



The Mind and the Self: A Preliminary Analysis of Handbooks Written by Women and Men on How to Write Fiction from 1900-1940

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America experienced revolutionary cultural shifts during the first few decades of the 1900s. There was the beginning and end of a first world war, the rise of first-wave feminism, and a proliferation of fiction accounting for these cultural shifts published in various magazines. As popularity for fiction grew, so too did writers' abilities to make money writing it, establishing the writing of fiction as a viable career for both men and women. With the stability of writing as a career, there developed a general curiosity in how best to write fiction, which led to, by the 1920s, creative writing finding its way first into primary education at the Lincoln School and then higher education at the University of Iowa (Mearns; Myers). Growing alongside the popularity of fiction writing were books on how best to write and publish it. By the 1940s, there was no shortage of books in America on how to write fiction. There were books on how best to revise your work for publication (Hamilton); books on the importance of emotional value to the success of written fiction (Reeve); and books on methods of producing literature as opposed to more commercial writing (Williams), among others. Not surprisingly, many of the books written on how to write fiction were authored by men. However, despite the prevalence of male-authored books on how to write fiction, there were, during this span of time, a growing number of books written by women, and it's within some of those texts that lies a unique distinction between the ways some male and female authors wrote about how best to write fiction. A preliminary look at a selection of books published on how to write fiction written by women from 1900-1940 are different from those written by men¹ in three primary ways—1) the way women discuss the role of writers' minds on writing fiction; 2) the role of self-reflection in writing; and 3) whether or not creative writing is teachable. By analyzing the relationship of these three distinctions throughout the rest of this essay, an interesting detail emerges. It appears the origin of the men's fiction, either consciously or unconsciously, is believed

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to begin with others and the world outside of writers themselves, while the women of this study purport that fiction begins from within. This difference creates an inconsistency in how the men and women of this study discuss the function of the mind in writing fiction, the fiction writing process, and whether creative writing can be taught.

When women in this study write about the effect of writers' minds on the work they produce—the first quality of difference in this piece—, they do so in internal and self-reflexive ways. More specifically, the women encourage writers to reflect on their own practices and thinking processes, arguing writers' psyches are the origin of their work. My observations align with those of Alexandria Peary, who notes that the texts of some women cited here (texts she refers to as self-help texts) represent writing “as a matter of human nature rather than of specialization” (“Taking” 90). Conversely, when emphasizing the effect of writers' minds on the work they produce, the male authors in this study tend to encourage writers to reflect on how exterior factors affect authors' minds and writing processes. These exterior factors include but are not limited to the study of other creative texts, the pursuit of formal education on writing, or studying psychology.

The second distinguishing quality of the women's work is their attention to the self. As with the women authors' interest in writers studying their own minds to better comprehend their writing process, and unlike much of the work consulted by the men, a number of the women prioritize the inner ability, skill, and even soul of writers as their source of writing, in turn making the act of writing accessible to anyone who wishes to do it. However, as with the mind, the male writers emphasize an understanding of the exterior world as the source of writing and encourage writers to familiarize themselves with that world over focusing on introspection.

Finally, perhaps the most pivotal distinction between the male and female writers in this study is that the male writers were the only ones to assert that some or all of creative writing could not be taught. The end result of this project, then, is evidence of a distinction between how some men and women wrote about how best to write fiction in America during a time when the very act, especially in the genre of short fiction, was proliferating on the continent in a way it hadn't to that point. With that said, to understand the affordances and contributions this article offers the current discourse of creative writing studies (CWS), it's important to note, no matter how briefly, it's situatedness within the literature on the subject.

EARLY 20TH CENTURY WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CREATIVE WRITING AND WHETHER OR NOT IT CAN BE TAUGHT

Studying books on writing used both inside and outside the classroom to see the impacts

they have or do not have on education, students, or the teaching of writing is now a common tradition that goes at least as far back as Robert Connors' 1986 article in *College Composition and Communication* (CCC), entitled "Textbooks and the Evolution of a Discipline". Eleven years later, Connors wrote *Composition-Rhetoric: Backgrounds, Theory, and Pedagogy*, which has a substantial chapter on the effects of textbooks on the teaching of writing composition in American higher education. There have been other books as well, like Carr et al.'s *Archives of Instruction*—an exegesis and critical evaluation of the influence of textbooks on American composition courses—and articles like that written by Alexandria Peary, which investigates the use of figurative language in textbooks to determine the possible misunderstood yet symbiotic relationship between composition and creative writing ("Licensing").

Though in the field of composition studies, scholars like Connors and Carr et al. have provided nuanced reviews of many textbooks and their relationship to the education of students in academic writing classes, the same has not yet been done in creative writing. With that said, the topic has not at all been ignored and has, instead of being published in complete works focused solely on investigating the relationship of textbooks' effects on student writers, generally been included in manuscripts as a part of a larger discussion of writing studies. Take Anne Ruggles Gere's, *Writing Groups: History, Theory, and Implications* as one example. Despite the fact that the book itself is about how writing groups (often creative in nature) outside of the academy impacted the evolution of writing education inside of the academy, there are also times when she notes the importance that texts and access to texts played in helping writers in writing groups develop their expertise, one such case being where literary groups established their own libraries to supplement the dearth of sources available to them from their university and college libraries (12). Likewise, in both *A Group of Their Own: College Writing Courses and American Women Writers, 1880-1940* and *A History of Writing Instruction in American Colleges* Katherine H. Adams mentions the role of handbooks in the development of writers and student writers, though neither text is wholly about the effect of handbooks in the way Connors' or Carr et al.'s work is. Though there is no book-length review of handbooks and their effects on creative writing, there have been individual articles that have analyzed the topic in pointed and intentional ways, two such examples being Peary's "The Licensing of the Poetic in Nineteenth-Century Composition-Rhetoric Textbooks" and "Taking Self-Help Books Seriously: The Informal Aesthetic Education of Writers." As is the case for these sources, this article contributes to the on-going conversation concerning the intricate nexus of writing, culture, and how books on how to write might relate to both.

