

MAR 12 1986

SELF-SELECTED TOPICS: THEIR USE AND FUNCTION IN HIGH  
SCHOOL WRITING.

Shelley Corrin-Sheps

A monograph submitted  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirement for the Degree  
of Masters of Education in the  
Teaching of English  
McGill University  
1985

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract.....	
Acknowledgements.....	
Chapter I. Introduction.....	1
Recent theoretical directions....	4
The Philosophy beneath the Philosophy.	23
Chapter II. Definition.....	31
The Purpose and Place of Freewriting..	51
Chapter III: Prologue and Case Studies.....	58
The Classroom Procedure.....	61
Search for Self: A Year's Work	66
Marco.....	67
Literature & Life.....	83
Laurie Ann.....	103
Death: May they be spared.....	114
Tim.....	117
Marlene.....	124
Danny.....	131
Martin.....	140
Style & Theme: Finding one's own voice.	144
Colleen.....	146
Kyle.....	149
Louise.....	152
Carla.....	155
Chapter IV: Findings.....	160

Synopsis of Findings.....	162
The Aspects of Writing Addressed.....	164
Effect on Classroom Dynamic.....	165
Implications for Teaching.....	167
The Place of Creativity.....	168
Re-Allocation of Authority.....	171
Elimination of Contradictions.....	173
Appendix .....	
Marco .....	177
Laurie Ann.....	192
Tim.....	205
Marlene.....	210
Danny.....	211
Martin.....	215
Colleen.....	217
Kyle.....	229
Louise.....	231
Carla.....	235
Letters .....	241
Bibliography .....	253

CHAPTER I



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my thanks and gratitude for the generous help and support I received while preparing this monograph;

to Professor Patrick Dias, whose scholarship and insight guided me always discreetly, and at times crucially, in the conception and focus of this study;

to Martha Strike, whose inspired teaching of writing and methods of classroom organization served as a model for my own. Recipient of the Hilroy Fellowship for Canada in 1984, for her use of letters to students - my recognition can add only a small voice to that richly deserved praise;

to Victoria Le Blanc-Stevens, whose patient devotion and involvement in the production of this text has been, for me, a gift of both friendship and scholarship;

to these friends, as well as Lynn Gold of Dawson College and Douglas Bale I am especially indebted for patiently listening and reading the work in progress. With their help, my own writing benefitted enormously; as a result and thanks to them, I can add my own personal 'hurrah' for peer - feedback; and

to my students, who wrote so wholeheartedly, put up with endless questionnaires, permitted me to keep their texts for 'my work', and who accepted my excuses for marking them at what seemed a snail's pace while I studied. Lastly,

to my school's administration who extended unlimited and invaluable access to the photocopier.

S. Corrin-Sheps

March 1985

The trouble with bad student writing is the trouble with all bad writing. It is not serious, and it does not tell the truth.

Eudora Welty

This is the first requirement for good writing: truth; not the truth (whoever knows surely what that is?) but some kind of truth - a connection between the things written about, the words used in the writing, and the author's real experience in the world he knows well - whether in fact or dream or imagination.

Part of growing up is learning to tell lies, big and little, sophisticated and crude, conscious and unconscious. The good writer differs from the bad one in that he constantly tries to shake the habit. He holds himself to the highest standards of truth telling. Often he emulates children who tell the truth so easily... (Macrorie, 1983, p. 5)

It is unlikely that those last words were meant to be read wistfully. Yet it is difficult not to impose that tone on them when contemplating student writing, or the teaching practices that have traditionally shaped and formed students' writing.

While the teaching of writing has a great number of stated goals, truth, has never been one of them. While expecting that writing will ring true, traditional practice has been to control, with teacher-determined variables, well-nigh everything that shaped both words and ideas.

This has, inevitably, resulted in writing in which the young writer's hold on truth was, as the phrase has it, 'purely coincidental'. However, the question of writing having an intrinsic purpose apart from the obvious extrinsic one of propelling Billy from skill to skill and grade to grade, has begun to attract consideration. That students can and do have a serious purpose of their own and will pursue it when permitted to do so naturally is the perhaps radical idea to be explored in these pages.

One of the givens in the ensuing discussion is that tightly controlled teacher-directed tasks, particularly in the area of 'creative writing', have the automatic effect of distancing a student from his subject and negating any concern with either truth or relevance. Such methods must inevitably result in inauthentic practices, artificial models of the composing process itself, and perfunctory, imitative, assembly-line writing.

Rather than to scrutinize traditional methods for the flaws, the purpose of this study will be to examine an entirely opposite state of affairs. It will present the demonstrable results of freeing students to write on topics of their own choosing with as much prewriting time as one school year permits, and with the greatest of flexibility of subject variety the student desires. A rationale for so doing will arise out of an examination of the work of Murray, Emig, Moffett, and Holbrook, primarily, and the evidence of the

students' case histories themselves.

The review of the literature will locate the theoretical underpinnings of this experiment in self-selection of topics. Most fundamentally, this study will take issue with the accepted notion that teachers' determining appropriate or meaningful contexts will compliment, or even define, an improved methodology in the writing class. The possibility of achieving growth, so that writing functions cognitively for the student by letting the student take control of his writing, has not been sufficiently examined either for its risks or benefits. Conditioned as we are to presume that we do good by acting, and that sins of omission are just that, it is perhaps very radical to suggest that not doing what we have always done may be the key to bringing about desirable change. Benign neglect has often been cited as a sensible approach to healthy child-rearing. Close control inevitably stifles some aspects of individuality, while absence of control, as a method, has been perceived as permissiveness. This study attempts to open a window through which the outcome of just such "letting", as it applies to the writing of senior high school students, may be viewed and explored.

### Recent theoretical directions

Over the last two decades the direction of theoretical speculation on the one hand and humanistic classroom approaches in the teaching of writing on the other has pointed consistently to student-centred practices and process-oriented learning. Of particular relevance to this discussion of writing pedagogy is the emphasis to be placed on meaning and content and their greater relative importance. Such an emphasis relegates surface or mechanical considerations to a lesser (and later) place in the composing process. The writer's intentions, as well as his own assessments of appropriateness are seen, now, as part of the creative drive which is to be given full play in the initial stages of composing. Increasingly, the writer-involved-with himself has come to be seen as the essential engendering source material.

In light of this, the ways in which meanings and content are forged by the student are of seminal importance. A crucial question to be borne in mind throughout this discussion will be whether or not, and to what degree, educators are moving in the right direction in the search for encouraging writing which has meaning for the writer.

The work of Britton et al has sharpened an awareness of the personal aspect of the student who puts pen to paper. Their model of the evolution of different modes of writing begins with this very human 'self'. It is as "I" that the

writer begins to spin a tale or think out an essay. The "I" - the writer in the 'expressive' mode - will, as he distances himself, become more objective, less the subject of his writing, and evolve into the writer of works in either the 'transactional' or the 'poetic' mode, depending on whether he moves toward factual informative writing or creative, aesthetic, shaped and styled writing.

The pedagogy which adopts this as its theoretical model consequently fosters the use of the expressive mode as a way of supporting a student's initial foray into a subject. This model posits a natural, indeed an almost philogenetic, scale. One feels, one talks, argues, or engages - (with oneself, in contemplation; with others in sympathy or disputation) and one arrives at fiction or poetry on the one hand, essay and pamphlet on the other. It is as if Piaget's model were circular. All new writing begins at the centre, with the self, and proceeds to de-centre, while keeping a firm sense of the truth; in other words we keep at bay the lies we've learned to tell, retaining as much as possible, our propensity to tell the truth, which we did as children, when truth was all we knew.

It is not too speculative to say that in the recursive phases of composing the writer is balancing his own inner intention with the demands of his medium, audience, purpose; searching for the ideal point on the continuum (poetic to transactional) where the piece of writing will finally come to

rest. This balancing of inner needs (what has to be communicated) with outer constraints (how my audience should hear it) is at the heart of the composing process. The act of balancing is an apt image for this subject. On a balance scale, both sides must swing freely.

The development of student-based approaches to writing in both college and public school has been gaining momentum since the sixties. The theoretical impetus has come from authorities like Moffett in America, and Britton, Holbrook and others of the English school, whose voices were heard so clearly at Dartmouth. It has been augmented in the writings of Murray, Graves, Macrorie and Elbow. Research in the composing process has been undertaken which has both fortified the theory and altered the practice. Notable in this area are the studies by Emig, (1971), Pianko, (1979) Perl, (1979), Clifford, (1981) Denman, (1975, 1978) and Shaughnessy (1977). To a greater degree than before, research in writing has shifted its focus away from a single-minded attention to the pathology of the sentence ( Kellogg Hunt (1970) and Frank O'Hare (1973) and toward a wider view in which the writer and his composing strategies are viewed as more germane.

Janet Emig's landmark research on the writing processes of senior students recorded, with regret, the degree to which, in present practice, the "teacher-centred presentation of composition...is pedagogically, developmentally, and



politically an anachronism." (Emig, 1971, p. 100) Donald Murray and others have likewise argued for a change in fundamental approaches to the writing class. Observation of skilled and even professional writers at work has provided valuable data, and shown classroom practical approaches to be wildly at variance with the way real writers function.

As a result many traditional practices have given way to new approaches. Some of these are that revision and multi-stage drafting be standard practice; that peer collaboration and conferences replace lectures in the writing class; and that the students' own voice and ideas be heard on paper, and, as well, that portfolios and student choice determine what is to be submitted. The results of these new strategies have begun to manifest themselves and attention has now turned to gaining an understanding of their etiology.

Fundamentally, the alteration has been accomplished by a shift from product-based teaching to process-centred learning. Process-based practice has as its primary concern the learning stages a student traverses which strengthen both his skill and his cognitive development in a trial-and-error (experimental) climate. The assumption is that manipulation of skills, and experience-based learning, will create an appreciation by the learner, not only of the demands of his present subject matter but also of the demands of the craft of writing, which transcend the particulars of a specific task. The de-emphasizing of the final product as well as the

focussing on ideas has created the radically new environment now being implemented.

Donald Murray on students' rights: What is to be gained

"Teach process, not product," says Donald Murray.

The traditional English class appropriately deals with a product - finished writing. The writing class deals with unfinished writing, writing that is in the process of discovering meaning. (1977, reprinted 1982, p. 150.)

In this class the teacher's role too must change. For Murray, the teacher's function is neither that of judge (dispensing grades) nor that of Moses (demanding form where there is not yet content) but rather of listener. Whereas the students of Moses "may not yet have anything to say - at least nothing Moses thinks worth saying ... they produce assigned papers, mass exercises in form. They write description, argument, any form the teacher wants, on command... Many of the students develop the misconception that how you say it is more important than what you say." The teacher who is listener, however, "has few strict laws to enforce and few great truths to thunder ... he does not put content into his students, he draws out what is there."

This kind of 'new' teacher has certain basic assumptions, the first among them is that he respects the students' potential. He sees his students - even in the primary grades - as experienced human beings who have had

extensive contact with life and language. He realizes their principal problem is lack of self-respect - they do not think they have anything to say or the words with which to say it. He sees his job, as first of all, to convince each individual student he has something worth saying and his own way of saying it ... " What does the language teacher do?...He listens for voices.. for what is there,

(for what ) will make him respond as a reader, a human being, not an English Teacher". As such, he is alert to spot a glimpse of ( the following) elements in order to know that he is meeting a potential writer:

...

1. Honesty. Most rare. Most important. Nurture the student who speaks honestly of this world, who is direct, candid, accurate.

2. Subject. The teacher looks for a subject on which the student may be an authority ... And the teacher should make no judgement as to which subject is worthy of the writer's attention. All subject are, for the student must write from his own knowing and his own caring. (emphasis mine)

3. Structure - "Admire students who observe and order their observations into meaning."

4. Tone - " The student with his own tone of voice rises off the page..."

( Ibid, 1973, reprinted 1982, pp.152-153)

Finally, Murray reiterates the students' "writing rights". Uppermost in his canon is respect - for the student, by the teacher: respect for the students' potential so that, through their work, they can "earn self-respect". This will be "far more intellectually demanding than a traditional program" and first among his ways to give respect to students

in a Freshman English course in this:

"Students pick the subjects for most papers so they can write from a position of authority, teaching the subject to the instructor as the instructor teaches them to write." (1981, reprinted 1982, pp. 175-177)

Now, some eight years after writing about the 'new' teacher Murray is still calling for the act of 'derring-do' that he was propounding in 1973 when in an article entitled, "What, No Assignments?" published in Alberta English (Winter 1973-74) he had vigorously argued for the elimination of the "assigned topic". Teachers are dependent on them, and they are, as well, the cause of a lack of student writing. The assignment means to help, but it hinders; the assignment-giving teacher, wrapped in virtue, keeps the students from learning how to think and how to find their own subjects. Good writing emerges when topics are not assigned and the obligation of the teacher is to encourage the student's individual search for topics, not to reinforce their assumption that they have insufficient resources to find any on their own. Given the appropriate atmosphere, one which leaves room for conception, time for freewriting, and creates the possibility of publication, the teacher is correct in making the student responsible for finding the subject. Freedom, yes, freedom of subject, freedom of opinion and conclusion, freedom of form and length, but not freedom from

the deadline... Quantity in the beginning, then perhaps quality will come." (Ibid. 1973, reprinted 1982, p. 132) Putting the student on the spot also puts the teacher there. Stripping away the impediments to the student, (those very assignments which teachers find reassuring) will create the student-centred classroom. It is "one in which the student has no excuse for getting off the hook. He has the opportunity, the terrible freedom to learn." (Ibid. p. 133)

Murray's purpose is to bring out the writer hiding in every student in Freshman English. The excitement of discovering talent, capability, and thought, where it had not before manifested itself is surely the ultimate 'high' for all who embark on learning, on both sides of the desk.

Although Murray's professional concern is the student at college level, his arguments are, if anything, amplified when applied to high school, where teaching the student is as much a concern as teaching the subject. If there is a writer in every person, there is a person in every writer, and to care for both, in the context of the school, is surely a double blessing. To discover these "blessings" will be the purpose of this investigation. Murray's conditions have been implemented in the classroom where the case studies which follow in chapter three were assembled. They should be studied with a particular eye to assessing the type of learning which is documented and the degree to which his

assertions are confirmed.

Janet Emig on negative conditioning: What is being lost

Researchers who work with grade school rather than college age students tend to reflect a greater concern for the whole child, almost instinctively. Thus in studies involving high school students, personal and affective considerations, quite appropriately, are given their due. While Murray portrayed the college level challenges, Janet Emig's major work, The Composing Process of Twelfth Graders, uncovered the darker side in high schools. In it she documents the perceptions and traumas of her very capable 'Lynn' who says " hence when I got into high school, I didn't want to put titles on my compositions..." (Emig, 1971, p.86) who is conditioned for 250-300 word length, " as if she spent her writing life in school learning to respond to Madison Avenue contests of twenty-five-words-or-less"; and who is always inquiring anxiously, "How long should this be?" ( 1971 p. 71.)

Noting the conditioning of Lynn's preoccupations, Emig observes the fact that extensive (transactional) rather than reflexive (expressive) writing is so much easier for her. "Secondary school has provided her with very few school-sponsored opportunities" (Ibid. p.73) for any other kind of writing. Lynn really cares to write honestly when she writes

for her peers; for teachers she cares to follow instructions. She elects not to write about her grandmother, a subject which would require a degree of prewriting (thinking-time, coming-to-terms time, form-finding time) that is not feasible in the system in which Lynn writes for a next-Friday deadline. Her energy is not directed towards her ideas, and she frets about spelling and minute lexical choices.

"For self-sponsored writing... the most significant other is a peer who also writes. For school-sponsored writing, the most significant other is a teacher..." In the latter kind of writing the topics are often "pieces of literature... or abstract topics" in the former "they often write about 'self' and 'human relations'." (Ibid. pp.91-92) There is, then, a clear division, one which posits a wide gap and a bifurcation which Emig suggests has school writing the loser in terms of the quality of concern the writer brings to bear.

In the matter of stopping, contemplating the product, and reformulating, Emig notes that none of these happen in school-sponsored writing, but do in self-sponsored work. She observes,

The first teachers of composition... set rigid parameters to students' writing behaviors in school-sponsored writing that the students find difficult to make more supple. She continues, These descriptions of the composing process differ markedly from descriptions by established writers and with the students' own accounts,

conceptualizations, and practices. Students' awareness of these discrepancies leads to certain behaviors and attitudes: outward conformity but inward cynicism and hostility.

Most of the criteria by which students' school sponsored writing is evaluated concerns the accidents rather than the essences of discourse - that is, spelling, punctuation, penmanship, and length rather than thematic development, rhetorical and syntactic sophistication and fulfillment of intent. ( p.93)

In her chapter, "Implications", (presaging Murray) she observes,

Partially because they have no direct experience of composing, teachers of English err in important ways. They underconceptualize and oversimplify the process of composing. Planning degenerates into outlining: reformulating becomes the correction of minor infelicities.

They truncate the process of composing. From the accounts of the twelfth graders in the sample one can see that in self-sponsored writing, students engage in prewriting activities that last as long as two years (emphasis mine). In most American high schools, there are no sponsored prewriting activities:

...

Much of the teaching of composition in American high schools is essentially a neurotic activity:".

The ceaseless pointing out of specific errors does not lead to their elimination; "another index of neurosis is the systematic confusion of accidents and essences ( one wonders at times, if this confusion does not characterize American high schools in general.) (Ibid. p.99)



Her recommendations for a reversal of the current situation include a plea for increased reflexive writing in the form of diaries and journals, and, most pertinently to this discussion, another (wistful?) 'perhaps'...

Perhaps teachers will abandon the unimodal approach to writing and show a far greater generosity in the width of writing invitations they extend to all students. (emphasis mine) One wonders at times if the shying away from reflexive writing is not an unconscious effort to keep 'average' and 'less able' students from the kind of writing they can do best, and, often, far better than the 'able', since there is so marvellous a democracy in the distribution of feeling and imagination. (Ibid. p. 100)

The extending of just such an invitation is the subject of this study. However, the notion of freeing the "invitations" themselves perhaps requires prior justification. The issue is more complex than meets the eye. At what point does a teacher-initiated assignment (whether literature-related or not) with a specified purpose, length and register cease to be in any way a creation of (or creature of) the writer? Is there a clear line separating those tasks in which a student can or cannot justifiably be expected to inject his own cunning or wisdom? Equally, is there a point at which a teacher's assignment is unjustifiably vague or ambiguous, and ought to be faulted for offering too much scope or a daunting degree of freedom? There is, as Emig so aptly puts it, "a delicate balance, if not a paradox, which exists in the

giving of assignments." The number of variables a student may be asked to consider, as well as the fact that grading will be done comparatively, are some of the factors which circumscribe latitude. Clearly, 'freedom' must not obviate the necessity for course related writing since such writing forms a significant part of the composing undertaken by a high school class. The challenge is to make it writing that is, nonetheless, honest and authentic.

For purposes of this discussion, the distinction between composition and literature will be maintained. Although school-sponsored reading and literature class may well inform the creative output of writing done for English, the work on which this study is based is wholly separate from that required in 'Lit'.

The distinction is an important one to maintain, not only in the assessment of the findings here, but also for the implications of the integrated curricula of the '80's. The general risk is that in practice, all writing will be valued for its serviceability in expressing content of either learned or researched material which is school oriented to a large degree. If the two kinds of school writing (i.e. creative compositions on the one hand, and literature related tasks on the other) are to become indistinguishable, then the freedoms which are being propounded will, de-facto, be erased. The gap between theory and practice may well widen uncomfortably - a phenomenon which is observed in the recommendations of

theorists like Elbow and Murray. As writing takes a more practical path, the theoretical advice seems to veer away from the purer intentions to enhance student-centred creative work.

There is always the possibility that well-motivated but covert manipulation of the text by the teacher will muddy the water. The fundamental question to be put is ' Whose (creative) writing is this, anyway?'

#### Do as I say, not as I say I Do

The advocacy of implications for practice will be addressed in detail in the last chapter: however, certain points should now be scrutinized.

Regard, for a moment, Donald Murray's book A Writer Teaches Writing. He reprints Matthew Doherty's advice to teachers:

Try to establish a writing situation where there can be real communication, where the student is given a genuine opportunity to inform the teacher and the class about his specialized knowledge of bird-watching or whatever, or is encouraged to think that his opinion about the function of the witches in Macbeth might be interesting to the whole class. Let the theme topic come out of any heated discussion, intellectual fights which the teacher carefully starts and guides. Arrange the year's writing in a sequential series of themes which seek to promote specific writing skills one at a time. Do not try to teach everything at once on one theme.

(Emphasis mine) ( 1968, p. 222)

Leaving aside the suspicion that this may simply be

thinly disguised lock-step (this week's essay will be argumentation; but then, could it surface as descriptive after the student has been lead into and through a guided, heated discussion...? ) - Doherty's words do seem to point up a contradiction - "letting the theme topics come out of" can hardly serve both Billy's bird-watching and Mrs. Smith's carefully pre-arranged sequences at one and the same time.

There is an acknowledged imperative to teach writing skills, (e.g. essay organization, poetry )quite apart from encouraging students to acquire them as they choose to tackle a variety of topics and their appropriate modes, styles and so on. But there is also an acknowledged imperative to encourage and promote other facets of a student's intellectual profile, viz.

- 1 - personal growth,
- 2 - independent thinking ,
- 3 - exploration of self,
- 4 - the exercise of judgement - one aspect of which is suiting content to mode.

There can be little argument with the notion that these also belong in a high school writing curriculum; therefore, the question remaining is, to what degree, and by what process can these goals be achieved? Were we to define the latter as 'skills', in the conventional sense of the word, the apparent dichotomy might well be eliminated - a perspective which this study would like to promote.

Questions like these are emerging from the general enthusiasm generated by the newer ideas and methodologies, and that is heartening. But perhaps the term should be "the general skirmish"! Reading Peter Elbow's most recent advice to the wordlorn is, at times, like reading a handbook for guerilla warfare on the academic front.

Prefaced as a handbook designed to help the writer "get power over yourself and over the writing process;...being in charge, having control; not feeling stuck or helpless or intimidated," Elbow's book argues that at least one of the main enemies is the teacher, more specifically, "the problematic relationship that exists between the student-writer and the teacher-reader even when the teacher is a decent person doing a conscientious job." After a seemingly sympathetic nod in the direction of a typical teacher-reader "setting (his) tea cup among the ring stains on his desk" armed with two dictionaries, ready to take on the set of essays, this adversary is unmasked:

The papers are all on the same topic, which he chose. Sometimes he gives free-choice assignments, but when he does, more of the papers seem fruitless journeys down dead-end streets and he suspects that the students learn less about writing - though a few students take off and write something splendid. But he knows he's got to give free choice now and again just for relief to the troops. ( 1981, p.218)

Elbow then spells out his subversive advice - portentously entitled "Advice If You Are Currently Writing for Teachers".

-Even if you hate the assignment you now have-

- Work out an alternative assignment

- If you are assigned a piece of persuasion on a topic of no concern to you, perhaps you could choose an entirely different topic where you have a real audience but where the kind of persuasion is exactly the same as in the teacher's assignment.

- If you are supposed to write about some aspect of Hamlet...and promise to treat prominently that aspect of the play the teacher wanted you to treat..

- Something completely different - ... emphasize the fact that you'll work at least as hard or even harder on it than you would on his assignment and learn a lot about writing." (Ibid, p. 228-229)

If the battle is, as it appears to be, to wrest permission to write what one cares about, and if, as Elbow himself agrees, you accept the fact that ( the teacher ) probably has a serious agenda of skills and techniques for his assignment, then the battle does seem to be over the set topic itself. "Free choice now and again" is seen as of no more use than a temporary sop: "relief to the troops". But even more distressing is the apparent assumption that the enemy is an interlocked complex, consisting of topic and teacher, all built-in to the system.

"But I want to spell out more fully what kind of audience the teacher becomes by virtue of his role" - Elbow continues. He knows that advocating 'writing without teachers' is all well and good - but nobody is advocating

grading without teachers, or passing without grading. His handbook intends to take an ordinary writing student and hone him into a dead-earnest campaigner who can get the grade without the twin defeats of either swallowing the topic or producing the formulaic essay. Elbow echoes Murray, too, on the question of what teachers become by virtue of their role, i.e. when teachers assume the 'mantle of Moses', the chameleon students must also adapt to the role of Moses' followers, by virtue of their 'place'. " Is this O.K.? I hope I didn't do something wrong?" Teachers who read Elbow's book won't find it striking at all to read, " It's striking how often students actually say those words to you as they give you their papers: ' I hope this is what you wanted?'" (Ibid., p. 219) Consider the possibility of that becoming the teacher's question while regrading the student's piece!

Real: Is it really our goal?

"Real readers are different from teachers." One can hardly argue with that, or with Elbow's plea to writers to ensure that they address real audiences, while writing for teachers. Taking his formulation one step further: real writers are different from student writers. The point then becomes, how can we get students to start behaving like real writers? To pursue the logic ... since real topics are different from assignments, how can we get assignments to start behaving like topics writers will want to write about? - not have to write about; that's an assignment, by definition.

A fuller discussion of this aspect of the problem will be undertaken in the second chapter. For the moment, the point to be underscored is that new approaches to learning the craft of writing ( prewriting, focus on audience, revision and polishing that presupposes sufficient commitment) have thrown the 'new' writing student into an adversarial relationship with the system. Predictably so; what is advocated is not what is being implemented, and what is desirable is often impeded.

This is not meant to wring hands over the gap between school and "reality" i.e., life beyond school. It is meant to examine the very real clash between the methodology and its principles, on the one hand, and the ends or products demanded, on the other.

Caught between the two, the student can hardly feel secure. Is he genuinely to practice, explore, shape, or is he to try to do so all the while making sure the teacher hears what he ( the student) thinks that he ( the teacher) wants to hear? While advocating freewriting, real situations, etc., we nevertheless persist in giving topics, or formulae for producing a recognizable product. We are, thus, operating at cross-purposes. This is not an uncommon state of affairs, especially when new ideas rub shoulders with old practices. However, if one recognizes that these are the circumstances which are 'neurotic', and which create the cynicism or hostility Emig and Elbow unveil, then sorting out the



## CHAPTER II

contradictions becomes imperative. Granting that the two can be separated, this study strives to illuminate just what some of the consequences of letting are, as opposed to arranging and thus, hopefully, clarifying the distinctions which Doherty seems to fudge so quixotically. To the extent that we know what might emerge from "terrible freedom", to that extent will the debate be informed and constructive.

### The Philosophy Beneath the Philosophy

One major touchstone in the new philosophy is the intention to anchor writing in the writer's self. This objective, for the most part, has concentrated on allowing the writer's expertise or personal interest find expression on the page. Tangentially, there is an emerging interest in the possibility of tapping the unconscious, which has been tacitly acknowledged as a source of inspiration. But while the 'inner' self is part of what teachers want to engage, there does not seem to be any consistency of intent once the process has been initiated. Both freewriting and journal writing have had as their stated advantages, the eliciting and unburdening of 'what's on/in your mind.' Whether in order to think on paper, to make initial "raids on the inarticulate", or to exorcise this week's demon, the process of freewriting and diary-keeping has been demonstrably successful and needs no further justification - merely propagation.

Twenty years ago, in an essay entitled " The Uses of

the Unconscious in Composing" Janet Emig was in the vanguard, enlisting support for the hitherto ignored place, of the unconscious in the scheme of things. Writers, the real ones, rarely "admit to writing a wholly conscious or contrived piece." Yet, she points out, the prescriptive evidence offered to students not only precluded what she termed 'prewriting' ( long-term incubation of ideas) but also assumed that composing was a lock-step, orderly undertaking which could be accomplished with an academic metronomic pace. "Nowhere," she writes, " in such an account, is there acknowledgement that writing involves commerce with the unconscious self and that because it does, it is often a sloppy and inefficient procedure for even the most disciplined and professional authors." (1964, reprinted 1982, p.48) And nowhere, she argues, is there place for the stimulation or validation of quirks and styles that are recursive, instinctive, automatic (autonomic) or compulsive. Writers have their demons, their rituals of evocation and incantation, by which the germination and cultivation of ideas are forced to fruition. Months go by, not days; - " the daemon, unlike the conscious self, is not always an efficiency expert operating on Western Calvin time." (1983, p. 52)

She proposes that the demands of teachers change to acknowledge the fact that most of us are 'Beethovians', anguished creators from whom the glories we create are laboriously wrenched, not 'Mozartians' " who can instantly

arrange encounters with (our) unconscious". In light of that fact she entreates a degree of flexibility in the amount of time given a student so that he can be "encouraged to regard themes as entities that evolve and develop." Nor is that all. "As important as flexibility about time is allowance for idiosyncrasy" and she braves a suggestion with - "are we ready? - themes to be turned in on non-uniform sizes of paper and in puce-coloured ink." (1983, p.53)

This essay, "The Uses of the Unconscious", prepared for an NCTE conference in 1964, was itself written at a time when she was writing and publishing poetry. She includes this information in the preamble to the recent republication of it, and it is not, I think, coincidental, that this realization of hers crystallized around events which doubtless submerged her in deep emotional waters. The poems' subjects concern the suicide of a Harvard classmate and the death of one of her own high school students. ( 1983, p. 45)

As will be seen later in the case studies, the experience of being touched by death is probably, after dreaming, the one which most urgently coerces the mind into awareness of its hidden fears, anxieties and reactions. For Emig, I venture to say, her poetic response to the deaths crystallized for her the very real connection between the unconscious and the creative, which was articulated in the essay.

What she was proposing in that essay seems modest enough, in retrospect: flexible deadlines; a "small obeisance in the direction of the untidy, of the convoluted, of the not-wholly-known, of a more intricate self and process." ( 1983, p. 48 ) Movement toward this eminently sensible goal has been growing ( some would add 'with glacial speed' ). Certainly the advocacy of prewriting, process-focussed procedures for work under way, and respect for the student as apprentice writer, now form the new wisdom of pedagogical theory in writing.

My own study is a report of just such an "obeisance". The direction this investigation follows is in a straight line from two points - Emig through Murray - from her very modest proposal in 1964 to his recitation of writing rights for students in 1976. One of those freedoms, which remains in a grey area, is the freedom of subject choice. It may be " the last , for which the first was made".

The classroom context that fostered the findings to be reported herein was, for the most part, one that was consistent with the theory for approaches to writing just reviewed. Where it departs, particularly from the college-based sources ( e.g. Elbow, Murray, ) is relevant to the argument under examination. In the earlier pages of this chapter the question arose as to what an assignment is, in active practice. It will be necessary now to further pursue the definition in order to round out the point:

What purposes do the assignments serve, and can they be better served by having the assignment chosen by the student rather than the teacher?

The notion that writing class should be used to help a high school student grow productively and positively through his adolescent years is one seldom heard. Doubtless this is so because research tends to be written out of college experience where innovative practices not only can flourish, but, more to the point, where the single-minded purposiveness of writing class is taken for granted: viz. to turn out writers whose academic success depends on the practical skill achieved. At all events, college students have already traversed the worst of their adolescent years. Where college practice (eg. the humane classroom such as Denman describes) has attended to the individual's personal functioning, it has had the enhancement of social interaction as an intermediate goal whose function is to create an environment to support academic objectives. These objectives have such primacy that even the instructor, implementing the most enlightened methodology, will of necessity, have to set topics, modes, length, style, purpose, and so on. A glance at a recent publication will focus the evident dilemma. David Foster, in A Primer for Writing Teachers, acknowledges the existence of the "fault lines" between personal and transactional writing, and wants to keep them from becoming "serious fractures". He weighs the course planning and assignment setting a teacher

must do from a standpoint which endorses the view that the personal element is what makes writing good. His analysis of the options available pinpoints the flaws in several methods of sequencing. He notes the problem of students operating without a rhetorical context doing fixed mode assignments, doing exercises "in which dutifulness, rather than inventiveness, uniqueness, or any form of risk-taking is the supreme virtue". ( p.127) He acknowledges that academic topics ensure "academic gaming" and a development of "canny judgement about the teacher's biases". Finally, he calls for assignment sequences that "at all costs avoid a mere stringing together of modal tasks." ( p.128)

"But," as he concedes, "sometimes, even when assignments have all these things, ( rhetorical context, a clear topic, a distinct audience when students have gained some composing experience, and an underlying purpose that makes certain structures and styles appropriate) students may still perceive them as mere exercises (whereas)...an essential aspect of writing assignments is their genuine significance for the writer." He wants writing to be "fraught with consequences beyond merely good or bad grades" and describes a sample assignment which he says avoids the pitfalls. Upon closer examination, though, and in spite of all his caveats, his suggested assignment is specific and comprehensive, to a degree that there is little room for the writer's originality, insertion of content of personal significance, or invention

and organization. These latter points are his stated goals for students; the teacher's responsibility, he states, is to "help students learn to move freely within the universe of discourse where change and growth are articulated and recognized." They are there to get students to "experience the genuine power of effective writing" and to see its consequences. "The instructors can make this possible by establishing writing tasks that students must take seriously" (p.124.) (emphasis mine). "Call(ing) out their seriousness and invit(ing) them to discover the power of writing with writing that "bears some implication" for them "brings this discussion to the horns of a dilemma - around the word "must". Foster means that well chosen topics, which careful thought and devising will produce, "must" find a sure-fire responsive chord in each student. Even his example leaves that proposition open to question, but granting it, there still remains the other classroom "must". "You must take this seriously", when either explicit or tacitly understood by students in the classroom, is likely to insure the opposite, for exactly the reasons Foster has himself outlined earlier in this same section. The dilemma exists because of the Catch 22 - the "genuine significance for the writer of the task", which Foster so correctly indicates is "essential", evaporates the moment a student deduces that he has no voice in opting in or out of a task comprising several specifics that the teacher clearly thinks "has genuine significance for the writer of the task"... and which he must do.



What is needed is a 'way in' that honestly does not shuffle with the necessary 'lies' of classroom life. Some tasks are 'musts', others perhaps must not be. Which are the latter may be clearer when one looks closely at what students do write with self-selected topics. Foster is correct in asserting that writing teachers are not in the business of changing lives. An honest resolution of the dilemma may well lie in separating the 'musts' of teachers, i.e. getting written work produced, and the students' own 'musts', i.e. producing work which, by virtue of its real significance, will result in its being demonstrably good.

Success may well be measured by this benchmark:

But of the best leaders  
when their work is done  
the people all remark  
We have done it ourselves.  
Lao-Tze.

O, tis most sweet  
When in one line two crafts directly meet.

Ham.III,iv.

The question of what students write about, need to write about, or indeed ought to write about can hardly be less central. When all is said and done, skills are not an end in themselves, but simply the means to be developed and put to use in the service of meanings. The perceptions of the mind, transcribed on paper, are the "essences of discourse." (Emig, 1971, p. 93) Such a perspective is the counterbalance to the "back to basics" philosophy and is sorely needed, if for no other reason than to bring the pendulum back to a balanced understanding of means and ends within the great literacy debate of this decade.

James Moffett's chapter on writing in The Universe of Discourse addresses itself squarely to the issue of how a reliance on composition text books is inherently harmful to students learning to write. But many of his points can be read as more than simply exhortation to the individual teacher to dispense with manuals and assume a greater proximity to the students' output. The principles he enunciates have a far

broader implication.

We must avoid teaching "that discourse need not be motivated...that it is good to write even if you have nothing to say and no one to say it to." There are harmful side effects occurring unnoticed "because we have fastened on the logic of the subject, instead of the psychologic of the learner. Students adopt a strategy for beating the game of exercises: they take a simplistic approach, avoid thinking subtly or complexly, and say only what can lend itself readily to the purpose of the exercise." More to the point, "the poetic justice in this strategy is that the exercises themselves ignore the motivational and learning needs of the student." (Moffett, p. 206) And as for writing stimulants -

Whatever the kind of stimulant, the wiser course is to let it arise out of the daily drama of the student's life in and out of school, including his regular reading. In this way the stimulants are automatically geared to what the students know and care about. To present stimulants in a book is to run an unnecessary risk of irrelevance and canned writing.

