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IMAGINARY SUBJECTS:  
FICTION-WRITING INSTRUCTION IN AMERICA, 1826 – 1897

by

PAUL S. COLLINS

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

2016

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in English to satisfy the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

IMAGINARY SUBJECTS:  
FICTION-WRITING INSTRUCTION IN AMERICA, 1826 – 1897

by

Paul S. Collins

Adviser: Ira Shor

*Imaginary Subjects: Fiction Writing Instruction in America, 1826-1897* is a study of the confluence of commercial, educational, and aesthetic developments behind the rise of instruction in fiction-writing. Part I ("The Predicament of Fiction-Writing") traces fiction-writing instruction from its absence in Enlightenment-era rhetoric textbooks to its modest beginnings in magazine essays by Poe and Marryat, and in mid-century advice literature. Part II ("Fiction-Writing in the Classroom") notes the rise of fiction exercise from early Romantic-era primers upwards into mid-century high-school level textbooks, and from there into Harvard composition exercises; this coincided with an increasing emphasis by author advocacy groups on writing as a learnable craft, culminating in full-fledged professionally-oriented instruction at the University of Chicago in the 1890s. Part III ("The Literary Advice Industry") traces the late nineteenth-century development of advice bureaus, "School of Fiction" magazine departments, and how-to periodical and guidebook literature. Their emphasis on teaching women, who were still largely unable to access higher education, remains an insufficiently studied influence on the later Creative Writing movement. An epilogue suggests further directions for research and notes how Creative Writing instruction, particularly at the graduate level, has since drifted far from its origins in both professional how-to advice and in experiential education.

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I'd like express my deep gratitude to my advisor, Ira Shor. I took up this dissertation after many years away, and with an entirely new subject matter—and that could not have happened without his patience and generosity. His guidance, both in my early years in the classroom and now in this study, have been essential to my development as a student and as a teacher.

I'd also like to particularly thank my committee members, David Reynolds and Talia Schaffer. Their feedback on this work guided it into a more carefully planned and focused study, and opened new avenues of study in a number of its chapters.

I'm indebted to the many scholars who have pursued these excavations before me, particularly D.G. Myers, Katherine Adams, and Mark McGurl. A special thanks as well to Edwin Battistella for his assistance in my inquiries about Sherwin Cody.

Finally, my profound thanks to my wife Jennifer Elder, who met me before I had published a single article or book, when I was temping as a receptionist and cramming the reading of journal articles into my coffee breaks. Her love and support has made all of this possible.

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## Introduction

### i. Scholarship on Fiction-Writing Instruction

Of all the degree-granting disciplines in an English department, Creative Writing may be the most peculiarly ahistorical. Like many of my colleagues, I experienced it as both a student and a professor with little sense of my field's origins, beyond a vague notion that Iowa's program apparently came first, that Bread Loaf has been around for a while, and that Black Mountain College was a colorful early experiment. Beyond that, the origins of creative writing instruction—let alone the debates that have surrounded it from the start—simply seemed to vanish in the mist.

This arises in part because the field's own practitioners are encouraged to publish creative writing rather than scholarly studies. For many years, what little scholarship that existed on Creative Writing's origins came by way of broader historical excavations in English and composition-rhetoric studies, pioneered by such scholars as Richard Ohmann (1976) and Gerald Graff (1987), as well as studies in composition-rhetoric history by James Berlin (1984, 1987), Anne Ruggles Gere (1987), Albert Kitzhaber (1990), Katherine Adams (1993, 2001), James Murphy (2001), and David Gold (2008). The mentions of Creative Writing in these works are relatively brief, though, or at most (as in Adams) limited to the focus of a single chapter. That Adams' chapter in *A History of Professional Writing Instruction in American Colleges* was indeed a crucial early effort at chronicling Creative Writing, even coming as late as 1993, indicates just how relatively undeveloped the field long remained—a particularly unfortunate situation given that, with the discipline's early openness to women also well established by Adams, it also represents a promising area of women's history.

Over time, two published studies did inaugurate a specific focus on the early academic history of Creative Writing. The field's origins are covered from an institutional perspective by D.G. Myers in *The Elephants Teach: Creative Writing Since 1880* (1996), who notes the late nineteenth-century movement in universities away from literary philology and into early twentieth-century progressive experiential learning. Myers's book remains the sole published monograph on the field's early development, but it barely covers the economic factors involved in its growth, bypasses the influence of British writing instruction, and only glancingly mentions how-to and mail-order instruction. These are predecessors which avowedly literary university workshops distanced themselves from, despite often quietly adopting their craft exercises and editorial maxims, and even as the two came to find notable overlaps in extension courses and textbook authorship.

The second published volume, Mark McGurl's more recent study *The Program Era: Postwar Fiction and the Rise of Creative Writing* (2009), has a titular postwar emphasis, and is generally more concerned with Creative Writing's effect on literature itself than on the development of the academic discipline. Nonetheless, its perspective on the modern history of the field opened one of the first public conversations of the idea that Creative Writing does indeed *have* a history, and a purpose that bears examining.

And it is indeed beginning to be examined by others. Another student, Mary Stewart Atwell of George Washington University, completed her dissertation *The Craft of Fiction: Teaching Technique 1850-1930* in 2013, while I was in the midst of working on my own. Her focus is more on the extracurricular discourse of British critics and writers, and though we overlap slightly in our discussions of aesthetics—particularly regarding George Bainton, Walter

Besant, Edward Bulwer-Lytton, George Gissing, and George Lewes—our studies are largely complementary, and a hopeful sign that the field is developing as an area of academic history.

## **ii. The Focus of This Study**

So how might one approach that history anew? My study seeks to build upon these previous works while particularly examining those aspects of the field that have remained outside of their scope. But in outlining my own study, it is helpful to first describe its own boundaries: in particular, the development in 19th-century America of self-identified instruction in fiction-writing, both in academia and through mass-marketed commercial guides and services.

This is only one facet of the history of Creative Writing—which has, as a modern discipline, come to encompass the triad of fiction, poetry, and nonfiction, with occasional forays into multimedia and theatre. My study focuses on fiction, however, because of the three, fiction alone was forced to invent itself as a category of instruction. Poetry has a long tradition of instruction in schools and colleges, particularly through the study of the classics, religious texts, and exercises in translation; the modern category of nonfiction can trace its more belletristic elements to oratorical training, including the development of sermons and essays. But formal, deliberate training in fiction arrived *sui generis*; it had no direct educational precedent or tradition to draw upon. Lacking these, fiction-writing instruction had to articulate its premises, its methods, and its goals—and defend even the contention that such instruction was tenable in the first place.

Similarly, while fiction writing was (and still is) often cultivated through a multitude of extracurricular means—through criticism, writing groups, and informal mentorships—my focus in this study is on self-identified, formal instruction in fiction-writing, whether inside or outside

educational institutions. These materials needed to specifically explain their premise, and (in commercial publications) to literally sell their readership on the idea.

So while fiction is only one part of Creative Writing, and self-identified how-to and curricular materials are only one part of learning fiction-writing, they are the most readily visible and articulated part. To understand its rise is to begin to understand the development of Creative Writing as both an academic discipline and as a commercial enterprise.

Though the geographical locus of my study of fiction-writing instruction is the United States, it is also necessarily – and in some chapters even primarily – the story of fiction-writing instruction in Great Britain as well. The lingering influence of Britain on American culture persisted throughout the nineteenth century in fiction instruction, not least because of rampant American pirating of books and articles. By the mid- nineteenth century, with the rise of distinctly American models of public school and land-grant university systems, though, the relation of American textbooks to British textbooks became much less pronounced. The passage of the International Copyright Act of 1891 saw the two country's paths diverge altogether; since the twentieth century, the two countries have had their own distinct cultures of fiction-writing textbooks, magazines, and classes. The final author profiled in this study, Sherwin Cody, may be among the last figures to bridge fiction instruction in the US and Britain—and even that was with limited success, and by virtue of Cody moving from New York to London and making sustained efforts to get his work published.

It is at this point that my study concludes—with, at the end of the nineteenth century, the crucial establishment of fiction-writing periodicals, textbooks, how-to manuals, college classes, summer institutes, and even the nomenclature of "Creative Writing" itself. There is, of course, much more to the early academic story of fiction-writing, particularly in its establishment into

degree-granting Creative Writing programs over the first three decades of the twentieth century. Much of that era's development is already well covered by Myers, but my epilogue also outlines the additional directions my research will continue to explore in a future volume.

### **iii. The Organization of This Study**

This study is broadly divided into three parts: the background of fiction-writing instruction in America, the development of fiction-writing in nineteenth-century classrooms, and the rise of commercial fiction-writing advice and instruction.

Part I ("The Predicament of Fiction-Writing") begins with the initial general absence of fiction-writing instruction in the first half of the nineteenth century from schools and how-to literature alike. The earliest era of distinctly American writing textbooks largely avoided fiction as a category of literature, while by contrast many other forms of writing were indeed considered teachable, including poetry and essays. Early self-identified efforts at fiction advice date from the 1830s, with both comic and serious works by Edgar Allan Poe, Frederick Marryat, and Edward Bulwer-Lytton. This is then followed by an examination of author publication guides in the 1830s and 1840s, and the addressing of aspiring women writers by Eliza Leslie in 1852. Part I concludes with the meditations on "success," both aesthetic and professional, in fiction-writing advice by Josiah Holland and George Henry Lewes, and the arrival of an outright commercial how-to guidebook on popular literature (including fiction) published by Jesse Haney in 1867.

Part II ("Fiction Writing in the Classroom") covers the midcentury emergence of fiction-writing exercises in school and colleges. These first glimmerings of fiction-writing initially owed less to professional aspirations or fine arts curricula than to interest among primary-school teachers in the Romantic pedagogy of Johann Pestalozzi, particularly through visual prompts as a

form of invention in the classroom. This led in the 1850s and 1860s to the school textbook authors John S. Hart, Hiram Hartley and George Quackenbos using textual prompts in primary (and eventually high-school) level fiction-writing exercises. This preceded the better known development by A.S. Hill in the 1870s of occasional fiction-writing prompts in his English classes at Harvard. Hill, however, is closely examined for his development of these exercises into the previously neglected volume *Stories for Children* (1875), one of the earliest recognizable products of fiction-writing instruction. From these modest beginnings, a more directly professional and articulated model of fiction-instruction emerged from Walter Besant and Frederick Newton Scott in the 1880s and 1890s—including, at length, the development of experientially-oriented education among progressive Chicago school educators, culminating in the first recognizable fiction-writing courses at the University of Chicago in the 1890s by Edwin H. Lewis and William Cleaver Wilkinson.

Part III ("The Literary Advice Industry") addresses a comparatively neglected element of the development of fiction-writing instruction: the late nineteenth-century trade in fiction-writing periodicals, advice bureaus, seminars, and guidebooks. Starting with its rather disreputable beginnings in 1870s London, and extending through the more idealistic efforts of later feminists and Chautauquas, this section examines such fiction-advice authors as Eleanor Kirk, Effie Merriman, and Sherwin Cody. I also trace the development of fiction "Schools" in *Atalanta Magazine* and *Arthur's Home Magazine*, and the summer seminars at the Bay View "School for Writers" in Michigan. These largely trade-based efforts are notable for voicing much of the conventional advice of later fiction classrooms, as well as the eventual nomenclature of "Creative Writing" itself. They also represented a crucial outreach to those lacking opportunities for college instruction in fiction-writing, most notably women. The study ends with the

articulation by Sherwin Cody of "fiction as a universal composition exercise"—that is, a form of instruction for everyone, even small children—a model that not only encompasses professional and fine arts instruction, but also recognizes fiction-writing as a experiential form of arts learning for the masses.

Sherman Cody might also be taken as an emblematic example of the methodology of this study. Though by no means unknown—his later mail-order "Correct English" ventures were the subject of a fine study by Edwin Battistella (2008)—his work in fiction-writing instruction has not received close scrutiny. Discovering it meant not only frequent recourse to the long-neglected texts themselves, but also to the contemporary newspaper articles, reviews, announcements, and magazine ads that revealed his publishing history, as well as the significant context of Chicago's growth in proto-creative writing and experiential learning classes in the 1890s. And so with Cody, as with many of my other subjects, much of my sourcing is primary, as this remains a field with comparatively little secondary scholarship.

While a number of my subjects have been noted in previous writing-instruction related scholarship—A.S. Hill, George Lewes, and Walter Besant, for instance—some, like L.T. Meade or Jesse Haney, have received scholarly attention in literary studies, but not for fiction-writing instruction. A number of other figures, such as Effie Merriman and Eleanor Kirk, have been the subject of no scholarship in English studies whatsoever. Merriman's guidebook was of such cheaply printed material that my own copy is one of only two surviving print copies on record, the other being in the possession of the Arkansas History Commission. This is a field that has perhaps already lost much of its ephemera, particularly in those areas of extension and at-home study that most directly served women, working-class writers, and others all too easily missed in histories of the discipline. It is my hope that this study, and the scholarly discourse that is slowly

forming around this field, may not only serve further inquiries in the future, but also help to preserve a fading past.

## PART I: The Predicament of Fiction-Writing

### **1. An Impolite Literature: American Fiction-Writing Instruction in the 1820s**

#### **i. Edgar Allan Poe (1826)**

Perhaps it's only fitting for a work about fiction writing to first indulge in an act of imagination. So: imagine that you are a seventeen-year-old Virginia boy in February 1826. You are a boy, moreover, in love with poetry—with a sneaking fascination for sensational Gothic fiction—and you have a strong desire to learn how to write both. In short, imagine yourself as the young Edgar Allan Poe, newly arrived at the University of Virginia. Oddly, conjuring Poe himself is the part of this conceit most easily grounded in facts. Envisioning the tutelage of one of America's earliest professional writers in fiction is not; and in this lays the peculiarity of discussing American fiction-writing instruction in the early nineteenth century.

Poe was motivated to learn writing. In 1820, when he was eleven years old, his foster father John Allan consulted with his teacher Joseph Clarke about the wisdom of publishing a sheaf of poems that Edgar had already penned. Clarke advised against it—"it would be very injurious to the boy to allow him to be flattered and talked about as the author of a printed book at his age," he judged—and though the poems have since been lost, Clarke recalled them as "pieces addressed to the different little girls in Richmond" (Thomas 47). Poe kept writing in the years that followed, and while John Allan is usually remembered for his disastrous stinginess during Poe's adulthood, in these earlier years he seems to have been ready enough to see his child attain the proper artistic attainments for a merchant's son; he even paid for dancing lessons (Quinn 73).

The advertisements in the *Richmond Enquirer* in the years before Poe went to college were not lacking in tutors ready to teach the fine arts--particularly for young women. One ad by a married couple seeking work as teachers promises education in mathematics, use of globes, and classic and Romantic languages, as well as "working muslin, embroidery in gold, &c., and the art of making artificial flowers; together with music, drawing, and painting" (A Married Lady and Gentleman). There were boarding schools that boasted of "three excellent Piano Fortes" (North Carolina Female Seminary) and "Drawing and Painting on Velvet and Paper" with a tutor who "has had the advantage of instruction in these accomplishments from an Italian artist" (Tappahannock Female Seminary). Amid the promise of reading literature, the glancing reference to belles lettres, and training in everything from practical penmanship to lofty classical rhetoric, though, one art form remains conspicuously absent: fiction.

It was not from a lack of interest in reading fiction; James Fenimore Cooper's immensely popular *The Last of the Mohicans* was released this same month. Sir Walter Scott had also published *The Betrothed* just a few months earlier, and the coming year would see publication of such widely circulated works as Benjamin Disraeli's *Vivian Grey* and Catharine Maria Sedgwick's *Hope Leslie*. Yet in visiting Richmond or Charlottesville bookshops, Poe would have found an absence of published help for the aspiring fiction writer, for such books did not exist in 1826. This was not the case in other arts: they were rich in instructive texts, particularly in translation from French. Painters could consult Lairesse's *Treatise on the Art of Painting*; dancing masters and their students could learn quadrilles from Gouroux-Daux's *Elements and Principles of the Art of Dancing*; music students could begin their lessons on Jousse's *The Piano Forte, Made Easy to Every Capacity*. That these were all fine arts—ones which required training

at the hands of masters, with reference to instructive texts—seemed so obvious as to scarcely elicit comment.

Poe would have found that fiction had neither self-identified masters nor instructive texts, even though—as a likely reader of rhetorical texts—Poe was well-prepared for instruction in writing. As Brett Zimmerman notes in his monograph on Poe's rhetoric, although biographical evidence does not clearly establish which of the era's popular rhetoric textbooks Poe studied before college, it is "almost inconceivable that Poe would not have read at least some" (30). The popularity of the era's standard rhetorical texts, and their emphasis on classical oratory, would have found an apt pupil in Poe, who one academy classmate recalled had a "talent for declamation." In a public exhibition in elocution in Richmond, he "bore off the prize in competition with... the most promising of the Richmond boys" (31).

What Poe would have found in such texts before college was, fiction notwithstanding, coverage of a wide range of forms. In one of the most popular academy-level texts of Poe's era, Alexander Jamieson's *A Grammar of Rhetoric and Polite Literature* (1818), a chapter on prose style includes sections on Historical Writing, Memoir, Lives, Orations, Philosophical Writing, Dialogues, and Epistolary Writing. Yet fiction is notably absent from Jamieson's coverage of prose, and not due to any lack of familiarity on Jamieson's part. In fact, Jamieson himself worked with fiction: in the year before publishing his *Grammar of Rhetoric and Polite Literature*, Jamieson appears as the translator on at least two novels, *Placide, a Spanish Tale* (1817) and *The Cavern of Roseville* (1817)—that latter of which, in his preface, he promises "may, without danger, be put into the hands of youth" (Herbster n.p.).

But as a teacher and headmaster, as well as a prolific and pragmatic writer of textbooks in subjects ranging from astronomy and algebra to fluid mechanics and cartography, Jamieson

knew what was expected in an academy-level text; and it did not include teaching fiction to those youth. Though we will see later debates over fiction-writing framed around the teachability of imaginative literature, this does not seem to be what impedes Jamieson. The issue may be a titular one: fiction was not "Polite Literature." Imaginative but polite literature is a different matter: the last of the seven chapters in *The Grammar of Rhetoric and Polite Literature* is titled "Poetry," and spends fully 47 pages on versification and figurative language, as well defining didactic, descriptive, and epic poetry. Its presence was no great innovation on Jamieson's part; there was a long English tradition of instruction in versification, including such early works as Edward Bysshe's *The Art of English Poetry* (1702). Indeed, by Poe's time one could even purchase a primer, *Conversations on Poetry* (1824), which presents an illustrated instructional dialogue between a young "Clara C." and her papa on the joys of metaphor and description. Such instruction, Jamieson notes in his own textbook, was more a matter of developing appreciation than of creating great bards. Though the preface of *The Grammar of Rhetoric and Polite Literature* explains that its chapter on poetry may indeed assist a budding genius, Jamieson notes that it is "handled more with a view to form the pupil's taste for the study of Poetry, than to inspire him with the thirst of reaping fame in the doubtful field of poetic composition" (v).

Poe certainly seems to have been in agreement about the limitations of textbooks for those who did wish to reap any fame. In his 1843 essay "Notes Upon English Verse," he complained that "In our ordinary grammars, and in our works on rhetoric in general, may be found occasional chapters, it is true, which have the heading, 'versification,' but these chapters are, in all instances, exceedingly meagre. They pretend to nothing like analysis, they propose nothing resembling system, they make no effort even at rule..." (102). To Poe, as a working

writer, even those forms of imaginative writing which were in the rhetorics of the day covered lacked credible guidance.

What, then, of fiction—which receives few mentions in Jamieson, let alone an entire chapter? If Poe, a well-educated merchant's son, had no obvious resources for tutelage in writing fiction, then what opportunity had his American contemporaries? Today, when we can consult books, websites, and magazines dedicated to creative writing, or enroll in high school elective classes and college workshops, it is hard to comprehend just how little formal or institutional guidance Poe's generation had in learning the art of fiction—or, indeed, if it even occurred to them to want it.

**ii. The Problem of Fiction in Hugh Blair (1783), George Campbell (1776), Richard Whately (1828), Samuel Newman (1827), and Richard Green Parker (1832)**

If Poe could find little or no formal guidance in fiction before arriving at college, the curricula of the era indicate that his situation did not change much upon his arrival at Charlottesville, not least because of a sheer lack of college-level texts on the subject.

In his study *Writing Instruction in Nineteenth Century American Colleges*, James Berlin usefully distinguishes between three eras of early instruction: Classical, Scottish Common Sense Realism, and Current-Traditional. In Berlin's accounting, Classical is a pre-Revolutionary model, closely influenced by oratory, and working from deductions and syllogism to reinforce existing precepts. Scottish Common Sense Realism, exemplified by Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric* (1783), features induction and forensic argumentation in an Enlightenment-era utilitarian approach to language as a means of communicating socially beneficial knowledge. Current-Traditional instruction, ushered in during the 1870s, accompanied a rise of entrance

examinations and the credentialing function of American universities to emphasize correctness, clarity, and paragraph-level construction, with a technical emphasis that deemphasized the social, moral, or aesthetic concerns of writing.

Yet the field's early relation to fiction remains largely unexplored. D.G. Myers (*The Elephants Teach*) is one of the few scholars to have considered the question, and his work begins in 1880. What, then, was the status of fiction in writing instruction before the Current-Traditional era?

It is a commonplace of literary history that novels—despite, or perhaps *because* of their popularity—were long considered a raffish and disreputable form of literature. This impression is not dispelled by early rhetoric textbooks, particularly given their emphasis on factual argumentation. To see fiction's problematic role in the academy, one need look no further than the college-level texts that Berlin and other rhetoric historians note as being particularly popular in antebellum America, beginning with the British predecessors: Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric* (1783), George Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1776), and Richard Whately's *Elements of Rhetoric* (1828). Indeed, Berlin considers subsequent American textbooks until 1870 as more or less imitative of these British works.

Blair's role would prove particularly important. *Lectures on Rhetoric* was not only the era's most widely used text, having passed through some 130 editions in the US and the UK between 1783 and 1911 (Berlin 25), it was also its most prominently adopted, serving as a required text at Harvard, Yale, and Dartmouth (Horner 176). Published in three volumes encompassing 47 lectures, Blair begins with a broad overview of the meaning of taste, the sublime, and the structure of language, before addressing sentence structure, argumentation, figurative language, and finally their application in various genres. Though he does not hesitate

to draw upon classical literature for his examples, he is just as ready to use literature of his own century, with a string of lectures centered around Addison and Steele's *Spectator* essays.

Nonfiction and poetry receive much attention in Blair's work, as both can be put to useful didactic or persuasive purposes; fully half of his third volume is given over to poetry.

Fiction is a different matter. Relegated to just one eight-page section of one chapter in the third and final volume, it "comprehends a very numerous, though, in general, a very insignificant class of writings... too [apparently] insignificant, to deserve that any particular notice should be taken of them." Yet, Blair concludes, some should indeed be given, because its popularity means "Its influence is likely to be considerable, both on the morals and taste of a nation" (3: 70).

Much of Blair's lecture is then spent on a brief history of the form, beginning with medieval romances—which he deems "suited to the gross ignorance of [those] ages" (3: 73). Blair has nothing approaching prescriptive instruction regarding the writing of fiction—though he does cannily note that fiction is pleasing by "a more regular and just distribution of rewards and punishments than what we find here [in real life]: because we meet not with these in true history, we have recourse to fictitious" (3: 71). He allows that this might be put to good purpose, particularly in vividly conveying historical and moral lessons: "The effect of well contrived stories, towards accomplishing these purposes, is stronger than any effect that can be accomplished by simple and naked instruction" (3: 71). And yet, ultimately, fictions "oftener tend to dissipation and idleness, than to any good purpose"—at which point Blair immediately brings down the curtain, announcing "Let us now, therefore, make our retreat from these regions of fiction" (3: 78).

As cursory as Blair's treatment of fiction is, it far exceeds that of the other standard British textbooks. Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetoric* takes little notice of fiction, though he

briefly considers whether stage tragedies might develop an audience capacity for empathy with others, by first allowing them to viscerally experience the tribulations of a fictitious character. He concludes that it might work for "children and simple people"—a comment that might be read as dismissive, but that would also prove rather prophetic of later developments in children's textbooks (1: 306). Whately's *Elements of Rhetoric* has even less to say, beyond noting the argumentative uses of fable or "invented examples" (70)—a form that, as he notes, hardly applies to novel-length work in any case (72).

Not only were Whately, Blair, and Campbell leading voices in the Enlightenment and in logical argumentation, all three were also clergymen—in fact, Whately served as the Archbishop of Dublin. Neither their forensic leanings nor the pieties of their era would necessarily incline them to a ringing endorsement of fiction. But in fiction as in so many other aspects of composition, Blair, Campbell, and Whately set the pattern for nearly a century in writing textbooks: a slight acknowledgement of the literature and its potentially redeeming qualities, but situated within either a larger dismissal of its overpoweringly corrupting influence, or in an outright refusal to engage with the form.

One of their first major American imitators, Samuel P. Newman's *A Practical System of Rhetoric* (1827), exemplifies the latter approach by noting the existence of fiction but eschewing any further analysis of it. Newman allows that literature includes poetry and fiction; but aside from a passing mention of the "modest, chaste, unobtrusive" artistry of Washington Irving in a chapter on "Plain and Ornamented" writing, he has little to add (197). A section on nonfiction, by contrast, is split by genre into five separate chapters. Newman takes the factual role of rhetoric quite literally, as may be glimpsed in one of his few statements on poetry; while acknowledging "the admirer of Byron, whose mind is filled with his delightful horrors" (51), he

asserts that "the man of taste" does not merely consider technical skills at evoking emotion, but is rather guided by "truth and nature" (52). This, it seems, precludes a consideration of literary confabulation.

As we will see later in this study, some of the first hints at an openness to fiction instruction would soon appear in children's textbooks. Richard Green Parker's immensely popular grade-school text *Progressive Exercises in English Composition* (1832) does hint that textbooks *might* engage with fiction—just not in colleges. Parker was a critical innovator at the grade-school level, both in the use of theme prompts and in popularizing the workbook format (Schultz 35). *Progressive Exercises* initially appears silent on the subject of fiction. Yet at the end of a chapter on Description, there is a feint towards innovation, almost as an afterthought. After giving Biblical history as a possible subject for a student theme, Parker notes that "If he is sufficiently acquainted with geography, history, &c. he may be required to embrace in performance, some account of the mode of life, &c.; and, in amplified history, represent his subject in fictitious scenes" (46). It is not *quite* a directive to write fiction in the classroom; rather, it is an option within a larger history-based assignment. With that one clause, though, Parker came as near as any author in the first half of the nineteenth century to engaging directly with fiction writing in the classroom. For most aspiring writers—including for Poe at the University of Virginia—such guidance would have to come from outside textbooks altogether.

### iii. "Euonomy" (1825)

On the same day that Poe began his first term at the University of Virginia, the new February 15th 1826 issue of the *Athenaeum: Or, The Spirit of the English Magazines* was shipped from John Cotton's editorial offices in Boston, reaching agents as far south as Savannah.

Readers perusing the biweekly's usual essays, poetry, and fiction also found a peculiar anonymous article: "Euonomy: Or, the Art of Novel Writing. In Reference to Names, Professions, and Places; in a Series of Hints to Young Authors" (403). If actual textbooks were hesitant or loath to teach fiction-writing, this appeared to be a rare specifically prescriptive article; and, depending on how one interpreted its subtitle, it might prove to be the beginning of a series of such articles, a nearly unheard-of proposition.

It was not, though, quite out of character for its actual source. "Euonomy" did not originate with *Athenaeum*, whose very subtitle, "The Spirit of the English Magazines," hinted at how it pirated periodicals as they arrived on Boston's docks. Rather, "Euonomy" first appeared five months earlier in London, in the September 1825 issue of *La Belle Assemblée: Or Court and Fashionable Magazine*. Described by periodical historian Margaret Beethem as "a landmark in women's publishing," *La Belle Assemblée* was near its commercial and cultural apogee in these years. (31). Founded in 1806 by John Bell—a veteran of the *Morning Post* and of theatrical publishing ventures,—*La Belle Assemblée* had survived his recent retirement to remain the most expensive and extravagantly appointed women's magazine of its era. Each issue featured original sewing patterns and sheet music, as well as science items, royal court reports from London and Paris, a pair of hand-colored plates in its fashion supplement, and extensive arts listings that included entries for "London Theatricals," "French Theatricals," and "Fine Arts Exhibitions." Most notable though, was the magazine's commitment to original writing; boasting such contributors as Mary Shelley, it regularly ran new fiction and listed works in press—books that were, above all, by and for its audience of women. This was reflected in the staff of the magazine itself; for years *La Belle Assemblée's* lauded fashion section was run Mary Ann Bell, and the

publisher had also attempted to recruit the novelist and playwright Elizabeth Inchbald to edit the magazine (Highfill 85).

*La Belle Assemblée* did not exactly have an editorial manifesto, though. Like a number of periodicals of the time, its expectations regarding writing came hidden in one-line notes, sometimes briskly dismissive, on an editor's page in its front matter. The November 1825 issue, for instance, not only warmly noted the acceptance of several manuscripts, but dashed several others aside for "very stale ideas" and "offensive trash." Another, who dared to send in a piece plagiarized from *Blackwood's*, was curtly informed that "we do not like to be trifled with" ("To Subscribers and Correspondents" n.p.). Occasionally an additional line of actual advice slipped through, as when a clearly exasperated editor wondered "why must we so frequently have occasion to remark, that our *Gentlemen* correspondents seem to forget that they are writing for *Ladies*?" (n.p.).

An actual article of "hints to young authors," then, promised something truly new in *La Belle Assemblée*; and yet, given its dedication to new fiction and literary coverage, the magazine was just the place for such a novelty to emerge. But despite the article's subtitle, "Euonomy" proved to be less about novel writing than a jocular account of how to name characters and locations:

Francis is a good name, provided it be spelled Frank; because Frank vividly suggests the idea of a young rattle-brained rake, with a fund of redeeming good qualities. But oh! my worthy pupils in the mystic art of novel writing, most carefully avoid the names of Peter, Nathaniel, Joseph, and Job. Obadiah is a Quaker, as Hezekiah cannot avoid being a Methodist. As to Christopher, you might as well admit Beelzebub to the privilege of a novelist hero as him.... Betty is an intriguing chambermaid; make the name Betsy, and

you convert her into a smart, pert little grisette. Eliza is a sentimental heroine, while Elizabeth only wants the prefix Lady to make her an Earl's daughter. (97)

Some of the distinctions are deliberately ludicrous—Christopher is as bad as Beelzebub?—and yet amid the humor, there is a fair point to be made. Names, in both their melodiousness and in their cultural associations, *do* matter in fiction. These resonances can be accidental and even distracting in nonfiction, but are usually meaningless; yet they are understandably taken as a deliberate authorial choice in fiction. The nature of such associations, and the traps they lay for the unwary, underlays the longstanding market in baby-naming books, and even in books dedicated to naming fictional characters—for such guides do exist (cf. Kenyon).

Amid variations upon this theme—we are also informed that it is unwise to set a romance in Garlick Hill or in Newington Butts—the article concludes, still chortling along in a jolly vein, with a remarkable statement of the role of class in fiction. Namely, it extends its banned locations to the economically jarring, and scoffs at the notion that the neighborhoods of laborers and shopkeepers could have any place in fiction: "Who could sympathize with the petty agonies of Little Britain?" it begins. "Who could bow down to a goddess of Cripplegate, or die from the love of a lady from Whitechapel? Who could melt in sentimental sorrow amidst the bellowings of Smithfield, or the judaical clamours of Rag Fair? Fie, fie! the thing is impossible" (98). In case the class implications of this stance towards novels and their audiences are left unclear to the reader, "Euonomy" is ready to elaborate to the readers of what is, after all, subtitled "The Court and Fashionable Magazine":

Again: nothing can furnish more unsentimental materials than trade. Trade, as politicians affirm, may be of infinite use to the nation, but it cannot be introduced into a novel: for what has a novel to do with the good of the nation, or any good but the good of a

circulating library, or the morality of a lady's boarding school?.... A tobacconist may procure meat, drink, and clothing for his family, but they can never inherit tender susceptibilities from his *shag* and *pigtail*. Nothing behind a counter can be allowed a place in a novel. (98)

It could not, at least, be allowed in the sort of novel that *La Belle Assemblée* would serialize.

The advice of "Euonomy" has less to do with any wide-ranging analysis of novels than with a droll jest upon the incipient "Silver Fork" movement of novels featuring the fashionable rich—which were, in turn, both part of the audience and the subject of *La Belle Assemblée* itself. And yet nominally offering such hints to authors, and perhaps even initiating a series of such articles, had a serious idea behind it. To the extent that an article of fiction-writing advice had even appeared at all, it is worth noting that it originated in a magazine for women, and one that had been grounded in decades of experience in theatre criticism and publishing—both hallmarks of many later efforts in fiction-writing instruction.

For readers like a young Edgar Allan Poe, though, it would prove a singular jest: for the article never did see the arrival of its hinted-at sequel. It was reprinted in a desultory fashion in the years to follow—the *Cheltenham Chronicle* retitled and reordered its paragraphs ("Hints to Young Novel Writers" 4), as did the *Pocket Magazine* in 1829 (55). By the time the article bobbed back up to the surface again in 1837, this time as "A Chapter on Names" in the British miscellany *The Guide to Knowledge* (118), other novel-writing advice—much of it similarly alloyed of humor and genuine advice—was beginning to emerge, not least from Poe himself.

## **2. All Plot, But No Plot: Advice Humor and Bulwer Lytton's "On Art in Fiction"**

### **i. Frederick Marryat's "How To" Series (1833 – 35) and James White's "Hints For Authors" (1835-1836)**

To explain one of novelist Frederick Marryat's most productive artistic periods, as well as one of the earliest examples of advice humor on fiction-writing, one could do worse than to begin with his disastrous London campaign event in 1833. A retired naval officer running for the newly created parliamentary borough of Tower Hamlets, Marryat was addressing a crowd of voters when one pressed him on whether he still supported the Navy's brutal and increasingly unpopular use of the lash. "Sir," the would-be MP replied, "if you, or one of your sons, should come under my command, and deserve punishment, if there be no other effectual mode of conferring it, *I shall flog you*" (Marryat, *Life and Letters* 168).

Captain Marryat did not win his election.

He did, however, incur ruinous expenses in his unsuccessful run—a dilemma that resulted in a period of desperate and inventive industriousness. Having already taken on the editorship of the London-based *Metropolitan Magazine*—along with £400 a year, he also demanded that his sub-editor "must be a nautical man"—he quickly turned out additional pieces for the magazine at £16 a sheet. For the year after his election defeat, he also holed up in a Brighton villa and cranked out three novels in quick succession (Hannay 64).

Among the chips cast off from this extraordinary period were Marryat's 1833-35 series of satires for *Metropolitan*: "How to Write a Fashionable Novel" (1833), "How to Write a Travel Book" (1834), and "How to Write a Romance" (1835). The first set the pattern that all the installments would follow: struggling young lawyer Arthur Ansard is beset by bills and has

unwisely contracted with a publisher to earn some quick guineas from hack writing. His friend Barnstaple then cynically debunks the genre, by way of offering Arthur frank advice on how to write a "fashionable novel."

He begins with advice on creating a protagonist: he must be a nobleman who gets up no earlier than 4 PM ("In a fashionable novel your real exclusive never rises early. The very idea makes the tradesman's wife lift up her eyes.") (*Olla Podrida* 171); he must have chiseled good looks ("great people are always chiselled; common people are only cast") (172); and his possessions must be described in extravagant detail, and the whole thing must be given a portentous air: "a piece, now and then, of philosophy, as unintelligible as possible, stamps it with deep thought" (176). The plot must then be resolved by the checkbook of an eccentric rich uncle ("Alas! there are no such uncles in real life; I wish there were") (202).

