

5-2019

# Friends or Foes? Composition and Creative Writing

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FRIENDS OR FOES? COMPOSITION AND CREATIVE WRITING

by

Christopher N. Davis

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree

of

MASTER'S OF SCIENCE

in

English

Approved:

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UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY

Logan, Utah

2019

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## ABSTRACT

Friends or Foes? Composition and Creative Writing

by

Christopher N. Davis, Master of Science

Utah State University, 2019

Major Professor: Jared Colton

Department: English

In the current realm of collegiate English, there exists a polarized separation between two fields: composition and creative writing. Though there are a number of ways these two fields intersect, they are seen and taught as distinct entities, and have been so for much of the last three decades. Some scholars see the blending of the two fields as potentially hindering to students' writing development in either field – the idea that attempting to do two things at once, rather than focusing on each one at a time, will inevitably result in less-effectiveness in both. Others see creative writing as having no *practical* use, thus the need for the continued separation. Because of these stances, the closely-related fields function independently from one another; generally, neither actually considers the other *in* the classroom, despite the benefit(s) this could provide. However, while little has been written on what's to be gained from integrating the two fields, much is lost due to the separation – e.g. the spark of interest in English, in general, that creative writing provides or the acute similarity in goals and skill-development that both fields share. In this paper, I examine the pedagogical benefits of integrating the two fields, focusing specifically on what's to be gained by diminishing the separation. My materials

will include scholarly articles from prominent journals in either field (such as *College Composition and Communication*, *College English*, and *The Writer's Chronicle*, among others), as well as textbooks to provide specific details about the similarities between them. I aim to address questions concerning the current separation so modern scholars in each field will consider the immense benefit(s) of integrating aspects of each field in both the composition and creative writing classrooms.

(36 pages)

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my committee members, Drs. Jared Colton, Michael Sowder, and Jessica Rivera-Mueller for their help in crafting this project. I give special thanks to my family, friends, and anyone else who supported me in any way.

Christopher N. Davis

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## Friends or Foes? Composition and Creative Writing

### Introduction

My experience with English was unique, but not altogether uncommon. I detested essay writing and literary analysis throughout high school. Writing analytical and research essays on assigned subjects that I wasn't invested in simply didn't interest me in the least. This all changed, however, when I got the chance to take creative writing courses in college. The creative aspects I experienced through writing in the fiction, poetry, and creative nonfiction genres, such as showing (rather than telling) and using figurative language, slowly opened my mind to the fun and challenging nature of writing. This then prompted my desire to understand how good writing of any kind comes about. For instance, I began seeing the use of providing concrete examples by better understanding the difference between showing and telling, and when to use each. I switched majors to English with a creative writing emphasis, became an "A" student, and graduated from Utah State University with a 3.63 GPA, a stark contrast to the low C's I'd earned in my high school English courses.

Like many others, I began teaching composition as I started my master's program at Utah State University, and I wanted to bring elements of creative writing into my composition classroom(s) to provide my students with the same spark that creative writing had offered me. I developed a good relationship with USU's Director of Composition, Brock Dethier, and visited his office countless times over that first semester, pestering him for both reassurance when I failed and teaching advice when I had an idea I wanted to try out in the classroom. Unsurprisingly, one of these ideas was integrating more creative writing into my composition courses to present my students



with the same opportunity that sparked my interest in English when I was an undergraduate. However, I was fairly surprised to hear Brock (the liberal, progressive, open-minded instructor and member of USU's faculty creative writing group, "Poetry at Three") tell me flatly that this was not an idea worth pursuing. "It's been tried before," "You can't blend creative writing and composition; it just doesn't work," and, "Maybe you could do something with mixed media in English, instead? That's a hot English topic right now," were all reasons Brock mentioned as to why I should abandon my endeavor.

I thought this might have been a single individual's opinion until it came time to choose a thesis topic. I was immediately drawn back to that first creative spark that prompted such a change on my own view of English and wanted to connect it to teaching composition. I pursued that same idea and was met with the same resistance from multiple faculty members, who each cited much of the same rationale as Brock had (sometimes nearly word-for-word) when I discussed possible project ideas involving the integration of creative writing into composition. I started to see a pattern of upholding the division I'd been perceiving between the two subjects and began researching what would later become the topic of this thesis.

As it turns out, my experience—meeting resolute resistance for wanting to blend composition and creative writing in some way—was not unique in the least. Teacher-scholars as widely-known as Wendy Bishop, Chris Drew, David Yost, Douglas Hesse, and Gerald Graff (among others) have written about their own personal experiences encountering this division. Bishop, co-president of the board of directors for the Associated Writing Programs (AWP), taught composition and creative writing simultaneously. While doing so, she began to realize how similar the two subjects' goals

and purposes were, and “wanted to connect [her] knowledge of writing and reading, discovered in the separate ‘strands,’ but was encouraged not to do so” (Bishop 121). Authors and instructors Chris Drew and David Yost, who both also simultaneously taught composition and creative writing, had nearly identical experiences to Bishop’s. They described a palpable “tension” (Drew and Yost 26) between creative writing and composition in their English department at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, and were each advised to “think of [composition and creative writing] as separate subjects” (Drew and Yost 25). Douglas Hesse, founding Executive Director of the Writing Program at the University of Denver, and past president of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), specifies this division even further, stating that creative writing “condemns” composition (Hesse 32), while composition sees “no real use” (Hesse 33) in creative writing at all.

