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WRIT 2000

### Reflection – My Theory of Writing

I hope you don't find this dreary. In fact,  
I hope it makes you cheery.  
Please read on dearie –  
this is some writing,  
condensed in a theory ☺

#### **I would like to begin with a flash back to my initial impression of the arguable Godfather of writing theory: Walter J. Ong...**

“In the beginning, when Ong created *Orality and Literacy*, it was full of information on writing, contained many intellectual ideas, and discussed the difference between oral and written culture. Then Ong said, ‘Make all the students cry of boredom’, and all the students cried of boredom. Ong saw they were miserable. Ong then decided to add one hundred and seventy-five more pages of his book. Ong called the book ‘good’ and the content he called ‘interesting’. Thus copies were printed all around the world – the first day” (September 19<sup>th</sup>).

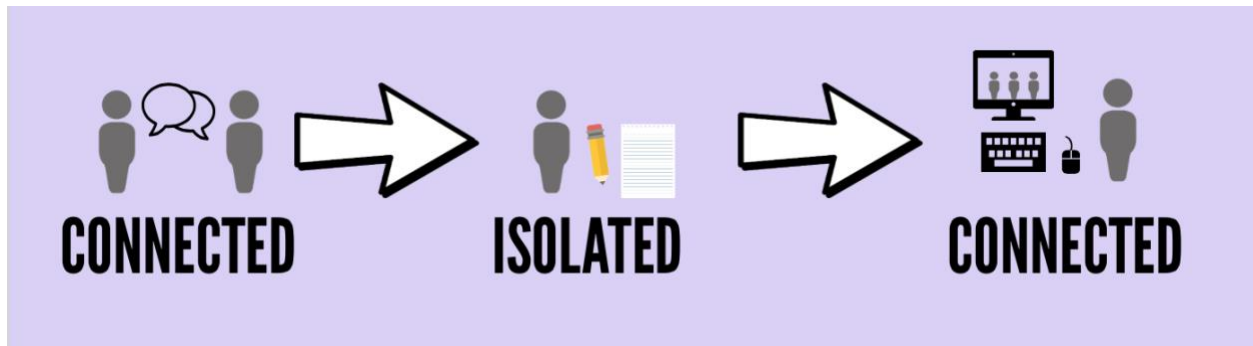
#### **Another treasure:**

“If Ong’s text is meant to be a stunning example of written language, I wish I lived in a culture of illiteracy” (September 19<sup>th</sup>).

As the entire class knows, I did not enjoy reading the first few chapters of *Orality and Literacy*. In fact, I found them painful. As I grudgingly read each page, I checked to see how many more were left, and trudged on, reluctantly, before writing a scathing reflection about my personal experience.

When asked to read our responses aloud, I volunteered to go first, to get it over with. I died a little inside with each word of adoration that my classmates bestowed upon the beloved Walter J. Ong. Each one singing the praises of the literary genius, commending him for his important contributions to the field of Orality and Literacy and his relevance in modern society.

My first post about Ong exemplifies the isolating effect that writing can sometimes have. Before our class discussion, I read, analyzed, and wrote about Ong individually. In contrast to the communal nature of primary oral cultures, the emergence of writing in secondary oral cultures can often lead to detachment and disconnection. But even though writing is often considered an individual activity, the emergence of spreadable media redefines writing as a group activity.



**For this, I am thankful. Perhaps our networked society will spare another from misinterpreting Ong’s prestigious print.**

The way we view writing in modern America is not in isolation, but centered around creation, interaction, and collaboration. This is largely due to the way we interact with writing, which is often done using word processing systems and social media networks. Our interconnected web culture allows us to interact with people across physical barriers. The ability to write, produce, and publish makes us feel closer than ever before. As King describes in *On Writing*, “We’re not even in the same year together, let alone the same room... except we are together. We’re close” (106). We make sense of our lives by trying to figure out who we are and how we relate to other people.

Classic novels are considered “classic” largely because they engage with society, provoke controversial discourse, or connect to audiences and leave them with a lasting impact... It would be impossible to do any of these things without first understanding the environment you are writing in, or the people you are writing for.

The author of the classic novel I read, *The Alchemist*, mentions in his prologue that he was motivated to write because “I wanted to write about my soul.” First and foremost, writing is an intensely personal activity. This is characterized by the separation, the quietness, and the deliberateness of the writing process. Each one of our memories, experiences, and reflections informs our writerly identity. Although we are all individuals, we can use our unique experiences and perceptions to engage with others. In my modern classic, *The Secret*, Rhonda Byrnes affirms, “We are One. We are all connected” (162). We are able to bond with our peers through writing, through collaboration, and through shared human experience.

