

## "Beginner's Luck: Marginal Writers and American Oralities"

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*"Hey, Butt-head. Is he the Mack Daddy or the Daddy Mack?"*  
(Beavis screening another ossifying hip-hop megastar's video.)

*"Bridges thrown out to an unseen shore."*

- C. G. Jung

### I

#### *Hic jacet*

Incipient basic writing programs in the United States during the 'sixties, 'seventies, and early 1980s involved nuts-and-bolts, reductionist strategies, stressing primarily inclass sentence and paragraph workbook practice. Students rarely wrote full-fledged essays; the *Summum Bonum*, for instructors who despised their demotion, seemed to be "mastery of the paragraph" (Langan xii); "drill" on topic sentences, intratextual detail and support; and closure and transition the norm. What little inclass writing evolved was largely expressive, affective—description, narration, quasi-biographical/"personal"—, extending the emotive and psychic umbilical cord to the past, but providing few revisionist "bridges. . . to [that Jungian] unseen shore" in, and of, which they were soon to be caretakers and shareholders. Acknowledged as failures in a "remedial," later "developmental," regressive course (or, still later, involved in an entire "program"), the students were often patronized intellectually and left unmotivated and unchallenged, Ira Shor, Mike Rose, and Lynn Quitman Troyka inform us, seeing themselves not as apprentice writers but burdened by task. In turn, they viewed the process through a room darkly, in fragments, found writing not a "skill" but an enervating, soporific, by-the-numbers bore.

The paradigmatic writing process itself has changed little over the course of three decades, become "essentialized, monolithic," Paul Heilker

argues. His examination of over thirty "recent" college composition texts reveals that most still buttress and replicate the HarBrace-McCrimmon-Borzoi, *et alia*, thesis statement/support/conclusion triad as the signature effective or permissible composing rationale. The Aristotelian thesis, then, and its sometimes foolishly consistent synthetic logic, assumes almost "‘talismanic properties,’" a "‘father tongue,’" Tompkins adds parenthetically, that legitimizes but one type of formal writing, thereby restricting students' thinking, marginalizing them further as individuals, and closing them off from "‘different kinds of writing . . . in different ways’" (qtd in Heilker 52). Students learn to "plug into the [main idea/detail/summary] formula, to support a predetermined conclusion. . . [and] inquiry stops. . . . They've [students] got all they came for," Heilker concludes ironically, "and all they need to succeed" (57).

Spearheaded by Mina Shaughnessy's codification of fresh thinking about nascent writers in *Errors and Expectations*, late 1980s' and 1990s' basic writing specialists and scholars challenged the assumptions, premises and practices upon which now culturally enriched and diverse classes and programs were grounded. Both nominal (in nomenclature) and substantive (in matter and manner) changes appeared: Bonehead/Remedial/Developmental English became Basic or Pre-College Writing; rhetorics replaced workbooks and drill; writing was demystified, approached "all-at once," holistically, progressively; recalcitrant students were encouraged to envision themselves as novice writers serving an artisan-like apprenticeship and invested with the very same strategies as their supposed "bettters" in intermediate and advanced composition classes. To borrow from E. D. Hirsch, Jr., "the vocabulary of a pluralistic nation" broadened to include "cultures *other than our own*" (*Cultural Literacy* 104, 107; emphasis added). Literacy replaced Ciceronian rhetoric. Even if he does not countenance all of the changes, the prescient Hirsch concedes that "Literacy is the rhetoric of our day, the basis of public discourse in a modern republic" (109).

Both Troyka and Andrea Lunsford detailed this fusion of classical rhetoric and basic writing earlier, and perhaps more comprehensively, than Hirsch articulated in his popular 1987 book. Similarly, the "onlie begetter" of the second wave of British language philosophers (The School of Ordinary Language), Gilbert Ryle, understood earlier in *The Concept of Mind* that cognitive "Mistakes are exercises of competence" (60) than Shaughnessy who

asserted that "students already 'know' the wanted [syntactic] forms but cannot produce them until they are encouraged to behave as writers [discovering] themselves as individuals with ideas, points of view, and memories that are worth writing about" (73). David Bartholomae, and others, like Lunsford, implement those seals of *imprimatur*, those bridges between rhetoric and process and basic writing, in the innovative workshopping classroom, insisting on "writing offered as writing—not as sentence practice or paragraph practice—" (85), speaking as equals with, not *at*, fellow-students, employing the *patois* of professionals involved in the same secret process of eliciting something from *Bonehead to Basic* nothing, or from very little—the language of discourse, "voice," "writer," "audience," "approach," "world-view [quality of abstracting]" (Bartholomae 86). Iterates Lunsford, "basic writers should begin composing whole paragraphs *and essays*, practicing the *entire process of writing*, from the very onset of the course" (44; emphasis added).

