

Kate Murray & Gregory Bortnichak

English 221

Arnold Sanders

December 2005

Why It Hurts To Write:
An Analysis of Pain in the Writing Process

“Writing is easy, I just open a vein and bleed.” –Red Smith

When given the task of choosing just one facet of the writing process to study for our own personal use and discovery as writers, as well as for the benefit of the broader academic community, we struggled, yearned, and damn-near broke our intellectual *spines* trying to make the decision. The process of sorting out all the possible avenues through which to guide our discourse was as engrossing as it was distressing. We could not rest without solving the problem this assignment posed to us. Our minds and bodies, despite being thoroughly worn by stress and sleep deprivation, would not allow themselves to be quiet. We were hurting in a most palpable and *consuming* way, but never once were we subjected to any quantifiable injury. And to think that we had not yet written a word...

The pain involved with conceptualizing, realizing, and honing this particular piece was something of a philosophical, sensory, and of course, literary journey. But was it unique in that respect? We knew that we could not be the only writers who could liken the experience of composing a significant work to embarking on Tolkien-esque quest. And after combing through considerable research, we are back at home again with the realization that brought us here in the first place: writing *hurts*.

So much of writing hurts, and it is not just the act of composing. Upon further examination and deeper consideration, we were able to identify pain in each and every facet of the writing process. From the pain of choosing which ideas to nurture and which ideas to lay waste to the storm of composition during conceptualization, to the pain of being blocked and unable to articulate those ideas when the time for composition has finally arrived –from the pain of coming to repressed truths, repressed *voices* even when composing, to the pain of having to censure your true voice for a critical audience when revising –from the pain of finding that you have become vulnerable on the page after a long night of inspiration, to the pain your body feels the next day when the thrill of invention has left you... Pain can be a motivator, a source of inspiration, an Atom Bomb in the face of your invention, or a mere nuisance. You may even enjoy it. But regardless of how it affects *you*, pain and writing are intrinsically and inextricably linked. By understanding this connection it is plausible that we as writers will not only gain the facilities to write through the pain, but we may also be able to transform the pain in a way that could simultaneously assuage pain sensations and use them to fuel more fluent writing.

Before we can analyze the exact role or roles that pain plays in the writing process, it is important to discuss the evolution of philosophical definitions and theories of pain, as well as their implications. Pain is a sense. It is a sense that is not only relegated to physical experience, or to just one sensory organ (like the eyes, the nose, or the ear, although all of those sensory organs depend on brain processes to function properly). In that respect, it may be more accurate to call pain a *sensation*. It is a sensation that can be derived from any of the senses, but does not necessarily have to.

Perhaps the fact that pain has the potential to come from any origin or no origin at all is why it was given so little philosophical consideration before the Age of Enlightenment.

In order to understand the evolution of pain philosophies, it is impossible to negate their predecessors: sensory philosophies. Sensory philosophies seem to be so intrinsically linked to the everyday visceral human experience, that they are almost too understood to be defined. Nonetheless, beginning with Aristotle, there came to be a long line of theory associated with the senses that largely overlooked the sensation of pain:

The doctrine of the five senses, which is common sense today, is ascribed to Aristotle although it is probable that it was also common sense in his day and generation. However that may be, the doctrine descends to us from antiquity, and it does not include, nor does it make any provision for, a sense of pain...unlike sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch, pain does not possess an obvious sense-organ; nor is it restricted to any part or locus in the body, but rather pervades the whole. (Dallenbach 331)

Aristotle did, however, start an ongoing debate about the nature of sensation that was carried on throughout the Enlightenment. Themistius elaborated on Aristotle's theory of the sense of touch by developing the view that touch contained a plurality of senses, one of which could have ostensibly been pain. After Themistius, philosophers such as Alexander, Simplicius, and Philoponus started a trend that put emphasis on the verbatim theories of the early philosophical greats, and disregarded Themistius' idea of the plurality of senses by saying that if the 'master' (Aristotle) did not specify more than one sense within the overall umbrella of touch, then therefore it could not be plural.

