prepared us for Nashe.

Sandra Clark is one of the few critics (other than Walter Ong), who, though not approaching Nashe from a fully developed model of reading oral discourse, nevertheless insists that we cannot ignore the oral tradition if we hope to understand him. Her position, unlike Ong's, is that Nashe deliberately cultivated oral techniques "in order to create a kind of paradox: that of the airiest and most ephemeral display of verbal fireworks transfixed and made permanent in print."⁶ Ong thinks that Nashe's "verbal fireworks" are the result of oral habits of mind trained in disputation; a habit is unconscious. Whichever position is correct, we have writing that appears as oral discourse and so requires an oral model of reading. But what did reading mean when Nashe was writing? Was it silent and isolated, or was it as oral as his writing?

In the Renaissance, as in the Middle Ages, reading was largely oral, even among groups where the majority were literate. Even those who did read alone probably subvocalized, a habit W. Ross Winterowd says we all have when we try to read a particularly difficult text--the more difficult the more audibly we vocalize.⁷ The usual practice at Elizabeth's court and elsewhere was for someone to read aloud to a group. Reading meant performance. Pamphlets, printed bulletins, broadsides, and so forth, may have been distributed or nailed to a door, but they were also read aloud, as the Elizabethan government required of all its proclamations.⁸ Just as writers assumed a hearing public, so that public

⁶ Clark, *The Elizabethan Pamphleteers* 256.

⁷ W. Ross Winterowd. *The Rhetoric of the "Other" Literature* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1990) 17.

⁸ Keith Thomas, "Literacy in Early Modern England." In Baumann 106. Thomas points out that even during the civil war it was standard for officers to read pamphlets and newsbooks to troops. Charles Nicholl, *A Cup of News: The Life of Thomas Nashe* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), points out that the practice at Cambridge was for students

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assumed that writers were speaking to them. There was, in Barry Lydgate's terms, a "profoundly social colloquy of reader and writer," which "points in turn to the propinquity of Renaissance texts--even printed--to the world of speech and hearing...."⁹ Today we speak of this colloquy as a metaphor, though it was more than that in the Renaissance. If we want to understand its culture and its texts, we can't ignore the oral nature of writing and reading. One of the benefits for us and for our students of the model of reading I am proposing is that it allows us to understand certain writers of the past, who might otherwise be closed to us. We need to listen when we read, to hear the oral elements "made permanent in print," as Clark says. Another benefit is that we better understand ourselves, our texts, and our culture, which is becoming increasingly more oral--perhaps as oral as the sixteenth century, though using a different technology to achieve it. So reading from an oral perspective, with the impulse provided by what our students write, prepares us to move both backward and forward, to writers of the past and to anticipate writers to come. Nashe, along with our students and our own prose writers, demands to be heard, not read silently. Confusing passages become understandable when we read them aloud, and his dialogue with his audience becomes audible.

The system of punctuation that grammarians advocated and writers followed during the Middle Ages and into the Renaissance also shows that they expected their work to be read aloud. Long controversial and misunderstood, the Renaissance habits of punctuation make it difficult for linguists to determine just what constitutes a sentence in the Renaissance. Sometimes a sentence continues for a page or more--that is, from one period to the next. For someone reading aloud, that makes for a long time between breaks. But anyone who has habitually read sixteenth century prose aloud notes immediately that the three

to read aloud a chapter of disputation after the 5 o'clock supper (24). Morris Croll, *Style, Rhetoric, and Rhythm: Essays by Morris W. Croll*, ed. J. Max Patrick, et al. (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1966) also emphasizes that the sixteenth century used books orally (62). The sixteenth century might have seen a rise in the number of books published but the people were not literate in our sense.

⁹ Barry Lydgate, "Mortgaging One's Work to the World: Publication and the Structure of Montaigne's *Essais*." *PMLA* 96 (1981): 211.

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major marks of punctuation--the comma, the semi-colon or colon (the two were treated together as the intermediate mark), and the period--serve as breathers, not sense markers. The particular mark used indicates the kind of pause a reader should take. Ong notes that with the exception of the period "...the position of a punctuation mark [is not considered] in terms of grammatical structure." He compares punctuation to the breath marks in a musical score.¹⁰ It was nearly accidental, then, for punctuation to match syntax. Although writers today occasionally punctuate for sound, writers in the sixteenth century consistently did so. Students are consistent in their oral use of punctuation, and Elkin certainly uses punctuation orally.

Although we know something about Renaissance reading habits, it still remains difficult to read Nashe with anything like the expectations of a sixteenth-century reader. Clark tries to envision a typical scene. "We may imagine the farmer's son," she writes, "reading aloud to a circle around the fire, and the old wives instinctively recording in their minds the new stories to pass on to their friends the next day."¹¹ It is unfortunate that most of us read alone and silently, for we mistakenly believe that we read sixteenth-century texts as the writers intended them to be read. To read orally and to read aloud (in a group especially) brings us closer to the sixteenth century.

Pierce Penilesse

My first example comes from *Pierce Penilesse his Supplication to the Diuell*. *Pierce* was the most popular of Nashe's pamphlets, going through six editions, three in its first year of publication, 1592. An edition, according to Walter Staton, legally could be no more than 1,250 copies, but print runs were usually

¹⁰ Walter J. Ong, "Historical Backgrounds of Elizabethan and Jacobean Punctuation Theory." *PMLA* LIX (1944): 351 and 353. He shows the influence medieval grammarians retained on Renaissance practice.

¹¹ Clark, *The Elizabethan Pamphleteers* 21. It is interesting to compare her vision with the stories Shirley Brice Heath tells of the African American cultures she has studied, for they have a similar communal, entirely social approach to reading. See *Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983).

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smaller.¹² Nevertheless, six editions was a publishing success. Nashe begins *Pierce* with a letter, “The Printer to the Gentlemen *Readers*” followed by “A priuate Epistle of the Author to *the Printer* Wherein his full meaning and purpose (in publishing this Booke) is set foorth.” Then begins the pamphlet proper, a story of how Pierce Penilesse decided to write this supplication to the devil and how he discovered the devil’s postman; the author allows the Knight of the post, as he calls the devil’s postman, to read his letter. That reading, which I assume to be aloud, is the occasion for our reading, as well--a double hearing, if you will.

In the first sentence of the pamphlet, some seventeen lines long, Nashe, in the persona of Pierce, calls himself a “distressed Orator” and a “singlesoald Orator”; we must proceed with “oration” in mind, as Pierce proceeds to talk about a familiar subject--the seven deadly sins--as familiar and popular a subject in sixteenth-century England as baseball is in twentieth-century America, and as culturally emblematic. But Nashe writes as if he found his subject accidentally, as if his description of the first two sins were intended only to capture our attention and that once he had hooked us he’d move to his real subject, whatever that might be. But he decided that once he had begun with the seven deadly sins, he couldn’t stop until he had covered each one. Unfortunately, his description of Dame Niggardize is so well done that his treatment of the rest of the sins peters out, until he concludes with lechery, about which he has little to say. He doesn’t end his pamphlet yet, however, but gives most of the remaining seventeen pages to the Knight of the post, who expounds on another equally trite topic, What is Hell? The Knight’s answer leads him into stories of various devils and spirits.

Because there is no real beginning, middle, or end to any section of Nashe, we can jump in anywhere without any more difficulty and with no less confusion than when we read him from start to finish. At any point he himself will dash off, leaving us to rush after him. And so we will jump into the middle of *Pierce*, a superb example of vituperation, the polemical aspect of oral discourse. Because of the length of the pamphlet, the numbers after each paragraph do not refer to

¹² Walter F. Staton, “The Significance of the Literary Career of Thomas Nashe,” diss., U of Pennsylvania, 1955, 33-34.

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the original but are merely for easy reference here. The volume and page numbers in parenthesis refer to the original text. We enter with the section on the deadly sin of Wrath--a sin close to Nashe's heart. The immediate context for the excerpt is: "Put case (since I am not yet out of the Theame of Wrath) that some tired lade....,"¹³ which leads him into the direct comments to his readers with which the excerpt begins. His comments to his readers in turn lead him to rail against an unnamed enemy whom Nashe presumes to be listening.

Gentlemen, I am sure you haue hearde of a ridiculous Asse that many yeares since sold lyes by the great, and wrote an absurd *Astrologicall Discourse* of the terrible Coniunction of *Saturne* and *Iupiter*, wherein (as if hee had lately cast the Heauens water, or beene at the anatomizing of the Skies intrailles in Surgeons hall) hee prophecietieth of such strange wonders to ensue from stars destemperature and the vnusuall adultrie of Planets, as none but he that is Bawd to those celestiall bodies could euer discry. What expectation there was of it both in towne and country, the amazement of those times may testifie: and the rather, because he pawned his credit vpon it, in these expresse tearmes: *If these things fall not out in euery point as I haue wrote, let me for euer hereafter loose the credit of my Astronimie*. Well, so it happened, that he happened not to be a man of his word; his Astronimie broke his day with his creditors, and *Saturne* and *Iupiter* prou'd honestest men then all the World tooke them for: whereupon the poore Prognosticator was ready to runne himself through with his *Iacobs Staffe*, and cast himselfe headlong from the tope of a Globe (as a mountaine) and breake his necke.

¹³ All citations are from Ronald B. McKerrow, *The Works of Thomas Nashe* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958).

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The whole Vniuersitie hyst at him, *Tarlton* at the Theator made iests of him, and *Elderton* consumd his ale-crammed nose to nothing, in bearbayting him with whole bundles of ballets. Would you, in likely reason, gesse it were possible for any shame-swolne toad to haue the spet-prooffe face to out liue this disgrace? It is, deare brethren, *Viuit, imo viuit*; and, which is more, he is a Vicar.... (1)

Thou hast wronged one for my sake (whom for the name I must loue) T.N., the Maister Butler of Pembroke Hall, a far better Scholler than thy self (in my iudgement) and one that sheweth more discretion and gouernment in setting vp a sise of Bread, than thou in all thy whole booke. Why man, thinke no scorne of him, for he hath held thee vp a hundred times, whiles the Deane hath giuen thee correction and thou hast capt and kneeed him (when thou wert hungrie) for a chipping. But thats nothing, for hadst thou neuer beene beholding to him, nor holden vp by him, he hath a Beard that is a better Gentleman than all thy whole body, and a graue countenance, like *Cato*, able to make thee run out of thy wits for feare, if he looke sternly vpon thee. I haue reade ouer thy Sheepish discourse of the Lambe of GOD and his enemies, and entreated my patience to be good to thee whilst I reade: but for all that I could doe with my self, (as I am sure I may doe as much as another man) I could not refraine, but bequeth it to the Priuie, leafe by leafe as I read it, it was so vgly, dorbelllicall, and lumpish. Monstrous, monstrous, and palpable, not to bee spoken of in a Christian Congregation: thou hast skumed ouer the Schoolemen, and of the froth of theyr folly made a dish of

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diuinitie Brewesse, which the dogges will not eate. If the Printer haue any great dealings with thee, hee were best to get a priuiledge betimes, *Ad imprimendum solum*, forbidding all other to sell waste paper but himselfe, or else he will bee in a wofull taking...and so I leaue thee till a better opportunity, to bee tormented world without end of our Poets and Writers about London, whome thou hast called piperlye Make-playes and Make-bates: not doubting but hee also whom thou tearmest the vaine *Paphatchet* will haue a flurt at thee one day....So be it, pray Pen, Incke, and paper, on their knees, that they may not bee troubled with thee any more. (2)

Redeo ad vos, mei Auditores, haue I not an indifferent pritty vayne in Spurgalling an Asse? if you knew how extemporall it were at this instant, and with what hast it is writ, you would say so. But I would not haue you thinke that all this that is set downe heere is in good earenst, for then you goe by *S. Gyles*, the wrong way to *Westminster*: but only to shewe howe for a neede I could rayle, if I were throughly fyred. So ho, *Honiger Hammon*, where are you all this while, I cannot be acquainted with you? Tell me, what doe you think of the case? am I subiect to the sinne of Wrath I write against, or no, in whetting my penne on this blocke? I know you would faine haue it so, but it shall not choose but be otherwise for this once. Come on, let vs turne over a new leafe, and heare what Gluttonie can say for her self, for Wrath hath spet his poyson, and full platters doe well after extreame purging.... (3; I. 196-99)

...Inough, gentle spirit, I will importune thee no further, but commit this Supplication to thy care: which, if thou deliuer accordinglie, thou shalt at thy returne haue

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more of my custome: for by that time I will haue finished certain letters to diuers Orators & Poets, disperced in your dominions. That as occation shal serue, but nowe I must take leaue of you, for it is Terme time, and I haue some business. A Gentleman (a frend of mine, that I neuer saw before) staies for me, and is like to be vndoone, if I come not in to beare witnesse on his side.... (4)

Gentle Reader, *tandem aliquando* I am at leasure to talke to thee. I dare say thou hast cald me a hundred times dolt for this senseles discourse: it is no matter, thou dost but as I haue doone by a number in my dayes. For who can abide a scurue pedling Poet to plucke a man by the sleeue at euerie third step in *Paules* Churchyard, & when he comes in to seruey his wares, theres nothing but purgations and vomits wrapt vppe in wast paper. It were verie good the dog whipper in *Paules* would haue a care of this in his vnsauery visitation euerie Saterdag; for it is dangerous for suche of the Queenes liedge people, as shall take a viewe of them fasting. (5)

Looke to it, you Booksellers and Stationers, and let not your shops be infected with any such goose gyblets or stinking garbadge, as the lygs of newsmongers, and especiallie such of you as frequent Westminster hall, let them be circumspect what dunghill papers they bring thither: for one bad pamphlet is enough to raise a damp that may poison a whole Tearme....Not a base Inck-dropper, or scuruy plodder at *Nouerint*, but nailes his asses eares on euerie post, and comes off with long *Circumquaque* to the Gentlemen Readers, yea, the most excrementorie dishlickers of learning are growne so valiant in impudencie, that now they set vp their faces

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And so I breake off this endlesse argument of speech abruptlie. (7; 245).

As Bruns says, a rhetorical meditation does not conclude so much as break off--stop--as Nashe does, by simply running out of things to say, as happens to any of us when we hold forth on any subject.

Here, under the topic of wrath, Nashe has provided a tirade about everything he considers wrong in his society; *Pierce* is an intensely personal document, as personal as the essays by Ms. W, Mr. F, Garrett, and Elkin. In paragraph one Nashe tells us about "the ridiculous Asse," his enemy Gabriel Harvey, though without naming him; in paragraph two he tells us why Harvey is an enemy, because he has "wronged one for my sake (whom for the name I must loue) T.N." We learn that Nashe considers that he has better judgment in eating than

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Harvey shows in his “whole booke.” Even his beard is a better gentleman “than all thy whole body.” None of this is logical, but the logical appropriateness doesn’t matter to Nashe; what matters is that he gets in as many digs as he possibly can, almost as if he judges his work by how many insults he can pack into each column inch. His scornful adjectives and his descriptions of his reading responses certainly help him achieve his goal. For as much as anything else, this section of *Pierce* concerns Thomas Nashe, reader.

One of the central ways that Nashe asserts his identity is by telling us how he reads. He becomes involved with what he reads, and he expects nothing less of those of us who read him, as he indicates in paragraph five: “I dare say thou hast cald me a hundred times dolt for this senseles discourse: it is no matter, thou dost but as I haue doone by a number in my dayes.” Nashe talks to his readers, and he expects us to talk back. Paragraph five also indicates that he even expects us to respond as physically to his discourse as he does to his enemy’s. If we don’t like it, tear it up; use it to wrap vomit in.

Nashe provides his own model of reading, one that is oral, physical, and psychological.¹⁴ The particular occasion for this discussion of reading is the “sheepish discourse of the Lambe of GOD and his enemies” (paragraph two). Nashe tells us that he tried to be patient and good to the author while he read, while sitting in the Privy--but no go. The discourse was too much for him, and he “bequeth[ed] it to the Privuie, leafe by leafe....” And he leaves us in no doubt as to why, with an accumulation of adjectives: “...vgly, dorbелlicall, and lumpish,” which sound more like a physical description of a person than of a person’s discourse. He blurs the distinctions between writer and text, making the text a physical, audible manifestation of the person who wrote it. Nashe also accuses the pamphlet, and so Harvey, of being “monstrous, monstrous, and palpable, not to be spoken of in a Christian Congregation.” In other words, the text must remain silent; it has no presence, no reality, because it has no voice. Or the voice

¹⁴ If for no other reason, this is a good reason to include Nashe in a study on reading oral discourse. Not only does he provide another opportunity to stretch and test my model but he himself in many ways is a practitioner of a similar approach to reading. We can learn much about reading by reading Nashe.

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it has is so ugly and monstrous that we can't abide its sound, so we plug up our ears; again, the readers control the text by their responses.

Despite appearances to the contrary, Nashe finds nothing on the page, thus his correct response, to use the paper as waste. The writer has the technology--"Pen, Incke, and paper"--but what results cannot be voiced. The issue of reading recurs throughout this section, particularly in paragraphs five, six, and seven, where Nashe steps outside his text to address his readers directly; and of course that is how this section begins, with the words, "Gentlemen, I am sure you haue *heard...*" (italics added). In fact, from the opening line in his letter to the printer to the end, *Pierce* concerns the nature of reading. Nashe gives himself as the premiere example of how a gentleman ought to read.

If Nashe reveals his identity through his role as reader--of texts, of London society, of rogues and rascallions, of international law, culture, and citizenry, and all these come in for comment--then he also reveals his identity through the kind of writer he is. He makes almost no distinctions between reading and writing, for he writes as he reads, and vice versa. In paragraph three he turns from a description of his reading to a description of his writing. Listen up, he says--though in Latin, which limits how many readers can hear him: "Have I not an indifferent pritty vayne in Spurgalling an Asse? if you knew how extemporall it were at this instant, and with what hast it is writ, you would say so." I've heard something like this before, from Mr. F, who also asserts that he has written "Hey Babe" on the fly. Taking the process into consideration readers must admire the results. Nashe (and Mr. F) seems to invite us to wonder how well he might have written had he not written in such haste and so extemporaneously, writing whatever occurs to him at the moment (he responds to what he reads in the same way--doing with the text whatever occurs to him at the moment). The admission is a request for praise and admiration, not for censure and condemnation.

We know the kind of reader and writer Nashe is not only by his direct comments on his methods but also by the conversations he holds within his text. As I said earlier, unless we're prepared to hear multiple voices we can easily lose our way with Nashe. He speaks to several people in this brief excerpt. He

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quickly turns from one gentleman to another, and just as quickly provides their responses, without providing any textual help to let us know who is speaking to whom (for instance, paragraphing or punctuation). If we don't listen closely we miss his changes in direction and the responses from his audience. These multiple conversations demand a certain kind of reading from us; the model I have been suggesting is inherent in Nashe's text. When we read Nashe aloud, it is as if we are listening to a conversation we can't observe; we're sitting in a different room, or in the dark, and can't see into the other, well-lighted room. All those people can see each other, while we can only hear Nashe. We even lack the privilege of watching him turn his head or point to the next person he's going to fire, as in light up, to use one of his own verbs. What we have in *Pierce* is a Roast, in our terms, the closest we get to the kind of vitriol Nashe serves forth, though his frank vocabulary and images (frank for his day, that is) are reminiscent of Elkin.

When Nashe puts the case to his readers that Harvey's pamphlet on the Lamb of God isn't worth the paper it's printed on, he doesn't argue logically, but rhetorically and associatively--orally. He proves his case through insult, innuendo, analogy, storytelling, anecdote; I mean "proves" in its Renaissance sense, of testing and speculating about a subject from numerous angles (Montaigne's assaying), not in the sense of thesis-ratification. Nashe says in paragraph two that the work made him resign it to the Privy; he says not even dogs would eat the "dish of diuinitie Brewesse" contained in it. He calls Harvey a "Bawd" and a liar ("not...a man of his word") in paragraph one. L. C. Knights points out that "invective and ridicule...parable and metaphor...alliteration and puns" form the basis of argument, not objective, logical discourse. Elizabethan pamphleteers may "bluff" a logic--Gould does this when he numbers each of his points as if they were connected in a linear, hierarchichal fashion--but no one is taken in. Knights adds that unless we can hear the debate we miss what's going on: "there are pages which can only be understood if we realize that certain sentences--there is no typographical distinction--come from the opposition side. The pamphleteering method is, in short, the method of spoken dialectic,"¹⁵

¹⁵ L. C. Knights, *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson* (New York: Norton, 1937) 311.

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what I have called conversation, or what is the call and response style Ms. W uses. As I said, we find the same technique in Elkin, though Elkin provides the typographic clue of italics, so that we know we are reading two voices in conversation with each other and with us.

The structure of *Pierce* shares much in common with the structure of the essays I previously discussed, in particular “Hey Babe”; Mr. F, too, “proves” his case about the benefits of baseball, proves in the sixteenth-century sense of the word, by association and analogy. Also, Nashe, like Mr. F, is positioning himself in relation to his reader. And here is yet another aspect of the identity of Nashe, only this time we find him asserting his identity in the analogous male forum of the baseball playing field. Nashe is a first-rate reader, a first-rate-writer, and a first-rate debater. But we must not overlook that these three identities are male identities for the sixteenth century. Women don’t read, write, or dispute, any more than women today play professional baseball, and so Nashe is writing to males, to gentlemen. We find no evidence that he thought women would read what he had written, despite having a queen as head of state. He never addresses ladies, and the only two female presences in this excerpt are those of “Lady Vanitie, thy mistres” in paragraph six and of gluttony in paragraph three. No, he is always turning to address yet another group of men, as he does with the words “inough, gentle spirit” in paragraph four, or the “booksellers and stationers” in paragraph six, where he also addresses “the Gentlemen Readers.”

In Nashe we find the schoolboy wit, the one who can out-insult the next guy (the next guy in this case being Gabriel Harvey). In particular, Nashe’s frequent Latin phrases function as schoolboy competition to show his skill in oral disputation. Ong’s view that the study of Latin was a Renaissance male puberty rite is apt here.¹⁶ Nashe wants to make sure that his male audience knows he knows. Latin is to Nashe what the infield chant is to Mr. F; it not only marks the men from the boys but marks the men from the women. We’re looking at

¹⁶ See “Latin Language Study as a Renaissance Puberty Rite” in *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology: Studies in the Interaction of Expression and Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1971) 113-41. Ong makes the case that once girls were included in the educational system Latin was doomed.

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privileged linguistic space--male identity played out through highly oral writing using a specialized language only the male initiates can understand, though Nashe often provides a translation for his Latin, without so labeling it, a double test. Readers need to be able to read the Latin, but then also recognize that the English which follows is a translation.

Prior to the passage excerpted here, Nashe says:

Alas poor latinlesse Authors, they are so simple
they know not what they doe....I maruell how
the Masterlesse men, that set vp their bills in Paules
for seruices, & such as past vp their papers on euery
post, for Arithmetique and writing Schooles,
scape eternity amongst them....

From there he defends his own university, as well as his Latin education; throughout his pamphlets he often refers to his erudition, another opportunity to assert his identity and retain center stage. For Nashe, Latin reflects male privilege, as does the very structure of his discourse. Only those who have gone through a certain educational system can fully understand what he means when he says, "put case"--an invitation to dispute, an invitation for invention. Mr. F accommodated me and the other women in his audience; Nashe does not.

Nashe, therefore, consistently keeps himself and his identity the center of his discourse, so that to answer the question What is Nashe's subject? we need only answer that Nashe's subject is himself. His metadiscourse--the direct addresses to his male readers--is the most striking way he reveals himself as subject and so reveals his orality. (Coupled with his metadiscourse is his use of the first person pronoun, which I will turn to shortly.) I've already referred to the first sentence in paragraph one: "Gentlemen, I am sure you have heard of a ridiculous Ass...." Clearly, we aren't meant to take this as a comment directed at the devil, whom he is supposed to be writing to. Nashe has broken frame, moved outside of his discourse. Notice, however, that he doesn't name the "ridiculous Ass," for we gentlemen are supposed to know exactly whom he is talking about and to have read the pamphlet that prophesied so much. This one sentence tells us much about Nashe's assumptions. Like Mr. F, Nashe knows his audience; these are

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friends, men like himself. They read the same things, think the same things, have attended the same university, have acquaintances in common. They may even have given him a few ideas. (The few studies of Nashe indicate that he did quite literally write for and at the suggestion of his social group.¹⁷) But his direct address excludes at the same time that it includes. Anyone reading--or hearing--the pamphlet who hasn't heard of this "ridiculous Ass" is disqualified as a member of Nashe's circle. An ignorant reader is analogous to a Latinless author or the duped parishioners of Harvey, the man he is roasting.

Nashe seldom fills in a circumstance he describes, unlike a newspaper reporter with whom he is often erroneously compared. Any city editor worth his computer would ask Nashe the following questions: Who wrote the pamphlet? What was the title? Where was the author from? When was it published? Why did he write it? How was it received? If Nashe couldn't, or wouldn't, provide satisfactory answers, an editor would delete the passage. Nashe assumes that his readers know the details, so he doesn't bother to explain himself. He doesn't tell what university he means or who Tarlton or Elderton are. Yet writing, unlike speaking, is supposed to allow "communication" across space and time, in part because it is necessarily removed from its original social and individual context. But this is not true of Nashe any more than for Mr. F or Ms. W.

After running through the vague terms of the story, at the end of paragraph one Nashe again addresses his readers, this time as "you," in a rhetorical question and using invective: "Would you, in likely reason, gesse it were possible for any shame-swolne toad to haue the spet-prooffe face to out liue his disgrace?" He is still putting his case against Harvey, who had wronged him in print. And his diatribe against Harvey is all part of his attempt to define Wrath. He has embedded his insults into a discourse on one of the seven deadly sins. In paragraph three he returns to Wrath, again by asking readers a direct question: "Tell me, what doe you think of the case? am I subiect to the sinne of Wrath I write against, or no, in whetting my penne on this blocke?" Providing the answer, "I know you would faine haue it so," he then leaves the subject of wrath to turn to gluttony.

¹⁷ See Nicholl, for instance, or McKerrow, Hibbard, or Hilliard.

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In paragraph five, Nashe again addresses the reader: “Gentle Reader, *tandem aliquando* I am at leasure to talke to thee,” rather as if he has just dismissed a servant on an errand and now has no more pressing matters to hand but a little fireside chat. But he has already anticipated what the “gentle reader” wants to talk about. This is Stephen Jay Gould, Stanley Elkin, or Ann Hodgman out to “save us time.” Nashe is speaking for his perhaps unsympathetic readers, who might have thought his was “senseles discourse.” Not that he cares, since he has said the same about numerous writers throughout the pamphlet. If we haven’t yet got the point, however, in scatological language he gives some of his most wonderful invectives, which include himself as well as those who have the gall if not the learning to address Gentlemen Readers and post their asses’ ears for all to see if not read.

Nashe keeps himself center stage, not only in his metadiscourse, but by the way he manipulates the first person singular pronoun. Sometimes he uses it to refer to Pierce, sometimes to himself, but we often find it difficult to know. Nashe both is and is not Pierce. For instance in paragraph one, “I” appears to refer to himself, but in paragraph two Nashe jumps back into the persona of Pierce in order to be able to refer to himself as “T.N.” The subsequent first person pronouns in the paragraph refer to Pierce and not to Nashe directly. But how do we understand the “I” when in paragraph three he once again turns directly to his audience whom he calls, in Latin, his auditors? He’s back to being plain T.N., hastening along, improvising as he goes, adding everything imaginable to his discourse on Wrath. Not that he means any of it, of course. As he points out, that’s the wrong way to Westminster. With false modesty Nashe adds, “I was just showing you what I could do if I were thoroughly fired.”

At any moment in the discourse, something Nashe says can remind him of another subject, and off he goes, leaving his readers to run after him. We find a good example of this in paragraph six. The following sentence occurs in the midst of his advice to booksellers and stationers: “Whilst I am thus talking, me thinks I hear one say....” And so, in answer to the conversation he is having with unseen readers, he begins a defense of his title, a defense that proceeds by

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analogy with houses in town and the titles of noblemen, not by any “rational” putting of a case. Ms. W uses the same oral strategy when she declares that Black English is an heirloom.

Also in paragraph six Nashe uses a conversational technique similar to that of Elkin, though without the italics to let us know we’re hearing two voices. Nashe asks, “Is it my Title you find fault with?...*Deus bone*, what a vaine am I fallen into?” Then someone responds, “what, an Epistle to the Readers in the end of thy booke?” Only the pronoun “thy” provides a clue about speaker. Then another voice seems to enter, who shouts, “Out vppon thee for an arrent blocke, where learndst thou that wit?” As we have seen, this is a sensitive point with Nashe, for it threatens his identity, as do all these questions, ultimately. They question his reading, his writing, and his wit. Nashe answers impatiently, “O sir, holde your peace. A fellow neuer comes to his answere before the offence be committed.” In other words, why should Nashe explain what he’s written until he’s finished writing, even if the tradition is to provide an apology up front. As he explains in paragraph six:

Wherefore, if I in the beginning of my Book
should haue come off with a long Apologie
to excuse my self, it were all one as if a theefe,
going to steal a horse, should deuise by the waie
as he went, what to speake when he came at the
gallows.

The irony is that thieves did plan an apology ahead of time, by memorizing a verse of Scripture to prove their literacy and thereby escape hanging. If Nashe’s pamphlet is no more than the recitation of an illiterate thief, then where indeed is his wit? But his extemporal vein has forced him into a corner, so out he leaps with “Here is a crosse waie, and I thinke it good heere to part.” What is the crossway? Why is this a good place to separate? Nashe doesn’t tell us. Instead, he says farewell to his digression, his “good Parenthesis,” and moves to yet another subject. However, since most of his pamphlet might be considered “parenthesis,” we find it difficult to determine what exactly he’s been digressing

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Nashe is like the guest who says “It’s time to go,” yet continues to talk for another half hour at the door, or like Violetta in *La Traviata* who sings eloquently and long while she dies. At the end of *Pierce Penilesse* Nashe can’t seem to pull himself away. He quotes some poetry, inserts an encomium to Edmund Spenser, moves to Ovid, and so, eventually, stops, but only, we have the feeling, because he may finally have run out of breath and not necessarily out of things to say. Nashe’s need to keep talking accounts in some measure for his additive, associative structure. There seems to be no other reason to mention *The Faerie Queene* at the end of a speech about the ills of society, for Nashe provides no logical connection. One thing simply leads to another.