As I’ve continued to research this division, I’ve been particularly interested in two issues. First, the problems caused by the division, and second, the benefits of integrating composition and creative writing. I started out wanting to do a literature review, as I felt the best way to move forward in my teaching career was to better inform myself on all sides of these issues: the history of the division, scholarly perspectives on it, and potential models for integrating composition and creative writing. However, as my research continued, I found far too few teacher-scholars to make a thorough literature review on the subject—more on this later. Along with this problematic issue, as I became more thoroughly informed by my continued research,<sup>1</sup> I decided to change the direction of my

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<sup>1</sup> The literature review—rather than being the main focus of my project—has now simply been absorbed into the argument, as a whole.

project and make a firm argument for why composition and creative writing should be integrated.

My argument follows a simple structure of four sections:

1. History of the Division: This section provides a brief history of how the division between composition and creative writing came about and how teacher-scholars feel about it.
2. Pro-Division Arguments: This section looks at why teacher-scholars may be for upholding the division.
3. Problems Caused by the Division: This section identifies problems that stem from the division between composition and creative writing.
4. Concluding Assessment: This section clarifies why, even after considering the history and pro-division arguments, I support integrating composition and creative writing by examining the benefits of integration and illustrating examples of ways some teacher-scholars have already begun integrating.

Before I get into the history of the division, it's important to briefly discuss the sources I researched and my criteria for evaluating those sources. It was difficult to find texts that explicitly addressed the separation, though implied arguments or allusions to the separation do exist. Therefore, the (admittedly, few) texts I found that explicitly referenced the division were given prominence in my research, while texts that implicitly referenced the division were included, but given less prominence. I was also interested mostly in sources from prominent journals. By "prominent," I am referring to academic journals related directly to either composition or creative writing, such as *CCC* or *CE*. This is an important aspect of my source evaluation because I could likely find a number

of educators discussing the division on teaching-related blogs or other similar, less-academically-credible locations, but I wanted to keep my argument focused on the most well-known and respected journals of either field. The same idea applies to the authors of the sources I considered: I wanted to focus on well-known and respected compositionists and creative writing teacher-scholars. I originally attempted to establish a relevant timeframe limited to anything written after 1990, as that could likely rule out any sources that were no longer valid due to more recent changes in pedagogical views, practices, etc. However, I found that to be too restrictive, as there are many teacher-scholars who wrote extensively on the subject (such as Peter Elbow or Wendy Bishop) long before 1990 that cannot simply be ruled out for inclusion.

I have two further key details to note before I get into my main argument. First, a couple of definitions I'll be using for the purposes of this project need to be clarified. When I use the term "creative writing," what I'm referring to is any form of poetry, fiction, or creative nonfiction writing. When I use the term "composition," I'm specifically referencing first-year composition courses, usually focused on introducing students to academic prose and research-driven persuasive argument(s). Secondly, my project—most evident in the "Concluding Assessment" section—focuses specifically on integrating elements of creative writing into composition courses, as opposed to the other way around. I may make some comments about integrating composition elements into creative writing, but my main focus is integrating creative writing elements into composition.

### History of the Division

The history of the division between composition and creative writing goes back a long time and contains a tangle of varied possibilities regarding where, when, and how the division came about. Gerald Graff provides one way of understanding the origins and process of how the division came about in his 2009 article “What We Say When We Don’t Talk About Creative Writing.” According to Graff, “tension” between the subjects existed as early as the era of European Romanticism.<sup>2</sup> He cites conflict between the “Moderns” and the “Ancients” as the time and place “the creative and the critical spirit first came to be dramatically pitted against each other” (Graff 273). Additionally, Graff claims the tension between the subjects increased with the “rise of the empirical sciences in the late seventeenth century,” and “evolved during the romantic period into an opposition between the creative imagination and the reasoning or calculating faculties (Graff 275). This tension and resulting division, Graff asserts, was then “popularized” by Cleanth Brooks’s 1947 book, *The Well-Wrought Urn*, wherein Brooks asserts that “the tendency of science is...to stabilize terms, to freeze them into strict denotation; the poet’s tendency is by contrast disruptive. The terms are continually modifying each other, and thus violating their dictionary meanings” (Graff 275). In other words, the sciences, which Graff essentially claims spawned the study of composition, saw the purpose of language as only to describe things for exactly what they were, for the purpose of settling meaning, and took no interest in symbolic or reflective words or phrasings, which were used to unsettle meaning. Graff further claims that relationships between composition and creative writing became even more “tense and uneasy...with the advent of ‘Theory’ in the 1970s and 1980s” (Graff 272)—more on this in the next paragraph.