It is not surprising, then, that *fin de siècle* basic writing instructors employ multifaceted rhetorics, many opting for the great ideas orientation, like Jacobus' *A World of Ideas*, that merges past with present, prevailing culture with peripheral—and unheard—ones: Jefferson on the Articles of the *Declaration of Independence*, pugnacious Richard Wright on being black "boy," feisty Frederic Douglass on *his* culture's July 4<sup>th</sup>, Machiavelli on opportunism and power, Lao-tzu, N. Scott Momaday and Joy Harjo on Asian *ch'i* and Native-American reverence for earth and all things sentient, Thoreau on incivility and conscience, Gandhi on self-abnegation, Caesar Chavez on itinerant migrant day laborers, Wollstonecraft on woman's rights, Marx and Keynes on capital's and management's excesses and rewards, Simone Weil on the "sacred" obligation of bosses to labor, essentialists Plato and Aquinas, radical existentialists Nietzsche and Mary Daly, Freud, Jung, Karen Horney, and June Singer traversing the "boundaries of the soul," and so on. Other voices awaken, embolden, and revitalize melting and boiling pot culture, provide journeymen- and- women writers, heretofore inured to a traditional canon, with a panoply of past and millennial divergent, but always fervent, views.

Concomitantly, the logistics of basic writing has altered significantly, from silent inclass workbook diligence, and stand-and-deliver recitations, to proactive, engaging peer grouping, editing, critiquing, valuing, increased individual and small group communal responsibility for work ethics and

processes, intensive insiders' involvement with writing process arcana—from conception to act, prewriting/thinking to product—so as to mold reluctant writers into competent ones, competent writers into fluent ones. This writing-intensive, “writer-based”, “student-centered” scheme presumes little or no personal prose; rather, the thrust is on developing and honing creative and critical reading, thinking and writing skills and techniques through extended expository and persuasive “professional writing” (largely business and technically-oriented) that engage Theodore Sizer's “whole student,” not just a syntagmatic part of him or her.

Academically, the writing process mirrors, and marries to their careers, the kinds of tasks—inventing, choosing, developing, organizing, revising—students will confront in a transitional paperless-and-cyber spatial service society, whether they become writers or not. “The student cannot escape rhetoric,” Corbett asserts in *Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student* (1971), “no matter what his vocation in life is. Every day of his life, he either uses rhetoric or is exposed to it” (40). With these exacting demands on their imaginations and intelligences, not to mention their time, beginning writers are expected to negotiate stiffer standards, climb higher plateaus—Been There! Done That! Do the Dew! Just Do It!—, rather than have the new classroom coordinator/facilitator “come down to their level.” The traditional writing-room, in short, had gone suddenly postal.

The neoclassicist Hirsch understands this recent fact of educational life, even if he does not approve of, or support, these kinetic programs for a very changed, and changing, American populace. Prevailing culture is imbued with and reinvigorated by fresh thinking, contemporaneous voices of emerging cultures that speak in, and of, our time, that recreate the world of-a-piece. They prevent culture from constricting, stagnating, ossifying. The Whole Writing vision stimulates reading, which, in turn, is intended to stimulate more incisive, penetrating thinking about substantive issues. In the best of all possible worlds, these “basics” ultimately translate into more engaging, and solidly crafted, student essays, even at the foundation level. The student surveys a variety of composing techniques and strategies, assimilates sometimes conflicting and discordant voices and points-or-view, learns to appreciate—like antique autos—the precision of intricate thought and logic, fine lines wrought by artisans largely no different than himself in their modes of activity.

