

Finally, teaching assistants should be encouraged to share their own writing with a freshman class in order to help students understand that the TA is practicing what he or she preaches. By showing students various pre-writings, drafts, and revisings of a graduate seminar paper soon due, the teaching assistant can describe how he struggles and succeeds through a disciplined use of the writing process. Such a description often commands the student's respect, helping the freshman to perceive the TA as an ally rather than an aloof adversary. When conveyed to the teaching assistant, such respect is contagious: the instructor finds it easier to "like" not only his class but his profession as well.

All of these suggested approaches and techniques are not guaranteed fire insurance against TA burn-out. Still, carefully implemented, they can do much to inoculate graduate teachers against their most common complaint.

Toward Honesty

I. Hashimoto
Whitman College

Honesty is getting away from me.

I used to be able to write on my students' papers, "Good job, Joe, an honest attempt at a difficult topic." Or "Nicely done, Lil, I especially appreciate the honest — although I know painful — attempt you made to communicate something of yourself." And while I couldn't be sure just exactly what I meant, I knew that somewhere, deep in Joe's psyche and Lil's psyche, I was twanging a bleeding, honest, moral fiber that would reverberate with the spiritual teachings of Elbert Hubbard:

Honest people are those who have been lifted up into a more spiritual atmosphere. They exercise an attractive force, and the better they are, the stronger this silent force they exert works for good. (159)

and Norman Vincent Peale:

Sincerely attempt to heal, on an honest Christian basis, every misunderstanding you have had or now have. Drain off your grievances. (210)

and Donald C. Stewart:

Writers settle for nothing less than absolute honesty in their work. This requires a special kind of writing discipline because you have to learn to throw away whatever else is false, no matter how much it pleases you. (19)

and George Washington:

I hope I shall possess firmness and virtue enough to maintain what I consider the most enviable of all titles, the character of an honest man. (Peter 246)

and Donald M. Murray:

The student should learn not only to see, but to see honestly, and he should discover the excitement of hearing another person's honest voice. (132)

In fact, even up to last month, I was more than willing to believe in some simple, divine, Honesty that I could recognize and promote along with Norman Vincent Peale and Elbert Hubbard.

But things are not so good anymore. Honesty is getting away from me.

I suppose I can trace my initial misgivings to Gregory Gump — one of those unsavory greasy types who spend most of their time molesting the neighbors' cats. (Gump is, of course, not his real name.) In a moment of inspired kindness, I told Gump that while his paper certainly deserved no better than a C- for mechanics, I would give him an A for revealing his honest feelings about Jews, wimps, nurds and queers. And Gregory sneered at me and said that seeing as he had lied about his feelings about Jews, wimps, nurds and queers to begin with, he probably couldn't take what I had said seriously, either. And I said that I honestly didn't know what to say — I had taken his response as a typical adolescent hangup revealing itself in some kind of absolutely honest, though idealized antisocial tribal ritual and I had responded as sincerely and — yes — as honestly as I could. I pursued my point and asked him how in the world could I respond spiritually if I didn't even know what was going on in his twisted demented head. And he said, "Don't you ever call me demented again," wrenching my arm behind my back and throwing my forehead against the blackboard. While I was drooling into the chalk tray, he made me confess that I really didn't like him as immensely as I had claimed on his previous papers and any problems I had with his writing were my own and that I was the one who had asked him to be honest to begin with and that was my main mistake, trying to get him to address his own inner conflicts and feelings toward life and existence. And as he left me, he said that lying was more fun, har har.

That har har still echoes in my head — even though my bruises were slight — most of which have faded now. (I was able to cover up the largest one on my forehead by combing my bangs down low and tilting my head forward when I talked to people.)

Who could take such a person seriously — a known cheat, a professed liar and molester of cats? I've asked that question a lot lately as I continue to tell my students to "Be honest! Find your true selves! Strip yourselves down to the barest shred of humanity before my very eyes and I will see you as you truly are! I truly will!"

But I'm saying so with less assurance than I used to because I've begun to doubt my own ability to recognize that treasured honesty that separates good students from the personally malnourished.

I had another encounter with honesty a short time later in Suzy Somes's journal. I found myself asking, How do I know if Suzy Somes is actually pregnant by her uncle's second cousin as she revealed to me on October 7? She looked honest enough. And there was real excitement in her words. I remember that I seemed to detect a slight rustle of fear in her eyes. I wasn't sure if that was caused by her pregnancy or not.

About a week later, I kept Suzy after class and asked her whether she had seen a counselor at all about her problem and she said "No" and what was I talking about anyway? I said something about her sexual "thing" and she said her "thing" certainly wasn't any business of mine anyway. And I said that I read about it in her journal and if she didn't want me to know, then she should stick to descriptions of her pet goldfish or maybe dreams of trees. And she laughed at me, saying that all she was trying to do was to reach out with a special kind of writing discipline and grab all that rich raw material I was always telling my class to write about. And she had nothing to write about so she made things up.

I still don't know whether Suzy was honest with me or not. I have never had the nerve to bring up the subject again and all she writes about now is her recent abortion and the terrifying dreams she has of the sycamore trees in front of the dorm at night.

I've been having trouble with Amy Schwarts, too. I can't tell if this note I found attached to her last paper is honest or not:

I cant writ to well. And spell. But I love you very much as a techer. I really do. I honestly want to feel you up.