The debate was rekindled by philosophers in the 11th century. Avicenna, Averroes, Appolinaris, Albert Magnus, Aegidius, Jandunus, and Marcellus were among the most influential philosophers to adopt Themistius' theory. However, they seemed to focus primarily on tactile qualities such as hot and cold; wet and dry. It was not until the Enlightenment when philosophers such as Cardano, Bacon, Locke, Voltaire, and Kant began exploring previously unacknowledged touch sensations, namely pain and pleasure. The qualities of sexual titillation in touch seemed to receive the most attention from this group, most likely due to the nature of the Enlightenment as being one of the first intellectual movements in the Western tradition since the Renaissance that incorporated an expansion on sexual mores.

It was not until the 18th century when grandfather of Charles Darwin, Erasmus Darwin, added seven senses to the original five (the sense of hunger, of thirst, of suffocation, of sexual appetite, of lactiferousness, of muscular extension, and of heat) that the previous sense philosophies begin to reach a synthesis. Not only did Darwin manage to cogently connect previous sense philosophies, but he also did a great deal to lay the foundation for the first dedicated pain philosophy. Darwin's *intensive theory of pain*, although classified as an effect of sensorial motions, says, "whenever the sensorial motions are stronger than usual ... A great excess of light... of pressure or distension... of heat... of cold produces pain" (Dallenbach 333). In 1840, Johannes Müller expanded Darwin's *sensorial motions theory* by stating in his *nerve-specificity theory* that the intensity of feeling depends on "mode of arousal... and ...the state of the organism at the time of their arousal" (Dallenbach 334). Unfortunately, he did not take the next logical step in his discourse –to try and quantify and categorize the various "modes of arousal,"

as well as the “states of the organism(s) at the state of their arousal.” Nonetheless, his contributions to the development of a modern, non-Aristotelian view of sensation were invaluable. Whereas previous philosophers posited that sensory nerves transmit properties or even copies of the objects being sensed to the brain, his philosophy took the emphasis of determining sensations away from the stimuli, and placed it on the nerves of the sensory organs. This implies that we can feel different degrees or qualities of pain sensations from the same stimulus, or potentially no pain at all. The most important factors in the pain equation, according Müllerian doctrine, are the sensory organ, and its specific state of arousal.

So if we take into consideration that pain does not only affect certain nerve-endings related to touch sensation, but has the ability to affect the entire sensory being, it begins to become evident that pain is not only relative to each individual, it is absolutely *unique*. Then perhaps we all feel pain differently from each other. Furthermore, is it even the same pain that we feel when we say that we are in pain? Twentieth century Austrian philosopher, Ludwig Wittgenstein, argues that there is no way for us to be sure that when one person says, ‘I have a toothache,’ that it is actually same sensation experienced by someone else who claims to the same pain in their tooth. According to Wittgenstein, “a word like ‘pain’ is used in place of the natural expressions of pain such as crying, that ‘the verbal expression of pain replaces crying and does not describe it’; in other words, that ‘I am in pain’ is a sophisticated way of groaning, and is no more a statement than is a groan” (Mundle 35). Wittgenstein argues that pain is impossible to communicate except through analogies and metaphors, because pain is a “private experience” that is only truly understood by the person experiencing it. Wittgenstein illustrates this idea by comparing

private experiences to beetles in a box: “everyone has a box with something in it which we call ‘a beetle’, but ‘no one can look into anyone else’s box, and everyone says he knows what a beetle is only by looking at *his* beetle” (Mundle 36). Wittgenstein insists that these ‘beetles’ of private experience are impossible to communicate with language, but only through the symbols of “private language.” Written conceit, the crux of most personal, expressive writing, is a fine example of the synthesis of symbols that comprise private language. Perhaps in this respect, the challenge of struggling to find the metaphors to accurately express private experiences could be both an instrumental motivating factor in creative writing, as well as one of its greatest sources of psychological pain.

