Myth-making and motivation to write

William Charles Archibald

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd-project

Part of the Rhetoric and Composition Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.lib.csusb.edu/etd-project/483

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the John M. Pfau Library at CSUSB ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses Digitization Project by an authorized administrator of CSUSB ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@csusb.edu.
MYTH-MAKING AND MOTIVATION TO WRITE

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition

by
William Charles Archibald
June 1995
MYTH-MAKING AND MOTIVATION TO WRITE

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

by
William Charles Archibald
June 1995
Approved by:

Juan Delgado, Chair, English

Eleanor Partridge

Rise Axélrod

June 12, 1995
ABSTRACT

Myth is made as a matter of daily course, underlying life and giving it form. The form accepts whatever is put into it, but changes it. This paradox: change combined with stability, is the basis of all myth. Since it is the nature of myth to change, then when it does, it breaks apart and the new myth emerges from the old. The myth gives and it takes away; it is a microcosm of our lives.

What is reassuring, however, is that the myth's form is recognizable but at the same time always new. Cultures and individuals do not know themselves until they shape their experience into form (read myth) through language. And these identities are made when myth provides us a form where we recognize all our possible lives. We construct language within the freedom of the myth and create ourselves around this nothingness with our stock of language.

When students become aware of how myth-making creates self in the writing classroom, this insight can help motivate them to write. The pedagogy I envision is democratic and organic. It balances product and process in a constant forming and breaking apart of self in text. There is no true text, only potential texts and selves. I want to awaken students to this personal myth-making project for their writing.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The Masters Program in Composition at CSUSB appealed to me at first because I had the impression that it would be a writing intensive program. When I began to take classes I was introduced to the theory and practice of composition. As I took more classes, the reason why a person writes became of intense interest to me. Yet, in the end I have received what I came in wanting -- to be a better writer myself. The bonus is that I have become a teacher too.

I wish to thank my three readers who were always patient and helpful while I struggle to put my own myth of writing into words. I want to thank Rise Axelrod for her commitment to my writing and for our always lively and interesting conversations. I want to thank Elinore Partridge for her grace and spirit. She will always be a model for my own teaching. I want to thank Juan Delgado for recognizing the poet in me and for encouraging me while letting me write. Also, thanks Juan for Ovid and "Themis' stones" which I throw over my shoulder as I leave this place.

Finally, I would like to thank Ed White for his perpetual kindness and confidence in my abilities, especially at the end of my studies here at CSUSB. Thank you too, Ed, for your class -- English 650/Winter Quarter 1992 -- where I met my lovely wife, Robin Mooneyham.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TABLE OF CONTENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>I. MYTH-MAKING</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction to Myth, The Writer, and The Writing Classroom</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Myth</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myth in Culture</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paradox of Myth</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myth, Mythographers, and Myth-Makers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Myth</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stages of Myth</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Theology</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Story</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Script</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Realm of Risk</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Havlock's Plato</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Risk Again</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>II. MOTIVATION TO WRITE—TAKING A THREAD FROM ARIADNE</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmony's Desire</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A Myth of Writing</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Larkin's &quot;Poetry of Departures&quot;</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ambivalence</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Wall</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need to Write</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Why We Write</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error Correction</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Error Redefined</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>III. MOTIVATION IN THE WRITING CLASSROOM</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Nemesis .......................................................... 70
Brophy: Motivation to Learn .................................. 73
Lack of Content .................................................. 75
Expressivist and Social Constructivist .................... 79
Spellmeyer ........................................................ 81
Owens ............................................................. 87
Nietzsche’s Perspectivism ........................................ 90

IV. PEDAGOGY/MOTIVATION

Myth, Feminism, and Voice .................................... 94

WORKS CITED ................................................... 101
I. MYTH-MAKING

Introduction to Myth, The Writer, and The Writing Classroom

At the beginning of *In the American Grain* William Carlos Williams speaks in the voice of Red Eric, father of Lief Ericson:

Rather the ice than their way: to take what is mine by single strength, theirs by the crookedness of their law. But they have marked me— even to myself. Because I am not like them, I am evil. I cannot get my hands on it: I, murderer, outlaw, outcast even from Iceland. Because their way is the just way and my way— the way of the kings and my father— crosses them: weaklings holding together to appear strong. But I am alone, though in Greenland. (IAG 1)

Eric, the defiant pirate and marauder-King, on the run from an encroaching Christian domesticity, snaps at the dogs that follow. He is not sure of the way things are changing. He knows he should lead because he is a king, but he cares not for the direction he must go. And the others do not follow to be his slaves; he has no power over them. He is alone, which is good and bad: he is "in Greenland." One of those wishful-thinking kind of places, such as the land for tract homes in Florida in the 1920's that ended up to be swamp. Yet, Eric is on the cusp of the new; he represents something specific for Williams: the brashness of the new
and a nostalgia for the royal prerogative.

Yet, to be "in Greenland," an ostensibly horrid place of ice and unforgiving climate, is for Red Eric to participate in an act of will that makes life possible. There is no question but that he knows what Greenland is. He also knows that he is already there in his own mind: "alone." For Eric, being "in Greenland" is the only thing he can do. Greenland is also the ruse he perpetrates on those who will follow, a kind of orientalism that will secure his place in history. Eric sprays the stale perfume of the ancien regime toward the wilderness of America. The heady odor of it is what Williams senses all around. He captures it; writes it down in In The American Grain.

It is a commonplace to say that Williams is Eric because he writes in his voice. There is no doubt we see Eric more real in Williams' use of the first person

---

1 Red Eric's myth-making concocts a mythical land, replacing the real Greenland of ice with this green land. Then he acts on this myth (when he says he is "in Greenland"), and by doing so, makes it real for those who follow. Of course, those who did follow got to know the "real" Greenland and kept going -- traveling deeper into the myth Red Eric had started. Williams is one of these travelers. Williams and others before him, rewrite the myth of America by including Red Eric, remembering him as the progenitor of the myth. It is ironic that Red Eric, his son Lief and his discovery of Vinland (America) were not known about by Columbus. But it shows how the myth is continually being remade.

2 No doubt this was early (four hundred years before the Age of Exploration), but the lure of the Orient, its mystery and promise of riches is contained in the name Greenland -- especially for those used to ice and snow.
narrator. This doubling, this creating of personae, says something about Williams and about America. In *In The American Grain* Williams constructs his myth of America, while he also constructs himself as an American.

Also, there is the sense that Williams is "alone" in an America that may be metaphorically full of ice. And like Eric, Williams fears that he "cannot get his hands on it." He does the best he can by writing the words of Eric down for us — by being the poet he is. And perhaps, by letting Red Eric speak for him, it does allow Williams to get his hands on it (America). Acquiring a voice like Eric's is an act of faith for a writer; it must be renewed with every line written.

I wish to emulate William's writer's faith in my own writing here — in this thesis. I want to show how students in the writing classroom might be able to "get their hands on" the writing they will be asked to do. My premise is that we are already myth-makers of extraordinary power but do not know it. We are like the men and women who made (wrote) the legendary myths that define our culture. On a smaller scale, but in a no less important manner, we can learn to write our own myths.

Myth-making gives us, as it did our ancient ancestors, the ability to understand the world around us by naming it, setting it up in narrative, and then, by living this story,
watch how it can change us. Writing allows us to do the work of myth-making, while the writing process -- when it produces knowledge -- motivates us to write. However, myth-making as it relates to writing is easily misunderstood. It is far subtler than it appears.

I want to be clear that my use of myth in this thesis has nothing to do with archetypes or any particular myth. I want to become aware of how myth-making is a tool for the making of self. The making of self, as I will show with the help of the German-Jewish critic Walter Benjamin, serves no purpose in itself. But let us ignore this for a moment and ask: what does it look like to make one's self?

It is difficult to know for sure. The stumbling block has always been the notion that there was only one self, some core to our being that we either knew or we did not know. We could conceivably miss the chance to make a self or discover our true self and languish (self-less) all of one's life. I believe this is false. In this thesis I will argue first of all, that myth-making shows us that there are many versions of the same self; and secondly, by explaining myth in this way it will allow us to see how students in the writing classroom can make their writing more visionary and at the same time more practical.

I begin my discussion of myth-making by describing myth and how it has been used in art and society. Early in my
research I realized that there were many versions of most myths. For example, the Theseus/Minotaur myth tells how Theseus goes to Crete, kills the Minotaur, and then flees with Ariadne, leaves her on a deserted island (Naxos), and returns to Greece. But over the months of reading about myth I found other versions of the Theseus myth, especially when it came to what happened to Ariadne. Roberto Calasso recites the variations:

Abandoned in Naxos, Ariadne was shot dead by Artemis's arrow; Dionysus ordered the killing and stood watching, motionless. Or: Ariadne hung herself in Naxos, after being left by Theseus. Or: pregnant by Theseus and shipwrecked in Cyprus, she died there in childbirth. Or: Dionysus came to Ariadne in Naxos, together with his band of followers; they celebrated a divine marriage, after which she rose into the sky, where we still see her today amid the northern constellations. Or .... (23)

So, there seems to be no reason to stick to the story. In fact, those who are touched by the myth tend to "read" it in a particular way and then change it. At the same time, this process of myth-making comes up against a force, as strong in society as the myth-making need, that wants to freeze the story into some canonical form. Yet the myths are made to be broken. We take the story and improvise it, tell it in a new way so that it eventually breaks the old myth apart and lets a new one be born.

In personal terms we experience this birth as a product of our need for individuation. We also have an insatiable
desire to name this new birth. The way we do this is with language, with story. We become authors and as the poet John Berryman said: ... the subject [is] entirely new, solely and simply myself. Nothing else. A subject on which I am an expert." We are all experts on ourselves -- a fecund fund of myth. A notion our students are hard pressed to learn. But what if they were to be given a method to learn to write themselves? They might see all the possibilities, all the geniuses of themselves.

I admit that this keening after self expression is not new. Writing has always been seen as a way to describe the author and those around him or her. The genesis of story is the need of the storyteller to tell the "folk" who they are. Yet to frame it more particularly I want to see myth-making in the writing classroom in the issue of voice. As I explain, near the end of this thesis, voice in the contemporary writing classroom is a thorny issue. Various writers in Composition Studies explain the difficulty in finding one's voice, knowing where it comes from, and controlling it when it appears. Voice is most often mistaken for what I call the "master scripts" of education. There is no denying these scripts. I do not want to argue, for instance, that we must do away with the script we teach that defines academic writing. Since I have been studying myth I have become wary of ostracizing any coming to voice, for
voice is a plural form. We do not have a singular voice; we have as many voices as there are forms for our writing. Therefore, where the voice comes from is not as important as which voice I am using today and how well I can use it.

Finally, being multi-voiced is the essence of myth, the reason why we should study how myth has been made, and why it should be encouraged in the writing classroom. Myth-making provides students and teachers with a method that puts the act of creation firmly in the hands of the individual. It allows the person to take control of the writing-self and build a tower of voices that do not babel at one another but can be turned on and used for whatever purpose. This thesis is an encouragement to all the voices inside of us; all the myths we are living and hope to live.

Briefly, before I turn to the my discussion of myth-making I would like to deal with the notion I raised earlier: why does the making of self serve no purpose? When the Paris Review asked Philip Larkin why he wrote, he said:

The short answer is that you write because you have to. If you rationalize it, it seems as if you've see this sight, felt this feeling, had this vision, and have got to find a combination of words that will preserve it by setting it off in other people. The duty is to the original experience. It doesn't feel like self expression, though it may look like it.(47)

What myth is for me is described in what Larkin means when he says that the experience of writing "doesn't feel like self expression, though it may look like it." The making of
self is like the myth — all surface. It clothes our duty to something deeper. It is the shell that we must deal with, that we must sell to our students so they can experience that ambivalence, the paradox of how the writing changes and how we change with it, and how what we thought was us is now something else. Yet we have a record of it (this self) because we have written it down. And pretty soon, if we continue writing, we understand that it isn't self expression at all, but something deeper, more whole. My thesis is the story of this journey to wholeness within the idea of the writing classroom.

Every idea like every story begins at a point of creation, a birth. We come upon a marker and it points us toward a way that gives us an understanding of where we have been and where we are going. Deciding to write about myth showed me my own personal myth of writing and gave me a model for how my students can write and rewrite the myths of their own lives and have faith in themselves as writers. I begin with my personal myth.

**Personal Myth**

James Carse in his *Silence of God*, a meditation on prayer, describes the essence of faith when he tells about

>The early Irish monks who would go so far as to put out to sea in small craft, merely to drift wherever the tides and the winds would take them. They considered themselves *peregrini*, pilgrims or wanderers. They were giving outward form to the spiritual act of placing themselves at God's
Carse explains that prayer-filled faith is not "the cry of help" of those using a handy safety net, but those who recognize "that in their human condition they [are] already out to sea" (37). The Irish monks demonstrate how we make our "Greenland" and then live into it. In other words, when we make a personal myth, be it Greenland or God's mercy, the implication is that if it is of our own making it allows us to live more fully. However, to live in this self-made myth is to live at risk. The peregrini throw away the oars and the sail. Yet, we are always "in myth" by our own hands or others. Few of us are aware that this is the case. Fewer know how to make their own myth — not accept the available copies but use these traditional myths to make something unique for themselves. We live our lives combating the forces we sense want to drag us under and feel helpless in their grip. But only when we try to copy do we see the difference between our life and that of others. At that moment, we need to be taught to be aware of our ability to make our personal myth, and not to forsake what makes us

---

3 "... to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answers." -- Rilke

4 Mary Oliver says concerning imitation: "You would learn very little in this world if you were not allowed to imitate. And to repeat your imitations until some solid grounding in the skill was achieved and the slight but wonderful difference -- that made you you and no one else -- could assert itself" (13).
different from others, but see genius "in our hands." We get our first glimpse of our ability to make myth when we are children.

I remember my parents had a set of Victorian children's books on the shelf next to the World Book. The book's deep red covers evoked mystery and wonder for me. Inside were glossy illustrations from the Greek myths. There was Perseus, in one picture, astride the winged horse Pegasus, holding the Medusa's head by its snaky curls, a sword dripping by his side.