Many of these details were familiar to readers: they were the already hallmarks of the "Silver Fork" novel, so dubbed by William Hazlitt for their aspirational fascination with the trappings of gentry "who eat fish with silver forks" (Sadoff 106). Fittingly, *Euonomy's* vision of fiction as an escape from dreary work-life, particularly for women, reappears here in the person of the tradesman's wife. Indeed, the wish-fulfillment of such fiction necessitates describing fine dinners that the hack-writer Arthur has never experienced himself—and so Barnstaple duly recommends that he plagiarize it from a manor cookery manual. In Marryat's satirical vision, the description of the hero's boudoir toiletries serves the same function, for the "dressing-room or boudoir of a supposed great person, is admitting the vulgar into the arcana, which they delight in" (*Olla Podrida* 171). Barnstaple's solution, which is serious enough in its jest as to remain recognizable even today, is to name-check fashionable brands: he advises Arthur to go to Bayley

& Blew's perfumery in Bond Street, jot down their whole catalogue, and then simply quote the entire list in describing the hero's sumptuous array of cosmetics (183).

It is no small irony that Marryat took to debunking travelogues and romance novels in subsequent articles, as his own life was the very stuff of both. Marryat had sailed the world, and he'd fought in the Napoleonic Wars and the War of 1812. Marryat also spoke from experience regarding books and their audiences; by the 1830s, he was already a well-established popular author in his own right. The "How to Write" series, in short, is written by someone who knows the fact *and* the artifice surrounding such books. The result was appealing enough at the time that "How to Write a Fashionable Novel" was immediately reprinted in America in the May 1833 issue of *The Museum of Foreign Literature, Science, and Art*.

The idea would be revisited soon after Marryat finished his series, with an 1835 - 1836 series of "Hints to Authors" in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*; although unsigned, it was the work of James White (Oliphant 425). Like Marryat, White was well situated to write on the subject: a close friend of Charles Dickens and a frequent writer for *Blackwood's* and later *All Year Round*, White was immersed in the business (Foster 425). Although White's five installments spanned a variety of genres, including history and philosophical treatises, it included novels in its first October 1835 segment, with tongue-in-cheek advice about authorship ("There are two rules applicable almost equally to the author and the hero, viz. be handsome—and be melancholy") (White 432), and, rather like "Euonomy," how to name your fashionable characters: "[Consider] the degree of interest he would take in the fortunes of the Master of Ravenswood and Lucy Ashton, if the hero had been the son of a bankrupt grocer, called Thomas Brown, and the heroine a constable's daughter, named Sally Jones" (439). More originally, White concludes each installment with a parody of the genre in question, delivered in a sprit of mock-

helpfulness—a strategy that one dedicated *Blackwood's* reader, Edgar Allan Poe, would himself revisit.

An actual how-to would still be years in arriving, and much less widely read when it did. And yet its first hints had already begun appearing in the prologues of one of the most popular authors of the era—in the pages, in fact, of one of the very novelists that Marryat and White had been satirizing.

## ii. Edward Bulwer Lytton's "On Art in Fiction" (1838)

Among Marryat's contemporaries, one of the few inclined to address fiction instruction at length, and with much greater seriousness, was Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton. Though he had launched his career with *Paul Pelham* (1828), itself an epitome of the Silver Fork novel, he quickly developed a serious and sustained interest in historical fiction. Bulwer-Lytton's novels *Eugene Aram* (1832) and *The Last Days of Pompeii* (1834), among many others, soon ranked him with Scott and Dickens among Britain's most popular authors. An MP who combined the respectability of a peerage with the still suspiciously down-market ambition to sell novels, Bulwer-Lytton had always wanted more: from his earliest years, he sought to change how novels were written, and indeed how authors themselves lived.

The first glimmerings of his ambitions came in the preface to his second novel, *The Disowned* (1829). Though not addressed to authors or positioned as advice, it takes advantage of the preface's role as a space in which an author can address the audience *as* an author, by acknowledging the crafting of what is to follow. Here the introduction is written as a closet drama—a dialogue between The Author and Mr. Pelham, the protagonist of Bulwer-Lytton's first novel. Largely a breezy advertisement for the previous novel, it does pause to allow Pelham to

drolly dispense advice to his Author on melodramatic writing ("Have bustle, black ringlets, fighting, moonlight, a waste moor, a ruin, a fascinating villain, who is very pale—no villain has a color...") (*Pelham Novels* 129)—precisely the sort of comedic instructional dialogue that Marryat pointedly adopted a few years later in spoofing the Silver Fork genre. Bulwer-Lytton's interests soon turned rather more serious, both in his novels and in their prefaces. After using other prefaces to reflect on specific aspects of fiction-writing—first in his 1830 novel *Paul Clifford* to praise dialect and warn against didacticism (381-2), and in his 1834 novel *The Last Days of Pompeii* to laud believable motive over historical accuracy (634)—Bulwer-Lytton would return to *The Disowned* in a 1837 reissue to write a slightly more expansive essay, "On The Different Kinds of Prose Fiction."

Though modest in their ambitions, these prefaces remain among the most widely circulated musings on fiction in Lytton's time. There were no published manuals addressing authors on the craft of fiction, after all, and the smattering of prescriptive articles in monthlies were ephemeral literature—and far more fleeting than articles are today. Photocopying and scanning was over a century away, and even *Poole's Index to Periodical Literature* was not properly begun until 1852. Old articles were not easily tracked down by any aspiring author; so that even the most ambitious efforts, if not collected in a volume, were liable to be—as James Russell Lowell once lamented of Poe's work—"blocks enough to build an enduring pyramid, but... left lying carelessly and unclaimed in many quarries" (Lowell 50). Bulwer-Lytton's prefaces, by contrast, were bound and endlessly reproduced into some of the most popular books of his generation, where they could be expected to find readers through decades of use.

Yet his most ambitious effort of all—a two-part article in which he most directly and prescriptively addresses authors—was indeed left unclaimed in the quarry.

"On Art in Fiction" ran in the March and April 1838 issues of *The Monthly Chronicle*. Writing anonymously, Bulwer-Lytton laid out one of the most ambitious sets of prescriptions to appear in the first half of nineteenth century, beginning with the remarkable assertion that "It is not until we have had great pictures, that we can lay down the rules of painting;--it is not until we have had great writers in a particular department of intellect, that we can sketch forth a code of laws for those who succeed them" (Barnett 85). In short, great art suggests rules, not vice versa. Setting aside the very tangled question of how one ascertains greatness in the first place, Bulwer's contention is important, because it circumvents *a priori* rules—be they moral or aesthetic—and in their place anticipates Duke Ellington's famed epigram on judging music: "If it sounds good, it *is* good." It is an inductive approach, rather than a doctrinaire one, which prioritizes results over a preexisting hypothesis. Bulwer-Lytton was well aware of the similarity to scientific method: "For the theory of art resembles that of science; we must have data to proceed upon, and our inductions must be drawn from a vast store of experiments" (85).

There is a subtle corollary here: namely, if an unconventional work is satisfying, it suggests that the rules themselves must be changed to accommodate the artwork's existence. Bulwer-Lytton himself inadvertently demonstrates this when, in an explanation of the use and abuse of close description—"minuteness is not accuracy," he instructs (86)—he snorts that, unlike a gallant hero's garb, "we do not require the same in describing the smock-frock of a laborer, or the garret of the girl who is now walking upon stilts for a penny" (87). His examples of characters and details beneath notice are, ironically, precisely the ones we might now laud. This latent potential for revising notions of "great" art makes Bulwer's notion of rules more *descriptive* than *prescriptive*—though he may not have foreseen this logical extension.

It must be said that from this first extraordinary leap, Bulwer-Lytton meanders into a number of fairly pedestrian observations; he is a sort of Polonius of the writing workshop. Historical fiction should not be so slavish to source works that its dialogue is stilted (86). Characters are important, but don't use too many, lest your reader be confused (88). Crime is interesting, and a hero should be good, but not too good; so too does a villain need redeeming qualities (90-91). And so on. The essay's second installment manages some rather more subtle observations, in particular regarding the looser structure of the novel and its ability to explore hidden emotion, versus stage drama's narrower plot strictures and its need for *visible* depiction of emotion and motive (103). Framing these altogether adequate observations though, is a real difference from the typical critical article of the day: his essay is giving advice to aspirants, and addressed *to* prospective novelists, for whom he refers to "your novel" (93).

They do not seem have paid much attention, perhaps because they had little notion than it was indeed Bulwer-Lytton addressing them. True, a number of newspaper columnists had initially guessed at the essay's authorship, with *The Examiner* of London instantly announcing "we recognize the author of *Eugene Aram*" ("The Literary Examiner" 5). Yet the essays were otherwise rarely identified with Bulwer-Lytton during his lifetime. And unlike Marryat and Poe's more flippant "advice"—or the genre of opportunistic self-publishing guides that followed the 1840s and 50s—Bulwer-Lytton's anonymous article attracted so little notice that it was apparently not even worth pirating. He remained curiously circumspect on the subject for decades afterward. When he went on to criticize aspiring writers for a lack of craft, as in one 1855 volume of correspondence, he was only identified as a "one fully authorized to speak on the subject of authorship": "People often say to me, 'I shall write a novel.' If I ask 'On what rules?' they stare. They know of no rules." (Blessington 260).

Despite collecting a number of his other, lesser essays over the years, Bulwer-Lytton did not reprint or acknowledge "On Art in Fiction" in his lifetime; by the time it finally appeared under his name in the posthumous 1875 collection *Pamphlets and Sketches*, the work was of more historical than practical interest. And indeed, to the extent that any ostensible fiction advice of this period achieved significant later circulation, it did not come from Bulwer-Lytton or even Marryat—but, rather, from Edgar Allan Poe.

### iii. Edgar Allan Poe's "How to Write a Blackwood Article" (1838)

Even as Bulwer-Lytton was publishing his essay in *The Monthly Chronicle*, 1838 was already proving to be a pivotal year for Edgar Allan Poe: it saw the release in July of his only novel, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, and the publication that October of "Ligeia," his first fully realized masterpiece of short fiction. It was the following month, though, that *American Museum* magazine brought out a paired ensemble of curiously reflexive works: "The Psyche Zenobia" and "The Scythe of Time"—or, as Poe more prosaically redubbed the former, "How To Write a Blackwood Article."

It was a subject that Poe knew well. Three years earlier, after Poe's first appearance in the *Southern Literary Messenger* with "Berenice"—a *Blackwood's*-style shocker which was, practically speaking, his debut in a national venue—he wrote to the magazine's publisher with a defense of its sensationalism. "The history of all Magazines shows plainly that those which attained celebrity were indebted for it to articles similar in nature—to Berenice...." Poe argued. "Such articles as 'M.S. Found in a Madhouse' and 'Monos and Daimonos' of the *London New Monthly*—the 'Confessions of an Opium Eater' and the 'Man in the Bell' of Blackwood. The first

two were written by no less a man than Bulwer—[and] the *Confessions* universally attributed to Coleridge—though unjustly" (Thomas 150).

Poe appreciated the power of sensational fiction and thoroughly understood its absurdities. "Loss of Breath: a Tale a la Blackwood" was published in the *Messenger* in September 1835 as a delightedly gruesome romp through the genre—a hapless protagonist gets partially asphyxiated, autopsied alive, hung again, autopsied a second time, and has his nose chewed off by a cat for good measure. In case the reader is unaware of the joke, the story also features such absurd character names as Mr. Windenough and Mr. Lack'obreath (737). But the piece was a rewrite of an unsigned earlier piece by Poe, "A Decided Loss." The dark humor of the original, which is significantly shorter and lacks the deliberately silly names, is as clearly meant to mimic *Blackwood's* as to mock it. Poe's send-up grew from a more serious homage; it is the knowing humor of a dedicated practitioner of the art.

The same could be said of Marryat, who that same year was completing his mock-advice series in *Metropolitan* magazine with "How to Write a Romance Novel." Built around the proposed tale of a gang of robbers disguised as priests, his notional story required incessant but incoherent action—or as the mock-advisor Barnstaple succinctly explains, "No plot, but all plot" (Marryat, *Olla Podrida* 301). Every ruffian dispatched by the heroine's stiletto must die "with a groan," and characters are given such absurd names as Angelicanarilella, Phosphorini, and Absentpresentini (304). Lest it seem that Marryat himself was altogether above such wild fiction, by 1837 he was serializing a supernatural maritime tale (*The Phantom Ship*) that featured a werewolf story in one of its chapters.

Poe knew Marryat's body of work well and reviewed his books—including *The Phantom Ship*, in fact. When Poe's own novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* was published in

1838, comparisons to Marryat were common enough that Poe's *Southern Literary Messenger* publisher summarized the novel as "Marryatt's (sic) style I suppose" (Thomas 242). So when what we now know as "How to Write a Blackwood Article" appeared later that year, it could be understood both as both a reflection upon Marryat's humorous advice and upon genre writing itself. The story is comprised of two parts: "The Psyche Zenobia," in which an aspiring writer recounts her interview with Mr. Blackwood and asks him for writing advice, and "The Scythe of Time," her resulting story after following his advice. Poe's satirical intent is established immediately with his idiotically conceited narrator, the aspiring writer Signora Psyche Zenobia (aka Suky Snobbs) of the "Philadelphia, Regular-Exchange, Tea-Total, Young, Belles-Lettre, Universal, Experimental, Bibliographical Association to Civilize Humanity" (301). Enthralled to meet with Mr. Blackwood, she asks him about his sensational stories, or what he calls his "intensities."

Poe's insertion of an actual publisher into the story was not an obvious device at the time. Even Marryat—who *was* the editor of *Metropolitan*—still speaks through the mask of Barnstaple, who is neither an editor nor writer at all, though he boasts that he could write a dozen bad novels a year "were I not above the temptation" (Marryat 269). But Poe makes full use of the mock-cameo appearance of Blackwood, and has him cite a number of actual stories from the magazine, blithely remarking that one was "composed by my pet baboon, Juniper" ("The Psyche Zenobia" 304).

Blackwood's advice comes in three varieties that will reappear repeatedly in fiction advice over the next two centuries: *presentation*, *tone*, and *plot*.

For presentation, Blackwood soberly informs Zenobia that "In the first place, your writer of intensities must have very black ink, and a very big pen, with a very blunt nib.... when a

manuscript can be read it is never worth reading" (303). This is, of course, hilariously bad advice. And it comes from a writer who, having recently completed a stretch as editor as the *Southern Literary Messenger*, was likely tormented by illegible submissions. Yet its prominence in the "first place" of the text is also slyly rooted in Poe's recognition that beginning artists fetishistically value the importance of the tools of art over the difficult task of actually *creating* art. The fundamental absurdity of Blackwood's "very black ink" and "very big pen" is recognizable to any modern reader who has seen an artist asked for trivial details of their writing routine or a photo feature on immaculately staged "writer's rooms."

In a description of tones for the work, Poe includes "the tone heterogeneous"—essentially a revisiting of Marryat's comical injunctions to throw a lot of second-hand learning around—and "the tone mystic," in which the writer will "Hint all, and assert nothing" (305). Despite the apparent comedy of this overstatement, this was a subject that Poe had dedicated serious thought to. His recently published "Ligeia" relied on a number of startling ambiguities, by lacking any fixed date or location, and by featuring an unnamed narrator who claims to have never have even learned the last name of his late spouse.

For plot, Poe has Blackwood stick to the basics. A predicament story often follows the most fundamental narrative arc of transformation—a person goes from being alive to dead, preferably in a new and exciting way. Such plots veer close enough to absurdity that all that is needed to transform them into satire is Mr. Blackwood's suggestion that Zenobia actually experience these career-ending novelties: "Sensations are great things after all. Should you ever be drowned or hung, be sure and make a note of your sensations—they will be worth to you ten guineas a sheet.... Get knocked in the head, or run over by an omnibus, or bitten by a mad dog, or drowned in a gutter" (304-305). Ever helpful, he then offers to feed her to some savage dogs next

door. It is a jest with a jagged implication: namely, that an aspiring writer might as well go hang themselves, or have an editor throw them to a wild pack of dogs.

Poe, in the decade to follow, would go on to more serious forms of literary advice and criticism—most notably in "The Philosophy of Composition" (1846). Written for *Graham's Magazine* in the immediate aftermath of the success of "The Raven," Poe's essay purports to explain the process behind that poem's composition. In so doing he outlines three key concepts: Method, which eschews ecstatic inspirations of genius for the deliberate direction of the writer's craft; Unity of Impression, which ascribes the greatest power to artwork that may be experienced in an uninterrupted fashion, i.e. "the limit of a single sitting" (164); and what is now commonly termed Unity of Effect, which directs the writer's methodical craft toward the establishment of a specific emotional or intellectual effect, i.e. "the choice of an impression, or effect, to be conveyed: and here I may as well observe that, throughout the construction, I kept steadily in view the design of rendering the work universally appreciable" (164).

Rather like "How To Write a Blackwood Article," Poe was wrapping his literary insights inside entertaining bunkum. By his accounting, to methodically achieve his unities "I betook myself to ordinary induction"—namely, by determining that logic insisted that the most poetical and effective possible poem must be about the death of beautiful woman, a raven, and the refrain of "Nevermore": "In such a search it would have been absolutely impossible to overlook the word 'Nevermore.' In fact, it was the very first which presented itself" (165). This is no more obvious or logical than that, say, a double murder must have been committed by an orangutan imitating a sailor at his morning shave. Coming from an accomplished hoaxer, Poe's claim is reminiscent of nothing so much as his explanation several months later, in his 9 August 1846 letter to Phillip Pendleton Cooke, about his detective tales: "I do not mean to say that they are not

ingenious—but people think them more ingenious than they are—on account of their method and air of method. In the "Murders in the Rue Morgue," for instance, where is the ingenuity of unravelling a web which you yourself (the author) have woven for the express purpose of unravelling?" (*Collected Letters* 595). Yet the ideas about writing contained within "The Philosophy of Composition"—in particular, the fundamental assertion that writing is a methodical and explicable craft—would resonate through fiction-writing instruction to the present day. And in this regard, Poe was not joking at all when, in the same letter to Cooke, he called this essay "my best specimen of analysis" (595).

Even so, "How To Write a Blackwood Article" has the distinction of being the only *fiction* advice presented as such by Poe. Within its broader and more obvious humor, there was also a painful truth. Even as Poe was writing in 1838 that an aspiring Blackwood writer might as well hang themselves, he was desperately trying to escape from his impoverished profession; one visitor to his Philadelphia home that year found the author and his wife "literally suffering for a want of food" (Thomas 248). Living on bread and molasses, during these months Poe briefly attempted to learn the lithography trade, and turned to fellow author James Kirke Paulding—newly appointed as Secretary of the Navy—to beg for a job that would free him from writing for a living:

Could I obtain the most unimportant Clerkship in your gift—*any thing, by sea or land*—to relieve me from the miserable life of literary drudgery to which I, now, with a breaking heart, submit, and for which neither my temper nor my abilities have fitted me... I could then (having something beyond mere literature as a profession) quickly elevate myself to the station in society which is my due (*Letters* 1:175).

Poe never did get a clerkship, and instead continued in such dire straits that even after landing steadier editing work the following year, he remained unable to pay off fifty dollars in back-rent to his landlord (Meyers 109).

Poe may be one of the most notorious instances of an impoverished writer, but he was not alone in his money woes. By the late 1830s, there was a growing sense of economic anxiety among Poe and his fellow writers that the suicidal advice of "Mr. Blackwood" was becoming uncomfortably close to the truth—and that the joke was now very much upon them.

### **3. Marketable Brains: The Birth of Author Manuals and Josiah Holland's *Letters to the Joneses***

#### **i. "The Poor Author and the Rich Bookseller"**

Walking past the Harper & Brothers offices on Pearl Street in the 1850s, a New Yorker might have spotted an indignant young Bohemian marching back and forth across its front doorway, wearing this boldly written sandwich board:

**ONE OF HARPER'S AUTHORS.  
I AM STARVING.**

Those familiar with the city's literati would have recognized the picketer as none other than the writer Fitz-James O'Brien; and they might have then recognized proprietor Fletcher Harper, who had his wayward Irish genius quickly hustled inside and given a five-dollar bill to go away ("Some Recollections" 514).

To be fair, O'Brien was not the steadiest of personalities; but, to be even fairer, Harper's was not the steadiest of supporters for American authors. Amid explosive growth in the nation's market for books and magazines, authors remained underpaid, pirated, vulnerable to bad contracts, and yes, even starving at times. O'Brien at least had the enterprise to march into the Harper's bindery department, requisition some twine and an advertising placard for *Livingston's Africa*, and angrily scrawl out his demand on the back; but in antebellum America, advice and advocacy for put-upon authors was hard to find.

At first blush, the era should have been an ideal one for authorship. Publishing saw technological leaps in printing and distribution with the popularization of stereotype printing to keep editions in print for years (1814), the rise of national distribution via postal waterway routes (1823) and railroads (1837), the invention of Keller's wood-pulp paper process (1843), and the

high-speed Hoe rotary press (1847). The founding of the Lyceum lecture circuit in America (1826) also heralded a new and increasingly literate audience of working and middle-class readers.

Fittingly, this period also saw the arrival of the first professional authors—a title sometimes given to Sir Walter Scott in Britain, and James Fenimore Cooper in the U.S. They were professional authors in the modern sense; that is, not dependent upon patronage or subscription publication, or on holding government posts or editorial jobs, but deriving a credible living from book royalties. Their position remained an unusual one, though: even celebrated authors like Irving and Hawthorne found it prudent to take paid diplomatic posts. But for a new American author without a patronage job or independent wealth, the financial challenges were daunting. Native writers were undercut by the rampant pirating of British literature—including, notably, by Harper & Brothers, who quietly lobbied Congress to stymie the development of international copyright laws (Everton 45). "The want of an International Copy-Right Law," complained their author Edgar Allan Poe in 1845, "by rendering it nearly impossible to obtain anything from the booksellers in the way of remuneration for literary labor, has had the effect of forcing many of our very best writers into the service of the Magazines and Reviews" ("Some Secrets" 103). Even here, the American writer was not safe: piracy of domestic periodicals was so common that, despite Poe's claim that over 300,000 copies of his story "The Gold Bug" circulated within one year, he only earned \$100 from it—the prize money for its initial publication in *The Dollar Newspaper* of Philadelphia (Meyers 186).

America's culture of literary theft was part of a broader downward pressure on book prices in the 1830s and 1840s. With some publishers exploiting a cheap newsprint postal rate loophole to ship entire pirated books as multicolumn newspapers—a proto-paperback format

dubbed the "extra"—stolen British books that once sold for a dollar now went for as little as 25 cents by 1843. "Literature is now a drug. All the markets are overstocked," complained *Brother Jonathan*, itself one of the most notorious of extras (Tebbel 70).

As William Charvat has noted, even Cooper—America's erstwhile first successful author, and by Chavat's reckoning its *only* practically successful one before 1850—found his royalties tumbling in these decades, despite his unit sales going up. In 1826, *The Last of the Mohicans* earned Cooper \$5000 on sales of 5,750 copies; in 1842, *The Wing-and-Wing* earned Cooper just \$1,187.50 on sales of 12,500 copies (Charvat 74). Not only had his royalty percentage been more than halved in the intervening years, the cover price on new Cooper novels had dropped from \$2 to 50 cents; the result was that, even when selling more than double his old unit sales, Cooper was now only earning a tenth as much per copy sold.

In an almost unregulated marketplace that lacked copyright protection, agents, or organized labor, American authors in the 1830s and 1840s found their plight not so different from Britain a generation earlier, when the expatriate artist Washington Allston painted *The Poor Author and the Rich Bookseller* (1811), and Isaac D'Israeli had marveled in *The Calamities of Authors* (1812)—"Authors continue poor, and Booksellers become opulent; an extraordinary result!" (25). Curiously, though, British authors themselves were now no longer in quite that same situation. They were about to become more organized and better protected than their American colleagues—and a new form of professional literature would arise from their newly discovered strength.

**ii. *The Perils of Authorship* (1835), *The Author's Printing And Publishing Assistant* (1839), and *Hints and Directions for Authors* (1842)**

In the same year that Cooper watched his *Wing-and-Wing* royalties falter, and the depredations of extras were at their height in America, British authors experienced a remarkably different turn of events: the passage in the UK of the Copyright Act of 1842. Not only did the Act enable seizures and fines to combat domestic piracy, it was also the first copyright law in any country to feature lifetime copyright; an author now controlled their work for 42 years *or* their lifetime plus seven years, whichever was longer. But while economic conditions in Britain for professional authorship were greatly strengthened by the law, there remained a major continued source of piracy: the US, which had no reciprocal agreement with the UK.

During his 1842 American tour, Charles Dickens prominently advocated for the creation of a US law; but in private, he despaired at their prospects: "I'll tell you what the two obstacles to the passing of an international copyright law with England are: first, the national love of 'doing' a man in any bargain or matter of business; secondly, national vanity" (*Letters* 3:231). By contrast, in the UK Dickens found writers so emboldened by their new legal protections that a year later he was chairing an early meeting of the newly formed Society of British Authors—a short-lived but seminal advocacy group whose members included Thackeray, Carlyle, and Bulwer-Lytton (Bonham-Carter 81).

The Society capped a decade of copyright reform in the UK, beginning with the Dramatic Copyright Act of 1833. These years had also seen the beginnings of a new genre of professional advice manuals to authors. Notably concerned with the business and printing of writing, rather than artistic advice, they would be the backdrop for later generations of increasingly ambitious and aesthetically-oriented works on the subject. And they began with a jeremiad against many of

the woes that copyright laws were to address: the aptly named 1835 booklet *The Perils of Authorship*.

"Reader! Art thou an author?" demands its anonymous writer. "If not, dost thou aspire to be an author? Have a care, should such be the case, what thou are about; for the difficulties of authorship are many" (Myers 6). The perils outlined are legion, and include avoiding printing errors by standing watch at the printers as each page is composed in type; the author recommends "the necessity of his remaining in town, and in the printing office ALL NIGHT rather than let a single sheet of work go to press, without having been thoroughly revised, even to a letter" (15). Aside from sloppy printers, there are also corrupt magazine reviews to beware of, with an *Athenaeum* editor coming in for particular censure: "In these 'independent' journals authors frequently review *their own works!*... One of these journals is notorious for such license. A MR. HOOD and others can attest it" (Wilson 11).

*Perils* was also one of a multitude of popular cheap booklets by its London publisher, William Kidd. A colorful Victorian eccentric, Kidd was also a devoted ornithologist whose charming inventions included a translucent crystal "fairy cage" for birds (Logan 150). As a publisher, though, he was eminently practical: other Kidd advice pamphlets available that year ranged from *Six Hints to Bachelors* and *Twenty Minutes' Advice on Corns, Bunions, Chilblains, Warts, Whitloes, & c.* to *Kidd's Picturesque Steam-Boat Companion to Margate*. If *Perils* was less a how-to than a how-not-to, it nonetheless fit comfortably into his existing line of products. Its originality and frankness brought it praise, with one magazine lauding the "fearless independence of its publisher," who they claimed defied a trade who "have done everything in their power to crush it, and prevent its being circulated" ("The Horrors" 146).

The same could hardly be said for the next such work. *The Author's Printing and Publishing Assistant* (1839) was advertised in various incarnations in London newspapers for the next two decades by its publisher, Saunders & Otley; one such version even turns up in the ad columns of the 1852 serial edition of *Bleak House* (Steinlight 134). Primarily an author's guide to manuscript preparation for the press—a genre pioneered by Caleb Stower's *Typographical Marks, Employed in Correcting Proofs, Explained and Exemplified to the Use of Authors* (1805)—Saunders & Otley's guide takes a self-promotional turn in its second half, offering up praise of the firm's own subsidy publishing services. More unusually, though, in its second edition (1840) it also notes that the company received enough inquiries "to obtain a critical opinion" to "have arranged to place any Manuscripts which may be submitted to them with that view, who will offer such Remarks and Suggestions as may be likely to insure the Work a more favourable reception with the Public" (60). If the *Assistant* guide itself does not offer critical advice on writing, it nonetheless represents an early effort to monetize such advice.

It was in the year of the passage of the copyright law, however, that British writers found the business advice and the technical content of these two previous volumes combined. Edward Bull's *Hints and Directions for Authors* (1842) also ventures, quite tentatively, into the first aesthetic advice by these guides about writing—and not about the words themselves, but the typography: "As a general rule to young writers, we should say 'think twice before you underline any word that is an English word, and be very moderate in your use of italics,'—for an excess of them spoils the look of a page, and too many emphaticals crowded together, cease to be emphatic: and, besides, it is decent and discreet to leave the reader, *sometimes*, to judge for himself where the emphasis lies" (40).

In the long prescriptive tradition in writing advice to trust the reader, this is a modest ancestor, but a recognizable one. Much of the rest of *Hints* gives the usual advice about calculating word counts, providing a clean manuscript, and writing in a neat hand, and it even includes a guide to proofreader's marks and a sample page of a marked-up galley (41). But, even amid the new professional protections, it also marked by some bracing cynicism as in *The Perils of Authorship* about any new writer's chances. A book by an unknown writer or an obscure publishing house, it warns, faces "one of the strongest prejudices" in the trade—" [no] bookseller between Holles Street and the extremities of Cornhill, will subscribe for a single copy, or so much look at the book" (24). Unlike the more overtly self-interested Saunders & Otley guide, *Hints* is particularly dubious about self-publication by newcomers: "Money spent by an inexperienced author, by one wholly unacquainted with business and the trade, might as well be thrown into the Atlantic ocean, or lodged in a United States' bank, or embarked in a South American mining concern, or disposed of in any other equally hopeless manner" (25).

Despite their notorious odds, though, there were indeed some on both sides of the Atlantic who continued to invest in US banks, South American mines, and—perhaps with the least practicality of all—in trying to get their writing published.

### **iii. Eliza Leslie's *The Behaviour Book* (1852), *The Search for a Publisher* (1855), and Josiah Holland's *Letters to the Joneses* (1863)**

For American readers, the most obvious evolution of literature in the mid-century was not in copyright or technology, but in the presence of women. The rapid rise of women's literacy and education in the United States during this era was reflected in an increasingly female readership, and in authorship: between 1830 and 1872, the women-authored share of published novels rose

from 30 percent to nearly 75 percent (Coultrap-McQuin 47). In the vanguard of this new wave of women authors was Eliza Leslie (1787-1858)—or, as she was known to American women of the time, "Miss Leslie."

Leslie was a cultural juggernaut among her contemporaries. In addition to cookbooks (*Domestic Cookery Book*, 1837), homemaking guides (*House-Book*, 1840), and juvenile literature (*The American Girl's Book*, 1831), she edited Edgar Allan Poe's work for *The Gift* annual in 1836, contributed regularly to *Godey's Lady's Book*, and rode her fame to a title role at the short-lived incarnation of *Miss Leslie's Magazine* (1843). By the time her manners guide *The Behaviour Book: A Manual for Ladies* was published in 1852, the *Domestic Cookery Book* had already hit its 41st edition (Smith 525).

Featuring chapters on "Tea Visitors," "Deportment at a Hotel," and "Decorum at Church," *The Behaviour Book* would prove successful as well. Leslie's perspective as an experienced author, though, is reflected in the most curiously specialized chapters of the work: "Conduct to Literary Women" and "Suggestions to Inexperienced Authors." The former is notable today as a period piece on women authors, and for its timeless advice on how to visit a writer: don't interrupt them if they're writing, don't beg stationery off of them, and don't make fun of their messy desk. ("Recollect that there is really no wit in a remark too common on such occasions—'Why, you look quite *littery*'") (262). But it is the latter chapter, "Suggestions to Inexperienced Authors," that represents one of the earliest serious examples of its kind in America—one that, presented in a popular book, as opposed to ephemeral periodical literature, may have been the most widely circulated and readily available set of suggestions for years afterwards.

Leslie is noteworthy for being perhaps the first to make two recommendations that would become stalwart pieces of writing advice: to allow writing to sit overnight before proofing, so

that you may "revise it the next morning, when your perceptions are fresh and clear" (279); and that fiction writers keep "a large book of memorandums, of any amusing or remarkable things you chance to hear, and which you may turn to account afterwards" (283). The latter notion is allied to the practice of keeping of a commonplace book, an activity with a tradition that extends at least back to the *De Copia* of Erasmus in 1512 (Richards 44). It would go on to survive rather markedly as a professional activity of creative writers, and indeed suggestions of their use to novelists seems to have been circulating for some years already, for in an 1834 letter Maria Edgeworth lamented that even after encouragement from her father, in a career of "upwards of forty years, I have had only about half-a-dozen little notebooks, strangely and irregularly kept" (Barnett 6). Nonetheless, Leslie's *Behaviour Book* may be the first published recommendation of the trusty memo pad to aspiring fiction authors.

Leslie's other advice is not only as pragmatic as her contemporaries over in Britain, it expands upon it with an editor's understanding of editorial calendars and freelance cash flow: she is the first to note the necessity of submitting seasonal pieces two publication cycles beforehand (Leslie 280), and to recommend keeping an account book of manuscripts in progress, in press, and monies owed. Indeed, Leslie is notable for her business-minded distinction between the commercial prospects of poetry versus prose, and she sharply criticizes those who write to simply see their own name in print:

Prose obtains a higher price than poetry, of which there is always a superabundance in the market. Much poetry is published without any pay at all; the writers being contented with seeing their effusions in print. No good author has any occasion to write gratuitously. A merely passable or "just tolerable" writer of poetry or fiction, should give up the

inventive line, and try something else—something for which genius is not indispensable; and from which, by patience and industry, a sort of living may be wrung out. (281)

We see here the beginnings of what will become a common theme in creative writing advice: a linkage of artistic ability with commercial viability, and a tension with those authors who undercut wages by writing for little or nothing. It is an issue that would shadow writing advice and indeed the publishing industry not just in Leslie's time, but right up through twenty-first-century debates over unpaid "content providers" of modern-day publications like the *Huffington Post*, who give away writing to corporate entities on the elusive promise of "the nonmonetary benefits [of] page-view exposure" (Ross 13).

Much of the rest of Leslie's chapter is taken up with presentation advice that was already standard in British guides—i.e., a request for legible, grammatical and correctly punctuated writing in black ink on single-sided pages. By the 1850s, even British guides themselves had settled into a repetition of a previous generation's worth of such advice. An anonymous rehash titled *The Search for a Publisher* (1855) went through eight editions under different London subsidy publishers over the next three decades, even as its original testimonials from the 1855 edition went moldy and were never updated. (Another knockoff, *Counsels for Authors*, followed suit in 1863.) The one dubious innovation of *Search* was its assurance that a worthy published book would be recognized by the public in time, "but that a good book is sure to be recognized as such in the MS. form by Publishers is not true" (7). Hence, presumably, the utility of subsidized publishing to British writers of soon-to-be recognized genius.

As unsold first editions of *Walden* and *The House of the Seven Gables* could already attest, this proposition might have seemed dubious to many American writers hoping for vindication within their lifetime—or even long afterwards. The British play upon such hopes is a

notable contrast to American assumptions of the almost divine election of the marketplace—and indeed the next major American work of advice from this era, Josiah Holland's *Letters to the Joneses* (1863), is a sharp rebuke to any neglected author's hopes for fame and fortune. A popular author and editor of the *Springfield Republican*, Holland was particularly skeptical of the notion that any artist could stand in heroic opposition to the tastes of their era.

"I suppose you hug to yourself the delusion that you are in advance of your age," he snorts, "and that what it fails to appreciate, posterity will receive at full value.... Let me assure you that the coming age will have its own heroes to look after, and will stand a very small chance of stumbling upon your dead novel or your still-born poem" (135).

Just as with Eliza Leslie's manners guide, *Letters to the Joneses* is largely concerned with advice on such broadly popular topics as parenting and churchgoing, but uses two chapters to indulge the author's personal opinions on his own profession. In particular, Holland eschews any specific set of aesthetic principles for the need to mind current taste, whatever that may be—because, he notes, "the world will not buy what it does not want" (139)—and because sales are indeed the measure by which, practically speaking, he considers most literature to be judged.

"What good," he asks plainly, "are brains that are not marketable?" (133)

Holland's question could serve as a fair motto of the Victorian industrialization of literature. Yet he is not altogether dismissive of writing for its own sake. In noting the posthumous publication of the works of Theodore Winthrop, he notes "such a man writes because it is a necessity of his nature to write, and I venture to say that he has never sought advice on the subject" (221). His example is a historical one, but Holland may have also had a living author in mind: he and his *Springfield Republican* co-editor Samuel Bowles were longtime friends of Emily Dickinson, and among the very few to publish her poems during her lifetime—

though she was not keen on repeating the experience (Sewall 2: 593). Indeed, Dickinson's poem #709 ("Publication—is the Auction / Of the Mind of Man—") is generally dated to late 1863; it may be a rejoinder to the publication that year of these assertions by Holland.