While this essay contributes to discourse on the affects of writing handbooks in creative writing, it also (and perhaps more importantly) adds new insights on the study of gender, writing handbooks, and creative writing. Gere's and Adam's work attest to the quantity and quality of scholarship on

the role of women in college writing courses, creative writing courses not excluded, but in neither of their works is there a comparative analysis done between the writing of men and women to see what might be garnered. More specific to this article, even, is Peary's analysis of self-help books and the extracurriculum, where she analyzes the writing of both Brenda Ueland and Dorthea Brande ("Taking"). The work of both women is reviewed here but with a slightly different approach, which sheds new light on the discourse surrounding the role of women and their writing on how creative writing might be taught, written, or understood. I consider this project to be a direct response to Peary's astute observation that "Despite the benefits to formal education, academia has not made optimal use of that other strand of the extracurriculum: self-help literature", literature that includes the women's work cited here ("Taking" 88).

Finally, this article, in small part, contributes new insights on the "teachability" of creative writing. The teachability of creative writing stems back at least to Longinus' *On the Sublime*, the first text I'm aware of that puts in print that great writing cannot be taught. Because I have already addressed it elsewhere, in detail, the contentious nature concerning the teachability of creative writing within the fields of creative writing and creative writing studies, I will refrain from doing so here and simply note that, though the discussion of whether or not creative writing is teachable begins with *On the Sublime*; it is still debated by creative writers and teachers of creative writing to this day, especially in the United States (James). With that said, the new addition this article brings to that debate is the acknowledgement that no woman cited here suggests creative writing is unteachable. In this work, it is only men who put so in print. This distinction is novel in the discussion of teachability in creative writing and opens a new channel of investigation and discourse to those exploring the lineage of the discussion within the fields of creative writing and creative writing studies.

EARLY 20TH CENTURY FEMALE WRITERS AND WRITERS' MINDS

To begin to understand some differences in how the men and women writers in this research discussed the role of the human mind in the creation of fiction between the times of 1900-1940, one might start with the work of Dorothea Brande. Her book *Becoming a Writer*, still in print today, was published in 1934, well after Freud advanced his theory of the unconscious mind but still while the discussion was prevalent.² Like Freud, who believed the unconscious housed our most natural proclivities and instincts, Brande trusted the most natural elements of us as individual artists were housed in our unconscious minds. Because she believed the origin of great writing was internal to each writer, Brande voiced discontent with most how-to texts written in her time and felt they were a primary reason why young authors spent too much time learning craft and technique instead of learning how they, as

individual writers, produce writing, a distinction Brande notes as teaching a student “how to write” versus teaching a student “how to be a writer.” Learning how to be a writer,” she assures, “is quite another thing” than learning how to write (16-17). Brande notes this focus on craft leads writers to “buy or borrow every book with ‘fiction’ in the title . . . [or to] read any symposium by authors in which they tell their methods of work” (5-6). To Brande, this early focus on technique was especially problematic because she felt there were four great difficulties novice writers face, and none could be taught through technique because each of the four problems were a “problem in the writer’s personality rather than a defect in his technical equipment” (15). In short, Brande argued that before trying to develop command of the skills and techniques of writing craft, writers must know how they write and why. Brande maintained this position because she felt the source and ultimate success of writers began with themselves, while a command of codified rules and traditions of writing comes afterward. For Brande, the ultimate source of writing for writers is the unconscious:

There is a great field of technical knowledge which the writer can study, many short-cuts to effectiveness which can be learned by taking thought. Yet on the whole it is the unconscious which will decide on both the form and the matter of the work which you are planning, and which will, if you can learn to rely on it, give you a far better and more convincing result if you are not continually meddling with its process and imposing on it your own notions of the plausible, the desirable, the persuasive, according to some formula which you have painstakingly extracted from a work on the technique of fiction, or laboriously plotted out for yourself from long study of stories in print. (123-124)

It’s evident, here, that Brande highly valued a writer’s unconscious as the primary source of great writing. Yet, she also highlights the importance writers play in shaping the affect the unconscious has on their work when arguing that writers must “learn to rely on it [the unconscious]” if they want to truly utilize their unconscious during the writing process (124). In order to aid writers in understanding the role of the unconscious in their writing, Brande discusses methods writers can use to tap into their unconscious. The first method, as basic as it might seem, is to refer to the unknown functions of the deeper mind as the *unconscious* and not *subconscious*, for Brande felt that to consider the unknown portion of the brain as *sub* makes it subordinate or inferior to the conscious mind, and nothing, she felt, could be further from the truth, especially when it comes to writing fiction (121-122).

The second step Brande suggests involves the relationship between writers and their unconscious. Peary notes that Brande’s work and others’ like hers calls for writers to focus on “the unconscious,” listen “to an inner voice,” and develop a “trusting relationship with the self” (“Taking” 91). This focus was meant to harmonize both the conscious and unconscious portions of the mind,

for though Brande discouraged relegating the unconscious to the conscious, she also did not encourage a permanent focus on the unconscious because, though the focus on the unconscious is imperative for growth in novice writers, more experienced writers, meaning those comfortable with the role of the unconscious in their writing, must blend what is generated by the unconscious with the conscious efforts of writing. Brand argues, “The unconscious is shy, elusive and unwieldy, but it is possible to learn to tap it at will, and even to direct it. The conscious mind is meddlesome, opinionated and arrogant, but it can be made subservient to the inborn talent through training” (29). To Brande, the marriage between these separate parts are imperative for the writer, for “The unconscious will provide the writer with ‘types’ of all kinds—typical characters, typical scenes, typical emotional responses; the conscious will have the task of deciding which of these are too personal, too purely idiosyncratic to be material for art, and which of them are universal enough to be useful,” a process that begins not with what writers consciously know but by “hitch[ing] your unconscious mind to your writing arm” (Brande 26, 47).

