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# Incremental Storytelling and Calypsis: A Hypertext Fiction a Critical Introduction

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INCREMENTAL STORYTELLING AND *CALYPSIS: A HYPERTEXT FICTION*

A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

by

W. Trent Hergenrader

A Dissertation Submitted in

Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in English

at

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

May 2013

## ABSTRACT

### INCREMENTAL STORYTELLING AND *CALYPSIS: A HYPERTEXT FICTION*

#### A CRITICAL INTRODUCTION

by

W. Trent Hergenrader

The University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2013  
Under the Supervision of Dr. Stuart A. Moulthrop

This critical introduction to *Calypsis: A Hypertext Fiction* argues that university creative writing programs should make full use of the institutional space, time, and resources available to them by introducing students to different types of writing projects and engage students in critical discussions about creative production, activities that they are unlikely to find outside the university's walls. These activities includes experimenting with digital tools, creating multimedia compositions, and producing collaborative work, as well as situating creative writing as an embodied act within specific historical, political, and material conditions. Herein I forward my theory of *incremental storytelling*, which is informed by both creative writing pedagogy and gaming theory, as one strategy for achieving these goals. Using this methodology, students learn the craft of fiction writing in smaller, discrete bits that, in aggregate, create something much greater than their constituent parts. This progressive approach puts students in immediate contact with each others' writing throughout the entire creative process and opens space for critical discussions about the fictional characters and the shared world they create.

I go on to describe a course I designed using incremental storytelling entitled “Gaming, World Building, and Narrative,” where students used a wiki and a Google map to collaboratively create a sprawling post-apocalyptic world that they then explored via a tabletop role-playing game. Students responded enthusiastically to the course, as shown in their responses to a survey asking them to reflect on this experimental method. I then connect the theory of incremental storytelling and narratives derived from role-playing games to my creative dissertation, *Calypsis: A Hypertext Fiction*, and how it might serve as inspiration for others to experiment with creating a collaboratively built world.

*For my wife, Amy Mueller,*

who has been beside me every step of this very long journey.

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## **Incremental Storytelling and *Calypsis: A Hypertext Fiction***

### **A Critical Introduction**

#### **I. Creative Writing Pedagogy and Incremental Storytelling**

This critical introduction proposes a radical departure from the traditional workshop method commonly used to teach undergraduate fiction writing courses. While the traditional creative writing workshop can be useful for helping students craft work intended for submission to literary magazines, I argue that creative writing programs can and should expand their scope of practice beyond the considerations of literary publishing. As an academic discipline, creative writing programs should make full use of the institutional space, time, and resources available to them by introducing students to different types of writing projects and engaging students in critical discussions about creative production, which are activities they are unlikely to find outside the university's walls. These activities include experimenting with digital tools, creating multimedia compositions, and producing collaborative work. Rather than reaffirming the romantic notion of the lone literary genius transcribing the whispers of the poetic muse, we can instead situate creative writing as an embodied act within specific historical, political, and material conditions, and where collaborative efforts can lead to more diverse and complex representations of fictional people and worlds than what novice fiction writers typically produce when working on individual projects.

Instructors using the traditional workshop method often have students read published stories from which they are encouraged to model their own work, but this approach can overwhelm beginning writers attempting to simultaneously create detailed settings, well-rounded characters, and comprehensible plots. As a result, workshop stories often feature wooden

characters acting against white backdrops as the author attempts to expound some universal truth about the human condition. Also, students working within their own hermetically (and hermeneutically) sealed fictional worlds often need to be coaxed into engaging with each other's work and providing feedback. In this critical introduction I address these concerns with my theory of *incremental storytelling*, which is informed by both creative writing pedagogy and gaming theory. Using this methodology, students learn the craft of fiction writing in smaller, discrete bits that, in aggregate, create something much greater than their constituent parts. This progressive approach puts students in immediate contact with each others' writing throughout the entire creative process and opens space for critical discussions about the fictional characters and the shared world they create.

In the first step of incremental storytelling, students build a fictional world from the ground up, populating a map with a diverse set of people, places and things, giving them a detailed setting for their stories. Next, students create well-rounded characters complete with personalities, strengths, skills, flaws, fears and motivations. Third, they set their characters into motion by having them explore the fictional world via tabletop role-playing, where the combination of collaborative storytelling and the aleatory aspect of dice rolls produce an inherently unpredictable narrative. Finally, the students recount their characters' experiences by writing vignette-length fictions, attempting to retell the most resonant moments of the sessions from their characters' unique perspectives. Incremental storytelling not only emphasizes discrete issues of craft, it also reveals the power of collaborative writing practice as the stories students write could not come into being without the significant contributions of their peers.

In this discussion that follows I describe the course I designed entitled "Gaming, World Building, and Narrative" and share student responses to this experimental approach. I also

connect the theory of incremental storytelling and role-playing narratives to my creative dissertation, *Calypsis: A Hypertext Fiction*, and how it might serve as inspiration for others to experiment with creating a collaboratively built world. While the traditional writing workshop will likely always remain a cornerstone of creative writing pedagogy, I propose that creative writing as an academic discipline has much to gain by promoting experimental writing that requires students to think critically about their creative production, and to reap the benefits of using digital tools and networked writing.

## **II. Progressive Creative Writing Course Design**

My personal dissatisfaction with the traditional workshop format stems from my first attempts at teaching introductory creative writing classes, where I experienced what I considered to be lukewarm success. I received positive course evaluations but I was frustrated by what I perceived as an overall lack of engagement with the course material: the readings, the written assignments, and especially the tepid interest students showed in each other's work. This surprised me as I had gained much both as reader and writer by participating in traditional writing workshops, but I realized that in those environments I had been working with other dedicated writers who were knowledgeable about the current literary scene. In the courses I taught, few students had publication as a goal and, from my informal discussions with them, several mentioned their sense of discouragement because they felt their work was clearly inferior to the published examples we read in class.

When teaching fiction, another common roadblock I encountered was students' overriding obsession to pin down a singular meaning of what a creative piece meant before it could be examined or even appreciated. I've called this the "buried treasure approach to literature," which is a belief that authors bury deep meaning beneath layers of symbols and metaphors that an

educated reader learns to dig up. Poet Ron Silliman has made a similar observation, speculating that from K-12 students are taught “that language is to be mined for ‘information’ that can be later regurgitated in test formats” they take a similar approach to writing poetry or fiction. Whether our shared assumption about the cause of this phenomenon is true or not, a large number of students write stories and poems focused on providing readers with some nugget of wisdom, relegating craft issues to a distant secondary concern.

These dissatisfactions led me to work being done in creative writing studies that critiqued the workshop and called for critical approaches to creative writing pedagogy (Amato and Fleisher, Leahy, Mayers, Ritter and Vanderslice, Wandor). With those critiques and my own experiences in mind, I began designing an experimental, progressive creative writing class with the following goals:

- Critically discussing the material, historical, and social conditions of student writing, both in our lived world and in their creative work
- Experimenting in collaborative writing to produce a shared body of work
- Encouraging the use of other media, such as the incorporation of images, audio, and video to compliment or augment the writing
- Attending to traditional creative writing craft concerns, such as the development of well-rounded characters, fully realized settings, and plots that unfold organically
- “Decentering” the classroom by minimizing top-down instruction and empowering students to direct the course
- Using a variety of Web 2.0 technologies to facilitate these goals

My ultimate goal was to have students think more deeply about the stories we choose to tell and how we tell them. While students would probably not produce stories suitable for submission to

a literary magazine in such a class, they would instead invest time participating in an intimate, collaborative, creative experiment that would potentially reshape their attitudes about themselves, their role in the world, and the worth of their own creative production.

### **III. Role-Playing Games and Incremental Storytelling**

To meet these goals, I used an unconventional inspiration to structure the course: the role-playing game (RPG). As an adolescent and young adult I played tabletop RPGs obsessively. While the epic high fantasy *Dungeons and Dragons* remains the most well-known RPG, growing up I played games in different genres: *Star Frontiers* (deep space science fiction), *Boot Hill* (western), *Top Secret* (espionage), and *Gamma World* (post-apocalyptic science fiction) to name just a few. I spent hours lost in other worlds, writing my own adventure modules for my brothers and friends to play. I drew maps for them to explore and, using each game's unique statistical system, rolled up dozens of characters, all with different attributes, motivations, and personal histories. These games were so influential on my imagination that when I first decided to make a serious go of fiction writing as an adult, I tracked each of them down and on eBay and repurchased a cherished slice of my youth. And when it came to building a strong foundation on which to build my experimental course, RPGs were an obvious-if unorthodox-choice for the classroom.

While it might be an unusual concept for teaching a fiction course, using RPGs to provide an engaging storyline is nothing new, especially among writers of genre fiction. George R. R. Martin, author of the wildly popular *Game of Thrones*, hosted a long-running superhero RPG campaign for other established genre writers; they translated their game events into the long-running *Wild Card* series, which currently includes over twenty books, several comic adaptations, a forthcoming film by NBC Universal, and (ironically) two different role-playing

games (“Wild Cards”). China Miéville, author of multiple novels including the Bas-Lag trilogy that features the city of New Crobuzon, has also credited RPGs and their “mania for cataloguing the fantastic” and their “weird fetish for systematization” for providing inspiration when he starts a new book and begins developing maps, histories, and timelines that may never make it into the novel (Gordon). Miéville’s comments speak directly to the appeal of RPGs, with their virtually endless catalog of locations, characters, and items that can be combined and recombined in an infinite chain of stories.

*Catalog* is the operative word, with its connotations of skimming and selecting of desired items, each with its own unique properties and descriptions. RPGs dedicate entire volumes to different game components such as character creation, weapons and armor, map making, modes of transportation, spells, and more, giving players a vast reservoir of information to draw from when shaping their games—yet no single catalog entry is a story unto itself. While a magic sword may have an elaborate history in its description, its function in the game is not to be a self-contained story for its own sake but to provide a platform for original storytelling by the players. They are the pieces from which the RPG narrative is assembled.

This construction metaphor is echoed in Daniel Mackay’s book *The Fantasy Role-Playing Game: A New Performance Art*, where he says players use “fictive blocks” of “famous lines, quotable postures, and vivid traces from literary passages or film scenes” (77) that are “restored as strips of imaginary behavior that constitute the role-playing performance from moment to moment” (80). Players bring their own knowledge and memories to the games and customize them to their tastes by altering rules and adding new elements, and they are able to resist and recoup the consumerist nature of popular culture, Mackay writes,

Because the form of the game encourages the players to bring their affective selves, their subjective selves, to the table and to winnow the concepts and images of our environment through that subjectivity.... [to] fill in the blanks of popular culture....through his own emotional involvement with the role....[which is] predicated upon interaction with other people. (82)

Through role-playing, players gain agency over the pop culture tropes of genre fiction-as cataloged in novels, comics, films, and videogames-by having near-complete control over their characters and the game world, save whatever narrative control they willingly cede to their immediate gaming group in return for deeper investment in the game.

The fictive blocks and genre conventions Mackay describes exist across media, yet this does not preclude the ability to critically analyze and make connections between them. Ian Bogost proposes a methodology whereby any medium can be understood as a configurative system of discrete, interlocking units of meaning-making called unit operations. Bogost describes unit operations as “modes of meaning-making that privilege discrete, disconnected actions over deterministic, progressive systems” (3) as opposed to system operations, which are “totalizing structures that seek to explicate a phenomenon, behavior, or state in its entirety” (6).

To apply Bogost’s theory to creative writing, students exhibiting a tendency to read a print text searching for a fixed immutable “meaning” could be said to be examining systems operations, looking for clues that would reveal the totalizing structure that serves to inform a correct interpretation of the work. Unit operations, however, isolate discrete moments of meaning-making in a text that invite the exploration of alternate configurations; whereas systems suggest rigidity and determinism, units suggest fluidity and potentiality in narratives. Combined with Mackay’s concept of fictive blocks, we can understand RPG genre settings not as sets of



tired clichés but rather stored and highly configurable units of fictive meaning that can readily drawn from, either from a physical catalog or from memory, and then adapted based on the subjective interests of the player during the process of constructing a unique narrative.

On the surface, nothing can seem further from the traditional workshop method of having students write complete short stories but, in fact, fiction writers have long used isolated writing exercises as a way to hone their craft. In John Gardner's seminal *Art of Fiction*, he suggests students work on small, discrete exercises that may grow into something else:

I would begin, then, with something real-smaller than a short story, tale, yarn, sketch-and something primary, not secondary (not parody, for example, but the thing itself). I would begin with some one of those necessary parts of larger forms, some single element that, if brilliantly done, might naturally become the trigger of a larger work-some small exercise in technique, if you like, as long as it's remembered that we do not really mean it as an exercise but mean it as a possible beginning of some magnificent work of art. A one-page passage of description, for example; description keyed to some particular genre-since description in a short story does not work in the same way description works in the traditional tale. And I would make the chief concern of this small exercise the writer's discovery of the full meaning of fiction's elements. (35)

Gardner speaks of the craft exercise that is not a throwaway gimmick but rather a seed than can germinate into something much grander. When put into the context of a large-scale collaborative writing project, no small exercise in technique would be wasted at all as the deftly crafted exercise adds to a "magnificent work of art" where every contribution adds to a greater, more diverse whole.

These different aspects of the catalog form the basis for my theory of teaching fiction writing through incremental storytelling. Rather than assuming all writers are prepared to write fiction that balances multiple craft issues simultaneously, incremental storytelling breaks these craft issues into discrete exercises that, over time and through collaborative effort, aggregate into something much larger and complex than any individual would be able to create in a short amount of time while remaining focused on writing technique. To cast it in different terms, incremental storytelling is a move from the macro element of story to the micro elements of craft. As writers, we gain a better understanding of the city by first understanding a single house; we reach a better understanding of our characters by first detailing their individual traits; and we tell better stories after experiencing characters' reactions to unforeseen challenges. This is the craft of fiction writing broken into units of meaning.

Thus the RPG provides an excellent structure for creating space for a digital, collaborative, student-centered writing project. Rather than using a store-bought RPG, an instructor can choose from several game mechanics-the basic stats and manner by which game conflicts are resolved (dice, cards, etc.)-and put the students to work creating the world incrementally. Instead of the traditional workshop method of dissecting published stories for the study of characterization, setting, and plot, one can adopt a reverse strategy and begin instead with fragments; rather than struggling to pull student writers away with their obsession with a published story's meaning, writers draw from their genre knowledge that they have gathered across media and begin crafting individual objects that become the building blocks of the fictional world.

In the following sections I discuss how using RPGs and incremental storytelling can be used to teach three key elements of narrative-setting, character, and narrative-and how this helps

beginning writers become more attuned to the micro elements of fiction writing. In addition, I also consider the social aspects of game-based learning in a creative writing classroom, suggesting that incremental storytelling forges a more tightly knit writing community based on collaborative writing practice compared to the traditional workshop method.