Later in Junior High, Mr. Lambert, my English teacher, had us read Edith Hamilton's The Greek Myths. At the end of the semester we wrote a myth of our own. I wrote a myth that told how sea water became salty.

My myth, a tragedy in the best tradition of Greek myths has, so to speak, stood in the place of "seawater" for me ever since. Briefly my story has to do with a young man from a foreign land, a land whose people were the only ones who knew about salt. He steals some "sacred salt" and travels to Greece where he becomes a famous cook. He has a secret. It is this: salt will kill the gods. Zeus and all the other gods eventually hear of this young man because of his delicious food. They invite him to Olympus, which is just what he was hoping for. Well, on the way up over the ocean, beside wing-footed Hermes, his bag of salt starts to rip.
The salt pours into the air. My young hero loses his balance straining for the vanishing grains and falls to his death. The seas are forever after salty in his memory.

In my myth of salt I name a force of nature; it connects me to something ancient. It is a luminous morsel of memory; my own private Edenic experience. I repeat this myth of salt again to tell you about me. With this naming I enter my voice in the ancient chorus — give life to a part of the natural world, my world. Thus one part of the world is no longer strange. It was not that I "explain" anything. In fact, the story stands in for a part of nature and appears enigmatic. It was the act of telling that gave what only it could give — "more life" (Carse SG). My knowledge that sea water is salty was the goad for the writing. What happened is that something was created, got into the blood, and now defines me. I assumed the voice of the salt. And as if it could talk it tells me its story. This was so it would not be silent any longer. The story I had was filled with me by way of the salt.

5 "The Greeks were drawn to enigmas. But what is an enigma? A mysterious formulation, you could say. Yet that wouldn't be enough to define an enigma. The other thing you have to say is that the answer to an enigma is likewise mysterious" (Calasso 343).

6 This process is circular. I no longer have the written text of my salt myth, but I have repeated it to my friends as an oral tale from memory, and now I have written it done again here.

7 Teaching a Stone to Talk is a title of one of Annie
In a myth we speak in a voice that is not our own; we tell a story that is not our story; yet we make both these things our own when we collect our thoughts and our voice into the graphophonic symbols of the written word. When these stories appear in this form they preserve a moment of time (my jr. High English class). When I retell my myth of salt it reflects nostalgia and lost power; it has been frozen in that classroom long ago. What does my myth of salt mean now? How do I describe the savor of my life?

I am aware that I have for the last three years been constructing the myth of a college composition teacher. I see this teacher I am becoming in the myriad of models of "the teacher" around me. I want to construct a myth of the teacher so that I can see myself teaching. This teacher will be aware as best he can of the necessity for his students to construct their own myth in order to write themselves into the composition classroom as I teach myself into that same classroom. I want to see how and why we should learn to be aware of our myth-making. This inquiry will take up Parts II, III, and IV of this thesis. But first, before I turn to how myth affects writing motivation and pedagogy, I want to talk some more about how myth works in the wider culture.

Dillard books. With no irony intended, I believe this should be our pedagogy: to teach stones to talk. We are all like stones that need to be taught to speak.
Myth in Culture

Myths are integral to how our culture represents itself, especially in literature, music, and the visual and plastic arts. Freud used the Oedipus myth, and Joyce used Homer's *Odyssey*, retelling the stories in contemporary ways. In culture, our notion of the hero is defined by characters from the myths such as Hercules and Achilles. Modern critics from Northrop Frye (*Anatomy*) to Roland Barthes ("Myth Today" *ABR* 93) show how writers use myths to create literary works, help Madison Avenue sell products, allow Hollywood to make movies, and produce pop music icons and their acts in front of worshipful fans.

The Greek myths form cultural markers for us, but there is an ambivalence; that is, we both believe and disbelieve the myth. Our need to devalue it serves a covert purpose — so the myth's power can be managed. At the same time it makes them more interesting. It is the duty of the artist to manage the power of myth.

Ursula Le Guin in the introduction to her novel *Left Hand of Darkness* talks about the relationship of the artist and the god:

I do not say that artists cannot be seers, inspired: that the awen cannot come upon them, and the god speak through them. Who would be an artist if they did not believe that that happens? if they did not know it happens, because they have felt the god within them use their tongue, their hands? Maybe only once, once in their lives. But once is enough. (iv)
Here Le Guin speaks of myth-making as an exceptional experience that seems to be reserved for the few. Yet it starts with recognizing the sacred in all things. The psychiatrist Dysart in Peter Shaffer’s play *Equus* says this kind of recognition starts with worship. He wants to tell that one "unbrisk person":

Look! Life is only comprehensible through a thousand local Gods. And not just the old dead ones with names like Zeus -- no, but living Geniuses of Place and Person! And not just in Greece but in modern England! Spirits of certain trees, certain curves of brick wall, certain chip shops, if you like, and slate roofs -- just as of certain frowns in people and slouches .... Worship as many as you can see -- and more will appear! (62)

Part of the problem why we cannot see the gods in our furniture, so to speak, is how they have been trivialized. Writers like Edith Hamilton, while providing a service by popularizing the Greek myths, rendered them in homogenized form. As Mircea Eliade says, they have been "dethroned and ... brought down to the level of children's stories" (*Myth and Reality* 112).

In contrast, Roberto Calasso in his *Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony*, tells the Greek myths in their multi-voiced complexity, refusing to censor them for any reason. For

---

8 "Furniture" is an unintended travialization of my own. I am sure there are gods in some furniture. I just can't see worshipping my desk for instance -- although I do like it.

9 We would not know the Greek myths as we do, if it weren't for those like Hamilton who were influenced by Victorian Romantics.
instance, gone is Eliade's equivocal description of heirogamy as "the genealogy of the Gods as a successive series of procreations" (MR 151). Calasso calls it rape. This not only describes the violent act of taking possession of another sexually, but this change in rhetoric (from Hamilton to Calasso) is violent; it tends to strip us of our illusions. It also reflects that as humans we have the god in us but are plunged into the dirt. This is the moment that we realize we are the product of heirogamy. It is the moment the modern appeared. Every age has the modern forced upon it (as does every person). Even Plato was concerned with the impact of the modern. (Havelock) The recognition of the modern is a pivotal point for myth as Red Eric knew. His reaction to the modern was to set himself down "in Greenland."

Walter Benjamin, the German-Jewish intellectual of pre-WW II Europe, speaks of the crisis of modernity [as] a crisis of the secular. Society has been in flight from the sacred ever since its beginnings. Our natures are balanced between the heavens and the dirt of earth, a razor's edge. How we meditate this is through our experience narrated "mouth to mouth." (Illuminations 87)

The "crisis of the secular" is the rift between Romanticism and the Enlightenment, art and science, poetry and rhetoric, the religious and the secular — the struggle between myth and history. Myth in this form is what is cast off by the
onslaught of history. Myths are the ruins left behind that still speak to us (Benjamin). They speak to us in language, writing in particular, that allows us to deal with the incursion of the sacred into the everyday. This is the story of myth.

We are filled with hidden urges and motives for dealing with disturbing experience. When we construct a myth we make it into something that mirrors our struggles with life; in this way it helps us overcome our fear and dread. Myth also reflects how this secularization and fragmentation of our world occurs. Myth models change for us when it is subsumed into the various modern forms of narrative such as the novel, the folk tale, and even the advertisement. These forms represent the democratization of myth with its power intact but with its genealogy uprooted. The modern forms are veils across the body of the god. We must look below the surface to see the method and practice of myth in our culture as it moves about in its high rhetorical/canonical robes. The technicians of Oz, behind the curtain of culture, are everywhere fiddling with the machinery. Myth is the golden statue that enchants, has the audience's attention while the magician does the conjuring. This pseudo priestly act can be exposed (remembered) when we look at how myth-making is a tool we can use, as common and as efficient for our lives as the computer I use to write this thesis.
Becoming aware of the myth we are living becomes the real challenge. It is like understanding a dead language.

Paradox of Myth

It is the paradox of myth that when we talk about it, name it, it ceases to be alive for us; it becomes a "dead language." (Calasso 292)

With time, men and gods would develop a common language made up of hierogamy and sacrifice ... when it became a dead language, people started talking about mythology. (Calasso 292)

Myth has the paradoxical nature of both being what is true and what is a lie (After Babel Steiner). The stories of the gods make a kind of sense to us, show us ourselves, and at the same time, these stories never "happened." These "axiomatic fictions" (Steiner 144) reassure us and at the same time allow us to pay them no mind. We characterize what we dislike, what we would reject, as myth, in order to make our position clear. In other words we argue a position at our peril. But myth, what we say about how things work, where they come from, and how they function has everything to do with us. We are myth-making creatures.

Myth is the residue of what still motivates us. The ancient myths were first told to gain power over the thing or person whose origin is told. They originated in ritual incantation where a singer/mage literally brought things to life by way of the words he spoke. These bards sang their
songs, improvising the received tradition, speaking it in their own "voice."

The bard was one of the most powerful persons in pre-literate societies. But this role could not survive the invention of writing. Writing allowed the Word (sacred) to be transformed into the word (rhetorical), a shell of its former self, a mask that replaced the bard's words when it did away with memory. The text then became only a simulacrum of memory, a veil that many took for the real thing. Memory as speech is a living force; as writing it must deny itself to exist as more than an empty shell.

It was only when alphabets were introduced that myth-making became readily available to those who desired to manipulate language to gain (personal/political) power. They disguised the power of myth in the rhetoric of the Good. The blatant power and destruction inherent in the myth, so evident in Homeric Greece, was subsumed into culture and forgotten but not eradicated.

Myths are alive in the sense that we "believe" in them. "The gods have never been but they are always" (Sallust). Even though we do not acknowledge their present significance, in the midst of this (and every age's) process of secularization, they still hold sway. It is the nature of the characters in the myth to change, to become something

---

10 This is the epigraph Calasso chooses for The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony.
else. But each change remembers a genealogy. The myth becomes uprooted when the present generation refuses to acknowledge this genealogy. Yet change is inevitable and the myth breaks through.

My purpose here is to learn to recognize these moments of break through in our lives and see how writing can make us more aware of when they occur so we can harness this power. On my way to locating the place of myth-making in relation to the teaching of writing, there are three philosophers of myth that I want to talk about: Mircea Eliade, James Carse, and Roberto Calasso. I have quoted from them in this introduction, but now I want to deal with them more specifically. Eliade gives me a definition of myth and a place to start. Carse takes the position that "myth provides explanation but accepts none of it" (FIG 165). And Calasso describes myth as the "realm of risk" where we are all at play.

Myth, Mythographers, and Myth-Makers

Definition of Myth

Mircea Eliade gives us a useful definition of myth in his book *Myth and Reality*:

Myth narrates a sacred history; it relates an event that took place in primordial Time, the fabled time of the "beginnings." In other words, myth tells how, through the deeds of a Supernatural Being, a reality came into existence, be it the whole of reality, the Cosmos, or only a
fragment of reality—an island, a species . . .

myth, then is always an account of a "creation"; it relates how something was produced, began to be. (MR 5-6)

This "primordial Time" he speaks of is not historical time, not events plotted on a calendar. In fact, what is most important about this mythic "Time" is that it is circular. The Greek myths are called "cycles." There is a tension in these circular patterns, however, that deposits a weight that must be expelled. The ancient myth rids itself of this tension in violence, and in a new creation, a new myth. An example of this is how matriarchy (The Great Mother) was overthrown by patriarchy.

Robert Graves tells us that in the time of matriarchy, in pre-history, when men and women were ruled by the Goddess, the King was killed annually as part of the fertility mechanism of the culture. Then somewhere along the line, the King used his power (of incumbency?) to forestall his execution; he put it off indefinitely, while

11 Homer's Greeks wished for the "last instant of clarity" that being killed in the "light" gave. Yet Calasso says "that such vision of life and of the afterlife that mockingly follows" could not be sustained -- that the Greeks as a people could not sustain it, so "the heroes wiped one another out beneath the walls of Troy, not just because Zeus wanted to lighten the earth but because they themselves could no longer bear this form of life and thus, with silent assent, chose to seek their deaths together" (Calasso 337).

12 Yeats' center that cannot hold in the gathering, expanding, and ascending gyres: "O sages standing in God's holy fire/As in the gold mosaic of a wall,/Come from the holy fire, prene in a gyre,/and be the singing-masters of my soul"("Sailing to Bysantium" 17-19, MGBP 515).
an appropriate sacrifice was found, usually a virgin (male or female).

It is probable that this was the beginning of a "divide and conquer" mentality that the powerful (kings) learned to use to maintain their positions. The king's motives are reflected in how the myths were then told, and in the dichotomy between what Eliade terms "true" and "false" stories:

In the "true" stories we have to deal with the holy and the supernatural, while the "false" ones on the other hand are the profane content . . . (MR 9).

The "true" stories sanctify the origins of society while the "false" deal with more ordinary, earthly elements.

In an important footnote Eliade explains what is happening:

Of course, what is considered a "true story" in one tribe can become a "false story" in a neighboring tribe. "Demythicization" is a process that is already documented in the archaic stages of culture. What is important is the fact that "primitives" are always aware of the difference between myths ("true stories") and tales or legends ("false stories"). (MR 11)

However, what Eliade terms "demythicization" becomes violent and a provocation to iconoclasm if a more powerful tribe seeks to foist its "true story" on a neighboring tribe or group. For instance, Colonialism was such an action perpetrated by the white tribe on black Africa. "Demythicization" is the response of a changing culture to a specific part of its heritage that is losing power. And, it
is true that the "people" know the difference between "true" and "false" stories, but they do not always know how the former changes to the latter. This is managed by the shaman's magic when he remembers the genealogy of forces. In the West we have secularized this "magic" into the philosophic notion of dialectic (Hegel). In the play of dialectic we assume that the "true" is good, and the "false" is necessary only in so far as it helps create the ideal. It is noticeable that those who still traffic in the ideal this late in the twentieth century, seem to have lost faith in this process, so that the "false" stories have on the one hand become trivial, mere entertainment, or art, and therefore useless; and on the other, they are regarded as tools for propaganda and other mischief.