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<sup>2</sup> Published in *College English*, commonly and hereafter referred to as “CE.”

Douglas Hesse provides an alternative view of the origins of the division, viewing it in terms of the creation of the composition discipline, itself. In his 2010 article, “The Place of Creative Writing in Composition Studies,” he claims sometime during the 1980s, many English departments, “faced with deciding...among ‘rhetoric’ (as argument and analysis), ‘composition’ (as academic discourse), and ‘writing’ (the broader making of texts), composition studies chose the first two” (Hesse 38).<sup>3</sup> Aspects of creative writing, Hesse later claims, fell by the wayside in composition courses while considerations of “rhetorical situation” and “genre” gained traction (Hesse 38). Hesse additionally identifies another idea that likely contributed to the division between composition and creative writing: the idea that creative writing is therapeutic. Hesse frames his argument around Stephen Minot’s 1976 article “Creative Writing: Start with a Student’s Motive,” wherein Minot claims that students will become more engaged in their courses if they can create their own motives for taking the course, rather than the instructor providing the motives for them. Minot identifies six examples of useful student motives, three of which deal with the therapeutic benefits of creative writing: “partially conscious therapy, entirely conscious therapy, and ego formation” (qtd. in Hesse 38). With this view of creative writing, it’s fairly easy to see why the critically-minded and theoretically-focused discipline of composition would want to distance itself from such a subject.

Another contributing factor to the division could be conflicting ideologies. The most well-known example would be the Elbow-Bartholomae debate. David Bartholomae took a social constructivist approach to composition, believing that student writing required a reliance on mimicking academic language, style, voice, etc. to produce a credible ethos

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<sup>3</sup> Published in *College Composition and Communication*, commonly and hereafter referred to as “CCC.”

(Bartholomae, *Inventing the University* 19), as well as viewing the composition classroom as “a real space” (Bartholomae, *Writing with Teachers* 66). On the other end of the composition spectrum, Peter Elbow believed that writing belongs to the student, was a firm advocate of freewriting, and believed in the idea of students “Writing Without Teachers,” as he named his first book (Elbow). Simplified greatly, Bartholomae and Elbow held a long-running public debate over these conflicting approaches to teaching composition. While the debate “ended” with the two more-or-less agreeing to disagree, it’s become clear in the years following that Bartholomae’s approach(es) won out—for instance, in my experience, echoed by Hesse, current composition students are not typically seen as authoritative authors, nor is writing without teachers a common practice in the modern composition classroom. This debate illustrates the long-term effects that ideological disagreements can have on individual disciplines.

Whether or not it’s possible to pinpoint a single specific time, location, or event that sparked this division, and regardless of which lens you choose to view it with, the division between composition and creative writing has existed for a long time. It’s likely some combination of all of these things brought us to where we are today. Understanding some of the ways the division came about can help illuminate why some teacher-scholars today may want to uphold the division.

Those in support of upholding the division between composition and creative writing argue first and foremost that it’s easier to keep things how they are than it is to attempt what some might view as a drastic change. Graff offers his thoughts on this, saying, “Leaving [making connections between subjects] up to students to figure out on their own is...a lot easier than working together or having sustained conversations with

our colleagues about what our goals are and how well we are achieving them” (Graff 272). It’s interesting to note that Graff’s snide comment is so condemning when he himself co-authored the textbook *They Say, I Say*, which literally provides students with templates for academic writing, which seems to be the absolute opposite of creativity, not to mention the fact that he seems most interested in speaking only to compositionists. Despite this seeming contradiction, Graff’s claim that leaving things as they are is easier, has some legitimacy behind it—for example, finding the right amount of integration would be difficult, potentially involving thorough restructuring of entire composition course curricula. However, while I can understand Graff’s logic behind this argument—successfully integrating composition and creative writing would absolutely take a massive amount of time and effort on the part of educators—I believe the logic behind it is problematic and there is much lost due to said logic—more on this in the “Concluding Assessment” section.

Understanding the current aims of composition may help illustrate why some teacher-scholars may support the division. In my own short experience teaching composition, USU provided me with full-course curricula (the major assignments, rough topic schedule, even occasional lesson plans) for both English 1010 and 2010, as well as put me through a teaching practicum for 1010 to emphasize the course aims. I was told directly (in the practicum) that most of our students weren’t English majors, and while we couldn’t teach them how to write well in *every* genre, we *could* teach them how to recognize different genres so they could learn to respond to different rhetorical situations when asked to. According to my experience, the goal of modern composition is to prepare students from all disciplines to write in multiple formats/genres. Wendy Bishop



echoes this idea, describing composition as having evolved into a “routinized operation for teaching the large numbers of students to write” (Bishop 122). Similarly, Hesse claims it has become a “training regimen for...vocational skills” (Hesse 38). According to these interpretations, the current aims of composition—whatever they began as—seem to be focused on practicality, application, and critical thinking. This understanding additionally helps clarify why teacher-scholars may support the division specifically in relation to Hesse’s claims—that creative writing is often valued for its therapeutic aspects, and that the division is often perpetuated by those outside the fields, themselves—as therapeutic benefits have no value in terms of vocational skills or understanding rhetorical situations.