### *Setting*

One of the first decisions a writer makes when beginning a new story is the setting. Characters must exist in some chosen space and time before they can act. This single choice in many ways sets the tone for the piece; after all, characters interacting in nineteenth century Paris should look, behave, and think differently than those created in twenty-first century Cleveland.

Writer and scholar Peter Turchi's book *Maps of the Imagination: The Writer as Cartographer* compares mapmaking with the creative writing process, a filling in of white space with content. Rather than merely telling "what's there" in a story, Turchi argues that writers must be able to imagine a full and vibrant world full of narrative potential, even if many of the details never make it to the page. Though few beginning writers may recognize it as such, choosing a setting is also an inherently political act. Turchi explains:

We chart our cities, so we chart ourselves. To chart the external world is to reveal ourselves-our priorities, our interests, our desires, our fears, our biases. We believe we're mapping our knowledge, but in fact we're mapping what we want-and what we want others-to believe. In this way, every map is a reflection of the individual or group that creates it. By "reading" a map, by studying it, we share, however temporarily those beliefs. (146)

The presentation of the world, whether in maps or in prose, hinges on the authors' inclusions and omissions of specific details; for example, by omitting Native American tribal areas (Turchi 33)

or presenting Africa as a blank slate for the projection of exploration fantasies (McHale 54), European mapmakers indeed inscribed their culture's priorities, interests, desires, fears, and biases, a phenomenon replicated in the literature of European colonialism and American westward expansion. Such gross oversights took hundreds of years to be recognized and (marginally) redressed, yet when it comes to the mapping of fictional worlds, creative writing instructors are poised to intervene at the moment of production through what Mayers calls "craft criticism," or the analysis of the social, political and institutional context at play in the construction of an artistic work.

In a creative writing course that revolves around collaborative world building, instructors may draw note such omissions and ask the student writers to reflect upon and discuss the absences, and correct them. Another strategy is to highlight the tensions that arise naturally from the clash of artistic perspectives in a room populated with students of different genders, races, social classes, and sexual orientations. In a traditional writing workshop such concerns may be mentally partitioned as something unique to a single writer or story, a "special" issue that only certain women or non-white writers might choose to deal with in a given work; however in collaborative world building, all narrative units reside on the same plane of existence. Writers must contend with the social concerns of others in their own creative work, something few beginning writers will have faced. The result is an uneven, messy world full of contradictions and curiosities-in other words, something much more resembling our real world than most neatly manicured fictional settings often seen in undergraduate creative writing classes.

RPG worlds are nothing if not vast and diverse. As Jennifer Growling Cover states in *The Creation of Narrative in Tabletop Role-Playing Games*, expansive RPG "settings are designed not to tell stories, but to create space for stories" (ch. 4, sec. 3), echoing Henry Jenkins' claim

that game designers are less authors of stories and more providers of evocative spaces, rich with narrative potential that allow players to “perform or witness narrative events” (124); he also notes that literary genres of such as fantasy adventure are particularly invested in world-making and spatial storytelling (122). The fictional worlds created for RPGs provide infinite space for the game narrative to grow and be shaped by the players; players become story-builders as their interactions with the fictional world leave discernable traces on the space (Fernandez-Vara), itself a kind of authorship occurring in an ongoing, recursive process that increases the sense immersion in the fictional world for players and adds to their enjoyment of the game (Cover ch. 5, sec. 4). More than just traversing an imaginary space, players in RPGs choose which storytelling invitations to accept and, in doing so, leave their own mark on the fictional world.

The setting of most RPGs usually belongs to one of the popular literary or cinematic genres: fantasy, science fiction, horror, espionage, or superhero worlds (Mackay 6). Rather than this being a detriment to creative writing courses, it is in fact a benefit as it opens a critical space between our common reality and the shared fantasy world; in a collaboratively built fantasy or science fiction world, even mundane details must be agreed upon by the writers. Not only do these genres require writers to interrogate some of their unconscious assumptions when building a fictional world, these different genres allow player/writers to explore various timeless themes:

Fantasy taps into the deep well of collective unconscious, calling forth the age-old archetypes and myths inherent in ancient storytelling practices. . . . Science fiction offers an exploration of the relationship between human beings and technology in an age of increasing reliance on machines. Horror allows people to confront the monstrous, both internally and externally. (Bowman ch1., sec.3)

As discussed earlier with respect to Mackay's fictive blocks, another benefit of using popular genres is the wealth of material across media from which students may sample. Unique features, details, and rules of fictional worlds can be drawn from literature, films, comic books, and games, media that most students will be more familiar with than work being published in contemporary literary journals.

The creation of this vast world happens incrementally through small, concise writing assignments. Even the metanarrative of the world, such as notable historical events as well as the general economic, social, and political systems (or lack thereof) that provide structure for the inhabitants of the world need to be grounded in specific, isolated details and events in order for them to be incorporated into game play. Though the world will continue to grow and shift during the course of play as players leave their unique traces upon it, the next step is to place actors on this intricately designed stage.

### *Characters*

Well-rounded, interesting characters are crucial for the success of fiction and RPGs alike. For Gardner, the fiction writer's chief goal is to "make up convincing human beings and create for them basic situations and actions by means of which they come to know themselves and reveal themselves to the reader" (14-15). Flannery O'Connor encouraged novice writers to devote ample time to their characters, who should naturally drive the story's plot:

In most good stories it is the character's personality that creates the action of the story. In most [workshop stories], I feel that the writer has thought up some action and then scrounged up a character to perform it. You will usually be more successful if you start the other way around. If you start with a real personality, a real character, then something is bound to happen; and you don't have to know

what before you begin. In fact, it may be better if you don't know what before you begin. You ought to be able to discover something from your stories. If you don't probably nobody else will. (105-6)

For Gardner and O'Connor, the act of reading and writing fiction should be one of exploration and discovery on part of the reader, writer, and even the fictional characters themselves. The question for students writing fiction ceases to be "what do I want my story to mean?" but rather "who is my protagonist and what are his or her unique qualities?" This is precisely the same question facing a player starting a new RPG campaign.

In terms of shaping a narrative from an RPG, character creation is a moment where players have most control over the game (Cover, ch. 6, sec. 2). Players create their characters incrementally, determining their traits and abilities based on the game rules, which often use a system of numerical representation. For example, characters in *Dungeons & Dragons* have statistical categories such as strength, wisdom, and dexterity and the scores range from 3-18 based on the rolling of three, six-sided dice. The White Wolf d10 system I have used in my classes requires players to distribute a fixed number of "dots" across multiple categories, with the dots representing how many dice will be rolled when players attempt certain actions. Both systems give players a tremendous amount of flexibility when designing their characters, and RPGs systems are careful to ensure characters possess both strengths and weaknesses. The GM refers to these statistics when resolving challenges in a game: a character's agility score may be used to see if a character can scale a drainpipe to a rooftop, or charisma may come into play if the character is attempting to fast talk his or her way out of a tight situation. Players often use archetypal figures when developing the statistics of their characters (Bowman, ch. 1, sec. 2) such as the warrior possessing more brawn than brain, or the thief who prefers stealth to physical

confrontations; the former character type would typically have high scores for strength and combat skills, while the latter type would have a higher speed and dexterity. As the player determines each trait, a mental picture of the character becomes clearer. Even if the player has a firm concept of the archetype they wish to work with-warrior or thief for example-this generalized idea becomes specific and unique through incremental adjustments made by the player.

As Mackay notes these “numerical quantifications of abilities...only quantify elements that are secondary to the story, leaving the primary elements of theme, meaning, and character development unbounded by the rules” (47). Thus players almost always create personal histories, often quite elaborate ones, to further flesh out their characters: where they come from, their family situation, their beliefs and attitudes, how they acquired their skills, their short-term and long-term goals, habits, pet peeves, etc. These details are crucial since the character is contact point between the player and the fictional world; how the player crafts the character will strongly determine how the character will interact with the fictional world-what roads she will travel, how she will interact with others, what situations will she choose to get involved with, and which she will pass by (Mackay 37). A lawful character may choose to join up with a band setting out to disrupt a thieves’ guild operation; the unscrupulous character may try to warn the guild in hopes of procuring a reward or joining their ranks. The player must have a keen sense of who his character is in order to have an enjoyable role-playing campaign.

The questions players address during the character creation phase strongly resemble creative writing exercises meant to help fiction writers develop realistic characters. In *What If?: Writing Exercises for Fiction Writers*, Bernays and Painter have two chapters and seventeen exercises dedicated to helping fiction writers learn more about their newly created characters.



“Fictional characters don’t come equipped with clues,” they write. “You, as writer, must supply them. The more specific you make these clues, the more immediate your character will be” (31). The exercises require writers to list traits such as their characters’ obsessions, politics, ambitions, as well as give them concrete details such as their careers as well as more intangible qualities such as their motivations and wants. They add:

Beginning writers often don’t know more than a character’s age or gender-and frequently neglect an essential piece of information that would have greatly informed or shaped their story. You needn’t include these details in the story, but their presence in your mind will be “felt” by the reader. (39)

Bernays and Painter quote authors such as Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Graham Greene to emphasize the importance of writers knowing as much about their characters as possible since such details may eventually be important for the story being written. Deeply knowing their characters is even more pertinent for players of RPGs, who will have limited control over the direction of the game narrative and thus cannot predict when such details will need to be summoned. While a fiction writer can add new wrinkles to a character’s personality over multiple rewrites, during a live-action RPG session the player has no such luxury. Absent details equate to missed narrative opportunities in the game world, so players often write copious notes about their characters’ attitudes, beliefs, idiosyncrasies, and personal histories.

Bowman argues that RPGs “force players to begin to think about their character as a layered, multi-faceted being” at the moment of character creation (ch.1 ) that allows players to inhabit a difference space:

Just as when reading a book or watching a film, role-players must inhabit a different head space and identify with someone “other” than themselves. RPGs

push this identification a step further, allowing that “other person” to evolve as the player’s own creation, rather than a conceptualization by an author foisted upon the passive reader of a book. (ch. 3)

Bowman’s point about the “passive” experience of reading addresses one of the complications of using print fiction as a model in creative writing courses. When writers in a traditional workshop setting study a well-crafted, published story they may indeed grow to identify with the main characters, yet this is a second-hand analysis as they do not see the evolution of a complex character but only the finished product. While this might be helpful for those writers who already have a deep understanding of characterization, it does little for those writers who only have a hazy notion of who their characters are. Using the detailed character creation process of a sophisticated RPG, players have a vested interest in working through these details, and then they learn more about identifying with fictional characters when they inhabit the same “head space” through role-play. Because players do not control the entire narrative, it allows them to focus more on the depth of their characters, thinking deeply about how they would react to the situations they did not expect. Free from the burden of a sensible overarching plot, players instead focus on how their characters perceive events, reflect on their histories, and evolve over time.

### *Narrative*

The creation of a role-playing narrative is a collaborative effort by necessity. Before any RPG session can begin, four components are required: a fictional world for the action to take place; at least one player-character (PC) with some set of motivations; a set of rules to determine the successes and failures of attempted actions; and a GM who manages the interactions between player-characters and the fictional world. The ensuing story develops through the GM describing

the fictional world, listening to how the player-characters react to the situations, and determining the outcome, which may or may not require an appeal to the game mechanic such as dice rolls.

The story is a result of fluid interaction between players and the GM.

An extended example will be useful. In this scenario, the GM might explain to three PCs that a building they wish to enter has a guard standing at the gate. The player-characters decide on their actions, either as individuals or a group. In this scenario, one PC may approach the guard and engage in small talk, trying to draw out some useful information. Depending on the group's playing style this interaction might be general ("I ask the guard about the party going on inside") or the GM might press players for precise language ("Hey fella, sounds like a big party. How many people are inside?") Based on how the player shapes the question, the GM must decide quickly-either through consulting notes or through her own judgment-if the action warrants a dice roll. For example, the GM may decide that the guard is dim-witted and may unintentionally reveal important information and respond in dialogue ("Yeah, about two dozen high brows drowning in champagne while fools like us stand out here in the rain") or she may decide that the guard is suspicious ("Get lost before you get hurt, pal.")

It's now up to the PC to react. He could respond by leaving, or trying to cajole or intimidate the guard into giving information. At this point, the GM would make another decision: if the guard is susceptible to such strategies, the GM may ask the player to roll against his character's charisma or manipulation abilities; or the GM may decide that the guard would never fall for this trick and responds by drawing a weapon or calling for backup. In that case, the PC will have another split-second decision to make: does he flee, attack, or take some other action? The situation evolves in a rapid interplay of decision-making, dialogue, and potential dice rolls that help shape the event and add an element of chance. Also, this brief scenario only describes

the action of one of the three PCs; the other two may be standing silently beside the PC doing the talking, interjecting their own characters' comments, or taking important actions in the background. For example, the conversation with the guard might be a ruse to distract him as a different PC attempts to scale the fence in the shadows, and the third PC attempts to circle around the guard to attack him from behind. In this multi-faceted scenario, the GM would have her hands full negotiating the different actions and determining how the guard would react, deciding for instance that the guard will need to roll his perception skill to see if he notices the intruder climbing the fence, and whether any penalties apply to the roll due to the multiple distractions.

This litany of choices models how beginning writers should think about the multitude of options open to their characters when writing fiction. Rather than dragging their characters to some predetermined outcome, beginning writers will benefit from considering the open-endedness of any given situation in the RPG. In addition, as Cover notes, the storyline is always negotiated by the other players, each of whom can pursue different narrative choices and consequences (ch. 1, sec. 4). Furthermore, the collaborative nature of the RPG often shares the responsibility of decision making between all players, even if each player ultimately decides the action his character will take. Players frequently debate how each other's characters would act and even challenge such decisions, with players commonly asking each other, "Would your character really do that?" (Cover, ch. 1, sec. 5). Because the game cannot proceed until decisions have been made and challenges resolved, there is a subtle social pressure to produce a mutually agreed-upon narrative (Mackay 128). This pressure can prevent players from making absurd choices, which would spoil the story for all.

By building their characters from scratch incrementally, beginning writers can also come to understand how characters might change incrementally over time. As Mackay states:

Players deeply identify with their character's actions, backgrounds, personal weaknesses, and unresolved issues. The story arc in these narratives seems to find its own harmony and balance. Often, players discover resonant themes and meanings in role-played situations that were not intentionally developed but seem to exhibit, instead, the narrative's own identity independent of the intentions of the players and the gamemaster. (Pt 4., sec 2)

A player of an RPG cannot decide on a rags-to-riches plot arc, or to decided that “true love conquers all” and make it happen in the end. Just as in life, a player may choose to pursue a goal for the character, but ultimately he has limited control in achieving it. After all, other characters have their wants and needs, and unexpected challenges delay or prevent characters from reaching their goals. Thus narratives derived from role-playing campaigns are more likely to deal with a character's frustrations, sense of loss, and changing expectations, as opposed to workshop stories where beginning writers often put trivial challenges, if any challenges at all, before their protagonists. In this way, conflicts experienced in game play force characters to grow and change in unforeseen ways (Bowman, ch 5. sec. 6). Playing an RPG through the eyes of an intricately detailed character as she makes decisions, scores unlikely victories, and suffers disappointing setbacks becomes a process of discovery about both the character and the world as the plot unfolds in unexpected ways through play. This process of discovery is exactly what both Gardner and O'Connor state is at the very core of good fiction.