Those in power or wishing to get power see these "false" stories (fictions) as provocations and try to turn them to their own use. They see those who produce these fictions as dangerous, as Plato did and as dictators do. Eliade charts this change as it played itself out in Greek myth in response to the appearance of the "Greek rationalists." He says, buoyed by the new science, they attacked

The adventures and arbitrary decisions of the

---

Arendt describes Benjamin as being a flaneur (a lounging, saunterer, loafer). This describes a method and a personality trait. For the flaneur, a "collected object possesses only an amateur value and no use value whatsoever" (42).
[Greek] gods, their capricious and unjust behavior, their "immorality." And the main critique was made in the name of an increasingly higher idea of God: a true God could not be unjust, immoral, jealous, vindictive, ignorant, and the like. (MR 148)

Here Eliade places himself on the moral high ground (as do the Rationalists) vis-à-vis the archaic Greek myths. Yet he acknowledges the myths recurring significance, decadent though they were. However, there is an agonistic spirit in Eliade's writing about Greek myth. He sees the Greek myths as something to be struggled against. He wants us to understand the Greek myths, and myth in general, in their historical prospective because they alas, will not go away. He notes that "mythical thought ... resists extirpation" (MR 176).

James Carse would say there is nothing to regret when it comes to the existence of archaic myth or any myth. Myth is only the shell, and more present and absent then most people know. In the last chapter of his Finite and Infinite Games he says, "myth provokes explanation but accepts none of it" (165). According to Carse, Eliade misses the point. Myth is neither true or false, it is a constant, a peculiar kind of constant that is empty until we fill it. The myths allow "the silence that makes original discourse possible" (Carse 165). We cannot live without using them, but we only use the ones we have decided to fill with ourselves. In this sense myth is an unconscious heuristic that produces
meaning by being a listening ground; yet, it cannot stand the scrutiny of interpretation. Indeed, this is how myth changes and dies. Interpretation itself is the myth (method— the thing being told becomes the telling) of the god who rapes. It is the inevitable outcome of the god who falls in love, pursues, and takes possession of the human. This process produces metamorphoses that brings on the new (myth), and gets rid of the old (myth).

Eliade sees this process of change in the myths of archaic people, while he foregrounds Christianity as the logical result of a historical maturation of the sacred. His subject is the decadence of myth. Yet while the Christian myth, as a tale of "a god who listens by becoming one of us" (Carse, FIG 175) may be exemplary; it is not necessary. After all, the Greek gods came down to listen too. The story of the marriage of Cadmus and Harmony is such an instance, and in its day was equally exemplary.

Eliade's argument valorizes Christianity and illustrates the dynamic of myth-making and myth breaking. He has forgotten (or has ignored) the genealogy of his own Christian myth while he talks with great insight about archaic myth and its demise. This paradox is "the very image of the Platonic process of learning: nothing is new,

---

14 Carse says, on the last page of Finite and Infinite Games, that: "The myth of Jesus is exemplary, but not necessary. No myth is necessary. There is no story that must be told" (Carse, FIG 176).
remembering is all" (Calasso 169). Thus the forgetting of sources forms the inevitable basis of rhetoric and argument, and finds its model in the need to kill the myth that came before.

This metaphor of violence shows us the reason why we need to establish new narratives in our lives. Each new narrative is forced to confront an interpretation which produces meaning. However, this meaning is unstable. It does not rest on the act of creation, but the result of this creation, which is a "ruin" (Arendt), a pile of detritus. For instance, in the case of writing, we are forced to fill the void that the word has made with myth. "What follows is a new story," Calasso says, "in which something has been taken away from the density of the body to house the vacuum of the word" (336). The word, as myth, waits for us to enter it and give ourselves in the fullness of the present moment. That moment has a god in it expressed in epiphany.

**Stages of Myth**

The trajectory of myth begins in primitive theology, in the magic inherent in the incantational songs of the bard. For instance, this spell, cast on the world of ancient Greek culture, is replaced by the lilting prosody of the Homeric bard (hexameters), which is in turn displaced by the persuasive and the driving tones of the Rhetor. Each stage does not get rid of the last, but takes the place of what
goes before and modifies the myth to suit its purpose. If this is true, then something of unaccountable mystery — what Benjamin says he settles for instead of transmissibility\textsuperscript{15} — is being transported in history. Yet this chrysalis inside the mythic form is new each time. The form is being transmitted, not the pupa of truth — the myth and not its interpretation.

The practice of myth-making in culture in general concerns not only what the myth says, but what it does. This distinction rests in the paradox of the word. In the time of the bards, words were known as a force of Nature, the actual breath of the god, which needed to be tamed. The god was too powerful; it could kill you. So society used its power to euphemize to select out these dire myths, to secularize them. Today the power of the myth is still there, only now it is harder to see it. What looks like a dead myth is only the shell, sloughed skin of the snake, the husk of the god who has taken another form. As the angel that presided over the empty tomb on Easter said: "Why search among the dead for one who lives." (Lk.24.5)

What is inherent in the earlier acknowledgments of the power of myth in human affairs is the red herring of belief.

\textsuperscript{15} "Even if truth should appear in our world, it could not lead to wisdom....'Kafka [qtd. Benjamin] was far from being the first to face this situation. Many had accommodated themselves to it, adhering to truth or whatever they regarded as truth at any given time and, with a more or less heavy heart, forgoing its transmissibility'" (Arendt 41).
The Archetypists, which include Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell, proclaim the unconscious power of the myth, but limit the power of myth to neat proscriptive images that are somehow immutable. To these Archetypists, myths are simply types, each one unique — one among many.

On the other hand, since we are concerned here not only with what a myth says, but what it does, then myth is not only an object of reverence and study, but a way of thinking, a state of mind. Socrates before he died expressed it this way: "we enter the mythical when we enter the realm of risk, and myth is the enchantment we generate in ourselves at such moments" (Calasso 278). He is saying here that myth can liberate us from the deterministic archetype. That is why, when we sit down to write, we make ourselves by the act of writing (by art), and by the way we link the texts we write about ourselves when we sense the spirit of the word let loose in the flow of our words, linked one to another.

Before we sit down to write, mythical thinking shows up most dramatically in something called the "felt sense" (Perl "Understanding Composing"). When we begin to write, it is still there, but eases into the background. The engine of the shift into the background is the paradox of our need to complete the uncompletable text. How does myth get around this difficulty? By telling a story and then by changing it. People in every generation sign on to rewrite the myths of
the past. We see the vestiges of myth in our own era in what Mircea Eliade calls the "false" stories of popular and folk culture. There are three stages in how myth travels in culture.

1. Theology

Eliade claims that Homer is not a theologian. We tend to agree with him since we are used to reading Homer as the first epic poet. Eliade says that Homer "laid no claim to presenting the whole body of Greek religion and mythology systematically and exhaustively" (149). Here Eliade himself speaks as a mythographer and systematizer, much like Robert Graves, Joseph Campbell, Robert Bly, Carol Pearson and many others. Eliade and these others are catalogers, and explainers of myths; they express a nostalgia for myths as if they were some lost precious object. On the other hand, Homer, Ovid, and Roberto Calasso among others are in the business of retelling the myths as new creations. They don't explain anything; they tell a story, cast a spell. Both the mythographers and myth-makers have their places. However, the mythographer has for too long set the agenda. Their cool cataloguing leaves out the reason myths were made in the first place -- to deal with the sacred. Well, the sacred has not gone away. Early myth-makers were first and foremost interested in theology. Our modern day theologians have been marginalized by claiming the primacy of their theology. This
wasn't the case for myth-makers who see theology as play.\textsuperscript{16}

Eliade is right to say that Homer is not a theologian, if he means by this, that he is not a metaphysician, like Plato or St. Paul; but, if he means that he is a poet, someone who travels between the spiritual and the profane, then Homer is a first rate theologian.

Such a theologian sits in the silence of God, (the "fear of God") and brings us words that tell us what the experience is like. Such words to be real come from the "converted subject." Vernon Gregson explains this idea as it is put forward by the Jesuit theologian Bernard Lonergan:

\begin{quote}
The foundation of theology is the converted person's experience .... It is the key ... to explor[ing] the whole range of experience which exists among those who are also converted and whose foundation is, like his own, their religious existence.(Gregson 17).
\end{quote}

Conversion is the object or state of being possessed. The words of myth buzz around the nest of conversion, the sweet honey of meaning. Homer took the traditional, oral stories, filled with myth, and built his house, his \textit{Iliad} and

\textsuperscript{16} James Carse describes a theology of play that "raises theology from a science to an art. This means that theology is no longer a region where we engage each other in dispute, attempting to mark out the boundries for proper belief, but where we come together in creativity and imagination, unwilling to put any boundries around the truth. Theology is inevitable, like spirited conversation between friends who have much to share with each other. It is only when theology is directed at opponents with whom we share nothing, and want to share nothing, that it falsely asserts its primacy"(SG 6).
Odyssey. His honeycomb\textsuperscript{17} was the hexameter.

As we have said Eliade charts the journey of myth as it becomes secularized, dumped of sacred meaning, and changed from the "true" to the "false." But this is missing the point. The function of Story is to carry meaning for the "folk" and show them how to live. The culture has control over the voice that speaks in Story. However, at times we are free to reject the message if it no longer has meaning. That is why traditional stories are like artifacts of an age gone by, and it is why the storytelling movement is dominated by folklorist. Yet there is great value in the storyteller's art. It renews the culture. They also define a venue for new stories of modern day "folk." Yet the resurgence of storytelling in the past few years is primarily a conservative movement. They are not told to integrate the older traditions into the modern world, but to preserve a cultural heritage that has been recognized as valuable in itself.

The modern retelling of traditional stories mirrors the models that occur in our ethnic folk traditions. Ironically the crux of many folktales is how change is mediated. Metamorphosis is at the heart of story, as Ovid and Kafka show us. For instance, folk-stories start with a problem

\textsuperscript{17} Walter Benjamin, speaking of Proust says: "From the honeycombs of memory he built a house for the swarms of his thoughts" (Illuminations 203).
that has come to the teller's attention in the middle course of a life. Dante's *Divine Comedy* comes to mind as an extravagant application of this method. Stories always tell us about ourselves somewhere between early adulthood and old age. Many story heroes are young adults starting out in life who must learn a truth and find themselves (their identity). There are many changes along the road to finding oneself in Story— one's own story.

2. Story

An example of one of these stories is Richard Kennedy's "Porcelain Man." Briefly, this is the story: A young woman is given a broken vase by her peddler father. She puts it back together in the form of a man, who then comes to life and falls in love with her. Her father breaks the vase/man when he finds her with it. Left with the pieces again she decides to put them together once again, but this time in the form of a horse, which then carries her away. When they reach a "circle of trees" the horse breaks itself, so it can return to the form of a man, but the "hero" of this last change, a new character called The Wheelbarrow Man, comes along and sees a set of china in the broken pieces and takes the broken pottery and the girl — now betrothed to him — home and makes plates out of the pieces. However, the love the Porcelain Man has for the woman is transmitted intact, so that at the end, when the plates speak to the woman of love (from the soul of the Porcelain Man), she has to
"shush" him because reality has fallen on her, and she must be the wife and not the fantasist. Still the plates are there as a talisman of the love that does not die. The story, "The Porcelain Man," shows a way to manage the passions that rage inside us. It tells a very conservative story of our culture. If we look at it in this way (not the only way), it teaches us to repress ourselves and live within boundaries. These boundaries may not always be to our liking. We might not want to choose this way of acting if we really knew we had a choice in the situation. The story is a mask used to instruct us to practices society finds valuable for its own purposes not ours. When the story becomes formalized in this way it becomes a script.

3. Script

How can we implement an emancipatory pedagogy that does not entail the therapeutic manipulation of its 'subjects.' (Spellmeyer, Common Ground 242)

The term "script" or "master script" is defined as an ideology, social pattern, or narrative that is used by one group to overlay their belief system on the other (Spellmeyer Common Ground). This script predicts and enforces particular behaviors. There is a top down generation and implementation of scripts. It implies a sort of social imperialism, if not social Darwinism.

Myth, by the time it has been designated as a myth, has slipped into becoming a script. However, before it is recognized as a myth, it is a narrative that no one is able
to manage; that is, in the same way a script is managed — delivered to be performed by its actors. A myth has many scripts and none is "master," because in myth there is the imposition of the sacred. In the myth the god imposes him/herself on mankind; mankind receives these impositions according to Socrates' "risk" and Carse's pilgrim Irish Monks. The script throws out the god and introduces the bureaucrat.

Myth has always lived in the transmission of the tale of the god. This notion appears in epic song and was mediated by the priest/rhapsode. All others, his audience, were listeners, but as Eric Havelock says in his Preface to Plato, the ancient Greeks participated in the reading of the epic with their bodies. The tale reverberated in them, became a part of them as my myth of salt has become a part of me. They were like tuning forks for it, reverberating the story out into culture and history. There was no doubt that the priest was in control of the ritual machine of the myth. This did not change even in the Middle Ages when the priest, many times the only literate person in the community, controlled the Word and its transmission from God to mankind.

The invention of movable type, the Protestant Reformation, and the Enlightenment exploded this control. Individuals were encouraged to seek God's Word on their own.
The Protestant Reformation gave the folk their own way to God, and their own Bible to guide them, the King James Version. The Bible as book became arbiter of the person's life, but then, as they became readers, every other form of knowledge became disseminated likewise, and there was quickly no difference in kind between the Word and Scientific Discourse. Again the god was expelled. This led to Science becoming master over metaphysics because it was "verifiable." Metaphysics was in a sense "grounded."

