These and many other imitation exercises can resurrect *imitatio* from his deathbed, giving him a vital place in the modern classroom.

NOTES

[1]For representative explorations of *imitatio* as a literary technique, see the following articles in *College English*: William E. Gruber, "'Servile Copying' and the Teaching of English Composition," 39 (1977), 491-97; John J. Ruszkiewicz, "Parody and Pedagogy: Explorations in Imitative Literature," 40 (1979), 693-701. Also see Frank J. D'Angelo, "Imitation and Style," *College Composition and Communication*, 24 (1973), 283-90.

[2]A representative version of this view is given by J. A. Burrow, *Medieval Writers and Their Work: Middle English Literature and its Background 1100-1500* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 29-42. Also see Ronald Tamplin, "Creation, Imitation, and Translation," *College English*, 37 (1976), 808-09.

[3]See M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953), pp. 51-52.

[4]Trans. Thomas Hoby, Everyman's Library (London: Dent, 1928), p. 45.

[5](New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), p. 448.

[6]Ed. Lawrence V. Ryan (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1967), pp. 78-81.

[7]*Notes Toward a New Rhetoric*, ed. Bonniejean Christensen (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

[8]*A Theory of Discourse: The Aims of Discourse* (1971; rpt. New York: Norton, 1980), esp. pp. 48-72.

A MODEST PROPOSAL: IN DEFENSE OF DIGRESSIVE WRITING

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"In general, however, digressions are to be avoided."
Crews and Schor, p. 545

I

I want to propose tongue-in-cheek, and in contrast to the epigraphical statement above, that every writer should digress right and left, back and forth, up and down, inward and outward at every opportunity. (Of course, no reader, unless cannibalistic or insane, ever presumed that Swift seriously proposed the consumption of Irish infants as a way of overcoming poverty.) There are, however, certain assumptions characteristic of this tongue-in-cheek stance, the stance I adopt in the next section of these remarks. One such, in this instance, is that this author is not advocating a chaotic rhetoric, a total abandonment of all rational guides writers have followed from time immemorial; neither is he advocating a slavish and uncritical acceptance of the conventional processes advanced in what Richard Lanham has called "The Books."[1] Such acceptance, I believe, inhibits, restricts, perhaps precludes inventive, spontaneous, creative thought and expression. In the final section of these remarks I summarize what I consider some of the specific virtues of a digressive composing procedure.

II

The authorities of the rhetorical establishment, such as those Lanham identifies with "The Books," publish books on how to write, usually with monotonous and repetitive advice about choosing a subject, writing a concise thesis statement, selecting relevant topics, using pertinent details, following an organizational pattern, applying logical criteria.[2] They are not original and creative and spontaneous the way we digressive, stream-of-consciousness writers are; they are committed to such traditional values as unity, and coherence, and emphasis in a unit of discourse.

In fact, if I may extend this exaggeration, they offer us pointed instructions, rules, admonitions, dicta, advice, and directions on how we should think (unintentionally, of course), who we are, why we can't write, how we can write, with accompanying questions on each model or paradigm, and an extended set of suggestions or writing "exercises" or rhetorical calisthenics which will redeem us, or at least allow us to move among those who can compose and write.[3]

They think we digressors write off the tops of our heads. They look down on us as the worst of all sinners and have, I am certain, placed above the portals of their rhetorical heaven the bald-faced statement: DON'T DIGRESS. If they mention digression in their texts, they use prejudicial and pejorative terms and scornfully introduce examples of our work. They fail to recognize that an effective digression may be worth any number of self-evident or inane theses or articles or essays. Shakespeare knew this when he introduced his first aside.[4] In these remarks I do not intend to consider the broad and extended subject of digression but only to defend a few techniques or strategies any writer may practice and develop to enhance and polish his digressive prose.