At last we come to the assignment directions themselves. They, of course, are justified, but for them, who needs a book?... It is better anyway for the teacher to give the assignment because he can adapt it to his particular class - cast it in a way that they will understand, relate it to their other work, and so on. (pp.208-209)

In promoting the teacher as listener, not sole instigator, Moffett sees the textbook as an artificial

mediator, which "kill(s) spontaneity and the sense of adventure for both teacher and student." Furthermore, "because they predict and prepackage, they are bound to be inappropriate for some school populations, partly irrelevant to individual students, and ill-timed for all." (Ibid. p. 209)

In shifting the onus from textbooks to teachers, and, as well, in shifting the emphasis from pedagogical building blocks to spontaneity and adventure, he sharpens the focus on the students' own role in providing content. Moffett concludes: " My main purpose has been to propose that writing be taught naturalistically, by writing, and that the only texts be the student productions themselves." (Ibid. p. 210)

In a general condemnation of drills and textbook exercises, Frank Smith's chapter "On Teaching Writing", alerts readers to factors not usually remarked.

Writing develops as an individual develops, in many directions, continually, usually inconspicuously, but occasionally in dramatic and unforeseeable spurts... it is impossible to predict what individuals in a group of children will learn as a result of a particular activity ... in principle (every kind of writing activity) might contribute something, but ... also can bore or confuse.

As always, the teacher's best guide are learners themselves - their interest, creativity, and the amount of writing they willingly or voluntarily do. Teachers themselves must develop the insight and exercise the judgement about whether a particular activity will help or handicap a particular child. (Smith, 1982, p. 203)

The direction to be followed it would seem, in approaching the individualization of writing is then, one of working outward from the child, rather than the reverse. The presumption clearly is that, given his own head, and the freedom to develop inconspicuously or dramatically, the writer will respond, and the teaching will be response-based. In this approach, errors are valuable, even an essential learning instrument. " I think any learning psychologist would agree that avoiding error is an inferior learning strategy to capitalizing on error .... trial and error make for more success in the long run because it is accurate, specific, individual, and timely....unsolicited advice is unheeded advice."(Moffett, 1968, pp. 199-200)

If error is free of any other penalty save failure to achieve the goal, then error avoidance has only one motivation: improvement. If not, Moffett points out, " the learner engages with the authority and not with the intrinsic issues." (Moffett, p. 200) Left to his own motivating forces, a writer is likely to experiment with different modes, as a particular subject drives him to range across a gamut of subjects, at any given moment. If the theme propels him, he may play with it, once, or many times, to the point of obsession. Given the right encouragement to experiment, and the penalty-free freedom to do so, he may well take sound advice to broaden his horizons. Like as not, he may find that techniques or styles he had previously perceived as areas

of weakness do yield success when his subject urges it. Overcoming previously perceived insurmountable hurdles induces creativity and experiment rather than defensiveness and caution.

Many of the rationalizations for avoidance that students invent are based on previous failure with teacher dictated tasks. If a student perceives the fault for failure as his inability to conform to "dumb titles" or "rules for expository", the onus for lack of success will not shift to himself. Then blaming rather than writing is likely to be the only outcome.

Although no teacher knowingly chooses writing tasks with anything but student success in mind, it must be granted that adults cannot a priori or always be in tune with the adolescent - if only due to the generation gap. Ginott points out that were children or adults to behave or feel as normal teenagers do, doctors would issue alarming diagnoses. (1969, p. 79)

If one grants Moffett's point that the unsolicited is the unappreciated, or Murray's point, that the teacher's role is listener, one comes closer to a definition of writing that is in keeping with the freedom this study is advocating. With the student's own choice and judgement as a primary source of topics, assistance can come from teachers who utilize their own wisdom and experience to enable the student to exercise

his own analytical skills, judgement, etc. in the service of his piece. The writer becomes the decision maker, and the teacher's intent is to help the student work toward successful manipulation of a variety of elements without also creating arbitrary, external restrictions. Since the discriminations a writer makes as he suits form to content are at the heart of the writing task, (Emig, 1971) any intervention which takes that fundamental function out of the hands of the writer should, ideally, be avoided.

For a deeper examination of why free topic choice has never been seriously considered as acceptable practice, we will pursue a relevant digression at this point. The largely unspoken issue is: the teacher-as-controller. Without delving into an area which is outside the realm of this study it is nevertheless necessary to note that teacher behaviour is as much a factor in class productivity as student behaviour. In maintaining control, the intention may vary from wanting to grade comparatively within a small range of variables in order to insure validity, to the sheer exercise of power for its own sake by teachers who may feel uncomfortable, threatened, or incompetent to guide with a looser rein. The notion that one's duty is to get students through a variety of hoops rather than permit and inspire leaping, touches on one of the more complex aspects of teacher mentality. When does encouraging creativity shade into control?

Accepted practice has been to assign topics, titles, modes, lengths,- "today you will...", "this week's tasks, or titles, or topic sentences - will be.." - the strategems are all of a type. The rationale behind this is to some degree based on what may be a confusion of ingenuity and creativity. Teachers' rationales which justify what Moffett would label "an assignment that stipulates arbitrary limits that leave the writer with no real relationship between him and a subject " ( 1968, p. 206.) are legion. Sample these teachers, whom Smith derides:

I was given two explanations why seven-year old children in one school were not encouraged or expected to write fantasy. One teacher believed that writing what you know about was surely easier than having to make something up, and another asked how writing could be marked if it did not contain facts that might be right or wrong. (Smith, 1982, p.236 )

Reading these comments, it is tempting to observe that, were teacher-proofing the writing process the only justification for freeing children to write what they want, that would be 'paradise enow.'

Ingenuity itself is not, however, to be gainsaid. Some of the pleasure students and teachers sometimes take in writing is based on the variety of novel and clever ways a common topic is tackled. By way of stimulation, the engaging of a pupil's enthusiasm with a catchy topic is laudable and



useful, given the limited number of ways school-bound writers have to get going. However, as the constant and/or exclusive method of assigning compositions it must be seriously criticized in these terms: there is a contradiction of purpose in rewarding the adroit and/or swift imaginative manoeuvre when one purports to seek methods which primarily foster meaning, discovery, honesty, and multi-draft task involvement.

No matter how open-ended, some students will always react negatively ("boring titles") and therefore avoid the obligation of taking responsibility for the piece. This is a serious motivational/dynamic problem, to be looked at more closely later in this study. But even in the name of stimulating ingenuity, one must grant that for every topic that may be an imaginative springboard, one also risks distancing the student from his own centre and his own resources. In this matter of creativity, we are all, more or less gifted. However, so are we all in this matter of ingenuity. It is fallacious to assume that in demanding the one we are fostering the other. Even less rational is the assumption that by demanding ingenuity one is establishing the groundwork which insures a well functioning imaginative response every time.

Rather it may well be that we have subscribed to yet another learning fallacy, much like the once-sacrosanct belief that Latin would make Johnny more logical, or give him a more retentive mind and so on. That some students of Latin were

more logical led to a post hoc rationale that was fundamentally illogical. Likewise, ingenuity does benefit and please its practitioners, and, as a skill to be exercised in life, love, and writing, ought not to be discounted. But where a student may be forced to rely on it for the greater part of his school writing, the pedagogical priorities warrant questioning. If one grants that the objective is to train writers who see the use and function of writing as a self-rewarding, practical activity, then the emphasis in our teaching should be squarely on the self - and ingenuity, as well as the myriad other skills, must be marshalled to that end, not vice versa. The great danger in writing pedagogy is to assign what we want on the page with an eye to what or how much we want to correct, and rationalize it by (ingenious?) avowals about specific skill-related objectives. Limiting correction time is, of course, enlightened self-preservation; but workload factors ought to be subservient to pedagogical wisdom so that the tail does not wag the dog. As prewriting comes to be seen as a vitally necessary pre-condition to good writing, fostering ingenuity per se must be re-assessed and placed into perspective. Emig, in her 1971 study, discussed the inhibitions on choice of subject matter that arise as the writer contemplates the limited time period in which to prepare and compose. The student "does not elect to work on a topic or problem he regards as psychically or cognitively complex. Rather he chooses one he perceives as more 'programable' - that is, one that corresponds with some

kind of schema he has already learned or been taught". (1971, p. 50)

Emig has also pointed out that student writers care about meanings when they write for peers. (as distinct from their concerns when writing for teachers) - Logically then, a system which seeks to facilitate writing which communicates meaning will exploit the motivational drive inherent in writing for peers. If Emig is correct, such a shift in audience will result in qualitatively different writing. To the degree that the content is self-sponsored rather than school-sponsored, it will elicit a greater degree of care given to content. In sum, then, prewriting and peer directed writing are the elements Emig would identify as having been previously lacking in school writing.

The pedagogy which has resulted in greater peer involvement has gone far to capitalize on the motivational benefit of having an audience of fellow writers. Writing for peers has that 'serious purpose' that elicits 'real writing', and deep personal engagement results when topics have had the benefit of a long prewriting period. Creating classroom environments that create such positive climates is part of the evolution of writing since Emig. 'Engfish'\* doesn't often surface unless a student is straining to imitate what he

\* Macrorie's term of the approximations of artful prose usage that cripple student prose.

imagines teacher-prose to be. It is not likely to survive a classmate's puzzlement beyond the first draft stage.

One other perspective on the benefits to be derived from peer audiences for the students in the initial stages of composing is shed by Britton et al who point out that a young writer has difficulty "de-contextualizing, i.e. detaching what he wants to communicate from his own; context, for a reader who doesn't share it. They can only write for readers they know, and that is why the response to their writing is so dependent on the shared context of the undertaking." (1975, p. 42) Naturally, it is the children who share both the experiences and the writing that emerges from it, hence one should leave to them the choice of context. Certainly in the initial composing stages, they must write to each other with the ease of shared and familiar references: positing a general audience may doom the effort to failure.

The relevant point is this: adults are not automatically, or professionally, given a privileged peek into these contexts of their students' lives. They may hit the mark occasionally or serendipitously. Moreover, even were empathetic adults able to guess consistently and accurately would any selection of topics or scenarios as are usually assigned, cover the range for a class of thirty students, no matter how homogeneous? Does spring come to every heart? or cussedness? or bereavement?

If children find it difficult to decontextualize, then it follows that great care must be taken when creating assignments where extensive revision and drafting is expected. The degree of commitment to taking a piece to 'publication stage' is not really measurable. The student must take into consideration his own ability to succeed at the task as he has framed it. The teacher, as resource, will aid the process, but it is the writer's involvement that should provide the fuel for seeing the piece through. He has to have every reason to do so and one of the main reasons will be that he wants to say what it says as he sees it. When it is done, teachers, among his readers, will be there to tell him how well he has succeeded.

Britton et al have made the definitive distinctions with which we work. In the study described in The Development of Writing Abilities the considerations which led to the adoption of the terms: expressive, communicative, poetic emerged out of the recognition that the general problem underlying all others was: the question of the degree of involvement in the writing task. In terms of the school situation it is the problem of the set task and the extent to which the writer accepts it and makes it his own. When and if he makes it his own it would appear not to differ from a self-imposed task, that is, writing that is voluntarily undertaken. The researchers posited two categories: involved and perfunctory, and the former category yielded a third -

impelled writing. This sort is characterized by a sense of the writer being engulfed in a "rising tide". Rather than being motivated by extrinsic satisfactions, impelled writing betrays a level of commitment about which Britton asserts:

that the notion of a rising tide of involvement is not merely whimsical" and is "demonstrated by a number of pieces in which the writer seemed not to be in control of his writing but to be controlled by it. Here the topic had the writer by the throat, as it were, and its relevance to the task set was hard to determine. We called this writing impelled. We did not pursue these distinctions....but we thought, and think, they are highly relevant to a study of the process of writing in general and of particular relevance where closely defined tasks are increasingly set, as is likely to be the case in the later years of the secondary school. (1975, p.8) (Emphasis mine)

In considering "this involvement or alienation of students from their writing" under the general heading of 'The first stage: conception' the researchers address the problem thus:

it is characteristic of school writing that a task is set. However, that amount of choice the writer has in what he will write about, and how he will do it, varies enormously...Of course school pupils, like adults, sometimes decide for themselves to write something they want to write, and their teachers may not even see what is written. Writing that is totally self-initiated is of great interest to us, not least because it provides an important link with mature adult writing. It is also likely to be accompanied by much greater involvement by the writer and may have very much longer preparatory states, and most of

the processes mentioned here may be much more complex.

Whatever it is that provokes the decision to write, it may begin as an isolated event, but it soon comes to be seen in relation to all the writer's relevant previous experience. ( p. 23 )

The connection most clearly underscored here is that between the degree to which a writer owns or possesses his subject matter and the level of intensity the writing itself generates - a tangible enough quality that does not escape the reader's recognition at first reading. Britton vividly describes it as a piece which "has the writer by the throat". Elbow refers to some self-initiated pieces where "a few students take off and do something splendid." In the course of examining the writing which commanded my attention and led to this investigation, the pieces my students wrote which merit the label "impelled" were invariably conceived experientially, and intensely felt, dreamed, or empathized. Indeed, some of them had incubated for one or more years, or had been written about at intervals for several years. Both Britton and Emig, ten years ago, were absolutely correct in singling out for attention the qualitative gap between writing that is 'task' in every sense of the word, and writing that is, or is adopted as, self-initiated.

The methods by which a student writer can be helped to find his own themes, his authentic voice, and to seek commitment are by no means beyond our ken. The exhortations

and methodologies abound, in Elbow, Macrorie, and Murray, to name only a few. A more ominous question is whether the system has already channeled the student to the point where he fears or is unwilling to tackle a task where he is instructed to approach his topic. " ' in whatever way seems right to you'... ( This ) may not produce the kind of work the teacher had in mind, but it could encourage the baffled child to try to explain the task to himself and help him towards the beginnings of a more confident approach." When this doesn't work, teachers may " simplify the task ...prop up the writer with detailed instructions... but it won't help if the next assignment is different." (Britton, et al, 1975, p. 25)

What is constructive help and what is not, then, can be very moot. The 'lazy writing teacher' (Murray's term, i.e. the one who makes the students do the work) may come to be seen as the conscientious one. For, at the very least, such teachers avoid the pitfall of detailed instructions which may be negative and counterproductive in three ways:

- 1) Implying the potentially self-fulfilling assumption that it cannot be done without guidelines;
- 2) Confirming that composing as the teacher wants it done is, in fact, the objective;
- 3) Neglecting to validate the importance of satisfying the intrinsic demands of the piece.

It would be difficult to measure these negative



effects - nor would we want to undertake such an investigation. But the converse is possible, as this study seeks to demonstrate. How interesting might it become if one frees students to find their own way to become good writers through trial and error methodology? Would it result in genuine 'discovery' learning?

There is one especial question : Are there developments which can only be achieved by freeing a student writer for a long period? Is a gestation period necessary to allow the students' own ideas to formulate themselves, incorporate with ongoing learning or experiences, and find frequent, even repeated expression in writing? If so is this process of gestation missing in the traditional class - thus eclipsing the emergence of writing which might have been elicited under another regime? If so, what are the implications?

Positive answers to the above questions in this study emerged in the course of implementing a peer-feedback workshop in average classes of senior students. (Although freedom of topic choice was also extended to low stream seniors as well, it was not in the framework of weekly peer-feedback groupings.) The workshop extended authority to the students in two ways, choice of topic, on a weekly basis and the choice of pieces submitted for evaluation, one or two per term. The inclusion of daily freewriting, in the form of private journal

writing or peer-read, teacher-given 'task' exercises, provided two benefits. The journals permitted the tapping of the inner self and the personal or expressive core in the individual. The task served both as drills-for-skills and as catalysts for idea proliferation.

At the inception of the writing workshop class, the intention was to implement group collaborative methods, experiment with feedback ( student-to-student) and to increase the amount and variety of writing being done, without altering the teacher work load with respect to marking. In the course of listening, reading, and evaluating, the patterns of texts and their import for their writers began to surface and gradually captured my attention. A fuller description of the methodology precedes the case studies of the third chapter; for the present, the point to be pursued is that the evidence of thematic significance in the writing samples came to my initial attention serendipitously. At the time, ( the second year of workshops) I had written about Carla:

These compositions were not consciously conceived as a trilogy but their imaginative 'fulfillment' is as significant as the compositional ones. Certainly the freedom of topic choice permits an emotional unravelling that is as fundamental to the writer's impetus as is the need to "read to the end" for a reader engrossed in the vicarious experience of a love story. One could hypothesize a developmental correlation. Certainly her plots and subjects take a large leap in maturation, not only in life situations, but also in the degree of realism with which Carla approaches her heroines' lot in life.

Although the focus of this examination of her three stories will not be on content, it will be apparent that many of the changes she manifests in her sentences are in the area increasing meaning, regardless of surface simplicity or complexity.

The link between personal growth and writerly growth, I am now convinced, is not simply a happy accident; the two are probably mutually reinforcing as well as concomitant, and highly predictable. The degree to which self-selection of topic determines increased meaning, authenticity, cognitive and maturational growth, even enhanced style, may not be quantifiable. Nor may these attributes be causally separable from the other innovations of the workshop which, together, created a significant departure from previous practice for these students. However it was, the benefits of self-selection, per se began to catch my attention; when they became the subject of this study, they became strikingly apparent. In reading Elbow and, more particularly, David Holbrook, one can see why I need not have been surprised to find students responding in this exceptional manner. Primarily and consciously they were looking for success. Cautiously and tentatively they were injecting their own style and content, and finding, whether out of desperation, or inspiration, that the pieces that had meaning for themselves turned out better than pieces that did not. They also discovered that the motivation to perfect a piece had much to do with having to present it to the reading group. Their own purposiveness in pursuit of experimentation or exploration

provided some sort of creative head of steam. Albeit that for some of the students the realignment of their previous assumptions about teachers' roles and the obligation of the student was a year's work in itself, my sense of their work is that they all benefitted as writers. They ultimately responded positively to all the innovative aspects, and 'guarded their right to their own texts.' (Brannon & Knoblauch, 1982 ) The expectations were demanding - a new composition or revision every week. Elbow puts it this way: "Treat the rigid requirement as a blessing. Since you must crank out something every week, expect some of it to be terrible.." A "dry" week, or any week for that matter, could be used for a draft revision in place of a new piece. ( 1973, p. 79). This idea was shared in the same year by Murray, in an article entitled, 'What, No Assignments?' where we find: "Freedom, yes freedom of subject, freedom of opinion and conclusion, freedom of form and length, but not freedom from the deadline." ( 1973, reprinted 1982, p. 132).

The results accorded with what the experts predict. "Engfish" disappeared - no more tangles of pretentious stumbling; - but, more to the point, the students were finding their own meanings, themes and voices. I had let them "use whatever procedure you think best for deciding what to write. Write the same kind of thing over and over again if you wish. Or try out wildly different things... If you have the desire to write, there is probably some particular kind of writing

you dream of doing. Do it." (Elbow, p. 80) There was "rubble" and "cooking" and "yogurt" in Elbow's terms -: so how could I not let them serve up the banquet?

This freedom required of them that they exercise responsibility and judgement. It soon became evident how inexperienced and even apprehensive they were about doing so. Some of their responses were revealing. " Would you be offended, I mean, could I use slang - it wouldn't sound right otherwise - my character is a prostitute."

### The Purpose and Place of Freewriting: Free to do What?

Previously the arguments Emig made for tapping the unconscious were presented. Subsequent developments in writing have linked her arguments to the movement to incorporate both prewriting and freewriting into the composing process of student writers. \* The liveliest arguments for freewriting from Peter Elbow and Macrorie cite the freewriting process as the source for generating ideas and getting over the hump of the conception stage. This stage is important for it represents the first personal and emotional writing in the expressive mode. At this point, then, the emphasis is on generating ideas for writing. Or is it? A glance at a recently published guidebook, Writers Writing, (Brannon et al, 1982) illuminates the contradictory currents.

The first point suggests how to get into the habit of exploring ideas in writing and discovering what you want to say:

" Quickly list three topics you might want to write about". Point two advises: " Read your freewritings to your writing group. Which topic do they feel would be the most interesting to develop?" Point three hints at a different denouement, viz." Save your freewriting. You may want to develop it into an extended piece of writing later on."

\*. and flexible deadlines - now incorporated as open-ended draft stages and term-long, not week long deadlines.

It continues, in the next sentence: " Eric used free-writing as a way of generating ideas for a paper he was assigned to write to fulfill the following assignment" ( what followed was a literature assignment - an essay- " analyse Kurt Vonnegut's...)"

Between the freewriting  
and the topic

falls

the assignment

The juxtaposition of these two items: " save your freewriting" and "generate ideas for the assignment" is telling. Individually no teacher would quarrel with either. But, as the placement on the page suggests, the creative and the personal is likely to be shelved, along with the potential for developing a 'rising tide', of which Britton speaks, while the necessary business of literature class intrudes. The preempting of an organic, integrated process occurs unwittingly, and the integration of elements, as well as the right to delve, follow through, or not, is no longer in the hands of the freewriter. If the freewriting succeeds in creating the desired involvement, then the writer's frustration has, if anything, been enhanced!\*

\*. Ann Berthoff criticizes in a similar vein: " A textbook which exhorts students in the first chapter to carry through discovery procedures and in the second discusses the rhetorical modes as they were defined in the eighteenth century has not encouraged students to understand the relationship of earlier and later phases of composing." Her point is this: "For unless composing as a process is what we actually teach, not just what we proclaim, the ideal cannot be fruitful." ( 1980, p.75-76)

David Holbrook : A humane perspective

Holbrook on growth through self-expression.

The authority who speaks most eloquently on writing that incites growth is David Holbrook of Cambridge University. From the dual perspective of the education faculty and his own broad classroom experience, he has made many observations which are germane to this discussion.

Whether with reference to the psychic reverberations of literature, or the lurching telling of 'D' stream students, his books describe the phenomena under examination here. The secret places of a child's interior world are moved and engaged in creative output when given the correct stimuli and appropriate outlet. His purpose, put at its simplest, is to take what a child produces on a page and use it to understand and help that child- though not overstepping the boundary between legitimate classroom concerns and therapy.

Children, to some degree, all function as did 'George', one of Holbrook's cases in point. When George wrote he "spoke better than he knew". His work alters in theme from typically adolescent fantasies about knife attacks (reflecting the aggressive needs and fears of boys who are becoming men) to tree of life-themes. Holbrook saw George progressively making positive gains "which have been won by allowing George to explore his unconscious fear and guilt" and which have



moved him to be "able to be glad in a feeling of joy and goodness". Moreover, (his) "little poem, showing a capacity for a positive sense of goodness...marks an important stage in his development." (1964, p. 70)

This concern for assessment of a child's total development, so different from our North American notion of evaluation has been further developed and elaborated by A. Wilkinson.(1982) It is in the nature of English schools to assess a child's development in order to know where he is as a person not to be satisfied only to know at what stage his skills are.(Michael Hayhoe - May 1984 in conversation with this investigator.)

Holbrook's view holds as axiomatic the notion that the process of writing and its acceptance by the teacher helps create the changes that are reflected in it. And if we posit that writing is, or initiates, discovery, that the point of utterance yields truths we did not know existed, but now do, then there is a fundamental truth in what Holbrook believes. Holbrooks' essay on George is worth presenting more fully:

What I have said in the previous paragraph is not offered as psychoanalytical, but as a search, through literary analysis, for some unconscious psychic pressure under the surface. These aspects of his writing are worth taking note of, even if we admit that to interpret his phantasies to ourselves properly we would need to know a great deal more about George, and that there must be other possible interpretations. Yet we may accept that the phantasy is a symbolisation of something of this kind, and it helps us to help him if we are aware of it, as we can from our own reading and analysis of poetry. And this is confirmed by other evidence. Later George told the Head, "That old pig I wrote about, Sir - she won't bother no one no more. She got out and got in front of a train. She's six foot down." The humanisation confirms George's more than casual interest in the family sow, and the train story, which we were unable to confirm, may yet be a further symbolisation of destructive impulses. It is not just a funny story, but an important contest with strong unconscious feelings. It is as important to George as that - and as valuable in overcoming possible unconscious fears, by dramatised comedy.

This story was the culmination of a sequence of stories by George, in which there were always trouble-makers who want knives, to make trouble with. They seek to hit people, sometimes women, over the head, sometimes men in the 'house of love'. Young boys are murdered, and run away - authority is always clashing with the protagonists. Such material is familiar in all small boys' work, but here there is so little else, and we see with bare starkness the Oedipus material and unconscious conflicts within him which obsess George. Yet because he is encouraged to write about these disturbing things, he does write, and covers page after page with his scrawl - which is not altogether unreadable. In the end he is even able to write an almost passable letter, and this I feel sure is as far as anyone could ever get with George in the secondary school, given his writing ability

when he left primary school. The free expression of unconscious material as fiction both helped George with the self-respect he needed at incipient adolescence, and also helped him to begin to write effectively. (1964, p.65)

Furthermore, Holbrook presents George's stories to show a number of things. First, that a teacher of English by the informal imaginative method must have patience - these stories are George's output for about four months. Many seem to be merely stock pattern television or film play stuff. Yet under the surface a teacher concerned with literacy by content...will note occasional indications of George's progress, in the order and sequence.

He is obsessed with guilt stories, and takes in materials from newspaper sensationalism ...But he selects for his own needs... I can see here material which is probably symbolism of unconscious Oedipus impulse and so forth - ... But at these limits of "psychoanalytic" interpretation I stop; yet these glimpses help me to be patient, and hope for improved literacy, coming by some sudden success. George has signally failed to learn to read or write... But yet he is obviously asking me how to spell more words... he wants to begin to write with panache: he is obviously enjoying himself... The piece in the middle is sheer verbal enjoyment. (pp.72-73)

George has clearly ranged from the expressive to the poetic. Equally clearly he has been motivated to write. The psychiatrist commentator adds " This piece seems so astonishingly at variance with the other children's comments that 'George can't read' that again perhaps one may say, rather, that it was that he dare not read or write." \*

\*.cf. Danny's case study, where in his last note to me, discussing his pride at having written three long pieces. "How do you spell glad, G-L-A-D?"

At chapter's end, the psychiatrist concludes, "I think there are more disturbances in this pupil than the author permits himself to observe... No doubt the acceptance of his violent phantasies without moral condemnation must have contributed a good deal of relief, and encouraged him to bring out more."(p.73 )\*

To which Holbrook adds: " Some readers of my manuscript have suggested that my references to the Oedipus myth in the psyche of such a child may frighten unconvinced teachers away from my thesis. I can only suggest that any teacher who reads a good deal of free writing by small boys must inevitably be struck with the recurrence of this theme." (1964, p. 76)

This theme, and others equally prominent in adolescents' development, are represented in the following case studies. In themselves, they reflect the growing pains and daydreams typical of their authors' time and place. Since they express only what their authors wished, these pieces form a group whose collective message is witness to two important facts: they authentically say only what the writers themselves wanted said; and, whether purposefully or in play, the direction they took, at random or methodically, was also entirely determined by their authors. Whether well done or not, they have served their owners well, and that is what matters most.

\*. cf. Louise's stories.

### CHAPTER III: PROLOGUE AND CASE STUDIES

In the fall of 1981, I initiated a radical alteration to the method of teaching writing in my grade XI classes. A fuller description of the innovations follows; for the moment, the relevant points are

1) Overall, there was a greatly increased amount of writing being generated, and

2) All topics were self-selected, as was the final choice for submission.

The intent in this reorganization was to observe in practice a 'humanistic classroom approach'. However, during the second year of implementation, the data which substantiates the findings of this monograph began to emerge, so that at the beginning of the third year, (Fall, 1983), specific attention was focused on self-generated topics.

During the three years, two groups of matriculation students participated in the 'workshop' for three terms. In the last year, however, free topic choice was also extended to a general group, but not within the weekly workshop context.

The school itself is a large polyvalent with a student population that encompasses a wide range of ability from varied socio-economic backgrounds. These specific students were in the regular stream with students destined for futures as diverse as the beauty salon and the academic professions. The classes met four times a week, for periods of sixty-three minutes: one of which was devoted to the

workshop. All classes began with freewriting; this time was devoted to either personal journal writing (absolutely private) or teacher selected tasks as 'exercises'. The use of freewriting as inspiration for students' compositions was suggested, but not stressed.

To facilitate acquiring data, I attempted to be alert to 'significant' content, but no pre-determined method existed for isolating specific writing or writers. Rather, I deliberately adhered to the usual methods of reading and grading formally practiced over the course of ten years of experience with Grade XI students. In the first two years, pieces which appeared to be unusual, or unusually good, were those photostated and kept. In the last year all writing submitted, along with its draft copy was retained. The Christmas examinations were also kept and stored for further evaluation in June, when their (by then) long forgotten content did yield further confirmation of emerging patterns.

The fact that the students' individualistic use of topic selection came to my attention so vividly was significantly aided by the fact that I was the sole reader of both their examinations and their submitted term work. Thus there was a greater likelihood of my noticing continuity or significant departures in their work than would be afforded to teachers whose exams are graded in committee.

This is a point worth stressing, since the investigative process itself, as well as the methods of observation brought to light that which, in the normal course of things, would not be readily apparent.

Specifically, these practices were:

- 1) Reading all examination writing as well as all term assignments.
- 2) Perusing feedback comments and rough drafts of submitted final copy.
- 3) Some deliberate investigative questioning of an open ended nature intended to elicit information concerning the source of ideas.
- 4) Collecting what at any single point in time might have appeared as random written work without discernible pattern or theme and re-examining this work at year's end for the developmental evidence it might demonstrate.

This latter practice was, of course, contrary to the usual way in which teachers normally examine submitted work. When grading, the intention usually is to see the achievement of the individual relative to that of the group, or to the terms of the task. Accordingly when the performance of a class of students is examined at any one point in the year certain types of connections are not perceptible. The view in this study is longitudinal. The connections in a single



students' output from November to June were discernible when assembled, or reconstructed after the fact. The schema which emerged was, if nothing else, different from what is usually perceived by the teacher.

The relevance of this perception to the findings is this: the phenomena which are reported can be presumed to be happening, in varying degrees, to individual students all the time. It may not be immediately apparent within the usual routines of regular classroom practice, but one can validly conclude after considering the evidence presented in this investigation that it is occurring. If this conclusion is accurate and the process deemed valuable, then it can be initiated, encouraged and enhanced by specific and appropriate methods.

#### The Classroom Procedure

Beginning after first term and one traditional assignment had been completed, graded, and returned, the weekly sessions began. Students were required to bring in one new, or revised piece of writing every week. No class time was allocated to composition; the workshop time was exclusively devoted to peer conferences of about forty-five minute duration.

Each group comprised four members; the criteria for inclusion was friendship and the groups remained stable

throughout the year. This resulted in fairly homogeneous groups; the range of ability among the groups tended to be greater than that within any given group. Progress was consistently maintained by all groups, and though the better groups tended to become exceptionally good as they added strength to strength, it was nevertheless apparent that seriously weak students also benefitted significantly. By June there were virtually no failures.

One long or two short pieces of writing were required for evaluation per term, self-selected from the student's portfolio. No formal constraints existed, either in length, mode or topic. The students were requested to submit enough text ( about 1000 words) to permit fair comparative evaluation and encouraged to produce work in as near to publication stage as possible. Consultation with the teacher on work in progress was entirely voluntary, and never formally required, though frequently suggested or offered. A few writers availed themselves of individual help on a random but regular basis; most did not. Deadlines were firm. Grades were based on content and form(i.e. mechanics) 25 and 15 respectively. No re-writing was allowed(as was the case for the first term's compositions and essay). Each term's final grade for composition usually included additional marks for 'form' which were earned on other written assignments in Literature ( tests and essays ) to a total of less than half the composition's value.

Frequent feedback was solicited by the teacher, but only in relation to the workings of the workshop class, or all of its innovations ( only one of which was self-selection of topics.) Individual comments were sometimes solicited in the form of a request from me to "write it down" in instances when a conversation or chance remark seemed relevant. The student was not given an explanation beyond the fact that the feedback was needed in the course of a study being undertaken. At no time was the subject of self-selected topics raised or identified: all references to this study referred to "the writing class " and its several innovations.

Within the class, the workshop period involved each student in reading and writing comments on each other's pieces. The attitude I attempted to foster was one in which the reader was there as a sounding board or as one who could alert the writer to problems, not someone who was responsible for correction. The writers were solely responsible for their own texts.

In general, the discussions that took place in the groups seemed to focus on text, i.e. plot and breakdowns in comprehensibility. Originality was often praised, though initially, absurdities tended to be tolerated. As the year progressed, a much greater degree of openness and honesty characterized the interactions; this shift was apparent to all and welcome.

Self-selected topics were universally appreciated, though finding them with such regularity was perceived as onerous. The oft-repeated advice to attempt a variety of modes and topics was generally heeded. As well, the weeks immediately preceding the final deadline became 'revise and proofread' time, although any revision counted as a legitimate submission for the week. The students' awareness of the particular usefulness of this part of the process was most noticeable as they began to demand class time for peer proofreading of their literature essays.

In attempting to free the students from previously learned traditional modes, I adopted their term "comp" to refer to all submitted pieces of work. The many attempts to define a piece by terms such as narrative or descriptive were deflected. Directions were focussed towards getting the student to choose an appropriate form or style. Experimentation, or moving beyond what had seemed traditional or expected, was encouraged, though examples were not specifically demonstrated. Whatever writing emerged was either self-generated or due to the influence of what had been read or experienced among the individual members of the class, either in the workshop drafts or the shared freewriting. These were teacher designated tasks or topics given at the rate of one or occasionally two a week.

A few students found the actual freedom to generate

ideas difficult but they were very much the exceptions. Usually the freedom was welcomed and jealously guarded.

At the end of the year, a questionnaire, designed to elicit data about the class, asked: which of the four innovations would you carry over to CEGEP, if you could. The replies were approximately 95% in favour of ( and split evenly between) self-selection of topic or self-selection from a portfolio of work. This evidence of 'the joy of ownership' came from all the students. The case studies which follow are only a small portion of the interesting samples that emerged. They reflect primarily the 'use of ownership'; I trust the joy is also apparent.

The relative merit of my students' work may be judged by this fact: with the exception of two pieces, all the prose printed in the last four issues of Opus ( spanning Spring 1982 to Fall 1984) has been work produced in my classes.

"The unexamined life..."

Recently the theory has been articulated that language develops as the individual searches for meaning - that is as he searches to make sense of his experience. Another fundamental is that understanding grows when it is supported by and provoked by talk and concrete experience. These assertions are, in a sense, palindromes. Meaning is gained by verbalization, and the sense one makes of one's own experience is accomplished by means of extending language to encompass the ideas sought.

Writing about one's own situation with self-conscious and deliberate self-awareness, Marco and Laurie Ann demonstrate the interlocking and reciprocal functions of language which make meaning of one's own life and leads, ineluctably, to personal growth.

