



**Welcoming & Acclimating Beginning College Creative
Writers from Classic(al) to Contemporary**

Transitions: Cavalier Conference on Writing & Literature, 2015
with Dr. Kevin Rabas, Emporia State University

Background

- ◆ Poet Thomas Lux: I never read any living poets, when in school.
- ◆ Tasha Messer (student teacher, EHS): We start out about 80/20 (contemporary/classical) and end the semester about 60/40. (She's new and progressive, though.)
- ◆ When I teach poetry writing, my students know a few of the modern staples, and a few contemporary poets and writers, but not many. They know Frost, e.e.cummings, Plath, Poe, Shel Silverstein.
- ◆ Surveys, to come.

Contemporary Rising

- ◆ So, the trend is to introduce a larger and wider variety of contemporary work to high schoolers, and student-teacher Tasha Messer said, “I’ve done more contemporary than classical (work) to try to relate it to students’ lives.”
- ◆ Beyond relating, though, we want to give students a sense of the field—and how to enter into the current, contemporary dialogue of poetry and prose.

Trends

- ◆ Workshop Model
 - Student-centered
 - Teacher as moderator, mentor, coach
(not published king or queen)
 - Workshop “modes” (personal response, diagnostic response, envisioning response...)

Trends 2

- ◆ Free Verse, in poetry:
 - 95 percent of published American poetry is some sort of free verse
(vs. fixed forms: sonnet, villanelle, pantoum...)
- ◆ Sophisticated (literary, specific) vs. simple (popular or genre, general) work: poetry and fiction

Trends 3

- ◆ Character- over Plot-Driven work:
(Aristotle on plot (“action”) vs. interior psychology)
- ◆ Craft vs. Message:
(How it’s made vs. what it means)
- ◆ Craft & Shape vs. Express (HOW it’s made, not what it SAYS)

Forms

- ◆ Free verse vs. Fixed form poetry
- ◆ Fiction:
 - Short story (7-30 pages)
 - Flash or Microfiction (1-3 pages)
- ◆ Ten-minute play (7-10 pages)

Demands

- ◆ Introduction to Creative Writing:
 - 1 poem
 - 1 short story
 - 1 ten-minute play
 - plus, lots of generative activities (exercises)
 - plus, daily reading (theory, movements, modes, exercises: 1-15 pgs. a day)
 - Peer workshop responses (comment/critiques)

Hidden Demands

- ◆ You're on *your own*: No one's coaxing you to write (such as parents or hometown friends.)
- ◆ You're on *your own* to go out and "experience" your community and the world (travel) & write about it. (This can also be fun.)