Nashe proceeds associatively in the overall structure of his discourse, as well as within paragraphs and sentences, where he shifts subjects without regard for the consequences. Shaughnessy thinks that “such shifts reflect an unstable sense of the writer-audience relationship...”¹⁸ and treats them as a category of problem to be corrected. However, Nashe deliberately creates this unstable relationship, perhaps to achieve reader involvement. Only a writer who really knows his audience and has a strong sense of his identity as a writer is able to risk such instability. Also, to shift subjects and pronouns is conversational, for it is common for speakers to begin a sentence, stop, start again, and change direction without an audible comma; or begin with “I,” then “we,” or move from “you” to “he.” Sometimes we say, “No, let me put it this way,” or “Wait. Let me start again”; sometimes we don’t. We assume that our listeners will pick up our nonlinguistic cues; and so does Nashe. A sign of a failed education? No, even “literate” speakers frequently restart sentences or repeat expressions, as economist John Kenneth Galbraith did frequently during a recent question and answer session at the National Press Club in Washington, D. C.; and Nashe does it, as well. We simply don’t expect to find examples in written discourse. Yet in nearly every sentence of paragraph two we find numerous pronoun and subject shifts. The person Nashe addresses as “thou” and “thy” has wronged him, and he defends himself with hyperbole and insult, as I’ve noted, but also by shifting

¹⁸Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations* 113.

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 body, and a graue countenance, like Cato, able to
 make thee run out of thy wits for feare, if he looke
 sternly vpon thee.

“But thats nothing” refers to the previous sentence, though it is ambiguous which part of the sentence the demonstrative refers to. The subordinate clause, “for hadst thou neuer beene beholding to him...,” seems to be an introduction to the main clause--the business of the personified beard being a better Gentleman--an if...then, cause...effect structure. But logically what does Nashe's beard have to do with it? Somehow he moves from being wronged and bragging about his scholarship to using the man's “sheepish discourse of the lambe of God” as toilet paper.

The only reason for the subordinate clause in this sentence from paragraph two appears to be rhetorical. He plays on the verb “held thee vp” in the previous sentence: “Why man, thinke no scorne of him, for he hath held thee vp...,” then repeats it, slightly changed as “been beholding,” and repeats it yet again in slightly different form in the next clause, “holden vp” (*adnominatio*). He uses a similar repetitive device earlier in paragraph one, “Well, so it happened, that he happened not be a man of his word,” where the word “happened” is used in two slightly different senses (*antistasis*). Also note the oral discourse markers “well” and “so.” The shift from active to passive voice is also rhetorically significant, as it appears to place Nashe's enemy in his debt--or power, if only rhetorically, though I do not intend the word “only” to belittle the significance of rhetorical oneupmanship.

It would be as difficult to diagram this particular sentence (quoted above) as the one I analyzed in Elkin's essay (see page 91), where we never do find a main clause, just a series of modifiers of the subordinate clause. Here Nashe provides a

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main clause but one that does not relate logically to what he has tried to subordinate to it. He starts a thought but then has a better idea and follows it instead. We have the problem here of a mixed construction. This is the same kind of error that Shaughnessy notes with students who hear what they write rather than reread silently as they write--an error of mixed construction that comes from writing as they speak, writing as oral discourse. As we begin to read the sentence in paragraph two, we might normally predict something like the following rewritten sentence, in which I have underlined the logical signposts Nashe might have used:¹⁹

But that's nothing compared to what you have done to him. For had you never been beholding to him, nor held up by him, then you would have had every reason to vilify him as you have done. But he has supported you, and look at the treatment he has received at your hands. He didn't deserve what you've said about him. So it's no wonder that....

Shaughnessy considers a mark of the advanced writer to be a sudden flow (at times an inundation) of words and phrases that point up connections. Not only do we find most of the idioms of connection, both logical and rhetorical, that produce the web of discourse in analytical writing but we find the syntactical structures that underlie many of these idioms.²⁰

By adding the connections and "the syntactical structures that underlie" such connections, I have made Nashe analytical, when he is rhetorical. Even so, my revision is only possible if we assume that the word "whiles" in "he hath held thee vp a hundred times, whiles the Deane hath giuen thee correction..." means that "he has praised at the same time that the Dean has corrected." The syntax

¹⁹ See George Dillon, *Constructing Texts: Elements of a Theory of Composition and Style* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana UP, 1981) for a discussion of how readers construct texts by anticipating what's to come and what happens when writers violate the normal syntactic expectations of a native speaker.

²⁰ Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations* 206.

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appears to indicate that this is the meaning we should construe. However, I'm not certain that we can draw such an obvious conclusion. The sentences are too ambiguous for certainty. Nashe seems to be making syntactic errors; or he is deliberately creating ambiguities of the sort that occur when we talk but that don't really matter because we have gestures, tone, and pauses to help us understand what is being said, even when the construction is mixed. If we're really stumped we can say, "wait a minute." Writing is supposed to avoid this. Nashe shows otherwise.

To insure that we don't miss his talk, Nashe calls our attention to what he's done in the well known passage about his extemporal vein (the beginning of paragraph three), which I have already quoted. Here I would like to look at it more closely from an oral perspective, beginning with the Latin phrase, "*Redeo ad vos, mei Auditores.*" I have already mentioned that Nashe's frequent use of Latin is an aspect of the identity he projects and the assumptions he makes about his audience. Today we might think that his Latin represents discourse that is emphatically literate, or written, but I see it as another evidence of his orality; it reflects an education that emphasized oral training. Nashe also uses certain Latin phrases to indicate his tone of voice or his emotional attitude, or to shift tone and create contradictions, as he does in a sentence referred to earlier from the beginning of paragraph four: "Gentle Reader, *tandem aliquando* I am at leasure to talke to thee." (Note how often his direct addresses to his readers serve as his transition from one subject to another, just as a phrase like, "Now that you mention it" or "that reminds me, Sue" does in face-to-face conversation.) The phrase *tandem aliquando* means, literally, "finally, finally" or "at last, finally." *Tandem* carries with it the idea of urgency or impatience, and the repetition reinforces it, which contradicts the tone of the English that brackets it. It also adds ambiguity; is Nashe expressing impatience at us, at the Knight of the Post for detaining him so long, or at himself for being a windbag (or all three)? Because of what follows, I assume that he is showing his impatience at us: we have kept him waiting, not the other way around. So not only does the Latin convey tone, but it puts the discourse in an oral mode, which is the intention with

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Nashe uses being a speaker to the point of preposition and what he is re subject. Which opportunity to identities. The paragraph addresses direct audience "but" predominates colloquial expression read as a context in this context before. Nashe resulting shift fashion.

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“*redeo*....”

Nashe uses an ambiguous verb, for *redeo* could mean “I return,” the “I” being a speaker. In other words, “now let me return to you again,” or “I return to the point you just made,” or “the point I was just making.” Yet with the preposition *ad*, *redeo* could mean return to the main theme or revert to, but what he is returning to or reverting to is *vos*, “you, my listeners,” and not to a subject. Which might make the theme of his discourse the occasion itself, an opportunity to entertain his hearers, the after-dinner *raconteur*, another of his identities. The Latin provides a transition of sorts, as it also introduces another paragraph addressed directly to his audience. There is nothing in the section but direct audience address. The structure is paratactic for the most part, “and” and “but” predominating. We also find several rhetorical questions. And Nashe uses colloquial expressions--“So ho,” “tell me,” and “come on”--which we might read as a contrast to the Latin, if we read the Latin as learned and formal, though in this context I am not sure that we should do so. In this paragraph, as noted before, Nashe turns his gaze from one member of his audience to another, with a resulting shift in what his pronouns mean. Nashe is showing off, in schoolboy fashion.

In some cases, the Latin serves as shorthand, bits and snatches of well-known thoughts, or *sententiae*, culled from commonplace books, the source of many of the clichés of the sixteenth century. Nashe and other Latin-educated writers did not need to quote something completely because the *sententiae* were so well known, as well known as “it’s Miller time” is today in certain circles. Only a few words were enough to convey a whole range of oral cultural nuances that effectively excluded the uneducated, which makes for a contradictory “popular” literature. If Nashe’s pamphlets reflected popular culture, as most literary historians maintain, they were a strangely narrow kind of popular literature.

Nashe, like all good orators, loves the sound of his own voice and gives it to us through metadiscourse, through his frequent Latin phrases and colloquialisms, and through his shifting subjects and pronouns. But he also achieves the sound of his voice through vocabulary, alliteration, and assonance, the best examples coming when he is most polemical. We find abundant vituperation. The last

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three sentences in paragraph one are good examples; I have underlined the alliteration and boldfaced the assonance, since Nashe often uses them together:

consumd his ale-crammed nose to nothing, in
bearbayting him with whole bundles of ballets;
 shame-swolne toad to haue the spet-prooffe face
 to out liue this disgrace; It is, deare brethren, Viuit,
 imo, viuit; and which is more, he is a Vicar.

Unless we read this aloud, we miss the muscularity of the prose, as well as the strong vocal rhythm, achieved as much by his one-syllable words as by their alliterative or assonantal qualities. They give the punch of an orator pounding the podium. His vocabulary is concrete, not abstract, and even the neologism “spet-prooffe” has a true Anglo-Saxon sound. We should also note the Latin phrase in this passage, for semantically it reinforces the repetitive phonology. “*Imo*” is used to introduce a correction, something more precise than what immediately preceded it, but the correction is merely a repetition of “he lives.” The English phrase “and which is more” also indicates a further refinement, a further precision of the previous statement. But what is this further precision? “He is a Vicar.” Note that Nashe introduces the Latin with “it is,” which answers his rhetorical question, How could anyone “out liue this disgrace?” It, meaning “the answer,” is...the gall of that man not only to outlive his disgrace but to live, repeating the phrase to live, a Vicar. A literal translation of the Latin in combination with “he is a vicar” would read “It is, dear brethren to live, that is to say, to live; and which is more, he is a Vicar”; vicar means, originally, one who lives for, or substitutes for. So Nashe repeats the idea of living three times, so offended is he that Harvey is still walking around. If the sentence sounds redundant, that is because it is redundant.

Another good example of the sound of Nashe’s voice comes in paragraph 6, beginning with the imperative idiomatic expression, with its ambiguous pronoun, “Looke to it,” which he addresses to “you Booksellers and Stationers...,” another male audience, and one he not infrequently harangues. Here we find him exhorting them to refuse “any such goose gyblets or stinking garbadge, as the

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lygs_of newsmongers....,” using alliteration. In other sections, he repeats “p” sounds, “l” sounds, and “f” sounds. For instance, in paragraph five we find “purgations and vomits wrapt vppe in wast paper.” In this seven-paragraph excerpt Nashe seems to prefer explosive sounds; we can almost feel the puffs of air that come from his mouth as he pontificates. (We should not forget his title, either, which some scholars think was pronounced “purse,” and is, then, a pun.)

But phonetic repetition is not the only repetition in Nashe. An aspect of a culture in transition from orality to literacy is the repetition of stock themes or phrases. I have already noted that Nashe’s Latin phrases can be heard as clichés, or proverbs, which compare to the numerous clichés we find in contemporary essays. He also has echoes of the New Testament, preachers, or prophets, for instance “world without end,” “if these things fall not out...,” “dear brethren,” “commit this Supplication to thy care,” “For who can abide,” “they know not what they doe,” and “let not your shops be infected.” Some scholars are bothered by the pastiche of quotations throughout Nashe’s pamphlets. It is interesting that Staton compares Nashe’s use of quotations to that of a modern “speaker” (note the word) who quotes Shylock to deplore anti-semitism--a speaker who is just as likely to have read *Bartlett’s* as Shakespeare.²¹ It is an oral, or a nonliterate, use of literature, failing to read the whole for the highlights, and *Bartlett’s* and commonplace books reflect an “oral” literacy. They make it easy for someone to sound highly literate without having the work of reading.²²

The use of stock themes and stories is analogous to Nashe’s use of proverbs. Although in this excerpt Nashe does not retell standard stories from the ancients (I will consider this when we turn to *Lenten Stuffe*), his entire pamphlet is a stock theme, as are the individual sections. Pierce is a stock character, the penniless wit railing against social and personal injustice. Nashe, after beginning with a story about Greediness and his wife, Dame Niggardize (personification itself being a stock rhetorical device and one Nashe uses repeatedly), continues to cover all the

²¹ Staton, “Thomas Nashe” 62.

²² During the Senate hearings on the confirmation of Clarence Thomas we heard an example of this nonliterate literacy, when Senator Alan Stimpson defended Thomas against the charges of Anita Hill by quoting a passage from *Othello* on the agony of losing a good name; ironically, the senator was quoting Iago.

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seven deadly sins, though without personifying them as he does at the beginning. Although the seven deadly sins are a stock theme, within them he tells other stories as well as giving a social critique of the behavior and learning of most of the countries in the known world. The Knight of the Post's description of hell and hellions is a standard subject, as is the narrator's descent into hell, even if these normally come in epic and not in nonfiction prose intended for a somewhat less elevated audience than that of epic poetry.

In oral disputation, it was common to vilify the nationality, parentage, appearance, education, and works of one's opponent, and Nashe uses this oral technique effectively throughout *Pierce*, though in the seven paragraphs excerpted here he abbreviates the practice and only insults, at least by implication, Gabriel Harvey's learning, his writing, and his worthiness as a divine. In *Strange Newes* Nashe also uses the techniques of oral disputation to demolish Harvey. It is interesting to compare the excerpt from *Pierce* with a brief passage from *Strange Newes*, entered in the stationer's register 1592-93, for the two passages have much in common:

Flaunting *Richard* and his Philosophie Lecture,
was vnder our fingers euen now, howsoeuer wee
haue lost him. Hold the candle, and you shall see
me cast a figure for him extempore: Oh hoh, I haue
founde him without any further seeking. Giue me
your eares, *Io Paeon*; God saue them, they are long
ones.

Now, betweene you and me declare, as if you
were at shrift, whether you be not a superlatiue blocke,
for al you readd the Philosophie Lecture at Cambridge:
Brieflie, brieflie; let mee not stand all daie about you....

For this once wee dispence with you, because you
look so penitentlie on it, but let not me catch you
selling any more such twise sodden sawdust diuinitie
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We immediately notice that readers have some work to do. Nashe asks us to “hold the candle, and you shall see me cast a figure for him extempore.” Our attention is focused on Nashe and his actions, not on his ostensible subject, Richard Harvey, Gabriel’s brother. Nashe directly addresses us, to enroll us in his discourse, which again is extemporaneous--an assertion of Nashe’s identity as wit and writer. “Look what I can do on the spur of the moment,” he says. We need to hold the candle because Nashe can’t quite find him in the dark, which, he hints, is where “Flaunting *Richard* and his Philosophie Lecture” leaves us. Once Nashe finds him, which he introduces with an oral exclamation, “Oh hoh,” he proceeds to grab him by the ears. Nashe uses other colloquial expressions, like “God saue them,” “between you and me,” “brieflie, brieflie; let me not stand all daie....” He also uses Latin, *Io Paeon*, and alliteration, “paper in Pater-noster-rowe.” Nashe criticizes Harvey’s--or his brother Richard’s--appearance (the reference to long ears), attacks his learning (even though he lectured on philosophy at Cambridge), and vilifies his writing (the pamphlet on the lamb of God). In *Pierce* he calls Harvey’s pamphlet sheepish discourse (one of several puns) and fit only for the privy (yet another example of hyperbole). It is “a dish of diuinitie Brewesse, which the dogges will not eat.” In *Strange Newes* he call it “twise sodden sawdust diuinitie”--both expressions hypberbolic, rhythmic, and alliterative.

In this passage Nashe also recognizes the digressive, illogical nature of his discourse, for the sentence that immediately precedes the passage I quoted says: *Sed quorsum haec*, how doe these digressions linke in with our *Subiectum circa quod?*” The Latin and English are repetitious, so that we see here another reason for his Latin--to embellish, amplify, add to. Although he frequently inserts Latin phrases, as I noted earlier he not infrequently provides an English translation, which for his literate audience (using literate in its sixteenth-century definition of one who knew Latin) is repetitious, but not for the nonliterate in his

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audience. At times he uses repetitious Latin phrases, as here; with the English he has a triple repetition. Nashe answers his question, “how doe these digressions linke,” simply with another digression, a stitching together of all the insults he can think of. From start to finish, *Strange Newes* is an amplification, an embellishment of one idea: Gabriel Harvey is ludicrous. But overriding that is something more important to Nashe: his own ability to assert that Gabriel Harvey is ludicrous, his ability to read rightly and so write correctly; Nashe the player, the performer, the witty extemporizer--someone of astounding energy. Nashe’s identities always come first.

I have suggested that we need to read *Pierce Penilesse* the same way. Nashe is amplifying, embellishing, heaping up--all to show himself as the ultimate subject of his own discourse. From the very beginning of the pamphlet, Nashe thrusts himself to the center, here the persona of an angry and frustrated pamphleteer, who insists that he deserves better treatment than he has received. At this point, he’s playing the part of Rodney Dangerfield; he don’t get no respect:

for all my labours turned to losse, my vulgar Muse²³
was despised & neglected, my paines not regarded,
or slightly rewarded, and I my selfe (in prime of my
best wit) laid open to pouertie. Wherevpon
(in a malcontent humor) I accused my fortune,
raild on my patrones, bit my pen, rent my papers,
and ragde in all points like a mad man.

Nashe is in the prime of his wit, without peer, he hints. We need to read this with the passage I excerpted in mind, as well as the section from *Strange Newes*. In paragraph two from the *Pierce* excerpt, Nashe also talks about pen and paper. We understand his anger that Harvey has lived and prospered by his use of pen and paper, and that he, Nashe, for all his brilliance, all his efforts, finds himself “despised & neglected,” his “paines not regarded, or slightly rewarded.” We

²³ Nashe’s use of the word vulgar, meaning common, ordinary, vernacular (an oxymoron with “muse”) is reminiscent of Gould’s Prologue in *Bully*, where he calls his work “vulgarization.” Nashe’s muse also is reminiscent of the muses heard by Elkin.

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can't ignore the injustices he feels, nor the affront to his identity. To be ignored is to be silenced, to be rendered dumb. In this passage Nashe presents himself as a man growing more and more irrational; each act increases in intensity, from his being "in a malcontent humor" to frenzy and raging "like a mad man" (he is rhetorically and psychologically involved in *gradatio*, or climax). However, this passage is more than an orator angry at being ignored; it also functions as directions to us on how to read oral discourse. Unless we focus on Nashe's identity despite the disguises he dons, unless we follow Nashe's voice as he calls to us from the twisting rabbit trails of his discourse, we will soon become hopelessly disoriented. When, after nearly a hundred pages, he has run out of ways to amplify, digress, define, or repeat himself, when he has no other roles to don or personas to exploit, no other rabbit trails to follow, and satisfied that his readers now recognize that he *is* a prime wit, as well as being in his prime, he lays down his pen. We can only respond, as exhausted readers, by saying, "Yes, Thomas Nashe, you *can* put on some show."

Lenten Stuff

With this pamphlet, an example of encomium, published in 1599, Thomas Nashe lays down his pen permanently. I want to consider two sections from it, to further exemplify the oral nature of his discourse and to show that again he is telling us how to read by presenting himself as reader, as well as extemporal writer and wit. Also, in *Lenten Stuffle* we find the best example of his use of a stock story--an extended cliché, if you will. Nashe tells the tale of Hero and Leander to extoll the virtues of the Red Herring and Yarmouth, his ostensible subject, though his real subject, as with *Pierce*, continues to be his own identity. Nashe addresses *Lenten Stuffle* "to his readers, hee care not what they be." Appropriately, for a pamphlet that deals with the writer's identity, Nashe begins where he ends *Pierce Penillesse*, by defending himself.

*Nashes Lentenstuffle: and why Nashes
Lentenstuffle?* some scabbed scald squire replies,
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them againe in prayse of their towne and the redde herring: and if it were so, goodman Pug-wiggen, were not that honest dealing? pay thou al thy debtes so if thou canst for thy life: but thou art a Ninnihammer; that is not it; therefore, *Nickneacaue*, I cal it *Nashes Lenten-stuffe*, as well for it was most of my study the last Lent, as that we vse so to term any fish that takes salt, of which the Red Herring is one the aptest. O, but sayth another *Iohn Dringle*, there is a booke of the *Red Herrings taile* printed foure Terms since, that made this stale. Let it be a taile of habberdine if it will, I am nothing entailed thereunto; I scorne it, I scorne it, that my woorkes should turne taile to any man. Head, body, taile and all of a redde Herring you shall haue of mee, if that will please you; or if that will not please you, stay till Ester Terme, and then, with the answeere to the *Trim Tram*, I will make you laugh your hearts out. Take me at my woord, for I am the man that will doo it. This is a light friskin of my witte, like the prayse of iniustice, the feuer quartaine, *Busiris*, or *Phalaris*, wherein I follow the trace of the famousest schollers of all ages, whom a wantonizing humour once in their life time hath possesst to play with strawes, and turne mole-hills into mountaines. (1)

Euery man can say Bee to a Battledore, and write in prayse of Vertue and the seuen Liberall Sciences, thresh come out of the full sheaues and fetch water out of the Thames; but out of drie stubble to make an after haruest, and a plentifull croppe without sowing, and wring iuice out of a flint, thats *Pierce a Gods name*, and the right tricke of a workman. Let me speake to you about my huge woords which I vse in this booke, and then you are

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your own men to do what you list. Know it is my true vaine to be a *tragicus Orator*, and of all stiles I most affect & striue to imitate *Aretines*, not caring for this demure soft *mediocre genus*, that is like water and wine mixt together; but giue me pure wine of it self, & that begets good bloud, and heates the brain thorowly: I had as lieue haue no sunne, as haue it shine faintly, no fire, as a smothering fire of small coales, no cloathes, rather then were linsey wolsey. Apply it for me, for I am cald away to correct the faults of the presse, that escaped in my absence from the Printinghouse. (2) (III, 151-52).

Although Nashe cites Aretine, says he wants to be a “*tragicus Orator*,” and refers to Pierce, who by the time of *Lenten Stuffle* had become something of a celebrity, his letter to the Readers is not the vituperation of his first pamphlet (though he can’t resist a few passing barbs). Even his defense of title and subject are much more light-hearted than the other, as he admits: “this is a light friskin of my witte.” But his wit remains central. He scorns other books and promises to make us “laugh [our] hearts out: “Take me at my woord, for I am the man that will doo it,” he tells us in paragraph one. He plays with the reader, despite admitting that ultimately his audience will do what they want with *Lenten Stuffle*: in paragraph two, “you are your own men to do what you list.” Yet Nashe has told us how to read, and he expects us to do what he says. Because he has taught us well, he can leave his pamphlet in our hands, since he is “cald away” to read proofs. The ultimate assertion of his identity is that he has the confidence to disappear, knowing that nevertheless readers will still find him on every page.

Nashe uses the imperative, taking a high hand with his readers, as he orders us around: for instance, “take me” in paragraph one and “know” and “apply” in paragraph two. The imperative always creates the effect of a face-to-face encounter, with the speaker in command. It is another technique in writing as oral discourse. In this same face-to-face way he provides his audience with some

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suggestions as to what they should make of *Lenten Stuffe*, as well as some reasons why he gives it that title and chooses the subject of red herrings. We need to hear this over-a-pint discussion. But who begins? Who says the first phrase, "*Nashes Lentenstuffe*:"--Nashe? or a reader? The second phrase, "and why *Nashes Lentenstuffe*?" is equally ambiguous. It appears to be a response from one of those "Readers, hee cares not *what they be*." Or who says the second sentence? "Some scabbed scald squire" replies derisively in the voice of Nashe--"because I had money lent me...." Then another voice enters with "but thou art a Ninnihammer," only to be contradicted by another voice, who says "that is not it." Even though this seems much more straightforward than the excerpt from *Pierce*, where we had frequent shifts of subject and speaker, the dialogue makes it difficult. Had he presented it as a script, as I think it should be read, it would be much more obvious that we have a part to play; we are reading a sixteenth-century version of the call-and-response style of Ms. W.

We find it hard to accept repetition in print, but once again Nashe is highly repetitive; for instance, "I pay," "I cal," "I am nothing," "I scorne, I scorne," "I will make you," "I am the man," "I follow." He repeats syntactic patterns: "I had as lieue have no sunne, as haue," "no fire...as haue...no clothes...." The most obvious repetition is with the combining of *adnominatio* and *antistasis* with the word "taile:" "taile," "entaild," "turne taile," and "head, body, taile." Less obvious is his repetition of "term": "so to term," "printed foure Termes since," "easter Terme." As we have seen previously, he uses alliteration, as in "some scabbed scald squire," "ninnihammer...Nicknecaue...Nashes," or "bee to a battledore."

An unusual aspect of this letter is Nashe's claim to reject the stock theme at the same time that he uses a stock theme as well as clichés and proverbs, for it had become common to celebrate the ridiculous. Nashe calls what we are about to read the kind of pamphlet "*Pierce a Gods name*" would write, "the right tricke of a workman"--ironic since *Pierce Penillesse* is, as we have seen, a pastiche of stock themes, characters, descriptions, proverbs, and rhetorical devices. Nashe rejects and embraces the stock theme, using such clichés as "play with strawes,"

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“mole-hills into mountaines,” and “bee to a battledore.” Any man, says Nashe, can praise virtue or a liberal education. What isn’t so easy is praising folly, injustice, or fevers, which other writers had done. No one, he insists, has attempted what he intends--to praise the red herring, the most difficult and foolish topic he could imagine.

Nashe doesn’t defend himself through logical argumentation but through analogy--“thresh corn out of full sheaves” or “fetch water out of the Thames.” Try, he says, to do what I have done, to make an “after harvest” from “drie stubble,” or to have any harvest at all since no one sowed any seeds, least of all him. Hardest of all is to get “iuiice out of a flint.” Common wisdom “substitutes for ideas,” or argumentation--in Shaughnessy’s words, a mark of “the inexperienced writer.” She adds that common wisdom “encourage[s] the flow of words and sentences without engaging the writer in the real struggle for articulation.”²⁴ Yet Nashe presents his common wisdom as a triumph of articulation. He also presents his common wisdom as a triumph of his identity, the prime wit, the brilliant reader, the extemporal writer. He could make no more flamboyant assertion about himself than to compare his achievement with that “of the most famousest schollers,” as he says in paragraph one. Even Erasmus, he implies, would have found it difficult to succeed with the task Nashe has set before himself--but not Pierce. Nashe’s mention of Pierce implies that he will be our narrator and guide on the tour he plans to conduct through Yarmouth. What we know about Pierce, then, will affect our reading of *Lenten Stuffe*.

Nashe’s letter functions as abstract²⁵ for his pamphlet, a justification and a summary of his encomium to a red herring. Later he catalogues all the great writers who have written copiously and lovingly of lowly subjects, starting with Homer’s rats and frogs, a section that embellishes his letter. His letter also

²⁴ Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations* 232.

²⁵ I am using this term in the same sense that Mary Louise Pratt, following Labov, does in *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana UP, 1977). In spoken narrative, a speaker usually begins with an abstract, a brief summary of what he plans to talk about, to let his listeners decide if they want to suspend their conversational turns long enough to hear the story. This is what Nashe is doing with this letter.

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Stay, let me looke about, where am I?
 in my text, or out of it? not out, for a
 groate: out, for an angell: nay, I'le lay
 no wagers, for nowe I perponder more
 sadlie vppon it, I thinke I am out indeed.
 Beare with it, it was but a pretty parenthesis
 of Princes and theyr parasites, which shall
 doo you no harme, for I will cloy you with
 Herring before wee part.²⁶

Has he disappeared from his text? he asks. Is he no longer the center of attention? His question asks us to question his control over his own discourse. Nashe finds it hard to stick with the red herring--an intentional humorous paradox. How much, after all, can be said about it? Shortly thereafter he returns to the role of his readers, who can make of his discourse what they want, only this time he speaks more plainly than in his letter. Again we see that his pamphlets concern reading, and reading the identity of Nashe:

My readers peraduenture may see more
 into it then I can; for, in comparison of them,
 in whatsoeuer I set forth, I am *Bernardus non*
vidit omnia, as blinde as blinde Bayard and
 haue the eyes of a beetle: nothing from them is
 obscure, they being quicker sighted then the sunne,
 to spie in his beames the moates that are not, and
 able to transforme the lightest murmuring gnat to
 an Elephant.

Nashe's auditors hear what isn't said; they find what isn't there, rather as he does with the red herring. Once more Nashe promises to return to his subject only to begin a discussion of Alchemy, which leads to Cornelius Agrippa and the stinking skin of a sheep, which of course cannot be compared to that of a red herring skin, though he does make such a comparison (another example of *occupatio* and

²⁶ 219. This comes only a few pages from the end of the pamphlet.

similar to Gou
can think of ab
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who ever men
role. Enter He

By the time
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Godfather with
yet another lon
Nashe travels f
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and eventually
story, told so w
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similar to Gould's use of this device), and then on to every cliché and proverb he can think of about his prize fish, in discourse reminiscent of Mr. S and his collection of travel clichés. Nashe produces a commonplace book of every writer who ever mentioned fish. He also brings fish into stories where they have no role. Enter Hero and her lover.

By the time Nashe wrote *Lenten Stuffe* the story of Hero and Leander had become common, as culturally trite as the Godfather stories or the Rambo films, and so he chooses it for his central analogy, a way to keep talking about the red herring without talking about it. (A writer today might refer to Rambo or the Godfather without further explanation.) The story of Hero and Leander follows yet another long digression of ancient tales in which fish of all kinds figure-- Nashe travels from the Ottomon Turks to the Saracens, down into hell, up into the pantheon, stopping along the way at the table of Midas, visiting drunken Silenus, and eventually coming to rest at Corinth. Finally he turns to the widely known story, told so well by "Kit Marlow." We need to keep in mind the purpose of his pamphlet--an encomium of the lowly red herring. I begin the excerpt with Leander dead, washed up on the shore. Hero has had a disturbed night filled with unsettling dreams; his mention of dreams provides a rationale for a brief digression on the psychological role of dreams before continuing with the story. Again, he directly addresses the reader.