The point I want to make about the script is that it doesn't take into consideration the sacred, the non human, the immortal. To secularize myth-making is to equate it with falsification, mystification. This common modern etymology for myth is a rationalization of the power of whatever is being described, in a pejorative sense, as myth. When we call something a myth (a lie) the speaker of these words is describing the death of the myth; the god has already gone out of it. That is why it is a lie, but we must be careful because what is said next opens a place for the god again, and this will then become the new (myth). It hasn't fully appeared of course, indicated by the parenthesis, but it will. In the meantime, the (         ), like a snake has sloughed its skin and imperceptibly grows it back again. This stage in the myth's movement is the time of mystification, when the (myth) is working in the subject but there is no awareness. This is typically thought to be how
dialectic works: there is always a practical type of awareness at every step of the dialectic that can be only observed in retrospect. Myth as negation is remembered also, but only at each remembering can the activity of mystification be intuited. It becomes a perspectival maneuver continuously adjusting its focus.¹⁸

This is to say that there are levels of myth-making. Societies perform their myths just as smaller groups and individuals also participate in myth-making. The construction of personae is a direct incidence of personal myth-making. Williams does this with Red Eric. It has the added feature of being, in the hands of some authors like Nietzsche and Freud, intentional activities. There is with these writers a substantial myth produced that establishes a position in intellectual space as they (their physical bodies) could never do. This taking up space is a way of infusing the world with the sacred, a perfection that is never otherwise available. It is a form of appropriation of the sacred, and of the creator's hegemony. A personae does this because it is the fulcrum between the knower (subject) and the known (object), the text in this case.

¹⁸ Nehamas gives a striking example of the charms and tricks of perspective in Nietzsche: Life as Literature. He describes a scene from the french film Mon Oncle d'Amerique. In this scene, what first appears to be a country scene, is really a mural on an abandon building. Then the camera starts to focus into show the grass growing out from between the bricks of the wall of the building — the nature scene completly "gone" now in the change of perspective(51).
The Realm of Risk

We enter the mythical when we enter the realm of risk, and myth is the enchantment we generate in ourselves at such moments. (Calasso 278)

The myth is like an oral filament inside the lighted transcription of a national epic poem like Homer's The Illiad. It is the lively emanation of what later in Plato becomes the script of metaphysics and ideology. We do not write or rewrite the myth as much as we retell it in our own words, improvise it like the rhapsodes who sang The Illiad. It does not change. We are the ones who change because it is embodied, acted out in us. How do we see the piece of writing we have made, when we are focusing on the myth? We remember what it was like in the throes of telling (when we are possessed by) the great story. We end up living only when we remember what we have forgotten -- in the midst of telling, in this ecstasy.

We can relate to the pleasure found in writing after our work has ended on the text, but while we are in the mode of speaking about what has just happened, we can not tell the truth. We instead establish hierarchies of criticism and argument. How can we stop what we are saying as it leaves our mouths (pens/computers) and use it against the very meaning we want to impose, use it as a soft weapon against
those that want to force us to say the unsayable and stick to it?

The myth lies in the doorway between oral and written culture. When writing became the predominant way of expressing and using knowledge, then the door was closed. Roberto Calasso ends his book as Cadmus and Harmony are leaving Corinth, two fused riders going off "into the sunset" of myth. Cadmus was the one who, responsible for bringing the alphabet to the Greeks, now must leave his chaos strewn land because no one has any use for him. Writing had erased memory and installed a vast silence. The spoken word of the myth with its lively god is replaced by the printed word and its statue (Calasso).

**Havlock's Plato**

We must realize that works of genius, [eg. The Iliad] composed within the semi-oral tradition, though a source of magnificent pleasure to the modern reader of ancient Greek, constituted or represented a total state of mind which is not our mind and which was not Plato's mind; and that just as poetry itself, as long as it reigned supreme, constituted the chief obstacle to the achievement of effective prose, so there was a state of mind which we shall conveniently label the 'poetic' or 'Homeric' or 'oral' state of mind, which constituted the chief obstacle to scientific rationalism, to the use of analysis, to the classification of experience, to its rearrangement in sequence of cause and effect. [Plato asks men then to] separate themselves from it (the Homeric mind) instead of identifying with it; they themselves should become the "subject" who stands apart from the "object" and reconsiders it and analyses it and evaluates it, instead of just "imitating" it. (Havelock 46)
Eric Havelock, in his *Preface to Plato* maintains that there was a sea change in man's thinking between the oral/traditional mind exemplified by Homer and the philosophical/rational mind exemplified by Plato. What really happened is there was a war, similar to the war in Homer, and Plato won (Calasso).

When Havelock says that Plato was necessary to the establishment of "scientific rationalism" (Havelock 46), he is always talking in a context. I am not sure that Havelock always knows this because of the value laden terms he uses when he talks about Homer. After all, it was not a mere matter of exchanging books, *The Iliad* for the *Republic*, that Plato envisioned, but a complete change in how the society saw itself. This was necessary because what was becoming known (in Fifth Century BE) could not be explained by using the Homeric "encyclopedia." That this struggle between Homer and Plato was over men becoming more self conscious is not in dispute. It is better seen as a struggle around the tools of making that self consciousness more viable and less myth ridden (for Plato).

Here we return to the twin presences of myth. One is a shadow, yet supremely viable, practiced, stable, and accepted, but never called Myth; and, two is the Myth, a hollow shell, its former beauty and grandeur in decay, a discredited narrative that has been supplanted, discarded,
and sent to the dust bins of history. The Greek gods and their cosmology are part of the second sense of myth (beginning with Plato), but always with a difference.

**Risk Again**

The risk is that we will miss the clue to the change coming down upon us. Roberto Calasso explains:

> ... for every myth told, there is another, unnamable, that is not told, another which beckons from the shadows, surfacing only through allusions, fragments, coincidences, with nobody ever daring to tell all in a single story. And here the "son stronger than his father" is not to be born yet, because he is already present: he is Apollo. (Calasso 93)

Will we be crushed or will we weather the change? They seem to be both the same here. It looks like the best thing for us to do — to at least participate in these mysteries (the "fun," i.e. Play) — is for us to choose to act. There are no bleachers to view this show. When Zeus looks around for the son he should fear, he (Apollo) is already there. This is the aristocrat's fear which is never to be undone. It is Red Eric's fear. The guilt of the ruler is palpable; for the god, he prepares a feast of his slaughtered children, (Tantalus and Pelops—Calasso 176). Zeus sends the heroes down to their deaths at Troy to destroy in glory Achilles, who might have been born to replace him. But all along the double (Apollo) is in Zeus's midst. It is not for nothing that Apollo spurs Hector on to destroy Petroclus. Hector
must die to destroy Achilles; fortune has a god in it.

When Priam meets Helen on the Scaean Gate and tells her: "I don't blame you. I hold the gods to blame," (Homer Bk.III, 199) we think he has also been seduced by Helen. We share the outrage of the fifth century Greeks who listened to Gorgias, one of the Sophists, praise Helen in his Encomium. What Gorgias did in his Encomium, however, is far more subtle. It is the matter of truth itself. Homer portrays Helen as blameless, Gorgias takes up the case as an exercise, as play, conscious of the difference between his time and that of Homer's. Things had indeed changed. Self-consciousness had gone that one fatal step further, the one writing produced, when it became the "etched model of a silence that speaks" (Calasso 390). Yet, it had not finally been given over to Plato's metaphysics, there was still something being consciously left out, something the oral culture could value because it was missing or improvised. When writing-culture begins to be slowly developed, speech is backed up into a corner, becomes defensive. It must defend a weakened position. Unlike what writers do when they manage the syntax of their sentences, it must combat the frozen text, and how it has wiped out memory.

To squelch this vestige of the past expressed in The Encomium of Helen, the Pre-Socratics had to denounced Gorgias. Helen represented a body that could metamorphosis. Plato et al could not stand for this to happen. Without
knowledge being seen as material (The Ideas), or something that could be stored up in a kind of storehouse, like a scroll (in a book and then in a library), then what Plato thought was truth would not prevail. Of course, truth was not the Sophists' coin, they preferred to play with words, with writing even, to see what it could do. The trouble with those who play and laugh (Bakhtin, TDI 75) is that they have no cachet in the establishment except as players or actors. A king is a serious person as Falstaff mourns to learn (Henry IV, Prt 2).

People praise fools like Falstaff, but live to see them damned. With the new regime in power the fools are banned, as Plato wanted to ban the poets from the Republic. Fools are particularly unarmed. The truth has risen its charming head and these people start being killed for ideas that do not fit anymore. The sophists are ridiculed and their schools lose favor. Plato becomes memorialized, and the Sophists, his prosperous advance men, are forgotten . . . . Yet, the Sophists have not gone away; they are beginning to be remembered again (Gibson). They are being remembered not so much for their lightheartedness, but because of their popularity. Every best selling author is a descendant of the sophists.

But best sellers are "innocent" of the myth they propagate. On the other hand, in this thesis I am looking
for more sustaining motives for our writing and for the writing my students do. In the next section I will follow the string of myth back through the labyrinth of motives we have for writing, to see if it can show us a beginning: somewhere we can write from to see ourselves more clearly.

II. Motivation To Write-Taking A Thread from Ariadne

Harmony's Desire

Roberto Calasso in his book The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony describes how Harmony falls in love with Cadmus, the Phoenician, the man who will bring the alphabet to the Greeks. Harmony's mother, Electra, has promised her to Cadmus, but the girl does not want to marry him and hides in her bedroom. Calasso describes the scene where her friend Peisinoe, who enters Harmony's bedroom in a flutter, proclaims her love for the handsome stranger.

Harmony listened and realized that something was changing inside her: she was falling in love with her friend's desire, and at the same time she went on looking around in desperation, because she knew that, if once she left, she would never see this room again.

For the first time she felt pricked by a goad that would not leave her be. In her mind she began to say words of farewell. She said good-bye to the caves of Cabiri and the shrill voices of the Corybants, she said good-bye to the palace she had grown up in and the rugged coasts of Samothrace. And all at once she understood what myth is, understood that myth is the precedent behind every
action, its invisible, ever-present lining. She need not fear the uncertain life opening up before her. Whichever way her wandering husband went, the encircling sash of myth would wrap around the young Harmony. For every step the footprint is already there. (Calasso 383)

As in most myths, the story of Harmony and Cadmus' love recalls a common experience and explains its inception. This myth is no different. It explains how desire can be awakened. Harmony is reluctant to love Cadmus, but as soon as she hears that her friend desires him, she falls in love with him herself. Calasso explains that the thing the Greeks say motivates us is "the goad." Harmony experiences this "goad" as an outside force that gets inside, awakens her natural passion for the beloved. This goad makes her, among other things, love this stranger, leave her home, and follow him.

At first Harmony's behavior seems to be similar to what happens on any daytime soap opera. But when Calasso aligns it squarely with "what myth is," Harmony's awareness of her own behavior takes on new meaning. Calasso does this by getting into her mind, changing perspective, breaking the spell of his own narrative. He does this so we will reflect upon our own myths of leaving home.

A Myth of Writing

For me there is something mysterious about why writers write and how they are able to sustain their writing—do the
work of writing. If I could learn more about this, then I would know how better to motivate my students to write and motivate myself to write. Therefore, I believe it helpful to look at my own history of wanting to write in order to find the thread that links my desire with a sufficient motivation to write.

Unlike Harmony's leave taking, when it was time to leave for college, there was no beautiful landscape to leave; yet, there was a state of innocence I did not know I was leaving. I was possessed by a desire to escape a house where I felt silenced. I did not know that I could not really leave. I did not know that I was stepping into the footprint of a myth; unlike Calasso's Harmony, I had no self awareness. I had no Calasso to "read" me. The books I read had prepared a way, yet I did not know how to use them. They were dumb objects. I did not know how to infuse them with myself.

When I got to college, I found that my books and my dream of a writing career could not sustain me. I had nothing to say; I was too full of myself. I realized there was nowhere to go, so I dropped out and started to wander. I figured that if I were to become a writer, something had to start happening to me. I had to become filled with action, with scene, with destination. I found that I did not have a clue how to be a writer. I piled up place, job, and love
affair, one after another, but found they were as devoid of meaning as the novels I read. They still did not tell me what to write. I found that I was accumulating stories around the blank myth of my family. It was maddening; I was becoming more like them everyday. The myth I had stepped into by my choice to become a writer had been prepared for me, but not in the way I imagined.

Walter Benjamin defines the ambivalence of leaving home when he talks about his childhood house in Berlin, he says: "it was prepared for me before I was born" (Arendt 28). It is both reassuring and depressing to know this about the world we are born into. Some would register it as a curse, but I now see it more as fate, in the Greek sense. Bernard Knox in his introduction to Robert Fagles's translation of *The Iliad* remarks that the Greeks gave us the concept of

A Civilization which makes a place in its thought for free will (and therefore individual responsibility) and pattern (and therefore overall meaning), the two concepts—fixed and free—exist uneasily cheek by jowl. (40)

The working out of this contradiction is the story of our lives. The paradigm for its telling and retelling is the recounting of the myth, the breaking of it, and how it is reconfigured (Menninghaus). To see how this is managed in a piece of writing I turn to Philip Larkin, who is the poet of these anti-departures.
Larkin's "Poetry of Departures"

In this section I want to deal with Philip Larkin's poem "Poetry of Departures":

Sometimes you hear, fifth-hand,
As epitaph:
*He chucked up everything*
*And just cleared off,*
And always the voice will sound
Certain you approve
This audacious, purifying,
Elemental move.

And they are right, I think.
We all hate home
And having to be there:
I detest my room,
Its specially-chosen junk,
The good books, the good bed,
And my life, in perfect order:
So to hear it said

*He walked out on the whole crowd*
Leaves me flushed and stirred,
Like *Then she undid her dress*
Or *Take that you bastard;*
Surely I can, if he did?
And that helps me stay
Sober and industrious.
But I'd go today,

Yes, swagger the nut-strewn roads,
Crouch in the fo'c'sle
Stubbly with goodness, if
It weren't so artificial,
Such a deliberate step backwards
To create an object:
Books; china; a life
Reprehensibly perfect. (Larkin 85)

In "Departures" Larkin recalls the myth of the romantic hero. The poem's narrator characterizes such a hero as one who "*chucked up everything/ And just cleared off.*" Later in the poem the narrator briefly sees himself as such a person,
who can "... go today/Yes, swagger the nut-strewn
roads,/Crouch in the fo'c'sle/stubbly with goodness." This
recounts the familiar romantic myth of the wastrel going off
to fame and fortune. It is the basis of every Golden Age
Hollywood movie. Larkin compares this behavior to what an
ordinary man must do, and how such a man is at the mercy of
this kind of cant in our culture. Larkin's narrator is
someone real in the sense that he is ambivalent. He "hate[s]
home" and "Its specially-chosen junk." The narrator, knowing
that he is a man who wants to live an integrated life, and
live it with honesty, rejects the romantic hero and the
clamorous way he is worshipped. The way Larkin breaks the
myth is by his use of irony. This irony is thick in the
early stanzas of the poem where we see the narrator's tacit
acceptance of the hero-worshipping man, his pseudo
identification with him. But then he smashes through the
myth of the hero in the last stanza:

... if
It weren't so artificial,
Such a deliberate step backwards
To create an object:
Books; china; a life
Reprehensibly perfect.