This Return to Rhetoric may prove another failed panacea in the evolution, and reinvention, of a thirty-year ongoing program that has baffled the best and brightest practitioners to elicit the best and brightest from their most challenging (and often challenged) students who, given the right circumstances, like UCLA's Mike Rose or Chicago's Richard Wright, became/can become linguistic contenders. These students surely will never succeed as writers by an hierarchical taxonomy of simply reading, say, William Bennett's *Book of Virtues*, Allan Bloom's *Closing of the American Mind*, Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy* (though they are a significant and enlightening start and as much recommended as Richard Rovere's anatomies of the histories of the H- and A- Bombs), but rather by both "knowing *how* and knowing *that*" (Ryle 59; emphasis added)— by doing and knowing. Until they emerge, like Plato's once myopic prisoner, from their inner *émigré* cave, acquiring insight, liberating themselves from stereotypic cultural and classroom constraints, they may yet learn to translate experience, abstraction, even contradiction—the *vita activa* and *vita contemplativa*—into a fitting "fine frenzy."

## II

### The Verve: Stand and Deliver

"One of the most notable differences between experienced and inexperienced writers," concludes Mina Shaughnessy in her penultimate chapter, *Beyond the Sentence*, "is the rate at which they reach closure upon a point. The experienced writer characteristically reveals a much greater tolerance for what Dewey called 'an attitude of suspended conclusion'" (qtd in *Errors* 227). The author of the "raw" student sample under advisement, both she and the *philosophe* of American liberal pedagogy might concur, "already know[s] the wanted forms, but cannot produce them, nor anything resembling [his] own 'voice'. . . until [she is] encouraged to behave as [a] writer. . ." (*Errors* 73).

Paulo Freire, echoing early Noam Chomsky, sustains this elliptical, existential logic, arguing that the "deep structure" of cognition is "more than mere vocabulary— it is word-and-action" (163). Learners, he admonishes both tutor and tyro, "must assume from the beginning the role of creative subjects" (163). This "failure of rhetorical imagining to imagine themselves as writers writing" (90), Bartholomae reasons of beginners, certainly accounts

for his own teacherly reluctance to impose sentence-skill, usage, and mechanical conventions' "encoding" or "decoding" criteria on himself, or perhaps even on the subject matter the student sample under review did, in fact, confront, albeit marginally, in four unindented linguistic hiccups.

Thomas J. Farrell and Walter Ong, via Harry Berger, Jr. (and perhaps Romantic Freudians and neoclassicists, Bloom and Hirsch), on the other hand, argue that such a student has not fully developed or negotiated the abstract faculty (has failed to explore his interiority) because he publicly speaks the one-page text (an "outering" or typical polemicizing indigenous to "oral cultures" [Farrell 447, 448]), and does not privately reflect and create "by excluding, focus[ing], shap[ing], form[ing], concentrat[ing]" (Berger, qtd in Farrell 451). The writer never transcends what Ong calls "secondary orality" (3), the electronic, increasingly public, *kulchur* that subsumes individuation, that resists Freirean "reflection and action," that obfuscates public and private proxemics, and rhetoric.

In a succinct *précise*, the unresolved student document under scrutiny, while clearly flawed by global rhetorical and internecine sentence-level "error" (or is it our presumed "expectation" of error?), ranging from ill-conceived and sometimes raw, undernourished, and "uncooked" paragraphs, paucity of detail, specificity and example, foreshortened conclusion, to misspellings, malapropisms, convoluted diction, omissions, repetitions and redundancies, *is not* uninformed, *is not* unfocused, *is not* unshaped, *is essentially not* unlearned; in its radical urgency, it is not without verve, not without "aptitude." The formal shell of a perfectly cogent and organized argument is evident in every brief paragraph, including the one-sentence "thesis" in which the very discernible voice takes a position, the unsupported (but presumably accurate) assertions in paragraph two links to that main idea, the somnolent awakening of detail in three ("TELEVISION," "CNN"), and the extension and deepening of that detail fusing three comparative sub-points about a Shakespearian play (God love him!) in what the basic writer assumes is a summation and clarification of fact.

Many of these inconsistencies and "problems" can be eradicated through constant rewriting (not just "sentence practice or paragraph practice—") and more intensive and diverse reading, collaborative peer and professor evaluation and editing, "encourag[ing] the] student to trust [his or her] own 'sense' of [rhetorical/syntactical] correctness" (Bartholomae 98).