You may see dreames are not so vaine as they are
preached of, though not in vaine Preachers inueigh
against them, and bende themselues out of the peoples
minde to exhale their foolish superstition. The rheume is
the students disease, and who study most, dreame most.
The labouring mens hands glowe and blister after their
dayes worke: the glowing and blistring of our braines
after our day labouring cogitations are dreames, and those
dreames are reaking vapours of no impression, if our
mateless cowches bee not halfe empty. Hero hoped, and

therefore shee dreamed (as all hope is but a dreame); her hope was where her heart was, and her heart winding and turning with the winde, that might winde her heart of golde to her, or else turne him from her. Hope and feare both combatted in her, and both these are wakefull, which made her at break of day (what an old crone is the day, that is so long a breaking) to vnloope her luket or casement, to looke whence the blasts came, or what gate or pace the sea kept; when foorthwith her eyes bred her eye-sore, the first white whereon their transpiercing arrowes stuck being the breathlesse corps of *Leander*: with the sodaine contemplation of this piteous spectacle of her loue, sodden to haddocks meate, her sorrowe could not choose but be indefinite, if her delight in him were but indifferent; and there is no woman but delights in sorrow, or she would not vse it so lightly for euery thing....(1)
(III, 197-98)

At that she became a franticke Bacchanal outright, & made no more bones but sprang after him, and so resign'd vp her Priesthood, and left worke for *Musaeus* and *Kit Marlowe*. The gods, and gods and goddesses all on a rowe, bread and crow, from *Ops* to *Pomona*, the first applewife, were so dumpt with this miserable wrache, that they beganne to abhorre al moysture for the seas sake....(2) (198)

The dint of destiny could not be repeald in the reuiuing of *Hero & Leander*, but their heauenly hoods in theyr synode thus decreed, that, for they were either of them seaborderers and drowned in the sea, stil to the sea they must belong, and bee diuided in habitation after death, as they were in their life time. *Leander*, for that in

a cold darke testie night he had his pasport to *Charon*,
 they terminated to the vnquiet cold coast of Iseland,
 where halfe the yeare is nothing but murke night, and to
 that fish translated him which of vs is termed Ling.
Hero, for that she was pagled and timpanized, and
 sustained two losses vnder one, they footebald their
 heades together, & protested to make the stem of her
 loynes of all fishes the flanting Fabian or Palmerin of
 England, which is Cadwallader Herring, and, as their
 meetings were but seldome, and not so oft as welcome, so
 but seldome should the meete in the heele of the week at
 the best mens tables, vppon Fridayes and Satterdayes, the
 holy time of Lent exempted, and then they might be at
 meate and meale for seuen weeks together. (3) (199-200).

Nashe continues to explain why Ling and Red Herring are always eaten with mustard and how the Red Herring, or Hero, came to be found off the coast of Yarmouth. From there, as he says, “Whippet, turne to a new lesson, and strike we vp Iohn for the King, or tell howe the Herring scrambled vp to be King of all fishes.” Nashe is always trying to think of yet another way to talk about his subject. Whatever he has just said inevitably reminds him of something else, and in this transition we find once more his direct address to his audience, “whippet,” again with the imperative.

The first paragraph contains marvelous examples of nearly every oral characteristic I have noted in Nashe. Each one shows Nashe at his most vocal and flamboyant, at the height of his career as *raconteur*. In the first two lines we find “not so vaine,” “not in vaine,” and “inueigh,” pun and repetition, a technique he repeats throughout *Lenten Stuffe*. “Glowe and blister” for rednecks, but “glowing and blistring” for “our braines,” a use of the personal pronoun that indicates what audience he finds before him. Hero, he tells us, has “her heart winding and turning with the winde, that might winde her heart of golde to her, or else turne him from her--a combination of *adnominatio* and

antistasis. But he also uses clichés in ways strikingly similar to the previous writers discussed: “all hope is but a dream,” which comes in a parenthetical aside, akin to Gould; “hope was where her heart was”; and “heart of gold.” He continues in this vein with “breake of day,” which he calls attention to by another parenthetical comment, here similar to Elkin’s style. Hero’s “eyes bred her eye-sore,” the “first white” (we fill in the rest) of the “transpiercing arrows,” as she sees the “breathlesse corps” of her lover, two unnecessary adjectives as any a student might have written. A few lines later Nashe calls Leander a “dead corse.” Next we find “sodaine contemplation” of Hero’s love “sodden to haddocks meat,” then “but be indefinite” [boundless]...but indifferent,” and “delight” to “delights” and so to “lightly.” The progression of the rhetoric--from delight, delights, and lightly--is more than repetitious. It satirizes the nature of a woman’s emotional responses. Nashe says that even if Hero’s “delight” in Leander had been only “indifferent,” she still would have “delight[ed] in her sorrow,” because all women love to be sad. And this takes him beyond the story of Hero and Leander to what amounts to a brief digression for the amusement of his male audience about women who cry at the drop of a hat, or as Nashe puts it, “or she would not vse it so lightly for euey thing.” Women are, literally, reduced to tears; they are nothing more than creatures who cry. Here is another assertion of his male identity with his male audience, and we recall how Mr. F ended his essay on baseball and male identity with the story of Marilyn Monroe and Joe DiMaggio. With this passage, Nashe also undercuts the picture he presents in the next paragraph of a woman so hysterical as to be Bacchanalian. Her responses are nothing more than deliberate acts, and not those of someone distraught to the point of suicide. He makes Hero all-too-calculating when he uses the expression “no more bones” and shows her diving right in to drown. “The gods and goddesses all on a rowe, bread and crow” sounds like a phrase from a nursery rhyme.

The primary characteristic of Nashe’s story of Hero and Leander is its repetition. We can find examples in nearly every sentence, some of which I have noted above. He reinforces his lexical repetition with syntactic repetition,

parataxis, and phonological repetition, using assonance at least as often as alliteration. The best example of assonance in this excerpt, with a little alliteration thrown in for interest, comes at the end: “they meete in the heele of the weeke at the best mens tables, vppon Fridayes and Satterdays, the holy time of Lent exempted, and then they might be at meate and meale for seuen weekes together.” But the passage about Hero’s hopes and fears in paragraph one is another good example: “Hero hoped, and therefore shee dreamed (as all hope is but a dreame); her hope was where her heart was....” He repeats “hope” three times. Notice, too, his clichés, which he uses almost as often as he uses repetition. Here are some examples: “ill a will,” “scorch it and dry it vppe,” “dust and sweate,” “scritch or outcry,” “to hell or to heauen,” “as dead as a doore naile,” “bread and salt,” “windy sailor,” “Sunne and Moone,” “dint of destiny,” “but seldome...as welcome, so but seldome,” and “bloud hath been spilt.”

When we focus on Nashe’s conjunctions alone, we hear how similar the section is to students who overuse “and” and “but.” Nashe favors “and,” occasionally using “or,” another paratactic conjunction I have not previously noted. In the first paragraph every sentence includes at least one of the three (Nashe seldom uses subordinate clauses).

To the end, Nashe defends himself, his digressions, his repetitions, his clichés, his illogical logic, his nonstop nonsense, and so keeps himself as the focus of his discourse. Even his defenses, as at the end of *Lenten Stuffe*, become another opportunity for further digression, further repetition, and further assertion that he reads and writes with better wit than most. His identity justifies the unusual associations he makes; they work simply because he has made them, and he knows what makes for witty discourse. He presents himself as understanding that all the world is linked in one grand chain, and no matter where we begin, we can always get to where we’re going. It reveals his attempt to integrate and synthesize the various elements of his culture and to recognize that even randomness can yield patterns. So Nashe can assert his identity by praising the red herring of Yarmouth via Hero and Leander; as Gould can give us his vision of himself and reality as Darwinian by talking about Cooperstown; and Mr. F can find his male identity through the language of baseball.

Chapter Five: Reading the End

“For making detours and going by sideroads, nothing is more convenient than the essay form. One can take off in almost any direction, certain that if the thing does not work out one can turn back and start over in some other....Wanderings into yet smaller sideroads and wider detours does little harm, for progress is not expected to be relentlessly forward anyway, but winding and improvisational, coming out where it comes out. And when there is nothing more to say on the subject at the moment, or perhaps altogether, the matter can simply be dropped.”

Clifford Geertz, *Local*

*Knowledge: Further Essays in
Interpretive Anthropology*, 6.

I began this study with a few simple questions to myself. What happens when we read written discourse--unpublished and published--from the perspective of the characteristics of oral discourse? What do writers achieve by writing orally that they don't using a conventional expository style? How does reading from an oral perspective, reading as conversation, change our understanding of the written text (as a text)? A few linguists have studied oral discourse from the perspective of written discourse or literary conventions, but almost none has studied written discourse from the conventions of spoken discourse, with the notable exception of Mary Louise Pratt in *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse*. So I began with the assumption that characteristics of oral discourse do occur--and often--in certain kinds of written discourse. I also began with the conviction that there probably were some good reasons why writers wrote this way. Once I began reading from the perspective of orality, however, I began to notice strong oral elements even in written discourse that proclaimed itself dogmatically distinct from orality. As I read and reread the essays that served as my examples, the relationship between speaking and writing seemed much more complex than certain linguists would have us believe, so interdependent that at times it is difficult to separate spoken elements from written ones, as I hope my analysis has indicated.

In fact, it is easy to overlook orality within written discourse because the fact of it as printed encourages us to bring certain assumptions to our reading, as well as to focus on the more obvious aspects of the differences between speaking and writing (such as face-to-face versus no physical contact). The obvious differences, which I am not trying to deny, can disguise the complexities of the relationship between speaking and writing and their overlappings and intertwining. Print encourages us to assume that writers don't routinely use oral elements, because to do so would violate our values of rhetorical decorum. So we tend to overlook in published writers what stand out as errors in unpublished writers. (As editors know, once something is in print, as opposed to a manuscript or typescript, it always sounds a lot better.) More than that, though, we willingly interpret what a published writer does, to make it fit, to make it acceptable, to make it artistic, even in so idiosyncratic a writer as Thomas Nashe. If we are honest with ourselves, we must admit that we don't bother to interpret what unpublished students write on anything like the same grounds that we do the published writers we value. We read and judge what students write by how far they deviate from whoever our model happens to be--Mark Twain, for instance, who shows up in almost every modern handbook of rhetoric, or Stephen Jay Gould, who also shows up frequently.

I wanted to reverse that procedure by reading published writers, present and past, after reading my two student models and reading all of them from the theoretical perspective of writing as oral discourse. By reading students first and last, I indicate that students write with intention and authority and that we need to grant them this. I trust them to teach me how to improve my own reading; I learn from them. Students are the sensitive indicators of our culture. If we want to know where we are now and the shape of things to come, it makes sense to listen. It's not a matter of allowing ignorance and illiteracy to spread, as some fear; our students are often able to grasp new discourse strategies better than we do, for traditional categories and discourse structures are no longer sufficient for our society.

Because I love to learn, I want to teach. I can help students improve their

reading: of themselves, of their colleagues, and of the published writers I introduce them to and so improve their writing. Students come to recognize that their texts have value and are worth reading. By learning to read themselves, they learn to read others, even writers from other cultures and times than their own. They come to understand that all writers of whatever culture or era incorporate their view of themselves and their society into their writing; they learn how to listen to a multiplicity of voices.

To repeat what I said in the first chapter, my assumption is that reading from the perspective of oral discourse changes what happens in a composition class, at all levels. As I read Mr. F and Ms. W, I also tried to show, at least implicitly, what model oral discourse might sound like--to give two standards, if you will. From there, I wanted to see how such discourse sounded in much more experienced writers but always keeping students in mind. Further, I intended that my reading of Mr. F and Ms. W serve as a model for the kind of reading any teacher of freshman composition should do; anything less, it seems to me, misconstrues and undervalues what students are attempting. Although students may be less skillful using oral discourse in writing than is Stanley Elkin (and I might claim that he is more skillful than Stephen Jay Gould), the impetus for such writing springs from the same source. Most students may never commit themselves to becoming professional writers, any more than students in an introductory art class may dedicate themselves to becoming a Jackson Pollack, but certainly the impetus for both the work of amateurs and professionals comes from the same source, the imagination, and Ann Berthoff recommends that we reinstate imagination as an integral part of the thinking process. In any case, my point is not that we should ignore distinctions between published and unpublished writers but that we should use the same general methods in reading both.¹

The irony of the conventional way of reading student work, of course, is that so many of the models we give them, Gould, for instance, are highly oral--talky--

¹ I think it important to emphasize that I said that we don't read students with anything like the attention we do professionals; my point is that we should narrow the gap considerably even while recognizing that there are practical differences, because student writers are not practiced. For Berthoff's views on the imagination, see any of her works cited in the bibliography.

and I need not comment on the talkiness of Mark Twain. We hold these writers up as models, but....But do we really want students to imitate the models we provide, or do we want them to write in certain predictable, uniform, homogeneous, non-oral ways? All the while we insist that writing is a process to discover what we think and want to say. All the while we insist that students talk about what they want to write and that they read aloud what they have written for a specific, face-to-face audience. And all the while we wonder why we often receive essays that don't fit the objective, abstract, expository essay we had in mind all along.

Our approach to reading what students write is a matter of mixed signals at best. We want them to use "process"; even handbooks that essentially present the same old forms--compare/contrast, narrative, descriptive, persuasive--couch the forms in terms of writing as a process, but then we don't want to read writing that is process-like, that proceeds by "sideroads" and "detours," "winding and improvisational, coming out where it comes out," which could easily be a description of the kind of writing we have looked at. That's one sort of text we receive.

But we also get another kind, its exact opposite--the voiceless, impersonal, homogenized, anyone-could-have-written-this sort of essay--and we get both kinds in the same classes because of the mixed signals we give students. We may encourage them to think of themselves as writers or to own their writing, yet at the same time refuse them the privilege of even being part of their own discourse. As Nancy R. Comley points out, "Academic writing privileges objectivity, or obliteration of the writing subject, who is meant to stay outside the text." She and editor Thaïs Morgan consider this a "male" way of writing; Morgan says, "when students are taught to use the impersonal (in fact male-gendered) pronouns *one* and *we* in writing papers and exams, the woman writer, like the woman reader, is again kept outside the text, in this case, even outside the very text that she herself has written."² I would say that we keep male students as

² See Nancy R. Comley, "Reading and Writing Genders" and Thaïs E. Morgan, "Reorientations," *Reorientations: Critical Theories and Pedagogies*, ed. by Bruce Henricksen and Thaïs E. Morgan (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1990) 190 and 18, respectively.

well as female students outside their own texts, for male students don't think that "one" and "we," to use Comley and Morgan's examples, refer to their identity any more than women do.

By making analytico-referential discourse the only right answer we keep all students--not just female students--out of what is supposedly their own, and then we wonder why they refuse ownership, responsibility, and care over what they have written. Yet writing handbooks urge students to make writing as comfortable a linguistic act as speaking is for most people. Also, we want students to take responsibility for what they write as they ought to take responsibility for what they say. We want them to care about their written words. But that only happens for any of us when we know that our words belong to us and reflect our identity--our intellectual identity, our gender identity, our psychological identity, our spiritual identity. All the identities, all the voices that combine to make up who we are. In this final chapter, then, I want to consider the benefits of engaging writing as oral discourse--what it allows that academic, or strictly expository, transactional, writing, might not--to suggest what we should look for when we read oral discourse, and to explore why oral discourse might be important today. What we look for when we read oral discourse and the reasons why it is important stem from the benefits it offers.

I can summarize simply the benefits as I see them: writing as oral discourse is playful, entertaining, open-ended, participatory, flexible, and exploratory; it allows--even demands--multiple perspectives and voices; it depends on questions and is intolerant of quick, easy, simple, multiple-choice, fill-in-the-blank answers, and so it encourages--again even demands--a tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty; it insists on ownership and responsibility; it provides opportunities for making unusual but intriguing cultural connections; it reveals a mind at work, thinking and imagining and so puts the two back together; it is both provisional and improvisational; ultimately it provides the opportunity for a writer to investigate her own identity at the same time she investigates a "topic." Unlike the kind of school writing where every answer sounds just like every other answer (the bane of any teacher who has read bluebooks or papers on assigned

topics) and insists that it alone is the answer, writing as oral discourse by definition insures that teachers won't receive twenty or thirty identical essays. (Even an essay that presents a destination rather than a journey to the destination has within it signposts that help us see how a writer arrived at the destination.) Perhaps I am only speaking for myself when I say that I enjoy rehearsals as much as performances, reading the ends of books while still in the middle, and studying a mind working rather than resting; but I don't think so, for otherwise why would scholars so value a writer's in-process manuscripts?

I think of this kind of writing, whether done in a composition class or in a course on Shakespeare, like a Mozart quintet from *The Marriage of Figaro*, not the unison singing of Gregorian Chant. In a Mozart quintet not only does each voice sound different but each sings different words: together they make up the whole. And with even one person missing you no longer have the sound the composer was after. But rather than looking at these issues in the abstract I want to consider the benefits of oral discourse by returning to the essays of Mr. F and Ms. W, without repeating what I have already said, and then by comparing them with some published expository articles, as I earlier compared them with some published essays. Before turning to the standards we should look for and suggesting why such writing is important today I want to consider one final student, Mr. M, and the opportunities that reading his work as oral discourse provides him and others like him.

Mr. F and Ms. W

Mr. F says, "You need to have the chatter perfected before anything else." He is ostensibly here talking about baseball language. But "the chatter" could well refer to any kind of chatter, the language of any speech community. In a very real sense, we don't belong, show our membership, or know who we are until we can perfect the chatter. Some of us may want to perfect the chatter of a particular academic or religious community; others of us may want to perfect the chatter of a particular club or organization. But until we feel comfortable that we can talk the way our group talks--so comfortable that sometimes we can violate it--then we have no way of expressing who we are. Once students have established their

voices, they can move more easily into other speech communities where they hear other voices. In school, that means the ability to move into the speech communities of the various academic disciplines they will encounter. We might say that students become attuned to themselves and those around them and then learn to adjust their voices as needed. To put it in terms of decorum, students learn when to break the unstated rules of decorum, both social and rhetorical (or are they synonyms?) and when to abide by them.

In “Hey Babe” Mr. F shows that he has perfected the chatter of a group that is particularly important to him at the moment, the all-male club of baseball. But it also points to the kind of organization he plans to join when he leaves school--a business organization. A reading of even a few magazines or books on business success shows how prevalent sports metaphors are in business. For instance, a new CEO for a company I once worked for described my job as a “player-coach.” Fortunately I knew what he meant, because I knew about people like Hall-of-Famer Lou Boudreau. So Mr. F in talking about baseball talk is also establishing his fitness for an executive career. It isn’t just that he knows all the synonyms for a baseball--“pellet,” “horsehide,” “sphere,” “orb.” It’s that knowing these names practically relates to his desire for a big house, a fancy car, and a leading management position. It lets him let his audience know that he can do something that women can’t do, master the infield chant, which is why he moves quickly from sitting in the stands, something anyone can do who’s got the price of a ticket, to standing on the field, something only males can do (softball doesn’t count). And in our culture, mastering the infield chant means learning how to play the game, follow the rules, and be competitive in business and not only on the baseball field. It means understanding that male identity is constructed through membership in certain social organizations that qualify them for membership in other social organizations. Males have participated in baseball, so they have earned the right to participate in business. Women haven’t; and women often have trouble in business where men don’t.

Within the social organization of an English class, “Hey Babe” serves as Mr. F’s batting practice or warm-up tosses, for it allows him to be heard in a class that

at first he feared and felt alienated in, since he saw no benefit for him in writing. He had always considered writing as an exercise in hiding and deception, never as a way of exploring himself and his ideas. He suffered the same obliteration of self that Cromley and Morgan claim women do when faced with a writing task. But in "Hey Babe" and nearly all the essays he wrote he discovered the benefits of writing as oral discourse. Mr. F certainly showed that such writing can be playful and entertaining. He brought in multiple voices through the quotations he used, but also in large part by his trying out the voice of Dave Barry, a humorist whose columns Mr. F read religiously, almost the only voluntary reading he admitted to. During class and in the rhetorical analyses he wrote about his essays, he frequently mentioned Barry; and one of his first questions to me had been, "Have you ever read Dave Barry?" It was more than idle interest. He was attempting to position me in relation to him, to determine the kind of reader I might be, and thus tell him the kind of writer he could try to become. Mr. F wanted to know his audience, to know what kind of participation in the reading-writing act he could expect from me. Or, to put it in oral terms, what kind of person I would be to talk to. Since I had never read Barry, as I told him, his first few attempts at play and entertainment were much more hesitant than the ones on baseball, which occurred late in the semester. By then he had become more comfortable with himself on paper and more comfortable with the identities of his audience, I being only one of his readers. He had also, as I mentioned, established his identity with Mr. P, socially outside of class, and inside class, as well. In this regard it is interesting that both were nontraditional students, though Mr. P was at least ten years older than Mr. F and held a responsible, highly public, and political job. Mr. F, however, was several years older than most of the other students, because he had spent several years in the Navy immediately after high school.

If writing as oral discourse allowed Mr. F to use and hear multiple voices, it also allowed him to explore multiple perspectives, within individual essays and also playing one essay against another, almost in contrapuntal fashion. The multiple perspectives, of course, result in his associative, chaining structure. Given a topic like baseball language, he tries to reveal as many perspectives and

connections as he can, in a way rather like a cultural anthropologist or sociolinguist--Clifford Geertz and Erving Goffman come to mind--who study games, rituals, symbols, and the frames of a society in order to understand it. "Hey Babe" was one of five short research papers on a topic that Mr. F had to write; though he doesn't approach baseball language as Geertz or Goffman would, because he hasn't yet been trained to think in anthropological or sociolinguist terms, he comes close despite his lack of training (in fact, it's a subject well worth the time of an anthropologist or a linguist; amateurs as well as professionals can have good instincts about what defines a society). So naturally a discussion of the ritual of infield chatter leads Mr. F to politics, to nationalism, to competition--or even to exploring fatherhood, as he does implicitly in talking about Little League. Marriage and family were much on his mind, since spring training and his engagement happened about the same time. Knowing this extra-textual information makes it easier to understand one reason why Mr. F ends his essay with the well-known story about Marilyn Monroe and Joe DiMaggio, but even without that information the quotation makes sense as an aspect of his exploring the various kinds of competition central to our society. Gender means competition. Politics means competition, nationalism (also an identity issue) means competition, business means competition; and so does baseball, which is a business as well as a sport.

In this sense Mr. F tries to reproduce the culture he believes in and wants to join; he was not, as I said, sympathetic toward bilingual education or multiculturalism generally. And he naturally chose the person he thought came closest to his cultural perspective for his confidant and audience. (That he did not fully understand Mr. P became obvious in our discussions about what education meant, which took our attention for more than a month of the semester, for Mr. P argued for a liberal education, a view of education that Mr. F opposed, as I mentioned in chapter two.) At the same time, he negotiated with his culture and modulated his voice to his audience by laughing at himself and his group. The infield chant is as ridiculous looked at from the outside as it is serious from within. Mr. F incorporated his voice and the voices of his audience using humor.

At the same time, he dealt with the serious business of competition amusingly.

Mr. F was not alone in using an oral discourse style to approach issues of culture, class, identity, inclusion versus exclusion in both a serious and a lighthearted, and so nonthreatening, way. Ms. C, whom I mentioned briefly at the end of chapter two, a member of Mr. F's class though not in his main writing group, tried in her writing to make connections with a course on the American underclass as well as with her personal journal writing and conversations with friends or fellow actors. She chose the language of jazz as her vehicle to talk about discrimination, poverty, and a desire for cultural singularity versus plurality. Because oral discourse is exploratory, participatory, and open-ended, it begins with questions--"what if?" or "how about?"--as it ends with questions, even more probing, challenging, and incapable of the easy answer; writing as oral discourse is intellectually engaging.

Another subject Mr. F explores, which is also related to questions of identity and participation, is that of approval, of applause. How do we show our acceptance of someone, how do we reward his efforts? Money is his first answer--lots of money. Ball players, professionals, are paid a lot to perform. But vocal praise is another kind of reward, and, says Mr. F, it ought to transcend team competition or team loyalty. But even vocal praise can become another kind of competition, as when players compete for fan approval, or when husbands and wives compete, or men and women. (It's a version of student competition for best teacher comment.) This is also the kind of support Mr. F came to want from Mr. P, primarily, though he also wanted the vocal praise--or the laughter--of his colleagues after they read one of his essays. Or when they asked him to elaborate on a point he made, or took off from a story he told to ask for more stories. Mr. F's essays were always his springboard into another kind of performance, verbal performance where he initially felt much more confident and comfortable.

I mentioned in chapter two that Mr. F did not write the kind of decontextualized prose that nearly all linguists say is a primary characteristic of written discourse. He left lots of holes and gaps and made a great many assumptions about his audience, most of which were justified (though he had one member of his group who disliked sports of all kinds, baseball especially, but she

dropped out midway through the semester; I'm not sure the two were connected). He used his texts as verbal, rhetorical occasions to explore his ability as storyteller but also his ability to persuade or to provoke discussion. Here, too, I found him using his writing as batting practice for his career in business. We have not paid enough attention to how most students will actually use writing when they leave college, at least those joining some kind of business organization, which would include students majoring in the sciences and the humanities, and not only those with some kind of business major per se.

The writing most people do in their lives needs few of the characteristics normally described as written discourse. Instead, it needs the characteristics of oral discourse, because that is exactly how it will be used.³ A memo, a report, a proposal, all function in the context of face-to-face encounters; business letters and perhaps a few memos would be the exceptions, but even with memos writers usually expect some kind of verbal response, and a letter often prompts a phone call, as in scene one in the first chapter. Or recall the publishing scene. Someone writes a report, distributes it, and then uses it as the place to begin his conversation in a meeting. The writer can't even assume that anyone at the meeting will have read the text; in fact, it would be a mistake to do so. Rather, the participants expect to talk about what the text is about. Even those reports or proposals that do not become the occasion for a formal meeting nevertheless are discussed. If a recipient doesn't understand something or wants further clarification or expansion, she can call the writer in or discuss it on the phone. Or see him at lunch, at the coffee machine, or in the hall. (Having separate bathrooms is a drawback for women, for jokes notwithstanding it is true that written documents often are discussed in the men's room.) So Mr. F can expect to spend

³ Shirley Brice Heath in "Protean Shapes in Literacy Events" (Tannen, *Spoken and Written Language* 91-117) explores how writing is used in Trackton, an all-Black, working-class community in the Piedmont region of the Carolinas. Her description is similar to the claims I make about the way writing is used in business. And just as my findings do, her findings raise questions about the dichotomy between speaking and writing; she faults the research along the same lines, as well. See also *Ways With Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983). The significance of her work for the teaching of writing has yet to be fully explored.

his life filling in gaps, explaining ideas, expanding on what he's written; he can expect to spend his life writing for people he knows and who know him, both those supportive of his ideas and adversaries of his ideas. It's not enough to be good on paper, or to expect that what's on paper will make an impact. To use another personal example, I once was hired to replace someone who was only good on paper and so had proved ineffective as a manager and advocate for his staff (ironically, this was a publishing company).

Here, too, the issue of identity becomes important. For Mr. F to succeed he will need to convey who he is in writing and subsequently in speaking about what he's written. Ideas and program initiatives never come outside the context of the person who makes the suggestions. Only in academic journals is this true (as in anonymous submission, and this is not practiced universally).⁴ We are simply more likely to listen to someone we know and respect than someone we know nothing about. And once something is in print, so to speak, or made public, it is as true in academia as it is in business. Mr. F was learning how to position himself on paper to gain a hearing during our class discussions. His essays were discussion starters, not discussion closers.

The open-ended, non-conclusive, meandering aspects of writing as oral discourse promote conversation, as does the approach to writing as a process within a group of people who are your audience and collaborators. Mr. F expected that his audience would affect what he wrote--change it, expand it, refocus it. His writing was never closed, closed-off, or finished but functioned like conversation. It was his turn, which would lead to other conversational turn-taking. This means that we can't judge an essay like "Hey Babe" exactly the way we do an article in *College English* or *Harper's*. "Hey Babe" is merely part of the conversation. Yet even an article in a refereed journal is in

⁴ Perhaps one of the reasons why linguists who study the relationship between speaking and writing are often so dogmatic about their findings is that they use academic discourse as their written texts and academic lectures (occasionally more informal conversations) as their spoken texts. But even with academic discourse their assumptions affect their findings, for academic discourse is becoming more oral, as my two examples will show.

some sense a conversational gambit, a turn-taking, not to be read apart from its contexts.

Michael Halliday makes a good point about the way we judge writing and speaking, which relates to this issue. When we study a taped conversation, we must judge the contributions of all the speakers--not just a participant but all the participants. He argues that some of the claims about the characteristics of speech--syntactically simple, for instance, or filled with hesitations, false starts, pauses, and errors--have resulted from focusing on isolated bits of conversation, rather than on the whole. He suggests that if we do that we ought to judge writing by all the cross-outs, rewrites, changes, and false starts writers make.⁵ The analogy is appropriate for writing as oral discourse, the kind that process and groups promote. We need to read the essays of all members of a writing group as (or in) conversation with one another, just as we need to recognize the multiple authorship involved as a result of the social nature of the writing. Mr. F is the writer, and he does assert his identity, but his identity is more than a product of himself alone; his identity, as I said, comes from positioning himself through language (spoken and written) in solidarity and identification with a person, group, or groups and in opposition to a person, group, or groups. "Hey Babe" is as much a result or reflection of the cultures of which he is a part as are certain kinds of physics, mathematics, power rituals, or funeral rites. We need to read the discourse of Mr. F and all our students in a multiplicity of ways, ethnographically, I might say, as well as compositionally, rhetorically, or grammatically. The approach I am suggesting is similar to that advocated by Clifford Geertz for reading all art. He makes the point specifically using the ritual of oral poetry in Morocco, where oral poets compose from certain established formulas, a characteristic, as we have seen, of all kinds of oral discourse. The social context is crucial: "The singing, the tambourines, the dancing men, the genre demands, and the audience sending up you-yous of approval or whistles of censure, as these things either come effectively together or do not, [the formulas] make up an integral whole from which the poem can no more be abstracted than can the

⁵ See M. A. K. Halliday, *Spoken and Written Language* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1989), in particular, chapters four to six.