The assumption in *Letters to the Joneses* is that writing for oneself is a personal and private activity; but that seeking advice on writing indicates a desire for professionalism. Yet it is a fair question of even how *much* good such marketable brains are, since in a later chapter Holland makes it clear that even artistic ability is not enough to survive in the profession. After a brisk dismissal of a desire to write as any indication of actual talent—"I think it the most unreliable index ever consulted" (Holland 217)—and a warning that the vast majority of writers fail, Holland makes it clear that he believes most aspiring writers are women frustrated with their domestic lives. Not only will they fail to find better sympathy among the public, he predicts, they will also find the logistics of book-length writing a very different challenge than penning magazine work.

"To write a brief poem, or a clever little essay for a magazine or a newspaper, it does not require much time," he notes. "You can do this in the intervals of domestic labor, and it would be rather a help than a hindrance to labor" (222). Books are different, however. They also require the ability to sustain oneself financially during such a period—a state that Holland outlines with a devastating specificity that could and perhaps should frighten prospective authors as badly in the present as in 1863:

This question of time is very important one to a person who is poor. A writer may devote one or two years to writing a good book, and then look one or two years for a publisher.... Six months after the day of publication he will give you a note for whatever may be due you for copyright, payable in four to six months from its date. Do you think this is an

exaggeration? Every author knows that it is not. It is the simple truth.... A man must be rich and independent or poor and desperate, to afford to write a first book. There are hardly ten persons among the thirty millions of Americans who rely on books for a living, and the most of those have a hard task of it. (224-225)

Because they require a commitment of years, books also require an artist to persevere at a work that they may become heartily sick of in the interim—so that even inspiring works of art, Holland muses, "probably left the author a disgusted man" (226). In short, those aspirants seeking a living from authorship, or even the emotional succor that they lack in their home life, will most likely find—neither.

Coming twenty-five years after "How to Write a Blackwood Article," Holland's *Letters to the Joneses* is nearly as despairing—a veritable recommendation to go hang yourself, and given in all seriousness, where Poe's vision of the writing profession was at least couched in humor. Over the next decade, American and British writing advice alike would see respective revolutions in both its aspirational nature and in the advent of aesthetic advice. But for many Americans, it may have seemed that the best advice about writing was still the simplest: Don't.

#### **4. No Man Weeps on Stilts: Literary Success and *Haney's Guide to Authorship***

##### **i. The Guild of Literature and Art (1865)**

It is easy to miss. Between the small Hertfordshire village of Knebworth to the north, and the smaller village of Woolmer Green to the south, a busy stretch of London Road runs by a scattering of Victorian homes in the suburbs of Stevenage—and past the remains of one of Britain's truly obscure monuments to an ideal in literature. It was here, on July 31st 1865, that Charles Dickens, Lord Edward Bulwer-Lytton, and dozens of fellow literati gathered for a housewarming. The object of their attention was a terrace of three newly-built Gothic cottages, the middle of which bore an inscribed stone arch: "*Institution of the Guild of Literature and Art, Anno Domini 1865*" (Hertford Mercury, "The Guild of Literature and Art," n.p.).

The houses were charming, with ornamentally tiled roofs, comfortable sitting rooms, pleasant gardens, and above all—space and quiet for the writing of novels. But they were not entirely isolated; there was also a new pub across the street, complete with a bowling green; and with Dickens' blessing, this snug little establishment had been christened Our Mutual Friend.

This community, Dickens explained in a speech, was to provide free housing and an annuity to worthy and needy writers in residence. "The ladies and gentlemen whom we shall invite to occupy these houses we have built will never be placed under any social disadvantage..." he announced to cheers. "They will be invited to occupy them as a mark of respect, and an assurance of high consideration from their fellow-workers" (*Hertford Mercury*, "The Guild of Literature and Art," n.p.).

It had been a long time in coming. In the decade after the passage of the Copyright Act of 1842, Dickens and Bulwer-Lytton worked to try to create author advocacy groups, though to

little result; the Guild, though, had finally managed to get the backing of some fifty fellow authors and a Parliamentary charter. The land that the Guild's cottages stood on had been donated by Bulwer-Lytton, and the funds to build them had largely come from a benefit play, *Not So Bad As We Seem*, written by Bulwer-Lytton and directed by Dickens. After £2000 in construction costs, their venture was now seeing its first tangible result. These cottages were to be the harbinger of a new era of creativity and artistic mutual aid.

Others were more dubious about the idea, and a *Saturday Review* headline scoffed at "The Guild of Mutual Admiration." Surely, it claimed, a worthy artist could find success in the marketplace: "If an artist is neither a blockhead nor a vagabond, he is not likely to require the Guild of Literature and Art to provide him with an asylum" (169). It was a flimsy argument—by then, one could have pointed out authors from Johnson to Poe as examples of geniuses in dire need—but it does demonstrate the deep-rooted belief that the market was a final arbiter in such matters. Still, some concerns about the project were more objective: in an otherwise admiring report, the *Westmoreland Gazette* let slip a characterization of the "long, dull, ragged village of Stevenage." ("The Guild of Literature and Art" 6).

These days Our Mutual Friend is still pulling pints for locals, but there are no writers in the Guild houses—indeed, the Guild itself is no more. Not a single writer ever took up the modest annuity to live for free in a Guild cottage, and after eleven years of standing embarrassingly vacant, the local council finally stepped in to rent them out (*South London Chronicle* n.p.). It seems the houses were in fact too remote; or as one later columnist drolly theorized, "the trains from London did not admit of their tenants coming back from the theatre." ("Chit-Chat" 18).

Yet the scheme stands as an apt emblem of a false spring in the history of Creative Writing in the UK and the US: a period of a few years in the mid-1860s when, prefiguring the efforts of later generations, it seemed that prescriptive theory, practical guides, and even tangible literary institutions for fiction-writing were about to flourish.

## ii. George Henry Lewes' "The Principles of Success in Literature" (1865)

Although the prolific Victorian critic George Henry Lewes (1817 – 1878) had been only lukewarm in his efforts on behalf of initial efforts by Dickens and Bulwer-Lytton at a Society of British Authors—"I am not a practical man; my business is to think and not to act" he apologized to them (Bonham-Carter 88)—within a few years he was more publicly espousing the view that writing was indeed a business. "Literature has become a profession," he announced in the opening of an 1847 *Frasier's Magazine* article. "It is a means of subsistence, almost as certain as the bar or the church. The number of aspirants increases daily, and daily the circle of readers grows wider" ("The Condition of Authors" 285).

Writing certainly was a thriving business for Lewes himself. Historian James Hepburn has noted that Lewes' work as an essayist earned him an average of about £400 per year from 1842-1861, and reached as much as £1300 per year in the mid-1860s (18). Some years his writing put him in the top 1% of British income earners (Picard 95). Lewes was at this peak of success when, fittingly enough, he helped launch the *Fortnightly Review* in 1865 with a series of essays on "The Principles of Success in Literature."

His project was a curious one. Within his own time, Lewes had a reputation for science commentary, and in particular on evolution. His first essay installment merges both interests, by declaring that nations are evolving social organisms, and that "Literature, in its widest sense,

becomes a delicate index of social evolution" (Lewes 9). To this end, he proposes how the fittest may survive: through what he terms the Principle of Vision, the Principle of Sincerity, and the Principle of Beauty.

If the vaguely scientific rhetoric scarcely lasted beyond the first page, Lewes' interest in literary advice was genuine—not least because, in his experience, "Genius is rarely able to give any account of its own processes" (98). And so he takes it upon himself. Under his Principle of Vision, Lewes asserts "Personal experience is the basis of all real Literature," (35). Though he overtly eschews this as an espousal of realism, and allows for well-described flights of fancy—"the mind must *see* the angel or the demon, the hippogriff or centaur" (96)—his principle inexorably leans away from the derivative and the grandiose. Inferior writers, he notes, typically mistake big subjects for good art: "I do not assert that inferior writers abstain from the familiar and the trivial... But their bias is towards great subjects" (38). And though Lewes never states them as such, his Principles of Vision remain recognizable today: they're the reliable maxims to write what you know, and that there are no small subjects, only small writers.

Lewes' next category, the Principles of Sincerity, are ultimately a restatement of his insistence on the primacy of lived experience. Writers are cautioned that they must care about their subject before a reader can—and that they cannot substitute a fine or provoking turn of phrase for honest expression. If Lewes' musing on dreary "great subjects" remains true of a certain class of unpublished manuscripts, his caution on provoking rhetoric remains recognizable of the too-easily published—those who can dance around the merry firecracker bang that their words set off, but who cannot sustain a large-scale work. "Open any book or periodical," Lewes observes, "and see how frequently the writer does not, cannot, mean what he says" (125).

This warning extends through into his *Principles of Beauty*, particularly in what Lewes considers the misuse of style and fine turns of phrase. Instructors will particularly recognize this problem: a writer willing to sacrifice the clarity of the work, and indeed its coherent purpose, for the sake of a beautiful line. Much of the latter half of "Principles" is essentially spent on insisting on the utility of language, and of the derivation of beauty from its proper use—that words are a tool, not an ornament—a means, and not an end.

"The racket player," Lewes inveighs, "keeps his eye on the ball he is to strike, not on the racket with which he strikes" (148).

What this means in practice is simple: revision. Of the writing advice thus far discussed, Lewes is among the first to insist on editing as an integral part of the composition process, and notes that this often whittles the work down: "every superfluous detail, every retarding influence, is at the cost of so much power, and is a mechanical defect though it may perhaps be an aesthetic beauty or a personal convenience" (165). Part of this emphasis arose from the occasional excesses of the triple-decker novels; Lewes particularly disliked triple-deckers, and longed for their demise as a publishing format (Stang 120).

Like Bulwer-Lytton, Lewes found drama a useful comparison in this regard—something both had drawn from recent German literary criticism (Tjoa 14). While both note that the novel can and should have more freedom to digress than the drama, Lewes was nonetheless struck by the useful line-level revision that occurs in the theatrical practice of a read-through. It's a merciless form of scrutiny that reveals a draft play's sentence flaws aloud, often by showing wording to be clumsy in its cadence, or so overlong as to literally keep other characters waiting on their marks. For the stage, the simple act of crossing out superfluous words or lines, rather than altering the remaining text itself, can be the crucial act of revision.

"If we have written a clumsy or confused sentence, we shall often find that the removal of an awkward inversion liberates the idea..." Lewes notes. "This is sometimes strikingly seen at the rehearsal of a play: a passage which has fallen flat upon the ear is suddenly brightened into effectiveness by the removal of a superfluous phrase, which, by its retarding influence, had thwarted the declamatory crescendo" (168). Much as his advice advocates for fiction itself, this is a critical observation based in lived experience—namely, in Lewes having witnessed theatrical revision.

Beyond the useful comparisons with drama, Bulwer-Lytton and Lewes would have something less helpful in common: their work vanished among their contemporaries with scarcely a ripple. "The Principles of Success in Literature" was, ironically, a failed work of literature—at least by its own standards. Lewes, like Josiah Holland, leans on the wisdom of the market in determining the value of a work—"it is idle to write in hieroglyphics" he scolds (23). Yet this ambitious work, stretching to over 40,000 words, was never collected in Lewes' lifetime. It excited little public comment beyond some polite praise largely directed at the launch of the *Fortnightly Review* itself.

Lewes never quite defined who he was aiming these principles at, though occasionally he turns to the reader with startling effect:

Try and form a picture in your own mind of your early skating experiences. It may be that the scene only comes back to you in shifting outlines, you recall the general facts, and some few particulars are vivid, but the greater part of the details vanish again before they can assume shape; they are but half nascent, or die as soon as born: a wave of recollection washes over the mind, but quickly retires, leaving no trace behind. That is the common experience. (85)

Though not quite a writing exercise, it comes close, and even today his invitation remains an effective example of how an apparently effortless scene does not come naturally at all, and depends on a painstaking accumulation of evocative detail by the writer. But it is ultimately a demonstration to the reader, rather than an exercise for the writer. Lewes never does address his peers directly.

That may be why the work never gained much circulation in its own time—though, as we will see in Part II, it did find an audience decades later. Lewes' modern biographer is largely dismissive of it, and particularly of the author's unfortunate flirtation with scientific rhetoric and "the theodicy of success" (Tjoa 76); he finds the *Principles* "no more than ad hoc, empirical, commonsensical injunctions" (75). That is a fair summary of Lewes today, but perhaps not in 1865. Injunctions to write what you know and to kill your darlings were not commonsensical when they were written; indeed, the very maxims just invoked did not find that exact wording until years later.

Under historical scrutiny, the commonsensical and empirical in writing instruction often proves to be nothing of the sort. Even the apparently obvious notion of gathering all these injunctions and examples into a book of advice still needed inventing—and that would not come until two years later, and from a source closer to Barnum than to Bronte.

### **iii. *Haney's Guide to Authorship* (1867)**

Americans may not have shown much interest in Lewes' advice in the 1860s, but they did not lack for splendid pointers on more immediately gratifying artistic feats: say, how to make a disembodied head float in midair before a crowd. To learn that secret, they needed to ask no

further than Jesse Haney (1829 – 1901), proprietor of *Haney's Journal Of Useful Information, Important Arts and Discoveries, and Valuable Recipes*.

"That the head is a gutta-percha or plaster affair, is a pet theory with those who have not seen it, but after witnessing the exhibition this idea is reluctantly discarded," its March 1868 issue explains (17). The stage trick, it seems, is done with mirrors. Later in the same issue, Haney continues his ongoing series on "The Rich Men of The World, and How They Gained Their Wealth," and his crusading mail-fraud column "The Humbug Squelcher," which gleefully reveals that ads for a \$1 "printing machine" merely net a rubber stamp—"which is a 'printing machine' in about the about the same sense that a cambric needle is a 'sewing machine'" (22).

Jesse Haney's name was a familiar one to many American humor readers in the 1860s and 1870s. Born in Germantown, Pennsylvania, he began as the young protégé of biographer James Parton, who had worked as a schoolmaster in Philadelphia (Gunn 18:245). Following Parton to New York, he became an integral part of the Bohemian culture of comic writers and illustrators, famously centered around Pfaff's beer cellar ("Jesse Haney Passes Away" 1). Much of what survives about Haney is in the highly opinionated diaries of his friend Thomas Butler Gunn, the author of *The Physiology of New York Boarding-Houses* (1857); fittingly enough, Haney was Gunn's boarding-housemate, living "in his room, at the other angle of the attic floor" (Gunn 8:72). Their contingent at Pfaff's commonly included Fitz-James O'Brien, Mortimer Thomson ("Doesticks"), and the illustrators Sol Eytinge and Thomas Nast. They put in near-daily calls nearby to the marriageable young cousins of James Parton, the Edwards Sisters; indeed, it was Haney who introduced Nast to Sallie Edwards, who became Nast's future wife. Haney himself had been smitten with her, but instead he married her sister Mattie Edwards, so

that he and Nast—as well as James Parton—were in-laws (Halloran 39). Jesse Haney had become, figuratively and literally, deeply related to New York literary culture.

Not the least of these relations was to Parton's wife, the author Fanny Fern. Haney had a tumultuous friendship with her, for he loyally took his old mentor's part in the couple's quarrels: "Haney's faith in Jim," as Gunn put it, "is touching and womanish" (Gunn 19:193). Haney's skeptical bluster in print seems to have offset, or was perhaps a rueful reaction to, his own utter credulity and loyalty to these friends. He was quite won over by Walt Whitman, for instance, so much so that James Parton was coaxed into loaning the poet \$300. When Whitman couldn't pay it back and dodged Parton's calls—"there's reason for suspecting the great 'Kosmos' to be a great scoundrel," Gunn mused—some of the blame was attached to the gullible Haney (Gunn 8:153). "I was carried away by his [Haney's] judgment of Walt Whitman, despite my own thoughts," Gunn wrote in his diary. "When Walt told him, 'on his honor,' that he—the Author of 'Leaves of Grass'—had lived a perfectly chaste life, that staggered my faith. I had doubts before. Now I know I should have held to my own judgment" (8:162).

Outside his circle of friends, though, Haney proved a hard-headed businessman. Along with publishing humor and puzzle magazines like *Picayune*, *Phunny Phellow* and *Nick-Nax*, he was the first American publisher of *Alice in Wonderland* through pirated installments in his *Merryman's Monthly* magazine (Clark 226). He also had a keen eye for more distinctly American taste and talent. He launched *Boy's Own* dime novels, hawking such titles as *Carmie*, *The Creole Spy* ("It is no cheap, trashy, or catchpenny affair, but the production of a first class author") (Jesse Haney & Co., *Field and Fireside*). Successful at attracting such comic talents as Orpheus C. Kerr, he even tried to hire Mark Twain into his stable of writers (Clemens, Letter to Jesse C. Haney). Haney's Nassau Street business also issued a blizzard of cheap how-to softcovers across

a broad range of interests, from *Haney's Handbook of Ventriloquism* to *Haney's Base Ball Reference for 1867*—the latter, in fact, becoming a foundational text for the sport.

Amid these brightly colored paper covers on the bookstands came an extraordinary volume: *Haney's Guide to Authorship: A Practical Guide to All Who Desire To Engage in Any Kind of Literary Pursuit for Pleasure or Profit* (1867). Haney's guide evinces the same qualities as his namesake *Haney's Journal* magazine—a desire for demystification, and a frank appraisal of moneymaking opportunities. His advice for new authors remains astute even today. "If the young author be wise he will get into an untrodden field, or at least into a part of the field that is least trampled down," he counsels. "When everyone is writing Braddonesque novels, filled with murders and bigamies, let him produce one in which domestic virtues and pleasures are exemplified" (Haney 9). It's advice borne of a publisher's experience that chasing last year's hit will dash newcomers against hardened professionals and a saturated market. And as for rejection letters, Haney finds them inevitable, a matter of paying one's dues, and hardly worth his sympathy.

"Generally," he says bluntly, "the fault is with you" (80).

Haney is also briskly dismissive of the usual trivia of hothouse writing habits: "It is probably a matter of habit, or whim. We were in the habit of writing editorial in a room next to where a hoop-skirt maker had a noisy machine in operation, and grew accustomed to the noise. When he removed, we found some difficulty in keeping our thoughts clear. We missed the noise" (13). What he does pay enthusiastic attention to, though, is revealing the earnings and advances paid out to authors; he explains how acquisition editors work, and why first books typically get a low advance (79).

What is most remarkable about *Haney's Guide to Authorship* is that it is designed as a true all-in-one guide: moving beyond the now longstanding British guidebook genre of advice on the preparation and proofing of manuscripts, Haney adds a glossary of literary terminology and an explanation of copyright. There is also an early hint of literary agents—what he dubs the "literary *accouchers* in New York" (83)—and indeed such "midwives" reach back informally, as Mary Ann Gillies notes, to revolutionary France (4). A later printing of Haney even appends one of the very first guides to freelance writing fees—a fascinating section that clocks in the *New York Evening Post* at \$3 an editorial, *Harper's* at \$6-10/page, dime novels at \$50 each, and *The Atlantic* at a princely \$200/article (117).

Most of Haney's guide, though, is occupied by the discussion of craft in a dizzying array of genres: journalism, poetry, sermons, plays, history, even puzzles and riddles. Above all, the focus is on fiction, which occupies nearly as many pages as all the other genres combined. Haney discourages long, pedantic words and sentences, particularly in description, and advises authors to model themselves on the emergent genre of crime reporting: "[Dickens] retained much of the trick of his former craft, and some of his best descriptions are as devoid of unnecessary words as a police report or the newspaper account of a street fight" (24). This economy in wording extends to the paragraph level: he cautions against the conclusion that is so precious that it needs an extra paragraph just to set it up (44), and lauds the utility of plot outlines to the point of noting the composition method of "beginning at the end," the better to minimize digression (47). It's an approach to editing whose utility in tightly written how-tos and dime novels served Haney himself well.

Haney's advice also reflected the ascendancy of Realism in American writing: excess emotion should be shunned, he counsels, particularly in spots where it will simply strike the

reader as ludicrous. This leads to an inimitable editorial maxim that appears unique to Haney: "No man weeps on stilts" (35). As for plots, he repeats the advice of a fellow editor: " 'If I wanted to write a story that would take, I'd get a young girl, pooty as a picture, and modest and good, and I'd make her suffer like ----;' and here the word was filled with a word more forcible than pious" (45). Ever the pragmatist, Haney also recommends that a novelist stuck for a title simply use the name of his heroine (76).

Haney's unsentimental view of literature extends to the question of artistic merit itself—like George Lewes and Josiah Holland before him, he trusts the marketplace and starkly rejects any Romantic notion of defiant genius. Like both of them, he'd become a financially successful writer and editor by dint of hard and prolific work, which perhaps encouraged a view of literature as a product, just like horseshoes or hoop skirts. It *is* that, of course; but whether it also might be something more is not often acknowledged in Haney's work.

Yet this avowed pragmatism also entailed a democratic openness to any new talent who could get the job done. Authorship is a particularly fine field for women, Haney explains, and only a lack of business acumen and higher learning had wrongfully held them back—" There need be no more weak writers among women than among men" (12). The travails and successes of a woman author, immortalized by Fanny Fern in her 1854 novel *Ruth Hall*, had been witnessed firsthand by Haney as her friend and in-law. And solicitousness of his female audience remained a particular point of interest for him, as indeed it would become among later creative writing instructors; following up in the February 1868 issue of *Haney's Journal* with the headline "Authorship as a Universal Accomplishment," his magazine emphasized that "To women is authorship as a recreation particularly suited... a young lady who can write pretty verses, or an

interesting sketch, does not lose any popularity on that account, and runs no risk now-a-days of being shunned by gentlemen as a strange and dangerous monster" (12).

Curiously, when *Haney's Guide to Authorship* is recalled at all today, it is for the historic role played by its brief section on newspaper writing: it was one of the first works, and perhaps *the* first work, to advocate objectivity in reportage (Mirando 25). True to form, Haney's reasons for this extraordinary innovation had nothing to do with ethics, and everything with business: "If newspapers were merely the organ of individual opinions, or the opinions of a coterie, this would be well enough. But a newspaper is a thing made for sale. It is as much as marketable matter as a pair of shoes, or a coat. It must be made to suit the views and wishes of its customers" (Haney 84).

All of which brings us back to the opening conceit in our first chapter: imagining the young Edgar Allan Poe in 1826, in a bootless effort to find a guide to writing advice. His counterparts a half century later would have no such troubles. *Haney's Guide to Authorship* turns up across the country in the *Catalogue of the San Francisco Free Public Library* in 1880 (88), and ads for it can still be found as late as 1888 in the advertising endpapers of *The Art of Boxing* (n.p.). (Indeed, Haney quickly went on to reprint the writing-advice volumes *Mind Your Stops: or, Punctuation Made Easy* and a *Poet's Companion* rhyming dictionary.) For most of a generation, *Haney's Guide to Authorship* continued to be hawked with little competition through newspaper and magazine ads that, in Haney's usual fashion, emphasized pragmatic business and aesthetic advice. "Experience is sometimes a hard teacher; many things can be learned in a few moments from the **Guide to Authorship** which might take years of painful experiment to learn from experience," one 1872 ad asserts. "The GUIDE does not pretend to make a genius of a numskull, but to show how to make the most of ability" (Jesse Haney & Co., *The American*

*Educational Monthly*). The same essential promise, and indeed much of the same content, has characterized an entire genre of mass-market creative writing guides up to the present day.

Jesse Haney may be a colorfully crass figure in the early history of writing advice, but it was precisely his sense of purpose that made him succeed where the hazier efforts of Bulwer-Lytton and Lewes failed to find their audience. He was, in his own way, as deeply related to a literary scene and its business as either of them were. But in creating the first guide to cover business practicalities, proofreading and editing advice, aesthetic counsel, and writing to the market in a variety of genres, Haney created a pioneering and avowedly practical work. He would soon go on to other pressing projects—*Haney's Hand-Book of Dominoes*, for instance, and *How to Make Slow Horses Fast, and Fast Horses Faster*—but his brilliant, blustering creation is an ancestor of the shelf-loads of creative writing advice in bookstores ever since.

## PART II. Fiction-Writing in the Classroom

### 5. The Moral is Excellent: George Quackenbos and the Coming of Classroom Fiction Instruction

#### i. Campus Literary Magazines

Ask an author where they were first published, and you may hear of a little literary magazine or a small town newspaper. But press them—*no, before that*—and after a moment, you may get a different answer. For me, it was a magazine called *Lower Case*. Or, more properly, *Lower Case: A Literary Magazine*. The equals sign was inserted, haplessly, by the well-meaning 8th grade teacher who hadn't spaced his cover layout properly for the title. *That* was where I published my first short story.

Dig deeply into the bibliography of many modern authors—perhaps most of them—and you will find school and college magazines. Willa Cather and Zora Neal Hurston wrote early or even first publications in their college literary magazines; F. Scott Fitzgerald was so pleased with his 1915 debut "The Ordeal" in Princeton's *Nassau Literary Magazine* that he revised the piece for *Smart Set* magazine, and then published it as "Benediction" in his first story collection (Fitzgerald 95). Nor has the passage of time changed this role much: one can just as readily find college literary publications by a young Flannery O'Connor, Thomas Pynchon, or David Foster Wallace. The college literary magazine is an important enough feature of campus life that the Association of Writing Programs now includes "an affiliated literary publication" in its guidelines for standards for creative writing programs (AWP Hallmarks).

All the more curious, then, that college literary magazines have not been the subject of modern scholarship—not a single monograph. As a shared formative educational experience among countless writers, and a major category of magazines within themselves, their absence

from literary history is mystifying. But this also reflects their early role on college campuses: widespread, formative, and yet unacknowledged within the formal curriculum.

College literary *societies* have been the subject of some limited scholarly study. Their lineage extends at least back to Cambridge University's Zodiac Club (1725), though accounts of its meetings are hazy—perhaps because, as one chronicler notes, "its eight or nine members usually imbibed over four bottles of wine apiece" (Clark 225). In the US, these societies took on a rather more sober role in antebellum higher education; as James McLachlan notes, "they were, in effect, colleges within colleges" (qtd. in Rudolph 95). Literary societies invited authors to campus and kept up with current literature; Frederick Rudolph has noted that Columbia students in the 1830s checked out an average of 20 books a year from society collections, but just two from the college library. A decade later, the President of Indiana University remarked that a literary society "was equal to one professor" (97).

There has been a long tradition of overlap between college literary societies and campus literary magazines; one of the earliest such publications, Miami University of Ohio's *The Literary Focus* (1827), was a collaboration between the campus's Erodelphian Literary Society and the Miami Union Literary Society. Like many other campus magazines of its era, it proved short-lived; a successor in 1833, *Oxford Lyceum*, was wiped out in its first year by a smallpox epidemic ("Early Journalism at Miami" 7-8). 1833 also saw Amherst College burying the last of three magazines in as many years: *The Sprite*, *The Shrine*, and *The Guest* (Sheldon 152). Even Yale, which can lay claim to the oldest surviving publication with the *Yale Literary Magazine* (1836), found it rough going: the magazine was preceded by a staggering 23 known lapsed students publications stretching back to 1806, and was followed by a string in the 1840s (*The*

*Collegian*, *The College Cricket*, and *City of Elms*) that never made it to a second issue ("Old Yale Periodicals" 89).

The typical causes of magazine mortality were, unsurprisingly, lack of funds and a high turnover of students. Sometimes the turnover was very high indeed, as when *The Student's Companion* (1831), ostensibly produced by nine "Knights of the Round Table," proved to all be one Yale student posing under multiple pen-names (Sheldon 153)

In form, these magazines often hewed closely to their non-campus contemporaries. Early publications, like *The Literary Miscellany* (1805) of Harvard, made little reference to the campus or indeed to original creative literature at all; their prospectus promised "Ancient and Modern HISTORY has been presented to the public, by writers of eminence....[and] Dissertations on the MYTHOLOGY, CUSTOMS, MANNERS, and ANTIQUITIES of Nations" ("Prospectus" 2). By the time it finished promising articles on mathematics, astronomy, and chemistry, the pledge of "POETICAL EFFUSIONS" was something of an afterthought. Such avowedly scholarly content would continue throughout the century in many magazines, and indeed the early issues of *Yale Literary Magazine* also contain a number of pieces penned by professors.

But many college magazines were at least somewhat student-oriented and noticeably nationalistic in tone. *The Harvard Lyceum* (1810) specifically notes that it is "conducted by a few students of the senior class of Harvard college" ("Address of the Editors" 1), and that "the subject of American literature will receive our particular attention"—a nod towards the incipient "Young America" movement preceding the War of 1812, and a need the editors find sharpened by "the foreign transactions of the last four years, nay, the last three months" (3). But above all, the *Lyceum* and its successors showed an increasing devotion to student-produced creative work,

particularly in poetry. "We assure our subscribers," *Lyceum* editors announced, "that a part of every number shall be inalienably devoted with religious sacredness to original poetry" (2).

College magazines also quickly adopted another convention from outside publications—namely, an "Editor's Table" or "Exchange" that reviewed and warmly acknowledged other magazines, particularly newly launched ones. One can thus see *Rutgers Literary Miscellany* of May 1842, for instance, cheering on the debut of the *Nassau Monthly*: "We are glad to see our friends at Princeton College are not behind the spirit of the age" (80). The result is a map of early college magazine culture, and evinces a growing self-awareness of college magazines as a distinct category of publication. "We remind our readers that the 'LIT' is conducted exclusively by the Students of College and has no rivalry with outside and more pretentious publications," the *Yale Literary Magazine* of October 1868 points out—a jab clearly directed at commercial magazines, as the next page goes on to acknowledge issue exchanges with 21 fellow college magazines (46-47).

Not surprisingly, given their young and volatile staffing, these publications varied greatly in quality. Yet college magazines were often credible literary efforts; and if some were given over to hijinks and fraternity rivalries (the *Yale Banger* of 1840 and the *Excuse Paper* of 1860 come to mind), a great many were serious attempts at publication. As early as 1829, the first attempt by Harvard students at a *Collegian* was advertised as far away as Baltimore, and had a news agent to collect subscriptions in that city (*The Collegian* 1). The *Yale Literary Magazine* received widespread attention from the start, and its 1843 publication of the student poem "Fanny Willoughby" was quickly republished in newspapers ranging from the *Wisconsin Democrat* ("Fanny Willoughby" 4) to the Charlestown, South Carolina's *Southern Patriot* ("Fanny Willoughby" 1). Despite only surviving for two issues in 1850, the University of

Michigan's *Peninsular Quarterly & University Magazine* managed to debut the first "Q.K. Philander Doesticks, P.B." story by freshman Mortimer Thomson, a literary persona that quickly became nationally popular ("Who is Doesticks?" 2).

So fiction was being created by these college students—but was it taught in their classrooms?

## **ii. Antebellum Composition: James Getty (1831), Richard Green Parker (1844), and Henry Noble Day (1850)**

Rhetoric instruction in the mid- nineteenth century faced a dilemma connected to the very reason that so many student magazines were flourishing: namely, as Robert Connors has noted, in 1831 there were 54 colleges in the US, and in 1869 there were 563. Though America's population increased roughly threefold in this period, the number of colleges had grown over ten-fold. (And perhaps even more than that: many closed during the Civil War, after an earlier peak that may have been closer to 700.) The necessity of hiring increasingly inexperienced instructors came amid a decline of the lecture and oratory, and a rise in written exercises, a development that in part had been abetted in the early nineteenth-century rise of senior peer "monitor" system. Inexperienced instructors, needing exercises to occupy their burgeoning roomfuls of students, were not in need of treatises, but of step-by-step writing guides and discussion prompts. Publishers initially responded by tacking questions onto the end of old editions of Blair and Whatley, and then producing a number of similar derivative works. As Connors adds, "Question-laden books proliferated... [in a] degradation of college rhetoric from a lecture-tutorial system to a catechistical recitation-based discipline" (*Composition Rhetoric* 77).

The change can be most dramatically seen by beginning with a relatively overlooked college text from the beginning of this period: John Getty's *Elements of Rhetoric: Exhibiting a Methodical Arrangement of the All of the Important Ideas of the Ancient and Modern Rhetorical Writers* (1831). Getty's respective weighting of the ancient and the modern may be guessed at by the fact that he makes no mention of Whatley or Campbell, four mentions of Blair, and 49 citations of Cicero—and from a Preface that commences with the statement "The unanimous voice of every civilized nation has awarded unfading laurels to the ancient orators of Greece and Rome. The thunder of DEMOSTHENES shook the throne of the Macedonian PHILIP to its foundation, and the weight of CICERO's unrivalled eloquence balanced, for some time, the tottering republic of Rome" (n.p.). Getty's text amounts to a backward look at the classical oratorical tradition in American education; little mention of recent literature is made by Getty, and the tone quickly makes a consideration of fiction just about unthinkable. As Jean Carr has noted, Getty's text was "at once entirely derivative and immensely learned"—and it left few if any direct descendants in American textbooks (54).

By contrast, one of the most popular domestic college texts of the antebellum period, Richard Green Parker's *Aids to English Composition* (1844), adopts a writing-exercise oriented format: indeed, its final twenty pages are given over to numbered lists of nearly 900 subjects for theme-writing. Dividing his work into 100 chapters, Parker includes numerous discussions on figurative language, aesthetic considerations in prosody, and the devices and forms of poetry, albeit largely as a means to an end of the more powerful practical utilitarian use of language. This pragmatism becomes particularly clear in the final chapters of the book, which—like British how-to guides of the era—not only explains proofreading marks, but includes such workaday genres as obituaries, critical notices, and sermons. But while it includes passing mentions of Sir

Walter Scott, Parker also adopts the same essential strategy of avoidance regarding fiction, making a slight mention of the genre through a sample argument in Philosophical Disputation. His nominal disputant notes that fiction has seen "an almost entire revolution in that department of literature," and asserts that though popular, it is blameless of draining vitality from useful forms of literature (361). Even though Parker had made an earlier feint towards fiction in his 1832 school primer *Progressive Exercises in English Composition*, in his college text he has little more to say about the genre beyond this passing reference.

The antebellum era would see a great many editions of Parker, as well as a flood of Whatley and Blair reprints, often adapted to include questions—as Carr notes, there were "over 40 abridged and two dozen complete versions" of Blair alone (49). A third successful text from this period, with a publication run of some 25 years, was Henry Noble Day's *Elements of the Art of Rhetoric* (1850). The nephew of Yale president Jeremiah Day, Henry Noble Day grew up under the inescapable influence of his uncle, as he was sent to live in President Day's home while attending Yale. Trained under his uncle's famed "Yale Plan"—a conservative hearkening back to academic classicism of the eighteenth century—Day debuted with an oratorically oriented textbook that was published even as many were calling for the abandonment of classical models.

In some regards Day's *Elements* looked like part of the new textbook vanguard: it was atomistically divided into 362 brief topics, and helpfully included 13 pages of theme and exercise prompts at the end of the book. Yet as James Berlin has noted, "Day considered himself an innovator.... [but] was in every way thoroughly the student of Campbell" (*Writing Instruction in Nineteenth-Century Colleges*, 38-39). His pedagogy remained rooted in oratorical focus of Campbell and other eighteenth-century texts, and made heroic efforts to modernize and extend them into the 19th. More carefully and rigorously structured than the hodge-podge rationale of

Parker, Day's oratorical basis nonetheless represented, as Robert Connors notes, "a dead end, a road that American composition rhetoric did not take" ("Henry Noble Day"162). Yet however idiosyncratic it may have proven in this regard, Day's textbook was also altogether conventional in its treatment of fiction. Though it featured sections on Narration and Description, his only substantive statement on fiction comes in one paragraph in a section on Beauty; namely, that a fiction writer may display "the elevation and correctness of his taste" with their selection of a subject—and that "those of the late French school," he hints, might not fare well by such judgments (22). Day provides no guidance on any other aspect of creating or even analyzing fiction.

The lockout of fiction from college textbooks, in short, had shown little change by 1850, some seven decades after Blair and Whatley's work. Even as campus literary societies engaged and fostered such work, the textbooks in their classrooms did not; and what might have been a high-minded refusal in the eighteenth century was now becoming a reactionary stance against a flood of arguably the era's most popular and innovative literature. By the following year, the water would begin to seep in.