Community

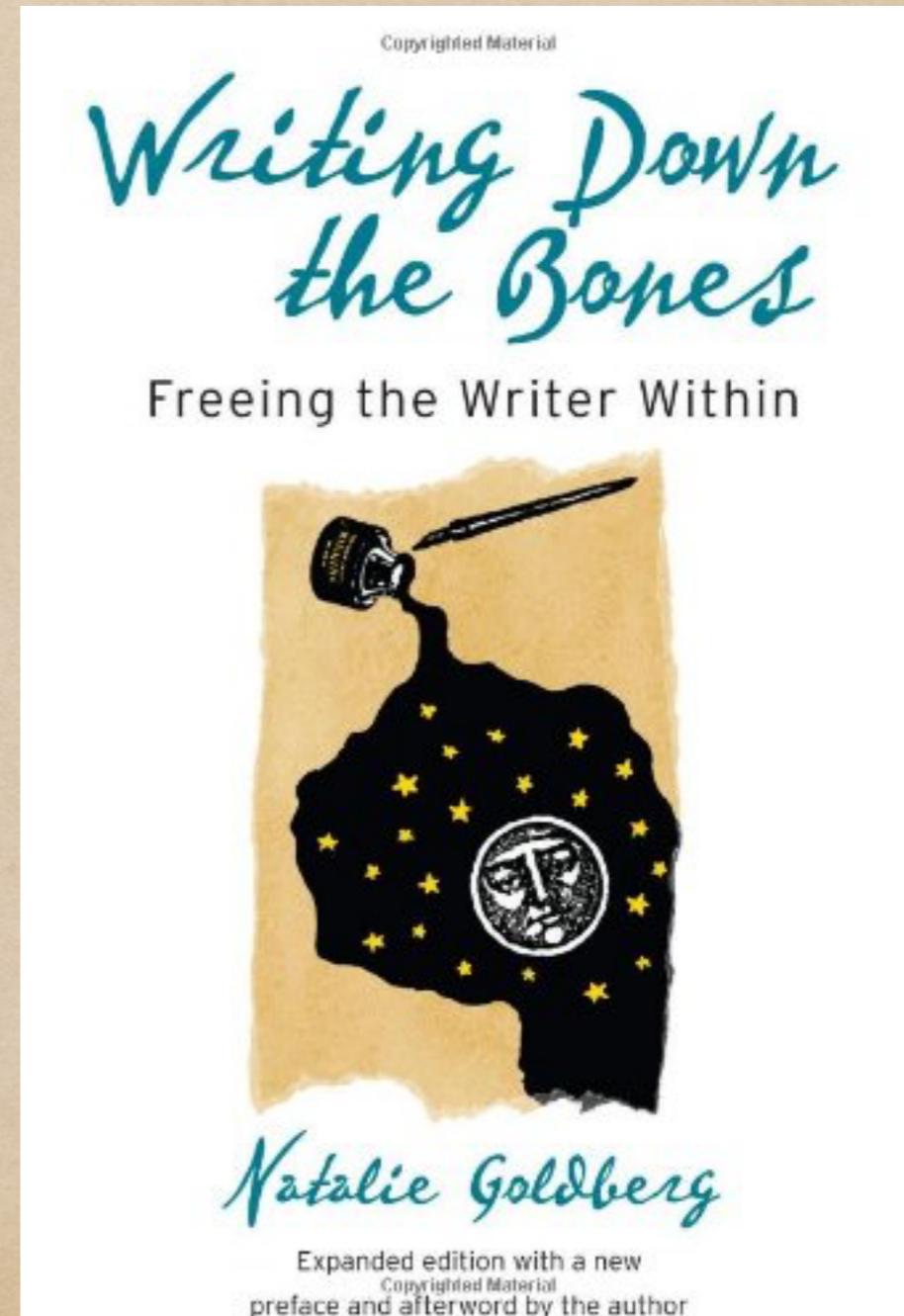
- ◆ When you enter a college creative writing class, you instantly gain community. You gain:
- ◆ Sounding boards, listeners
- ◆ Peers in this endeavor: writerly friends and companions (people “like you” or similar to you)
- ◆ Trade and profession companions

Community 2

- ◆ a Club, usually linked to a literary magazine publication (QUIVIRA, MIND'S EYE, TOUCHSTONE, MOCHILA REVIEW)
- ◆ Major or Minor identity & peer group
- ◆ Someone to go to conferences with: AWP
(Association of Writers & Writing Programs)
- ◆ Grad. school peers & potential long-time contacts