It’s important to note, here, that my experience, echoed by Bishop and Hesse, was highly influenced by my Director of Composition’s views, which would likely be viewed as outdated. I’ve since learned that the goals of modern composition have turned slightly from genre to multimodality, with a greater emphasis on digital forms of writing, due to constantly-changing technology and the ever-rising popularity of internet-based media. However, this shift only strengthens my case, in that creative writing should be seen as just another mode of writing, and thus, integrated into the composition classroom.

While this division between composition and creative writing has clearly been around for a very long time, it is fairly surprising that there has been very little research on the division and its effects within studies of composition or creative writing. In 2009, Gerald Graff claimed that in his forty years of teaching, he’d “never heard of an English department meeting to discuss the philosophical relationship between its creative writing program and the ‘regular’ literature program” (Graff 271). In 2010, Douglas Hesse

provided specific numbers for how few times creative writing articles appeared in *College Composition and Communication* (CCC): of 284 articles that mention “creative writing,” only about twenty feature creative writing as a major focus (Hesse 35). In the same article, Hesse cites similar sentiments from Wendy Bishop: “professional journalists, poets, and novelists have spoken in *CCC* in their dual roles...[but] comparatively few creative writers have spoken in [the] past 50 years” (Hesse 35). While Hesse does go on to discuss a few possible reasons for the shortage of creative writing-focused articles—such as the possibility that few creative writing authors have submitted them to *CCC*, or that *CCC* developed a focus for “some kinds of writing and related matters and not others” (Hesse 35)—a simple internet search of my own in 2018 illustrates that there is still a significant lack of available information on the connections between composition and creative writing, especially from *CE* and *CCC*, the two most prominent collegiate English academic journals in the U.S.

While the history of the division between composition and creative writing is certainly messy, both in terms of origin and causes, a few important pieces of the puzzle can be clearly identified and, thus, summarized. The division came about due to the divergence of scientific thinking and creative thinking, and the fact that the field of composition sidelined creative writing in favor of argument, analysis, and discourse. The division was then deepened in more recent years by the solidification of (modern) composition’s aims—vocational skills and practicality—while a large part of the value of creative writing was equated to therapeutic benefits. This deepening continued with the Elbow-Bartholomae debate, as Bartholomae’s social constructivist approach to composition took hold. This brings us up to the present day, where the division is more

evident than ever, yet—as mentioned—very little has been written on the division, let alone anything challenging it outright.

### Pro-Division Arguments

It is important to mention here that in my research, I have been unable to find any scholars who openly and/or explicitly support the division between composition and creative writing. This is generally understandable, as no scholar wants to appear exclusionary. However, while I have been unable to find scholars that explicitly defend the reasoning behind the separation, many of the teacher-scholars I've researched offer numerous allusions as to why some scholars may support the division. This allows me to theorize the reasons behind why scholars would be in support of upholding the division. These rationale are somewhat varied, but seem to be generally agreed upon, in that each reason supporting the division is pointed to by multiple scholars, though I have not observed any hierarchy of which reason might be the most significant or supported. In other words, the following potential reasons for scholars upholding the division are not ranked in any particular order, hence the phrase “potential reason” that pops up multiple times in the next few paragraphs.

One potential reason for upholding the division may be that many creative writing scholars and teachers believe that creativity is innate, and therefore, not something that can be taught. Tim Mayers, in his book, *Re-Writing Craft: Composition, Creative Writing, and the Future of English Studies*, states that it is often viewed that “creativity or writing ability is fundamentally ‘interior’ or ‘psychological’ in nature and that it is thus the province only of special or gifted individuals and is fundamentally unteachable” (Mayers 14). Madison Smartt Bell echoes this sentiment in his book *Narrative Design* (an

analysis of fiction stories with the aim of observing the successes and pitfalls of each writer): “creativity [is and] must be innate” (Bell 3). Hesse quotes Ron Macfarland, who goes so far as to say, “I once ascertained five essentials of a serious write: desire, drive, talent, vision, and craft...[O]f the essentials, only craft can be taught” (Hesse 36). This belief<sup>4</sup>—that creativity cannot be taught—matters to composition because, according to Ted Lardner’s article, “Locating the Boundaries of Composition and Creative Writing,” composition valorizes teaching (Lardner 73). Thus, if that belief is held as true by either (or both) compositionists or creative writers, it’s easy to see why this could be a legitimate reason scholars would support the continuation of the division: composition can be taught, but creative writing can not.