*Vignette-Length Fiction*

In each of the three areas discussed—setting, character, and narrative—I have shown how beginning students can better learn the craft of fiction writing using incremental storytelling. Not only do students build confidence by mastering small writing assignments, their learning is intimately connected to the work of their peers. The final step is for students to craft their narrative impulse into a vignette, or very short story, that captures a snapshot moment from the RPG session.

I suggest vignettes not only because RPG campaigns are episodic by nature—indeed, final endings for characters are frequently never reached (Cover ch. 1, sec. 4)—but also because of their compact size, they lack the length to accommodate the clichéd epic plots that haunt lesser genre work. The emphasis in incremental storytelling is on short-form writing that can be quickly produced and shared so feedback from peers and the instructor can be incorporated into the next vignette. The brevity of the piece also deemphasizes plot in favor of highlighting details about the world or the character come to the forefront. While this type of writing has few notable examples in genre fiction, both Ernest Hemingway’s *In Our Time* and Isaac Babel’s *Red Calvary* provide excellent examples of vignette-length fiction steeped in character and environment.

#### **IV. Theory in Practice: Gaming, World Building, and Narrative**

In spring 2010 I designed and taught an experimental creative writing course entitled “Gaming, World Building, and Narrative” to test my theories. Using the science fiction subgenre of the post-apocalypse as the theme, I structured the course in three, five-week units: post-apocalyptic narratives across media, world building, and tabletop role-playing.

In the first unit students read short stories from the *Wastelands* anthology, edited by John Joseph Adams, which contained both classic and contemporary takes on the post-apocalyptic short story. They also watched the films *The Road* and *Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome* and played the post-apocalyptic digital role-playing game *Fallout 3*. To analyze these works we used

Bogost's concept of unit operations to isolate individual characters, locations, and items in the narrative. The idea was to temporarily divorce the constituent parts, or units of meaning, from the plot. This meant studying individual character's abilities, attributes, and attitudes and the details of the setting, including the physical environment as well as the political, economic, and social realities of the fictional world. Finally, we discussed plot as the result of these characters interacting with their environment and each other. In the second unit, each student was given ten items, five locations, and five NPCs to create on the course wiki. Students were given the race, sex, and age of their characters based on the demographics of Milwaukee. They were also assigned a general category for locations (industrial, residential, governmental, etc.) and items (perishable food item, tool, firearm) in order to ensure diversity and reduce the potential for duplicate entries. In an effort to maintain suspense and surprise, I plotted the entries onto a Google map of Milwaukee along with links to the appropriate wiki items in the map marker's information bubble. This allowed for seamless transition between the map, wiki, and gameplay during the third part of the course, tabletop role-playing. They called their fictional city Rivertown. In the final portion of the course, the students broke into groups of four players, with volunteer students and me acting as their gamemasters. One day a week we spent our 75-minute class period immersed in the fictional world, and in the second weekly class period we critiqued the vignettes students wrote from the previous gaming session.

### *Student Reactions*

The instructor's opinions on the success of an experimental class means little if the students cannot explain what was gained by the experimentation. To this end I asked students to participate in a series of surveys discussing their thoughts about different portions of the course, and their answers bore out my intuition that this approach had been an overwhelming success.

Below are a few of many comments that connect specific aspects of creative writing craft to the act of role-playing and incremental storytelling.

### *World Building*

As far as collaboratively building a fictional world, several students mentioned this as the highlight of the class because it serves be a never-ending resource that can continue to be edited and appended:

- Combining my ideas with the creations of 24 other people was a new experience. Everyone had a different idea of what this post-apocalyptic world was supposed to be like, so in the end it was sort of a hodgepodge of different ideas, yet it somehow worked.
- The collaborative wiki setup was great. The rich world that the class as a whole developed gives us such a large well of material to draw on, that it is very tempting to continue on in this world after the semester is over.
- I love the amount of usable content that came out of this class, and the crowd-sourced nature of our world means that there will always be surprises as long as the world keeps evolving.

One student even alluded to the empowerment he felt in using a real world location:

- Building the post-apocalyptic Milwaukee was the most difficult, but most rewarding part. Taking my neighborhood in Greenfield and turning it into a newly-established town that can protect itself and build into a self-sustaining society was the best part in my view. Now that I have made New Bottsford, I can imagine the settings of the town as I walk or drive about in my neighborhood.

### *Character Creation*



Students responded in an overwhelming positive way to the character creation portion of the course. “Try to get into your character’s head” is a creative writing chestnut dragged out repeatedly in writing workshops, yet it proves difficult for the beginning writer. Student after student used this phrase and said role-play helped them develop a far stronger sense of character:

- Then there was the business of player-character creation. That is the most personal aspect about this course. You decide everything: you have a back story, you give the character a personality, traits, etc... In fact, a lot of what is in this character may be coming from yourself or your own experiences... This character has become more than just a snapshot; I have developed an idea to write a series centering on this character now
- I have really been able to get inside the head of the character I created. As far as characters go, I have not had to worry about developing anyone else except the one I created. This aspect has given me a lot of time to truly think about what makes this character tick, what pleases this character, how he speaks, etc.
- The idea of learning about your character internally though acting out his/her choices is a much different experience than learning about them through just writing, an experience I’d like to try again, hopefully soon.

#### *Collaborative Narrative*

Along with character creation, students appreciated the unpredictable nature of stories that practically wrote themselves and allows them to focus on the most important part of the narrative, the main character:

- I have been extremely interested in the way the role-playing has affected and shaped my fiction writing. It’s been intriguing to be stuck with set actions - more of an outline for the plot of the story, I suppose. It’s kind of like the way a writer might map out the

skeletal points of a piece before delving into the details of it - except this method requires little to no imagination on the behalf of the writer. The main actions are determined partially by the world, partially by the GM and partially by the choices of the character or the group. This provides an interesting setting in which to write the character's personal experience of the action - it is really a road map for the character's personal development.

Another student explicitly mentions the importance of the collegial, collaborative atmosphere established in gaming sessions:

- My writing was most impacted, however, by the adventuring itself. I began to embrace writing as a storytelling exercise you could inject your own personal view and spin on, instead of merely telling the facts creatively, because the story WAS CREATED in the context of joking, conversation, and having fun.
- The advantages of role-playing, I feel, is that the story is collaborative, meaning it is very easy to get fundamentally different acting characters in the same story. The outline of the story is done together which provides the writers the essentials that they can emphasize different parts of or expand upon.

Though at the time of the course I had not yet coined the phrase "incremental storytelling," a few students mentioned how writing fiction through a series of discrete tasks helped them get a better handle on individual elements of craft:

- This course is genius. There was really nothing I didn't like. It was better than any other writing course I've ever had. It helped me to develop my characters and to focus on setting rather than a storyline as a whole. It broke things down in an easy, do-able way.
- What has really helped me in this class is the structure that the role-playing gives to plot creation. There is a set of parameters that I need to follow which includes plot points,

other characters' actions, and the world's tendencies. Staying within these parameters, and not needing to think so much about the plot, allows me to devote my thoughts to the way the character experiences these situations....I am able to think more about my character and her personal growth than laboring over what is going to happen next...It's a really great tool for the writers who struggle, like I do, to come up with truly new and innovative plot elements.

The course proved to be a greater success than I expected. The one complaint, which was stated often, was the desire for more than four role-playing sessions. The students not only enjoyed the sessions but they made personal connections with each other and learned more about their characters through role-playing. In the next iteration of the class I plan on having students begin role-playing and world building immediately, and having more structured time to discuss the experiences and writing.

#### **V. A Return to Rivertown - *Calypsis: A Hypertext Fiction***

Online chatter about the course continued for weeks and even months after the end of the semester as students continued to reflect on their experiences and to coax other players into continuing the sessions over the summer. Because of its profound impact on all the participants including myself, I wanted to connect the project to my creative dissertation in some integral way. While I could not use student work as the core of my work, I decided on the next acceptable course of action: setting my fiction in Rivertown years before the events that transpired in the student campaigns. I would keep a few student-created landmarks and non-player characters, but otherwise start over with a new cast of characters and give the existing ones added depth and detail to make them sufficiently my own.

*Calypsis: A Hypertext Fiction* presents both sides of the incremental storytelling process: it tells the stories of the characters in the game, and it also tells the stories of the players playing it. In this fiction, nine participants built the world of Rivertown using a wiki, created their characters, and then explored it through online role-playing sessions. Their stories are captured on a series of two-columned pages: the column to the left shows a gaming transcript revealing the interchange between the player and GM, while the column on the right is the vignette-length narrative produced from the gaming session and told through the perspective of the player's character. Each page features numerous links to relevant wiki entries, and Rivertown can be explored via a scrollable Google map with embedded locations. A timeline that resembles a subway map shows the various connections between the characters' storylines.

*Calypsis* is an attempt to make visible both incremental storytelling and the role of the game mechanic for the resultant narrative. Though many novels have been based on games, almost none talk about game mechanics such as dice rolls in the production of narrative (Cover, ch. 3, pt. 6); the closest book I am familiar with is Robert Coover's *Universal Baseball Association, Inc., J. Henry Waugh, Prop.*, which links a character's game play to a story taking place in a world of his invention. *Calypsis* delves deeper in this regard, showing how a multifaceted narrative can be produced by multiple players making decisions that leave traces in their shared world.

The passage of time is central to the work. The meticulous reader will note that the events in the stories are not only tied to the gaming session that accompany them, but also to the chronology of those gaming sessions. So for example, a gaming session held on Friday evening for Player A will impact the gaming session for Player B on Saturday afternoon. Every story is impacted by every change to the world that has come before it, and has the potential to impact

every story that comes after it. The time stamping of play sessions and vignettes distinguishes play time (the time the players take to play) and event time (the time taken in the game world) (Juul 131). Event time in RPGs, like time in traditional works of fiction, is malleable, speeding up slowing down to suit the narrative, as one week of event time can pass in one second of play time. Conversely, one hour of play time can cover a few breathless minutes of event time in session that requires many actions to be resolved by dice rolling. The challenge in a multi-authored work is allowing the players to explore the issues their characters wish while neither getting too far ahead nor behind of the other players, as every action leaves a mark on the fictional world. The hypertextual nature of the work, along with the timeline and links at the foot of each page, allow readers to traverse the fiction by following each character's thread of vignettes in chronological fashion, or by skipping across the narrative tracks to get a sense of the intertwined metanarrative advancing with each vignette.

While I hope readers find *Calypsis* an engaging read, my larger goal is creating a platform for teachers of creative writing to glimpse the process of incremental storytelling at work in a coherent, if perhaps bewilderingly complex, work of collaboratively-written fiction. My intent is not to keep readers enthralled by any single narrative thread, nor is it for them to decipher the master plot (which does cohere for those willing to put in the effort); I neither want nor expect readers to follow every link down every pathway to every wiki entry to learn every sordid detail of the world. What I do hope, however, is to encourage others to undertake such a project for themselves; to gather with others to build a vast world, create detailed characters, and become immersed in an unpredictable narrative. I particularly hope to inspire teachers of writing classes who have classrooms of students who can learn much from constructing expansive fictional worlds and learning the fundamentals of characterization through role-playing; for as

sprawling as the world portrayed *Calypsis* is, it is still only roughly *one-third* the size of the Rivertown my students created.

As such *Calypsis* is less about product than process; it is not a conclusion but an experiment; it is not an answer but an open-ended question. Are there other ways to use incremental storytelling effectively? Almost certainly. But creative writers must be willing to put aside traditional methods of teaching (and thinking) about creative writing pedagogy and try something new. To roll the dice, as it were, and see how the story unfolds.

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Appendix A. Website examples of incremental storytelling.

1. “Rivertown Chronicles.”

Created in the course English 236: Introductory Topics in Creative Writing – “Gaming, World Building, and Narrative.” UW-Milwaukee, spring 2011.

Course wiki: <<http://rivertown.wikispaces.com>>

Google map: <[http:// goo.gl/maps/LLGK](http://goo.gl/maps/LLGK)>

2. *Calypsis: A Hypertext Fiction.*

Creative dissertation by W. Trent Hergenrader set in Rivertown.

Site: <<http://www.trenthergenrader.com/calypsis>>

3. “Hellwauke” (in progress, February to May 2013).

Created in the course English 236: Introductory Topics in Creative Writing – “Digital Storytelling and Role-Playing.” UW-Milwaukee, spring 2013.

Course wiki: <<http://hellwauke.wikispaces.com>>

Google map: <[http:// goo.gl/maps/ R1tQh](http://goo.gl/maps/R1tQh)>

Appendix B. Selected student responses from course survey.

Students of the course English 236: Introductory Topics in Creative Writing, subtitled “Gaming, World Building, and Narrative” had the option to take part in a series of surveys that asked them a range of questions about their experiences in previous creative writing classes and their reactions to the experimental approaches used in this course.

- Survey #1: Diagnostic survey asking about their gaming habits and past experiences in creative writing courses
- Survey #2: Asked their opinions about using digital tools and media other than print fiction in creative writing courses
- Survey #3: Asked their opinions on using role-playing games in creative writing courses
- Survey #4: Asked them to reflect on the course as a whole.

What follows are the unedited student responses only to the questions that directly pertain to the content of this dissertation.

Survey #2, Question 2

*Write a few short paragraphs reflecting on your experiences learning about world building and characterization based on the short stories you read, films you viewed, and the video game you played. Which forms of media best helped you understand concepts relating to world building and characterization?*

- The wide range of materials we've looked at in class have given me a much better understanding of a genre that I already felt fairly comfortable with. Specifically, the breakdown of Mad Max helped me understand how to much more convincingly structure fictional societies and political systems. I feel like I've gained some interspective on character motivation most through the short stories "A Song Before Sunset", "Killers", and "Artie's Angels." In "Killers" I was more interested in how the main heroine's motivations made her unlikeable and the effect that had on the story. In both of the other stories I had a strong reaction to the raider at the end of "A Song Before Sunset" and the Reaper from "Arties Angels". these characters are actively trying to destroy humanity, which I felt was harder to accept then anything from "Ginny Sweethips Flying Circus" or "Dark, Dark Were The Tunnels." I think that playing the game Fallout III best prepared me for the wiki-building section of the class. In stories characters are much more ingrained in the narrative in my mind, but in videogames the characters are more seperated because you can see then in diffrent order and they move. I appreciate how the method of worldbuilding we must use for the wiki follows the partmental world building approach you discussed at the start of the class and have explained is closer t the style used by professional writers as opposed to academic writers.