### **iii. The Beginnings of Classroom Fiction Instruction in George Quackenbos's *First Lessons in Composition* (1851) and *Advanced Course in Composition* (1854)**

To buyers of *First Lessons in Composition* in 1851, the title page listed a respectable-sounding author: one G.P. Quackenbos, "Rector of the Henry-Street Grammar School, New York." His job title was quite true, but hardly the full story of the man. Behind one of the most popular rhetorics of the mid-century America, and the first to openly embrace fiction writing in the classroom, there was the hack writer's equivalent of pulling off an inside job.

George Payn Quackenbos's interest in literature was apparent from the start. A nearly lifelong New Yorker, he attended Columbia in the early 1840s and was among the founding members of its Psi Upsilon fraternity—which, though not a student literary society per se, was notably focused on such matters. "Our meetings were almost purely literary," Quackenbos later recalled, and a number of the papers read at them were then published in *Anglo-American* magazine (Gabauer 46). The experience seems to have marked Quackenbos; after college, he made a half-hearted try at studying law, and then cast aside it for his real passion: writing. In 1846, he made his literary debut—and not with a textbook. It was with *St. Jean's Evening: Or, Crime and Mystery*—a dime novel published by E. Winchester, a New York outfit also known for publishing translations of the newly popular urban mystery writer Eugene Sue.

It was not a background Quackenbos was at any pains to reveal later. Yet he may be the only major writing textbook author of the nineteenth century who can trace his beginnings to the early dime-novel market. *St. Jean's Evening* was hardly the dire stuff of some shockers—ads in the *New York Tribune* assured that "The moral is truly excellent. it may be introduced without danger into the family circle" (Winchester 3)—but it was cheap fiction, and sold with the promise that it was "full of interest and excitement" (Winchester 48). Though he'd begun teaching by 1847, Quackenbos was still not quite ready to leave the literary realm: in 1848, he launched a weekly magazine, *Literary American*, for which he was the proprietor, editor, and frequent contributor. *Literary American* ran a number of Quackenbos short stories that have never been reprinted since, beginning with "The Lawyer's Love," on the front page of its first July 8th 1848 issue.

Unlike many of his contemporaries among textbook authors, Quackenbos was convinced that fiction need not be inherently damaging to public morals. *St. Jean's Evening* was advertised

as a tale safe enough for children, after all, and in *Literary American's* debut issue, he announced its aims as a family publication under "Our Plans and Ends": "First, we give Fiction.... Our tales shall be readable; and at least contain none of those glaring immoralities, which too often creep into works of otherwise respectable character" (13).

This was not a particularly common stance for an erstwhile educator to take. One of the most popular academy-level texts that year, J.R. Boyd's *Elements of Rhetoric and Literary Criticism* (1844), reiterated a position present since Blair's *Lectures*—namely, an acknowledgment of fiction's qualities, but promptly negated on the grounds of its corrupting influence. Only three pages of Boyd are given over to fiction, as compared with 27 pages for poetry; and while Boyd allows that "a good novel" might contain "a perfect freedom from every degree of immoral tendency, together with the power of deeply interesting the feelings of the reader" (143), it quickly concludes that (emphasis his): "the facilities for cheap publication are manufacturing a flood of this species of literature.... *The unwary may imbibe the poison of vice or infidelity when looking only for amusement*" (144).

Yet at the same time that he was writing his first textbook and running his school, George Quackenbos was indeed actively writing and editing fiction under the bruising demands of a weekly publication—of, as Boyd might have it, "the facilities for cheap publication" of poison. Perhaps inevitably, Quackenbos's moonlighting began to show up in his educational work. *First Lessons in Composition* notes in its preface that it was borne of his experience in the classroom that, "while there are several publications well calculated to advance pupils at the age of fifteen or sixteen"—this, one suspects, might include J.R. Boyd's works—"there is not one suited to the comprehension of those between nine and twelve" (4). Comprised of 85 lessons, averaging two pages each, Quackenbos's *First Lessons* gives many of the same familiar (if simpler)

explanations of issues of grammar, usage, and style. But in its final twenty lessons, it ventures into forms of writing, with a catechetical lecture on such forms as letter-writing and Natural Description followed by "Exercises" in the form. And it is here that a remarkable title occurs: "Lesson LXXVIII: Fiction" (163).

It is a brief lecture on the form—but entirely free of censure or recourse to morals. Quackenbos merely generically notes that fiction has "no foundation except in the imagination of the writer," and is made interesting by "Striking scenes and novel combinations of events." He then follows this with something truly new in American education: "EXERCISE.... Imagine that you had an encounter with banditti, while travelling Italy, and write an account of it" (163).

A prompt to *write* fiction? It is hard to overstate how new this was—though whether Quackenbos or his contemporaries realized it is hard to say. Clearly, though, while he had numerous models to draw upon for his other lessons, Quackenbos *had* to write his fiction chapter from scratch. Its novelty is evident even in some of the topics themselves; in a suggested "List of Subjects" for exercises, appended to the end of the textbook, Quackenbos includes ten more suggested fiction themes, the first being "Adventures in California"—a hint that this material may have been newly written in the aftermath of the 1849 Gold Rush (179).

A footnote on the same page includes what may be the first classroom pedagogical instruction on teaching fiction writing:

For the Exercises in Fiction it will be necessary to draw on the imagination; in some cases, it may be well for the teacher to assist the pupil with remarks on the subject. In the case of "the History of a Pin," it is necessary only to imagine some of the scenes that a pin would be likely to pass through, and to relate them as if the pin itself were speaking; thus, "The first recollections that I have," &c. (f. 179)

It seems that the rather dismissive view, voiced back in 1789 in Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, of fiction's capacity for teaching imaginative empathy—that it might be suited for "children and simple people"—had, in fact, come to pass in a grade school textbook.

Three years later, Quackenbos took his idea a step further in his *Advanced Course of Composition and Rhetoric* (1854). Unlike *First Lessons*, this textbook was subtitled for "The Use of Schools and Colleges"—but like its grade school predecessor, it included a fiction chapter, this time tucked in near the end of the book's 108 lessons.

Along with the usual potted history and generic distinctions between different genres of fiction, Quackenbos includes advice to students on how to write it. The plot, he advises, needs to be probable, moral, and lead to a denouement. There needs to be "a striking and lifelike portraiture of character"—one that is achieved, in part, by portraying "peculiarities of mind and character" (374). Noting the popularity of fiction, his emphasis is on its positive capacities: "In the hands of judicious writers who feel the responsibility of their position, fiction becomes an important instrument of good. It furnishes one of the best channels for conveying instruction..." (375). As a sample story, he includes Alfred Gaudet's "Cardinal Richelieu's Guest"—a piece he previously ran in *Literary American*—and then ends his lesson with a single, modest assignment: "EXERCISE. Write a Tale, founded on incidents of your own invention, and conveying the moral that appearances are deceitful" (379).

And there it is: the first fiction writing advice and exercise in a college textbook.

All this might be of little note if Quackenbos's textbooks had simply lapsed into the obscurity of a single printing. But they did nothing of the sort. *First Lessons*, Lucille Schultz has pointed out, was "enormously successful, one source noting that forty thousand copies were printed"—becoming, along with Parker's earlier *Progressive Exercises*, the leading "emblems of

nineteenth-century, school-based writing instruction, at once those most popular in their day and those most often recognized today" (36).

Quackenbos's rhetoric texts were a juggernaut well into the 1870s; in 1869, his publisher was crowing in ads that they "have superseded almost every other on the same subject," and boasting from the latest *New York Regent's Report* that "127 Academies of the State of New York use Quackenbos's Rhetoric, while the number that use all other text-books on the subject is only 34" (D. Appleton & Co. 287). His *Advanced Course* appears to have also found favor at the college level. The Rockford Female Seminary in Illinois, for instance, long had various classes of students using combinations of Boyd, Whatley, and Newman texts in their rhetoric classes; but for at least a decade after 1862, all levels of their Rhetoric classes switched *solely* to Quackenbos (Grate 140-141).

Yet George Quackenbos remains comparatively little known in scholarship on nineteenth-century writing instruction. Remarkably, we do have some account of the man himself by no less than Henry James—who, along with his brother William, was one of Quackenbos's young pupils. James recalled "a strange, curly, glossy, anointed and bearded" instructor whose youth and energy seems to have contrasted with Mr. Forrest, his "awful and arid" senior partner in the school (*A Small Boy and Others* 212). The school, James mused, was almost improbably stocked with children from the city's wealthiest families:

At Forest's [sic] the prolonged roll-call in the morning, as I sit in the vast bright crowded smelly smoky room, in which rusty black stove-shafts were the nearest hint of architecture, bristles with names, Hoes and Havemeyers, Stokeses, Phelpses, Colgates and others, of a subsequently great New York salience. It was sociable and gay.... Everyone did things and had things—everyone knew how, even when it was a question

of the small animals, the dormice and grasshoppers, or the hoards of food and stationery, that they kept in their desks, just as they kept in their heads the secrets of how to do sums... (222-223)

By the 1870s, this "strange, curly" instructor would see his notion of fiction in instruction quietly spread from that Manhattan classroom to every corner of the country. Quackenbos didn't argue or editorialize in its support, and indeed never singled out his innovation at all: a seemingly minor idiosyncrasy in his work, it germinated without notice among a generation of students and instructors, borne by his astoundingly successful textbooks.

As James' generation became instructors themselves, the question of fiction's proper role in the academy—whether creative reading and creative writing alike might be new and distinct academic disciplines altogether—would finally become unavoidable.

## **6. Cakes and Ale for Everyone: A.S. Hill and Fiction-Writing at Harvard**

### **i. *The Harvard Advocate* (1866)**

At midnight on May 11th, 1866, two figures could be spotted stealthily making their way through the darkness of Harvard Yard. Edward Fox and Joseph Reed, both Class of '67, carefully took out brushes dripping with paste, and proceeded to slather sheets of paper against the stairways leading up to University Hall, and then right onto the rough bark of the surrounding elm trees in the Yard. If the posters could not quite be made out in the moonlight, their lettering would be clear enough to the bleary-eyed students who made their way across campus at sunrise:

#### **THE HARVARD ADVOCATE.**

You couldn't miss it, not least because Fox and Reed had hit one more location: they'd also papered the President's House (Baldwin 595).

The subject of these broadsides was to be found on the corner of Dunster Street in Harvard Square. As students filed in to buy their hometown papers and examination books at Richardson's Newspaper Depot, they found fresh twenty-cent copies of the *Advocate* amid the copies of the *Daily Atlas* and the *Cambridge Chronicle*. Bearing the motto *Veritas Nihil Veretur* ("Truth Fears Nothing"), its sixteen pages were largely occupied by pleasant if unremarkable news regarding the campus "Base Ball" team, an upcoming concert by visiting Yale students, a number of original poems ("You kissed me in my dream, love / Your face lay close to mine...") (10), and an essay noting the habit of students of "scaling the cemetery fence" to sneak into Mt. Auburn at night—a freshman year stunt that is "thereafter is apt decidedly to dwindle" (8). It reads today as a typical campus publication; but in 1866 it was seen as something else altogether.

"The Faculty," reported an alumni magazine forty years later, "could not but look upon the publication of the *Advocate* as an open act of defiance" (Baldwin 595).

The reason was clear from the paper's columns: *The Advocate* was a successor to *The Collegian*, a student magazine squelched that spring after just three issues, less for its poetry and strolling musings than for its criticisms of mandatory chapel attendance and its complaint that Harvard professors were unfriendly ("History of the Founding" 34). The editors were forbidden, on pain of expulsion, from publishing again. Various short-lived campus magazines had sputtered out before, the *Advocate* noted, but this was something new: "They were, for the most part, allowed to die a natural death. A few of them, indeed, committed suicide; but the 'Collegian' was the first one which was ever murdered" (3). The result was perhaps inevitable: rebellion.

"The college was roused instantly," cofounder W.G. Peckham later recalled. "Everybody wanted to be an editor" (Peckham 147). Even the crew captain and the baseball team pledged "physical backing" to the new effort.

While the *Advocate* maintained a fig-leaf of being a different publication, a class report would later admit that "it was *The Collegian* under another name" ("History of the Founding" 35). The student editors were summoned again before the faculty. This time, though, young alumni and professors rallied around their cause. The most prominent writers on the faculty, all alumni themselves, also sided with the students: Oliver Wendell Holmes Sr. and Thomas Wentworth Higginson argued for a free press on campus, and James Russell Lowell genially confided to the editors, "I was something of a revolutionist myself, you know" (Peckham 148-149).

When Holmes and Lowell were strapping young Harvard students, they too had written for college publications. Holmes contributed to the first Harvard magazine to bear the name

*Collegian*, in 1830; Lowell edited *Harvardiana* magazine during his 1837 – 1838 senior year, at least until his revolutionary tendencies (not going to chapel, for one) got him "rusticated" to Concord and forced to study John Locke essays with a tutor (Hale 41).

Their efforts succeeded better than anyone could have imagined: the *Harvard Advocate* still lives today as the oldest campus literary magazine in the country, and indeed figures among the oldest ongoing magazines in America. The motto and logo are the same, and some of Harvard's central campus would still be recognizable to its original editors. Yet the academic landscape they began this magazine in—one where creative writing did not exist on campus as a discipline or as an elective course, and which had to be supported by the students and literary societies—was, by the time that year's freshmen graduated, about to be completely altered.

## **ii. The Coming of Land Grants and Fine Arts to American Colleges in the 1860s**

For all that textbooks can tell about education in this period, the textbooks of the late 1860s bear little hint of the year-to-year changes rapidly unfolding on American college campuses. Alexander Bain's *English Composition and Rhetoric* (1866), by far the most successful new textbook of that decade, includes a two paragraph acknowledgement and description of fiction, while offering no particular advice regarding its composition. One of the otherwise more innovative textbooks of this period, Henry Noble Day's *The Art of Discourse* (1867), has nothing on fiction; while E.O. Haven's *Rhetoric* (1869), by the erstwhile President of the University of Michigan, dispenses with the subject in two pages of generic description that conclude that "no special rules" applicable to fiction warranted further discussion (284).

Yet universities themselves were evolving with unprecedented speed, a direct result of the passage of the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862. Rooted in the needs of the industrializing

North—and passed without fear of objections from the more traditional, seceded Southern states—the law's language provided millions in money and land grants to create state colleges that would "promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes" ("Transcript of the Morrill Act"). A simple roll call quickly shows the magnitude of this legislation. Before the 1860s had ended, the law brought about the founding of the State Universities of Pennsylvania, Kansas, and Iowa—and the flagship Universities of California, Delaware, Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri, Minnesota, West Virginia and Wisconsin. It was an immense expansion of capacity and geographic range in American education, and a marked change in its mission.

The "practical education of the industrial classes" meant a move away from the classical refinements of the gentleman's college, and towards the teaching of engineering, professional preparation, and agricultural science. The beginnings in the 1860s of English as a new and distinct academic discipline—a history well covered by numerous chroniclers, including Gerald Graff and Richard Ohmann—can be broadly placed in this context of a nationalist and business-minded reinvention of the university. Yet Harvard, Yale, and other private universities were also rapidly developing the new nomenclature and emphasis of English studies, and in no small measure created the precedent for the large public universities to follow. By the 1868-1869 catalogue, "English" makes its first appearance as a subject category at Harvard, as opposed to the old categories of Rhetoric or Belles Lettres; in 1870, Yale and Georgetown were including English in their job titles of new academic hires (Myers 20).

Running in parallel to this new discipline, though, was the rise of Fine Arts in American universities. Until the 1860s, America lacked Italian-style music *conservatoria*, and except for the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, no art schools on the French *Ecoles des Beaux Arts*

model. Most artists seeking academy-level training had little choice but to go to Europe. 1867, though, saw the first staking out of the Fine Arts in American colleges: first with the opening of the Yale School of Art, and then with the annexation of Oberlin Conservatory and a wave of conservatory foundings in Boston, Baltimore, Chicago, and Philadelphia (Grove 6: 34).

There would be later attempts to justify arts education in terms of an industrial and monetary benefit, a strategy epitomized by the federal Office of Education's 1885 report *Art and Industry*. But as Frederick Rudolph has observed, art programs initially depended more on institutional and individual will than on any substantive industrial or legislative interest: "The first art courses and programs of more than an ephemeral nature required a determined benefactor, a determined professor, a determined president, or a combination of the three" (142).

In Yale's case, it was a benefactor: their art school can be attributed to Augustus Russell Street, a wealthy alumnus who in 1864 worked with the university's president to create a governance committee for a projected art school. Street donated a staggering \$317,882 solely for the art school's creation—an unprecedented gift for the university (Steiner 193). His goal, *The Yale Courant* explained in 1866, was to "introduce the leavening element of aesthetic culture among the influences of the University" (*The Yale Courant* 104)—and not just at Yale. Street sought to change the nature of private and public education; he saw that Yale's name and his money were highly effective ways to do this, and to do it on his own terms. It hardly mattered that Yale had not, in fact, much wanted an art school; for years afterwards, their administration resisted even allowing undergraduates in, or budgeting money for instructor salaries. Yet the sheer amount of money and the new building offered by Street ultimately proved irresistible (Fahlman 127).

Using the leverage of an enormous bequest, and then continued funding by his widow, the Streets attached conditions that bent Yale to their will. For the first time, Yale had to create a coeducational program. Street also deliberately broke the campus's enclave-like courtyard model by demanding that the art school building have entrances facing New Haven's Chapel Street, the better to disseminate its influence to the public (126). But all of this paled before the real significance of his plan: precedence. Augustus Street picked Yale because he specifically sought to legitimize arts education. The way to do that, he realized, was by attaching it to a preeminent educational institution (*The Yale Courant* 104). He refused to allow his own name to be attached to the school or the building, a move that unequivocally committed Yale's name and reputation to the discipline.

That strategy appears to have worked. Even as Yale hired its first Professor of Painting in 1869, Harvard was inaugurating president Charles W. Eliot, whose 1869-1909 tenure would be the longest and most dramatically evolutionary in the university's history. In his inaugural speech, Eliot emphasized that "we cannot afford to neglect the fine arts." Within two years, the university followed Yale to appoint an instructor of Drawing, and within five Harvard had its own Department of Fine Arts (Rudolph 143).

By the end of the 1860s, two pillars were in place for university creative writing instruction: the beginnings of English as an academic discipline, and the recognition of Fine Arts as a curricular route in college education. Fiction writing might be said to fall between these chairs, and was still neither claimed nor developed by either at the college level. Victorian children's education, though, was another matter altogether.

**iii. Thomas Harvey's *Elementary Grammar* (1869), Hiram Hadley's *Lessons in Language* (1870), and John Seely Hart's *A Manual of Composition and Rhetoric* (1870)**

By the time American colleges began to reinvent themselves in the 1860s, secondary schools had already been undergoing tumultuous change for decades. This most notably grew from the Common School movement begun in the 1830s by Horace Mann—a vision of free secular public schools that replaced catechistic one-room schoolhouses with Mann's alloy of the Romantic child-centered philosophy of Johann Pestalozzi and the twelve-grade structure of strict Prussian academies.

Writing textbooks evolved accordingly, and visibly so—for they acquired pictures. Quaint pictures of dogs, farm-hands, and horses were familiar enough to children from popular periodicals and gift-books, but their presence in textbooks served a subtler educational purpose encouraged by Pestalozzi in his work in Swiss schools. They were a prompt for responses by children—one which, rather than the elocutionary recapitulation of text on a page, demanded the *written creation of an interpretation*—a shift, as Lucille Schultz has noted, "from knowledge grounded in authority to knowledge grounded in experience" (96). Instead of the scholastic repetition of rules, children were encouraged to use their imagination to create typical scenes.

The instructional use of illustrations can be seen in grammar textbooks as early as John Frost's *Easy Exercises* (1839) (Schultz 74). Frost and later writers like Thomas Harvey largely asked students to identify the characters and objects, as seen in one lesson ("Things Seen In Pictures") in the first edition of Thomas Harvey's *Elementary Grammar* (1869), which includes two men on horseback galloping past a boy and his dog (15). Soon texts like Hiram Hadley's *Lessons in Language* (1871) went further: its numerous illustrations include some rendered without any text prompt at all—just pictures to write from. One Hadley illustration, of two

country boys holding a hapless-looking frog, prompts what may be among the earliest fictional dialogue exercises in a writing textbook: "What do you imagine those boys are saying to each other? Write out their conversation in full" (69).

Hadley's innovation was no accident: his preface plainly attacks learning grammar through memorization, and favors learning through the "practical use of language" (iii)—a process which, he later reminds instructors, also entails "that fundamental law—never tell a child what you can lead him to discover" (74). Both Harvey and Hadley were remarkably popular textbooks: indeed, not only did Harvey's text stay in print into the twentieth century, it is *still* in print today as a favored text among home-schooling traditionalists.

These kinds of picture-lessons could serve as a conduit not just for interpretation, but for imaginative acts of creation. Writing in 1869, educator Mary Peabody Mann—Horace Mann's widow—noted that she used both word and plot details and pictures on her schoolroom wall to prompt children. Initially they told her stories aloud, which she transcribed onto a blackboard; this then led to children composing stories with pencil and paper. The result remains strikingly familiar to any modern parent with a child in elementary school: "One child writes funny stories, and laughs to herself as she writes; another gives descriptions of natural scenery, in the midst of which her characters find themselves. One writes about wolves and other horrors" (Mann 204).

A generation after George Quackenbos's first tentative steps, simple fiction exercises were beginning to find a more widespread use in K-12 classrooms. They even turn up in state mandates; an 1871 annual report by the school superintendent of Kansas recommends that primary schools have students "describe imaginary actions of persons or animals represented in a picture," as well as writing imagined dialogue and the broader charge to "Write a story about a

picture" (*Report of the State Superintendent* 38). Identical paragraphs appear in Maine's annual school report beginning in 1873 (*Twentieth Annual Report* 80).

During this same period, one of the most successful of K-12 textbooks burst fiction exercises into bloom: John Seely Hart's *A Manual of Composition and Rhetoric* (1870). At first glance, it does not look particularly groundbreaking: Hart does not use any illustrations in his work, and his initial consideration of fiction as a genre is limited to two perceptive but brief pages, complete with an obligatory warning that "the greater part of fiction now published and read has no other object than mere pleasure, and that of a very low kind. Novels of this sort have a debasing effect" (287). But later in his book, an altogether new sort of chapter heading appears: "Compositions on Imaginary Subjects" (305).

In a "To Teachers" note that leads the chapter, Hart warns that strictly factual composition topics are effective, but may lead to "a sort of mechanical and monotonous formalism. Something is needed, therefore, to stir the imagination.... assign unreal subjects, in which the scholar has no resource but to make up something out of his own head" (305). Hart has provided an explicit and specific pedagogical goal behind a fiction exercise—and what is more, he doesn't hide the idea in a single idiosyncratic paragraph or page. Hart labels his chapter as such, and lists numerous topic suggestions, including some worthy of old Blackwood's sensation stories: "An Involuntary Descent into a Volcano"; "The Man Who Never Forgot"; "A Visit to the Mermaids in Their Coral Groves"; "What I Heard and Saw When I Used My Invisible Ring"; "A Year of Total Darkness"; "Man Endowed With the Power of Flight" (310-311). Rather less fancifully, one would still like to hope, this 1870 list of "Imaginary Subjects" also includes "Our First Woman-President" (310).

Remarkably, Hart also gives sample responses by actual students. Among these, perhaps the first published fiction exercise responses, is a nine-year-old boy who was instructed to write on Columbus, but "not to put into the composition anything he had read about Columbus, but to make it all up out of his own head." His response is worth preserving:

Columbus started from England to discover America. He was the happy owner of a small row-boat, with two hoop-poles for propellers. He took with him a loaf of bread, a clam-basket, and an old ham-bone, also his brother Nicodemus. His brother had a hat that measured five miles around the brim. He took with him for society a pig, a cat, and a rat: for fear they would quarrel, he placed the rat in a sugar-bowl, the cat in a salt-box, and the pig in the cabin. Columbus's watch was immense: the hour-hand was fifty feet long. One day the pig took a walk on the deck, and got dizzy and fell overboard, and was drowned. He was 2 years, 3 months, 4 weeks, 5 days, 6 hours, 30 minutes, and 50 seconds old at the time he died. Soon afterward, Columbus discovered Guanahani or Cat Island, so named on account of the tremendous number of cats peopling the island. (310)

We have now come a long way from Scottish Common-Sense empiricism.

Hart was an ideal figure for connecting both the worlds of K-12 and higher education, as well as the disciplines of English philology and rhetoric. Like Quackenbos, his background suited him for this synthesis: along with serving as a professor at Princeton at both the beginning and end of his career, he had mid-career experience as principal of Philadelphia's Central High School and of the teacher's College of New Jersey. During that time, he authored dozens of volumes, including textbook anthologies (e.g. *Class Book of Prose* and *Class Book of Poetry*), textbooks on grammar and composition, and even an illustrated gift annual, *The Iris* (1851).

His connections to the world of art were close; when a priceless Thomas Eakins portrait was rediscovered at Central High in 2004, it proved to be of none other than Principal Hart. Eakins was an alumnus, having taken his first drawing classes at Central High, thanks to Hart's eager adoption of drawing classes and textbooks (Werbel 26). But then, Hart's belief in practicing art fit perfectly with his belief that doing was part of understanding. In a monograph immediately preceding his rhetoric textbook, *In The School-Room* (1868), he explains his educational philosophy as experiential: "In the first place, teaching is not telling.... No one can be made to know a thing but by the act of his own powers" (9-10). It's a notion that we'll see making a forceful return a generation later, not only in the work of John Dewey, but in the late-period pedagogy of one of Hart's own contemporaries, William Cleaver Wilkinson.

Still, it's possible to overstate the direct reach of Hart's exercises beyond the K-12 system; though *A Manual of Composition and Rhetoric* is rather hopefully titled "A Text-Book for Schools and Colleges," it's hard to imagine any but the most basic college courses using it. The sample responses cited by Hart himself in the text are nearly all written by minors. But with Hart's final decade spent as a Professor of Belles-Lettres at Princeton, students there didn't need his textbook to spread the notion of fiction exercises: they had the man himself. *A Manual* was published, in fact, squarely in the middle of this professorship at Princeton. And whether by his influence or by the broader movement of such texts as Quackenbos, by the time Professor Hart died in 1877, fiction as a classroom exercise had also been appearing at another university—Harvard.

#### iv. Adams Sherman Hill's *Stories for Children, By Eleven Sophomores* (1875) and *The Principles of Rhetoric* (1878)

When the *Harvard Advocate* held its tenth anniversary dinner on May 11, 1876, it was a more festive affair than the clandestine postering of Harvard Yard a decade earlier; in fact, the evening nearly sank the magazine, which spent the next three years paying off its catering bill. Crusty old deans couldn't kill the *Advocate*, but wine stewards nearly did. There was much to celebrate, though: at the suggestion of Thomas Wentworth Higginson, the magazine was publishing a collection, *Verses From the Harvard Advocate*. This was not even their first published offspring: the doomed young artist Frederick Wadsworth Loring had already dedicated his 1871 volume *The Boston Dip: And Other Verses* to the *Advocate*, "in which many of them were originally published."

After the recitation of a poem by their staunch old ally Oliver Wendell Holmes, and the uncorking of a ruinous running tab, there came one of many toasts by the student editors present—this to their guest Adams Sherman Hill, the Boylston Professor of Rhetoric.

"To the Theme Department," a toast was called out, "the nursery of the *Advocate*" (Baldwin 600).

At first glance, it's a puzzling compliment. In most composition histories, A.S. Hill is the bogeyman of Current-Traditional rhetoric: as Harvard's professor of rhetoric for decades, and a leading textbook author of the period, he is the baleful personification of joyless late-Victorian red-pen correctness. Charles Paine notes that he is "composition's *bete noire*.... Hill has become the emblem of almost everything wrong in writing instruction" (86). Yet Hill's role in the history of creative writing instruction was a pioneering one, and altogether more complex than his reputation in composition studies might hint.

Hired in 1872 by President Eliot, Hill came into the university amidst a raft of reforms by his old Harvard classmate. The university's influential system of modern elective courses was introduced that same year; the following year, the elocution requirement was dropped from the curriculum (Hurlbut 46). Within a few years, Hill would engineer both the model of the entrance exam and required freshman composition theme-writing, features that became so entrenched in American universities that it is difficult to realize that there was ever a time without them.

Like Quackenbos and Hart before him, Hill's background was not a solely academic one. Far from it: between graduating from Harvard in 1855 and returning as a professor two decades later, Hill worked as a journalist, most notably as a war correspondent and then the Washington bureau chief for the *New York Tribune*. After repeatedly clashing with publisher Horace Greeley, he resigned to cofound a wire service that went head to head with the Associated Press—and lost. He left journalism with a jaundiced view of his old profession's careless use of language, its pretensions towards objectivity, and its inability at careful and reflective analysis (Paine 98). In his essay "English in Colleges," Hill would later attack newspapers as one of the dangers that his college composition classes were expressly meant to counteract: "Educated men should arm themselves against the numerous foes that beset pure English on every side in these days of free speech and a free press" (*Our English* 78).

The result was, by many accounts, a relentless and medicinal emphasis on sentence-level correction—one reflected in his 1878 textbook *The Principles of Rhetoric*, a standard text for many years at Harvard. The first of the book's four sections is titled "Grammatical Purity"; it includes a chapter simply labeled "Barbarisms."

Hill's student and colleague Barrett Wendell later recalled that "his tendency as a teacher was to grimly eradicate fault rather than sympathetically to stimulate promise"; another

colleague, LeBaron Russell Briggs, noted his approach was "surgery; wounds which left scars, and at first, it may be, bitterness towards the operator" (qtd. in Paine 93). Both considered his influence a benevolent and beneficial one, but that bitterness is certainly apparent in a scathing 1893 *Town Topics* magazine item, which noted that "Professor Hill was never notably popular with Harvard men. His notions of composition and rhetoric were extremely pedagogic and hide-bound. He was given to no end of captious fault-finding" ("Saunterings" 7).

But if Hill's legacy is easy to caricature, it is not so easy to characterize. Academic theme writing, particularly of the hortatory and morally corrective variety, had long lurked in the background of literary publications like the *Advocate*; its first issue in 1866 drolly noted the campus presence of themes on students too lazy to walk to school, assigned by "the professor of English literature, who ordered fourscore able writers to treat upon the prerogatives of ladies in horse-cars.... [and] degenerate students who shirk from a three-miles walk, and coil themselves up on the corners of horse-cars like cats under a stove" (6). Yet along with continuing the grand tradition of horse-car jeremiads, Hill brought a new type of exercise to campus—and the result was a publication which, long unnoticed among his body of work, greatly complicates the image of the knuckle-rapping rhetoric professor.

For the Christmas of 1874 saw the arrival in bookstores of a great literary curiosity: *Stories for Children, by Eleven Sophomores* (aka *Children's Stories, by 11 Sophomores*). The book was handsomely published by Roberts Brothers, a major Boston press, and it was well distributed; along with numerous library holdings, a copy even turns up in Emerson's house (Harding 135). But its claim to fame is in this unusual notice in its front matter: "The stories contained in this volume were written as Themes in the spring of 1874. Cambridge, DEC. 1, 1874."

This volume for children is the earliest proof of fiction exercises conducted in a Harvard classroom—and indeed in any college classroom—and the first published volume to emerge from a college writing classroom.

It may have been initially meant to be explicitly associated with the class. An earlier item in the *Lewiston Evening Journal* of Maine indicated the volume was heading to press under the title *Eleven Children's Stories by Eleven Harvard Sophomores* ("Brief Jottings" 2). But the volume as published the next month was anonymous: neither its editor, its college, nor any of the students are identified. Annotations in Harvard's library copy, though, name all eleven authors, members of the class of 1876. It also notes that Hill was the editor. These attributions were publicly confirmed by authors in the years after its publication, and in such references as *Allibone's Critical Dictionary* (1437) and Cushing's *Initials and Pseudonyms* (88), and they include a number of future authors, journalists, and publishers.

Among them was Charles Franklin Thwing, who penned the lead story in the volume, "Harry":

Brown curly hair, eyes bright as stars, mouth red as Thompson apples, cheeks like apple blossoms, three feet six inches, fifty-five pounds, seven years,—that's Harry.

And O! what a fellow Harry is! the strangest, most wonderful fellow in the world! He's now a dog, and rushes for you, as though he would eat you up; he's a colt, and races, and prances, and dances round the house; he's a kitten, with eyes still unopened, and he mews, mew-ews, mew-ew-ews... (7)

Thwing would go on to not only author numerous books, but to become president of Case Western Reserve University.

The *Harvard Crimson*, in a book notice running the week before Christmas, praised the book and of the sight of "the Sophomoric mind turned to such innocent and humanizing pastimes, instead of planning new cruelties and tortures for the harmless Freshmen" ("Book Notice"). Hopes for the project were high enough that the cover illustration bears the stamp "No. 1." No further volumes of *Children's Stories* ever did appear, but Hill was far from done with fiction. His 1877-8 teaching notebooks include as a theme topic "a story for a five year old child," and similar fiction assignments run through years of his later lesson plans (Adams 38-39).

What is striking about Hill's work in fiction is that he was clearly fond of using it in the classroom, and yet left little visible effort to reconcile it with the rest of his pedagogy. For all its reputation as a byword for the excesses of Current Traditional rhetoric, Hill's *Principles of Rhetoric* is a curiously lumpy book—and the lumps are all fiction. Of its four sections (Grammatical Purity, Choice and Use of Words, Narration and Description, Argumentative Composition), the third is by far the shortest and the least clearly related to the others; it is also the one that unabashedly addresses storytelling. Hill emphasizes how selective description can create the illusion of a larger scene, which verbs then bring to life: "A writer can only suggest to the imagination scenes or person that a painter can depict to the eye, as a painter can only suggest a story that a writer can fully tell. Each is strongest at the other's weakest point" (169). After examples from Thackeray, Dickens, and other contemporary classics, students are then bewilderingly deposited back into a chapter on "Proposition and Proof."

That 1876 *Advocate* dinner may give as good an answer as any as to Hill's motives. Gratefully accepting the toast to the Theme class as their nursery, Hill "urged editors to supply the 'cakes and ale' of literature" (Baldwin 600). Amid the grim and determined work of Grammatical Purity and battling Barbarisms—and rather like John Seely Hart's explanation in

1870 that his "Imaginary Subjects" provided "something to break the monotony"— the occasional fiction exercise may have been a diverting aesthetic pleasure for student and instructor alike, rather than the staking out of a new academic discipline. Yet it also spoke to a profoundly problematic aspect of Current Traditional Rhetoric: the lack of motive or audience. Hill had rejected these precise qualities after his earlier newspaper work, where he found them so defining as to be overbearing. Yet he could not quite bring himself to reject their profound appeal in the creative arts: and so hidden in the bottom of Current-Traditional's chest, rather like the Hope left in Pandora's box, is a directive to tell a story to a five-year-old.

By virtue of his position at Harvard, and the burgeoning national influence of the university's English curriculum, A.S. Hill created converts. Two of Hill's 1880s additions to the department, Wendell Barrett and Le Baron Briggs, were his old students and published authors— Barrett wrote novels and poetry, and Briggs wrote books of poetry and an operetta—and both also became known for using fiction prompts for theme writing (Adams 44). (To this day, Harvard has a Le Baron Russell Briggs Prize for undergraduate fiction.) Fiction, however inchoately, was finding a place in multiple college writing classrooms.

But as to the question of whether fiction deserved a classroom or indeed an entire discipline of its own, we must turn our attention not to Harvard, but back across the ocean—to London.

## 7. A Sneaking Ambition for Literature: Writing Instruction and Walter Besant's *The Art of Fiction*

### i. A Set of Propositions

The Royal Institution was a fine place for explosions, both literal and figurative. Its ground floor lecture hall backed up against one of London's most lavishly equipped laboratories, a room built to the specifications of Sir Humphrey Davy himself. Those who used their five-guinea membership to gain entry found themselves confronted with air-pumps, scales, a forest of glassware, a galvanic apparatus, and a delightfully hazardous pneumatic trough full of mercury (Knight 375). But for the popular Friday Evening Lectures, members would drift into the lecture hall from the Institution's library, lab, and newspaper rooms, as often to hear about mesmerism or Moliere as the latest chemical discoveries.

By the time Walter Besant walked up to the lectern at the Royal Institution on April 25, 1884, his speech on "The Art of Fiction" had been a long time coming—he'd already had to call it off once, back in March ("Royal Institution," *London Standard* 3). Now before the crowd at last, Besant sized up his audience. A former mathematics professor turned popular novelist, he then commenced with what his old calculus textbooks might have termed a Set Of Propositions.