Finally, Larkin with this poem reconfigures the myth of the
hero, transposing it into a story of an honest man who
rejects the manipulation of culture. The message is that one
cannot live someone else's life even if, as Larkin and
Benjamin, and especially Kafka, who Benjamin identifies
with, one must at times face the fact that his or her life is god-awful. The making of the poem, the essay, or the story sends a shaft of light into that darkness.

The point Larkin is making is that we cannot really go away. We go through a metamorphosis. For Larkin, heroism is not being sucked into the myth of the romantic hero. This negation is his myth but with a difference. The difference is that Larkin's myth, as is the case with Benjamin and Kafka's myth, is encased in language and a style surfeited with metaphor and irony. Their style has insulated them from being cast into the boneyard of myth where we have cast the romantic hero. In other words, these authors have not had their works reduced by popular culture to empty ciphers, as have the writers of pulp fiction and movies. These popular writers write texts that have already been reduced (see Benjamin's "Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" Illuminations 217-251). On the other hand, Kafka's myth is made more enduring because it is both mysterious and evocative—resists interpretation. Myth functions in Kafka, but it is not called myth.

The myth that is named refers to the latest ideas the daily newspaper claims are false. Everyday the media touts the exposure of this myth or that. In this sense myths are "not true;" they are lies that have newly been discovered having been the truth just weeks or years previous. Yet
there are those who still believe them, and as directed by the media, we should pity them in the light of what is now presented as new truth. That a myth is not a myth until it is pulled down, however, does not relieve us of the duty to see what if anything of it still remains true. We are reminded that history has a way of repeating itself. History is always present (yet hidden) in the form of the myth; the news anchor's spin on the facts is what we experience as history. We must brush away the posturing of the media, or as Benjamin says: "brush history against the grain" (Illuminations 257) to see the fleeting truth of myth.

My exegesis of Larkin's poem as related to myth does not destroy the poem for those who read it fresh or even for myself as I read and reread it. The man who hates his home is me. I am also the man who is nostalgic for home, as Harmony is, even before she or I leave it. In fact, Larkin amid his cynicism is also nostalgic, or else he would not write about home so incessantly. Nostalgia can be a heuristic to pry one's life apart to see all sides of it. This is what Calasso's Harmony does. What nostalgia tends to do if we are not self aware, however, is to settle us into objects that become "reprehensibly perfect," instead of to give us a method to break the myth in order to reconstruct

[19] Even his famous indictment: "Families fuck you up" makes us look with a critical eye at family. But there is no way not to have family. He seems to want to break the myth of family and allow for its transfiguring.
it. Writing has a chance to do this for us. Not only because of the "process" of writing but because it opens a way of life where we are more aware. The key to this new way of life is our continuing sense of ambivalence. I recognize this in how I acted toward wanting to be a writer.

Ambivalence

There was a time when I was continually falling in love with someone else's desire. However, I was more Peisone than Harmony, more Larkin's man enamored with the hero, then his narrator (Larkin). I never did forget about writing, but I did not let myself get too close to it either, never saw material for it in my "specially-chosen junk"(Larkin 85). I let other things become more important.

Because she chose freely, Harmony could fill her life with a husband and children, confident that it was the right thing to do. She could do this only after she agreed to love. However, when I moved in search of my own desire I faltered; I fell into obsession and addiction. To be efficacious, desire must lead without crushing us in the contradiction that "once we have succeeded in acquiring the object of desire, that object is no longer desirable"(Carse, SG 44). We must learn how to receive what we ask for. It must be someone else's desire given to us so we will not
want it any longer. It must be given to us so that we can see it as a husk and know that love was there, has now gone, and needs us to keep following it so we might freely enter it with our love. This love is the core of our remembering, the pure center of risk. Annie Dillard talks about this ever-present sense of risk, quoting Dorothy Dunnett: "There is no reply, in clear terrain, to an archer in cover" (89). How do we stay that extra moment in the clearing; the moment at the center of our need?

The Wall

This falling in love with someone else's desire is never the end of the story. In the film Shane, the hero played by Alan Ladd rides off into the sunset, leaving behind the widow and the boy. What will their lives be like? Harmony's life did not end with her marriage to Cadmus. That was just the beginning. It did not guarantee happiness either. She gave birth to vicious children (they were murderers and died violent deaths) and a city (Thebes) that exiled her and her husband in their old age. What Harmony's act of falling in love did, however, was to reveal the truth to her—the truth of the myth. It prepared a path for her

---

20 The character Fax, in Ursula Le Guin's science fiction novel Left Hand of Darkness, explains that the reason they are foretellers (a group that can answer questions about the future) is "to exhibit the perfect uselessness of knowing the answer to the wrong question" (70).
where she could learn to live as Harmony. I believe that Harmony's story is paradigmatic. It can explain how we deal with needs and the desires that swirl around these needs. An example of this was when I decided I needed a cinder block wall built in my front yard.

My hillside yard had been eroding for some time, and so I wanted to contain the soil to be able to landscape it someday. I planned to build the wall myself. I had plenty of time and knew something about construction. While building the wall I expected to learn the skills needed to do a good job. I bought a book to get me started. My neighbor who worked construction and had built block walls promised to come over to give me a hand. In the meantime I got started digging and pouring the foundation. When the blocks were ready to go up my neighbor spent a Saturday helping me lay the first blocks. I watched him and then started a section on my own. I found that I was a clumsy amateur compared to him. He effortlessly applied the mortar, which was perfectly mixed, to each block placing them correctly with one deft motion. In contrast, when I started building my section, I could not get the mortar to stay on the block. It was either too much or too little, or it fell off when I got it to the row. Everything took three times as long. My blocks were set crookedly and I constantly had to start over.

For me this was a familiar learning experience. I
finally did build my wall. It took observing an expert (my neighbor), reading a book, and finally doing it myself. The irony, however, is that I only got good at wall building near the end of the project, when there were no more walls to build.

Need to Write

What lessons are there here as I begin to talk about writing practice? One thing I noticed was the effortlessness of my neighbor's wall building abilities. The skill he applied working the blocks is quite mysterious. How does one devote the long hours to learning such a skill? The same question can be asked for those who wish to become writers.

There are several interesting aspects of my neighbor's skill at wall building that might help us see how we become dedicated to an art. One thing I observed was that my friend didn't seem to have to think about what he did as he worked. His body was in tune with the job. This is like having memory "in the hands" for a task. Another way to describe the mystery inherent in a craft is to say a skilled craftsmen gets into the rhythm of the work and it "flows."

Writers do much the same thing. They work hard at writing for years. They develop a particular form or genre of the writing and a certain "memory in the hands" takes over.
What is clear in both wall building and writing is we pour something of ourselves into the work that makes it worth doing. Otherwise we would not care to do it. And it is not just a matter of the money. A craftsman usually has left the idea of the money behind as the principal motivator for the work. The job is worth doing in and of itself. However, there is a limit to what we will attempt. We usually get good at one thing because it satisfies us and takes up our available time. But we have other needs that often go unfulfilled. I take after my father in the way I often start a job and cannot find the energy or the time to finish it.

My need to be a writer has always swirled around the need to break out of my family myth. Leaving home was only part of it. Becoming someone other than my businessman father, who was also a painfully silent man, was my goal. I wanted to be creative, be amid artists who, I imagined, took it as their duty to search for a craft/art that they could be uniquely identified by. This was the lure of the creative life for me, and such a life began by rejecting my family. But as my research into myth showed, this was only the first step.

I retrieve the idea of breaking apart the myth from Walter Benjamin's difficult and wonderful writings. Since most of what he wrote is still untranslated I had to depend on commentators like Winfried Menninghaus, who gives a
muddled rendition of Benjamin's theory of myth. Near the end of the article he explains myth in relation to experience, "a self-reflective passage through myth" (323). These passages or rites of passage are where the myth exists to be challenged; on the one hand, as a site of "unrestricted synthesis" and on the other as it "distinguished itself from abstract knowledge through its link to mythical forms of meaning. Experience, then, breaks apart myth by its own means—a dialectical passage de mythe" (Menninghaus 322). Menninghaus finishes by saying "the motif of blasting apart myth becomes transfigured into the dialectic of breaking apart and rescuing myth" (323). Every myth breaks apart and then is reborn out of its own destruction. It is an engine of great destruction and great creativity. Rejecting my family destroyed something but did not replace it with anything. I have since learned that to see myself clearly I must try to reconstruct myself through the eye of my genealogy. I relate this idea to how Benjamin was comforted by the "mausoleum" of his childhood home in Berlin. We do not ever leave that home, but make a life out of our moribund genealogy. The myth is reborn in our genealogy—a sacred site where the work of transformation is done.

The metaphor Benjamin uses for this site is the Paris Arcades—the passages, built in the Ninetieth Century, between the street and the shops. The threshold of the
arcade is the place which is symbolically reduced to the place where we become aware of how the myth is changing, and likewise, how we are also changing. For instance, when I drive into the parking lot at my university, the walk from where I park my car to the door of University Hall is the arcade between my family life and my academic life. Stepping over the threshold into University Hall, I become a different person than who I was in my car.

Benjamin's point is that we cross thresholds daily without noticing what is happening. We confront greater and lesser thresholds in our daily walk; most we pass across unaware. We can usually take no advantage of them, but occasionally they are used against us. Benjamin's call is for us to wake up to their importance.

The most productive way that I see these passages is to see them as the thresholds of possible worlds. To become aware of these different worlds, we cross a threshold and build a self by our actions within that world. This is the way we construct the various selves we live by. We are transformed in the arcades of our life, taking on a self like pulling on a mask.

So if we link the earlier idea, that when we make something we also make ourselves, we can see how writing as a way of making knowledge fits into our work of awareness inside the arcade. In other words, writing as a process of
working on alternate selves in the middle passage between silence and speech (communication).

This notion of multiple selves I take from the theory of consciousness developed by Daniel Dennett in his book *Consciousness Explained*. He rejects the materialistic, Cartesian idea of the single self for what he calls the "multiple drafts" theory of consciousness(101). And if the primary thing that we are conscious of is the self, then we are also forming multiple selves. We tell the same story of ourselves, the one that defines us, but we keep changing it, trying to get it right. The same story is Harmony's myth, "the precedent behind every action, its invisible, ever-present lining,"(Calasso 383) but with our experience swirling around to fit that "footprint," where the stuff of us is always changing.

It must be said that the notion of multiple selves will produce a certain anxiety in some quarters. There is the tendency to hold onto the image of the one self, especially the one that is emerging from any number of cultural, psychological, sexual, racial, or class imprisonments. This is a self that is in need of liberation, a victim in need of redemption. It is also a self that is straining after its authentic, natural voice. These longings are ill considered. To accept a self so bound, is to accept someone else's idea
of how we should be.\footnote{This is the heart of Freud's idea of transference. See Finke ("Knowledge" 19) and Freud ("Negation" 54).}

The unified self has been a site of conflict since the very beginning of Western culture. We are ascribed a self so that we may know our freedom and so we may be controlled. We are told we have this one self so we can continually give it away to obsessions where we experience the phenomenon of never really having self, just the empty desire for it. This is how we are seduced (Carse, SG 51). The seducers are almost always giving us something for the life we are handing over to them. But they never can give it to us completely, or the spell would be broken, the seduction ended, and we would see there was nothing there. The seducer must keep the desire free floating without any affect, so the veil will never be torn.

One of the places where the idea of the singular self developed was with Plato. He showed his distrust of multiple selves when he did not want artists in his Republic. He knew they were in the habit of being self-less—or as he said, dealing in mere "reflections of a reflection."

In the writer's case, Plato's complaint has to do with creating personae. The usual way of looking at this is that a personae is a mask for the author. The writer creates characters that stand in for him/her. The fictional character is said to be thinly autobiographical. This
presupposes that there is an autobiography and not just versions of a biography—the subject's version just one of an infinite series. Creating personae is what we do whenever we write with the awareness that we are creating myth.

Falling in love with someone else's desire, as Harmony does in Calasso's myth (cited above), is the secret to building personae. We cannot write about what is too close to us, too familiar. We must transport the desire onto a form outside of ourselves. We make it into a (false) story. We do not freely imagine it so much as build it into the myth (as does Harmony) that someone else is living, before they have discarded it, and before they have a chance to know that it is myth. This mythical place is timeless: where art, literature, and story live. It is where we construct our lives. If this is true, how can it motivate us to write? Perhaps we could get closer to an answer if we knew more about why everyday people choose to write.

Why We Write

A true artist is born with a unique voice and cannot copy; so he has only to copy to prove his originality. —Raymond Radiquet

There is a line of distinction in the college writing classroom, and it is drawn by the timed writing proficiency test that determines who will take English 101. This test defines those who are ready for college, and those who are
not. What we teach by administering such tests is the false value of our own standards; that we value these standards above students' own nascent desire to write. What makes matters worse is students come to us hobbled by their writing education, with very little desire to write, and we knock them down again when we test them on their ability to write, a skill they have been taught to have little faith in. And that writing is a skill that has never been adequately presented to students. So what have we been telling students about why they should write? I begin by citing a study by Deborah Brandt ("Remembering"). She discusses early childhood memories of both reading and writing education and learning.

