115 Vernon: A Journal for Writers, Vol.1, No.2

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Recommended Citation
Schurr, Andrew; Sullivan, Kate; Brown, David Sterling; Francoeur, Dorothy; Peltier, Robert; Welshans, Phillip; Freeman, Simira; Khan, Syre Matin; Libbey, Elizabeth; Eno, Allison; Schrager, Sophie; Hojnacki, Sean; Canata, Anthony J. Esq.; Gavin, Patrick; Judy, Amy; Martinson, Erica; Irwin, Ron; Pearson, Patricia; Adams, Kate; and Miller, Beth, "115 Vernon: A Journal for Writers, Vol.1, No.2" (2004). 115 Vernon. Paper 15.
http://digitalrepository.trincoll.edu/writing_associates/15
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“Fill your paper with the breathings of your heart...” - William Wordsworth
An Editors’ Note...

What is a writer? How does one write? Why write? In addition to a steady hum of tutoring sessions in the Writing Center, this year’s Writing Associates continued to ask these questions.

Representing over forty academic departments and a handful of political and social interests, the Writing Associates of 2003-2004 desired to foster a community in which the writer could flourish. Through dynamic online discussion, small writing groups, and introducing a new lecture series to the campus, Writers on Writing, a plethora of occasions arose for some of Trinity’s finest writers to hone their passion.

In consideration of what happens to an Associate’s writing once he leaves the College and goes to the “real world,” we decided to ask a few former Associates where their writing has taken them in “WA Alum tell it like it is.” As well as shifting 115 Vernon’s focus to writing, we hope that this edition will continue to consider of what happens to an Associate’s writing once he leaves the College.

Thank you for your contributions to the program. We are particularly grateful for the guidance of Dr. Beverly Wall and Dr. Papoulis for their continued encouragement and support.

Best Wishes,
Kate Sullivan & Dorothy Francoeur
Head Tutors, 2003-04

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DO YOU LOVE WRITING?

The Writing Associates Program prepares highly talented undergraduate writers to supplement faculty efforts in the classroom and to expand the opportunities for helping writers on campus and in the community. Students are recommended by faculty and selected by a special committee composed of faculty and student representatives. Those students selected to be Writing Associates take English 302, Writing Theory and Practice, while serving as apprentice peer tutors in the Writing Center. In subsequent semesters, student Writing Associates affiliate with faculty as teaching assistants in many different courses—ranging from First-Year Seminars to Senior Seminars—and work as writing tutors in the Writing Center, in residence halls, and in a number of other contexts.

We appreciate current Writing Associates’ and faculty effort in promoting and developing the program by encouraging suitable students to apply. Applications including a personal statement, writing samples, interview, and references are taken each February. Please stay posted for notices from Dr. Beverly Wall next fall!

The Writing Center
115 Vernon Street
Trinity College
Individual Tutoring Services Available
HOURS:
Monday–Thursday 1–4 p.m.
& 6:30–9:30 p.m.
LATE NIGHT HOURS:
Sunday and Monday
10 pm–Midnight in the Library
Drop in or call X-3600 for appointment

"Why Write?"
By Andrew Schurr

Why write? Why bother?

Of all the forms of communication, it is the most archaic. In today’s world, we beam our thoughts out over the phone lines, we express ourselves in film, images, in recorded sound, in text sound bites and Instant Messages. As soon as a thought enters our heads, it can be bitten off, encoded, and spirited away. Why then should we stoop to put words on paper, one by one, confining them to a sluggish, stale media? Millions can see a film, hundreds can pass along an e-mail. How many can read the lines in your hand-penned notebook?

Why write? Does the world need to hear the contents of your head? Are thoughts expressed in paper somehow more valuable? How can a thought, squeezed through the filter of language, be any more real or true? Our thoughts have color and substance and weight when they exist in our heads, but ink has no weight, and paper no color.

Why bother?

I was in a book store the other day, killing an hour or two between meals. I saw three children—brothers, I think—huddled around the “Harry Potter” rack.

“The movie was awesome,” said the first child. “Totally.”

“Yeah,” said the second. He held the book in his hands, flipping randomly between pages. “Book was better, though. You can….” He paused, frowning for a moment in thought, then, “I can, like… I can see the colors and stuff in my head.”

I can see the colors in my head.

I see them, too. If the author is good enough—really at the top of their game—I can also taste and smell. We all experience this, although some people see the colors more brightly, or find the taste to be sweeter. One minute we’re trotting along, reading the words, connecting sentences together, and then the dull mechanics slip away from us and we’re filled with sounds and images and ideas.

Where did they come from? Sprung from the ether? Beamed directly from the author’s mind to yours? What mysterious alchemy is this?

A silly question, maybe. Reading falls into the category of Things That Just Are, like why is the sky blue? and why do hot dogs come in packs of six and buns in packs of eight? But unexplained wonders are still wonders.

Movies don’t do this. TV rarely even comes close. These are images that have already been formatted and packaged, ready to be dumped down our retinas in their final form. If the director wants us to see a house on a windswept beach, we will see it exactly as he or she wants it, every angle and trim of the house, every color and smell of sand. And we all see the same thing: each person in the theater will dutifully store the exact same image. Hundreds of identical windswept beaches, all in a row.

And then there’s writing.

Ask ten different Tolkien readers what the home of Bilbo Baggins looks like, and you’ll get ten...
different answers. And a probably an argument, too, if the opinions differ sharply. Take Tolkien’s description of Bilbo’s hole in the ground: “Not a nasty, dirty, wet hole filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, bare, sandy hole with nothing in it to sit down on or to eat: it was a hobbit-hole, and that means comfort.” As we read it, the machinery in the back of our head grinds up to speed and starts latching on to phrases; “not wet and oozy”, “not dry and here”, “hobbit-hole means comfort.” A structure begins to expand: A little door, maybe four feet high, set back into the hill, with a few tufts of dirt peeking around the edges. Wide brick hallways... no, wait, not brick: it’s faded plaster, cracking with age, like old pre-war English houses. A lamp at the entrance with a well-trimmed wick. And no, not wide halls, either, but narrow, and cozy.

None of this detail is described in the book; it’s entirely a product of my own imagination. This creation is different, unique, and maybe a radical departure from what someone else’s imagination made, and yet it is still undeniably Bag End, humble home of Bilbo Baggins. My Bag End is as real, and as valid, as any other version, including the one in Tolkien’s own head.

Ask ten different moviegoers what the home of Bilbo Baggins looks like, and you will get essentially one single answer: “Round green door. Grass, New Zealand-esque exterior. Wood interior, well lit. Low ceiling: Gandalf bumps his head on stuff.” Exactly how director Peter Jackson envisioned it.

But that’s not my Bag End.

Writing is more than the transmission of an image or an idea. It’s an amazing combination of having complete control and ownership of your work, and yet utterly submitting to the inner eye of your reader. The act of committing your thought to paper is merely the beginning of creation, not the end product. At some point the reader takes over and continues building.

When I described how I envisioned Bag End, did you see the cracked white walls? Was it bright inside for you, or dim? Did your mind’s eye see the color and the shape of the doorway?

Even the very best of movies—the absolute cream of the crop—can inspire only a ghost of this creative process. We may imagine Rick’s dark thoughts as he drinks alone in a bar in “Casablanca.” We may see in our minds eye what lies beyond the jungle at the edges of “Apocalypse Now.” But we are still entirely in the filmmaker’s world, and it is always clear that we are only visiting.

Write because there is power in words that surpasses film and computers and technology. Feel the intimacy of provoking the inner eye of another, rather than layering your own images before it. Technology may give us greater speed and a wider audience, but it can also build a wall between your mind and that of your audience. Is convenience worth the sacrifice? Words can have color and weight and power, but they quicken only if planted in fertile ground.