A third way Brande discusses writers utilize the unconscious in their work is to tap into it through various writing practices and experimentations that might lead to writers understanding their unique methods of practice. One method she discusses is the artistic coma (124). Though Brande admits it can be different from writer to writer, the artistic coma is a seemingly uncreative period of time where a writer produces no new work—or may not even be thinking of writing at all—but trusts (and often later discerns) that “*something*” is at work (Brande 124). These non-creative moments might consist of “solitude” and silence, self-reflection, and the like and can be induced, Brande argues, by a kind of meditative practice, though they don’t have to be. In Brande’s equation, the artistic coma is a kind of incubation period for the unconscious and should be embraced by writers instead of feared or forced away through the perceived need to produce writing when it’s still too early to do so (Brande 124, 138).

What’s pertinent to note about Brande’s discussion of the conscious and unconscious mind, their marriage through the act of writing, and the artistic coma is that all are writer-centric and have little to do with the external world. This distinction is crucial in distinguishing Brande’s work from her male counterparts because it places the act of producing great writing in nearly anyone’s hands. While discussing the travails of many writing students, Brande writes, “In the opening lecture, within the first few pages of his [the student’s] book, within a sentence of his authors’ symposium he will be told rather shortly that ‘genius cannot be taught’; and there goes his hope glimmering . . . He had longed to hear that there *was* some magic about writing, and to be initiated into the brotherhood of authors”

(5-6). Here, Brande highlights (against most of her male counterparts) the still very common belief that great writing cannot be taught, that great writers are born and not made. Brande's book itself is a vehement response to such a belief. She writes, "This book, I believe, will be unique; for I think he [the student] is right. I think there is such a magic, and that it is teachable. This book is all about the writer's magic," and though she uses the word magic (somewhat facetiously, I think), what she proposes is not magic at all (6). It's thinking of writing, in part, as a method of reflective practice, one which makes the belief in achieving great writing a more equitable one. Brande summarizes this best when writing, "The author has at his command, in the mere exercise of stringent honesty, the best source of consistency for his own work," for:

No one else was born of your parents, at just that time of just that country's history, no one underwent just your experiences, reached just your conclusion, or faces the world with the exact set of ideas that you must have. If you can come to such friendly terms with yourself that you are able and willing to say precisely what you think of any given situation or character, if you can tell a story as it can appear only to you of all the people on earth, you will inevitably have a piece of work which is original . . . Every writer must turn to himself to find most of his material. (93-97)

Unlike the work by male authors, Brande forwards a method of learning to write that is inclusive and not exclusive, productive and not reductive, and she was not alone in her efforts.

Like Brande, Margaret Widdemer also prioritized writers' minds as the primary source of great writing, and she encouraged writers to explore that source in order to familiarize themselves with how they create (as opposed to write) their fiction. As a case in point, early in her book, Widdemer reminds readers,

Your mind is—you will remember that the psychology books say—like an iceberg; one-eighth of it sticks up in the conscious; the other seven-eighths are below the surface of consciousness. You use a great deal of the undersurface part always in your writing. But the shape is you; it is the thing that will make your writing different and original. (14)

What this passage shows is that very early in her work, Widdemer takes an apparent interest in convincing her readers of the palpable importance of understanding that most of what they produce as writers comes from within. This sentiment is expressed again, many pages later, when she notes, "It is what is in *you*, that sends your own story down its own road" (47). Understanding Widdemer's allegiance to the large, submerged portion of writers' minds is integral to both understanding her work and in relating it to the larger discourse of women writing about how to write fiction from 1900-1940. Though it's easy to align Widdemer's work with that of Brande's, Widdemer, like

Brande, had her own vision of how best writers could work with the conscious and unconscious minds to create great fiction, a method she detailed in her book *Do You Want to Write?*

Widdemer begins her work by suggesting the entirety of the writing process is developed through the mastery of three writing tools: “*creative urge*,” “*creative instinct*,” and “*the sense of literary value*” (4-5). From here, Widdemer situates the unfolding of the three tools in two primary stages. She notes,

There are really two stages to writing. First, having the idea (or fact or incident) possess you enough to drive you to shaping it into a piece of original work. This is the creative instinct at work. Second, the act of actual shaping—turning the piece of work into words on paper. That’s technique. (7)

Similar to Brande, Widdemer divides the stages of the writing process into those that are internal—creative urge and creative instinct—and external—the sense of literary value—and though she notes the importance of the second stage of developing a piece of writing, it’s the first stage, where creative urge and creative instinct occur, that makes great writing possible (62). The importance the first stage of writing holds for Widdemer is made evident early in the book, when she confesses, “What I hope to do in this book is to assist you to methods of translating into written actuality the creation which was so beautiful and perfect in your mind before you got it on paper” (7). What’s vital to notice in these passages is that Widdemer separates a writer’s creation from the written artifact. This distinction is significant because to Widdemer the *writing* is not the *creation*. The creation comes first, and when writers can learn to inspire, tap into, or become comfortable with the workings of that creative source, then they can use external processes to articulate the creation through the act of writing. This emphasis on the internal generation (the creation) being the crux of great writing is made especially clear when Widdemer states, “All the rules, all the definitions, remember, were deduced *after* the things they applied to were made” (20). What Widdemer is arguing here, then, is that the creation, the thing to be made, must come to fruition *before* structure is applied, before the writing begins, insisting that great writing starts from within writers and not outside them.

By placing the origin of great writing within the unconscious, Widdemer, like Brande, extends the ability to write to nearly anyone³. The assumption that those who apply themselves are capable of writing well was not generally accepted by the males in this project who authored books on how to write fiction from 1900-1940. These males’ perspectives that essential elements of writing well were not teachable or were inborn has had a lasting impact on how the world perceives the process of writing creatively. For example, it was once believed,