Search for Self: A Year's Work

Marco: Uncovering the truth; becoming a better self

Laurie-Ann: Stalking the problem; solving it

Marco:

Autobiography to Autoanalysis:

Marco is a tall lean, dark-haired young man who carries himself in a casual and offhand manner. He could easily be imagined at home among a group of self-assured young men lounging in a Spanish town square. His coming of age in Canada against a background of conflict both with his Spanish born father and the last several years of English teachers provides the emotional baggage which he brings to class. The first inkling I had of his protracted bouts with authority came in the first of the letters he wrote which arrived in the first lot (Oct.) of personal letters my students send me throughout the year. His letter opened with an almost audible sigh of relief. This was a class, he said, where the respect between student and teacher was mutual; a state of affairs, he implied was atypical. He referred briefly to last year's conflict with his English teacher, a contest of wills which he took all the way to the principal, who had interceded on his behalf, but which he lost, nonetheless. This much I understood: he wanted me to know where he was 'coming from', and in what frame of mind. Had it not been for this letter, however, I would not have noted any particularly positive attitude; in class he participated thoughtfully, but sparingly he expressed himself orally in a way that indicated quite a lack of sophistication: His speech that was laced with 'moving



right along' and a general style that was typical of lower stream boys. However he usually had perceptive comments to make, and seemed, flustered, if not actually surprised, at having his ideas praised or picked up by me. He let me know of his dislike for a "preppy" eager-beaver male student in the class who generally had answers to every question. For the first few months of the year, he was affable, but in no way trying to impress. He chatted often with the pretty girls seated on either side of him, was amiable as he left class, and left the impression of being a self-possessed young man of strong feelings who felt at ease amongst his peers. Later on in the year I discovered who they were : a group of boys who had come to our school in Grade X. I had taught several of them in low stream classes; the kind of boys who have little academic capacity, less interest and much frustration - the potential failures of our society acting out their negative attitudes and passive hostility in class.

By the time I knew of this, Marco had begun to tell me of his sense of drifting away from them and his uncomfortable feelings about the disloyal, almost snobbish implications involved in his change of heart towards them. This state of affairs is foreshadowed in his first composition. Called 'Changes' it is a first person account of his rejection of a pattern of teen-age fun that was characterized by drinking beer, smoking joints, and "talking

behind each others' backs". The incident which leads to a break with his old ways and with the dependency on a friendship which demanded the hated way of life is presented in the story thus:

At this point my eyesight gave away like when you're lying down watching T.V. and you get up fast and then go blind and feel faint. I started to throw up with an almost immoral will. I almost went into convulsions. Just then Mat came in and said, "Can't you see what you're doing to yourself! Don't you see how useless all this is! I'd rather work out my problems with my ol'man than keep doing this crap.!"

The denouement approaches quickly, with he and Matt having a year of doing "What we really want to do and not what we thought people expected of us. We finally broke loose of that we were entangled in and now we are experiencing freedom in its true sense". The story ends with the two boys' families having Christmas dinner together. His last line proved to be prophetic: "Changes are scary and do take courage, but in the end, it's for the best."

This five-hundred word composition had thirteen single spaced tightly crammed pages of rough drafts attached. In one of the drafts his former buddies\* die in a car accident during the year of his and Matt's redemption.\*

\*( In the first drafts, Matt bears the real name of one of Marco's former mates who dropped out of the school after an inglorious year in 412 English)

\* The draft material which does not survive into the final copy, with its disturbing content, tells a great deal about what Marco feels.

He describes the year thus: " I lost my security blanket and I feel more secure than ever." As his friends die, high on acid, he comments "I'm very sorry they didn't catch my bus. They say people change their destiny by just missing a bus. I finally missed mine."

At the same time, about December of 1983 Marco wrote his Christmas exams. On the composition exam, his ideas were sound, his arguments were well developed, but he paid slight heed to the terms of the question and it cost him a 10% loss. However off the topic, he seemed bent on writing a spirited condemnation of the nuclear race ( "a ratrace")instead of a view of the world in 2083.

His style on the literature exam reflected his vernacular fairly accurately. In the short story 'War' by Pirandello: " Death stinks and losing your loved ones stinks even more", on Jane Eyre: " She, later, defies all stereotypes of governesses and climbs the ladder of society...This usually does not happen even today but she beat the system and made it work for her. She's humble yet proud and she almost is invulnerable except to love." His style is one I recognize as the unvarnished vernacular of his street-smart set of friends. Worth noting is Marco's intense sensitivity to the emotional facet of the events, both as motivation and reaction, which is evident in these samples (chosen randomly). This is a tangential glance; what Marco will tell of himself will become clear enough, for he had

already chosen autobiographical narrative as his mode when the free choice of topics were put in place in composition class.

In 'Changes', the aspect Marco seems to be celebrating is his breaking loose of a pattern of conformity with a destructive peer group and his emergence as a self-governing person. The courage to make the break receives his conscious self-congratulation.

Becoming a self-defining individual is one of the major tasks of adolescence, (to be observed more clearly in the next case study, Laurie Ann.) Although it is clearly uppermost in Marco's mind at the time of writing 'Changes' (Nov. - Dec. ), it does not re-emerge as he turns his attention to a much profounder issue. This issue, the reasons behind his habitual drinking and "toking" with the boys, surfaces on only one line of the submitted draft (quoted above), and likewise in a line in one of the drafts (there were three) full of lively thought, detail, and dialogue, unlike his cleaned-up and over simplified 'good' copy).

The line, in one of the drafts, says:

"But my father got me so fed up with his egotistical attitude that I had to get the hell out of my house and to my security blanket." (Emphasis mine)

In the final draft, Matt's intervention is a clue to where Marco's senses tell him lies the true solution, "working out problems with the ol'man". Only in the rough

drafts, does Marco speak voluably about the thought processes involved in this evolution, and he does so with self-awareness and honest introspection.

Memories ran through my mind of previous week-ends and how special and different this one was. Special because I began looking at everyone and everthing from a third moralistic person's point of view...I began to question lots of things I had previously just accepted as part of life or at least my life. Why did we spend 20 dollars on hash and beer, take it in and then try to act sober? The reasons were not obvious to me.

Having turned his mind to the exploration of what bothered him and needed to be understood; and, having the freedom to do so, Marco set about it singlemindely and determinedly, to do so. The rest of his year in English was spent creating and thinking, questioning himself, reading and incorporating, and finally, unearthing and resolving. The process was his own undertaking. It was helped by a few happy coincidences which dovetailed with this investigator's own learning.

My own reading of the theory of writing had often talked about putting a student in touch with his own dreams. As a catchphrase for tapping the unconscious, or self-discovery it was familiar; suddenly it appeared to me to be intended as a very practical idea for freewriting. One day in early January I proposed the task for shared writing (i.e. a ten minute daily writing session which, unlike the private

journal, does have a reader. In these sessions I stipulate a set topic, purpose or audience, quite randomly.) On this day I proposed we would write out a dream; the reader would psychoanalyse it. As luck would have it, I participated this time. When I was done, the only head not still bending over the page was Marco's. Recalling his letter, and his praise of my respect for students, I felt he was likely to agree to exchange with me, and he did so readily. My dream eluded him; he asked to keep it to think it over at leisure. I analysed his, signed it playfully, and returned it.

#### MARCO'S DREAM

Every couple of months it happens. I wake up in a cold sweat. The kind where you have to change the sheets and take a shower or you won't sleep for the rest of the night. My dream goes as follows, I wake up one morning. Not with the morning light but with a howling wind, and with my bed shaking and furniture flying around. The shades are down and somehow I know that if I open the shades, the possession of my room will discontinue. I get up to go open them but something throws me out of the room into the hall. By this time my mother and sister are starting to freak out. My sister just sits there and cries. My mother tries to get in but the winds are blowing from the shades and she can't get there. Satanic faces appear in the room and yell out to us. My father meanwhile is shaving in the washroom which is a door down the hall. He can see what's going on from the mirror's reflection but he doesn't do anything. Meanwhile we keep trying and we keep getting hurt. So I get up and start telling my father to do something. So, casually, I might add, he goes to the room, walks in, opens the shades, everything disappears, he continues shaving, and I wake up.

My Reply

Marco - This dream seems to reveal a young man's frustration at having to envy as well as resent his father's competence.

How can you assume manliness, when someone else seems to have cornered the market ( at your house, so to speak?) Yet how can you not be grateful for the fact that he can save you from destruction?

This is the ambivalence of young men in relation to their envy/hate vis a vis the father they admire but want to equal.

Dr. Sheps

Toward the end of the Jan.- Feb. term each member of the classes involved in the writing workshop wrote a personal comment which I solicited. Marco's had to be returned with a request to please supply the information requested. His initial page of comments elaborated on his reasons for not complying. His general stance speaks for itself; suffice to say that a good deal of trust must have existed for him to say his say. The returned comments are of an entirely different nature, but each may be as honest as the other, since one does not contradict the other. In the first, Marco reveals himself:

Dear Ms. Sheps,

When students complain about something in the school, I get the feeling that staff members just take the complaint as a compliment on their work. What I mean is that they probably think "what they ( the students) don't like is good for them." That's why this year I've taken upon myself

to just shut up about anything the school puts down on me. I am not going to complain about your writing program like most students probably will because I don't think I have a good reason to back me up. The most popular excuse is, "It's too much work to have one comp. a week.". I don't think that's a good excuse. On the other hand, I'm not going to say I like it either because I hate to be told when and what to write.\* You don't tell us what to write but you do tell us when. I don't mind a deadline but to have to have a comp every Tuesday last period bothers me. But I'm not here to tell people how to run things, I'm just here to finish what I started.

Dear Ms. Sheps,

The writing programme has worked for me nicely. Having one comp a week works wonders on the creative side of our intellect. The journal lets us express our personal emotions on paper and that's good. The groups we get into are very refreshing because they help the individual hear the truth about their writing. It helps me quite a bit to know what people think about my writing. It also greatly improves the final comp.

All in all it is a good program which should have been installed in our schools a long time back.

The reason I wrote what I wrote in back is that I didn't want to really comment on the program but I guess I had to.

At this same point in the year, his second story was handed in. In this one, the protagonist is named Bowie. He remains the main character for the rest of the stories. It is clear that Bowie is the "I" of "Changes". His "security blanket" is the same basement, with the same activities, \*cf. p. 20 - Emig labels this state "outward conformity but inward cynicism and hostility."



however the focus of the narrative has shifted radically.

In place of the young man who chooses his own salvation by veering away from his friends, this hero is a young man whose downfall and death is precipitated by yet another instance of humiliation at his father's hands coincidental with his girlfriend's betrayal. This time it is Bowie who dies in a car accident. It is his father who is left hapless at the end. There is a thread that is woven through all three drafts; one day he would reverse the 'losing' that is inevitable in the face of his father's fist, abusive authority and constant humiliation of him. This "win" is presented in the final paragraph.

Bowie's soul hovered over the bed and watched the scene. He thought about the peace he had finally found and about how, after all this time, after all the waiting, he had won. At least he thought so. His soul then faded in all directions to oblivion.

The narrative focusses heavily on two incidents. In these, Bowie fails to change a car battery and is humiliated publicly on the front lawn; in the second he is sent out of the family restaurant in disgrace after breaking some dishes when working as a busboy. ( This last incident is true; the other may or may not be). Between these two events he has gone to a party found his girlfriend in the arms of someone else. The final event takes place in the same basement, where

he has retreated. He smokes a joint, and speaks his heart to Jameson, his friend:

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing much. Just that my father seems to feed on my being embarrassed and insulted, especially in public. I never seem to make him happy or proud. He won't let me, dammit. And when he gets the provincial and sees I didn't graduate, he'll go nuts on my face. And Marg, well that 's another story...."

An examination of the two complete drafts and part of an initial one show several points worthy of comment; his narrative skill is developing, as seen by the effective revision and reshaping he undertakes; and the ventures into psychic territory he is not yet in control of, and therefore discards.

The earliest draft sees the girlfriend's betrayal dealt with in eight lines, and it tells more about Bowie's emotional vulnerability than anything else. The later version is a fully depicted event, rich in detail and imagaic explicitness.

Draft 1. "Bowie had a nice looking girlfriend whom he loved quite a bit, he felt she was the only sure thing in his life. He opened up his heart wide to her. This open flesh, like all other wounds was very likely to leave a scar. That Monday in school she decided nine months of seeing him was more than she needed. When he got home that night Bowie lashed out in an incredible fury that would have scared a Hun."

That version does not appear in the subsequent drafts. The emotionally revealing confession is replaced with a long scene in which her refusal to date Bowie that night is followed by this discovery.

"He was dumbfounded at what he saw in the "make-out" corner of the hall. Marg had a hand up (his) shirt and she had her hand in...Greg's pants!"

In the same draft, slashed out with long x's Marco has also a paragraph in which his mother "attacks his intelligence".

It follows the previously quoted scene with his own fury and tears. The association of the betrayal of the two women who matter, is, on reflection, not without literary precedent.

"She had gotten a call from his English teacher of his behaviour and marks. His mother want(ed) to call his father. He slipped into his basement to think. His mother put all her fears into him, she let him sing but never fly. She always found out where he had been so of course she helped him build the wall since birth. The father, only since he he came home drunk for the first time. Before that, he never spoke to him. Bowie was breaking up."

The linking of his mother and his English teacher may not be fortuitous either. But, this paragraph, vigorously excised, is a deletion Marco consciously accounts for later on. His mother does not figure in these biographical stories.

And not until after he has sorted out the father problem, and after the final essay on the June exam will he understand his own responses to her or her role in the conflict with his father which absorbs all his emotional energy at this stage.

Looking at the two pieces of writing I received in February what is predominant is his adversarial stance. In draft, he writes of himself:

"He was indifferent to his failing grades and his growing conflicts with authority figures".

As his letter to me suggests, he is trying his best to cast me into that role, though he grudgingly admits that he is not told what to write, only when. He also writes positively when asked to, but then, he has forewarned me that he intends to "shut up about anything the school puts down on me." He has fashioned it like the puzzle which begins, "the message on the other side of this paper is false, and the other side says, "the message on this side is true."

One message though is very loud and clear:

"His father stopped the arguing with a fist...Bowie tried to refuse at first for fear of failing in front of him but saw no way out."

And when the chore his father set is finally taken out of Bowie's incompetent hands:

"He shoved Bowie aside like a sack of potatoes and Bowie, feeling like one of these potatoes, just stood there listening

as his father said,

"You fucking wimp! What are you good for? At your age, I could fix the transmission on any car you threw at me. Christ! When are you gonna learn!"

Bowie didn't know what to do while his father changed the battery. If he went into the house, he'd look like a cry baby running to mommy but if he stayed, he'd have to witness his father's superiority and take more abuse."

The resemblance to the dream and its analysis is marked. It prompted me to inquire about a possible connection; the response was a twenty minute session during lunch in which his whole family-related distress was poured out. The piece of writing I solicited after the conversation touches clearly on all the main points he made orally. They should be supplemented by the following information:

Marco's father is a Spanish immigrant who, upon coming to Canada, worked double shifts in restaurants until a point, about three years ago, when he was able to buy a restaurant of his own. It is in a downtown business building which has only a lunch clientele. As a result, the father suddenly became a presence in the home for the first time, at a point which coincided with Marco's reaching adolescence and Marco's becoming difficult for his mother to control. He is the oldest child; there is a much younger daughter whom the father makes much of. ( Fully presented, and contextually relevant, on the June Literature exam's poetry question.)

Marco works in the restaurant on holidays and weekends. Of these days, he says, " I look at holidays the way most kids look at school days."

### The Connection

Dream

comp.

origin

### The Connection

I got the idea to write that composition before Christmas but the idea was vague for me and I didn't fully understand what it was I was trying to put across. So for the composition I wrote over Christmas vacation, I wrote about my second choice, which was in case you don't remember, about a young man breaking free of the drug related social scene. Then came the day when we shared dreams. I wrote about my father being the hero yet he was evil because he was about to break through the satanic spell in my room. You analyzed it really well and when I read it, it started an enormous chain-reaction. The comment you wrote started me to think about my father and I. I then began to think about my parents and I. Our relationship, the problems we have such as lack of communication lack of understanding and lack of respect and when they all started. I could have written a hundred pages instead of eight and it would have gotten my message across a lot more clearly. The reason I didn't use my mother in the story is because at this point in Bowie's life, he had absolutely no relationship with her. My mother and Bowie were very close in his pre-adolescent years. She had been using his father as an example of what not to grow up to be like. She made Bowie disrespect, dislike and almost hate his own father. He never saw him so this helped immensely.

Anyways, then Bowie started to get involved with the wrong people. He didn't know it but he was digging his own grave. He was rejecting his mother's authority and so she all of a sudden took his security blanket and gave it to his father. Bowie now had to deal directly with his own father and not his mother. So here he is or rather here I am, this man who I've always looked at as an example of what I shouldn't grow up to be like is all of a sudden suppose to put me on the right path to a happy life? I completely disrespected the man and so incredible problems arised. Anyways, I got the composition's theme, plot, main idea and events from my own personal experiences. Every comp. I hand in is just one chapter in the saga. When I have some spare time such as in the summer, I'm going to start from the very beginning and I'm not going to leave out one single detail. Why? It helps me greatly to write because it helps me to put my own life into focus and maybe help me fix up whatever it is that needs fixing up. And when I have my own children, if the day ever comes, I can read it all over and not do the mistake my parents did. My next comp. will probably continue along the same lines but in a different situation.

The salient points to note are these:

1. His present awareness of why he eliminated his mother from the final text. ( A point which we in our chat had not discussed. I myself was not even aware of her presence in the first draft until a closer perusal, months later).
2. His cogent assessment and awareness of the uses of writing, both as a way of putting his own life into focus and as a means of fixing in time, for later use, the "saga" which, he feels, will enable him to recall, and hence avoid repeating the errors of his father's way.
3. He echoed, from our conversation, the depth of the commitment

he felt to continuing writing " if it takes 500 pages and till I'm forty"... " chapter by chapter". He had said the story warranted many more words than he had submitted, but " you can't do more for just a comp., eh?"

His plan for writing this autobiography very clearly presupposes and relies on the luxury of time for as much pre-writing preparedness ( in terms of thinking through and self-examination ) as he deems necessary. Equally obviously, the freedom to write variations on a theme ( which are what his 'chapters', one a term, turn out to be, ) are the sine qua non. Without the freedom to enchain, he would not have embarked on this personal odyssey.

#### Literature & Life

Writing, as is here acknowledged, should and does reflect a child's reading or learning. Indeed, if the latter were not integrated as experience, they would hardly qualify as either reading or learning. Naturally, the literature chosen to be in an English programme strives to achieve a high degree of relevance for its readers. Both through texts of wide universality or specific age or time relatedness, literature can and must achieve a personal response to elicit the vicarious experience Louise Rosenblatt describes as the essential one. Although our year ended with One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, and Marco contributed much thoughtful comment, the text that clearly shook him with self-recognition was Hamlet.



Upon re-reading the notes of our March 27th conversation, I now see the elements in his situation which lead to the correspondences he perceived and the pieces of the jigsaw he illuminated for himself. Although their significance was only apparent to me in the last weeks of the school year, this is what I noted about him then :

He is often caught in the cross-fire of battling parents who have never gotten along, and asked to take sides in family disputes that still extend into Spain and the family there and he has literally descended into the basement at home - goes for meals and sleep - and has adopted silence as a defence against being sucked in as a witness or ally. He can talk to his father - though resents being used as an example when chivvied publicly for errors on the job .. and he has to squelch his resentment to collect his (admittedly) good pay.

He is also drawing away from his 512 friends ( one of whom is Danny ) and drawing closer to an old friend already at CEGEP. He is bored with them, sees through Marc's fantasies and escapist illusions about his own father's imminent success. He sees Marc's own career dead-endedness.

At this point in the year I confirmed to him that he does have the intelligence to go on to university, that his sense of things coincides with mine ( I teach Marc and Johnny in 512 this year, and am surprised to find out that these are his friends at all). He concedes that he does need to perfect his language skills, read more, acquire more vocabulary. " I really enjoyed this" are his parting words. I too have felt good about his sharing these difficult experiences. Had he

not broached the topic in fictional form, neither of us would have been able to say what needed saying in person. Thus the opportunity arose to tell him something that turned out to be pivotal in terms of his self-assessment.

Three weeks after our first conversation at lunch, Marco sought another conference - this time ostensibly as the student writer to his teacher. He has begun the hour by clarifying and justifying aspects of his latest narrative. Is this just a way in? Somehow, I doubt it. Marco's role with me now is 'artist as a young man'. Besides, he really does care that his stories are both good, in a writerly sense, and true, in a personal way because it is closely linked to his coming to understand himself. It is important to him that both these aspects mesh. Instinctively, he seems to know what Eudora Welty knows.

His care is for the quality of honesty and truth; his characters must seem motivationally valid and believable, and that can be achieved only if he fully understands, and then writes Bowie's story. Hence the extraordinary personal learning he achieves. Moreover, he doesn't lose sight of the way in which changes in what he knows affect the quality or effectiveness of the story he has shaped. For example, the ending of the last story has been softened, and he had warned me early on, "This story won't be as good as the last one." This version is much more ambivalent about the father; since

he cannot, in all fairness, retain his former harsh view in the light of new knowledge. The priority he consciously places on truth over effective storytelling is a clear indication that the purpose the writing has for him is uppermost. It has him by the throat; his integrity demands truth where he might have, perhaps, made concessions for a more 'commercial' success.

He assumes here, as he had on the writing feedback letter, that others are not as wise as he:

"Some kids just use their comps for just - you...know, the usual...narratives". But he has been using them as sounding boards: "When Bowie does something and I have to explain why he does it - well, that's me, so I have to really look at why I did something." ( My notes, May 14 )

The ending, then, has been softened, but cannot be altered. There can be no relationship for this father and son that he can imagine. Any other ending would be "Hollywoodish", by which he means a saccharine pandering for happy-ever-after climaxes that he knows does not ring true for them.

This third story, "Irreversibly Proud" is essentially the same, but the differences are important signposts, both of a new tolerance, and a readiness to include newer aspects of the conflict, specifically, the source of the anger which is directed at his mother and whose existence he

acknowledges. In this story, Bowie remembers a childhood scene in which his mother had been physically abused by her husband. "The hate Bowie felt surge through him was abnormal for a child his age yet it was as real as the love he had for his mother." The crisis he experienced at being handed over to this stranger he'd been taught to hate, he now sees as a fault of the loved mother figure, and which can be psychologically defined: "All of a sudden, she stepped back as the authority figure and his father stepped into the limelight. Bowie felt betrayed and in his subconscious swore revenge on his mother."

In this story, the rejection of the family members is, for the first time, visibly mutual; they exclude him as much as he does them. Equally even-handed, and charitable - though ineptly handled in the narration ( not surprisingly given the emotional weight of the gesture), is the necessity to acknowledge his father's own even-bleaker history suffered at the hands of an unknown grandfather. His first 14 page draft was substantially altered to accomodate the revelations about his father's past. His father, when a fiesty 10 year old, had been placed in a monastery school, and never again visited or brought home during the summer visiting month. When fourteen, and permitted to travel alone on that one month of the year, he fled to Madrid. There he began to work, and eventually emigrated to Canada, where he remained except for a two year sojourn in Spain, ( where he made the money to

finance the Montreal residence, and where Marco spent grades three and four essentially unschooled). The return to Canada placed Marco in a middle-class suburb, not the city slum he vividly remembers before Ibiza and Madrid. The rough drafts are, again, emotionally clearer than the submitted one.. Does Marco feel shy about spelling it out to me, his final reader? His student readers of the drafts are enthusiastic and complimentary. One can speculate. At all events, here are a sampling of some changes that occur :

Draft 2: "What the hell is wrong with you"

"Dammit answer me."

"Bowie was in a coma...His father grabbed his hand and said, " Bowie, I love you. Believe me, I do but you won't let me. You're just like my father used to be. Stubborn, cold, removed. I hate you, Bowie...dammit..answer me."

He bowed his head and cried. He then felt Bowie squeeze his hand."

The final draft has no such intense melodrama. The father mutters, " please, please". The hand responds, but only as he walks out of the hospital room does the father "feel a void in his life now, that he could fill with just about anything he wanted." Squeezed in over the line of the next sentence is the tacked on phrase "because the living memory of his father was now dead".

Stylistically unclear, and seemingly an after thought, clearly he is expressing the terrible fear that Bowie may represent the reincarnation of his grandfather to his

own father. The rough draft is too emotionally blatant ( too Hollywood?) and he has toned down the ending in the final copy - though the last minute insertion is evidence of the powerful need to set it down asserting itself. And as Marco had already told me , they can't have a future; Bowie still has to die.

One last change should be noted. The roughs all have the parents watching "Rebel Without a Cause" on the VCR as the telephone rings to inform them of Bowie's accident. In the final draft the parents are making love.

In several ways, he is charting for me the actual steps by which he uses fictionalizing in order to analyse himself. In the course of the conversation (May 14) it also becomes clear that he has become less defensive, less rigid in his perception, and less needy of the confrontational contests for that elusive "win" over authority figures. He is not only able to incorporate facts which mitigate the anger he directs at his father, but also begins to be a sympathizer. He is less a self-pitier, and is now negotiating for his own long term goals, even though they conflict with his earlier emotional conviction that his only certain act, upon turning eighteen, would be to escape home and be self-supporting.

Before turning to the pieces Marco writes in June, in which this latter point's relevance will be clear, there is one last aspect of great significance for him that shows the

amazing personal growth and change that has accompanied this writing. Marco is, in fact, overjoyed. As we left behind the subject of the composition, and 'digressed' to the present, he buoyantly asserted that he was delighted with himself. He had been accepted at CEGEP. "I'm so confident"; my notes tell me he said this four separate times. He has completely altered his view of himself - suddenly college bound, getting high marks in Math (albeit repeating) and "everything's going so well". He then recounts two interactions, and I am suddenly struck by the maturation these revelations disclose. The first item concerns his father's offer of an apartment of his own in town for the coming year. Marco sees the flaw: the offer is only for rent, therefore, it is clearly not in his own best interest to have to work to feed himself, or lose time in housekeeping chores, while trying to pass CEGEP. He assesses his long term goals correctly and is not going to be out-maneuvred by an act of apparent charity on the part of a parent whose motives are clearly not altruistic. He will stay at home; "Imagine, and I thought I'd be out like a shot at eighteen."

This newer, self-confident and spirited person is reflected in a Bowie of a different sort.

Both the title, 'Irreversibly Proud' and the car incident reflect this change. No more the humbled victim, when told to clean the car, he refuses in no uncertain terms,

and gets away with it.

Father: "I'm not asking you, I'm telling you..."

Bowie: "Look, I don't want anything to do with your ego trips..."

Father: "...what the hell do you think you are? You think you can do anything you want?"

Bowie: "...you use it, I don't, so you clean it!"

Father: "Come back here...dammit!"

Bowie: "Fuck off!!

( This last line, again an afterthought, possibly a final piece of daring with the teacher, is squeezed in on the line left for doublespacing.)

Obviously he wants this new found strength to ring loud and clear on the page. And, if one concedes that fictionalizing is a form of rehearsing, then the writing of the projection contributes to the future reality - realization. As a psychic "feedback-loop" it works to strengthen future action, much as dreaming unravels the tension generated by past action.

The next item he raises harks back to a subject alluded to in his very first letter, the altercation in English 422. He now concedes that his motives in the quarrel were not ones he could have admitted to last year. When doing a test "on a novel you have studied" he had written on a novel done in a different year. The argument, which had gone all the way to the principal, supposedly on his side, had been



to no avail. He still got a 30%. I recalled to myself how he had referred to it as an example of how kids couldn't buck the abuses of power that teachers perpetrate. He was admitting to me, now, though he couldn't acknowledge it then, that he had done it deliberately. Guessing that the teacher had erred in not adding 'this year', he leapt at the chance to 'get the upper hand' with her. He now recognizes the motivation, and explains that since he had been locked in a power struggle, he thus welcomed the challenge of outwitting her. He told me this with an evenness in his voice and demeanor that led me to comment that it was doubtless a pattern he had learned from power struggles at home. He agrees - and wrapping his hands around his body as he gestures, he says, - 'yeah' - at home he feels 'closed in' but now he feels 'opened up' - and his long arms become wings. The body language amplifies the texts I am observing.

What can be seen at this point are the signposts of successful "working through". He has clarified the causes of the family malaise to himself, and is able to distance himself from them. The problem has been objectified, and some form of catharsis has taken place. Most importantly from the point of view of this investigation, the means to that end has been the writing. The evidence is in the stories as much as in his present behaviour. He has ceased to feed ( and feed on ) the adversarial style of life. No longer either a passive and resentful follower ( with his peers ) or a self-destructive

thorn in his father's flesh, he has turned his life around, and has his own well-being as his primary concern. Although still having "humungous fights" such as the one that precipitated his mother's telling him her husband's story, he is flexible enough, or detached enough to incorporate this information in an honest attempt to "piece together the puzzle". This breakdown of the rigid defense, while not total, (as his story shows) is the beginning of a way out, for Marco. Rather than defensively huddle in the basement, literally and figuratively, he has stopped staring daggers at his father and has begun to peer out at a future he now discovers he is capable of constructing. Being able to redirect his energies in healthy directions, he can exploit the normal ego-centrism of adolescence, as is shown by his refusal of the offer of the apartment, and the decision to hang on to his mother's caretaker services.

To choose to stay at home is the best indication of ego-strength Marco could make. To do so on the assumption that he will succeed at CEGEP is courageous. He is not at all certain of himself in this new projected role. "Changes are scary", I recall, was what he had first written.

As if to confirm that he himself had a very unfamiliar grasp of the behaviour of 'real' students, Marco treated both of us to a cliff-hanger finish for his academic year. As if driven by fear of success, he suddenly reversed the pattern of presenting committed, multi-drafted work on

time - a pattern which had been augmenting itself as the year went on. His compositions had grown to 1800 words; their three drafts even fuller. His literature marks, however depended on the Hamlet essay. The class had a choice between two set topics, and a month to write in.

Marco had not not chosen to discuss "The Readiness is All" but rather "Universality". The topic set out these parameters: a discussion of the universality of Hamlet with respect to its insight into personality and motivation, and factors such as character flaw, as well as guilt, doubt, depression and sexual anxiety.

His essay, a week late, was very good, but was heavily indebted to sources, none of which were cited or quoted directly. Other parts were Marco's own unmistakable prose, and the transitions were bumpy. I explained the problems, and asked for a rewritten version. Time was running short, and for about a week neither the essay nor the student re-appeared. On the last day of term he arrived - with the intention of handing it in "next week or so". He had been partying a lot this last week, he explained. Announcing that my deadline was now, I insisted he do the revision on the spot. He protested that he didn't have his original in school but that he was prepared to salvage just a few marks by handing it back in. I turned a deaf ear and sent him to the back of the room where he did produce an essay, 90 minutes later.

Parts were extracts recalled verbatim from his source books; when I expressed astonishment at their accuracy he replied " No wonder...I did about six drafts of that first one". He footnoted these: 'Inaccurately and partly based on "Shakespearean tragedies", author = ?' The essay is an Oedipal interpretation of the play. The interpretation begins with, "Hamlet seems to have never outgrown his childlike attitude of being the only object of affection when it came to his mother". It goes on to present a clear view of the role of the subconscious in controlling behaviour, and examines Hamlet's hesitation in the light of its being a rationalization. That rationalization is based on the fact that Hamlet's hatred of his father, "covered-up" by an over-lavished respect, obscured the fact that ( and here he indicates quotation marks) " Claudius only did what Hamlet, subconsciously, always wanted to do in the first place." This, he asserts, "causes Hamlet to subconsciously almost not want to avenge his father."

These last words are his, or mimed as his. Interestingly, he manipulates the verb 'to revenge' more skillfully than most of his classmates do. But then, Marco has been doing his homework and absorbing it well.. He read Freud, in an encyclopedeia; it must be that source speaking as he wrote;

According to Freud, we all are sexual beings, we all have, or have had some sort of sexual attractions to the parent of the opposite sex, and our subconscious predicts

and motivates our conscious actions.

This having been learned, Marco can now take an even closer look at what, according to common wisdom, would ordinarily be taboo to acknowledge. Before examining his last pieces of writing, it is important to note this about the Hamlet essay. The verbal, syntactical, and lexical sophistication is highly polished. That he could produce, or even reproduce, seven hundred words of this quality in the sixty to eighty minutes I watched him write, without reference to his original final draft, is a writing achievement of no mean feat.

What his behaviour implies about his self-image is confirmed by a later comment: he thought I had given him a high mark just to encourage him. His confidence is still quite shaky. Marco's perception of himself as a successful student lags, as it most probably must, given the pace of the changes that have taken place. There is, however, also the possibility that he may not, reflexively, take an adult's assessment of him at face value, be it good or ill- a legacy of the pain he has been dealt at his parents' hands.

Marco's last stroke of luck, (and this investigator's, as well, as it turned out) was topic H, on the June composition matriculation exam.

Topic H offered the student an opportunity to write

on a topic " you are currently interested in". His essay, "The Oedipus Complex" certainly qualified. In it, he wrote a properly balanced discussion of the complex itself, its manifestation in Hamlet, and in normal family life. He deals with the conflict with the parent of the opposite sex this way:

When the child grows up to be a young adult, they will unconsciously try to develop some form of defense mechanism to prevent themselves from realizing that these supposedly immoral feelings do exist. Some rebel against the parent of the opposite sex by questioning authority so as to rationalize and make themselves think it doesn't exist. They try to ignore it and store it somewhere in their subconscious. This later may cause some sort of challenge to their sanity. What of the resentment felt to the other parent? Many let their true feelings show through and thus cause external conflict within the home or family. Others, such as Hamlet, cover-up their resentment with respect and "false" admiration. This is a form of rationalization.

He closes with general remarks about defense mechanisms as being "normal but very unhealthy". "They prevent the individual from facing the cause for their unrest," and he ends with a call for more open discussion on the subject.

The point-finale of this self-analysis could not have arrived more opportunely, both for Marco's exam ( 34/40 content, 15/20 mechanics) or for this case study. To have seen the results of the many levels of intellectual

integration' and investigation so concretely expressed was lucky enough. That it lead to one last conversation, and another written summary ("write it all down for me, just as you said it, please"), was truly fortuitous. That our paths crossed at all in the halls of our very large school a week after he had written that exam was in itself the last of a string of lucky coincidences, beginning with the dream analysis.

We chatted amiably for a while, then I suggested to him that I had seen a connection between what he had written on the exam and his own family situation. He grinned, sheepishly, almost as if caught out and mumbled, "yeah, oh, yeah" - and then continued " well sure, if you have my kind of family and then you read Hamlet and Freud on Oedipus complex - well, it's just got to connect - I mean, I wouldn't tell any of my friends this, but, sure, and I remember, especially when I was young...and the analysis of the dream - it all fits together ; and everyone has it."

A few days later he did seek me out. The requested copy had not yet been written, and he was unsure of what was expected. I reiterated the request to simply reproduce the content of our last conversation - and while I chatted with a few of his fellow students who had come in at the same time, he wrote the following, pausing only to request the spelling of one word - alienate.

'Letter'

When I started writing about Bowie ( me), I was sure the conflict between him and his parents was the following. He hates his father because of his youth and how there was a lack of communication and how his mother helped Bowie alienate his father. He know hates them both because his mother sort of betrayed his trust and love by stepping out as the authority figure and bringing in the father. This was the inner conflict. But then I read Hamlet, I read about the Oedipus Complex and I began to think. Pieces of the puzzle began to come together. What I came out with is the following. What if Bowie, when he was young, had some sort of subconscious sexual attraction towards his mother and thus resented his father's existence? When Bowie came home and found his mother crying because she had gotten hit by his father, instead of just getting mad and forgetting about it, he reacted like a man who's love was just attacked upon. What if Bowie, later in life, not only rebelled

against his mother because she let him down and he had to now deal with the man be despised but because he started to realize in his dreams that he was attracted to his mother. He then tries to cover up these immoral, guilty feelings by starting to alienate himself from her, thus causing a conflict which in turn means no more contact between them. Because of Hamlet, I started thinking, because of what I read about the Oedipus Complex, I started realizing. Remember Bowie is in many ways, me. Too bad we don't have another comp. to hand in. I'm sure I won't write any more "Bowie Stories" for any teacher because some people invite openness and others invite hate or dislike. I'm 100% sure that what I've written for you this year and talked about will stay here and not continue next year with my new English teacher because she won't be Shelley.