By way of background and illustration, consider the establishment notion that ideas will fit neatly into parallel order in an outline.[5] Ever looked closely at such an outline and wondered where the writer went? Jacob Epstein, editor of *The American Scholar*, is more our kind of writer. In a discussion of the process he followed in writing an essay entitled "What Is Vulgar?" he says flat out: "I am not opposed to outlines in logic or on principle but by temperament. I have never felt comfortable with them" ("Postscript" 439). There! He understands the digressiveness of us stream-of-consciousness writers. He understands the psychological discomforts that outlines generate.

An outline says that we know where we are going before we have written the first paragraph. Again we have Epstein to defend our way of writing: "I have discovered that there is no way I can know what will be in the second paragraph of something until I have written the first paragraph.[6] My first paragraph may contain a phrase or end on a point I hadn't anticipated, and this phrase or point may send me off into an entirely unexpected direction in my second paragraph" ("Postscript" 439).[7] Epstein understands the excitement and suspense and sense of discovery we digressive writers experience when we put our thoughts into words on paper. I would guess that the real issue probably comes down to whether we are Platonists or Aristotelians. Plato, I would imagine, rarely if ever used an outline; and Aristotle probably never wrote without one. We digressive writers are true-blue Platonists.

But I have digressed too long. Initially I said I would defend digressive techniques, ways of staying or straying away from the subject, thesis, topic, or idea of a unit of discourse. You will want to sustain your stream-of-consciousness creativity by practicing routinely the following techniques. Remember what George Orwell said, in "Politics and the English Language," about the five rules he had proposed for effective prose writing: "Break any of these rules sooner than say anything barbarous"

(550). No more Aristotle, Quintilian, Cicero, and their ilk. And now, the digressive techniques.

The Platonic thesis digression. One way to really catch your reader's attention is through the potentially digressive thesis statement. This may be dictional, phrasal, clausal, appositional, gerundial, ungrammatical, etc. Frederick Crews and Sandra Schor, authors of *The Borzoi Handbook for Writers*, say you should use a thesis statement, "a full thesis statement," as the core of your thought and purpose in a given discourse unit (375-6, 394). If you expect to develop your digressive skills, you must stay away from this hot potato. If you feel you must write a thesis statement, make it so broad or vague that you can slip everything and anything into the article or essay, from soup-to-nuts as someone from Illinois might say.

For example, the thesis "Sex is only a matter of mind" (which Crews-Schor would call a topic and I would describe as dictionally digressive) leaves the door open to sophisticated digressiveness. You may use Freud, Margaret Mead, and Phil Donohue, or include sermons, editorials, and "Dear Abby," or develop your notions on machoism, feminism, and momism. By limiting yourself in your thesis to God, man, and nature, or, in this instance to sex, mind, human nature, and society, you can write digressively from here to yonder.

A glance at the titles of essays and articles indicates the potential for thesis digressions. Consider "What Statesmen Should Know" (Spengler), "Whither Mankind?" (Beard), "The Social Responsibilities of Scientists" (Russell), or more recent titles such as "Will Our World Survive?" (John J. McKett), "Preventing Nuclear War" (Roger Fisher), and "Love and Marriage" (Ernest Van Den Haag). These writers think big thoughts. One might try to second-guess what they may say, but the wiser course, one the digressor adapts to easily, might be to belay any speculations and enter willingly into the minds and thoughts of these writers.

Robert Benchley, a writer with a large and humorous mind, illustrates in "The Children's Hour" the proper sort of Platonic thesis statement that leaves the writer almost wholly free to say almost anything he may wish. Benchley states his thesis as follows: "I don't want to be an alarmist, but I think that the Younger Generation is up to something. I think that there is a plot on foot." The reader can imagine many things Benchley might say (What does a reader imagine the writer is going to say when he addresses the question "Whither Mankind?"). The humorist does in fact suggest that the Younger Generation is "plotting a revolution," for how else can their characteristic behavior be explained. Note that Benchley was not bound by his thesis to suggest revolution. He clearly kept his options open.