So write.
Not even 

He has a passion 
That passion is his pen 

The writer in me 

Developed
From being a person who simply writes 
To being someone who is a writer 

Now, he understands 
When united words are more 
They are power and strength 

He may start a sentence with “and” 
Or even “because” 
And if you ask why 
He will tell you “because” 
And if you contest him 
He will say “and” 

The writer in me does not procrastinate 
He gives himself time 
He gives his thoughts time 
To develop into something more 
He expands on the weak areas 
And says some more 
He is never done 

The writer in me is his worst critic 
He will look at his work 
And tell himself something is not right 
He will tell others something is not right 
Even those so-called “writing-gods” 
Because he knows 

The writer in me needs time to reflect 
He likes to take a step back from his work 
So that he can look at it with a fresh eye 
So that he can see paragraph two 
Make no sense 
So that he can see his thesis is not clear 
So that he can fix the half-ass conclusion 
So he knows 

The writer in me cannot do without feedback 

He wants criticism at its best and its worst 
Tell him his paper makes absolutely no sense 
He will accept all of your suggestions 
Because in the end that's what they are 
But he trusts you to be honest 
Look him in the eyes when you give him feedback 
Your suggestions are helpful 
Not overwhelming because he has 
Time 

The writer in me is responsible 
For all of the language that he uses 
He looks at the literal meaning of words 
Before he applies them to the page 
He understands that in some cases 
"Accurate" is better than "realistic" 
"Realistic" better than "accurate" 
It depends 

The writer in me uses writing as his therapy 
When he is happy 
He writes 
When he is sad 
He writes 
When he is angry 
He takes his frustrations out on the paper 
With his pen 
His writing is at its best when he is heated 
When he is hurt 
When he is feeling 

The writer in me is not scared 
To take risks and defy the norm 
He is not afraid to 
Travel the path that is 
Least often taken 
And challenge himself 
It's often better that way 
The writer in me never stops 
When he puts his pen down 
His thoughts never cease 
When he lays his head down 
He writes in his dreams
From Trinity to the Alamo: Writing My Way West
By Robert F. Pelletier

Years ago, as an undergraduate, I was a Writing Associate. A week ago, I met Billy Bob Thornton in San Antonio. The connection seems obvious to me, but maybe not to you, so I'll explain all that a little farther on.

First, though, I'll tell you that I was a pioneer Writing Associate, a member of the first group. The position of pioneer is a curious one. There are few immigration laws for the pioneer, it's relatively simple to travel into uncharted lands, and pioneers get to make the rules for the civilization to follow, although that civilization will eventually refine some of the rules and throw out others and enact still others.

These days, Writing Associates are not so much pioneers, as citizens of a settled country. The immigration laws are still all that essay writing and paper submitting and recommendation begging, followed by a mysterious process, behind closed— and locked—doors, that determines who gets to be a citizen and who must wait on the far shore for another chance to enjoy the benefits, privileges, and responsibilities of citizenship.

Before I beat this extended metaphor completely to death, let me just add that some things remain. Institutionally, we still have the tutoring, the special projects that go beyond tutoring, and the continuing focus on improving writing on Trinity's campus. Personally—and, let's be honest, our actions are more often motivated by personal, not institutional, reasons—Writing Associates get to become better writers, to enhance their resumes, and to bask in the sunny praise accorded to all good writers. (And that last may be at the heart of our muse's whispers).

But it all starts with the writing. Writing is a process, not a product. It opens us up to possibilities by creating new knowledge. There are things I know that I would never have known had I not written. This creative process seems, to me, miraculous at times. Fiction writers often write about characters before we sit down to write, because knowledge comes to us through the writing itself. Of course, this is not to say that we need never pick up a book nor do the research necessary to our topic. Knowledge is built, refined, and articulated from the raw materials lying in profusion around the messy construction site of our brains.

What's more, if writing creates knowledge, what better subject to write about than ourselves? Journals, diaries, memoirs, autobiographies help us to lead that examined life that Socrates was so keen on.

This astonishing fact of creativity may be what made me want to be a writer, but I'm afraid that I can't be sure, because that original impetus is lost in the mists of history and hazy memory. It's just as likely that I was

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1 I was once told by a high school teacher that I shouldn't start a sentence with the word "but." I pointed out to her that Shakespeare had done just that. She told me that I wasn't Shakespeare. I replied that I never would be if she didn't allow me the freedom to start my sentences with "but." Our relationship was never warm after that.

fascinated by the ability to make letters on a page with a big fat first grade pencil and, later on, with a typewriter (the computer seems less physically connected to this process and, besides, it came along much too late in my life to have been an inspiration). It just seems that I've always been a writer. Maybe because I was good at it, I kept writing or maybe, because I kept writing, I became good at it.

At Trinity, the first class I took was English 100: Writing 1 (I published an essay I'd written on Martin Luther King from that course as an Op-Ed piece), and I continued to take writing courses, both fiction and non-fiction. Since I hung around the English Building so much, everyone got to know my name, and someone proposed me for the program. I was asked to become a Writing Associate and, not knowing fully what that meant, I said yes, I'd be happy to. Little did I know how happy. Like you current Writing Associates, I tutored (in one of two small rooms since combined to make room 108 next to the present-day Writing Center and, later, in the new center) and studied writing in theory and practice.

Tutoring then wasn't, I suspect, much different from tutoring now: we asked questions and listened closely before making any suggestions, and our goal was not just to help the writers improve the papers they brought in, but also to help them improve their writing generally. We worked hard and were rewarded with the development of our own writing and the cachet that came with the title Writing Associate. And we had a pretty good time hanging around the Writing Center and getting to know one another, too. In addition to the tutoring, I also worked as a writing tutor for a film class, and researched the writing abilities and needs of IDP students. I didn't know it then, but all of this was helping me to develop a pedagogical philosophy that would be important to me later on as a teacher of writing.

But all good things come to an abrupt and jarring end, and soon graduation was upon me. I continued to write, including a creative writing thesis, in graduate school, and I taught as a Writing Fellow, which led to my current position as Lecturer in the Allan K. Smith Center for Writing and Rhetoric.

And that's how I got to meet Billy Bob Thornton. As a writing teacher, I attend various conferences each year, including the biggest: The Conference on College Composition and Communication which, this year, was held in San Antonio, Texas. Also in San Antonio at the same time: the premiere of the movie The Alamo.

I won't tell you the entire story of how I met him because, although it's a great story, it's too long. I'll just say that Billy Bob (a writer of some note, himself) prefers walking along the streets and seeing the sights to riding in a darkened-window limo.

So, you never know where writing is going to take you. You might meet a celebrity. You might even, though the odds are tremendously against it, attain a degree of celebrity yourself. But if you work really hard at your writing, you will get to know yourself and the world around you better. What other activity can promise so much?
On Academic Writing
By Phillip Weishans

Reading much of what has been written about the process of writing and what makes a good piece of writing as opposed to a bad piece of writing, I have come to the conclusion that very few people choose to write about writing in general or about other writers and instead relish in their own munificence as literates. They sometimes use words like 'munificence' and 'literates' to create a smokescreen of syllables...

Anyway, in exploring my own thoughts on writing, I decided to incorporate this conclusion into a small piece on a topic near and dear to my heart: boring writing. If there's one thing that I can't stand, it has to be boring writing. And if there's another thing I can't stand (and for the purposes of this essay, let's say there is), it has to be bad academic writing. For some reason a scholar can write the driest, most coma-inducing article in a journal, but because he makes his points, it's suddenly seen as a great piece of scholarship. My bibliography stands at six pages in length and eighty-one sources in quantity. Now, of course I haven't read all of these books or articles cover to cover. But trust me, if you're not a thesis writer, you can't know how disturbing it is to suddenly realize you have read more books on your subject than your age three times over.

I'm not sure what it is about poor academic writing that bothers me so much. Certainly it's the style, or rather the utter lack thereof. But more than that, it's a combination of the dry writing and the natural melancholic subject matter that most scholars write about. It becomes a diabolical combination that drives young students away from academic journals in droves. When someone is trying to write about economic trends in the Tang dynasty or the history of the slave trade in eastern Africa during the late 19th century, by definition they're writing about a topic that seems boring to most people. While it may not be boring to the writer, they rarely seem to understand that in order for the reader to be interested, they have to be entertained. I'm not talking about being entertained in the usual sense of being distracted (by TV or a movie or a video game, etc.), but instead the concept that fiction tends to adopt: using colorful prose to tell a story in such a way as to keep the reader's attention. For academics, the story just happens to be true. Unfortunately many scholars could not write a colorful sentence if you paid them (wait a second...they do pay them!).

For instance, I am reading a book for a class I am taking on the Civil War Era entitled, Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War, by a great American history scholar, Eric Foner, who teaches at Columbia. Unfortunately for Dr. Foner, he can't write without inevitably lulling me to sleep. A subject of immense importance to antebellum American history becomes the bane of consciousness. On the cover of the book there is a phrase, "With a New Introduction by the Author" as if that's supposed to be a selling point. Luckily, I have read Foner before and was fully aware of his dry style going into the ordeal with Free Soil... and so was able to skip the New Introduction by the Author without feeling too much guilt. And by 'too much' I of course mean 'none.'