Amy's a nice girl and even if she is sincere and honest (I think there is a certain attractive force in that last sentence of hers), what am I to do? I was the one who originally encouraged such honesty by revealing in class the lust I once had for my grandmother. And besides, I love little fresh, lovable Amy too, especially her little cheeks and the way she swishes her little tennis shoes — but how can I make the love I have for her clear in its entire, cerebral sense when she is just so basic? How can I get her to hear what Dale Carnegie calls my own "honest, sincere appreciation" (38)?

And I've begun to worry about Alan Smithers, who wrote the following:

I love to fondle and caress the toilet handle, heavy metal, chromalized to polished smoothness. I feel a beautiful urge to release my cares and fears, sensing them gurgle down the drain, down the drain, down the drain. Glug. Glug. Ah! what sweet release!

I asked him, "Why did you choose such an off-the-wall subject?" I told him that I couldn't imagine taking him seriously, especially since the assignment was to write a comparison/contrast paper on two people especially important to him. And he said, "You have no right to talk to me that way. I have a sincere, honest interest in plumbing, and your assignment sucked." I gave him an A for what I took to be his sincere, cruelly honest lyrical treatment of the movement of the flusher arm and flapper ball. I was, in fact, deeply moved and I said so. But since that time, I've had misgivings. I don't know if I really heard that cruelly honest treatment or whether I just *wanted* to hear it. I don't know if he actually fondled that handle or not. I don't know if he really stripped himself down before me and that toilet. I don't really know the force of his flush.

The real problem is becoming much more clear to me: I no longer know when my students are really being honest; I can't hear an honest voice. Susan Miller tells me:

The power of good writing is most often the surprising combination of a need to write in a particular situation, the use of a standard form, and a personalization of that form by allowing it to convey your most honest insights. (32)

and Rise Axelrod and Charles Cooper tell me that "Readers know an honest voice, and they applaud it" (37). And Roger Garrison tells me, "I'll recognize an honest communicator behind the words" (6). And what I want to know is *how do I learn to see with the piercing clarity of Donald Murray and Susan Miller and Rise B. Axelrod and Charles Cooper and Roger Garrison?* I, too, want to know when those little folk out there in my classroom are just egging me on, making me react for no reason at all, giving me dishonesty wrapped up like a fat little honest bouncing baby. I don't want to get flattened again against the blackboard and have to admit that I don't know beans about honesty as my drool flows freely into the chalk tray.

Lacking any innate gift of recognition and feeling despair rapidly creeping over my pedagogy, I've begun experimenting with mechanical means to improve my abilities as a true reader. I hope I am on the right track. A friend of mine has designed an electrical test and I have high hopes that my dean will give me per-

mission in the near future to require electrode implantations in all in-coming freshmen. (My friend suggests that if he doesn't give his permission, I might only need them to shave patches of their scalps.) In the meantime, I will teach my classes in the nude next semester and require all my students to read Carl Rogers. I don't honestly know whether true readers would find much excitement in such plans, but I don't have much time and right now, I'll try anything before I abandon ship.

Works Cited

- Axelrod, Rise B., and Charles R. Cooper. *The St. Martins's Guide to Writing*. New York: St. Martin's, 1985.
- Carnegie, Dale. *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. New York: Simon, 1936.
- Coles, William E., and James Vopat. *What Makes Writing Good: A Multiperspective*. Lexington, MA: Heath, 1985.
- Garrison, Roger. *How a Writer Works*. New York: Harper, 1981.
- Hubbard, Elbert G. *The Notebook of Elbert Hubbard: Mottoes, Epigrams, Short Essays, Passages, Orphic Sayings and Preachments*. New York: Wm. H. Wise, 1927.
- Murray, Donald M. *Learning by Teaching: Selected Articles on Writing and Teaching*. Montclair, NJ: Boynton, 1982.
- Peale, Norman Vincent. *The Power of Positive Thinking*. New York: Prentice, 1952.
- Peter, Laurence J. *Peter's Quotations: Ideas for Our Time*. New York: Bantam, 1977.

Teaching Creative Writing: An Emphasis on Preparation

Virginia L. Chestek
Gannon University

Can creative writing be taught more effectively if specific methods of preparation are stressed in the classroom?¹ If, as Janice Lauer has suggested, psychologists have begun to establish the general procedures by which an original work is produced (396-97), could creative writing teachers adapt these for use in their own classrooms? Are there, in fact, any applicable principles of creativity that can be taught? Or should teachers of creative writing leave studies of the creative process to the psychologists, as Ann Berthoff has suggested (238-40), shunning any methodology of creativity as too mechanical to produce any worthwhile piece of fiction or poetry?

Creative writing teachers seem to take the latter viewpoint. Over half of those interviewed in a 1972 book called *Craft So Hard to Learn: Conversations with Poets and Novelists About the Teaching of Writing* maintain that creative writing teachers should teach critical, analytical reading of already published works.² Two state categorically that writing cannot really be taught (43, 68), perhaps in silent deference to Berthoff's contention that interference in this area would endanger the writer's chances for producing a worthwhile original work.

Thus, at a time when lower level composition courses are increasingly process-oriented and devoted to teaching students rhetorical mechanisms to generate, focus, and organize their ideas, creative writing courses tend to stress final products only. Class time is devoted first to a study of the final products of published writers, and then to the final products of class members. The processes by which creative writing students initially