and is sometimes still, that great writing comes from some exterior source, such as a god, inborn genius, or some other unidentifiable point of origin (Gilbert). Because of this traditional belief, it is still perceived that not everyone can be a writer (Donnelly 45; Mayers 115). However, despite a body of work that leads to this paradigm, Widdemer claims the source of great writing comes from human qualities we all possess. For example, most of us have creative urges of some kind, at least from time to time. In addition, we possess creative instinct, even if it is not to write or create art, and everyone can be inspired. Even one of Widdemer's tools, a sense of literary value, which could be perceived as writers' understanding of literary techniques, theory, or criticism, is actually "the gift which makes you able to tell (or write, which may not be the same thing) funny stories so that people laugh; dramatic ones so that they are moved. It is the capacity for knowing the point of what you tell and being able to make others know it too" (5). In short, a sense of literary value, as Widdemer defines it, is not necessarily a value developed from a *formal* understanding of an exterior work like, say, literature with a capital "L". Instead, literary value is writers' ability to notice about their work what moves others when encountering it, making a sense of literary value a writerly process of reflection that occurs between action, spoken production or written artifact, and human reaction to that production or artifact, a reflection that, inevitably, acts as a kind of feedback loop that, upon rumination, enlightens writers so that they might further develop their skills. The encouragement by these women for writers to look within themselves to become great artists means that, to them, writing belongs to everyone, not just the highly educated, the rich, or those touched by the muse. This distinction is a stark contrast with much of their male counterparts in this study, which often encouraged vast understandings of influences outside writers themselves and supported a general acceptance that the ability to create great writing was inborn.

EARLY 20TH CENTURY MALE WRITERS AND WRITERS' MINDS

Like the women already cited, the male writers in this study also wrote about the importance of the human mind in relation to the production of fiction, though the topic is often discussed quite differently. For example, in *The Story of a Novel*, Thomas Wolfe discusses the role of writers' minds in forming their fiction. Wolfe asks, "Where does the material of an artist come from?", to which he answers, "All serious creative work must be at bottom autobiographical, and that man must use the material and experience of his own life if he is to create anything that has substantial value" (19, 21). While taking an autobiographical stance on the origin of fiction, Wolfe is also quick to note that, despite the imminent influence of the exterior world on the work of the writer, "Everything in a work of art is changed and transfigured by the personality of the artist" as well (22). There are two details of Wolfe's framework that stand out. First, for Wolfe, the source of fiction is predicated by the outside world. Second, the outside world depicted through fiction is comprised of authors' lived experiences, experiences they can identify, manipulate, and utilize. Take Wolfe's explication

of youth's influence on the writing process as a cogent example. He notes that when writing, the young writer is likely "to confuse the limits between actuality and reality. He tends unconsciously to describe an event in such a way because it actually happened that way, and from an artistic point of view, I can now see that this is wrong" (21). To clarify his position, Wolfe employs the example that if a young writer meets a "young woman of easy virtue" who is from Kentucky and wants to write about her that he will feel "'She must be described as coming from Kentucky because that is where she actually did come from'" (21, 22). In this instance, the unconscious has no real role in Wolfe's framework. Instead of working with writing and the writing process to connect the unconscious with artistic production, Wolfe implies that, instead, the mind's gaining of wisdom aids writers in understanding how their art is made. Wolfe's framework, then, suggests there is a clear connection between the writer, reality, and the artifact resulting from that relationship, and, once it is identified, it can be mastered. Like the women already cited, Wolfe argues artists are pertinent to the work they create; however, Wolfe's framework accounts for a level of cognitive awareness simply not available to people when dealing with their unconscious minds. The unconscious, by its very nature, absconds most or all human control and understanding, especially initially, when it would be producing the material meant to become fiction. When the women writers cited here discuss the unconscious mind at this stage, they discuss an unconscious that manifests more like an instinct, one that is meant to be allowed to play out however it sees fit, one that is to be analyzed only later, after the unconscious function is exhausted.

Though Wolfe didn't directly address writers' minds in the way that Widdemer or Brande did, some male authors writing books on how to write fiction did directly address writers' minds, Arthur Hoffman's *The Writing of Fiction* being just one example. Hoffman's work was a staple text on how to write fiction in its day. In it, Hoffman details the importance of authors familiarizing themselves with the functions and processes of their writing minds. However, in order for writers to understand the workings of their writing minds, Hoffman suggests they look to the field of psychology. Hoffman argues, though "We need not be technical psychologists to understand and use these urges in writing fiction. . . . [.] we must have a broad and general understanding of its principles and a solid grasp of the main forces at work in fiction" (97, 100). While Hoffman's focus on human psychology was rare among popular books on how to write fiction written by men during the time and is, therefore, unique in its own right, it's important to note that Hoffman encourages writers to study the outside world first, then turn their observations inward to learn about themselves, while the women writers in this study ask writers to start their investigations internally and apply what is learned externally.

Though Hoffman's line of thought regarding fiction and psychology was uncommon, he

was not the only man championing the importance of relating psychology and creative writing. In fact, years before, Walter B. Pitkin took an interest in literary psychology, starting in the first decade of the 1900s and continuing for another fifty years. Pitkin's *The Art and Business of Story Writing*, his first text on the subject, argues that there are a series of techniques writers can use to generate good fiction, and many of those techniques derive from an interaction with and understanding of human psychology as showcased through the actions of individuals and humanity as both proceed through time and space. Pitkin's focus on psychology, as well as his different approach to considering the writing of fiction, is evidenced early when he argues that writing good fiction "is impossible without a thorough, though perhaps very much restricted, knowledge of the mind's workings and of the world it works over" (VIII). In order to develop such a knowledge, Pitkin ushered writers away from those areas commonly studied to strengthen the writing of fiction. As a case in point, Pitkin urges that because the workings of good fiction require an understanding of the human mind and human behavior:

The laws of fiction are not to be sought in rhetoric, which is the science of conveying ideas effectively and not at all the art of shaping the subject matter conveyed Neither are they to be found through the study of literary styles The novelist's and the story writer's constructive principles lie in no such direction; they lie wholly in the realms of psychology and worldly wisdom. The patterns of life are revealed only in life; and life is composed of people and affairs. (VIII)

Pitkin's position on this matter is well detailed when discussing the effects of what he calls genuine knowledge, the writing of fiction, and the role of the two in creating fictional characters.