My point in all this is that one must be very careful when writing academically. While you shouldn't write your thesis in iambic pentameter and try to have it read like a work by Homer, you also can't make it so matter-of-fact that there's no life in the words. I don't plan on being a scholar when I finish my education, partly because I couldn't stand having to read the dreary, one dimensional work of my would-be colleagues that is sure to emerge in the new generation of professors and academics. In a profession as ancient as that of the scholar, things cannot and do not change overnight. But History and Economics and Sociology and everything else are all supposed to be fun and interesting. And yes, fun to the writer, but also, to the reader.

Sometimes I wish I could say to the writers, "Look, I know that since you wrote 300 pages on the Republican Party of the 1850's that you are interested in it. Now, when I read your book, try to make me interested in it too, if only for a brief moment in my life." That's the part of scholars' jobs that I think most have either never grasped, or have lost touch with. And thus, we as students, and genuinely interested lay persons, are forced to suffer through many years and thousands of pages of diatribes by the Eric Fones of our world when what we yearn for is a combination of academia and prose that will give us illumination and enjoyment.

Did I mention that I enjoy the munificence of my syllables?
Writing Practices
By Simira Freeman

"You're a great writer."

I shift in my seat, and my eyes drop modestly as I search for the right thing to say without seeming sure of myself than I really am. "I like to write."

"Your use of language is very effective and vibrant. I didn't realize you wrote so well. I haven't gotten a chance to read too much of your writing. But this is great."

I feign a nervous smile, "Yes um, I really enjoy writing personal essays, there is so much freedom in those."

She leans forward excitedly, awaiting my profound response. "Can you describe yourself as a writer?"

"Well I..."

"I mean like what is the writing process like for you as a writer? Do you have a special way you like to do things? A pattern you follow? Anything?"

I pause thinking of an answer worthy enough to serve as my reply, but all I can come up with is, "I just write."

I see writing as an extension of my brain. The constant stream of consciousness, runs like the tentacles of so many axons to the base of my fingertips and onto the page. They leap effortlessly now, across the synapse from thought to word. The womb of my writing world need only have a means with which to transcribe and a relative level of comfort. The rest is dictated by my state of mind. Treasured moments of heightened interest in content tend to lead to the most insightful analysis.

How does a self-proclaimed writer describe the process of writing. I suppose in the same way an artist describes the process leading up to the creation of a masterpiece. However, is writing even a process at all? Perhaps for others, it is, but for me, conceptualizing it as such is relatively new concept. After years of writing for the sake of the thrill of creating, it wasn't until recent years that as other people continue to define me as a "good writer" that I've been asked to identify my process. How do you identify something you never realized existed separately?

As I volley the idea around in my head, I can feel a temporary feeling of inadequacy oozing over me slowing my flow of thought, as I feel the pressure to define what comes to me naturally. If all good writers have a process then where is mine. As of late, there isn't a special chair or special time of the day, or a special place where all the precursors to an eventful writing session merge at the pinnacle of writing success. Instead, I just write. I begin expecting the overall continuity of my statements: the love child of thought and desire to emerge on its own, born from the fruit of my words. Is this all to my writing process: perhaps. I've come face to face with questions that have the words "writing process" looming in their subtext, but I always shy away from trying to define it. The irony of it all is that describing my writing process is one of the only written tasks that I find difficult to capture in words without sounding contrived. This stems from the unavoidable fact that if I haven't definitively concluded whether or not I have a consistent writing process, so how then can I describe it to others.

As with anything that I intend to write, whether personal, emotional, or academic, I define my position, feelings or beliefs first and then write as though moving from a starting point to a finish line. The words always almost find their way, as if my thoughts have some innate power to arrange themselves coherently on the page. Perhaps, I am fortunate in this regard. Although, regardless of how fluent the process is, I usually subject my writing to a barrage of revision.

Revision to me means playback. I playback my thoughts by reading them aloud. Hearing my words and how they fit together makes it easier to see which pieces don't and need to be rearranged. This playback period, is like listening to a familiar song I know all the words to. And just I sing along. As I add things or take them away, my ear plays along catching any inconsistencies in the pattern. But even when I revise I use the same method as I did the first time, letting the additional thoughts find their way to the paper unobstructed. After the playback, I sit back away from the piece and in most situations I don't return to it. I enjoy the feeling that comes from being able to produce something physical: a piece of writing from something as abstract as a thought.

Although I never really understood it as such, this is what many would interpret as "my writing process". I never really thought of it as a process, only what I tended to do most of the time. When I sit down to write, I rarely encounter that wall of self-censorship that blocks the flow of free thought for many writers. The writing process for me seems to be a collection of abstract goals that I have the tendency to want to achieve in all my writing. During the creation of it, I put less focus on structure and more on the importance of fostering a stream of coherent thoughts. Even when writing in a more personal setting within the pages of my journal, I often begin with something in mind and move through it with a definite starting point. I tend to pay less attention to how the words are organized because they usually organized themselves.

My confidence in using writing as a means to express myself through words makes writing less forced. I find security knowing that my words reflect a point of view derived from my own beliefs, and that the process of writing organizes those perspectives in a fashion that allows others a rare insight to my subjective consciousness.

'Don't compromise yourself. You are all you've got.'
—Janis Joplin
Elemental: A Seasonal Journal in Four Acts

By Dorothy Francoeur

Prologue: Ode to the Macintosh - written from the blizzard

With the snow, it still feels like Christmas in my apartment. In some form or fashion, there are presents everywhere - some are old, but no less appreciated, like this Macintosh computer I am currently using. Hawk, my pagan friend, rescued it from a dumpster behind the Hartford Public Library, refurbished it, and then presented it to me in my shy and useful way. Since then, it has become the perfect writing instrument for me, small enough for my bedroom, and comfortable to use. Its needs are simple, like mine.

As I sit here typing, I find myself enjoying the tactile clack of this old Macintosh's keyboard! I sit with it cradled on my lap, like a rectangular cat, perched royally on top of my gold and cobalt tapestry pillow. For a time, I look out at the blizzard and type blindly, enjoying the sensation of petting this keyboard-kat. It purrs here to wonder, to imagine, to realize, love.

In spring, Air brings freshness and new beginnings. It can cut, coldly, like a white, metal knife. It can churn your world into sudden chaos, like so much rubbish on city streets. It starts like a whirl of grey and white pigeons, whose wings beat against one another in their upward spiral toward some distant rafter. Air drifts, carries, lifts - it is a bird's lover. Winds dance and disperse the last leaden clouds of indecision, revealing a golden spray of sunbeams streaming toward the land, penetrating and reviving, warming and reminding, that we are here to wonder, to imagine, to realize, love.

In the Earth's belly, life quickens. Once, in early spring, I went away from my mother to give birth to a daughter of my own. I was only fifteen. I left home on a Sunday morning in late April. The day was yellow with daffodils and dandelions. Sun-washed flowers grew everywhere but in my heart. My journey was funereal and I arrived with relief at the blood-red brick home for unwed mothers. Inside, I saw nuns wrapped in black shrouds and moving through the corridors without seeing the ghosts of girls around them. They were the Sisters of Mercy, and I made my confession to them, because I was Leonard Cohen's Suzanne, dressed up in my Salvation Army rags and feathers. And by the beginning of the summer, with my daughter gone far from me, I had touched their perfect bodies with my mind.

ACT 2: Spring, Silver-Yellow, Air

The voice of spring is like a Maiden, breezy, willful, and risky. She begins to speak in late February - just before the first white and yellow crocus. In Her are the seeds of summer desire and autumn fruit. She comes on the wind when March's Lions roar. He, as Her champion, drives away with wind and sword the Silver Dragon of Winter. It is the Maiden who brings forth the trembling beauty of spring. And we, as mortals, fill our lungs with her breath and our ears with her song.

In spring, the last snow retreats as the wind sweeps the lingering cold beside the mountains and across the open land. The snow clings to the banks of the streams, where the sunbeams dance and the ice begins to melt. With this melting, the air becomes pungent with the smell of new growth. The earth begins to wake from its winter sleep, and the first signs of spring can be seen in the budding of the trees and the blooming of the flowers. The air is filled with the sweet scent of the changing season, and the sun shines down upon the earth with renewed warmth and energy.

