

THE SHOCK OF RECOGNITION:
a personal and professional narrative about mastering/sharing the art & craft of writing...
or: why it's so much more than "just" your college essay©
by Maxene Fabe Mulford

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i. THE SHOCK OF RECOGNITION

For genius, all over the world, stands hand in hand, and one shock of recognition runs the whole circle round.

—Herman Melville

...

We all talk about poetry so abstractly because we all tend to be indifferent poets...At bottom the esthetic phenomenon is quite simple: all one needs in order to be a poet is the ability to have a lively action going on before and continually, to live surrounded by hosts of spirits...To be a dramatist all one needs is the urge to transform oneself and speak out of strange bodies and souls.

—Friederich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*

...

A LOT OF THINKING YOU CAN'T WRITE is having a blind spot about stuff you know, but take for granted; and then there's the stuff you think you know, but don't. For me that would be the triangle. I just assumed that everyone who'd ever taken college English knew that it embodied how to tell a story...

ONCE ...LONG AGO AND FAR AWAY...I'm at the University of Cincinnati sitting in American Lit, a class I find bearable only if I don't have to look at the professor. Austin Wright, a man in his early 40's, is excruciatingly shy. His countenance, as haggard as a Puritan minister's, mirrors the toll exacted by attempting to articulate his passion for dead men's tales to a jaded classroom populated by the likes of me. As usual, he looks as

if he hasn't slept in days and then in the suit he's wearing. Today, mercifully, the syllabus has finally delivered us from a diet of such penitential rations as Jonathan Edwards' sulfuric tirades and Anne Hutchinson's prim good-wifely poesy. Today begins Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*, a buffet of bounteous prose for which I realize I am ravenous.

Today though Mr. Wright is not in lecture mode. Instead of that tremulous fight-or-flight voice of his, all I hear is the purposeful staccato application of chalk against a blackboard. Reluctantly I force myself to look up so I can copy into my notes whatever it is he's clearly bent on promulgating. This proves to be an array of dense impenetrable Greek literary terms: *mimesis*, *protagonist*, *antagonist*, *desis*, *lisis*, *peripeteia*, *catastrophe*, *hamartia*, *katharsis*, most of which I've never seen before. And yet when Mr. Wright now begins to draw a triangle on the board: "The Aristotelian arc"... "Beginning" (emphatic chalk clack) ... "Middle" (emphatic clack.2) ... "End" (final chalk clack), I experience a jolt of *déjà vu*.

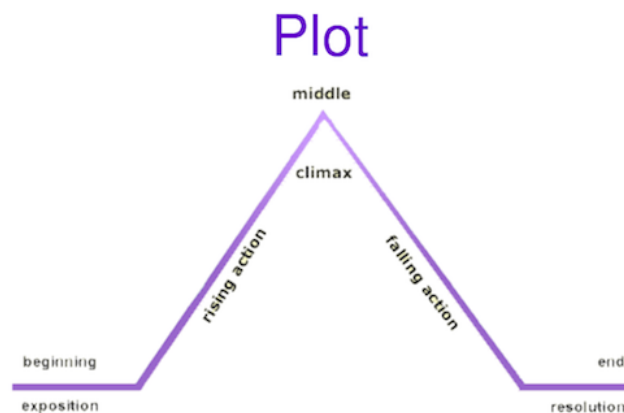


Figure 1 <http://www.docstoc.com/docs/536735/plot-and-conflict-powerpoint---narrative-elements>

CINCINNATI, OHIO. FIVE YEARS EARLIER... Tenth grade. I'm in high school, Walnut Hills HS, to be exact, an elitist six-year college-prep public school (Gr. 7-12) where Greek was once taught and Latin to this very day, where to attend you must as a sixth-grader pass a citywide entrance exam, and whose *raison d'être* has for many decades been to march its graduates in AP-annealed lockstep to the Ivy League. The dismissal bell has rung, but I've descended to the Math Department's subterranean digs at the behest of Mr. Hurley, my geometry teacher, a man who, come to think of it, resembles Mr. Wright to an unsettling degree. Same Poe-esque pallor. Same tormented Grand Guignol smile. Mr. Hurley is new this year, a dicey proposition for any teacher to be in, but infinitely worse if you teach smart-asses. The boys in our class have been taking bets that they can torment Mr. Hurley back to detox or the psych ward, destinations that seem altogether plausible based on how wretched he always looks...and how mercilessly we function when we catch a whiff of weakness. I encounter him hunched over his desk, wait for him to take his head out of his hands, and recall who I am. "Make-up test...?" I prompt. I'd pretty much given up on math when I'd first met up with long division, toward the end of fourth grade. Still, I'd never flat-out failed a test before until last Friday. "See me Monday after school," Mr. Hurley had scrawled across my mark, a dismal '23.'

That weekend, in a panic. I had taken my geometry book home and restarted at the beginning. By about page 5, it hit me that I was actually grasping what I was reading. By the time I'd reached Formal Proofs, the material covered on the test, I was psyched. Euclid's definitions, axioms, postulates and theorems formed an utterly lucid hierarchical chain of logic, each based on the preceding step and building on the next.

To initiate students into the classic method of dissecting the first of Euclid's fifty propositions, the textbook displayed a series of three T-shaped templates. The first was filled in for you. The second: half completed. Tentatively I numbered, then entered, each statement with supporting reasons, then turned the page to find I'd done it right! The third proposition you flew solo. On the test, just three days before, I had frozen at the sight of all that yawning space. Now I experienced a form of rapture. To think that each proof can have only one solution, one set of logical responses to produce it. To think that just by trusting my creative and analytical faculties, I had been equal to the challenge. By systematically retracing my steps back to where my understanding had been obscured, I had successfully brought myself to illumination. Leaving Mr. Hurley's room that afternoon, something besides my re-take grade of '89' is pressed into my memory. On the blackboard, in preparation for the fresh set of proofs we would begin tomorrow, had been Mr. Hurley's newly finished rendering of The Triangle.

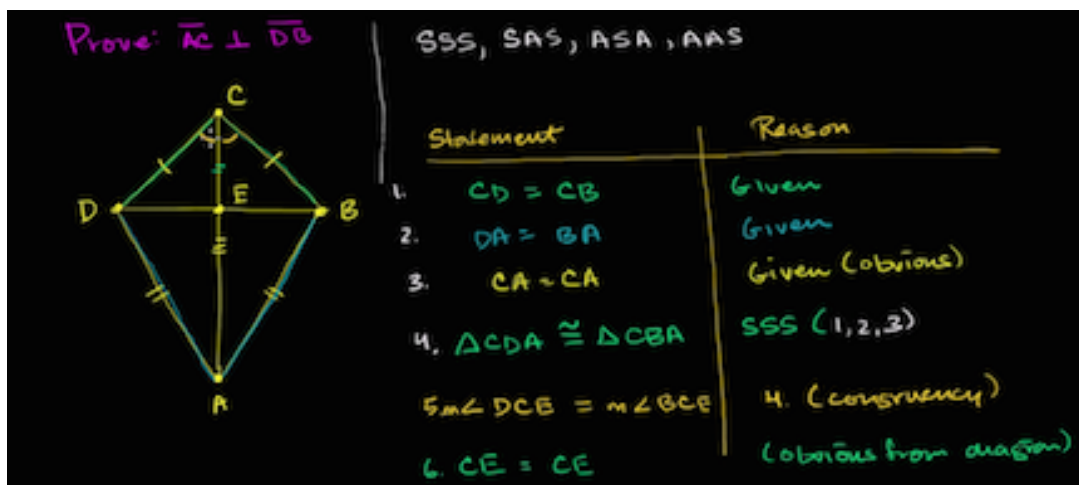


Figure 2 <http://s3.amazonaws.com/KA-youtube-converted/fSu1LKnHm5Q.mp4/fSu1LKnHm5Q.png>

FAST FORWARD TO GRAD SCHOOL at the University of Pennsylvania, from which I emerge in one short year with a serviceable, no-frills master's degree in English...thence on to New York City to seek my fortune in publishing, a world where, I swiftly discover, mediocre books routinely find their way into print despite wobbly *peripeteias* and nonexistent *dénouements*. "I can write better than this," I think and start to. Some of my stuff gets published; some stuff doesn't. I marry, move to Connecticut, bear two children, and when they're both old enough for full-day school, I join a writers group and write my second novel...then go into shock the day I learn that after fifteen years of not hearing from me, my agent elects not to pick up where we left off. That same morning my mother calls. "Be sure to read *The New York Times* book reviews today!"

Mr. Wright has penned a novel? The review, a good one, relates that it's his fourth. My second novel, resting in a banker's box in a corner of my office, has yet to be submitted. Curiously, merely by having mentioned frequently enough that I've been working on this novel seems to qualify me to teach creative writing for the Stamford Public School's division of Continuing Education. When the incumbent creative writing teacher unexpectedly quits, some lady from the SCE's calls in a panic, and, sight unseen, offers me the job.

That first class, what do you think is the first thing I do? I draw a triangle on the blackboard. "Aristotelian Arc... Beginning... Middle... End," I say, emphatically clacking the chalk beside each slope in order to exude an authority I definitely do not feel.

That expends about sixty seconds of the ten-week course. In my bi-monthly writers' group, the only structure we've ever needed is furnished simply by putting aside a morning between meetings to read and then write critiques of other members' manuscripts, which we will each read aloud at the next meeting, then pass to the writer to contemplate or crumple. Now, standing before my first two-hour class as a teacher, I immediately perceives that, when dealing with beginners, this combination of pedagogical informality and logistical exactitude will not be enough. Then a writer friend lends me *Bird by Bird* by Anne Lamott, which proves to be my lifesaver. To this day, a lot of my handouts to my creative writing classes and in the Uniquely U. college application essay work-up kit pay homage to the laugh-out-loud, blackly humorous ways Lamott nails what a daily slug-it-out it is to be a writer. Plus, there's the bottom half of page 62: it's B3's formula for writing a short story; Austin Wright's as well; and Aristotle's. "A-B-D-C-E." A = Action. B = Background. D = Development. C = Climax, E = Ending." Encountering such validation just as I begin to teach rallies me: perhaps I'm not as out of my depth as I've feared. For the first time, I begin to think of writing in terms of its individual facets and components. I begin to structure each subsequent class according to a short story's logical narrative elements: "Character," "Setting," "Dialog," "Central Conflict," "POV," and, my favorite topic, "Subtext."

Excavating the buried unifying metaphors in the first drafts of raw beginners, I discover, is far more difficult than tracking it in *Moby Dick*! I devote more hours to each of my student's disjointed manuscripts than I am comfortable revealing, ferreting out the subtlest of coincidences that I intuitively *know* point to the writer's barely realized intentions. I get very, very good at this.

NOT NEARLY GOOD ENOUGH, though, to satisfy Mrs. Coville, my daughter's senior-year English teacher. By now, my sweet Alexis is about to apply to college. I am laidback and serene about helping her come up with the right fit. Walnut Hills had done its level best to make its students feel like failures unless they gained acceptance to the Ivy League. Thanks to a paper I'd written on the Turner thesis, "The Influence of the American West on US History," it hadn't worked on me. My daughter will thrive at the University of Iowa, my son at the University of Texas at Austin. Nonetheless, Lex is still going to need to write a college essay. How fortunate she is to have *me* for a mom. Before she hands in her first draft to Mrs. Coville, she shows me what she's done so far. "Not bad," I say, I confess a little patronizingly. "But, gee, do you really think telling a college how much you hated practicing the piano is *significant* enough? What about that time we sent your allowance to the Red Cross after the Oklahoma City bombing?"

The handed-back pages of Lex's draft are so reddened with Mrs. Coville's circles, arrows, and tightly penned suggestions that barely a phrase has been left intact.

Well! We'll just see about this! What can some high school English teacher know? Has she published three books and been on The Tonight Show? Does she have a finished second novel sitting in a box? I study Mrs. Coville's remarks: "Who's applying to college here, you or the American Red Cross?"... "What happened to all the fictional devices we talked about: 'Show, don't tell'... dialog?"... "What happened to that great piano lesson from Hell you said you were going to try?" I read the comments chastened...and intrigued. No doubt about it, Mrs. Coville knows her stuff. In the margin, she has drawn a triangle and labeled it: Beginning. Middle. End.

"Hey!" I grouse to my daughter, "I thought this was only supposed to be a college essay! Sounds like Mrs. Coville is expecting a short story!"

Lex shows me the packet of exemplary college essays Mrs. Coville had passed out to the class. Wow. Dialog's allowed? These essays actually chronicle their writers' epiphanies!

"Well, if *that's* the case," I muse, "you might want to try arranging your next draft thusly: A-B-D-C-E..." Thanks to Alice Adams, Anne Lamott, and Aristotle, and, above all, Mrs. Coville, Lex's essay proves to be a winner. And I myself begin to apply what I've already been advocating in widening ways to my class and to my own work.

WITHIN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS of Stamford, however, I learn the following December, not all high school English teachers are equally well versed in Aristotle. The college essay which Anand Ahuja, the son of my former next-door neighbors and now a senior at Westhill, Stamford's other high school, asks me to read feels moralistic and superficial. "I doubt that it will be a deal breaker, but your middle's muddled," I remark.

"I know, I know," says Anand, "My English teacher keeps trying to assure me that it's fine. I think it's sort of fine. I just don't know how to fix it."

I do.

Fortunately, Anand falls in love with the A-B-D-C-E rewrite process, because the eleven schools to which he is applying demand twenty-three essays in all. Most of the extra essays are the predictable "What is your most important activity?" and "Why is our school a perfect match for you?" variety. There is one question though on his Princeton

application whose pompous premise we both feel is particularly galling: *"In what ways can you imagine yourself growing and changing as a result of your spending the next four years in the company of your Princeton family?"*

"How about telling them precisely why you find the question so condescending," I advise. "What do you have to lose?"

"Yeah! It's not like I'm getting in there anyway..." April comes. Princeton accepts Anand to its College of Engineering. ("Your essay created quite a buzz.") Anand is also admitted to Columbia, Cornell, Duke, Northwestern, Penn, and Michigan.

ANAND'S CHEEKY RESPONSE TO PRINCETON THAT LAUNCHED UNIQUELY U.

I am going to make a brash assumption that your eyes are glazed over from reading high school seniors predicting their future. This is a very tough task to achieve and probably impossible. College is a place to have assumptions shattered and to discover things not even imagined. If I were to hazard a prediction, it would be all of the obvious stuff: "Become responsible and independent and to learn about myself." Most of all, I want to come out of college knowing more, but as Socrates said: "The more I know, the more I('ll) know that I do not know." So I would like to pose a different question: "In what ways can I imagine Princeton growing and changing as a result of spending the next four years with *me*?"

Princeton has a unique emphasis on family, as in the "Princeton family." Once you enter Princeton, you have extended your family not only to those in your class, but also to the generations of Princeton graduates prior to you as well as the generations to come after you. I too am part of a people that goes back thousands of years. *My* family's value system, music, art, culture, architecture and religion have been around long before recorded history. My people invented language in the form of Sanskrit, the Mother of Western Language. Even the

preppy clothes worn on the campus of Princeton have an Indian origin: consider khaki, madras plaid and the polo pony on all those Ralph Lauren jerseys. Most famous of all is the food that we create. It was the matchless aromas of our spices in the time of Columbus that drove men to risk their lives to reach my family's lands, the Indies, and the spices we alone produced: cardamom, cumin, and coriander. This venerable and classic family of *mine* can add to the prestigious family at *Princeton* and therefore make the next four years and many more years to come ones of progressive change and growth for *both* our "families."

—Anand Ahuja, Princeton, Class of 2002; Co-Founder of Uniquely U.

KNOW HOW SOMETIMES YOU JUST KNOW something that might appear to be a coincidence to others really isn't? From my time spent at my Ivy-avid high school and at Penn, I intuitively knew that Anand's daring to be brash about Princeton's insularity would fly. Anand can't stop shaking his head. "Maybe you don't realize just how good you are at this. My articles for *The Westword*, a nationally ranked high school paper no less, have won awards; I've won trophies for my ability to mount and articulate any issue on the fly for the Debate Team, and last year, I got an A on my junior English paper from the hardest teacher I have ever had. So it's not as if I can't write more than adequately. But I've never encountered anything as engaging as the way you've shown me. From now on, whenever I write anything in the future, I'll know to anticipate all the drafts required and be confident to enough know that what I'm really trying to say *will* inevitably emerge. I'll also know that, by the time I'm done, every word, every punctuation mark is there because I want them to serve the purpose of my theme. Last Christmas, by the time I finished, I didn't even care whether I'd got in or not. I was too involved in the process of doing my very best."

After a few more rounds of "high fives," Anand and I discuss teaming up, of applying my "unavailable anywhere else" college essay writing techniques to what we hope will be a large, college-entrance-obsessed Fairfield County clientele. Before he's even graduated, Anand has a dozen juniors lined up, all eager to duplicate his spectacular success next fall.

If they're willing to pay the \$100 an hour we original billed, perhaps it would be prudent if we did a little homework first. *Is essay help legitimately allowed?* From the number of bookstore shelves overflowing with "how-to" paperbacks and the "help with college essays" Internet sites, we're betting "yes." Which is why we feel equally happy to have also come across this by Sanford Kreisberg in, of all validating places, *The Harvard Education Letter*. (Vol 11, Number 6; Nov.-Dec. 1995):

excerpted from **THE APPLICATION ESSAY:**
TEXTS, SUBTEXTS, AND TEACHER INTERVENTION

by Sanford Kreisberg

The debunking of the old myth that the SAT is not "teachable" has given rise to a huge SAT-cram-school industry, and college counselors now admit that preparing for entrance exams is essential for most students. But not enough attention is paid to helping students with their application essay, where the guidance of an experienced coach can potentially have an even greater effect on the outcome.

Help can come from many sources: teachers, college counselors, parents, family friends, and even the Internet. Students in private schools and certain well-endowed public schools have long enjoyed this kind of personal coaching on their applications. Yet even in these schools help can be random, varying by luck, student initiative, and parental intervention. Many teachers feel unsure about the propriety of helping students with application essays, and few schools have set up

systems for doing so. Most public high school students are completely on their own.

College officials agree that help is allowed, but how much? Admissions officers suggest having someone look over the essay for form and perhaps sense. "Have someone else whose judgment you value take a look at your essay," says [the late] Princeton Dean of Admissions Fred Hargadon, "in order to point out typos, grammatical errors," or even, ahem, incomprehensibility. Hargadon cautions, however, that the essay should be the student's in "style, flavor, and substance"—both for ethical and practical reasons.