- I feel that it was the integrated approach that helped me most of all. The exposure to several different media types really inspired me to envision a very complete and rich world to draw my ideas from. I feel the video game and readings were most helpful for character creation purposes, while the video game and movie combo helped inspire my world building ideas. This means that the video gaming was most helpful over all, but I definitely feel the movies and readings were important as well as the trifecta forms a strong foundation for the work the class is completing.
- What separates this creative writing class from others (in terms of building a fictional narrative) is how every aspect is placed under its own 'narrative' so to speak. Instead of connecting each person, place, object, to one another, we've dissected each place, person, object, looking at them in their own terms. Each 'thing' stands alone, and by looking at what makes up each character, place, object, we go to the core individuality and uniqueness. It's a uniqueness that connects us to reality, in a sense. Because people and places are not always well defined in our world, using this dissecting technique helps us build fictional worlds that are as complex as our own. Each form of media we encountered offered these concepts in the same (or close to the same) amounts. Depending on the point of view the media is taking (in terms of storytelling), we discuss and dissect different things from them. For instance, in a first person narrative (ie: some short stories) world building becomes a topic that can be reached more in depth with because we are focused on a singular character who calls attention to their surroundings. In a third person narrative, we are seeing characters through a God-like nature so the characters become more of a focus.

- A pretty big aspect of characterization that I have gained a deeper understanding of through this course and the materials related to this course is the idea of the possessions a person carries with them and how those possessions influence their decisions and reflect their role within the story. For example the man from *The Road* has a gun with two bullets and the fact that he only has two bullets changes how often he pulls the weapon out, and also influences when he would use it. If he had more bullets he may not have hesitated to shoot the raider who threatened the boy. For me the video game and the movies were the most helpful with understanding world building and characterization. Both of those mediums are very visual and allowed for me to actually see the post apocalyptic worlds and grasp the barren landscapes and atmosphere of the world.
- I think that playing the game helped me to more understand world building than anything else. It is easy to look at the game and see the things that the creators want us to see. From there it is easier to really think about the person place or thing and really see it's place in the world. It is also easier to see all of the little details like the items strewn about and all the little snippets of history.
- All of them were really helpful. I would say the short stories and video game were most helpful because you get the feel for the world since you deal with it longer than in movies where they are quickly moving around to get to the plot. I am glad it was short stories and not novels because I was able to see how different writers developed their worlds and see what they thought was important to point out and what they all had in common.
- I think that examining the video game, and deconstructing it was interesting. It was certainly the newest way I've tried understanding world building and characterization.

- I guess for me the ultimate eye opening experience into world building was my experiences with MMORPGs (Massively Multiplayer Online Roleplaying Games). It really brought into perspective how you can make the most of a character by making him or her as dynamic as possible. Without this element the game seems stagnant as does many table top roleplaying games and short stories. In particular I was drawn to the way that race makes a very large deal in games like World of Warcraft. That is something that has always interested me - race conflict, and WOW does a good job of addressing those issues through missions in which you earn/lose allegiance points with other races.
- World building and characterization is vastly different depending on the media that will be used. With movies and fiction the world is implied and the way it is built is completely dependent on how the creators of the story include details about the environment, history, and characters. With video games the world is also implied, but it is up to the player to build his own perspective of the world depending on what he/she takes in and how. For example, in a game like Fallout 3 the player is free to wander the wastes at his leisure as long as he has enough supplies to survive the conditions. You can experience the game as a drifter traveling along the road always looking to trade or you can stick to the main storyline and find out about the world through that perspective. Video games are both more open and more limited than movies. They are more open than movies because you can take that character and remove him from the storyline to go about on your own adventures. While video games let you blaze your own trail, the worlds within a video game are not completely wide open to the player. You can't say anything you want to a character in conversation, you can only say whatever options the designers provide. I still believe that video games are and will be the most interactive and, consequently,

intimate form of storytelling available. As the years roll by technology becomes more and more powerful and it is opening up avenues of detail previously thought impossible.

World building is all about having a world with details; every time you zoom in on something, there is something else to zoom in on even further. With the pace of advancement in technology, it is not hard to foresee a video game in the future that has as much detail as reality does.

- They always say setting is important. But just how important is sometimes underrated. With the stories we read, movies watched, and game(s) played, I learned a lot about what creates the world. Specifically that of Fall Out 3, without the world it'd be entirely different. Knowing how the world actually strengthens the story is very important, and I'm glad that we focused on it so much.
- The most important thing I've learned so far in this class (regarding world building) is the importance of focusing on the character's outlook on the world. I think the thing that helped me most to conceptualize this was actually the playing of the video game. It's important to realize that, while the world can be intricately created and either amazingly interesting or horrendously boring, the story really lies in the way the character experiences and reacts to that world. The enjoyment of playing a video game comes not out of the way the world is created, but the experience that the user has simultaneously with the protagonist. Translating that into story-writing, it tells me two things: 1. I need to have a very clear conceptualization of the character I want to explore. I need to know exactly how the character thinks, how he reacts in various situations, and what that says about the world in which he lives. The way a character acts says so much about his perception of the world, that you hardly need to develop the world outside of his own



perception. 2. The world itself does need to be built, however. It can be built from the character's perception, or, less effectively, built through exposition. But in order to have a fully fleshed-out character, the world needs to be fleshed-out as well. The thing there is, though, that you do not need to include every detail of the world (and indeed you can't) in order for the character to get a sense of its workings. In fact, fleshing out only a slice of the world to its fullest potential is probably a more effective way of drawing the reader in, because then the reader can make his own inferences as to other aspects of the world and the characters it contains.

- Strangely, I liked the video games best. Not only could I see what was going on (Which is why videos helped more than short stories), but I could actually interact with it as well. I could pick up things, interact with objects, and get more detail about them. So you see a cup on the ground during a movie. Bit whoop. You can't interact with it. Now, why you'd need a cup in a video game...
- I've always like to world build. To be honest, I spend more time world building than writing stories set in those worlds. The most important thing I learned from the short stories, films, and video game is how to incorporate those ideas into the narrative. It's one thing to build a world with its own history, stories, and customs. It is an entirely different thing to utilize those things into a narrative. Why is this world's history important to the story at hand? And how does it affect the characters right now? I think I have a much better understanding of how to show the reader a world rather than tell them about one.
- Not to side-step the question, but honestly, all 3 forms of media were extremely helpful in learning about world building and characterization... just in different ways. When

reading the short stories, as a reader, you have to let your imagination do most of the work. Unless it is written detail for detail, you are allowed to let your mind wander the world that has been created on the pages in front of you. Imagining the worlds and characters from a creation of someone else, at least for me, inspires me to create worlds like these. The 2 films we viewed were extremely different from one another, in the sense that one was extremely well-done and a lot more meaningful than the other. I am talking about *The Road*. There is nothing positive or uplifting about the landscape in *The Road*. It is grey, dreary, and depressing. It makes you think; it made me sad and wish that I never have to experience something like that. While I think reading the short stories are a close 2nd place on what form of media has helped me the most in this class, I would still have to give the edge to playing the actual video game, *Fallout 3*. The reason I have for this is that you get to choose what your character does. Essentially, you are the character wandering the wastes. You can decide if you want to be a terrible person, or a goody goody saint-like figure. I also give it the edge because there are so many places to explore and so many NPC's to interact with. Sometimes, it almost feels like you are actually having those conversations, not your "character."

- In regards to the class assignments, I'd say that the short stories helped the most with world building. It came as second nature to imagine the worlds that the story's characters came from because the development of that fictional world was executed well. For example, the world buildup in the story "Dark, Dark Were the Tunnels" was excellent. It was so easy to place myself next to the character during his journey through the tunnels. The short stories were also very helpful because they sparked idea's for NPC's and even PC's. *Fallout 3* was definitely the most helpful and relevant source of reference for

character development. From the very beginning, it was clear that your character was the most important part of the game. You get to choose the color of your hair, skin, and eyes, the shape of your facial features, and the style of your hair. Further, you get to take a "test" that decides what type of character you will become. In the end, you can be whatever you want to be. But in my opinion, you really had to decide what kind of character you wanted to be and stick with it, otherwise the game just wasn't fun. The only reason I didn't mention film as being influential because I think I've watched so many movies that analyzing the world and characters just comes as second nature now. But for people who are less into films, watching movies for class and picking them apart is a great learning experience.

- Watching the films gave me visual ideas, and was good at giving me strong feelings about the situations. The stories did the same, and the stories also showed me how to effectively write about different worlds. The video game helped me to understand what it would be like to be inside that world, and how I could explain my experiences.
- The media that helped most with my proficiency with world building would have to be Fallout 3. Because a gamer has to be so explorative with the world he's placed in, the level of detail and cohesion the world has is much higher, and seeing the types of world facts that are considered by professional writers offers a much keener insight into what it takes to create.

Survey #2, Question 3

*Write a few short paragraphs reflecting on previous experiences in creative writing courses. Did you discuss or work with media other than traditional print texts (e.g. poems, short stories, or essays)? Do see advantages or disadvantages to other approaches to teaching creative writing concepts?*

- Gothic Literature is the only classes I have taken that are even close to a creative writing class thus far. I am in the Information Science major and as a result I rarely craft fictional realms. For Gothic Literature we read a large selection of gothic poems and novels and a few papers on the gothic as a genre. I definitely learned a lot about the genre, but the only writing opportunity for the class was the end project where we could write a paper or a story. I failed spectacularly and misunderstood the due date, resulting in a slipshod, last-minute Frankenstein-esque novel. I failed to incorporate characters becoming sick because they feel bad and anything as supernatural as I would have liked but I pulled through with an A- or B. This being my only experience, I suppose I see the advantages and disadvantages of the method of teaching this way. I personally find character creation and worldbuilding to be my strong suits, while I am dismal at dialogue and prose. I definitely see how focusing on the individual pieces of a story helps with the overall narrative. Based on what I've read I find compelling and well thought-out building blocks for stories the most important to my satisfaction with said story. But what do I know?
- I believe the integration of different media types is very helpful for students of creative writing. It is said that one should write what one knows, but for someone with little life experience this would produce nothing but aggravation and boredom. Life experiences can

be synthesized through a collective media approach and then drawn upon to teach the craft of creative writing. This can also be used to help fill the gaps between reasonable life experiences and impossible situations, as many creative writing students are blissfully unaware of the troubles of living in a post apocalyptic setting or being a medieval knight. This is where the aid of full immersion through mixed media comes in. This is the first creative writing class I have taken that has tried this approach, my other classes were primarily reading based with the occasional movie.

- The biggest advantage to working in different medias is that we can understand that storytelling, no matter what the form, is based in the same principles. At least, good, thought out storytelling is. Many people would argue that the video game media is lacking in terms of storytelling, but this is an untrue bias. Game developers who care about storytelling dive deep into their chosen world, exploring each character and place. In a game like Red Dead Redemption for example, each house is unique and has a history of its own. This attention to detail brings the player in, and like a good book, you can get lost for hours playing as a rouge man of the west, trying to right his wrongs. All in all, each media has something to offer, and the more you explore different medias the better. This is because it allows us as students to understand the similarities and differences of the storytelling art forms, and which ones we gravitate to. Across all platforms writing is essential to the media arts, and it's my belief that one isn't easier to write than the other... if you're choosing to be a good storyteller of course.
- Before this class I can't recall a creative writing class that used any other form of media aside from traditional print texts. It had always been poems or short stories that were later reflected on and discussed with a class. I think a benefit to using movies or video

games is that it give the instructor concrete examples of things that work in either of those mediums but don't work in writing. I think we all watch a decent amount of television or movies and a lot of us play video games also, having been exposed to those forms of fiction we may think that something from a movie or video game would translate well into the written word when it actually wouldn't. By using movies and video games in a creative creating class and then discussing them we can better understand why a fifteen minute fight scene works in a movie but the same fight scene written into five pages wouldn't work. Both movies and video games are also good for showing how to create a world and how to think about the subtle things that may go unnoticed but make a difference for the overall experience.

- In previous classes I have spent some time with other sources like poems and short stories. I think that it is very advantageous to students in creative writing to work with all kinds of media. Making a student come out of their shell and work with unfamiliar things can really make a student (like me) think more about their writing as well as hopefully give them inspiration. When I took a short story class I was challenged by the kinds of stories that I had to write. For the most part I had only written fantasy/fiction but My instructor challenged me to write realistic fiction as well and I had a lot of fun doing it.
- I feel that the old way of teaching creative writing is completely outdated. You take more time trying to understand the readings than actually seeing and understanding the creativity of the works.

- For the most part, every creative writing class I've had relies on traditional print text. While I can't complain as it has been how I've learned up until now, I think we need to start using modern tech in writing, regardless of what 'purists' say about it.
- Well, I had taken for my other and only creative writing course at the college level and tertiary level of education. He integrated a lot of graphic analysis into his class which I found fundamental and very informative. I was particularly a fan of our last project in which we took one of our pieces that we had written over the semester and turn it into a graphic piece. I also particularly like working with the news clippings when we did "found poetry". I think that it's very advantageous for us to explore these avenues. They are after all a form of creative writing and thus should be analyzed and appreciated.
- One creative writing course I took had examples of a few different formats of short fiction like short fiction told by diary entries, court transcripts, choose-your-own-adventures, lectures, letters, and resumes. I think that it is absolutely critical for the literary community to embrace the idea of nontraditional media in order to stay relevant. Creative writers, just like fiction, come in all different shapes and sizes and with the integration of things like the internet and video games into our cultural fabric it should be only natural that the literary community advocates creative growth in these new avenues of expression. Literature is a reflection of the zeitgeist and it is obvious that nontraditional forms of media are quite prevalent in our culture now-a-days. It should be a no-brainer to encourage students to pursue creative writing in whatever form of media they wish.

- We talked about briefly about what works and what doesn't in different medias. Example: a writing for a movie is completely different for how you should approach a novel or short story. Focusing on the world has helped show the importance that it holds. And our writing SHOULD begin to reflect that.
- I have not taken a creative writing class in which I deal with other types of media. The only others I have taken thus far are 233 which was online, and therefore rather difficult to incorporate other media, and 415 currently which is strictly 12-page short stories. I do feel like both of these courses (both kind of functioned as introductory courses for me) formed a good basis for my creative writing knowledge and have helped me a lot with conceptualizing the way i approach my writing. However, I feel like the staunch avoidance of other media is detrimental to the standard creative writing student's experience and perception of the field. Starting out, I had the impression that my career options as a potential Creative Writing major were: Novel or Bust! This is obviously not the case, as there are many other options that even a student studying standard print texts would have. However, there is a whole portion of creative writing opportunities that is ignored if the student does not delve into storytelling in other types of media, such as script-writing (which is wholly different from standard story writing, in its implication rather than description of action and setting), and indeed the video game genre, which probably holds more job opportunities due to its growing market. The fact is that a student focusing solely on print texts becomes rather limited in his options when it comes to job opportunities. It's true that such a person would be just as capable of working in a video game script writing position as one who studies mixed media storytelling, however that person would just not be as familiar with the limitations and freedoms that this



particular type of writing implies. It is important to expand one's horizons and become familiar with all types of writing and each genre's particular quirks, because it not only adds to one's cultural background, but that person become more versatile and more "hireable" than one who limits oneself to standard writing practices.