Concerning general knowledge and the writing of fiction, Pitkin argues, "*The writer must possess genuine knowledge of the matter actually employed in the dramatic narrative; but need not know any more*" (58). However, Pitkin asserts the kind of knowledge he alludes to here is not strictly, or even mostly, a book-based knowledge. This position is made evident when he criticizes the work of many other authors by claiming, "A much larger multitude of stories give evidence that their authors, after taking pen in hand, have asked some Public Library assistant about the flora and fauna of the Tahiti Islands, and scanned Baedeker to find out whether Russians drink Vodka through a straw", then adds, "The writer in search of material must turn, not to libraries nor to schools and laboratories, but to intimate every-day affairs" (58, 59). To Pitkin, this intimacy, resulting from writers' awareness of people and the moments in which they live, is more important than facts because he feels that "Most facts that are important to scientists are only distantly connected with those which help to make a situation dramatic. These latter are exclusively those *which the persons in the dramatic situation are directly aware of*" (59). In short, there is an unstated

connection (but a connection nonetheless) between writers' psychological understanding of the world (why and how people do what they do as assessed through observation—people and their behavior as primary source) and the characters they create. This connection is psychological, as it results from writers' understandings of human behavior, as experienced by the artist and within the context of humanity, and not as it is explained by others in books. This relationship, Pitkin argues, is integral to the creation of fictional characters. He writes, "The writer is free to develop a theme which he does not believe. But he must understand how and why the characters in the story feel and act as they do. And he must portray the reasons and causes of their acts sympathetically. If he cannot, he must give up the theme" (60). In Pitkin's argument, in order for writers to know and understand how characters would feel in a given situation, they must, "*possess genuine knowledge of the matter actually employed*" (58). Similarly, to the women cited earlier, Pitkin notes the impact of the human psyche, especially the understanding of its functioning, on the production of good fiction. However, Pitkin's psychological focus is predicated by a study of the outside world and how it applies to the written product, sometimes in a very mechanical sense—mimeses; the single effect; plot; length of stories; characters; and types of conflict—instead of how writers interact with their own psychologies as they study the outside world or attempt to connect it to their writing (IX, 50-53, 60, 77). In short, there is a lack of reflective practice in Pitkin's work, a kind of reflection that, if there, would prioritize writers and their understanding of their individualized practices. Pitkin is not asking writers to understand themselves as writers. Instead, Pitkin proffers a model where writers study the outside world and attempt to reproduce their understanding of it in a manner that allows their artistic creation to connect to their observed reality, a reality that readers, then, will connect to by default.

Pitkin's emphasis on the importance of the psychological understanding of humanity as depicted in the physical world and replicated through fiction was recast decades later by his pupil Thomas Uzzell. Uzzell, in part due to Pitkin's theories, believed an understanding of human psychology was important to writing good fiction. However, Uzzell felt that a psychological understanding of human behavior proved that art had mechanism (XV). In short, Uzzell felt if there were patterns in human behavior that, over time, revealed something about people as a whole, then art created as an expression of those behaviors and actions would also. *In Narrative Technique*, Uzzell argues the act of writing creatively is a mental project that is unlike the production of any other art. Though Uzzell does encourage writers to familiarize themselves with their thought processes, his equation for doing so maintains a heavier reliance on the world outside of writers than it does encouraging a kind of reflective practice where writers can learn about themselves as artists without a heavy dependence on the critique of an exterior world that Uzzell, himself, arranges within three categories:

1. A *message*: something to say, the thing the author wants to write about, the content of his narrative. 2. *Technique*: His ways and means of organizing and manipulating his material; this factor is commonly called the structure of narrative. 3. *Style*: The writer's manner of using words in the final expression of his message. (XII)

Here, one might recall Widdemer's framework from earlier. Though one might find points of intersection between Uzzell's and Widdemer's frameworks, Uzzell forwards an argument common to the literature of the men in this study, and that distinction is that most of Uzzell's formula is unteachable. Of his three factors to writing well, Uzzell argues technique "is the only phase of creative writing which can, or, in my opinion, should be taught. The mastery of it depends on the intellect almost all together, as does mathematics or geology, and it can be learned in the same way these other sciences can be learned" (XIII). What this means is that to Uzzell, two-thirds of the writing process is unteachable, which is especially problematic when the author argues that a writer's message is the most important element of being able to write. Uzzell notes that message is the most vital aspect of writing because if the author has "nothing to write about, no one can give it to him[, for] you cannot make a splash by pouring from an empty pitcher" (XII). What this contradiction means is that on the one hand, Uzzell argues, to some degree, that the most important element of being able to write is inherent (having something to say), therefore, tacitly suggesting the source of great writing comes from within the writer first and foremost, which would somewhat align with most of the women cited here. However, Uzzell separates himself from many of his female counterparts when arguing the only teachable element of his three factors of writing successful fiction is a skill demonstrated through intellect alone and that is mastered the same way other school subjects are mastered. Again, this is not to say that Uzzell is right or wrong, but there is a stark contrast between Uzzell's discourse for writing good fiction and the discourse of the women cited here.

In addition to noting that much of creative writing cannot be taught, Uzzell also distances himself from his female counterparts through his prioritization of the outside world to the success of writing fiction. Uzzell is quick to note that his "purpose [in writing his book] is to try to explain, not the artist, but the mode of expression the artist uses. To state it in scientific language, I want to help the student define, classify and interpret the phenomena of human conduct. In this sense this book is a contribution to science rather than to art" (XXIV). By analyzing the act of writing fiction as a science, Uzzell directs writers' attention outwards and toward external phenomena that can be studied and mastered. One of those phenomena is technique. Uzzell asserts, "Young writers, like young painters and musicians, should be taught the value of an intensive study, at least for a time, of technique for its own sake" (XXI). For Uzzell, this technique is about the control of external

“mechanisms” that have no value until they have “been mastered and forgotten, until [they have] become an unconscious part of [writers’] mental equipment” (XV, XX). As a foundation for his position, Uzzell cites the work of John Dewey, who claims, “Art and the habits of the artist are acquired by previous mechanical exercises of repetition in which skill apart from thought is the aim, until suddenly, magically, this soulless mechanism is taken possession of by sentiment and imagination until it becomes a flexible instrument of the mind” (XV). Uzzell calls for this shift in focus to technique because he feels, “The critic or teacher makes the fundamental error of teaching the technique of the writer’s *tools* instead of the technique of the *material* with which he works”, and by material, Uzzell means “the workings of the mind, the mechanics of emotion, growth, all human senses and sensibilities” (XVI, XVIII). In short, to Uzzell, “The fiction writer is a psychologist with an artistic purpose” (XIX).