While there is a marked difference between physical and psychological pain, studies show that there are distinct similarities and ties between the ways that our brain registers the two types. Naomi I. Eisenberger, a doctoral candidate in the Social Psychology Department at UCLA, found in a study that “the same neurochemicals that regulate physical pain also control [sic] psychological pain” (Panksepp 2). From this we can deduce that there is an inextricable relationship between physical and psychological pain, which would explain why psychological as well as emotional pains so often manifest themselves in the form of physical ailments. Robert Kugelman supports this claim in his article, “Pain in the Vernacular: Psychological and Physical,” stating; “Psychological pain is pain. Psychological and physical pain have similar phenomenological structures. Both are felt bodily performances that entail at least temporarily a disabling of a potentiality for action” (Kugelman 306). This has key

implications about one of the most significant causes as well effects of pain in the writing process: writer's block.

Before delving into the subject of pain and writer's block, however, it is necessary to discuss the difference as well as fundamental unity of psychological and emotional pain. Up until this point, our discussion of pain in the writing process has borrowed heavily from philosophical viewpoints which tend to treat pain in written communication as being comparable to the psychological, intellectual stresses of pouring over a puzzle that can not be solved. But writing involves more than just problem solving. It involves acute personal *feeling* throughout the process of working through the language maze. In her article, "Some Thoughts about Feelings: The Affective Domain and the Writing Process," Susan McLeod point out that writing is an "emotional as well as cognitive activity – we feel as well as think when we write" (McLeod 426). Because the writing process is not just an intellectual exercise, but also an emotional process, it involves both negative and positive emotional reactions. Consider the thrill of having a breakthrough realization while writing, and contrast it to the often debilitating frustration of not being able to synthesize on paper ideas that seem to make perfect sense in your head.

Moreover, we often assign negative connotations automatically to any emotional response we are having when writing. Anxiety, for example, can be interpreted and utilized in different ways. McLeod illustrates this by analyzing her reaction to being anxious while composing, and comparing that to the reactions of her students, also anxious while composing.

My [McLeod's] physiological state was certainly agitated (I wrote, then paced, then wrote again); but I was so intrigued by my subject and task

that I interpreted the sensory data as excitement—the excitement of the chase, perhaps, as I tracked my ideas. My emotional state was enabling.
(432)

Here, McLeod demonstrates the way in which anxiety during writing can be harnessed and used constructively to aid the writing process. In contrast, she describes the effects of anxiety on her students:

When many of my students write they also show evidence of autonomic nervous system arousal—paper wadding, pencil chewing, sighing—but they describe this agitation in negative terms. They are anxious, frustrated, blocked; they have difficulty continuing... (432)

The students lack the confidence, instruction, or simply the interest and personal investment in their topic to view this anxiety positively. This particular example also shows that whether experienced or not, we all are subjected to similar pain stimuli in the writing process. Nonetheless, it is how we perceive, interpret, and choose to process that pain that makes the difference. Clearly, McLeod benefited greatly from controlling and harnessing the same pain that seemed to take control of her students. McLeod comments on her ability to twist and tame such potentially dangerous emotions by referencing George Mandler's "Mind and Body," stating that;

According to Mandler, emotional experience consists of two factors, one physiological, the other cognitive. When an emotion occurs, the autonomic nervous system is activated (the familiar 'gut' response: a knot in the stomach, a quickened pulse, a heightened awareness of external stimuli). There is also a cognitive interpretation of this visceral arousal

according to past experience or current situation; this interpretation makes sense of the physical agitation, evaluating the physiological evidence either positively or negatively (McLeod 431).

In other words, when we start to feel anxious, we recall circumstances in the past when we have been anxious that did not play out well, so we start to panic, and in panicking we create a self-fulfilling prophecy that often leads to unnecessary pain and writer's block.

In regards to this specific theory, McLeod feels, "If Mandler is right, we can tell students that all writers are agitated as they compose, and that they can learn to find that agitation enabling rather than debilitating" (433). Alice G. Brand supports McLeod in her article, "The Why of Cognition: Emotion and the Writing Process," claiming "a realistic and complete psychology of writing must include affective as well as cognitive phenomena." She and McLeod both agree that there is a lack of conclusive research on the emotional and affective aspect of the writing process. Brand points out that while there is a lack of research on the roles and effects of specific emotional phenomena in writing, other researchers do make mention of the existence of specific emotions common to the writing process such as "apathy, anxiety, disequilibrium, alienation, despair, and commitment," but stop short at doing a more thorough exploration of the full range of their implications (438). However, significant studies on writer's block, the most common effect of these emotions, have been conducted with salient results.