Brandt, in her paper compares how forty people, "a broad section of the population"(460) near her college in Wisconsin remember their first experiences with both reading and writing. In her paper Brandt describes how writing is viewed in the general, non-academic population. In general, she finds that the group she studied valued reading but did not give the same respect or regard to writing. She links these attitudes to how their parents raised them and how teachers taught them.

When Brandt's subjects were children "there was a reverence expressed for books and their value and sometimes [there was] a connection between reading and refinement or
good breeding" (Brandt 464). On the other hand, Brandt claims writing was more "problematic." For example, parents never wrote for their children and rarely encouraged writing in the home. They typically used writing only for the mundane tasks of accounting and letter writing.

One type of writing Brandt's subjects did produce was writing in resistance to others. This writing was in the form of graffiti, class notes, and eschatological scribblings. Diary writing was another typical kind of writing these people did, mainly as a way to purge hurtful or troubling experiences. Much of this writing was ignored or destroyed soon after it was written. In other words, it was not valued even by those who wrote it.

For most of these people school writing assignments were "introduced in order to induce, support, or verify reading" (473). This writing was based on professional models which, citing Shirley Brice Heath, "[were] actually a way of imposing elitist values and domesticating amateur, popular forms of writing that had flourished in earlier times" (474).

Finally, Brandt says, because writing is so problematic, parents share writing with their children only with difficulty. "Many [parents] are outwardly wary of what they sense are the creative and mysterious origins of writing" (476). This points out the difficulty, Brandt says, of knowing how to use writing in our lives. She notes that
books, the products of an author's talent and hard work, are seen as valuable, while the act of writing is not.

Brandt's study shows that students are ambivalent about the need to learn to write. Typically, when they are forced to write they respond with writing that teachers view in three ways: 1) writing that is minimal, contrary, or off the subject -- seen as resistance; 2) writing that is in complete complicity to the assignment -- duplicates "what the teacher wants;" 3) writing that is unexpected, fresh -- like "real" writing. Composition teachers fight students when they resist them, accept their complicity, and recognize with pride the excellent students writing. Many teachers admit, to their credit, that the excellent writing has nothing to do with their instruction. Yet in these ways teachers set up double standards in their classrooms. It may have to do with a sense of angst teachers feel when their curriculum (i.e. control) produces paltry results, and when the work of good student writers puts them, as the Deconstructionist say, "under erasure." However, it isn't my purpose to mourn the low morale of teachers, but to see how writing done in classrooms can be lively and instructive. I believe that to become aware of myth-making practice will give us this kind of classroom. Both students and teachers will be more motivated. I have come to this problem in my graduate studies and by interrogating my own first year practice as a writing teacher. I realize that my writing
(this thesis) is an attempt to write my myth of this kind of teaching and writing practice.

The inability to foster writing, to recognize it as potential, and to not grow resentful when it doesn't appear is a problem for my own teaching. One way to look at it is to talk about the idea that some teachers have, that writing cannot be taught. They believe that writing is a matter of natural ability. When it appears it is wonderful, but it cannot be predicted. It is like the attitude toward creative writing in the Academy. Creative writing is both valued as text and rejected as unsuitable for practice.

In Brandt's study creative writing in the home is looked upon with disdain. Those who wrote creatively were ignored or merely let alone to pursue their "gift" as best they could, while the others, in one woman's view, need not have bothered:

The idea that you must be creative is sort of wrenching it out of the natural. It always seemed to me that it was a natural thing if it was going to come. And the idea of psychologizing it and thinking, now, if a person can express themselves well they'll have a bigger sense of themselves and this is good for them is nonsense to me, frankly. (C.Krauss, qtd. in Brandt 468)

Many believe like this woman that writing is "a natural thing if it [is] going to come." So when clear student writing appears, these people attribute it to this natural ability. This attitude is especially detrimental for our writing instruction, and it is particularly injurious to
basic writers who arrive in our classroom with a highly developed sense of where they lack the necessary skills to do good writing.

When writing teachers want to recognize student writing, encourage and value it, this natural-writing-ability theory dismisses those students who come to us unprepared to do college writing. These "basic writers" do not get any of the teacher's respect and very little instruction under the rules of natural writing. These students are unprepared to write in the way the teacher has envisioned they should write. The pedagogy resulting from the naturalistic theory usually has nothing to do with students but everything to do with the teacher's own prejudices and predilections. Naturalism is a subtle corrosive element in writing classrooms. I know because I experience its presence in my own teaching.

I experience the naturalistic argument as a fact of life as a teacher. I experience it because I unconsciously propagate it, and because the theory arrives with the students (as Brandt shows), as a part of their educational backgrounds. All my theory rejects it. But as I enter a classroom it is there. It is there before I speak or look at a single student paper.

Error Correction

It is not enough to love the writing as a Composition
teacher. The question that nags me as I continue to teach writing is how do I love the writing when it comes broken and nonsensical from my basic writing students? There are those who say: I am blaming the student. It is my job to slog through that stuff. What I should do, they say, is work on error with these students. But first detach the error from the student who is making it. But how do you detach the writing product, what is written, from the author and his or her process? Basic writers are nothing if not involved in their own writing. After all, they know they are making the errors. So what message am I giving to the person who errs? That he or she is less.

It is true that most Composition theorists I have read on error (Hull, Shaughnessy, Batholomae, Lu) define error somewhat positively, as integral to a person's cognitive processes. For most, it is a way of thinking that is connected mysteriously to the student's personality and culture. Isolating the error, allowing the person to become aware of it, instituting a regimen of practice to correct the error, all has a chance, it is argued, to begin to stamp out writing error. But what if what is torn out is more than just the error? What produces the error might be a valuable way of thinking for that person (Hull). Indeed, it may be a valuable part of the self. What seems to result when error is weeded out of a student's writing is that the writer
accomplishes, in a sense, syntactic assimilation. The result is the student's voice is either co-opted, or, in this process, an essential voice is duly refined.

These two opposing critiques of the perceived need to conform linguistically are given by Batholomae ("Study") and Lu ("Professing"). Bartholomae believes that error correction is necessary because the student must learn to use the discourse of the academic community. He believes students will have to secure their own personal voice elsewhere. Lu, on the other hand, sees a need for the student to retain his or her individual voice and, in this way enliven the mix of styles in academic discourse.

My own experience is that students want to learn how to make fewer mistakes in their writing, and they don't know what you are talking about when you say voice. Voice and error are not easily perceived notions for students, except to say, that their failure to pass the entrance exam to 101 tells them their writing needs to be cleared of their errors. In other words, these students have not come upon their deficiency in writing on their own, as Brandt explains -- they were taught. This is why many of them have a hard time believing they are poor writers. And they may be right. Entrance tests test for certain kinds of writing. Those good at first draft writing have a better chance to succeed in these writing situations. For all its practicality for
administrators, these tests discourage writing. No one wants to be looked at as being "in error," despite the error spin-doctors like Bartholomae and Lu. It doesn't seem to matter that both Bartholomae and Lu are writing in professional journals that do not tolerate any kind of error. These error theorists cannot practice what they preach even if they wanted to. The final irony is that if we purposefully single out error, we must eradicate it if it is going to be called error at all. To avoid this irony we should not ignore error, but see how it defines us, how it allows us to "attain to perfection." Myth as method helps us see this possibility.

Error Redefined

In all deference to those who have written extensively on student error I would like to try to redefine the notion of error in a familiar but forgotten way; that is to say, we are all "in error."

If we step back into our Western Judeo-Christian heritage, we can see the genealogy of error and an indication of how we might redefine its correction. Jesus, in John's Gospel, 8:7, says: "He who is without sin among

22 There is an element of fear in error correction. For me it is helpful in this context to reflect on a favorite passage from 1 John 4:18: "For fear brings with it the pains of judgement, and anyone who is afraid has not attained to love in its perfection"(New English Bible).
you, let him cast a stone at her" (*King James*). I cite this dollop of Sunday School wisdom for two reasons. One is to repeat the by now secularized and weightless sentiment encased here: we are all guilty of the complaints we make against others. This idea has become "light" (Kundera). Its moorings have been cut from John's Gospel, and it does not do anymore what it was meant to do. I want to put it back but for a new context — the writing classroom. Show how writing makes a space where we can listen to each other and build a life, perhaps even a writer's life. This writer's life has a genealogy for each of us. The myth that we have been given to see ourselves as a writer must be exploded. We are always in metamorphosis. There is always fear and risk in this as Calasso says, but also more life.

The second reason I picked this scene in John (8:1-11) is because it is the only place in the gospels where Jesus writes. This provided me with the "chink" to coax out my own writer-based interpretation of Jesus' actions.

In this story from John's Gospel the adulteress, caught in the act, is brought to Jesus. The law says she must be stoned. "What does Jesus say" asks the Pharisees. Jesus knows that whatever he says he will be found wrong. Instead of falling into their trap he "stoops down, and with his finger [and writes] on the ground, as though he heard them not" (v.6).
I have never known what to make of this verse. The text does not say what he writes. Some say it is an accounting of the sins of those who accuse the woman. This seems unlikely because few if any could have read what it was Jesus wrote. Anyway, the sin he is talking about in v. 8:7 is Sin in general, not specific sins.

So why did they all leave? I think it was the specter of the holy man writing in the dust that spooked them, made them listen to his words and caused them to be convicted. Not only that, what persuaded them to leave was the writing itself -- not what was written.

The way Jesus got out of their trap was by proposing to them that they throw the stones, while making it impossible for them to act. This was clever enough, but enclosing this command within the action of writing (he stoops down twice to write) he shows us that it isn't the words that are important, but the act. The irony is especially pungent because he writes in the dirt. His act of writing has done something else too. It shows the woman her sin. Not by pointing it out to her, but by pointing out how it isn't being pointed out. When Jesus gets up after all the woman's accusers have disappeared, our author included, the sin (of adultery) has been written away. We imagine the wind and traffic on the road will shortly obliterate any trace of it. Also, and this is my point, the silence of Jesus' writing
allowed the creation of something new in the women, something that even she does not know the nature of. I am convinced that the act of writing is at the heart of the mystery; it produces the new life that is offered to the woman. Whether she accepts it or not is speculation and of no matter. What is clear is that the silent writing of Jesus gave her that new self. This self is not a thing complete by any means. It is something that needs to be filled, in her case, by a life lived in imitation of Jesus' life. This is John's purpose in writing this story.

I take another purpose from this story. It forms itself into questions I am only beginning to ask of my own teaching practice: Is it possible to provide a writing silence for our students so they may have new selves to fill with whatever they desire? And can we ask, while they are with us, that they use their writing to fill this silence? I think we can when we become aware of the myths we enter the classroom with, and the possibilities of making ourselves, not as Plato wished — less myth ridden — but more myth conscious, thus multi-voiced.

III. Motivation in the Writing Classroom

Nemesis

Our culture is so much an amalgamation of the Judeo-Christian and Greek traditions that we do not know where the
one begins and the other ends. From a distance it looks like there is a layering of hope (Judeo-Christian belief) splashed over a dire Greek mythos. It has been only in the last two hundred years that this pastiche, orchestrated primarily by St. Paul and Augustine, has started to crumble under the weight of its own practices.

That Greek thought was subsumed into the Judeo-Christian ethos does not say that it was in any way quieted. It does not take a seer to see that Western society is in many ways Christian in name only. We proclaim as Americans: "In God We Trust," but since most of the founders of the Republic were Deists, the sarcastic retort pasted on the auto mechanic's wall: "all others pay cash" rings true with a bitter laugh.

We have had to pay. The coming of the Messiah and the Last Judgment are put off. We are concerned with death; it is in our bones. We pursue and are pursued. Big fish eat the little fish, who in turn are eaten by even bigger fish. The eating and the guilt is endless. The guilt especially because from the time we were small we become aware of ourselves as beings that consume other beings.23

There is a faceless despair hiding behind all of this

23 "The primordial crime is the action that makes something in existence disappear: the act of eating. Guilt is thus obligatory and inextinguishable. And, given that men cannot survive without eating, guilt is woven into their physiology and forever renews itself"(Calasso 311).
that culture has tried to hide. The Greeks had a name for it, she was Ananke. How it was embodied was in the form of the daughter, Nemesis (necessity). The myth of Nemesis is a story of being pursued and at the same time an act of possession. Calasso describes the myth of her seduction by Zeus:

Nemesis fled to the ends of the earth to escape Zeus, transforming herself into one animal after another, just as the manifest flees and scatters before being caught and pinned down by its principle. The same sequence of flight with metamorphosis followed by rape is repeated when Peleus chases Thetis and finally couples with her in the form of a cuttle fish. The repetition of a mythical event, with its play of variations, tells us that something remote is beckoning to us. There is no such thing as the isolated word. Myth, like language, gives all of itself to each of its fragments. When a myth brings into play repetition and variants, the skeleton of the system emerges for a while, the latent order covered in seaweed. (Calasso, 136)

The basic repetition Calasso describes is a harsh indictment of our state as human beings. Many would deny it. But in so doing we leave ourselves open for not understanding how we have always been able to ameliorate the consequences of "flight/metamorphosis and rape." Our making of myth has allowed us to do this. And to reduce it further, as Calasso begins to do, when he equates myth with language—a tool—and therefore, a myth making tool also. It allows us to flee, to metamorphose, and to understand the inevitable rape (rape in the sense of possessing and being possessed). For it is not what we have that motivates us, but what we will
become. To appreciate this idea we must become conscious of how and why we must flee and change. Learning then can become the reason that motivates us.

**Brophy: Motivation to Learn**

Educational psychologist, Jere Brophy, defines motivation this way:

Student motivation to learn is an acquired competence developed through general experience but stimulated most directly through modeling, communication of expectations, and direct instruction or socialization by significant guides, those others, especially parents and teachers, who are more experienced. If activated in particular learning situations, motivation to learn functions as a scheme or script that includes not only affective elements but also cognitive elements such as goals and associated strategies for accomplishing the intended learning. (Brophy 40)

Brophy's script, along with most such scripts, gain its power from being integrated into the economy of the self where they are only recovered after the fact. There is no choice in the implantation. Our cultural baggage is given to us at our birth, "our mausoleum" (Arendt 28). The knowledge of how scripts work arrives gift wrapped for administrators and politicians, prison wardens, and those who run mental hospitals -- all who wish to devise procedure and set public policy (Foucault). These scripts feel permanent and irrevocable. However, they deny the process which gave them life. They became scripts in the free commerce that produces every act of creation. In this case, the student acting
within the learning situation acts with the teacher to create a place to learn.