Essays that are professionally terrific, or show a level of literacy that obviously mismatches other facts (recommendations, test scores, grades) in the application, will glow in the dark with the hard neon flame of fraudulence. Sarah Myers McGinty, writing in a recent issue of *English Journal*, proposes a much more concerted level of intervention—a semester-long course designed to help students over the cognitive hurdle of self reflection. Her plan includes assigning personal narratives that are revised over a period of months with advice from a peer writing group, which helps the writers "build their own meaning from the story." Alternatively McGinty suggests assigning essay topics with "built in reflectiveness," such as writing about "a choice you've regretted" or "something you believed once but don't believe now."

The nub of McGinty's plan is the shrewd observation that when it comes to writing the essay, maturity is a proxy for virtue, and that the way to crank an essay to the next level of authority, power, and "winningness" is to increase the maturity of the insights and feelings with which it deals. But is this kind of intervention fair?

No, it's not fair, in the sense that Student A at Richly Endowed High School will get an edge on Student B at Middle Range High School. But such help—already given to the most privileged—is less un-fair as it becomes available to more students. Further, from an educator's point of view, I would argue that a course, or some type of clinic focused on the application essay, is both good pedagogy and good politics. After all, there is no real difference between this kind of

coaching and what is otherwise called education: leading the student out by guidance, questioning, and discipline. (www.hbsguru.com/test/college/html)

We know a green light when we see one, and, as the Stamford Public School year ends, in late June of 1998, Uniquely U. College Essay Consultants, LLC, officially comes into being. As it happens, competing demands on Anand's time will relegate his involvement to the sidelines. I, however, 17 years later, continue to this day to soldier on.

IT'S CLEAR MY EXPERTISE is as welcome as it is beneficial. It's also clear from the very first that we are capable of helping students on a much wider spectrum than merely highly motivated seniors bent on applying early to the Ivies. By February, the end of our first season, we have successfully worked with seniors who are ADD-LD, hearing impaired, bilingual kids, kids who are the first members of their family to apply to college, transfer students, kids applying to graduate schools, an 8th grader whose boarding school applications require several essays, and a dozen or so students who've reached us from across the country—and as far away as the International School in Beijing—via Internet.

When English is the second language for one student whose family hails from Haiti, I encourage her to weave Creole French into her moving story:

ESSAY BY A STUDENT FOR WHOM ENGLISH WAS HER SECOND LANGUAGE

AUNT MARIELENE

What I remember most about my aunt was her strong perfume, for she wore gallons of it—rose-colored lipstick, too—even when she went to church. On those faithful Sunday mornings when the preacher no longer could occupy my musings

and I had become frustrated with my daydreams being constantly interrupted by shouts of "Amen" and "*Gloire L'eternel*," I would lay my head on her lap and doze off caressed by whatever fragrance she chose to wear that day. Maneuvering myself to Aunt Marielene's lap to begin with took some effort. Every Sunday, she would beckon. I would attempt to bolt, an action which would be checked by a reprimand from my mother. Now it was my mother's turn to beckon—summoning an usher over to escort me more decorously across church to her pew. I would always hate the end of church because I would not see her for another week. For I adored my aunt. At those times she would look down and her soft brown eyes would smile, "*Petite, moin prale la dimanche si dieu veut, pas crie*." And believing there would always be another Sunday, I would at once stop crying.

Sometimes "*Dieu ne veut pas*."

The news came to us by telephone one day, striking our family like a bolt of lightening. "*Un accident*," my mother cried into the phone, instantly inconsolable, "Who!! How!! Where!! *Dieu aidez moi!!*" Aunt Marielene was dead.

She was coming home with a group of friends, who had all gone to a tailor's to be fitted for a wedding—her wedding—when her car was sideswiped by a drunk driver. Everyone was able to walk away from the crash, even the drunk driver. Everyone except for Aunt Marielene.

A woman of strong will and bravery who loved deeply, Marielene had come to this country speaking only Creole. She went through many lean years, working herself to exhaustion to get an education. Finally facing happiness, and one week before her wedding, her life was cut short due to the stupidity of a perfect stranger.

I was not allowed to go to the funeral. It was not until I went to church the next week, peered over the pew, and searched in vain for my aunt's face in the crowd that I understood: when somebody dies, they are gone forever. I still remember sitting in the church, for the first time wide awake for the entire sermon, because I was crying bitter tears.

THE SHOCK OF RECOGNITION:
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Now I am no longer six, but seventeen. Many of my friends tell me they find it difficult to refuse a drink at a party because they don't want other people to think they are not fun to be around. I have never had this problem. I have already lost a loved one to alcohol. There is no way that I am going to purposefully expose myself—or anyone who loves me—to that kind of pain again. Marielene's life was stolen from her; I am not going to give mine away.

ESSAY FOLLOW-UP...

*I'm just writing to tell you that I have gotten into Columbia University and to thank you again for all your help. I got into all four colleges that I applied to. What a gift from God. Thanks for helping me out with my essays. The ones you helped me with I sent to Barnard, (where I'm going!!) UConn, NYU and Columbia. It is an honor being accepted to all these great schools, and being offered a full scholarship to UConn! Thanks again for all your help. —E.D.,
WHS, '99*

When another student's attentional issues make it frustrating for him to capture his thoughts as quickly as they start pouring out, I find that transcribing, then printing, out his uttered words, keep his essay moving forward instead of bogging down.

**EXAMPLE OF STUDENT WRITING THAT EVOLVED FROM A
COMBINATION OF WRITTEN DRAFTS AND ORAL TRANSCRIPTS**

MARCO POLO

I'm manning the lifeguard chair at the shallow end. The sun is beating down on my shoulders; my back feels like it's on fire; the sweat that's streaming down my forehead stings my eyes. To top it off, Scott, my nemesis who's twelve, has made his customary entrance.

First he waves at me to make sure he's got my full attention. Then he dives into the pool where it says "No Diving." He emerges, grinning, and begins to splash me. He does this every day, just as, right now, he's straddling the lane lines, which he's not supposed to do.

"Off," I beg, once, twice, a third time...until, inevitably, Scott succeeds in getting me to lose the little cool I have, gets me to blow my whistle and call for the senior lifeguard to exile Scott to the deep end, beyond my jurisdiction.

There, for the next hour, it'll be a raucous game of Marco Polo with other kids his age. Then he'll break for a snack-bar lunch, followed by an afternoon spent down on the beach tormenting the lifeguards there by messing with the rafts. But he'll be back at four o'clock to bug me.

Suddenly it occurs to me why I know Scott's routine by heart. When I was his age: too old for the beach club's day camp, too young to have a job, this is how I spent *my* summers. There even was a lifeguard whom I used to pester!

His name was Shark. He'd been a lifeguard for at least five years. The spiky way he styled his hair set him apart from the other lifeguards; but he was also older, cooler, wiser. I longed to have him see me as an individual, not just another kid.

One day I chanced to see a side of Shark I never dreamed existed. I saw him arrive for work. Emerging from his just-parked car, his hair conservatively combed and parted, he wore a suit and tie. "I'm a law student," he'd explained.

Until that very moment I'd thought of Shark as a fixture at the pool who, at the end of each day, at the end of each season, got packed away with the blue and white umbrellas and the deck chairs. That day, for the first time, I'd glimpsed a wider world beyond "no running on the deck... no diving in the shallow end... and no leaning on the lane lines;" grasped with a budding, new-found maturity, that there were other ways, such as conversation, to relate to him than lamely straining to impress him. For the first time, I'd comprehended that when I reached the next stage of my life, I would not become some stranger known as an adult.

...Like clockwork, Scott is back, but try as he might, since my recent insight, this afternoon his customary antics don't provoke me. Instead, I'm looking at a boy who merely longs for someone older he can talk to. I see myself as a role model with maturity, coolness, wisdom to impart. "You're old enough to understand

that pool rules are meant to keep you safe," I say. "Behaving like a kid is not the way to gain my friendship."

I survey the pool and the people in it who are my responsibility. I see a group of campers, eight years old or so, in identical blue tee-shirts, pass by—on their way to 'arts and crafts, just as I 'd done once. Over in the deep end, I see the perpetual game of Marco Polo. No doubt Scott will rile me in the future. But not for very long. Today, in this place, where day after day, year after year, summer and its rituals are timeless and unchanging, for a long satisfying moment I can read Scott's future. When I head off to college and thence into the realm of suits and ties, *Scott* will be the lifeguard with someone who is twelve—someone who was just like him (and me)—to bug him. —G.B.

COME APRIL 1, WHEN COLLEGES RELEASE THEIR DECISIONS, we are again gratified to learn that we've bucked a national trend. Even as an article on the front page of *The New York Times* declares: "For '99 College Applicants, Stiffest Competition Ever," (06.12.1999), every single family we've worked with keeps gratefully reiterating their unsolicited conviction that their Uniquely U.-guided essays played the pivotal role in their multiple acceptances.

Typically:

~Dear Creative Lifesaver:

I got into St. Lawrence and was offered \$31,000 a year. I'm thrilled! Honestly I was jumping up and down in my kitchen. All your help was invaluable in that stressful time; hopefully my best compliment to you can be the referrals I give you. You were great! —B.M., WHS, '99

B.M.'S COLLEGE ESSAY

THERE BUT FOR THE GRACE OF GOD

Of all the cool places in Manhattan, Meredith from somewhere in Iowa had her heart set on seeing South Street Seaport. "Almighty God! Why me?" I thought,

tartly eyeing the visiting hayseed my parents had saddled me with for the day. Being allowed to take the train in from Connecticut—only to be sentenced to that tourist trap! Then, once we got there, she didn't have a clue: ("You won't even try the raw bar?" "No, thanks. But I sure am hankering a hot-dog and a pop. My stars! Look! J. Crew!...Why is everything so expensive in New York? Think they'll take a traveler's check from Cedar Rapids? \$100 for a sweater?")

I had to agree with her there: my Mom'd kill me if I paid that much; but I also had to admit the sweater was a knockout. Except of course for its color: bright yellow. Might as well just wear a sign: "Mug me. I'm a hick."

But the worst thing about Meredith was: the girl simply had no street sense. She didn't clasp her purse protectively under her arm. She talked too loudly. "Hey! a hippie with green hair!...Who on earth are 'Jews for Jesus?'... Jehosephat! Is that a turban?" She made eye contact with strangers. (Approaching on my right was a tall brunette, thinner than my left pinkie. She wore bell-bottom pants and six-inch heels to accent her natural height of almost 6 feet. I could swear I'd seen her on the cover of *Vogue*. But I certainly wasn't going to be lame enough to acknowledge her. Leave it to Meredith, though, to gesture, gape and point.)

Above all: she walked too slowly. To tell the truth, I was starting to get anxious: the sun was setting. Brrrr: and it was getting colder. "Hurry up, please," I snapped.

On top of a ripped plastic garbage bag in a doorway up ahead lay a frail, destitute woman. She was naked. Her cheekbones were jutting out and her black circled eyes longed for help. Although I noticed her, I was not about to stop. This was New York, after all and a not-uncommon sight. You might know Meredith would pick this time to loiter.

Angrily I wheeled to see her running toward me, shivering, her brand-new bright yellow J. Crew sweater far behind her lying on the ground. No, it was now warmly wrapped around the woman. "There but for the grace of God go I," said Meredith.

Was that really true? Walking with my father once when I was younger, I'd benevolently paused to put a dollar in a beggar's cup only to see him stagger to

the nearest liquor store. I felt like I'd been cheated. Better to work at a local hospital, homeless shelter and soup kitchen as I've done regularly ever since, where I can interact one-on-one with numerous people less fortunate than myself and see my efforts do some good. But how much had my "street sense" closed my mind? Hadn't my preconceptions about Meredith's being naive and provincial just been movingly proved wrong? In actuality she was an open-minded, warmhearted, independent girl. Despite our different upbringings we had similar values and beliefs. In fact, her impulse to give up her yellow sweater proved her to be the true humanitarian.

I realized that because of my experiences in New York and the all-too-common sight of homeless people, I had become less responsive. For the first time in my life, I feared that I was starting to become just like the high and mighty businessmen who are always in a rush, carrying large black briefcases, who will knock you over if you're not looking; the taxi drivers who'll run you down if you're not careful. "There but for the grace of God go I," I shuddered.

An open mind needs to be coupled with open eyes and an open heart in order to understand other people in our diverse society, "even" if they come from Iowa. I recognize the influence one's environment can have to shape and change an individual, whether it be Meredith, the woman on the sidewalk, or myself. But that should never keep any of us from seeing and doing the right thing. Thanks to having witnessed Meredith's extraordinary gesture, for me, at least, I know it never will.

J.B.'s COLLEGE ESSAY

Notre Dame, my first choice school! Ask me whether working with Uniquely U. made a difference. Definitely. I couldn't believe it. There I was at my interview and all the guy could talk about was how much he loved my golf essay. Thanks so much for all your support and great suggestions! —J. B., WHS, '99

AN ACE IN THE HOLE

In the age of adolescence, there are certain occurrences that one remembers as those which have shaped their values in the transition from childhood to

adulthood. One such instance occurred not long ago in the summer after my freshman year when my father and I, both avid golfers and naturally driven competitors, took our rivalry to the links at prestigious Harbour Town on Hilton Head, SC.

My father didn't have the graceful swing of a professional, but he always knew how to win by compensating for his weakness with an iron will. His diehard spirit on the golf course had always made me feel as if I were playing in the shadows of a Ben Hogan or a Sam Snead, as if here were a legend dwarfing a novice. By that summer I was already taller than my father, a detail he found irritating. He would always stand on his toes to "gain an extra inch" while comparing our heights. However, unknown to him, I had been practicing golf religiously. Today I would move past him on the golf course.

"Today you'll learn the difference between a winner and a loser in this game," he teased, oblivious to my ulterior motives, as we faced the narrow chute of sea pines, twenty yards wide, which led to the first green.

"You're so right, Dad," I said, certain that I'd annihilate him.

To my dismay, my game was distinctly less spectacular than the setting, and my father had been playing like a tour pro. By the time we reached the eighteenth tee, I was feeling two feet tall. However, all was not lost because the score was tied. I still had a chance to vindicate myself on the last hole.

My father however had another scenario in mind. "This hole will be your demise," he said gloating and standing on his toes as if to tower over me.

With that, the teasing had gone too far. I was determined to triumph at any cost. When my wayward tee shot found the water hazard, I told my father instead that I'd found the ball. The deceit allowed me to bypass a penalty stroke, eventually enabling me to "win" the match.

For weeks, I agonized over my deception. It began to dawn on me that my lying about my errant golf stroke was parallel to my father's standing on his toes. Both actions signified a need to gain an edge. But to what end? By realizing what was wrong with my father's action—not accepting that he was shorter than me—I fully

understood my own.

Trying to get ahead through sheer determination is always acceptable, but trying to change the inevitable is wrong. My father could not make himself taller and I could not make my golf score lower than it actually was. As philosopher Bertrand Russell said, "Even in the valley of the shadow of death, two and two do not make six."

Months later, on a local golf course, I beat my father by four strokes. Humbly, I looked down into his eyes and finally confessed the words we both had been waiting for me to utter: "Dad, this is my first true victory over you at golf."

Ever since, I believe that together we both learned the true difference between a winner and a loser.

IT'S CLEAR TO ME I've been doing something very right. But what exactly is it? And what is the meaning of this puzzling trend: why does everybody who comes to me tend to express frustration at the same unlikely spot—two-thirds of the way into the process?

Up until now, I'd been using as my model the three steps laid out in Anne Lamont's *Bird by Bird*. There was Stage One: the "Down Draft" which corresponded to "Brainstorming," in which, "You get it down." Then there was Stage Two: the "Up Draft," when "You fix 'er up." And finally, the "Dental Draft," a term I still employ for the step in which you probe, test, and tighten. But when I stopped to think about it, there always was a complex, wobbly transition in the middle of the process before the buried logic of the drafts revealed itself.

The original flow chart I devised was an enormous aid to fledgling writers. It made me a more thoughtful, empathic editor, prepared to forestall frustration before it could develop, and it taught me that rewriting was a lot more complex a process than anybody

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tells you. Anne Lamont's "down draft" and "dental draft" were definitely part of it. But there were *two layers* in the middle. The flow chart revealed something else that I hadn't grasped before: Everyone experienced a "crisis of faith" at the same point, just before they reached The Triangle.

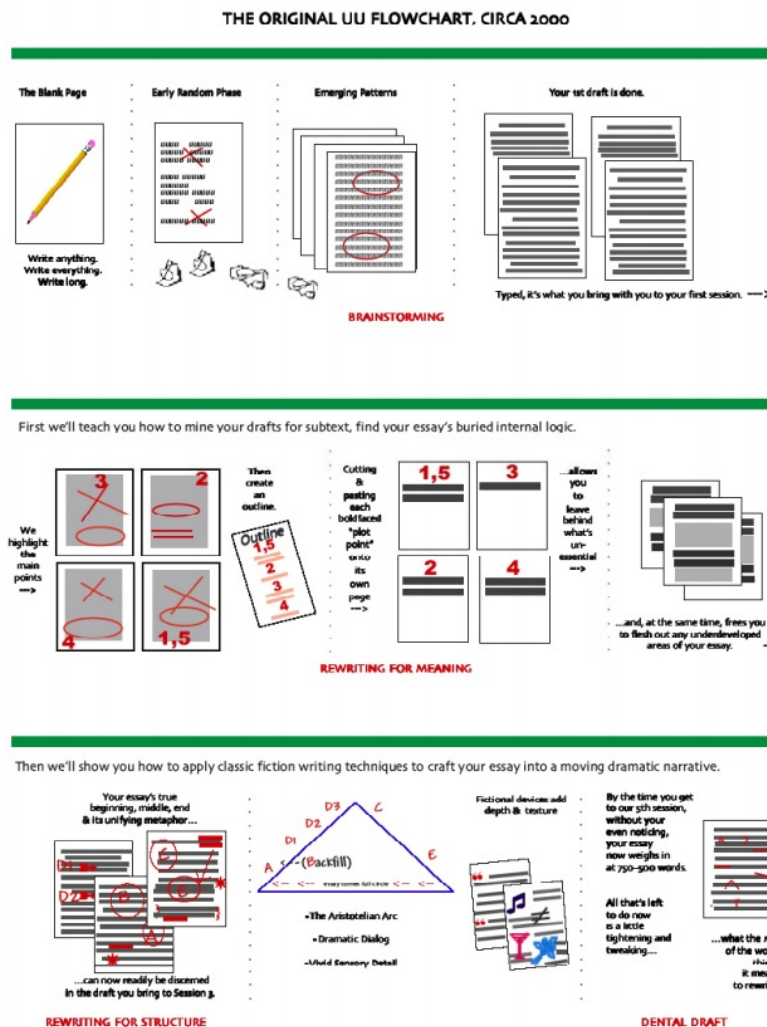


Figure 3

THERE IS NOTHING LIKE SEEING THINGS IN EXTREME CLOSE-UP to put an end to that "taking things for granted" mindset I mentioned at the outset, because, at

first, I'd merely absorbed my discovery without questioning it. Now I realized there was an "invisible zone" in the process, a gap between meaning and structure, I was failing to account for.