Quran from the reciting of it.”⁶ This is exactly the kind of reading we need to do of student essays--to understand them as part of an integrated, social whole. Such reading requires that we know much more about our students, and that we attune ourselves to our classes, in much more intimate, demanding ways than we normally do.

Certainly we see this need explicitly and overtly when we turn from Mr. F to Ms. W. She, too, is talking about mastering the ritual chatter of the particular groups she belongs to: her immediate family, her extended family, her racial family, her cultural families, her roommates, her schools, her church, her friends, her classmates. The identity of Ms. W, just as of Mr. F, is as much a social construction as it is an individual construction.⁷ All these groups and people concern her, for all make demands on her that in some ways violate who she is or wants to be. Or if they don't violate her identity they try to impose an identity on her that she may be unwilling to adopt or may be unsure about adopting. In other words, she is confronting issues of power and control; she even sounds a little like Caliban when she decides that she will talk white standard English better than whites talk it (“I was determined to speak just like them, to speak their language better than them”; see the Appendix, paragraph nineteen, for the complete context; is this why subsequent students have read her as angry?).

At the same time, of course, she uses the opportunity this paper provides to try out and try on all the voices asking her for attention: Do they fit? How do they sound in her voice? She explores the multiple perspectives and voices, and, because the subject is important to her, she takes responsibility for her discourse; she owns it as she explores the decisions it asks of her. In addition, Ms. W wants

⁶ See Geertz, “Art as a Cultural System,” *Knowledge* 113.

⁷ For an interesting critique of educational reformers' too great an insistence on the individual and too little a recognition of the social, see John Willinsky, *The New Literacy: Redefining Reading and Writing in the Schools* (New York: Routledge, 1990), in particular, chapter eight, “Meaning, Literature, and Self.” He bases his argument on a passage from Jerome Bruner, *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*, who now believes that students create their identity and their knowledge within a community of people who share a “sense of belonging to a culture.” However, the implications for this in light of our changing society and the demands of multiculturalism need much more exploration.

to know the implications of any decision she makes, even down to the kind of food she will be expected to enjoy (chitt'lings) or the clothes she should wear (her reference to dashikis) or the hairstyle she should adopt (afros). A strictly objective, expository discourse would have forced her to remain outside and would not have allowed her the freedom to become the subject of her own study.⁸

Writing as oral discourse, then, allows her to explore Black English at the same time that she explores her identity and allows her to position herself within the discussion and within competing communities. It also allows her to see that all aspects of her identity are involved--food, clothes, hair, even politics (Black power) vs. economics (Green power). All of these she intuitively connects--or has seen connected--to the kind of language a person speaks. Take the issue of food. It is interesting that as head of a multicultural campus organization called Colors she is responsible for an annual international dinner, the point of which is to celebrate differences. The group includes members from various American minorities (American Indians, Hispanics, African Americans, and Asian Americans), as well as Koreans, Philipinos, Indians, Chinese, and Japanese. So the annual dinner not only celebrates various cultures but also in some ways is a social extension of the college's ESL classes. Ms. W commented recently that until she got involved with that event she had no idea how strongly people felt about food--or, as she put it, "why people have such a thing about what they eat"--even though she herself won't eat chit'llings and said this during a meal at which she refused to try chutney, a standard condiment with the Indian food we were eating. A benefit of writing as oral discourse and its associative nature is that I can point Ms. W to what her text says about her "thing" for food. I can make explicit to her how language and culture and identity are all aspects of each

⁸ For an interesting discussion of this in regard to deconstruction and the relationship between speaking and writing, see Robert Scholes, *Protocols of Reading* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989) 71. Scholes quotes linguist Emile Benveniste that "language is possible only because each speaker sets himself up as a *subject* by referring to himself as *I* in his discourse," which also implies a "you." When feminist critics talk about denying a writer her "I," then they are really saying that we have denied them language itself--and that is to deny humanity, personhood, and society. For without an "I" there can be no you.

other, a connection she had made intuitively, subconsciously, and which she tries to bring forward into her conscious self. Or I can show her that though she may not like Shakespeare he can offer her some stimulating conversations.

It is also interesting to note how many physical images and metaphors she uses to explore her position within the ongoing intellectual discussion of Black English Vernacular. She talks about her lazy tongue, about working at what should be automatic, about embroidering her speech and turning up her nose, about diagnosis with its implications of doctors and illness. Is to speak Black English Vernacular to need medicine for an illness? Ms. W even makes the grammar of Black English concrete. Language may be an abstract concept to some of her colleagues, but she shows them that some of the most concrete, physical aspects of our culture connect to language--especially those concrete aspects important to first-year college students.

Ms. W's essay, perhaps even more so than Mr. F's, shows a flexibility of mind, working and puzzling over one thing and another that all relate to the way she talks. Her writing is as lively from this respect as the editors claim for M. M. Bakhtin, who defend his "allusive structure...and the repetitiveness that so often bothers readers trained to value more economical and forensic presentation."⁹ Their word choice is interesting: "trained to value" recognizes that what we think is appropriate and good in written discourse is largely a matter of social construction--our rules of decorum reflect our culture. Ms. W includes a lot of people in this essay, explores numerous voices, those of the experts, some of whose she adopts as her own (for instance Smitherman), her family, roommates, and friends. As I said, she demonstrates her attempts to try out different voices and so determine which one comes closest to her own, which one she can say is most authentically the person she hears. All the people in her life participate with her in this essay, even if they don't know it or don't do so voluntarily, though she has asked her roommates for permission to write about them. In addition, her writing group participated with her as she developed her ideas and questions by asking her questions she had yet to articulate or by requesting more explanation

⁹ Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist. *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1986) xvii.

for particular points. At every stage they encouraged her to give examples, be concrete, tell stories. And the results reveal their involvement, for she tells many stories while she tries to explain the more abstract issues. As she read her work aloud, she also demonstrated to them the differences between the “standard” and the “dialect” she was talking about.

One of the most striking ways Ms. W reveals her mind at work, her open-ended, exploratory approach is through her questions. Hers is a provisional as well as an improvisational discourse. Where Mr. F requires his readers to supply the questions, Ms. W provides many of them for us. When she says, “questions came one after another,” she means that she has little more than questions, despite her assertive opening statement, which sounds like all her questions have been asked and answered. But as she writes her questions become more and more frequent, so that by paragraph twenty-one we find four statements to nine questions. In all the conversations about her essay, both with me and with her collaborators, she also asked many more questions than she made statements, generally concluding that she “didn’t know what to think.”

Exploring what she meant by this, I discovered that her experience with research papers heretofore had been to state a question and answer it--end a discussion, close the conversation. She didn’t know how she could write a paper so open-ended, so provisional, too tentative and tolerant of loose ends; she felt uncomfortable leaving so many questions unanswered. She had even more questions at the end than she had at the beginning of her research. Her discomfort, of course, is another aspect of her identity revealed by her essay. Because Mr. F leaves his questions unstated, even to himself, he may reveal a sense of complacency. Is he perhaps too comfortable? Should he assume that the world is as stable, simple, and secure as a game that can be summed up the way Willie Mays did: “You throw the ball, you hit the ball, you catch the ball”? A place for everything, and everything in its place: fish, fowl, men, women.

For Ms. W, to say that she didn’t know what to think meant that the messiness of life was all too obvious--that she couldn’t come up with a quick, simple, straightforward, yes or no. And she complained--frequently--that one question led to another, just like life, which, as Geertz says, is “just one damn

thing after another.”¹⁰ Finally accepting that at least one purpose of her essay was to explore ideas, participate in discussion, and ask questions that lead to more questions--not simply to give an answer--allowed Ms. W to use her subject to think about why the subject mattered to her and, not incidentally, why the issue of which language each of us chooses to speak should be important to the rest of us. She began to understand the words “productive” and “productivity,” in new, non-mechanistic, ways. Ms. W was also beginning to explore, even if only implicitly, the numerous speech communities we all live in and the frequency with which we switch codes, even within a dialect (from her black friends to her black family, for instance).

For unlike Mr. F, Ms. W is not interested in reproducing her own culture--if she could only decide what that is. Which, of course, is the point. How can anyone, she wonders, want solely to reproduce her own culture in a society that is so pluralistic? What culture should she choose? Why should she choose one over another? Ms. W understood the sensitive nature of the issue, for she participated in the near shouting-match about “those” people who come to this country and speak a foreign language on American soil--how rude (and who dress funny and eat funny, too). Yet like Mr. F, she is able to incorporate without threatening them the voices who disagree with her, by viewing her concerns from their perspective.

Mr. F looks at baseball language from the position of someone who doesn’t get it or enjoy it (as well as from someone who does), and Ms. W looks at her concern with her language from one who doesn’t see what the big deal is (again, also as someone who does). She laughs at her selves in so many ways: by the stories of her English teacher, her scarf, her bugging her friends. Ms. W even lets us hear her say “neato,” a response cry, ridiculous in anyone’s mouth. She plays with herself, her subject (the two are almost synonymous), and her readers. She accommodates me by including what she thinks I consider the serious and necessary requirements of a research paper--experts and parenthetical citations; note that Mr. F didn’t bother, that his accommodations came not with my identity

¹⁰ See Geertz, “Common Sense as a Cultural System,” *Knowledge* 73-93.

as an English teacher but with my gender, as I shall consider below. Ms. W, now in her junior year, professes herself able to accommodate any professorial audience without violating her interests and intentions for any essay (the responses of other professors to her writing show she is accurate).

Mr. F accommodated me by sterilizing the language of baseball, an interesting fact in light of the frank discussion on obscene language and the graphic list we put on the blackboard of all the gender-demeaning obscenities prevalent among college students. I, though, had to begin by saying aloud a word strongly taboo within the context of a classroom, despite how common it is on the street. In other words, I had to break the rules of classroom decorum first, before anyone else dared to do so. Once I instituted another set of rules the discussion took off.¹¹ Yet Mr. F's comfort zone did not extend so far as to allow a female, and a teacher, to become one of the boys in the locker room.

Ms. W shows an equal reluctance by referring to "the talk with the homeboys" without giving examples, one of the few places where she isn't concrete. It's one thing to expose herself to laughter by laughing first; it's quite another to expose her relatives to laughter or misunderstanding. Her essay, already risky or confrontational enough, presents a culture polarized into them vs. us, white vs. black, rich vs. poor. At the same time she herself embodies the results of plurality, and its problems. It is not ever easy to turn oneself into an example--an artifact, say--but the kind of writing Ms. W pursues in "Black English" makes it less difficult. It enables her to offer herself up for group discussion, the only African American in a class in a college of mostly white, affluent, and ethnocentric students.

I know that without her example the essays written by her collaborators would have suffered, one in particular, which concerned Bible translation, another sensitive issue for the writer and his community. Mr. K came to recognize how much someone's language affected his culture through the prodding and challenge of Ms. W's paper. Just as Mr. F and his group used their

¹¹ Although students wanted me to leave our lengthy list on the board for the next class to read, my sense of classroom propriety did not extend so far, and to moans and jeers I erased our hard-won list of obscenities.

essays as occasions to move outside of the confines of their writing to discuss the issues they raised in greater detail, so too did Ms. W and her group find themselves in intense and demanding discussions about the interrelationships of family, mores, language, and self. Using their evolving essays as the beginning, not the end, of discussion, they learned from and taught each other. Again, this is the way most students will use writing--to begin a process, not end one. Let me repeat, we need to read the essays of a writing group in relationship to each member and not in isolation from each other. For writers in a group incorporate the voices of each other into their work, just as Ms. W incorporates her friends, relatives, and resources. Two groups in Ms. W's class decided to formalize the reciprocity by turning their essays into a mini-collection, complete with introduction. I, in turn, took the idea to all groups and asked each one during class to write together an introduction as if they were producing a book. It was one of the liveliest and most informative classes of the semester, for students needed to consciously analyze and synthesize their research.

If I seem to be praising writing as oral discourse at the expense of what we have traditionally considered appropriate school discourse, expository writing, let me say that I am not dismissing such writing as wrong, inappropriate, or irrelevant, only suggesting that there may be another discourse that should have "a claim on our hearts and minds," as one correspondent put it to me. In fact, I think that the one can lead quite naturally to the other, but not, as more than one theorist has suggested, that writing as oral discourse must yield to a non-oral, objective, academic discourse.¹² The two discourses aren't baby teeth and grown-up teeth.

At any rate, I do want to make another claim, and support it briefly with two examples--that expository, academic writing today is becoming more oral and less the objective, self-obliterating discourse that Cromley and Morgan object to; the

¹² For a good, brief example of this view, see Barry M. Kroll, "Speaking-Writing Relationships in the Growth of Writing Abilities," in Stock 94-6. He argues that "we must actually curb [students'] reliance on oral language during later phases of their growth as writers," though he admits that mature writers do retain some oral influences. The difficulty is that he tries to make learning to write a "sequential" process, which it isn't, as Ann Berthoff points out.

discrepancies between the two are not as great as they were only a few years ago. We find a melding of oral and written even in academic discourse; we find the same things happening in formal scholarly discourse that we do in the work of Mr. F and Ms. W, or in the work of Stanley Elkin and George Garrett.

To illustrate this point, I have chosen two recent academic articles from two disciplines, one by Stephen Jay Gould and one by W. Ross Winterowd. Although some may argue that I have chosen anomalies from academic discourse, I would respond by saying that I had difficulty in limiting my examples to two. These essays present themselves as traditional academic discourse, deliberately avoiding the kind of discourse Olivia Frey wants to see more of.¹³ I will not, however, for reasons of space, engage in as thorough an analysis as I have with the other essays I have considered; I am interested in pointing out trends--similarities with the discourse we have looked at already--as well as differences. After this discussion I will turn to the writing of Mr. M, then to the benefits of writing as oral discourse for teachers, and conclude with some possible standards for evaluating it as well as some reasons why I think it is particularly important today.

The Academic Discourse of Gould and Winterowd

In a scientific journal like *Evolution*, where Stephen Jay Gould published the essay I have chosen, we would expect to find certain obvious clues that the articles reflect serious, scholarly discourse. No glossy paper, no four-color

¹³ When I began this study I was unaware of the discussions about what constitutes appropriate academic discourse. This study can certainly be read in the light of these ongoing discussions; therefore I think it important here to read some academic discourse in addition to the essays I have already read. Olivia Frey in a response to letters about her article "Beyond Literary Darwinism: Women's Voices and Critical Discourse" (*College English* 15 September 1990) calls for "open writing," what I call open-ended and oral. Using an oral discourse style herself, she says that such writing is risky, "self-revealing," and "open to charges of contradiction and sloppiness." She cites *Profession* 1990 as including two such academic articles. As I hope it is clear from my Prologue forward, I am sympathetic to Frey. See "Comment and Response," *College English* 53 (November 1991): 831-41. See also the essays by William Zeiger and Chris Anderson, cited in the bibliography, for two more perspectives on the essay and the expository article.

photography, no ads, unlike *Natural History* magazine. We would also expect the articles to be longer, on more narrowly focused or specialized topics, and less accessible to the average, though educated, reader. Certainly the title of Gould's article would chill the most intrepid average reader: "A Developmental Constraint in *Cerion*, with Comments on the Definition and Interpretation of Constraint in Evolution."¹⁴ It isn't so much a title as it is a one-sentence summary of his twenty-three-page article. The abstract, which follows immediately, elaborates briefly on the title, and the article itself is a further elaboration--"a compendium of...examples," as Gould himself says. Other than two sentences in the abstract that begin "I show" and "I refer," and the phrase "I have undertaken," his language there is formal, depersonalized, and latinate.

I am, then, in no way prepared to read what follows. True, unlike in the essay on baseball, here he starts out directly with his subject, rather than finding the most circuitous route to his subject, but the language is not that of his abstract. "Biological terms," he writes, "have times of fashion, since they reflect intellectual change or ferment. 'Constraint,' particularly 'developmental constraint,' has, within the past decade, become one of the hottest topics and most widely discussed terms in evolutionary theory." This is fairly colloquial--even two clichés in one sentence, "times of fashion" and "hottest topics." Maybe this could have appeared in *Natural History* after all. Not even his obligatory scholarly references are much of an interruption. Here is the final sentence of his opening paragraph: "Unfortunately, as has happened so often since the Tower of Babel, this popularity has also bred confusion, because the term has been used in two distinctly different ways." Standard Gould discourse--another cliché and a biblical reference, which he is fond of, and the phonetic and semantic repetition in "distinctly different."

The second paragraph continues like the first. We're going down "one path" or another, we're depriving "the term of all punch and meaning." People who live in mountaintop villages get enlarged hearts. Concrete, ordinary language. Two paragraphs later Gould tells us "we are Darwin's intellectual children" and

¹⁴ *Evolution* 43 (1989): 516-39.

after some brief explanation of the ways the word “constraint” is used, he explains why readers of *Evolution* should care about developmental constraint in snails: “they [the various uses of the term constraint within three evolutionary traditions] excite our interest, as any challenge to, or broadening of, an orthodoxy must. What else is intellectual life all about?” Strict Darwinism is under seige. Gould is on an intellectual treasure-hunt specific to his discipline, but his question is apt for the subject of writing as oral discourse; it, too, challenges and broadens an “orthodoxy,” and it allows students to challenge and broaden their view of learning, thus bringing them along in their understanding of the intellectual life.

Next Gould digresses, which he admits to his readers at the beginning of the paragraph following, with “in any case” and justifies further by saying that “one final clarification completes the argument....” Bear with me, he seems to say, while I pursue yet another apparent digression, another sideroad, which is linguistic in nature. He traces the etymology of the word “constraint,” from the Latin *stringere*, and then brings up numerous references to the word in the King James Bible, which now makes his earlier reference to the Tower of Babel less gratuitous. He even, in his favorite parenthetical commenting on his own text, enters the fray of the Revised Standard Version and the “current vernacular English.” Despite all the negative connotations that constraint has in our vernacular, though, he wants to stick with the term, “--a good English word with the right *range* of meanings.” Gould seems to be pursuing several points, in a nest-of-Chinese-boxes way. He is presenting the results of his research, he is defending the traditional use of “constraint” by his discipline (which seems unnecessary), and he is telling a story about himself. A reader is unsure which is his real point, or his main point, the abstract notwithstanding. After several readings, we may decide that he is at least as interested in the story as he is in giving us objectified scientific data. He is “proving” in the Renaissance sense more than in the twentieth-century sense--or at least melding the two, a reflection of the melding of oral and written strategies.

From this point in the text, Gould tells of his twenty-year study of the West Indian land snail *Cerion*. Each section begins with subheads that provide readers with a summary of what it will cover, something common in academic

discourse but hardly unknown in popular magazines. Although the discussion from this point on becomes much less oral, Gould continues to use common analogies--“*Cerion* is not malleable putty” (common and therefore striking in the context)--and parenthetical asides. However, as he focuses specifically on the growth of his snail we find fewer first-person pronouns or the kind of direct address to readers that he uses so frequently elsewhere. Instead, he uses more conventional academic metadiscourse such as “(all explicated later in the text)”--a “hold your horses” statement asking for reader patience and persistence. But the instances where he does revert to explicit personal references serve as transition and a means of establishing his scientific identity and credibility: “I was led to write this paper...” (an informal, even religious, way of stating it), “I have published six monographic treatments of...,” “I showed...that both sides were right in different ways...,” and “my final examples involve....” He seldom presents his scientific data without a direct reference to himself. Gould is telling us that he writes under some urgency, that he has been writing and thinking about his subject for a long time, and that therefore he is a serious scholar--balanced and evenhanded. His evidence comes from direct, personal observation. Unless we know something about him, the person who has done the work, recorded the data, and written the results, we cannot believe the story. We come to agree with his position only by accepting Gould’s identity. This is a departure for science, a discipline in which the data matters more than the person who recorded the data.

This article is the most recent example of Gould’s scholarly work (of which he is the sole author). By talking about himself, not only does he depart from the traditional position of science but also from the traditional position of how science ought to be written. The academic discourse of science has always prided itself on being as utterly objective and self-obliterating as possible and so as passive as a human can bear to read;¹⁵ and there is some of that in Gould’s paper, as well as other evidences of traditional academic discourse. For instance, he uses many more hypotactic constructions than he does in “The Creation

¹⁵ One result of “objective” writing is that writers must resort to circumlocutions and passive constructions.

Myths of Cooperstown,” just as he is more concerned with precise definitions. His columns often take a sweeping and inclusive approach to evolution, rather than the close, detailed, specific investigation here. Yet we also find evidence of oral discourse, his attention to himself, his clichés and digressions, as well as his pursuing multiple perspectives and conversations. He includes statements that seem out of place in such discourse; in addition to those I have mentioned we find “we almost chuckle at...,” “button-to-barrel transition,” and “the jigsaw constraint,” the metaphor that controls his paper. Gould uses the passive voice less often than many scientists who report their findings; he prefers active, metaphoric verbs to carry the freight, just as he does in his writing for *Natural History*. But the reason for his preference of the active over the passive relates to his identity and credibility. A writer interested in hiding himself uses the passive; a writer interested in asserting himself and of putting himself at the center of his discourse (I don’t mean this in an egocentric way) uses the active voice. Gould takes responsibility for his views and his findings. If readers disagree, or think he is wrong, they know that they can engage a real person in an honest debate. He stands behind his words, whether they are printed in a journal or in a popular magazine.

Although Gould’s academic discourse presents only a modified use of oral characteristics, yet they are striking nevertheless within a scientific context and tradition,¹⁶ and for that reason I have included this example. The next writer, however, shows a much more radical use of oral characteristics. I have already introduced W. Ross Winterowd into the discussion of academic oral discourse, in the examples I cited in the final paragraph of chapter three. The examples come from the article “Brain, Rhetoric, and Style,”¹⁷ an interesting combination of scientific research into left brain-right brain characteristics (the validity of the research now under question), rhetorical theory, reading theory, and literary theory, among other things--the world is his oyster. Here I want to look more closely at his essay.

¹⁶ It is also striking that Darwin, of course, did not write the kind of decontextualized prose that has come to be accepted as the standard for scientific discourse.

¹⁷ In McQuade, *The Territory of Language* 34-64.

Winterowd has a disconcerting habit of starting as if we've stepped into the middle of an on-going conversation, rather the way Elkin approaches his essay. We're immediately put off-balance. Here he says, "It may be well to start our speculations with the obvious before we begin to probe the not-so-obvious and even the esoteric. Obviously, then...." Who is "our," and "we?" What speculations? Are they really "our" speculations--or his? Are "we" going to do some probing, or is he? And what, I'd like to know, is the subject? The only clues come with the title--three very general words that could go anywhere and do anything. What might be obvious to Winterowd about the three abstractions may not be obvious to me, and I am not certain that I am ready to include myself in his plural pronouns. He violates the rules of decorum and practice of the normal academic article by refusing to tell us his thesis. So despite the initial appearance of objective, academic discourse, the first sentence seems highly contextual, making many assumptions of face-to-face discourse.

That Winterowd can do so is the result of the same paralinguistic items I noted with Gould's article: paper, typographic layout, here the bookbinding (cloth, seldom used any more in general trade publishing, and even the color, a sober, dull green, which wouldn't attract attention in the highly competitive world of popular publishing where shelf space in bookstores is at a premium). Winterowd also assumes that any reader who opens to his essay might do so because she has read some of his other articles or books, though that doesn't guarantee she will know what aspect of the three abstract terms named in the title he will discuss "obviously" (that all of us have a brain in our heads? that we are rhetorical creatures? that some writers are better stylists than others?). Certainly, he gives us not a clue that he means to talk about expository writing, the ability to generalize, state a thesis, organize, use deduction, and be "logical" (his quotation marks). His first paragraph, then, appears to define in rather traditional, conventional terms the kind of writing school traditionally requires--the kind that normally gets published in books of the sort readers have in hand. By the end of the first paragraph, however, readers should be wondering just what Winterowd is up to, since from the first sentence he violates his own prescription, as he

continues to do in the next paragraph, where he brings in the brain. And in that paragraph he also brings himself into the essay, using “I” three times in explaining what he plans to do in the article. However, he switches back to “our” in the next sentence (new paragraph)--“our interest does (and must) spill over from that homely subject [composition] into the headier realms of poetry.”

Now I know a little more about the audience he’s after--not writing teachers but teachers of literature, specifically poetry. However, I wonder why he risked alienating some members of his audience by playing on the secondary status of composition--a “homely subject”--within the academy and the primary status of poetry (an even higher status than mere “literature”)--those “headier realms.” Nevertheless I also know that he is disguising his interest under the pronoun “our,” which he admits in shifting back to “I,” the only first-person pronoun he uses for the next nine paragraphs before reverting to “our” again, in “our interest in the brain centers on hemisphericity....” Is this the same “our” as in the first sentence? Or is this the “our” of the researchers he has mentioned immediately preceding that statement? It seems to me that this “our” is the “our” of the group of people who have been engaged in left-brain, right-brain research and those who have articulated its implications--the experts.

I find his shifting pronouns, ambiguities, assumptions, and conversational gaps interesting in an essay that supposedly considers how brain research can help us better teach the traditional expository essay, a style he himself does not follow nor intend to follow: “I intend *not* to keep a sharp focus in these pages, but to maintain a lambency of interest” (his italics). In effect, he dismisses the very rules and definitions that he asserts are “obvious” of skilled writers of expository discourse. He is rebelling against the formulas, at the same time that he is asserting and developing his identity, just as much as Mr. F and Ms. W do, though perhaps more subtly. His use of “lambency” is significant in this context; it tells readers how to interpret what we find and what tone of voice we need to hear. Winterowd is playful, yet serious; bold (“I do not hesitate...,” “I often use...”) yet responsible (“I have made every attempt to keep...,” “I have approached my materials with caution”); confident (“I am relatively assured...I have good warrant”) yet not arrogant (“when I am less assured, I...”).

Most of his introduction, then, is metadiscourse used to let his readers know what kind of man, scholar, thinker, teacher, and writer he is. He wants us to know his job--and ours: "The reader must determine...where conclusiveness ends and speculation begins..." and "alert readers will know perfectly well when the paper becomes highly speculative, for I have made every attempt to keep not only my audience but myself oriented. No small task, when one considers the drama...." So if we don't know, it's our own fault; we haven't been paying attention. "Listen up!" in other words. These are the opening conversational sparrings between two people trying to get to know one another, to judge their compatibility, their sensitivity to each other's interests, the rhythms of their pauses and their turn-takings. Winterowd lets us know who he is as well as his impressions of who we are (or might be--even to our prejudices, to return to "homely" and "headier"). He also anticipates our objections at his lack of focus by disarming our objections: "I've tried to keep on the straight and narrow but the subject is so darned hard, and anyway I never did intend to be so singular," he says. Again, he is putting a lot of the burden for clarity on us.

We have more clues about Winterowd's identity than his use of the first-person singular pronoun. His frequent colloquialisms, as well as his metadiscourse reveal his identity: "All of which is to say, really..." "will know perfectly well..." and "all in all, however..." He often juxtaposes colloquialisms with extremely formal diction, just as he will use the imperative immediately after a more "abstract" section, nor is he above interrupting his discourse, reminiscent of Gould, to step outside it and address his audience directly: "We have not, I assure you, wandered from our purposes"; then he repeats his purposes in case we've forgotten them or mislaid them in the plethora of sideroads and detours he's been traveling. He is asking for our patience, as Gould asks his readers for theirs. Winterowd is also assuring us that he knows what he's doing, that he is in control of the situation, and that though we may not have the map in front of us, he does. He helps us out by adding, "You will recall our characterization of RH as..." another "my" disguised as an "our," and a good way to give us a summary of what he's said so far and so lead into his next point.

Throughout the essay he consistently moves between formal and informal discourse, between the impersonal and the personal. A few more examples of the latter will be enough to give the idea: "I cannot resist ending this characterization...with a paradox"; "Some years ago, quite by chance, I found an article on..."; "I can only suggest that intensive exposure to..."; "I cannot resist an instructive and essentially relevant digression..."; "I want to use 'Prufrock' as my example, for it is the first modern poem that I took seriously"; and "At the moment, I am reflecting on my own writing problem here." Such phrases indicate that the article is as much an investigation of Winterowd's own mind at work as it is about his very broad subject: brain, rhetoric, style. He invokes paradox and uses contradiction--can something essential to an argument really be a digression?--both paradox and contradiction in the context that he "cannot resist" saying something readers could find irrelevant. All such phrases, and there are many, many more, essentially defend his structure and style rather than further his argument. We might say, as Chris Anderson does about several modern essayists, that style is argument.¹⁸ Or we could put it that subject and object blur, that he is a subject of his own object--his discourse on brain, rhetoric, and style. He moves from scholarship to personal examples as readily as does Ms. W, even to examples from his past, as in his first encounter with T. S. Eliot in 1948 on the banks of the Truckee River in Reno, Nevada. Winterowd is a storyteller waiting for a narrative opportunity. He depends on his presence within his discourse and the strength of his identity to carry his article; it is a primary structuring device, what holds his article together and holds us to it.