Another potential reason scholars may be in favor of the division is the various pressures that each field faces. These pressures include turf wars (Graff 272), as well as fiscal, political, and structural pressures (Bowen and O’Driscoll 59). According to Bowen and O’Driscoll, “Long-term cuts in state funding [and an] increased need to transfer institutional resources into financial aid” (Bowen and O’Driscoll 59) are common and legitimate pressures that each field within the typical English department faces on a regular basis. These pressures are perhaps a little more understandable when one considers the fight that creative writing had to put up to secure its place in academia.

Stephen M. Jefferies offers insight on this particular pressure, discussing creative writing’s struggle to find a home in his thesis “Reuniting Old Allies: A Case for Creative Composition,” stating that creative writing “fought to remain institutionally relevant”

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<sup>4</sup> While I want to be careful about not making a universal assumption, I have found this a common belief even in just the scholars I’ve researched for this project.

(Jefferies 2). There are and were a number of things the field of creative writing was up against, from the belief that creative writing was of no practical use—reinforced (perhaps unintentionally) later by Peter Elbow and Donald M. Murray’s support of “expressionism” (Jefferies 9) and the therapeutic aspects and benefits of creative writing—to composition’s more extreme dismissal(s) of the field of creative writing as “habitual, narrow, and uninterrogated...or for absent research, or for perspectives and preoccupations that seem naive in (1) a world of writers with practical needs or (2) a world whose discursive practices sorely need critique” (Hesse 33). Again, it’s easy to see how creative writing must have struggled to find a “home” if it was viewed by scholars from other fields as absent of research or naive in its endeavors. Thus, Jefferies points out, when creative writing eventually did find a home, it was firmly set *against* composition, citing the Iowa Writers’ workshop as an example of this—as an “institution dedicated solely to creative writing” (Jefferies 2), it’s as exclusive of composition as it can be. The point is, both composition and creative writing encounter constant pressures—like fighting for academic legitimacy—that they have to struggle against to secure funding and resources.

It’s important to mention here that many of these problems and pressures are generally based in personal experiences, meaning they’re not necessarily universal. For example, there is no clear study or firm consensus that supports Graff’s, Bowen and O’Driscoll’s, or Jefferies’ claims, making them somewhat vague. Graff, for instance, never specifies what kind of turf wars he’s referring to, though we can assume he’s talking about each field’s security within their respective English departments. However, these claims seem to be widely-agreed upon by the majority of these teacher-scholars,

which perhaps illustrates the division as clearly as the claims they make. In other words, even within the few sources I'm citing for this project who believe in the need for integrating composition and creative writing, there are a significant amount of assumptions being made about the relationship between the two fields.

Yet another potential reason scholars may support the division comes from an emphasis on the different modes of writing, as illustrated in Danita Berg's dissertation, "Re-composition: Considering the intersections of composition and creative writing theories and pedagogies," wherein she examines Robert Connors' article, "The Rise and Fall of the Modes of Discourse." According to Connors, Berg describes, the "influential classification scheme' known as the 'modes' organized types of writing into four main categories: narration, description, exposition, and argument" (Berg 10), which were later divided up between composition (who took exposition and argument) and creative writing (who took narration and description). Thus, the selection of the different modes of writing by each field doesn't allow much space for one field to effectively pick up or teach the other modes. This modal-division also extends indirectly to James Berlin's work on rhetoric and poetics in his article "Rhetoric and Poetics in the English Department: Our Nineteenth-Century Inheritance." Rhetoric, Berlin claimed, was "concerned with the uses of language in carrying on the practical affairs of society in law, politics, and other essential social functions," while poetics was "concerned with language that existed as an object of contemplation, apart from any practical consequences, and poetic discourse was studied for its intrinsic merits, as an object of interest in itself" (Berlin 522). If we equate rhetoric to composition and poetics to

creative writing, Berg and Berlin's perspectives help illustrate that many teachers may see the two fields as being *unable* to integrate in the first place.

Each of these reasons for upholding the division is reasonably legitimate. If composition and/or creative writing scholars and instructors believe that creativity can't be taught, it makes sense that they would support the need for students who possess that inherent ability to be cultivated by those trained specifically in the field of creative writing, as opposed to attempting to fit a small number of creative elements into a composition course. Equally justified are the pressures of securing funding for each field—if English departments typically have a set amount of funding for each, then it makes sense that composition and creative writing, respectively, would want to vie for their piece of that funding, rather than having to share it, had they been integrated. Additionally, if scholars and instructors in either field saw the fields as too distinct to integrate, such as in the examples of Berg and Berlin's provided above, they would be fully in support of continuing to uphold the division. While all of these concerns are generally valid, I will argue that integrating composition and creative writing offers ways of handling each one, with a number of added benefits.

### Problems Caused by the Division

With a basic understanding of the division—possible origins (*where* and *when* it began); causes (what *events* led to its creation); stances (*where* teacher-scholars in either field stand on the issue, and *why*)—I can now begin to analyze the argument as a whole in a more comprehensive assessment. First, what is lost due to the division or, to phrase it a different way, “what problems are caused by the separation?”