They might also be ameliorated through individual, pair, and communal conferencing, query, and inquiry (even in distance-learning venues), opening him to a more global, more referential "world view" so that he might "produc[e] meaningful generalizations" in other, more thoughtful paragraphs, composed in other, more challenging, writing-rooms. Moreover, the composition under review ought to be examined in relation to the larger context of writing—its mode, audience and rhetorical purpose, focus and organization, embedded and/or evolving meaning, conventions consistent with the writer's community, and so forth—and only afterward more intensively with surface issues. The fundamental premise of any writing, Mikhail Bahktin postulates in the posthumous *Dialogic Imagination*, is that language transforms, is fluid and progressive, "generative and open," not static, bound by the onerous strictures Derrida deems disciplines "of grammatology" (qtd in Adams 843).

The student under scrutiny knows more about writing and the composing process than he suspects. This student (and others like him) not only needs to "behave" as a writer by harnessing and disciplining his thinking and by cultivating the reading habit, but must first be taught by example, by practice, by a shared writerly openness, to behave as a writer. Once he and his instructor/evaluator/facilitator/mentor or composing peer conclude what Shaughnessy, through Dewey, already has about inexpert, unseasoned writers, he may "learn, "like Saint Francis, through Galway Kinnell's old and fertile sow, "to reteach [a] thing/Its loveliness" ("St. Francis and the Sow"), instinctively intuit, as Carlos Williams does of red wheelbarrows, that, at his close, "so much depends" on fulfilling one's expectations as to how one begins. "To learn something," Zen master Shunryu Suzuki reminds novitiates in his commentary on "Attachment, Non-Attachment," "is not to acquire something which you did not know before. You know something before you learn it" (120). Or, in Heidegger's pre-mystical *Being and Time* prose koan: "Every inquiry is a seeking. Every seeking gets guided beforehand by what is sought" (24).

### III

#### **Talking Heads/Metal Heads/Tech Heads: Comity**

The influence of public orality on post modern culture is both pervasive and systemic, a collective (and pop) technocratic need to refuel our bankrupt

interiority, mortality and "creatureliness" (of which Ernest Becker wrote so eloquently in *The Denial of Death*, three-plus decades ago), our very "thrownness-into-the-world," our rote responses to life and living (and to pursuing ineffable transcendentals— Good, Beauty, Truth, Justice, The One), our "everydayness" (Heidegger calls it an ontological "disconnexion" from "things" and concomitant lust to possess them and so fill up the Void left when Nietzsche reluctantly proclaimed God was dead), subsuming interiority ("the landscape of vision," Richard Howard extols, in another context), and all that chthonic living entails— the private, reflective and meditative (some might say, medieval) arts, a sense of self, vision, voice, philosophical disquisition, civic, ethical, moral, and social decision-making, independent responsibility and interdependent communal sharing.

Few basic writers, of course, have a philosophic sense of this essentialist canon, but neocom and traditional scholars do, post-Fugitives taking their stand in the wake of ex-New Lit Critics in prosaic radio Rush Rooms and Hannity Halls. These pre- and- anti-Whole Language linguists and *litterateurs*, among a cadre of influential on- and off-mike media spin doctors, have as much polemicized and politicized a phenomenon of culture, of technology, of social philosophy as have erstwhile scientific materialists of "historical inevitability" and "historical necessity." Old and New Right Rhetoric, weaned preeminently on Cold War epistemics and polarities, recognizes that classical hegemonic rhetoric and western learning, what F. R. Leavis deemed "The Great Tradition" in High-Modernist fiction from Jane Austen onward, has been effaced by the New Literacy or, perhaps, more appropriately to some, Illiteracy.

Unlike cultural anthropologists and ethnologists, Ong and Farrell, on the other hand, are less concerned with primary orality, that primordial collective cultural reservoir of psychic residue in the process of being, like Huck Finn, consumerized and "sivilized," than with the "new orality, electronic orality, literate orality, or secondary orality," even "residual orality" (possessed by those whose "oral habits of thought and expression," Farrell adds, "still permeate their [primal] thinking" [446]). Although the litany is not exhaustive, these might include the millennium, retro-'70s/'80s hip intellectual slumming and *kulchur-al* voyeurism of being "into" terrestrial, and would-be cyberspatial, schock/schlock radio-jocks aping Howard Stern, over-the-top "reality tv" like *The Apprentice*, *Fear Factor*, *Survivor*, glam-teen and "boomer" escapism (*Lost*, *Desperate Housewives*) hyped as The Next New