Again, I am not suggesting that Winterowd is as highly oral as are Mr. F and Ms. W, or Garrett, Elkin, or Nashe, but I am suggesting that he is more oral than we normally have thought academic discourse should be and that he is not alone. In Winterowd we find particular aspects of oral discourse, in Gould we find others. Clifford Geertz and Deborah Tannen have a fondness for still others. The point is that the blurring of distinctions between oral and written discourse is showing up in numerous scholarly essays; such examples indicate that academic

¹⁸ See Chris Anderson, *Style as Argument: Contemporary American Nonfiction* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1987).

discourse may be tending toward the kind of writing students find most comfortable--and for some of the same reasons.¹⁹ It allows scholars to place themselves within their own discourse and own responsibility for what they have to say, rather than hiding behind the ambiguous “we” or “one” or “our,” as Winterowd still does at times. An “I” with a real identity is more persuasive than a devoiced, it-could-be-anybody “we.” It also releases them for the tyranny to “prove,” rather than suggest or explore. Another interesting example is Scholes’s recent book, which he calls “a meditation, an essay in three parts,” adding:

I have tried to function as a reader myself throughout..., seeking to embody and illustrate my conclusions rather than to ‘prove’ them....I have not tried to hide behind some mask of scholarly objectivity in presenting these views. My own strong feelings about the uses and abuses of reading have driven the writing of this book, and I can only hope that the writing itself is in some way adequate to that originating impulse.²⁰

It was not so long ago that scholars tried hard to preserve the mask of scholarly objectivity; nor would it have been considered good manners to admit that “strong feelings” drove them to write--especially in the first person. In fact, strong feelings are, in part, what Daniel J. Singal is decrying in his recent article, “The Other Crisis in American Education.”²¹

For me, the most interesting and convincing sections of Winterowd’s article come when he drops the pretenses of dispassionate objectivity and speaks

¹⁹ I could also mention Robert Scholes, Wayne Booth, Jane Tompkins, and the women academicians Olivia Frey holds up to us as models of a different kind of academic discourse, one much more personal, immediate, and exploratory--characteristics that I have identified as oral.

²⁰ Scholes, *Protocols* ix and x.

²¹ Daniel J. Singal, “The Other Crisis in American Education,” *Atlantic Monthly* (November 1991): 59-74. This article also laments, without so naming it, the oral characteristics in the written discourse of students, as well as their unsophisticated reading habits. However, I think that teachers are often guilty of unsophisticated reading when it comes to what students write. The problem works both ways.

directly, person to person. Identity becomes important, as does watching a mind thinking, exploring, questioning. I am invited to participate in the conversation, co-produce it, just as I help produce any face-to-face conversation. Winterowd is not talking at me but with me.

But there may be another reason why academic discourse is tending toward the oral. As territorial fences become less and less acceptable between or within disciplines, scholars need to talk and listen to those outside their areas. Winterowd's own essay is an example of crossing fields, wandering through the thickets of brain research, cognitive psychology, traditional and modern rhetoric, modern theories of poetics, reading theory, linguistics, and, after all that, he says, theories of "the mind." How we say what we say becomes important; our vocabularies can't remain so discipline-specific that the rest of the world can't become part of the conversation. In other words, scholarship is as socially constructed, multi-voiced, and collaborative as is the writing that students do in their workshop classrooms. As Geertz puts it, scholars are "communities of multiply connected individuals in which something you find out about A tells you something about B as well, because, having known each other too long and too well, they are characters in one another's biographies."²² So for Winterowd, Gould, or Ms. W to tell us something about themselves is for them to tell us a lot more. Writing as oral discourse is a way, again to quote Geertz, "to gain access to one another's vocational lives."²³

The Writing of Mr. M

Before I turn to some possible standards for highly oral writing, I would like to consider one more student, who presents, and represents, certain challenges facing writing teachers that Mr. F and Ms. W do not.

Mr. M was an upperclassman, a criminal justice major already working as a

²² See Clifford Geertz, "The Way We Think Now: Ethnography of Modern Thought" in *Knowledge* 157.

²³ Geertz, *Knowledge* 160.

police officer. He enrolled in a literature course that fulfilled two requirements for him--his last supplemental writing skills course and a liberal education course. The purpose of the course was to explore the stages of life through literature, in much the way Robert Coles does in his book *The Call of Stories*. We read such novels as *Davita's Harp*, by Chaim Potok, *The Color Purple*, by Alice Walker, and *The Tongues of Angels*, by Reynolds Price. And we watched such films as *Hannah and her Sisters*, *Tender Mercies*, and *A Trip to Bountiful*. The novels and films plunged us into discussions of gender identity, intimacy, family relationships, and death. And because I and the students discussed each text in small groups we also confronted the issues of identity, intimacy, and relationships with each other. It was a psychologically draining course, and for most students it required more writing than they had ever done: a weekly rehearsal of at least a page and three long papers, the last at least 3,000 words, in all between thirty to forty pages of text. In addition, each of us at least once shared with everyone something that we had written.

The nature of the course helps explain (to a certain extent) why Mr. M wrote about the subjects he did. Unlike the courses Mr. F and Ms. W were enrolled in, this course made the issue of identity a central focus. However, he could have avoided those subjects; not everyone in the course wrote about sexual identity, intimacy, and gender stereotypes. Students were free to choose any aspect of "life journey" that they wanted to. For instance, Ms. A found herself returning again and again to questions of loss and death, not to gender issues, though eventually she connected loss with loss of innocence, naïvete, and even racism (a kind of death for the victims of racism as well as for those who are racists). The course brought most of the students face to face with their own worst fears and prejudices, and it did the same for me.

During the semester, Mr. M found it difficult to talk about the questions his colleagues raised and found it particularly difficult to share with anyone what he had written. As he put it in a rehearsal, why would anyone "want to read it [what he had written] out loud and let people in your mind. Hell, I don't know about any of you, but I sure don't like to read anything of mine out loud. I'd rather kiss my sister." Notice, though, that he says I and directly addresses "any

of you,” which indicates that he is not writing to or for me but to all the students who are in the same boat he is. He also uses an expletive, what Goffman calls a response cry, and a cliché, which is, of course, sexual. Mr. M’s most articulate writing occurred when he did use expletives, because they were a familiar part of his oral discourse. In addition to the oral nature of this brief passage, it shows that Mr. M had some idea of what writing demands, letting “people in your mind.” There was no question that he would try to fake something to make it acceptable to me; it also showed that he took me at my word when I asked that students not pretend in writing. I had also emphasized the intimate nature of reading, following Wayne Booth’s view in *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*. Keep in mind that most of the thirty students had never done much reading or writing, let alone considered both acts as interdependent or intimate and risky; these were radical ideas to them. Also keep in mind that all the students had fulfilled their freshman composition requirements. With that brief introduction, let me turn to the first five paragraphs from Mr. M’s last essay. Again I have not written *sic* after every error, and I ask that you read the passage aloud.

My last paper has to do with the first day of class and the topic, should some definition be changed. I remember that the class wrote the metafores and misnomers about males and females that did not sit well with them. It’s not that the definition of these words should be change. What should be change is the peoples idea of what the word really means. Most off my paper has to do with the first rehearsal I wrote. (1)

What are masculine trats, rough, unemotional, strong, or be a leader not a follower (submissive). What happens if a women has some of these traits or all of them. She is laugh at and often called names or looked down on,

mostly by men. Let's for instance look at the word dike. I could not find the definition in the dictionary for an appropriate explanation of this word, but we all know when it is thought that a woman has manly qualities. (2)

The physical aspects of what society thinks that a dike looks like. Very large, fat, squat or both, short hair and no makeup. That's not the bad part of it at all. To be known as a dike, is to be known as a lesbian. Does this mean that any woman who is not submissive or shows that she can do anything that a man can do is thought to be a dike and gay. (3)

What about the word stud, this is a word that most of the men of the world would like to be remembered by. The dictionary reads, a sexually promiscuous man. I think that dike, slut and stud kind of mix together. Stud is all the good traits of man, been laid a lot and achieved his goals. On the other hand men give more demeaning titles to women who show any of these traits. A woman sleeps around and gets laid a lot she is given the titled slut, nice HA. Then if she is aggressive or shows any manly traits at all. She is then known as a dike and thought to be gay. I don't understand this, how did it get like this and who made it up. (4)

This word to men stud, is not just about being a champ in bed or how many notches he has on his bed post. To a male this word means that he excels in whatever he does. For the most part people use this word as a sexual derogatory. The symbolism of stud means that a man has reached manhood if he is seen as a stud in the eyes of his

pears. (in the age pratit that I'am in) This uselly means
that he reached manhood. (5)

The assignment for this essay was to write a personal life journey--either the journey the course took the writer on or some other aspect of his or her experience. Mr. M chooses to write in a very oblique way about what happened to him from the first day of class to the final rehearsal, where he admitted that he had started to learn some things about himself as a result of the course and that he should probably repeat it. He began class with numerous stereotypical prejudices, particularly about the roles of men and women. Women, he implies, should be submissive, men should be aggressive. Aggressive women are masculine--dikes--and submissive men are, in effect, feminized. He is attempting to put into words something that has bothered him for a long time--maybe as long as he can remember. That he gets out as many words as he does about this subject is a matter for approval, for, as I said, Mr. M found speaking and writing extremely painful because he found intimacy extremely painful, even, or perhaps especially, intimacy with himself first of all.

No one can speak or write comfortably until (or unless) he is first comfortable with himself and his language. Mr. M had to become comfortable as a language-using human being within a community of language-using human beings. Many of his errors are the result of his discomfort using language--the written counterparts to social awkwardness. He uses oral punctuation consistently, much the way Thomas Nashe punctuated. In this, Mr. M is far closer to the Renaissance view of punctuation as marks for breathing. He uses commas, for instance in paragraph three, where he would naturally pause were he to speak the words. His spelling, too, is oral; he spells the way words sound to him, ignoring the print conventions of standardized spelling (as Nashe ignores them). He also uses oral expressions, as in "nice, HA," something we would say but not necessarily write. Oral punctuation, spelling, and expressions are the only linguistic tools he knows. He uses these tools less skillfully than Mr. F or Ms. W not only, I suggest, because he is a "basic" writer, but because his spoken skills

are less fluent and well developed. I would point out, however, that the image of a man with “many notches...on his bed post” shows some spark, as does the expression “did not sit well with them,” which anticipates for me the discourse in Alice Walker’s novel. Let me point out, too, that his verb tenses show some influence from his African American colleagues where he works, who speak Black English Vernacular.

By contrast, when Mr. M writes with expletives his discourse is much more fluent, because he is used to talking in a highly polemical style rather than in a thoughtful, relational style, again perhaps influenced by his fellow police officers. For instance in his rehearsal for the last class before spring break he wrote:

I’am pissed, I’am pissed, I’am pissed off.
My roommates are going on vacation for
springbreak. I have to stay here to start a
new job. My mind is not into class at all
tonight, I can’t think straight at all. I need
a break, I need a vacation from myself.

He uses repetition effectively, and the last phrase of the first sentence indicates an increase in volume, with the word “off” getting the most emphasis (a kind of *gradatio*). The sentences that begin with “I” also move to a climax--the greatest force coming with “I need a vacation from myself.” He revealed more than he realized in this statement. Much of his writing, in effect, shows a desire to run from the self that he has known to a self he has yet to discover. So despite the fact that his written discourse shows hesitancy, just as his spoken discourse did, yet it also shows someone who is struggling to make sense of himself and his society. He is asking, implicitly, How would--or should--a man write? And his portfolio answers, with expletives, polemically, confrontationally. And yet Mr. M most often attempts to write about subjects that require a “feminized” style; even at the stylistic and discourse level he reveals dissatisfaction with traditional definitions and identities.

Mr. M’s essay points to the necessity of an ethnographic and oral reading, for this theme of non-aggressive males and aggressive females recurs in all his writing, as it recurred in his discussions. For instance, he admitted in another rehearsal

that he had been bullied when he was growing up; in other words, he was considered effeminate and it bothered him, even though he didn't fit the physical stereotypes. If he had, he might have been less bothered by thinking of himself in terms unacceptable to his image of masculinity. But having been the object of these stereotypes, and having stereotyped men and women himself, leads him to want some better definitions for masculinity and femininity. Here is the point of his final essay. Although he arrives at no answers, it is significant that at least he recognizes that he ought to have some questions.

The discussions about male-female intimacy were particularly difficult for him, though he related them, correctly, to the larger issue of what defines men and women in our society. He confessed to all of us (a remarkable breakthrough for him in a large group discussion) that he had never experienced real intimacy with anyone other than his best male friend, Kevin--adding quickly that he wasn't "gay or anything." However, and this is significant, he was only able to make these statements to the class after he had confided them to me in a written rehearsal. His two-page story about Kevin, one of his longest rehearsals during the semester, released a fear that he would be misunderstood and unaccepted. Underlying his great gesture at classroom intimacy was the concern that men don't or aren't supposed to really understand "relationships"--the territory of women--and yet he does, with another man. The night the subject surfaced most strongly, during a discussion of *The Color Purple*, his group of all women, as he wrote later:

were just nagging me to tell them what intimacy means to a male. So I told them that it had nothing to do with sex for me. Intimacy is like love to me. Love is everything to me the good and the bad. I explain it to them using a symbol of an umberlla. Love is the actual umberlla and on one side of the handle was the good part of love and the other side the bad....then they were taring me apart to find out if I ever experience them [intimacy and identity]

together. *I told them that I never did, but I did....*
 for my friend Kevin....that's when I experanced
 identity and intimacy together (italics added).

Here Mr. M uses sexist language ("nagging" and "they were taring me apart"), but he also shows that had he admitted his love of Kevin he would have been a victim of sexism himself. He also switches into the oral narrative present tense ("I explain it to them") and again shows that he is capable of thinking in images and metaphors (the "umberlla").

In the five paragraphs of his final essay cited above the same concerns about intimacy and identity surface. What does it mean to be feminine? What does it mean to be masculine? Are all ugly women with short hair dikes? Are all non-aggressive men queers? Notice that though he easily uses negative labels for women he leaves the reader to supply the negative male labels. In his culture "stud" is not negative--nor is getting laid, a concern he shares with George Garrett (see the complete essay in the Appendix; indeed Garrett and Mr. M are exploring some of the same issues). Stud means, Mr. M writes, "that a man has reached manhood." And the mention of manhood leads him to a discussion of maturity, which he ends up pitting against the normal connotations of the label stud.

It is significant that he thinks "dike, slut, and stud kind of mix together." "Kind of" is an oral expression, but more significant is that he offers an opinion--a rhetorically assertive act, though hedged--but then immediately backs off, failing to explain why the three terms blend in his mind. As readers, we have to do a lot of constructing here to arrive at a possible meaning, as all his writing is highly contextualized (for instance, his reference to the first day of class). I construct his meaning in the following ways--that men who are studs should be considered sluts if women who behave promiscuously are to be considered sluts. However, he is not condemning the behavior of either. In addition, part of being a stud means giving certain kinds of women those kinds of names: to be a stud (and so mature) means participating in the demeaning and stereotyping of women. In other words, to be a man means refusing to grant women anything more than label status. As Mr. M writes, he begins to question a society that

seems to make people choose between men or women; we can't have both because the one negates the other. He also suggests that constant verbal contests result, so that we're caught between polemical, expletive-filled discourse and nagging and being verbally torn apart. These are startling insights, even if only half-consciously expressed, for someone who entered class with a definition of himself as a stud and who had always thought in labels and ad slogans. The quintessential miller man, living the high life Stanley Elkin refers to. Also, although Mr. F negotiates his discourse more smoothly, or in more acceptably public ways, his subject and that of Mr. M are not so different--nor are their positions. It could be argued that of the two Mr. M is the more thoughtful.

In this essay Mr. M uses the verbal labels and slogans as weapons against themselves and ultimately against himself. For maturity is exactly what by the end of the semester he had decided that he lacked. He might qualify as "stud" and so mature by some broad standards, but he had learned through our discussions and some disturbing events in his life during that three-month period that he was far from mature. Mr. M had no answers about how to gain maturity, but at least he finally understood that he had been looking for it in the wrong places, just as wrong, he implies, as the stereotypes he had held. On the other hand, even to the final class when we discussed *A Trip to Bountiful*, some stereotypes just wouldn't die: "The thing I didn't like is that teh male (I can't remember his name) [he means Sonny] was really weak and didn't seem like a Texean. Well maybe he felt that way because he couldn't get his wife pregnet." In other words, Sonny just didn't live up to Mr. M's image of the strong stud from Texas, where they pump a lot of oil and raise a lot of stallions. Sonny was ineffectual and effeminate when judged from all the stereotypes Mr. M is trying to get rid of (keeping women barefoot, hungry, and pregnant); Sonny was even a momma's boy.

So Mr. M's writing reveals ambivalence, insecurity, and immaturity, the same lack of maturity that he claimed his personality lacked. His regular space breaks between paragraphs indicate to me a lot of silence, places of inarticulateness that he simply doesn't know how to fill; yes, the space breaks make his essay longer,

which is also one function, but he needs to fill his text with silence because he can't fill it with words. His discourse reveals an uncomfortableness with himself and his masculine image, yet I also find a willingness to change, to take some risks. As he wanders associatively in this essay and in his other writing, I think he surprises himself by what he learns about himself--and that newfound understanding is what he wishes to apply should he "retake" the course. His oral statements in class certainly showed that he startled himself; it's been a long time since I have seen someone blush as much as he did. As he wrote in his last rehearsal:

The last class, as I walk out the door for the last
time I feel that I left apart of me there. Then again
I also feel that if I said something that I kept in side
it might of made a difference. The thing I really wish
I could is go back in time and retake the class. I feel
that I could of gave more of myself in some class sessions.

Ambivalence, recognition of change, and understanding that he had perhaps kept too much inside.

Mr. M, as I said, was a criminal justice major looking forward to attending a police academy. I had several criminal justice majors in the course, and the faculty in that department encouraged its majors to take this literature class. Why? The faculty want their majors to confront the issues of sexism, racism, bigotry, and any stereotypical behavior. To see such behavior as wrong and to see that we have such prejudices are reasons for criminal justice majors to take liberal arts courses. This student, unlike Mr. F or Ms. W, will not need to write fluently and will not write often in his job. But he does need to know how to talk and respond to people without hostility, animosity, prejudice, or self-importance. Mr. M needs to learn to treat people who don't come from his subculture with respect and some understanding. He needs to learn fairness and sensitivity. His untitled last essay--his lack of a title is also significant for to give it a title would have made it something formal and so dissociated from himself--shows that he has begun to learn these lessons. His writing allows me to "gain access" to his vocational life--and it allows him to do the same for himself. "The knowledge that I have gained

from collage,” he wrote a month before class ended, “was not from reading or writing, but from the people that I have met.” And yet he also admitted that *A Trip to Bountiful* moved him, even though, as he wrote, “I don’t usually like or get in to watching movies that I get a message.” He had, perhaps despite himself, learned something from reading and writing. Had he begun earlier than his senior year to explore himself through writing and in talking about his writing he might have been (I would argue probably would have been) a much different writer than the one I have quoted. However, it is difficult for any teacher, myself included, to read a writer like Mr. M from the interpretive model I have suggested, for all our instincts tell us to start adding “d” to his past tense verbs, removing the “a” in his contractions “I’am,” and insisting that he proofread. We have to work hard not to be distracted by such matters.

(Almost) the Last Words

If writing as oral discourse benefits students as they play with ideas and connect those ideas to their identities and aspirations, reading from the perspective of oral discourse has benefits for teachers, which they can give to students. Teachers participate with students in the writing and reading process; they model for students ways to read that deepen students’ understanding of themselves and of their own texts. Even the most confident students are critical and disapproving of what they have written; the most frequent comment I hear in conferences and read when students analyse their own writing is, “I don’t like what I’ve written.” I’ve never heard students say that about their spoken discourse.

When we read from the perspective of oral discourse, we can never be bored, and boredom is, if we’re honest, a hazard of the teaching profession. It takes a great deal of concentrated energy to encounter the same essay student after student and read each one as if for the first time. For me, it is wasted, unnecessary energy, if only because I am merely reading what I already know when students repeat back to me what I think rather than exploring what they think. Neither they nor I am any further ahead. However, when students play with ideas and

connect those ideas to their identities and aspirations we will not read the same essay over and over, for each student is different. So beyond what may seem trivial--preventing boredom--such discourse challenges writing teachers to interpret and analyze what our students turn in. We don't need to do this with the rote, depersonalized, anyone-could-have-written-this essay, for the writer is irrelevant. And students know when they are irrelevant and treat a writing class accordingly. When we really read students, when we approach their texts with the same care, interest, and expectations with which we read Stephen Jay Gould or Thomas Nashe, students know that, as well. They then read their own texts and the texts of their colleagues with the same care that we read them. There is nothing automatic, or rote, about reading twenty to thirty (or more) essays because each one is different and requires different interpretations. When we add to the reading challenge that we must read each essay as both an individual and a collaborative effort, we need all our critical wits about us.

To read such writing is a privilege, for it opens our eyes and ears to a mind in progress (and in process), working with ideas, exploring issues, and struggling with confusion, chaos, and ambiguity toward some sort of sense--even a writer like Mr. M, whom most teachers would read as in need of correction only, not critical interpretation. It enables us to help students see how their various courses intersect with one another and how their school lives and their personal lives may indeed cohere. To help students understand the connections and to work them out for themselves is part of what "liberal education" means. Even when students aren't writing "personal" essays, even when we ask students to write "academic" or expository essays--and I have suggested that the two types aren't as different as they once were--we can learn a great deal about them from their discourse. Since such writing encourages them to explore themselves, it reveals much about their intellectual and psychological needs and interests, which helps us point them in particular directions. We become better teachers as we engage real people; we stop teaching classes, in other words, and start teaching human beings. We don't "cover" material, we explore ideas with people who are discovering that ideas exist not out there in some book or in a teacher's head only but inside themselves as well. The corollary, of course, is that as students

become more than just a corporate object that sits in the same seat each class period so must we become more than an object that hovers over them, taking attendance and handing out grades.

As students play with and entertain ideas, they gain mental flexibility, increase their tolerance for ambiguity and uncertainty, and learn to resist--or not to expect--the one-right-answer approach to life. And this challenges us to avoid lapsing into an authoritarian dogmatism. We can ask real questions, questions to which we don't have answers, rather than the kinds we often depend on, the ones we already have the answers to. Some of those questions are necessary, but the questions that engage students and teachers in open enquiry are more important. We can try on other voices, just as we want students to do. We can engage in play, in open-ended, exploratory discussions that benefit all members. We can be provisional and improvisational, "what if," rather than "it is." Certainly, this is the kind of teaching we should want to promote at the graduate level, but I am suggesting that writing as oral discourse encourages it at the lower undergraduate level, even though, or at the same time that, it makes lots of first-year students extremely uneasy after twelve years of one-right-answerism. (It also makes many teachers uneasy.) But the benefits far outweigh the risks and initial resistance.

By now I hope the implications for evaluation (as well as for classroom construction) are apparent, though it has not been my purpose to present yet another set of standards for judging what students write but rather to present standards of reading for teachers. The traditional standards that we would apply to someone like Mr. M's writing are conventions that, until he understands himself as a language-using human being, are of no more relevancy than the intricacies of verb tenses would have been when he first learned to say "I goed." I am not trying to beg the question; I am merely trying to say that reading as I have suggested must come first for Mr. M and for students like him. We need to make our readings available to them so that they learn how to read their own discourse.

The same is true for students like Mr. F and Ms. W, though they have more

control of the conventions than does Mr. M. When I read students, I ask myself a series of questions, and I encourage them to ask the same questions of themselves and of all the writers they read. How productive is a particular essay? How many questions does the writer ask and how well do they promote further discussion and questioning? How provocative are they for her colleagues and collaborators? How startling and intriguing are the connections he makes? A good essay of this type--and both those by Mr. F and Ms. W qualify in my view--contributes to the learning of all members. It shows a writer's increasing flexibility of mind and an awareness of the multiplicity of modern life and thought. It shows curiosity. Even the writing of Mr. M shows some of these characteristics. Students come to care about what they write and to take responsibility for it, though I can never predict when during the semester this will happen, and of course it doesn't happen for every student. As a student wrote at the end of the semester:

I felt myself beginning to get emotionally attached to my work. I began to really care about what I was saying and to consider that it was worth saying....I don't know what happened or when or how, but...I...felt something more inside me. Something new and strange. Although I still find writing very frustrating, I don't hate doing it anymore.

Sometimes other students recognize such a change before the person herself does. But phonies don't stand a chance, even early on. It startled me to hear a group tell a writer in discussion of his first essay of the semester that they knew he didn't really care about what he was writing--that it was just an assignment. "You shouldn't write like that," they told him. A student in another freshman class, one who categorized himself as "jock," persistently asked why all the essays he heard and read from his colleagues sounded alike. He became a catalyst for students to risk themselves, to adopt or adapt a voice, take a stance.

Paradoxically, while such writing sounds increasingly less like a monologue, it nevertheless enables a writer to learn more and more about himself. For first- and second-year students this is extremely important; or even for seniors, as

Mr. M's work shows. Writing that helps students to establish, confirm, comfort, confront, or exchange identities will lead them to more confident intellectual enquiry. So another standard becomes how well a student incorporates an investigation of self into his investigation of a subject.²⁴ And conversely, how well does the student begin to move beyond her own concerns to seeing that those concerns have connections with and implications for broader issues? The writing of Ms. W responds to such a question. Even Mr. M is trying to move outside his own narrow concerns to those that have broad social implications, at the same time that he is trying to understand himself and his place within our confusing society. He is looking for patterns to hold on to. Writing as oral discourse actually makes a positive out of the insecurity and the many voices of students' development. We need to read a student's progress toward flexibility, toward entertaining another view of an issue, toward participation and open-ended explorations. At the same time we need to read a student as part of the social network our classes become. How has a writer incorporated the voices of others in his discourse? How openly has he contributed his voice to the voices of his colleagues? Just as students recognize empty writing, they also recognize those who make the most fruitful contributions to the society. Writing outside of the classroom serves a social function; it is a reason why we think students should learn to write. Writing within a class therefore must serve a social function, as well. So long as we continue to insist that students write only in dispassionate and objective ways, we ignore the importance of the social nature of writing.

Our society is highly oral. We call each other to confirm or explain what we've written. We talk about decisions and write about our talk. We need to learn how to read such writing, writers who are readers-to-be, readers who are writers-to-be. By reading from an oral perspective, we not only learn to read the present, but we

²⁴ Susan Krieger, in her book *Social Science and the Self: Personal Essays on an Art Form* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1991) talks about the delicate balance between the self as an aspect of social life and an aspect of individual, inner experience. Writing as oral discourse allows a writer to explore this balance.

learn to read the past. The audience of Thomas Nashe heard *Pierce Penilesse* and *Lenten Stuffe*; we hear “All Things Considered,” “Morning Edition,” or “The CBS Evening News with Dan Rather,” even those of us who still read (silently) about political events. We answer the questions of pollsters and accept what pollsters tell us people think. Once we might have written a letter to the editor, or read the letters to find out what our neighbors thought. Now we tune in to Bruce Williams, Rush Limbaugh, Larry King, Sally Jesse Raphael, Oprah Winfrey, David Frost, and all the other talk show hosts. We hear stories before we read them, or in place of reading them--“The Radio Reader,” “Selected Shorts,” and “The American Radio Company of the Air,” not to mention the growing availability of audio tapes of fiction and video tapes of everything from Shakespeare, Dickens, and Austen to the latest McMurtry bestseller or diet and exercise how-to. We may be listening to books while we drive or do household chores, with no one else around. Although we are part of a group of listeners, we are unaware of being one of many, unlike Nashe’s audiences, who shared the latest pamphlet with friends; or the audiences for each installment of *Pickwick*. But we are listening.

Our students also listen. They hear, and see, television and MTV, U2 and Sting and heavy metal. They listen to the radio. No doubt these media help account for much of the oral prose we find among them and among published writers--writing that is meant to be heard, not writing that is meant to be understood in silence. New, voice-activated computers and hypertext (or hypermedia) will also further reinforce what Robert Ochsner calls a “speech-based literacy.”²⁵ I am not suggesting that reading will disappear--that “the book” is or should be endangered--but that the lines between oral and written will be less distinctive, the characteristics of the two much more similar. However, as I indicated at the end of chapter one, technology, in particular computer technology, is helping to reshape our intellectual lives, the discourses we produce, and the forms in which we read them: our culture, in other words.

²⁵ Robert Ochsner, *Physical Eloquence and the Biology of Writing*. SUNY Series on Literacy, Culture, and Learning: Theory and Practice, ed. Alan C. Purves (Albany: State U of New York P, 1990) 101.

Let me pursue the implications of this a little further, using the five paragraphs from Mr. M as my example, to show the academic value of his work. Let's imagine Mr. M writing and then reading, using a hypertext computer program. He has written the essay partially quoted above. Next he has read and discussed his essay with his colleagues, and read and discussed their essays, as well. His colleagues tell him that they know something is bothering him about relationships between men and women today. They, too, are bothered and would like to know more, just as he would. They reassure him that he has an important subject--maybe many important subjects. Mr. M sees that he is exploring something that he does want to learn more about; he is writing about himself, yet his colleagues help him understand that the issues go beyond just him. These are problems for all of us. He is exploring language, his language and that of others, in an effort to see how he and others connect--or fail to connect--in meaningful ways. Mr. M is beginning to write, because he is also beginning to read himself and others. Once he leaves his colleagues, though, where does he, a person whose culture is not bound by the traditional book, go to learn more? The computer technology Ochsner talks about can help Mr. M. As Lakoff says, with information-processing technology

we will have achieved a sort of meeting of the fullest benefits of literate [written] and non-literate [oral] forms of information-sharing. We will have at our disposal the emotional closeness of the oral channel, its immediacy, its ready accessibility.²⁶

The melding of the written and oral will benefit Mr. M, who is struggling with the two and the apparent conflicts between them--how his voice, his identity, his concerns and interests have anything to do with what he is asked to write about in school. He has yet to discover that the written and oral are partners, not opponents. And so he moves between what he considers the objectivity of the dictionary and the subjectivity of his own life in his use of certain examples and

²⁶ Robin Tolmach Lakoff, "Some of My Favorite Writers Are Literate: The Mingling of Oral and Literate Strategies in Written Communication." Tannen *Orality and Literacy* 259.

language.

After Mr. M has written his essay, talked with his colleagues, and has read my comments, he now reads his own text as the starting point for further reading and eventually for further writing. He probably has never bothered to read what he has written, since he hasn't ever seen much value in his writing; I doubt that he ever found his ideas interesting to himself, though this time things are different. Sitting at his computer, then, Mr. M logs on to a hypertext program on gender, the topic he decides, after reading himself, that his text is most concerned with. The program offers him several options to pursue, several essays to read. Let's consider a few possibilities.