Yet these motivational scripts are only practiced as scripts when they are not useful. They are useful to someone, but not eminently so. The creating of the scripts is the important part of motivating students and not the practice of writing to scripts. If we present our students with the scripts, or genres in the composition classroom, we present them with the abandon molds, objects where the "god has gone out of" (Calasso). In this way the scripts are what we are left to deal with; and they are adequate. The god has not gone far because there are always new scripts to embody. Every form is a hollow place to put the self; the god has prepared the form for us. It is the myth.

I do not wish to argue against the scripts but against valorizing any particular script, genre, or form in the composition classroom. I want to argue for the awareness that any particular script, as James Carse says about myth, "is exemplary, but not necessary" (FIG 176).

---

24 "...in the molds for fragments of the drapery of Phidias's Zeus [the statue] found in the sculptor's studio in Olympia: the material is neutral and the same throughout, only the curves of the folds very. In the end it is what is cast that survives. We live in a warehouse of casts that have lost their molds. In the beginning was the mold" (Calasso 175).
Lack of Content

The writing classroom is unique for its lack of content, or fixed curriculum. I see this as a benefit for the teacher of Composition. However, it presents great possibility and danger. Like myth, it represents a "realm of risk." In Composition Studies we do not have a layered history of cause and effect, one fact or idea building on another to form a grand pyramid of knowledge and significance. Our students must contend with themselves: writers plunked down in front of the ubiquitous blank page. We ask, what shall they write? I say, let them write themselves. Let them construct the myth of themselves as writers in the college classroom. I want them to accept what it means to be a college writer. But there is a genealogy here that we cannot forget. The classroom, like Benjamin's mausoleum of childhood, holds a myth for both teacher and student that is powerful and daunting. It is never easy starting a new writing course.

I am afraid that most Composition teachers, myself included, start the term with a certain dread. We haul out our choice of readers, rhetorics, and writing assignments and hope for the best. When the drama of the classroom begins we institute the writing, the instruction, and evaluating processes. The teacher and students assume roles around a script presented by the teacher, the university,
and in a more general way, the culture. And to give our writing classrooms legitimacy we try to understand our changing culture and how we are a part of it and not enforcers (colonialist) of the hegemony of one culture over another. We do a pretty good job of this. But somehow there is no joy in Muddville. In most cases we teachers are still students ourselves. We are chagrined by our behavior in front of the classroom. We must tell others what they should write and how they should write it.

One of our problems is choosing a text to use as a writing guide. I wish to frame the particular choice of a text in the context of what I have said so far, and that is, the problem reading a text is a problem of reading "in myth." I believe that each person must do this for him or herself. We are the embodiment of myth and travel through culture and classrooms, for instance, collecting pieces of this culture for our own use.

Our ability to read our culture, therefore, goes beyond the ability to read selected texts. It is more a problem in translation. Thoreau in Walden, referring to the ancient classical texts such as The Illiad, says "that no transcript of them has ever been made into any modern tongue, unless our civilization itself may be regarded as such a transcript." (III. 6) Not only is the writing about us but it makes us, makes "civilization, as we know and pursue it."
If this is true then when we write we not only write about the culture but we have a hand in producing culture. Thoreau is talking about a doubling effect, a translation that is carried out repeatedly. The translation can be seen as a metaphor for all writing.

We read a text and we make it our own; we read it to possess it, while it also possesses us. The lowliest writing about text is then a making of text (self) in the shadow of that larger multifarious cultural text that we are a part of and that we have a part in forming.

But how then to we choose a pedagogy and choose correctly in order to serve our students needs as writer? The neat answer that comes to mind is that there is no right text. Students are concerned with writing error free papers and fulfilling a requirement, and we are in the business to help them do these things. The well chosen text is not enough in most cases to help us help our students. We must learn to teach the text.

It is not that whatever we do is all right with them. Or that they will learn to write because or in spite of us. But by looking at myth-making as method we as individuals can learn to choose what kind of writing pedagogy is right for us. This entails giving students responsibility for their own learning and for constructing a multitude of voices in their writing.
It is instructive to see how different theorists in Composition deal with voice. The Social Constructivists require the student to develop an "academic" voice, while at the other end of the spectrum the Expressivists want the student's "authentic" voice to come to the fore. My position is that we need both of these notions of voice (and more), but neither goes far enough in an attempt to make what Kurt Spellmeyer refers to as "common ground." I am reminded of what James Carse says about the failing of theology: "It is only when theology is directed at opponents with whom we share nothing, and want to share nothing, that it falsely asserts its primacy" (SG 6). What I am trying to say is that we often silence each other with our arguments for what we consider to be our students' greater good. I am afraid our students look at us and say: "How do you know? You haven't asked us." Listening, myth-making, and creating a writing self (and a teaching self) all go together. The tendency to become a disciple of one or the other of the Composition camps I mentioned above is overwhelming at times. But it should not blind us to the value there is in each of them. In fact, their claims provide us with the current myth of Composition. But let us see how their struggle over student voice in particular, is a struggle within all of us for a better knowledge of our own writing voice(s).
Expressivist and Social Constructivist

The two principal schools of thought on how student voice is to be viewed in the writing classroom are first, the Expressivists, who loosely follow Peter Elbow; and second, the Social Constructivists, led by David Bartholomae and others.

Expressivists believe that self knowledge precedes any functional discursive knowledge. A personal voice has to be recognized before a public voice is used. Individuals begin to know how to write by getting the writing out, by freewriting and participating in "believing games" (Elbow, *Power* 270). This is criticized by the Social Constructivists, on the other hand, for promoting isolation and narcissism. The Expressivists counter that they are "blending rather than separating the personal [voice] and the public [voice]" (Fishman 653). Others are not so sure. (see responses, especially Farmer 548, *College English* 9/93)

Both the Expressivists and the Social Constructivists speak specifically in terms of voice. For the Expressivist, "voice" is more personal, something singular and material. The Social Constructivist's "voice" is no less material, but socially produced, an academic discourse. Elbow in his book *Writing With Power* gives examples of voice but cannot describe how it is produced. The Constructivists talk in
terms of effective communication, audience, and clarity, all to produce a particular kind of student "voice—an original and authentic voice which will allow them to fluently and expressively speak the language of the university"(Pfeiffer, CE 669). But it is not clear how writing can be abstracted to accommodate all the different kinds of academic voices there are out there.

These two approaches deal with two separate and specific areas of student life. The Expressivists purport to help students with their personal lives, promoting a self-help goal of writing. On the other hand, the Social Constructivists' goal for student writing is their struggle to find a career path.

I value both these views on voice. However, it has been hard in my graduate studies not to take a side and champion one view over the other. I believe I have lost something of the "body" of Composition studies when I have tried to do so. This need to take a side is an entrenched part of our culture, and I am not arguing against it. So how do we value both, and act against this need to take a position? The most we can do is make an attempt to write ourselves out of the current myth and into a new myth within our own culture. It is never entirely successful. Kurt Spellmeyer makes this attempt in his writings on Composition. He does not totally succeed but it is instructive to watch how he is trying to
create common ground in Composition Studies. He begins by arguing with his opponents in Composition Studies.

Spellmeyer

Kurt Spellmeyer in his book *Common Ground: Dialogue, Understanding, and the Teaching of Composition* describes the academy as a place where teachers/scholars have ferreted away the ideas of culture for their own use. They jealously guard high culture and dole it out in ways that can only be seen as self-serving. Students are serfs of these great landowner/teachers. Students serve them until they themselves can carve out little plots, little fiefdoms to rule. He says as teachers we stamp out students in our own mold; they learn to write as we write.

Spellmeyer preaches against this traditional top-down paternalistic classroom throughout his book *Common Ground* and his essays in *College English*. He believes that we must establish a common ground with our students to allow them to write authentically and for the writing to be important to them. He has some definite models for the kind of teacher who strives to create this common ground, and who he will allow to use it with him.

In his essay "Language, Politics, and Embodiment" Spellmeyer says the anthropologist James Mooney's "writings offer us a deep-political alternative to the reductive
heuristics of 'argument' . . ."(279). Mooney is one of Spellmeyer's heroes. He lived with and wrote about native Americans during the days of the Great Ghost Dance in the 1880s. For Spellmeyer, Mooney is the exemplary scholar/researcher because he observed the Plains Indians "non-invasively," establishing with them, amid the mysteries of their practices and beliefs, a "common human ground—common not in the details of what [they] thought, but in the dilemmas that made thought necessary"("LPE" 278). He is one of Clifford Gertz' "'implicated' anthropologists, who 'don't study villages' but 'study in villages': not impersonal recorders, but parties to an unpredictable, mutually transforming dialogue" (Spellmeyer,"Foucault" 722). Spellmeyer uses Mooney's life and work as an example by analogy of how composition teachers should act with their students by not being afraid to let student writing be the plane of conversion between them.

I have come to value Spellmeyer and his characters (Mooney, Foucault, and Hanson in "Travels") as real exemplars of ways to operate that are valuing and are responsible to the differences of people. Spellmeyer's concern — he publishes in College English and is a director of a writing program at a prestigious university — seems to be with student writers. However, what strikes me in all his writing is the position he has taken as theorist and
teacher, using an anthropologist and ethnographer as an example for teachers and students, while at the same time writing the kind of prose he is attacking. There is a paradox here that he acknowledges only once, as far as I know, in his own writing, and then it is effaced. It makes me question his desire for common ground. Perhaps he is preparing ground only for those who believe the way he does.

In the last paragraph of Spellmeyer's essay "Foucault and the Freshman Writer: Considering the Self in Discourse" he quotes an "anonymous reader" who read his essay before it was published in College English. He calls him "a reader that has shown me an outside where I had least expected it." This person comments that:

One student's essay is hyperbolically praised as a model of success, while the other student's essay is dismissed as a failure....I would suggest that the writer is adopting here, in relation to a new norm of "good student writing," something of the authoritarian pedagogic stance which he began the essay deploring. ("Foucault" 729)

Spellmeyer ends the article being grateful for this "outside" (person), a term he takes from Foucault, that defines a place and a person speaking in the natural dialectic between self and other. He says it has "restored the problematic" and "opened a new outside to me, to my students, and to the colleagues with which I work most closely." Or has it? Three years later he included this article as a chapter in Common Ground, but he drops this
concluding, ameliorative paragraph completely and adds in its place more discussion of Foucault's theories.

It is quite common for the authors of articles in College English to discuss their particular pedagogical theory and then, in the second part of their article, give some examples from student writers. It is also common to cite both "good writers" and "bad writers." Spellmeyer's bad writer is a "basic writer" who is trying to "go native" (722) (suppress her own voice in lieu of acquiring an academic one). This basic writer's "crime" is to blend two disparate points of view and say what she thought without first making it clear what the disputed issues are. Spellmeyer's "good writer" does this more expertly. The point is that experience builds knowledge, and the "good writer" is able to bring her own life and ideas into convergence with her subject, while the other writer merely blindly imitates what the teacher wants.

This "good writer" in Spellmeyer's essay on Foucault can be aligned with other Spellmeyer's heroes, James Mooney and the latest, Earl Parker Hanson, an ethnographer in the Amazon Basin circa 1930. Hanson appears in "Travels to the Heart of the Forest: Dilettantes, Professionals, and Knowledge." I don't mean to disparage Spellmeyer's models or his writing about them. They and it is wonderful. He tells their stories with the passion of an ideologue. And that is the trouble.
In all his writing he vies against the ideologues; he argues his case against theirs. He plays at "the reductive heuristics of 'argument'" himself. He takes Foucault as his true master but does not follow him. He quotes him in a note in *Common Ground*:

> We must conceive of discourse as a series of discontinuous segments whose tactical function is neither uniform nor stable....[We] must not imagine a world of discourse divided between accepted discourse and excluded discourse, or between the dominant discourse and the dominated one; but a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies(93).

This sounds amoral and perplexing at first, especially since Spellmeyer has been pitting different discourses against each other, but what Foucault means, I think, is that we can play this language game and not be played by it. We play the game but are aware of it as a game.25 Spellmeyer acknowledges this in his term "embodiment," but he doesn't seem to practice it. Foucault's life and death embodied his theories. He always put himself at risk for his ideas. As his ideas changed, his life changed (see Miller's *The Passion of Michel Foucault*).

But finally, what I value about Spellmeyer's writing is the chance to see how the myth of Composition studies is worked out by him and how it works on him. His faux pas in arguing against a method that he uses is not interesting to

---

25 This is James Carse idea that we play at a series of finite games within an ongoing infinite game.
me for how it "exposes" him. It is interesting because in
his attempt to deal with the Composition animal from within
its bowels he fails to break out of the myth. This
illustrates how the myth-maker (Spellmeyer) is unable to see
the further labyrinth beyond the one he currently sees
himself breaking out of.  

Spellmeyer is employing Eliade's "true story"/"false
story" dichotomy here. Just as Eliade cannot see
Christianity as a myth, Spellmeyer cannot see that what he
is doing makes just another myth for Composition. His may be
exemplary but it is not necessary (Carse).

However, I can relate to Spellmeyer's conundrum. It is
especially instructive, for instance, in explaining the
queasy feeling we get as teachers when all our best laid
lesson plans go up in flames at the simple student question:
"I don't understand." We present our lesson the best we can,
and when it is not understandable then we have to stop and
find out why. Perhaps even admit that we were wrong.
Spellmeyer seems to be ignoring this feeling while he
presses his own myth of the Gertzian "implicated"
Composition theorist. He does not practice Composition as an
art as James Carse encourages theologians to practice
theology. He does not seem to want to share anything with
those he criticizes.