- I've never taken a writing class where we dealt with anything other than stories or poems. In regular English classes in high school, we'd sometimes watch the movie version of a book, but only after we'd already read it. I had an Advanced Composition class (in high school) where we once made a food dish, brought it in to school, and then wrote a "review" on one of our favorite dishes. I did have to sit in a public place and "eavesdrop" on other people's conversations. But other than a very few ideas (for a short story, maybe that length), it wasn't very productive. Other than that, all my writing classes have revolved around workshops. I can see how it is advantageous (eventually), but I don't like people reading anything other than my best work. If I have to hand out several copies of something that I'm actually not turning in, I feel weird, because it (the piece) is not yet where I want it to be. Maybe, for someone else, that can help. For ideas, sure. But when I have to read another person's work, I mainly feel like an editor. I have noticed that the prerequisites for creative writing classes don't include the grasp of basic grammar.
- I actually wrote and drew a children's book in a previous creative writing class, and it was a very interesting experience. I had to find a way to let both the words and the pictures tell a singular, cohesive story. In that same class we discussed poems and comics. Obviously both had their own ways of telling a story, and I liked trying out techniques usually reserved for one medium in another. It wasn't always a success, but it was always interesting. I think looking at various mediums can drastically improve one's

understanding of how to tell a story. The same story told in prose, poem, or comic panels can be very different. I think it's important to learn how the inclusion and omission of a story's various elements is important in its telling.

- In all of my other creative writing courses, the material is usually pretty similar; we read a selection of poetry or short stories, and then we'd talk about them. Then, if it were a workshop class, we would have a couple workshops per week. I don't have a problem with having a teacher who suggests what to read, but it wouldn't hurt to try to freshen up the creative writing courses. Sometimes, it felt as if I was just going through the motions. I don't want to feel that way while I am doing something I love. There will always be advantages and disadvantages in anything and everything somebody does. However, I think when you enable and encourage a classroom of students to have fun while still requiring them do an incredible amount of work is an advantage...
- I think the more, the better. Because of my background in art, it's easy to appreciate exposure to multiple media. In highschool, I was always more interested when the teachers deviated from the norm, especially in my english and history courses. I paid more attention when different, non traditional media was used, whether it was just a recorded voice, a film, animation, song or what have you. I loved the creative writing 233 that I took with you (Trent) last year because you integrated different forms of creative writing, including video. These media are an incredibly influential tool in my mind. It was a great idea to include gaming and film and pair them with creative writing because it helps push the mind in a new direction, or at least open it up to the choice to move in a different direction. Anyway, in my opinion, non traditional forms of creative writing make the deepest impact.

- In previous creative writing courses, we really never talked about media. I think it's great to incorporate media because it leaves a lot more to imagine. Writer's block is so common and with so many forms of media, it's almost impossible to not think of things.
- Before this semester I hadn't taken any creative writing classes, but the other one I am taking at this time has us read a little poetry, but most of the reading is fiction. Alternative methods haven't really been tried in my other class, as the workshop structure is pretty well mandated for that level of class. The advantages to alternative methods of teaching are clear; a renewed look at the process of writing is always productive, and alternative methods can integrate and engage a wider range of students than traditional workshopping really can.

Survey #3, Question 2

*Write a few short paragraphs reflecting on your role-playing experiences (map creation, character creation, and adventuring) thus far and how they have impacted your fiction writing. Has role-playing impacted the way you approach world building and/or characterization when writing fiction?*

- The role-playing sessions have been awesome. It really gets you thinking about character over story, which any artist knows is key. Because we are playing with the character we are writing about, we have 'double the experience' of being in that character's mind. When I'm playing I try to stay in character, which heightens the overall writing 'product'. The only problem with the writing we've done so far is that they are based on our RPG sessions which makes me feel like I should draw out of the lines. For instance, my character has sex with a girl. Because I rolled a 10 on performance the sex was great, so that's how I wrote it. Would it have been more conflicting if he didn't enjoy it? Yes, but a big part of me wants to stay true to the role-playing experiences we had. However, I don't see this being a big issue. These session help us build the character that we will be writing about for the 'big fiction piece' in which writing outside the lines seems more warranted.
- Starting with map creation, it was a very interesting concept to me that we'd be creating items, places, and even characters to then place them in the world we would soon be exploring. The places and the items weren't necessarily too difficult to construct, as our "world" was post-apocalyptic and full of destruction. But, it put me into a simplistic mindset, in the sense that the items I should be creating should be meaningful, simple,

but perhaps even mundane. Character creation was my favorite portion of the overall map creation, compared to creating items and places. Even creating the non-player characters was exciting because it gave me the chance to throw in a back story for five "fictional" characters. But, it wasn't as simple as that. Even though I was creating characters I would not be playing, I still had to briefly get into the head of each one of them. I had to create them with the thought in mind that my actual player character might eventually interact with them. Perhaps my player character wouldn't actually get the chance to interact with any of them. Either way, that's the mindset I came to this with. I had to have a balance; I couldn't make every character good or every character evil. I couldn't make every character intelligent or every character dumb. And so on. Playing around with what they'd be like and throwing names around that I had never thought to put in a story before all came out through this process. Then there was the business of player-character creation. That is the most personal aspect about this course. You decide everything: you have a back story, you give the character a personality, traits, etc... In fact, a lot of what is in this character may be coming from yourself or your own experiences. Then again, maybe none of it was. It was all on you. Finally, for the actual role-playing sessions, my only complaint is that I wish there were more of them. I had never done role-playing/tabletop dice games like this before, and it has been extremely entertaining and intriguing. Over the past few weeks, I have really gotten into the head of the character I created. I have really gotten to know this character and I have even acted in-character outside of this class, just to become more familiar with his persona. While writing my fiction these last few weeks, I have focused my energy on the methodical,

self-involved pace of the character I created. This character has become more than just a snapshot; I have developed an idea to write a series centering on this character now.

- Role-playing, I think, has changed entirely how I looked at my writing. To make the decisions I needed in game, I had to step into my characters head and actually think like it. And if I wasn't doing the things I thought my character would do, I felt like I was weakening the session. Also, being forced to think of so many ways to make the writing more concise to stay under the limit, it was fantastic! Focusing on one thing and making it exciting was hard, and it took some extra brain power I hadn't used before while in my writing. Understanding how every word shaped the narrative helped. I still am not getting into character enough, but I think this has definitely been insightful, and will try to continue this approach in my future writing.
- Role playing has helped me with fiction writing by helping me to see how a world is pieced together. Through everything we have done I have come to see how much goes into a single world and how much of that may be cool ideas but we don't see in every story. Role playing has impacted how I approach world building because it has changed my perspective of that world. It has made it easier for me to see on the level of the characters and to understand the things that are important and the things that are not.
- I think my role-playing experiences have helped build on my world building skills. When creating a character for an RPG, you need to flesh out that character and put yourself in his or her shoes. This is helpful for creating fully-realized protagonists.
- The role-playing experience as a whole has been very interesting for me. I did not have any previous experience, which made the whole experiment simultaneously exciting,

interesting, and frustrating. It was exciting and interesting to explore our mass-created world through role-playing, although I felt that the chance encounter and scavenge tables put very severe limits on our abilities to really achieve certain goals (for example, my character was specifically searching for technology items, and so far has only come across a few corpses, broken glass, some batteries...). I was also interested in the function of the GM and the surprisingly large role he seems to play in the creation of our fictitious world. Although the locations and some of the NPC's we've encountered have pre-established backstories, the GM can and does create other characters whose interactions with us are completely determined by his will. The frustration I have experienced comes from the tried-and-true glitches with group projects in academia. Inevitably, there are going to be varying levels of interest in the tasks at hand, and this has certainly been the case in the classroom for me. It has been difficult to advance the gameplay due to other classmates not completing character sketches, attention straying frequently, and above all the GM's lack of desire or ability to corral attention back toward gameplay. All that being said, I have been extremely interested in the way the role-playing has affected and shaped my fiction writing. It's been intriguing to be stuck with set actions - more of an outline for the plot of the story, I suppose. It's kind of like the way a writer might map out the skeletal points of a piece before delving into the details of it - except this method requires little to no imagination on the behalf of the writer. The main actions are determined partially by the world, partially by the GM and partially by the choices of the character or the group. This provides an interesting setting in which to write the character's personal experience of the action - it is really a road map for the character's personal development. What I really enjoy about using role-playing to inspire

short fiction in this instance is that the world is previously fleshed out. It is so much more interesting to go into a piece of fiction having a fully-realized concept of the world the character inhabits - this allows the character to interact more fully with the world, and in turn gives the author so many more opportunities to explore the way the character is shaped by its surroundings. I think I often write in the opposite direction - focusing on the plot, and letting that plot realize the character and the world, rather than the other way around. I enjoy this method as much as I dislike it; for all its limitations, it really opens up new doors for my writing because I am not stuck on "What happens next, how would my character realistically react?" Furthermore, I have plenty of opportunities to delve into my character's past, in which I have more leeway because that is not pre-determined by our gameplay.

- I think the role playing aspect of the class has helped me with the fiction writing in that when I made up a character and made up a background for the character, I was able to form more insight into the characters head. By already having a background and then writing a story about that character in another situation it was easy to write in that character's perspective and have an idea of how they would react, given their background.
- I have never role-played before. I never thought I'd like it as much as I actually do. But making myself try and think what Ursa would do, and not me, is hard, but fun. And it allows me to really get into her head. I don't know if it's good or bad: I used to create a world (sort of) to fit a certain character. Now, we've made the world, and I needed to make a character for it. Having the world already set means I know how to shape my character (what are her strong points? What's she scared of?) instead of changing and re-changing the whole world, over and over again, simply to fit the character.



- The role-playing portion of the course has really been exciting. You venture into a world you've helped create and there isn't anything that gives you more creative fuel for writing than being able to escape into the world you're writing about. I find that approaching short fiction using this format really allows me to identify with the protagonist because it's not something that is made up, it's something that you BOTH lived through and experienced. It helps the writer align with the character. While keeping the short fiction that you write within the (relative) confines of the role-playing session can be challenging, it can also be rewarding. It makes you think long and hard about the choices that you've made and the choices that were made for you and how your character reacted to them, both overtly and introspectively. Why, when a sniper's shot rang out, did my character run for cover instead of running to save the child, when he had developed such a strong bond with the kid? That makes for some interesting reflection and, in turn, that makes for some interesting fiction.
- The map creation and the character creation was really fun and pretty helpful for writing. When creating the map I was immediately thinking about all the locations I could remember from all the stories, movies, and games that dealt with the post-apocalypse and kept that atmosphere in my head and tried to imagine characters living under those circumstances. Character creation was fun and useful because I had to think harder about each of the possessions, events, and people that has impacted the character. Writing based off of role-playing is a refreshing experience to me. First thing is that while you play as your character you begin to get attached to it and that is when you start pondering about how exactly would the character act in situations.

- Once we began creating items, I knew that this last part of the class would be my favorite. I wish we could have had more time for this role-playing section. The items were the easiest to create, places a little bit more difficult, and characters even further so. I tried to put more effort into the places and characters so that when PC's stumbled upon them, there'd be more of a story behind them. I figured that items, with a shorter description, are easy enough to fill in the gaps with your imagination. When it came to creating my PC, I had the most fun. Finding her true colors and getting to know her was a process more than anything. I think I still have things to learn about my PC, Rabies. Building our own world as a class from the bottom up definitely put a different perspective on fiction. In the past, I've usually decided on a few characters and a journey before anything else, so this process of creating the little things first taught me that it's easier to find what you want to write through a process of creation, rather than force out something kind of alien. For example, If I'd like to write a story about an a forgotten unicorn searching for a unicorn prince: she meets a talking tree who tells her to complete three tasks in order to find a prince, she does so through certain challenges, and finds her prince and lives happily ever after, I already know the ending so it's not much fun to fill in the gaps. Role-playing has shown me that it's okay to change a character after writing about them for a while. Nothing has to be set in stone. Not only do people change and mature, but over time, you also find out deeper motives the more you get to know someone (your character).
- For my first role-playing experience in the class I was very frustrated. The way you made game time progress independently from us really threw me. I remember the group tried to decide how to react to a deer, I said "I kill it?" and while other decided the various tactics

they could implement, it got away. That style focused a lot on quick thinking and knowing your character completely, neither of which I had a grasp on at the time. I remember in the practice session Joe passed a notebook to another player, which struck me as odd since we were stating every thought that came in our heads. It was then I decided I hated leading groups and also decided to create a character with a complex back story that I could fall back on when play sessions didn't work out well. I had planned on making my character be delusional every session but after the first it was difficult to come up with relevant flashbacks. And I didn't want to hurt the group by being useless and delusional all the time. So I scaled it back. After role-playing I wish I had spent more time on my NPC's. I feel like I should have added much larger back stories and how they would react in given situations. When I write I don't necessarily make throw-away characters but only include what I think the extra needs. I've been trying to write as if every character is a main/player character now, with mixed results.

- Map creation never really involved the players, since we only created unique places for Trent to place around the map, but walking through and seeing our own locations was pretty fulfilling. The way the DM's embraced everyone else's content was awesome as well. My writing was most impacted, however, by the adventuring itself. I began to embrace writing as a storytelling exercise you could inject your own personal view and spin on, instead of merely telling the facts creatively, because the story WAS CREATED in the context of joking, conversation, and having fun.
- I role-played only a handful of times before this class, so this is the first time I really put any significant effort into it, and it's definitely the first time I acted in accordance with my character's personality rather than just 'trying to win'. It was a very interesting

experience, and it allowed me to understand my character in a way that I never experienced a character I created before. I wouldn't say it's more in-depth than a more traditional approach to character creation, but it's definitely unique, fun, and fascinating. As for world creation, I have a tendency to do such things on my own, so this wasn't too different of an activity that I'm used to. However, combining my ideas with the creations of 24 other people was a new experience. Everyone had a different idea of what this post-apocalyptic world was supposed to be like, so in the end it was sort of a hodgepodge of different ideas, yet it somehow worked. I'm a bit of a control freak when it comes to world building, so having things that existed in this world that ran counter-intuitive to my own perception was a bit jarring at first, but I managed to accept them, and even utilize them in my role-playing.