You can learn to make the thesis ambiguous, vague, abstract, one-sided, obtuse, even close to incomprehensible if you remember always to sprinkle it with digressive potentialities. You must remember that a too precise thesis statement creates expectations in the reader which you may not satisfy through your digressive writing. To tell the truth, such precision inhibits serious digressiveness. Stick to the tried and true: use inchoate expressions for your theses. They leave you room to breathe.

The structural digression. You will find the rhetorical experts telling you that you should choose a governing "structural design,"[8] specific methods of development, such as enumeration, cause and effect, classification, for your essays and articles, but in most instances you will find that they themselves do not practice what in theory they preach. You can master this technique by never allowing a structural principle to interfere with your digressiveness.

Recently on a trip south through Iredell County, North Carolina, I noted a specific example. A farmer had mounted his mailbox on an old-fashioned hand-pump and attached to this the following red-white-blue information:

First:	an American flag followed by '76
Next:	the number 200
Third:	Prepare to Meet Thy God
Fourth:	Happy Birthday
Finally:	USA

Obviously the farmer wanted to celebrate the two-hundredth anniversary of the United States, but he also wanted, as do most digressive writers, to make an affirmation of faith and to announce to the passers-by that they too should prepare themselves for eternity. You should note that the farmer in no way allowed the structure to interfere with his digressiveness and, perhaps for him, the more important and fundamental religious statement. You can polish your structural techniques by following the farmer's example.

Bruce Catton, in an essay entitled "Grant and Lee: A Study in Contrasts," also illustrates clearly the structural digression. The title and thesis promise the reader an examination of the contrasts between these two Civil War military leaders. Catton depicts Lee as a man with background, family, culture, tradition, chivalry, leisure, an "aristocratic ideal"; he depicts Grant as a man of the frontier, the son of a tanner, one who has earned his way, an individual with a national sense of identity and a pragmatic dollar-and-cents stake in the country, a democrat, a "modern" man. For twelve paragraphs the historian delivers on this promise.

In paragraph thirteen he announces that "these two great soldiers had much in common." He identifies their common traits: "marvelous fighters," "the great virtue of tenacity and fidelity," "Daring and resourcefulness," "the ability at the end, to turn quickly from war to peace once the fighting was over." In the final paragraph he catches up with the digression when he writes, "Two great Americans, Grant and Lee – very different, yet under everything very much alike." The title is a misnomer; the thesis promises contrasts; the essay ends on the much higher note of the common qualities shared by these American leaders. The digression has become Catton's primary purpose. This is one way the structural digression works. You can surprise the reader by promising one thing and delivering another, by shifting, as in this instance, from contrast to comparison without offering any forewarning.

The example "digressio." The rhetorical fundamentalists tell us at every turn to illustrate, to show, to use examples. I have tried to follow their direction, but not for the reasons they give. The example *digressio* among the many kinds of digressions is one of my favorites, for the writer may belabor his point by citing three or four examples, and the examples, as you and I know, are often far more entertaining and interesting than the point being made.

Many years ago an Episcopal minister in Mississippi, who had previously served for twenty-seven years as a missionary to China, would begin his three-point homily with a Biblical quotation, such as "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth," and then read his opening paragraph in which he would clarify his particular adaptations of the text. True to Epstein's discovery method, he would find some phrase or point in the opening paragraph that would generate an anecdote, about the hungry sheep kneeling to suck, or the time a bishop attempted to feed the water people on the Hwangpoo, or something about A. J. Cronin's China or Pearl Buck's "good earth." Each anecdote

spawned another, something like one limerick leading to another, until the minister would note that the time for the sermon had elapsed. With elan he would flip the pages of his sermon to the last paragraph, and then read, "As you can see, Christ's beatitude teaches. . . ."