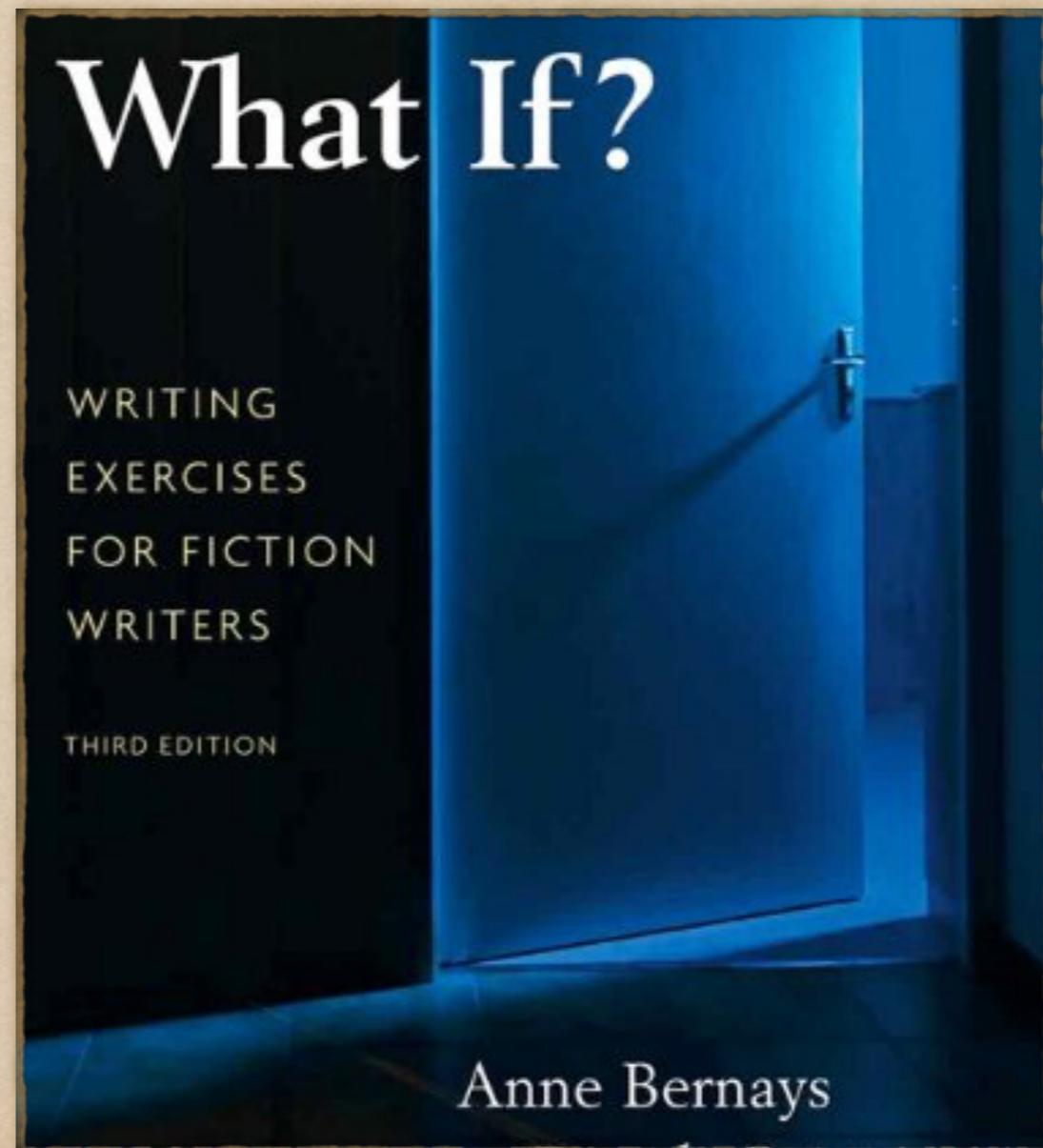
Some books that can aid in the transition

- ◆ Beginner's Transition Books
(all purpose: generative & inspiration):
 - Goldberg: *Writing Down the Bones*
 - Lamott: *Bird by Bird*
- ◆ Intermediate Books
(interviews & poems + video)
 - Moyers: *Language of Life*



Transition Books 2

- ◆ Intermediate/Generative
 - Practice of Poetry (Behn/Twicheil)
 - What If? (Bernays/Painter)
- ◆ Intermediate/Generative & Theory:
 - In the Palm of Your Hand (Kowitz)
 - Poet's Companion (Addonizio/Laux)



Transition Books 3

- ◆ Intermediate/Anthologies in the Genres:

----- POETRY: -----

—The Norton Anthology of Poetry (Gerguson, Salter)

—Best American Poetry (by year, Lehman, series editor)

—Best New Poets (by year)



Transition Books 4

◆ Intermediate/Anthologies in the Genres:

----- FICTION: -----

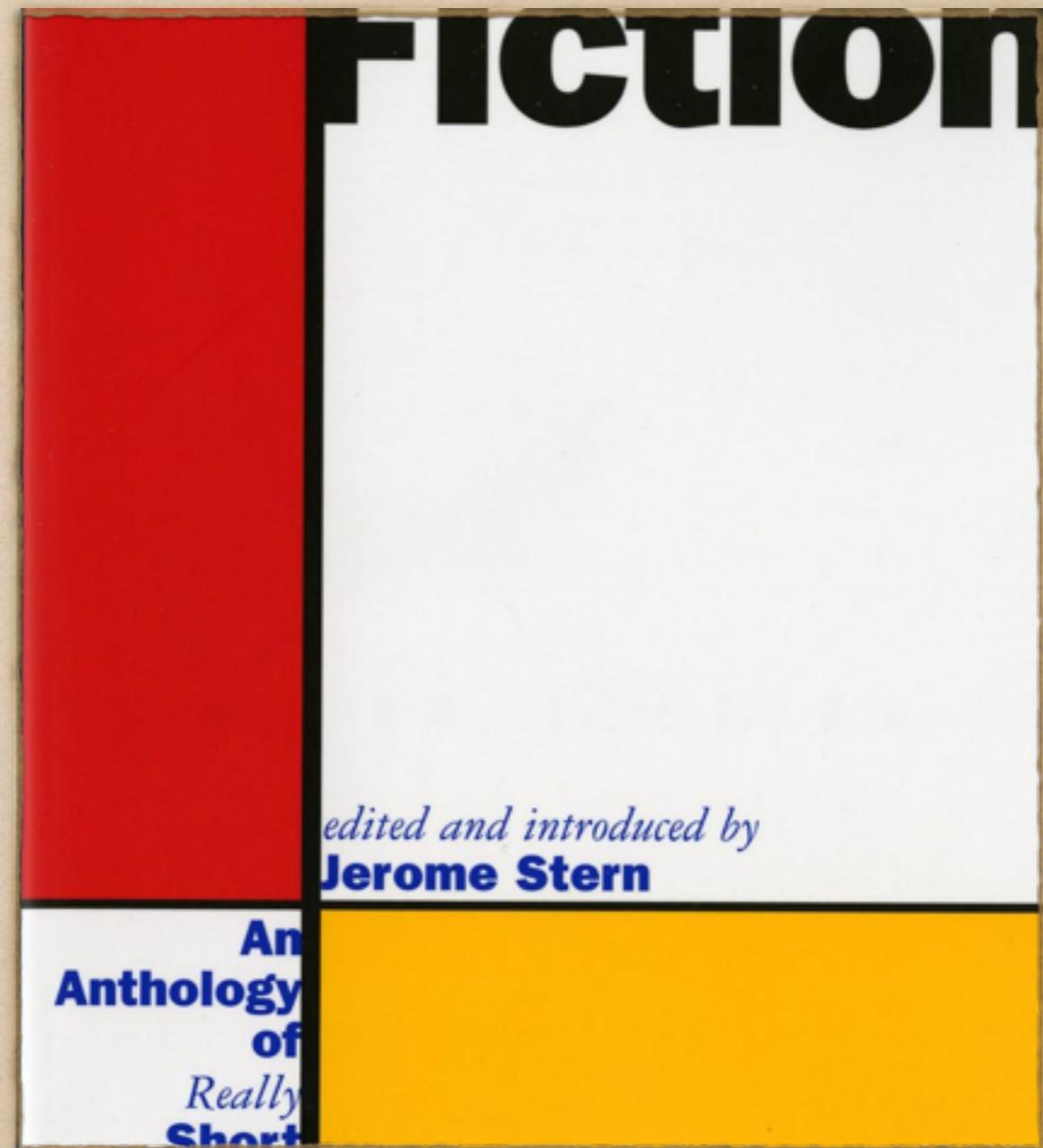
—The Norton Anthology of SHORT FICTION (Bausch, Cassill)