"One," Besant announced. "That Fiction is an Art in every way worthy to be called the sister and the equal of the Arts of Painting, Sculpture, Music, and Poetry..." (Besant, "The Art of Fiction" 3). Whether or not his listeners agreed, this first proposition was hardly surprising coming from someone with Walter Besant's professional pride. In 1884 he was at the zenith of his popularity with his novel *Dorothy Forster*; as Fred Boege has noted, perhaps only Thomas Hardy and George Meredith were held in greater critical and commercial esteem in the 1880s (250).

"*Two*," he continued. "That it is an Art which, like them, is governed and directed by general laws; and that these laws may be laid down and taught with as much precision and exactness as the laws of harmony, perspective, and proportion" (Besant, "The Art of Fiction" 3). Similar sentiments had been anonymously voiced by George Lewes two decades earlier, and indeed by Edward Bulwer-Lytton five decades earlier. Despite the persistence since the 1830s of author's guides to the physical process behind submitting and publishing books, in Britain the notion of *teaching* a craft of fiction, in a sense of a formal pedagogy, was more tenuous than in America. Neither Quackenbos nor Harvard instructors issuing fiction-writing assignments quite had a British analogue.

"*Third*," Besant ended his Propositions. "That, like other Fine Arts, Fiction is so far removed from the mere mechanical arts, that no laws or rules whatever can teach it to those who have not already been endowed with the natural and necessary gifts" (3-4). An insistence on the role of natural giftedness in a Fine Art was a telling one; unlike a "mechanical art," this separated artistry and aesthetic pleasure from the allied, but carefully distinguished, categories of craftsmanship and utility.

There was more to come for this audience; Besant was hardly a single leaf into a 36 page lecture. But with these three points, he began in earnest a public debate on the status and the teachability of Creative Writing. They were the opening propositions of a proof that, over a century later, has still not quite reached its Q.E.D.

ii. **Anthony Trollope's *An Autobiography* (1883) and Walter Besant's *The Art of Fiction* (1884)**

The London newspapers took notice of Besant: the first press summary of his late-night lecture appeared hours later in the *London Morning Post*, and similar reports soon filtered across the domestic and American press ("Royal Institution" 3). For an actual response, though, readers had to wait for the following week's *Pall Mall Gazette*, where critic Andrew Lang meditated upon the evening in a front-page essay. "The art of novel-writing has a pedigree less illustrious than poetry or music," he claimed, pointing out that it lacked a classical background. "Her name is not written in the golden book, where Homer's and Milton's are." Yet, he allowed, fiction might be considered an equal to other arts—though "we can hardly give it the highest place" (Lang 1).

Much of Lang's essay, however, focused instead on what followed that evening. Namely, Besant attempted to formulate "Laws of Fiction," perhaps hoping to achieve the steady certitudes of musical scales or color theory. In this, Besant was no more successful than Bulwer-Lytton in 1838. Some of their advice is essentially identical. There is the primacy of writing what one knows: "there should be no exception—never go beyond your own experience" (Besant, "The Art of Fiction" 16); there is the bolstering of such knowledge by keeping small notebooks of observations; and then too, there is the familiar injunction to both mind the plot (27) and to not lean upon catch-phrases and quirks as a shortcut to characterization (22). What his remaining injunctions do not echo from Bulwer-Lytton is still largely familiar, albeit from George Lewes in *The Principles of Success in Literature* (1865)—namely, the careful selection of emblematic detail, and the necessity for editing so that every word pulls its weight.

It is these would-be Rules of Fiction that commentators on Besant, both then and now, have generally focused the most upon; but these are also his most conventional and thus least interesting propositions. What seems to have been lost upon Lang, and indeed upon the *London Morning Post* and other contemporary accounts, was this: that by establishing fiction as a fine art, Besant was also claiming it as an activity that was both professional and trainable, at least to those with "natural gifts."

The argument was one of pressing importance to Besant. Five months earlier, he'd led the founding of the Society of Authors—the first major revival of author advocacy since the short-lived Society of British Authors that Bulwer-Lytton abortively launched in 1843. Indeed, Besant was familiar with the history of SOBA, and found it had been too toothless for advocacy (Colby 111). His group would be more adversarial, and retained newly ascendant literary agent A.P. Watt, whose aggressive negotiating style was already ruffling London publishers. Besant's new Society boasted an impressive group of sixty-eight members in this first year, including Wilkie Collins, John Ruskin and Thomas Huxley (Bonham-Carter 121).

Much of this had been out of the view of the public, however; the Society's first official meeting was only held that February. What had far more people arguing about professionalization of fiction came with a tell-all posthumous *Autobiography* released that same fall of 1883 by Anthony Trollope. Significantly, the "all" in question was not love affairs or the like. "If the rustle of a woman's petticoat has ever stirred my blood; if a cup of wine has been a joy to me... if now and again I have somewhat recklessly fluttered a £5 note over a card table;—of what matter is that to any reader?" Trollope charges (318). Rather, the scandalous revelation was on a more taboo subject altogether: *money*. Trollope had done something altogether uncouth by explaining exactly how he worked, and exactly what he got paid for it.

The reputation of *An Autobiography*, perhaps unfairly, is as the work that killed Trollope's reputation (Smalley 6). The reason was simple: Trollope breezily, and without the least mystification, explains his working habits (3 hours a day in the early morning)—reveals his ideal length for a book (300 pages, and 220 words a page)—and scoffs at the notion of not writing for money: "Brains that are unbought will never serve the public much" (Trollope 92). It is a sentiment that rather neatly mirrors Josiah Holland's in 1863 regarding marketable brains. And like Holland, Trollope's autobiography revealed a unromantic and practical strategy that put the work into "working artist": namely, get a steady job at post office, and then tidily supplement that income with a daily quota of words.

Trollope saves his coup de grace, though, for an astonishing three-page stretch at the end, where he gives a book-by-book accounting of his earnings: a grand total of £68,939 17s 5d, earned from 1847 to 1879 (317). Even today, few authors would reveal such an unsparingly honest accounting of their earnings to the public; the effect was all the more surprising in 1883. As Peter Keating notes, for those who resisted seeing literature in commercial terms, "*An Autobiography* hit them with shocking accuracy. Nothing could have been more calculated to infuriate them" (14). Upon seeing the manuscript, his publisher William Blackwood was so mortified that he pleaded without result to Trollope's son to censor his late father's chapters on money (Michie 144). The matter of how authors earned their living was now set squarely before the eyes of thousands of readers.

It was amid this new frankness about literary labor that Besant's lecture had debuted, and it soon found further circulation through print. The widely advertised Chatto & Windus publication of Besant's lecture in late May 1884, one month after the Royal Institution event, was a telling sign: his talk attracted enough attention to warrant commercial publication. But in

bringing the lecture to print, Besant chose not to deploy footnotes or an introduction to respond to nitpicking over his *Rules of Fiction*; instead, he added a two-page appendix that solely focused on financial matters. Perhaps Trollope's autobiography forced the issue; but rather than merely acknowledging the late novelist's view of authorship as a profession, Besant doubles down on it. A book that gets turned down by all the London major publishers, Besant warns, is likely not worth pursuing any further. But if the author insists, they should at least never resort to subsidy publishing.

"Persevere, if you feel that the root of the matter is in you, till your work is accepted;" he writes, "and never, Never, NEVER pay for publishing a novel" (38).

This emphasis on professionalization also had a more subtle component relating to training. As early as February 1884, *The Observer* of London had dashed cold water over the efforts by the Society of Authors by wondering if, unlike doctors and lawyers, authors were simply a too untidily unlicensed and untrained class of laborers to effectively organize.

"Unhappily," they observed, "book making is about the only business which men take up without having been trained for it by a sufficient pupillage; and indeed, it is too often, like cab-driving and the small-coal trade, adopted after all other avenues to a livelihood have closed" (qtd. in Bonham-Carter 122). Now, after a month of second-hand accounts in the press of Besant's lecture, a wide readership outside of the Royal Institution could see the full extent of his ideas—and among those ideas, an extraordinary notion thrown off in passing regarding that lack of "sufficient pupillage." It is a rhetorical question by Besant acknowledging skepticism of *Fiction* as a Fine Art—one whose import would easily outlast nearly every other point Besant made in his lecture:

How can that be an Art, they might ask, which has no lecturers or teachers, no school or college or academy, no recognised rules, no text-books, and is not taught in any University? Even the German Universities, where they teach everything else, do not have Professors of Fiction, and not one single novelist, so far as I know, has ever pretended to teach his mystery, or spoken of it as a thing which may be taught. (7)

On the face of it, Besant's statement almost sounds like a disavowal of the idea of training, or at least an admission of its improbability. Yet the context of his lecture begged that the question now be asked in earnest.

### **iii. Henry James' "The Art of Fiction" (1884) and Robert Louis Stevenson's "A Humble Remonstrance" (1884)**

Just days after the publication of Besant's lecture, the Society of Authors was back in the headlines again with announcement that Lord Tennyson had accepted their nomination as its first president ("The Incorporated Society of Authors" 7). But another literary eminence had also been watching Besant's handiwork, though from an ocean away. An American edition of *The Art of Fiction* was in circulation that summer—as was, that September, a lengthy reply in *Longman's Magazine* by Henry James. His response, quite suitably, was also titled "The Art of Fiction"—for, as he explained, he was "anxious not to lose the benefit of this favorable association, and to edge in a few words under cover of the attention which Mr. Besant is sure to have excited" (Besant and James 51) The lecture presented James with an opportunity to discuss a theory of the novel—something which the previous generation of Dickens and Thackeray, he hazards, might not have considered a meaningful topic of discussion: "There was a comfortable, good-humored

feeling abroad that a novel is a novel, as a pudding is a pudding, and our only business with it could be to swallow it" (52).

James quickly agrees with Besant's premise that fiction is indeed a fine art: "It is impossible to insist too much upon such a truth" (56). But most of James' essay is taken up by a refutation of the less original part of Besant's work, i.e. his *Laws of Fiction*: "He seems to me to mistake in attempting to say beforehand what sort of an affair the good novel will be" (60). James' dubiousness about *a priori* rules of fiction is such that he is left with little advice to offer but the one line from this essay that has been incessantly quoted, and thus incessantly misunderstood: "Try to be one upon whom nothing is lost!" (66). Rather than a vaguely inspirational exhortation, it is an admission of the hopelessness of exhortations. James can hardly agree to any of Besant's injunctions to writers except that they take field notes—and "this, I fear, he can never learn in any hand-book" (67).

Ironically, James is one of the few writers of his generation who, as a young pupil of George Quackenbos, we can be reasonably sure *was* given fiction writing assignments in a classroom—though his memoir gives no recollection of them. In fact, it is in the question of teachability that a more fundamental schism between James and Besant becomes apparent. It is one that will persist through the entire existence of the discipline of Creative Writing: Besant's argument is that fiction is both an art and a teachable professional craft, but James cannot agree that the one follows the other.

To James, fiction is an art and a *mystery*—"a sacred office," as he puts it. He is "shocked" by Trollope's lack of tact in admitting working habits, business matters, and deliberate craft to readers: "I was lately struck, in reading over many pages of Anthony Trollope, with his want of discretion in this particular" (55). As Bradley Deane has noted, the complaint was not a new one

to him; writing a year earlier in *The Century* magazine, James claimed Trollope "took a suicidal satisfaction in reminding the reader that the story he was telling was only, after all, a make believe"—a tendency that he found "deliberately inartistic" (qtd. in Deane 108).

Writing, in short, becomes an art, but not a profession—because, quite literally, James does not want writers to profess to what exactly it is they do for a living. Writing privately to Edmund Gosse a decade later, he complained bluntly about the Society of Authors, objecting to the very premise of labor advocacy:

The fact is that authorship is guilty of a great mistake, a gross want of tact, in formulating & publishing its claim to be a 'profession.' Let other trades call it—& let it take no notice. That's enough. It ought to have of the professions only a professional thoroughness. But *never* to have that [claim of trade]... to cry on the housetops that it *is* the grocer & the shoemaker is to bring on itself a ridicule of which it will simply die (qtd. in Deane 108).

Tellingly, it is "want of tact" and "ridicule"—those Jamesian agonizings over social pressure and norms—that are his objections to treating writing as a business. Yet just as tellingly, James himself joined the Society of Authors. He may have resented the leveling effect of Trollope and Besant's candor, which dragged artistry from its empyrean realms, from beyond the reach of money; but he also quietly recognized the utility of an organization whose very tactlessness allowed it advocate effectively for authors.

James may have also overestimated the attention of the public to such matters. He was dismayed to find that his own *Art of Fiction* initially received just one letter in response, from his friend T.S. Perry, to whom he lamented "my poor article has not attracted the smallest attention here & I haven't heard, or seen, an allusion to it" (James, *The Art of Criticism* 187). Perhaps it was as well that he didn't spot them, for one actual allusion came that December in the New

York comic magazine *Life*, which featured a mock essay by "Ennery Jeems" on "How We Do It"—"Yes, I rather think the idea was first my own to obfuscate and confuse the reader by the depth of my peculiar mental gymnastics, which I term 'insight.'" The secret of his fiction, "Ennery" then confides, is: "BUNCOME! Anybody can do it, but the art is—How we do it!" (Jeems 315).

A more appreciative response came that same month of December 1884, in *Longman's Magazine*. In "A Humble Remonstrance," Robert Louis Stevenson extends James' rejection of *a priori* rules: "Let him not mind if he miss a thousand qualities, so long as he keeps unflinchingly in pursuit of the one he has chosen.... These [prescribed] elements are not essential: a novel may be excellent, and yet have none of them" (147). Stevenson also questions the practical distinction of discussing an art of *fiction*—a striking insight, particularly given the later rise and nomenclature of Creative Nonfiction. He suggests that the art in question is narrative storytelling, with its dramatic sequencing and evocative detail, and is as applicable to epic poetry and history as to novels: "The art of narrative is the same, in fact, whether it is applied to the selection and illustration of a series of real events or of an imaginary series" (140).

The combined weight of commentary by Besant, James, and Stevenson did at length begin a critical discussion of these matters. Just as an edition of Besant's lecture circulated in America, so too did a combined edition of both Besant and James. Noting that Besant "believes in steady work as thoroughly as Trollope ever did," a December 1884 editorial in *The Continent* magazine claimed that the teachability of the craft was not even a question anymore across the Channel: "In France the opposite opinion prevails, and the elder Dumas established a school for fiction in which he taught pupils how to write novels indistinguishable from his own" (Migma

760). As 1885 arrived, this notion would take root even further afield than James or Besant might have realized—not in Boston or London, but in the American West.

**iv. George Lewes' *The Principles of Success in Literature* (1865): Reprint Editions by Albert S. Cook (1885) and Fred Newton Scott (1891)**

The early history of Creative Writing pedagogy has a curious duality. While its aesthetic strictures and arguments largely came down from established critics and novelists, its pedagogic practice in the classroom came from the bottom up—in primers and primary schools, then in high schools, and by the 1870s in Harvard's freshman and sophomore composition classrooms. The point at which the critic and the classroom unequivocally meet—the golden spike that joins these two sets of tracks—was driven in San Francisco in March 1885.

*The Principles of Success in Literature*, announced the books coming off the presses of Bosqui Engraving & Printing Company that summer. George Lewes' old 1865 treatise was hardly the press's first work on aesthetics; the proprietor, Edward Bosqui, was a Gold Rush veteran turned presiding eminence of local painters and engravers, and a patron of artists of every sort in California (Wagner 330). But what set this volume apart was its subtitle: "Reprinted for the Use of Students of the University of California." Edited by Albert S. Cook, an Associate Professor of English at UC Berkeley, it was the first reappearance of George Lewes' *Fortnightly Review* series—a book-length collection that had still remained unsigned, uncollected, and virtually unknown upon Lewes' death in 1878. Now modestly bound into a 50-cent student edition, Lewes' *Principles* became the first volume on writing fiction to be expressly published as a college textbook.

Like Quackenbos, Hill, and other innovators in fiction pedagogy, Albert S. Cook's route to professorship has a scattershot and peripatetic quality, and an interdisciplinary ethos that served him well. Cook graduated from Rutgers in 1872, just as the university was undergoing its first attempts at hiring specifically for the new discipline of English. Cook then worked in turn as a schoolteacher, a math tutor, and turned down a job offer from Japan to teach Chemistry. Instead, he headed to universities in Gottingen and Jena for his doctorate, where he was profoundly impressed by the same Hegelian aesthetic theory that so moved Lewes decades earlier (Chamberlain 390). Just as importantly, he came to see the analysis of art, and its practice, as not just an act of pleasure, but the development of a vital part of critical faculties.

"Practice medicine—we have heard of that," he later mused in a 1898 lecture, "practice running, vaulting, swimming, even, practice scales; but *practice music*... do we often hear people so much discuss the possibility of that?" (Cook 6).

Hired by the University of California upon his return to the US, Cook was tasked with both organizing its new department of English and with teaching a heavy slate of classes (Jones 131). Just which class was using *Principles* is unclear; while Cook's courses in Old and Middle English, Shakespeare, and Milton might be safely eliminated, in the years preceding the Bosqui edition he did teach composition classes in "Junior Themes" and "Senior Themes," as well as surveys in "English Classics" and "The History of English Literature" (University of California 93). The textbook would be a peculiar choice for a survey class, though of use as a critical view of the writing process behind a masterpiece; however, given the fiction theme-writing already pioneered in Harvard freshman and sophomore classes, the more likely candidate seems to be Cook's composition classes. If so, then a decade after Hill's first introduction of "cakes and ale"

writing to relieve freshman drudgery, it appears fiction-writing had reached far enough into some far-flung upper-division courses to warrant its own textbook.

Cook, though, soon disappears from our story. In 1889 he was hired away by Yale, primarily to work in Old English and Medieval studies. Yet his protégé and successor at Berkeley, William Arnes, not only continued the use of *Principles*, but brought out a new edition in 1891. Nor had Cook's work escaped notice in other universities. 1891 saw *another* edition of *Principles*, from a much larger press (Allyn & Bacon), and edited by Fred Newton Scott of the University of Michigan—a newly appointed professor destined to become one of the era's major figures in composition.

Like A. S. Hill at Harvard, Scott's explorations in fiction were coming early in his academic career, and on the heels of a career in periodical writing—for after working at three different student publications as an undergraduate at the University of Michigan, Scott spent 1886 and 1887 writing and editing for Cleveland newspapers (Stewart 12). Returning to the University of Michigan, Scott gained another influence on his pedagogy: the progressive educational theories of his thesis and dissertation advisor, John Dewey. Only a year older than Scott, Dewey was just beginning to formulate his ideas of experiential learning. The timing was fortuitous; youth and a smattering of commercial experience was a combination that perhaps made Scott open to new ideas in rhetoric, yet already familiar with the pragmatic craft of deadline writing.

Hired to Michigan's English faculty in 1889, Scott soon showed the influence of experiential learning and Dewey's strategy of having students create learning materials from their immediate environment. In 1891, Scott co-authored *Paragraph-Writing: With Appendices on Newspaper 'Style' and Proof-Reading*, which had students report on campus news as a means of

learning to write. "If the class be not too large," he suggests, "it may be organized into groups for reporting local events... [and] handed to a second group of students to be read, corrected and edited as if for publication" (58).

In his first two years on the job, Scott had been largely occupied with teaching English 1 and 2—that is, theme classes. It was during this time that he also began drawing upon Cook's edition of Lewes' *Principles*. Like Cook, Scott's initial motives for "reprinting this admirable little treatise" were simple: "to make it accessible to his own classes in rhetoric and literary criticism" (3). And it is indeed the rhetoric class that he aimed his reprint at—but now at a national level, with a large Boston educational publisher. Lewes' *Principles*, Scott's preface makes clear, is above all for the aspiring student artist: "It is just the work to go into the hands of that hope and despair of the teacher of rhetoric,—the callow young man with a sneaking ambition for literature, much sentiment, and a decided relish for rhetorical decoration (3)." Scott's preface gives another hint of the form of future creative writing classes for these callow young men. Eschewing the traditional lecture format, he describes arranging his students into "what may be called a rudimentary form of the seminary method" (3)—a circular table, where instead of recitation of texts, they are expected to have already read texts, and to be ready to respond in an open discussion with the instructor (Stewart 26). He has given us, in short, one of the earliest descriptions of a writing seminar.

By 1891, then, we can see the slow germination of fiction pedagogy in American education: over eighty years of campus student publications, fifty years of fugitive exercises in children's textbooks, two decades of Harvard students writing one-off fiction pieces, and a decade of UC Berkeley and then University of Michigan students using the first college textbook

on fiction writing. Yet there was not yet an actual course dedicated to fiction-writing. One year later, that would change.

## **8. Writing for the Mermaids: How College Fiction Classes Grew Out of—and Away From—the Influence of Harvard**

### **i. Barrett Wendell and the Launch of English 12 at Harvard (1884)**

In the final two decades of the nineteenth century, one could on any given day walk across Harvard's Elm Yard, creak up the stairs of Grays Hall, and find Barrett Wendell ensconced in Room 18 with stacks of student themes around him. Scattered as they were around the room, each was nonetheless carefully tracked in a ledger, with columns ruled off to grade every theme for Words, Sentences, Paragraph, Whole Composition, as well as Clearness, Force, and Elegance (Wendell 4). Occasionally Wendell would rise to tend to the room's fireplace, or to meet English students whose conference times were duly noted through announcements in the *Harvard Crimson*; but more often than not, he was engaged in the Sisyphean task of grading these themes—which, as they overflowed from his desk, then had to be cleared from chairs to admit guests.

"When he lay down on the sofa, to get a little rest" his colleague William Lyons Phelps later recalled, "he used a bunch of themes for a pillow" (*Autobiography* 271).

It was not quite the life Wendell had envisioned for himself. An eccentric young man sporting an ornate cane and a vaguely British accent—the former honestly acquired through a youthful back injury, and the latter the odd affectation of a native Bostonian—Wendell had drifted through a Harvard undergraduate education, and then through its law school, only really distinguishing himself by helping to found *Harvard Lampoon*. At loose ends after failing his bar exam in 1880, Wendell found A.S. Hill seeking an assistant to grade themes. Wendell came back to Harvard imagining it would be a short job; instead, he stayed for 37 years (Self 25).

Wendell's career came during a seismic shift in writing instruction at Harvard. Under President Eliot, the university was changing from an antebellum classical curriculum to the modern era of elective and major-based education. When Eliot hired A.S. Hill in 1872, Harvard still required three years of rhetorical training in the sophomore through senior years, among a plethora of other requirements; this immediately began changing under Hill, first with the institution of placement exams in 1873, and then an increasing compression of requirements, so that by 1897 the sole mandated course for a B.A. was a single year of freshman composition (Berlin, *Rhetoric and Reality* 20).

Though fiction-writing made its first and idiosyncratic collegiate appearance in this rapidly evolving curriculum—as something of a tossed-off exercise in Hill's 1874 course in English A—it was Wendell who would actually integrate fiction writing into his lectures, his exercises, and indeed into the textbooks and pedagogy of two generations of his students. In particular, his upper-division English 12 elective (English Composition) saw Wendell in his element. When piloting the course in the spring of 1884, Wendell hit upon the "daily theme"—a page a day on any subject that the student wished to observe—meant to habituate students to written expression through repetition, and which, through a sheer exhaustion of their stock responses, might force a sort of desperate originality in their responses (Simmons, "Constructing Writers" 335). The notion, Wendell later explained, had come to him from "talking with a friend who was connected with a Boston newspaper" and noting the effects of deadline work at newspapers—for, as with A.S Hill, the rapid expansion of the popular periodical press had made its mark on Wendell's conception of writing (*Official Report of the Seventh Annual Meeting* 75).

Notable among these daily themes was not just the acceptance by Wendell of fiction, but his active encouragement of it: as Katherine Adams notes, his lecture notes for the 1885

academic year include substantial sections on fiction and news-writing (*A Group of Their Own* 45). This can be attributed, to some degree, to Wendell's interests outside the classroom: he was the almost archetypal figure of the novelist trapped into earning his rent through teaching. Wendell's two published novels, *The Duchess Emilia* (1885) and *Rankell's Remains* (1886), were written amidst his launch of English 12, so that fiction-writing loomed large, almost necessarily to the exclusion of much else, in his daily schedule outside the classroom. Neither novel was a great success, and a half-written third (*Plaster of Paris*) spent years painfully lingering in Wendell's desk as he reluctantly shifted his attentions over to academia. And yet he was, as D.G. Myers points out, "perhaps the first professor of rhetoric who taught students to write on the basis of his own ambition to write" (48).

The effects of this ambition became immediately evident at Harvard. So much new creative writing was generated that by February 1885 the *Harvard Crimson* began running special supplement sections for the best themes. Several of Wendell's students, most notably George Santayana, took up the idea of creating an entire publication around such work, and that October the *Harvard Monthly* was launched. Wendell's room in Grays served as a de facto office, and Wendell himself provided the magazine's first short story. This only further burnished the reputation of his English 12 course. 150 students signed up that fall—a dilemma that Wendell's colleague A.S. Hill had wisely avoided by limiting sections of his own advanced composition class (English 5) to 25—and an editorial in the *Harvard Advocate* pleaded for Wendell to either institute enrollment limits or to hire additional instructors ("The Week" 19). In the meantime, a tide of magazines and themes alike swept over the instructor's office.

"At some point in his career," Barrett later mused, "almost every undergraduate is seized with the idea that he can write fiction, and proceeds to submit to me a story. In eight or nine

cases out of ten, the plot of this story concerns the flirtation of a youth of twenty with a girl of eighteen or so at a summer hotel" (Wendell, *English Composition* 217).

At first, though, the most visible evidence outside Harvard of Wendell's influence came in a textbook: *English Composition: Eight Lectures Given at the Lowell Institute* (1891). These lectures show Wendell largely stripped of his campus idiosyncrasies: it is all pedagogical business, for as he noted a bit ruefully in a letter at the time, the Lowell Institute audience was "Most[ly] school teachers, I fancy. They are earnest females, I mean, who take notes, and don't take jokes" (Wendell, *Wendell and His Letters* 99). A stalwart text of Current-Traditional rhetoric, the most salient emphases of *English Composition* were captured in the 1894 edition's prefatory "Note For Teachers: Using Wendell's English Composition," which not only outlines a series of highly prescriptive lessons beginning with "Grammatical Purity," but also helpfully reproduces his theme-correction ledger format. But this popular text, which went through thirty editions over the next fifty-one years, also captures a curious paradox about Wendell: namely, that the written record he left behind hardly appears to capture the dynamic figure that he clearly was in the classroom. Sue Carter Simmons has noted a number of innovative elements in his pedagogy, ranging from open subject matter in papers, rapid writing through his daily themes, an insistence on one-on-one student conferencing, and the regular integration of peer response into his course structure—the latter through a Monday-Wednesday-Friday schedule that set aside Fridays for responses and revision ("Constructing Writers" 332). Part of the discrepancy might have simply been that the texts were not necessarily intended solely for Harvard students, who Wendell saw as America's next generation of literary greats.

Just as notably—and again in striking contrast to his own more conservative tendencies, which included an opposition to merging classes with Radcliffe—English 12 almost immediately

began a women's section, comprised at first of just four students. These were not, as Simmons has noted in a separate study, always well received. "At first a system of public criticism is certainly trying," she quotes Annie Ware Winsor Allen, who took the class from 1886-1887. "It is always hard for people to get out of themselves and look at themselves with impartial eyes. This is what we are expected to do when our themes are criticized aloud in open class.... We are not used to sharing our peculiar difficulties with the general public" ("Radcliffe Responses" 275). By the end of her time at Radcliffe, Ware had given up her own journal writing entirely, perhaps crowded out by the volume of daily themes—an experience that she did not find greatly edifying (287).

But for many students, it was indeed English 12, and its steady stream of mentorships through *Harvard Monthly*, that marked Barrett's influence in the teaching of fiction-writing. "[Wendell] has had a greater influence upon the craftsmanship of the writer than any other American man of letters," the University of Chicago professor and novelist Robert Herrick would later claim (Adams, *A Group of Their Own* 44). He certainly had a great influence on the instructors of those writers: in its first three years alone, English 12 and *Monthly* student-editors under Wendell's guidance included Herrick, George Pierce Baker, Jefferson Fletcher, and William Rice Carpenter. These students literally formed an old boy's network: as the Mermaid Club, a campus literary coterie drawn largely from juniors and seniors in Wendell's composition course, all four pose together as a gregarious young team in one 1888 photograph ("Harvard University, Mermaid Club"). As each followed the whorls and eddies of campus hiring from Cambridge to Chicago, these protégés came to occupy key roles across the country as writing professors in the 1890s.

**ii. Barrett's Protégés in the 1890s: George Rice Carpenter (Columbia), Robert Herrick (Chicago), William Phelps (Yale), Jefferson Fletcher and George Pierce Baker (Harvard)**

Barrett Wendell's place in academic history may have been secure, but his job at Harvard was not. It took Wendell eight years simply to gain promotion to Assistant Professor in 1888; with the renewal of this five-year contract about to be blackballed in 1893, he was saved only by the providential death of an antagonistic board member.

But it was not so much Wendell as the entire writing wing of English that found itself under scrutiny during these years. The 1892 "Report of the Committee on Composition and Rhetoric" at Harvard—an alumni committee comprised of a *New York Post* editor, a soon-to-be mayor of Boston, and a former president of the Union Pacific Railroad—reviewed a great mass of English papers from current Harvard students, and marveled first and foremost at the "not only unremitted industry, but mental drudgery of the most exhausting nature" that composition instructors labored under (Harvard College, *Report of the Committee* 117). Along with a sense of the plight of writing instructors, the report's facsimile reproduction of a number of student responses also gave an unusual window into student writing of the day. When asked about his high school writing instruction, one student responded that, "sometimes fanciful objects were chosen in which imagination only and not experience could assist, such as 'A Trip to Mars' or 'Journey to the North Pole'" (Brereton 512). The fiction writing prompts that had dated back at least to the popular textbooks of George Quackenbos, then, were indeed finding their way into the high school lessons that prepared Harvard's incoming students.

Despite the commiseration of the committee with the labors of Wendell and his colleagues, the committee's grim emphasis fell upon on the wretched quality of composition in English A. Much of the blame for this regrettable state of affairs was laid upon high schools. As

James Berlin has noted, the wide national circulation and influence of the Harvard report meant that "the vilification of high school English has since become a common practice" (Berlin, *Rhetoric and Reality* 24). This in turn, as Richard Ohmann would later describe it, would become "the first national scandal of a type with which we've become all too familiar with"—the literacy crisis (27). The 1892 Harvard report, and three others that followed that decade, would demand that college writing instructors engage in more correction, more examination, and an increasing emphasis on gatekeeping. Hill and Wendell had always combined their ardent belief in correction with creative exercises and upper-level courses in writing; increasingly, these latter ideals would be submerged in a sea of marked-up freshman themes.

Some in the field were unconvinced: most notably, Fred Newton Scott at the University of Michigan not only continued to emphasize progressive and experiential learning, he launched a doctoral program in Rhetoric that put him squarely at odds with Harvard and its many curricular offspring (Stewart, "Two Model Teachers" 128). In time, Scott's doctoral alumni would become a crucial counterweight to Current-Traditional instruction. But initially, many of the instructors most attuned with Scott's alternate vision of writing instruction came almost perversely from within Harvard itself: they were the old Mermaid Club, the old Harvard Monthly editors, and other Wendell protégés whose fascination with the artistic and creative use of composition courses had quickly surged beyond that of their mentor.

All had witnessed firsthand the effects of endless corrective composition. William Lyons Phelps, a student of Wendell's now newly teaching at Harvard, found himself almost immediately abandoning endless theme-reading and correction even as the 1892 Harvard report was released. "The curious thing," he later recalled, "is that I then believed in the efficacy of the system. I said to myself, 'This is worse than coal-heaving. This is nerve destroying, a torture to

soul and body. But it is necessary. Someone must do it. Why not I? But not I any longer.' " (*Teaching in School and College* 120).

Exhausted by reading daily themes, after a single year Phelps fled to Yale, which operated at the opposite extreme, by integrating writing into all of its courses and eschewing corrective rhetoric. Indeed, Yale had no entrance writing examination at all, and only bothered to run one composition section a year (Payne 37). But Yale's comparative freedom also had its limits. Phelps soon announced a course in "Modern Novels," widely hailed as the first of its kind in an American university. Taking on a different novel each week, it ranged through such popular living authors as Hardy, Twain, and Kipling, and the effect was electrifying: it enrolled 258 students and 50 auditors, instantly becoming the most popular course at Yale ("Fiction as a College Study" 4). Bewildered by the attention of such national headlines as "They Study Novels" (*Ottawa Journal*), more traditional members of the Yale faculty quickly forced Phelps to discontinue the course, a decision that itself made headlines and left the *New York Times* reporting that rebelling students were considering circulating a petition ("Modern Novels at Yale" 16).

Ostensibly, the reason given was that modern students would read novels anyway, and were better served by prompts to read such edifying fare as classical literature. These concerns echoed the debates already occurring over the teaching of fiction-writing. As one wire report drolly put it, "Mingled with the hope that Yale has struck the keynote of a great reform, is the haunting fear that the continuous study of fiction may implant a desire for its creation" ("Fiction as a College Study" 4). The newspaper reports may have been the course's real undoing; over at Princeton, Bliss Perry was also, and more quietly, conducting the study of modern novels, and exciting little controversy at all ("Princeton Surprised at Yale" 16). Perry's version was nestled in

the second semester of a senior elective with the unremarkable title of Literary Criticism, and though by his own later account it also prompted students to write the occasional fiction exercise, it did not announce itself as such.

But then, no academic effort at fiction-writing on the East Coast openly announced itself yet, even as the pedagogy of Wendell's students already reflected its presence. Mermaid Club comrades Fletcher and Carpenter both taught together at Harvard for a time, and as Carpenter left Boston to become Rhetoric chair at Columbia in 1893, the two collaborated on adapting Fletcher's Harvard lectures into the popular textbook *Introduction to Theme-Writing*. While much of the book hews to familiar modes of writing—letter-writing, argument, criticism, and so forth—it also included chapters on narration and description. The latter, it noted, would be useful for "novelists and poets" (33). Along with explaining selective descriptive detail through examples from *Martin Chuzzlewit*, and characterization through action in *The Strange Case of Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, the text offers a magnificent example of narrative compression and expansion by citing a battlefield death in Tolstoy's *War and Peace*: "With what takes place in *one* minute he fills three pages" (66). Were the man's fifty-year-long life story written at the same narrative speed, Carpenter and Fletcher gravely announce, the result would be sixty-seven million pages long. But as adept as the book is at explaining some fictional concepts, and although some exercises in Carpenter and Fletcher tacitly allow the possibility of fiction-writing, that ground was not quite ready to be broken in Harvard's formal teaching materials and curriculum.

Another key Wendell protégé teaching at Harvard—George Pierce Baker, who decades later would become famed for pioneering the "workshop" method of creative writing instruction—was still fairly circumspect in his early efforts, focusing his first textbook that same

year on legalistic argumentation. Stopping by to see Carpenter in Manhattan, he mused about visiting their fellow old clubman and novelist Robert Herrick, who now taught at the University of Chicago. "We almost have a Mermaid reunion," Carpenter cheerily wrote to Herrick (Letter, 25 April 1895).

They would have done well to travel westward. For almost without the Eastern educational establishment noticing, something extraordinary was occurring in Herrick's department: fiction-writing was being taught, deliberately and as part of a formal college curriculum.

### **iii. The Chicago School, 1892-1897: William McClintock, Robert Herrick, Robert Morss Lovett, William Cleaver Wilkinson and Edwin H. Lewis**

For William McClintock, the English chair at the newly established University of Chicago—the campus having only been open for three years in 1895—the fuss over the Modern Novels course at Yale was puzzling.

"I think a course in novel reading is of the very highest moral benefit to students of a university," he informed newspaper readers. In fact, he pointed out, incoming Chicago students were obliged to read from certain required novels before they even matriculated. And what was more, when they did arrive on campus, they'd find courses not unlike the one Phelps had just been pilloried for. "The course as outlined by Dr. Phelps is not at all a new method of college instruction," McClintock added. "Since the establishment of the Chicago University there have been plans of study very similar as to what is now being forwarded as unique in theory, and as early as 1893 I delivered a series of lectures on the development of the English novel from Richardson to the present day" ("The Novel in the College Curriculum" 4).