Essayists such as Twain, Thurber, Orwell, and Tom Wolfe frequently employ a series of somewhat similar examples to illustrate what is conceptually not difficult to perceive. Twain, for instance, in "Corn-Pone Opinions" takes a pessimistic view of human behavior, developing the idea that man conforms to the values and attitudes of those around him because his "bread-and-butter interest" is best served by such conformity. To support his view he introduces examples from fashion, manners, literature, politics, and religion. He offers, to illustrate, a detailed description of public attitudes during the emergence, popularity, and decline of the hoopskirt, following by references to bloomers and Eve's "quaint style." Twain's point is conformity; his illustrations elaborate on this point.

Similarly Tom Wolfe defines "pornoviolence" in terms of "the camera angle," the viewer being identified not with the hero but with "the gun, the fist, the rock," the viewpoint of the aggressor, the villain, the muscle, Wolfe's terms. He chooses a host of illustrations from such sources as *The National Enquirer*, reports of the assassination of President Kennedy, the television program *Gunsmoke*, Capote's *In Cold Blood*, and the James Bond stories. In theory each illustration should add another dimension of meaning; in fact, the various illustrations allow the writer to reflect the variousness of the points he is introducing and to discover in the process additional ramifications of his thought and insight.

To return to my earlier illustration of the Episcopal minister, the straight thinker might recoil (with horror is the cliche digression), but the minister's anecdotes were much too full of meaning for the digressive listener to recoil in such a way. For example, the anecdote about the sheep stirred not only Heabraic and Christian thoughts but the whole of the pastoral tradition in western thought, from Bion and Moschus and Theocritus to Virgil, Chaucer, Spenser, Goldsmith, even D. H. Lawrence and Yoknapatawpha County. The digressive writer perhaps employs the example *digressio* more often than any other single technique. You must practice this one constantly.

The figurative digression. Rhetorical stylists encourage us to write figuratively to reflect the uniqueness of our vision, to show the unity we find in diversity, to emphasize our individuality, to demonstrate that we are imaginative. You will want to exploit this technique, particularly when you have no idea of what you want to say next. Simply extend a metaphor or simile from the dead point of your thinking so far out that the reader will forget where you and he began.[9]

Allegorical writers have found this technique especially successful. For example, Edmund Spenser uses it in "The Faerie Queene" to describe Prince Arthur recovering his resolution to fight (310; bk. 2, ct. 11, st. 32):

> Like as a fire, the which in hollow cave
> Hath long bene underkept and down supprest,
> With murmurous disdayne doth inly rave,
> And grudge, in so streight prison to be prest,
> At last breakes forth with furious unrest,
> And strives to mount unto his native seat;
> All that did earst it hinder and molest,
> Yt now devoures with flames and scorching heat,
> And carries into smoake with rage and horror great.

You will note that there is much fire and little Arthur. You should not attempt at this time to master the Spenserian stanza, although the uses of such would add new dimensions to your writing and call attention to your digressive skill.

You should, however, begin to develop extended metaphors and similes to demonstrate your imaginative skills and to appeal to the intellectual and allegorical abilities of your readers. For example, if you are at a loss as to what to say next, make a transition to "Jack and the Beanstalk," and develop the golden egg metaphor till you are again ready to return to the lost treasures of your less digressive thought.

The modification digression. One of those establishment people, Francis Christensen, has offered a number of compelling arguments in support of the extended uses of sentence modification. If you take his argument one step further, you have the digressive writer offering modification on modification on modification and so on. Christensen calls this the principle of addition (4). The thing to do here is to force the reader to use his imagination to fill in the gaps—omitted transitions the establishment people call them.

The following parody of the familiar "Thirty days hath September," which I learned many years ago, is illustrative.

> Thirty days has Septober
> April, June, and no wonder.
> All the rest have peanut butter,
> Except my grandmother,
> And she rides a bicycle.