On the one hand, I couldn’t agree more with Uzzell’s transcending the focus on writers’ tools, which he classifies as things like grammar, spelling, and mechanics, to prioritizing the workings of the world and the study of the human condition. However, it’s the way he defines the material of technique I find problematic when comparing it to those works written by the women included in this study. For example, his first trait of material technique is “knowledge of the human mind and human conduct” (XVII). I believe it sound advice to encourage writers to consider the human mind and human conduct in their writing well before worrying too much about spelling or grammar. However, there is a difference between developing *knowledge of the human mind and human conduct* and *developing an understanding of your mind and conduct as a writer in relationship to the rest of existence as you perceive it*. The first example begins with sources outside writers themselves. Those sources might be simply watching others, or they might require (as appears to be subtly encouraged in Uzzell’s work) access to a formal education, such as the study of scholarship in psychology and history. The second, however, encourages writers to engage themselves first, extract what they can from within and pin it to their surrounding world. In the second example, an example that appears more in the work written by the women studied here, writers are the origin of their work and the techniques they must master in order to write successfully.

EARLY 20TH CENTURY WOMEN WRITERS AND WRITERS’ SELVES

A second quality of women authors cited in this work is their belief that the most important quality a writer can adopt is knowing one’s self. Again, as with the earlier focus on the mind, the women writers consulted in this research ask writers to direct their focus inward in order to understand the relationship between their writing process and the outside world. One such request to do so can be found in the work of Brenda Ueland, who urges writers to recall

that “Everybody is talented, original, and has something to say [if] . . . he tells the truth, if he speaks from himself. But it must be from his *true* self and not from the self he thinks he *should* be” (3-4). This honesty with oneself is a key component of Ueland’s theory of writing well because it is essential to the technique of microscopic truthfulness (92). To explicate what Ueland means by microscopic truthfulness, she shares the story of one of her students, Mrs. B., who was a talented writer at the local level but struggled when world building, especially in regard to constructing unique and believable characters, which Ueland feels originates from within writers and not from without. The problem Ueland felt Mrs. B. had when writing was that she relied on conventions and tropes to *write* her story instead of telling what she actually saw, felt, and experienced (92). Specifically, Ueland asserted Mrs. B. depicted characters in a stereotypical fashion, describing the *idea* of them instead of their reality. As an example, Ueland uses the instance of a writer who wants to create the most Yankee character imaginable and does so by describing a version of Uncle Sam, even though many kinds of people might fit the description of a yankee (94). Ueland’s example suggests (though she doesn’t say so outright) that the general description of something exists outside writers as a kind of universal typecast or stereotype, yet for writers to generate good characters, they must create characters as they experience them. For example, Ueland felt everything Mrs. B. wrote “was a gloze of the commonplace, a kind of gray, dull conventionality. Her heroines all tended to be very mean and sinuous and vampish. She loved to write about rather exotically mean people in studio apartments”, which Ueland clarifies is not a problem, except for when authors do so through constructing character types, for “a ‘type’” Ueland notes, “is never convincing and never comes to life” (93, 94). Instead, Ueland encouraged Mrs. B. “to write microscopically, truthfully” (95). “I told her,” Ueland states, “to describe somebody she knew, to write then, angularly. ‘Don’t try to make it sound smooth and mellifluous but, write with exquisite and completely detached exactness and truthfulness. Look at the person and just say what you see, even if it sounds like a catalogue” (95). At first glance, it might appear that encouraging writers to write what they see is asking writers to prioritize the world outside themselves, a best practice I have associated with how-to texts written by the men in this study and not women. However, the way Ueland discusses the generative process of creating characters is more about describing characters as writers *experience* them instead of just describing what writers *see*.

Microscopic truthfulness, as Ueland discusses it in relationship to character generation, is more about individual writers acknowledging their unconscious observations of the physical world by trusting the writing that most naturally manifests from their interaction with it (95). Imagine, then, five writers looking at one person and describing what they see. A universal description might detail the person from head to toe, being sure to mention hair color, eye color, the clothes the person is wearing, etc. In contrast, a description with microscopic truthfulness at the helm would be individualized, different from person to person, because the description would begin within

the unconscious of each writer. This individuality is then expressed in the uniqueness of the character's description, luring readers deeper into the prose through the captivating and convincing nature of the character's organic existence. To Ueland, this individualized nature of description is successful because "The more you wish to describe a Universal the more minutely and truthfully you must describe a Particular" (94). Ueland argues it is when developing the skills to describe the universal through the particular that writers experience their most significant growth.

When mastering the ability to tell what is individually experienced or perceived (writing the particular), instead of detailing what is perceived in a familiar way (writing the universal), and when depicting what is experienced unconsciously through the act of writing unrestrictedly, there can be, as there was in Mrs. B.'s case, a change "of the personality of the writer, *behind*" the words used to tell the story (Ueland 96-97). This change, resulting from microscopic truthfulness, is especially important because when "you get down to the true self and speak from that . . . there is always a metamorphosis in your writing, a transfiguration" (Ueland 92). The metamorphosis Ueland speaks of is unlike anything her male counterparts discuss. The source of evolution she discusses is found in every writer and is "unfathomable," and by unfathomable she means that a writer's "inner self is ever-changing, ever-creating new things from itself" (97). This inner source of creation can never be truly understood. To Ueland, writers who feel they understand the capacity of their inner-selves really only damage their own growth as artists, for if "you write one good and successful thing and then try to make all the others just as good, i.e., just like it, then the unfathomable fountain of talent will be dried up" (97). What Ueland argues in her work is that good writing is a derivative of a tripartite structure. 1) The unconscious interacts with the outside world. Then, 2) that interaction is observed with microscopic truthfulness so that 3) it can be articulated through writing. What is more, Ueland asserts this writing should account for what organically manifests in each writer so that what's written *tells* what surfaced. To Ueland, the source of great writing and microscopic truthfulness—one's ability to articulate the outpourings from that source—exists in everyone, if they take the time to truly know themselves as artists. To Ueland, the origin of originality, talent, and, thus, success in writing is inherent in all people—period.