ACT 3: Summer, Green, Fire, Passion

To me, summer starts on Mayday, when nature-loving ladies rise at dawn to wash their faces in the morning dew, just as our great-grandmothers did. On Mayday, verdant hues of grass and leaves emerge, expand, and quiver in the sunlight. According to Pagan lore, the spirit of Robin of the Green Wood is about, and that of his Merry Men. It is a time of mischief and revelry, of matchmaking and dancing, when couples court and spark, love-drunk bodies conjoining in the summer. Long after dark, as the fiddler slices his bow across cajun strings, a lilting melody drifts skyward with sparks from the smoking wood fires, trailing like a snake, out into the deep, nodded hole. But that is a dream. And now I am awake.

By Mayday, the nights are long and languorous. Blossoms fill the yards and byways of Hartford city, shocking the pavement. Bees buzz fatty, gluttonous with flower nectar. Even in the daytime, passion effuses the very air that I breathe. I notice it in unexpected places, like while walking on congested city streets where throngs of humans jostle for space with too-large advertisements, and darting, shark-like yellow taxis. In downtown Hartford, along "Cigarette Row," the living corpses are pulling hard on their death sticks. Their exhaled nicotine has, over time, coated the sidewalks a dark, brown-gray. With growing revulsion, I anticipate walking among them in August's blistering days, when discarded bubble gum oozes in pink stickiness, bleeding into the cracks of the broken sidewalks in front of Traveler's Insurance. There, in spite of the filth, street musicians barter their golden songs for the price of one night's revelry, of matchmaking and dancing, when couples court and spark, love-drunk bodies conjoining in the summer. Long after dark, as the fiddler slices his bow across cajun strings, a lilting melody drifts skyward with sparks from the smoking wood fires, trailing like a snake, out into the deep, nodded hole. But that is a dream. And now I am awake.

And I am awake.

Summer is for hearts on fire - even those hearts beating against.

Epilogue: Winter, White, Ice, Spirit

Autumn turned to winter overnight this year, leaving tiny droplets of bitter-sweet recollections that scatter through my mind and out my fingers. I have been longing for what feels like years, emerging, finally, from the Earth, as the Wise Woman.

Now, I am living a dream, wrapped up in an ivory and fringed shawl, surrounded by beloved whiteness. It begins with the bed comforter - a soft, queen-sized puff covered over in white eyelet lace. Underneath, the sheets are white-striped Egyptian cotton. An ivory wall hanging clings behind my pillows adding texture to an otherwise barren wall. The white does not end, but with miles of snow extending beyond the window. It is lucky that I like bright bedrooms. My windows face east, to the rising sun, and to where all things must begin, like this new phase in my life, where I am learning how to write again in all of this ... whiteness.

Turning my head, as I type, I see the cars half buried now, snow drifts up to the wheel wells of all but the tallest SUVs in my apartment parking lot. The evergreens lining the street are frosted all down one side, like wax-dipped tree candles at Christmas time. Or, like larger versions of those toy-like miniatures used in recreating New England villages, where mirrors become ponds and a tiny, white-steeped church becomes the focal point, surrounded by cunning cottages, a Main Street lined with shops and thronged with costumed villagers.

White is everywhere outside the window. The blizzard has consumed the parking lot and street, making imperceptible the dark green letters on the Hess Gas Station's neon-lit roof. The bushes are disappearing underneath the drifts as night intrudes on the scene. Watching, I realize that storms-walkers, seeking warm, dark sanctuary, must transmogrify the weight of years, moving, all at once blinded, but guided by, the White. It is time for them, and me, to hibernate, to nestle between soft, white sheets. To sleep, perchance to dream, until life begins again.
**Procrastination**

By Syre Matin Khan

Procrastination: It is a deadly disease; it slowly wears me down, until I am ready to give up. Its approach is slow, steady and sneaky; as I go to do my work, it comes close to me, standing on its toes, looming close, whispering in my ear. Where are you going? Come, come, that is not the way. Why go in that direction? It only leads you to study, work and stress. It takes away your time of fun and leisure. Enjoy life, have fun. Follow me. Come, come, don’t think about work; sit here and watch a movie.

Knowing fully well how many times before I have fallen into the same trap, wooed by the exact same arguments, I try to fight procrastination at the back of my mind, believing that the greater extent of the consequences of following the path that procrastination leads to stress, frustration, fatigue and all -righters — I do not want to go there.

I reply to procrastination, “No, I cannot watch a movie. I have too much work and a movie takes too much time. By the time movie ends, it will be too late and I will have to sit up all night. Besides, I have other work tomorrow and I want to get some sleep tonight so that I can do that.”

Procrastination, wily as ever, wholly conscious of my inherent inclination to succumb to its arguments, comes at me, “No, you don’t want to watch a movie! That is all right; we can find something else for you. Ooh no, come back; don’t go to work again; even if you know you have work. Listens; don’t worry; you have time. It is only eight at night; your paper is not due until tomorrow morning and you, it is only a five page paper. How much time do you really think your paper will take? Hardly four hours; you only need to do a little research and then you are off! My resistance against procrastination is weakening. Gradually, I am yielding to its arguments, thinking that they do make sense. “Well, perhaps it is true; the paper is not that difficult and it should not take me too long. I could probably finish it by two or three in the morning if I start at ten so I can sleep for seven or eight hours, not bad, actually. But maybe I should just finish it right off now. What do you think?”

Stillting its self-satisfied sneer, knowing how it has got me once again, procrastination replies, “No, no. You should have some fun, work can be done later. Come on; just watch this basketball game; only half an hour left to finish the paper now. Then you can go and work. Come on; it is not such a big deal.”

Convinced, I say, “Yeah, you’re right. Just this game though.”

Procrastination: “Come on, change; some other interesting program might be coming. Don’t worry, you have time.”

Flash-forward:

It is after midnight, perhaps one a.m., and I have unwillingly trudged to the computer lab. Finally, it is time to get to work. However, even here I am not beyond the chicanery of procrastination; it resides in every computer around and manifests itself, particularly, in the form of the Internet. How ironic is it that the computer, which is supposed to help work faster and more efficiently, is the primary source of procrastination for me and multiples of others like me. Not only does it facilitate me to procrastinate more, it exacerbates this by pulling over a facade over my mind, to a degree of an open Microsoft Word document combined with an open Google window — as a proof of research — allow a false sense of satisfaction to pervade me, in my mind, both these programs are testimony to the fact that I am working. Internet plays the actual villain; it opens a multitude of pathways, each distinct, for procrastination to venture down and lure idle and sick with me, procrastination lures me after itself, to follow it, to find it, to chase them, leaving just a trace behind to allow me to keep going in its pursuit, but does not even realize it is doing so. Yes, that is my mission; to follow procrastination down those enticing pathways, to capture it and to lock it away in a safe from which there is no escape for me.

However, this chase always ends in utter failure for me. Every night, I begin the pursuit of procrastination with renewed zeal; I continue it unsuccessfully for hours on end; finally, I am exhausted and give up. I look at the time and the night is complete. I still have work to do. However, as I think this, I gradually start feeling drowsiness, as the sleep catches up on me, I have gone through the same sleep, another night with this sick procrastination. Perhaps, I might get some sleep tonight and I will wake up fresh and happy, to begin work tomorrow. I look at the paper; I have been working consistently for three hours.

I protest, “But I have only completed one paragraph; the rest of the section, this chapter, the entire paper, this is not a waste of time and when I am finished doing that I will immediately get to the next task and I will have no problem.”

Procrastination: “Crafty as ever, replies, ‘Quality matters, not quantity. And anyway, getting coffee will only take five minutes; then I will have some time back and start working right away’.”

I think, “Well, procrastination is right, getting coffee won’t waste much time.”

Obviously this “time” reason is only to dupe myself or satisfy my own need. The reason why I choose specific activities, like getting coffee to avoid work is because they hardly require any effort on my part. I am willing to go through with them without any resistance. When I am having this internal dialogue, I can only think about the coffee. I am aware that coffee is no time killer, but I am unable to convince myself just to go and get coffee. I have to do something, which is a readily available activity. I look at the coffee maker and think about the coffee. I consider another activity — like watching television. It is the one thing I can do. I decide to procrastinate by finding out why I and so many others are affected by this problem of procrastination. Why do we procrastinate? Obviously, I went on to search. What I found was interesting, though not really surprising. According to research, “procrastination is a complex personality trait that extends to various domains within a person’s life.”

Flash-forward: The basketball game is over, the final whistle is blown, and the lights go off. The game was not a close win; the team on the other side was unable to even come close to a victory. I was surprised at the outcome of the game; I had not expected that the other team would have fought so hard and fell so easily in front of me.