The first problem caused by the division between composition and creative writing is student confusion about the goals and relationships of these two forms of writing. This division makes students unable to see and make connections between composition and creative writing, which results in problematic student assumptions and generalizations of either field. This confusion or lack of understanding the connections has multiple negative results, not the least of which is the division is polarizing for students. This polarization surfaces in students in the form of skewed student perceptions of either field—students “taking a side” so to speak. I see this often in my current graduate program. On the one hand, students who feel more positively toward creative writing, considering composition as un-creative and monotonous. On the other hand, students who feel more positively toward composition may consider creative writing as containing no practical value, a place to play, but not to actually learn anything. These are just two possible examples of the way the polarization manifests itself in students. However, I have found these examples to be not only consistent with my own experience, but with Graff’s, Friesinger’s, and Bishop’s experiences as well.

The division is often upheld by instructors, which is damaging because it influences students’ minds. Graff summarizes this all-too-common occurrence: “Ultimately, the disconnection between instructors reproduces itself as a disconnection between our students” (Graff 273). Friesinger echoes Graff’s sentiment, stating, “the student image of [creative writing] is radically more positive than that of composition” (Friesinger 283). Wendy Bishop further illustrates this idea, citing an undergraduate student’s journal entries regarding her failed attempts to make connections between her composition and creative writing courses: “The student...found composition a dreary,



teacher-imposed *task* and creative writing something done to pass time, for *fun*” (Bishop 117). As we can see from this example, depending on which view their current teachers take, students can be left thinking either composition or creative writing is worthless or impractical. Bishop further identifies this occurrence as the myth of “free creativity” (Bishop 123) wherein students are consistently told that creative writing is fun, with no ‘set’ rules or guidelines—a place for experimentation and play—while composition is boring—a place to write research papers and analyze essays. Bishop’s “myth of free creativity” (Bishop 123) hinders both the student’s understanding of what creative writing actually is—that there *are*, in fact, rules and guidelines to writing creatively—as well as their understanding of what composition is—that it’s not *just* research and analysis.

This polarization of student views of composition and/or creative writing also causes problems regarding student engagement in these courses. For example, if a student comes to think that composition is a worthless course, but they are required to take it, they’ll expect it to be a waste of time, resulting in their putting in as little effort as possible, just enough to earn a passing grade and get out of there as soon as they can. This teacher-influenced student mindset additionally limits students’ opportunities for finding major or career options they may have become interested in, as Douglas Hesse asserts: “ignoring different kinds of writing...is marginalizing” (Hesse 35). This point is dripping with irony, as composition is a *required* course for *all* majors, with the simple intention of producing well-rounded students. This point is additionally significant to me, personally, because my own experience reflects the benefit that can come from exploratory course-taking. Had I been told creative writing had “no practical use,” as

many believe, according to Hesse, I may never have taken that first creative writing course that led to my interest in English and consequent academic success. Friesinger, Hesse, Bishop, Graff, Drew, and Yost all identify this common occurrence in their respective articles.

The next problem is that students' confusion regarding the division can often translate into self-doubt. Wendy Bishop writes about an issue that she calls "author hero-worship" (Bishop 121) wherein composition instructors provide their students with exemplary writings from published authors as *the* example(s) of good writing. This technique can contribute to a problem Chris Drew and David Yost refer to as the "author/student writer binary" (Drew and Yost 28), wherein "the works of published authors are treated as complete and exemplary, while even the final drafts of students are treated as 'in process' texts to be corrected" (Drew and Yost 28). The result of these linked problems, which lead from one into the other, is that students feel as if the purpose of writing is to make perfect, published *literature*, and begin feeling as if they'll never be able to attain such an idealistic status of writing. For instance, "author hero worship" commonly occurs in composition classes, causing students to feel as if publication is the quintessential moment (as if there was one) wherein a piece of writing is suddenly considered perfect. This causes students to feel as if they will never reach such a distinguished level of perfection, especially since composition typically offers no opportunity for publishing student work, at least in my experience—in the multiple composition courses I've taken, as well as the course curriculums for teaching composition courses that USU has provided me, none of them contained even the slightest mention of learning about publishing student work. In the creative writing

course, however, while exemplary authors are often lauded for their expertise, students examine the texts simply in terms of craft, encouraged to point out both strengths *and* weaknesses of the exemplary writing (Drew and Yost 28). While these problems exist in both the composition and creative writing classroom, regardless of whether there is a division between them, the division compounds the problem, because the subjects aren't sharing methods that together could alleviate this self-doubt (such as creative writing's approach to exemplary texts provided above).<sup>5</sup>

While Graff adds his own testimony to the problems that upholding the division transfers to students specifically, he also cites an alternative view of the resulting problems, stating the division additionally deprives *instructors* of “the possibility of helping each other, making our jobs harder and less pleasurable in the long run” (Graff 273). He further states his belief that even the college administrations suffer as a result of the division (Graff 272). Later in the article, he asserts that more inter-departmental communication would benefit students and instructors alike (more on this later). It's easy to see how instructors, and even potentially department administrative staff, as Graff claims, would be negatively affected by upholding the division: how could individual instructors possibly be willing or expected to share teaching methods or resources if they saw the other field as “worthless” or of no “practical” use? How could instructors from different subjects observe anything other than non-work-related pleasantries with one another, instead of interactions involving useful exchanges of teaching ideas, resources, or approaches? Ultimately, the answer to these questions is simple: they couldn't.