Robert Boice is one such analyst, publishing studies on writer's block, including his findings on the "The Six Most Common Causes and Cures" of writer's block in the *Journal of Higher Education*. He includes in his six causes *censors, fears of failure, perfectionism, early experience, procrastination, and mental health*. He posits that

internal censors are the single most common cause of writer's block, saying that writer's block is "marked by an anxious self-consciousness" (20), and that "blockers suffer from having accepted and exaggerated the warnings of teachers, parents, and other authority figures" (25). He recommends *Automacity*, which he defines as "writing with a reduced awareness of what is being written," stating, "The success of this method for generating momentum and ideas for writing lies in its effortless, unself-conscious, and self-revealing products" (30). Automacity, much like stream of consciousness writing, helps to effectively breach the emotional barriers to fluently composing that writers erect in their minds. It is then possible to assume that utilizing automacity when writing could lead to the discovery of buried knowledge, a more defined and original narrative voice, and non-linear logic that may contribute greatly to the enjoyment of writing for students who struggle with pains of criticism and fear of audience.

McLeod notes that many studies have pointed to the crippling effects on the writing process, like writer's block, that emotions can have. She sums up the general understanding about such emotions as "negative, anxious feelings (about oneself as a writer, one's writing situation, or one's writing task) [sic] disrupt some part of the writing process" (427). Taking a different approach, however, McLeod points out that, "emotions can be enabling as well as crippling" (428). Much of what determines the effects of any emotion, but especially something as acute as pain, is perception. Take, for example, the prevalence in our country of giving anesthesia to women in labor. In the United States, it is culturally understood that childbirth will be painful. We are socialized practically from birth to associate childbirth with such great trauma that it is almost unconceivable to give birth in the US without medical intervention that includes some form of anesthesia. This,

however, is unique to our cultural disposition and the culturally-specific way that we are taught to interpret this particular pain stimulus. Pain philosopher and theorist, Melzack, points out that:

Anthropologists have observed cultures in which the women show virtually no distress during childbirth. In some of these cultures a woman who is going to have a baby continues to work in the fields until the child is about to be born. Her husband then gets into bed and groans as though he were in great pain while she bears the child. The husband stays in bed with the baby to recover from the terrible ordeal he has just gone through, and the mother almost immediately returns to attend to the crops. (Pitcher 490)

Melzack explains this and similar phenomena with a “physiological theory of pain-perception based on the idea of a gate-control system and of the brain’s ability to modify its operation” (Pitcher 488). Melzack and his colleague, Wall, supply a multitude of examples to illustrate the gate-control principle that in some ways resemble the attitudes surrounding the writing process, especially college writers.

One such example involves;

Hospitalized soldiers, not in shock but severely wounded in battle [that] deny feeling any pain or claim to feel enough to need pain-killers, while civilians who have undergone surgery involving incisions very similar to the wounds usually suffer great pain and require medication to relieve it. (Pitcher 490)

Melzack credits this strange, but not uncommon, occurrence to a key difference in the meaning of injury and perception of the pain that accompanies it between the soldier and the civilian:

In the wounded soldier the response to injury was relief, thankfulness at his escape alive from the battlefield, even euphoria; to the civilian, his major surgery was a depressing, calamitous event. (Pitcher 490)

Perhaps the fact that many college students self-medicate when faced with the pain of writing is due to their conditioned fear and anticipated pain in the writing process.

Another such example would be prizefighters who become severely injured during a fight but do not notice it at all until the fight is over. This feature of the gate-control theory may explain why college writers are often able to forego sleep for dangerous amounts of time when caught up in the ‘prizefighting’ aspect of writing a good paper. Indeed, writing a good paper is a battle of sorts. It is not surprising then that the battle of writing has similar effects on the mind and body as an actual physical fight.