I'M HEADING INTO UU'S THIRD YEAR, and things are going great. The resulting essays continue helping seniors gain admission to well over one hundred colleges and universities. I have an international clientele. UU's logo is a registered trademark. I have a toll-free number, and honor credit cards. The only thing I don't have is a website, and, to tell the truth, I haven't really been in all that big a hurry, since not having one has allowed me to grow and gain experience at a manageable pace. Still, now that UU has a flowchart, Simon Gutkovich, Anand's classmate whom I'd once helped with *his* college essay, now our karma-designated webmaster, wants to see how it will play in Flash.

Wow! A pencil suspended in midair fills in blank pages; instructions loom into the foreground, rotate, and do other giddy gliding things, while vividly and effectively explaining our five-step method. It looks sensational! In fact, it's too impressive not to share with someone whose fellow students have just voted him "Best Writer in the Senior Class."

"Yo, Charles," I say to my son, knowing nonetheless that I'm risking declaring open season on myself. "Check it out. www.uniquelyucollegeessays.com." This year, Charles himself is college bound.

Despite having been diagnosed with ADD in the fourth grade, he has blossomed into an honor student with a bent for chemistry, a passion for film...and an unsparing sense of

humor. However, this fall, ever since it had been decreed by school elders that the school day begin half an hour earlier than previous years, relations between Charles and me have been less than idyllic. Arising has never been his strong suit. Mine either. This year, his strategy for getting himself to school by 7:25 a.m. appears to be as follows: if some divine force breaks into his delta stage slumber and succeeds in levitating him from underneath his down comforter, additionally warmed by the furry body of his curled-up cat, he will be on time. An SAT score of 1430 and a nearly perfect 780 on the SAT2WRI has clearly gone to Charles's head, causing him to boast that he is a shoo-in to be admitted to any college on the planet Earth; *ergo*, senior year he does not need to study...or consult with me about his college essay. Now sitting in front of his monitor, he punches up my new animated flowchart. Silently, he replays it once, twice, a third time.

"Very impressive, I have to admit, but you left out the most important step of all—the part where you step in, take over, and write the essay's final draft for the kid. No one's complaining, of course. Not with the results you get. But no way am I letting you within a mile of *my* essay!"

If my strength is zeroing in on a given system's unifying metaphor, Charles has always possessed the dubious genius for homing in on any given system's invisible central flaw.

There was no question in my mind that somewhere in the switchover from the expansive “Rewriting for Meaning” stage to the contracting “Rewriting for Structure” phase, there remained an invisible wall that kept it from coalescing into its final form—were it not for my hands-on interactive guidance. But no one has ever before come right out and

questioned that. I looked at my website's flashing exuberant rendition of my methodology, but now all I see was a nondescript triangle just sitting there in the middle with some letters of the alphabet around it. I hadn't succeeded in translating what I did, or it would never have given my son the ammunition to torment me, even in jest. ("Jeez, can't you take a joke?")

Handing out my "road map" only points out the location of the problem; it doesn't solve it. For it is indeed true that, depending upon how much time is left in the session and the attention span of the individual kid I am working with, this penultimate phase of the essay's revision could now go in one of three directions. 1) Either I sat kids down at my monitor and had them tediously electronically cut and paste the relevant elements of their essay into A-B-D-C-E order on their own; 2) I sent them home, flowchart in hand, with instructions to themselves put the essay in A-B-D-C-E order to bring back one final time to do the dental draft; or, 3) to streamline and demystify the process, I sent them home with the assurance I'd email them *my* template of their essay's A-B-D-C-E logic to reword any way they wanted.

It would be one thing if the seniors I've been working with snatched this template from my hands with a gleeful, "So long, sucker!" But that has never ever been what happens next. It's: "Yeah! that's close, but, over here, not quite..." And, sometimes (rarely): "Nope! You missed the boat here. But thank you anyway since I now can see the direction it's clearly meant to go."

HERE'S AN EXAMPLE OF A "GIVE-AND-TAKE" RESPONSE to one of my logical templates that doesn't quite capture yet what this students wants to say:

UniquelyU2: k: i was assuming there were lots of other groups of tourists out & about: so you could say "other groups of camera bearing tourists like myself" or some such. . .

Teytran: that's true -- but I was talking about speaking in a negative tone about a group to which I belonged it's as if I'm putting down all of "us" (c-b tourists)

UniquelyU2: hmmm

Teytran: anyway, I was also wondering if the "lost camera" part was believable ... or if it even mattered if it was or wasn't

UniquelyU2: k: i see what u mean. well there were a few things i was (theoretically) driving at mainly to achieve an internal logic that unified what u you're aiming for. so let's see if we can unbraid them in a way you're comfortable with.

Teytran: ok sounds good

UniquelyU2: ok: assuming that the camera works as a useful symbol for seeing superficially at the beginning of the essay vs no longer being necessary in order to "really" see at the end, then it's your call about how many references to it becomes overkill

Teytran: personally, I think the symbol/metaphor works well (insight, etc)

Teytran: I understand what you're driving at

UniquelyU2: what i was thinking at the beginning is that when you first arrive in another country, it's the other guys with cameras that look like tourists, never oneself

Teytran: so true ... thanks for clearing that up

Teytran: I found where I wanted my voice for the rest (did you know that I'm a

photographer? – this works GREAT!)

UniquelyU2: wow. you're kidding. . . anyway i was basically looking for a way that by the time you fly home, you're so connected you can put your camera away, realizing when you first arrived, you looked like all the other tourists with cameras. you're comfortable with that part, right?

Teytran: yes -- that makes sense and completes the metaphor/realistic change transition

UniquelyU2: the lost camera: i was just trying to think of a way the bus driver could have gently interceded by possibly picking it up & putting it on the bus seat for you. and then delivered his message about how to really see

UniquelyU2: but you're right: that could be forced. any suggestions that work better? ie that you're actually comfortable with?

Teytran: I don't know -- in order to fill that role, nothing could really do it better (running out of film sounded even worse)

UniquelyU2: i was also uncomfortably aware that i omitted the israel component of the quote. let me look at that part again. 'it's lost' really is a bit much, huh? it's way too hokey.

Teytran: yeah that one paragraph and accompanying quote weren't quite "there"

UniquelyU2: i agree

Teytran: I just couldn't think of any other way to "pull off" the camera idea w/ finding myself

UniquelyU2: well, it nearly works. if you/we can just come up with something a little more plausible, re the driver telling you the camera is a crutch that now that you're bar mitzvah, you no longer need

UniquelyU2: because that's what your original impulse was in your first draft. so you really are close.

Teytran: maybe he sees me taking pictures at Masada, etc and comments

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UniquelyU2: that's good. much better than a hokey lost camera

Teytran: I got it -- sunrise -- he sees me taking pics -- asks me if that wasn't a sunrise I'd remember forever anyway (w/o pics) and pulls line

UniquelyU2: bingo! i would say essay #1 is in the bag.

Teytran: the "new quote" -- "Your memory is your personal record. To know where you are going, you must REMEMBER where you came from. To know where you came from, you must come to Israel."

UniquelyU2: woooo! great! you should sleep very well tonight.

A student's full engagement in the essay-writing process manifests itself in other ways as well: the student writer suddenly becomes an avid grammarian, meticulously nitpicking his/her way through every single paragraph and sentence, until finally satisfied that every word and syllable expresses precisely what he/she wants to say. "Go home!" I frequently have to insist at the very end. "Your essay's more than good enough. It's awesome!" ...only to discover many a UUser, Strunk & White open in his/her lap, still weighing whether to insert a dash, opt for an ellipsis, or settle for a colon.

And sometimes punctuation unexpectedly becomes the central metaphor for the entire essay:

THE HYPHEN IN BETWEEN

"The key to success is to get up one more time than you have fallen."

Every Wednesday and Sunday, I would visit my father's grave and weigh his solemn legacy.

When lymphoma cancer left him nothing of himself, he saw the world to come in me. "Promise me, Kit, you'll do well in school, open every door and place others

before you, live life for the very essence each and every moment has to offer."
Tears always came to my eyes when gazing at the inscription of his date of birth
and of his death: October 30th. 4:30pm.

Within the space of time that my mother's first tear left her eye and hit the floor,
my mind froze. I lost myself in an abyss of disbelief and denial, questioning the
value of what was left of my own life. Previously, I had lost my favorite CD—and
within an hour bought a new one. I once lost \$200—and within a week earned it
back. I lost my journal of poems—and within a month rewrote them. But now, I
had lost my Papa and within infinity I could not replace the warmth of his
presence.

Over the next year, without a father to teach me and only a mother to love, I
lacked the motivation to accept reality, and denial forced me to view life as a blur.

One year later, October 1998, I fell twenty-five feet, a freak accident, through a
glass skylight. I felt no resistance as the glass gave way. Within that split second
of my descent, time fell away as well, as I began to recollect upon what my denial
had kept hidden.

"Kit, look inside the volcano," my father smiled as our helicopter hovered over
Maui's Mount Haleakala at the end of the last vacation we spent together.
Descending into the arid crater where life cannot exist, cancer was all that came
to mind, for I already knew he did not have long to live. As the helicopter lifted
over the rim of the volcano, the sight of the lush greenery encompassed by clear
turquoise water represented the better place he would be entering when he died.
Since his death I had not allowed myself to think of this happy time, but rather
each morning I thought only about the days I had ahead without him.

BOOM!!! My hip smashed as I landed on the brick floor of the Mall. I could hear
the murmuring of people in shock as they walked by. "Is he dead," they said? I
tried to gasp a second of breath, but adrenaline merely got me to my knees. At
thirteen years old, I never thought I was going to die, but now ironically when I
was feeling most complete, I knew my naive assumption had been wrong.

Now, laying in the broken and shattered glass amid my healing and mended

memories, I realized that this sure comprehension of the meaning of my own mortality was actually the antidote to appreciating what I still had. To my amazement, my lungs opened! Within those thirty life-suspending seconds, fate's erratic course taught me the sacredness of my life.

I awoke the next morning in the Stamford Hospital to voices just outside of my room. "Your son has broken almost half of his body; it will take a couple months until the bones heal." My mom began to cry. But I had already begun to smile. After a year of mourning, my blurred vision had cleared. I was no longer in denial and accepted my father's departure into heaven, even as I also gave myself permission to live my own life to the very fullest. I knew the beauty of life did not leave with the death of my father, but rather remains, magnified, by the memories of him when he was here.

Memories of my father and me have become my daily guide in appreciating, not the sorrow brought upon by his death, but the amount of love he left in his wake. Eleven days later, although with crutches, with the strength of success, I got up one more time after falling, knowing that my father's true legacy resides in all I still must do.

Several times a month, I visit my father's grave and tell him of my progress, in school, helping others, life in general. Although I will never understand why my father, so great a person, nor any other one of God's gifts, should chance to be unwrapped so early, a smile always comes to my face when I gaze at the inscription on his tombstone. I no longer see the date of birth or date of death but rather the—hyphen—in between. —CSR

BUT DID MY KNOWING LONG BEFORE THE KIDS DID that a deep narrative pattern is always there, did my asking them to, cinematically, write specific scenes in the drafts out of sequence, did my devising a tangible demonstration of every essay's inner logic *constitute writing an essay on someone's behalf*, the concern my son had raised? In no case were the words, the thoughts, observations and inherent wisdom of an essay ever mine. Nor the order: That was Aristotle – and Alice Adams's: A-B-D-C-E.

On the other hand, I'm not going to lie to you. There is, in fact, a hypnotic allure to seeing how an essay's cadence is foreordained to flow, a heady compulsion comparable to when Roger Rabbit hears, "shave and a haircut" and has to go "two bits." "See! Here on page 4 of your third draft is your real first sentence," I might say, showing where with a circled A. "Over here, in the second paragraph of the very first draft you ever submitted, is B, your flashback. Right here at D1, you're going to have to build up this sentence just a little, and then fine-tune D2, a smidge. But D3 is fine just the way it is. Aha! Here's C, your turning point, which flows directly into E, your evaluation of your experience that lies at the soul of every essay." It's where I got to blissfully reaffirm the essay's kinship to a Euclidian formal proof.

Still, the fact remained that no high-school English teacher or college Freshman Comp TA I knew of approached writing in this way. Oh, they might fall into one of two theoretical camps when it came to teaching writing. Some might passionately believe that "process writing" surely must be the optimal way to engage reluctant student writers. Others, traditionalist, might place structure first at the expense of spontaneity, insisting that students concentrate on the engineering of a five-paragraph essay, painstakingly replete with correct grammar, punctuation, and cited sources. But so far as I could tell, achieving a *bridge* between "meaning" and "structure" had continued to elude both sides of the debate. And I was pretty sure the reason that the gap continued to exist had nothing to do with a teacher's fear of violating any canons of ethical integrity or out of homage to an Honor Code. Because if teachers *did* know how to help kids unearth and share their deepest insights and yet withheld the information, then they were party to a far worse dishonesty. Rather, I was convinced, they didn't teach it

because they themselves didn't *know* of a way *to* achieve it - or that it even *existed*.

Great literature obviously achieved it. Surely, this is what Herman Melville meant when he referred to "the shock of recognition," what James Joyce meant by "epiphany." But I myself didn't really know how A-B-D-C-E worked, because if I did, then I could devise a less draining way to guide kids to harness the power of Aristotle's mysterious triangle, without needing to inject every particle of my concentration in the process.

It was definitely high time I did know. And, at the very least, perhaps I could place myself safely out of range of my son's uncanny ability to get my goat.

MY SON'S FORMERLY CLASSIFIED COLLEGE ESSAY

Reflecting on your family's experiences and personal circumstances, what would you like to tell us that is not already revealed or explained sufficiently in your application?

SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

Charles Mulford

There is one thing that should be brought to your attention that isn't apparent in my application. My mother has made a career out of helping high school students get into the schools of their choice by advising them on their personal statement essays. Her professional advice is available to me anytime. This is why I take pride in the fact that she will not have read this essay until well after it is in the mail. She told me I was "such an idiot" for this, and that I was making a huge mistake, but after I explained to her that spite was in no way involved in my decision, she lightened up. She now likes the idea, but still thinks it would be in my best interest to let her read it. I think so too but this would corrupt the symbolic nature of this essay.

When my mother first started her college essay consulting business, cleverly named Uniquely U., from afar I harbored my suspicions about whether the

service she provided was ethical. The summer she began I was away at camp. However, this summer I've been home, which has forced me to come to the conclusion that what she does is entirely legitimate and is in no way cheating. So my decision to not show her this essay isn't based on a fear that she will in some way corrupt it with her influence. No, in fact, I made the decision to fly solo to show myself that I've got what it takes to do something this important, without my mother to hold my hand. The way I see it, becoming independent of your parents is at the heart of the college experience.

She works out of the home, so day in, day out, hour after hour, I get to meet fellow college-bound seniors. They all have nothing but positive things to say about my mother's aid, and go on and on about how lucky I am to have essay help at my fingertips.

Teenagers enter with frightened looks frozen to their faces, and exit with grins so wide, they were visible from the back. The way her office is situated up a spiral staircase in an open loft at the top of our house, I can even hear the sessions.

She is definitely a talented writer. She's got a knack, no, make that a genius, for getting to the heart of a story and trimming the unneeded details.

Of course, as her son I already knew this. Growing up, I couldn't have a conversation with her without being told to 'cut to the chase.' Through my experiences and discourses with my mother I developed a finely tuned ear that I have honed over the years. That's not to say I think I'm a great writer. I know how much I have to learn before I'll even permit that thought to enter my head. I do feel however that I must attempt to get my point across completely on my own. That's why, whatever the risk I undertake with my decision, this one is sacred, and must be kept unconditionally independent.

So when you read: this, for what it's worth, is my essay, WYSIWYG, as 'uniquely me' as it is possible to be!

ii. TRACKING DOWN THE TRIANGLE

IT SEEMED SO SIMPLE: just document for my mouthy son the existence of the triangle that since my school days I'd embraced without question as the sacred compass for how to tell a story. Instead it proves to be the beginning of my own surprising quest.

STEP 1: ATTEMPT TO DOWNLOAD A DIAGRAM OF TRIANGLE

Matter-of-factly, I instruct Google to produce said triangle under the entry "Aristotelian story arc." 1380 entries spring into view. Not a single one makes mention of or depicts, the triangle. Nor does sought-after pictogram show up under just plain "Aristotle," "Aristotle's triangle," "epiphany," "protagonist," "plot point," or any other variations I can think of.

There are some triangle-related links to:

- "Pythagorean ratios," "harmonics," "numerology," "mystical cosmology," and the "importance of the pyramid in transferring dead souls to the netherworld and their next transmigration into another corporeal being";
- More links that hook me up with the etymological connections between Egyptian hieroglyphics, the Greek triangle-shaped letter Δ - "delta"—as in the "mouth of a river," the Greek word for "womb," as in the "Delphic oracle," who made her visionary pronouncements seated with tripod;
- There are even triangle-related depictions of the GUTTOE (Grand Unifying Theory of Everything) concept of the cosmos.

None of the above refers to Aristotle.

STEP 2: RETHINK APPROACH

Recovering from my initial shock, I attempt to track down a diagram of the triangle from the point of view of a writing teacher. In under a second, I find myself at the website of *The Bedford Bibliography for Teachers of Writing*, where, sure enough, Aristotle is everywhere—just not any Aristotle I'm familiar with. The thousands of writing links listed on the sitemap here concern themselves solely with the complete-within-itself alternative universe of Aristotelian *rhetoric*, especially as it relates to teaching English composition. Whatever Aristotelian rhetoric consists of, writing about it in academia is obviously a fail-safe way of getting published—even as it points out the yawning disconnect with the sort of writing that I help people with. Surely there must be a bridge here somewhere!