See you at the Queen Elizabeth on Friday and remember to save poor Marco a dance.



Your good friend,

Marco

P.S. Do you dance slow like our generation or what?!

Before writing that last 'letter', Marco said he had been reading back his year's writing, and was astounded by the progress and development his writing showed.

Reading his June Literature exam, that growth is evident in this simple sentence:

Davie resists the advice because of his lack of understanding for the motivation behind the people's ignorance. He experiences a need to understand before he can take a retaliatory action such as lying or whatever else.

My marginal note beside another answer indicates that Marco is the only student out of sixty to have noted an alteration of one word in a passage which the exam quoted, and its first mention earlier in the text. It is a clue which he used in order to pinpoint the crux of an idea, and the answer got full marks. One line in his answer, related to the Bradbury story, 'The Wheel', sounds as if he were talking about himself, but I have picked it out as a final example of his syntactic fluency and stylistic growth:

They don't understand that man makes of what he has what he wants and thus they blame all change and newness on the devil himself. They are all more like sheep rather than like human beings who have a natural need for evolution and change so as to make life easier for all to cope with.

His entire literature exam reads well. His answers are insightful and perceptive. His essay falters because he

leaves out an important segment on the essay question he has chosen: he fails to describe the interaction between the protagonist and antagonist in, you guessed it, Hamlet! And, as if in a final nod to the old Marco, he sheds the scholarly voice he has marvellously perfected of late, and writes the last line of his essay:

"(Hamlet) was too screwed up for a while to live..."

Marco's growth on several planes has been amazing,\* not only for the depth of self-knowledge, but also for the concomitant gains in verbal and written skill. The sheer quantity of work he had done, on himself, on paper, in the course of one year is, in itself, overwhelming.

How all events have conspired to make this happen! The confluence of a myriad of determinants: his family, this methodology, coincidence, have all had a part in the chemistry. What must be emphasized is that Marco credits both the "openness" which I have invited, ( freedom of topic choice), and the functional role the actual writing has itself played in this successful self-analysis. " Too bad we don't have another comp. to hand in."

\* Carl Rogers, On Becoming a Person, 1961, pp. 171-173, describes particularly the reduction of rigidity and or other ego defensiveness. In this context Marco's feedback to a fellow student written late in the year substantiates this assertion.

Obviously, Marco himself had to be ready and willing to deal with the very difficult elements in his life. But equally obviously, his readiness was not solely what counted. The time and the freedom of this methodology provided was the framework without which this intricate staircase could not have been so meticulously constructed. Each of his stories and essays has been a plateau from which he took the next step. And with each he has emerged as a better writer and a wiser and healthier person, using all the elements English class has to offer and achieving all its goals.

#### Postscript

Contrary to the pessimistic view in his last note to me, Marco's desire to write in a school context had not been extinguished. He visited the school twice in the Fall of 1984; during the second visit a long conversation ensued during which he mentioned that he had been frustrated in his intention to register for a creative writing course at CEGEP. He was obligated to take Literature because he was "too good" for the composition course.

Laurie Ann

"To be that self which one truly is" Kierkegaard

On the last day school opened its doors for students, when all but a handful had left for the summer, Laurie Ann came to our classroom. I was sifting through the Christmas exams, looking for these, now special names, amongst the booklets in a forgotten cupboard. Hers was one of them. It was not, however, her first exam, but rather her last, which was in the back of my mind as we chatted about the past year.

She had come in to see the video-tape of the English school play, a made for T.V. play in which she had a minor part. An active participator, she'd been in the French play, also. On that June afternoon, she was only one of a few who had made the effort to see it in its entirety at this their first and only chance.

That was typical. She had a seriousness about her, a quality of intensity of involvement that was earnest and committed - but never heavy. She always seemed light-hearted and on her way to somewhere or other. On this day she was cheerfully and tastefully dressed - white blazer with rolled cuffs over a red and white dress, red plastic shoes, very flat, very modish, and perfect for her large boned frame. I recalled that she often dressed in real clothes; though jeans

were mostly her style, they occasionally gave way to surprisingly well-cut dresses. At those times she could have been mistaken for a teacher, except perhaps for the open smile that was constant, and the intense way that she fixed her eyes on a speaker's when listening and seeking answers.

She did that with me often; that too was not typical of her peer group. Was that the special intensity which she attached to her writing, or just the determination with which she pursued so many things? An artistic person, she was off to John Abbott College for their art courses. The drawings which she had shown me for the first time in June were modern - fragmentary, expressionistic - a self portrait showing her eye sharing the page with part of a clock face. Would I venture a guess at its meaning?

We talked about the grad dance, and then I raised the question at the back of my mind: Had she realized that the piece she had written for the June composition exam ( defend to your own children the clothing styles you adopted as a teenager) had been a variation on her usual theme? She looked puzzled; then, as light dawned, she exclaimed, "but I wasn't conscious of that at all". But, yes she agreed that it was so. "Interesting, isn't it?" I offered.

As we scanned the direction her writing had taken she enthused, "Free topics were heaven!" As for the improvement she had made, the memory of her first effort, "Beyond", was mortifying to her. "The sentences were choppy, the words were

wrong oh, it was awful! "

She wrote it down for me:

When expressing myself in writing I resolved conflicts and discovered ideas which were important to me without realizing it - only when others read my composition and saw the same types of ideas recurring... I don't know if it's the fact that we wrote more often or that we had the choice of free topics that helped me write better, but I felt the free topics were ideal for me in expressing what I cared about and not a majority of students.

What Laurie Ann "cared about" was a subject that is essential to maturing - the establishment of one's own identity. Specifically for her, the focus was on the process of separating her own developing ego from that of the voices of her culture, her parents, and her learned value structure. Part of that process had involved the erecting and extricating of herself from a fixation on an idol. He was, understandably, male; perhaps a singer; she was never specific, but, as she acknowledged, the person was representative of a larger idea. This figure was the object of her idolization and idealization; along with it she experienced the attendant anxiety about the abdication of self this adulation implied.

Erikson describes her state perfectly:

To keep themselves together (adolescents) temporarily over identify, to the point of apparent complete loss of identity, with the heroes of cliques and crowds. This initiates the stage of "falling in love", which is by no means, or even primarily a

sexual matter. To a considerable extent adolescent love is an attempt to arrive at a definition of one's identity by projecting one's diffused ego image on another and by seeing it reflected and gradually clarified. This is why so much of young love is conversation. ( 1963, p. 262 )

### Her Beginnings

The piece I culled from the December composition exam, in the cupboard, was composed with the inspiration of the Dudek\* poem which allowed her to remember the feelings evoked by an experience with a special person. It was a moving farewell to a worshipped and loved one, fatally ill in hospital. The nature of the love object's personality, or their relationship was not mundane:

We must remember that time didn't exist  
between you and me...

Your skinny limbs and seemingly  
unproportionally long extremities of your  
body laying there without stimulus...

We felt distant because we hadn't freed  
our souls from impeding thoughts of worry or  
unexpressed love

All this time wasted. I could have  
told you that I loved you...

Now I feel remorse. Yet I know in my  
heart your privileged intelligence  
understood my intention.

From that day I gather every potential  
of hope and strength.

I try to pave a new road. So that  
finally one day I will meet you in someone  
else!

This composition coincided with the end of the first term in which free topic choice had been instituted. Her  
\*cf. Colleen for a fuller discussion of this exam question.

submission for the term essay, which was handed in a few weeks after the exam, was an expository essay; the exam piece was, in effect its narrative analogue.

This essay, "Beyond"; presents not only her ideas but also the problem she has in framing them. Continuity, lexical choices, ellipses, logical leaps, all are present. For nine pages she searches for truth, for self, for God (rejecting her own religious teachings, but seeing forces for good in all religions), discusses programming, equilibrium, becoming vaguer, more ethereal and finally verging on the evangelical. " Our mind is a means of expression which can reach much farther than the body."

In the first paragraph she tackled an adolescent's need to "define himself from the mass of different people in his environment". At the end having returned to her topic she is all elusive abstraction, asking, " Now what is the difference between what you have lived in your mind and the supposed reality of your existence?"

Her concerns are clear, her presentation of them is not; her sentences are imperfect, ( "When we become master of our own thoughts.") She seems to have poured her entire life's muddle into this one effusive essay in that delightful way that signals to a reader that here is a mind tripping over its own tongue.

In the first of what became regular conferences for



close proofreading and clarification of flaws, she readily agreed that her words and sentences lacked coherence and accuracy. Her French background was part of the impediment, as well as quick habits of mind and speech which had caused her to pluck randomly for words; a kind of lexical pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey which accounted for some bizarre coinages ( "superficies", "unenables").

These frequent sessions about eight or so in the course of the next five months, ultimately became important for her, not only as a way of assuring good proofreading, but also as a means of guaranteeing that her ideas were clearly represented. Sometimes we argued the logic itself; e.g., Is an almighty voice not simply another idol?

In the final term, she also needed my reassurance that her compositions were worth pursuing in the face of criticism from her workshop group. They were of the opinion that good compositions had plots; her abstractions left them bewildered, and her final letter to her idol, perhaps understandably required a grasp of the context and direction of the previous essays as well as an appreciation of the larger purpose they served in her scheme of things: the elaboration of her ideas on identity formation. The thread in her writing was continuous, and the receptive ear was her teacher's. These essays were not incapable of standing on their own, but their mode and style were so individual and the

mode so specifically attuned to content that an adult reader was better able to appreciate their worth. What is noteworthy here is that Laurie Ann had achieved sufficient independence from her group's opinions that she did carry on.

The foundation for that confidence had been established around mid-February, when she was struggling with her second composition, "Control". "It got good marks from my group", she was relieved to report. It was at this point that I first noticed that the content was a continuation of "Beyond" and I commented on that. She agreed, adding that the first foray hadn't been much of a success. "Then it's a good idea to go back to it and attempt to clarify it," I agreed. As our conference ended, she made for the door, hesitated and sought reconfirmation, "But I want to...it's alright if I still write on this?"

I mused about her parting remark. The notion that reformulating is somehow "not done" is all too widely held; much reiteration and encouragement is necessary in class to alter the conditioned pattern of expectations. Or in this case was it just her timid side, needing to follow - the very struggle she was waging war on in her writings? It is still part of every girl's struggle with a typically feminine 'burning issue'; the need to please, to be obedient, to be praised, which engenders a consequent distress when it is perceived as submissiveness and lack of strong individuality.

She reminds me of Carla ( cf. other case study ), both in the dilemmas they face and the devices they use for

resolving their stories while their authors are still in the intermediate stages of dealing with the underlying issues . They fictionize their conflict, but resolve it with the death of the protagonist. As a device, its a cut above 'and so I awoke to my mother shaking me saying, you've had a dream'. But Laurie Ann is also a cut above; she has read a book on dream symbols and knows that they can be used as literary devices. The symbolic dream, then, is used a device and it worked well for her. The several voices who shout and control her are telescoped into one body, representing the singleness of the problem as it funnels itself toward her from a multitude of sources, and the death as climax serves as a way out of having to imaginatively conceive a more credible solution or ending.

Her exposition has clarified itself markedly, and the construction of the composition , focussed as it is in the dream, has the depth and evocative power which captures the ideas, and dramatises them concretely. She has combined first person exposition with the dream - an individualistic approach which suits her purpose and where the expressive, transactional, and poetic interact organically. Her student readers say it best:

Well, I have to say that the "article" does really capture the interest of one's self. Whether you know it or not, you managed to combine a constant, much studied about issue, and the plot of a story and turned it into a semi-expository, semi-composition. The character was well developed, from the conformity in the beginning to the rebellion in the end. It was very good. You captured conformity in a composition not any essay.

T.B., the commentator, is perhaps, in this last line, making a favorable comparison to her first composition, "Beyond". He is also congratulating her originality. That she has suited her form to the topic is a rarity for students schooled in the four modes: as one of the editors of Opus the school creative magazine, he is sufficiently appreciative of her departure that he feels the need to 'pin it down' for praise. ( although later in the year he will criticize the absence of plot.)

Having enunciated and analysed the dimensions of her predicament, Laurie Ann has, in effect, cleared the first barrier of 'working through'. Seeing the issue delineated, she is ready to advance to a point where she can acknowledge shortcomings and come to terms with them. In her last piece, the letter to the idol, she acknowledges her dependency, rejects it and enunciates her own worth which exists independently.

She celebrates her insistence on recognition for her self ("I can't cheer for you among a mass of disembodied individuals"); affirms the value which has now been outgrown for her of her former hero-worship ( "where my past belief in you will be transformed into my own self-confidence"); then bids farewell to the previously conceived self which has given way to the real person she is now.

"This is really not a letter to you, but to the God

in you, to the God in me." Her enthusiastic embrace of the wonder of man leads her to this "vow": " I must renounce my attachment to you. I don't want to become just another member in your fan club..."

The welling up of joy of a rediscovered world, freed from the tunnel vision of her obsession finds its best expression in Hamlet's lines, which she quotes:

"What a piece of work is man...how like a God!"

She continues:" This may sound absurd to you, but I let myself see a wider perspective of life. I saw life's multiplicities, and the totality of the nature of things."

How far she seems now from her first composition, the one in which the loss of the worshipped one was equated with loss of love, loss of life's joy, and which occasioned the prayer for a replica.

Now she sounds like one of Maslow's

self-actualized people (who) have a wonderful capacity to appreciate again and again, freshly and naively, the basic goods of life with awe, pleasure, wonder, and even ecstasy, however stale these experiences ( of external reality) may be for other people.

(Reprinted in Rogers, 1961, P.174)

Her last examination piece, a "defense of teen clothing styles to your own children", conveys a measure of the emotional intensity the issue has had for her. She explains her teen-age punk style as being motivated by the

need to rebel, and criticize adult life, which itself intensified under the ridicule it drew. " We just wanted to become individuals...we really felt special among a mass of people who were content." But she closes with a tearful appeal to her own children - fleeing the room, her face " as red as a tomato" - not to do as she had done - " don't judge yourself by the way others think of you...if this had been done no one would be alone..."

Both Marco and Laurie Ann have arrived at a point where they can generalize about their own experience or what they have learned about their own lives. That it made its appearance on their final exams is not unexpected as is the fact that both of them have expressed their new found ideas with a perspective that has distance and proportion. They regard with almost adult chagrin, the extremities of youth to which they were given and can assess for the function it played then, as it were. Their writing demonstrates that they perceive it as normal and necessary. It is this last point which strikes a wholesome note; the process has worked them toward acceptance and perspective. Each has closed a chapter for himself. Was that just coincidence, or a psychic adaptation of the Peter principle? An intriguing thought, as this their chapter, also closes.

Death: May they be spared further suffering

Tim: Rehearsing, Preparing

Marlene: Acceptance, Coming to Terms

Danny: Consolidating Later Reckonings,

Martin: Bereavement and Eulogy

## DEATH

Death is a fearful, frightening happening, and the fear of death is a universal fear even if we think we have mastered it on many levels. As Elizabeth Kubler-Ross has pointed out in her significant work On Death and Dying what has changed is our way of coping and dealing with death and dying and the death of those close to us. ( 1972, p. 5.) The process of grief always includes qualities of anger and denial, writing then is a vehicle towards an evolution and personal growth. Writing about death helps the survivor to resist avoidance and its attendant regression into immaturity. Death, chosen as a topic is an essential step in the 'education' of an emerging healthy and productive personality.

One's teens are the years in which the reality of another's death is likely to etch itself in a person's life. The mental and emotional coping mechanisms that are to develop must be created ex nihilo. The answer to the question, why me?, and the many other confusions attendant upon loss by death, are more easily dealt with, like everything else, with the benefit of experience. Teenagers have neither seen enough tragedy on stage, nor lived long enough, to deal philosophically with grief or bereavement. Nor, in the normal course of events would they, at their age, be touched too closely by it.



But for the unfortunate ones who are experiencing loss through death, the need for catharsis and for coming to terms is great. They need to balance and adjust the extent of their pain to their own capacity for accepting hard realities. The absence of a coherent or satisfactory conception of an afterlife, a heightened sense of dependency or a host of other problems face an adolescent who has no ready answers. These needs demand expression, but to the degree that only the sufferer can or should determine. The timing, the readiness and the manner, are of the utmost delicacy. Indisputably, if writing can be harnessed to the process of responding to death, it can hardly add a better *raison d'être* to its list of benefits. What is not needed is a justification; the writing that can be therapeutic under these circumstances is 'a consumation devoutly to be wished'. What is needed is a legitimate 'way in' to link the feeling, the thinking and catharsis with writing that can function to that end.

It is highly unlikely that a teacher would list the subject when making an assignment. In any event the point is this: if ever there were an instance when Moffett's claim that a topic's entire worth depends on its timeliness, this surely is it. The likely criticism - fostering such a practice might be seen as morbid, or generally inappropriate might well be valid, and doubtless swift to be levelled at the teacher with the temerity.

That having been said, it is , nevertheless, probably

the subject uppermost in students' minds in some form or other. When probed, teachers readily acknowledged it to be so. In the last days of term when I finally told my classes what the subject of this study was, and asked what they thought students might be surprising us by choosing for a subject, the answer, given without a second's hesitation by a very bright boy, was "death". Leaving aside the obvious, that their stories deal out death as readily as their television equivalents, there is still a large grain of truth in the quick rejoinder. Somewhere between the terror of death of childhood and the expectation of death raised by their own ill or aged relatives is where teenagers hover.

Both fictionalizing and experiencing vicariously are means for imaginatively preparing the psyche. From Easter rites to Greek tragedy or Star Wars, the functions of rehearsing, and achieving catharsis is one of the functions of the literary experience of death. The preparedness which is accrued, gradually provides the armoring of one's vulnerability, in advance of the experience, and is ideally, an organic part of the mourning process. A wish to adequately eulogize, after the fact, may also present itself, and it, more than the others, is, by definition bound to verbal expression.

## Tim

Some "hidden agendas" are not very hidden, and yet they may stay in hiding from full consciousness, or play hide and seek for a time. So it appeared to be with Tim. Lean, and laconic, only his last name provided a clue to his Italian origin. He considered himself a weak student of literature, but usually good in composition. While admitting that he was fairly "clueless" about punctuating, he nevertheless was confident enough as a writer to experiment. He recalled past strengths, and built on them - adding "challenges" as he called them. The true challenge he took on was confronting the death of his grandfather, which gained and receded in imminence, during the year, and by imaginative extension, confronting the fear of his own father's death.

As appeared with Marco and Laurie Ann, for whom the obsessional (in the healthiest sense of the word) quality is present, the coincidental Christmas exam and first essay submission with self-selected topics, ran along parallel lines. The exam essay, using the poem with its invitation to present a moment of great feeling, focuses on the moment of his grandfather's death. He ranges over his grandmother's pained reactions and his own benediction from the hands of the dying man. It is all rather serene, despite his denoting his own feelings of confusion and uneasiness. The tone establishes a very tangible but accepted grieving, and the

last lines eulogize:

I learnt many things from grandfather, his  
smile I cannot forget, his wisdom I will  
always respect, and his love I shall never  
forget.

My own comments were:

"Very well done - it has the ring of truth, too. Is it?"

What was recognizable was the truth that was evident  
in the emotional authenticity; the dialogue, at a glance -  
points to the idealization of the scene. This is how one  
hopes it will be:

" I'd never seen grandfather so happy in my entire  
life...he said unto me: "gentle boy, approach me, do you fear  
me?"

This composition's title, "Memory over Mind", may  
state the obvious need to construct a projection of how he  
would like to be able to remember the event. The title was  
echoed in May's submission - " In the Theatre of My Mind".  
It, too, described the death of his grandfather, and provides  
a clue to the function of Tim's mind as it weaves imagination  
into representation. As he stages and restages the drama, he  
is rehearsing, in the most literal sense, that which is about  
to be played out a real stage, one in which the protagonist-  
author has an unfamiliar, unwelcome other role to play. In  
this initial foray, he is scripted to acquit himself with  
dignity: " He is proud of you Tim my grandmother said to  
me..." What is fascinating is watching the writing work

towards both ends simultaneously, providing the cross-over between the ostensible and pragmatic goal of producing good compositions, and the underlying, only half-conscious one which is providing the emotional veracity that fairly shouts from the pages.

The composition which paralleled the December exam was a descriptive one entitled "A Funeral Parlor". The deceased, this time, is his own father. The writer is still in the first person, but now a man. It is good, sparingly but evocatively written. The poem submitted with it "Moment of Truth" has a speaker who "tilted his head" as did the author of the descriptive. The speaker says, "gray hair is a thief". He is "asking myself questions / Wondering why".

My own curiosity prompted a direct question. "Has your father died?" The response was quick, "No, no, I just did it, well... it was a challenge. Last year I wrote a descriptive of a funeral parlor, and it was really good - you know, flowers, lots of mood... so this time I did it,; but this time with my own father...well...it was a challenge." His friends overheard, and made horrified, quizzical noises. They thought it bizarre; I only heard his rejoinder, twice repeated: "It was a challenge."

The evident prewriting has confirmed Emig's point, that psychically or cognitively difficult material needs much time, and even, I would add, tentative forays, in a partial and progressive manner when treading ground that is a

minefield. The reason for Tim's re-entering the funeral parlor in his writing became apparent in May.

For February, Tim's topic was the boxing match between Sugar-Ray Leonard and Marvellous Marvin-Hagler. At six pages, it is significantly longer than his other pieces, and significantly inferior. It rambles, has a perfectly non-sequitur last line, many run-on sentences, and the grade is quite a bit below his other evaluations - 18/25, not the 20/25 of his exam or the 22/25 of "A Funeral Parlor". As a topic, it does not serve him as well, but clearly his mindset has shifted, and he indulges in a typical teenage male narrative - the contest, the blow by blow, and the victory - "A Boxing Classic". His rough drafts include an expository essay on boxing, headed English 422. This experimentation with modes while building on earlier (content) foundations (revisiting the topics of deep personal engagement) is an important evidence of the crafting these students continue to engage in. Clearly many find it useful and/or necessary to work from a previously successful, or pressing subject area. Writing what you know about. It does not preclude experimentation. On the contrary, for them it is perceived as an advantageous staging point.

What still has him "by the throat" is, however the subject of the last two compositions - "In the Theatre of My Mind" (May) and its exam parallel on the final composition

exam: " Honour Thy Father." My marginal comments on the former describe my response - "Great title, "So well put," "excellent choice of words." In the May version,

Grandfather was in pain, his eyes were droopy and his mouth sagging. Grandmother prayed relentlessly, knowing that soon this would be but a memory.

After a scant three and a quarter pages he ends;

"Those visions of grandfather lie permanently embeded in the theatre of my mind."

I've written,

" This gave me goose bumps reading it. You have touched a deep reality with the excellent way you have written about this death. Well done."

Although I had absolutely forgotten the previous essays of December and January, the same sense of intense veracity made me inquire about the inspiration. He reminded me of the descriptive done in a former year saying, "Miss you're not going to believe this..." then said, and wrote it down:

I was sitting at home one Sunday evening thinking of a topic to write a good composition on. I remembered that once I did this descriptive on a funeral parlour, it was good. I decided to use the same descriptive technique but refering to the illness of my grandfather. I began to write, I wrote about one page and then I went to bed. The next morning we received a phone call, Grandfather had died. I couldn't believe it. I didn't want to complete that

composition but I did.

He protested that his grandfather had seemed too well... what a shock he had received. Later in the period, as I was chatting with students, and showing his excellent poem, he added that in fact his grandfather had indeed suffered serious bouts of illness recently, strokes and such. I suggested that perhaps an unconscious fear had provoked the essay. " Yeah, I suppose ...come to think of it, my Mom had just bought a dress that week. She said she might as well have one ready just in case." " Do you mean a black dress?" " Yeah. I guess that must have been there in my mind."

A few days later, asked if he wanted a xerox copy, he hesitated, saying, "I'll think about it". Later that day, when again asked, he replied, "I'm not sure I want it at all. It's too spooky."

A month later, the last composition of this series was written. Using the option of writing "on a topic you are currently interested in" Tim again seized the writing opportunity for his dual purposes. Relying on some of his past successful formulations, he has revised some of the lines and images. This time the invalid near death is however his father. Tim's own feelings of guilt and anxiety appear unequivocally:

"I can never forgive myself for letting him work so hard when he is merely a feeble man, and I, a youthful boy with



endurance."

He is venturing into this 'minefield' yet again; touching the fringes of the unthinkable, steeling himself, venting his own emotions, projecting a "worst possible" scenario with a "best possible" outcome, exactly as he had done on the December examination. In this run-through, the illness is not fatal, as it had first threatened to be. He rings down the curtain thus:

"I just looked at him and thanked God for blessing us."

### Marlene : A Grandmother's Death

Marlene is the "average" student every teacher dreams of. Her willingness to think aloud, venture, take counsel, and participate won my admiration very early in the year. Though a large girl, buxom and verging on overweight, she was a member of the senior girls' basketball team. Her enthusiasm and unselfconscious vitality was coupled, early in the year, with a tenacious resolve: to finally learn how to write and punctuate an English sentence. Though her grasp of grammatical correctness left much to be desired, her main and overwhelming problem was "run-ons", two or three to the page. Knowing that she would likely fail if the problem remained uncorrected, she not only welcome the workbook I gave her, but actually consistently did the sentence combining for four or five months, bringing in the work, and diligently making corrections of errors.

In literature class she unfailingly contributed, though her comments tended to make unintelligible the elegant thoughts behind them. Verbally, she was significantly less adept than her peers, yet she seemed to have understood that grappling with language was the only way to counteract her weakness, and she did, without ever succumbing to visible frustration or discouragement.

Her work showed slow and consistent improvement, but the one composition that was exceptional was the one which

told of the reaction to her grandmother's death. Her doggedness in wanting to say things correctly showed here, in more ways than merely the verbal. Not only the grade (content: 22/25, form 11.5/15) but also the four drafts and her "comments" provide ample evidence of the commitment to writing well and succeeding in the attempt. The drafts show much genuine revision: adding and eliminating, shifting, and increasing syntactical fluency.

What is of interest in Marlene's composition is twofold: the genesis of the written work as well as the personal function served by its having been written. The genesis of the piece is revealing of the extent to which the students in her group had begun a thoughtful and deliberate consideration of the connection between good writing and true, i.e. veritable, subject matter.

What caught my attention, one day in mid-February was overhearing a loud defense of a piece of writing from one of the group sessions. "Well you know, this is a true story". J-M's story about a jet that crashed through the Empire State Bldg. was being criticized for having too much detail. I joined the conversation, and Marlene and I fell into a discussion of the effective use of descriptive detail, especially where the truth of the experience supplies the author with too much raw material. She then described her current topic and the effect writing it had had on her: " You know, the other night I was working on my comp about my

grandmother - she died last August - and I found myself crying my head off." She went on to describe her anger at the joyfulness of the wake, her refusal to go fishing the next day with the family because she regarded that as inappropriate but now acknowledged " was the worst thing I could have done". So she "pushed it out of her mind" then and there, and hadn't really accepted the death of her "live-wire" grandmother.

She acknowledged that Martin 's composition on the death of his neighbour (c.f. Martin's case study) had inspired her to make her own attempt. ( Although his composition had not, at that point, been graded and returned, it had been read by this group two months earlier. Its excellence so uncharacteristic of his work had certainly made an impact on its readers).

His eulogy had, obviously, presented her with a "way in". The denial and incomplete grieving of the previous summer were opening up because of the example his composition had provided. That she needed to deal with the subject requires no argument, I believe. What should be noted are the factors of cross-fertilization and timeliness as they combined to precipitate her choice of topic, a likelihood quite beyond the realm of possibility with a traditional approach to topic allocation, as Moffet has argued in his rejection of textbooks.

The influence on general excellence of the actual

truth of the subject matter was a factor that this group was beginning to consider very consciously and deliberately. Consequent to Martin's breakthrough, they were re-appraising the place of 'reality' in school writing, and all of them subsequently moved in the direction of writing factually or out of personal experience or thoughts. Marlene's own "Comments on my first Draft", which may have been written as a result of my suggestion, (as the daily writing of that period, but of which I have no specific recollection) is highly revealing of her awareness of the necessary elements of good writing and revision.

#### My Comments on my First Draft

I did think strongly of my comp. I hope I got my message across. I know I got my idea but I must place it into the right words. I think I didn't look over it enough and see what was wrong I think my mechanics are terrible as usual. I think the main part of realizing my grandmother death is a very strong point. I also liked the way I build on the truth I think you can notice it was true. The weak point is I didn't seem to get the message across. I wanted the reader to see at first I tried to escape from the reality and when it caught up with me I fell apart. I must work on putting my thoughts together and re word it.

Marlene's focussing on the truth of the event as its main strength, and the fact that building on the truth pleases her are the salient points to be noted. Nor does she ignore the role mechanics plays in insuring comprehensibility, but retains a sense of all that goes into improving her work.

The element of coming to terms is as relevant in her work as it was for the others who wrote on the death of close relations. The title her piece receives puts the final point to that: "Death and Reality Go Hand in Hand". As if to identify the true function the writing has served for her, the newly learned wisdom is the title's message. Where her problem had been the protracted period of denial, her solution, arrived at by and through writing, is the banner under which her composition has proceeded. She has lead herself, or been lead, to the full and final resolution of her mourning, a patently healthy process. She had closed, in her second draft, with

You know something else, it has been almost eight months since she died and when I wrote the composition I started crying. I guess I didn't realize that she'd gone. As a matter of fact I still think the next time I drive to P.E.I. she'll be there with open arms. Then when will I ( "remember", crossed out) accept when!

By the final ( fifth or more) draft, her last paragraph has altered the actual timing of events, and the final acceptance has taken place soon after the event when she perhaps now realizes, it ought to have occurred. The journey may now be meant metaphorically, to include the intervening months from August to February. Certainly the emotional truth is that; - her alteration is, I feel, a sensible authorial decision since she does not want to write about the lengthy period of denial, rather, she wants to relate the experience of August to the

learning it created. The fact that she is making literary decisions to alter the actual timing of the events she describes indicates that her primary intention is to produce a good piece of writing; i.e. the freedom of topic choice has not subverted the purpose of achieving good writing, per se.

"On our long journey back I came to an understanding about death." She cites the reasons for pretending, as well as her final reason for accepting, ( " to end the suffering... it was her time") and her own sadness at not having had " a chance to tell her how much I loved her."

Those realizations, so honestly put forth, are the result of having sorted out her own behaviour, which she does perceive as being anomalous.

The subject of death, in a general sense, was still, for Marlene, not entirely a closed one. The anger that is part of the natural response to deaths of loved ones emerged in her next composition, an expository, entitled "If I could change anything in the world?" There are two points of interest to our discussion worth bringing forth:

1) Marlene can now acknowledge her own fears, and the reader can see the emotional correlative which prompts a touching bit of illogic: "Why does death have to be so cruel? Personally fatal diseases scare me and I dread death. You would think that modern technology could erase all the fatal diseases."

2) Marlene uses the essay to fictionalize an alternative reality, as seen in the following passage. By so doing she can correct the 'fault' of the true course of events, and give life to the way it 'should have been', a scenario which would have lessened the pain and guilt whose cause she had pinpointed in her previous composition.

She fought for her life but the pain was unbearable and cancer won. As I watched my grandmother slowly slip away I felt helpless, everytime she felt pain, so did I.

Rewriting events permits Marlene a fantasy by means of which she erases her not having been at her grandmother's side even to say "how much I loved her". As a balm to wounds which are not amenable to actual healing, it seems to be a psychological 'trompe l'oeil' which I have observed in other free topic writing. Death-bed reconciliations between warring fathers and sons, suicide escapes, solutions of that ilk are part of the known function of literary production that fuses autobiography and fiction in ways that are inextricable. The important point is that the need to produce such myths is a need which writing answers, and from time to time, it does so, for Marlene and others like her.



## Danny

Danny's school history had one consistent thread: he didn't read and he didn't write. He'd been in special education, been given reading training with the aid of machines, small group care, and though failing or tottering, went from grade to grade. Having been his teacher in Grade X, I knew what to expect - or rather, not to expect.

He had what could charitably be described as 'idiosyncratic' spelling ( which had to be read phonetically, for the most part), little punctuation, random capitalization, an odd sense of how things are said, words left out, and, not surprisingly, no willingness to write.

When the class wrote, he sat and stared, wouldn't let others read when he did what was to be "shared freewriting;", got teased by his old friends, and begged off even the writing activities that everyone liked ( the anonymous letter exchange with a Grade 9 class). But, at 18, he was old enough to carry it gracefully. Basically he was a nice kid with a gentle, unaggressive, even self-possessed way about himself - though he looked every inch the tough guy who still clung to his long hair style.

My efforts with him, during Grade X, had been directed at praising his ideas whenever they appeared - usually in literature tests or the one page 'compositions' of

Eng. 412. Two years later, and after substantial success reversing a lifelong history of failure to write he could tell me that part of the reason he had brought himself to make the attempt at all was that for now his work was not automatically criticised for spelling, to the exclusion of all else, which had "made me not want to write." The two factors which occasioned his dramatic breakthrough were: the positive feedback for his ideas in the previous year, and I suspect, my suggestion at the beginning of Grade 11, that he use the services of the class teacher-tutor to transcribe his rough work. These factors combined with the freedom of topic choice to amaze both of us, as early as October.

He knew he had done something special, and he came in to specifically ask what I thought of it.

"It's so unusual"... I began. He interjected, "It's about my father's death. I wrote it two years ago, freewriting for Mrs. X, I didn't know what to do for a comp, (now) so I showed it to my girlfriend and she thought it was good enough, so we went over it together to fix it up, you know, spelling..."

"It's good enough for Opus; I'd like to submit it, if you'll agree."

"No, it's too personal...You know, you can really write well when it means something to you, when it comes out of real feeling..."

"I know"

"And when my father died I really felt.."

"I'm going to give it 30/30 - but, you know, it almost feels wrong to put any marks on it."

"I know".

"Black lights and white roads" is a first person account of the journey towards death, towards the gathering up of aged souls who proceed down a road,

On their way to a second life and I too had been chosen...but a voice spoke and told me that I would be seeing the light of life in approximately nine months.

As I was to find out later, Danny considered this the first composition he had ever written. Its importance for him needs little elaboration; the 'coming to terms' and catharsis it reflects, as well as the value it has for him (as writing? as eulogy?) that is reflected in its having been preserved speaks for itself. Although still highly personal, he was visibly proud of having turned it into a refined piece. The availability of a transcriber who was also a trusted friend whose judgement he valued, happily, coincided with the suggestion he employ such a "way out" of his disability. The topic was, of course, deeply felt and, as he had discovered, such topics do indeed make one write well. A lucky collision of freewriting and prewriting had occurred. Here was evidence that the cumulative result could be much greater than the sum of its parts.

At the end of term, his grade in composition was an astonishing 63. I joshed as I showed it to him, "Hope you can match that next term." "Nope," he shot back, "next term I'll get 73!"

A few weeks later, and after a two day absence, he came over to my desk, crouched down, and began to tell me of the funeral he had just been to. The aspect that particularly upset him was the party-like drinking and gait of the Mormon mourners. We spoke about it briefly; my remark that death rituals were really for the living didn't satisfy, and he said "Yeah, but I found it really..well.. I might write about it."

He did, though not until April, when a free topic composition again became mandatory. In November, however, he did write during a class task of shared writing, which he showed to a student reader, a poetic piece on secrets. The task had been to write on trust, or failed trust. What is exceptional is that, tacked to the submitted rough was a note to me in which he pointed out that the inspiration came from a real event, one in which he'd "got in a mess". He successfully turned it into a poem and got 20/25 for it.