(Cool) Thing, the effusive commonplace obscenities of a totally buzzed Ozzie, Sharon, and obnoxious Osbourne clan, Anna Nicole's lame lifestyle (the banality of litigious success?), *E!* neers-do-well posturing while house sitting, *Nick-at-Nite* reruns of any fifties, sixties', or seventies nostalgic "family" sitcom out-of-touch then- (and-certainly-now) with the realities of the marketplace, schoolplace, and workplace, "dumped" on cable to "emerging" nations, along with Gut-Buster®, *Marlboros*, and *Johnnie Walker Red and Black Label* advertising. For example, reporter Cathy Baron, for whom the tube was *de rigueur* during her formative years, confesses blithely that a high school English teacher "was very impressed when I used the words 'adversarial relationship' in a composition. I explained I had learnt the term watching Adam West on Batman [sic]." *The Surreal Life* indeed.

In both cases, orality-based, post-baby-boomers and 'tweener, those whose English is a secondary or tertiary tongue, marginalized minorities, metalheads, dropouts and dopeheads, Gen-Exers, airheads and skinheads, tapeheads and techies, Goths and Hoodies, aureal and visual talkshow addicts, bloggers, I-Pod-ers, peripatetic text-messagers, and even some ex-Bronx Bomber fanatics reared on postgame (Ol' Casey) Stengelese cablese, and for whom *lingua franca textus receptus* is no longer the requisite business or academic tool for *entreeé* into a very narrow and specialized world, do not measure up in reading and writing, critical and creative, skills with their traditional and newly naturalized Asian, Eastern and Western European, sub-Continent and Middle Eastern immigrant counterparts who understand the *Realpolitik* of language and its multivarious equations with personal and professional success. Inarticulate, unable to abstract or cogitate, to forge coherent argument, let alone chiseled sentences and paragraphs, occasionally mesmerized by monitors and tapped into arcane BBS and esoteric chatlines continents removed, they often lack ways of ordering and controlling "self, others, and the surrounding world" (Farrell 444). They relate to others less formally (*Yo!*), more publicly and problematically (in-your-face, say, with *fashionistas'* Moto Pink Razr V3s), and certainly unsymbolically by gainsaying an interior life that measures, reflects, sorts out and recreates life anew artistically, culturally, economically, emotionally, politically, psychologically, socially. Logos is now *topoi*, even cliché: "I feel your pain," mimics the iconoclastic, Attention-Deficit-Disorder(ly)-challenged MTV cartoon icon, Butt-head, of ex-President Clinton, whom he once met by comic happenstance in the high school gym. "Yeah," grunts his lesser-half, the witless Beavis, "I feel your pain, too, Butt-munch. In my 'nads. That sucks.";

adspeak (where lyric-attaches-to-thing, *any thing*, so long as its salable, Ford Rangers [Like a Rock], Coors Lite [Rocky Mountain High], any nostalgic Irving Berlin, Frank Sinatra or Beatles' tune turned-to-Xmas-cheer by global "communications" marketing "strategists" promoting yet another innovative nano-telephonic messaging "system" we probably don't need ["I'll be seeing you in all the old, familiar places. . ."]); cloyingly programmed, sound-byte video-sententiae ("Make my day!", "Hasta la vista, baa-aa-by!", "What we got here is a failure to communicate," "I love the smell of napalm in the morning!", "Plastics!", "The Truth is Out There"), *imago* and language once special to self now co-opted, pitched to conglomerate Coke or Pepsi or whomever— more increasingly, like James Wright's used car dealers in *The Minneapolis Poem*, to hasten our psychic death. The medium, not the message (*it has become the message*), even thinking perversely distancing and desensitizing us from others ourselves, all the while beguiling us to just reach out and touch someone. "Image," after all, a beatific Andre Agassi once reminded us in realtime and on hyperlinked Tru-Color images, "is everything." "True interiority," Walter Ong amends, "makes it possible to address others: only insofar as a person has interior resources" (*Presence* 124).

The expected, gamey, street and video voice that proliferated late-1980s and pre-millennial basic writing classrooms reflected a radically changing rhetorical culture desperately seeking solace in a more public "barbaric yawk" less reliant on silent reading and writing than heretofore. Like Bartholomae, Shaughnessy, Troyka, and other linguistic de- and- reconstructionists, Farrell concedes that, pedagogically, "fluency or *copia* should precede other concerns" such as "mechanics and grammar" (454). These new academic clients' collective failure to address an anonymous, private audience, assume a persona or voice, engage in systematic and exacting thinking, confront subtle, ambiguous, or contradictory positions or issues, results in foreshortened dialectic and *préemptory* conclusions, what Farrell elsewhere designates ""preselected and packaged" thinking (qtd in Heilker 58).