Hmm. Like my Aristotelian A-B-D-C-E formula, Aristotelian rhetoric also claims a five-step order. This, I decide, merits closer attention. If I am going to cite Aristotle, the least I can do is familiarize myself with this side of what he has to say—especially since the term "template" appears in the second paragraph of Gideon O. Burton's *Silvae Rhetoricae, The Forest of Rhetoric*, an amazing site on Brigham Young University's website, <http://Humanities.byu.edu/rhetoric/silva.htm>, It's included here to provide an informal sampling of the vast triangle-less terrain of Aristotle's parallel universe of writing.

THE FIVE CANONS OF RHETORIC

Rhetoric has long been divided into major categories or "canons":

1. INVENTION CONCERNS FINDING SOMETHING TO SAY (its name derives from the Latin *invenire*, "to find.") Certain common categories of thought became conventional to use in order to brainstorm for material. These commonplaces (*topoi* in Greek) are called the "Topics of Invention." They include, for example, cause and effect, comparison, antecedent/consequence, contraries and contradictions...and stasis.

| QUESTIONS TO FIND STASIS | KIND OF QUESTION | KIND OF STASIS |
|---|------------------|---------------------|
| Did he do it? | Of Fact | Conjectural Stasis |
| What did he do? | Of Definition | Definitional Stasis |
| Was it just/expedient? | Of Quality | Qualitative Stasis |
| Is this the right venue for this issue? | Of Jurisdiction | Translative Stasis |

2. ARRANGEMENT CONCERNS HOW ONE ORDERS SPEECH OR WRITING (its Latin name, *dispositio*, means "placement") In ancient rhetorics, Arrangement referred solely to the order to be observed in an oration, but the term has broadened to include all considerations of the ordering of discourse, especially on a large scale.

| ARRANGEMENT OF A CLASSICAL ORATION | |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. Introduction | <i>exordium</i> |
| 2. Statement of Facts | <i>narratio</i> |
| 3. Division | <i>partitio</i> |
| 4. Proof | <i>confirmatio</i> |
| 5. Refutation | <i>refutatio</i> |
| 6. Conclusion | <i>peroratio</i> |

3. STYLE IS A RICH AND COMPLEX CONCERN OF RHETORIC THAT GOES FAR BEYOND THE CONNOTATION OF "PERSONAL FLAIR" OR THE USE OF FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

THE SHOCK OF RECOGNITION:
a personal and professional narrative about mastering/sharing the art & craft of writing...
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by Maxene Fabe Mulford

In Classical and Renaissance Rhetoric, Style was concerned with ornamentation, but in the original sense of that word (from "*ornare*," to equip. fit out, or supply). Consequently, Style encompasses both very minute and very large-scale language choices, all of which affect the overall style. One could divide the concerns with Style as found in Classical and Renaissance rhetorical manuals as follows:

| |
|---|
| 1. Word Choice |
| 2. Sentence Composition |
| 3. Levels of Style *Low *Middle *Grand |
| 4. Qualities of Style (Descriptive terms) |
| 5. Figures of Speech *Schemes *Tropes |

In addition, classic formal rhetoric recognized Figures of Pathos, Figures of Ethos, and these Figures of Reasoning:

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| <i>Enthymeme</i> | The informal method of reasoning typical of rhetorical discourse, truncated syllogism; |
| <i>Sorites</i> | A chain of claims and reasons which build upon one another; Concatenated enthymemes; |
| <i>Syllogismus</i> | The use of a remark or an image which calls upon the audience to draw an obvious conclusion; |
| <i>Aetiologia</i> | A figure of reasoning by which one attributes a cause for a statement or claim made; |
| <i>Ratiocinatio</i> | Reasoning (typically with oneself) by asking questions; |
| <i>Anthypophora</i> | A figure of reasoning in which one asks and then immediately answers one's own questions; |
| <i>Apophasis</i> | The rejection of several reasons why a thing should or |

| | |
|---------------------|---|
| | should not be done and affirming a single one, considered most valid; |
| <i>Contrarium</i> | Juxtaposing two opposing statements in such a way as to prove the one from the other; |
| <i>Expeditio</i> | After enumerating all possibilities by which something could have occurred, the speaker eliminates all but one; |
| <i>Proecthesis</i> | When, in conclusion, a justifying reason is provided; |
| <i>Prosapodosis</i> | Providing a reason for each division of a statement, the reasons usually following the statement in parallel fashion. |

In all, *The Forest of Rhetoric* website lists 427 such figures!

“Style,” the learned explanation continues, “is essential to Rhetoric in that its guiding assumption is that the form or linguistic means in which something is communicated is as much part of the message as is the content.” For example,

when Julius Caesar said, "*Veni; vidi; vici*," ("I came; I saw; I conquered"), he communicated a lot with a little. In fact, the efficiency of this statement about his military conquest seems to mirror the efficiency of his campaign itself. Through his use of *asyndeton*, (the lack of conjunctions between independent clauses) he demonstrates that he is direct and to the point. Caesar's short saying also constitutes a perfect *tricolor*! (three parallel clauses of identical length—at least in the Latin.) One can almost visualize the orderliness of a phalanx of soldiers marching rank and file to battle in the smooth orderliness of these parallel statements. The rhythm of the words in Latin also drums out a marching cadence that seems inescapable: *VE-ni; Vl-di; Vl-ci*. Caesar certainly reflected and probably augmented his credibility, or "ethos" in making this statement, one that seems completely appropriate for the report of a successful military campaign.

Where rhetoric meets poetry, it seems to me.

4. MEMORY HAS TO DO WITH MUCH MORE THAN JUST MEMORIZATION

It was a requisite for becoming *peritus dicendi* – well versed in speaking something only possible if one had a vast deal of information on hand to be brought forth appropriately and effectively given the circumstances and the audience.

The canon of Memory also suggests that one consider the psychological aspects of preparing to communicate and the performance of communicating itself - especially in an oral or impromptu setting. Typically Memory has to do only with the orator but invites consideration of how the audience will retain things in mind. To this end, certain figures of speech are available to help the memory, including the use of vivid description (*ecphrasis*) and enumeration. Orators were encouraged to envision where they would be speaking as a preparation for memorizing their speech. Then, having completed the speech's composition, they were to divide it into manageable portions, each of which they would assign, in turn, to a different part of the room where the speech was to occur. Thus, by casting their eyes about during their speech, they would be reminded of the next part of their speech to give.

5. DELIVERY IS THAT ASPECT OF RHETORIC THAT CONCERNS THE PUBLIC PRESENTATION OF DISCOURSE, ORAL OR WRITTEN.

To prepare, students were asked to observe closely a progression model of figures known as the *Progymnasmata* and then, first as a writing exercise, to copy the form but supply new content; or to copy the content but supply a new form. Such imitations occurred on every level of speech and language, and forced students to assess what exactly a given form did to bring about a given meaning or effect.

Here, in sequence, are the fourteen literary forms students were called upon to imitate:

| | | |
|------------|--------------|---------------|
| Fable | Confirmation | Impersonation |
| Narrative | Commonplace | Description |
| Chreia | Encomium | Thesis/Theme |
| Proverb | Vituperation | Defend/Attack |
| Refutation | Comparison | a Law |

There's tons more, but you get the idea.

Illuminating and thought provoking? Even elegant? Decidedly. So how come, since this is our linguistic legacy from Aristotle himself, as is English composition, no one today knows how to write? It certainly wasn't the way I worked with kids, who, by the time we were finished, *could* write.

But enough already with Aristotle as rhetorician. I want my triangle!

STEP 3: RE-RE-THINK APPROACH.

If only I could pinpoint just where this impossible-to-document understanding of mine had originated! At my desk, as I search *my* memory (Canon 4), my eyes fall on a book with a faded spine across the room on my bookcase, *The Anatomy of Criticism* by Northrop Frye. (New York: Atheneum, 1966, originally published by Princeton University Press, 1966). It's a book which I've never read but always meant to, a book from which Austin Wright used to read aloud in his tongue-tied efforts to convey his own rapture over Aristotle. My hunch is if this book doesn't offer me my answer, nothing will.

And sure enough, the very first sentence of Frye's "First Essay: Historical Criticism: The Theory of Modes," begins thusly: "*In...The Poetics, Aristotle speaks of the differences in works of fiction ...*" (p. 33)

And if I don't find a triangle or reference to one anywhere within its pages, (because I don't!)—for schematic symbolism, Frye favors another geometric emblem, a circle divided into quadrants—I have finally connected with a mindset that posits the presence

of a coherent universal narrative pattern, one possessing a purposeful beginning, middle and an end.

Viewing page after brilliant page of *The Anatomy of Criticism* helps me grasp the philosophical implications of Frye's symmetrical, literary cosmology, namely that templates, genres, archetypes, allegory and metaphors exist, not because people are too lazy to be original, but *because* they're universal, or, as Frye puts it, "Any serious study of literature soon shows that the real difference between the original and the imitative poet is simply that the former is more profoundly imitative..." (p. 17). Indeed, without actually singling out A-B-D-C-E, Frye also speaks of the narrative formula in general:

Total literary history gives us a glimpse of the possibility of seeing literature as a complication of a *relatively restricted and simple group of formulas* that can be studied in primitive culture. We next realize that the relation of later literature to these primitive formulas is by no means purely one of complication, as we find the primitive formulas reappearing in the greatest classics—in fact there seems to be a general tendency on the part of great classics to revert to them. This coincides with a feeling we have all had: that the study of mediocre works of art remains a random and peripheral form of critical experience, whereas the profound masterpiece draws us to a point at which we seem to see an enormous number of converging patterns of significance. We begin to wonder if we cannot see literature, not only as complicating itself in time, but as spread out in conceptual space from some kind of center that criticism could locate.

It is clear that criticism cannot be a systematic study *unless there is a quality in literature, which enables it to be so*. We have to adopt the hypothesis then that just as there is an order of nature behind the natural sciences, so literature is not a piled aggregate of "works," but *an order of words*. (pp. 16-17)

Then Frye takes the precept that points to A-B-D-C-E farther than I'd imagined it was possible to go. Before he's done, *The Anatomy of Criticism* has brilliantly laid out a

portal to literature,

...which makes one poem every poem, embodying and revealing the Logos, the power of The Word to create and organize the Cosmos.

One can get a whole liberal education simply by picking up one conventional poem and following its archetypes as they stretch out into the rest of literature...One step further and the poem appears as a microcosm of all literature an individual manifestation of the total order of words. Anagogically then, the symbol is a monad—all symbol being unified in a single infinite and eternal verbal symbol which is, as *dianoia*, the Logos, and as *mythos*, total creative act. It is this conception, which Joyce expresses in terms of subject matter, as "epiphany," and Hopkins, in terms of form, as "inscape." ...We can therefore think of literature as existing in its own universe...containing reality in a system of verbal relationships... This unit of relationship is metaphor... (p. 100).

Frye has not been alone. Academics and researchers who share his premise that all stories are embedded with their own, deeper, "universal grammar" are Noam Chomsky, Jerome Bruner, Michel Foucault, Russian formalists such as Tzvetan Todorov and Mikhail Bakhtin, and French structuralists Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, A. J. Greimas, Bertrand Gervais, Julia Kristeva, and Vladimir Propp. In the last fifty years, in fact, there has been an explosion of interest in narratology in all its manifestations, the scope of which becomes clear from the number of academic areas of study that have sprung up in the fields of literature, linguistics, anthropology, psychology, biology, cognitive science, communications and philosophy—all of which obviously accept as a given that the human brain naturally imposes a beginning, middle, and an end to whatever otherwise random barrages of raw data it encounters.

A few of those areas of study that appear in course catalogs across the land:

THE SHOCK OF RECOGNITION:
a personal and professional narrative about mastering/sharing the art & craft of writing...
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| | |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Applied linguistics | Literature & science |
| Classical hermeneutics | Literature & sexuality |
| Classical philology | Literature & society |
| Cognitive linguistics | Literature & sociology |
| Comparative literature | Literature & space |
| Computational linguistics | Literature & technology |
| Conversational narrative | Literature & the visual arts |
| Critical theory | Meaning & linguistic interpretation |
| English philology | Morphology |
| Fictionality | Myth & Folktales |
| Figures of thought | Narration |
| Form & structure in poetry | Narrative embedding |
| Functional linguistics | Narrative modes |
| Generative trans-formational linguistics | Narrative patterns |
| Genre theory | Narrative structure |
| Interdisciplinary narratology | Narratology |
| Interpretive theory | Narrativity |
| Language & linguistics | Nonverbal communication |
| Language of poetry | Paralanguage |
| Lexicology | Philology |
| Linguistic concepts | Philosophy of language |
| Literary language | Pornographic narrative |
| Literary Theory | Pragmatics of literature |
| Literature & anthropology | Psycholinguistics |
| Literature & culture | Rhetoric |
| Literature & history | Semantics |
| Literature & ideology | Semiology & structuralism |
| Literature & philosophy | Semiotics of drama |
| Literature & politics | Semiotics of literature |
| Literature & popular culture | Semiotics of poetry |
| Literature & psychology | Semiotics |
| Literature & race | Sociolinguistics |
| Literature & religion | Speech acts theory |

Structural linguistics
Text & text grammars
Thematics
Theory of literature

Theory of motifs
Therapeutic narrative
Word formation
Writing

However, even as Frye pens page after page of razor sharp analyses of the narrative pattern our brain is preprogrammed to receive, perhaps because it's too obvious, or lacking the mentoring of an experienced, shamanistic guide, he never quite makes the connection that the act of crafting his words on paper is also deeply personal.

The process of absorbing knowledge does not happen in a vacuum. Learning anything is an interactive imitative activity imparted by a teacher who is him/herself an active practitioner of his/her subject. Cognitive scientist and educator Howard Gardner in his landmark work, *Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*, expands our understanding of the pivotal role played by the catalytic guide who physically serves as the active go-between leading his/her pupils from ignorance into knowledge:

...We are all equipped with a sixth sense of *kinesthesia*—the capacity to...
(automatically) apprehend directly the actions or the dynamic abilities of other
people or objects...If imitation is the central component of kinesthetic thought
then imitative teaching and learning may be the most appropriate way to impart
skill in this domain....

Then, specifically applying the process to learning how to write, Gardner tellingly reports that cultural anthropologist Ruth Benedict noted that in Japan, central to the traditional teaching of writing, is this interchange, "...the instructor took the child's hand and made the ideographs. It was to give him the feel. The child learned to experience the controlled rhythmic movements before he could recognize the

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characters, much less write them." <http://www.epubbud.com/read.php?g=NEXHBG79&toep=82>

Perhaps interactive imitation is hardwired into the entire animal kingdom! Check out, for example, the imitative powers of communication honeybees possess.

Foraging honeybees *Apis mellifera* render a dance that symbolically codes knowledge of the distance and bearing of the food from the hive. This dance recruits other workers, which are then able to travel to the distant food site...This general pattern of communication is used by all bees of the genus *apis* but different species and races vary in the detail of the waggle dance...These variations have been dubbed "dialects."

By following the dance, the receiving bees rehearse the journey in miniature and prepare to translate it into a real flight. When the bees execute the flight, it can be said that they were sent and not led to the goal. What is different about the waggle dance then, is that it is a truly symbolical message that guides a complex response after the message has been given the fascination with the means in which honeybees recruit nest mates to a food source even aroused curiosity in Aristotle's time. [wwwnobelse/medicine/laureates/frischlecture.pdf]

Now I don't know what epiphany I myself am expecting to experience when after long last, I finally come across The Triangle (under "Sophocles *Oedipus* text") on Google.

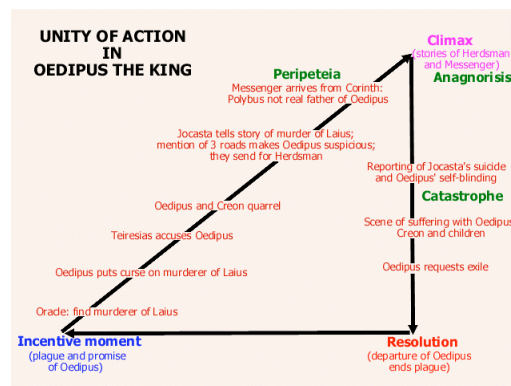


Figure 4[<http://www.cnr.edu/home/bmcmanus/oedipusplot.html>]

In truth, what I feel is a gigantic letdown.

Turns out it's not Aristotle's triangle at all—turns out, according to its caption that a nineteenth-century German playwright named Freytag first suggested that the action of a play could be represented graphically.

"This visualization of dramatic anatomy is known as 'Freytag's triangle.' The triangle is based on the notion of rising and falling action, which form the sides of the triangle whereby the apex is the climax..."

What?! Who the freak is Freytag? I *know* I'm finally looking at a triangle that's covered with Aristotelian terminology. But I also know I'm not up to another wild-goose chase through ambiguous secondary sources. Is the triangle Aristotle's? Or isn't it?

WHICH IS HOW, I FINALLY BITE THE BULLET AND FOR THE FIRST TIME ACTUALLY OPEN ARISTOTLE'S *POETICS* AND BEGIN TO READ IT FOR MYSELF!

iii. PONDERING THE POETICS

ARISTOTLE'S POETICS IS TOUGH SLEDDING even if you take it on knowing exactly what you expect to find. I expect it to be syntactically quaint, syllogistic, archaic but ultimately mind-bendingly relevant. I expect to finally come face to face with the esoteric terms Austin Wright chalked around his triangle on the blackboard in American Lit class years ago: *desis*, *lisis*, *peripeteia*, *anagnorisis*, *catastrophe*, and *dénouement* as applied to Sophocles's *Oedipus Tyrannos*. I expect after all these years of winging it to finally learn what I'm talking about when I use terms such as *hamartia*, *katharsis*, *mimesis*, and *epiphany*. I expect these terms, as well as *in medias res*, *deus ex machina*, and The Three Unities, to jump out at me or at least be in italics. I also don't expect reading it to take me very long; after all; the edition of *Poetics* I read (S.H. Butcher) is only 55 pages. [<http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/poetics.html>]

In truth, the *Poetics* reads like a rough draft that contains a lot of erudite thinking out loud—in shorthand. For this there is a reason: Though Aristotle created a comprehensive system for classifying every other category of existing knowledge, he never published the *Poetics*. In fact, the disjointed fragment that we have was lost to all

of Europe until 1500, when the West once again gained access to the contents of the libraries that had been in Arab hands. The *Poetics* contains no reference to any arcs, triangles or to A-B-D-C-E. To top it off, when it comes to pontificating upon his literary theory, Aristotle writes exactly how I beg my kids *not* to: All tell; no show. Which explains why anyone who has ever tried to understand the *Poetics* has had no choice but to puzzle it out by means of jerry-rigged diagrams (triangles and charts) in a pedantic, artificial fashion.