The tumult over Phelps's Yale course was all the more regrettable because it was avoidable: Phelps was originally slated in 1892 to join McClintock as part of the founding faculty at the University of Chicago ("Peripatetic" 630). He would have fit in perfectly; McClintock had been a protégé of Albert Stanburrough Cook at Johns Hopkins during his studies there in 1880-1882, just before Cook departed for UC Berkeley and initiated the publication of Lewes' *Principles of Success in Literature*, and McClintock's subsequent openness to fiction instruction was the logical extension of what Cook had started.

Indeed, when asked to describe Chicago's English department, McClintock's colleague Albert Tolman stated a decisively fine-arts and aesthetically focused view of the discipline, as opposed to the ascendant philological emphasis that even Cook had since taken at Yale and other universities. "The study of the most charming of the English classics[,]" Tolman complained in 1895 of other universities, "has too often been a mere starting-point for laborious investigations into antiquities, history, geography, etymology, phonetics, the history of the English language, and linguistics. The stones of learning have been doled out to students hungry for the bread of literature" (Payne 89).

A focus on aestheticism was, at least initially, an apt match for the University of Chicago itself. Opened in Fall 1892 with the backing of John D. Rockefeller, the school sought, as Katherine Adams has noted, "to combine Progressive service with Protestant evangelism," a manifestation of Midwestern Progressivism that placed it literally and figuratively in proximity to such secular missions as Jane Addam's Hull House (Adams *Progressive Politics* 80). Along with the university offshoot of John Dewey's Laboratory School, she notes, "'The Chicago School' of pragmatic instrumentalism emphasized the crucial role of self-expression and active experiential learning in education" (Adams, *A History* 73).

In the English department, that vision was one in part initially enabled by the Harvard disciples of Barrett Wendell. When Phelps was lured away to Yale instead of Chicago, his fellow Mermaid Club member Robert Herrick was hired instead; and when he lacked money to settle in Chicago, their fellow clubman George Rice Carpenter loaned it to him (Carpenter, Letter, 2 October 1893). (Yet another Harvard clubman—Carpenter's sometime co-author Jefferson Fletcher—soon also became Herrick's brother-in-law.) Herrick promptly instituted a Wendell-like regimen of daily theme writings that also encompassed fiction, and recruited another fellow Barrett disciple and *Harvard Monthly* editor—Robert Morss Lovett—to join him in the Midwest as an instructor.

The raw, unfinished campus and Chicago's extremes of poverty were a shock for both after their bucolic life at Cambridge. "The campus was a rough sand-lot with a swamp marked by a few scrub oak trees where frogs croaked us to sleep at night," Lovett recalled. "It was all bleak and grim, with little academic grace or charm.... Worst of all was the spectacle of poverty—men, women, and children marching to the garbage dumps and, in spite of unoccupied buildings galore, sleeping in jails or the City Hall" (Lovett 54). With the disastrous four-year recession following the Panic of 1893, the English Department office literally found its windows overlooking "Coxey's Army" encampments of the unemployed.

This specter of poverty, as much as any pedagogic philosophy, may have lent an urgency to the avowedly pragmatic and careerist focus in their writing instruction, and to their own development of a strong professional writing background to bring into the classroom. "In Herrick's view," Lovett explained, "this implied writing ourselves and stimulating our young colleagues and students to write for professional publication. This was in marked contrast to the tendency at Harvard, where the *Monthly* and the *Advocate* were the goals" (Lovett 96). Fittingly,

Lovett and particularly Herrick worked hard at building substantial careers as authors; with Carpenter at Columbia initially serving as his informal agent, Herrick launched his career with a short story in *Scribner's Magazine* (Carpenter, Letter, 21 Oct. 1893). Herrick would go on to publish twenty novels of frequently sharp-edged social realism over the next four decades.

As important as Barrett Wendell's students proved to be, Herrick and Lovett were not the only, or even the most ambitious, fiction instructors on the University of Chicago faculty. The most senior member of the department, William Cleaver Wilkinson—appointed as the sole full Professor of the founding English faculty—created this remarkable description for his course in "History and Fiction" for the university's Fall 1892 launch: "Critical study of select masterpieces among Historical Monographs and Short Stories. Written criticism of such works. Production for criticism of original essays in these two lines of literary composition." (*Annual Register 1892-1893* 74). This was followed by Wilkinson with a winter graduate course in "Journalism, Periodical Literature, Literary Editorship, etc.," which included "original productions" and "consideration of the author's part in converting the finished manuscript into the printed book" (*Quarterly Calendar Fall 1892* 40). In the Fall of 1894, Wilkinson initiated a full-fledged "Short Stories" course, describing it in the catalogue as "Study, with criticism, of select masterpieces. Production by the class of short stories for criticism" (*Annual Register 1894-1895* 134).

Nor was Wilkinson's use of experiential learning particularly limited to fiction, though that was by far its most innovative manifestation; catalog entries from this period also show him teaching courses titled "Blank Verse" and "Sentences" using the same expectation of "original productions" for critique (*Quarterly Calendar Fall 1894* 116). These other courses in sentences and poetry indicate that although Wilkinson was clearly open to the Besant's earlier call for

fiction to be regarded as a teachable fine art, and a form of professional training, he was primarily impelled by the idea of applying experiential learning across a variety of genres.

Curiously unrecognized in creative writing studies, William Cleaver Wilkinson appears to be the first bona-fide college fiction-writing instructor in America. His initial training did not quite mark him out as a likely candidate for such a daring idea. Born in 1833, the same year as Adams Sherman Hill, Wilkinson's path had not gone through Harvard, but rather the Rochester Theological Seminary; a restless career saw him often serving as a Baptist preacher, along with a decade-long stretch as a professor of theology at the University of Rochester. By the time he was hired for the opening of the University of Chicago, he was nearing sixty.

And yet Wilkinson clearly *had* been fulminating upon the corrective drift of writing pedagogy for decades—indeed before A.S. Hill or even President Eliot had been hired by Harvard, which renders the following 1869 comment by Wilkinson in *The Baptist Quarterly* all the more prophetic. By condemning the incipient Current Traditional Rhetoric, and lauding the model of student literary societies and publications, Wilkinson almost managed to write a manifesto for the creative-writing workshop, and to criticize the Harvard program of corrective theme-writing, before either had quite come into existence:

It is a capital mistake for boards of oversight to suppose they have done the best for the literary education of young men, when they have provided them with an instructor who is willing to go through unlimited drudgery, in the way of minute rudimentary criticism of their essays with the pencil or the pen.... Vigorous growth can better be trusted, than the most laborious pruning-knife, to give symmetry of form. The criticism that is applied should be living criticism,—by which we mean oral criticism, in which the criticized writer should share as respondent, while the writer's classmates, under stimulating and

regulating direction from the head of the department, should take a principal part in it. It is in some such way that the voluntary societies of a college manipulate their members; and many a student will testify that he is more indebted to their influence than to the influence of the regular instruction for the forming of his literary habits. ("Mr. Lowell's Poetry" 461-462)

Though never widely reprinted, the importance of Wilkinson's realization was apparent enough to other instructors that John Genung quoted this passage in his own 1892 monograph, even as Wilkinson himself was arriving at Chicago to set its precepts into motion (Genung, *The Study of Rhetoric* 17).

Not only did appointment to a new and malleable Department of English enable Wilkinson to act upon these ideas, his age now gave him the added authority of long experience. Having already published volumes of literary criticism in 1874 and a volume of poems in 1883, and foreign language textbooks through the 1880s, Wilkinson arrived at Chicago fresh off of publishing *The Epic of Saul* (1891), a nearly 400-page biblical epic in blank verse, an effort that received prominent distribution from Funk & Wagnall's. So while he was not primarily a fiction writer, Wilkinson was far more experienced with actual commercial editorial processes and publishing than most of his other colleagues.

And the practical emphasis of such instruction even held a personal urgency: among the writing students at the University of Chicago during these early years was his own daughter, Florence Wilkinson, who would in turn become a prominent novelist and poet ("The Talented Author" 6). Indeed, because the University of Chicago's reform-minded charter mandated coeducation, during the 1890s fully one-fourth of the school's students were women. Though a counter-reformation in 1900 split men and women into separate classrooms again, during this

brief period of the 1890s, the English Department was marked by not only by vigorous innovation in its curriculum, but by a great openness to women students (Adams, *A Group of Their Own* 35)

At least one other Chicago faculty member was emboldened during these years to launch a similar course. Edwin Herbert Lewis had been one of the University of Chicago's first doctoral students, with his 1894 rhetoric dissertation advised by McClintock and including Wilkinson among its faculty readers (Lewis 5). In the spring quarter of 1896, he taught "The Art of the Short Story," a course primarily aimed at graduate students, which not only had them writing fiction, but considered such craft-related weekly questions as "How Do Characters Reveal Themselves?", "Do The Words of One Character Reveal Another?" and "Are the Characters Strongly Contrasted?" (Franklin 10). Lewis's course gained some local renown, in part because of his willingness to speak at community gatherings, an important function of the University's growing Extension wing; one typical weekend in November 1896 shows Lewis lecturing on "Types of American Fiction" at both the Columbia School of Oratory and then at the Englewood Women's Club (Untitled item, *The Inter Ocean*). Lewis, fittingly enough, also taught and eventually became dean at the city's newly established Lewis Institute, one of the first modern junior colleges; among their students the following year was a young Sherwood Anderson, who struggled to stay awake in his night classes as he tried to shake off the cold and exhaustion of his daytime warehouse job (Rideout 74).

And yet Chicago's pioneering work in Fiction-Writing instruction did not quite last; it appears, at least initially, to have relied on the good graces of their English Department chair. After the Harvard philologist John Matthews Manly was recruited as their new chair in 1898, the Department's fiction-writing classes disappeared; earlier that academic year, there had already

been an ill augury, when Wilkinson's "original composition" of fiction was crudely yanked out of the course mid-semester ("Official Notices" 263).

"Manly's reorganization of the English department involved a change from the aesthetic to the historical approach in literature," Robert Morss Lovett later recalled. "Hitherto our discussions had turned on such questions as: What is literature? Is Macaulay literature? [But] Manly defined the basic discipline in six period courses each occupying a quarter, running from the sixteenth century through the nineteenth" (Lovett 92). One professor, the dramatist and poet William Vaughn Moody, was so upset by Manly's changes that he attempted to hand over a letter of resignation, announcing: "At every lecture I slay a poet" (Lovett 92).

That claim would at least gain some brief sympathy; slaying novelists, less so. Fiction retained enough of its suspect popularity that the study of its contemporary art, let alone embracing its creation, remained an uneasy fit with English Department. By then, though, an entire and nearly separate sphere of instruction had developed, one more solicitous of the hearts—and wallets—of budding writers. It would not be born of the English offices of Harvard and Chicago, but of the commercial world of book and periodical publishing that lay just beyond their campuses.

Part III. THE LITERARY ADVICE INDUSTRY, 1880 - 1895

**9. Exile on New Grub Street:  
On The Murky Beginnings of the Literary Advice Industry**

**i. The London Literary Society and Percy Russell's *The Literary Manual* (1886)**

If the teaching of fiction had some trouble establishing its respectability inside the classroom, it hardly helped that its instruction off-campus occasionally turned downright larcenous, as it appears to have done with Percy Russell's 1886 guide *The Literary Manual*. Occupying a curious borderland between confidence trick and education, Russell's book is emblematic of the monetizing of how-to literary advice in the decades to come—not least by through the depredations of Russell's own publisher, one J. Playster Steeds of the "London Literary Society."

Steeds had started off his professional life as a travelling agent for Boord & Sons, a firm best known for its Old Tom Gin; perhaps seeking a higher station in life, he struck out on his own in 1879 and founded a subscription Wine Society ("The London Literary Society" 1173). A year later, the wine scheme faltering, he invested his final hundred pounds in a new venture, with ads in the *London Standard* and *The Morning Post*. At first they simply directed "Authors, Amateurs (poetical and prose)" wishing to write for a "high-class Half-crown Quarterly" to "Publisher, 376 Strand" (London Literary Society, *London Standard* 5). Soon, though, the ads spread through classified sections across the countryside, sporting rather grander language:

LONDON LITERARY SOCIETY, Established 1879, as Authors' Agents, Publishers and Literary Advisers, would be glad to hear from Authors and others desiring to sell Manuscripts (prose and poetry) suitable for Volumes or Magazines, &c.,— Address the "Director M.," 376, Strand, London. (*Royal Cornwall Gazette* 5)

Authors responding received a prospectus on how the Society "supports the interests and promotes the welfare of those desirous of following a remunerative literary career." For a yearly membership of one guinea, they would receive the splendid literary advice and attention of a Society consisting of "Publishers, Authors, Agents, Printers, MSS Readers, and Literary Advisers... in Constant Communication with every editor and Publisher (Buyers of MSS.) throughout the United Kingdom" (qtd. in "The London Literary Society" 1173).

The ads quickly landed Steeds thousands of paying respondents and a revenue of about £2100 a year. This, shared with the Publishers, Agents, MSS Readers, and the literary advisers of the Society, left the proprietor with a share of... about £2100. For they were all one man: J. Playster Steeds.

Members sending manuscripts to the Society received the happy news that their writing showed *great potential*, and that they could take part in a revenue-sharing plan if they forwarded their share of the printing costs. Over the next 8 years, the London Literary Society published some 51 titles, including such deeply obscure volumes as *Brother or Lover?*, *Sketches of Celibate Worthies*, *My Strange Wife*, and at least six books simply titled *Volume of Poems* (Russell n.p.). It was all going rather well until Steeds lost an April 1888 lawsuit by one Mrs. Abercromby, who was irate at having received nothing for the £65 she submitted to publish her novel *Dorothy Derwent*. The case was picked by papers around the country—"SUED BY A LADY NOVELIST," read a headline in one Sheffield account—and the scheme then unraveled quickly ("The London Literary Society in Trouble" 3). In June 1888 Steeds filed for bankruptcy, and that October he faced a very skeptical court.

Authors were told that 2000 copies *could* be printed of their book, but when pressed, Steeds admitted that "The demand rested entirely with the trade, and if they did not demand more

than 50 copies, he was not bound to publish more" ("The London Literary Society," *The Publisher's Circular* 1349). When asked just how many copies he had published of various books, Steeds couldn't quite recall. At least one book that had been paid for, *Secret Chamber* by a Mrs. Roe, had no apparent existence at all—but, one reporter drolly noted, "He would, however, swear that the book was printed" (1349).

There is, alas, no record in the British Library or anywhere else of Mrs. Roe's *Secret Chamber*.

But one volume of rather greater interest was indeed printed by the London Literary Society in its brief and larcenous existence: Percy Russell's *The Literary Manual: Or The Complete Guide to Authorship* (1886). As a journalist and sometime novelist himself, it is not particularly clear how much Russell was in on his publisher's con, though his *Manual* has, as most other LLS publications did not, a supplementary catalogue in the endpapers for the publisher's wares. The main text includes a plug for the London Literary Society, impudently describing it as a successor to Dickens and Lytton's British Society of Authors, while not bothering to mention the actual Society of Authors run by Besant and Tennyson (74). In any case, by the very circumstances of its own publication, Russell's guide occupies a place emblematic of the monetizing of how-to literary advice in the decades to come.

The need the *Manual* addressed was real enough, though. Russell points out that while guides for preparing manuscripts had long existed, his country still largely lacked a how-to guide to literary technique—what he terms "Literary Technics" or "Literary Technology": "It seems strange that while every other legitimate pursuit has a special technology, Literature has no practical manual of Literary Technics" (3). This was indeed still true in Britain, which had

neither *Haney's Guide to Authorship* nor the previous year's reprints of *The Principles of Success in Literature*.

They would find little help in *The Literary Manual* itself. While Russell is knowledgeable about newspaper work, and passes along a few chestnuts about fiction—to write from life and not from other literature, and to ease up on the heavy-handed use of similes (43)—much of the book is a pile of literary lumber, with a contemporary review describing one chapter as "a jumble of names which can be scarcely be of any use as a guide" ("The Literary Manual" 46). A chapter tantalizingly titled "On The Constructing of Plots," one of the first such chapters to turn up in any such guide, proves to contain little more than the advice that it is indeed useful to have a plot. At best, the reader learns that the woolly storytelling of Dickens and Scott is to be avoided, whereas the deliberate plotting of Collins and Bulwer-Lytton is to be emulated (Russell 89)—that is, the ending is always to be kept in view. But, Russell warns, the use of *deus ex machina* in that ending "always irritates the veteran novel reader and the veteran reviewer" (89).

If the publication of *The Literary Manual* was not simply aimed at draining money out of Russell himself—which, as with any dealings with publisher J. Playster Steeds, remains a distinct possibility—then who was it aimed at? A significant part of the audience, as in the previously noted author guides and articles, was comprised of women: "Already," Russell explains, "we know instances of ladies employed in Editorial work, outside the sphere of essentially women's publications" (8).

In fact, the publications list of the London Literary Society was so markedly occupied by women writers that when Steeds suffered a legal setback, one newspaper hoped that now "fewer women would have to mourn the loss of money which they could ill afford to spare" ("Currente Calamo" 2). Russell's *Literary Manual* represents the gendered and economic flip side of the

college textbook market: an emerging "downmarket" for those able to write, but without the finishing opportunities of a college classroom, or of campus literary magazines and societies. The insight of J. Playster Steeds and his ilk was that these aspirants to the literary marketplace constituted a market in themselves. Whether assisting such readers played upon false hope or a constituted a genuine service was a closely related but different question—and by the time Steeds went bankrupt, a new American magazine was already staking out this morally and pedagogically ambiguous new territory.

## ii. *The Writer* (1887) and Early Literary Bureaus

Few editors can claim to invent a category of periodicals, but when the first slim issue of a new magazine emerged from Boston in April 1887, its novelty would have been apparent right in its subtitle: "THE WRITER: A Monthly Magazine to Interest and Help All Literary Workers." The issue itself was modest in its contents—just 18 pages of text, with a decidedly prosaic lead story of "How I Write My Sermons." Yet this was, for all purposes, the first English-language magazine devoted to literary advice.

The magazine's very notion of "literary workers"—so suggestive of Trollope and Besant's recent statements about writing as paid labor—made sense, given the proprietor's background. William H. Hills was a graduate of Harvard's class of 1880, which placed him squarely in the university's first years of theme-writing innovations. Hills was a quick study: before he graduated, he'd already collected and published *Students' Songs*, a highly popular music compilation snapped up at campuses around the country (*Harvard College Class of 1880* 51). After graduating, he took a *Boston Globe* job as a city reporter and then an editor—a position he would hold for the next 50 years ("William H. Hills" 4).

Only twenty-eight when he launched *The Writer* in 1887, Hills was already an experienced professional writer: he'd worked at the *Globe* for years, and saw a rapidly expanding *Students' Songs* through 13 editions and sales of 57,000 copies (Hills, *Students' Songs* 2). And this, much like the market-driven pragmatism of Jesse Haney and his *Guide to Authorship* a generation earlier, likely contributed to the bluff and demystifying tone of Hills' magazine. A first issue article bluntly titled "How to Get Into Print" employs a simile of commodification: "An article that one editor has refused may be accepted by another, as a produce dealer may take your potatoes which the shoe manufacturer refused. Imagine yourself a fruit-raiser instead of a writer" (Hammond 8).

Fittingly, given its market-driven ethos, there is a distinctly conventional and conservative element to *The Writer*. Their emphasis is on writing what the current market will bear, with little thought of creating future markets, and a decided antipathy to bucking the market in favor of any artistic principle. The closest they came to anything provocative was in a hint for reusing rejected stories: perversely rewriting them to switch the roles of the villain and the hero. "You can make the good characters bad in a surprisingly short amount of time," an 1890 article marvels, adding that doctor and lawyer characters are especially easy to transform (Saunders 198).

And in this we see key difference between the writing fostered in the classroom versus the advice industry; in University of Michigan and Harvard "Theme" classes of this era, the only audience was an instructor like A.S. Hill or Fred Newton Scott—who, despite their journalism backgrounds, did not necessarily desire their students to write anything that was particularly slick or timely. In fact, Hill's bitter recollections of his journalism career made him positively suspicious of such demands. But even as their ends were different, academia and the advice

industry would often come to share the same advice. An 1888 *Writer* article, "How to Write a Short Story," for instance, shows the already-familiar hallmarks of conventional fiction advice: take notes, write what you know, outline your plot and stick to it, and show don't tell via character and dialogue.

A surprising new area of overlap proved to not be in the magazine features at all; it was in offering to critique specific works. In September 1887, just months after his magazine's launch, William Hills began advertising "The Writer's Literary Bureau"—a referral and critique service for aspiring authors. The Bureau was a comprehensive typing, proofreading, and referral operation, combined with a commission agency; along with typing at a nickel per hundred words, they would send writers a list of suitable markets for manuscripts at a rate of 25 cents per thousand words, or \$10 for a book; and at rates beginning at 50 cents, they would also include a letter of editorial advice. The Bureau would also represent manuscripts for a commission of 25%; and while work of all kinds was accepted, it appears that the wide majority was in fiction ("The Writer's Bureau Literary Prospectus" n.p.).

The idea of the Bureau was new to most Americans, though not entirely without precedent: a least as early as 1868, James Medway's "American Literary Bureau" had made an abortive attempt at offering "to furnish criticisms to young or inexperienced authors" (American Literary Bureau, *Round Table* 2). That service was soon dropped, and instead they specialized in representing such authors as Mark Twain and Bret Harte in lecture touring (Twain 5: 321). The first *successful* advice bureau began in 1883, when the colorful physician and Manhattan bon vivant Dr. Titus Munson Coan launched his New York Bureau of Literary Revision on a similar premise. An occasional contributor to *The Writer*, Coan began as a former whaler turned student; in 1859, he'd even gone on an unannounced college-break literary pilgrimage to Herman

Melville—beginning a friendship that continued until Melville's death in 1890 (Parker 2: 917). After serving as a naval surgeon in the Civil War, Coan launched into simultaneous careers as a sanitarium doctor and a jack-of-all-trades author.

Coan's ads in *The Writer* and other magazines—in friendly competition with that magazine's Bureau—not only promised agenting and proofreading services, but also "impartial criticism" on fiction and other genres of all kinds. A valuable account of the Bureau's workings came from Edith Brower, whom Coan occasionally employed:

Nearly always he [Coan] had something especially interesting or amusing laid aside to show me—it was usually the latter: an impossible *ms*, perhaps, that could only be returned untouched, with a letter containing the minimum of justice—as expressed in structural criticism—and the maximum of mercy compatible with entire honesty; for the motto of the Bureau was: "The truth, and nothing but the truth, but not all the truth"—unless definitely asked for! (Robinson 204)

Unlike the London Literary Society, the New York Bureau of Literary Revision's assistance to writers was in earnest. The still-unknown poet Edward Arlington Robinson, after getting his start in the *Harvard Advocate*, found his first mentor in Coan. The Bureau's ads soon also boasted testimonials to the good doctor's expertise by George William Curtis, William Dean Howells, and Charles Dudley Warner (New York Bureau of Revision, *Book Chat* 330).

What Hills and Coan were doing with their respective services embodied not just the commodification of writing, like so many potatoes or pears, but the sale of the writing *process*—of critique and revision itself. In the hands of the advice bureaus, this was not educational, strictly speaking; it was meant to instruct a writer on a specific piece, rather than towards generalizable knowledge. Yet these Bureaus looked forward to a new industry in writing advice,

where the observations in piecework editorial guidance would become repeated in correspondence schools and guide-book materials, particularly for those literally or figuratively in situations far from a classroom. Where they differ from an operation like the London Literary Society is not in the doomed aspirations of many of their aspiring writers—in which, one may suspect, they had much in common—but in the inextricable admixture of genuine literary advice and success stories, particularly among populations that previously lacked such mentorship.

This makes characterizing the nascent advice industry considerably more complex and ambiguous than the debunking of a mere bucket shop operation. One might contrast the appalled Henry James—whose fear that writers would "cry on the housetops that it *is* the grocer & the shoemaker" became a reality in the pages of *The Writer*—with a figure like Jack London, who appreciated such labor-minded services. Where London's high-school training and a brief enrollment at UC Berkeley left off, the advice industry stepped in. In his adolescence and early adulthood as a sailor and occasional vagrant, London saved issues of *The Writer*, circled its articles, and actively used its submissions advice (Auerbach 22). He later became a contributor to the magazine. And, as collections like the aptly titled *No Mentor But Myself* show, London never disowned this home-schooled marketplace ethos—or the sense, as he wrote later, that "If you want to sell such goods you must write marketable goods" (London 153). Nor did he find the advocacy of writing labor troubling; with his background as a fiercely pro-union factory worker, London was unabashed about the value of his work.

This tension—between academic art and vocational training, between the selective enclave of a Harvard classroom and the take-all-comers mail-order commercialism of *The Writer*—would long continue to haunt creative writing education.

**iii. *The Author* (1890), *The Grievances Between Authors and Publishers* (1887), and George Gissing's *New Grub Street* (1891)**

When a headline in the June 1890 issue of *The Writer* announced "The Flattery of Imitation," it was with an unintended irony: just two weeks earlier and an ocean away, *The Author* magazine had been launched by the Society of Authors, under the editorship of Walter Besant. As William Hills had already launched an American spinoff of *The Writer* also titled *The Author*, it was easy to imagine, as his editorial mused, that Besant had "quietly appropriated" the title for himself (131).

In fact, Besant had been planning *The Author* since the start of his Society in 1883—but between his own career as a popular novelist, and the rapid growth of the Society, he hadn't the time to do it earlier (Colby 112). In the intervening years, the Society of Authors grew from 68 members to about 800, and added such luminaries as Oscar Wilde, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Rudyard Kipling to its ranks (Bonham-Carter 130). A series of Society books, most notably *The Grievances Between Authors And Publishers* (1887), had already rattled the publishing industry over its accounting practices, and led the Society to successfully shame London publishers into making a standard practice of issuing detailed royalty statements to authors (Besant, *Grievances* 184). All of this deliberately and avowedly followed continental models, for Besant and his magazine studied precedents set by the Société des Gens de Lettres and a more recently formed German society, the Deutsche Schriftsteller Verbund (Brand 67).

Along with the professional advocacy of these groups, a more aesthetically oriented service emerged—namely, an advice bureau. In late 1890, *The Author* announced the Society's bureau as open to the public, but unlike their American counterparts, the SOA's bureau did not charge by the word: instead, for a flat fee of one guinea (i.e. £1 1s.), it promised a critique by

reading the outline and perhaps a fraction of the manuscript. "A typewritten *scenario* is also of very great assistance," a Society announcement explained, "for it must be clearly understood that a practiced reader does not require to read the whole of an author's work before being perfectly able to give a just opinion on its merits" ("Conditions of Membership" 199).

The practical necessity of only reading the outlines and beginnings of manuscripts—and the need to quickly answer "Do I keep reading this?"—remains familiar to anyone who has ever worked amidst the overwhelming submission piles of publishing. What the SOA's bureau begins to codify, though, is not just the practical effect of such reading practices, but the aesthetic effect of them. "Scenario" outlines—or what one contemporary American article in *The Writer* also headlined as "Skeletons of Novels"—are here not only recommended for self-reference by the author, but for reference by *others* (Hatch 87). This necessarily encourages more structured, plotted forms of fiction, a tendency that would continue to be emphasized in advice-industry materials. Even more than its American counterpart, the Society's bureau thus represented a step towards servicing and commodifying a market-driven writing process.

Fittingly, the first major artistic outcry against this development also dates from this period: George Gissing's 1891 novel *New Grub Street*. An indictment of the commercial pressures of publishing, it contrasts the miserable fate of the declining novelist Edward Reardon, forced to go back to his job as a hospital clerk, and his smooth-tongued rival and erstwhile friend Jasper Milvain. It's hard not to hear the rhetoric of Walter Besant and William Hills in the latter's character: "I am the literary man of 1882.... Literature is a trade nowadays. Putting aside men of genius, who may succeed by mere cosmic force, your successful man of letters is your skillful tradesman" (56). Milvain is unsentimental but not without some charm; yet his goal, he explains, is merely to supply "good, coarse marketable stuff for the world's vulgar" (61).

Both Reardon and Milvain are shadowed by alter egos: Reardon by the idealistic Harold Biffen, who writes a disastrously unsalable novel of proto-social-realism titled *Mr. Bailey, Grocer*, and Milvain by the perpetually unpublished but eager literary aspirant Mr. Whelpdale. When the latter opens a literary advice bureau—"But it's a confounded swindle!" Reardon protests—it is Milvain who gently points out that perhaps even an unpublished author like Whelpdale might offer helpful advice (193). But Whelpdale's pretensions to advice soon border on travesty:

"What do you think I'm writing just now? An author's Guide. You know the kind of thing; they sell splendidly. Of course I shall make it a good advertisement of my business. Then I have a splendid idea. I'm going to advertise: 'Novel writing taught in ten lessons!' What do you think of that? No swindle; not a bit of it. I'm quite capable of giving the ordinary man or woman ten very useful lessons.... The first lesson deals with the question of subjects, local colour—that kind of thing. I gravely advise people, if they possibly can, to write of the wealthy middle class; that's the popular subject, you know... people who have no titles, but live in good Philistine style." (238)

Even the mercenary Milvain can't help needling his unpublished friend at this: "What a pity you can't apply your own advice, Whelpdale!" (284). But, of course, Whelpdale does not need to: like Milvain, he is simply in a business of "marketable stuff." By the end of *New Grub Street*, the seemingly inexorable result is that the idealistic Reardon and Biffen have both died in poverty, while the commerce-minded Milvain and Whelpdale earn prosperous livings as, respectively, a magazine editor and a literary agent.

We have seen this before, though. Whelpdale's literary advice—which also includes such pearls of wisdom as "I urge study of horsey matters especially"—is that of an updated

Barnstaple, Marryat's cynical (and equally unpublished) advisor in "How to Write a Fashionable Novel" (238). But Whelpdale and Milvain are also the logical extensions of the backwards-facing and market-driven aesthetic of the advice magazine and the literary bureau: their pragmatism exists on the basis of serving the markets that already exist, and not on innovation. For those seeking to actually make a living by art, the unease of reading a publication like *The Writer*, or of hearing an editor's breezy commentary on the basis of a half-read story and a scenario, is that this is indeed *conventional* practice—and conventional practice tends to reinforce conventional aesthetics. That does not make the advice wrong so much as it makes it, perhaps, upsettingly correct.

It is little surprise, then, that in private Gissing disparaged Besant and the Society of Authors for a vulgar business-mindedness worthy of Milvain and Whelpdale, and personally found Besant "commonplace to the last degree; a respectable draper" (qtd. in Korg 200). A dinner at the Society struck him as proof "of the degradation of that our time has brought upon literature. It was a dinner of tradesmen, pure and simple" (qtd. in Gissing and Arata 21). Fittingly enough, the action of *New Grub Street* spans the years of 1882 – 1886, which would situate the launch of the Society of Authors and Besant's "The Art of Fiction" debate squarely in the center of the novel's chronology.

The cruel irony is that during those years Gissing himself could have used trade advice and education. Toiling in dire poverty, he'd squandered a modest windfall on publishing a plodding first novel, *Workers in the Dawn*, for £125 as a triple-decker vanity project—even more than the infamous J. Playster Steeds had charged his suckers. The book sold just 49 copies—at least, that's what the publisher told Gissing, who had no royalty statements to contradict him (*Letters of George Gissing* 94). In fact, he'd even struck a rather poor deal for *New Grub Street*

itself, selling the copyright for £150—"ignoring not only the financial potential," as Peter Keating notes, "but even the message of his own book" (18).

If Gissing's sympathies clearly lay with Reardons and Biffens of the world, he was also aware of where his own self-interest might better lay. Within months of the successful release of *New Grub Street*, he signed on with the literary agent A.P. Watt; by 1894, he had joined the Society of Authors as a member (Gissing and Arata 21). As other authors would later discover, tradesmen are an irresistible target for disdain—but their advice is curiously handy when you want to set up house.

## **10. Women For Women: A Brooklyn Suffragette's Home Startup and the Modern Writing Guide**

### **i. The Making of "Eleanor Kirk"**

For the one hundred women who gathered on November 12th, 1868 at Botanic Hall—a lower Manhattan warren of union offices and Masonic lodges, all housed in an old medical college—making a living from the printed word was a tangible thing indeed. Save for a few reform-minded older women of means, most of the crowd was comprised of female typesetters. They had been quickly assembled as an incipient labor group after a proposal a few weeks earlier in the offices of Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton's newspaper *The Revolution* ("The Workingwomen's Association" 3). The first meeting of their new group, the Working Women's Association, would be a key moment in drawing together women's labor in a New York; but more unexpectedly, it would also mark the rise of Eleanor Kirk (1831 – 1908), one the unheralded pioneers of the American how-to writing guide.

Now largely forgotten, today Kirk is generally only invoked through historical misappropriation in abortion debates (Thomas 45). Yet in her own time, Eleanor Kirk was a firebrand spoken of in the same breath as Anthony and Stanton—"the most pronounced of the women's rights women," as the *New York Herald* put it in 1870 ("The M'Farland Trial" 4). Widowed twice before she turned forty, and left with five children to support, in the 1860s the former Eleanor Maria Easterbrook Ames reinvented herself as an ambitious reporter for the *New York Standard* ("Eleanor Kirk' Dead" 2). Though she established herself as a versatile writer, she refused to mute her opinions when writing on women's issues: "Not an erasure, not an addition, no alterations," Kirk warned one meddling editor ("A Word For the Women" 3).

Her public fame, though, more truly began with the short-lived Working Women's Association. In the Botanic Hall that evening, Kirk quickly asserted herself. "With one end of a Rob Roy shawl thrown defiantly across her bosom...[she] asked if ladies who were not working women should dictate [the] constitution and officers. Eleanor threw a withering glance in the direction of the elegant ladies with gold mounted glasses," the *Herald* reported ("The Workingwomen's Association" 3). It was no surprise when the outspoken Kirk was tapped the next year to succeed Susan B. Anthony as their President—but she shocked a crowded meeting by instantly turning the post down. "The necessities of my life," she informed them, "render it impossible for me" ("Working Women's Association" 1).

This was "MRS. KIRK'S HAND GRENADE," a front page sub-headline for *The Sun* announced the next day. Susan B. Anthony pleaded in vain with her before the assembled women. Kirk was, she warned, "making the great mistake of her life" ("Working Women's Association" 1). And maybe she was; the group went on to form part of the nucleus of the National Women Suffrage Association. Though Kirk continued lecturing on the behalf of both women workers and for suffrage, and even served as the new organization's Secretary for a time, she simply could not afford to lead the movement ("The State's Women's Suffrage Association" 4). Her path would need to be a very different one.

## **ii. Eleanor Kirk's *Periodicals That Pay and Information for Authors* (1888)**

The dilemma that the Working Women's Association faced, fittingly enough, was that Eleanor Kirk really *was* a working woman—and as a single mother, she still had five children to feed. She supported her Brooklyn household over the next three decades by throwing herself into writing brash columns of advice and New York gossip; she urged her readers to take up biking

and mountain climbing, and snapped that anyone lacking the courage to wear bloomers "would do well to remain in her rocking chair on the piazza and solace herself with her embroidery, novel and pug dog" (Kirk, "Bloomers" 3). At her height Kirk was reaching women through 150 newspapers nationwide with a combination of droll reportage and no-nonsense feminism ("Pen Pictures of Two" 19).

Along the way, she also penned a novel of divorce rights (*Up Broadway*), a stage comedy (*Flirtation*), and called for more women in newsrooms. Yet Kirk still found herself confounded by questions from women who couldn't break into writing. From their predicament came a slim volume—one so odd that Kirk had to publish and sell it from her Brooklyn home: *Periodicals That Pay Contributors: To Which Is Added a List of Publishing Houses* (1888).

"I want to help the girls who feel they can write if they have a little encouragement. I know what uphill work it is," she explained in announcing a contest that gave away volumes of the work to young women. (Kirk, "Something About the Influence Club" 6).