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<sup>5</sup> Specifics on this in the “Concluding Assessment” section.

Clearly, the list of problems caused by the division is a lengthy one, but understanding problems allows you to then find solutions.

### Concluding Assessment

While the resulting problems of the division are few but far-reaching, the potential benefits of integrating composition and creative writing are many and varied. The sources I examined for this literature review identify a number of ways that integrating composition and creative writing can benefit students. Perhaps the most important aspect of these benefits is recognizing how breaking down this division between composition and creative writing can potentially allow instructors to solve many of the significant problems created by the division.

The sources I examined for this project identify a number of specific ways that integrating composition and creative writing can benefit students, first and foremost by debunking Wendy Bishop's concept of the myth of "free creativity," wherein students perceive creative writing as fun and composition as boring. Friesinger echoes Bishop's claim with his own that students' views of composition are inherently negative when compared to creative writing, but goes on to state that both can be improved by integrating the subjects to avoid things that "turn students off from the outset" (Friesinger 283). Friesinger provides a second understanding of this improvement to students' image of composition: "If we can [integrate creative writing aspects into the composition classroom, students] may come to see that writing [of all kinds] *matters*" (Friesinger 284). In other words, integrating creative writing elements into the composition classroom can help students see the fun in composition *and* the practical use in creative writing.

Perhaps most importantly, integrating composition and creative writing can help students and instructors alike understand and appreciate the connections between these two subjects they're currently confused about. Friesinger puts it simply: "[By effectively using aspects of creative writing in the composition classroom] we will have opened up the possibility of a unified sensibility [for our students]" (Friesinger 287). Bishop echoes this sentiment, claiming that the distinctions between subject boundaries broke down when her student experienced a mixture of creative and composition techniques (Bishop 117). Bishop also claims that her particular method for integrating creative writing and composition (explained in the next section) helps boost student confidence in their own writing (Bishop 127), addressing the aforementioned problem of student confusion translating into self-doubt. Going back to Graff's point that even departmental administrations suffer from the division, he suggests that increased communication between inter-departmental fields would help that administration "become easier and more rewarding in the long run if the approach...changed from smothering or neutralizing faculty differences to harnessing those differences to create a campus intellectual community" (Graff 272). These teacher-scholars propose that everyone—students, instructors, even administrators—benefit from integration.

There are a number of benefits from integration that relate directly to the goals and aims of the composition classroom, itself. Bishop states that "Students are well prepared for future academic writing when they explore creativity, authorship, textuality, and so on, *together, all at once*" (Bishop 129). Marvin Bell provides an even more composition-related thought on this in his essay, "Poetry and Freshman Composition," stating, "the importance of particular concerns in the composition classroom are

reinforced when [a student] finds them similar to elements in so-called ‘creative’ writing” (Bell 5).<sup>6</sup> These are, perhaps, the most obvious of benefits from integration—clearly students would have stronger understandings of course concepts when they can identify and make connections between even somewhat differing subjects—but they are extremely significant and equally worthy of pursuit.

Finally, the craft benefits of integrating composition and creative writing are numerous. Marvin Bell advocates that integration causes students to understand the necessity for both good writing *and* the technique (Bell 5), the best of both worlds. In Chris Drew and David Yost’s 2009 article, “Composing Creativity: Further Crossing Composition/Creative Writing Boundaries,” they present a number of creative exercises that can be integrated into the composition classroom, listing the specific (mostly craft-related) benefits students can learn from each exercise.<sup>7</sup> Some of these benefits include: gaining greater appreciation for texts; understanding the effective use of word choice, vocabulary, and syntax; increased sensitivity to diction; learning how to do close-readings; understanding authorial choices for concepts like voice and tone; tailoring their writing to specific audiences; understanding differences between colloquial language and academic discourse; understanding genres; and the value of specificity (Drew and Yost 30-37). Needless to say, creative aspects clearly have a positive impact in the composition classroom.

While there are a vast array of approaches to bringing about the integration of creative writing into the composition classroom, the first question we must answer is *who*

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<sup>6</sup> Published in 1964 in CCC.