Survey #3, Question 4

*Write a few short paragraphs reflecting on role-playing compared with your previous experiences in creative writing courses. Do you see any advantages or drawbacks to role-playing versus other approaches to teaching creative writing concepts, such as world building and characterization?*

- Because I am a film major I tend to see movies in a somewhat different light than the general viewing public. I'd like to think it's a more refined taste. Anyways, the movies that have lasting appeal and are artistic are those that put a higher emphasis on character over story. "Apocalypse Now" "Goodfellas" "King's Speech" to name a few. The role-playing approach lends itself to this artistic principle. It's cool anytime you can incorporate some sort of higher meaning or message, but too many times we find ourselves focusing too much on theme over the all important character. Character helps us see ourselves within the fiction, and like I said in the response above, being in character during these role-playing sessions helps us achieve that goal (of bridging fiction with reality).
- While I have had some bright spots in other creative writing workshops/classes, most of them follow the same format. So unfortunately, after awhile, they all begin to mesh together, and I lose track of which is which. Nothing really starts to stand out anymore. This class has been a huge exception, mainly because of the role-playing/creating an entire world on a wiki. It has been unreal how much fun I have been having while also coming up with several new ideas for future fiction pieces, and even poetry pieces. The advantages of this have been that I have really been able to get inside the head of the

character I created. As far as characters go, I have not had to worry about developing anyone else except the one I created. This aspect has given me a lot of time to truly think about what makes this character tick, what pleases this character, how he speaks, etc... I have thoroughly enjoyed creating and developing this character. Also, the role-playing gives you opportunities to act in ways you wouldn't necessarily act outside of that particular session. It puts you in a realm of being comfortable because you are acting as if you are somebody else. Through this, though, you certainly may become more comfortable outside of a particular session,

- In past courses, when you're told to step into your character, it never really sunk in on how to do that, even though I had played games like this before. When put into a room where you will specifically look at how you will be doing this writing with the gaming, it takes on a whole new meaning. Creating the setting is more than just, well it's the city, and there a lot of people, and then they go to the character's apartment.... the world needs to be just as fully developed as anything else. I think there are real advantages here as a planning stage, and look forward to hopefully applying them else where.
- One of the main advantages of using role playing for creative writing is that you don't spend as much time thinking deeply on each movement and action of each character, usually you are making decisions in the heat of the moment like the characters which makes it more believable. One of the drawbacks I have noticed however is that I am not as free to express things and I do not have the ultimate control over events like I want. This can be frustrating for a situation where you want your character to have something like a person to love but they keep dying in the game. I think that role-playing is a great

way to help teach world building and to help get into your character's skin and understand how they feel.

- Using roleplaying to facilitate character creation is a very unique and rewarding experience. I would recommend it to other writers.
- As I mentioned before, the role-playing has really allowed me to think of my writing in a new way. I spend relatively little time drafting - I can't focus on a piece for too long before it becomes either foreign or frustrating to me. When I have written for creative writing classes in the past, I have spent so much of my allotted time trying to work out plot points (or even to come up with a plot, or a setting, or a character... AGH!) that when it comes to developing the character or relationships or other aspects of the world, I have almost reached the end of my attention span, and I have to come back on a second draft and drastically revise my story to flesh out the details. What has really helped me in this class is the structure that the role-playing gives to plot creation. There is a set of parameters that I need to follow which includes plot points, other characters' actions, and the world's tendencies. Staying within these parameters, and not needing to think so much about the plot, allows me to devote my thoughts to the way the character experiences these situations. I am able to think more about relationships, character development, sensory description, and other items that I wouldn't normally be able to focus on in a first draft. I am able to think more about my character and her personal growth than laboring over what is going to happen next. The most time I spend on writing is the time I spend thinking of ideas for interesting plots - I have started thinking of potential plot points for my Fiction Workshop class as far as six weeks in advance, but haven't been able to actually start writing until a day or two before the piece is due (really

only because the due date forces me to pick something and write). It's been such a relief to have a creative way of interacting with others to determine the thing that gives me the most pause, and not have to worry myself about the creation of plot. I also enjoy the creative outlet of the wiki, and reading the way the others in my group have their characters reacting to the same situations. It makes for fascinating reading when my classmates post fully-realized character-based sketches (although the pieces that just tell what happened with minor comments aren't quite as enthralling, of course). I write too much! But I hope this is helpful :) I have really enjoyed this class and the new ideas it has to offer, and I would really like to continue on over the summer or take similar classes or will consider forming groups of my own to write in a similar manner. It's a really great tool for the writers who struggle, like I do, to come up with truly new and innovative plot elements. It only makes me wonder what other kinds of methods could be used in a similar way?!!

- Role playing can really get you into the state of mind of the character your going to write about. Also the situations and events that occur aren't completely up to you. If someone you are role playing with decides to throw a punch at someone or run away from a situation that impacts the story you can tell, because the events that you will write about and that will impact your story were determined by someone else.
- I thrived in elementary school (when we did so many projects), in high school chemistry labs (when it was hands-on), and college calculus (all the homework and reviews for tests). But I've always been good in English. It was always learning, and doing. I never thought English could be even more interactive than it already was. I didn't get to simply read a book about a post apocalyptic world, I got to create one. I didn't get to read about a



character in a post apocalyptic world, I got to be one. I'm getting more immersed in this world than normal (not in a bad way, though). The only drawback I see is other people (parents, students, other professors) not taking role-playing as a serious learning venue. I think it's something they'd have to experience to be able to understand - just like I am.

- This has been my favorite creative writing course I've taken in my entire collegiate career. I will be graduating this semester and I am saddened to finally see such a creative and relevant approach to writing fiction appear only at the end of my scholastic career. Using something like role-playing to fuel creativity is a great idea. By role-playing a scenario, the students can pinpoint exactly what decisions their characters make and how they react to the environment around them. They are writing fiction as they role-play. It gives them structure, while still (mostly) letting the student control exactly how the fiction will turn out.
- I believe that the role-playing is a new step forward in creative writing. I do not understand why we continue the same creative writing process over and over. It is always the case where we would have to read old literature and somehow relate to that style of writing and then come up with your own way of writing. No wonder there is rarely any inspiration in students' writings. The role playing eventually, even if you do not like playing, involves you more into your writing. At one point you feel like you can relate to your character and I actually felt like what I wrote came directly from me instead of trying to observe other authors writing patterns.
- Role-playing has helped this class form some pretty awesome relationships, which might be something that other classes lack. I think the two main reasons to connect with peers

in OTHER creative writing classes are critiques and giving your opinion during class discussion. In that regard, maybe this class could have had more time for class discussion. We did more so in the beginning, but I felt like there was so much that you had to tell us (which wasn't bad or boring or anything) that sometimes our class discussions cut short. That's not your fault, that's the fault of time. It didn't take long to feel comfortable amongst my peers in this course. Role-playing was something to look forward to and something to get excited about. Other classes may lack that enthusiasm. Something that might help for future classes like this would be to prepare students before the first day. Stress that when they sign up for the class that they shouldn't just take this because they need to for an elective, but that they should choose this because they really want to take it. Try and have people come prepared with all of the materials and maybe even some stories read before the first few classes. I'd say there were many advantages to role-playing. Like I said before, it puts a different perspective on world building and characterization. I think it's the best way I've looked at writing thus far. Role-playing also forces you to get to know characters you may not have thought of using in writing before, and because the GM has a huge impact on the delivery of events, your character may be forced to make some epic decisions. A word on role-playing: awesome. Thanks for an awesome class.

- Conventional creative writing courses focus on what you are trying to say, and also how you say it, I feel. The idea of composition and content were much more integrated than past English classes I've taken. I haven't taken any other creative writing classes in the past, so if you could change your study to better fit my experiences I'd be much obliged. The advantages of role-playing, I feel, is that the story is collaborative, meaning it is very

easy to get fundamentally different acting characters in the same story. The outline of the story is done together which provides the writers the essentials that they can emphasize different parts of or expand upon. In conventional writing the entire story has to be pieced together by one person, and so every action is weighted greatly, things don't happen that can be glossed over. The drawbacks of role-playing are so numerous I am surprised it ever works. The GM is crucial to the story, in ensuring interesting opportunities are available and balancing the player's time, the plot development, and providing an interesting environment that the characters populate. Other players can easily make role-playing dull. 2/5 of the role-playing I have done consisted of players actively trying to destroy me, which I thought would make great writing, you know, the struggles of mortal combat. This may be because my fighting ability is atrocious, but it is challenging narratively.

- It's definitely a more involved method of developing prompts for writers, but the role playing has much more effect than just providing the plot. The method of creation of the characters really emotionally attaches a writer to their success, failure, or situation because we're playing to win, and that authenticity comes through in the writing.
- Like I said above, learning about your character by acting him/her out is a very enlightening experience. At first, I wasn't certain if my character would have actually made the choices that I did, but as I progressed through the sessions, I could understand better what, and why, he would make a choice. This allowed me to write better stories though his perspective. However, since I wasn't controlling any other characters, it was a bit harder to write about them. I didn't want to put words into any character's mouth that he/she would never say, but I also needed something for my character to work against. It

was a delicate process to balance story needs with staying true to the role playing session, but as I played more and more, this became much easier. I would note that I think there should be more time spent role playing, since the more I roleplayed, the easier it was for me to act, and write, in character.

Survey #4, Question 2

*Write a few paragraphs reflecting on the course as a whole. What parts of the course did you especially like or dislike? How did it compare with your previous experiences with creative writing?*

- This course was unique and enjoyable. The fiction/film/games approach is not one I had encountered before, but I feel it was helpful in generating inspiration for writing. The collaborative wiki setup was great. The rich world that the class as a whole developed gives us such a large well of material to draw on, that it is very tempting to continue on in this world after the semester is over.
- I really liked this class a lot. The entire role playing part of the class, was interesting and very different from any other creative writing class I have taken before. By doing the role playing and then writing about it, it was almost as if our stories wrote themselves or at least had a pretty good outline before we even started writing. Since we already created these characters, and gave them back stories and motivations, when we played as them, for me at least I was already in their head and had ideas of how they would feel the situations we were in. Then writing about that was very different than any other class we had.
- This course is great and I would recommend it to anyone with an interest in writing. I'm not sure if I have anything to add to what I've said before on the subject. I think the small group mentality is amped up in this class compared to others, and that helps both the writing and the community part of the class. The role-playing was a lot of fun, obviously,

but it was also a great crutch for writing. We write about the experiences we had in the RPG sessions, but it certainly made me think about stories and characters outside of the session.

- I enjoyed working with a variety of students with different levels of experience in gaming, literature, and role-playing. Interacting with role-playing games and applying what was gained from that into a student-built world was very useful and got me orientated with the concepts involved. Building the post-apocalyptic Milwaukee was the most difficult, but most rewarding part. Taking my neighborhood in Greenfield and turning it into a newly-established town that can protect itself and build into a self-sustaining society was the best part in my view. Now that I have made New Bottsford, I can imagine the settings of the town as I walk or drive about in my neighborhood. I had not taken any other creative writing class in a university setting prior and wanted to take it so I can both be more creative in my work as an artist and take a break from the usual courses that I take as an art student at UWM. The one problem that I had with the class was getting a story made between the role-playing session and the due date the next day because of all the classes that I have between those two events in the week.
- This course trumped any course that I've taken at UWM thus far, and I'm sure it will continue to outweigh courses in the future. I especially liked playing Fallout 3 and discussing all the places and NPCs in class with other students in technical and formal terms rather than just saying "yeah that character sucked and that place was cool". I also really enjoyed role-playing. I think that was the most exciting part of the course. Role-playing taught me the most about to think about writing, character building especially, in a new and awakening way. I'm glad the class was only about 20 students. It would not be

as successful as a larger class. I have never taken a class that encouraged video games or tabletop role-playing. Because the students had similar interests, we connected more as a whole group, rather than just feeling like an individual student in a weird environment. I feel like I've taken away many useful skills and have further improved my writing.

- This course is genius. There was really nothing I didn't like. It was better than any other writing course I've ever had. It helped me to develop my characters and to focus on setting rather than a storyline as a whole. It broke things down in an easy, do-able way.
- I love the amount of usable content that came out of this class, and the crowd-sourced nature of our world means that there will always be surprises as long as the world keeps evolving. What I liked most about the class, though, were the writing critiques with other talented, dedicated writers. My previous experiences with creative writing had mostly been for high-school english class, and while I was still good back then, there was no refinement or workshopping. I'd come out of a class no more proficient than I went in. But this style gives precise, accurate feedback about things you can do to make your writing really unfairly good, and that was awesome.
- I liked all the content of the course. The reading, video gaming, wiki-building, role playing, and writing. I think I was least comfortable with the acting aspects of role playing. I described my character, Virgil, in the third person a lot, but when I had to describe the actions he did, I found myself saying I did them. The only bad experience I had was when another GM took over our last session, not because we were cast as villains, but because we were cast as uninteresting villains. I often made comments the events in the role-playing sessions being accurately portrayed in the writing, so maybe

I'm just finnick. I felt the most comfortable in the world-building section of the class because I had plenty of time to think of good locations or items I thought might be interesting. I also enjoyed the role-playing a lot, I'd often get very involved only to have to go straight to work afterwards. There I would walk around zoned out, plotting my next move that I would have to wait a week to be able to do. I liked how our group only had three members. I feel like we got a lot done in the hour we had, we joked, but it never ate up time. The dynamics of creating a reason my party's three members would band together was challenging, we just bumped into each other and later we worked backwards for our reasons for staying together. This is the first creative writing class I've taken at UWM, but I think I would have found the vignette style challenging no matter what. I had planned on having Virgil write about what was real, and then mix in memories seamlessly, and then add sections of a novel he was trying to write and also a series of dream sequences. I hope my writing has improved but I have not been able to accomplish what I had hoped at all.

- I liked all three sections of the course (Apocalyptic stories across media, wiki creation, and role-playing and fiction writing). I thought that we could have condensed the wiki creation phase of the course in order to make room for more role-playing and fiction writing. I would have to say that, although I thoroughly enjoyed all sections of the course, my favorite thing we did was the role-playing and fiction writing. It really was different than anything I've ever done in any other creative writing course. It was a very unique and, in my opinion, mind-opening experience. It FORCED a lot of people out of their comfort zone for writing and that's always a good thing to explore.



- As a whole, I really enjoyed the class. It expanded how I want to create meaningful characters, and the idea of character creation in an RPG element really helped determine how to write my stories. The more hands on in the creation process was really nice.
- As a whole, I loved the concept of this course. I thoroughly enjoyed the role-playing sessions, and I suggest that they are included more if this course is taught again. I would suggest you jump into the role-playing sooner and you continue it for longer than just four weeks. Regardless, the four weeks of it was wonderful. But, I was left wanting more, much more. As for having to play Fallout 3 from an educational perspective, I felt as if it was completely necessary for this course, if you took the video game playing seriously. If you connected to the game, to the NPC's within the game, and your character, then this should have been useful to you. It was useful to me because I felt the need to find my father in the game. My first play-through, I felt the need to be the good guy, the "savior." And, the second time through, I felt the need to be awful. I wanted to experience things in a game that I know I would never do in real life. Also, it really helped with creating my PC for our role-playing sessions because it made me focus on what skills/attributes would be important and useful in a post-apocalyptic world. As for the movies and short story anthology, both components were necessary to this course, as it helped introduced all different kinds of media to help us draw ideas from and write fiction. My suggestion here would be to switch out Mad Max Beyond Thunderdome for a movie that is a little... well, better. I understand why it was chosen, really. But, I'd like to think there are better movies out there that would get across what this class is all about just as well. As for The Road, I thought that was a wonderful choice, and it did a hell of a job (depressingly so) painting the post-apocalyptic world. I imagined most of our role-playing world was like

the world in *The Road*: empty and lifeless. As I've stated in previous surveys, this class was far more exciting and fun than all of the creative writing classes I've taken previously. That is not to say they were bad by any means, but after awhile, the normal creative writing class settles into a formula that is monotonous throughout most of the other creative writing classes that are offered. This class was a whole new take on things: the students were in charge of the world (for the most part), we all took it seriously and enjoyed what we were doing. I don't think this "experiment" could have gone any better, honestly.