—Best American Short Stories (Egan, Pitlor)

—Flash Fiction International (Thomas, Shapard)

—Microfiction (Stern)

—Flash Fiction Forward (Shapard, Thomas)



Transition Books 5

- ◆ Intermediate Books/
History in the Genre:
—A History of Modern
Poetry (series) (David
Perkins)

of MODERN POETRY

DAVID PERKINS

Modernism and After

Take a class in MAP or CAP

- ◆ MAP: Modern Amn Poetry
- ◆ CAP: Contemporary Amn Poetry
- ◆ OR read & study MAP or CAP carefully, looking for artistic lineage & tradition:
Cary Nelson: Modern American Poetry (pictured)



List of poets covered in MAP

Whitman, Dickinson, Sandberg, Stevens, Mina Loy, Williams, Pound, Eliot, HD, Moore, Masters, Stein, Frost, Cummings, McKay, Hughes, Tolson, Bennett, Cullen, Millay, Hart Crane, Oppen, Kunitz, Olson, Bishop, Rukeyser, Hayden, Berryman, Stafford, Brooks, Duncan, Levertov, O'Hara, Ginsberg, Creeley, Bly, Wright, Ashbery, Kinnell, Merwin, Sexton, Plath, Rich, Snyder, Knight, Lorde, Harper, Baraka, Gluck, Komunyakaa, Forche

(We cover about 5-12 poems from each poet.)

Workshop “modes”

2.) *Diagnostic Response:* (declarative / identifying)

This type of reader asks, “Of what is this piece constructed? How is it built?”

This respondent tends to assess the work. The reader identifies elements of its construction and proportion.

The reader may identify Formal Elements of the piece. It may or may not provide some qualitative assessment of them.

Ex: “This poem has exactly the same line pattern as the Petrarchan sonnet, but the beats per line differ in the last stanza.”

Or... “This story is told in third person, limited omniscient narration. That works to provide some distance from the character, who is somewhat unreliable.”

(devised by Prof. Amy Sage Webb, Emporia State U)

Workshop “modes” 2

6.) *Envisioning Response:* (interrogative / judging)

This reader raises questions, such as, “Where can this piece go from here? What promises does it make, and how can it follow through on those? What is the preferred option?”