MacSpeak translates into MacWrite and MacThink, rhetorical norms rather than aberrant deviations for many basic and intermediate writers, the lingo now never replete with classical myth or allusion, but with contemporaneity's convenient and comfy "give-me-a-hug" cant or edgy rant—"Now go out and face the day!" chirps "Dr." Laura before each commercial station break. That dialogic, and gangsta rap verbal signifiers, often mirrors

the teflon lexicon of high-school and higher education Education professionals (via Oprah, Dr. Phil, Springer, *et alia*) transmitted, as by osmosis, to their student bodies ("She's always there for me," "I give myself permission to eat/smoke drink/carouse ...," "What I'm hearing is from you is," "She's/He's all that," "Be all that you can be," "I be tellin' you," "Words mean things," "As iii-ff!", "I hear you," "What we're talking here is low self-esteem," "You know what I'm saying," "That's *inappropriate* behavior," "Keepin' it real," "X-treemme," "Duh," *ad nauseam*), online *USA Today* and CNN flash opinion polls and page one news e-z sidebars, "live" "anchor-personalities'" infotainment dish on *Hollywood Insider*, Ricki Lake, Joan Rivers *et fille* on the red carpet, whom- or- whatever, as young and old insulate and isolate themselves day and night surfing 360, soon to be 500, cable and satellite channels that clone "The Golden Age of TV" (apostrophized by Houyhnhnm Mr. Ed and Jethro Clampett) by the nanosecond. (Ironically, the very early audio- and- visual chip-technology the late Meg Greenfield gushed about in a *Newsweek* editorial nearly thirty years ago as cementing us globally, divides countrymen- and -women, "packages" and "markets" thinking, compromises creativity, rigidifies, ossifies, writing.) Residual and secondary orality, based on what Ong rightly calls a "media-conscious world," is with us, as they say, for the long haul. And so, too, are the educative gang wars of our multicultural, pluralistic cultures. Since there is no Luddite-like turning back technology, no reclaiming the nostalgic Western European Golden and Silver Age cultures even Don Quixote yearned for as Thoreauvian "Realometer[s]" for devaluing present-day pluralism and multicultural diversity. The sooner writing discourse professionals accept this salient fact of life the better in order to better understand, and teach, "the basics" in entirely innovative and challenging ways— even while instantiating their "terminal" commentaries on assignments. Those basics need not necessarily translate into an attenuated Three Rs regimen. What quirky Marshall McLuhan predicted in the 1960s is, and has been for some time, upon us pellmell: The fourth cultural revolution (after fire, the wheel, and print) of cyberspace, preceded by Guttenberg's printed word and almost immediate vernacular translations of the bible.

Print seemingly has atrophied, exhausted itself. At least, intellectual or "highbrow" print. Even sections of *The New York Times* once explored an uneasy commitment to color; it has since developed an in-depth sports journal "for serious fans." There is almost too much writing, much of it as breathtakingly banal as many of our blogged and "Soaphra-ish" lives have

become. Increasingly, print cannot hope to compete for the hearts and minds and imaginations and viscera of the young in a sexier, electronic virtual reality explosion that parallels Captain Kirk's and Spock's Summer of Love *Star Trek* transmigration into an earth-cloned San Francisco zone. *Pistis* (Opinion, ephemeral Cant), Socrates reminds wealthy young Athenian charges in the *Dialogues*, subverts *Gnosis* (Knowledge, essential Enlightenment) because humankind has uniformly preferred its gossip to gospel. That is never a reason, however, not to confront ideality, move on, as the African-American spiritual has it, to higher ground.