That the personal aspect of the topic mattered significantly to him was again brought home at the end of November - a month after his first composition, and on the day I was returning his poem. The point I raised with the class

concerned plagiarism; the continued freedom to choose one's own topics was at stake. Danny, so rarely outspoken on anything, interrupted sharply, " No, no, I don't want that to go."

For him, then, writing from his own inspiration was clearly a winning proposition.

The subsequent term's writing rested exclusively on the novel the class was studying, so that the next free choice creative compositions was due at the end of the March-April term. By mid-April he let me know that the composition on death was in progress. He proudly told me it was eight pages; had it not been worth so many marks, he would not have done it. I asked if he had enjoyed doing it, or learned from it. No, he hadn't; he had thought beforehand that he might, but he hadn't. It was hard work. He found it interesting reading it back, though.

During the conversation we had touched on the fact that he had never read a book cover-to-cover - too boring - but his attitude was positive: "It's something I guess I'll have to acquire."

The essay on death finally arrived, on time, and after four months of on-and-off work. My own amazement could hardly be contained; rather than taking a personal view of the specific event he had been upset by in October, he had written a formal expository essay on the subject. The thought and

distancing that entailed had not been lost on him either; he said, with a kind of wisdom, " I generized (sic) a lot, because I've experienced so many deaths."

Proudly he told me this essay had been through six drafts! This essay, so superior to 90% of what I'd learned to expect from 512 students, would indeed have required six drafts. What was so astounding was his commitment to putting in that amount of time and effort.

Full of surprises, and a month before the end of the year, Danny asked me to supply him with a title "to save him the trouble!" This, coming a week after he'd shown me another poem ( on the recent break up and reconcilliation with his girlfriend of three year's standing), left me puzzled, though when I offered to confer on it with him, the next day, he just shrugged and the idea went no further. ( A classmate chum had reacted with hostility to the idea of my giving topics - Danny could, if he wanted, but "no way" was he going to have that imposed on him).

I conjectured that the risk of being "caught by the throat" with the six draft essay just behind him may well have given him justified pause. With only a short time in which to write, choosing his own topic may well have seemed too risky for the little time available.

A few days later, I made another discovery about

Danny- and writing . At the beginning of a literature period I had asked him why he had preferred to have a set topic. After the ten minute journal freewriting had ended, the class broke into small groups for a small group discussion of a poem. Danny moved into a group , but quietly persisted writing. After the groups had been talking for about twenty or thirty minutes, I happened to pass behind him, and caught a glimpse of what I think was on the first line, " You wanted to know WHY" - Guessing it might have been a response to my earlier query, I stopped to ask about it.

No, indeed, it was a private communication to his girlfriend.

"Have you used writing for thinking a lot?" I asked. He replied, "I just started to, a while ago."

On that day, I wrote, "Danny has discovered writing as a tool; he has given in two or three poems, two compositions of unusual quality for any 512, which are, for him, a triumph of content and proofreading. He has said what he needed to about death, which has touched him so closely. And amazingly, all I had to do was fix the spellings as I read and talk only about the content. And let him choose his own topic. Can it really be that easy?"

The final composition was, indeed, completed on time. In conversation with his girlfriend he had complained he was "bored" looking for a topic. She suggested he write on that, and, having done so, he told me "while I was thinking about it

I realized that boredom was not getting involved in anything - not that the thing is boring." We agreed - and I added that "writing makes thinking happen." Yeah ", he said, " Yeah".

Two days later, on June 6, we chatted in our empty classroom. The pride of achievement he felt was enormous. He had told me, the previous week, how "special eds were underestimated", how having been at another school in Grade 9 had saved him from being routed into short-vocational (i.e. Grade X H.S. Leaving). His self-esteem at having been able to write real compositions had mounted considerably and in response to my congratulations, he told me he felt really good about putting his ideas down on paper, and good about himself.

As he told me this, I asked him to write it down for me. He wrote, pausing only to ask, " How do you spell glad, G-L-A-D?"

I luke finding a way to put my thoughts dun  
on paper  
I glad for myself because Iv accomplish a  
personl gole.

### Postscript

A. Danny may also be on the way to becoming his own proofreader, as well as critic and 'standard bearer', to wit:



We passed in the halls in mid June, and he stopped to tell me how unhappy he was with his literature exam:

"I had so much to say but when I read it over I knew it didn't make sense". ( Note: it did; he passed )

B. Danny tells me that the only "comps" he's ever written were this year's, and a poem in Grade 9 ( about a vision he'd seen on a path in the woods). My records show comp marks in Grade X, a book report, among other items in Grade XI. I can't remember them, and he doesn't even count them as compositions he has written. In all honesty, I have to agree with him.

C. Over the summer, my vice-principal happened to be at a gathering at which Danny was present. Taking her aside, he asked her advice about night school, which he wants - understandably, with trepidation. The confidence needed to contemplate that step, we agreed, was built on the pride of achievement in English Class.

D. In March 1985, he was in school to request a letter which would help him get into CEGEP. I finally recognized him - well-kempt, wearing a tie - he was now in Sales - writing up Sales Reports and "using a dictionary all the time".

"Did your writing last year help you to do them?"

"Oh no they are all facts..."

"What I mean is did it give you confidence?"

"Oh, for sure. And I'm going to have to write a letter to the CEGEP explaining why I want to go back to school."

## Martin

Like Danny, Martin had never read a book, cover to cover. Unlike Danny, though, he was in a 522 English - supposedly pre-college entrance level. He was affable about it, even apologetic. Reading was as close to physically painful as possible for this active, champion team hockey player.

Predictably, he was a very inadequate writer; and where reading comprehension was linked to written questions, he was wholly inadequate. His final June exam essay question was quite incoherent, and he failed Literature 522.

But I am getting ahead of his story.

Martin had one brilliant success, one in which, even months later, he took considerable pride. It was the composition he had written on the death of his neighbour. Undertaken in the weeks after the funeral, it is a piece that speaks so authentically in both voice and emotion, that even were Martin's usual work not familiar to a reader, it would stand out. The touching evocation of the fatherly role the neighbour played in his life and his anguished, "why me?" is genuine. I found out months later that Martin's own father is an alcoholic, and that the death of the neighbour, a surrogate father in fact, was indeed, a keen loss for Martin.

The degree of the commitment to perfecting his piece

was, after its ringing honesty and quality, the next most remarkable fact about this essay. Not only had it had several drafts, but, (since it was Martin) it had many more surface errors in its final draft than would normally be acceptable. (Eighteen red marks on the first of five pages) It had received a mark (22/25 content, 8/15 form), praise for its feeling and truth, and a suggestion that it could use a "cleaning-up". To my utter amazement, the perfected copy arrived, two weeks later. No change in the marks was ever discussed; he obviously wanted to make it as perfect as possible. And it was.

Again, like Danny's writings, the importance of the piece to its author speaks for itself. What is remarkable is, of course, the inextricable connection (or spillover) between making pieces of intense engagement and the desire to perfect them to a degree where the student exceeds himself dramatically. The amazement (on both sides of the desk) works its reinforcement in greater further efforts, enhanced self-esteem, and a beginning to the process of thinking about how good pieces are formed.

In March, I had commented to Martin that his last piece had been "so good". He bubbled with enthusiasm, and "wait 'll you see this one".

He experimented with another true incident. It was not the success he'd hoped for. Truth is a precious commodity,

but reality, unvarnished, is not automatically a work of fiction and Martin, understandably, stumbled into that trap. But he learned, by so doing, and accepted and understood why it had worked so well in one instance, not both. He wasn't upset, either. He had known from the beginning, that the standards were tough, and that I "really meant business", and that final copy was expected to be as close to publication stage as possible. I remembered that his first effort ( with an assigned topic), had been returned for three "rewrites" until it merited a 5/10 for form.

What Martin did have, though, was one composition which made him glow with pride. He had reversed his defeatist attitude which had developed in high school as a result of "so much negative criticism", which he contrasted with the praise for "clever ideas" he had been used to receiving in elementary school. This, he explained, was what had prevented him from showing me his work in progress, but he now realized how useful feedback on drafts, and multi-drafting, was. He even regretted that his own peer group had not been less superficial in their criticism of his pieces.

By the end of March, he could tell me that he felt really good about his improvement, and that, after the initial shock about how difficult it might be , "then I did really well and got a real thrill of success".

In May, in response to my request, he produced all

his year's writing, and the two 'final' copies of "A Neighbour".

"I'm really proud of that one", he said, as he gave it to me, almost bouncing with joy.

## Style & Theme

Finding one's own voice

1. Colleen: Pulling it all together = Success
2. Kyle: Breaking new ground by heeding new voices.
3. Louise: Writing Becomes Electra
4. Carla: Future Projection: Message modifies Medium

Style in the service of meaning, is in large part what is meant when referring to the unity of form and content in literary works. In the context of this discussion, the importance of style lies, specifically, in the flexibility and suitability of style a student can conjure up as he seeks for appropriate structure and wording. If we agree that content, purpose, and audience are the significant determinants of style, and that an uninhibited voice is what ought to be encouraged, then both personal style and voice ought to emerge concomitantly when all the determining elements are self-selected. The greater the chance for experimentation and discovery given, the greater the likelihood that the individuality the writer seeks (or that his topic demands) will emerge. When it occurs, it cannot fail to delight both writer and teacher. When it happens, it will show that the student will have fulfilled what Murray has called "the student's first responsibility" in a student-centred class. In Murray's article, whose title is echoed here, focus is on the necessity for a student to find and express his own 'voice'. The responsibility he cites is for the student to find his own subject (which the teacher must not cheat the student out of) "Since each step in the writing process - form, style, tone, effectiveness - stems from what the student has to say." (LBT, 1969, p. 140)

Both Kyle and Colleen, in 1983-84 and Carla in 1982-83, and Louise, in 1981-82, were examples of this phenomenon,

though each of their departures into stylistic "new ground" was different in duration. Kyle's experiment was one unique effort, whereas Colleen's and Louise's represented a wholly new approach to writing. All of them did, however, make stylistic departures for reasons that were functional. In several ways, all benefitted personally; the writing which moved into a previously untried area, also benefitted in quality. Again one observes the double success of which this monograph speaks - the function for the writer and the enhancement of the writing serving and reinforcing each other.



## Colleen

Colleen's discovery was simple enough: one could write about emotions. She learned this from the question which I had put on the December composition exam. It presented a poem (for text see p. 217 of Appendix) by Louis Dudek, "Fragments" (Note: though a minority of students took this topic, all teachers reported that it elicited writing of markedly better quality than usual for exams) in which remembered and savoured pieces of a former loved one are enchainned. The question was:

1. Read the following poem: (Broken Pieces- Dudek )  
Then think of a time when something very significant happened to you as you were with another person. Set down the things you remember vividly about the event ( or moments) and the reasons or feelings that made them stay in your memory. The composition can be personal or have a purpose for which it will be used. Indicate the audience. ( It does not have to be true.)

She had, she later told me, been taught very clear guidelines for plotting narratives; she had thought that was all that was required. Having "emotions" in stories was a new idea - and an exciting one. After her first successful story, "Promises", she had asked for a xerox copy to keep. " I thought it was really good - a masterpiece." When asked why, she responded that she had done three drafts; it was unusual

for her to have such confidence in her own work, she said, - but the group had been encouraging. Five minutes later she crouched down beside my seat, and asked, almost conspiratorially, "Is it better if you write out of your own experience?"

"Well, what do you think?"

"Well, 'Promises' was ..."

I handed her a piece of paper, and she wrote:

My last composition turned out so well perhaps because it was something I had experienced. Therefore it makes it easier to write about. Being something I can associate with and something which I feel about strongly I can transfer it on paper more easily.

"Have you answered your own question?"

A nod. "Yes, I guess I have."

This composition, which she told me was based on a friend's experience, but "it was as if it was me," was published in Opus, as was her next one, also, an unusual accolade (for one not on the selection committee!) to have two published in one issue.

Her last piece, also exceptionally good, received the same high grades that had pushed Colleen from the low eighties in Grade X to the top of her Grade XI class, with mid-nineties. All of them, including the exam show a mature and deft handling of situations fraught with emotions that are difficult to portray or capture, yet she does so with

subtlety. The moods are intense, the description supportive of the main idea, and the ideas are tenderly served.

At year's end, she was fairly bubbling with the tide of success, and her new image as a writer equal to the acknowledged "best writers" of her grade.

It was then, early May, that she told me, " I really bloomed this year." Her friends and her mother, all had registered surprise. Her brother ( in CEGEP ) and his friends, on reading her two published stories, expressed their admiration and envy for her having been able to develop what they called " her own style." " At CEGEP they make us write all alike."

Kyle

Kyle is a writer. In personality, he is self-confident, almost an "executive" style student. This is his second year as one of four students on the selection committee of Opus, the school's journal of creative writing. Not surprisingly, he has been published.

In class, he answers all questions intelligently and unhesitatingly. Not all the students like him, as a result. I wish there were more voices like his.

Kyle's work developed in length and plot complexity for the first part of the year. He was later to develop into a writer whose journal provided germs for compositions. That probably had its impetus, or at least, its first concrete manifestation, in early February.

While unpacking his books at the start of class, he exclaimed, in a tone very near exasperation, " Miss, your journal writing is making me schizophrenic!" He went on to say that he had now stopped writing his usual (adventure) type of composition, and started writing differently. This latest composition had a connection between a dilemma he'd been struggling with a week earlier.

I handed him a pen; write it down, please.

Your journal writing is turning me into a schizophrenic! Every time I'm faced with a problem or something is bothering me, I pick up a piece of paper and write to myself so

as I can tell myself what I should do, what conclusions to reach, which paths to follow.

Well, that night, in the comp, I was torn apart. I wasn't sure what I should do so I wrote to myself. I ended up reviewing all the past events, told myself what I should try to do, but I ended up praying for guidance.

Of note is his conflation of the terms 'journal' and 'comp'. Though this is a comp, he also says he is writing to himself, and doing so as a means of thinking and resolving. That it will evolve into public or shared writing, i.e. move from the private and expressive to the poetic and public, seems wholly unremarkable and natural to him.

The finished product arrived a few weeks later, at term's end - appropriately titled "A Prayer for Guidance". It was ten pages long, and had two drafts, with it, totalling fourteen pages. One of the readers, Laurie Ann wrote;

"Kyle, it's wonderful!!! Especially the last part of the prayer and the poem. It's great to hear someone reveal their honest emotions so simply and directly..."

Emotionally charged as it is for him, it lacks the usual smooth elegance his work usually displays. This is to be expected; there is not much distance here, and the personal need to write for clarification and exorcism is paramount. His crisis is first love, and the questions it raises about the contradictions of head and heart are of the essence. It is no wonder he was "schizophrenic; the greater wonder was that it did become grist to his mill.

Kyle continued to write; significantly, though, much more originally than before. All his work had at least three drafts, and was well crafted. Happily for him, no more 'agonies' beset him, as far as his public knew. After one last "adventure" composition his final submission was a beautifully crafted monologue of a preacher who intoned the virtues of turning on, hallucinating, and vagrancy in the style of a snake-oil salesman.

But, ever the Opus editor, and doubtless less aware of the changes he himself had undergone, he could still, as a reader, intone his own learned assumptions - ironically enough, in his comment on Laurie Ann's final letter to an idol, to wit:

... Very Good. I didn't really find any hot spots because I don't like this kind of comp. Idea is developed well. I don't see any plot. Character is developed nicely. Theme is clear. Good setting, atmosphere is A.O.K.

I have penned in a marginal note to him in red ink. It says:

"K.B. not every comp is a narrative! Be flexible."

So much for the contradictions of the student writer and critic. Kyle could make his teachers schizophrenic; but mercifully, he is not doing as he tells others to do. On his own, he's breaking new ground, using writing for introspection, and becoming a stylist, too.

Fiction as Fix(ing)

Louise:

Carla:

Kyle:

## Louise

As I showed Louise's first story around the staff room, her previous teacher was amazed " She didn't write like this last year!" What lit a fire under this little girl? Too hot to handle, the teacher ( a cycle II English specialist) responsible for Opus rejected her composition out of hand. It had all the elements teachers look for in good writing - concise and riveting, the well crafted plot led to a shocking climax, and, as he said, it was on a subject "unsuitable" for a student audience.

Louise was not only pleasing her class audience, she was also leaping from 60's in Grade X to the 80's in Grade XI. As she wrote in a class set of individual commentary on the writing class:

This has been really fantastic. It was a terrific way to develop our writing. Frankly, my writing has improved a great deal. I have found out I am pretty good at writing from a sadistic point of view. The others, in general, are also improving. They come out with fresh ideas.

Her work had taken a definitely "Poe"ish turn. Though not all her pieces ended with ghoulish deaths, and some were funny, all of them showed steady improvement. Her only small setback came in attempting parody, which was a laudable departure, where she took risks with style that virtually none of her grade mates ordinarily do. I photocopied her June exam compositions, at the time, as examples of the qualitative



strides the writing class students were exhibiting.

Two years later, and just because it was on file, her work was re-examined, for this study for topic self-selection. Suddenly the thematic thread which ran through several of the stories, as well as their audaciousness, their zest, and their originality stood out in bold relief.

The Electra theme is clear in the first piece which so shocked the members of the English department. In "Isn't That Strange", the speaker, who is gradually revealed as the inmate of an asylum recounts the description of a murder. It was, as it emerges, her own act against the lover whom they tell her was her father. "The Match" is a love story which mates a wizened, sixty-eight year old woman with a fifteen year old boy, ending in the death of the ...boy! Her last exam composition takes the given topic of a "letter of complaint" and has a young secretary taking her mature boss to task for not fulfilling the pattern of chasing secretaries round the desk. It is signed, "Betsy Buns".

This last piece, taken from the June composition exam, as well as a humorous essay using a Mark Twain epigram as a topic sentence, provided a real and very welcome laugh as I graded the set of exams. It was not only a delight to read, but also evidence of creative maturity. Since original output always bears the imprint of an author's stylistic and thematic pattern (or demon, as Emig would have it), her examination

performance, adapting and sustaining her own material so successfully, is heartening. In her case, unlike Marco's, the psychological impetus is irrelevant and/or unremarked, by both teacher and student, as it most often is. The classroom is not a couch, and all of life's themes are present in the writing class. Her work confirms that school-initiated writing can closely approximate the natural evolution of self-initiated originality, once the students' own creativity has been released and has developed its own momentum.

In addition, the reward of discovering that one has a resource or gift that 'works' is inestimable in personal terms ( self-esteem, a sense of being on the road to self-actualization, to use Maslow's term). This sense of having a personal stamp is the essence of identity, and it does not need saying, that the task of adolescence is to arrive at a vigorous sense of one's own individuality and the recognition of one's own 'voice'.

Carla

Style, Theme, and Free Choice.

In the initial two years of implementing a writing workshop format in class, the first and strongest fact my students impressed upon me was their enthusiasm for self-selection. My own in-depth understanding of its efficacy developed as I examined and reported the students' reactions.

Late in 1982 in the reports documenting the first six months, I had quoted these student sentiments:

S. W:

It is a much better program. It allows more chance to experiment and since it relies more on the judgement of our peers it reflects an accurate opinion of the people who would be more exposed to such literature had it been published. Also, it allows people with similar concerns and background to judge work by their peers and thereby profit by this experience through knowing what things their peers appreciate and what items should be included in most compositions.

It is also an excellent time to practice different and sometimes extravagant form.

It seems to provide an excellent group atmosphere where students may not be afraid to write things they would have wanted to for a while, but wouldn't have handed in to the teacher. Most comps are good and some have excellent and surprising turns which are very intriguing and very noteworthy.

A.M.:

This program of yours for composition was very beneficial for most students. I can

remember when I was in grade school and I had to write compositions. I use to love to write them because the titles were so interesting. But when high school started, all that changed. The titles we were given were never interesting and composition then became boring. But with this program of yours compositions had become interesting. During the year I'd get so caught up in a composition that sometimes I'd wake up in the middle of the night and have to write down the thoughts that had just come into my mind. And on weekends when there was nothing to do I'd just sit down and write comp after comp. I'll admit they weren't always that long but I really enjoyed doing it.

In the initial set of responses, the evidence revealing the sheer pleasure, stylistic and modal resilience, risk taking, topic exploration, and increased motivation was overwhelming. Louise was in that group, but, as was noted earlier, though the connection between the thematic, novel and stylistic vitality in her work had struck me, the pattern or thread had not.

Where it did do so was in the next year of the program, one that spanned three quarters of the year. At this point, a report on Carla's linguistic development emerged consequent to an observation she had made about her own stylistic development.

My description, in the spring of 1983, was one of the germinating seeds of this study. What I observed then (a full account of a previously quoted segment: ) was this:

At one of the weekly sessions in March, she was overheard commenting, rather in amazement, that her compositions were getting shorter and shorter all the time. I responded to this, saying that that was not necessarily a bad thing, and especially if she was managing to say as much, but with fewer words. Was this the case, I wondered... It really was a question posed to get the group thinking about the virtues of being concise, and I was, in turn, amazed to see the quick nods from her readers. They were in no doubt, and their agreement seemed confirmation, indeed. Carla too agreed, after a moment's thought. My curiosity was piqued.

Just how accurate was her perception of her development as a writer? Would I, the professional, concur with her perception and to what degree? If she was right, the chance to measure or verify this was opportune.

Luckily, she had three samples of writing that not only spanned the relevant time period (before and after the inception of the workshop) but also were remarkably similar in content idea as well as mode. Knowing how sixteen-year old girls think, perhaps it's not surprising that, left to choose, their fancy will invariably turn to thoughts of love (regardless of the season).

So it is that Carla's three narratives fall into the category of love stories with career conflicts. Each one concerns a creative heroine whose relationship with her hero is pivotal with respect to her own personal creative goal. In the first, "A.M.", he keeps her viable as she, world-class skater, discovers she has leukemia. In the second, "Mistakes" she rejects him, even though pregnant by him, to continue to pursue a career in broadcasting. The third "The Hour Glass" represents the synthesis of the preceding two, in that our heroine, successful broadcaster, is happily married, pregnant, and, after a leap in narrative time, is looking back over a long and happy married life.

These compositions were not consciously conceived as a trilogy: perhaps their imaginative "fulfillment" is as significant as the compositional ones.

Certainly the freedom of topic choice permits an emotional unravelling that is as fundamental to the writer's impetus as is the need to "read to the end" for a reader engrossed in the vicarious experience of a love story. One could hypothesize a developmental

correlation. Certainly her plots and subjects take a large leap in maturation, not only in life situations, but also in the degree of realism with which Carla approaches her heroine's lot in life. Although the focus of this examination of her three stories will not be on content, it will be apparent that many of the changes she manifests in her sentences are in the area of increasing meaning, regardless of surface simplicity or complexity.

A reading of Carla's compositions will reveal not only the development of narrative style, but especially the leap into prose-poetry in 'The Hour Glass'. This latter piece had its first expression in her private journal (freewriting) done in the 10 minute class-time allotted daily. This points up the organic connection of freewriting to finished product which is fundamental to the internal logic of giving free topic choice to writers. The necessity of maintaining thematic continuity was central to Carla's wrestling with her own career plans. She told me (no surprise) that she intended to become a broadcaster. For girls of her age, any career projection which is off the beaten track is anxiety laden. For girls of our 'age' feminist awareness has supplied a new element in the anticipation of conflict occasioned by the collision of traditional female patterns, roles, and rewards, in the course of melding career and marriage.

Like Tim, Carla used her fantasy projection for a "run through". Having conceived each step, working through progressively more mature levels of perspective and toward

more likely scenarios, she has literally conceived the happy outcome.

One does not need Freud to tell us that this kind of fantasy-fiction is the imaginative testing-out on which planned behaviour relies. When one's 'impossible' dream enters the realm of the 'conceivable', it is then that one can set about realizing it.

The totality of the progress, both in idea and form, content and mechanics, is not, I contend, accidental. The growth Carla exhibits is multi-dimensional. It is this 'omnibus' benefit that self-selection of topics may yield.

## CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS



## Findings

These findings are preliminary. They represent ventures onto fairly unexplored ground, though they follow the many signposts, invitations, and directions present in the literature. Their emergence was due, in part, to intentional but non-explicit and discrete strategies designed to enhance the process under examination. Texts were never manipulated, and random ideas from the desk tended to encourage diverse forms of exploration. No suggestion was mandatory, and all writing could remain private. It is my belief that in such an environment, students do discover the facts about where good writing comes from, and are best left to discover that from their own experience. However, I am sure that a more experienced and deft hand could have been both light and more effective.

One hopes that the concrete examples in the case studies will be of use as research attention shifts to examining the results of student-centred practices. The case studies are, of necessity, anecdotal, and thus lend themselves to speculative theorizing about processes and qualitative change. Their value, and that of the methods that foster them, should be scrutinized in the coming years. English teachers are used to bringing the reader and text into as close a relationship as possible. This has always been the goal of the literature class. To apply this to composition is

an organic and logical extension, and one which could be readily welcomed if the benefits became self-evident, which they do once the process is underway.

The case studies present the benefits, as they appeared in the classroom context. The use of the writing to the writers themselves can be inferred from the content, and exists quite apart from (though contributing to) the positive part the topic's usefulness played in getting grades. The therapeutic function these writings served for both the usual and unusual events of adolescence must be evident not only from the opinion of the writers (who themselves are vocal and unanimous) but also from the content. The intellectual and emotional territory that was covered and resolved speaks for itself. That might have also happened without the writing but is, in one sense, irrelevant. Since school-writing, is deemed, properly, to be purposive, then the quality of purpose evidenced in the writing should be judged for what it reveals.

These case studies reflect the fruit of less than a full year's work. The possible benefits that might accrue to students with long term practice and acquired ease is a matter of speculation. But that possibility is the one that this study hopes to encourage. If these methods and goals achieve wider application, the place of writing in the students' lives must needs change.

## Synopsis of the Findings of the Case Studies

The most important generalizations to be made are these:

The writing evolved in such a way that it served the authors' own needs, both as a writer and as a person.

The method insured that the writing process was unimpeded by extrinsically set tasks, and could benefit from the motivational 'by-products' generated from the writers' own commitment to his topic.

The four specific areas of benefit are as follows:

### I Personal or Individual Uses or Function

a) personal growth and self-discovery, as well as the development of openness or readiness to discuss and/or reveal self-chosen aspects of the above i.e. the growth toward autonomy by risking the freedom to be oneself.

b) problem solving of a wide variety of sorts, in a timely and appropriate manner - e.g. cathartic, intra and inter-personal, coming to terms, etc.

c) conceptual expression in concrete terms - i.e., formulation and clarification of ideas, biases, emotions, future projections - and their re-examination or re-formulation, over time.

d) experimentation and risk-taking - the affective experience of it in a non-punitive context; as well as discovery of self-devised strategems in trial-and-error fashion.

## II The Effect on the Student in His Relationship to Writing, the Writing Task, and His Product.

a) increased motivation as a result of intrinsic rewards fuelling the drive to excellence: increased rewards are seen as the direct result of, and proportional to, the quantity and quality of effort.

b) an increased appreciation of the factors which link quality to content: ( between excellence and the topic,) i.e. its degree of truth, honesty, reality, or integration with other learned or read subject matter.

c) as a corollary of b), the need to match the quality of surface text to that of the deeper text, i.e. the self-induced desire to revise and draft as well as to polish final copy.

d) enhancement of the self-esteem of the student qua writer: the perception of the correlation between his own creativity and the final product; the writer experiences the recognition of his own power to create ex nihilo, to uncover the range of his own resources, and to reassure himself that these powers operate independently ( i.e. are not initiated extrinsically ).

e) as a corollary of d), the growth of confidence, willingness to trust one's own instincts, belief that ordinary lives viewed with perceptiveness ( de-mystification of the writer's craft ) are indeed the sources out of which

writing emerges.

f) in the event of some significant enlightenment as a result of introspection and analysis, there is self-esteem of an intellectual kind, i.e. the self, aware of achieving self-awareness.

### III The Aspects of Writing Addressed

In the search for one's own meanings and intention, and in the absence of imposed criteria, the student writer finds it necessary to consider and manipulate factors previously outside his own prerogative or experience.

a) Truth, in particular its relation to fictionalizing, negotiating the creative leap from life to art.

b) Form, in particular, the experience of decision making with respect to mode, length, style, and voice in order to best suit the topic, as well as the development of a judgemental role and skill.

c) the "feel" of impelled writing and the experience of the sensation of writing which is going well, or driven; and the self-generated parallel need to want to spare no effort to get it right, in both content and polish.

d) onus: what rests with the writer, in relation to his own needs and the readers' needs; that which exists quite apart from and separable from, the onus on the student to meet a deadline for purposes of evaluation ( i.e. the elimination of writing conditioned by a perception of what the teacher

wants to hear - and an elimination of writing which is perceived as correct, even if boring)

#### IV Effect on Classroom Dynamic

Since the case studies themselves were not accompanied by research into attitudinal changes, what follows is conjectural, but based on personal observation, classroom experience, and is confirmed, in part, by the letters ( see appendix) of some students.

a) a reduction of what Emig terms outward compliance and inward hostility

b) elimination of the tendency to project blame in the event of lack of success; i.e. productive channeling of emotional reactions

c) an altered perception of the teacher as collaborator or enabler; reduction of the adversarial, confrontational, or defensive postures that can develop in the teacher-student dynamic

d) a maturer classroom demeanour; the result of the student having been dignified by the teacher's assumption of his capacity, and the trust and confidence implied by the extension of freedom and its responsible exercise.\*

\*The general importance of positively altered attitudes and degrees of self-satisfaction (equated with pride) with its obvious effect on motivation has been documented ("Motivation in the Classroom", Research in the Teaching of English, Williams & Alden Vol. 17 No. 2 May 1983.)

Note: My experience in 1984-85 with both slow and regular Grade IX's, some of whom are integrated special education students, indicates that it is not only seniors who respond responsibly.

The pivotal part the commitment to self-selected topics plays is, of course, the single point at issue in this monograph. The concatenation of benefits, seems to me to have sprung from the freedom of movement around the subjects that had relevance and fascination for their writers. The interest in the topic, the open-endedness of the demands, and the willingness to invest time and effort were the variables the writer could manipulate. Both the amount of prewriting or rewriting and revisiting (revising) had a part to play in the final function and quality. All the goals of the traditional approach to composition class were consistently met and, more often than not, exceeded.

Since high motivation translates into copiousness, per se ( the benefit of which has been established), one can feel certain on those grounds alone that good things are happening. Just as reading has come to be seen as more beneficial to writing skills than traditional grammar, so too, I believe, will methods that enhance involvement, commitment, and self-related benefits.

This study did not encompass any attempt to measure the improvement in the mechanics of writing ability in any specific way. Since several variables were introduced simultaneously, all of which increased the amount and frequency of writing dramatically, it would not have been possible to isolate and correlate mechanical proficiency. Increased competence is nevertheless discernable and marked,

as is shown in the case studies which span November to June. Most importantly, what does speak out of those pages is the honesty and authenticity, as well as the fun and the determination. The copious effort and quantity of ink invested I have not reproduced here, though I have seen the 'drafts' and heard of the time spent. It must have been worth it to them. One female student recently wrote that composition was, "her favourite part of English this year." She confessed that she really enjoyed reading her own compositions and hoped I did not find that "too conceited."

#### Implications for Teaching

What is being proposed is not radical when viewed from the point of view of current pedagogical thinking. It is the next step in the extension of student-centred, experienced-based practice. However small or rational a step, it may nevertheless conflict with many benevolently held ideas about the role and function of the writing teacher. The teacher-topic bond may need to be re-examined and re-cast, in order to place it less categorically and more efficaciously, in the hierarchy of duties.

Implementation of the classroom methods applied in this study, (as described in the prologue to the case studies, pp 59-60) is not a complicated matter. What should accompany the methodology is a re-examination of certain perspectives in pedagogy in order to develop an appropriate



new mind-set. There are three fundamental issues to be addressed; they have been touched on tangentially throughout the study, but bear closer examination here. If meaningful changes are to be made in the re-orientation of certain practices, what must be taken into account is:

1. the place of creativity as a goal in the regular classroom.
2. the re-allocation of authority with reference to the decisions student writers are to be permitted
3. the elimination of contradictions in present practice and theory which have gone unnoticed.

### The Place of Creativity

Creativity is an attribute of people who have normal to above average intelligence. It is, clearly, a function of the 'self' at its most individualistic. The deliberate intention to enhance both 'creativity' and 'self' has lead to curriculum modifications such as seen in the regime pedagogique in English studies in Quebec and to renewed attention to programs for the gifted. In focussing on the link between the creative self and the school experience the conflict between them has become clearer. Schools are characterized by rigidity and authoritarian orderliness, but creativity requires practices which require self-direction, time, open-endedness and which reward self-actualizing.

Research into giftedness has shed some relevant light

on creativity itself. Worth repeating is the point Emig made over a decade ago about creativity being 'wonderfully democratic' and that practices which inhibit creativity stifle its emergence from the intellectually gifted as well as the academically disadvantaged ( of whom Danny and Martin are prime examples). Methods which encourage creativity will not only advantage a wider spectrum of students, but also permit the actual emergence of creative powers which are stifled by methods which reward the fulfilling of rigid requirements.

What happens when creativity is not pursued is described in a study of gifted students: tasks perceived as mundane or unchallenging yield lethargy or produce work deliberately meant to seem 'average'; the research goes so far as to suggest that much potential creativity of all the gifted is improperly nourished, extinguished or punished out of existence at an early age. The best environment is one which is neither rigidly orthodox nor overly permissive; the nurturance of creativity requires the development of a sturdy ego and high self-esteem; and the reward of forsaking conformity is, ultimately, finding reward in one's own work rather than in the plaudits of others. ( the gifted Case Studies, Hauch & Freehill, 1972.) If creativity is not nurtured, it follows that neither teacher nor student will be in a position to document the loss. The regular classroom ought to be the first place where creative potential be encouraged to emerge.

The cross-over from studies done with the gifted and their application to general humane practice is most germane to the writing class and its goals. The terms in which the researchers comment are redolent of those one reads concerning the conceptual stages of composing. "Plaudits may come, but ordinarily after, not before or during, the lonely and lengthy period of creation." (Ibid, p. 132)

Hughes Mearns, an American working with gifted writers in junior high school, in Creative Power, as long ago as 1928, wrote:

Feeling is the guide to discovery and thinking serves only to verify what is found. Therefore the creative spirit must be enticed rather than driven. The teacher is effective not by teaching but by paving the way for creativity. Creative potential is always present but the child must be taught to trust his own judgement. (1928, cited in Hauck & Freehill, 1972, p. 139.)

The implication for teachers is clear. The encouragement of creativity has, as its first step, creating an environment where the students' own judgments and ideas surface; 'being taught to trust them' follows. Creative people "trust their own ideas, remain persistent in their own interests and structure individualistic goals" (Ibid.,p.139)

The literature on creativity so often refers to potential. Is that yet another 'wistful' sigh, in academic language? Earlier in this study I had put the question,

"Whose (creative) writing is this, anyway?" Perhaps the question ought really to be "Who's creative?" There is much joy to be had in seeking to answer that.

### The Re-Allocation of Authority

The issue of who holds the authority over texts is the central one. If the student is his own master, or, at the very least, perceives himself as not being over-mastered, a multiplicity of benefits accrue. As well, many of the negatives of classroom life (exacerbated as they are by the adolescent's age-appropriate necessity to wrest power from adults) will inevitably wither away. From whichever viewpoint one adopts, the benefits are readily apparent. The implicit message in placing power or trust is a positive one. The underlying assumption that the teacher deems the student capable of exercising his own resources successfully is translated into a self-fulfilling prophesy.

The respectful granting of freedom results in the responsible exercise of it where both parties share the same objectives, where one is ready to help the other achieve them, and where the standards are fair and appropriate.