The team on the other side must have been there for a good reason, and that reason was to challenge me. They were there to show me that they could be in it, that they could beat me. I had never thought of myself as being invincible. I had never thought of myself as being the best. I had always thought of myself as being just good enough. But, on this day, I had been proven wrong. I had been proven to be something more than just good enough. I had been proven to be something more than just good enough. I had been proven to be something more than just good enough.

The team on the other side had been there to show me that they could be in it, that they could beat me. They had been there to challenge me. They had been there to make me realize that I was not invincible, that I was not the best. They had been there to show me that I was not the best, that I was not invincible, that I was not the best.

The game had been a wake-up call. The game had been a reminder of what I was capable of. I had been reminded that I was not invincible, that I was not the best, that I was not the best.

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I am not a fences builder nor am I a businesswoman. But after 40 years of life, I am now writing for my grandchildren. I believe that it is never too late to start doing something new. After all, it's never too late to learn something new. I am now writing for my grandchildren. I believe that it is never too late to start doing something new. After all, it's never too late to learn something new.

In the end, I believe that it is never too late to start doing something new. After all, it's never too late to learn something new. I am now writing for my grandchildren. I believe that it is never too late to start doing something new. After all, it's never too late to learn something new.

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ANTI-EMAIL: JUST SAYING NO TO SPEED

My resistance to email is peaceful and personal. In this cheetah/gazelle paced world, I don't want anyone not to use email if they want to. I just don't want anyone to send it to me, or expect a response. People who believe in email don't make me nervous except at those fairly rare times when someone speaks to me of email in the hushed tones of religious reverence. I guess this indicates my line drawn in the sand—the line between email as tool, and email as icon. False idols and all that.

Not only am I anti-email, I am also anti-email: I arrived on the earth and became a shaped package of selves when email was just a gleam in the eye of a scientist/discoverer/inventor's eye. I was six years old before I ever got sucked into a tv screen. My father felt that tv was an unconvincing substitute for radio, since you couldn't see nearly as well watching tv as you could see listening to the radio. He also felt tv was an invasion of privacy (I wonder. Did he feel that people on the tv screen were watching him? I guess that's a question for the psychologists). But of course I ought to tell the rest of the story: when I was six, my father bought a behemoth of a console tv which became, instantly, the focal point of our living room. Yes. All this may even make it possible for me to live a long and less risk-riddled life... ninety? In closing, I think you should know that my husband and I are currently in the process of buying an expensive satellite cone just for our Mac computers. As it turns out, we don't want the email, but it's a package deal: internet/email. And maybe we'll end up using email. Who knows? I think of my father and his long ago decision to buy a tv—my husband and I are going to get with the plan, go with the flow. And even if email is an unconvincing substitute for the face-to-face where more than the words do the talking, we don't want to be left behind.

Do we?

Respectfully submitted,
(by means of my old typewriter)
Elizabeth Libbey

FEAR AND THE WRITER

By Allison Eno

I'm really not sure why I believed I was the only person on this planet who felt insecure about my writing. I applied to be a Writing Associate and was accepted. I carried my letter of acceptance around with me for weeks—just to remind myself that it was true. Last semester, I remember my first day of English 302. I arrived to class early and waited to meet the other students who were naturally better writers than me. A flush began creeping up my neck, my heart began to race, and this really comforting question crossed my mind—"What the hell am I doing here?" Funny thing is—turns out I wasn't the only one feeling this way. I was pleased and relieved (yes, anxiety loves company) to find I was simply not alone. This little revelation has since made me question how someone becomes a good writer, but still has a hard time accepting it.

For me, the knowledge that I have some skill and talent to write creatively is a new concept. Most of my fellow Trinity classmates seemed to write with apparent ease throughout their high school years. My story does not read this way. My ‘better person’ is a self who moves physically, emotionally, mentally (but aren't they all entangled in each other?) farther into the being in being alive. And that involves slowing down; that involves attention, and not only the attention that comes with sitting still—imagine assembling your tools: the pine branch because its wood is soft. The book-size piece of birch bark because its underside is smooth and hard. The cutting stone, maybe obsidian, with which to sharpen pine branch to a point. And the fire, hot enough to char the point, but not so hot you burn it. Then you begin to write, black tip of stick against birch bark's underside—by the time you've done the blur of me may resemble the pelt of cheetah or gazelle... ninety?

My ‘better person’ is a self who moves physically, emotionally, mentally (but aren't they all entangled in each other?) farther into the being in being alive. And that involves slowing down; that involves attention, and not only the attention that comes with sitting still—imagine assembling your tools: the pine branch because its wood is soft. The book-size piece of birch bark because its underside is smooth and hard. The cutting stone, maybe obsidian, with which to sharpen pine branch to a point. And the fire, hot enough to char the point, but not so hot you burn it. Then you begin to write, black tip of stick against birch bark's underside—by the time you've done, all that, you've honed what you need to say.

In closing, I think you should know that my husband and I are currently in the process of buying an expensive satellite cone just for our Mac computers. Our house sits in the middle of two hayfields in rural western Massachusetts, heartland of the most ancient phone lines. These phone lines will not tolerate much of anything, especially internet and email. Why are we doing this? Is it our goal to go into bankruptcy? Clearly not; after all, at least one of us at a time is fairly sensible. We don't want to be a talk show, but it's a package deal: internet/email. And maybe we'll end up using email. Who knows? I think of my father and his long ago decision to buy a tv—my husband and I are going to get with the plan, go with the flow. And even if email is an unconvincing substitute for the face-to-face where more than the words do the talking, we don't want to be left behind.

Do we?

Respectfully submitted,
(by means of my old typewriter)
Elizabeth Libbey
Poem for Mike

By Sophie Schrag

My mother thanks me
for taking her to a Billy Collins reading,
then asks why I don't write
lighter poetry, why my
poems are always so dark, so somber,
so elegiac.

I now realize why I have had trouble
making you into a poem.

You are too good for my brand of poetry.
You are too kind
and too real and
do not hurt me at all.

I have countless poems
about boys who have flopped in
and out of my life
like pigeons who come for bread
and scurry away with only crumbs
in their wake.

I have written about crummy
high school boys
who were so alluring
with their big pants and
big personas
with blunts behind their ears,
a marker always ready to catch a tag
and one hand free to hold my hand
but who still returned
to their Park Avenue or West End apartments,
secretly appreciating their
Jewish, or Anglo-Saxon, or Italian mothers
waiting up for them as they entered
with the morning sun.

I have written about boys who kissed me
like I was the last girl they were ever going to kiss.
I have written about boys whose arms I have fallen asleep in
and whose arms I know I'll never again be in.

But you, you remain too good for this poetry.
The last sonnets have already been done.
I can't compete with Shakespeare or Verlaine.

I can't write about you who is so good
who puts the earth for me
in dewy layers
who wets in the day
waking me with whispers,
shouting the alarm before it goes off.
In Plato's Symposium, Agathon begins his speech on love with a rhetorical gesture: "I wish first to speak of how I ought to speak, and only then to speak." Is this not how one always already speaks? Speech always has an address written into it, a listener who confronts the speaker. All speech confronts the injunction of how the speaker ought to speak, before a single word is uttered. So what speech concerns us here? What obligation concerns this speech?

Academics become very familiar with the position of authority by necessity of their position. The lecturer always already addresses students from a position of authority on one topic or another—Lacanian psychoanalysis or the political economy of the Masai—inasmuch as these topics are domains of knowledge. But what about writing? What can be said about writing? Who is in a position to speak about writing? Who's writing? Whose writing? What can be said about written into it, a listener who confronts the speaker. All speech confronts the injunction of how the speaker ought to speak, before a single word is uttered. So what speech concerns us here? What obligation concerns this speech?

Artists often take recourse to a model of art as inspiration; writers are notoriously vague about the method of their craft—a compulsion, a channeling, a labor, an inexplicable gift for the privileged few. Professors often speak of writing from a position of authority, but only with regard to the mechanical rules of language. Creativity is the impossible opening in the act of writing. How might one acquire insight into the craft of writing, that inexplicable operation? One would hardly have the audacity to suppose that by asking a writer how to write a poem, or a novel, or even an academic essay, that said writer would then be able to impart some technical knowledge, which might endow the listener with an ability to write a poem, novel, or essay.