Like Ueland, Widdemer also hones in on writers' awareness of themselves as their primary source of creation. However, Widdemer discusses self-awareness as a step in a process of mimesis where writers study the work of other writers to develop technical savvy. Though appearing traditional on the surface, Widdemer discusses mimesis in a way not found in many books on how to write fiction. For example, take the way Basil Hogarth discusses the process of mimesis in his *How to Write for a Living*. Hogarth, in a more traditional manner,

urges writers to “Read all the great novels you can. Study the greatest masterpieces of fiction. Then for a while try to imitate those masters whose work appeals to you most and in whose school you feel that your own talents lie” (7). Such advice is directly against that offered by Brande, who urges no imitation by neophyte writers, the stage of writer Hogarth is speaking to when he informs readers of his book that the manuscript addresses “the novice who has yet to grapple with the task of writing his first novel” (61, vii). As Hogarth continues, he maintains an almost virulent tone while extending his advice. He writes, “The literary aspirant’s attitude to the novel must be similar to that of a medical student’s regard for his anatomical ‘subject.’ It exists only for the purpose of ruthless analysis, to be discarded when it has served its purpose” (7). Here, Hogarth urges writers to dissect parts of works most applicable to their own writing, utilize them, then discard the rest. Hogarth’s advice is not only violent and surgical, but also, it prioritizes sources outside writers as the origin of successful writing, for studying a priori work as one’s apprenticeship to mastery demands a prioritization of material outside of writers as the primary source of teaching them how to write. Conversely, in Widdemer’s version of mimesis, when mimicking other writers, writers do so not to understand technique as a set of maneuvers replicated from one text to another but, instead, to identify a series of writerly choices made by other artists, choices not meant to be copied but to be blended with a writer’s “subconscious like a mold” (7). The implication in Widdemer’s work, then, is not that writers appropriate what is already done or act like a mirror for what is already printed but, instead, that they recognize enough about themselves and what they study to blend both into the folds of the literary tradition already established. The goal is not to parse and borrow work but to become part of it, as it has already become a part of the writers through their studies (7-8). Widdemer’s explanation of mimesis is not unlike Edith Wharton’s, which posits that when working with existent texts as a source of mentorship and inspiration, a gifted writer “will come to see that he must learn to listen to them, take all they can give, absorb them into himself, and then turn to his own task with the fixed resolve to see life only through his own eyes” (22).

EARLY 20TH CENTURY MALE WRITERS AND WRITERS’ SELVES

As Hogarth’s previous depiction suggests, male writers in this study spoke differently than women about the role of writers’ selves in their work. In fact, more commonly, the male writers relegated the internal selves of writers to a position inferior to that of the external world. In many instances, the male authors encouraged writers to begin their observations about what to write and, in some cases, even, how to write about it by studying the external world first. However, it’s not often that male writers announced their approach to successful writing in just this way. For example, they tended not to come out and say, “Start your writing by prioritizing the world around you!” Instead, the male writers couched the discussion of how to create writing within a framework that, in many instances, *appears* to prioritize the writer first. However, a closer analyzation of their work reveals

a writing process that prioritizes the world outside the writers as the source of successful writing. For example, Trentwell Mason White mentions that it is important for writers to have what he calls “*the creative writer’s temperament?*” which has two different definitions depending on what kind of writer you are (XIV). White’s *How to Write for a Living* is a how-to-book written for commercial writers, so he spends most of the work discussing how to be a successful writer of commercial fiction, yet White does mention the literary writer from time to time, as is the case when discussing a creative writer’s temperament. White’s discussion of writers’ temperaments divides writers into literary and non-literary writers, where the literary writer “has the courage, the rebelliousness, the self-faith to stand against the mob and build something genuinely his own,” while commercial writers must “satisfy . . . while [also] emancipating [themselves] from the mob” (XIV). What’s important to note here is that while White acknowledges that “he who refuses the restrictions of mass thinking” (XIV) becomes a better artist, he also notes that if writers want to be successful commercially, they must also satisfy the consumers of mass thinking (XIV). White draws a distinct line between literature and commercial writing, where literary artists neglect the external world while commercial writers appeal to it. On the surface, White’s dynamic appears to suggest that literary artists, at least, create successful writing from within themselves and not from without, especially when White writes, “He who within himself refuses the restrictions of mass thinking and mass living, who will not be caged by convention or regimentation, who sincerely believes that his ‘purpose holds to sail beyond the sun set,’ can retain the true creative spirit” (XIV). However, a more nuanced reading suggests that in the instance of both literary artists and commercial writers, White prioritizes writers’ evaluation and understanding of the outside world in lieu of self-reflection. White suggests that literary artists separate themselves from the mob but that they do so by studying and evaluating the outside world to shape something other than what they observe. This process asks writers to *begin* their reflective practice outside themselves, prioritizing the external as the origin of their writing. Likewise, White urges commercial writers to study and evaluate the outside world to understand what it might desire from their written work so that they might write to satisfy that demand. In either case, whether going against the grain of society or acquiescing to it, White’s formula to successful writing situates the external world as the origin of writers’ written work.

Not only does White ask that writers’ pay close attention to the culture around them and generate their writing from the universal expressions observed there, but also, he asks that writers employ a nuanced control and understanding over the actual generation of their work. When writing commercial fiction, White asserts writers know “when they start that the purpose of their narrative is to reach an objective. With that ending well established in their minds, they construct the tale to meet it; thus, in a sense, they always write the story

backwards” (26). White’s focus on the importance of writers knowing the ending before beginning their writing is emphasized later when he writes, “A primary rule, therefore, in the mechanics of short fiction writing is to set a satisfactory objective as the *raison d’être* of the yarn before anything else is planned for it” (30). With this and the previous observations in mind, it stands to reason that White encourages writers, especially commercial writers, to study their exterior world, paying close attention to the universal expressions that appear to carry weight with readers, and then use those universal expressions as an end goal to a story. Then, White encourages writers to begin their work with the end goal and write their way to the beginning. Again, this detailed study of White’s work is neither to support nor condemn what he says. It’s only meant to highlight White’s thought process and compare it to the women cited here. When doing so, it becomes clear that when discussing the origin of successful writing, the women writers included in this project turn an observant eye inwards by urging writers to trust and investigate themselves first before exploring their relation to the outside world.