The role of affect in the enhancement of learning is not at issue here. Clearly, success is joyful, but the necessity is to make success a function of the exercise of the student's own power; then the positives accrue because they

are seen to be a result of the students' own trials, errors and hard work. The displacement of emotions which are specifically due to power struggles, so common to adolescents, should be channeled into more positive self-directed problem-solving.

Teachers cannot hope to create self-motivated students if self-selection is denied. Portfolios and self-selection has now been advocated, and has come tantalizingly close to this last step to which reference was made earlier. The notion that the teacher must provide 'meaningful contexts' ought not to be applied beyond the stage of short exercises or inspirational goads to experimentation or skills practice.

To make the positive presumption of students' capacity to yield the performance, it is necessary to make real concessions.

To profess confidence is not to vest it in actuality, let alone to create it. The significant and real shift in power is the difference between 'you can do it' - in itself an expression of confidence - to 'you have it within you' and the corollary of that, 'I genuinely want you to realize it.' When that message is received, there will be no shortage of work to be done in composition. Teachers will be as busy as ever, conferencing, generating ideas, and yes, suggesting topics, too ('try this out, see how you like it'). There will still be slackers and lapses, the odd plagiarism and truant, but

overall, there will be less negativism in the classroom dynamic itself. The attitudinal changes alone are worth the price.

In welcoming the shift away from a confrontational or conflictual role to that of enabler or collaborator, the teacher will find herself in a more comfortable role. While providing what a student needs to know about the achievement norms, the teacher can strive to avoid being judgemental about the worth of a particular subject. While helping a student to speak his mind well, questions concerning agreement, personal taste, or personality need not arise; teacher flexibility is one of the behaviours of respect.

Like parenting, teaching involves the gradual weaning away from dependency, the searching for ways to enhance and reward self-sufficiency, and the gradual shifting of the right to determine goals and directions. In tandem with nature, the writing teacher can find no more willing ally in her craft than the student himself.

### The Elimination of Contradictions

The introduction of new theory and practice is bound to be bedevilled by contradictions. With the best will in the world, new systems develop hitches in them - places where the gears are not meshing. Stopping to re-examine and re-align the workings is a necessary and common-sensical step while

phasing-in.

The contradictions to be assessed are primarily three:

- . student-centred theory becomes teacher-directed practice.
- . freewriting is done by students who are not 'free' to either choose its subject or use its products.
- . journals or diaries which are intended to be sources for the student to get in touch with himself - to tap his unconscious- are read by others; no longer private they are inauthentic.

Perceiving these contradictions, students become cynical or suspicious of hypocrisy.

The first of these 'contradictions' is likely to be inadvertent. Teachers who genuinely subscribe to the philosophy of student-centred teaching may still be casting about for new methods that will effect the change concretely. Freeing students to write as they wish could not be simpler, yet so few teachers do it. If ever there were an instance of 'less is more' - this is it.

Freeing freewriting ought to be one of the first steps in unblocking all the stoppages of high school writers. Freedom to tap into one's own centre is the first step to making the leap from life to art, in the creative writing process. The textbooks which are too goal oriented in terms

of "product" may well need to be re-assessed, both in terms of process-based teaching, student-centred ideology, and creativity theory.

One of the obvious places for freewriting is the diary or daily journal. Recently introduced and enthusiastically embraced in our classrooms, teachers run the risk of 'killing the goose' by losing sight of the reasons why it must be scrupulously private. Whatever term one applies to what one hopes to have invested in the diary - the not-wholly-known, the expressive - catharsis, self-discovery - it must be granted that if there is any risk of its being intercepted, then it will not function toward these purposes. Students whose journals are kept in cupboards, or whose teachers inspect them, will not write what they want - they have told me so - nor will they trust promises not to read - some of them have been betrayed. Privacy should not only be insured, but even extended where it may not have initially be intended, by either the writer or teacher. The true benefit of this kind of writing is too precious to risk losing. Some of the best pieces of writing my students have produced have begun in their journals - and by best I mean the ones where the honesty of the event and emotion spoke with a movingly authentic voice. The question is both moral and pragmatic; the answer is to keep the journal in the hands of its writers at all times. Teachers who enjoy the open communication that reading it offers can ask for teacher-designated submissions or letters. Teachers are a specific audience and students must



have the right to suit their material to that reader. If not, we have yet another contradiction between preaching and practice!

Ultimately, any discussion of freedom - or freedoms - finds itself confronting this paradox. The freedom that makes for civilization is the one that contains the seeds of self-discipline and responsibility, either to oneself or to larger entities, such as 'art' or 'community'. Thus, this final freedom should be added to those compiled by Murray and Elbow - and it is Jerome Bruner's. He catches the quintessence of the paradox, while accurately pinpointing the essence of what teachers of writing long to inspire. He calls it "the freedom to be dominated by the object being created". At its most extreme it is Pygmalion dominated by Galatea. "To be dominated by an object of one's own creation ... is to be free of the defenses that keep us hidden from ourselves."

To this I would add:

Were "freeing students" to become the object of teachers' creativity in the classroom, then they too would be free - free to discover, through the writings they read, the very students who have been hidden from them. What is offered is the joy of discovery for students and teachers alike.

## APPENDIX

Marco

1. Changes - December, 1983
2. The Short Lived Party - February, 1984
3. Irreversibly Proud - April, 1984
4. Hamlet essay - Universality May-June, 1984
5. The Oedipus Complex - Composition Examination English 522  
June 7, 1984.

Danny met me at his side door just like every weekend. He would open the first door, shove his over weight, mixed breed aside and he would open the door just barely enough to let me and my beer shove through. I remember not having a taste for beer that Christmas eve but if I hadn't bought any, the guys would talk. Once in, Danny went straight to the basement and left me to put my things away. Everything seemed to be business as usual, except for the date.

When I reached the basement, what I saw was Al, Mat and Danny gathered around the television watching a porn on the video. I sat beside Mat who greeted me first. I hated the business of drinking and then trying to act sober to prove somehow and indirectly that you're a man. But these guys seemed enjoy it, especially Danny and Al who were having a ball. Mat didn't seem so alive today. He's usually in the limelight but today, he seemed reluctant to even speak or drink. Al, yelling Merry Christmas, then took out three joints that were nicely rolled. You could tell Al had experience in this area. I then looked at Mat and I saw what no one else could. He almost broke his face trying to hold back his expression of disappointment. I know what I saw. He then got up and left without saying a word. That was stupid, I thought. I mean, he knows that now we are going to talk behind his back. We were all good friends but we seemed to enjoy talking behind each other's back. Truthfully, I hated it but that's the way it was. I'm not going to make a fool of myself and stand up for what I thought and even lose my friends. I had no one else. Al lit the joints and we smoked while Al and Dan made jokes about how Mat can't handle his end. For an hour we smoked and drank. After a while, I decided to see what was wrong with Mat. I told the guys I was going to the washroom and then got up. I walked two, maybe three steps and then all the booze and hashish hit me at once. I felt incredibly sick and everything was spinning around. Then I remembered what I should have remembered before. Two days before, Dr. Marcus gave me a prescription for penicilin. The label said no alcohol. I started to get incredibly scared. I ran upstairs and into the washroom. At this point, my eyesight gave away like when you're lying down watching T.V. and you get up fast and then go blind and feel faint. I started to throw up with an almost immoral will. I almost went into convulsions. Just then Mat came in and said, "Can't you see what you're doing to yourself! Don't you see how useless all this is! I'd rather work out my problems with my ol'man than keep doing this crap!"

I don't remember what else he said because at this point I passed out.

When I woke up, I was in bed with my parents and Mat beside me. They smiled with relief and Mat got up to leave. On his way out he just said "I'll see you tomorrow. My parents are waiting for me so we can start the family dinner."

He laughed and left.

I later got better and eventually got back to normal. Since this scare, Mat and I have devoted our week-ends to do what we really want to do and not what we thought people expected of us. We finally broke loose of that web we were entangled in and now are experiencing freedom in its true sense. Tomorrows Christmas Eve and Mat's family is coming over for supper and the party. This time we'll drink eggnog so as to keep our twelve month streak of no drinking or drugs alive. Changes are scary and do take courage but in the end it's for the best.

Marco

### The Short Lived Party

The short lived party winded itself up at one in the morning because of a fight that broke out over a missing beer.

"At least they'll remember the party for a long while and that's while and that's what it's all about, right?"

Jameson just looked at him in a disgusted manner and said "Why don't you go home, Bowie. It's about time I lock up anyways."

With that, Bowie jumped into his parents' Chevy and drove away. You'd never guess he'd only been driving for eight months in the way he handled himself and the car, especially after mixing warm beers and wine and breathing the "sin semillian" smoke in the hot, thick space of his best friend's basement.

Sunday morning was the typical Sunday morning of any other previous week ends. The hangover, the yelling upstairs and the evangelists on television. His father stopped the arguing with a fist and afterwards told Bowie to change the battery in the car. Bowie tried to refuse at first for fear of failing in front of him but saw no way out. Bowie tried relentlessly to get it done fast and in the right manner but, as usual, he couldn't accomplish what his father had asked of him. His father, who had been watching from the living room window, came out towards Bowie. All of a sudden all of Bowie's senses went blank. He couldn't hear the neighbour's lawn mower, or his wife's voice yelling at the kids to come in an the music coming from the sixteen year old girl's radio across the street. All he would hear were his father's footsteps which sounded like a dry, funeral drum. He shoved Bowie aside like a sack of potatoes and Bowie, feeling like one of those potatoes, just stood there listening as his father said,

"You fucking wimp! What are you good for? At your age, I could fix the transmtion on any car you threw at me. Christ! When are you gonna learn! "

Bowie didn't know what to do while his father changed the battery. If he went into the house, he'd look like a cry baby running to mommy but if he stayed, he'd have to witness his father's superiority and take more abuse. Either way he knew he'd lose, he didn't know what he'd lose but he swore that whatever it was, one day he'd win.

Later on the day, one of Bowie's friends, Daryl, called to invite him to a party he was throwing in honour of Canada Day. Bowie readily accepted the invitation. After he hung up, he called Marg on the phone,

"Marg! It's me. What are you doing tonight? You wanna go out?"

She answered,

"I can't, Bowie. I promised my folks I'd stay home tonight. Especially after yesterday when he picked me up and smelled my breath. Sorry!"

He reassured her that it was alright and then hung up.

When he got to the party, he noticed everyone was surprised to see him there. He didn't know why but it seemed like he wasn't supposed to be there and some were showing interest in how he felt. For an hour he wondered but then it all came into focus. He was dumbfounded at what he saw in the "make-out" corner of the hall. Marg had a hand up her shirt and she had her hand in..Greg's pants! All he could think of is the nine months she's probably been doing this and how she's making him feel like a jerk. He then ran home and blew out in an uncontrollable fury. He punched his basement walls and tore up anything that reminded him of her. He then fell to the ground and cried for what seem I the rest of the night.

The next morning he went to work with his father as he always did when he didn't have school. He worked as a busboy in his father's restaurant. Bowie didn't seem to have his mind on his work and in the middle of rush hour, he dropped a few plates in the middle of the dining room. Bowie instantly started to sweat, turned red, and itched all over because he knew who was coming up behind him. It seemed like a thousand eyes were set on him and his father as he said, "Pick it up and bring it to the back and while you're there, change your clothes and go home. We have no place for this sort of nonsense."

Bowie sat in a dark corner full of dust and after he changed. For a while, the only sounds in the room were the tap in the corner dripping and then this sound was broken by a cynical laugh originating from Bowie.

That night, Jameson sparked up the first joint in his basement with Bowie.

"Bowie, I've noticed you're getting a little edgy lately...",

he stalls for a second to take a toke and then continues,"  
What the hell is wrong with you? Have a toke, relax."  
"No!...Thanks," he answered.

"C'mon Bowie, talk to me. What's wrong?"  
"Nothing much. Just that my father seems to feed on my being  
embarrassed and insulted, especially in public, I never seem to  
make him happy or proud. He won't let me, dammit. And when  
he gets the provincials and sees I didn't graduate, he'll go  
nuts on my face. And Marg, well that's another story, nine  
months of living one big fat lie and, God! I must look like a  
fool to her. Christ I'm screwed up bad. I don't worry  
because I don't give a damn about these people. Everything's  
cool! Really ::: I don't care."

Jameson stared at Bowie in awe. All he could say was  
"for sure man...for sure".  
"Well, I'm going to split. I'll see you Tom...whenever,  
allright? See ya." and just left. He got in the car and  
left in a suicidal speed.

At home, his parents and sister were watching "Rebel  
Without a Cause" when they got the phone call.

"Mrs. Colt?" asked the serious, deep voice.  
"Yes".  
"This is Dr. Smith from Children's Hospital. I'm sorry to  
tell you, your son has been in an accident up on highway  
thirteen. It seems that for some reason, he drove right into  
oncoming traffic and hit a car head on. Unfortunately the  
other driver didn't make it. Your son is in a coma and being  
looked after by the best staff in Montreal."

His mother broke down in tears and hung up the phone.

The neighbours gave them a ride to the hospital.  
When his parents and sister walked into Bowie's room, all they  
saw was a half bandaged face and a body being invaded by  
tubes in every direction. All that could be heard was the  
steady beat on the cardiogram from Bowie's heart. His mother  
and sister left with the doctor and left his father alone with  
him. For ten grueling minutes, all he could do was stare at  
the son he never had. All of a sudden, a team of medics came  
in and started to work on Bowie frantically to try to revive  
his heart. His father was so deep in thought, he didn't even  
notice how that steady beat had stopped.



Bowie's soul hovered over the bed and watched the scene. He thought about the peace he had finally found and about how, after all this time, after all the waiting, he had won. At least he thought so. His soul then faded in all directions to oblivion.

Marco

### Irreversibly Proud

"I'm pretty sick of you. What is it you want? You want blood from me? Yeah, blood!" Bowie ran to the kitchen cupboard, found the meat cleaver and held it to his wrist. He then turned quickly to his father who was standing near the dining room table. Bowie just stood there, ready to slash his life away. Whether he would or wouldn't was a question only fate could answer.

An eerie silence suddenly took over. The air between them was thick with dissension and tension. They just stared at each other for too long a time until suddenly Bowie jerked his arm and tossed the knife away. Knowing there was nothing left to do upstairs he went down to the security of his basement. Temporary harmony was available to Bowie in the dark corners of his basement. Bowie's father sat down wondering why Bowie needed twenty dollars so badly that he would steal them from his father. Just then Bowie's mother came in the room holding a bag of groceries, "Darling, I took twenty dollars from your desk and I forgot to tell you. I bought a few groceries for the week-end. Darling! What's wrong! Did you and Bowie have another argument?..."She kept on asking what had happened while he clinched his hands tightly, rubbing them together and then bowing his head in disgust.

A young boy reluctantly labours on the fields of post-civil war Spain when all of a sudden takes him by his shoulder straps and throws him in hole in which he fell for five years. Finally, he hit bottom in a lavishly furnished office. He was then strapped down to an electric chair which clashed immensely with the victorian decor. A fat monk came at him with a hammer in one hand and a bible in the other. Just as the pig was about to hammer the young adolescent's mind away, a man, the young boy as an adult, came in and blew the monk's brains out with a shot gun the size of a canon.

Bowie stared through the darkness of his room, at a light piercing through a crack in his parent's bedroom door. A piercing cry, bouncing off the walls, coming from his father's bedroom, woke him up. The rest of the night remained undisturbed.

Saturday morning was as typical as death is to war. The reluctance to get up, (because of the hangover,) was apparent in Bowie, the yelling upstairs, the roadrunner running away from the coyote who's lost cause is always getting him in trouble and the phone calls from his friends wondering what he's going to do that night. After breakfast, he went outside to do some serious tanning on the front yard. From where he was sitting, he would see all his neighbours. Some were washing their cars trying to make sure anyone could admire it from every angle. Others were trimming their hedges and lawns trying desperately to accentuate their middle class homes. Bowie was the only teenager on his street so only his home was playing music. Little kids were running around the street playing b-ball. He could also see his father washing the car. "Bowie! Stop smoking those cancer sticks and help me wash the car."

"No, thanks."

"I'm not asking you, I'm telling you, come and clean the car. Start inside."

"Look, I don't want anything to do with your ego trips. I'll have enough time to clean my own car when I get one. Meanwhile, I'll wait."

His father stopped washing the car and walked over to Bowie, put his hands on his hips and asked, "What the hell do you think you are? You think you can do anything you want?"

"Don't worry, I realized I can't last Thursday when I asked you for the car to go to the store for cigarettes. You can't even give me the keys to your shit box for five minutes and you want me to clean it? You use it, I don't so you clean it!"

"Come back here! Where do you think you're going? I said come back here dammitt"  
"Fuck off!!"

Bowie then slammed the front door behind him leaving his father standing outside wondering what to do next. He looked up and saw how everyone had stopped working to watch the scene. The perfect home was not so perfect after all. The truth was out so the acting was over and done with. Bowie's father unwillingly realized it and couldn't hide it anymore.

Bowie, meanwhile, was walking accross(sic) the kitchen when his mother stopped him and said, "What's wrong with you Bowie? Why are you doing this?"

"Look, ma. Don't meddle in my affairs and I'll stay out of your life. This is none of your God damn business so just keep washing the dishes and leave me alone!"

He left the kitchen and went downstairs, leaving his mother confused and wondering where their relationship had gone wrong. She sat down and began to remember the days when Bowie was growing up from a baby to a teeny-bopper. One time, Bowie had just arrived from school and he had seen his mother sitting in the living room crying. Bowie ran to his mother and hugged her; he then saw her neck all bruised up. He asked what had happened, she answered, "Daddy and I got into an argument. Don't worry about it, okay? Let's go eat." The hate that Bowie felt surge through him was abnormal for a child his age yet it ws as real as the love he had for his mother. From that day on, with help from his mother, he learned to disrespect and dislike his father. Bowie used him as an example of what not to grow up to be like. Shortly after his fourteenth birthday, Bowie discovered alcohol, drugs and the fun and challenge in rebellion. His mother, using her failing health as an excuse, then realized she could no longer handle him so she decided that Bowie needed a father figure. All of a sudden, she stepped back as the authority figure and his father stepped into the limelight. Bowie felt betrayed and in his subconscious swore revenge on his mother. That's when Bowie began to build the imaginary wall around himself to protect himself and whatever there was left that remained untouched by hate and betrayal. It's ironic how this defense mechanism can turn out to be the complete opposite. The foundation was down and the wall had begun to erect itself.

Bowie later came up for supper. He saw his family feasting at the table and so sat down in his usual place not realizing that there was no food, not even a setting, in front of him. When he realized this, he looked up at both his parent(sic) who were talking to his smaller sister. He then looked over the kitchen counter and saw his food there with a high chair in front of it. He felt so ridiculous and stupid, he didn't know what to do next, so he just got up and went to eat, away from his family, separated. He heard them talk and laugh, as if he wasn't there anymore. The wall around him was complete. There was no way out, he couldn't break it down, at least, not by himself.

That night he went over to his best friend's house. "This is great hash I'm letting you smoke with me. I only sell the best, right Bowie?"

"Right Jameson. Shut up and pass me another spliff."

"Hey! Here I am, letting smoke my profits away for no charge; I don't hear any 'Thank you's' and still you're rude. Smaren'up asshole!"

"Look, I don't need you or anyone else to do me any favours. You got that? I'm sick and fed up to here with the fronts you put up, the pretending you don't sell shit to little kids and your conceited remarks! The hell with you and anyone else who doesn't know what I am. I'll see you tomor... ..whatever!" He slammed the door leaving Jameson in complete awe, holding the joint near his mouth, saying, "I was just joking. Bowie?" Jameson knew this was no ordinary "Bowie depression".

At home, Bowie's parents were making love when they got the phone call.

"Mrs. Anderson? asked the serious, deep voice.

"Yes."

"This is Dr. Smith from Children's Hospital. I'm sorry to tell you, your son has been involved in a serious car accident. It seems that your son just jumped in front of a car up on highway thirteen. We are trying to get the full details but the driver of the car is in deep shock and police will not be able to question him until he has fully recovered. I recommend you and your husband come down immediately." She hung up the phone and broke down in tears. His father knew what had happened.

His father walked in the room and saw a body being pervertedly invaded by tubes everywhere and a face, he really didn't know, half bandaged. He stared at Bowie, letting a few tears get by him, and just kept staring, thinking, wondering. He then knelt between Bowie and the cardiogram which was counting Bowie's last moments on earth. He grabbed Bowie's hand tightly, bowed his head on the bed, he prayed, he cried and kept repeating, "Please...please just this once, ...please". Just then, he felt Bowie squeeze his hand tightly and not let go. He looked up and saw a tear run down Bowie's left cheek. All the walls came crashing down around Bowie. He was free. Just then a medical team rushed in and immediately began to work on Bowie's heart to try to resuscitate it but it was to no avail. Bowie's father was so deep in thought that he hadn't heard the ongoing sound emanating from the cardiogram.

Bowie's father walked out of that room feeling drained of all emotions and anxieties. There was a void in his life now that he could fill with just about anything he

wanted because the living memory of his father was now dead.

He walked over to his wife and daughter and hugged them for what seemed to be an eternity.

Marco

## Hamlet Essay

### Universality

In the following essay, I will discuss Hamlet's universality with respect to it's insight into personality and motivation. Taken into account will be such factors as character flaw, as well as guilt, doubt, depression and sexual anxieties. Included in the essay is Claudius as well as Hamlet.

Claudius murders his own brother, the king of Denmark, so as to marry his wife and then he himself become king. We later in the play understand that he does because he loved his brother's wife, Gertrude. Hamlet the prince of Denmark, who is excluded from his birth-right is then called upon to avenge his father's death! How can anyone, including Hamlet, act promptly and decisively in a situation fraught with personal conflicts and doubts? If Shakespeare had presented Hamlet as doing so, he would not have represented Hamlet, but rather a creature so fanciful as to have no prototype in human nature. Hamlet seems to have never outgrown his childlike attitude of being the only object of affection when it came to his mother. The Oedipus Complex seemed to be in Hamlet because in his first soliloquy, he meditates over his mother's betrayal rather than the crime against the crown. He reacts like a betrayed lover rather than like a prince who's had his father killed. If the Oedipus Complex can be applied(to) Hamlet, then he must have resented his father's existence. He must have "covered up" this resentment with over-lavished respect.\* "Claudius only did what Hamlet, subconsciously, always wanted to do in the first place."\* Thus his inner conflicts begin.

He begins his prolonged meditation subconsciously, out of a need for time rather than for gaining wisdom. His subconscious is trying to figure out a solution while his conscious part stalls for time by rationalizing. This suggests the modern idea that the subconscious greatly affects what we do consciously. Freud first brought this out into world wide acceptance in the early part of the 20th century. Since Hamlet doesn't fully understand why he's stalling so much, he begins to think himself a coward and ponders over the idea of suicide but of course doesn't go through with the idea. Rationalization then comes in great force. He uses excuses that have some truth to it like if the ghost is good

\*Inaccurately and partly based on "Shakespearean Tragedies" authors = ? .

or evil or whether to kill him in prayer or not, but they are not enough to halt his purpose for being there. Normally, these little excuses would go unnoticed but since he needs time to meditate over what to do, and they seem to be the real and only reasons to him, then they become his excuse for his procrastination.

Claudius, the uncle we all would hate to see married to our mother. When we imagine this, we imagine an ugly man, with no self-respect, overall a man we can easily hate. But Claudius seems to be a courageous man, a righteous man and someone who belongs on the throne. This mixed with Hamlet's Oedipus Complex causes Hamlet to subconsciously almost not want to avenge his father. If Claudius had been the type of man I described above, Hamlet probably would have acted faster and done his job in a cleaner fashion.

\*"Shakespeare amazingly predicted the most radical advancements in psychoanalysis by almost three hundred years." The fact that these psychological theories, which have only come into light this century, can be applied to Hamlet to explain Hamlet's feelings, motivations and sexual anxieties suggests the universality of this play. According to Freud, we all are sexual beings, we all have or have had some sort of sexual attraction to the parent of the opposite sex, and our subconscious predicts and motivates our conscious actions. Hamlet, the human, is no exception to this rule. This play, to me, transcends the barriers to time, language, culture and fashion. It will always be universally accepted as long as we all remain human no matter what.

\*Inaccurately and partly based on "Shakespearean Tragedies"  
author = ?



## General Audience

### The Oedipus Complex

In the following essay, I will discuss Freud's theory on the Oedipus complex as well as it's universality.

Freud first brought the Oedipus Complex out into the limelight in the early years of the twentieth century. It is the subconscious sexual attraction to the parent of the opposite sex, it is usually accompanied with resentment towards the other parent. It isn't something that pertains only to certain persons, but rather to all people from the moment they are born. Young children display it by tending to play, love and sleep more with the parent of the opposite sex. This is not done consciously but rather by instinct. This suggests the modern idea of the subconscious predicting and motivating our conscious actions.

Just because the Oedipus Complex was accepted universally only a few decades ago, it doesn't mean it only existed this century. Shakespeare's Hamlet is the best proof of the fact that the Oedipus Complex was as universal four centuries ago as it is today. It comes into view in Hamlet's first soliloquy where he meditates more over his mother's betrayal to his father by marrying his uncle so soon after his father's death rather than over the crime against the crown. Claudius kills his father, marries his mother and becomes king. Soon afterwards, Hamlet is called upon to avenge his father's death but he begins to procrastinate because in his subconscious Claudius only did what Hamlet subconsciously always wanted to do. Remember, the Oedipus Complex is accompanied with some resentment towards the other parent's existence. Another reason for Hamlet's dawdling is that he covered up his resentment with overlavished respect like so many young men do today. Thus, when Claudius took over as his father, Hamlet's respect was now directed, subconsciously, at him. All in all, the Oedipus Complex played a major role in this tragic play. It went so far as to indirectly mean the death of Hamlet as well as seven other lives. Hamlet is universally accepted a one of the best and most enjoyed plays in the world today and I contribute it's success to the fact that everyone can identify with the Oedipus Complex that's so every present throughout the play.

Going on to the present times, when the child grows up to be an young adult, they will un-consciously try to develop some form of defense mechanism to prevent themselves from realizing that these supposedly immoral feelings do exist. Some rebel against the parent of the opposite sex by questioning authority so as to rationalize and make themselves think it doesn't exist. They try to ignore it and store it somewhere in their subconscious. This later may cause some sort of challenge to their sanity. What of the resentment felt to the other parent? Many let their true feelings show through and thus cause external conflict within the home or family. Others, such as Hamlet, cover up their resentment with respect and "false" admiration. This is a form of rationalization.

In conclusion, I'd say that defense mechanisms, in any shape or form for any problem as well as the Oedipus Complex, is normal but very unhealthy. They prevent the individual from facing the cause for their unrest. I also think that the Oedipus Complex should be discussed more out in the open. Too many people don't understand it.

Laurie-Ann

1. The Men from the Boys - October 1983
2. Strength and Hope - December, 1983
3. Beyond - January 6, 1984
4. Dream Consoling Place - Journal - March 26, 1984
5. Letter to an Idol - May 5, 1984
6. Composition Examination English 522 June 7, 1984.

## The Men from the Boys

It was ten o'clock. The streets were silent. The streetlights glowed in the dark. The sky was black. Inside the Montreal Forum thousands of teens were applauding their idol. He was twenty-three years old. His name was Paul Hyde. His face glittered as he smiled at the audience. This adoration was what he strived for the most. He looked angelic with his short blond curly hair. The audience never saw his tender blue eyes. Still his clear fascinating eyes pierced the thick darkness and blessed everyone of his fans. The music flowed harmoniously. Every strum of the guitar was magical. Every drum beat was a heart beat. The keyboards echoed into infinity. Paul's voice was his own destiny.

After his performance, Paul trotted through a long narrow corridor to go back-stage. His body was covered with sweat. Paul met with his manager, Nick Roman, and they entered his dressing room. Large, comfortable chairs awaited them. The room was richly decorated with navy blue furnishings. A large mirror covered an entire wall. A dim light glowed in the corner of the room. Clothes were left on the counter for somebody to pick up. Immediately as he entered the room, Paul examined himself in the mirror. He did this constantly. Not only was he an introvert he was self-concentrated. He ignored anything else that wasn't a part of him. Yet he didn't know himself very well. Fixing his hair, fashioning his clothes on himself - grimacing in the mirror. This was all part of his daily life.

Nick sat down to talk with Paul. Paul didn't sit down. He didn't want to talk. He didn't have time to sit down. Every second of Paul's life was devoted to success and perfection. Paul had admired his late father very much. He was a great general in the army and a great man in Paul's eyes. Paul Hyde Sr. had raised his son the best way he could since his wife died when the child was three years old. His father had always told him to work the most he could to become the best; to become a man. One thing his father had forgotten to tell him was; to work because he loved what he did not to reach a perfectionists goal, which cannot be achieved. Day in, day out, he worked like a dog. What was Paul's reward? His self-adoration and the adoration of millions of others was his reward. He had to force things; to push things to their farthest. Little did Paul know this would cause serious damage to his self and to others he lived with. As for talking? Forget it! Paul had also learned that to be a man

there was no question in discussing one's personal emotions. Everything was said and done. Paul felt that there was nothing to discuss. Nick understood these feelings about Paul. Nick would stay sitting calmly in his chair without arguing. Paul was misled into believing that Nick cared for Paul. The truth was that Nick cared for his personal profit only. Nick would pressure Paul and his band to produce an album per year. He would also arrange concert dates so that Paul would receive a sense of satisfaction from his work. In Nick's eyes, Paul was only a commercial item. As Paul admired himself in the mirror; Nick gave him his speech on how he should use his creative knowledge to produce musical inventions which would make lots of money. Although Paul felt nervous whenever he had to explain himself; this time he tried to hid it. Paul left his dressing room. 'Nadia!' Paul called. Nadia was Paul's girlfriend. Nadia knew Paul and knew his movemented life. There was never anytime to be alone together. To Nadia, Paul only did things because everyone else did them. He bought expensive gifts to everyone thinking he could purchase their love. It was only normal he treated everyone as he was treated. Paul tried to be sympathetic with her. Nadia resented his feelings. They stood face to face. Even though they had maintained a long time relationship; they seemed like strangers towards each other. Paul's face fell into sadness. He couldn't change anything. He never showed any affection or tenderness. How could she respond lovingly to someone she seemed not to recognize any longer. Her face was impassive. There was no emotion between these two people. Strangely enough Paul always hoped to impress her. Therefore she would become desperately in love with him. Nadia felt he used her simply to credit his image. Nadia wouldn't talk. She felt nothing for this lonesome, desparate. "Pop" star.

If Nadia wouldn't talk to him, he would go see Joe Strummers. Joe was a 'roadie' for the band. Joe was taking care of the instruments when Paul walked over to see him. Silent, yet very philosophical. Joe kept to himself. No one knew but he was Paul's best friend. When Paul was confused Joe was the man who should have taken credit for Paul's moral uplifting. "Hey Joe!" called Paul, "Whatcha doin' old chap!" "Fine", shispered Joe. Paul explained he had a big problem. Paul always became nervous and couldn't face his own emotions. He felt he had to be what his imge demanded of him - he couldn't be what he felt. He became nervous just at the thought of trying desperately to please everyone. He was a perfectionist. He spent his time forcing himself to conform, which abused him more than it did any good. Joe couldn't talk to Paul this time Paul had to stay in his misery. Now he had to go to a party. Ladies would fall to his feet and ask for autographs. Most of all Paul feared an interview with

reporters. He didn't know or understand himself. How could he face his emotions and answer them.

He burst the door open. The crowd of people fell to his feet. Quickly the reporters quarelled around him. Stunned by these happenings, he sat down. Questions began to race around his head. Trying to find answers to these imposing and personal questions from the reports his face became blank. Then his mind became blank also. His face was now full of shock, and panic. He didn't know or accept himself. He didn't understand himself. How could he answer these questions. He was only what others understood of him. Maybe people would forgive him even if he didn't meet up to their demands. The room was silent now. Time had stopped. His tender blue eyes circled the room. He was nervous again. His body frittered. He was a handsome chap. Others would say he was a beautiful child. Now he was a tormented child. Then again others adored him without knowing why. No one could or would ever see the tears from his eyes. He stood up and ran away. He found an abandoned room and crouched down on the floor in a corner. He looked like a frightened child. He hated himself for not having answered the public's demands. He hated himself for not being perfect in the eyes of the public. Deep inside, most of all he hated himself for not having listened to his self.

He regretted not having known himself. He regretted not living what he felt. He cried until there were no more tears to wash his face. He felt empty inside. He felt as if he had fallen down the stairs; now he was at the first step. He was nowhere. Yet he was somewhere. Deep inside himself was where he was. There was a spark of life in his soul; a spark of love. Possibly a spark of holyness. He felt confident inside himself. He had prayed all night. He had thought all night.

He had forced himself to be a man, without knowing what it really was. Perhaps he wasn't a man, and he wasn't supernatural, not ever perfect. But he would start by being himself, trying to be human to start with.

Audience - My dead companion.

Strength and Hope

The paint on the hospital walls were of a faded and dull green. The corridors of the hospital were long and the lights were dim. I could smell the strong odour of excessive detergent. These depressing sights had no effect on me now; it seems I was immuned to all this. Since I came here so often, I practically lived here with you.

I entered your room, to catch you, talking to your plants again. The T.V. was on, but who watched it? Of course, no one in this dimension of space and time. We must remember that time didn't exist between you and me. I was sure our souls had entrusted each other before we were born. I took your hand and guided you to the sofa. I remember your skinny limbs and seemingly unproportionally long extremities of your body laying there without stimulus on the sofa. Your eyes seems still vivid and glittering, and it was senseless to talk, since we read each other's minds.

At other times we felt distant because we hadn't freed our souls from impeding thoughts of worry, or unexpressed love. These thoughts now twisted our hearts and forced up to become impersonal.

So sudden it seemed, you announced you were going to die. I laughed in a high pitched, screeching voice. My voice soon subsided and transformed itself to nervous spasms from my body. An endless flow of tears seemed to wash you away; just like the sea deteriorates some types of stones.

You sat there, as if a hero, courageously ignoring the past. Perhaps this was the best policy to accept. I wept upon your hand and communicated tenderness through my aura.

Believing the tragedy had already happened, I felt deserted. My strength, my hope and my life from you had been shattered. There would no longer be abundant nourishment for men. Still, you sat there, and I couldn't see you because of the blurred vision the tears in my eyes were creating. All this time wasted, when it was time. I could have told you that I loved you! The words never seemed to be able to exit

my mouth. Why?? Was it consciously or unconsciously??

Now I feel remorse. Yet I know in my heart your privileged intelligence understood my intention. Most of all I didn't even experience the joy of telling you that I love you, and sharing our love together.

From that day I gather every potential of hope and strength. I try to pave a new road. So that finally one day I will meet you in someone else!

I love you!



## Beyond

There comes a time in a young adult's life, when he defines himself from the mass of different people in his environment. It is with honest and directness that he finds who he is, his goals, his needs etc. It seems, however, that this honesty towards his own character fades after a period of time. In his environment ideas and concepts influence him. For instance ideas which have their origin in religion, traditions or politics etc. In accepting these ideas he shapes his personality and establishes opinions which have a firm grip on the way he thinks. Soon he uses them everyday in his encounters with people, events, or problems. In time confusion occurs upon realizing these ideas are misconceived and have been faithfully accepted.

What is the truth for the young adult who's existence is dictated by parents, or authorities who is to be trusted when man is in constant disagreement with his own kind? I am forced to doubt the knowledge I've acquired from books, since it has been contradicted by reality.

Programming is a pattern of thought which is taken from our education, nationality, language, caste, tradition or religion and which becomes an element in the way we judge. Furthermore it contradicts our intuitive and instinctive reasoning. We can tell we are programmed when we seem to change personalities as we change settings.