Mr. M might read about the history of gender distinctions, or current slang, perhaps the etymology of certain slang words. He notes that he has indicated an interest in the definition of words by consulting a dictionary. But he also reads that he is concerned about stereotypes; the subject recurs throughout his brief essay. He clicks on the button that is labeled "stereotypes" (an exit from the screen text), and the new text that appears provides him some information, including definitions, and several more exit points to choose from. Perhaps he should read what scholars have written about gender stereotypes. He finds essays by Robin Lakoff and Dale Spender listed, to name two; he clicks on each in turn, to see if he wants to read their essays, and discovers that both write in a way he can understand. He notices that the name Adrienne Rich keeps coming up, so he moves to women's poetry, where he discovers some references to writers he's heard about but never read, writers from the past. Shakespeare, for one. That's a familiar name, though he never could read what he was assigned in his survey course. Nevertheless, he notices that under the topic of friendship among men, another issue that has been on his mind all semester, and a topic he also touches on in his essay, he finds Shakespeare's name, so he brings onto his computer screen a sonnet and begins reading aloud, stumbling and hesitating but persisting.

Mr. M rereads his essay, this time noting that he also seems interested in gender-related conflicts and has talked about his work as a police officer. He returns to the computer, this time looking for essays about law and gender or law

enforcement and gender, or perhaps business rules on gender discrimination. The options are nearly limitless, and he begins to understand what his professors mean by a liberal arts education. And he begins to see how many subjects he has to write about, subjects he wants to write about. The problem of invention no longer seems much of a problem. This time he chooses an essay on Michigan laws on discrimination. And so he continues to follow the thread of ideas and associations contained in his written text--or at least prompted by his written text. He is engaging in a conversation composed of a multiplicity of informed voices and perspectives, positioning himself, querying, adding to his personalized narrative thread the historical, imaginative, legal, cultural, research findings that lend depth and precision to his investigation. As he proceeds he discovers his interest in issues he would have once ignored by seeing the connections to his initial essay. Mr. M has written more than he realized, though he also begins to understand how much more he has to write.

How then do we read Mr. M's first essay? By how many and how fruitfully his associations develop or further his explorations or arguments. As we read him, we ask, To what extent do his ideas engage those of informed discourse communities? In a very practical sense, does his original text enable him to identify those larger issues or abstractions that allow him to enter and exploit the hypertext resource available to him? Is he able to use his text as a thread or path through the complex web of possible associations that are not ordered in logical hierarchies? For hypermedia technologies are not structured in a linear fashion, but are structured orally. They are associative, digressive, nonlinear; they blend, as Lakoff noted, the best of the oral and the written. Does Mr. M's discourse show his willingness to enter the discussions of concerned, thoughtful communities? And finally, how do his subsequent revisions and new essays show the incorporation of the threads he has followed? The point is that we don't read his text as the end, some final product to stamp good or bad. Nor does he. Rather he uses it to further his own reading and writing. He uses it to further the reading and writing of his colleagues. He uses it to further our education.

Such work with hypertext as I have described has already been developed

and tested at Brown University.²⁷ However, I don't want to conclude with the picture of student and machine, detached and divorced from the social relationships essential for the kind of reading I have been exploring. The machine is only an intermediate step in a process that begins and ends with students and teachers engaged together in reading and writing. And it is possible, even without such sophisticated technology, to use a hypertext approach with Mr. M to improve his reading and writing and to engage his intellectual, his imaginative, and his psychological being. In fact, the ways of reading I have suggested are "hypertextual." Teachers become the hypertext, which necessitates a multidisciplinary view of education, a broad vision, and wide reading on our part. In conference with Mr. M or in a text of our own--in written comments to him--we can give him options to pursue, ideas and threads to follow that his writing has sparked in us; I cannot emphasize this enough. To read his writing from the perspective of oral discourse opens our minds to the possibilities latent in his work and others like him; to read from the perspective of traditional, written discourse (as I would have done in the past) is, I am firmly convinced, to risk missing the possibilities Mr. M offers himself and us. The advantage of hypertext on computer, in addition to within the teacher, is that Mr. M begins with his own knowledge, his own text, to construct and to discover the further knowledge he wants and needs. He makes the decisions of what associations to pursue. Another advantage is that the texts he creates as a result of his reading can be added to the hypertext data base as resources for future students; or he can make suggestions about material that should be part of the hypertext file. Mr. M's original text for all its problems shows a person awakening to a desire for understanding--we might even use the word wisdom--and not merely for information, which is the real source of his dissatisfaction with dictionary definitions.

All of this is to say that today more and more writing increasingly makes explicit its social functions. When we read from the perspective I have been recommending throughout this study, we help prepare students to make the most

²⁷ See George P. Landow, "Changing Texts, Changing Readers: Hypertext in Literary Education, Criticism, and Scholarship" in *Reorientations* 133-61.

of the explicit social and oral functions of texts, as well as the new technology. To put it another way the subtext, which has always been there, is pushing up and through into the main text, giving us hyper texts, or multiple texts--texts of plurality, heterogeneity, involvement--choose the term most acceptable. Society is coming to welcome, indeed to expect, that students will know how to read and write this melded discourse; new technologies that blend the oral and written will become standard not only in education but also in business. We help prepare our students by reading from an oral perspective.

We take our writing in through our ears, not primarily through our eyes, and it is multiform. Given such a heterogeneous, diverse, and talkative society, to continue to insist on homogeneity and voicelessness is to bring students (and ourselves) into conflict with our culture. Not only that but we bring them into a conflict with themselves, their colleagues, and the modern texts we urge on them. We fail to provide them a way to explore and perhaps resolve the kinds of conflicts Ms. W writes about so well. I would even maintain that so long as we lock students out of the discourse structures our society has come to welcome and value they will never be the kinds of readers of the past that we would like them to be. Not having a strong sense of their own discourse and their own discourse communities, students will find it difficult to read past discourse communities and their texts. A person needs to know who she is and how her relationships are structured before she can really understand others and their social relationships.

To return to rhetoric and logic, the terms Jonathan Crewe pitted against one another in his discussion of Thomas Nashe, rhetoric, a central aspect of writing as oral discourse, unlike logic, or traditional expository discourse, plays with multiple viewpoints--even contradictory viewpoints--which can be held in equilibrium, something Joel Altman pointed out in his study of the tudor mind. This playing with contradictory viewpoints was a characteristic of the sixteenth century's oral educational method.²⁸ Such discourse is not hierarchichal but is more like a visual mapping or Gould's "network of lateral connections." It is more like

²⁸ Joel B. Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1978).

hypermedia technology. Only a broadly educated--a liberally educated--person **can make** such lateral connections. The potential for such connections exists **within** the writing of Mr. M, despite his lack of practice at seeing beneath the **surface** to the roots, where seemingly disconnected ideas are intertwined. Mr. F **and Ms.** W trust themselves more than Mr. M does; they are more confident in **their** identities and so more willing to take risks and play with ideas and **connections**. I have pointed out how confident Nashe is with his identities and **how central** he is to his discourse. Perhaps the most confident of all, though, is **Gould**, who has been practicing for seventeen years oral associations and oral **discourse** strategies within a written medium. But let me repeat what I said earlier **about** Gould and his clichés. Students cannot ever read and write their way to **the** kind of vision we find in Gould if we silence them at the start. They will never **learn** that tensions and contradictions can become productive, not **counterproductive**; that they can be studied and enjoyed, entertained and **entertaining**; that they can be a source of invention.

APPENDIX

Appendix

For the convenience of readers I include here four complete essays, that of Ms. W (as written, excluding her Works Cited page), and the essays by George Garrett, Stanley Elkin, and Mr. M. The essays by Mr. F and Lewis Thomas are given in full in the text; Stephen Jay Gould's is readily available in his new book, *Bully for Brontosaurus*.

"Black English"

Ms. W

Slaves didn' be having no heirlooms tah pass on tay they childrun; unless maybe you is countin' black English. Black English is a heirloom. It is a language, though metamorphosed, passed down to millions of descendants. Black English is a descendant. It is a babe whose great grandmother was a pidginized English and whose ancestors before that number from the tens of tribes of the west coast of Africa. Black English has a history. (1)

It is not the language of a lazy, inferior people. It is not the language of an uneducated people, it did not emerge and remain a major American dialect without rhyme or reason. "Black English is a bona fide language system with its own rules of grammar, vocabulary, and structure" (Haskins and Butts 40). Black English is the language of a culture. "Black English is not just a linguistic system; it is the expressive system of Black Culture" (Abrahams 100). Black English has a present. (2)

Black English has a future, but the future is possibility. One question answered or one decision made does not end all; it opens up endless other questions or decisions. This is progression, believe it or not. But progression also involves some looking back. Forward movement without an origin is no movement at all. (3)

You cannot evolve into a full person by skipping any stages of development. That goes for all of the variety of influences that shape you. One thing that has influenced me is Black English (BE). I never thought much about it until

recently. It has been with me always, but those things common to me rarely seem interesting enough to write about. But it has got me wondering: what is the big deal anyway? Should I as a Black American choose BE over standard English (SE)? Or is it a matter of “taking sides”? How conscious should I be of it? Should one’s speech take effort? Questions came one after another. They poked and prodded at my thoughts. They persisted, petitioning for my attention. That’s why I want to look at the history so that I can make intelligent decisions now. I want to take a step back so that I can take two steps forward. (4)

In the beginning, that is before slavery, the people of Africa and Europe began to trade manufactured goods and raw products for indentured servants from Africa. A hybrid of European and African languages emerged as a trading language. English, on the European side, and the Mandingo language of the Mali Empire (from which over ten percent of blacks trace their ancestry) were the dominant languages that influenced the pidgin spoken by the first Africans to land on American shores (Haskins and Butts 29-30). (5)

As a result of the slave trade, African and European contact grew; pidgins (mixed languages developed for trade) and creoles (pidgins that become the principal and native languages of speech communities) quickly emerged. These gradually evolved into a black language common to all American slaves. (6)

A common language was necessary for survival. It was common colonial policy to mix slaves of various tribes to create disunity among the slaves. Slaves had to adopt some kind of common language in which they could communicate with their masters as well as each other. They also developed a type of code language; it used many of the same words as the white man’s language, but not his meanings (Haskins and Butts 31). The number of American-born slaves gradually exceeded the number of those brought over from Africa and gradually pidgin English became the mother tongue of the new generations (Haskins and Butts 32). It became an integral part of black culture. (7)

Since then Black English has been undergoing a process of de-creolization, directed more and more toward the “standard.” However, the process is not complete. During slavery the lack of education, or even the opportunity for it, hindered a slave’s assimilation into SE. Also, the only linguistic role models for

slaves were the overseers (generally poor whites themselves uneducated). Lastly, the particular and unique isolation of the slave ensured a self-perpetuating nonstandard dialect. Other immigrants, though experiencing some difficulties, were allowed to assimilate into the culture better. As Haskins and Butts say, "Assimilation is the key to acquiring the language system of a dominant culture" (38-39). (8)

Well into the twentieth century, blacks were not allowed to assimilate into the dominant culture. This led to a subculture within the dominant culture that affected every aspect of life, including language. Thus, today Black English still reflects fundamental linguistic differences from White or standard English. (9)

Characteristics of BE can be heard in the everyday speech of blacks. "I be done did this lil' spot a hair fo' you know it" was said by a middle-aged beautician. The verb form **be done** plus the verb is common used. It's SE equivalent is **will have** plus the verb (Smitherman 559-60). (10)

Another distinct grammatical characteristic lies in the inclusion or exclusion of the verb **be**. If I say about another student, "She studyin when de teachah come aroun'," it is paying her no compliment. I am saying that she only studies when the teacher is around to watch her. If I say, "She be studyin' when de teachah come aroun'," I am saying that she habitually studies, before and after the teacher comes around (Haskings and Butts 42). (11)

BE phonological speech patterns seep up between my standardized enunciations. Often I say "bof" instead of "both." My roommate catches it every time. I barely notice it. A pattern in BE is that the "f" sound replaces the th- sounds at the end of words (Fasold and Wolfram 122-23). (12)

Sometimes I view my BE and my SE to be at odds with one another. The scenario starts out quite innocently. I finally find that scarf I've been looking for all day and declare, "Here it go." The image of the tsking, reprimanding grammar teacher frowns inside my head, "Subject and verb do not agree." So I improve upon it, "Here it goes." That ain't it (I push her out of my head this once). I try again, this time with all of the "bad English" edited out, "Here it is." (13)

The examples used are just a few from the structured patterns in BE. Many

BE patterns have West African structural and word sound origins. For example, the use of the verb be in the sentence “She be studyin’ when de teachah come aroun’,” is similiar to a verb tense in West African languages. It is the habitual tense. The special black usage of the verb to be stems from the slave trade, for it is found in black dialects such as the Jamaican and Gullah as well as American black dialect. The Psychology of Black Language demonstrates the similarities of four black dialects to each other:

Gullah: “We bin duh nyam--en’ we duh drink, too.”

Jamaican Creole: “We bin a nyam--an’ we a drink, too.”

Sranan: We ben de nyang--en’ we de gingie, too.”

West African pidgin English: “We bin de eat--an’ we dring, too” (Haskins and Butts 42-3). (14)

The book goes on to tie BE in with the other dialects by showing the similarities of repitition of the subject and dropping the final consonants:

Nonstandard black English: “We was eatin’--an’ we drinkin’, too” (43). (15)

Another characteristic of BE that seems to have West African ties is the substitutes of the th- consonant cluster. The th- sounds are lacking in West African languages and consonant clusters are rare. Words tend to end in the vowels or soft-consonant sounds. Slaves learned English with West African tongues (Haskins and Butts 43). Today characteristics like that persist. So “both” becomes “bof” even in blacks who don’t speak wif a “lazy tongue.” Correspondences such as these fit in too well to be ignored and interpreted as the failed mimicry of a white standard. West African influences run thick through BE’s veins. (16)

Now that some of the history has been laid out, I can come back to the present. What significance does BE hold now? There have been unofficial debates on its value to blacks. When I was fifteen, my black friend remarked, “...[name deleted], you go to that white high school and now you talk so proper.” She threw down the gauntlet. I had to respond. My response was an awkward shrug of silence. And now when my speech is brought to my attention,

I put on that same awkward, silent shrug. And I keep a careful watch on my tongue. One day I made a mistake; I did not leave my school language back in my locker. As Frantz Fanon said in his book Black Skin, White Masks:

The Antilles Negro who goes home from France expresses himself in dialect if he wants to make it plain that nothing has changed. One can feel this at the dock where his family and his friends are waiting for him. Waiting for him not only because he is physically arriving, but in the sense of waiting for the chance to strike back. They need a minute or two in order to make their diagnosis (37). (17)

In my friend's eyes I was that Antilles Negro coming home from a white existence. And the diagnosis was not good. (18)

I got it from the other side too. Coming into a white high school freshman year from a predominately black junior high I took some BE speech patterns along with me. White kids laughed at certain words and pronunciations that the black kids would use. They say it was all in fun, but jeers and pokes at our language still hurt. I guess it's almost as bad as making fun of someone's appearance. In some ways worse. That only pointed out one more falling short of the standard. One thing I did not want them to do was define me, to say I could not speak their language. As Fanon said, "...the first impulse of the black man is to say no to those who attempt to build a definition of him...the first action of the black man is a reaction" (36). I was determined to speak just like them, to speak their language better than them.

The Negro arriving in France will react against the myth of the R-eating man from Martinique. He will become aware of it, and he will really go to war against it. He will practice not only rolling his R but embroidering it. Furtively observing the slightest reactions of others, listening to his own speech, suspicious of his own tongue--a wretchedly lazy organ--he will lock himself into his room and read aloud for hours--desperately determined to learn **diction** (Fanon 21). (19)

So my "lazy tongue" gradually became industrious. I embroidered my speech with pretty and precise threads. It was a semi-conscious metamorphosis

because I don't remember practicing words in the mirror or anything, but over my high school years my speech patterns changed, so much so that last year my seven-year-old cousin said to me, "You talk funny." Translated it means "Like white people." (20)

How important is BE? It's part of a (sub)culture. It has a history. But is it left out on the cotton fields? Or (as some say) is it left in the ghettos where blacks have a foot in the cotton fields anyway? Do I feverishly embrace it, or do I turn my nose up at it like I do chitt'lings (even though they're supposed to be part of the culture too). Do I have free will to pick and choose what I will? Or am I forgetting my roots? If those of German, French, or Dutch descent don't retain the languages of their ancestors, are they wrong? Why does not using BE mean sometimes feeling "not black"? In the book Language, Society, and Education, it states, "The black child needs his Black English in order to be part of his culture" (Abrahams 97). Supporters of BE argue that without it he is alien to his own culture. In my learning the standard, did I lose something? (21)

Some of my white friends, and some black ones, too, wonder what all the fuss is about. I've bugged many of them into a long vacation away from me. "Talk how you talk." "Just be you." Who am I? Who do I be? And on the other side, some blacks, and some "culturally conscience" whites, say, "Don't talk so proper," or "Celebrate your culture." What does that mean? And no, I'm not celebrating chitt'lings. (22)

I guess the dilemma started in my childhood. In all of the different environments I lived I received conflicting messages regarding BE. At school the black kids mocked white expressions like "neato." At church (mine is racially mixed) some blacks looked down upon BE, regarding it as backwards. (23)

I can also blame my uncle and his gang. He was militant. Touting black power with clenched fists was his thang. It was "kopestetic" to be wearing dashikis, sporting afroes, and talking the talk (BE) with the homeboys. Then there's my mother. While my uncle and his gang were shouting "Black power", she was shouting "Green power" cause that's where it's at. "Money talks, so honey hush." (24)

Still, those answers don't satisfy me. Sure, I should just talk the way I talk,

but it isn't just talk. My friend in high school didn't think so, some of the blacks at church didn't think so, most people don't think so. When it comes down to it, the judgments are made: this person's intelligent, this one's not, this one is to be feared, he tryin' to be white by talkin' so propah. It's more than just talk. Frantz Fanon in Black Skin, White Masks, says that "to speak a language is to take on a world, a culture" (38). (25)

Can you wear the "clothes" of a culture too well? I've probably asked this question in other forms many times before. White students have stereotyped blacks (including speech patterns) in my presence only to explain that I'm different. I'd been given a kind of honorary citizenship. I guess the dilemma has been with me always, but I never thought of the Black English debate, and what it meant for me, not in this way. Geneva Smitherman's piece remains anchored in my thoughts:

"...the question of the moment is not which dialect, but which culture, not whose vocabulary but whose values, not **I am** vs. **I be**, but **WHO DO I BE?**" (Black Scholar 168). (26)

So where does that leave me? Where does that leave us? BE is something to be thought of on an individual basis, but it should also be thought of as a community. That includes whites. As long as the way a person talks seems to bear more on the mind than the content of his speech, it is a problem. The solution is not for blacks and their children to drop the use of their cultural language into non-existence. Blacks, however, do need to have a working knowledge of both standard English and Black English. Professor Toni Cade Rutgers, who doesn't want "ghetto accents" tampered with, advocates mastery of the standard. She said, "If you want to get ahead in this country, you must master the language of the ruling class" (Seymour 209). And knowledge of both is needed for middle-class Blacks who no longer use BE as their primary way of talking. Two different societies are being formed, and I'm not talking about white and black. We must be careful that history doesn't repeat itself. The "more privileged" house blacks segregated themselves from those of the field. Today cotton fields don't divide us, but sometimes language does. BE should not be

scorned as an inferior language of the field. It is an heirloom, perhaps one of the few Black Americans have. We have a common ancestor, we have a common bond. Some whites also have a need not only to know BE, but also to understand its significance and its legitimacy. All whites and blacks alike need to act with knowledge and understanding, and not upon stereotypes and ignorance, for we have a common bond. We are all human beings no matter what color our tongue. (27)

"My Two One-eyed Coaches"

George Garrett

I came to reading and writing more or less naturally. As, for example, you might come to swimming early and easily. Which, matter of fact, I did; learning to swim at about the same time I learned to walk. I can very well remember the name of the man (he was the swimming coach at Rollins College near Orlando, where I grew up during the Depression years) who took me as a toddler and threw me off the end of a dock into a deep lake where I had the existential choice of sinking or swimming. And chose to swim, thank you very much. His name was, I swear, Fleetwood Peoples. Could I forget a name like that? More to the point, could I invent that name? For reading we had all the riches of my father's one great extravagance--an overflowing library of some thousands of books. Books of all kinds in bookcases and piles and on tables everywhere in the house. Everybody read and read. And so did I. I remember reading Kipling and Stevenson and Dickens and Scott sooner than I was able to. And you could earn a quarter anytime for reading any number of hard books that my father thought anybody and everybody ought to read. (1)

A few words here about my father. For there were many things, more than the love of reading and writing and the gift of the ways and means to enjoy both, which he taught me by example and which at least precluded the possibility that most teachers could ever be as influential as he was. But athletic teaching was the one great thing that he could not do for me, and this, now that I am forced to

think of it, must have led me to seek out coaches as teachers. He had been an athlete and, I am told on good authority, a very good one, playing ice hockey and rowing in school and college. And he had led, for a time, a rugged physical life, dropping out of M.I.T. to work in Utah as a copper miner. He wanted to be a mining engineer some day, but midway his money ran out; so he went to work in the mines out west; and he hoped to save enough to go back to school. He had a slightly mangled left hand, missing two full fingers, and bulked, powerful shoulder muscles and a sinewy eighteen-inch collar size to show for his hard years as a miner. He had his charter membership in the United Mine Workers framed and on the wall; and in the attic there was a dusty old metal suitcase full of one kind and another of ore samples he had dug out himself. But he was crippled, which was what he called it, not being ever an advocate of euphemisms. Lameness was more like it, though: for he had a bad left leg and a limp left arm. Neither of which greatly impeded his apparent vigor and energy and, indeed, were scarcely noticeable unless he tried to hurry, to run, or to leap out of a chair. His lameness came in part from an injury and in part from a severe case of polio which had almost killed him. Now he could still swim--an awkward, but powerful sidestroke; and he learned to play a pretty good game of tennis, hobbling it is true, but overpowering many good players with a hard backhand and a truly devastating forehand. He also had a quality possessed by one of his tennis heroes, Betsy Grant. Somehow or other, in spite of all awkwardness and all disability, he would manage to return almost anything hit at him. He was hard to ace and you couldn't often get by him. When I was a boy, he was a ranked player, fairly high on the ladder of the local tennis club. (2)

By the time I was born, he was a prominent, controversial, daring, and, in fact, feared lawyer, Fearless himself. Together with his partner, he ran the Ku Klux Klan, then a real political power, completely out of Kissimmee, Florida. And lived to enjoy the victory. Took on the big railroads--the Atlantic Coast Line, the Florida East Coast, the Seaboard, and the Southern--and beat them again and again. Tried not one, but a number of cases before the U.S. Supreme Court. Yet, at the same time and always, gave hours and hours of time, without stint, to those

who were once called downtrodden. Especially to Negroes who were more downtrodden than most anyone else. When black people came to see him at home, they came in by the front door and sat in the living room like anybody else. And nobody said a word about that or any of his other social eccentricities. Because most of them, white and black, respected him and depended on him. Those who did not respect him were afraid of him. With good reason. Once in my presence (for, by his practice, all the family were included in anything that happened at our house) a deputation of lawyers from the various railroads offered him a retainer, much more money than he earned, in effect *not* to try any more cases against them. He didn't wait or consider his reply, though he surprised all of us by being polite. He thanked them for their flattering interest. He allowed as how it was a generous and tempting proposition. (3)

"I would be almost a rich man," he said. "But what would I do for *fun*?"

(4)

And, laughing, he more shooed them than showed them out the door. (5)

Naturally the thing I thought I needed and wanted most of all was someone who could teach me hopping and skipping and jumping. Someone who could teach me how to run and how to throw a ball without the least hint of awkwardness. That was, I suppose, my kind of rebellion. (6)

Besides all that, there were writers, real ones, on both sides of our family. On my mother's side was my grandfather's cousin, Harry Stillwell Edwards. Whom I never met or even saw, but about whom I heard all kinds of family stories. One that stuck like a stickaburr, and I liked a lot, was how Edwards, who was then postmaster of Macon, Georgia, won a \$10,000 *Chicago Tribune* prize for his novel *Sons and Fathers*. Now that was a plenty of money, big money, even then when I heard about it. Child or not, I knew that much. But it was, as I would later learn, a huge sum, in the last years of the nineteenth century, to fall into the hands of a Southerner of most modest means. One who my grandfather always claimed owed him some modest sum of money. Didn't choose to repay it. Chose instead to rent a whole Pullman car, fill it with family and friends, and take them all to New York City. Where the money was all spent in a week or ten days. Then back to Macon and life at the P.O. (7)

Nobody ever had to teach me anything about the potential joys and pleasures of the writer's life. (8)

On the other side was an aunt, Helen Garrett, who wrote some truly wonderful children's books and even won some national prizes for them, too. But she always wanted to be a novelist for adults, also; and somehow she never managed that. (9)

Then there was Oliver H. P. Garrett, my father's surviving younger brother. (Another brother had been a mountain climber and a professional guide who vanished in a blizzard.) Oliver Garrett was a much decorated soldier from the Great War; newspaper reporter for the old *New York Sun* who had interviewed Al Capone and, yes, Adolf Hitler, too, twice. First time on the occasion of the 1923 *Putsch*, from which Oliver Garrett predicted Hitler would recover and most likely come to some kind of dangerous power and influence. Finally in the early 1930s, with the advent of sound movies, Oliver went out, at the same time as a number of other good newspaper reporters, to Hollywood to be a screenwriter. And was, I learned much later, a very good one. Wrote dozens of good and bad and indifferent films. I have in front of me a copy of *Time* for Aug. 4, 1930, which has a review of his movie *For the Defense* and a picture of him (p. 25) and describes him as "said to be Manhattan's best-informed reporter on police and criminal matters." Adding this little person touch: "When Paramount began its policy of trying out newspapermen as scenario writers, he was one of the first reporters to become definitely successful in Hollywood. He is fond of driving a car fast, takes tennis lessons without noticeable improvement to his game, lives simply in a Beverly Hills bungalow with his son Peter, his wife Louise. Recently finding that he was going bald, he had all his hair cut off." He was one of the uncles, and a godfather, who sent extravagant and memorable presents at birthdays and Christmas; and once in a great while he would, suddenly and without any warning, appear for a visit. I recall a large man with a beret (first beret I had ever seen) and a long, yellow, open car, with shiny spoked wheels and chrome superchargers. And colorful short-sleeved shirts. And, usually, a beautiful wife or companion--there were several, of course. I remember that he

could sing and play the guitar by a campfire on the beach. And most of what I know about World War I, I learned from him, from his stories of it. (10)

Well, then. No lack of “role models” in those days. And early on, after I had announced that I intended to grow up and be a writer, I even managed to win a crucial approval. My grandfather on my mother’s side, Colonel William Morrison Toomer, thoughtfully allowed that it would probably be all right for me to be a writer because: “It is as good a way to be poor as any other.” He added that I should not expect him to lend me any money, not after what cousin Harry did with all that prize money without bothering to pay Papa (as we called him) back whatever he owed him. Anyway, what could he say to me with sincerity and conviction when one of his own five sons, my uncles, was a professional golfer and another was a dancer? He was a little worried about what I would find to write about, concerned about my sheltered life and lack of experience. I must have been at most twelve years old when we talked. Well, when the captain and only other person on board was knocked cold and unconscious by the boom, my grandfather, at six years of age, had managed to sail a large schooner with a full load of cut timber successfully into Charleston harbor. What he didn’t stop to consider was that I already planned to use him and a lot of his experience, whenever possible, to make up for the absence of my own. (11)

II

In school there were teachers, some very good ones as I remember, who were kind and were interested and who, I’m sure, tried to help me along at one time and another. But I was always what was politely known then as an “indifferent student,” all the way through kindergarten, grammar school, junior high, and through most of my high school years. Those high school years were spent at the Sewanee Military Academy in Sewanee, Tennessee, that lonesome, isolated, beautiful, and changeless mountain village. The Academy, or S.M.A. as it was known then, is no longer with us. In those days it was part of the complex that formed the University of the South. Within the context of the South, military schools have always been considered more conventional than elsewhere and therefore they have not been wholly designed for and dominated by juvenile delinquents. True, we had our share of them, brutes sent off to be as far away

from home as possible, to be, if possible, tamed and reformed without the stigma of reform school. And, as if to give these predators some function and sense of purpose, there was also a modest number of others, sissies in the persistent American term (remember Harry Truman calling Adlai Stevenson a “sissy”?); these latter sent off to be toughened, turned into “men.” There were some of both types at Sewanee, but the majority were made of more ordinary stuff; though normalcy was tested to the quick by a schedule which began promptly, rain or shine, at 5:00 A.M. and ended with the bugling of Taps, and lights out at Quintard Barracks, at 10:00 P.M., and all the time between (it seemed) spent in the daze of a dead run, running, marching, gulping meals--formations, classes, inspections, military science and tactics, all of it controlled by the constant bugle calls. At one point, really until recently, I knew, by heart and by hard knocks, every single American military bugle call--and from First Call to Taps and including such things as Tattoo, Call to Quarters, Guard Mount, Mail Call, Church Call--the whole Battalion of Cadets marched, armed, flags flying and band playing “Onward Christian Soldiers” to the chapel of the University of the South every Sunday morning regardless of creed or country of national origin. (There were no black students in white schools in the South in those days.) The handful of Catholics, Jews, and, in British terminology, Other Denominations were officially Episcopalians for the duration of their time at S.M.A. A rigorous schedule, then. And rigorous regulations, too. Only seniors, and then only as a special earned privilege, were allowed to possess radios, one per room. No point in it, anyway. There were about thirty minutes a day when the radio could be legally turned on. Everything you owned, folded in a precise manner and to the precise measured inch, had to fit neatly in a tin wall locker. No pennants, pictures, or decorations of any kind whatsoever. I remember each cadet was allowed to possess one snapshot. Which was to be taped in its specific place and displayed on the wall locker. Some cadets put up a photo of a parent or parents. Some put up a (fully and decently clad; no bathing suits allowed) picture of a girlfriend. There was quite a flap one year, as I recall, when a cadet, who grew up and lived on a large Central Florida cattle ranch, taped up a picture of his favorite cow.