If we examine creative writers especially, the idea of writers “battling” with themselves, their environment, and their writing becomes not only more prevalent, but also more romanticized. The difference between creative writers and writers who do not identify themselves as such could have something to do with their understanding of their writing as “art” and themselves as “artists.” In a culture that has perpetuated expectations for artists to be “tortured” by glorifying the tragic elements of popular artists’ lives since the Romantic era (Acocella 111), it is not difficult to understand why many student creative writers identify so strongly with the painful elements of their craft.

There are several facets of the “tortured artist” identity, however, that can not be written off as purely the indulgent results of a greater self-absorption. Creative writers often put a special emphasis on word choice and the meticulous assembly of complex metaphors to accurately communicate the stuff of “private language.” This heightened sense of self-awareness while writing often leads to monumental blocks in creative writers. What is worse is that often as the creative writer grows older, more experienced, and more attuned to recognizing excellence in writing, their level of self-consciousness intensifies to a point that makes it too painful to compose creative works entirely. In describing the French Symbolists, a famous group of writers including Mallarmé, Rimbaud, and Paul Valéry among others, who all experienced crippling blocks after writing for less than a decade, Joan Acocella comments: “To them, the problem was with language; how to get past its vague cliché-crammed character and arrive at the actual nature of experience. They needed a scalpel, they felt, and they were given a mallet” (111). Wordsworth and Coleridge are two examples of Romantic poets who produced brilliant work in the first ten years of their careers and then slowly became completely unable to write creatively. Coleridge described this phenomenon by saying that poets “begin in gladness... Resolution and independence... But thereof come in the end despondency and madness” (Acocella 111). Looking back on these tragic cases of stifled creative voice, Boice and other modern writing theorists would have most likely recommended automacity to these writers in order to get them to transcend the pain of suffocating self-revision. Famous 19th century novelist, Trollope, overcame this same predicament by setting aside three hours every morning in which he disciplined himself to write 250 words every fifteen minutes. He credits this technique for allowing him to

publish forty-nine novels in thirty-five years, and even advised fellow writers in his autobiography, saying: “Let their work be to them as is his common work to the common laborer. No gigantic efforts will then be necessary. He need tie no wet towels round his brow, nor sit for thirty hours at his desk without moving, --as men have sat, or said they have sat” (Acocella 111).

In addition to having a risky disposition to self-consciousness, perfectionism, and writer’s block, creative writers also tend to depend on powerful emotions and the experiences that elicit them to provide the inspiration for their work. As novelist Catherine Munch points out; “the tragic events in our lives and the emotions they evoke are grist for the writer’s mill” (17). However, there is a popular misconception that a creative writer ought to write while experiencing the pain of these emotions or events. To the contrary, it has been documented that famous writers with seasonal affective disorder and manic depression, which would put them at a special disposition to be in touch with those intense emotions during the depressive state of their illness, could not compose while in the grips of a depressive state. It was their ability to draw vividly from those states when they were not acutely depressed that enabled the brilliance of their writing. If creative writing teachers could make an explicit point of this, it could very well save many aspiring creative writers from depending on overwhelming emotional experiences to inspire their writing. Furthermore, if creative writing teachers could shift the stress of experiencing tragic emotions to observing them and drawing from those observations, then the creative writer could ostensibly avoid tragedy while still having full access to it as a source of inspiration.

The last and most devastating attribute of creative writing as an art form for “tortured artists” is its unique demand for “flow” or being “in the zone.” Achieving flow or getting in the zone is what is commonly understood by writers as the ability to fluidly channel an inner narrative voice, and usually entails a higher level of output and inspired, poetic, or lyrical language. This is generally due to the fact that most poets and creative writers hold the view that they cannot find that inner narrative voice, it must find them. This view has origins that stem all the way back to the Romantic poets who:

...came to see poetry as something externally, and magically, conferred. In Shelley’s words, “A man cannot say, ‘I will compose poetry.’ Poetry was the product of “some invisible influence, like an inconstant wind,” which more or less blew the material into the poet, and he just had to wait for this to happen. (Acocella 110)