The religion I've learnt has tried to influence people by implying fears in its teachings. They've explained to me, as a child, that I must have sins and if I do have too many of these I must go to hell. However if I practice good will I will go to heaven. I believe these thoughts are symbolic in meaning. Although the truth may be interpreted with the use of different words the meaning remains universal. I know of people who practice a different religion. Their truth is to believe that material possessions in their lives is of so little importance. Therefore they attempt to concentrate themselves on their religious spiritual life. However I feel humans are made of spirit and flesh. I believe it is only ridiculous to neglect a part of us since both elements are important to form the whole. Religion has attempted to define what is "good" and "bad" and what is "right" and "wrong". Personally I believe the subject is debatable. Something good gives you a feeling of happiness and something bad gives you a feeling of contempt. However something which is good for one individual might be bad for

another person; or vice versa.

The truth requires no searching . For someone who believes this will be searching all his life until his death. The truth is all around up. It needs to be discovered, and observed everyday. It may come under several names, but it is there. There is no need to seach. No matter what colour humans are, we all have a soul which meets these basic fundamental needs.

Beyond all superficialities of life there lies in the human spirit simple yearnings which everyone share. It is the nature of life or God, or love: call it what you may, that drives us forward everyday. We share the same difficulties in life which appear through different circumstances. That is why we are not alone. We are a whole.

I believe the spark of life that is in us is God. To my opinion the truth is inside us. What I propose is that we become more conscious of the whole, universal existence of the spirit of life. Rediscovering the value of existence. Becoming aware of all that consists of your self; awareness of the world around you. Sensetize. It is forgetting the little problems in your life and reaching to the rest and source of your existence to better understand what makes the earth move. From your source you shall know the spirit that pushes you forward it means also living in the infinite present. Freeing yourself from the programming that has occurred in your past. This programming which you've accepted and unenables you to change and grow furthermore. It is this omnipresent force inside of us which can be compared to electricity circulating in a light well. We are the light bulb, and God is the electricity. It may also be compared to the spirit of growth through a plant. We being the plant, and God the spirit of life.

Equilibrium or Balance. I believe this is one of the universal laws demonstrated in human life. For instance people are dying minute by minute, however as they are dying there are people who are born to replace them. With this idea in mind I think we cannot comprehend the world if we do not take up a total perspective of the world.

Some people may believe that we are limited. Our body may be a limitation. However our mind is a means of expression which can reach much farther than the body.

Judgement may limit people. I believe judgement distorts what really is there. Therefore there is no sense in judging, but simply observing. If there was less judgement among our society, there would be less conflict among people. Of course more concern and love of one's neighbour would certainly generate more peace and harmony among men.

Others may blame society for their own lack of consciousness because of programming which originates from public areas. I feel there is no society to blame but us. We are the society.

Fear limits people in the choice of their actions. Fear is caused by a miscomprehension of reality. It is also a way of avoiding reality. Either way fear can only be cured if we take action, and face our fears and our weaknesses. These are all very heroic convictions. It only takes one person to have the courage to take action, until then will there be a change. Until we can forget our neighbours negative opinion whose purpose is only to obstruct us from action. When we become master of our thoughts. When we realize that all the dreaming we've done is about to be fortified if only we believed in it. If we dare speak against and question tradition which was thought of as an eternal truth. Until we decide to change, just as we've been deciding to accept for all this time. This programming which seems to have erased our power of our individuality. If we believed in ourselves. Now what is the difference between what you have lived in your mind and the supposed reality of your existence?

P.S.

Because of my lack of experience - so I've been told - I am open to your honest criticism. Since I've heard it's customary for young people to want to change the world. If people would look with more of a spiritual vision than a materialistic one. To see beyond.

Dream consoling place

Journal

March 27, 1984

Note - This is a piece of writing where the idol  
as the person in mind.

It is in a field; full of high yellow wheat. At different places at a distance there are large trees which take on vivid browns and greens. The sky is blue without a cloud and the sun is high in it. The wind is playing in my hair. I am with my love. As I look at him he makes me laugh. His finely traisted face with mixed up blond hair on his head. He gives me a gentle, innocent look with his blue eyes. He even seems to read my mind. Yet I cannot come too close to him at times since I feel his fears or hope a misconceptioning of all that I am. He's small and slim, and even feels nice to cuddle. When he speaks he's interested in hearing what others say. Also enthused by all that's around him, discovering a new world; he even plays the part of a hundred roles - making me laugh more and more. Making me love him more and more for the exciting joy and love that seems to want to burst out of chest, making me giggle and even shakes my frame. I'm not scared if he leaves because he's given me the gift of love. My only morcel of sadness left after digesting this abundant meal is that I wish I, myself could be an expression of such a divinity.

(Student Response)

Its beautiful. You start off pretty well. I had no difficulty picturing the scene. The only thing is that you went too much into describing the person that you didn't add enough of what you were feeling in comparison to your environment.

(This is a letter written to an idol by an admirer)

Dear Idol,

This letter is more than one of praise for your great success and popularity. It's a letter to express my exact sentiments concerning my obsessiveness with you. This subject may be the farthest thing from your mind, but for me it's at the root of my perspective and my state of mind.

You are the reason my thoughts drift from reality. I often find myself captivated in my gripping imagination; living a life which is not mine. The fact that I haven't met you, or don't know you, makes my heart bleed with distress. Not only am I caught in a space of time which does not exist, but the spirit of my life is slowly smothering.

I can imagine you full of dynamism, humour, love,.... almost divine. You are the subject of my imagined idealism. I've transformed you into my worshipped illusion. I even seem the victim of my own creation; since you've become my needed consolation to the frightening jaws of reality. Adults around me repeatedly tell me it's simply a phase in my adolescence, and that it will pass. But I refuse to let go of my self-indulgence. The adults around me can't feel the joy, and excitement, which is self-created, that stirs in my heart and wants to burst out of my chest making me giggle and act silly. My interior world seems brighter although I'm blind to the value and reality of my own existence. The fact that this happiness is self-created makes me conscious of the original source of my joy, which is my thinking ability - my attitude. Reality would require my constant search for your idealized image. I even sense an emptiness in my life without your picture with me ... of course ... I do SEEM to love you...

Presently I let myself hear the stirrings of my mind. Your image was in large part my own ideas, needs and desires expressed; I reminded myself I had control of my thoughts. Therefore if I wanted to make my dreams come true I had to control what I nourished my mind with. I saw what I nourished my mind with. I saw what the universe was about. "What a piece of work is man! How noble in reason! How infinite in faculties! in form and moving how express and admirable! in action how like an angel! in apprehension how like a God!" This may sound absurd to you, but I let myself

see a wider perspective of life . I saw life's multiplicities, and the totality of the nature of things. Seeing all this I made a vow to myself.

I'm sorry to say this, but I must renounce my attachment to you. I don't want to become just another number in your fan club. I don't want to talk if you can't hear me. I can't cheer for you among a mass of disembodied individuals. I must escape, from my own mind, the image of your perfection since it can only obscure and blind my view from the obligation I have to believe in myself and live my own life. Of course, in all this misconception I can't assure myself I will find my own reality...

However, hopefully, the love and blessings contained in my thoughts towards you will be more than enough to help me also create my own personality, where my past belief in you will be transformed into my own self-confidence.

This is really not a letter to you, but to the God in you, to the God in me. I wish you much love and abundance in your life. Hopefully my prayer will open all doors to my aspirations or dreams. But most of all the thought that I cultivate in my heart is the realition of a wholeness in God which I've seen in you, which is my goal as I will succeed.

Pray for me...

Truly Yours,

## PART I

I was faced with many conflicting thoughts when my children got hold of an old magazine which illustrated fashion from the 1980's from the Punk Rock Revolution. Of course, I had been a 'punker' myself, but that was when I was a teenager, and I had always avoided remembering this naivete of mine to have participated with such a radical and extreme organization.

Finally they tormented me so much with the idea that I was forced to tell them in full detail the idea of this movement to satisfy their curiosity and relieve my own tension created by avoiding the subject. They absolutely wanted to know what I looked like, so I told them:

"- Well, .. I had a mohawkian hair cut, that is shaved on both sides of the head died blonde, sticking up in the air. I wore three sets of earrings on each ear, heavy black eyeliner under my eyes and ripped clothes."

They admitted to me that they liked me better the way I was now, but they insisting on knowing the reason for my metamorphosis. I couldn't hold back any longer I told them all.

How this was a form of rebellion. We wanted to prove something. We wanted to make people aware of something. More specifically, we decided to make them conscious of what was 'bugging' us about society and the world we lived in. Obviously we weren't content, since we chose to expose to these people what we saw of them, but what we didn't realize was that we were part of them as much as they were part of us. The image we projected, brought out in other people, exactly what we didn't like about them. They would judge us, insult us, laugh at us; treat us like outsiders. So that's what we became; which gave up more reason to rebel against a people who didn't understand that we just wanted a chance to express ourselves to become individuals, and affirm our value of existence!!

Our change in attitude wasn't because of our own decisions but we began to believe that this was really life - PAIN. Once you were a "punk" it was hard to become normal again because we really felt special among a mass of people who were content with living the same life the whole nation was living.

Instead of playing it safe in life, like they did, and then escape their reality because of their dissatisfaction. We decided to do things no one dared to do; to break down the limits society gave us in order to affirm our power, and worth in order to be accepted.

We had it all now, we were different from tradition, we were together, we could do anything we wanted (sic) (since we were a minority), we had power 'cause we were special, and had proved ourselves in doing something against authorities who told us they knew everything, and they controlled everything.

There was just one thing, we hadn't made our message clear; we just meant trouble to society. But we didn't know how to go about it since past generations of teenagers had always failed in being considered as a thoughtful group.

Now, I'm telling you, what I would have told the society of my days, don't judge people by the way they look, where they come from, what they've been through. ... don't judge yourself by the way others think of you... if this had been done no one would be alone, no one would be separated from a human race which was created for progression of all its infinite resources. I know it's hard to do, kids, but's the best thing you can do to better know yourself and understand your neighbours. Please, kids, don't do this to me, because I do love you, I want to understand, and I'm gonna help you when you need it."

I ran out of the room tears filled in my eyes, my face blushed as red as a tomato.



Tim

1. Memory Over Mind
2. A Funeral Parlor
3. Moment of Truth - poem
4. In the Theatre of My Mind
5. Honour Thy Father

Tim

## Memory Over Mind

I can still remember that terrible day when Grandfather was extremely ill and in a hospital because of his heart problem. Father and I went to visit Grandfather to try to keep his spirit up. We entered his room on the seventh floor, his room was small and the air was stiffling, one could almost feel the tension in the room. There lay grandfather, fast asleep with grandmother by his side. We entered slowly and silently. Almost like an expert thief in a department store. Grandmother stood to greet us and she appeared to be twenty years older. Her once soft gentle complexion turned pale and full of wrinkles. I touched her hand to try to ease her troubles but nothing could southe her. Every so often Grandfather would let go a violent cough that would go right through me. Grandmother looked like she cried so much that not a single tear could be shed, only cries of alarm and displeasure. Suddenly Grandfather's eyes opened, he spoke in a hushed tone and said: "Gratiella, why do you cry?" Grandmother did her best to hold in her feeling for the sake of Grandfather and said: "No, I am fine congenzio but it is for you I worry." Grandfather smiled, he turned his head and I could see a tiny little tear fall from his eye. His face seemed thin as if because of malnutrition. Father and I rose from our not so comfortable visiting chairs and said helo(sic). I never seen Grandfather so happy in my entire life. Grandmother smiled at me as if I had done something magical. I had color again to his once colorless face and he said unto me: "Gentle boy, approach me, do you fear me? With uneasiness but good intentions I knelt beside his elevated bed. He smiled once more took hold of my hand. He said not a word, he just kept looking at me and smiling happily. He is proud of you Tim my Grandmother said to me, I never felt so confused and uneasy in my whole life. Grandfather coughed loudly again and again, Father instantly went to find a doctor it was too late, Grandfather was no more. Cries of grief filled the air but it was no use. I learnt many things from Grandfather, his smile I cannot forget, his wisdom I will always respect and his life I shall never forget.

### Funeral Parlour

It was ten a.m. on a humid Saturday morning. I tilted my head towards my window; I awoke to the sound of silence, I was afraid! I got up and went to the washroom to shower and shave. I could feel how tension changes a man. It was odd. After washing, I put on my best suit and went to pay my respects to my father. You never realize how important somebody is to you until you loose them, I understood, this and saw the light. I started my old Rambler and went to find the funeral parlour.

I arrived at an old building and discovered I was at the right place. I proceeded cautiously up the stairway of the gloomy building and opened the door. The building was badly luminated but well kept. The people were dressed in dark colored clothes and they sat in clusters with their heads held low in prayer. The people were motionless and spoke in hushed tones. The room was hot with tension and the air was stifling. Layers upon layers of smoke formed in various parts of the room. There alone in the far corner of the room lay the casket, it was beseeching and I grew closer to it. I caught a smell of decaying flowers from a near distance. I became couragous and advanced slowly every inch was like a mile, every mile an emotion trickled down my face. There he lay with cross in hand but he spoke not a word, not a single word. I broke down and wept but it was of no significance because father still lay fast asleep.

## Moment of Truth

No!

Yes!

Maybe so.

Time,

Endless time,

Where does it go?

Tilted my head,

Looked to the sky,

Asking myself questions,

Wondering why.

Death comes soon,

night turns into day,

My routine goes on,

what can I say?

Can't escape it,

It can't be true,

Catch the spirit,

or it will catch you.

Live life now,

You don't need this grief,

Nobody is old,

Grey hair is a thief.

For the mirror of hope reflects the life yet to be, and indeed shows promise for mankind to see.

## In the Theatre of my Mind

It was 8.00 a.m. on a Saturday morning. I awoke to the sound of a distant telephone ringing. Soon thereafter I was exposed to a series of frantic footsteps from the ground floor of the house. I sat in bed wondering what was going on and suddenly a scream broke the silence. Instantly I dashed up the stairs and found my mother crying. Grandmother was on the telephone; Grandfather was very ill. I went to my room and dressed in my most respectable garments and proceeded to drive mother to her parents' house. While in the automobile buildings appeared to be running alongside the road. We reached the house in no time at all. Mother rang the doorbell with it a degree of uncertainty apparent on her face. The door opened slowly, it was uncle Guido. He embraced mother and then led us to the bedroom. We entered the room silently and gathered with the others who formed a feeble circle around grandfather's bed. There lay my Grandfather his withered body and ghostly pale face distorted from his once natural features. Grandmother was by his side. Tears trickled down her weary and wrinkled face as she prayed for him. The absence of conversation made me feel uneasy. Every now and then I heard a faint hollow voice, I was confused. I felt closed in, my emotions seeking an alternative, there was none but the truth. The people sat in clusters at opposite ends of the room, with grief in their eyes. Grandfather was in pain, his eyes were droopy and his mouth sagging. Grandmother prayed relentlessly, knowing that soon this would be but a memory. Grandfather reached out and found his wife's hand; he smiled and then closed his eyes. The room became deathly quiet, grandmother's face lost all expression. A shriek of horror awakened the room. I looked on in total horror, grandmother fell to her knees. Those visions of grandfather lie permently embeded in the theatre of my mind.

## Honour Thy Father

It was eight A.M. on a Saturday morning, I awoke to the sound of a telephone ring. Suddenly I heard a series of frantic footsteps followed by a scream. I sprung from my bed and dashed up the stairs, mother was crying. I didn't realize that my brother Tony was trying to revive Father. Mother always warned him not to work too hard, lifting heavy objects was not good for him, not with his condition. The ambulance arrived in a flash and they carefully put Father on the stretcher. Dad's face was so pale - and his eyes were watery, I wish I could forget! I can never forgive myself for letting him work so hard when he is merely a feeble man, and I, a youthful boy with endurance. Our family was totally disrupted by father's sudden illness. My brother Tony and I drove mother to the hospital. She was in no condition to drive.

As we drove at high speeds down the highway the light poles appeared to be running along side the road. We arrived at the hospital and went directly to the "Emergency Center", Father had already been admitted. We sat down in the waiting room among the many mangled bodies which surrounded us. Hospitals always brought out a terrible fear in me, even in a waiting room. Mother looked like a beast, her once beautiful smile turned sour, her once humorous disposition gone. A tall black man entered the waiting room, his face wore no expression. He came and sat down beside us. The doctor said Father's sugar content was extremely low but that he would be fine. Mother cried but her tears were unlike the others, she smiled. We were allowed to see Father, mother greeted him with a flourish of emotional kisses, I just looked at him and thanked God for blessing us.

Marlene

"Death and Reality Go Hand in Hand"

## Death and Reality Go Hand in Hand

While I was preoccupied with my own life I didn't realize what was really vital till I was too late.

During the month of May I was informed that my only grandmother I ever knew was dying of cancer. I was torn apart by a number of feelings the main ones being shocked, infuriated, dejected even apprehensive. The peculiar thing was these feelings I discovered were inside on the outside I was robust even a bit courageous. Instead of feeling sorry for my grandmother I found myself focusing in my own life. One might think I was ruthless and selfish but I deny it. It's just that I found it easier to pretend than to accept. I was pretending that she was actually recovering when deep down I knew the truth.

In my mind I painted a picture of my grandmother because I rarely saw her. The picture was of a vivacious woman who enjoyed life to the fullest. This woman was my loving grandmother who also enjoyed cooking, fishing and most of all being a part of a family. This picture was drawn through my memories of her.

On July twenty-eighth I went to a party down the road from my house. A few minutes after I had arrived my father followed. I thought he was being concerned about me and checking up on me. I didn't even realize what he was there for until he said "Marlene your grandmother died."

At first I was speechless then I started crying and uncontrollable tears came rolling down my face. At that very moment my picture was destroyed.

Our family attended the funeral in Prince Edward Island to pay our last respects to a very loving lady. When I left the island I realized that the place would never be the same without her.

On our long journey back I came to an understanding about death. The reason I pretended was I couldn't face reality. The reality wasn't that my grandmother died because I accepted it was for the best since she was suffering. In other words it was her time. The real reason was I had to face the fact I had lost someone very special to me. I didn't even have a chance to tell her how much I love her. That is why I pretended she was getting better because I didn't want to accept I was going to lose someone forever!



Danny

1. Black Lights and White Roads
2. Death
3. Boredom

## Black Lights and White Roads

As the cold wind swept up the remaining leaves off the bare lawn, I wondered what I was doing here. This street that I have lived on since the age of 2 had undergone a dramatic change making it unknown to my recognition. Something about our town was missing. I sat at my window staring across until I noticed that I could barely see my doorstep due to the darkness that so suddenly fell over the town. For days now, I had not set foot out of the house, and I didn't even know why. I, being the one who complains about being indoors, was not at all disturbed by the fact that I did not go out for three consecutive days. Finally I rose from the chair by the window and put on my coat. As I did so, I wondered how come I was wearing a winter coat in the month of July. There was not a flake of snow on the ground but the air was as cold as a day in mid-January. I stepped out and the street was crowded suddenly by curious people like me. Why were the street lights suddenly grey and why was I walking along an empty street? As I<sought> sought for a logical answer I became totally confused. Now I was sure that I didn't recognize this place and I wanted to get away. A group of people were accompanying me and I had noticed a similarity in each one of them. They all seemed to be at least 80 years old if not more. I grew more and more confused because I did not know who I was anymore or where I was headed. Darkness seemed to be following me until a tremendous change occurred in the sitence<silence> of the night. The air became warm and a stream of light took the place of the road that we were walking along. We kept on walking until we reached the end of the light. We tried to go on but something held us back. As I stood in wonder I could see wrinkles on my hands and I finally knew why we were here. These people who all appeared to be old were on their way to a second life and I too had been chosen. All of us now understood and were able to go on. As we did so, we each went our separate ways and I found myself enclosed by darkness once again but a vois spoke and told me that I would be seeing the light of life in approximately nine months. I closed my eyes and shed my final tear for the black lights and the white roads.

<> indicates teacher change necessary for reader coherence.

## Death

Death - a subject which seems to have different effects on many people. How can death be defined? Since it basically holds the same meaning for everyone who is faced with death, it may well be defined as the loss or termination of life. But is that all it really is for everyone? The answer is definitely no.

There are various forms of death which are accompanied by their many reactions. No matter what form death takes, it is still however, the loss of life. A person cannot possibly identify with death until they come face to face with it. Death is something we hear of day in, day out but we only feel it when it involves someone close to us. The thing about death is that it hurts the living more than the dead. That is because those who are alive must face it and learn ways of dealing with it.

When the word "death" is mentioned, there is a sudden feeling of horror, pain and emptiness which accompanies it that is because of the way in which death is presented today. We usually see it in the form of murder or accidents and this is probably why we associate death with such incidents.

For some, it is a horrifying and painstaking <painful> experience which can be death with after a certain period of time. For others it is the end of everything. They feel that there is nothing left except an empty space that could never be refilled.

Natural death can be taken more lightly because it is usually more expected. When a person dies of sudden death, it comes as a shock and may leave others in an unstable state of mind. People find it to be unfair, too unjust for the one(s) they love to be taken away from them which it comes to cases of suicide, it is most unlikely that those left behind will find a way to put the blame on themselves. They feel like they could have helped prevent it in some way or another and that causes them to feel responsible. The hardest thing to face in the case of death, is knowing that you will never see, hear, touch, or speak to the person again. There is no hope left because we know that as much as we'd want to we could never get the person(s) back.

All in all, the whole acceptance of death is the only thing we can possibly gain from a person's death is the strength that comes from.

Well the best thing to do is to let out all your feelings and face reality. No one enjoys death but if death did not exist neither would life.

## Boredom

What in actual fact is 'boredom'? Boredom is simply a state of mind that finds itself in many people. At one point in time, everyone gets bored with something or someone. To be bored can be taken in different ways. People may be bored if they have nothing to do; if something is continuously repetitious or if there is no spark of interest for whatever is happening. Boredom is expressed in many different ways. People sigh, complain and even nag at others to express their feelings of boredom. People who become extremely bored may go to extremes to relieve them of their boredom. This can lead to drastic problems such as drinking, drugs and violence. When people have nothing better to do, they very often turn to the situations mentioned. That is why people should always try to involve themselves in activities that will keep them from becoming bored whether they be community activities or just personal hobbies. Many people go into deep states of depression that sometimes lead to causes for suicide. At this point, boredom has reached its peak and the results are drastic. People are the cause of their boredom because they are in control of their actions. That is why it is important to overcome boredom, rather than let it overcome you.

Martin

1. A Neighbour

'Composition Essay'

" A Neighbour "

When I grew up, I was very fond of my neighbor. To start, well Mrs Thompson used to give me cookies all the time, and as for Bill, well, he used to bail me out of trouble all the time. You know how us young kids are, troublemakers sometimes. I grew up most of my childhood not knowing what he was saying to me because I was French and they were English! By the time I reached the age 10, well, sad to say but, yes, Mrs. Thompson passed away. It was very touching, because I had never felt a great loss before. As months went, it was time for the Thompson's sons to move away. One of them moved to Montreal and got married, another moved to Toronto and he got married too, and finally the youngest son left for the N.W.T. to work for the Bank of Mtl. He's been there since he started, and has come to visit once in a while, now & then !!

Anyways, coming back to my very good neighbor, Bill, well, he had been alone since his sons moved out. So, my sister and I started to pay him a couple of visits here & there, nothing special, of course. But when we needed advice or when we had a problem we'd go see him and he would try to help us out, either with his advice or by bailing us out with a few dollars. Of course, we would pay him back. But the greatest thing was he would never refuse to help us out unless he thought otherwise of the favor we'd ask him. A few examples of the favours we would ask him was like for instance, when you want to go to a party on a Saturday night and you're stuck asking your mom & dad for a ride. Well, I would go see him and he would never refuse unless he was very busy. That is only one example of what he would do for not only me but my sister too. To go on, when we were sick of hearing my parents scream their heads off. I'd go over to his house and we would talk until it was time for me to go back home. But you could say I practically lived there. The best thing was he would get our minds off what we wanted and he would encourage <us> to think of more fun and pleasant things.

To move on, it was on a Friday night and my mom had asked me if I had seen Bill lately, I had told her that I had seen him Wednesday and that he had told me that he would be going out of town for a few days. So he'd asked me if I could take care of his little dog called "Rags". I agreed, of course, and that was the end of that conversation, anyways

< > indicates teacher correction.

Saturday came along and I had a football game to play that day so I was gone all day!

My mother had recieved a call around 10:00 AM that morning and she was advised that Bill was died. Well, my mom was laughing because she thought it was a joke. But it ended up very true! I had left at around 9:30 that morning so I hadn't the faintest idea of what had happened. After my football game I went out for the night. I then called at around 2:00 A.M. in morning to advise my mother that I was going to sleep over at a friend's house. She was more upset then when I usually called home to tell her I was sleeping at someones house. She started to question left and right so I told her to calm down and I'd be there first thing the next morning. Then, all of a sudden my sister got on the phone. She was crying & she couldn't say one word without pausing to cry. I told her to slow down and I then I was told that Bill was dead. I was startled, and you can believe that it hurt me. Everytime I thought of it at all I couldn't believe it. It was unreal, because, he was such a good man. He was practically a grandfather to me; I was emotionally very moved. The next morning I had taken a bus home and as I got to the corner of my street, I couldn't help but to start to cry. I visited Bill's family and gave my sympathy!

Bill was such a good man to me and my sister too. I couldn't complain about anything. He practically loved me more than I think my parents did. This man was loved by everyone because of his good deeds; I tell you I don't think, God put him on the earth to make enemies. But, anyways he died on November 25, 83 which was the day of his birthday and you say to yourself, why him?? But that's the question which will never be answered by anyone because there is no answer for someone who dies. But I can say to you that this story was true, because he was my neighbor and God did he ever break a many people's hearts. He was my buddy and best friend! Now, when I think about him, I remember all those nice times we had together but the only thing I regret in all of this, is that I can't go see him for advice and I have to go on living in this huge world alone. Once in a while I get a really close friend, but there's so much you can tell a friend, right? I don't think it was very fare for him to die because I'll never see another man like him again and that's what hurts the most. Why him??



Colleen

1. Broken Pieces - Louis Dudek
2. Composition Examination, December 1983
3. Promises ( Reprinted from Opus)
4. Pink, Purple and Blue ( Reprinted from Opus)
5. The Infant Upstairs

Broken Pieces

( L.Dudek's poem from December exam.)

What time was it you cried in my arms  
The moon through the curtain, broke into tears  
(ghosts of those dead days broken  
pieces) we left behind  
ourselves, with who knows what meaning  
Under the blown curtains  
head bent over knees  
the gold chain holding the cross round your neck  
and sudden surprise bringing laughter,  
talking, strings of cadenzas  
burst out of love - relief  
that had waited long...  
I still do not understand  
I tried to, later, but couldn't make words come  
and by the coffee table, looking down, beside you  
the rest watching, knew  
but had not imagined, you were that beautiful  
And in the rain, we walked the streets  
together, took the bus and came home  
I bought you stockings, and (funny to think)  
shoes

What was I trying to make up for?

You laughed

at my inanities\*

What else do I remember? Your face  
looking over the sea, and music....

\*sillinesses

### Composition Exam

I cherished the memories of the last moment we spent at the beach house. How I had wished that day would last forever. I remember our last walk on the beach. I was consumed with such anger. I resented you for having decided to give up the beach house. We walked side by side. I watched how the sun was slowly being swallowed by the vaste sea. The setting of the sun left a shade upon your face unabling me to read your expression. With each step it took I buried my foot deeply into the sand. As we continued our silent walk I longed to hear a change in your decision. I refused to accept the truth. The long explanation that was given to me rushed through my head with no meaning attached to it. I saw you glance down at me occasionally as if waiting for the right instant to speak. " We have no choice, Jenny. We have to give it up." You finally said. I paused allowing myself to clear my thoughts. I could no longer hold back the tear that gently rolled down my cheek. I came to realize at this point that my tear was not the result of having the beach house. It was more a tear of relief. I had felt a sense of guilt upon me. I lifted my head and seached for your eyes. I saw the sadness you were experiencing. My feeling of guilt grew. It had been hard enough for you to give up the house but I had made it even harder with my stubborn reaction. You gently wiped away the tear from my face. I felt the need to apologize but before I could utter a word you bent down allowing me to receive a hug. I had grown that day and I thank you for having allowed me the time to realize and accept the hardship of life.

## Promises

The air was crisp and fresh. The snowflakes one by one gently drifted to the ground like lost and confused children. Since the light of dawn mother nature had laid her icy fingers on the city covering it with an enormous white blanket. Despite the heavy winter garment, I felt the cold pierce right through me. It didn't annoy me so much since other thoughts preoccupied my mind. I could still hear his last words echoing in my mind. I questioned myself, "Why did he call? Why does he want to see me? Why does he constantly appear and disappear from my life?" Once again a combined feeling of anger and confusion started to build up inside of me. I found myself desperately trying to steady my pace. Every step that I took resorted in a quick but deep pounding within my head. I could feel the blood rushing through my veins as I neared the little restaurant. Placing my rigid fingers on the frozen glass door I took a deep breath and gently pushed the door open.

As I entered the small and cozy restaurant I was greeted by the smell of fried potatoes which instantly tickled my nostrils. At the far end of the room a middle-aged man sat in an erect position. His gray streaked hair lightly covered his square forehead. His tanned and rough skin revealed a face that had been exposed to harsh and cold weather over the years. His dark and piercing eyes met my gaze. Brushing aside a thick strand of hair, he motioned me to sit down, I sat and hesitantly leaned over the table giving him a light peck on his dimpled cheek, I felt a cold mass of air envelop me causing a barrier between the man and myself, and I knew it wasn't due to the abnormal temperatures outside.

"Hi, how are you?" he asked.

"I'm fine, Dadday, and you?" I uttered mechanically.

"I'm fine, dear."

I felt a sort of tension building up. There seemed to be a wall standing between us, forbidding us from communicating with one another. This block often times caused me to picture him as a stranger who came into my life three or four times a year, offering me a few dollars to make up for his absence. Our conversations were short and vague. We limited our discussion to daily happenings. We rarely discussed our feelings or interests. After a few more comments our conversation would gradually die down. He would then make it a point to persist with his promises of visiting me more frequently and spending more time with me. He always made an effort so as to help me believe this statement.

Today the conversation had been no different. The

promises were the same only the tone of his voice was renewed. Getting up, I kissed him so as to bid him good-bye. Walking back home I noticed that the air was still chilly but the snow had ceased. A feeling of hope overcame me, for once again my Dad had succeeded in making believe all his unfaithful promises.

(Reprinted from Opus)

Pink, Purple and Blue

The memories constantly invaded my sleep. His last words echoed vividly within my head. "The kids are letting me play with them. I'm gonna show them. They'll stop calling me stupid." He dug his spoon into his plate emerging with a spoonful of macaroni and cheese. Pausing, he looked directly into my eyes. "You want to hear a secret?" He brushed the hair from his eyes and without waiting for my response he added eagerly, "I found the best hiding place." There was a twinkle in his eyes as he uttered these last words. He hurried over his lunch anxious to finally join the other children. The feeling of victory expressed on his soft and gentle face made the faint pink spot upon his right cheek appear even brighter. His last spoonful in his mouth, he looked up, seeking my approval. Content, I nodded, permitting him to leave the table. His soft blond curls seemed to bounce off his head as he scampered off, filled with premature victory.

It was a hot and dry afternoon. The few puffy clouds were promising hopes of precipitation. The sun seemed to direct its brightest rays through the small kitchen window. Peering through the window, I saw how the grass had turned yellow from the lack of rain. The flowers along the fence were drooping helplessly. The cracked soil beneath it craved for water like a child craves for the feeling of being accepted by his peers. Farther away from the fence the narrow lane of cracked and uneven pavement was filled with children's loud cries of joy.

Johnny had not been this happy in a long time. He had so desperately wanted the children to accept him. All morning he sat quietly on the back steps longing for their approval. They were so harsh with him, rejecting him because he was different from them. It pained me to see Johnny unhappy and upset. Johnny was what people called a "slow thinker". He had difficulty getting along with children his age. They were never able to understand him. Johnny, on the other hand, being mentally slower than the other children his age was not able to associate with them easily even making his best efforts. When the children finally allowed him to play hide-n-seek with them, he was determined to prove to them that he was capable of not only understanding the game but being very good at it.

The time had passed by silently. I stepped outside to call Johnny home for supper. A slight wind had gradually built up swaying the trees. The once drooping flowers lay

flat upon the ground exhausted and helpless. It was late, where was he? I passed the wooden fence yelling out his name, I was greeted by a dead silence. Walking down the abandoned lane I searched vainly for him. I desperately screamed, "Johnny, the game is over!" As I neared the end of the narrow passage I saw an old freezer lying on the dark pavement. A hot tear gently rolled down my cheek. "Johnny?" I gasped. Nearing the massive container I feared what I might discover within it. Horrid thoughts rushed through my head without any sense of order. Placing my trembling hand on the handle, I gathered my strength and lifted the door open. My heart skipped a beat and I could hear a pounding within my head. The blood in my veins seemed to want to rush up my head all at once. The tears came running down my cheek like a flowing river. I was unable to take all the pain I was experiencing. There he lay, his small and delicate body twisted in an uncomfortable position. His soft baby skin no longer retained its pink color but rather was changed to a purple shade. His blue lips curled helplessly as if gasping for a last breath. There was a queasy feeling that had gradually built up in the pit of my stomach. As I turned my head from the horrid sight a faded pink color caught my eye. The faint pink spot still rested untouched upon his right cheek, very much like earlier that afternoon. I came to believe that indeed, he had found the best hiding place.

( Reprinted from Opus )



## The Infant Upstairs

The sun's rays could barely penetrate the dust covered windows. The accumulated dust and countless spots were due to a lack of housekeeping. I realized that ever since grandmother's prolonged illness the house had been totally neglected. I gazed around and saw the duty that awaited the new lady of the house. I felt it was my duty to get this house clean. The walls which were covered with a yellow film would no longer regain its whiteness even after long hours of scrubbing. In the corners dust particules had gradually assembled themselves, as if for a reunion, forming little puffy brown clouds.

I stepped into the bathroom and noticed that the clothes which had been in the bathtub since this morning no longer floated in a bubbly liquid. The bubbles which were caused by the amount of soap and the pressure of the water had burst quietly until they all had disappeared. As I thought about the long hours of work, there seemed to be a battle going on inside of me, between a sense of obligation and a feeling of discouragement. Deep down I knew that this strong sense of obligation would conquer. I got down on my knees and leaning over the tub I started scrubbing the enormous diaper. It was unbelievable how that little fellow could get his clothes so dirty.

Although the bleach was eating away at my hands I felt content since I was making up for that error. Ever since grandmother's death I have been taking care of the helpless and demanding infant upstairs. I didn't mind the extra clothing I had to wash nor the special puree meals I had to prepare since for once in my life someone needed me. I had an obligation towards him like a parent has an obligation toward his children. He was very demanding and would cry as soon as something annoyed him. I would hear his screaming voice pierce through my ears. I hear him crying now. I better tend to his needs before he gets carried away.

On my way up the old creaking stairs, grandfather's picture, hanging quietly on the wall, caught my eye. He was a stern and severe man. Mom, his only child, brought me into this world at the age of sixteen. Grandfather had been scandalized and ashamed of the fact that his daughter was an unwedded mother. Had it not been for grandma I would not be standing under this roof today. He resented both of us for having brought this "shame" (as he called it) into his home. All through my childhood he had been harsh and cold towards me, making me feel responsible, guilty, and useless. He constantly repeated that I had ruined mom's chance of ever

finding a decent husband. Grandfather had succeeded in making me feel guilty and worthless. All my life I felt it was my duty to make up for mom's mistake. Then one day, mom finally got married. I saw his resentment grow even deeper when mom's new husband did not want me as a reminder of her past. Mom, then left me behind like she'd leave a stack of old clothes.