This caused a great deal of controversy until it was finally decided, in favor of the cadet and the cow, by the superintendent who was a brigadier general of the United States Army, in fact on active duty at the time. As were a fairly large percentage of the faculty. For these were the years at the beginning of World War II. Military training was very serious in any event and especially at a few places in the country like Sewanee which still, in those days, could confere a direct commission on their outstanding graduates. Others went to West Point, V.M.I., the Citadel and, I swear to you, reported back that they found these places relaxed and pleasant and easygoing in comparison with S.M.A. (12)

So there we were in the cool, fog-haunted, heavily timbered mountains of East Tennessee. We were lean and if not thriving, then enduring on skimpy institutional food, for which we had to furnish our ration cards and tickets like everybody else. There were moments in those days when most of us would have cheerfully fought to the death, or mighty close to it, for the sake of a hamburger or a piece of beefsteak. Still, the University had a first-class dairy herd (as did so many Southern schools and colleges in the Depression and wartime); and, in the absence of any other students except ourselves, a small V-12 Navy detachment, and a few 4F's and discharged casualties, we had all the milk and butter and cheese we could manage. Treats--a CocaCola, an ice cream cone--were available at the University Store, the "Soupy Store," about half a mile or so from our barracks and which we were allowed to visit, providing you were not restricted to barracks for demerits or any other disciplinary or academic reason, on Sunday afternoons, following noon dinner and prior to Parade formation, roughly from 1:30 to 3:30 P.M. Most of that time would be spent in line at the counter, listening to Jo Stafford records (over and over again, "Long Ago and Far Away," tunes like that on the handsome and primitive Seberg machine, or was it an early Wurlitzer?), hoping against hope to get served in time to drink or eat whatever it was that was available and which you could afford before the sound of the bugle blowing First Call for Parade sent everyone at frantic, stomach-sloshing, breathless run back to the barracks, to grab our rifles, our beautiful 1903-A3 Springfield rifles, and fall in for Parade... (13)

Girls? Odd you should ask. There were a few on the Mountains, as I recall,

altogether untouchable and, of course, utterly desirable. Otherwise there were formal dances once or twice a year. Some nice girls from some nice schools in Chattanooga and Nashville might be brought in by bus. Spic and span, barbered, scrubbed and brushed, shine and polished, we timidly met them at the gym and tried to fill out our dance cards (yes!) before the music began to play. I remember half-lights and the scattered reflections of a rotating ceiling globe. How the whole gym seemed to seethe with the exotic odors of powder and perfumes. I think the little band must have played "Body and Soul" over and over again. I remember a lot of standing and watching from the sidelines. There were some wise cadets, old timers, who, given the choice, chose not to attend the dance. Went to the library instead. Or enjoyed the odd peace and quiet of an almost empty barracks. Without temptation and maybe without regret. (14)

III

Athletics were everything. A way to escape the drudgery (and sometimes, for new cadets and younger ones, the danger) of the afternoons in the barracks or study hall. To be on a team meant an excused absence from some mundane and onerous chores. Best of all, it allowed for occasional forays off the Mountain. A trip to play another school. Where there might be a chance to get a candy bar and a Coke, a Grapette and a Moonpie, at a bus stop or country store. A chance to see girls, maybe even, with luck, to speak to one. A chance in the "contact" sports to move beyond simple competition and to heap some measure of fury and frustration upon some stranger who was, most likely, seeking to do exactly the same thing to you. (15)

Whom did we play against? It was, of course, the same set of schools and places in all sports. But when I try to summon it up, I think of team sports. Of football most of all. It seems to me we played all the time, almost as much as we practiced. I suspect now that some of the games didn't really count. Were merely game scrimmages. Who knows? I do know that it was a long season, beginning in late summer and ending in boredom and bone weariness sometime after Thanksgiving. We sometimes played a couple of games in the same week. On the one hand we played against East Tennessee high schools--Tullahoma,

Murfreesboro, Lynchberg, etc., together with tiny country schools whose names I've long since forgotten. On the other we played against the other military schools: Baylor and McCallie in Chattanooga, both of which were bigger and generally better than we were, but for whom we had sneering contempt because their military lifestyle was casual (in our view), easygoing; Columbia Military Academy, which was, we believed, *all* athletics with no academics worth mentioning to interfere with sports, and where the players were bigger and more numerous than anywhere else; Tennessee Military Institute, which appeared to be *really* a reform school of some kind, wire fence around it, catwalks and search lights and shabby khaki uniforms. And always our Episcopal neighbor, St. Andrews, with its monks and its poor boys who grew their own food. When we played them, we had to play barefooted because they had no football shoes. They had a considerable advantage, tougher feet from playing barefoot all the time. (16)

If this was Real Life, if this was all the world that mattered and we were in it, then coaches were urgently important to us all. Trouble was that most of them didn't *teach* anything. They exhorted and denounced, praised and blamed, honored and ridiculed, but they seldom had any practical advice or real instruction for us. Those who (somehow) already knew what to do were all right. And there were always a few athletes with great natural ability at this or that who figured out what to do by trial and error, intuition and inspiration. The rest of us ran about in shrill gangs, packs, and herds, desperately trying to make the elaborate diagrams of the coaches in our playbooks come to represent something real on the ground. The chaos of circles and X's on paper bore very little resemblance to anything happening in fact and particular. Nobody on either team ever seemed to be where he was supposed to be. But only the most cynical and worldly-wise among us concluded that the fault wasn't ours. There was a great deal of dust and confusion on the playing field. Missed assignments, on both sides, were almost the rule rather than the exception. Luck, pure dumb luck, became a much more crucial factor in every game. So did tricks and trickery. Fake substitution plays were common. Fake punts and field goals were frequent. The old Statue of Liberty Play was always worth a try. I seem to recall rehearsing

an elaborate fake fumble play. All this only added to the general confusion and to the unpredictability of the games. Upsets were so commonplace they could hardly be called upsets. With so many variable and changing factors, even a state-of-the-art computer would be hard pressed to come up with any good clear patterns of probability. (17)

...Well, now, you are surely thinking. All of that must have been wonderful training for a life in the American literary world: hard knocks, massive confusion, fake punts, fake passes and fake field goals, ceaseless trickery and treachery; and all of it depending on luck, on pure dumb luck... (18)

And, once in a while, on coaching. (19)

The coach who first reached me, taught me anything above and beyond the most basic fundamentals of the game, was Lieutenant Towles. I think. That is the name I remember. And the nickname, used by everyone except in front of himself--"Lou-Two." Let us call him that, since that is what he was called. (20)

Lou-Two was young and tall and lean, a splendid physical specimen. Except that he had somewhere lost an eye. Had one glass eye. And it was that which kept him out of the war. I picture him now not in uniform but in a neat sweat suit, long-legged and moving about the playing field in a sort of a lope, which was either imitated from or maybe borrowed by his two loping boxers, who always seemed to be at his heels. He was quick and just a little bit awkward, this latter I think because of being one-eyed. Some of the guys thought he was funny. (21)

It was from Lou-Two that I began to learn some of the things which made a big difference in my life. I do not know if it was his intention to teach the things I learned. We sometimes learn what we want to quite beyond the intentions of pedagogy. (As Theodore Roethke put it--we learn by going where we have to go.) His concern and interest at that time was teaching athletic skill. And that coincided with my interests. I had not the faintest notion that I might be learning things which would be transferable and could later be transformed into something altogether different--the art of writing. Athletic skill would grow, then fade later on with injuries, age, and change of interests. But attitudes and habits, together with something deeper than either, *rituals* really, would become so

ingrained as to be part of my being. (22)

At any rate I followed him into whatever sports he coached, season by season. He was one of several football coaches, an assistant; but he was head coach of boxing in winter and track in springtime. I had no particular natural ability at either of these sports. Swimming, which came easily, was my best sport. But I gave it up. To be coached by Lou-Two. I suppose I followed him because he had taken an interest in me and had encouraged me at a time when I was very eager but very easily discouraged. (23)

His interest in and encouragement of myself and others, scrubs in life as well as athletics, now astonish me more than they did then. By and large coaches have their hands full just teaching and encouraging the few pupils who are already demonstrably talented and essential to the success of any given team. Which is why the great art or craft of contemporary coaching is more a matter of careful and clever *recruiting* than anything else. They assemble teams of the gifted and experienced, and they teach refinements only. Of course, this is one reason why, when you watch many college football games today, you will see that the main and often crucial mistakes are made in matters of fundamentals--missed blocks and tackles, dropped passes and fumbles. (24)

But in a little school like S.M.A., where teams were so often overmatched, it was probably good sense to try to make something out of the scrubs. They could, after all, make a difference as, inevitably, the basic team and its best backup players were worn down by attrition during the long season. (25)

I am still speaking of football. Which was my chief goal. Like every other red-blooded Southern boy. It never occurred to me, then, to doubt that playing football was the most important thing a young man could ever do with himself. Except, maybe, to get laid or to go to the war. From track I learned to run and then to run faster and faster. From boxing's hard school I learned to cultivate a certain kind of aggressiveness, out of self-defense if nothing else. And I experienced a sharper, keener sense of contact. It soon dawned on me that for the most part and most of the time football was neither as tiring nor as dangerous as boxing. From boxing I began to learn to take punishment better; to know that it was coming; to bear it. But at the same time I was learning, with the pleasure of

instant and palpable results, to dish out punishment. Learned by doing, by giving and taking, that other, even better athletes did not enjoy receiving punishment any more than I did. I learned then that there was at least this much equality and that if I went after my opponents, quickly, there were times when I could take command. (26)

Shall I, may I, say a word or two about pride and skill? Please understand that I am now, for better or worse, possessed by precious few illusions. I had even fewer at the age of fifteen or sixteen. I was never a very good athlete. But, on the other hand, I have been there and I have known the ups and downs, the feel of it all from head to toe. Which is (I do believe) mostly much the same for all who have been there--regardless of their share of good luck or their degree of skill. I have won and lost races on hot cinder tracks and in cool swimming pools. In the ring I have won and lost decisions, knocked out other young men and, myself, have been beaten to the dazed, vague, bloody, and bruised edges of consciousness. Never knocked out (yet) I'm here to tell you, though. I have known those times when my mouth and jaws were too swollen to open up for a teaspoon and when my bruised hands and sprained thumbs failed me at the simple chores of buttons and shoelaces. In football, in high school and college, I have experienced a few moments I can honorably remember. I have run the ball and passed the ball. I have caught passes and punts. Once upon a time, and once only, I ran back a kickoff for a grand total of twelve yards. And one wonderful afternoon I managed somehow to block and generally manhandle an All-American tackle. Who must have been just as astonished as I was when he kept on finding himself sitting firmly on his altogether ample ass. Oh sure, there are boobos and stupidities which will still wake me up in the middle of the night wincing with shame. (27)

But I guess now I am grateful for all of it, if only because it taught me early and forever that most *literary* accounts of athletic events and adventures, from Hemingway to Mailer and through McGuane, are bullshit. (28)

But from Lou-Two I was learning other things which would prove useful. From him, first of all, I learned conditioning. Conditioning, then, as now, only

more so then, was more a mystery, more a matter of craft and secrets, than any kind of science. Faith and hope, I venture, had as much to do with being in shape as anything else. The same thing was true of the repair and healing of injuries in those days before there was anything called "Sports Medicine." Except for broken bones, the care of injuries was in the hands of trainers. Ours was the celebrated trainer of the University of the South, who, for the duration, had no teams to care for. He was an ancient black man named Willie Six. It, too, was a mostly nonverbal experience. You went to his den at the University gym. He did things with heat and cold, with strong-scented and mysterious ointments and salves of his own making and with deft massage. It, too, was a vaguely religious experience. Sometimes, made whole as much by faith as treatment, I imagine, those who had hobbled in left cured and ready to play again. (29)

Conditioning was mysterious like that. What you learned was that if you did certain things (and did without certain things) and performed certain rituals, your body would answer you by tiring more slowly and by recovering much more quickly from weariness, wear and tear. You learned to know and to listen to your body. Since all this was aimed toward the performance of a particular sport, its focus was less narcissistic than conditioning for its own sake or to improve appearance or health. The practical results of being in good shape showed up in performance. That, in itself, was a lesson which would carry over--that you could establish a relationship with the self of the body and could train it and teach it to work for you. And that you need not, indeed should not be crazy or tyrannical in this matter. If you overtrained or mistreated your body, you lost ground. (30)

What was happening, even during this period of concentration upon the body, was a kind of self-transcendence. In which, gradually and inexorably, the body, one's own, became in part something separate and distinct, an apparatus, a sensory instrument designed to do things and to feel things and to accomplish certain chores. It need not be a thing of beauty. It need only be able to perform, to the extent of its own learned limits, specific tasks. Inevitably one was, ideally, observing the body-self in action from a different angle and vantage point. An early lesson in point of view. (31)

The larger value of this learning experience, however, was more complex. It

was a matter of learning one kind of concentration, of a kind which would be very useful to an artist. Concentrating on preparation, one could not afford to waste either time or energy worrying about anything beyond that. You were too busy preparing to worry about the game (or match or meet) until its moment arrived. And when that happened, it was pointless to worry about anything else, past or future, except the present experience. You learned to concentrate wholly on the moment at hand and to abandon yourself completely to it. (32)

And *that* made some sense out of all the chaos and confusion. Wholly given over to the present, you likewise limited focus to your own small space. To what you had to do. You became, for yourself, a single lamp burning in a dark house. You learned to live in that light and space with only the most minimal regard for or awareness of all the rest of it, going on all around you. You learned to play your part, early or late the same, and without regard for the score. Winning or losing didn't much matter. (33)

The athletic advantages of this knowledge and concentration, particularly for an athlete who was making up for the absence of great natural skill, were considerable. Concentration gave you an edge and advantage over many of your opponents, even your betters, who could not isolate themselves to that degree. For example, in football if they were ahead (or behind) by several touchdowns, if the game itself seemed to have been settled, they tended to slack off, to ease off a little, certainly to relax their own concentration. It was then that your own unwavering concentration and your own indifference to the larger point of view paid off. At the very least you could deal out surprise and discomfort to your opponents. (34)

But it was more than that. Do you see? The ritual of physical concentration, of acute engagement in a small space while disregarding all the clamor and demands of the larger world, was the best possible lesson in precisely the kind of selfish intensity needed to create and to finish a poem, a story, or a novel. This alone mattered while all the world going on, with and without you, did not. (35)

I was learning first in muscle, blood, and bone, not from literature and not from teachers of literature or the arts or the natural sciences, but from coaches, in

particular this one coach who paid me enough attention to influence me to teach some things to myself. I was learning about art and life through the abstraction of athletics in much the same way that a soldier is, to an extent, prepared for war by endless parade ground drill. His body must learn to be a soldier before heart, mind and spirit can. (36)

Lou-Two, perhaps without realizing or intending it, initiated me. But it would be another man, a better athlete and a better coach, who would teach me most and point me toward the art and craft I have given my grown-up life to. I could not have gained or learned anything from the second man, the next coach and teacher, if I had not just come under the benign if shadowy influence of the first man. (37)

A final track season, graduation; and I went my way, having so much by then absorbed what he had to teach that I took it all for granted without any special gratitude toward Lieutenant Towles or any special memory of him until now. I remember the two boxer dogs first. I fill in the man loping between them. (38)

IV

The next man had a certain fame. He was Joseph Brown at Princeton University. (39)

With Joe Brown I now encountered an artist, a sculptor, and a coach who had once been a great athlete. Never defeated as a professional fighter. And *just* missed being a world champion. Missed because he lost an eye in an accident while training for a championship fight. As a coach, he had much to teach me. Or, better, there was so much to learn from him. For one thing, he was able to show me that there were things, particularly habits derived not from poor coaching but from experience, which it was already too late to unlearn. Things I would have to live with. There were things, beginning with my basic stance as a fighter, which were “wrong” and less than wholly efficient and effective. I fought out of a kind of sideways stance which allowed for a good sharp left jab and even a left hook and was an effective defensive stance, but limited the use of my right hand except in very close. He taught me how to analyze that stance (and my other habits) and how, rather than discarding it and disregarding all the experience which had gone into forming it, to modify it slightly so as to take best

advantage of its strengths and at the same time to compensate for its more obvious weaknesses. Compensation, that's what he showed me first. How to compensate for inherent physical defect or bad habits. (40)

What was happening, then, was the introduction of mind, of *thinking*, into a process which had been, until then, all intuition and inspiration, all ritual and mystery. He did not seek to eliminate these things, but he added another dimension to them. (41)

From Joe Brown, both by teaching and example (he was still, close up, the best fighter I had ever seen), I began to learn the habits of professionalism, the kind of professionalism, which would be demanded of me as an artist. Never mind "good" artist or "bad" artist. I even learned, through the habits of this kind of professionalism and the experience of trying and testing myself and my habits against others who also knew what they were doing, that nobody else, except maybe a critic-coach like Joe Brown who knew that [sic] was happening at all levels of his being, could honestly judge and evaluate your performance. I learned to recognize that the audience, even the more or less knowledgeable audience, never really knew what was going on. Nor should they be expected to. (42)

I learned that in the end you alone can know and judge your own performance, that finally even the one wonderful coach-critic is expendable. He can solve a practical problem for you, problems of craft; but he cannot and should not meddle with the mystery of it. (43)

I learned something, then, about brotherhood, the brotherhood of fighters. People went into this brutal and often self-destructive activity for a rich variety of motivations, most of them bitterly antisocial and some verging on the psychotic. Most of the fighters I knew of were wounded people who felt a deep, powerful urge to wound others at real risk to themselves. In the beginning...What happened was that in almost every case, there was so much self-discipline required and craft involved, so much else besides one's original motivations to concentrate on, that these motivations became at least cloudy and vague and were often finally forgotten. Many good and experienced fighters became gentle

and kind people. Maybe not “good” people. But they do have the habit of leaving all their fight in the ring. And even there, in the ring, it is dangerous to invoke too much anger. It can be a stimulant but is very expensive of energy. It is impractical to get mad most of the time. (44)

In a sense this was not good training for the literary world. For the good camaraderie of good athletes is not an adequate preparation for the small-minded, mean-spirited, selfish, and ruthless competitiveness of most of the writers and literary types (not all, thank God) I have encountered. They do things which any self-respecting jock would be ashamed of. They treat each other as no fighter would ever dare to. (45)

And all the time they talk about...*Art*. With a capital A. With a kind of public and mindless piety and genuflection. (46)

Ever since my youth, since the days of first the shadowy Lieutenant Towles and then the unforgettable Joe Brown, I have been deeply suspicious of pious amateurs. (47)

From Joe Brown I also learned something of the permissible vanity of the professional. Joe had long since outgrown any of the false and foolish pride of the athlete. But he knew himself well enough to know that some pride was earned and all right. Once in a great while he would go to the fights in New York at Madison Square Garden or St. Nick's. If he went, he would be recognized, starting in the lobby with the old guys walking on their heels who sold programs. And the ushers. Before the main fight he would be introduced from the ring. He liked that moment even when it embarrassed him. It was a homecoming. He wrote a fine short story about it called “And You Hear Your Name.” (48)

Joe Brown was an artist, and he was as articulate about his art as he was about his sport. He could talk about it, though always simply and plainly. For those who were tuned in to his kind of talk it was valuable. R. P. Blackmur, for example, used to discuss literary matters and matters of aesthetics with Joe. It was from Joe, Blackmur said, that he got one of his best known titles--*Language as Gesture*. Which was a reversal of something I, myself, had heard Joe say: in sculpture gesture was his language. Many of his athletes also went, one night a week, to his sculpture class. It was, in those days before coeducation came to

Princeton, the only place you could be sure to see a naked woman on the campus. A powerful inducement. We managed to learn a little about modeling clay and about the craft of hand and eye. For most of us what we learned was that we could never ever be sculptors even if we wanted to. But, hand and eye, we learned some things that would carry over, despite a lack of natural talent.

(49)

Some of the intellectual lessons Joe Brown taught were brutally simple. In boxing, for example, he was fond of reminding his guys that to win in boxing you had to hit the other guy. To hit the other guy you had to move in close enough for him to hit you. No other way. One of the immutable lessons of boxing was that there was no free lunch. To succeed you had to be at risk. You had to choose to be at risk. That choice was the chief act of will and courage. After that you might win or lose, on the basis of luck or skill, but the choice itself was all that mattered. (50)

Or a matter of sculpture. Teaching something of the same sort of lesson. At one stage Joe was making a lot of interesting pieces for children's playgrounds. This in response to some Swedish things which were being put up in New Jersey and which, in Joe's view, while aesthetically interesting, had nothing special to do with *play*. He said a piece for a playground should be something you could play on and with. One of his pieces, I remember, was a kind of an abstract whale shape. High "tail" in the air and a slide from the "tail," through the inside of the "body" and out of the "mouth." It was tricky to get to the top of the "tail." There was no one and easy way to climb there. Many different ways as possibilities. Some of them a *little* bit risky. You could fall down. So? You can fall out of a tree, too, or off a fence. Once at the top of the "tail" there was the wonderful, steep S-shaped slide waiting. Only right in the middle it leveled off. The experience of the slide was briefly interrupted. (51)

Why? (52)

"I want these kids to learn the truth," he said. "You can have a great slide, a great experience. But to do it all the way you've got to get up off your ass and contribute at least one or two steps of your own." (53)

My first lesson in...*meaning in Art*. (54)

As I am thinking about these things so much has changed. My father has been dead for many years. Lieutenant Towles has disappeared from my life. I have no idea where he may be, even if he is alive or dead. And as I write this, I have news that Joe Brown died recently in Princeton. Thirty-five years and more have passed since he was my coach and teacher. And likewise the half-child, myself, who came to him to try to learn and to improve his boxing skills, is long gone also, even though, by being alive, I can still carry the memory of him and thus, also, of Joe Brown. I can summon up the sweat and stink of that gym. Pure joy of it when things went well. Pain when they did not. (55)

Ironically, I tend to dismiss most comparisons of athletics to art and to "the creative process." But only because, I think, so much that is claimed for both is untrue. But I have come to believe--indeed I have to believe it insofar as I believe in the validity and efficacy of art--that what comes to us first and foremost through the body, as a sensuous affective experience, is taken and transformed by mind and self into a thing of the spirit. Which is only to say that what the body learns and is taught is of enormous significance--at least until the last light of the body fails. (56)

"The Muses Are Heard"

Stanley Elkin

And Jesus, I'm thinking at the time, this snob of geography, this longitude-latitude fop, it can't have been but three weeks ago I was living in a villa on Lake Como, taking the gelato, the customized pastas; servants were cutting my meat. And tucking in, too, feasting on the blood-oranges architecture folded into the terraced hillsides organic as agriculture, the lake's thin gray porridge and lumpy Chinese mists. Well maybe, I'm thinking at the time, in spite of Missouri is my hometown, distance is only a different time zone of the head. Because I recognize nothing here, all jet-lagged out in the van, two or so hours southwest of St. Louis on I-44 deep--I see by the recurring billboards that keep on coming,

popping up at us like an infinite loop of highway in some redneck video game--in the walnut-bowl belt, in roadside zoo land, cavern and cave country. Among the fireworks stands. Live bait mines. And there's a sense, God bite my high-hat tongue, of something so un-gun-controlled out there we may have fallen, may my swank wither and drop off, among a race of Minutemen. There's billboards for the Passion Play, for Silver Dollar City, for rides on the Wet Willies. (1)

This ain't any America of franchise and one size fits all; this is a time warp. Some live-by-the-tourist, die-by-the-tourist figment of the imaginary bygones and halcyons, of fiddles and corncobs and jugs. We are, I mean, deep, real deep, in a hanger-on economy, in some landscape of the novelties, and I ask Ross Winter, founder and artistic director of the Mid America Dance Company (MADCO), the man who leads our troupe of modern dancers bound for Springfield, Missouri, where we're performing Friday and Saturday evening, what folks do hereabouts when they're not minding the bait stores and walnut-bowl factories. (2)

"Don't know," he said. "Perhaps they groom each other for ticks." It's improbably close to what I've been thinking myself, for we seem to be traversing tracts of the summer pests and poisons, a vast American steppe of allergens and contact toxins, of wicked itch banes in the woods and high grasses. (3)

The van, something in a fourteen- or fifteen-passenger Ford, has been rented for the four days it will be required. A second vehicle, also rented, containing the dance company's props, wardrobe trunk, special equipment (some of which is also rented), and rolls of the vinyl theatrical flooring it has just acquired and which will have to be paid for by matching grants, had set out earlier, is probably already in Springfield, setting up. (4)

The dancers, I think, are used to me by now. (We go back.) We are practically colleagues, these toned, flexible, almost jointless young men and women in their twenties and the crippled-up fifty-eight-year-old man who has to negotiate the high step up into the van by means of a high step up onto a milk case, a breathtaking piece of choreography in its own right, let me tell you. They call me by my first name, something which normally squeaks against my blackboard like chalk--I am, by ordinary, when not playing *la strada*, a teacher--

but which, here, in these circumstances, oddly I do not mind at all, and even find flattering, though I must say it's a little difficult to keep *their* names straight, wait for others to say them first, only gradually constructing a private mnemonics. Liz is the married one. Her husband, James, is part of the tech crew and has gone out with David in the other van. Raeleen is the one with the close-cropped hair. Ellen is the tall one, so Darla must be the one with the reddish hair and the expressive face you associate with white clown makeup and one dark apostrophe standing for a tear. The men are a bit easier. Paul is driving, Michael is reading the Stephen King. Jeffrey, unseen in the van's last row, is apparently sleeping. (5)

No one calls me by my first name now, or says much of anything really. Indeed, they seem a bit torpid for a group normally so casual with gravity. Not like last time when they stretched out on the long ride to Winfield, Kansas, by improvising themselves into various riffs of position, a kind of jazz yoga. Not like last time when they passed the time in the moving vehicle playing board games without a board and counting cows and doing license-plate poker. When they made up ideas for dances. Even me. "You pass out these dinky cardboard glasses," I said. "You give a pair to everyone in the audience. There's this green lollipop cellophane over one eye, this red over the other." (6)

"So?" (7)

"So you tell them if they put on the glasses they can see the dance in three-D." (8)

"Right," Paul said, "then we chuck spears at them." (9)

Not like last time when I smelled, I swear it, the lightly scorched odor of composition-rubber gym shoe in the van's closed air and browsed the curious sampler of upscale magazines, *Interview* and *Elle* and *M*, that the company favors, and dipped at will into proffered community snacks, introduced for the first time to the delicious sodium nitrites and scrumptious carcinogens of beef jerky, on whose long, tough leather I chewed with pleasure for half an hour, for if I am crippled up and need assistance to get into a van, I have the jaws of a grown man. Nature gives with the right hand, takes with the left. (10)

Now we don't stop for gas, so forget the beef jerky. Forget dinner, too. Not

like last time. (Place in Kansas? No fast-food joint or truck stop or theme restaurant but the genuine article, the kind of place you see on the network news when Tom Brokaw breaks bread with vox pop--a banker, a farmer, the John Deere man. And there are plaques for Rotary, Jaycees? And Angie--the company's high school apprentice--asked what the Optimist Club was, and Liz told her it was a support group for people who are too happy.) (11)

Hi-diddle-de-dee, the actor's life for me! (12)

Only it isn't the boards I want to trod, it's the Road. Having been born with this J. B. Priestly sense of good companionship, some troupe notion of traveled kinship, a true believer--my pop was a traveling salesman--in lobby encounters, this yet of the shifting, shared geography, this heart's perpetual reunionist, you see, this sucker for chums, this long-standing-enough guy on that pavement in Paris who eventually runs into everyone he's ever known--this, this *auld acquaintance*. Because it ain't really friendship I'm talking about, it's *Miller time!* And even today I imagine all sports announcers, men covering not only different teams but different games even, know each other, and are always bumping into one another in the best hotels in the different towns--though it's always Cincinnati--and going off together to the good restaurants to catch up, to do the divvied shop talk of their lives, speaking in a jargon so closed it's almost ethnic of the great patsies and fall guys--did you see *Broadway Danny Rose*? like that--doing the anecdotal schmooze and war stories, all high life's tallest tales. (13)

Still, not like last time. Because we really do go back. Well, a couple and a half years anyway. (14)

Ross Winter was born in Australia. He studied at the University of New South Wales and, though he took modern-dance classes while he was a student, he ultimately went for an architect. Emigrating in 1959, he was with a film company in Portugal for a year, moved to London and set up in the design and architecture trade. He choreographed dances for the London and Edinburgh festivals, married, started a family, came to America and moved to St. Louis, and in the early

seventies went to work for the Wetterau Corporation, a wholesale-food-distribution company in Portugal for a year, where he was head of the design department. While at Wetterau he founded, in 1976, the Mid America Dance Company, a sidebar to his life. Then, in 1984, the company closed down Winter's department, and it was suddenly a compulsory hi-diddle-de-dee on him. Missouri, Illinois, Kansas, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Arkansas, Texas--this is the venue of MADCO's modern dance. (15)

Winter looks, in profile, rather like some King George on currency and, like other educated Australians, talks a sort of soft-edged English Prim, the vaguely indeterminate accent of someone raised in a mother tongue but an alien in the land where he speaks it. It's an agreeable, even amiable sound, but you can't imagine anyone ever shouting in it and so it seems, well, vulnerable, the patient calm of a forced, stoic courtesy. (*Aw geez, come off it. What are we talking about here? Some great Greek patsy fall guy? A few not-like-last-times, and we're into the tragics? As Georgie Jessel said about his chauffeur forced to stand outside the limo and wait for him in the rain, "Nobody told him to go into his profession."*) At fifty-two, Winter is slightly egg-shaped. "The irony about dancing," he says, "is that as a dancer gets better his body only gets worse." In any event he hung up the taps years ago, though he still performs in "The Madcracker," his parody of *The Nutcracker* and the company's most popular dance. (16)

MADCO doesn't do badly. That is, it's a wash. The company takes in and disburses about \$150,000 a year. Between \$35,000 and \$40,000, or about 28 percent of its income, comes from grants; touring brings in another 34 percent; fixed-fee performances in St. Louis, 8 percent; box-office sales, 14 percent; educational performances in schools, 11 percent; fund-raising, 3 percent; with a miscellaneous 2 percent coming in from classes and such. Salaries for the dancers range from \$115 to \$210 per week. Liz, who's been with MADCO eight years, gets \$210 (for a thirty- to thirty-five week season), but the mean salary for the dancers is \$150. Ross allows himself \$330 a week. David Kruger, the tech man and company manager, books the tours and works on commission. (17)