Once technology loses its novelty, its street-cred, so to speak, once writers at all levels of proficiency sense its larger implications for human development, endeavor and substantive creative/critical applications, once its orality (for surely that is but a code for what is fresh, and fast, maybe too fast for some so afraid of its implications the young so assiduously, and instantaneously, crave) has become acceptable to the straitlaced Academy and its attendant straitjacketed Learned Journal consorts (as writing today is evaluated far differently than it was ten or fifteen years ago), students and educators can challenge the traditional writing-room, learning, and teaching the basic composing arts and critical thinking skills by a cooperative give-and-take in flexible, progressive workplaces. Proactive students conditioned to, and by, the new pop-orality in a hyperkinetic "Communications Age," yet aware of the rhetorical facts of life in order to succeed in an ever-diminishing skills-based, service-oriented marketplace, will "do whatever it takes" (in soundbytespeak) to "remediate" whatever skills' problems need remedying and stride into the Millennium's second decade one communicative leg up on its slacker-half still heeled to its Doc Martin's prole boots, flooring gas-guzzling, supersized, widebody SUVs through cities clotted with a fresh, undereducated, underclass.

That significant and pervasive undereducated "other half" of haves-not is yet another unnecessary fact of postmodernity. The playing field for writing was razed because myths and traditions once held in common no longer sustain a change, transglobal America. Or transglobal anywhere. Kids in Beijing, China and T'ai-nan, T'ai-wan sport Nike®-logoed Anything, flash what were once counterculture gang hand-signs since co-opted by cable TV news, "tag" street underpasses and street-walls with iconic graffiti, work on between-the-leg and spin-dribbles like NBA pros, talk trash, talk American: "Say, bro'. What up? Y'all cool?" Who says shortcuts to speech, what Jean

D'Souza calls “languages of common interaction,” to private *and* public discourse, to the composing and encoding and decoding processes, are invalid for a new age? Mostly traditionalists, “Old School” (once receptive to change), trying to conserve or retrieve an entire past who must invite, welcome, even encourage, reinventive thinking about language, and the teaching of it, if language is to remain vigorous and in touch with its world, and not become dead, noted, and buried. Standard English of the old millennium evolved gradually into the “standard” rather than emanating *super spottum, sui generis*, from the head of Zeus, or Dr. Johnson’s *Dictionary*.

“Whose influence?” Edwin Thumboo inquired rhetorically in his plenary talk on “Cross-Cultural Creativity in English” at an International Conference on World Englishes. Each reader de- or- revalues subjectively any text, from a menu to metaphysics, not from an absolutist culture but from a panoply of variables— acculturation, age, education, environment, gender and sexual orientation, political and social leanings, and the like. Like language, humankind, too, is shaped by integral and by transient, even trivial, forces of a vibrant and an increasingly popular culture always in flux. “One must get to know the [elusive, ephemeral] values,” the ebullient, sometime gunrunner, connoisseur of fine wines, and probably self-titled “Count” Mippipopolous tells the emasculated Jake Barnes in Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) during America’s other transitional, “lost generation” period about which we now speak so wistfully, romantically, almost reverentially. So, too, Hemingay *redux*, in this age, “in our time.” The lesions between what classicists demand and what evolving culture bespeaks can only be sutured by “a pedagogy of reconciliation,” a “peaceful coexistence of daily speech and standard form” (Shor 155, 191). “Yeah,” even the clueless and (alas!) since deposed from My MTV®, Beavis might opine as an apt coda to any discourse of AC/DC or Metallica, Barthelmean *blague*, flummery, or Bonehead-Become-Basic, “Now that really rules!”

#### Basic Writing Student Essay: **Insert—Section II**

##### **Learning about Coledge**

The Best thing about Coledge is learning things about world me and my frens. Like about the World and all the intresting scret stuff evry Day.

For Example I read just yesterday on class on sociology about how where going through another IceAge inspite of Global warning that's info. You can use anytime in Life. Whats more, the CNN that one at lunch in Jones Dining hall tells me he knows nearly every halfhour. Not like the star on the Television whos only one in the am because she gets up at 4 only 5 day week, but she still speaks good Head-lines about Life. That can be Deep things, Too.

Even English class tells me stuff I want to now like for instance, were into Hamlet right now and hes the kind of young guy whos mixed up because his single parent Mom and cant make up his mind about anything-to Be or Not to Be that is the Question, killing or raggin on his frens, even his Girlfren. He dumps on. "Get Yourself lost in a Nuttery he says to he." And she then drops dead. Hes like we thought when I have hard times making up my mind about me and my frens so I learn from this Prince of aMan, Hamlet, psychologicoly.

Coledge is a greet learning when I can learn More as soon as I gradiate.

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**N. B.:** First-language American male learner paper from the millennial cusp in what was then still called "Developmental English," and which the class collectively shortened to "Devo"— as in "We Are Devo."

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