26 Kafka wrote a parable with this theme called "An
Imperial Message."
For me Spellmeyer is a Moses figure. He has brought me to the promise land, to a better awareness of how I need to be aware of my students needs and not impose my myth on them. But Spellmeyer cannot lead me to see how to change this about my own teaching practice. He merely shows me the need to be "implicated" and not how to be that new person.

Derek Owens on the other hand takes a more radical but still a traditionalist tack toward Composition. He seems to be a bit more aware of himself and the nature of his arguments and their efficacy than Spellmeyer, but in the end he is no less flawed.

Owens

Derek Owens in his book Resisting Writings is much like Spellmeyer in his dissatisfaction with both the Expressivists and the Social Constructivists. Where Spellmeyer writes about the explorers of the margins, those in the outback of discourse, Owens pushes for alternate forms of writing, what he calls "resisting writings." One of the real differences between the two, however, is that Owens, throughout his book, admits the absurdity of writing against the establishment and publishing such writing. In other words, writing conventional discursive prose about why you think traditional discursive prose is garbage. This is an irony he seems to enjoy in Resisting Writings. Those
expecting a consistent argument will probably stop reading at his confession that he is spilling out what is for him mother's milk. Yet, I admit that he seduced me with his talk of resisting the staid writing in Composition. I wanted to know what this "young turk" had to say about the changing rhetorics of Composition even if his writing is not an example of these changes. Yet, while naming the seduction (read myth) we step out of it.

Owens' argument against academic prose is a wonderfully layered piece of work. He quotes Adrienne Rich, who is quoting Walter Ong, who describes argument as a male centered rhetoric originated in "Learned Latin" of the medieval academy. Ong says that it was prominent "until the romantic age." Owens counters that it is alive and well in the modern academy and is even what he does in his own text, quoting Olivia Frey:

[Her] findings imply that the rhetorical combat described by Ong has continued to thrive long beyond the romantic period, remaining a standard for the public language of our profession (elements of which, readers will notice, are alive and well in my manuscript too). 'What troubles me the most,' she writes, 'is the basic, unexamined assumption that the best way to know things about literature and to help others know things about literature is by presenting a thesis and making a case for it by answering counterarguments. . . . The implication is that if one does not argue well or argue at all, the writing is unclear, ineffective, and unconvincing'"(Owens 115).

But this does not mean that Frey has been able to write without arguing her case in her own essay. As Owens notes,
she "feels professionally obligated to avoid any attempt to discover her own version of exploratory rhetoric. 'I hope I have the courage, 'she concludes, 'to write differently next time' (524). Me too—" chimes in Owens. Well, this part of the whole charade does not impress me. I am led to read the resisting writers he names in his book for what news there is from the boundaries. But Owens is like Ariadne — better left on Nexos while we go off back to the real work on Greece.

Both Spellmeyer and Owens are fine writers and have powerful friends in scholarly magazines and publishing who are themselves, we assume, concerned with the moribund nature of Composition. However, these writers, editors, and publishers are not about to print some of the wild examples of "essays" (see Owens section "Essaying Alternatives" 28) that Owens talks about because ... well, it isn't done. And that is the trouble. Spellmeyer says he wants students to bring their life histories and unique voices into the classroom conversation. But who will hear them? Is he giving us the parental advise: "Do as I say, not as I do?" I think he is.

There is another way to approach argumentative writing that is not full of this paradox of establishing "common ground" on a patch of earth that is your staked out territory and the rules, your rules. There is a blindness
inherent in what both Spellmeyer and Owens do when they complain about what goes on in Composition Studies. An antidote to this anti-discursive discursivity is Nietzsche. Nietzsche's life and writing illustrates the continuing hope for us all to find a private language that will speak to others.

**Nietzsche's Perspectivism**

One of the complaints that both Spellmeyer and Owens have about the teaching of academic writing is that we mean for our students to use argumentative writing in a mendacious way. Argument is a genre that is highly respected as the bedrock of our academic and social practice. We learn to argue a position early in our education, and in an adversarial society both men and women are valued for their skill at argumentation. This behavior cannot be too bad if the rules of this game are set out before hand and all participants are aware of them. Owens describes this awareness this way:

There are indeed significant differences between rhetorical usage that willingly adopts an adversarial tone in order to confirm some argument, and that of the writer (or collective of writers) who undermine authority by exposing its presence, weakening its influence by encouraging a range of conflicting observations within the same text, thereby problematizing any writer's (or reader's) ability to 'claim' authority. Since there are circumstances that make both poles worthwhile, there's value in exposing writers to both ends of the spectrum(131).
But this rarely happens. The very secret of our rhetorical practice is to hide the fact that we are playing at one side of the argument and that the other can be just as viable. Debating competitions are a way of domesticating this energy making people expert at it. But the fact still remains: we push the truth out in front of us as we go, hoping no one will discover our trick.

As we are taught to use the skill of argument against others; we find that we are the victims of it ourselves. The truth as someone sees it oppresses us daily. Since this has been an age old pedagogical tool we are taught by those who have learned the "truth" from those who have taught it to them and so on. This kind of truth, made from argumentation, is built to last; it is the stuff of dogma as both Carse and Benjamin point out.

The antidote for this as Spellmeyer and Owens suggest is to infuse writing practice with personal knowledge and a style that reflects the transparency of the language. Not that we should not argue our position; we must. But how do we argue it with all the other positions thrusting forward and obscuring the sky? If every position, every interpretation of the facts becomes possible, how are we to say ours is right? For Nietzsche it is all in one's perspective.

Nietzsche confronts dogma, Alexander Nehamas says in
Nietzsche: Life as Literature, with "'genealogy,' for genealogy reveals the very particular, very interested origins from which actually emerge the views that we have forgotten are views and take instead as facts"(32). The problem is that if all views have their origins and are seen to have been created for practical reasons, then these motives can be called into question. Even the view that every view is also suspect, is suspect. Nehamas notes that Nietzsche openly acknowledges this paradox: "When, having attacked the mechanistic interpretation of physics, he presents his own hypothesis of the will to power and concludes, 'Supposing that this is also only interpretation—and you will be eager enough to make this objection?—Well, so much the better!'"(35). But then how does this not sink into base relativism—one view as good as another? Nietzsche seems to "escapes" this paradox by constantly varying the writing styles he practiced.

Nietzsche used many different styles within types of discourse throughout his life that Nehemas catalogs for us: "the aphorism," "notes," "(... 'fragments')," "essays," 'epic,' "monologue," "scholarly philological treatise," "polemical pamphlet," "autobiography," "lyrics," and the "vast number of letters"(18). When Nietzsche writes in so many different ways, using different styles, it suggests "that there is no single, neutral language in which his
views, or any other, can ever be presented. His constant stylistic presence shows that theories are as various and idiosyncratic as the writing in which they are embodied"(37). That this constant changing of styles gives the reader pause is the point. If we become practiced at reading different styles for not only what they say but how they are saying it, then we are never seduced to the fact "that some views at least are independent of style"(37). What we see, then, are the effects of personality on the contents of a world, and writing used as a tool to construct self and at the same time propel it, like a bundle of texts along a trajectory, in a personal and intentional way. In other words, we are enjoined to make a writing that is self referential and at the same time attempts to build knowledge outside the realms of polished truths that have been handed down by less observant readers and writers as never changing truth.

When I think about teaching in the context of what Nietzsche does I am reminded of a quote from Heidegger that Spellmeyer uses: "Teaching is more difficult than learning because what teaching calls for is this: to let learn." (CG 210) "To let learn" entails not enforcing our one true style on our students. That they must choose a style (within the academy) is analogous to choosing a self to operate in this world. Many of us never do this; it is imposed on us. Spellmeyer in reply to one of his critics quotes Terry
Eagleton: "the privilege of the oppressor is his privilege to decide what he shall be; it is this right which the oppressed must demand too, which must be universalized" (CE 55, 91) The Steve character in the movie The Thomas Crown Affaire is asked by his girlfriend after coming down from flying a glider why he is not worried about killing himself. "The only thing I worry about," he says, "is who I will be tomorrow." All our students have the chance to be someone tomorrow if we can let them learn what it means to write themselves into their own scripts and not impose ours upon them.

IV. Pedagogy/Motivation

Myth, Feminism, and Voice

Voice has been viewed traditionally as a single material thing. I have been talking about it as multiple (Dennett), as an emanation of being; what we do, instead of what we are. Voice is not a static piece of soul-furniture, to be dusted off and used when we feel the need to hear our most familiar self; instead, voice like self is a plural form. I have also tried to build voice into my idea of myth-making as method. Myth-making is an embodied action; it results in a person becoming the consequences of their actions. However, there is rarely any integration of the notion of myth-making—how it is done. The insight that we
are formed by the stories we tell is lost on those who feel helpless in response to our modern technological culture. But I am convinced that the practice of myth-making represents the ability to make multiple selves in order to deal with the mysteries of the human condition. Writing helps us do this. It has been my purpose in this thesis to present a myth of the writing classroom where multiple selves can be generated, where both student and teacher can play at writing so what they say will have real significance for them. I return again to the powerful voice of William Carlos Williams and his "self," Red Eric. The classroom should be a place where we can comfortably be "in Greenland," while struggling to go beyond it.

Both feminism and psychoanalysis has helped me see the kind of work that needs to be done in our own private Greenland. These critical positions both say important things for the writing class and how and why we should make voice. I believe it has everything to do with what I have been saying about myth-making. In the following reflection on voice, I want to bring feminism and psychoanalysis to bear on Composition theory. In Composition, voice usually appears as a mysterious artifact -- a particular metaphysical notion.

For Expressivists like Peter Elbow and many feminists, voice is a rallying cry against traditionalists in
Composition. The talk about voice is usually against the teacher imposed voice of the institution. The student has a voice, sometimes deep down, unexpressed, that according to the Expressivists and some feminists, the teacher/establishment is trying to subvert. On the other hand, the Social Constructivists believe the student's voice must give way to the instructor's wish that students arrive at a working academic voice. Others are not so clear cut about the place of voice and how it should be used. They leave off talking about it altogether because it cannot be pinned down. One who speaks of it in a more pro-active context is Laurie Finke.

Finke in an article in College English ("Knowledge as Bait: Feminism, Voice, and the Pedagogical Unconscious") uses the psychoanalytical term "transference" to position herself in this debate. First, she redefines the feminist idea of coming-to-voice: "The process feminist pedagogy seeks to describe is not the student's discovering a voice that is already there, but her fashioning one from the discursive environment through and in which the feminist subject emerges"(14). She uses Lacan and his idea of the "subject," and how it "more fully captures the sense of subjection, of the self's fashioning by its insertion into

27 "... love for the parent which is successively transferred to other objects, to teachers or the analyst" (Freud 18).
an already articulated symbolic economy" to break free from an essentialist position that most feminists find themselves in. She finds herself and her students in a more political and vulnerable position within the dynamics of the classroom by locating her own feminist ideology within the conversation going on in the classroom between student and teacher. This place, this classroom, is an inevitable matrix of power that is not easily negotiated for either teacher or student, especially when we demand that it be a free zone.

Freedom is more easily given than performed. As Finke admits the best intentions of the most radical teachers are subverted by the resistance of students. The problem becomes again one of voice. We want them to acquire a voice, but it is too often true that it is the voice we have assumed they will have, and not the voice they chose to have. This is where the psychoanalytic idea of transference plays a pivotal role.

If, following post-structuralist Lacanian theory, voice appears within the discursive interchanges of the classroom, it is tethered to the writing our students do for us. What our students chose to write, however, depends on what they bring to the classroom and how it is dealt with there. What Finke "teases out" of the dynamic of transference in the classroom is "possible only within a highly unequal relationship"(18) such as the one between teacher and student. This exchange, described by Lacan as "love directed
toward, addressed to, knowledge"(18), is the "bait" Finke talks about, that serves the trap of identification with the teacher. However, it is often tripped by the student's resistance to the teacher's authority. This resistance appears when the teacher disturbs the student's sense of a unified self. Both knowledge and desire, as it is directed at us, always precede resistance. Teaching with an awareness of transference allows us to break down a student's initial representation of voice and allows it to be reconfigured in response to the collision of desire/knowledge. That is, when they see you as a person who happens to be a teacher, and not as their father, their priest, their high school teacher, or whomever .... That is the moment they break the myth and a voice appears. This is not always a happy "accident." It is full of risk as we have been saying.

Finke's talk of voice and transference has many links to my thinking about myth and motivation to write. She describes a place where both student and teacher have to come to grips with what will be written. Will the teacher "let learn," and will the student break the received myth to establish one that is charmed from the incantation of words swirling around the circle of trees within which they sit and write.

It is not enough for the teacher to observe like Peisinoe must have done when Harmony began to fall in love
with Cadmus, fall in love with the abstract idea of love. We must be mythographers of our own myths, that is, we must see our own Harmony-falling-in-love-with-her-friend's-desire as we write it out. If we see in the outline of our own motives to create the desire to do the work of writing, we can produce the needed change for us to flourish. We cannot maintain ourselves on the stale bread of someone else's words; we must make our own. And it is comforting to believe that we do not have to pull up a voice already prepared for us but have a chance to fashion one anew every day out of the desires we are given. When we know this about our writing practice, writing becomes play.

What kind of pedagogical practices will motivate our students to write? We need to prepare a place where they can watch themselves fall in love with writing. Where the pleasure of coming to voice can be repeated over and over again. Where myths are broken and rebuilt and the very dynamic of our actions can expand unimpeded. Most of all the writing we do in the classroom should be generative and playful. Assignments should flow in and out of one another. Students should be able to follow their noses and at the same time should work the forms to see themselves more clearly there.

My myth of the writing classroom reflects how those who produced the ancient myth's narrative centuries ago took it from their own bodies. Likewise, my students will build
their myth/text in the garden of their bodies and mirror the creation to themselves. To do this I set off with them in a boat without oars like the *peregrini*, on a sea — their writing practice — where they eventually find their voices in Greenland, there to the West.
WORKS CITED


1993.


Metzger, Bruce M. and Coogan, Michael D. editors. The Oxford Companion to the Bible. New York: Oxford University


____. "'Too Little Care': Language, Politics, and