- I really enjoyed the course overall. My favorite part (though it took a little while to get to that point) was by far the role-playing. I so enjoyed the collaborative experience and the opportunity to learn about my character through that medium - it was far and away the most inspiring portion of a writing class that I have ever experienced. One of my least favorite parts of the class was the weeks of wiki creation. I felt that this could have been combined pretty easily, as was mentioned in class, with the first six-or-so weeks of class, pairing readings (focused on characters, locations, items, etc) with our own wiki creation. Reading through stories focused on characters for one day, followed by a discussion and then solitary wiki creations, would have been a really great way to apply the concepts we learned through interacting with the varied types of media we were assigned. I also felt that possibly the portion of the class in which we played *Fallout* could have been reduced a bit (and this just to make room for more role-playing). I didn't get too far into the game because of technological restrictions, but I felt I achieved all of the concepts we talked about through exploration of the Vault and venturing out from the Vault into a few other locations. It was certainly interesting to play the game, but perhaps further exploration of

the game would be optional for those who'd be so inclined. I was surprised that this was my least favorite part, because it's what initially got me hooked. I wonder if it would be relevant to include the playing of another RPG, maybe a more linear one, to demonstrate the differences between the approaches? The limitations and the character development are quite different, and it would be interesting to juxtapose the two styles of playing (like, say, a Final Fantasy game, where the character is already fleshed out; then the focus could be more on the distribution of information and how it comes about). Just a thought; Fallout really demonstrated the world-building aspect, but for those who'd never played before, it might be difficult to envision the world as a finished project. I really have never experienced creative writing in this way before. I loved the idea of decentering the classroom, especially because it wasn't so readily apparent to the group at times the lessons they were learning. It must have been so gratifying to hear the class as a whole coming up with their own ways to phrase what they learned, without realizing that they were learning at all. It was a very social atmosphere which differs so greatly from my other writing class right now - nobody talked to each other, and everyone thought they were so much more talented than all the others. This format of the class really put everyone on an even footing, and the success or failure of the project depended on everyone's equal input and participation. I thought that was so valuable in contributing to a collectively driven mindset.

- I found the course as a whole to be quite fascinating. The collaborative world building and storytelling aspects was one of my favorite parts of the class. Letting other people's work influence my own writing is something I never before considered, and I found it to be quite enlightening. It not only taught me how to do such things, but also provided

insight as to how I work as a writer myself. Also, the idea of learning about your character internally though acting out his/her choices is a much different experience than learning about them through just writing, an experience I'd like to try again, hopefully soon. While I don't have too many formal creative writing credits to my name, this was far different than any experience I had in any classroom, and definitely one of the more useful ones.

- I liked the role playing best and worst. I have... anxiety issues. Big groups, people I don't know... it all adds up. Every time I take a small class, a discussion, or a lab, I dread going to it. But in the end, I feel better and more confident of myself. So role playing was hard, because I had to interact with other people, put myself out there, and risk anxiety attacks. It was also the best part because it let me open up and not really care what people thought. It was interactive, and that's how I learn best. Plus, I got to think like Ursa. People doesn't bother Ursa. Make her nervous, sure, but not anxious.
- The course was very interesting to take. The new way that the instructor had developed the course was most entertaining and highly informative. It was finally a course that was directed and aimed at what I personally had been working for. It took many forms of media to explain and teach topic writing in fiction. The most enjoyable part was watching other students who were slightly unfamiliar with gaming and writing as a whole, develop their own style of writing. What was a bit slow was the development but I was not sure how to view this because I already had a full grasp of fiction writing in the genre we were studying, I was unsure of how many other students were already comfortable with the topic. The time was well divided for the variety in the subject matter. This was the most

engaging in a creative writing course I have ever been, which is a lot due to this being my major.

- I enjoyed the challenge I was presented with in having to actualize a complete and functional world with a group of others and adhere to the collaborative rules created therein. I wish we would have had more time to roleplay but felt that the makeup of the class was necessary to complete the goal. This class has single handedly restored my faith in English classes, and the teacher was awesome. He nurtured our creativity and helped to sculpt writers out of us.
- This course was really fun and inspirational and I hope that this way of teaching creative continues in the future. I haven't taken many creative writing courses but I have taken many English classes and I have to say that it always feels repetitive and outdated. The emphasis is always on the classics and never anything recent and never incorporated media or role playing. This class included all of these things, short stories, movies, video games, and role playing. I really liked how all these sources served as inspiration to our fiction writing. It is very refreshing to feel that I can actually relate to my fiction than before where I felt I was imitating classical scenarios.

Survey #4, Question 3

*Write a few paragraphs reflecting on how using different media, role-playing, and gaming impacted your fiction writing. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages to this approach? Do you feel you learned more or less about creative writing concepts, such as world building and characterization, and why?*

- liked the combination of the roleplaying and fiction writing. Playing as a character for an hour, then basing my fiction writing assignments on that character and his experiences was a unique challenge that I think was a great benefit to the learning process. Having that framework of the sessions to work with is both a help and hindrance, because you have to keep in mind that not everything that happens can work in your story, but you do have that rich tapestry to draw upon in writing your vignette.
- I sort of already answered this in the above section, in that I think the role-playing gave us a unique insight into our own characters' heads and that paved the way for the fiction we wrote, in that for me at least I already had an idea of what to write because I already had what I thought my character would be thinking in those circumstances. I think that the video game and movie aspect of the class helped us think about world building. Comparing how movies and video games build the world the fiction is in to that of writing was interesting. In movies and games the creators have to put a lot more detail into the world and include things that you would never think about while simply reading a story.

- This class is not focused on different media/gaming at all. Its focus is clearly on a different way of writing stories, and we explore that way through the different media. The 'different way' is to focus on the world around you and every aspect of a character, instead of a more traditional focus of story and theme. The classes focus is not dependent on multi-media reflection, BUT... I do think it brings an added element to the class. Because most visual media are more story/theme driven, looking at them from a different perspective adds a dimension to those media forms. This class taught me more on world building and characterization, which is the ultimate goal of course. Other creative writing concepts (themes, story arch, ect) I did not learn about in this class, but that's fine because most classes (albeit creative writing or any other art class) teach the other concepts.
- A major advantage of using role-playing, gaming, and other media was the ease of usage. I'm familiar with playing games and taking the story-driven nature of them into fiction writing helped with creating the fictional events and settings of 2114 Milwaukee. One disadvantage can be access. Before the class, I didn't have an Xbox 360. So rather than using my roommate's console I went to Microsoft and got one. Which was a better way to go considering that mine works and his does not. However, the one concern is that not everyone is ready to throw down \$250 for a console. Using role-playing and gaming helped for the better with creating writing concepts including world building. The reason is that it can be used as a stepping stone to go into greater depth. For example, when I was in middle school I played San Francisco Rush 2049 a lot. The music and the setting of a futuristic San Francisco to race through played a great role in immersing me to a familiar but different world. From there I made all my fictional creative writing set in the

late 2040's to the early 2050's in San Francisco with the style and feel of a futuristic bay area.

- I haven't found any disadvantages to the activities in which we participated. Everything was engaging and exciting. I feel like I've learned more about creative writing concepts, especially characterization. Fallout 3 and designing my character for role-playing helped the most with character design. Building our world from the bottom, filling it with items, non player characters, and places, opened my eyes to a different way to approach creative writing. I had always started with a character and a story in mind rather than items and places. Gaming was an efficient way to think about being a part of your character. You made all of their decisions, decided what they said, and chose their clothing and hair color. However, there's the whole thing where your character is inside your t.v., and you only control them with a little piece of plastic with buttons on it. At the same time, you build such a strong connection with your character. I flinched when I saw a hit coming my way, I felt fear in the dark, I got exciting when I won a battle. I found that connection between me and my character absolutely awesome.
- Writing for me, before this class, was just putting a shitload of words on paper. Making them make sense with each other. But as we watched movies, played games, etc, I learned that I could write just about anything. The people who write movies, construct video game worlds, and develop tabletop games are all creative writing nerds like me, and that realization really expanded my thinking for my own writing future. The world-building we learned from fallout (playing the game really did help more than I initially gave it credit for) made me think in a broader scale in my own writing, and helped me develop more cohesive and unified worlds for my pieces.



- I think that the gaming portion of the class affected my world building, but not my fiction writing. I thought about the composite parts that made up Fallout and tried to follow that structure when making places and NPCs. My writing drew from the world we built and the actions of the role-playing, but I drew most from the short fiction at the very beginning of the course for my writing. I liked the different factions the class came up with, but my group didn't run across any NPC's that were very compelling I thought. The places were generally rubble, which caused me to second-guess my locations which seemed overly complex and impossible compared to bike shops and salvation armies. I know I learned a lot about character creation from this class. In Fallout I was OCD and kept restarting my character (12 times) whenever I thought I misplaced points or perks. In role playing though I understood the need to flesh out a character robustly, and that a strong voice is necessary to distinguish him.
- This approach to fiction writing is great because it really approaches it from several different (and not so explored) ways. When looking at fiction across media, one can see the differences between how the story is written and how it is interpreted. Whereas many times fiction is looked at from a single facet, when the same piece of fiction is considered across different types of media (film, game, book, graphic novel, etc.) it really breaks down the walls that hold it up and allows us to look at what element make or mar fiction writing in each media type. A disadvantage to approaching fiction in that way is that there is an under-representation of different genres in certain media types. For example, there aren't many romance graphic novels. Role-playing and gaming really effected my fiction writing in this course. I definitely feel that, because it was a departure from convention, I learned a lot about writing and a lot about myself. Using role-playing as a

means to create fiction brings the character you're playing as and writing about that much closer and more intimate to you because the decisions you make as the character during role-playing sessions are directly effecting how your character in fiction is portrayed.

- Creating characters you had to step into to play helped immensely in the writing process. Even knowing the most mundane things about your character could define how you would approach something. It just creates very rounded out characters. The only disadvantage I really had was getting distracted by the action of the role playing, and not getting the full impact of how my character was feeling.
- I, myself, could not find any disadvantages as far as using different media, role-playing and gaming impacted my fiction writing. In fact, I've already stated several of the advantages these concepts have had on my writing over the course of this semester. The role-playing, in general, was definitely the most helpful. I had never written from the perspective of solely the character that I created. I controlled everything that character did: from the way he thought to the way he acted, spoke, felt, etc... I had to get into that character's head week in and week out, and eventually it led me to getting into his head on an almost-daily basis. It was very interesting and enjoyable. Because of those sessions and that approach to character creation, I now have the idea to write a series based on that character. I don't know if I would've had that inspiration to do this if not for this class. I don't know if I even would've created this character sometime in the future. I'm willing to bet I wouldn't have. Since we all took a big part in creating our world, I feel very connected to it. I feel like I had just as big of an impact on this course as the rest of the students. It is a very welcoming feeling, and I would like to think the rest of the students in this class feel the same way.

- I may have written a few similar things before, but I'll say it again here... It was so illuminating to really dissect the way stories are told across media. Prior to this class I hadn't really thought too much about the way information is conveyed, and how that has to be adapted when it comes to various media types. I was absolutely fascinated to see how the role-playing affected my writing: it provided me with plot elements (my eternal struggle) as well as giving me a very intricate personal knowledge of my character, and how she makes decisions. I think she ended up being a little bit like me, which I was hoping to avoid, but I think in the end the role-playing kind of lends itself to a personal manifestation in the character. What this style of writing allowed me to do was forget about the events taking place in the story, as they were already laid out for me by both Claire's choices (and the choices of my teammates!) as well as by the ingenuity of the GM. Instead I was able to focus on Claire's conscious decisions, and her analysis of others' decisions, and therefore give a bit more realistic take on her approach to the world through my recollections of the game experience. There were also limitations involved with this style of writing - which, for some people, could be problematic. My writing all tends to be a bit more introspective, particularly in this gloomy world, and a lot of our events were shaped by strange decisions by my companions, which limited my ability to flesh out personal relations. Some might really struggle with the inability to completely map out their own plots, however I didn't find this to be such a bad thing for my purposes. World building was a concept that was actually rather new to me. I suppose that before coming to this class, I wrote my characters into my own world, with the assumption that the reader might inherently understand the trappings and tendencies of that world. This kept me from really investigating or developing the world through the

character's perspective, though I didn't understand the importance of this until I enrolled in this class. It was so helpful and interesting to collaboratively create a world. This allowed for the character to explore unfamiliar places (as a real person might) with fresh eyes, because other people created locations that I never would have thought of. That unfamiliarity particularly lent itself to our post-apocalyptic setting, because my character naturally approached unfamiliar sites with caution, turning tail at the slightest hint of danger. Placing my character into a fully fleshed-out world also allowed me to focus more on her interaction with that world. I didn't have to imagine the items that would be in a particular location, and then communicate that through my writing (because that inevitably leaves holes as I don't consider the whole space, only the items/aspects that I consider important); I received a description from my GM that allowed me to experience the location as my character would. This was so helpful for writing from a natural perspective.

- Personally, I think learning across media is an important aspect of learning fiction writing. The same story told in two different mediums are two very different experiences. While the plot can remain consistent, the actual storytelling method is changed, and they both lead to different ways to consume the plot. Studying narrative across media is a great way to show the specifics of how a narrative is conveyed to an audience, and by focusing on how things change from media to media, you're better able to create the specific ideas / images / emotions / etc. in your own work.
- I've always created a character first. Then I put that character in a somewhat-today's version of the world. Reading different books, watching different movies, playing different games, and role playing allowed me to get into the world, first, and then make a

character I'd like to see interact with the world. I don't think just reading books/short stories would have gotten enough of an impact about creating an entire world. Like we've said about Fallout3 before, "Oh, hey, look; there's a filing cabinet." But you can't pick it up, check all the drawers, tear it apart... Now I have to think about that, too. My character has a desk, let's say. She might not be interested in it, but a robber would be. And what about that building, over there? The one with the smashed and boarded up windows? Well, now I've not only got to think about why it has smashed and boarded up windows, but how long they've been there, what caused them, what were they like before, how are they boarded up, can they ever be fixed...

