

recognition of another as an audience, and finally to the writer's analysis of a distant, unfamiliar, universalized series of values as an audience. Kohlberg's work . . . outlines the progress of valuing, the development of the Aristotelian *ethos* toward trustworthy, creditable, and authoritative persuasive content (124).

In addition, Miller cites Kohlberg's observation that students could understand a stage one level above their own, but not two. Thus, she suggests the need for sequenced instruction that allows for a recursive movement as students master different aspects of complex rhetorical skills (125). The ethically-oriented assignments in which students write two papers on one topic, concentrating on different skills in each paper, would help move students toward the rhetorical skills and the cognitive/moral levels that complex academic writing demands.

The introduction of ethical issues, the emphasis on the need for information in making decisions, the requirement that students listen to others' points of view in class discussions, the effort to adopt others' points of view in exercises like the *controversiae* and the *prosopopoeia*, and the insistence that students examine decisions, analyzing them for the values that lie beneath them — all these exercises encourage the students to assume an approach to moral issues that recognizes their complexity and difficulty as well as the inevitability of making ethical decisions. In addition, having the students articulate their own positions and examine these positions for the values upon which they rest fosters the concept of themselves as decision makers, as actors in their worlds, not passive victims.

Classical rhetoric, then, has much to offer basic writing students. Characterized not only by increased grammatical problems and reduced syntactic, semantic, and rhetorical options but also by a greater need for growth in the cognitive, psychological, moral areas of development, basic writing students can benefit from the methods and intertwined rhetorical/ethical emphasis found in classical rhetoric. The methods and emphasis foster the kinds of growth these students need and engage them in the learning process in ways that, as Lynn Troyka says, ". . . revive their confidence in their natural powers to learn" (194).

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## SOME OF WHAT I LEARNED AT A RHETORIC CONFERENCE

Jim W. Corder  
Texas Christian University

Now that I think about it, the title above is a little presumptuous and maybe secretive. It suggests that I learned a bunch, but am only going to tell about a little. No matter, perhaps: the thing is slight, non-substantive, as they say, and non-empirical, just so all present can know early.

In July, 1985, I went to the Penn State Conference on Rhetoric and Composition in State College, Pennsylvania, or University Park, Pennsylvania, but anyway a lovely spot, and a delightful conference. I learned a lot. Some of it I learned in the Sly Fox Lounge in the Sheraton State College under the accidental instruction of a young bartender named John, called Doctor John by some student-aged customers.

My attendance in his class, I'll hurry to add, was infrequent. I didn't go to the Sly Fox Lounge *instead* of attending sessions and hearing papers; I did feel it was acceptable to give local merchants my custom *after* I had done what I was supposed to do.

At any rate, on Wednesday evening, I chanced by the lounge, went in, and sat down around the curve of the bar toward the far end. The place was crowded; the entertainment — a fine act by Ernie Fields and a small band — was entertaining. I was sitting across the bar from John's principal work station. Orders were many and fast. His pace was constant, rapid, and demanding. He produced a surprising quantity, and the quality was apparently acceptable, too, for I saw no drinks returned and none thrown at him.

Then, early on and just one glass of wine into the evening, I saw something happen. Watching him, I began to see punctuation marks in his work — a slice of lemon here, a squirt of lime there, an extra splash yonder, two onions and an extra olive down the way, a flourish over a drink, a pause to make a drink ahead of the order from a man who was apparently a regular customer. I began to see that he was rapidly creating schemes of conveniences as he worked. Two waiters came to their work place near him, and each turned in an order, one for three drinks, given serially, the other for four drinks, given serially. With no discernible pause, he took the order for three and the order for four and converted them into a set of seven with repetitions and parallelisms grouped, followed by individual units. That is to say, as he began making the drinks, he had already in his mind taken one drink from the first order and the identical drink from the second order and grouped them as a start, a repeated rhythm to commence with; he had already in his mind taken a total of three drinks from the two orders that used the same whiskey but with different added ingredients for a little parallel triad with a version of incremental repetition. The two remaining drinks were different; he finished off with them, two closing dependent clauses. While I sat there, he continued to do the same kind of thing, with no noticeable pause in the pace of his work.

He was composing. I realized only then that what he was composing was not the drinks he made and dispensed. The indi-

vidual drinks were composed, of course, but as units in a larger composition. He was composing the bar, the lounge, the atmosphere, the circumstance, the quality—I'm trying to avoid saying the ambience of the place. I daresay he had to compose the bar anew every evening. No doubt some constituents would remain the same, but just as surely there would always be new ones, too, unknowns to be composed. And always, I'd guess, people would keep dumping stuff, a lot of it useless, into his inventive, composing world, so that he would continuously have to be deciding which parts to use, which parts to ignore, which parts to throw out, forcibly if necessary, including the belligerent drunk down the bar.