Something like this audacity invited Fred Pfeil to 115 Vernon St, the Trinity College Writing Center, to speak precisely on this impossible topic of writing. By academic standards, he is an authority on writing—a professor in Trinity's prestigious English department in addition to being a published writer, both as a critical essayist and a novelist. In speaking about writing however, Fred (I should point out that he might wince were you ever to call him "Professor Pfeil.") though by his manner of dress, you might hardly expect him to be a professor of anything at all, and in reality, one is just as likely to find him conducting a non-violence workshop at a prison or perhaps protesting the war on terrorism in creative ways as one is to find him actually teaching a class on film theory. Again and again repudiated any position of authority on writing whatsoever.

Poetry thrives on listening, and indeed, on the silences between words. Fred constructs the process of composing poetry as primarily a study of silence, an examination of the dialogue between silence and poetry.

But what Fred offered was much more significant. Far from the familiar mystifying dress on writing (remarks on inexplicable creativity) which is of no help to anyone, Fred's were practical words on the materials themselves of writing. As opposed to dwelling on the consciousnesses involved in putting thoughts on the page, Fred's discussion spoke to the material reality of the writing process—listening. One could say that to speak about writing, one must first speak of how one ought to write, and only then speak of how to write. Automatic writing is useless as writing (for all except Yeats); listening must precede writing.

Fred elaborated his talk in terms of modalities of listening across three different forms of writing—poetry, novels, and the academic essay. By suggesting this metaphor of listening, the most familiar concept of the writer is stood on its head—nimensis. The model of the writer as producing a narrative of memory is familiar by now, a task "completed" by Proust, but repeated book after book up to present day. Listening, by contrast, necessitates not some crude introspection into the self, but instead an opening of the self to the world. To clarify, these modalities of listening should not be conceived as eavesdropping, taking notes for a novel based on an overhead conversation in a bus. More fundamentally, the model of listening does not demand any sound per se—listening to silence can be an extremely valuable activity for writing. What one fails to realize is that this practice of listening itself takes practice.

Try listening to silence.

How long can you go without growing restless?

Empty your mind. Allow silence to think. Is there a residue to the silence? Does it speak back?

Of course, Fred readily admits that these modalities of listening are merely a powerful metaphor for how he has experienced the writing process. And yet, is this metaphor not a necessary fact of the process of writing? Few know silence better than Fred. His intimate relationship with silence goes far beyond my own, and indeed, beyond that of anyone else I know. Last fall, on sabbatical, Fred participated in a six-week silent Buddhist retreat. Immersed in silence and meditation for such an extended period of time, the first realization one comes to is that silence is far from silent. The absence of spoken language merely serves to call attention to the carpentry of mental life, the vast array of sensual stimuli and thoughts which emerge in the silence of the speaking subject. Undeniably, listening is a thoroughly active process.

So, how does listening bring about writing? We must recall here Fred's three modalities of listening with regard to genre, in a more descriptive sense. Poetry thrives on listening, and indeed, on the silences between words. Fred constructs the process of composing poetry as primarily a study of silence, an examination of the dialogue between silence and poetry. Perhaps the fragment of whistled radio jingle, or the image of a friend's face long passed on, or a name of some long forgotten banker encountered at a cocktail party—poetry arises amidst such fragments. The writer mediates between silence and language, and nowhere is this mediation more silent as in poetry.
In contrast to the tranquility of listening as found in poetry, writing novels or academic essays burdens the writer with a further task of mediation. Listening becomes more difficult in the course of saying so much. As opposed to prizing the sublime metaphors that poetry reveals in language, novels and essays demand work from the writer. The fact of labor imposes language in the course of forming a proper ironically, the mechanical demands made by the course of saying so much. More output from the writer. In the case of revealing in language, novels and essays demand forge sense and continuity from this addition of words to one another across pages. Somewhat ironically, the mechanical demands made by language in the course of forming a proper sentence demand work on the writer's part. Of course, listening precedes writing in novels and essays, but the mediation requires considerably more output from the writer. In the case of novels for example, the writer may have a conceptual sense of the project—what works and what does not, which characters need to do and say which things—but explicating these concepts through plot and characters is a considerable task. This is why one must live with the novel in composition, according to Fred. It is absolutely necessary that a writer return to the novel-in-progress nearly everyday, lest the conceptual sense of continuity might recede back into silence.

Unsurprisingly, essays, specifically those of an academic kind, are the most work in Fred's view. Perhaps this is because essays are the most faithful to the mechanics of language, or rather, the most encumbered by the mechanics of language. Rarely is an academic essay notable for its creativity. Intellectual or theoretical creativity in this context should not be confused with linguistic creativity. Indeed, academic essays as a genre are rarely grouped with novels or poetry. Perhaps this is because the academy rejects this model of listening; academics always already speak from a position of authority. This is the most familiar model for the essay—an authority expressing an authoritative interpretation on one academic subject or another. Similarly, academics generally have trouble listening, being so anxious to speak as an authority.

But contrary to conventional wisdom, work should not be encouraged, at least not in writing. Work assigns a worker to a task. By contrast, listening demands no listener; silence is not exhausted by listening. And with regard to the writer, where does the author emerge? In the listening prior to writing, the position of the writer cannot claim authority. Though actively listening, the language found in writing is hardly the writer's language. The writer is a reporter, a third party, a mediator in the conflict between language and non-language. So considering the result of this mediation, writing, two questions arise: 1) whose writing is it? 2) who is writing? Given Fred's model of listening, the answer can only be that while the writing is to some degree or another the product of the writer, his words are borrowed. The writer never writes, but is written upon by silence.

Anthony J. Canata, Esq. '93
Now almost ten years removed from Trinity and the formative years of my writing style, I continue to write, both professionally and personally. I find that both bring me great satisfaction, but in different and complimentary ways. On the one hand, my professional writing, as a lawyer, challenges me to articulate and create, literally, binding relationships between parties. I draft motions, contracts, and wills. I also write letters and memoranda articulating a position or creating a record for later use in litigation (e.g., a letter describing a breach of duty and demand of payment).

On the other hand, in my personal writing, I break through all of the edifices that give structure to our world. I write as a spiritual exercise to penetrate deeper mysteries, to expand and deepen my awareness of things and of eternity, to access the ground of being that is the source of life. Such writing is for me akin to meditation, karate, hiking—and any other practice that aids me in letting go of my 'self' and allows me to experience life directly.

At Trinity, writing was very painful for me, because I lived in constant fear of what I guess one would call writer's block, or just plain fear of failure. I would start assignments as early as possible, and work through a number of drafts, often working right through the night. My writing style was a manifestation of my insecurity. Fortunately, my style resulted in great technical and intellectual gains. Writing is a medium for expanding the mind beyond its thought-range and depth. Successive, sharper, deeper drafts lead to the expression of sharper, deeper thoughts and ultimately to the development of a sharp, deep mind.

My writing now is more or less spontaneous. It just happens. I do not do much thinking about it, nor do I typically revisit it in any serious way. I suspect that is because I start sharper and deeper in my understanding of things, and have developed the skill of expressing that understanding as well as I can the first time around. I also suspect that my style reveals a more balanced, self-forgiving attitude about my writing and my life.

As for the future, I may write articles about legal issues relevant to my practice, and have actually begun to do that recently. On the personal side, like many people I think of publishing some of my writing, should it ever congeal into something that could be called a book.

A last word to the writing associates: writing is a great gift, and a double-edged sword. Like any worthy endeavor, it may lead to great awakenings, but awakenings rarely come without difficult choices and changes. To paraphrase Nietzsche, you may draw conclusions, but then your conclusions may draw you.
I was in a position to get a column, so I asked for it. During my time at Trinity, the genre of my writing was diverse and chaotic: poetry, political columns, humorous sex columns, short stories, long political essays. My "expertise" and "community stature" as a teacher made many local papers very receptive to my opinion pieces, and I began to have a sizable stack of clips. Still, employees wanted hard writing, not opinions; anyone can think, but can you report? Ultimately, I did not gain a reporting job, not simply because of my lack of reporting experience (many were willing to take a chance on me), but I simply could not afford to wait until those jobs opened up. I took a job at a think tank in DC and have continued to freelance on the side, with opeds in the Christian Science Monitor, Miami Herald, Chicago Tribune, Baltimore Sun, and others. I am now putting opeds on hold and working on longer feature pieces. Ultimately I hope to obtain a permanent job at a magazine such as the New Republic, Slate.com, etc.