Here's just the sort of thing I mean:

| STRUCTURE OF SOPHOCLES' OEDIPUS TYRANNOS | | | | | |
|---|--|--|---|---|---|
| Prologue | Episode 1 | Episode 2 | Episode 3 | Episode 4 | Episode 5 |
| Effect of plague on Thebes: Oedipus/priest; Oedipus/Creon | Oedipus: "Let me answer" Oedipus curse; Oedipus/ Tiresias: "The murder is here." | Beginning of truth: Oedipus/ Creon: conspiracy charge; Oedipus/ Jocasta: doubts about oracles. | Truth revealed: Jocasta's prayer Oedipus/ Jocasta Messenger: Oedipus not son of Polybus. | The truth confirmed: Oedipus; messenger; herdsman. | Jocasta's death; blinding of Oedipus: Messenger; Oedipus/Chorus Oedipus/Creon: Oedipus requests denied. |
| OEDIPUS AS SAVIOR | | OEDIPUS BELIEVES HE IS "THE SON OF CHANCE" | | OEDIPUS AS POLLUTED CRIMINAL | |
| Parados | Stasimon 1 | Stasimon 2 | Stasimon 3 | Stasimon 4 | Exodos |
| Entry of Chorus of Thebans. Prayers to gods to aid Thebes | Oracle of Apollo. The murderer is an animal. Man's ignorance. | Tyrant's pride. Effect of religious skepticism & impiety. "Why should I honor the gods?" | Speculation about Oedipus's parentage. "Is he the son of a god?" | "The generations of men." Oedipus as a man of misery. | "Count no man happy before he is dead." |

Figure 5 [http://www.temple.edu/classics/oedipus_structure.html]

The subject of the *Poetics* is Greek Tragedy. Some scholars believe Aristotle also penned a lost companion piece on Comedy. Some also say it was intended to be Aristotle's response to Plato, who advocated the censorship of poetry in *The Republic*.

PLATO'S OBJECTION TO POETRY

- (i) Poets compose under inspiration, not by using reason;
- (ii) Poetry teaches the wrong things;
- (iii) Poetry is a *mimesis* (imitation) at two removes from reality;
- (iv) Poetry encourages the emotions of those who perform or listen to it.

Figure 6 <http://bit.ly/Tc1WXv>

Were we being purists, we could endeavor to grapple with the original text in Attic Greek. And were our main objective a microscopic parsing, we could carefully weigh as well the quality of Aristotle's various translations and the merits of each of his translators themselves. But that's not where we're headed.

RIGHT OFF THE BAT, it's clear that the *Poetics* as a read is murky. The drop-dead statement I've been hoping for all this time to put my son in his place will not be forthcoming. It's possible something has been lost in the translation, or worse, was never here to begin with. Skimming Aristotle's *Poetics* yields NOTHING...Neither does reading and rereading the same precise-sounding but completely meaningless numbered blocks of text.

I do not discern any validation of my expectations in Aristotle's convoluted general definition of Poetry, which I've mercifully paraphrased:

Poetry in general seems to have sprung from two causes each of them lying deep in our Nature:

- 1) The instinct of imitation is the means by which we learn;
- 2) We experience pleasure by seeing things imitated.

Nor is it evident in Aristotle's definition of Tragedy:

Tragedy imitates an action that is serious, complete and of a certain magnitude, whose stated aim is to elicit pity and fear in an audience and then purge them of pity and fear.

Nor is it in his account of how the new genre evolved:

Tragedy—as also Comedy—was at first mere improvisation. The one originated with the authors of the Dithyramb; the other with those of the phallic songs, which are still in use in many of our cities. Tragedy advanced by slow degrees; each new element that showed itself was in turn developed. Having passed through many changes, it found its natural form and there it stopped.

Aeschylus first introduced a second actor; he diminished the importance of the Chorus and assigned the leading part to the dialogue. Sophocles raised the number of actors to three and added scene painting. Moreover, it was not till late that the short plot was discarded for one of greater compass and the grotesque diction of the earlier satyric form for the stately manner of Tragedy. The iambic measure then replaced the trochaic tetrameter, which was originally employed when the poetry was of the satyric order and had greater connection with dancing. Once dialogue had come in Nature herself discovered the appropriate measure. For the iambic is of all measures the most colloquial ...

Nor in Aristotle's list of the six necessary components of tragedy:

1: **Plot**...is the first principle and, as it were, the soul of a tragedy...

Central to the plot's success are the skilled placement of these two elements:

Reversal of the Situation is a change by which the action veers round to its opposite subject always to our rule of probability or necessity. Thus in the *Oedipus*, the messenger comes to cheer Oedipus and free him from his alarms about his mother, but by revealing who he is, he produces the opposite effect...**Recognition** as the name indicates, is a change from ignorance to knowledge producing love or hate between the persons destined by the poet for good or bad fortune. The best form of recognition is coincident with a Reversal of the Situation as the *Oedipus*. Recognition, then, being between persons, it may happen that one person only is recognized by the other when the latter is already known—or it may be necessary that the recognition should be on both sides...

There is a third concluding component of plot:

1: **The Scene of Suffering** is a destructive or painful action such as death on the stage bodily agony wounds and the like. It is designed to elicit the cathartic emotions of pity and fear in the audience;...For the plot ought to be so constructed that even without the aid of the eye he who hears the tale told will thrill with horror and melt to pity at what takes Place. This is the impression we should receive from hearing the story of the *Oedipus*...

2: **Character** is that which reveals moral purpose showing what kind of things a man chooses or avoids.

3: **Thought** on the other hand is found where something is proved to be or not to be or a general maxim is enunciated.

4: ...Fourth among the elements enumerated comes **Diction**; by which I mean...the expression of the meaning in words; ...its essence is the same both in verse and prose.

5: **Song** holds the chief place among the **embellishments**.

6: ...The **Spectacle** has indeed an emotional attraction of its own, but of all the

parts, it is the least artistic and connected least with the art of poetry...

Can *this* be Aristotle's description of The Three Unities?

A well-constructed plot...must neither begin nor end at haphazard but conform to these Principles. ...But the limit as fixed by the nature of the drama itself is this: ...the proper magnitude is comprised within such limits that the sequence of events according to the law of probability or necessity will admit of a change from bad fortune to good or from good fortune to bad.

Well, I do know one thing: what comes next can't possibly be A-B-D-C-E!

We now come to the quantitative parts—the separate parts into which Tragedy is divided—Namely **Prologue**, **Episode**, **Exode**, **Choric Song**; this last being divided into **Parode** and **Stasimon**. These are common to all plays...

- The **Prologue** is that entire part of a tragedy which precedes the *Parode* of the Chorus;
- The **Episode** is that entire part of a tragedy which is between complete Choric Songs;
- The **Exode** is that entire part of a tragedy which has no choric song after it.

Of the Choric part ...

- The **Parode** is the first undivided utterance of the Chorus:
- The **Stasimon** is a Choric ode without anapests or trochaic tetrameters:
- The **Commos** is a joint lamentation of Chorus and actors...

How did that Freytag guy - anyone for that matter - come up with a triangle to begin with? Based on the empty abstractions I've been reading and rereading so far, I would be on the verge of experiencing a major *peripeteia-anagnorisis* of my own were it not for the reflexive homage I've paid to Aristotelian methodology every time I go to read

anything since my sophomore year of college "It's always in the subtext," I keep muttering reflexively. And so I grit my teeth and continue reading.

Aristotle's genius lies in the airtight analytical *Organon* he devised for compartmentalizing every branch of knowledge into Categories, Interpretation, Prior Analytics, Posterior Analytics, Topics, and Sophistical Refutations. Whereas his teacher Plato had concluded in *The Republic* that the arts were too volatile to be permitted entry into his overarching Ideal Schema, Aristotle believed that when, armored by the logic of his dialectic, one could approach poetry safely. We'd have to define "safe" of course. If Aristotle means "immune," then I for one failed to be inoculated. For in the very act of taking language back to its most basic elements in order to disarm it, he managed (unwittingly) to unleash it.

Aristotle's purpose in the *Poetics* is to furnish us with the tools by which we can study The Arts dispassionately. In the course of doing so, he must, reasonably enough, name the various categories of The Arts, then systematically scrutinize each according to its substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, position, state, action, and affection. In the further course of doing so, he must name the various genres within each category, then, to provide a representative example, single out one to serve as its epitome. For the paradigm of Tragedy, Aristotle selects Sophocles' *Oedipus Tyrannos*. Because of necessity, tragedy is comprised of words combined into a formal order, these elements must be analyzed as well.

And so I stumble upon the true power of the *Poetics* in the least likely place. And I know

that were I not a writer, I would have completely missed it. Everyone else certainly seems to have! It's in the Diction section (!) where it begs to be passed over as either too self-evident or too arcane. Yet to succumb to wave after wave of grammatical minutiae of this lengthy section in Aristotle's stately catalog of implacable syntax is to be compellingly caught up in a mantra that transcends translation.

VERY LENGTHY EXCERPT FROM THE *POETICS*

(To catch its cadence, read it aloud)

SECTION II, PART XX: Language in general includes the following parts: Letter, Syllable, Connecting Word, Noun, Verb, Inflection or Case, Sentence or Phrase. A Letter is an indivisible sound yet not every such sound but only one which can form part of a group of sounds. For even brutes utter indivisible sounds none of which I call a letter. The sound I mean may be either a vowel, a semivowel or a mute. A vowel is that which without impact of tongue or lip has an audible sound. A semivowel that which with such impact has an audible sound as S and R. A mute that which with such impact has by itself no sound but joined to a vowel sound becomes audible as G and D. These are distinguished according to the form assumed by the mouth and the place where they are produced; according as they are aspirated or smooth, long or short; as they are acute, grave, or of an intermediate tone; which inquiry belongs in detail to the writers on meter. A Syllable is a non significant sound composed of a mute and a vowel: for GR without A is a syllable as also with A-GR A. But the investigation of these differences belongs also to metrical science.

A Connecting Word is a non significant sound, which neither causes nor hinders the union of many sounds into one significant sound; it may be placed at either end or in the middle of a sentence. Or, a non significant sound, which out of several sounds, each of them significant, is capable of forming one significant sound—as *amphi*, *peri* and the like. Or, a non significant sound, which marks the beginning, end, or division of a sentence; such, however, that it cannot correctly stand by itself at the beginning of a sentence—as *men*, *etoi*, *de*.

A Noun is a composite significant sound, not marking time, of which no part is in itself significant: for in double or compound words we do not employ the separate parts as if each were in itself Significant. Thus in Theodorus, 'god-given' the *doron* or 'gift' is not in itself significant.

A Verb is a composite significant sound marking time in which as in the noun no part is in itself significant. For 'man' or 'white' does not express the idea of 'when'; but 'he walks' or 'he has walked' does connote time, present or past.

Inflection belongs both to the noun and verb and expresses either the relation 'of,' 'to,' or the like; or that of number, whether one or many, as 'man' or 'men'; or the modes or tones in actual Delivery, *e.g.*, a question or a command: 'Did he go?' and 'go' are verbal inflections of this kind.

A Sentence or Phrase is a composite significant sound some at least of whose parts are in themselves significant; for not every such group of words consists of verbs and nouns—'the definition of man,' for example—but it may dispense even with the verb. Still it will always have some significant part as 'in walking' or 'Cleon son of Cleon.' A sentence or phrase may form a unity in two ways—either as signifying one thing or as consisting of several parts linked together. Thus *The Iliad* is one by the linking together of parts, the definition of man by the unity of the thing signified.

SECTION III, Part XXI: Words are of two kinds, simple and double. By simple, I mean those composed of non significant elements such as *ge* - 'earth' By double or compound those composed either of a significant and non significant element (though within the whole word no element is significant) or of elements that are both significant. A word may likewise be triple, quadruple, or multiple in form like so many Massilian expressions, *e.g.*: *Hermo-*, *caico-*, *Xanthus* [who prayed to Father Zeus]

Every word is either current or strange or metaphorical or ornamental or newly coined or lengthened or contracted or altered. By a current or proper word I mean one which is in general use among a people; by a strange word, one which is in use in another country. Plainly, therefore, the same word may be at once strange and current, but not in relation to the same people. The word *sigynon* -

'lance' is to the Cyprians a current term but to us a strange one.

Metaphor is the application of an alien name by transference either from genus to species or from species to genus or from species to species or, by analogy, that is, proportion. Thus from genus to species as: 'There lies my ship'; for lying at anchor is a species of lying. From species to genus as: 'Verily ten thousand noble deeds hath Odysseus wrought'; for ten thousand is a species of large number and is here used for a large number generally. From species to species as: 'With blade of bronze drew away the life' and 'Cleft the water with the vessel of unyielding bronze.' Here *arusai* - 'to draw away' is used for *tamein* 'to cleave,' and *tamein* again for *arusai*—each being a species of taking away.

Analogy or proportion is when the second term is to the first as the fourth to the third. We may then use the fourth for the second or the second for the fourth. Sometimes too we qualify the metaphor by adding the term to which the proper word is relative. Thus the cup is to Dionysus as the shield to Ares. The cup may therefore be called 'the shield of Dionysus' and the shield 'the cup of Ares.' Or, again as old age is to life so is evening to day. Evening may therefore be called 'the old age of the day' and old age 'the evening of life' or in the phrase of Empedocles 'life's setting sun.'

For some of the terms of the proportion there is at times no word in existence; still the metaphor may be used. For instance, to scatter seed is called sowing; but the action of the sun in scattering his rays is nameless. Still this process bears to the sun the same relation as sowing to the seed. Hence the expression of the poet 'sowing the god created light.' There is another way in which this kind of metaphor may be employed. We may apply an alien term and then deny of that term one of its proper attributes; as if we were to call the shield not 'the cup of Ares' but 'the wineless cup.'

A newly coined word is one which has never been even in local use but is adopted by the poet himself. Some such words there appear to be: as *ernyges* - 'sprouters' for *kerata* - 'horns'; and *areter* - 'supplicator' for *hiereus* - 'priest.'

A word is lengthened when its own vowel is exchanged for a longer one or when syllable is inserted. A word is contracted when some part of it is removed.

Instances of lengthening are: *poleos* for *polos*; *Peleiadeo* for *Peleidou*; of contraction: *kri*, *do* and *opsas* in *mia ginetai amphoteron ops* - 'the appearance of both is one.'

An altered word is one in which part of the ordinary form is left unchanged and part is recast: as in *dexiteron kata mazon* - 'on the right breast' - *dexiteron* is for *dexion*.

Nouns in themselves are either masculine, feminine, or neuter. Masculine are such as end in N, R, S, or in some letter compounded with S—these being two P, S and X. Feminine, such as end in vowels that are always long, namely E and O and—of vowels that admit of lengthening—those in A. Thus the number of letters in which nouns masculine and feminine end is the same; for PS and X are equivalent to endings in S. No noun ends in a mute or a vowel short by nature. Three only end in I: *meli* - 'honey'; *kommi* - 'gum'; *peperi* - 'pepper'; five end in U - Neuter nouns end in these two latter vowels; also in N and S.

Part XXII. The perfection of style is to be clear without being mean. The clearest style is that which uses only current or proper words; at the same time it is mean—witness the poetry of Cleophon and of Sthenelus. That diction on the other hand is lofty and raised above the commonplace which employs unusual words. By unusual, I mean strange (or rare) words, metaphorical lengthened—anything, in short, that differs from the normal idiom. Yet a style wholly composed of such words is either a riddle or a jargon; a riddle, if it consists of metaphors; a jargon, if it consists of strange (or rare) words. For the essence of a riddle is to express true facts under impossible combinations. Now this cannot be done by any arrangement of ordinary words, but by the use of metaphor it can. Such is the riddle: 'A man I saw who on another man had glued the bronze by aid of fire' and others of the same kind. A diction that is made up of strange (or rare) terms is a jargon. A certain infusion therefore of these elements is necessary to style; for the strange (or rare) word the metaphorical, the ornamental, and the other kinds above mentioned will raise it above the commonplace and mean, while the use of proper words will make it perspicuous. But nothing contributes more to produce a cleanness of diction that is remote from commonness than the lengthening, contraction, and alteration of words. For by deviating in exceptional

cases from the normal idiom, the language will gain distinction; while, at the same time, the partial conformity with usage will give perspicuity.

The critics, therefore, are in error who censure these licenses of speech and hold the author up to ridicule. Thus Euclides, the elder, declared that it would be an easy matter to be a poet if you might lengthen syllables at will. He caricatured the practice in the very form of his diction as in the verse: "*Epicharen eidon Marathonade badizonta* - I saw Epichares walking to Marathon" or "*ouk an g'eramenos ton ekeinou elleboron* - Not if you desire his hellebore."

To employ such license at all obtrusively is no doubt grotesque; but in any mode of poetic diction there must be moderation. Even metaphors, strange (or rare) words, or any similar forms of speech, would produce the like effect if used without propriety and with the express purpose of being ludicrous. How great a difference is made by the appropriate use of lengthening may be seen in Epic poetry by the insertion of ordinary forms in the verse....

It is a great matter to observe propriety in these several modes of expression as also in compound words strange (or rare) words and so forth. **But the greatest thing by far is to have a command of metaphor. This alone cannot be imparted by another; it is the mark of genius for to make good metaphors implies an eye for resemblances..."**

IF NOTHING ELSE, ONE COMES AWAY from this "Diction" section of the *Poetics* with a rare sense of the malleable inventive fun it is possible to have with language: lengthening syllables compressing them, interweaving exotic words, concocting new ones mindful all the while of the conversational characteristics of iambic pentameter, the extra beat and eccentric stresses dactylic hexameter imposes on the writer's boundaries and the listeners' well-tuned ear. In short, Aristotle has a very different "take" on diction.