His composition and his manner of composing interested me. He was working with a large and perpetually shifting number of ingredients and constituents, and he was producing quantity and some quality on call as he created the bar. I found myself wondering if there was something that a teacher of composition such as I could learn from his practice, or if there was something I knew that his work would call back to memory and some immediacy (I am trying to remember Dr. Johnson's remark that we humans require more often to be reminded than informed). I certainly wouldn't want to push the matter too far, for fear of being thought addled at the bar, but I did learn or remember some things, first of which is that it is nice to have a glass of wine after hearing some interesting papers. But I'll go a little further.

I was struck by John's memory. Tending bar reaches over a limited set, to be sure; it isn't the same as remembering chemistry or cognitive psychology or Alexander Pope. Still, his memory was interesting. He knew the recipes for all the drinks, with no appreciable pause to recollect. He knew where all the ingredients were and reached for them without hesitation. He remembered which waiters gave which orders from the tables in the lounge, and he remembered his own bar customers and their orders. He remembered and noticed regular customers and seemed to know which of them would always order the same drink. He made quick, deft transitions.

What is it that freshman composition students have to remember when they come to write for us? What is it that we expect them to remember? What is it that the writing calls them to remember. Do they know that they need to remember? I can only answer the last question: mostly not. Do they know recipes? Do they know where things are that can be used? Do they know—do we provide or show—ways of thought, available patterns, usable structures? Mostly not, I'd guess, unless all of that comes in the form of a five-paragraph essay. Do they know and then remember habituations of writing? Mostly not, despite all efforts and good intentions. Do they own information? Often not. Do they know who is ordering which drink? Something heavy weighs here that I cannot name. It has to do with the likelihood—again, despite all efforts and best intentions—that writing in composition classes is mostly done absent the need for remembered information, method, and insight.

Doctor John, the bartender John, was adroit at his work; he was fast, and he seemed to understand and to enact the principle of economy of motion. Maybe that's just a version of our sense of literacy, and maybe some will say that if students don't have the right genes, they can't do some things. They probably can't write *Paradise Lost*, but no one needs to. They probably can acquire some speed, adroitness, and economy of motion if there's need. The young bartender, of course, was working against need. Absent genuine need for genuine writing, there are close limits to what we can do in freshman composition courses, and the world—including our colleagues in other courses and divi-

sions of our universities—pretty regularly announces that it has no great need for writing.

Part of what made the young bartender's composition successful was his own personality, which I could not know and did not ask to know except in its visible manifestations: he was pleasant, he noticed people, he listened to people, he was capable, and he did not seem to doubt his own capacity to do the work that needed doing. I don't know that we have yet found efficacious ways to bring students into trust of themselves or willingness to risk themselves. If students don't know that writing is worth doing, and they mostly don't, and if they don't value themselves as writers, and they mostly don't, then our best work will come to little. I think one has to believe that it all counts.

The young bartender seemed to understand and to pursue the needs of what I'll call *saloon ecology*. He caught and balanced the interplays of customers, constituents, ingredients, and needs, always moving, always working that busy evening, making drinks, filling orders, chatting a moment, greeting someone, restocking constantly. I don't know that we have regularly managed to show writing students when they need to go get some more bottles, when they need to visit a moment with the customers.

In general, I thought John, the young bartender, composed a good room, a good bar. He had a good sense of diverse things, and he knew his audience. The attention we have paid in recent years to audiences for writing was overdue; it is appropriate and useful attention. There are also limits beyond which writers cannot pay early or principal attention to audiences. A particularly interesting thing about the young bartender was that, yes, the customers mattered hugely, but first, he was doing all he could do, and getting the work done, doing all he could do, seemed to be what mattered most. Perhaps what is owed in writing is to do all we can do, to do all it takes to get the work done. Perhaps self, subject, and audience fall away before the value of the work itself.

What else did I learn that evening? Nothing much, except to remember that once you take it in hand to think about writing and the way it gets done and taught and why, you can't much let go, even over the second glass of wine in the Sly Fox Lounge, lest you decompose.

## Preventing Burn-out in Teaching Assistants

Maurice Hunt  
Baylor University

Those of us who have worked in some capacity with graduate teachers of college writing—whether that capacity be supervisor of their teaching or advisor in general—have probably been confronted at least once with the following scenario. It is a rainy, Thursday afternoon late in February, that most forgettable of months; twelve wan-looking graduate teachers of freshman writing, each of whom takes two graduate courses and teaches two sections of writing per semester, file into the fluorescent-lit, antiseptic classroom for his weekly seminar in the teaching of writing. Someone coughs and receives a glare partly malevolent, partly sympathetic (for the glarer coughs, too). This is the group that in late August of the prior year was tanned from summers spent in Italy, in the Rockies, in Southern California. This is the group that each week in the seminar eagerly sought to understand the psychological needs and expectations of late-adolescent