You will note that the illustration has at least five digressions, beginning with "Septober" and concluding with the image of your grandmother riding a bicycle. It will take a good reader, perhaps one trained in the reading of Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, to really follow your digressive thoughts. This technique demonstrates clearly your originality: the coinage of "Septober," the parodic surprise in adding "no wonder" in a sequence, the inductive leap in finding "peanut butter" among "All the rest," the personal and experiential through the reference to your "grandmother," and a modern concluding action with her on a "bicycle." Of course, you could have suggested that she is old fashioned and is riding a "unicycle," but such a reference would date the piece, something the digressive writer should not do. Stick to the tried and true, the digressive modification, that shows that you are both imaginative and original.

The on-the-one-hand and on-the-other-hand but neither-but-another digression. The authorities on rhetoric insist that we should think broadly and deeply and logically about the subjects we discuss. Hence you will want to polish this technique as quickly as possible, for it offers limitless possibilities for extended digressions. A common-sense person might ask, if something is not this and not that but another, why would one choose to take up space with the one-hand-other-hand remarks? Of course, that's just the point. It's not either. And better yet, after pointing *that* out, instead of showing that it's another, show that it's not that either. What you are doing here is avoiding the usual neither-but-this and substituting the neither of these nor this-nor-that-nor-other. I know this sounds confusing, but this method reveals that the digressive writer is a complex thinker, Heraclitian to the nth degree, never smugly finding a point of rest, as those establishment thinkers do.

G. G. Coulton in *Medieval Panorama*, an examination of English life in the middle ages, offers an excellent example of the one-hand-other-hand-but-neither technique:

> The liberal Bishop Thirlwall, when first the question of relaxing statutory attendance at college chapels was seriously discussed, found himself confronted with an opponent who argued: "It comes to this plain question: Are we to have compulsory religion, or none at all?" The bishop replied: "My powers of logical analysis do not enable me to grasp that subtle distinction" (203).

Note that the Bishop does not permit the opponent to constrain his digressive thinking. That's the point. You too can make the language serve you and not another.

The monistic digression. We might also call this technique the capping digression or the umbrella digression, for what we must do with this technique is subsume anything and everything under some kind of higher generalization. At first glance you might think that this technique is nondigressive, but such a perception is probably due to your having been taught to think horizontally (linearly) and vertically (hierarchly), especially vertically, whereas what I am suggesting is that you think as an Aristotelian or Coleridgean, numerologically. You will make 728 one, two views on a subject one, everything one. What you are doing, using the familiar spatial metaphor, is digressing metaphysically.

The separatist will speak of God and man, two distinct entities; you will counter with God and God-in-the-soul-of-man; he will counter with the incarnation; you will counter-counter-counter with God is man or man is God: you have made everything one. Remember, the trinitarian is a monist in disguise. From this point you can digress throughout the universe.

The semanticist and former U.S. Senator from California, S. I. Hayakawa, deals with the monistic digression in his familiar "ladder of abstraction," the principle of subsuming things under other things. He calls the process one of abstracting, beginning with a particular "Bessie," "the lowest *verbal* level of abstracting," who is a "cow," "livestock," "farm asset," and may end up in such a category as "wealth," "natural resource," or a metaphorical or metaphysical symbol of Plato's Ideas (152-3). The process is a "natural" for the monistic digression. You can subsume everything under God one week, under love the second, and under cows the third, such as "the milk of human kindness."

Play around. There is no fixed order and there are no inviolate categories. The beauty of the technique lies in the fact that you have a unified universe, a clear indication that you are a monistic writer of the first order, like Descarte and Spinoza.

The allusive digression. The effective writer, our rhetorical mentors tell us, can enrich both his own and his reader's vision of a subject through meaningful references to literary, historical, and contemporary statements, events, situations, experiences, characters, figures, and such.

Once a writer begins to digress – remember Epstein called it the discovery of what to say next – the world becomes, in a Pistol paraphrase, his "oyster" (*MWW*; 2.2.2). Here I have introduced the allusive digression, for Pistol is one of Shakespeare's creations and a suitable subject for extended discussion. Also, I have suggested the inherent value of the digressive paraphrase, which out of context loses much of its force, not that force is a governing principle of the digressive writer. Moreover, a metaphorical "world is my oyster" offers innumerable opportunities for ontological and epistemological, as well as axiological, digressions. Any digression devoted to a metaphorical development of a philosophical oyster opens countless possibilities: the pearl of the sea (suggesting two homonymic digressions), the pearl before swines, the grit that irritates, the Japanese pearl divers, the international economy, not to mention the sauces one may prepare, the New Orleans' aphrodisiactic "Make love not war." The possibilities for various kinds of allusive digressions are limitless.