- The conduits we used to develop our fiction were very strong. The movies we watched showed how on screen visuals and subtle writing techniques can bring together the scene, or scenes. The media we examined were really good examples of the topic. And it was good to use so many different mediums to teach. It expanded the knowledge and breadth of experience of the class as a whole. The forms our instructor used most definitely taught a lot about world building and character development.
- I feel I learned more from this class than many of my other ones. I was forced to work through my character and understand her thousand fold better than I could have otherwise. I was given the privilege to walk in my characters shoes in a way that would never otherwise be possible. It was magnificent.
- I feel that the short stories were helpful to find out what writers find important enough to include in the stories. Movies helped me visualize the characters and the world better. The video games taught me how would I feel in such a world, the sense of survival and

isolation. The role playing helped me understand the way my main character would react in many circumstances. In conclusion, this approach made writing much easier and more normal than the past.

Survey #4, Question 4

*Please share any other comments, including areas needing improvement, about this course.*

- I would replace Beyond Thunder Dome with I Am Legend, 28 Days Later or anything else really, but that is probably just a personal taste thing. I think that the one-on-two critiques we did for the second half of the role-playing and short fiction portion of the class worked a lot better and I would suggest starting with that, but I bet you already figured that.
- I loved this course. I'm glad that I took the time and credits for the course because I have learned about putting into detail the mindset of the characters, not just the setting and environment. However, The one thing that could use improvement is more time creating fiction. As much as I enjoyed reading & viewing different stories, not to mention adored sculpting Milwaukee into a ruined city, but I wanted to create more fiction in the world during the class and I just felt like that portion was pushed too close to the end.
- I think there should have been more time for critiques. Also, you talked about using other media, such as video and sound, creative text, and artwork. We didn't really have time to talk about any of that or do any of that... so, ultimately, this class needs more time to have a more successful impact upon the student.
- This course was fun, helpful, laid-back, and interesting. It was the only class in my college career where I made friends, and those friends are people I'd like to continue knowing. I don't want this class to end, and my group and I have talked about continuing our role-playing and stories through the summer.

- More roleplaying and actual fiction writing. The end part of the semester, while undeniably more fun, was also the densest in terms of how far my writing progressed. The wiki is SUCH a cool idea, it worked out so well, I just have to keep throwing stuff up there. Don't swear so much in class, it really makes me uncomfortable.
- I greatly enjoyed the course and appreciated the time and effort you put into it. This course covers a lot, but I cannot think of any improvements that would meet the course objectives better. I would have liked to start writing earlier, I liked getting feedback and working to improve my pieces a lot. Reading my group members works gave me a lot of ideas as well. I echo the class consensus that the roleplaying should be longer. There would be more time for writing, but my main thought was on all the items we made but didn't find. A longer role-playing time would provide opportunities to interact with these pieces. The arching narratives of role-playing groups may also be more Epic.
- Like we said in class, try to find a way to consolidate the world/item/npc creation while doing the reading and watching of the fiction. While FO3 was an awesome part, I'm not entirely sure it was necessary. After each session though, I learned a lot about my character, which made for better writing. with more time to play, it would lead to even more improvement I think.
- I think I about covered it in the two previous boxes. I would definitely take any other classes offered that are similar to this one; I really feel that I grew as a writer, and would love to explore this medium a bunch more.
- The biggest change I'd recommend is to have more time spent gaming. I found the longer I was able to game, the better I understood my character. I'd imagine longer gaming



sessions would lead to better, more focused writing. Also, I think the wiki entries could be done outside of class. There wasn't much creative writing in the first half of the course and this could fill that role, and I think class time could be used for other things.

- Longer than a 16-week course, please!
- The course seemed rushed at the end but that was probably due to the desire of most of the students to continue their campaigns. It could use a little more time on the gaming and probably take out the in-class workdays for the wiki-work.
- This class was beautiful. I hope that Trent is given an opportunity to teach this again as he would be doing a great service to many prospective writers.
- Like we discussed in class, less time on the schedule for the gaming and maybe rearranging the order of things. For example, maybe the movies first since those are the easiest to remember and maybe the short stories closer to our fiction writing so that we can better understand how writers incorporate their thought in their world. Less time for the wikis possibly too can save you some time for more workshops.

## Curriculum Vitae

W. TRENT HERGENRADER

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### EDUCATION

#### **Ph.D. in English**, emphasis in Creative Writing

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, May 2013

Dissertation Title: *Calypsis: A Hypertext Fiction*

Committee: Stuart Moulthrop (chair), Liam Callanan, Thomas Malaby, Peter Sands, Anne Wysocki

Special emphasis in Professional Writing

Certificate in Online and Blended Teaching, Learning Technology Center

#### **Certificate in Spanish**, advanced level

La Democracia Spanish School, Quetzaltenango, Guatemala, Aug. 2008

#### **M.A. in English**, emphasis in Creative Writing

University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Aug. 2007

Masters Project: *Pastures of Plenty and Other Stories*

Committee: Liam Callanan, James Liddy, Peter Sands

#### **B.A. in English**

University of Wisconsin-Madison, May 1997

### ENGLISH DEPARTMENT HONORS AND AWARDS

Teaching Excellence Award

Tinsley Helton Dissertation Fellowship

### PUBLICATIONS

#### *Academic Publications*

“From Meaning to Experience: Teaching Fiction Writing with Digital RPGs.” *Dungeons, Dragons and Digital Denizens: Digital Role-playing Games*. Eds. Gerald Voorhees, Joshua Call, and Katie Whitlock. New York: Continuum, Feb. 2012. 304-23. Print.

“Gaming, World Building, and Narrative: Using Role-Playing Games to Teach Fiction Writing.” *Proceedings for the Games, Learning and Society 7.0 Conference*. Pittsburg, PA: ETC Press, September 2011. 111-16. Print.

#### *Fiction Publications*

“The Lighthouse Keeper’s Daughter.” *Zahir: A Journal of Speculative Fiction*. Jan. 2010. Web. <<http://www.zahirtales.com/lighthouse.html>>.

- Honorable mention. *The Best Horror of the Year #3*. Ed. Ellen Datlow. San Francisco: Night Shade Books, 2011. Print.

“Eskhara.” *Federations*. Ed. John Joseph Adams. Rockville, MD: Prime, 2009. 336-49. Print.

- Standout story in *Publisher’s Weekly* starred review.
- Honorable mention. *The Year’s Best Science Fiction: 27th Annual Collection*. Ed. Gardner Dozois. New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2010. Print.

“The Hodag.” *Black Static* 7 Oct. 2008: 9-12. Print.

- Reprinted in *The Best Horror of the Year #1*. Ed. Ellen Datlow. San Francisco: Night Shade Books, 2009. 125-33. Print.

“Black Jack Davy.” *Realms of Fantasy* Apr. 2007: 56-63. Print.

- Honorable mention. *The Year’s Best Fantasy & Horror: 21st Annual Collection*. Eds. Kelly Link and Gavin Grant. New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2008. Print.

“Working Out Our Salvation.” *Weird Tales* Apr./May 2007: 50-54. Print.

- Reprinted in *Weird Tales: The Twenty-First Century, Volume 1*. Eds. Sean Wallace and Stephen Segal. Rockville, MD: Prime, 2007. 35-41. Print.

“Change of Seasons.” *Cicada* Sept./Oct. 2006: 40-50. Print.

“From the Mouths of Babes.” *Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* Mar. 2006. 106-13. Print.

- Honorable mention. *The Year’s Best Science Fiction: 24th Annual Collection*. Ed. Gardner Dozois. New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2007. Print.

“Secretary’s Day.” *Alienskin*. Feb. 2006. Web.

“Of Silver Bullets and Golden Teeth.” *Animal Magnetism: A Charitable Anthology*. Ed. S.A. Parham and W. Olivia Race. Raleigh, NC: SFH Charity Anthologies, 2005. 33-42. Print.

- Reprinted in *The Beast Within*. Ed. Matt Hulst. Lakeside, AZ: Graveside Tales, 2008. 280-92. Print.

### ***Creative Nonfiction Publications***

“The Mouth of the Volga.” *Post Road* 21 (2011). 21-25. Print.

- Pushcart Prize nominee.

### ***Creative Projects***

*Calypsis: A Hypertext Fiction*. A novel-length work based on a role-playing game, featuring eight characters’ intertwined narrative threads told in vignettes.

July 2011 to present. Web. <<http://trenthergenrader.com/calypsis/>>

*Rivertown Chronicles*. Curator for a website featuring over 100 vignette-length stories written by 25 student writers based in their collaboratively created fictional world. Jan. 2010 to May 2010. Web. <<http://rivertown.wikispaces.com/>>

*Strands of an Invisible Web*. Narrative installation. *SPRAWL @ the Borg Ward Collective*, Milwaukee, WI. Nov. 2008.

## TEACHING EXPERIENCE

**Graduate Teaching Assistant**, Department of English, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

### **Teacher of record for:**

- *English 236: Introductory Topics in Creative Writing* (spring 2013)  
*Course Subtitle: Digital Storytelling and Role-Playing* - A course designed to teach key elements of fiction writing through collaborative world building, a student-designed role-playing game, and networked stories
- *English 236: Introductory Topics in Creative Writing* (spring 2011)  
*Course Subtitle: Gaming, World Building, and Narrative* - An experimental course incorporating role-playing games and gaming theory to teach fiction writing, including the online publication of collaborative writing projects
- *English 233: Introduction to Creative Writing* (fall 2009, spring 2010; online fall 2010) - A survey in the reading and writing of poetry, creative nonfiction, and short fiction, including visual art, electronic literature, and new media
- *English 215: Introduction to English Studies* (online summer 2011) - An introductory course in the multiple critical approaches to the study of literature
- *English 205: Business Writing* (fall 2010) – A course introducing principles of business writing, emphasizing clarity and conciseness in letters, memos, and reports, and effective strategies for social media and digital presentations
- *English 102: College Writing and Research* (fall 2009, spring 2010, fall 2011; online fall 2012) – A first-year composition course teaching skills and techniques for college-level research writing including assessing sources in electronic and print media
- *English 101: Introduction to College Writing* (fall 2008, spring 2009)  
A first-year composition course addressing principles of college-level writing through interpretive and reflective essays in response to readings, artwork, and films

### **Teaching assistant for:**

- *English 380: Media and Society*, Prof. Stuart Moulthrop (fall 2011)  
*Course Subtitle: Game Culture*  
A critical study of games, especially videogames, and the culture of participatory media to which they belong

## CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

“Build Me a World: World Building, Emergent Narratives, and Environmental Storytelling.”  
*AWP Conference*. Chicago, IL. February 2012.

“Writing Games: Gaming, Digitally, and Creative Writing Pedagogy.” Panel chair. *AWP Conference*. Chicago, IL. February 2012.

“Units of Meaning: Videogame Criticism, Literary Analysis, Effective Pedagogy.” *Midwest MLA Conference*. St. Louis, MO. November 2011.

“Playing in Character: Role-playing Games and Character Development.” *Midwest MLA Conference*. St. Louis, MO. November 2011.

“Gaming, World Building, and Narrative: Using Role-Playing Games to Teach Fiction Writing.” *Games+Learning+Society Conference 7.0*. Madison, WI. June 2011.

“Leveling Up: Using Video Games as Teaching Tools in Introductory Writing Courses.” *Second Annual UWM First-Year Composition Professional Development Conference*. Milwaukee, WI. May 2010.

“Broken Bodies, Broken Worlds: Varieties of Dystopia in the Works of Paolo Bacigalupi.” *Fifth Annual UW-Madison Graduate Student Conference in Language and Literature, Liminal Literature: Borders and Genre*. Madison, WI. Feb. 2009.

“Straddling Borders: Science Fiction and the Fantastic As Transgressive Literatures.” Panel chair. *Fifth Annual UW-Madison Graduate Student Conference in Language and Literature, Liminal Literature: Borders and Genre*. Madison, WI. Feb. 2009.

“Introducing Technology Into the Composition Classroom: Some Assumptions and Suggested Practices.” *First-Year Composition Graduate Student Conference Presented by UWM and Marquette University*. Milwaukee, WI. Dec. 2008.

### **INVITED TALKS**

“Fictional Selves: Video Game Character Creation and Customization.” *Minnesota Online High School’s Wednesday Forum*. Online. May 17, 2012.

“Games, Game Culture and Creative Writing Studies: A Conversation.” *Beloit College Guest Speaker Series*. Beloit, WI. April 17, 2012.

“Gaming and Creative Writing: Theory and Practice.” *Technology and Pedagogy Forum at UW-Milwaukee*. Milwaukee, WI. April 21, 2011.

### **GUEST LECTURES**

“The Evolution of Role-Playing Games.” *English 380: Media & Society – Game Culture*. UW-Milwaukee, Milwaukee WI. Nov. 8, 2012.

“Exploring Game Space.” *English 380: Media & Society – Game Culture*. UW-Milwaukee, Milwaukee WI. Oct. 26, 2011.

“Fictional Selves: Video Game Character Creation and Customization.” *English 380: Media & Society – Game Culture*. UW-Milwaukee, Milwaukee WI. Oct. 19, 2011.

## ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATIVE EXPERIENCE

**Department of English Digital Technology Assistant**, Department of English, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, August 2012 to present.

Duties include:

- Developing and updating the Department of English website, including maintaining current faculty profiles, program descriptions, and administrative forms
- Posting news and events to the department's social media streams
- Scheduling and providing technical support for media-enabled classrooms
- Planning and publicizing technology and pedagogy workshops
- Editing and publishing *Student Work* online magazine

**Media, Cinema and Digital Studies Research Assistant**, Department of English, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, July 2012.

Responsibilities included the independent reading, summarizing, critiquing, and cataloging a series of academic articles being considered for a collection on new media theory.

**Creative Writing Program Assistant**, Department of English, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Aug. 2008 to May 2009.

Duties included:

- Answering program questions for enrolled and prospective students
- Processing program paperwork
- Note taking for monthly program faculty meetings
- Managing the monthly student/faculty reading series, *United We Read*
- Coordinating the Visiting Writers Series and Boudreaux Reading
- Designing poetry cards for *Eat Local: Read Local* project
- Managing the special events, *BLAST! Book Launch and James Liddy Memorial and Milwaukee's Poets Laureate Reading*
- Digitally recording and editing readings for uploading for *iTunes U*

**Neurosciences Clerkship and Neurology Residency Coordinator**, University of Wisconsin Medical School, Department of Neurology, Madison, WI. Sept. 2004 to Aug. 2006.

Routine duties included scheduling medical students and residents through six neuroscience services, standardizing syllabi, preparing digital presentations and exams, publishing call schedules, and creating internal and external websites for publishing information related to the neurosciences for prospective applicants and current students, residents, and faculty.

## MEMBERSHIPS AND AFFILIATIONS

Associated Writing Programs (AWP)  
Electronic Literature Organization (ELO)  
Horror Writers Association (HWA) Active Member  
Modern Language Association (MLA)  
Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America (SFWA) Active Member