On the other hand, there is the remote chance that Sections II: xx, III: xxi, and III: xxii of the *Poetics*, as translated by S. H. Butcher and presented in their relentless, unabridged entirety by *moi* did not succeed in producing the same eureka-evoking sense of bliss in you that it did in me. Yes, yes, I know the reason for that could be because I'm certifiable. But I think rather it's because once you've experienced a lift-the-top-of-your-head-right-off creative epiphany or two yourself and coached a several hundred high school seniors to theirs, your radar becomes mega-sensitized to look for mesmerizing narrative rhythms ever after. So when I catch myself slipping under the spell of Aristotle's mantra-like explanation of Greek grammar, I KNOW something else is going on here behind the theoretical pea soup the *Poetics* presents itself to be.

Then it dawns on me that when Aristotle writes about the cathartic impact of *Oedipus the King* upon an audience, he isn't saying: this is what theoretically *ought* to happen when we watch the play; he is describing what DID happen. He isn't saying: if you imitate this specific narrative formula, powerful, theoretical psychic energy will be generated and released. He is saying: it WAS/IS generated and released.

Aristotle testifies that the power of a tightly crafted plot, conveyed by means of the tightly crafted diction he has just at length described, was such that an Athenian audience did not even have to actually witness the dramatic action on stage to be moved—which is something to think about in and of itself. However, Athenians didn't merely hear *Oedipus Tyrannos*; its presentation also involved those five other essential elements that Aristotle says "every play must have." There was a chorus eerily chanting in hexameter and dancing to pulse-rate-elevating flute and tympani. There were

shamanistic actors wearing grotesque masks, clad in elaborate costumes and wearing height-enhancing footgear. There were the flash of lights, the wheeling in of the *ekkylema* bearing a tableau of the aftermath of carnage the audience didn't see occurring, and when things on stage got *really* tense, the lowering of a divinity-bearing mechanical contraption, the *geranos*. Most importantly, there was an audience psychically predisposed to be led to the brink of the abyss in a state of "empassioned contemplation" to thence leave the amphitheater keenly cognizant of the unexpected discovery to which they had been guided, that the line between godlike rationality and bestial ravaging is fragile.

It is possible that Aristotle does not describe catharsis more accessibly because, ever the scientist, he wanted to classify it as dispassionately as possible. He was, after all, writing about dramas performed 150 years before he was born. It is also possible that the man who advocated, "everything in moderation; nothing to excess" had not himself actually, synaptically experienced the X-treme potency of the creative energy he is describing. That at least is what Nietzsche quotes Goethe as thinking in *The Birth of Tragedy*...

No one, not even Aristotle, has analyzed the effect of tragedy in terms of its esthetic conditions and the esthetic activity on the audience. At one moment we are told of the release of pity and terror through the serious events of the action; at another we are asked to be elevated by the victory of noble principles and hero's sacrifice to a sublime moral norm. I am sure that the effect of tragedy for many people resides in precisely this, but I am equally sure that these people and those who interpret to them have not the slightest inkling of tragedy as a supreme form of art. Aristotle's catharsis, that pathological release of which philologists are unsure whether to place it among medical or moral phenomena reminds me of a curious perception of Goethe's. 'Without a lively pathological interest,'

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Goethe writes, 'I have never been able to manage a tragic situation, and for that reason I have rather avoided them than sought them out. Can it have been one of the virtues of the ancients that, for them, the highest pathos was but a form of esthetic play, while for us there is need of verisimilitude in the production of such a work?' (Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Genealogy of Morals*, translated by Francis Golffing. Garden City, NY: Doubleday Anchor, 1956. pp. 133-134).

Which is when it suddenly occurs to me, if I'm really serious about eschewing secondary sources, Aristotle isn't the ultimate last word in this matter after all.

iv: 'ELEUS'-IVE ANSWERS

They acted without knowledge till I came
Number, chief of sciences, I invented for them
And how to set down words in writing
The skill of remembrance, mother of the Muses
I gave the hidden sense of voices
Sounds sights met by chance upon the road
I guided mankind to a hidden art
And read to them the intimations of the altar-flames
Clearly I set forth all you would learn;
Speaking not in dark riddles, but simply
As speech is due between friends

—Aeschylus - *Prometheus Bound*

HIS NAME WAS AESCHYLUS and he invented Tragedy, called by Aristotle "the higher art, attaining its end more perfectly." And whereas Sophocles may have perfected it and been more popular with the 10,000 people in the audience each April who came to judge and be gripped by the new art form, Aeschylus was the first to deliberately craft them into tragedy.

Here is what we know of him: that he was born in Eleusis in 525 BC, seat of the Greater Mystery of Demeter and source of his family's livelihood... But first a little backgroun

IT'S ONE OF THOSE LITTLE FACTS that slides past you in a survey course.

Sometime around 800 BC, the Greeks acquired an alphabet from the Phoenicians.

| | | | |
|--|--|--|---|
| 2000–1200 BC Bronze Age Mycenaean civilization: conquest of Knossos use of Linear B, colonization of Mediterranean Islands, Asia Minor, Trojan War 1184 BC Fall of Troy | 1100–800 BC Iron Age Dorian Occupation of Attic Peninsula Greek Dark Ages: commerce, industry, writing cease | 800–750 BC Early Archaic Age Greeks acquire alphabet from Phoenician traders; other important external influences: knowledge of plane geometry; the cult of Dionysus with orgiastic red-wine sacrament | 750–650 BC Homer, Hesiod: consolidation of Olympian myths, epics, hymns |
|--|--|--|---|

The thing is, it was their *second* alphabet. There had been a Linear-B-utilizing civilization a millennium earlier centered at Mycenae, a city on the plains of the Attic mainland. These Achaean Greeks had been aggressive seafarers who'd conquered the Knossos of King Minos, then island-hopped their way to take on Priam's Troy. Across the wine-dark sea, in faraway Asia Minor, they had waged a decade-long war; there a mighty city had been besieged and sacked. Though the Achaeans had been victorious, the Trojan War had exacted a toll. It had taken one epic hero ten years to find his way back home. It left King Agamemnon and the members of his family stained with a guilt so deep it continued to pollute the collective psyches of the Greeks for centuries after. The Trojan victory had taken a physical toll as well, leaving the Greeks too drained to defend against successive waves of barbaric Dorian invaders from the north. Their four-hundred-year occupation had obliterated all traces of Greek civilization, until the Dorians at last decamped to Sparta, freeing the Greeks to adopt with gusto the

replacement alphabet, which they cunningly improved upon by adding vowels.

Boustrophedon. Text ran from left to right then doubled back, like an ox plowing a field.

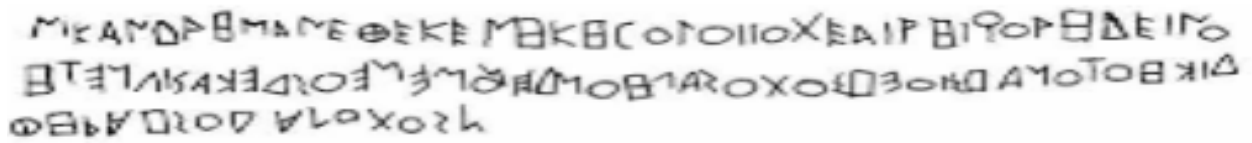


Figure 7 <http://etyman.wordpress.com/2011/10/07/boustrophedon-%CB%8Cbustr%C9%99%CA%8Afid%C9%99n/>

*Linear B of the Myceneans was too complicated for widespread use.
Each symbol represented a consonant-vowel combination.*



Figure 8 http://chars.lin.oakland.edu/lin109/Handouts/Greek/new_page_2.htm

In fact, you can practically hear them say: "...Language in general includes the following parts: Letter, Syllable, Connecting Word, Noun, Verb, Inflection or Case, Sentence or Phrase."

Eight separate oral recountings of the Trojan War got resurrected from the Greeks' barely remembered cache of hearsay: *Cypria*, which set the backdrop of the Trojan War; *Aethiopis*, which chronicled the death of Achilles; the *Little Iliad*, which brought the story to the end of the war; *The Sack of Troy, Returns*, which saw all the heroes home, except for Odysseus; and *Telegonia*, which encompassed the subsequent death of Odysseus. In addition to these epics, reclaimed as well were the more matter-of fact moralistic litanies of Hesiod, whose *Theogeny* formally chronicled the birth of all the

nymphs, titans, gods, and the comely mortals with whom they coupled to sire heroic offspring. Achilles, it was said, was born of the union between Zeus and the sea sprite Thetis. There was also respectful lyrical homage paid to the deities in the thirty-three "Homeric Hymns." These gave a kind of priestly/oracular stamp of approval to the various enshrined caves, copses, and grottos that dotted the Greek landscape, which were said to be sacred to one god or another.

But the most perfectly realized example of the Greek's seriousness of purpose in reclaiming their psychic center were the two book-long epic poems attributed to Homer. Both *The Iliad* and *Odyssey* had specific attributes, which made memorization and oral transmission possible: both epics had a geometric structure. They were rendered in an archaic ornate verse form with a six-footed mesmerizing rhythm: dactylic hexameter. They were composed of frequently repeated litanies of long formal speeches, catalogs, histories, descriptions of inventories, epithets, patronymics, and epic similes whose frequent invocation had a spellbinding power over listeners. Both poems confined themselves to details consciously selected to dramatize a thematic conflict: *The Iliad*, for example, occupies itself with a period of nine days in the ninth year of the ten-year war. Both contain detailed descriptions of the topography of Hades. And both achieved their sense of immediacy by applying a strict narrative formula. They began familiarly, in the middle of an action, flashed back to the past, then steadily built to a crisis with a satisfying resolution: A-B-D-C-E.

IT WOULD BE A NAIVE OVERSIMPLIFICATION to imagine that the Attic Greeks now marched smoothly forward into the Golden Age, which we most associate

with ancient Greece. Given Greece's mountainous terrain, there wasn't a lot of arable land to go around, and what there was quickly came to be in the hands of a few powerful families. Now, in this more stable time, the population had begun to grow to such an extent that it left poorer Greeks with three options: they could pull up stakes completely and put to sea to form colonies in Asia Minor (hence the source of future friction with the Persians). They could move into the city, in this case Athens, where they could be free to make a living not tied to the land (hence the rise of the Athenian city state). Or they could angrily demand redress (hence the evolution over the next 125 years from 632 BC, when Athens' monarchy ended, to direct democracy).

| | | | |
|--|---|---|---|
| 632 BC End of Monarchy in Athens 621 BC => Dracon's laws begin to set up oligarchy in Athens; Rise of Athenian city-state; colonies established on Asia Minor to ease overpopulation, creating tension with Persia | 600 BC Athens annexes Eleusis 580–570 BC Solon=>Council of 400 546–527 BC Peisistratus, benevolent tyrant of Athens establishes Festival Dionysia. Gives archons civic duties | 525 BC Aeschylus born at Eleusis 508–500 BC Cleisthenes establishes direct democracy; attracts sophist philosophers to Athens 496 BC Sophocles born | 490 BC Athens defeats Persians at Battle of Marathon; Aeschylus is hero; Pericles born 485–484 BC Aeschylus wins first 1st Prize. Birth of Euripides |
|--|---|---|---|

The raw tension that existed between urban and agrarian sectors of the city-state of Athens was mirrored in the choice each made in the gods they held most dear. The agrarian oligarchs were the natural heirs to the traditional gods of Hesiod's pantheon, particularly Demeter, goddess of agriculture. It is no accident that her myth is the most fully realized of all the Homeric hymns.

In case your Greek mythology is rusty, here are the basics:

One day, Persephone, daughter of Demeter, while picking flowers on the plain of Nysa, reached for a narcissus of exceeding beauty, only to see the earth yawn, and a golden chariot bearing Hades loom up and seize her. Though Persephone cried out, no one heard her except Hecate, and so she was borne off and separated from her beloved mother.

When Demeter discovered her loss, "bitter pain seized her heart." Bearing a torch, she embarked on a search, roaming the earth for nine days, vainly seeking her child, but on the tenth day, Hecate approached the distraught goddess and reported what she'd heard from Apollo. Demeter would further learn that Zeus himself had sanctioned the abduction.

"But look on the bright side" Apollo would attempt. "Hades is Zeus's brother, and, besides he rules a third of the universe." Now Demeter shunned the company of the gods, and disguising herself as an old woman, continued her wanderings until she chanced to find herself in Eleusis. There, she refused food and drink, especially "unlawful" wine, calling instead for a mix of meal and water to which mint had been added. "And so the great queen Deo received it to observe the sacrament." All that year, still inconsolable Demeter prevented the seed from sprouting everywhere on earth and, "so she would have destroyed the whole race of man with cruel famine, and robbed the Olympian gods of the gifts and sacrifices" had not Zeus interceded and arranged for Persephone's return.

The reunion was a joyous one, but there was a catch. "If you have tasted food, you must

go back again beneath the secret places of the earth, there to dwell a third part of the seasons every year, yet for the two parts you shall be with me and the other deathless gods"—worse luck, for, Persephone had been tricked by Hades into eating the seed of a pomegranate. "But when the earth shall bloom with the fragrant flowers of spring, then from the realm of darkness and gloom thou shalt come." Hecate volunteered to serve as Persephone's companion during the winter months. And in the spring and summer and the warmer days of autumn, Demeter caused the grain and fruit to again abundantly appear. Then she ordered the elders of Eleusis to build her a temple with an altar, and taught them how to conduct her secret rites.

By the 6th century, however, there had also come to be a distinctly modern cast to the narrative that originally linked it to the myth of Orpheus, the musician who nearly succeeds in releasing his beloved Euridyce from the Underworld, and, by extension, to the cosmology of Pythagoras.

To the Greeks, geometry was far more than a way to establish property boundaries, construct buildings, and chart a navigational course. It was the literal, logical, and metaphorical foundation where written language and mathematics converge, upon which everything is built, and to which anything can be compared. To Pythagoras, numbers emitted a harmonic bond that balanced the universe. Mystical geometric numbers such as the *tetractys* had the power to conquer death as well; it combined four triangles on a square base, its components adding up to a perfect form. This pyramid shape was thought to perpetually preserve a soul departed from the body. The squared hypotenuse of the famous Pythagorean right-angle triangle also took on a particularly

powerful symbolism for a culture seeking to restore its buried truths. The theorem has a logical fallacy at its core. Rooted in the impossibility of determining the square root of 2, it requires acquiescing to the accommodation that two numbers can be mutually prime, simultaneously rational and irrational.

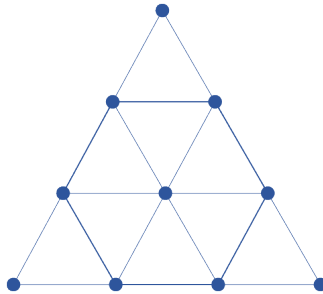


Figure 9 <http://hexnet.org/tagged/sacred%20geometry>

In the urban enclave, the deity of choice was Dionysus. Like the alphabet and geometry, Dionysus worship had been brought to Greece by sailors. Like the rites of Demeter and Pythagoras, Dionysus' were a closely guarded secret. But it was no secret what popularized the new religion: the unbridled consumption of red wine, which in turn led to ecstatic dancing, fueled by the erotic strains of tympani and flute. Women were known to be highly susceptible to shedding all inhibitions in this fashion. It was said that in their frenzied state, they tore to pieces anything that crossed their paths.



Figure 10 <https://web.eecs.utk.edu/~mclennan/BA/JO-Len.html>

Fortunately, there was a sacramental side to the hedonistic bliss Dionysus offered. He was the patron god of "re-creation" in every meaning of the word including drama. By 600 BC, Arion of Mehtymna had written down the first formal lyrics to the dithyrambic ode to which each spring a chorus of fifty men, dressed in satyr costumes and wearing phallic headgear assembled to emote. Before very long some of the song and dance began to include dialogue between a protagonist and the Chorus. By 535 BC, under the reign of Peisistratus, a state-run theater was constructed into the side of the Acropolis with Thespis emerging as the winner of the first drama competition at a new state holiday, 'The City Dionysia.' Peisistratus himself was Dionysus-like in this iconoclastic approach to obstacles. Dubbed the Benevolent Tyrant, he had seized control of Athens by bypassing the reigning oligarchy altogether; instead he'd simply raised an army of his own and taken over. His base of support was, of course, the increasingly vocal *demos* of Athens and he did whatever was needed to please them.

Fortunately, Peisistratus was a lover of the arts. In addition to legitimatizing Dionysus by building the first theater, he commissioned the permanent authoritative transcription of *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Then, in a true stroke of genius, he reduced the sting of the oligarchy's loss of political power by transferring to nine administrative *archons* full control of all civic pomp. In no time, a calendar full of well-run, fiscally sound celebrations was prominently erected in Athens' new Agora. The Festival Dionysia was held in the spring; Athena's Pan-Athenian games commanded the summer; there were days in winter sacred to Apollo, but what to do with the fall?

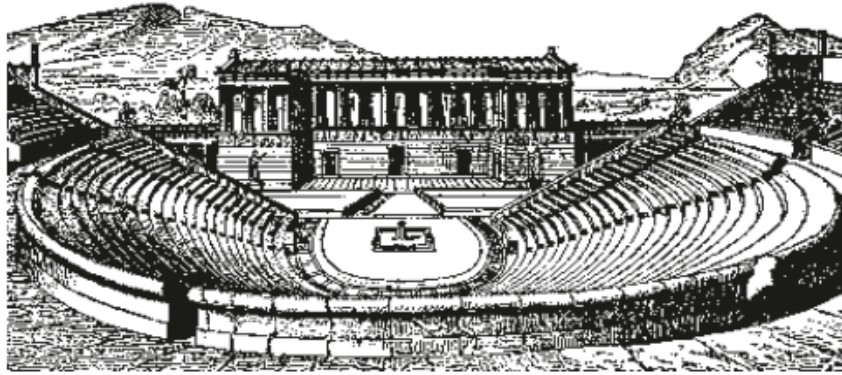


Figure 11 <http://cgim.dbq.edu/cgim/greece05/images/theatre4.gi>

ATHENS HAD ANNEXED ELEUSIS in 600 BC at the height of political instability. Up until now, it was easy to overlook the possibilities of this sleepy shrine 17 miles away. Now, however, the archons approached the priests and priestesses and made them an offer they would have been foolish to refuse. A spruced-up Sacred Way between Athens and Eleusis would now lead to an expanded temple to Demeter. Oh, and there would be a slight modification of the storyline. After all, would it diminish any of the power of the formerly all-matriarchal ritual if it turned out that Demeter had a son as well, Iacchos, who could mystically transform himself into her consort, Dionysus?