I come into it in 1986, about. (18)

Ross wanted to choreograph a dance to prose and asked me to write a story that I could read downstage left while the dancers carry on behind me. When "Notes Toward a Eulogy for Joan Cohen" is performed on Saturday night in Springfield it will be the fourth time, not counting rehearsals, we will have worked together. It's a long piece, about forty-five minutes, and although, owing to my location onstage, I've never seen all of it, the bits I have seen--in MADCO's rehearsal studio--have always seemed to me rather sexy. Well, all dance is about screwing, finally, even the barn dance, even the waltz, but we're talking leotards and leg warmers here, we're talking spandex and muscle. We're also talking, in the instance of "Joan Cohen," about a rabbi who officiates at the funeral of a woman with whom he's been carrying on an adulterous affair--talking porno movies in a Philadelphia hotel room, talking blow-job discussions. We are a distance from *Swan Lake*. And did I mention that Springfield is the world headquarters of the Assemblies of God? Not so much the people who gave you Jimmy Swaggart as the folks who took him away. (19)

When we danced the dance in St. Louis those other three times there seemed to be a lot of enthusiasm for my cane, applause all around the minute they saw it when I limped in from the wings to take my seat behind the table where I do my stuff--all my plucky Look, Ma, I'm Dancin's and show-my-flags. Well, I'm known in St. Louis, a known cripple. When I stumble on in Springfield Saturday night and they *don't* applaud I will think, this is some tough audience! Well, I'm spoiled. (And why, incidentally, do top-hat, white-tie-and-tail types like Tommy Tune and Fred Astaire use canes in *their* acts?) (20)

If the collective mood isn't like last time, maybe it's because these are the final performances of the season; and for Liz, married now and who, whither thou/thither me, will be leaving the company and moving to Arizona with James in a week or so, it's a last tango in Springfield altogether. And because Darla, she of the reddish hair and supple face, has been in severe pain for eight months now and has either torn ligaments in her hip or a ruptured disk in her back, maybe

both, which isn't great for the leg extension and presents difficulty for her turnout, and has given her more downtime than a computer; and even if the company *is* family, unlike real families it's forced to function, is burdened always--unlike me with my merely hail-fellow, good-time-Charley, Miller-time intentions, all my visions of those sugarplums in a weightless world--and if that's the case, what alternative did she have except to ask Ross if he had a minute and then offer her resignation? (21)

Only I don't know all this yet. I'm still sitting innocent next to the Stephen King-reading Mike, a few rows up from invisible Jeff, apparently sleeping. Passing with Ross the time of the day and, deep in my heart, wondering what the place will be like where we're going to stay. (22)

Well, not much. It doesn't have a restaurant, it doesn't even have a coffee shop, let alone a lobby where one can transact old times with the other announcers. It's a hot day in the summer of the great drought and though there's an air conditioner in my room, it doesn't work. Oh, it has the *sound* of air-conditioning down, but no B.T.U.'s. And there are bugs squished against the walls. But hi-diddle-de-dee anyway, because isn't this how it's supposed to be? To all intents, ain't it a kind of vaudeville we're doing, riding the tour van like a time machine, all symbolic trains, rails and clickety-clack like a montage in movies, name, pop, and elevation wig-wagging above the stations like the accepted synecdoche for distance itself? Ain't it? We're paying out dues, man. Look, Ma, I'm playing Springfield! Ain't I? Ain't we? W're *taking* this show on the road! Ross, me, and the mean-average twenty-five-year-olds, those hundred-fifty-buck dancers. Hell, if we had any sense we'd go *all* the way, split the motel altogether, maybe look for a boardinghouse maybe, some place with just the one telephone next to the landlady's apartment in the front hallyway, or something *really* fleabag, a hotel with old bus-station chairs and ripped-up green plastic cushions in the lobby. And that's *one* muse. The Muse of Myth, of How It Was. There were hobos in the earth in those days, a race of fry cooks, of broke-mouthed old fellows, closed-jaw, and all wide, ear-to-ear, turned-in lip like Popeye the Sailor. And you know what? If you permit me to get ahead of myself, you know what? There still are. I saw them. (23)

Friday, breakfast morning of show time, a bunch of us were sitting around Orville & Betty's Café--SERVING DOWNTOWN SPRINGFIELD FOR OVER EIGHT YEARS--doing the large o.j., French toast, sausage, and coffee, \$3.25, when this bo came up. His hair was perfectly black but he was toothless. He was wearing a T-shirt, his exposed arms so covered with tattoos he looked abstract, as closely decorated with geometry as a mosque. He needed a light for his cigarette. Liz, or maybe Jeffrey, lit his cigarette, and he asked if anyone happened to know the time. It was ten-thirty, and Liz filled him in. "Thank you. Is that A.M. or P.M.?" "A.M.," said Liz, "it's ten-thirty in the morning." "You want to buy a floor lamp for two dollars?" There it was, in the corner, this classic floor lamp with this classic lamp shade, this classic wire, this classic plug. (And for my money, in my book, right there's another muse--the Muse of the Bizarre Confrontation. The muses are singing today, I'm thinking. How it was is how it is, and I should get out more.) Liz didn't live in Springfield, she'd have no way to get it home. "I can understand that," he said reasonably. "I'm not from here myself. You can have it for a dollar." Betty, at the cash register, besides a wall mounted with a half-dozen stuffed heroic silver bass, is watching closely. Liz just plain doesn't want the damn thing. "Take it off my hands," pleads the tattooed man. Who is difficult to look at, on whom time, booze, and circumstance have worked their magic and whose colors are running, who, like some ancient, benighted schoolboy, cannot seem to stay within his own lines. "Take it off my hands, take it for nothing." Betty shoos him, but before he goes he asks the time again, and once more needs to know if that's A.M. or P.M. (Later, Ross will mention he's seen him in the street, that he didn't have the floor lamp with him so must have gotten his price, better than his price. There were two bucks in his hands, and he was counting them out like some crazed miser, turning them over and over. "A dollar, and a dollar, and a dollar, and another dollar...") (24)

There are several agendas. (25)

Even if five of the eleven of us showed up for breakfast today, it isn't often we're in the same place at the same time. Michael likes to stay in the room when

he's not working, though when he's with us I've noticed he's a superb mimic, a parrot of the zeitgeist. Of the male dancers, he is the most solidly built, the most powerful, though it's Paul, I think, who is probably the best athlete. It's surprising to see him at the motel pool. Dancing must be a sort of ultimate acting. In a bathing suit he's almost scrawny. He *is* scrawny, yet when he swims there's no wasted motion, no energy loss. A few strokes take him the length of the pool. The women are similarly deceptive. Except for Ellen they're all relatively short, yet on stage they appear tall. In one of the dances Liz moves across the stage, apparently without effort, with Paul on her back. (*What's going on? Are you funny, are you in one of the high-risk categories?* No, of course not. *Of course not? Michael's powerfully built, Paul's the best athlete, Liz plays horsey with him? Of course not?* Well, it's the fashions. *The fashions.* The way their clothes fit all right? *Are you caught up yet?* The way their clothes fit, I tell you. My clothes never fit me like that. *You're fifty-eight years old.* Don't make excuses for me, they *never* fit. *Whiner, you're in mourning for a wardrobe?* Yes, sure, why not? Only not for a wardrobe, just that accident in the genetics that skewed my architecture and made me silly in caps, jeans, in Jockey and boxer shorts either, in all the extraordinary accessories of the rakish, wind-blown young down to the beaches in boaters and scarves. The only equality is the equality of sexual style, the Me Tarzan's You Jane's, all the level playing fields of dalliance. You bet your ass I'm in a high-risk category, the highest. I'm not cute! *The grass is always greener, eh?* Always. *All right, get on with it.*) (26)

So there are different agendas. Raeleen is at the theater with Ross, holding up costumes so David and James--who wears clip-on suspenders with a length of Mickey Mouses attached to trousers so baggy (fashion) he could be that Dutch kid who saved Holland--can present the proper cues on the lighting board. Darla and Ellen are sunning themselves. Michael relates the plot of his Stephen King, and Jeffrey retrieves tossed dimes before they sink to the bottom of the pool. I chaise lounge alongside. Paul is dressing. There's a technical rehearsal at one. (27)

“Step leap step skip,” Liz drill-sergeants in theory class in Richardson Auditorium the afternoon of the performance at Southwestern College in Winfield, Kansas. “Swing and up, left two three. Over right, two three up,” she calls out, commanding mantras of the dance, square-dance calls. (28)

“Oof.” (29)

“Shit.” (30)

“Find your center, you’re not finding your center.” (31)

Ellen pushes up on her push-up sleeves. Angie, the apprentice, fixes the off-the-shoulder sweatshirt on her shoulders. Everyone wears leg warmers, even the men, who appear oddly old in them, as if their circulation were impaired. Liz, a cappella, continues to snap her fingers, never surrendering the beat while the troupe in its artfully ripped sweatshirts (*fashion! fashion!*) hunts its lost center. Difficult, I imagine, to find in the near dark they’re working in, all the three-ring din of the crew’s preparations--they’re putting together a jungle-gym forest for the set of “Lemurs,” they’re testing the fog machine, adjusting sound levels for the romantic, boozy music of “Silver” while a stagehand kneels in the dark and blows up props, two dozen silver cushions. “Are you the curtain puller?” Ross asks a student. “When you’re closing you can always be a little faster than when you’re opening,” he says to him. “He’s a quick study,” he tells David as the curtains come smoothly together. (32)

“Two, that’s warm.” David addresses a person or persons unknown in the booth. He speaks, like an air-traffic controller, into a microphone cantilevered across his mouth like a prosthesis, some orthodontics of sound. “Two and a half, that’s even warmer. Two and a quarter. Okay, that’s good.” (33)

Liz crickets away, the dancers swarm. (34)

They are theoried, believed, suffused with us/them, farmer/rancher, mountain/shore antipathies and yin/yangs. Well, they have nothing against ballet dancers *personally*... (35)

Ballet dancers are bun heads. (36)

” ” ” robots. (37)

” ” ” toy soldiers. (38)

As ruled and rigid as ice skaters doing all the compulsories and mandatories of their frozen art. Ballet a by-the-numbers game, *tableau vivant*, not classic so much as stiff, dead to the arts as Latin is to language. Modern dance is to ballet what jazz is to golden oldies. (Though how much is terror I can't say. Much would have to be, no? It stands to reason, doesn't it? Life up on the pointe? Or down in pli  ? Lowered in painful rice-paddy mother-squat? Because all dance really *is* about screwing. Even ballet.) (39)

When we get to the motel Ross hands envelopes to each of us. They are pay envelopes. Because I think the check for my fee will be in it I am embarrassed to open mine in front of them. It isn't my fee. It's my per diem--a lump sum \$45. This is Thursday, we will be leaving Sunday. It will have to last me. (But I come back with money to spare. I could have lived a week and a half in Springfield.)

When I finally see it, the Landers Theatre gives me the hi-diddle-de-dees altogether. It's the real thing. A classically legitimate legitimate theater. A theater like the theaters there used to be a broken heart for every light on Broadway for. (41)

Once, years ago, in Rome, dubbing a film into English (I was Sextus, son of Pompey) and asked "What hour is it?" I was supposed to answer, "It is a quarter past the hour of the second watch." I delivered the line not only without credibility or good evidence that I could even tell time, but without any clear understanding (me, Sextus, a grown co-conspirator) that it was the time I was being asked to tell. I worked almost the entire morning before being fired. The point isn't that I was fired. It's that once, years ago, in Rome I dubbed a movie. Wait, I take it back. The point is also that once, in Rome years ago, I was fired. Legitimate legitimate theater. (42)

And the Landers is it. Built in 1909, it has two balconies. Its seats are plush, ornate. Great fierce gilded masks--almost gelded masks, not asexual, but not Comedy, not Tragedy, only dramatic--with bulbs sitting on their tongues line the sides of the theater and the bottom of each balcony, perched like gargoyles on

Architecture. The second balcony isn't used now, but, in its day, a full house would have been about a thousand people. (43)

This is it, all right. By *God*, it is! (44)

There's a kid, maybe he's eighteen, who volunteers his time as a stagehand at the Landers. He says his ambition is to *own* a place like this someday. Not an actor, mind, but an impresario. I don't know why this should move me but it does, as I am moved by the theater, as I am moved by the dancers, as one is always moved by odd, off-center hope, by people hanging in there and the persistence of the obsolete. (*You crybaby! You're so moved, why didn't you buy the bum's floor lamp? Why didn't you take it off his hands for two dollars! That's something else. Something else. Ri-ight. Well it is. Sure. All right, smartguy, I've reason to believe it may have been an ill-gotten floor lamp. Oh, an ill-gotten floor lamp! I was too moved, I was too! Sometimes you're moved, sometimes you're only embarrassed. This is a postmodern thing, right? I could ask the same of you.*) Because there's something in the blood, I think, eager to hold the other guy's coat, to present his card, to serve as second. That admires a blacksmith in the late 1980s but wouldn't necessarily care to be one. (*Didn't you used to be Charles Kuralt?*) (45)

In the event, I am delighted to be at the Landers, thrilled in fact. And I can say *exactly* what it was like. It was like turning sixteen and getting your driver's license, receiving, I mean, the high privilege of doing what *real* people do. Because the guy is right, the grass *is* greener, and I wish I had Ross Winter's guts *in* his dancer's bodies. Having it all on the low mean average. Not to fuss. Because *I* don't know how they do it. Hi-diddle-de-dee or no hi-diddle-de-dee, it can't be much of a picnic to have to live in America the Third World life. (46)

To live it on a lark, of course, is a different story. Though it's odd, I'm thinking at the time, that I don't much care for backstage, that I find it oppressive, in fact. (David Kruger says the Landers's "stagehouse"--the term for the dressing rooms and work areas, everything not properly the auditorium--is badly in need of attention.) Indeed, the stagehouse is itself a sort of Third World, as cluttered and underdeveloped as a favela. Everywhere are cables, ladders, light

trees, sets, wardrobe racks, sound equipment, props and gels and Styrofoam cups, all the detritus of fast-food lunch, all theatrical schmutz, all dramatical squalor. (47)

But mine ain't the only game in town. The company will perform two different programs in Springfield--"Pretty Fooles and Peasantries," "Silver," "Hard Day," "Tango Greeze," "Continents," and "Lemurs" Friday; "Flashpoint," "Canon Studies," "Hidden Walls of Time," and "Joan Cohen" Saturday--and they're doing the techs, not run-throughs exactly so much as a fitful electronic blocking on the new stage, vetting the audio. The dancers, for all their flexibility, are hostage to equipment. If movies are, as they say, a director's medium, then movies are the exception, for all the other performing arts belong to the technicians. (48)

Indeed, watching the rehearsals, one is reminded of the book on movie stars, all the rap about the downside of glamour. The cliché must be true about the poor dears bored in their trailers. It's like the army, or being on time for your doctor appointments, like hurry-up-and-wait enterprises everywhere. These folks are disciplined but, not like me out of harm's way on my chair on the stage--where the easel once stood that identified an act in old vaudeville days. First, I can make out Ross and David's soft conferences, David's mumbled relays to James in the booth. I don't even understand Ross's minimalist comments to his dancers, his remote-control ways, the data they seem to store about stages everywhere in their collective show-biz unconscious, a stage's invisible cuts and primes and vectors, all its unmarked markings paced off in their heads meticulously as the universal weights and measures of duelists' strides. Ross waves them over or calls them in. He moves them about like a manager adjusting his fielders. (49)

It's *very* technical. (50)

And, that night, it's the technical side which blows, the equipment which fails. (51)

I'm seated beneath the overhang of the first balcony near the back of the house, in a good seat on a side aisle. I want to get a feel for the demographics. Which are sparsish, a scant sparsish of demographics. Better than a handful, oh

way better, but hardly the “pretty good house tonight” that the house manager promised, driven, I think, by hi-diddle-de-dees of his own, as if--Kansas, Springfield, St. Louis: I’m an old hand by now--the body counts and reassurances were intended to dish the same calming hush-hush politicals as government handouts in a war zone, say. Only kindly meant, servicing, stroking some perceived need for the old there-theres, palpable in performers as an open wound. Except I’m only crippled up, not blind. There are, oh, perhaps 150 summery souls in the demographics tonight. In a theater built to hold 1,000. Of these the vast majority are women. Plus, of course, a bun-headed contingent of little girls and their younger brothers. A smattering (maybe) of the underwriters, patrons, benefactors, contributors, and sponsors of Springfield Ballet listed in the program. Most in frocks, the comfortable, neutral, down-home dowdy of people who have nothing to prove. (52)

And they are appreciative, generous. On our side, they laugh in the right places, applaud with enthusiasm. Though they are so thinly spread out, I doubt if the dancers receive their message. I’ve noticed an audience’s sound is tricky to hear onstage, as though acoustics were a one-way street, or the stage a transmitter, the house a receiver. Though the observation must be tempered. The dancers have told me they frequently speak to each other on stage, not pepper talk but flashing the clipped, distant early warning of contingency, guiding each other through the lifts and all the double- and triple-time of their close-order drill arrangements. Close to them as I am when we do “Joan Cohen,” I’ve never heard them. So that’s another thing--dead spots like the lead opaques of Superman’s vision, all the willed limits of transmission, all reined-in, shut-lipped, back-of-the-throat pronouncements, For Performer’s Ears Only’s like the cleric’s promptings and inaudibles to the bride and groom at a wedding. (53)

But something’s up--or down--with the sound system. MADCO’s tapes are incompatible with the Landers’s sound equipment. There’d been trouble at the technical, some missing-nail thing in the tape deck in a for-want-of-a-nail sequence, temporarily papered over by a run out to Radio Shack by somebody in one of the crews. (The Landers has a crew of its own.) Tonight, when the curtain

risers and the lights come on, the bouncy, lusty music for “Pretty Fooles and Peasantries” is neither bouncy nor lusty. Indeed, it is scarcely heard. Certainly the dancers, who must take their cues and rhythm from it, have trouble hearing it. (What happened was this: the papered-over part tears. David, backstage, stage-managing, sends an SOS. James leaves his post at the light board and rushes to the second balcony, where their guy is running the sound equipment. James punches up the sound levels, amplifies the amplification. It’s like Scotty giving the *Enterprise* warp speed by rubbing two sticks together. Afterward their guys will say our guy had improperly plugged something or other into something or other. It’s a their guys/our guys thing, an honest-to-God territorial dispute.) (54)

After the intermission the sound is back where it should be, but it’s too late. The dancers are in a foul mood, David and James furious, Ross depressed. Personally, I don’t see what’s so terrible, and argue so. They were pretty good despite, I tell them after the show. But there’ll be no hanging out tonight. Again. (55)

I am dressed in my suit of lights--my Brooks Brothers Golden Fleece and special-ordered pants. And, give or take a row, pretty much the same seat I’d occupied the previous night. I’m not nervous so much (though I’m nervous) as apprehensive, and not so much apprehensive as a wee gone with guilt. More than a wee. Why am I here? *I* don’t have Ross’s mission. The Regional Arts Commission, Arts and Education Council of Greater St. Louis, and Missouri and Illinois arts councils don’t fund *me* to build an audience for modern dance. *Build* an audience? If I had my way, I’d disassemble what’s here. (56)

Though it’s hardly SRO, or even the mythic “pretty good house” of our comforter’s reports and special pleading, it’s up from last night. Maybe 250. Many are little girls, even more than on Friday. More homemakers, too. I’m thinking of what I heard two ladies say to each other after MADCO’s performance in Winfield: “Pretty neat, wasn’t it?” “Oh, I thought it was *real* good.” This far south in Kansas, I remember thinking, people sound as if they’re from Oklahoma. It could be, this grammar, this music, this language of placed persons, the true, sweet, inflected neighborlies of Prairie itself. (57)

Because I know what's coming after intermission. (58)

Me. Yours truly's coming, the larky, city-slicker Jew with his love rabbi and his love rabbi's blow-job conversations and his love rabbi's death jive. Right here in walnut-bowl country, deep in the cavern counties, hard by Orville & Betty's two-buck ham 'n' egg breakfasts. In Passion Play terriotry. Only it's not like it sounds. I swear it isn't. I'm *not* afraid of them. I'm not. I just don't want to upset anyone's apple cart or ruffle the feathers. I would leave everyone's dander down where I found it. I've no desire to build an audience, even my own. (59)

Only it goes without a hitch. Technical *or* spiritual. The applause is even more generous than last night. There are curtain calls. I get roses. (60)

It's Ross, ringing me in my room, can he come over. (61)

He sits in one of those light, polypropylene, contoured shell chairs, universal as coat hangers. He's drinking a generic 1.75-liter bourbon with ginger ale. I'm dressed, sprawled on the bedspread. He drinks, I think, recalling "affairs," like a Jew. (62)

"I thought show people," I tell him, "were supposed to be sentimental, ceremonial. Well, those awards shows, those Oscars and Tonys, that Lifetime Achievement crap. Well those curtain calls, well those roses." We're really talking about Darla, who drove off after the performance with her parents and boyfriend and scarcely a word to anyone. "I'd expected a scene, *counted* on a scene. At least toasts, at least hugs and handshakes and the we'll-meet-agains people taking their leave owe each other out of respect for endings, rites of passage. My turnout ain't any better than Darla's." (63)

"Well," says Ross, "maybe not everyone can throw herself on the mercy of the court with your abandon." (64)

Ross is in a mood. Not a *bad* mood. Actually he's rather pleased with how things turned out. Especially after last night's performance. He blames the dancers. "They should have gone to their battle stations." (65)

We're gossiping, getting *down*. I have to be careful what I ask him. He

won't duck a question. He tells me what he makes, he gives the reasons he broke up with his wife. (66)

"Do you ever think of leaving St. Louis?" (67)

"I think of changing my life. I don't mind about the money. You can decorate an apartment quite nicely with what people throw away. I would have taken in that floor lamp. I didn't because it was ugly. Some street people have no taste at all." (68)

And ah, I'm thinking, ah, the young 'uns out on the town, me and Ross waiting up for them, bandying our eleventh-hour truck-farm confessions and plans, talking all the high and dry, buddy-stranded locutions of lull. (69)

"Well," Ross said, "I don't socialize with them anyway. They're my tribal family. I'm their elder. It's nothing personal. I guess Liz was teacher's pet. If I had one. By dint of long tenure, her right-hand-man manners. *Droit de right-handedness*." (70)

"I have to laugh," I say. "You know what they said at the reception? 'Springfield needed to hear that.' *Jesus!* Want some gum? I chew lots of gum since I quit smoking." (71)

"I don't chew gum. In Australia, during my formative gum-chewing years, it was rationed. Now it's too frustrating. I feel I should be able to break it down and eat it." (72)

"I understand. I really do." (73)

If the place had room service I'd have sent out long ago. There's nothing to nosh but gum, but we're all over the board. We could be in Cincinnati, I'm thinking. (74)

"Liz used to be a mouse," Ross says. "She used to dance with her body screaming, 'Don't look.' And it hasn't quite clicked with Ellen yet that she's there solely for the pleasure of the audience. She's too shy with her talents. She has to learn to throw them out into the house. An audience wants to be flashed." (75)

Paul's too intense, Ross says. He's very smart but too intense. In a mood, Ross doodles his dancers. Of the women, Raeleen's the strongest. Jeff has the best stretch and turnout, the most extension. Michael is a teddy bear and could

be a wonderful dancer. He watches too much TV. (76)

"Too much TV?" (77)

"Turnout, extension, strength, and stretch are important. Mind is a dancer's most important instrument." (78)

Liz, James, Jeffrey, and David are at the door. (79)

"Come in," I say, flattered, "come in. Come in." (80)

"Is Ross around?" (81)

"Come in." (82)

Jeffrey, subdued, is already anxious to leave. After Friday's performance he went for a walk. He'd been thinking about his career. He didn't get back to the motel until 2 A.M. He was pretty tired, he said. He thought he'd better get going. (83)

Ross is using my bathroom. Liz says, "He has to know." (84)

"Tonight? Come on," David says, "tonight was terrific. Don't bother him tonight." (85)

"He should know. I don't care, he should. David, James, I'm going to tell him." (86)

"Jeffrey should tell him." (87)

"He just told *us*." When Ross comes back Liz says, "Ross, that Saturday Jeffrey missed rehearsal? When he said he'd made plans? He was in Chicago auditioning with Shirley Mordine's company." (88)

Ross didn't say anything for a while. I know that's what they all say, that they don't say anything for a while. Or that they blanch, go white as the unimpeachable testimony of Darla's clown-white pain, but that's what happened. Maybe there's a muse of the autonomic physiologicals for bad news, or when you've been let down, badly disappointed, some Muse of the Involuntary Facials, and a muse working, too, when he recovers, finally speaks. The Muse of At a Loss, Vamp 'til Ready. (89)

"If he'd asked I'd have let him. I would. It's helpful for a young dancer to audition, to get someone else's opinion of what he does wrong. I'd have let him." (90)

"Did he get the job?" I ask. (91)

"He says he has a good feeling," Liz says. (92)

"You know Jeffrey," David says, "he has a good feeling if the ketchup on his hamburger isn't green." (93)

"I'm dissolving the company." (94)

"Ross, you're upset." Liz is stroking his arm, giving out comfort like first aid. (95)

"Darla's gone. Liz is moving with James to Arizona. Now Jeffrey? I'm dissolving MADCO. It's my company, I can do what I please." (96)

"And put the others out of work?" (97)

"Sleep on it, Ross," James advises. "You're upset. Don't make rash decisions when you're upset." (98)

"I'm a grown man. I'll make rash decisions when I please. More than just wedding bells are breaking up that old gang of mine," he tells me. "I'll tell them tomorrow." (99)

But he doesn't. The Muse of Second Thoughts. (100)

When Ross sent Jeffrey's check he thanked him for his patience but told him he was not being asked back for next season due to his lack of professionalism and commitment to the company. The women have been replaced, but until he can find a replacement for Jeffrey, they'll be dancing with two men, not three; six dancers, not seven. They book programs in advance. "Continents" may have to be dropped from the repertoire, though Paul thinks that with a quick costume change either he or Michael ought to be able to double up on one of the parts. "Hidden Walls of Time" and "Pretty Fooles and Peasantries" are definitely out, as is, of course, "Notes Toward a Eulogy for Joan Cohen." (101)

The irony muse which plucks my gig and leaves this crippled-up old soul hi-diddle-de-deeless. Until, at least, Life breathes on my life again, the all-embracing muse of lark and unexpected compensations. (102)

Mr. M

My last paper has to do with the first day of class and the topic, should some definition be changed. I remember that the class wrote the metafores and misnomers about males and females that did not sit well with them. It's not that the definition of these words should be change. What should be change is the peoples idea of what the word really means. Most off my paper has to do with the first rehearsal I wrote. (1)

What are masculine trats, rough, unemotional, strong, or be a leader not a follower (submissive). What happens if a women has some of these traits or all of them. She is laugh at and often called names or looked down on, mostly by men. Let's for instance look at the word dike. I could not find the definition in the dictionary for an aproperate explanation of this word, but we all known when it is thought that a women has manly qualities. (2)

The physical aspects of what socity thicks that a dike looks like. Very large, fat, squaty or both, short hair and no makeup. That's not the bad part of it at all. To be known as a dike, is to be known as a lesbian. Does this mean that any women who is not submissive or shows that she can do anything that a man can do is thought to be a dike and gay. (3)

What about the word stud, this is a word that most of the men of the world would like to be remembered by. The dictionary reads, a sexually promiscuous man. I think that dike, slut and stud kind of mix together. Stud is all the good traits of man, been laid a lot and achevse his goals. On the other hand men give more demeaning titles to women who show any of these traits. A women sleeps around and gets laid a lot she is given the titled slut, nice HA. Then if she is aggressive or shows any manly traits at all. She is then known as a dike and thought to be gay. I don't understand this, how did it get like this and who made it up. (4)

This word to men stud, is not just about being a champ in bed or how many notches he has on his bed post. To a male this word means that he excels in what ever he does. For the most part people use this word as a sexual derogatory. The symbolism of stud means that a man has reached manhood if he is seen as a stud in the eye's of his peers. (in the age pratit that I'am in) This uselly means that he reached manhood. (5)

What about the word slut, most of the time women are to be known only to be one. The slag definition of slut, a careless, dirty, slovenly women, slattern. Men use this word to describe a women who sleeps around or when she does better than a male in something, like a test. Just like the word dike, if she is seen as wild or outgoing females are seen as losse. The ironic thing is here is that most boys are told this by their mothers. That women are wild or losse they are whores. (6)

Maturity, when does a boy become a man or when does a girl become a women. What at a certain age "bingo" your a women or a man. Through my life I've known some real mature and immature people. I never thought that age has nothing to do with age. In America it does have it's being. (7)

A statement in a movie, made me wonder what it meant to be mature. I heard the statement in the movie parenthood. You need a licence to drive a car, or to hunt and fish, but any asshole can become a parent. After hearing this it really made me think what pleasures of life is all about. It's not about being grown up and being able to drink alcohol, it's about being mature. (8)

Wouldn't it be nice if some one can up with a quesitioner that would test the maturity level of people. Based on the definition, a perfect being, complete, or ready. I known that nobody is perfect, but do some of the people you meet really fit this discription at all. (9)

Who makes up the definition to these words, don't they ever revise them. At least make them equal to both sexes. I guess back in the pass this is the way they thought. Their thinking was more conservitive and differant, but I didn't think they were dumb. Maybe the pest way is to teach the childern what the word means , not the sterotype of the word. (10)

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The following gives the works that I have found particularly helpful in forming my views on the relationship between speaking and writing and in developing my model of reading. Although I have not referred specifically to every book or article in the text that I list here, I would like to credit in this way those whose work has helped me. This bibliography represents a very personal reading list. I have also provided this list for those who are interested in pursuing one or more aspects of this fascinating and complex issue, which crosses many disciplines, eras, genres, and cultures.

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