When I began looking for jobs, my main question was, "But how does one get a reporting job without any reporting experience?" Occasionally I know exactly how to begin a piece of writing. The first sentence becomes clear in my mind before I sit down to write. It is the first sentence that is the impetus to write that specific piece, and revisions are based on making the content fit to the introductory sentence. Other times, I decide upon the topic that I want to discuss, but must suffer through piles of revisions to find a proper introduction for that topic. Most of the time, I start writing with little preconceived notion of direction. "Sit down," I tell myself, "and buckle-up."

I rarely identify what I truly want to write about in one simple step. And since undirected writing does not follow a direction of its own, I use it to determine the direction of a future piece of writing. Though every sentence stems from the preceding sentence (at least in my mind), there is no attempt to help the reader follow along with abrupt shifts in tone and topic. These pieces loll along, like a slow Sunday stroll. Thoughts, images, and memories detract me from the starting point. And as one would react to intermittent distractions in the course of an aimless walk, I react to these unexpected shifts in my writing. I stop, I examine the distractions, and eventually I move onward towards an unknown endpoint. I am moving from point A to Z, but Z has yet to be identified. I do check my digressions, because progress must continue in the same general direction, but my starting and ending points are just as important to the process as the circuitous path that joins them.

Writing helps me decide what I want to write about by identifying themes that keep resurfacing, or concepts that I struggle to move beyond. In literature classes, we are taught to analyze prose to gain a deeper meaning from the author's particular use of words. When I re-read a piece of my writing, I analyze my choice of words, and my changes of tone and of topic.

How do you get a reporting gig when all of the newspapers reporting gigs are filled and they're only looking for the occasional op-ed?

Accordingly, I began writing op-eds for local newspapers, in order to acquire a portfolio of clips to send to prospective employers. My "expertise" and "community stature" as a teacher made many local papers very receptive to my opinion pieces, and I began to have a sizable stack of clips.

Patrick W. Gavin

Although I always knew that I wanted to be a writer, I have always struggled with how exactly to achieve that objective. Unless you're bankrolled by someone, you can't just sit and write and expect to get paid for it (at least you can't expect to write what you want to write and get paid for it—there are plenty of jobs to write what other people want you to write).

After graduating Trinity, I moved to Princeton, NJ to teach 7th and 8th grade History and English. It was during my third year as a teacher that I realized that teaching—however wonderful—was not what I wanted to do forever. I needed to get moving on my writing, in some sort of capacity.

But again...how?

During my time at Trinity, the genre of my writing was diverse and chaotic: poetry, political columns, humorous sex columns, short stories, long political essays. When I began looking for jobs, my main question was, "But how does one get a reporting job without any reporting experience?" Occasionally I know exactly how to begin a piece of writing. The first sentence becomes clear in my mind before I sit down to write. It is the first sentence that is the impetus to write that specific piece, and revisions are based on making the content fit to the introductory sentence. Other times, I decide upon the topic that I want to discuss, but must suffer through piles of revisions to find a proper introduction for that topic. Most of the time, I start writing with little preconceived notion of direction. "Sit down," I tell myself, "and buckle-up."

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What I Have Learned

By Erica Martinson ’03

I have learned many things on leaving Trinity and its esteemed Writing Center. For example, I have learned the importance of getting up early to get a parking space, and that writing in the library on cold mornings clears the brain. I have learned that turkey bacon is precooked and that coffee is almost always better when made by someone else, that one must never wash a mushroom, and that anyone will call you “professor” if you stand in front of a class and put your name at the top of a syllabus, whether you have earned the title or not. I have also learned that while writing is hard, the teaching of writing is, quite possibly, the most difficult endeavor man has ever undertaken.

This may be an overstatement—or perhaps an oversimplification. I have yet to decide. In the past six months, I have found myself routinely standing before a roomful of skeptical freshmen who have all admitted, at one time or another, that they either hate to write, think they’re “bad at writing,” or too lazy to try very hard. My reaction to each of these has been, without fail: “how can anyone hate to write?”; “we all do one thing well in writing, whether we know it and believe it or not”; and “why, why would you confess something like that to your teacher?”

The last statement—for these students I can only do my best to convince them that the laziness will only get them mediocre grades and a very boring educational experience, and they are never truly impressed. Most often, the students that make the first two comments, however, make them in conjunction: “I am bad at writing, and so I hate to do it.” These students have made me wonder about my own relationship to writing: do I love writing only because I think I am good at it?

It’s a hard question to answer. There are things I’m not particularly good at that I enjoy doing: singing, driving, singing and driving simultaneously, playing cards, wearing heels. I have hated writing some papers I thought rather good, and I have enjoyed writing papers I know to be not quite as good. Why is writing so particular that people who are “not good at it” tend to dislike it?

The students I taught last semester were a difficult group to figure out. They didn’t love to write, they didn’t love to read, and I questioned constantly my ability as an instructor. Often, I found myself attempting to “explain” something, as I came to think about it, with very little idea as to how I could do so. I felt the same frustration they did—I believed I was “not good at teaching.” I still enjoyed it, for the most part. A bad experience in the classroom did not make me want to leave forever, though it made going back to class the next day all the more difficult. I wanted to sit down with them and tell them I knew how they felt, and I wanted us to fix it together. Tell me how to teach you, I’ll tell you how to make your writing “better.”

As I’ve gone into the new semester the past few weeks, trying a new set of principles and ideas, letting—or rather, making—the students work at writing and figure it out a bit more independently, I figured out the problem. One of my greatest challenges this year has been the constant and worrying idea that no one has ever taught me “how to write.” I hear the words, and I know when they sound right or wrong, and I fiddle with them until they sound the way they should. I’ve had wonderful writing teachers, and they’ve taught me to recognize my own good writing qualities. I write with confidence because I don’t have to worry about “how to do it.” That’s ingrained.

How do you teach them so well they don’t have to think about it anymore? Can that be done? When I hear my students say they’re “bad at writing,” and I see them grimace apologetically as they hand me a paper, I sympathize. I’ve got to learn the same things they do—how to make it sound right, how to make it effective, how to do it without thinking. The thinking is the part that hurts. All of us, we have only the raw material, the words and the ideas, and we’ve got to put it together and make it sound pretty.

I haven’t had students this semester say they are bad writers, or that they hate to write, but I am sure they’re there. They’re sitting in class without the structure or the methods, maybe without the words. I still don’t have any easy answers about the words, about that part of the process that remains fairly mysterious to me. I’m uncertain about the methods, but knowing that I can at least begin to make myself certain.

I have learned that if you do not take out the trash, no one will do it for you, that the Sunday paper does not come if you do not subscribe, and that asking a question does not guarantee a satisfying answer. I have learned that you cannot be good at something just because you want to. I don’t have convenient resolutions for my students or myself, but I’ll tell them the same thing I’ve learned since leaving Trinity, both about writing and teaching: this is hard work; it takes practice and patience; being shown the way will only take you so far.
I took two degrees at the University of Cape Town under Prof. JM Coetzee. One was a Masters in Literary Studies, which I was awarded in 1996, and the other a Masters in Creative Writing, which I was awarded in 1999, the same year Prof. Coetzee won his second Booker prize for his novel *Disgrace*, and three and a half years before he took the Nobel Prize in 2003. By that time, Prof. Coetzee had left South Africa in order to build a house in Australia and was dividing his time between that country and the United States, where he teaches at The University of Chicago and Princeton. Many believe (I among them) that Prof. Coetzee should have won the Nobel two years before he did, after the publication of his harrowing novel *Waiting for the Barbarians*. Prof. Coetzee replied, "I cannot agree with that." Prof. Coetzee was like is impossible without describing the awe people had of him at UCT. He was one of those very few established researchers and freshman alike. His office was on the top of the arts building as I arrived at UCT (and a few of the post-graduates) simply referred to Prof. Coetzee's office on the top of the arts building as "God's domain." He was one of those very few scholars (Derrida, Foucault and Chomsky come to mind) who capture the imagination of established researchers and freshman alike. His novels are written with an uncompromising precision, the kind of fiction that lends itself to endless scrutiny and discussion. Yet he was known to eschew the public light, and the interview requests that he received almost monthly from around the world. The first-year English students at UCT (who, like freshmen everywhere throughout history are anti-conformity, anti-establishment, anti-everything) admired his reticence. Because most of them were required to read at least one of his novels, usually *Waiting for the Barbarians*, he had legendary status even though he had not given an undergraduate lecture for some years by the time I came to Cape Town in 1994. It was not fortunate for them, for he is a hypnotic speaker.