Once the mechanics of this ceremonial infrastructure had been squared away, it was time to make the route between Athens and Eleusis as accessible as possible for its pilgrims. Exacted would be a hefty entrance fee, the equivalent of one week's wages. More democratic than most of Athens' state-run operations, the Mysteries of Eleusis were open to all who spoke Greek - men and women, slave and citizen, and eventually even foreigners who could afford to pay the tariff. But there was one stipulation with a deep resonance with the Greek psyche. The rite could be joined only by those who had

shed no blood, or who had undergone strictly supervised ritual cleansing. It was a proviso mythology had rendered particularly vivid. According to tradition, Heracles had come to Eleusis to cleanse himself after massacring the Centaurs. Orestes, too, had come to rid himself of pollution after having killed his mother Clytemnestra.

Anyone seeking to be initiated into the Mysteries at Eleusis had to first produce an affidavit attesting that he/she had previously partaken in the Lesser Mystery. It was conducted in late February during Anthestrion, the Month of Flowers at Agra on the east bank of the Illisos River. The Lesser Mysteries required fasting, sacrifice, and, finally, immersing oneself in the river.



Figure 12 <http://www.oocities.org/athens/aegean/3193/sacrifice.htm>

The first stage of the Greater Mysteries again involved immersion - this time in the Bay of Eleusis - as well as undergoing three days of instruction under the tutelage of a personally assigned mentor. Following this, initiates now assembled back in Athens on Day 5 of the nine-day ordeal. Even then, all initiates were well aware that, at a future date, an even more sacred rite lay ahead, which was open only to those who had first successfully completed this one.

On the fifth day of the festival (Boedromion), the rites began to assume a distinct mimetic quality. Celebrants would proceed on foot in formal procession the seventeen miles from Athens back to Eleusis bearing the sacred Hieria as well as a statue of the boy-god Iacchos. The initiates would then rest, again purify themselves, and maintain some degree of fast – complete or partial. It is believed that they broke their fast as evening approached by drinking the "*kykeon*," a nonalcoholic sacramental beverage consisting of the same meal and water mixed with fresh pennyroyal mint leaves which Demeter had consumed.

A long, emotionally tense night lay ahead, which was designed to evoke an even deeper identification with Demeter's grief over the rape of her daughter. According to some reports, [<http://www.sacred-texts.com/cla/pr/pro4.htm>] the initiates were now subjected to a carefully orchestrated experience, which required them to grope their way through dark passageways without direction or guidance.

Finally, however, all found their way to the sacred space.

To confirm their readiness to participate in the rites, that night when the *mystai* entered the Telesterion, participants were required to utter in unison a special formulaic password or "*synthema*": "I fasted; I drank the *kykeon*; I took from the *kiste* [a cylindrical reliquary]; having done my task I placed it in the basket and from the basket into the *kiste*." This comprised Part One of the initiation: the *legomena* ("things said").

Next, illuminated in a sudden blaze of torchlight, there would have been the joyous moment of Persephone's resurrection...? and/or: the mystical merging of Demeter and

Dionysus...? and/or Persephone's possible mystical melding into Iacchos...? *some* wordless demonstration that, just as a kernel of wheat can sprout itself, become fecund, then wither into chaff, and yet sprout again, so too does each initiate live, die and become reborn. That was Step Two, the *dromena* ("things done").

At last came Step Three: the *deiknymena* ("things shown"), when the Hierophant would withdraw alone into the Anaktoron (the sacred secret chamber of the Telesterion) and reemerge with the Hiera, those most mysterious and holy relics of Demeter and Persephone. Possibly, according to classical scholars C.G. Jung and C. Kerényi in *Essays on a Science of Mythology: the Myth of the Divine Child and the Mysteries of Eleusis* (Bollingen, 1963) these consisted simply of a shaft of wheat, much as the Buddha is said to have wordlessly held up a perfect flower as the sole text of the Lotus Sermon.

Whatever it was provoked a moment of profound inarticulation in whomever experienced it.

THE THEORY HAS BEEN ADVANCED (*The Road to Eleusis*, authors Hofmann, Wasson, Ruck) that the wheat-based *kykeon* contained ergot, the mold from which LSD is derived. This would have undoubtedly helped produce the elevated state of Oneness with the cosmos the Mysteries obviously engendered. I personally think that's plausible. But I also think it doesn't really matter. According to E. R. Dodds' classic work, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (1951), this was a culture capable of and comfortable with blurring the lines between dream, trance, obsession, and creative meditation. It was a culture to whom Plato would demarcate four distinct forms of divinely induced madness

(distinct, that is from "ordinary" mental illness). Prophetic Madness, domain of dreams and oracular trance, was governed by Apollo; Poetic Madness by the Muses; Erotic Madness by Aphrodite and Eros; and Ritual Madness—the domain of Dionysus. But whether psychedelically fueled or no, we do know something profound happened here that people didn't talk about because there simply *were* no words to describe it. We also know that whatever it was, this spiritual mind-expanding experience became part of the shared psyches *of every single Athenian man, woman, and slave* who took part in the Mysteries of Eleusis. It's an impressive list, for, to name a few, it includes Pericles, Socrates, Plato, Phidias and Praxiteles, Demosthenes, Thucydides, Herodotus, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes – yes, and even Aristotle. Indeed it was part of the collective experience of 10,000 people a year for 2,000 years!

Mircea Eliade in his conclusion to *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* (Bollingen, 1964), perhaps approximates the dramatic alteration that took place during this climactic moment of the Eleusian Mysteries. Speaking of the power evoked by Siberian shamans, he states:

Something must ...be said concerning the dramatic structure of the shamanic séance. We refer not only to the sometimes highly elaborate "staging" that obviously exercises a beneficial influence on the patient. But every genuinely shamanic séance ends as a spectacle unequaled in the world of daily experience...(a) world in which everything seems possible, where the dead return to life and the living die only to live again, where one can disappear and reappear instantaneously, where the 'laws of nature' are abolished, and a certain superhuman "freedom" is exemplified and made dazzlingly present. (p. 511).

Taking his observation even further:

It is likewise probable that the pre-ecstatic euphoria constituted one of the universal sources of lyric poetry. In preparing his trance, the shaman drums, summons his spirit helpers, speaks a "secret language" or the "animal language" imitating the cries of beasts and especially the songs of birds. He ends by obtaining a "second state" that provides the impetus for linguistic creation and the rhythms of lyric poetry. Poetic creation still remains an act of perfect spiritual freedom. Poetry remakes and prolongs language; every poetic language begins by being a secret language, that is the creation of a personal universe of a completely closed world. The purest poetic act seems to re-create language from an inner experience that, like the ecstasy or the religious inspiration of "primitives" reveals the essence of things. It is from such linguistic creations, made possible by pre-ecstatic "inspiration" that the "secret languages" of the mystics and the traditional allegorical languages later crystallize... (p. 510).

Shades of Northrop Frye!

INTO OUR EQUATION we are now ready to place Aeschylus' invention of tragedy that Sophocles would take further in *Oedipus Tyrannos*, and which, 150 years later, Aristotle, would extol.

It is said that Aeschylus realized his calling when Dionysus appeared to him in a dream and exhorted him to become a playwright. As a "townie" raised in Eleusis and privy to the backstage mechanics of the Mysteries right down to the lighting, the sound effects, and even the garments worn by the priesthood, there can be no question that Aeschylus knew them intimately and respected their dramatic power. Moreover, Aeschylus's *de facto* affiliation with Eleusis was a mutual exchange. So impressive were the costumes Aeschylus designed for the stage, we are told, that the Hierophants and Dadouchoi at Demeter's Temple at Eleusis duplicated their "comeliness and dignity of dress" for their own dramatic ritual.

In addition to melding the Eleusian Mysteries with the rites of Dionysus, Aeschylus's Eleusis-inspired new medium successfully created a bridge across the divide between meaning and structure. Through a trilogy of tragedies (and one satyr play) Aeschylus revealed to an audience, each member of which had already acted as the protagonist in his or her own personal Eleusian drama, its most unvarnished impulses by means of stories and myths that had been ritualistically, cathartically crafted in a way which was both profoundly familiar, yet arrestingly unique. He served as the experienced guide who knew how to safely expose an experienced audience to the previously unimaginable, whose impact was catharsis, to be sure, but epiphany as well. The Mysteries were private, subterranean, serenity eliciting, and taboo to talk about. Athenian theater was public, performed in broad daylight, emotionally wrenching, and designed to provoke discussion. Aeschylus took these opposites and synthesized them, enabling what had been inutterable to become a shared universal articulated narrative. He did this the way every creative writer does. He used the familiar narrative patterns of the Homeric epics and the *Homeric Hymn to Demeter* that lay at the foundation of the Mysteries, and he employed the equally familiar cadence of the dithyrambic ode to do so. Then he showed that this mimetic cathartic pattern of A-B-D-C-E could be applied not just to Demeter's allegory of birth, death, and rebirth but to all tales: Jason and the Argonauts, Hercules, Perseus, Theseus, and Prometheus, the Fall of Troy and of the House of Atreus, even the defeat of the Persians at Salamis. The brilliance of Aeschylus's dramatic invention was not that it revealed the contents of the Mysteries, but rather the cathartic leap of faith, coupled with the shock of recognition that A-B-D-C-E is engineered to engender.

So how come the *Poetics* doesn't simply say what I just said? Well, what tragedy worth is

proscenium doesn't involve a lethal dose of hubris? The re-acquisition of writing, geometry and a charismatic god of "acting out" were only three of the convergent factors that made possible the creative synergy that triggered Athens' heady ascendancy. Throw in an exhilarating victory over a militarily mightier Persian army at Marathon (490 BC) - Aeschylus was a hero; a fortuitous silver strike at Laurium (487 BC) that bankrolled the building of an invincible fleet of a hundred triremes manned by Athenian citizens themselves, that would, ten years after that (480 BC) again humiliate the Persians at Salamis. Then, for good measure, have the Persians, as they turn tail, burn down the Acropolis and Demeter's temple of Eleusis (479 BC) and you have handed Athens carte blanche to corral every other city-state in Greece into a tribute-paying protection league. Now use that money to embark upon a spare-no-expenses series of grandiose construction projects, which would include a solid marble, gold veined Parthenon atop a magnificently rebuilt Acropolis, an even bigger temple to Demeter at Eleusis, and a widened Sacred Way that connected them and accommodated the ever-growing flocks of dues-paying initiates.

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| <p style="text-align: center;">483 BC</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Silver strike at Laurium=>building trireme navy; manned by Athenian citizens</p> <p style="text-align: center;">480-479 BC</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Athens defeats Persians at Battle of Salamis; Persians raze Acropolis, Temple at Eleusis; Delian League formed</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">472 BC</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Aeschylus' <i>Persians</i> wins 1st prize. Pericles is <i>choregos</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">470 BC</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Birth of Socrates</p> <p style="text-align: center;">468 BC</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Sophocles wins 1st Prize, Aeschylus is 2nd</p> <p style="text-align: center;">467 BC</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Aeschylus' 7 <i>Against Thebes</i> wins</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">463 BC</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Aeschylus wins with <i>Danaïad</i> Trilogy</p> <p style="text-align: center;">461-429 BC</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Pericles assumes power=> Golden Age; 1st Peloponnesian War</p> <p style="text-align: center;">458 BC</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Aeschylus wins 18th 1st prize for <i>Orestia</i>; accused of revealing Mysteries</p> | <p style="text-align: center;">457 BC</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Long Walls completed</p> <p style="text-align: center;">456 BC</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Aeschylus dies in exile</p> <p style="text-align: center;">447 BC</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Construction of Parthenon begins; Rebuilding, expansion of Eleusis</p> |
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Put another way, if you were an Athenian on the brink of the Golden Age, who had had *dirknymena* revealed to you both as an individual and a member of your culture, you would have had no doubt whatsoever that you too were invincible and infallible.

Athens' revolutionary new form of government, direct democracy, which had only really begun functioning as we know it in 508–501 BC under Cleisthenes, placed a premium on the ability to speak and argue well in public. To develop this skill required a new form of education, one emphasizing public speaking Rhetoric, Grammar and Logic (Dialectic) would comprise the *trivium*, three of the original seven liberal arts, which would also include the Pythagorean-influenced *quadrivium*: Arithmetic, Geometry, Music and Astronomy. From across the Mediterranean, philosophers and teachers would be drawn to Athens in large number: Protagoras, Gorgias, Hippias, Euthdemus, Prodicus, Evenus, Antiphon, Critias, and Socrates. Athens' population would swell to 150,000. The writings of Herodotus and Thucydides would give birth to the discipline of history. And over the next 75 years, from 479 to 404 BC, Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides would collectively pen nearly 300 plays for audiences numbering in the neighborhood of 30,000, and even Plato would render his philosophy in the form of dialogue.

Still, how does a democracy deal with excellence? In Athens, the answer was: by self destructively sentencing its most outstanding individuals to ten years of ostracism. Though in 458, Aeschylus's *Orestia* trilogy, his last, would win first prize at the Festival Dionysia, its third play, *Eumenides* was a patriotic plea, in the face of the coming

Peloponnesian Wars, to preserve classic morality and values. Decrying the abolition of the Areopagus, the assembly at the civic heart of Athens' tradition-protective aristocracy, will see the architect of tragedy tried for impiety and for revealing the secret workings of the Mysteries. Aeschylus, though acquitted, would go into voluntary exile, and be dead within two years.

True to Aeschylus's premonitions, by the end of the fifth century, the Athenian experiment in radical democracy will have imploded, and with it, the genre of Dionysian tragedy with which it was intertwined. The art form Aeschylus's piety had pioneered, and which Sophocles perfected would with Euripides swiftly descend into shock theater, depicting a society that had hubristically embarked upon a cavalcade of folly and atrocity, drum-majored by the gross ineptitude of demagogues. The *Bacchae*, Euripides final work, will describe a society in denial and utterly out of control. It is the stomach-churning spectacle of catharsis devoid of enlightenment. Performed posthumously, *Bacchae* coincided with the death of both Sophocles and Euripides, as well as with Athens' surrender to Sparta and its allies in 404 BC and was the last of the Greek tragedies.

And with that, Western Civilization found it had permanently lost its appetite for venturing into the uncharted labyrinths of the mind. For all time, Athens would become a cautionary tale. Where before it had been a "given" that the rational and irrational could, no, *should* be synthesized, now increasingly rigid religious dogma gradually gained primacy to split the universe into simpler, safer, easier-to-comprehend antagonistic dualisms: Flesh versus Spirit; Good versus Evil; God versus Satan. As for

the morphing and blurring of irrational with the rational creative imagination, the nether world would emphatically be declared the "off limits" realm of demons and the damned. And so Western thought would remain for the next 2200 years, until the German Romantic movement.

FROM HIS MORE SOCIALLY STABLE perspective a generation later, Aristotle would dismiss the Eleusian Mysteries thusly: "The initiates were not going to learn anything, but they were to suffer, to feel, to experience certain impressions and psychic moods"—never realizing that *this*, not the cathartic rush which accompanies and obscures it, IS the moment of enlightenment. With his pronouncement, Aristotle will miss the opportunity to become the enlightened guide with regard to creativity that he

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| <p>431–429 BC 2nd Peloponnesian War begins; Plague decimates Athens Pericles is victim; Sophocles wins for <i>Oedipus Tyrannos</i></p> <p>428 BC Plato Born</p> | <p>425–415 BC Euripides, Aristophanes in ascendancy; Defeat of Athenian Fleet off Sicily</p> <p>411–405 BC Oligarchy reassumes power in Athens; Athens surrenders to Sparta, Death of Sophocles, Euripides</p> | <p>403–322 BC Democracy restored</p> <p>399 BC Trial, Death of Socrates</p> <p>388 BC Plato founds Academy in Athens</p> <p>384 BC Birth of Aristotle</p> | <p>367 BC Aristotle => Plato's pupil</p> <p>343–340 BC Aristotle tutor to Alexander Aristotle returns to Athens, founds Lyceum</p> <p>323, 322 BC Death of Alexander; Death of Aristotle</p> |
|--|--|---|--|

was in virtually every other sphere of knowledge. He will cut off any opportunity to show a student how to make the creative leap of faith across the gap into the shock of recognition, where he/ she can experience, define, align and share the personal capacity for extreme excellence that exists in each of us.

Now, whenever encountering excellence in others, the student will be conditioned to feel competitive rather than supportive. By failing to guide a student to know what

excellence actually feels like, Aristotle will have ultimately guaranteed that for both student and teacher, true learning will remain mired in mediocrity, the price you pay for embracing the Golden Mean.

In Book 8 of his *Politics*, we begin to see the consequences of this position. What should children in an ideal society be taught about melody, rhythm, and harmonics? Aristotle will ask (rhetorically, of course). Is merely listening to music sufficient? Or should children be taught to play an instrument as well?

By the time Aristotle has finished his astonishing explanation, the seductive power within the creative process will seem more dangerous than ever. Yes, youth should learn to play an instrument, Aristotle allows, but it shouldn't be anything too complicated—like the lyre—because mastery would take time away from achieving balance in the academics and athletics. Nor, he cautions, should children be allowed to take their mastery past a certain level or an audience might actually be driven to want to pay them money solely for the pleasure of hearing them—or a student who excelled might be tempted to enter a vulgar music competition.

And under no circumstances should that musical instrument be the flute!

...the flute is not an instrument which is expressive of moral character; it is too exciting. The proper time for using it is when the performance aims not at instruction, but at the relief of the passions...The ancients therefore were right in forbidding the flute to youths and freemen, although they had once allowed it. For when their wealth gave them a greater inclination to leisure, and they had loftier notions of excellence, being also elated with their success, both before and after the Persian War, with more zeal than discernment they pursued every kind

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Education must not result in going overboard.

And so the Liberal Arts of Aristotle's Academy, with its safely sanitized core curriculum, assumed the restrictive role it holds to this very day.

v. RE-SEEING WRITING

KNOW HOW SOMETIMES YOU LOOK at the sweep of thousands of years, spot a tragic disconnect and wish you had a second chance to put matters back on track? Especially if you play the flute? So let's just call Aristotle's principles of rhetoric what they really are – the elaborately constructed apparatus meant to deliberately control the intensity of your emotion. Instead, let's concentrate on those cadences.

Fast forward 2175 years... to the late eighteenth-, early nineteenth-century German-speaking world, where, as formerly in Athens, an atmosphere of limitless creative and intellectual possibility has spontaneously exploded.