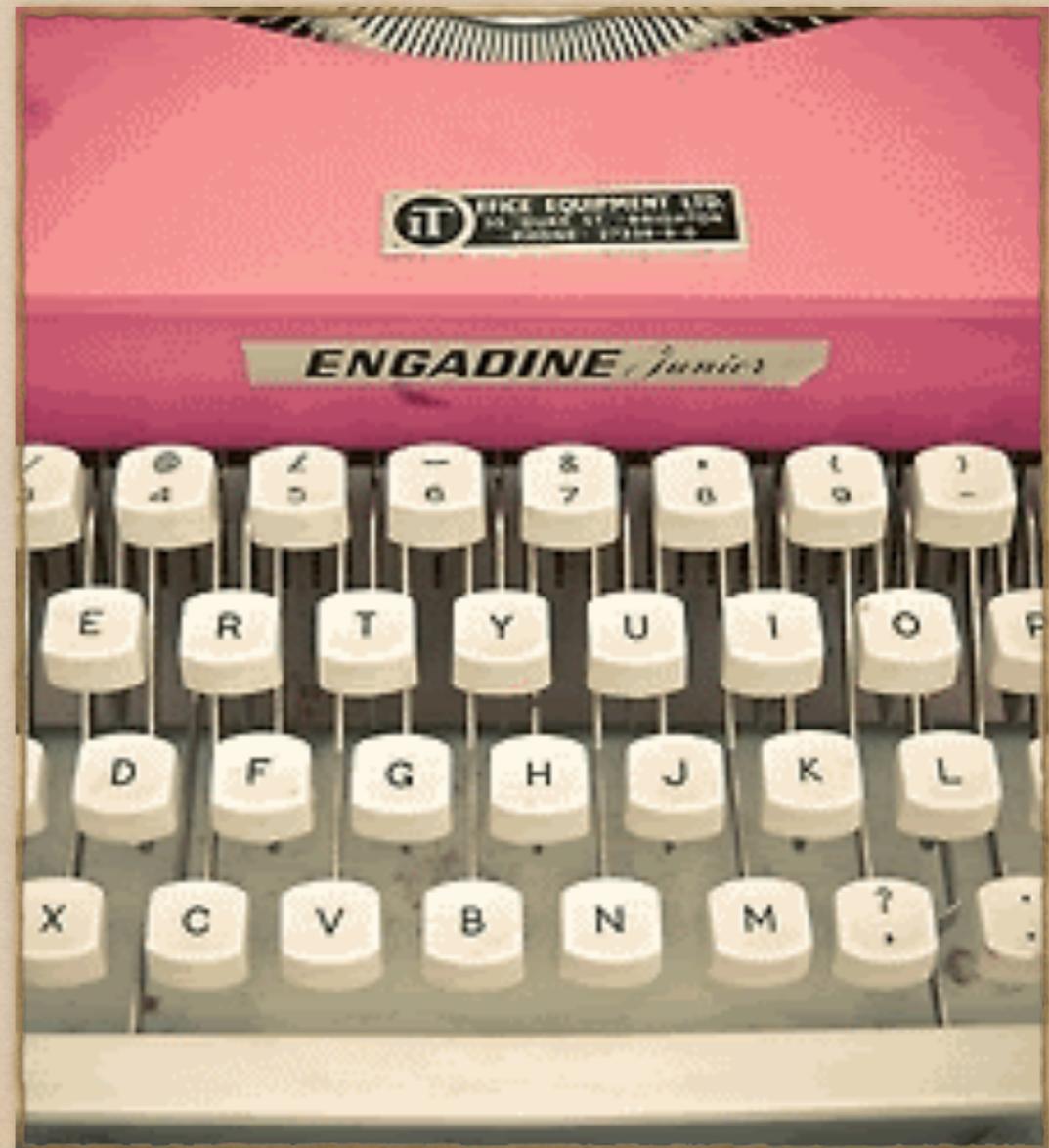
Ex: “The poem establishes itself in the first stanza as a narrative poem, but moves in the later stanzas to an image-driven piece. The decision will have to be made as to whether the piece will be performance-based or page-based.”

Or... “The opening paragraph establishes the boy’s desire to escape his small town, but by the second page the story’s main focus becomes the boy’s relationship with his dying grandfather. The story needs to be re-framed.”

(Amy Sage Webb, Emporia State U)

Summer CW Residencies

- ◆ REGIONAL
WORKSHOPS:
- ◆ Tallgrass (Emporia State)
- ◆ Iowa Summer Writing Festival (Iowa City)
- ◆ Breadloaf (Green Mt, VT)



Year-round Writing Workshops

- ◆ Brave Voice with former KS Poet Laureate, Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg:

**The 10th Annual Brave Voice:
May 10-15, 2015**

Please join us for a soulful, invigorating and life-changing 6-day retreat to dive into writing, singing, and songwriting, and surface with new work, collaborative creations, a community that supports your artistic development, and a renewed vision of your life. Total cost of the retreat, all meals, and five night's lodging: \$760. (bravevoice.com)





Thank you, & write on.

If you'd like a copy of this presentation to view later,
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Contacting Kevin:

As always,
write on; teach on!

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