You may wish also to make personal allusions, which many of our modern poets do, such as T. S. Eliot, just to show the reader that your thoughts grew out of the depth of your being. Better yet, enjoy a little "inside" joke that no one will get.

The Dali digression. You must, the authorities of proper prose say, such as the authors of the *Harbrace College Handbook*, avoid needless or unnecessary shifts in "grammatical structures, in tone or style, and in viewpoint" (314). However, as every effective digressive writer knows, the introduction of an unanticipated viewpoint offers both the writer and reader special pleasure, the former in terms of originality, the latter through his discovery of exactly what the writer has done.

For example, Salvador Dali in his paintings introduces unexpected and unfamiliar perspectives, such as that in which we look down from the heavens on the head of the crucified Christ. You can keep your reader on his toes – I'm speaking metaphorically, the mixed digression – by shifting your point of view suddenly, without giving the reader advanced warning. Ambrose Bierce does this sort of thing in "An Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge." You're not writing fiction, which has its own special kinds of digressive writing, but a shift shows that you are bringing a multiple perspective to the subject, something most readers admire in the versatile writer.

The following short quatrain by E. Y. Harburg, his definition of an "Agnostic," illustrates the technique succinctly.

> No matter how much I probe and prod,
> I cannot quite believe in God;
> But oh, I hope to God that He
> Unswervingly believes in me (1).

Note how Harburg begins by expressing his attitude toward God but quickly shifts to God's attitude toward him. The effective digressive writer would add a third viewpoint by quoting the grandmother from James Baldwin's "Blues for Mister Charlie," who, in response to her grandson's statement that he did not believe in God, stated flatly, "It ain't up to you" (33). Most readers admire these swift shifts in viewpoint. You want to keep the reader hopping or grunting or growling or meowing to keep up with your subtle and versatile shifts.

By now you should have a pretty good idea of some of the basic techniques of digressive writing. I have not mentioned the malapropistic digression, such as "The girl came down the stairs in her negligible," which is certain to bring a slight gleam of recognition to even the dullest-minded reader, nor have I considered paraphrases, cliches, euphemisms, paradoxes, metaphysical digressions or digressive footnotes, all of which should become a part of your polished digressive style.[10] However, I would hope that the techniques I have discussed will help you as you develop your existing digressive prose.

III

In summary, digressiveness enables the effective writer to avoid the limitations of the small thesis statement and to explore freely his thought and experiences through which he may generate an expanded discourse. The writer in process creates the structures through which he expresses these thoughts and experiences, rather than straight-jacketing them in preselected or imposed patterns. In choosing examples and illustrations from a wide range of experiences he offers variety, new and fresh percep-

tions, implied depth, and even complexity of meanings. Through figurative expression he identifies his intellectual and imaginative uniqueness and develops his analogical, metaphorical, multiple ways of perceiving, assimilating, and expressing.

Modification of expression enables him to follow through verbally, imagistically, logically, associationally, to turn the screw on what he has previously thought and said, to turn not once but a series of turns; with each turn he also begins to anticipate the multiple expressive opportunities emerging in the discourse through which he may further develop and refine his thought. Dichotonomous thinking of the either-or variety offers a Procrustean bed for the literal minded, a context the digressive writer denies every time he admires the beauty of a rainbow; as a writer he must insist on a multiplicity of viewpoints which on-the-one-hand and on-the-other-hand thinking exclude.