CONCLUSION

In closing, there are three points I’d like to make to finalize this project where it stands. First, this article only *initiates* a new dialogue about the relationship between traditional beliefs surrounding the writing of fiction and gender, especially regarding fiction’s teachability. To suggest, for example, that the belief that creative writing cannot be taught stems more naturally from a male’s psyche than a female’s is unique and, I feel, opens new opportunity for research in the fields of creative writing and creative writing studies. With that said, it’s clear this article itself is not exhaustive. It’s not meant to finalize the discussion in any way, just to begin it. There are undoubtedly other sources written by men during this timeframe that are not included here. In addition, there are some works by women that I have knowingly excluded, works that talk more about how to write short stories for the market (Quirk), revise fiction for publication (Hamilton), and strict formula writing for fiction (Reid), all ripe for further research but not applicable to this particular project, at least as I see it. There’s even a fascinating MA thesis by a graduate of Ohio State University. She graduated in 1934 and was doing cutting edge research in creative writing! (Hargraves). In short, there are certainly limits to any project of this size and scope, but I hope that the historiological discussions it might invoke make the limitations palatable. Second, I presented what I had learned in the nascent stages of this project at the 2018 Creative Writing Studies Conference and was asked by an attendee what I thought my observations *meant*. Because I realize that question might surface after reading this, I want to address it by only partially addressing it. As a white male who wasn’t alive in the early part of the twentieth century, I don’t feel it’s my place to say why the women or men cited here wrote about writing the way they did. That’s somebody else’s project. But as an educator of over ten years, many of which have been spent at a community college, I am versed in understanding

how cultural situatedness affects the conception of self and the written work stemming from that relationship and, therefore, can at least hypothesize about it. Plus, I'd be lying if I said I don't regularly ask myself, "What does it all mean?" Hypothetically, then, it's *possible* men prioritized the importance of the external world in their work because they found acceptance there. The outside world provided their efforts meaning and affirmation. Conversely, though women writers from the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century *did* find footing as writers, they often had to write as, what Adams calls, the "True Woman," a female writer who "gave repeated assurances of their own morality and limited role" in their written work (21). This categorization would only begin to dissolve with women's prominence in higher education, and even then, they were often met with sexism that could negatively impact their growth as writers and their writing career after college (Gere; *A Group*). It's possible, then, that women found meaning (and an origin) in writing that didn't require external acceptance *cart blanche*. In short, maybe the origin of men's work, either consciously or unconsciously, began with others, while women's writing began with themselves. While I'm certain the answer is not that simple, it might be an okay place to begin. Finally, I think it's important not to simplify the fiction writing process by making it a simple gendered binary. That kind of restriction is dangerous and would never hold up, thank goodness. However, because people are subject to their societies and cultures, because those societies and cultures paint the way we see our world, and because our art, as every one of these writers have attested to in some fashion, is affected by the connection between the artist and their perceived existence, I think it's a sound exercise to find those schisms in artistic ideologies and practices that might result from one's place within the myriad ideological frameworks inherent in any culture. As these frameworks, like tectonic plates, incessantly shift, collide, and recede through the course of human history, the art produced by those subjected to the shifts—which accounts for all artists—will contain the residue of all cultural happenings. In order to continue evolving our understanding of ourselves as the sole animal who makes art, we must search for that residue. This article is an attempt at doing just that.

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ENDNOTES

1 The use of the gendered pronouns for women and men account only for the authors of the works selected for this project. For example, phrases like “one quality of women’s work” or “one quality of men’s work” are not sweeping generalizations about all writers who identify as male or female, only observations about the work of writers cited here. Moreover, the pronouns do not generalize the writers themselves, only what I interpret through their textual expressions. Finally, the discussion of the impacts of the selected authors’ gender identities on my interpretation of their understanding of writing fiction do not extend in any normalizing way to others’ gender identities or their work.

2 Discourse by and on Freud, psychoanalysis, and the unconscious were abundant, even in the 30s, and are certainly so now. Though there are endless sources one could consult to develop an understanding of the role of the unconscious in the culture of the early nineteenth century, two informative sources are Caroline Banbridge et al.’s *Culture and the Unconscious* and Anna Green’s *Cultural History: Theory and History*.

3 In her book, Widdemer states, “You can’t develop creative instinct if you haven’t it. Sense of literary value, if you *have* creative instinct, you *can* develop” (6). It could be argued that Widdemer is suggesting, since people can’t develop creative instinct if they don’t have it, some people are born writers, and some are not. If this interpretation were the case, it would mean the most essential part of being a writer, in Widdemer’s equation, is unteachable. Though I admit the possibility of this interpretation, when considering her discussion on creative instinct with all else she writes in her book, I come to a different conclusion. I assert that what she’s arguing is that, yes, some people are born with a natural creative instinct. Others are not. However, this position is different than one claiming great writers are born or that good writing cannot be taught. The distinction I’m making is most clear to me when Widdemer writes that the first necessary tool for writing well is “your passion for self-expression. And you have that, or you would not be reading this book” (4). What Widdemer notes here is important because anyone literate enough can read her text, implying that anyone with enough interest in the creative work of writing has the creative urge necessary to write well. That also means, then, that someone who doesn’t care about writing creatively will not have the urge and, therefore, will not be able to write well. However, to me, this distinction is not the same as saying some are born with creative urge and are, therefore, capable of great writing while others are not. The urge is a choice, and anyone might pursue it if they desire. Yet, without the urge to write, one won’t write. It’s a simple as that.