Unfortunately, this view was then adopted wholeheartedly by the Beat poets of the mid-twentieth century who added to it a new level of danger: the use of narcotic and hallucinatory drugs to enable flow. Drugs were not only a way for tricking a skittish narrative voice out of hiding, they were also a way of giving the writer easy access to intense, painful emotions without having to wait for natural circumstances to put the writer in touch with them. Drug use among creative writers remains prevalent, and is perpetuated by the glorification of addiction in popular authors like Charles Bukowski, William Burroughs, and Hunter S. Thompson. The difference between these authors and manic depressives such as Sylvia Plath is that often these modern authors are not just drawing from painful experiences when they write, they are actively using intoxicants and the resulting pain and disorientation, while writing to enable their unique narrative

voices. Although this fact must not be ignored in creative writing classes, as their contributions were significant and perhaps would not have been possible if it were not for the drugs, it is vital to stress that many of these writers risked their ability to *craft* their writing by sacrificing brain function as a result of drug use. It is important to delineate that creative writing is a craft first and foremost, and that it must be carefully developed if the writer ever hopes to use his or her inspiration to its fullest potential. However, this approach does not cover the problem of flow. While perhaps flow is something that cannot be taught, there are more effective ways of teasing it out than using drugs or feeling depressed.

Writing pedagogy theorist, James Moffett, suggests meditation as a dependable way to channel the voice of “inner speech.” Moffett accepts a modern, cerebral definition of meditation: “to turn over in the mind, reflect on” (235), and recommends several different techniques, such as breathing exercises, and “pleasantly monotonous craft activities like knitting and weaving... [that] tend to ‘entrance’ the ordinary mind and constitute a natural kind of meditation” (245). Moffett mentions several different meditation techniques and discusses how each one of them could benefit a specific aspect of writing. To aid the conceptualization phase of composition, Moffett recommends a subtle but powerful form of meditation he calls *visualization*:

The meditator closes his eyes and transfers the image inward to the middle of the forehead. Alternately gazing outward and visualizing inward teaches one to develop inner attention and imagination without forcing verbalization. Other pure visualization meditations can follow. Staying focused either in or out frees the meditator a while from the excitations of

the environment and lets him or her feel the strength of the self, the deeper self that abides at least somewhat independently of the outside. Writing presupposes just such inner strength. A writer of whatever age has to feel full of herself and have a degree of confidence, belief that she has something to say, faith in her will, and control of her attention. Gazing and visualizing, finally, develop *vision* – seeing and perceiving in both outer and inner prerequisite for writing. (236)

To facilitate composition, Moffett suggests a “meditation technique [that] consists of letting inner speech flow spontaneously but also of *witnessing* it. Instead of floating along on this stream and being borne away from the center of the self, one sits on the bank, so to speak, and watches it flow by, staying separate from it, not trying to influence it, but above all not being “carried away by it” (236). Although Moffett does advocate certain forms of meditation to assuage specific pains of writing, it is important to not lose sight of his key argument; that meditation is primarily a form of deep self-reflection that is vital for writers to use to develop confidence, clarity, and voice.

Joann Campbell of Indiana University backs Moffett, and explores the implications of incorporating meditation into traditional writing pedagogy in her essay “Writing to Heal: Using Meditation in the Writing Process” [or italics]. Campbell points out that meditation, as a healing exercise, is something that writing educators feel is inappropriate and beyond their qualifications to teach. “‘Healing’ is rarely heard in academic discussions of writing and teaching, perhaps because is it has become the province of those credentialized to heal: physicians, psychologists, perhaps ministers – but surely not writing teachers.” (Campbell 247) Campbell even expresses some anxiety

about being using the word “heal” in her essay, saying that she was warned; “I could be sued for claiming something that I could not deliver” (247). However, with the prevalence of psychiatric writing therapy utilizing the therapeutic power of keeping a diary, chronicling feelings and transferring them from inside the patient to the safety of the page where they can be quantified, analyzed, and dealt with, which is a necessary element of detachment instrumental in making objective decisions about subjective stimuli. But why is it that the self-determined therapeutic nature of writing should be left for the doctor to prescribe when it has been scientifically proven that “those subjects who had written about their thoughts and feelings about traumatic experiences evidenced significant improvement in immune function” (Campbell 247)? It may be true that writing can put the writer in touch with unacknowledged pains, some of them possibly acute, even excruciating, but this is the very crux of our argument: if writing teachers worked to teach their students how to effectively work through and utilize pain in writing, then it seems definite that those pain experiences could be used as an overwhelmingly positive experience of growth.