*Periodicals That Pay* was preceded by earlier how-tos like *Haney's Guide to Authorship*, and came scarcely a year after William Hills' launch of his advice magazine *The Author*. But Kirk's publication was the first to systematically arrange listings of markets and advise readers on how to break into them—by noting the name and address of the editor, and what material they ran. "Does not want poems about love and roses," an entry for *The Journalist* magazine warns, "nor stories about the widow who was starving until she wrote a magazine article which placed her in luxury" (39).

Her advice found a ready market: it was reported that she received "a bushel of letters a day" from aspiring authors (*Bismarck Daily Tribune* 2 July 1891, 2); one St Louis fair even

featured "an Eleanor Kirk doll named after Brooklyn's well-known editor" ("Of Interest to Women" 3).

Kirk immediately issued another how-to, *Information for Authors*, in 1888. While *Periodicals That Pay* is essentially a reference work, *Information for Authors* is an early advice manual on the writing and marketing of writing, including fiction—though, unusually for its time, it also includes a journalistic section on interviewing technique (67). Like other writers of her era, Kirk noted the reign of the overstuffed novel was over: "The three-volume novel went out of fashion when the steam-engine and railroad train came in" (35). The problem, it seemed, was the fast pace of modern life: "Reading is not the only recreation of the present age," she explained. "Leisure is absorbed in a hundred other ways, unknown to us half a century ago" (9).

As in Lewes two decades before, Kirk also foreshadows modern injunctions to show and not tell, in particular by minimizing introductions and description, and by situating characterization and moral judgment within the scene and dialogue, and not through omniscient narration:

It is well for the author to let his characters do the talking instead of doing it himself... there should be an effort made to present pictures to the reader,—that is, such grouping, arrangement, and movement of characters as to enable him to see, as well as comprehend, them; and, if any moralizing is to be done, let it be done by the characters, rather than by the author himself. (42)

The general effect of such advice is to remove reminders of authorial artifice. This does not make fiction any less crafted work in itself, nor any less designing upon the reader's judgment; rather, it hides such craft and designs by displacing them onto the voice and viewpoint of the characters. Yet Kirk believed there is moralizing to be done in fiction—or, at least, a moral

purpose to be heeded. Her guide contains an entire section, though altogether vague in its specifics, devoted to reminding writers of the "Moral Responsibility of Authors" (14).

Just as significantly, Kirk joins both Lewes and Hills in emphasizing the importance of revision. Unlike them, though, she does not present it as a necessarily progressive task: "Still it does not follow that the first draft of a composition is necessarily inferior.... It is possible to prune and polish away all the points which give strength and character to the work" (39). In this regard, Kirk literally sees the process as a re-envisioning, which is beneficial in providing a different perspective on the material, but does not necessarily produce a better work with each alteration. It is a more subtle view of the revision process than one finds in most guidebooks.

Conveniently—and not at all coincidentally—Kirk also used her guide to advertise her own "Bureau of Correspondence," which offered manuscript advice for a fee. Like other writing advice bureaus, Kirk's advice is framed in the same expectation that the finished product would itself be quickly assessed and bought in the marketplace, just like any other commodity: "A[n] MS. reader can often tell by a glance at a page or two whether or not the whole article is worth reading, as truly as a customer at a counter can judge by examining a yard of silk whether she would care for the whole piece of goods" (92).

Situated between the advice bureaus of Titus Munson Coan (1883), William Hills (1887), and the Society of Authors (1890), Kirk's bureau was also part of the advice industry's first wave. Along with a particular appeal to women, Kirk also competed on cost: her rates (\$5 per book or play) are squarely half those of The Literary Bureau run by Hills. What was more, Kirk also offered translation services, and even a title-naming service: "Striking titles, sometimes difficult to find, but always necessary to the success of a play, book, or story, will be furnished by the Bureau" (Bureau of Correspondence 6).

While Lewes' early interest in revision appeared to be rooted in the profound influence of playwriting and production upon his thinking, Hills and Kirk were both veterans of newspaper sub-editor rewrites—and both now also had a direct financial interest in promulgating revision as an authorial strategy. This did not inherently make their advice any less worthy or helpful for their readers. It does, though, suggest some of the dubious motives behind the less ethical knockoff guides that soon followed from competitors.

**iii. George Bainton's *The Art of Authorship* (1890) and Alice R. Mylene's *To Write or Not to Write* (1891)**

In the summer of 1888, just as Eleanor Kirk was publishing her author guides stateside, the Midlands clergyman George Bainton penned this thoughtful letter to an unnamed English novelist—explaining that he had decided to write to "one or two of our most skillful and honoured authors":

I am wanting to address our young people, in response to their request, by way of a lecture upon the art of composition and the means essential to secure a forcible and interesting style of expression.... May I be permitted to ask whether in early life you gave yourself any special training with a view to the formation of style, and also whether you can give us any information of your own methods that would aid us to realize, to some degree at least, the secrets of your own great powers in the use of a clear and forcible English. (qtd. in *The Author*, "The Art of Authorship," 44)

A flattering request: but rather less so when, in June 1890, Bainton's name appeared above newspaper ads for *The Art of Authorship: Literary Reminiscences, Methods of Work, and Advice to Young Beginners, Personally Contributed by Leading Authors of the Day* (James Clarke & Co.

17). Somehow the "lecture upon the art" to "young people" had become a widely advertised commercial volume issued simultaneously in the UK and the US. And the letters to "one or two" great authors? These proved to have gone out to at least to 187, suckering everyone from Mark Twain to Thomas Hardy into helping the modest clergyman with his "lecture" (Bonham-Carter 160).

"There are many ways of stealing the brains of authors," chuckled the *Aberdeen Evening Express* over Bainton's scheme, "but it has been left to a clergyman to show how the operation can be performed with neatness and despatch" (21 June 1890, 2).

The "contributors" were less amused. Bainton was pilloried in *The Author*, complete with damning examples by members of just how the rogue minister had reeled them in ("The Art of Authorship" 44). Bainton protested in response, not very convincingly, that it was all a misunderstanding—"I have had no other than the purest purpose in view" ("Mr. Bainton on Himself" 83).

When Bainton's volume is recalled at all today, it is for one famous line in Twain's reply—"The difference between the right word and the almost right word is the difference between lightning and a lightning bug" (Bainton 87). But *The Art of Authorship* also provides a snapshot of national attitudes towards literary arts training. The great majority of Bainton's correspondents were British, and typified by H. Rider Haggard's blunt response: "I doubt the efficacy of such preparation" (320). Among the few dozen American respondents, there is generally less hostility to the notion, as they tend more towards more puzzlement or agnosticism. Henry James explains that "I am afraid I can give no more coherent or logical account of my little success"—perhaps fittingly, as any instruction he received from George Quackenbos was so early in his schooling that he might have forgotten it altogether (208). Replies by James Russell

Lowell and Bret Harte mused on the effect upon their style of past jobs—Harvard lecturing and frontier typesetting, respectively—which if not quite an endorsement of training, hints at style being both mutable and acquired.

By this point, picture book fiction exercises had been practiced in American primary schools for at least 50 years, and one-off exercises in fiction had been present at Harvard for at least 20 years. Bainton's American correspondents were part of the first generation of writers to have grown up with the notion of fiction-writing on at least the margins of education. While Besant and others strongly advocated such training in Britain, the lack of a comparable educational tradition there may hint at why fiction-writing as a discipline was notably less welcomed.

The reputation of literary advice and training was not certainly helped by the chicanery of Bainton and his ilk, which Gissing would so perfectly mock the following year in *New Grub Street*. (Gissing, perhaps not coincidentally, had also been tricked into "contributing" to Bainton's volume.) And Bainton did indeed continue to have company in such ventures. In 1891 a dubious American volume of advice joined in: Alice R. Mylene's *To Write or Not to Write* (1891). Mylene and her book are something of a mystery, though she was identified in 1890 as a "special writer for [the] Boston Globe" ("Woman With a Big 'W'" 94). Yet the only readily findable byline for Mylene in any publication is for a single poem, "In The Fall," published in the November 1889 issue of *Cosmopolitan* (66). Similarly, the Co-operative Literary Press, listed as the publisher of *To Write or Not To Write*, appears to have only existed for this one volume. The Co-operative's real business becomes apparent from ads in the end pages of *To Write or Not to Write*: it was running a manuscript advice bureau.

Bainton's *The Art of Authorship* may have also been a grab-bag, but it did have the guiding principle of Bainton's original question to his unwitting "contributors." Mylene's work, though, is simply a collection of various and sundry advice, most of which was already familiar. In fact, it was a little *too* familiar. For instance, a striking response by Edward W. Bok—"Fancy writing is a grave into which hundreds of young writers are being buried," he warns (35)—proves to be from an article he had written just a few months earlier for *The Ladies' Home Journal* (Bok 16). Its visibility made it a particularly unwise article to pirate, if that's what Mylene was doing; as Anne Ruggles Gere has noted in her study of "extracurricular composition," Bok's columns in the magazine, which sometimes touched upon writing advice, found very wide circulation by virtue of the *Ladies' Home Journal's* sheer reach into American households (Gere 82).

A scathing review in *The Writer* by publisher William H. Hills fingered Mylene's book, which claimed in its subtitle to be "Personally Contributed By Leading Authors of the Day," as a clip job masquerading as original work. "The book is made to sell," he accused. "... [And] taken from books and periodicals previously published" (Hills, "Book Reviews" 55).

Perhaps such criticism dented those sales: Mylene dropped out of sight after this book, and the Co-operative Literary Press disappeared from Boston city directories. But if it was Alice Mylene's last offense with a scissors and glue-pot, it might not have been her first. Her one bylined work—"In the Fall"—just happens to be identical, right down to the title, to an obscure poem that ran 20 years earlier in *All Year Round* magazine ("In the Fall" 517).

**iv. *Eleanor Kirk's Idea* (1892) and Effie W. Merriman's *The Young Author's Assistant and Guide* (1893)**

Despite the sideshow of opportunists like Bainton and Mylene, more reputable efforts in the literary advice business also continued to flourish in the early 1890s. Along with multiple editions of *Information for Authors*, Eleanor Kirk also began reaching aspiring writers by more decidedly eccentric means, with the 1892 launch of a feminist newsletter cheekily titled *Eleanor Kirk's Idea*.

Printed each month from her Brooklyn home under the motto of "Women For Women," *Eleanor Kirk's Idea* also reflected the publisher's fascinations with astrology and health reform. Writing remained a concern, though, and an August 1892 issue shows at least one promotion specifically marketing it to young women by bundling the magazine with her author guides as a double-shot of feminist can-do ("To The Girls" 6). The same issue features not only headlines on "Why Women Should Vote" (Twining 2) and proposing "A Tax Upon Trailing Skirts" (Manning 2), but also spends several of its ten pages on writing-related matters. Prominent quasi-editorial ads hawk Kirk's author bureau and, both through mail-order and at Brentano's bookstore in Manhattan, her author guidebooks (Bureau of Correspondence 6). In the same issue, an article on "The Mission of the Short Story" retains the moralizing emphasis of Kirk's other work by maintaining that "the short story is not to be despised as a vehicle of education" (5), while another article comforts "young writers" with assurances that the author had once received so many rejection slips that "I had them of every shade and color, until 'trip slips' and postage were about all that I had" (Burbank 9).

At their height, then, Eleanor Kirk's how-to guides were being hawked at bookstores, through her magazine, and in her newspaper columns to women across the country. Not

everyone was enchanted: the *New York Times* labeled *Eleanor Kirk's Idea* "the amateur maniac's own journal" ("Topics of the Times" 4). But even by the end of a thirteen-year run in 1905, when its founder retired, *Eleanor Kirk's Idea* still had over five thousand subscribers. Well into her seventies, Kirk had continued printing everything from author how-tos and health manuals to astrology guides and "Gumption Cards" of vegetarian recipes ("Eleanor Kirk's Idea" 240).

Nor was Kirk the only author promulgating such instruction to women in the early 1890s. In 1893, Effie Woodward Merriman's *The Young Author's Assistant and Guide* appeared in mailboxes across the country as part of F.M. Lupton's *People's Handbook Series*—a booklet subscription plan that, for 40 cents a year, sent a cheap paper-bound how-to booklet (normally priced at 10 cents) every other month. The catch was that the subscriber didn't know what guide they'd be getting next. And so it was that, in July 1893, *The Young Author's Assistant and Guide* appeared in untold thousands of households that had perhaps never before given any thought to authorship—and who might have been surprised by the rather earnest subject matter, coming after their May subscription shipment of *The Minstrel Show; Or, Burnt Cork Comicalities*.

But Merriman was well situated to dispense advice. After a youthful turn as a Minnesota schoolteacher, she married and turned to writing letters for her local newspaper, the better "to enliven the monotony of a prairie farm" ("Mrs. Effie W. Merriman" 3). Encouraged by the publisher of *Minneapolis Tribune* to turn professional, she rose in time to publish numerous children's novels and plays, and to become editor of *The Housekeeper* magazine. Along with being a Minneapolis-based "Journal of Domestic Economy," her magazine maintained a Literary Department in fiction and poetry.

Merriman was mindful of the economic realities of many women readers in the prairie states—one of her other how-to books, *How Women May Earn Money* (1898), covers everything

from piecework sewing to beekeeping. She was also keenly aware of the market demands on fiction, and more generally of the freelance writer's lot in life. And like Josiah Holland and his near-despairing *Letters to the Joneses* thirty years earlier, Merriman was blunt with her *Young Authors* readers about just what the financial lot of even a widely published writer was. "There is little money in authorship," she warns. "Even they who have reached the sunshine of success will tell you that. The woman in your kitchen, working for two dollars and a half a week, may have a larger bank account at the end of the year than you " (3).

Merriman nonetheless encourages readers to buy themselves a typewriter—a serious commitment in 1883, when a moderately priced Munson Typewriter cost \$65 ("Among the Typewriters" 77). She also recommended acquiring a copy of the Besant and James edition of *The Art of Fiction*, and to subscribe to the advice magazine *The Writer*. Yet she does not indulge in the latter publication's optimism. She notes that even Anthony Trollope—that most calculating and business-like writer—had to maintain his post-office position for many years. And so she counsels aspiring writers to keep their day jobs—to "find remunerative work which does not tax the brain too severely" (Merriman 4).

Like Trollope and Eleanor Kirk, her simplest advice is to keep at it, and to eschew artistic inspiration in favor of habituation and gradual accumulation. "Do not trust to inspiration," Merriman advises. "Write something every day, whether you feel like it or not, but do not imagine that all you write must be published" (10).

The form of the writing does not greatly trouble Merriman—her advice ranges over all forms of commercial writing—but it is particularly interesting in the case of fiction, as she was an experienced novelist and playwright. Novel writing, she admits, presents "a greater field for the rising young author than in any other branch of literature"—but, she cautions, "at the bottom,

there are more struggling for recognition" (20). Instead, as with many later works of advice, Merriman recommends the short story as a more attainable way to gain a mastery of the basics of fiction.

In particular, since she believes her titular *young* authors to be short on the mature judgment of character, Merriman advises them to focus on what they already do know—interesting incidents, and rapidly told. Old-fashioned editorializing narrative is again deemed a liability—the hero and villain must reveal themselves without being labeled as such, as indeed should the settings that they move in—for "long descriptions are an indicator of weakness on the part of the writer" (21). As was now common in writing advice, Merriman places a particular emphasis on internalizing characterization and description into the scene, so that the reader and writer alike can hear the dialogue and visually see the story: "A story cannot be made unless the writer has a strong mental picture of his characters" (21).

"His characters" might well have been "hers," given Merriman's usual readership. Merriman not only cultivated this female readership, but actively sought women who were, as she had once been, restless thinkers stranded in rural areas. In 1898, the same year that she published *How Women May Earn Money*, Merriman also founded the short-lived Progressive Women of America, particularly targeting "the woman who is isolated—living on a ranch or farm, for instance" ("The P.W.A." 10).

With Merriman's sober and earnest Midwestern work, and Eleanor Kirk's more eccentric and impassioned crusades from Brooklyn, by the early 1890s two widely circulated women writers were in charge of publications and columns that advocated both writing instruction and women's economic empowerment. Soon their aspiring writers would discover not just advice manuals and bureaus for their art, but both figurative and literal schools of fiction to pursue it in.

## **11. Young Maidens Trained to the Business: How Women's Magazines and a Temperance Union Fostered the First Schools for Fiction**

### **i. The *Saturday Review* (1868, 1874), James Payn's "The Literary Calling and Its Future" (1879), and Walter Besant's "The Science of Fiction" (1891)**

"A 'School for Novelists,' they say, has risen. / A School? What's really wanted is a Prison..." began a mocking poem in *Punch* on March 14th, 1891. ("By a Tired and Cynical Critic" 123). Their joking aside, in early 1891 a rumor was indeed circulating in the press that a "school for novelists" was to be founded in America.

The notion had been quietly growing for decades. As early as 1868—the same year that saw an explosion of art-schools and conservatories—the London-based *Saturday Review* gave over most of an unsigned book review, ostensibly for Frances Trollope's *Mabel's Progress*, to muse that "it would be well to start a school for novelists." Fiction, it asserted, was becoming a trade like metal-working, and "At any rate, the greater novelists might take apprentices." More ambitiously, the writer imagines what a fiction classroom might look like; taught by "an experienced artist, they might be taught to put together a plot with some approach to coherence and distinctness. Models might be set before them, that they might study the difficult art of sketching from life" ("*Mabel's Progress*" 319).

This lonely voice seems to reappear in 1874 in another unsigned *Saturday Review* book notice, this time for Annie Lefurt's novel *Sweet, Not Lasting*. The reviewer proposes "an Institute for Novel Writing," with an educational focus now explicitly extended to collegiate training; it would have "the guidance of professors." Rather than cultivating genius ("originality cannot be taught"), it would guide writers into avoiding basic errors of craft ("*Sweet, Not Lasting*" 415).

It's conceivable that the reviews were written by Walter Besant, and as such would give the first hint of his later advocacy for teaching fiction; his first book dates to 1868, and he occasionally reviewed for the magazine. So, for that matter, did George Henry Lewes and the popular novelist James Payn—both are also plausible candidates for authoring either review, and the latter approached the idea of fiction schools in his 1879 essay for *Nineteenth Century* magazine, "The Literary Calling and Its Future."

Like the *Saturday Review* writer, Payn acknowledged that some geniuses were wholly untaught—but, he added, "nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand of us" learn through practice (Payn 987). Although he never explicitly advocates graduate school as such, Payn ventures near the idea, suggesting that not only was "training" needed for writers, but that it might come after their undergraduate education: "At four-and-twenty, in short, he is but an overgrown schoolboy.... Why should he not be fitted out in early life with literary weapons of precision, and taught the use of them?" (994)

This, Payn knew, would be seized upon by some as simply encouraging mediocre aspirants:

Should I encourage clever Jack and, what is worse, a thousand Jacks who are not clever, to enter upon this vocation, what will editors say to me? I shall have to go about, perhaps, guarded with two policemen with revolvers.... 'Is not the flood of rubbish to which we are already subjected,' I hear them crying, 'bad enough, without your pulling up the sluices of universal stupidity?' (995)

Even as he disavows being able to go much beyond the merely clever—"I have no expectation of establishing a manufactory for genius"—Payn also implies that the lack of genius is not the same

as stupidity. For the great middling mass of talent in the rapidly expanding market in literature, training will improve the *overall* quality of writing (94).

These would be the same essential points popularized by Walter Besant in his 1884 lecture *The Art of Fiction*, and amid rumors of an American "school," they were revisited by Besant in an April 1891 essay, "The Science of Fiction." "We have heard nothing about the proposal," Besant admits, "and perhaps it was only invented" (852). But like the *Saturday Review* writer, Besant imagines a school "in which the students should be made to practice observation, description, dialogue, and dramatic effects" (854). And like Payn, he sees little wrong with mere mortals taking such courses: "We shall then, it will be objected, be training a hoard of mediocre and incompetent novelists. Why? In every little town there are now Schools of Art and Schools of Music. Do they train a crowd of incompetent painters and musicians? Not at all" (854). Instead, he notes, the overall standard of creating *and* appreciating these arts had been raised—so "there are now thousands who can paint and draw, play and compose, after a fashion" (854).

As spring and then summer passed without any apparent sign from America of the school, Besant tried to keep his hopes up. Editorializing in the October 1891 issue of *The Author*, he vowed "We shall see a School of Fiction yet. If I had the time I would start one myself" (144). But soon he wouldn't need to—for even as he wrote, that American school would not remain a mere rumor.

## **ii. *Arthur's Home Magazine* and the "School of Fiction" (1891 – 1892)**

"In the November number we propose to add a new department to our Magazine, in the nature of a School of Fiction," trumpeted the October 1891 issue of *Arthur's Home Magazine*.

Cannily capitalizing on the rumor of a physical School, *Arthur's* created a figurative one within a magazine. "Such a project has been in the air for some months, and has been warmly recommended by such a master of the art of fiction as Walter Besant," they added. Their school would be rather like a public Literary Advice Bureau; it would critique manuscripts sent in by hopeful writers, and explain "their excellencies as well as their defects"—as well as why some stories were accepted while others languished ("A School of Fiction" 851).

Few would have pegged *Arthur's* as a place to break new artistic ground. Founded by the popular temperance author Timothy Shay Arthur in 1852, it spent decades under variations of the title *Arthur's Lady's Home Magazine*, purveying decidedly sober and conventional domestic fare. By the 1890s, it remained a mid-sized magazine, with a circulation of 45,000 (*N.W. Ayer's American Newspaper Annual* 674). But with its sale in 1891 and the arrival of editor Joseph P. Reed, the dowdy old magazine was changing rapidly. The fonts and layout were overhauled, photographs replaced the old engravings, the price was lowered, and a certain playfulness entered its pages; the first issue under Reed included a monthly contest offering a free year's subscription to the reader who spotted the most typos in an issue ("Our First Number" 586).

Response to the School was immediate and polarized: even as *Arthur's* readers submitted from around the country, the literary editor of the *New York Herald* weighed in that the School would be of "little value," as it would only "make chronic that itch for writing which attacks in youth most people with a taste for reading.... fiction is not and never can be a remunerative field. Then, why entice new laborers into it?" ("The School of Fiction," Dec. 1891, 1028). This response was a perennial in such discussions: that writers, especially young ones, were too numerous and untalented already, and should not be cruelly lured into an unrewarding profession.

But who were these writers, exactly? In the case of *Arthur's*, we have a few hints. They appear to be overwhelmingly female: a manuscript bearing a man's signature was unusual enough to occasion comment in one installment ("School of Fiction," Aug. 1892, 756). And though authors were unnamed, the later publication of some of their stories allows their identification: the first two identifiable entrants, from the November and December 1891 issues respectively, were Eleanor B. Caldwell and Maud R. Burton. Burton had previously published brief poems in *Ladies' Home Journal* (1889) and *Traveler's Record* (1891); Caldwell had published one poem in *Overland Monthly* (1887). These were writers, then, who were not entirely newcomers, but who sought advancement into the next stage of an artistic career—getting a second or third clip, and breaking into the far more lucrative prose market. After rewriting based on the advice of the "School" editors—a new ending for Caldwell's story "Old Mere Pensai," and a less-drawn out death scene for Burton's "Little Mother Nail"—both authors made their national prose debuts in *Arthur's* in early 1892.

So did this advice and mentorship help? It may have. Burton went on to publish in *St. Nicholas* (1893) and *Famous Story Book* (1896); Caldwell's later publications include an opium tour of Chinatown for *Peterson's Magazine*, and a 1900 *Cosmopolitan* piece on an ill-fated attempt to go prospecting in the Yukon.

Not every entry received a warm welcome from *Arthur's*. "Listen to My Tale of Woe," for one, did not fare well:

We wish to state that we have resisted the temptation to impale the author of the "Tale of Woe" on our editorial spit, where we might have roasted her before a slow fire and served her *sauce piquante* to the pupils of the School of Fiction. In the letter which

accompanies her MS., the perpetrator of this literary offense tells us that she "has not written much."

We advise her to write less. ("The School of Fiction," Feb. 1892, 267)

Much of the magazine's criticism, though, was more specific—and its critical quotation from one manuscript, plus its later publication by *Arthur's*, allows the identification of not only the author, but the revisions that resulted.

"How Summer Came to Sara Munro," critiqued in their January 1892 issue, was deemed "a more than average story"—with some parts being excellent. The problem, the editors explained, was "a[n] MS. over-burdened with true North Carolina word-clipping and consonant elimination" (106). Though dialect writing now carries much historical baggage, its greater sin to *Arthur's* editors in 1892 was that it was "bewildering... [and] does not leave us so much as a pronoun to cling to" (107).

From its later publication, "How Summer Came to Sara Munro" can be identified as the work of Walter Fernandez Jackson (1859-1907) of Raleigh, North Carolina ("The History of a Magazine" 894). The son of a railway engineer, he'd had little education, but much ambition and a readiness to work with what he knew; one of his earliest traceable stories, "The Hut By The Wateree" (1885), was a railway tale set in Carolinas. Encouraged by the School of Fiction's response—"modify the dialect of your story, and *some one* may accept it" (107), they added—Jackson wrote the editors again, begging for guidance on what books he could read to improve himself. Along with Matthew Arnold's *Essays in Criticism* and Robert James Lowell's *Among My Books*, they recommended short stories by Maupassant.

Jackson's obituaries from 1907 show that he did, in fact, go on to write for a living—namely, as an editor at the *Raleigh Evening Times* (Obituary 4). At least two of his stories did

indeed run in *Arthur's*. Here, from their January 1892 original critique, is a passage from his initial draft of his first story:

"Wel, Sairy," filling her mouth with the aromatic powder, "Wurkin' hod iz never uh zee... Uh wouldn't slave day in 'nd day owt iz you does, fur no man dih face uh dis green yeth. Fusingyouknows you'll kill yuhse'f; 'nd dih groun wou' be col' above yih fo' Jim Mun's'bl be cockin' 'is eyes aroun atter some yother 'oman. (107)

Here is the same text, revised after its School of Fiction critique, as it appears in May 1892 issue:

"Wal, Sairy," filling her mouth with the yellowish-brown powder, "busy iz ever, I see.... I wouldn't slave 'nd scuffle iz you does fur no man on top of this green yeth. 'Fo' long you'll kill yo'self; 'nd dih ground'll sca'cely close over you when Jim Munro 'ill be makin' sheep's eyes at some other woman." (May 1892, 433-438)

Though hardly lacking in dialect, it is palpably changed; alternate spellings have gone from 64% of the text (37 of 58 words) to just 24% (13 of 55 words).

Jackson made a point of thanking *Arthur's* editors for their guidance; an October 1892 account of the magazine's contributors includes a tousled and mustachioed photo of Jackson, and the revelation that he had "bitter disappointments" previously: "Bundles of rejected MSS., representing upward of two years' hard toil, lie in a trunk near me as I write" ("The Story of a Magazine" 894). But while one of their notable finds was a Carolina writer, it may have been on shoals of Southern literature and politics that *Arthur's* School of Fiction finally foundered.

Much of the magazine's advice was fairly conventional and temperate in tone—it reminded writers of Samuel Johnson's credo that they find a particularly fine line and "strike it out" ("School of Fiction" February 1892 206), and pleaded with them to stop sending poetry to the fiction department ("School of Fiction," August 1892, 756). Yet the August 1892 issue saw

particularly sharp criticism of the submission "A True Love Story of the War: Written by the Heroine, A Southern Woman." If the editors had held off roasting a contributor over a slow fire before, they did not this time: the piece "invites ridicule" (754) and, in its pompous justification of a master-slave relationship, was damned as an "exaggerated and utterly false sort of literature" (755). The editor's verdict was crushing: "the Southern heroine should forever abstain from pen and ink" (755).

Unusually, the column returned to attack this tale a second time, in October 1892, as part of its criticism of another Southern story, "No. 1." Though ready to praise the potential of the author of "No. 1," the editor loses all patience with yet another idealized portrayal of slavery—"it is flaunted in our faces, thrust down our throats, dinned in our ears repeatedly" (930). Then the accusations turn more personal and scathing:

Their peculiarly isolated position, the almost feudal tenure of lands, climactic influences, and high living all tended to generate in the Southern people indolence, haughtiness, and a boastfulness from which they have not quite recovered. That the relation of master and slave fostered these evils is beyond question.... We warn our Southern contributors that almost invariably their pictures of ante-bellum life and character are so idealized as to appear ridiculous." (930)

Coming amidst the new inroads of racism into American culture, as the 1890s were the years of *Plessy vs. Ferguson* and the rise of Jim Crow, *Arthur's* had uncharacteristically ventured into a much more jarring subject than plotting and dialogue. If the previous column had caused offense in the South—just weeks earlier, the *Richmond Times* snapped that the School of Fiction was fit only for "the little writers who swarm like black beetles on the face of the earth" ("A School of Fiction" 10)—this one was even more likely to offend subscribers and advertisers.

The following month, the School of Fiction disappeared without explanation from *Arthur's*—and it never returned.

### iii. *Atalanta Magazine* and the "School of Fiction" (1892 – 1893)

The same month that the *Arthur's* experiment collapsed, this curiously familiar department title appeared in *Atalanta*, a young women's magazine in London: "THE SCHOOL OF FICTION."

The real surprise was that *Atalanta* hadn't got there first. From its debut in 1887, the magazine included a monthly lecture and essay club, the Atalanta Scholarship and Reading Union, which in its third installment had none other than Walter Besant contributing "On the Art of Writing Novels." Until now, though, their Union had not systematically presented itself as a place for learning to write fiction.

The magazine's history and editorship made it an ideal candidate for pioneering a School of Fiction. The founding editor L.T. Meade was, like Walter Besant, an immensely popular author in Britain. She'd authored forty books before starting *Atalanta*, and would go on to amass over 250 volumes in her career (Mitchell 11). Unlike more conventionally girlish rivals, Meade's publication emphasized the incipient adulthood of her readers, particularly through an emphasis on covering women's colleges, essay competitions, and literary content (Dawson 478). The latter made *Atalanta* a formidable presence among youth magazines; Meade's contributing writers included Christina Rossetti, Frances Hodgson Burnett, and Robert Louis Stevenson.

As with *Arthur's Magazine*, innovation coincided with a change in ownership and a relaunch; the October 1892 issue marked the merger of two young women's publications, *Atalanta* and *Victorian Magazine*, and the pairing of respective editors L.T. Meade and A.

Balfour Symington. To launch the School, Meade marshaled her impressive literary contacts and commissioned at least six months' worth of essays on the craft by popular authors of the day (*Atalanta*, September 1892, "Advertisements," n.p.). Squarely placing itself in the public debate over the teachability of fiction, its inaugural essay by the prolific novelist William Edward Norris noted not only the old complaint that "the literary art has no schools, colleges, paid professors, no system of salutary checks to intervene between the student and the public," it also revisited Payn and Besant's provoking contention that arts education was for the cultivation of competency, not for the creation of epochal geniuses. "Ah, well! We cannot all be artists like Flaubert," Norris sighs. "We are mediocrities at best, most of us" (Norris 62).

*The Critic*, in its December 24 1892 issue, responded with an unsigned comment on *Atalanta* that tellingly conflates a distaste for professionalism with an assumption of the primacy of genius:

It is appalling. As if there were not novels enough already. ... [Now] we are to have our young maidens trained to the business, and let loose upon the world, in batches, every year to pursue their devastating calling, as if they were dentists or pharmaceutical chemists. Novelists—even female novelists—are born, not made. Jane Austen and Fanny Burney were the forced growth of no 'School of Fiction' whatsoever. ("The Lounger" 365)

The invocation of Austen and Burney is not quite enough of a fig leaf to cover that rhetorical aside: "even female novelists." This appeal to the Romantic figure of the lone genius—learning and creating art without the social and emotional support of a group of other writers, and finding their way without crassly overt instruction in the trade—presupposes their access to a set of educational and social resources that were historically male and affluent. But as we have already

seen, in everything from the London Literary Society to *Arthur's*, writing instruction tended to be popular among women. It is worth asking whether the notion of genius upheld when attacking such instruction is implicitly a gendered one.

As for *Atalanta's* female readers, they responded enthusiastically to the School of Fiction; their submissions fill up month after month of Honor Lists in the department. The addition of the new school built upon the *Arthur's* formula by not only soliciting entries from readers, but by adding specific exercise prompts for the submission of 500-word "Reply-Papers"; the first installment's prompts include a dialogue exercise and an imagining of "the Heroine has lost her way in a lonely tract of country, and night is approaching" ("School of Fiction," Oct. 1892, 63). By the Christmas 1892 issue, the magazine was singling out their newest department in London newspaper ads for all-caps praise—"THIS DEPARTMENT HAS ALREADY ATTAINED AN ENORMOUS SUCCESS"—and topped it with word that the latest issue would contain a craft essay by the popular author S. Baring Gould (*Atalanta, Daily News*, 19 December 1892).

This was followed in 1893 by an impressive series of essays and competitions in the magazine. Writing in the March 1893 issue on "The Short Story," Lanoe Falconer emphasized the efficiency of a genre that dispenses with "those dreary addenda called explanations": "Explain what?—the situation? That should have explained itself. Or the relation of the actors? A word or two in the dialogue might have done as much. More I, as the reader, do not wish to learn" (Falconer 457). In Falconer's advice, one can detect an astringent strain of editing advice now generally associated with twentieth-century fiction. The final death throes of the triple-decker novel can already be heard in Falconer's briskly dismissive comment that most would be improved "by the simple process of leaving out about two volumes and a half" (458).

This stricture against over-explanation is elaborated on by Louisa Parr in the June 1893 essay, "A Story to Tell." Among unsophisticated writers, she explains, "It is thought necessary to tell the reader that this person is very clever and witty, and that this one is stupid and odious, much in the same way that a child draws some strange creature, under which it writes—'this is a cow—this is a horse'" (650). This incipient break with omniscient and explanatory narrative is even further apparent in the penultimate School essay, Mabel F. Robinson's "The Novel With a Purpose," which dispatches moralizing fiction by declaring that "nothing can be proved or disproved by fiction" (780). Much as one could hear the end of triple-decker novels in earlier installments, here one can see an ax struck into didactic fiction:

It is inartistic in execution because it reduces fiction to falsehood, and fact to fiction. The novelist must concern herself with truth, and though it is not artistic to tell the whole truth—else our characters would sleep through a third of our pages—she must tell nothing but the truth.... The novel written with the idea of proving an idea is false through and through; its brother, written to call attention to an abuse, is almost invariably inartistic, but only as the reflection in a spoon is inartistic; it reflects truth, but reflects it in distorted proportion; it is out of focus rather than untrue. (780)

Lest one think that Robinson is merely chopping away at conventional Victorian mores, her comments extend across novels in "the cause of women's suffrage, free thought, or teetotalism[.]" Her stance is fundamentally one of both aesthetics and Aestheticism.

Fittingly, when Meade herself finally weighed in with the September 1893 essay "From The Editor's Standpoint," she stuck to practical advice. It remains as useful and unheeded as ever: keep your pitch short, do not plead, nail down a tangible story first, and for god's sake read the magazine before you submit to it (Meade 840). Honor List members were then invited to

submit fiction entries of up to four thousand words for a Semifinal competition, with a £20 Scholarship as the prize (Meade 842).

Yet this was to be her School of Fiction's last hurrah. "From The Editor's Standpoint" was Meade's final column for *Atalanta*, and in October 1893 editorship passed to A. Balfour Symington. The reasons for her departure are unclear, though Meade scholar Janis Dawson suggests the overstretched author had practical commercial reasons to leave her editorial duties (Dawson 491). Meade had begun writing mysteries for *The Strand* magazine, which in late 1893 faced an impending crisis: their best-known author, Arthur Conan Doyle, had decided to kill off his phenomenally popular creation Sherlock Holmes. The timing was right for another popular author to fill the vacuum, and Meade went on to a successful run in the genre.

The following month, the School noticeably shifted away from literary advice, and dropped the fiction exercise prompt. Perhaps the absence brought an outcry; the essays Meade commissioned were quickly collected as a book, *On The Art of Writing Fiction*, and the 500-word exercises returned for occasional appearances with such prompts as "Describe [a] conversation between two strangers in a railway carriage" ("Atalanta Scholarship and Reading Union" Sept. 1894, 738). But with its craft essays on the writing of fiction all but gone, the School of Fiction now largely existed in name only—and by 1895, not even as that.