While insisting that his thought must be free and uncircumscribed, the digressive writer may perceive commonalities, even unities, in diversities: that verbal expression is a symbolic surrogate for human experience; that natural continuity in verbal expression is metaphorical and not organic; that logical coherence is a rule-bound system; that metaphysical unity in discourse is a matter of faith between writer and reader and not a given quality in the nature of language. Through digression the writer will also find pleasure, allusiveness, for instance, offering one among many ways of enjoying one's self-perceptions during the process of writing. Finally, the writer who shifts viewpoints enjoys not only the pleasures of discovering and creating intellectual and imaginative insights but also the anticipations of the pleasures and surprises he will offer his readers.[11]

I find it amusing that T. S. Eliot's essays are anthologized year after year and are presented as models for beginning writers to examine and imitate, particularly when Peter Ackroyd, Eliot's biographer, characterizes Eliot's technique in *The Idea of a Christian Society* as follows:

> His characteristic method is to make a statement so large or vague as to be practically meaningless, then to qualify that statement by explaining what he does not mean by it, and finally to outline the reasons why he does not propose to discuss matters arising from it; he apologizes, at this point, for wandering off course, but instead of clarifying or refining his original proposition, he classifies the arguments of those who might object to it and proceeds to deal with their objections. At the end his argument comes full circle. The first statement remains intact in its vagueness and generality, but the casual reader might assume from the wealth of clauses and subordinate clauses that it has been argued and proved. This is essentially a rhetorical technique (250).

Perhaps digressiveness is just the point. Eliot takes us on a trip with his mind. He may not go very far; the trip may be roundabout; in fact, nothing specifically may be accomplished or achieved; but most of us are certain of one thing: we'll take a trip with Eliot any time we can. Why? Well, for one thing, he's digressive.

NOTES

[1]Lanham describes the purpose of "The Books" as follows: "They aim to take in a typical freshman, gawky and clueless, process him cover to cover, and turn out a conflation of Walter Pater and George Orwell" (14).

[2]Representative chapter headings, mentioned by Lanham, include the following: "Do not take yourself too seriously. Consider your readers. Make your writing talk. Be a good mechanic. Sharpen your thesis. Believe in your thesis. Build your essay in three parts. Write from a suitable design" (15). The bromidic nature of these exhortations indicate the firm grasp the establishment has on composition practice.

[3]Elbow takes a more sensible and realistic approach: "You will waste energy and weaken your writing if you try to *prevent* digressions before they happen. Let them happen. After they happen, simply find an opportunity to put yourself back on the original subject. But in some cases you will realize that the digression is sufficiently engrossing or important that you should stick with it. Do so" (10).

[4]Among the many functions of Shakespearean asides, one involves the introduction of an alternate point of view on a given situation, character, theme, and such.

[5]A standard advice statement is the following: "Once you have developed and revised your preliminary outline as part of the process of organizing information, you are ready to select one of the conventional outline forms with standard notation so that your final outline shows the relationships of your main ideas and supporting information to the thesis" (Hodges and Whitten 448).

[6]Macrorie departs from rhetorical theory to writing practices in a comment on the functions of outlines: "Eight out of ten writers say they never use outlines and the other two say they use them only in late stages of writing, in the second or third draft when they have all the materials captured and need only to rearrange them strategically." (163).

[7]Bowen, after noting that "Each book one writes is different in content and therefore in form," comments on the writing process: "The job is to get something down on paper. . . . for better or worse let the typewriter roll. We need pages in the hand to work with, ponder over, rewrite, reshape" (xii, xiii).

[8]I took this phrase from Strunk and White since it conveys more clearly the concept I am discussing than other descriptors such as pattern, organization, and such.

[9]Crot writing, which Weathers examines as one of the techniques writers may employ who elect to use "Grammar B" (a more fundamental style, he informs us, than the conventional one taught by most rhetoricians), offers the writer unlimited opportunities to extend his thought and figures. Since juxtapositions replace verbal transitions and the crot by definition is an independent and autonomous unit, the crot writer may extend his units of discourse in almost any way he pleases (14-16).