I continued up the steps which led to the never ending hallway. It seemed to take me forever to reach the little bedroom. The door was slightly opened. There he lay helplessly, crouched, like a fetus embedded in the wall of the uterus, seeking for comfort, warmth and security. As I moved beside him his large arm extended out to me like a child asking to be held in his parents arms. When I didn't respond, his big hairy hands formed themselves like little pink fists ready to fight, as if through the slits he had for eyes he could see something before him. His fragile body suddenly began to twist itself, seeking for a comfortable position. Like a baby his lips gently parted ready to utter a word but no sound would emerge from those creased lips. It was my duty to take care of this old man. This sense of obligation and that strong feeling of guilt was like a flame in the pit of my stomach that had been nourished over the years. It was getting bigger and stronger and now I can feel it as it invades my whole body. I gazed down at him as he lay motionless on the bed. He "needed" me and besides it was the least I could do to make up for the shame and disgrace I had brought him.

### A Prayer For Guidance

Please help me, God. I am very confused and I can't figure out what to do. You see, there's this girl that I love very much but after what happened tonight, I'm uncertain of what actions I should take. I have this peculiar feeling, and I don't know what's causing it. Please help me find out what it is while I recap two years of work, hoping and praying.

It all started a couple of years ago while the Rubik's Cube Fad was passing through. I was introduced by my very good friend to a girl-- an extraordinary girl. I couldn't explain it, and I still can't, but for some reason I was drawn to her. That night I couldn't sleep because I was constantly thinking about her, and just as I was about to doze off I heard a song on the radio that reminded me of her so much that I wrote it on the inside of a book. This song captured her character, and at the same time reflected the ideas I was having about our future. At this, I realized I was in love with her, but this love was very special.

For the rest of the school year, we ate lunch together, participated in the same lunch-room activities, and shared other common interests. During this time we became very close friends but I was aiming to reach a goal; that we could establish a more personal relationship, but first I'd have to reveal my love to her which she was not yet aware of.

During the summer, a summer I had hoped would be very memorable for both of us, I contracted an illness that lasted the whole summer. My plans had been postponed, but the school year was yet ahead.

Shortly after school commenced, we attended a dance. I was going to reveal my love for her, but would wait a bit until we danced to slow music. That time arrived and I tried to be as close as possible to her, and while we danced, she kissed me! I was completely off-guard, but it did inspire me, and as I was about to ask, I backed-off. I don't know what caused it, but the moment and opportunity had been lost, and here's why.

Later on, after Christmas break, she started going out with another guy. I was struck down, then and there, and I couldn't help but go into a depression. During this time, we remained as friends, but consequently we didn't see as much of each other. I wished she would have known my feelings for

her because one day she told me about a dream she had had, and it really put me down. Apparently, I had proposed to her by offering her a yellow tulip and she accepted. I laughed when she told me that she could never see us as one, but deep inside, something wrenched out my heart.

As the school year was closing, I had lost almost all hope of regaining what I had lost, and I wasn't looking forward to the summer.

One day though, I got the surprise of my life when she phoned me and ask me if I wanted to play ping-pong at her house. Automatically I accepted. We played for a while and then went for a bicycle ride. Again she surprised me, but she also gave me life by asking me if I had ever wanted to go out with her. I told her that was true. We later agreed that someday we could possibly become more involved with each other.

Another special moment happened later on during the summer at LaRonde. We went together with a couple of friends, but while we were on a 'kiddie ride' we were kind of silly, we were about to exchange a kiss, but I backed off, and again for some reason I couldn't explain. But it was on the day before summer ended when I got mixed up with something I didn't want to happen.

I had met this young lady who had a charm that couldn't be resisted and immediately I fell for her.

Up until Christmas, at school, we found out how much we really meant to each other, but when she asked me to go out with her, I declined because I was dating another girl. But before the week ended, I was no longer attached to anyone and this left me free to ask her to go out with me, but I would have to hurry because she was leaving for Barbados right after our exams before Christmas.

When I did ask her, she didn't answer me until after she came back. For three weeks, I beat my brains about, creating many reasons why she would say 'yes', but also as many for a 'no' reply. But the answer was neither. She wanted our relationship to be very special, and so did I, so we agreed we'd wait until the grad dance before getting more personal. But I couldn't last long under those terms.

Then one day at lunch, she asked me to kiss her.

I did, but this kiss was special, but again I sensed something was wrong. Well that really blew my chances for ever getting closer to her. Tonight she said 'no' when I asked her. I asked her why she had decided this, and it was because I backed off when we were sharing our special kiss. This explained why I felt a gap forming between us for the past couple of weeks and I regretted myself.

But God, oh Dear God, I think I can see why we never did "click". I know that I had been fooling myself when I said I had sensed something was wrong. Something was - it was because I wasn't totally sure of myself. But there is another reason why we didn't succeed. I had asked her earlier that evening why she didn't accept my invitation before the holidays. She told me honestly that it was because she knew she'd meet someone she would like in Barbados. This proved that she wasn't fully ready to embark upon a very special and intimate journey, but neither was I.

Think I've found the reasons why we went wrong, and that feeling was cleared up, but I still love her very much. I hope that there is still hope for us. God, good God, could you help guide us along the proper paths so as we can find one another? (Do you think I should send her a yellow tulip?)

Kyle

1. A Prayer for Guidance
2. Distortion

## Distortion

Here are the words of Peace and Love the " Preacher" spoke to us about today:

"Fellow brothers and sisters. Let the good grace of God shine his love and peace upon you all. We are the innocent ones; don't fight back when the fuzz or Tourists call us 'hippies' or just stare at us and laugh. By Tourists, I mean a clean shaven person. Let them have the kicks, cause they're God's children also, but we're the "flower" children while they're the "trouble" children. Our motto is ' live and let live' so let them be. Go about your affairs in peace."

At this point everyone was feeling groovy. A couple of joints were going around, and the mood was mellow. The 'Preacher' continues: "The heat's been on lately. City Hall boys haven't been too helpful in providing us with food. Even though we're all hungry, I beg you, don't go steal any money or food cause chances are you'll end up in the cooler. I know times are hard as well as you do, so stick to the good side of the law, and just make peace and love with your comrades," and he came down from the little "stage" with a paper bag. He asked us to knell side by side and passed by each one of us, giving us a pregnant chiclet. We took it, reflected, then left. That's when the tingling sensation sent shivers all through my body, and as I walked farther on, a glowing haze formed in my mind...I'm sitting on the grass under a tree; a strange tree, though. I think it's licorice - red licorice to be exact. Up in the sky I see a yellow lightbulb shining through cauliflower leaves. Surrounding the lightbulb is the odd marshmallow floating in the green river. I get up feeling a bit dizzy, and continued my walk along the park path.

I'm feeling kind of hungry also, so I walk across the street and enter the lobby of the tall cardboard box. The lobby is quite fancy for one in a cardboard box; there are sofas with real alive leather backs, expensive taffy carpeting, and people made from clay play-doh. But there is no caftertia or restaurant so I leave and go back to the park.

The lightbulb is now red-orange, and the marshmallows are now floating in a light-brown chocolate river. Matchboxes are going and down the street, theirs one guy who's replacing a broken button on his sports-matchbox with a new one.

I feel another tingle. All of a sudden my legs become springs and I feel energetic. Just to test myself, I

jump up and down, always getting higher and higher in the air. I jump so high I can see the roof-tops of the tallest cardboard boxes. Then I see beanie hats and paper aeoroplanes, and next I can touch the marshmallows. When I get back down, my legs becomes wheels and I go for a spin.

At the next street the jellybean is red so I stop. I feel it's starting to rain, so I reach to find the top to the convertible, but I can't find it. After a little more effort. I do find it, but I also see a big brick coming up behind me and the clay driver is yelling. "No Brakes"! when I go to turn the corner I forget the roof in my hand and I end up ripping it. Once I clear the brook, I look behind and see it hit a couple of putty people and then hit a cardboard box. What a mess! The rain stops and I feel tired. My legs are legs again, and I thought I'd call it quits for the night. I walk back to the park and find a comfortable spot under a licorice. Through the cauliflower I can see a full cheese, and I then dozed off...but not for long.

My body turns into a super-vitamin, and I can see twenty zillion volts going through me. The sky looks like a rainbow with the colours always changing - blue, pink, orange, black, white, green, yellow. I look at the licorice and notice it has an orange; what a strange bark for a licorice?! The hair on the ground has little plasticene people - actually, it must be plastic explosives: they're blowing up - coming from it and crawling all over my arms.

When I get up, my head spins, my mind changes ten different colours, heat burns throughout my body and arms and became clubs. Those little exploding people on my clubs start to dig deeper, and I start beating them up against the licorice until toothpaste oozes all over the place, and I pass out against the stump of the licorice.

The next day I'm confused. I'm lying below a tree with blood and dead ants all over my arms. My poncho is ripped in the back and across the street from the park there's a big truck embedded in the front of a store. From a clock across the street I can see its ten thirty, so I get ready for another sermon the "preacher" will deliver to us later today.



Louise

1. Isn't That Strange
2. The Match
3. June Composition Examination, 1982, Part III, B.

## Isn't That Strange

Oh yes, I remember quite well. Every detail of that night has been embedded in my mind. It is with utmost accuracy that I recount this terrifying event.

Excuse me, but I must not leave out the fact that I'm gifted, or perhaps in this case 'jinxed', with a peculiar kind of insight, too great for any human to understand. But enough with that and let me tell you what happened.

Late one night, three hours after mid-night, my lover and I lay half-awake in my bed, obviously exhausted from over-exertion. Oh, how we loved each other! It was so magnificent. There was no one so in love as we.

As I was saying, while we were resting from our passionate love-making, I heard a faint knock at my door. I did my best to ignore it as an ominous feeling grew deep inside of me. I became more and more terrified as the knocking resounded louder and louder. Suddenly, there came a loud crash. In that thunderous instant, I sensed something which can only be described as death.

Thirty-three nazi spies cluttered my room. They carelessly and brutally pulled my lover out of bed. I can still hear the pitch of his shrieks, while one of them slowly sliced parts of his body to pieces. Meanwhile, I silently watched as if in a trance.

I still sat staring when the sun peeked through my window. My lover was at the foot of my bed in three hundred pieces. His blood added colour to my room, though. It blended well with my beige draperies. After the police finally came, I no longer remembered what happened.

A young man, much younger than my thirty-three years, frequently sits at my side to keep me company. He wears beautiful white cotton pants and a nice white hat. I think this must be the new fashion because I see many dressed alike. He's a bit strange though! He is constantly telling me that I have killed my father! Isn't that strange since I have always lived with my lover!

## The Match

Annabelle was an old spinster of sixty-eight years. She was an extraordinary sight upon which to rest one's eyes. No taller than four feet and nine inches, her hunched back made her appear very unique. One could not tell from such bulging eyes that she had perfect vision. Her wrinkled skin was as soft as a bald tire off of a fifty-seven Chevy. She could only be described as set apart from the rest of humanity.

Leonard was a young boy of fifteen, who despite his youth was exceptionally mature. But for the acne which spread across his chin, he could be portrayed as attractive. The sprout of freckles on his nose matched his sandy-brown mop of hair. He was the image of charm itself.

Leonard and Annabelle met in a grocery store. He packed her groceries in bags for her one afternoon and offered to carry them to her dwelling. She accepted; and not being able to afford a tip, she invited him in for sour milk and cookies. Not wishing to cause offense, Leonard went in.

Leonard would repeat this task several times through the next few weeks. Annabelle took pleasure in recounting her problems to Leonard; and he in turn took pleasure in feeling needed. She would tell him of her rheumatism and her rapidly spreading varicose veins while he produced words of comfort. She would complain about how hard it was to buy food and he would offer what meager money he owned. She would greedily assume an obligation to take it. Yet, there was still something lacking.

Inevitably, they began to fall in love. Each night, he would crawl out of his window so that he might be with her. Together, they gave each other new experiences.

It was unbelievable to others and even forbidden by his parents. But, nothing could quench this romance. What was to happen later was not to be escaped. At his eighteenth birthday, they were happily married and living off of her pension and his tips from the grocery store. They fitted together like foot and sock.

They lived happily for two years when that terrible

day came. Annabelle was listening to her radio when the doorbell rang. She answered it to see a police officer standing in front of her. When she let him in, he told her of her husband's tragic death. He was killed by a speeding car. Annabelle immediately grew bitter. She was angry at him. How dared Leonard do this to her. At his funeral her only thought was that he had not even said good-bye. He left without saying adios. He had not bid her adieu. How dare he!

Composition Examination  
June 1984

"Write a Letter of  
Complaint..."

Dear Sir,

I am writing you this letter for the simple reason that I am dissatisfied with the working conditions. There is much which needs to be set straight.

First of all, I must clarify the fact that I had heard rumors that women who became secretaires also become more. I was told that some employers make their secretaries fetch coffee and do such errands. I was also told that some employers would take advantage of their secretaries and were not above pinching posteriors. Well, that's not all I heard. I heard that some employers, even if they're married, will have affaires with their secretaries.

So, Mr. Smith, you can imagine what I have to complain about. Not once did you pinch my posterior. You never even look at me. And when I wear those tight skirts and lowcut blouses, why you just go on ignoring me like I was some piece of menure. Ain't I good enough to have an affaire with you!

My dear, Mr. Smith, unless conditions change around here and you start acting like an employer acts, your going to have to get yourself another secretary!

Insulted, but yours anytime,

Miss Betsey Buns.

Carla

1. Aaron-Marie

2. Mistakes

3. The Hour Glass

## Aaron Marie : The Story of a Winner

"Here from Rhode Island is Aaron-Marie Benjamin." A young girl of 17 steps on the ice, her beautiful green eyes staring at the audience in amazement. Her light brown hair is tied back neatly in a french braid. For a moment she was so nervous that she forgot her routine. But as the music began she glided across the ice trying not to miss a step.

Aaron-Marie has been skating since the age of 8 when her mother gave her a pair of skates for Christmas. Even as a child she promised herself she'd become a big star. Her goal right now was to make it into the World Finals and maybe even the 1984 Winter Olympics.

As she stepped off the ice after gathering all her flowers, we could have seen a look of satisfaction on her face. "Look at those scores Benjamin," her coach whispered in to her ear. "I feel like doing a cartwheel, right here and now" was her reply. She always did cartwheels when she accomplished what she wanted. As she entered her dressing room she saw amongst dozens of red roses her boyfriend Noah Kelly. A boy of 18, he was tall with transparent, ocean blue eyes that expressed all his emotions. His blond curly hair was flat at the top because he had a habit of always wearing a Red Sox's baseball cap. "I knew you would do it," he said hugging her. As the intercom announced, "Advancing to the world finals which will be held next year are Suzy Albert, Aaron-Marie Benjamin... but that's all they heard.

"Hurry up honey!" Judy Benjamin called. Slipping into the car Aaron-Marie said, "Ma, I really don't want to go to the doctors, I really should be practicing, anyhow there's nothing wrong with me. "You've been practicing too hard and you do look tired, dear," Mrs. Benjamin answered buttoning up her daughter coat despite Aaron's moan of disapproval.

The snow fell on the white bungalow. In front of the house two of the Benjamin children, little Cory 10 and 15 year old Erica were trying to build a snowman. In the back Aaron was practicing on her skating-rink her father had built for her before he died seven years ago. Every year as the weather started getting cold, Aaron's older brothers Peter and Christopher would fix it up so the children could skate. Judy Benjamin was sewing up Aaron-Marie's skating uniform when the phone rang. It was the doctor, he wanted to discuss the

results of Aaron-Marie's checkup. After hanging up Judy looked at the window, she saw Aaron's beautiful eyes gleaming like emerald's as Noah tried to follow Aaron around the rink. Tears steaming down her eyes Judy called her daughter.

"Noah?" Aaron called. As he turned around he could see Aaron's tearstained cheeks and her swollen eyes. Her braid was a mess and her blue head-band seemed out of place compared to her dove-white face. His first thought was God, I love this woman, I can't bear to see her like this. "Noah" she repeated, "Guess what the doctor just phoned with the results of my check-up, he knows what's wrong with me, I'm dying of Leukemia. Funny isn't it she said trying to fake a laugh, "I've only got about three years to live." With that she started crying. Noah took her in his arms and also started crying. That's how it was for a long time, no words, just tears locked together in each other's arms.

Back home Judy tried to be courageous. She called Erica and Peter to come set the table while Christopher and ory helped her prepare supper. She looked out the window and saw Aaron-Marie and Noah walking hand-in-hand. She then realized how ruinable her children really were and she wanted to take them in her arms so she could protect them from all the harm in this mean world.

After supper Christopher suggest a game of snow football but Aaron-Marie and Noah turns him down. Instead they went for a walk in the woods. "I don't want to die, Noah, I'm afraid" says Aaron-Marie. Noah looks at her distraught face and answers. "Everybody has to die at one time or another. You know when your going to die, but we don't. I mean look at your brother Joshua who ever expected him to die in an accident at the age of six. That was 13 years ago but I'm sure your mother still hasn't gotten over the shock. Let me just give you this advice. Don't let this stop you from achieving your goal. Your a good skater and you know it! Reach for the stars Aaron, and don't give up 'till you get'em. Looking in his serious face Aaron could see he was right. She'd continue on skating, for her family, for him, and for Joshua, but most important for herself.

The next week, at six a.m. as the snow lightly fell on the sleepy town of Bristol, you could hear in the distance the sound of cold metal scraping the ice and the fast breathing of Aaron-Marie as she practiced for the Finals. Also you could hear something that had been rare that week, her laughter as she attempted to make a cartwheel on ice.



Some people even said that if you listened carefully you could the faint laughter of a six year old child.

## Mistakes

As Tara Phillips a 17 year old petite girl, with smoke-gray eyes and raven black hair got into her 1981 black Fire-bird, we could tell her mind was not on her driving. Instead she was thinking of how she'd tell her boyfriend Jameson Andrews about her being pregnant. Tara was in her third semester in college studying Creative Arts, so that she could be a broadcaster, hopefully for KFXL her favorite radio station. She's been thinking all night of what she'd say & now as she drove in glorious fall morning with blue-blue skies, she was at loss for words. How would he take it she thought.

She could still remember the night two months ago when she attended her best friends Priscilla Herium beach party. She and Jamie had both gotten very drunk. So drunk that she couldn't walk straight. Plus there were joints being passed around. She never tried the stuff nor would she. But she noticed Jamie taking some long drags. Then came the swin & dancing & more drinking. It was at this time that Jameson, Tara's boyfriend for over two months, asked her with his beautiful brown eyes sparkling, his blond hair plastered on his head, water dripping off of him, a grin spread on his small red mouth if she'd like to go play behind the bushes. She thought there was no harm in a few kisses. The rest happened to fast for her to remember. She got home it was 5 a.m. thank God her parents weren't home that night.

As she stopped at a red light, she realized that her whole life was ruined by those few extra beers. As she turned into the Andrews drive way she spotted Vance Andrews, Jamesons younger brother fixing his car. A 1976 silver Pontiac. "If your looking for Jamie he's in his room Vance told her. After thanking him, she went inside the house. A 1937 colonial and walked up to Jameson's door & knocked. From inside she heard a muffled COME IN. As she entered she noticed that Jameson was cleaning his room. "Jamie I got to talk to you," she whispered. Just the look on her face was a give away. Noticing this Jameson in alarmed voice said, "Tara baby, what's wrong?" She then started crying and between sobs managed to spill out the story. Jameson didn't have a clue on how to stop her crying so he said in a pampering voice, "It's alright, baby, listen everythings alright, I mean accident happen & Pric's party was a big accident." With that he started singing her favorite song and acting it out, till he finally got her laughing. "See I told you everythings cool, I mean you can have an abortion & the problem's finished." He said. " You don't understand Jamie I want this baby & also want school, oh! Jamie I'm so confused what I'm going to do?"

she asked. Meanwhile on Jameson's radio was Tara's favorite song, Mickey, which Jamie had just been singing a little while before. "I don't want to have an abortion," "alright baby, then I'll tell you what, I have a job, we can get married." Jameson said holding Tara's shaking hands in his. "That's also part of the problem, Jamie, I don't want to marry you. ssh! let me finish, you see I've always dreamed of marrying a gorgeous guy whom I was madly in love with & having dozens of children. But that was a dream & this is reality, you see Jameson, I don't love you!" she carefully said. "I came here," she continued, "to tell you that I'm going to this house for pregnant teen-agers in Massachuts, where I'll continue my education. My parents are paying the tab, they know about the baby, then, I'm going to get a job & someday, I'll get married and have some more children. But I have to marry for love Jamie, understand. Well I came really to say good-bye, you see I'm leaving next week. I should have told you sooner, but I didn't have enough guts" she concluded. On the radio, the song "What's Forever For" came on and through Jameson's window in the second floor, you could see Tara & Jamie dancing for one last time and Jamie whispering in Tara's ear, "And I loved you!"

### The Hour Glass

"This is Kayla Stuart for CJXY." As she said that, while putting some music on, Geoffrey crept up behind her, planted a kiss on her neck and touched her swelling belly. They had now been married a year and a half and life was simply bliss. The love they had for one another was unbreakable. They lived in an enormous house near a beach in Redwood City, California. They already had a room next to theirs awaiting the baby. She had her career in broadcasting and he was an engineer. Everything to them was beautiful and it rarely rained on their side of the mountain. The sand in their hour glass had just begun to spill.

Thirty years later, the enormous house which at one time had been filled with five children was once again empty. Kayla and Geoffrey grew more and more in love every day. As they saw their creations grow, they also saw wrinkles beginning in their faces. They knew that they must savor their days the best they could for the sand was quickly running out of their hour glass.

Letters

Eleven students were present on that day at the end of the year when I kept my promise to reveal the topic of this study. I then asked them to write their own comments about the freedom of topic choice - how it felt, where their ideas came from or whatever they wanted to record about the year's writing program. They are all reproduced here - a small but 'unexpurgated' and unedited sample of personal responses.

None of the eleven who wrote these letters is in the case studies. Not surprisingly, there were more better students in class that day, though a few were among the weaker of the class; who they are will be fairly self-evident. Inter alia, these letters will serve as a counterpoint and provide a sense of the general writing ability of the students.

Student "A"

Most of my ideas for compositions came from within me. I remember writing about a character I had named Bruce. The composition I wrote was a narrative, but it was based on an experience that happened to me.

Another composition that I wrote was inspired by a Michael Jackson article I read in the Gazette. I didn't really base my composition on what I had read. The article said something which I thought should have been said. In other words, the article expressed something which I had felt before the article was ever printed: that Michael Jackson is overrated. I felt relieved that I wasn't the only one who felt that this was so. I decided I would express my opinions of Michael Jackson in my comp 'Michaelmania'.

I basically wrote about things which originated from me.

The comps that I didn't hand in to you were similar to the ones I handed in in that they expressed my views of interpretations of events in my life. I attempted to write a book report, but it didn't appeal very much to Maureen. However, the rest of my group liked it.

In my comp group, I depended on Maureen for good feedback. If she said the comp was good, I considered handing it in. If it was bad, I would either rewrite it or trash it.

Some of my comps were diary entries, others were expositorys on topics like the Victorian age or abortion.

Student "B"

### Free Topic Writing

I think free topics are a very relaxing form of writing. One can write about anyone, anything, anywhere, and anyhow. There are no restrictions and that is why such a wide variety of composition subjects are submitted to you everytime the term comps are due.

I guess I get my ideas from by basic perception of life. I never write about the supernatural, the bizarre or the "unknown". My best writing comes from elaborating on situations which present themselves in everyday life. Oddly enough however, I never write about my own experiences, only "could be" experiences. I like to put myself in other peoples' shoes and feel and act as if I were the one with the problem. Writing a comp gives you the liberty to assume any identity, any attitude etc. ... I could be a drug addict, as in my last comp or I could be a dying teenager. I rarely write stories with happy endings for unfortunately it rarely happens in reality. I like for the reader to become sensitive to the situations I write about. Open their eyes to see that there are other lifestyles than theirs. I want the reader to feel, not as I the writer feels, but how the person I have created feels. This is one of the major reasons why I usually write in the first person. It makes my story seem more realistic and I think better captivates the audience.

Well then you have it. Ms Gloria's writing technics. For more pointers write to....

Bye.



Student "C"

Dear Ms. Sheps,

About how and where I find the ideas to write the weekly comp, well, sometimes during the week someone says something to me or in conversation something just hits me and I feel I'd like to say more about the topic. Sometimes I'm just sitting on the bus and see someone do something very odd and it starts me thinking and then imagining and then writing. I got the topic of "nutrition" by observing how and what people eat. Do you realize how many kids eat french fries and a chocolate bar every day of the week? A hell (oops!) of a lot and 3/4's of them are not even fat but are they health and what is all that junk doing to their inners? That started me thinking. Then I was at the track and field meet and I saw how the other life lived. The athletes there push themselves so hard that under all that pressure and heat and fatigue still are able to pull through fantastical. Where do they get that power, the ENERGY, to perform that well. These thoughts gave the other part of the argument on "Nutrition and Health".

All the topics which we write about some how or in someway hit a certain "key" in us that allowed our imagination to run wild.

I feel that writing about things that interest us allows us to learn and try new things that we never have before. We learn more about us and what we like and how much that topics is on our mind.

P.S. I guess this will be the last letter you will be getting from me, so, so long, fair well and have a great, fulfilling life and may you, everyday, learn something new!

Student "D"

I found weekly comps were very effective for improving writing skills. In most years I have written four or five comps in a year. Yet, this year I wrote the same in one term. After writing so many compositions the flow of my ideas came easier. Once I got used to my groups' comments and their own particular style everything went great. I usually knew what needed changes or omitting after reading it over a few times.

Anyway I think this method, as well as the free-writing must have improved the style of a lot of weaker writers. I was also happy with the choice of topic for I was allowed to take my own idea and expand it to a composition; then see it in writing. Many times, when one wants to write about something and is stopped from doing so; the person has his ideas cut. Also, when one writes with a given topic it isn't always something they want to write about, so the form and ideas may sound mechanical when one chooses a topic, the composition should be that much more expressive.

The ideas for my comps just came to my head. It really is quite difficult to explain. After thinking an idea will come to mind, then I just form it mentally. I'd write it out briefly on paper and see what happened. It was then that I decided if it would be a comp or not.

## Student "E"

The ideas for my comps came to me by thinking of many situations and what I would do if I was the main character. I would write all my ideas that would come on looseleaf. Some ideas came from writing in the journal because when you keep on writing the ideas just flow out one after another. If I got frustrated or emotional ideas came to mind and I would write it all down. When, it came time to write a composition I would just look at all the ideas and situations I had and write a comp on something that I was able to talk about. Every night I would read over my comp. and make changes where needed. In the comp. groups the groups would tell me if the comp was good or not and if it needed changes. The idea of having weekly comps was a very good idea. It was effective for everybody because it helped everyone's writing abilities. The groups helped all of us because we got other readers' opinion on our idea in the comp and how we can make it better etc....

Student "F"

I got the ideas for my comp by watching T.V. or reading a book, and also from discussions I had with my father. If I had an idea I would think about it and I saw if it was good enough to write a comp on it.

I also wrote on things that are interesting to me. I like writing comps that are mysterious like the one I did about Jesus appearing at the end, that comp I had written on things that I wanted answer to, and the only being that could give me the answer was Jesus.

Writing about that comp was good because it made me understand some of the suffering and why things happen in the world. I still have questions about it but a great many are answered.

Student "G"

The titles that I used for my compositions were taken from newspaper articles and some just out of the air. The kind of story I like to write is one that little kids can read and one they'll enjoy. When I write a story I like to take a true event and fantasize it a bit. Sometimes I'll read an article and then completely rewrite it but in my own words. This year comp was fun because for once we were able to pick our own headlines and topics.

Student "H"

First of all, I mostly write essays. Well, I usually get my ideas from past experiences. For example my part time job.

I can write much calmer and easier when they affect me in a certain dimensions and ways.

When I write essays I feel that I can't really be wrong since they are my opinions. Well that's all. Have a nice life.

Student "I"

Where did I get my ideas and topics? Well sometimes it was very difficult. One week I could write and write, because I'd have so many thoughts and ideas to write about. Other weeks it would be hard to get a line written. I tend to write more when I'm feeling a bit gloomy. If I'm feeling great and life is good to me, I really don't have much to say. I don't know where and how the ideas came in my mind. Sometimes I'd be falling asleep in my bed and a thought would occur to me, and I'd get up four or five times before I'd fall asleep. Once I was delivering papers at night, and as I walked by this spooky house, I imagined what was going on inside and I'd write about that. A television program once gave me an idea to write about PMS (pre-menstrual syndrom).

If you put your mind to it and think and dig down hard enough, you'll probably find something!

Student "J"

As you already know, I really found that having a choice of topic this year was useful and beneficial . First of all, I was under no strain or pressure to write about something that I had "no comment" on. That's often the case when a student does poorly in a composition, because he or she just has nothing to say.

The way in which I chose my topics is basically through "everyday happenings" or class discussions. Sometimes, an idea just sparks up in my mind, and I jot it down, whether it be in English or French. From there on, all I have to do is write what I think and feel about that particular topic, and then add the "finishing touches".

Also, the little "experiences" that happen in "a day's work" also inspired me to write. I'd either make up a story, or write on a topic that related to the situation. But what I found with these was that they were sometimes too personal. I somehow feel more comfortable handing in a piece of work that is strictly fictional.



Student "K"

I got my ideas for the weekly compositions, basically from everywhere. Events which would happen in my life or little things in everyday life would give me things to write about.

I find being able to choose different subjects is good because it gives us a wider span to be creative and more imaginative. We are able to experiment with the different ways of writing (descriptive, narrative, expository) when we want to. We are less pressured in that we can write what we want, how we want and when we want, without anybody telling us what to write.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Berthoff, Ann ed., Reclaiming The Imagination,  
Boynton, 1983.
- Bettelheim, Bruno, Love is not Enough,  
Avon Books, 1971.
- Brannon, C. ,  
Knoblauch, C.H., "On Students' Rights to Their Own  
Texts": A Model of Teacher Response,  
College Composition and Communications  
Vol. 33) No. 2 (157-166) May 1982.
- Britton, Burgess, Martin,  
McLeod, and Rosen, The Development of Writing  
Abilities (11-18), Schools Council Research  
Studies, 1975.
- Bruner, Jerome, On Knowing, Essays For the Left  
Hand, Harvard University Press, 1979.
- Clifford, John, "Composing in Stages: The Effects  
of a Collaborative Pedagogy"Research in The  
Teaching of English, Vol. 15, No. 1, (37-53)  
February 1981.
- Denman, Mary E., " I Got This Here Hang-Up: Non-  
Cognitive Process For Facilitating Writing"  
College Composition and Communication  
Vol. 26, No. 3 ( 305-309), October 1975.
- Denman, Mary E., " Personality Changes Concomitant  
with Learning Writing " Research in the  
Teaching of English, Vol. 15, No. 2, (170-  
171) May 1981.
- Denman, Mary E., "The Measure of Success in  
Writing" College Composition and  
Communication, Vol. 29, No. 1 (42-46)  
February, 1978.
- Elbow, Peter, Writing With Power, Oxford  
University Press, 1981.

- Elbow, Peter, Writing without teachers, Oxford University Press, 1973.
- Emig, Janet, The Composing Process of Twelfth Graders, N.C.T.E. Research Report, No. 13, 1971.
- Emig, Janet, Goswami & Butler, eds., The Web of Meaning, Essays on Writing, Teaching, Learning and Thinking, Boynton/Cook, 1983.
- Erikson, Erik, Childhood and Society, 2nd edition, Norton, 1963.
- Foster, David, A Primer for Writing Teachers Boynton/Cook, 1983.
- Freedman, Sarah, W., "Student Characteristics and Essay Test Writing Performance", Research in the Teaching of English, Vol. 17, No. 4, (313-325), December 1983.
- Freedman, Aviva, and Pringle, Ian, eds. Reinventing the Rhetorical Tradition C.C.T.E., 1980.
- Ginott, Haim, Between Parent and Teenager, Avon Books, 1971.
- Ginott, Haim, Teacher and Child, Avon Books, 1975.
- Harris, M., "Strategies, Options, Flexibility and the Composing Process" The English Quarterly, Vol. xv, No. 3 (57-61) October, 1982.
- Hauch, B. and Freehill, M., the gifted-case studies, Wm. Brown Co., 1972.

- Hillocks, George, "The Interaction of Instruction, Teacher Comment and Revision in Teaching the Composing Process" Research in the Teaching of English, Vol. 16, No. 3 ( 261-278), October 1982.
- Holbrook, David, English for Maturity, Cambridge University Press, 1967.
- Holbrook, David, English for the Rejected, Cambridge University Press, 1964.
- Holbrook, David, The Exploring Word, Cambridge University Press, 1967.
- Holbrook, David, The Secret Places, University of Alabama Press, 1965.
- Hull, Glynda, "Effects of Self Management Strategies on Journal Writing by College Freshman" Research in the Teaching of English Vol.15, No. 2, (135-148), May 1981.
- Hunt, Kellog, "Syntactic Maturity in School Children and Adults" Society for Research in Child Development. Vol. 35, No 1, February 1970.
- Jacko, Carol, "Small group triad as an instructional mode" College Composition and Communication. Vol. 29, No. 3, (290) October 1978.
- Kubler-Ross, E., On Death and Dying, MacMillan, New York, 1969.
- Macrorie, Ken, Searching Writing, Hayden Book Co., N.J., 1980.
- Macrorie, Ken, Telling Writing, 3rd ed., Hayden Book Co., 1980.

- Macrorie, Ken, Writing to be read, revised 2nd ed., Hayden, 1976.
- Moffett, James, Teaching the Universe of Discourse, Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1968.
- Murray, Donald, A Writer Teaches Writing, Houghton, Mifflin, 1968.
- Murray, Donald, Learning By Teaching. Selected Articles on Writing and Teaching, Boynton/Cook Pub., 1982.
- Murray, Donald, "Teaching the Other Self: The Writer's First Reader", College Composition and Communication, Vol. 33, No. 2 (140-147), May 1982.
- Murray, Donald, "Write Before Writing" College Composition and Communication Vol.29, No. 4, p. 375-381, December 1978.
- O'Hare, Frank, Sentence Combining: Improving Student Writing Without Formal Grammar Instruction, N.C.T.E. , Urbana, 1973.
- Perl, Sondra, "The composing process of unskilled college wrriters" Research In The Teaching of English, Vol. 13, No. 13, (317-336), December 1979.
- Pianko, Sharon, "Reflection: A Critical Component of the Composing Process" College Composition and Communication, Vol. 30, No. 3, (275-277), October, 1979.
- Rogers, Carl, On Becoming a Person, Houghton, Mifflin Co., Boston, 1961.
- Shaughnessy, M. Errors and Expectations: A guide for the teacher of basic writing, Oxford

University Press, 1977.

Smith, Frank,                      Writing and the Writer, Holt,  
Rinehart & Winston, 1982.

Sternglass, Marilyn,              "Applications of the Wilkinson  
Model of Writing Maturity to College  
Writing"      College Composition and  
Communication Vol. 33, No. 2, (167-175),  
May, 1982.

Wilkinson, Andrew,              "Quality of Feeling", unpublished  
paper presented at C.C.T.E., Montreal, May,  
1983.

Williams, J.D. and  
Alden, D. Scott,              "Motivation in the Composition  
Class" Research In the Teaching of English  
Vol. 17, No. 2, (101-112), May, 1983.

Veron, P.E., ed.,              Creativity, Selected Readings,  
Penguin, 1970.