#### **iv. The School For Writers in Bay View, Michigan (1891 – 1895)**

Where, though, *had* that first 1891 rumor of an actual writing school come from? Though long obscure, it seems that vision was indeed realized—but not in London, nor in New York—nor, indeed, in a town that Besant or other proponents had likely ever heard of. It happened in, of all places, the woods of Michigan.

"TO BAY VIEW IN SUMMER" crowded display ads in spring 1893 issues of the *Wisconsin Journal of Education* and the *Public-School Journal*. Their target was schoolteachers headed for the World's Fair in Chicago that summer, for whom a trip to the Michigan woods would be just a steamboat or train ride away: "Everywhere teachers have heard about Bay View and longed to enjoy its advantages.... [including] the Summer University, comprising schools in method, music, art, oratory, physical culture, bible study, the college, and school for writers" (Bay View advertisement viii).

Bay View was an offshoot of that great phenomenon in American adult-education history, the Chautauqua Movement. The first "Mother Chautauqua," a potent big-tent Methodist brew of arts and lectures, was founded on New York's Lake Chautauqua in 1874; Bay View, a resort town on Lake Michigan, was one of three original "daughter Chautauquas" spun off two years later. Paired with the regional headquarters of the Women's Christian Temperance Union—a progressive pro-suffrage juggernaut whose history was closely bound to Chautauqua's—Bay View was well-suited to schoolteachers. Summer Chautauquas were a perfect fit with the academic year, and the WCTU's presence in Bay View created a supportive environment for schoolmistresses. By 1892, the town's profusion of summer professional development and training classes had made it "a Mecca for hundreds of teachers," as a correspondent to the *Indiana School Journal* put it ("Four Weeks at Bay View" 324). That summer, amid the sailing and nature hikes, and cooking classes that sometimes shared quarters with music conservatory training, the town hosted high-profile visits, including an anti-corset lecture by Dr. John Harvey Kellogg and a lecture by crusading *New York Times* reporter Jacob Riis (Doerr 174).

Riis's visit seems to have been a leftover from plans, first proposed in 1891, to create a School for Writers at Bay View. What better place to bring the notion into physical being, after

all, than amid the idyllic pine groves? Edwin Shuman, the literary editor of the *Chicago Evening Journal*, was also initially slated for a ten-day session in July 1892, with guest appearances planned by Jacob Riis and the novelist James Lane Allen (Perry, "The School for Writers" 23).

There is no indication that this first attempt actually came to pass; however, by the following summer of 1893, Shuman did indeed teach a course that ran from July 27th to August 8th. Excluding the Sundays off, it was eleven full days of writing instruction. Within months, Shuman had written up his lectures as *Steps Into Journalism* (1894). Though most of the lectures focus on newspaper writing, among the book's eleven chapters—one of roughly equal length for each day of the class—there is a penultimate lecture on "Magazines And Novels."

Shuman initially frames his subject in economic terms: while the daily demand for news makes it easier to break into than fiction, short fiction and novels can offer greater earnings (196). Much of his advice, drawn in part from an interview with James Lane Allen, is familiar: work out your plot beforehand, avoid an overuse of dialect, favor Saxon over Latinate words, and keep a notebook to store nuggets of fugitive conversations and street scenes, so that "when the time comes, you may be able to melt them down into one big golden brick" (214). Shuman's interview with Allen marks, along with Anthony Trollope's autobiography, an early description of a writer's work habits. Actual writing can rarely be sustained beyond a few hours at a time, Allen explains: "Four hours with the pen I call long, hard day's work—all that a man can stand the year round and not lose his health" (202). The context for understanding this, he adds, is that writers must spend much of their day "collecting materials"—often simply reading periodicals to stay aware of the market and of the world at large.

All this might seem like a curious fit with journalism education. But newspapers still commonly ran fiction excerpts, and Shuman's lectures can be readily understood through his

awareness of the fiction education of his time. He was the literary editor of the *Chicago Evening Journal*, after all, and he quotes at length from Walter Besant. An author presentation copy of the work to Fred Newton Scott, still present in the University of Michigan library, hints that Shuman may also have known of Scott's reprint of Lewes' *Principles of Success in Literature*.

Shuman moved on, but in 1894 and 1895 the editor and journalist Trumbull White ran the School For Writers again, and set his students to producing a daily newspaper, the *Bay View Assembly Record* ("Daily Paper for Bay View" 42). Fiction remained an avowed and advertised part of the course, and even after a financial crisis at Bay View in 1896, elements of the course still appeared the year after ("Department of English" 355). Trumbull White himself eventually returned to run the entire Bay View operation, and found himself solicited for writing advice by a teenaged Ernest Hemingway—whom he counseled to write what he knew (Baker 44).

It is always dangerous to pronounce a historical first, as it begs a prompt refutation. But coming amid the Schools of Fiction in *Arthur's* and *Atalanta* magazine—themselves aptly embodying the traditions of the domestic temperance periodical and progressive women's education—Bay View's School for Writers may have featured the first actual summer sessions avowedly dedicated to writing fiction. Any writer today working at the edge of their art at Bread Loaf or Taos might take a moment, as they face the room with an experimental piece, to consider this: the schoolmistresses of Michigan got there first.

## 12. "Fiction As A Universal Exercise in Composition": Sherwin Cody and the Dawn of Creative Writing

### i. Sherwin Cody's *How to Write Fiction* (1894 typescript edition)

In the fall of 1894, Charles T. Dillingham's front window presented something of a puzzle for passers-by on lower Broadway. His bookshop and printing company had already been ailing even before the Panic of 1893, and in need of creative new sources of revenue ("Charles T. Dillingham" 1469). But even that couldn't quite explain its latest book. For one thing, it wasn't really a book at all, at least not in the conventional sense. Priced at a staggering ten dollars, it was a leather and gilt portfolio, containing a loose sheaf of 160 typewritten pages inside, complete with strikethroughs, typos, and the occasional omitted word written in by hand. The mystery was only cleared up slightly by the title page: *HOW TO WRITE FICTION: Especially The Art of Short Story writing; A Practical Course of Instruction After the French Method of Maupassant. First Edition of One Hundred Numbered Copies, in facsimile from the original Manuscript.*

As to *whose* original manuscript, there was no saying: the book was anonymous.

The subject of the book was no less unusual than its format. For all the attention paid to fiction in various how-to guides and critical works over the years, this was the first how-to book to solely dedicate itself to the subject. How it intended on doing this was not apparent to the casual browser: the typescript lacked an index or even a table of contents. But paging through revealed sections on character, motive, setting, dialogue, and plot—with the latter festooned by hand-drawn diagrams mapping out Maupassant's story "The Necklace" (46).

All this, the preface declared, was in service of treating writing like music or art, and defying "a mystery fetish, closely hugged, that the art of literature is so elusive that there is no

possibility of formulating or teaching it to another" (i). *How to Write Fiction*, it added, was finishing the task Besant started—"and possibly might have quite succeeded had not Henry James come fiercely to the rescue [of the mystery fetish]" (i). The guide cannily notes that even if instruction is not necessary to learn fiction writing, particularly among geniuses—the usual line of attack against such efforts—that instruction was less for the lone genius than for the masses. It then invoked a timely comparison: "To say 'Young man, read literature,' is like saying 'Young man, go west,' without pointing out the road.... Thousands of people will find it possible to go toward literary art where now only a few can encure [sic] toward the end... just as thousands of people go to the west on railways on steamships, where only a few could go across the plains in wagons" (4).

But an anonymous typescript, selling at \$10 a copy, was not quite the sort of work fated to draw reviewers or customers. Of two publications that did notice it, opinion was evenly split. The first out the gate, *The Literary World*, snapped that "There is little to commend in this style of getting up a so-called book," and complained that its focus on short stories left novels "practically ignored" ("How to Write Fiction" 448). After noting that the volume, like much fiction-writing instruction, was largely aimed at women ("the main part of the audience here addressed"), it concludes that despite its relatively sensible advice, that for talented writers it was superfluous, and "probably it would have a bad effect in leading young women who are not talented" to believe the talent was a learnable one (448).

"The soundest advice to give to most young women ambitious to write," it concludes, echoing Josiah Holland's three decades years earlier, "is 'Don't'" (449).

Not surprisingly, the country's leading publisher of literary advice begged to differ. In a long review in *The Writer*, founder William H. Hills quotes extensively and approvingly from

the book, even finding its peculiar format laudable—"the work possesses interest for collectors, in addition to its merits as a helpful and instructive book" (Hills, "The Art of Short Story Writing" 48).

Initially, though, the book found few takers. This remained the case even after the anonymous author found himself on the front page of the *New York World* that fall—but not for his book. "ROMANTIC MR. CODY," the headline declared on October 13th, 1894. If one believed Pulitzer's paper—and, in the depths of the Yellow Journalism era, there were reasons not to—then one Alpheus Sherwin Cody had hatched an elopement scheme with the daughter of a rich but disapproving New York family. They had fallen in love, it seems, as he tutored her in writing—and to prove his devotion, she demanded that they escape by her rowing down the East River, where he would meet her by rappelling down from the Brooklyn Bridge at midnight. Cody had walked out onto the foggy bridge with his brother Robert, who tried dissuading him before fleeing from an approaching policeman. Robert later returned to find Sherwin gone; after no trace could be found at home of his fiancée, the police were called in.

"Robert believes that his brother and his sweetheart lost their lives in making the romantic test of courage," the *World* reported ("Romantic Mr. Cody" 1).

The *World* never did report on whether Cody and his mysterious sweetheart had succeeded in their plan. But the twenty-five year-old Cody most certainly had not died that night—in fact, he lived to be ninety.

Still, in the initial rush of mystery, wire services carried the story around the country. It did not, alas, go on to identify Cody as the author of *How to Write Fiction*, and so the book still sold as poorly as ever. As the lovely leather and gilt portfolios gathered dust in Charles Dillingham's shop window, they finally fell to a dire measure: a half-off sale ("Literary Notes"

10). Even at five dollars, the books were expensive; one could buy a hardbound novel or a year's subscription to *The Writer* for just a dollar.

Yet this inauspicious beginning was the commercial debut of Sherwin Cody—a name that became an early twentieth-century byword for aspirational mail-order instruction. In his rarely recalled first publications on fiction-writing, he would pioneer three key elements of creative writing education for the coming century: dedicated how-to guides, school textbooks, and the very notion of "Creative Writing" itself.

## ii. Sherwin Cody and the Origins of *How to Write Fiction*

*How to Write Fiction's* combination of typographic facsimile art and how-to is an uncommon alloy in literature—but one that makes a peculiar sense when viewed from the life of the author. For Sherwin Cody, the typewriter not only represented a professionalization of the writing process, but an escape from poverty and into a writing career.

A distant cousin of Buffalo Bill Cody, Sherwin was born in a Michigan log cabin and orphaned at an early age; the Massachusetts relatives who raised him had little interest in sending him to college. Undeterred, Cody arrived at Amherst College in 1885 with scarcely enough money to feed or clothe himself; after earning just fifteen cents an hour digging out a cellar "for a skinflint of a Baptist minister," he subsisted on potatoes and mush, and nearly starved over the Christmas break (Cody, *100% Self-Correcting Course* 11). Unable to secure an open job as the college president's secretary because of poor handwriting, he begged a better-off uncle for a Remington typewriter—"the only thing he ever did give me" (12)—and proceeded to master the still-arcane device. By learning an early mimeographic process, Cody was able to sell typed

copies to other students of lectures by his rhetoric instructor, John Genung. In a single stroke his room and board, and indeed his education, had been secured.

The time and place were right for Cody. Composition scholar Albert Kitzhaber classes Genung among the "Big Four" textbook writers of his era, along with Fred Newton Scott, A.S. Hill, and Barrett Wendell. Genung popularized "modes of discourse" (i.e., narration, description, exposition, and argument), and his newly published *The Practical Elements of Rhetoric* (1885) represented what Robert Connors terms "the turning point, the text that really marks the paradigm shift" for teaching modes (Connors 447). Of the newly popularized modes, two (description and narration) lent themselves handily to fiction exercises—and while Genung did not use them in his own textbook, he set aside a section on Fiction that not only recognized it as a valuable form of literature, but nodded to the discussions of Besant and James by noting that "the laws of fiction are much discussed nowadays" (Genung 380).

Along with an immersion in the work of a key rhetorician of his time, Cody was also mastering a valuable new technology; the typewriter had entered mass production by Remington in 1874. It offered a new form of advancement to those who, like Cody, had not learned a "clerk's hand" in handwriting; just as importantly, it was superior in efficiency. A top handwriting speed was about 30 wpm, but before the end of the century records of 95 wpm were set on typewriters (Bliven 118). And while the secretary had been a traditionally male job, women proved remarkably well poised to master typewriting; it was, as Friedrich Kittler quotes from an 1895 report, "a practical use for what has become a veritable plague across the country, namely, piano lessons for young girls; the resultant dexterity is very useful for the operation of the typewriter" (Kittler 194). Typists themselves were quick to note the portability of this skill;

the first touch-typing manual, *Remington Typewriter Lessons* (1882), specifically ascribed its technique to piano training (Raykoff 173).

With his newly acquired Amherst education and his typewriter, after college Cody took a job at the *Boston Herald* as a reporter—for which rapid typewriting was invaluable asset—and in 1893 moved to New York and hack-writing jobs for how-to manuals (Battistella 16). His heart, though, was in literature; he continued to post occasional columns to Boston newspapers of New York literary gossip (e.g. Cody, "Literature of Today" 14). The 1894 typescript edition of *How to Write Fiction*, then, was in some regards the culmination of these years. His studies with Genung, his work as a literary columnist, and his experience as a writer of how-to manuals all combined to form a truly innovative volume. If the use of a typescript was an odd affectation, it was an apt one, coming from a writer who felt he owed his education to the device. And the typescript even provided a tangible lesson: it gave readers an example of what a manuscript submitted to a publisher should look like.

Still, a slow-selling run of one hundred copies could not sustain him. Whether it was simply to seek new work, or perhaps to escape the wrath of a powerful New York family over his attempted elopement, Cody set out in 1895 for London—and for the first expansion and mass publication of his guide.

### **iii. Sherwin Cody's *How to Write Fiction* (1895) and *In The Heart of the Hills* (1896)**

Sherwin Cody arrived in London to greater success than in New York: he found George Redway, a partner at the well-regarded house of Kegan Paul, launching his own imprint and willing to publish an expanded version of the guide. Redway felt it would find a ready audience in Britain: "The number of persons who are now engaged in writing fiction [is] somewhere

between fifteen and twenty thousand,” a *Glasgow Herald* profile of Redway estimated, adding that his new title now opened “a new prospect for those would-be novelists who are annually rejected in their thousands” (“Our London Correspondent” 7). It had certainly opened a new prospect for the guide’s still-anonymous author. Cody undertook writing a novel for Joseph Dent’s publishing house—another name to conjure with, as it would soon to launch the Everyman Library—and he began attending the New Vagabonds dinner club. A monthly gathering in Holborn of working writers and illustrators who met to dine cheaply among droll speeches and comedy, it had Cody circulating among such fellow members as Kenneth Grahame and Jerome K. Jerome (“The Diary of a Book-Seller” 172).

The inconvenient fact that Cody was still a very new author was hidden by his savvy editor; published as by “An Old Hand,” *How To Write Fiction*’s anonymous author was, Redway assured the *Herald*, a “well known novelist” (“Our London Correspondent” 7). The New York typescript edition had at least admitted that Cody was “not the author of a very great many short stories” (ii). Yet the British edition promised the clarity of long experience—not some youth whose “work will appear like a picture in a stereopticon that is out of focus.” Despite his claim that “all young persons are more or less unbalanced,” Cody himself was still just twenty-six years old (15).

Yet *How to Write Fiction* had matured considerably in the intervening year. Along with standard typesetting and an actual Table of Contents, it had also turned noticeably more conventional in its aesthetics. “The French Method of Maupassant” is no longer hailed in the title, and though the text still vaguely hails the French author’s “scientific method” of fiction—like Zola and Flaubert, his Naturalism was influenced by Darwin in pondering the effect of environment on character—and Cody was now careful to shed any of French literature’s popular

reputation for controversy. Writers were ill-advised to write about anything disturbingly peculiar (“the special and queer in human nature ought to be eliminated”) or peculiarly disturbing (“legitimate art does not admit controversial theology or science”) (31). Indeed, they were not to awake the slumbering reader at all: Cody adopts Realism’s credo that no artifice should be visible to the audience, explaining that “the public is like a child: it wants to be moved emotionally or unconsciously” (12).

And yet Cody's book remains startlingly innovative by any other measure. The inventiveness of gathering fiction advice into one how-to book is also matched by a number of exercises and practical tips which, if commonplace today, were new for the how-to literature of the time. An entire chapter is devoted to “A Story Re-Written,” demonstrating how a newspaper clipping could be transmuted into fiction (159). He suggests that aspiring writers take jobs where they can observe humanity, and to use passers-by the way a painter uses models. Cody gives the now familiar prompt of noting, for instance, an old man in the street and imagining his life story—“all the elements of his broken youth are clearly visible under the hapless veneer of time” (105). And instead of simply exhorting writers to show and not tell, he provides a specific example of the difference between the two: “To say that your heroine was proud and defiant is not half so effective as saying she tossed her head and stamped her foot” (131).

The form of the book, too, shows an evolution away from a bare-bones how-to and closer to something like a textbook, although it is not identified as such: along with an appendix providing brief history of fiction, Cody now also reprints Maupassant's “The Necklace” in full, so that the reader may see the principles of fiction writing in action.

The reception of the expanded and revised *How To Write Fiction*, though, remained about as mixed as it had been in the US. Within days of publication, a review in the *London*

*Daily News* bluntly refused the validity of Cody's premise: "We have no belief at all in this kind of education. The novelist, like the poet, is born, not made.... This gift cometh not from taking pains and reading manuals"—a statement that, while perhaps understandable in reference to epochal geniuses, ignores the very long academic tradition of training students in both versification and translating poetry ("How To Write Fiction" 4). A handful of American publications also picked up the British coverage, with one Missouri newspaper announcing flatly in its headline: "Writers Are Born, Not Made" (4). Even a rare sympathetic review, which only gave a lukewarm endorsement, still couldn't help questioning its low price—an ironic turn for a formerly \$10 volume. "I must confess," noted a reviewer in *The Speaker*, "that were I in a position to teach the world how to write Fiction, it is not three-and-sixpence that would buy the secret" ("A Literary Causerie" 446). It's a witty line, but it hides a sharper implication—that perhaps the skilled writing of fiction is not really an activity for the three-and-sixpence masses.

It was, at least, not really an activity for Cody himself. A year after his British how-to, the "Old Hand" published his first novel, *In The Heart of the Hills*. It's a surprisingly leaden effort—an Algeresque tale of a young man who rebels from his family by declaring that he wants to go to law school, takes to the road with \$2 in his pocket, haying his way up to Vermont, and then slowly rises from the clerk in a dry goods store to its prosperous owner. Though he has an eye for scenery, Cody falls victim of his own injunctions to avoid upsetting readers, and gives his characters little to do. About the most that can be said of the protagonist at the end of the book is contained in the line "Alexander Howe is now a rich man in the town of Ashton" (294). The book's most charitable review—and indeed, one of its few reviews at all—lauded Cody's craft, but admitted that "the setting of the book is delightful, but it is impossible to get up much

enthusiasm for the hero... It is admirable, no doubt, to make a fortune in a dry goods store, but it is not idyllic" ("Literature" 3).

In short, *In the Heart of the Hills* alarmingly resembles a *Mr. Bailey, Grocer* come to life—and appears to have sold about as well. The book never entered a second printing; only two libraries in the US are even known to still possess a copy.

Cody himself would later claim that "as an optimistic American I couldn't write for the old world British." In time, he would indeed find the educational and self-help aspirations of Americans to be more congenial to his career. And for that, Cody would set out for what he termed "the frontier of literary civilization, to hew out my own salvation as my pioneer ancestors had done"—Chicago (Cody, *100% Self Correcting Course* 17).

#### **iv. Sherwin Cody's *Story Composition* (1897) and "Creative Writing"**

As with London, Cody's move to Chicago began well. His return to the United States was followed with a newspaper serialization of *In the Heart of the Hills*; that autumn, he began running an ad in the *Chicago Tribune* that publicly acknowledged his authorship of *How to Write Fiction*, and advertised "private instruction and club lectures" (Advertisement 15). Most importantly, he picked up a job guest-judging a children's Christmas short-story contest in the *Chicago Record*.

Cody's timing was ideal: he arrived at the intersection of the groundbreaking short-story writing courses by William Cleaver Wilkinson at the University of Chicago, now in their third year, *and* the launch of an arts lectures series at the Lewis Institute, one of the first junior colleges for the masses. Cody was invited by the English Department at the University of Chicago to deliver three weekly lectures that December, including one on "Fiction as a Fine Art:

The Practical Art of Story-Telling" (University of Chicago 148). A few weeks later he lectured the newly launched Lewis Institute on the subject of novels ("Lewis Institute Lectures Continue," 10).

But then Cody's luck nearly ran out: his novel didn't get picked up for a US edition, and Cody and a number of his friends fell ill amidst a typhoid outbreak (Cody, *100% Self Correcting Course* 18). He emerged from months of convalescence broke and exhausted. Desperate for income, he fixed upon some articles he'd written to accompany the *Chicago Record* children's contest as a starting point for his next project: *Story Composition* (1897).

For a Hail Mary pass to get something out the door for paid publication, this slim 106-page textbook also happens to be one of the most forward-thinking works of fiction instruction of its time. *Story Composition* was the first school textbook in fiction—which is to say, it didn't merely acknowledge fiction, or include an exercise in writing it, or even a chapter or two on craft—it is a school textbook, marketed to teachers and for distribution to children, *solely* on the writing of stories as a school exercise. "As an exercise in school composition, the value of story-telling has never been appreciated," its preface notes—a statement that was certainly true of textbook publishers themselves, who had never attempted such a volume (n.p.).

In one desperate leap, Cody had invented a new textbook category. *Story Composition* acknowledged as much, explaining that there were "lots of essay, but no fiction textbooks"—and calling on teachers themselves to help, as the book itself was "experimental and needs testing in a class-room" (14-15). Even the simple step of identifying the school level in the title had not been taken, though the tone of the work suggests that the volume is aimed at an age range of about ten to fourteen.

Unusually for Cody, *Story Composition* was not an adult vocational guide. "It is not expected that pupils with whom these exercises are used will in any considerable number of cases become professional writers," Cody admits (99). Instead, the use of fiction-writing is presented as a practical and compelling means to practice *any* expression in language. Though implied by such earlier textbook authors as Quackenbos and A.S. Hill, this idea now found overt support in Cody's book. "Even if we do not aspire to be story-writers," he explains, "we wish to know how to speak with force on occasion; and I feel perfectly safe in saying that in no way can this command of language be gained so practically as in the studying of short-story writing" (8). The emphasis was on accessibility and pragmatism: Cody assured his young readers that the skill was a comfortably familiar one, as "it is just as possible to learn how to use the English language effectively as it is to learn how to play the piano or how to skate or how to play baseball" (8). Exercises in plot, setting, and dialogue, he explained, were essentially the piano finger-exercises of the mind (98).

Like John Dewey and other progressive Chicago-area educators, Cody also addressed experiential learning, in this case by positing fiction-writing as a means of *reading* literature. *Story Composition* cannily used a comparison that Victorians, with their fondness for piano training, could immediately grasp: "Great music is followed with far greater intelligence by one who is at least an amateur performer himself, who understands an infinite number of details which the untrained listener might miss altogether" (15). This direct linkage to literary education would become a key support for the later Creative Writing movement; for while fiction-writing instruction itself was still a novel concept, English instruction in literature was becoming a well-established academic discipline, and thus one might gain legitimacy by such an association.

Similarly, Cody sought to make his text accessible by grounding his exercises in student experience, and by recommending recursive step-by-step exercises that built upon that previous experience. Students are invited to write about a real-life incident—Cody gives the unnerving example of an instructor asking "Did you ever have a burglar in your house?" (16)—and then, through imagination, to extend the story by asking such questions as where the burglar lives. Through an exercise titled "One Story Out of Three Incidents," invention and plotting is cleverly introduced by having students find several disparate real-life incidents and then combine them to explain the events of one story (26).

A similar approach to step-by-step instruction can also be found in Cody's dialogue exercises. Children are first to learn monologue, then dialogue. One way they learn the former is by telling the same story in several different voices, through stereotyped ethnic narrators: "the New England farmer would be shrewd, innocent and serious in his narrative; the Irishman would be witty, even at his own expense; the negro would be happy-go-lucky" (55). As an intermediate exercise, the student is asked to bring these contrasting voices together in the same story—"perhaps adding a Chinaman"—and as an advanced exercise, to create a dialogue between two similar characters, who then will need to be distinguished through more subtle means than Chinese or Irish dialect alone (55).

To modern sensibilities, there is something almost comically appalling in suggesting this exercise to schoolchildren. Yet there is also more than meets the eye. For one, Cody also suggests that "each speaks his own dialect and ridicules the dialect of the other"—which suggests a certain linguistic relativism (55). Cody also insists on an unexpected moral aspect in dialogue exercises, one that would also loom large in later arguments about the teaching of fiction: namely, that the adoption of other points of view through fiction inculcated empathy in children.

Practice in fiction would thus become a means of both learning language and learning about one's fellow citizen: it was, Cody proclaims in a header near the conclusion of his textbook, "FICTION AS A UNIVERSAL EXERCISE IN COMPOSITION"—that is, as a way to develop a facility in language and an ear for other voices, not just in literary geniuses, but in "every man or woman" (99).

This moral and practical sense of fiction-writing lingered with Cody for years. In 1912, he would write one of the earliest essays in the NCTE's *English Journal*, suggesting that fiction-writing be made into a primary focus of eleventh-grade English studies—true to form, through the particular study of Maupassant (Battistella 135). Despite Cody's vision of fiction instruction—integrated into the classroom, not as professional training, but as a means of experiential learning about language and literature itself—such exercises would not fully come to fruition until the 1920s and 1930s, when the "Creative Writing" movement manifested itself in academic journals and progressive pedagogy. By then Cody had moved on to be a mail-order titan of aspirational "correct" English and business writing—as iconic in the correspondence school trade as Charles Atlas's 98-Pound Weakling, or the U.S. School of Music's "They Laughed When I Sat Down at the Piano" campaign (Battistella 97).

But he had already played an unheralded role in fostering the idea and nomenclature of fiction as Creative Writing. Although *Story Composition* saw few sales, both it and *How to Write Fiction* were later reworked and bundled into the final title of a four-volume mail order set of Cody's, *The Art of Writing and Speaking the English Language* (1903). It was Cody's first real commercial success. Dedicated to both John Genung and Edwin Lewis, the latter of whom assisted in its preparation, the set was sold in mass quantities, first through Sears Roebuck of Chicago, and then via full-page magazine and newspaper ads that promised "Good Money in

Good English" (Battistella 18). In the first three years alone, Cody sold a staggering twenty-five thousand sets of the series. Scattered across the land by the sheer force of mail-order and catalogue sales, it likely represented the first encounter many Americans had with the term "creative writing."

Although Emerson famously uses the phrase in his 1837 speech *The American Scholar* ("There is then creative reading as well as creative writing") (Emerson 13), Cody was one of the earliest authors to use it in the modern sense of a field of study—and he used it enthusiastically, with the entire final third of his volume carrying the section title "Creative Writing" atop every recto page. Cody saw the subject, much like Emerson, as intimately connected with the experiential learning of reading: "As this work is intended for the ordinary person, who makes no pretense to genius, it may seem unnecessary to discuss 'creative' writing. Many may doubt the feasibility of teaching creative composition at all... [But] We are all, or ought all to be readers, and the reader has been described as re-creating the work of the great author, sympathetically following in his footsteps" (71).

Until the 1920s, the term "creative writing" appears to have had more circulation among Cody's self-help contemporaries than in formal education. Frank Haddock's *The Power of Will* (1907), the first "Power Book" in a popular self-help series, promised among many other skills "How to Acquire the Skill of Creative Writing," both in its over two hundred printings and through over a decade of ads in such publications as *Cosmopolitan* and *Popular Mechanics* (cf. Pelton Publishing Company, Advertisement). Given fiction-writing instruction's long history of existing uneasily between commerce and curriculum, it seems fitting that its later nomenclature might owe a little to mail-order hucksterism and America's aspirational culture.

All of which brings us back to our original conceit in this study. Where might an aspiring author go to formally learn to write fiction? By the end of the nineteenth century, it was only a magazine, a book order, or a college away. Instruction in fiction now flourished, not only through exercises at Harvard and classes at the University of Chicago, but through access to the masses in magazines like *The Writer*, through summer tutorials at Bay View, through advice bureaus and guidebooks like those of Eleanor Kirk, and through the aspirational how-tos and textbooks of Sherwin Cody. Along with being taught to adults seeking a living as writers, fiction-writing now had a tradition in the schoolrooms, extending from Quackenbos through Cody, of being used as an imaginative and experiential method for children to learn about language.

As a formal course of academic study, the broader field of Creative Writing did not yet exist in name; but it now existed in practice. Its significance seems obvious from the perspective of the present, when its introductory classes and graduate programs alike thickly populate the country. Yet even pioneers like L.T. Meade and Sherwin Cody knew at the time that what they were creating in fiction-writing instruction was indeed *something* new. Recalling his crude and slow-selling 1894 typescript guide years later, Cody still proudly recalled that it was "the first of its kind" (Cody, *100% Self Correcting Course* 17). For all of his bravado and self-promotion, Cody's boast was no fiction at all.

## Epilogue

While much of the basis of fiction-writing instruction was established by the end of the nineteenth century, it was still far from the workshop-focused and degree-granting discipline that debuted in the 1930s. James Berlin, D.G. Myers, and Katherine Adams have all carefully covered how creative writing developed in colleges from the turn of the century through the 1936 launch of the MFA program at the University of Iowa. Progressive experiential learning had a central role in this evolution, and a lasting one; indeed, as Berlin notes, "It is from [this] expressionistic rhetoric in the twenties, and just before, that we get the first extensive discussions emphasizing the 'Process' of composing over the 'Product'" (*Rhetoric and Reality* 75). But what remains less understood is the prior contextual history around these college classes: with the notable exception of parts of Andrew Levy's 1993 study *The Culture and Commerce of the American Short Story*, there has been little research on the initial influence of the K-12 "Creative Writing" movement of the early twentieth century, or the growth of these courses through college extensions, correspondence schools, and the modern literary advice business. These developments warrant a study of their own—and so, in a future volume, I will focus on these areas of fiction-writing instruction in the decades that followed.

How-to trade guides remain a particularly little-known area of inquiry. The early twentieth century saw a proliferation of these guides, often connected with correspondence schools that flourished from Chicago to Toledo to Springfield, MA, and run by such key editors and authors as Joseph Esenwein and James K. Reeve. Here women and marginalized working-class writers found their interest and their dollars welcomed. With the founding in Cincinnati of *Writer's Digest* in 1921, and its 1922 launch of the *Writer's Market* directory, writing advice was becoming a big business.

Not only were publishers now taking notice of this as a sales category, so was a newly emergent force in writing: Hollywood. Popular how-to guides and plot-generation devices followed a rapid growth in movie writing. Beginning with Edwin Hadlock's *How to Prepare and Where to Sell Motion Picture Plays* (1911), silent-film "scenario writing" cross-pollinated with fiction in how-to guides aimed at quickly produced and popular narratives. Their authors were often one and the same: Hadlock also wrote *Journalism and Authorship* (1917), and David Raffelock combined both fields in *How To Write a Screenable Plot Into Your Fiction Story* (1925).

One result was instruction in overtly formulaic writing that meshed random juxtaposition with Structuralist morphology. William Wallace Cook, for instance, had earlier hit upon informally crafting dime-novels from collecting odd newspaper stories and then combining them to suggest new premises, an approach also employed in Sherwin Cody's *Story Composition* (1897). These approaches to plotting and characterization became increasingly formalized by Cook and others in the early twentieth century, particularly in the wake of the 1916 translation of Georges Polti's *Thirty-Six Dramatic Situations*. Wycliffe Hill's 1919 guide *Ten Million Photoplay Plots*, for instance, grew directly from his discovery of Polti's work, and also counsels combining random and formula elements. After Cook's later (and bewilderingly complex) plot-generator *Plotto* (1928), Hill created a rival guidebook series, *Plot Genie* (1931), which used board-game spinners for randomized plot generation in various genres. These efforts, though almost baroque in their complexity, have remained a key influence on innumerable trade plot and character guides.

These same decades also saw progressive educators more widely drawing upon the notion of writing as experiential learning in literature, particularly through K-12 articles in the

*English Journal* and other education journals. This "creative" approach was further popularized in Ludwig Lewisohn's *The Creative Life* (1924) and Hughes Mearns's *Creative Youth* (1925). Among the earliest textbooks available for such educators were from the existing how-to market. Volumes were quickly retooled for the academia and slapped variants of "For Schools and Colleges" into their titles—most notably by adapted textbooks and studies by such prolific correspondence authors as J.B. Esenwein. The mainstreaming of this instruction is also evident through volumes that followed by established academic publishers, including Oxford University Press, Doubleday, Heath, and W.W. Norton.

In the 1920s and 30s, rapidly expanding university English curricula—first through extension classes, and then in for-credit courses and degree-granting programs—hybridized this consumer-level writing instruction with experiential progressive education to create training in more literary forms of creative writing. A final element came from Harvard—but not through its English department. Instead, it was George Pierce Baker's use of theatre workshops, which he controversially moved into an academic setting, that inspired much press coverage in the 1910s and 1920s, and popularized the notion of workshop response as a means of instruction.

The emphasis of K-12 education in the early "Creative Writing" movement meant that the resulting experimentation in higher education found especially fertile ground in and around teacher's colleges. This can be closely studied in the efforts at Columbia University and its progressive offshoot the New School for Social Research, where Baker's peer-learning techniques inspired the first fiction "workshop" in 1931. It was these experiential and peer-learning concepts, championed by Norman Foerster and Wilbur Schramm among Education students at the University of Iowa, that would eventually guide the creation of the first graduate creative writing program in 1936.

Yet as D.G. Myers has noted, "Creative writing at Iowa was never intended to become a free-standing apparatus of courses, an autonomously constituted 'Workshop,' leading to separate degrees" (133). Iowa's program was largely created with an eye on preparing students for established job markets in K-12 education—and much less for the creation of full-time professional writers, let alone peripatetic adjunct labor. This initial generation of students, pursuing steady middle-class careers in education, could *afford* a literary emphasis in their art, eschewing product-driven genre and formula writing for process-oriented self-expression. And although these programs welcomed the prestige and achievements of their artistic students, they did not need or emphasize publication; the goal was the enrichment of one's ability as an educator. In effect, these programs gave students the tools and building materials of trade-writing instruction, but encouraged them to build architectural follies out in the middle of nowhere if they liked.

Which brings me back to my own experience as an MFA professor, and to some of my motivation for pursuing these studies, both in this and in my next volume. The justification of "art for art's sake" remains a powerful and deeply appealing aspect of many graduate creative writing programs—but, perhaps, an insufficiently examined one. We have seen that for much of its history, fiction-writing instruction was ultimately art for a composition theme's sake; art for literary appreciation's sake; art for a pulp market's sake; or art for teacher-training's sake. But it was rarely art for its own sake—for the creation of a highly literary work in its own right.

Traces of the field's teaching-training emphasis remain, perhaps more as a matter of coincidence than causality, in the channeling of MFA graduates into work on adjunctified college campuses. But that is a far cry from being prepared for a steady day job in a high school. And this change has unfolded so slowly, over the course of decades, that the shift in the

fundamental intent of the field has gone largely unnoticed. During that time, college funding has also shifted away from decades of federal grants and state support: not only are students now facing a very different situation outside graduate school, they also now face a very different experience of paying for graduate school itself.

Creative writing instruction at the K-12 and undergraduate levels often remains a form of instruction intended for individual cultural enrichment, much as it was envisioned by progressive educators a century ago; and in fiction's how-to trade publications, one may still find the get-published and make-a-buck ethos as unapologetically present as it was in Jesse Haney's guide in 1867. But the premises of graduate-school fiction-writing instruction are less clear today. Graduate creative writing instruction has drifted far from its anchorage in K-12 teacher preparation, even as it has grown in both enrollment and in the unremunerative financial burden it imposes on MFA students.

The significance of this development is a matter for other studies; but by a more informed awareness of our field's past, we might at least better understand how to regard its future.

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