Furthermore, there is a religious association with meditation that makes it seem wholly out of place, and politically risky in modern secular classrooms. Campbell notes:

Perhaps the continued exclusion of meditation as a classroom practice is based in part on a distrust of the idea of a “deep” self so often sought by the meditating personal seeker. Swami Muktananda, for example, writes, “We do not attain the Self through spiritual practices, because the Self is already attained. The Self is already with us. Just as the sun cannot be separated from its light, the Self cannot be separated from us.” The

capitalized “Self” seems to indicate a singular essence at the core of each individual, similar to that valorized by many advocates of expressive writing... In postmodern theory, this idea of transpersonal unity is not possible or desirable, and instead difference is foregrounded... [But] Because religious groups have historically suppressed differences, with tragic consequences, in the name of a single path to God, any technique used by religion seems suspect to some. (249)

However, meditation is not only relegated to religious use, and even within that specific application, it is non-denominational (Christians and Muslims “pray,” Buddhists “meditate,” but both are essentially engaging in the same activity). Perhaps if the term “meditation” was dropped in favor of something less politicized, such as “reflection” or “deep-thinking exercise,” then this unnecessary roadblock would become a non-issue.

So with this discussion of applying meditation as a technique of pain management, transcendence, and transformation to writing pedagogy, we are beginning to draw to a synthesis. Several key implications are borne of acknowledging the symbiosis between student and teacher of writing in teaching meditation as a personal tool for overcoming pain by facilitating writing, as well as preventing possible pain by giving writers a means of finding narrative voice without the risks of using mind-altering substances or depending on tragic life-events. It works to exemplify the existence of pain throughout the writing process, as well as a pronounced need for recognition of this pain, and more so, for the development of techniques to appropriately utilize, cauterize, or transcend this same pain in modern writing pedagogies.

Unsurprisingly, student-run writing centers could prove to be the epicenter of actualization. If writing is a conversation with oneself that is necessary for the realization of vital pain sensations in to order to effectively process them, then expanding that conversation would ostensibly increase the efficiency and effectiveness of later processing. This idea is not new. Robert Boice comments on the positive effects of collaboration on blocked writers in the professional academic community:

First, they report that writing is transformed from an essentially reclusive activity to a more sociable enterprise. Not only do former blockers specify ways in which they improve their writing by means of collegial feedback on early drafts. But they also note the sharing of information about writing skills. (43-44)

Joann Campbell also weighs on the enormous benefits of keeping an open dialogue about painful writing as well as the pain sensations involved with writing, and takes it one step further to incorporate group meditation as another way to aid the process.

Meditation and writing often work well in conferences with individual blocked or apprehensive writers. For instance, over the course of four meetings, Marianne, a graduate student I worked with, began to get past her writing block only after she saw her dissertation director in a meditation and continued writing the dialogue with him she started there. Our conversations and further meditations helped her change her working habits so that she was able to write daily, to use a different voice in her writing, to include personal information for an academic audience, and to finish her project in time to submit it for publication. (250-251)

Conversations in writing centers could start as a simple dialogue of how a student is feeling about a given piece. From thereon, questions about exact emotions, images, and sensations in connection to their piece could give the writing tutor further indication of how to implement the appropriate techniques to manage, utilize, transcend or transform the writer's pain (whether its automacity for blocks, visualization for pains in conceptualization, etc.). The first and most important step, however, is to put the conversation on the table. Maybe then we could push for a new holistic pedagogy that would give equal attention to the technical, as well as affective, sensorial aspects of the writing process. It is inevitable, of course, that even with these necessary developments, the next generation of student writers will still hurt. We can but hope that these new pedagogies will give future students the ability to view the pain in writing not as a pain of decay, of death, but as a pain of growth, of *enlightenment*.

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