It had taken the German-speaking states four hundred years to recover from the social upheavals wrought by the Protestant Reformation, and then to recover from Napoleon's occupying army. Winning the Battle of Leipzig had spelled liberation in more ways than one. Prussia, the dominant duchy in a yet-to-be-united Germany, had recognized the victory as an opportunity to institute sweeping social, political, military, and educational reforms. Thanks to Friederich Schleiermacher's idealistic educational theories, a dynamic new regional German university system now came into being, one that

mandated unrestricted academic freedom, first at the University of Jena, then at the newly established universities of Berlin, Heidelberg, Bonn, Breslau, and Munich. Instantly they would become the envy of the world, especially in the young United States. In this fertile environment, German physicists, chemists, and engineers would close Germany's technology gap within twenty years. The concept of the research university would instantly take hold; America's own great research-oriented public universities are a direct result.

SIDEBAR

HOW THE DYNAMIC GERMAN UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

EVEN SPAWNED THE COLLEGE ESSAY!

Cambridge, Massachusetts. The year is 1851. Francis J. Child, Harvard professor of Rhetoric has just returned from an exhilarating three-year leave of absence spent studying drama and philology at the Universities of Berlin and Göttingen. Professors there do not have to lecture on Classic Oratory and Forensics, desiccated subjects students preparing to be theologians and lawyers have grimly ground away at since the Middle Ages. At German universities, being a professor means you get to blaze new trails the way the Brothers Grimm have. There, professors hand the scut work over to lowly graduate students.

Upon his return, Child announces to Harvard that unless some changes are made to what he teaches, he will be departing for Johns Hopkins, which is just opening its doors, the first American university based on the German model.

Harvard hastily kowtows to Professor Child's demands. The mandatory composition course he detests is stricken from the curriculum. In its place: English Literature, a brand new course of study. It will draw upon a required

reading list of fifty books, which under Child's successors A. S. Hill and Charles W. Eliot become known as "The Harvard Classics." The arrangement frees Child to devote his energy to his academic passion: the cataloging of English and Scottish ballads.

Still, how to guarantee that incoming freshmen will be able to write clearly and concisely if Harvard no longer teaches courses in rhetoric, oratory, and English composition? In 1874, an ingenious pass-the-buck solution evolves which other colleges hasten to adopt, and which remains in place to this very day:

...each candidate for admission will be required to write a short English composition, correct in spelling, punctuation, grammar and expression, the subject to be taken from one of the following works: Shakespeare's *Tempest*, *Julius Caesar*, and *The Merchant of Venice*; Goldsmith's *Vicar of Wakefield*; Scott's *Ivanhoe* and *Lay of the Last Minstrel*.

From now on, somehow figuring out how to write *on your own*, before you even get to college, conveniently becomes a prerequisite for admission.

END OF SIDEBAR

THE PARALLEL BETWEEN THE PROLIFERATION of intellectual creativity in the post-Enlightenment German Romantic movement and the one that had occurred in classical Athens is striking. Both societies were comprised of a loose confederation of states united chiefly by a common language and a heroic mythology, which deified the common man. Nineteenth-century Germans were every bit as enthralled by the lofty system of abstract thought of Kant, Leibnitz, Hegel, Herder, Schlegel, Nietzsche, and Schopenhauer as the Greeks had been by their philosophers. Romantic Germans adored finding patterns amid chaos. This would lead them to found an entirely new field of

knowledge, the social sciences. It would also attract them to a subterranean vein of study that had been suppressed since Athens self-destructed: Goethe will raise Hell; Schliemann will excavate Troy; Einstein and Planck discover subatomic particles; Marx and Engels will plumb the Proletariat. Pain-wracked, doped-up Nietzsche will in his study of the Dionysian and Apollonian principles both give birth to tragedy and epitomize it, and Freud will reveal the Oedipus in all of us.

Above all, nineteenth-century Germans love the emotion-stirring power contained in music. There is nothing like a good booming Beethoven symphony (especially if it's got an "Ode to Joy), a waltz, a good schmaltzy lieder, the sound of an oom-pah band, or a rousing drinking song—to cause the Teutonic collective heart to swell. The erotically charged epic operas of Wagner have a particularly hypnotic hold. "I know of some and have heard of many who could not sleep after it, but cried the night away" Mark Twain wrote upon witnessing the feverish state of mass hypnosis that descended upon the audience of Wagner's *Tristan und Isolde*, and Wagner himself thought he was unleashing on the world "something fearful" that could lead to derangement, even death to those who heard it. "Only mediocre performances can save me!" the composer wrote. "Completely good ones are bound to drive people mad!" You could accurately believe that in superheated nineteenth-century Germany, Aristotle's Golden Mean had been placed in mothballs.

As in Athens at the time of Cleisthenes, the push for direct democracy intensified in Germany as well. In 1830, and again, more intensely in 1848, impassioned citizens would take to the streets throughout the German states, the Hapsburg Empire, France,

and Italy, demanding constitutions. Most visible of all among the German firebrands on the barricades were the university students and their professors. One by one, the uprisings would be brutally crushed. In the aftermath, tens of thousands of energetic, educated and idealistic Forty-Eighters will prudently emigrate from Germany to the young United States. Carl Schurz becomes an adviser to Lincoln, a general in the Union Army, and Secretary of the Interior. Many of his compatriots will relocate to the Texas Hill Country. Others to Wisconsin, where they will, well into the 20th century, set a national agenda for progressive social reform. And over thirty thousand will settle in the Over-the-Rhine neighborhood of Cincinnati, my hometown. In short order, in Cincinnati alone, they will give birth to the Art Academy, the Cincinnati Summer Opera, the Cincinnati Symphony, the May Festival, and the Krohn Conservatory, to say nothing of dozens of brands of local beer and sausage. Cincinnati's *"Our Crowd"* German Jews in particular will make a national impact in the fields of finance, retailing, food goods, culture, government reform, philanthropy and psychoanalysis. Cincinnati is as well the birthplace of Reform Judaism. To deal with the latter-day influx of immigrants from Eastern Europe (my immediate forbearers) they will invent the Community Chest, the quicker to move us out of our frock coats and *tefillin*. In Cincinnati, instant assimilation was both the objective and the outcome. Of even more personal impact, my father's artistic talent will be nurtured. During the Depression, he will win a full scholarship to the Art Students League in New York. He'd return from NYC and WWII in enough time to see me into Walnut Hills, the high school where, in Grade 10, I would first encounter that triangle.

For Walnut Hills itself was and still is very much a product of the German model of

education with its devotion to the classics. Greek statuary still lines the main hall, marble friezes ring the Romanesque-Jeffersonian dome above the library. Three years of Latin is mandatory. An academic magnet school, free of charge to anyone across the city who can pass its rigorous entrance exam, it had been modeled after New England's elite boarding schools in order to spare Cincinnati's so-inclined the inconvenience of having to send their offspring East to prep. Its student body was a stressed-out but intensely grateful melting pot of meritocracy, one that's still ranked in among the top 75 schools in the US. It is also one of the very few public schools in the country that can justifiably pride itself on its racial diversity. Its inventive solution to middle school should become a national model. That solution? There is no middle school! Grades 7-12 follow the same fully integrated six-year curriculum.

As for me personally and professionally? Was this Classical-German cultural model of extreme academic excellence responsible for teaching me the art and craft of writing?

In the classroom? Not so sure. I was never selected to participate in the brand-new AP English classes because due to undiagnosed ADD, I didn't test well. (Though students in the program would routinely come to me for help to survive their endless onslaught of writing assignments). I shone in both of the newly launched AP European and American History courses. Not so coincidentally, my senior paper, "The Turner Thesis: the Emphasis on the American West on US History," instilled in me the awareness there were other alternatives to going East to college. Truth be told, at Walnut Hills I mainly flourished as a writer outside the classroom, devoting quite a lot of totally satisfying creative energy to editing *The Chatterbox*, the school's award-winning, weekly, after-

school newspaper. Oh, and I was runner-up for Wittiest. As for my college essays, I remember casually handwriting them on deadline night, submitting them, scratch-outs and all, directly onto my *three!* mail-in paper college applications: Mount Holyoke (rejected); Duke (waitlisted); Earlham, my safety school, accepted; went there for just one year, then attended the University of Cincinnati, tuition free because my father was on the faculty. As for writing, in that sphere

It wasn't until I undertook this study decades later that I began to seriously question WHHS's impossible, soul-killing standard of excellence. Before it dawned on me that the concept of "personal best" had been totally left out of the definition, I suffered from a deep sense of shame that my B+/A- average relegated me to some second-tier purgatory. It was a discovery that has driven me ever after to help my students concentrate primarily on the truer goal of self-definition that can best be found through the patient certainty that the deepest truths, unique to each individual, await beneath the surface in the subtext.

Therefore, especially validating has been the current research being conducted by neuro- and cognitive scientists, linguists, and psychotherapists. Their research and therapeutic work continually confirms the power that metaphor possesses as a tool for self-understanding and transformation. I'm convinced their findings confirms the flash of insight the Greeks were privy to when they made their pilgrimage to Eleusis, portrayed and transmitted through the epics told by Homer, the dramas first crafted by Aeschylus – A-B-D-C-E.

PERMIT ME THEN TO FULLY LAYOUT THEN the theoretical underpinnings of
how I teach writing:

1. Within everything written and/or read, I assume the omnipresence of *subtext*, the deeper logic in which powerful, potentially life-altering metaphors and unexpected connections reside.
2. "Life altering" is not a frivolous expression. In the last 25 years, research by neuro- and cognitive scientists, psychotherapists and linguists has established that the therapeutic power of metaphor can and does provide clients/patients/students/each of us with key insights that enable us to re-see=> revise a personal life script that points us to a more productive future. It's not a stretch to see this powerful wordless insight as paralleling the revelation that occurred during the climactic moment at Eleusis. Nor is it a stretch to equate the preparatory cleansing rituals at Eleusis with the potential for personal growth of each of us.
3. Over 17 years, I have found that revisiting a student's middle school years can elicit this therapeutic moment. When a formerly perceived period of shame or defeat can be re-seen from the more mature perspective of a high school senior about to embark on college and/or career, a once-traumatic experience can now be seen to actually contain a source of strength and resilience for students that can help them to master future obstacles and challenges. Failing to find it at the designated time will require an individual some time in the future to psychically backtrack to that period to re-see=> re-vise his/her truer understanding of that time - as I myself did.
4. The unexpected connection contained within a buried metaphor can be identified, analyzed, and assimilated through the directed questions asked by an experienced teacher/volunteer who has ideally personally experienced the process.

5. I believe that this moment of enlightenment, when converted into the written A-B-D-C-E narrative cadence invariably extends this deeply experienced insight not only to the writer, but also, equally powerfully, to a reader.
6. I have found that A-B-D-C-E can be optimally expressed in a 750-word personal essay, because that is the organic cadence of this particular genre, though a shorter 500-650 words requested by the Common Application will also suffice. If the writing of a strenuously edited final draft still clearly requires more space to tell its tale, this should also be encouraged.
7. I believe that encountered once, forever after the client/patient/student becomes permanently primed to seek these unexpected but omnipresent metaphors at every turn, making possible an ongoing series of creative observations and solutions throughout his/her life.
8. To verify this assumption, two years ago I conducted a longitudinal study of a sampling of my former students that documents the ongoing power of their discovered insights on their post-college lives. You can read those findings here: <http://www.uuessay.com/write-your-future/longitudinal-survey-finds-uu-essays-shaped-my-future/>
9. However, the most validating work I have done to date is taking place right now with the teaching I am currently doing at Stamford Academy, a charter school of last resort for high school students who have amazing transformative tales to share. Here, every single day, students are immersed in collecting, connecting and conveying information about themselves to re-see=> re-visit their own life scripts in order to embrace a liberating future.

MAKE NO MISTAKE: AS THE GERMANS were to discover, the burst of energy that is released when the A-B-D-C-E cadence of discovered subtext is invoked is exhilaratingly real. And it can definitely also become dangerous to those whose goal is to *lose* themselves by merging into any collective swell – be it at a Young Hitler rally, on a

happ, or in a mosh pit. Even when, like a lemming, you try to write a Harvard- (or WHHS-) pleasing college essay.

Therefore, what if, instead of losing yourself in the maelstrom of the mob, your goal were to personally *find* yourself within it?

What would have happened, for example, if Herr Professor Child had seen teaching writing as his primary responsibility? What if he'd discerned within his students' compositions what they were really groping to say, then showed them how to tap the ballads submerged within themselves? "In quatrains use this cadence: 4 beats; then 3; rhyme them a-b-c-b, alternately invoke 4 beats then 3," he could have said. "Begin your narrative abruptly, in the middle. Abandon linear time in favor of pointing to a deeper logic that expresses a universal, preverbal point of view. A-B-D-C-E."

What if he had known there is no dueling Manichaeian dualism between "creative" writing and any other kind? that it requires same STEM thinking, the same rigorous quest for fresh connection, patterns and cadence that go into exacting scientific and mathematical research.

What if, in addition, he/you/we each defined real writing as existing beyond the bankrupt five-paragraph essay? What if we all grasped that the most basic building block is not the letter or the sound it makes but 1 / 0 // 0 / 1 ...that the grammar invoked at this level could just as universally be applied to the cadence within Traditional Chinese, the C-minor scale, calculus or to C++? and that when the resulting syllables, words, phrases, sentences, and paragraphs are applied to a given form according to their

functions, the results are just apt to be a Java applet, a sonnet or a sonata?...

What if by "thinking outside the box" you began to teach beyond an ivy-covered, brick-and-mortar university with a \$75,000/ year price tag, but rather, via Internet, the freely accessible, boundless, interconnected yet focused universe?

Pie in the sky? Perhaps...

For we could philosophize and theorize, jargonize and proselytize till we were blue in the face, and still have failed to trace the true source of the problem to its roots. So here is the one question each of you needs to ask before you take another step, the one Aristotle feared you'd feel compelled to know:

How's YOUR writing? That's right: YOU?

Have you personally ever followed the process of collecting, connecting, and conveying who you are right now, how you came to be this person, and what you now plan to do with your insight? Made the leap of faith between meaning and structure? Realized the cosmic profundity in something simple? Have YOU personally ever experienced the "shock of recognition?"

Have you found *your* narrative within your subtext, empowering yourself to write *your* future. And by so doing, are you ready to help others do so as psychically empowering Eleusian shamanistic guide.

Real writing can be taught—but only in one way: A teacher of writing must know what

THE SHOCK OF RECOGNITION:
a personal and professional narrative about mastering/sharing the art & craft of writing...
or: why it's so much more than "just" your college essay©
by Maxene Fabe Mulford

real writing feels like in order to meaningfully teach it. Then and only then will you realize that the genuine creative process does not take place by doubling the number of themes you assign but by radically reducing them, so that the end result for every paper by every student, playing within him/herself, can only be the self-defining, utterly original and meaningful grade of A.

Can *you yourself* now serve as empowering, Eleusian, shamanistic guide?

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BIO

MAXENE FABE MULFORD

MA, ENGLISH, UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA

BA, ENGLISH, UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI



THE ULTRA COMPETITIVE, classical, six-year college-prep public high school I attended in Cincinnati embedded in me a permanent savvy sixth sense when it comes to “SATs, Stats and Forms.” There were 23 National Merit Scholarship Semifinalists in my graduating class of 304. Still we had our share of nervous breakdowns and bulimia even then. I know, up close, the needless stress all that can engender.

Fortunately, growing up in the Midwest also taught me there were saner ways to choose a college. My own college-age “children” attended the University of Texas @ Austin and the University of Iowa. I consider my “heartland” point of view to be one of my greatest assets.

In 1997, my Aristotelian training in English and American Lit, talents as a creative writer, teacher, and editor, and mavericky “take” on today’s college admissions craziness, coalesced when the fresh, clear thinking editorial suggestions I gave to Anand Ahuja, the son of my former next-door neighbors, proved instrumental (according to Princeton) to his gaining admission there, and again to Harvard when he attained his MBA. We formed Uniquely U. together.

Hundreds of happy seniors later, I am still in awe of the empowering impact that my 3-step process has had on helping high school seniors collect, connect, and convey their unique narratives, then confidently choose their futures.

Writing, it turns out, can be taught.

MISSION STATEMENT

Uniquely U. guarantees that its classically based, cutting-edge writing process will guide you to your unique self-defining narrative, empowering you to envision, then actualize your personal, academic and professional calling.

Find your narrative; Write your future!



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—Graham Greene

EDUCATIONAL
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FOUNDER & CEO. 1:1 & online college essay/application expertise provided for high school seniors and graduate students; résumés. www.uuessay.com

TEACHING
VOLUNTEERING

STAMFORD ACADEMY/DOMUS FOUNDATION: writing-curriculum developer; community liaison; School Governance Council; pro bono essay coach.
CT WOMEN'S BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL: advisor, editor.

BOOKS
ANTHOLOGIES

CREATIVE WRITING: SPS SCHOOL OF CONTINUING EDUCATION, 1994-1999; PRIVATE WORKSHOPS.

TV GAME SHOWS: appeared on Tonight Show, nat'l reviews, nat'l syndication.
BEAUTY MILLIONAIRE: THE LIFE OF HELENA RUBINSTEIN, nat'l reviews, movie option.
DEATH ROCK: A NOVEL: national reviews including Rolling Stone.
TV BOOK, WORKMAN: 2 articles.
HEALTH FORUM: articles anthologized.

ASST'D ARTICLES

MADEMOISELLE: article about couples counseling.
THE VILLAGE VOICE: articles about driving a cab in NYC: safety, politics.
STAMFORD ADVOCATE/GREENWICH TIME: feature articles, special sections.
CONNECTICUT: wrote about magnet schools & racial balance.
APARTMENT LIFE: regular columnist; NEW TIMES: breast cancer awareness;
PENTHOUSE FORUM.
CREEM: TV critic at invitation of Lester Bangs; DC COMICS: wrote "House of Secrets," "House of Mysteries" & "Plop" comics for 2 years; editor: Joe Orlando.

OTHER
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INVITED TO JOIN DARIEN COMMUNITY ASSN WRITERS GROUP, 1992-1998.
PUBLICIST: HARPER, COLLINS; MACMILLAN, et al.

EDUCATION

UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA, MA, ENGLISH, studied with Arthur Scouten;
UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI, BA, ENGLISH, studied with Austin Wright.