Prof. Coetzee had little to say to the press and was notoriously brusque in his dealings with staff members. I hesitate to say, as others have, that he was unfriendly or snobbishly aloof. I would instead describe him as distracted, a man very conscious of the value of his time. He was also shy. Because he was one of the best-known scholars in the department, students in the graduate program were eager to gain his approval. A murmured word of encouragement from Prof. Coetzee was enough to make one's whole year. His disapproval, on the other hand, struck hard. In one seminar I attended, he listened carefully to a presentation given by one of my classmates on postmodernism. The woman, who is now widely published in the field, ended the presentation with a summation to which Prof. Coetzee replied, "I cannot agree with that." Dead silence reigned over the class, and the woman burst into tears. Prof. Coetzee looked on at us blankly, waiting for the next student to present.

He once dropped me an email asking me to call him in his office when I had a moment. It was unprecedented for Prof. Coetzee to ask for such a call, and I prepared myself by reading through my manuscript as it stood and trying to pre-empt what he might have to say. Initially I panicked, and his dry voice came on the line. "Hi Ron," he started, "I just wanted to ask you about what happened on the last twenty pages of text you handed in for our meeting Thursday." I waited, wondering what he wanted to know, but that was all he had to say. "Could I ask what was wrong with them?" I ventured. "They read as if you wrote them directly from your subconscious thoughts." And that was it. I told him I would rewrite the pages, print them and bring them to his office that day. It would never have occurred to me to email the edited text to him and ask him to print it out, as so many of my students now do with me. I cancelled all of my appointments for the day, set to work and when I was finished, I trudged up Devil's Peak to the University and his office.

Prof. Coetzee met me with every two weeks and would meet with me once, if I had so desired, to talk about my fiction. On the morning of our first meeting I walked up the hot back stairs to his top floor office. He had been given what was clearly the most desirable office on that floor, which is set aside for senior staff members. It was Spartan. There were a few books on the shelves, some piles of student papers beside them, a small, wooden table with a computer pushed in the corner, and his barren desk by the door. I sat down in a straight-backed chair in front of him. My manuscript lay between us. The look he gave me on that first day was the look of a master chess player gaazing at a neophyte opponent across a board, waiting for the opening move: inquisitive, polite, and challenging. I realized that I would have to drive the meeting, and fumbled through a few queries. When I was finished, I gathered up the edited manuscript and left. Because Coetzee despised endless scrutiny and discussion. Yet he was unwilling to let the class critique his work and submit to open criticism from their peers. I asked him what I should do if a student was unwilling to let the class critique his or her work. "Inform them they cannot take the class," he said evenly. I still run my course that way.

Our relationship slowly became more cordial over the years. I would routinely drop off material to his small apartment close by where I lived, and every so often asked for extensions on my work, which he readily granted. I suppose the most important thing I learned from Prof. Coetzee was that fiction and editing fiction are important. I had of course read his novels by the time we met, and I was impressed by his ferocious hatred of oppression, by his refusal to avert his writerly gaze from the grotesque and the painful. Before starting work on my MA, I had lived close-by Soweto teaching underprivileged secondary school students for just under two years, and was well aware of the brutality of the regime that was just leaving office when Prof. Coetzee and I began work. During the time when the minions of the apartheid government were routinely detaining and killing people without charge, or, as was the experience of one of my female colleagues, raping them in holding cells for the crime of having a lover of a different race. Prof. Coetzee was busy writing novels describing the apartheid government's ministers as tyrants, sadistic brutes, and, in *Age of Iron*, "a locust horde". At the time they were written, these words could get a South African jailed or worse. But because his novels are so complex, allegorical and sometimes downright baffling, the censor and his enforcers apparently left Prof. Coetzee alone. I know I myself would have worried in the dead of night when the South African police used to round up its malcontents in Beast class, and I began work. During the same time when many white intellectual leftists were being arrested for simply wearing a politically provocative T-shirt. I also found that Prof. Coetzee made me feel like a legitimate writer, and because he was so rigorous, I have little fear of editors and agents. Prof. Coetzee, for all the mystique that surrounds him, remains to me a fairly straightforward person: a hard worker and a clear thinker in a world of talk show self-promotion and fashion-fiction. I have sold numerous documentary films, articles and pieces of fiction to numerous editors over the years and I have yet to find one who is as penetrating in their criticism as Prof. Coetzee. Studying under him gave me a kind of fearlessness that has served me well and has enabled me to edit work of others for a living. This is no small gift.

Former Trinity Writing Associate Ron Irwin (1992) teaches creative writing at the University of Cape Town.
Writing: Two Snapshots
By Patricia Pierson '93

When I think about writing, past and present, I think of two geographic images. The first is a winter landscape from my first shift in the Allan K. Smith Writing Center. It was evening, and the snow fell in little drifts around the bright lampposts lining the pathway outside. There were a couple of spanking-new computers and lots of comfortable chairs and couches to read on. Looking out the window that night at the falling snow, I felt that being a Writing Associate was the most exciting job I had ever had. It was so much fun to meet in

Kate Adams and Beth Miller

We struggled over this assignment. We don't know why we thought this would be any easier than any piece of writing we have ever done. If there is one thing we learned from the Writing Associates experience, it was that writing isn't easy. Writing is a difficult, time-consuming, gut-wrenching process. Whenever our students tell us today “writing is just too hard," we tell them that it is hard for us too. We just have more comfort with the difficulty; as an expected part of the process. Skill does bring with it ease—it just brings confidence and comfort.

While for some there is skill and that skill helps tremendously, there isn't enough writing skill possible to make writing easy. So inevitably we figured we would sit down over dinner one night and “hang out" the article touching on all the ways the Writing Associates program and the English 302 class in particular affected our lives. Then as dinner wound down, coffee and dessert were on their way, we realized all our discussion and planning had gotten nowhere. We had no outline, no thesis, no plan. All we had were nebulous feelings about confidence, support, encouragement, and self-fulfillment. How do you explain that one class determined your future, your career, your joys and your pains, as well as your best friend? There aren't words to describe how changed our lives became as a result of the Writing Associates Program. How funny that a class designed to cultivate our writing is the same class that stymies us now as we try to write about its affects on us.

The Writing Associates program gave both of us confidence when we each needed it most. It fulfilled an inner need we had to express ourselves academically in a way that did not only benefit us. The freedom the program gave us to legitimate our interests beyond the academic, beyond the next essay or grade, provided a release of the stresses of college. Not only did the Writing Center become an exclusive refuge for each Associate, but it also represented a unique place on campus where we felt wholly confident and completely at ease. For us specifically it became what Virginia Woolf suggested all women writers needed, a room of our own. We felt comfortable and in control, able to help and support our peers and each other through tutoring and writing. There is nothing unique to our experience. Each new associate has his or her own road to the program. Beth was an IDP student ten years removed from academics. Kate’s need for the program was not mirrored in her grades. We both had reasons to fear rejection. In fact, Kate was rejected the first time, but through perseverance and Dr. Wall's candid suggestions, she applied again and was successful. We both needed this program and its affect on our lives isn’t quantifiable.

We are writers. We are teachers. We find ourselves happily mired in the academic world. That world isn’t always a kind or easy one, but the need to cultivate and develop good writing in ourselves and others is immense and we find ourselves at Trinity College or Quinnipiac University or Northwestern Connecticut Community College trying to recreate that experience we had in the Writing Associates Program. We don’t believe we will ever find anything so perfectly designed for our needs and aspirations, but the experiences we shared with ourselves, with each other, and with our peers has permeated every aspect of our lives.

How has the Writing Associates Program affected us, both then and now?

We need to free-write on that for a little while longer.
The Back Page

The Trinity College Writing Associates publish this journal on an annual basis for writers across the disciplines. Next issue: Spring 2005.

For submission info e-mail: Irene.Papoulis@trincoll.edu

Farewell to our Senior WA's:

Taryn Allen
Matt Barison
Leah Brennan
Nicole Brown
Sarah (Mimi) Krueger
Wendy Metager
Robin Muller
Kirk Quinsland
Chiharu Romano
Kate Salottolo
Sophie Schrager
Andrew Schurr
Laurie Skelly
Katherine Sullivan
Phillip Welshans

Welcome to our First Year Associates:

Erica Brody '07
Vanessa Chabrier-Davis '06
Rhonda Duggan IDP '10
Sandra Gollob '07
Julia Hoppock '06
Gabriel Hornung '07
Kathryn Hurley '05
Natalie Kindred '06
Nile Lundgren '07
Sanjog Rupakheti '05
Avery Salisbury '07
Caitlin Schiller '07
Jessi Streib '06
Edward Sweeney '07
Laurel Valchuis '07