[10]Weathers' "alternate style" includes a host of techniques that may be adapted easily to digressive purposes: crots, labyrinthine sentences, sentence fragments, lists, double-voices, repetitions/repetends/refrains, and language variegations (14-34).

[11]A closer look at the methodological foci and hypotheses rhetoricians have employed reveals the variety of approaches professionals have employed in teaching composition, each focus an index to a number of subcategories: language, grammar, subject readings, prose models, logic, observation, prewriting, thesis or purpose, structure and organization, nonfictional genres, speech habits, rhetorical modes (Snipes 15-18).

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FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE IN STUDENTS' WRITINGS

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Writers of freshman composition textbooks and theorists on language and rhetoric differ in many ways, but especially great is the difference in their approach to figures of speech. Freshman textbooks rarely stress figurative language and usually teach students little about how to employ these devices. According to a study of one hundred freshman college textbooks published between 1975 and 1985, the four figures most frequently mentioned are parallelism, metaphor, simile, and analogy (Devet 96-104).[1] In general, these freshman composition textbooks teach students that they can use these figures for well-constructed sentences, proper diction, and colorful descriptions. As a result, the students' writing will acquire "vividness" (Canavan 211)[2] and "force" (Hacker 111).[3]

Most twentieth-century theorists and rhetoricians, however, emphasize that figures are integral to language and persuasive in discourse. Richard Weaver, for example, explains that metaphor underlies language itself: "Many words which we think of as prosaic literalisms can be shown to have their origin in long-forgotten comparisons. [For instance], the word 'depend' analogizes the action of hanging from; 'contact' analogizes a relationship. . . ." (205-06). J. Hillis Miller characterizes metaphors as central to the act of reading and writing: "Metaphors are not like the racing turn. They are the universal medium in which the writer – novice, intermediate, and advanced – must learn to swim" (54). Kenneth Burke also recognizes the vital nature of tropes and schemes. In *A Grammar of Motives* he cites metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, and irony as ways to distinguish between scientific and poetic realism (503-517), while in *A Rhetoric of Motives* Burke implies that schemes are the underlying pattern of all speech: "You can't possibly make a statement without its falling into some sort of pattern" (65). Besides stressing that figures are innate to language, theorists discuss the rhetorical nature of schemes and tropes. Burke says that "many purely formal patterns [like antithesis and climax] can readily awaken an attitude of collaborative expectancy in us" (*Rhetoric of Motives* 58). Chaim Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca indicate that schemes and tropes are integral to the subject, speaker, and audience of a discourse. In *Shakespeare's Use of the Arts of Language* Sister Miriam Joseph demonstrates that figures of speech are linked to "thought, emotion, and expression" (398), while in *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* Edward P. J. Corbett explains that figures are related to the *ethos, pathos*, and *logos* of a discourse (459). Hence, among modern theorists there is a sense that figures are vital to expression.

Composition instructors, therefore, find themselves torn between two positions. Their textbooks give little specific advice on the role of figures in discourse, while the theorists extol the virtues of schemes and tropes. Such a gap between textbooks and theorists is, in fact, largely unnecessary. If instructors examine the writings of students, they can discover how these writers employ figures and how figures can be taught.

How have students used figures of speech? With little priming,[4] students have shown that figurative language can be used to amplify or summarize a subject. Figures also structure a discourse by pivoting ideas in a paragraph, establishing coherence between sentences, acting as transitions between paragraphs, and setting up contrasts. In short, figures of speech may be studied as more than "colorful descriptors." Schemes and tropes can play vital, specific roles in the writings of freshmen.

One of the functions of figures is to amplify a topic. This function is aptly illustrated by the examples which follow.

To open her essay, a student uses anaphora, or repetition, at the beginning of successive sentences or clauses, in order to explain that teenagers are curious about sex:

> It seems that high school students are more curious about sex than about any other topic. They would prefer knowing the time it takes to conceive a baby rather than know-