<sup>7</sup> Published in *The Journal of the Midwest Modern Language Association*.

can or should go about actually making the changes we want to see. There are a number of varying views on this topic. Hesse, for instance, says the change would likely come about through individual instructors, themselves, simply making the changes they want to see (Hesse 45). Graff, on the other hand, says the change is unlikely to come about “unless upper-administrators—deans and provosts—provide the encouragement and incentives to change” (Graff 278). Bishop proposes yet another way to think about who could bring about this integration, claiming that “teachers should be trained as writers,” citing the rationale for this as the idea that instructors can’t begin to teach writing without understanding *how* to write (Bishop 130). Finally, Hesse provides perhaps the most important suggestion for how to bring about the integration, claiming that the individual subjects of composition and creative writing, themselves, would have to change their current views of one another:

For creative writing, this might mean tempering outdated aspersions of composition as formulaic tyranny, considering a broader repertory of teaching strategies, and developing curiosity about additional ways of studying writers and writing. For composition, this might mean recuperating new interest in writerly activities and processes, including the levels of style and word choice, adapting an expanded persona of themselves as writers for readerships beyond other scholars, making curricular, or at least, conceptual room for writing that does not ‘respond’ to a rhetorical situation (Hesse 43).

Of all of the possible “first responders” (if I can refer to them as such), this last suggestion seems like the most logical, and realistic, group to start this process.

Individual instructors could begin this integration, but without a unified front of sorts (for

example, all composition teachers at a single university) the integration won't be as effective. Deans and Provosts, in addition, seem unlikely to suggest what they likely view as a somewhat "radical" change. But if the disciplines of composition and creative writing themselves (potentially exhibited in academic journals such as *CE* or *CCC*) changed their view(s) of each other, the influence could be a lot more far-reaching.

Whichever individual or individuals could potentially start the process of integration, there are then an equally vast array of approaches to *how* this integration would come about in the composition classroom. As with the *who*, each of the authors I've referenced have a different approach to *how* the integration could/should begin. From a fundamental or structural standpoint, Bishop asserts that we should (require and) teach creative writing in the first-year program, rationalizing this with her belief that "Understanding writing as a subject...aids the development of written products" (Bishop 129). Graff proposes similar structural changes, such as making courses "team-taught by members of the creative writing and regular literature faculties," as well as "pairing...courses, in which a common cohort of students would take the same two courses together, the way cohorts of first-year students at some campuses take a paired first-year writing course and a general-education course" (Graff 278). As mentioned previously, Bishop proposes instructors be trained as writers in a number of different genres for the benefit of understanding how to instruct their students in multiple genres of writing (Bishop 130). These suggested structural changes could provide the first stepping stone into more significant integration.

Some of the other authors I'm referencing propose other, more classroom-specific ways of integrating the subjects. Graff proposes adding authors of varied genres into the



composition course, claiming “The more one lists such [authors], the more *arbitrary* the division comes to seem between creative and other forms of writing” (Graff 278). Drew and Yost propose (and currently utilize) a series of creative writing exercises that blend aspects of each subject, such as creatively rewriting authorial texts or roleplaying themselves in a specific role, then write from that role’s perspective (Drew and Yost 30).<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Friesinger proposes continually “establish[ing] a workshop atmosphere,” which emphasizes the writing *process* more than the product (Friesinger 285). He further proposes letting students work on each “formal assignments...in an imaginative way,” which allows “form [to] come out of content rather than being preconceived” (Friesinger 286). All of these exercise and/or process-related changes effectively integrate aspects of creative writing into the composition classroom, providing the basis for the benefits of integration to begin.

As the purpose of this project was to learn about both sides of the argument(s) for the sake of helping me take a clearer stance, I now feel knowledgeable enough to say—considering all the problems the division causes, all the benefits of integration, and the numerous options for bringing that integration about—I advocate for integrating composition and creative writing. I feel it’s important to add, here, that when I say “integration,” I don’t mean the composition course has to forfeit any units or be cut in half to accommodate creative writing. The kind of integration I feel confident in supporting is using positive *elements* of creative writing to emphasize composition concepts. For instance, one of Drew and Yost’s creative writing exercises focuses on

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<sup>8</sup> Many of these exercises are currently used in the creative writing classroom, but haven’t yet made it (as far as I’ve found, thus far) into many composition classrooms.

teaching students how to use showing details, which they even go on to say they relate to providing specific examples in research essays (Drew and Yost 36). These small, but effective changes are the kinds of integration I see finding their way into my classroom—methods and approaches that connect ideas, rather than divide them.

In my short time (three semesters) teaching, I've already experienced dismally low student expectations, students directly stating how little they care about composition or how little effort they plan to put into the course (just enough to get a passing grade so they can move on and forget all about it), and the glazes that befall students' eyes the second I mention the word "analysis," "research," or even just "essay"—I even remember the feeling, myself. But I've also had the experience (echoed in both Drew and Yost's personal experiences) of sneaking in little pieces of creative writing, and seeing students' eyes light up, the wheels behind them turning, their interest kicking in (Drew and Yost 25). I personally believe that's the biggest loss of all: that by upholding the division, students and instructors alike are missing the opportunity of bringing the best aspects of composition—critical thinking and practicality—and creative writing—creativity and genuine interest—together.



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