Spreadable Media emphasizes the importance of networking and being a part of a larger community, “Yet, even if we agree that some degree of self-promotion plays a role in all communication, we must likewise recognize a desire for dialogue and discourse, for solidifying social connections, and for building larger communities through the circulation of media messages” (60).



This picture is supposed to demonstrate the interwoven connections between people, and also to illustrate that through collaboration and interaction with writing, we are one...

**As a member of a community and as an individual, Joan Didion reminds us in *The White Album* that, “We tell ourselves stories in order to live” (11).**

Last week I got done with my biology class at 6:50PM in Sturm and got a text from a friend to join her for Panhellenic study hours in the library. Having a lot to do, and already walking toward that end of campus, I reluctantly agreed to join her.

During my time at the library, I posted videos and pictures on snapchat, got coffee, and took the opportunity to say hi to anybody I knew as they passed by. I did yoga, looked up vampire bats, texted friends, got coffee, filled up my water bottle, went to the bathroom, and ate Scooby doo fruit snacks. However, I did not compose a single word of an essay and I did not read a single page of my homework while I was there.

To be completely honest, I was in the library earlier in the day too, and I did get some homework done. But I also took a nap in one of the study rooms and spent some quality time in the café.

So much of writing is finding a reason to write, finding a good time to write, and a good place. I couldn't get anything done when I was surrounded by distractions (real or imaginary), because the library is, in theory, the best place to get work done on a college campus.

In his book, *Orality and Literacy*, Ong mentions, “The very reflectiveness of writing – enforced by the slowness of the writing process as compared to oral delivery as well as by the isolation of the writer as compared to the oral performer – encourages growth of consciousness out of the unconscious” (147). In order to become a more thoughtful and engaged reader, I have found that I read best with a pencil in my hand. To combat the inevitable list of distractions, in any venue, I am only able to truly focus with what I'm reading when I force myself to be engaged.

I got back to my dorm room, kicked off my shoes, made myself my third cup of coffee for the day and leaned back on my Stormtrooper pillow to finally get some work done.

I don't think being a writer means sitting down for x hours x many days a week and composing x number of pages. I don't think it means being published, being recognized, or being considered

“great.” Being a writer means being a participator, having opinions, and expressing your voice. For my modern classic novel, I read *The Secret*, which emphasizes the importance of thinking, “Thoughts become things!” (9). Much of our writing is composed in our mind, as thoughts. Writing allows us to materialize these thoughts, and turn them into a tangible creation.

You can be given all of the tools to be successful: motivated friends, resources and materials, and a quiet, comfortable atmosphere. But if you don’t want to read or write, you still will.

Read that last line one more time... *But if you don’t want to read or write, you still will.*



Even Chester the Raccoon (from *The Kissing Hand*) has discovered the power of writing, and he wants you to discover it too! Let’s take a moment to reflect with Chester...

### **If I were to take a stab at philosophizing, interpreting, and theorizing my views on writing:**

Early writing was not explicitly written, but rather composed in the mind, and spoken out loud. The emergence of writing technologies, the access to pencils and paper, and later printing presses, allowed people to document history, record progress, and influence others. Our own country has been chiefly framed by writing.

In America, we declared our independence and wrote out our most basic structure of government on pieces of paper. Founding fathers drafted laws and treaties, which granted them absolute power over native peoples. Freedom and independence were correlated to literacy, so slave owners often chose not to teach slaves how to read or write.

Throughout history, even in the United States, writing has been linked to power and influence over others. Those who write history are the ones who have the ability to write history. As Ong mentions, “Writing created history” (168).

Even today, many societies throughout the world live in primary oral cultures, or have no knowledge of how to read or write. In contrast, the vast majority of the United States population today is literate, and most people even have access to internet. Writing is often used as a marker for education because it has a close relationship with power, influence, and expression of ones’ voice.

In modern America, we tend to view writing in a much different way than the rest of the world because most of us have always had access to it. Before we consider it in any other terms, we must recognize that the ability to learn about reading and writing is first and foremost, a *privilege*.

It is only because of the time and the location where we live that we have the luxury to theorize and philosophize about writing. It is only because we live in a society that affords spare time and emphasizes the importance of education that we can consider writing anything other than a necessity of life.

In her *Writing in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* address, Yancey says, “through writing, we participate—as students, employees, citizens, human beings. Through writing, we are.”

### **My final thoughts before bidding, sweet reader, adieu...**

Writing cannot be escaped and it cannot be ignored. The sheer volume of writing that we encounter each day (food labels, newspaper articles, social media posts, to-do lists, pamphlets, tickets, posters, announcements, reading for pleasure) demands that we be engaged, reflective, and participatory.

Throughout this class, we have engaged in class discussions, reflected on our writing process, and participated through posting on our digital platforms and through class activities. With infinite networks, tools, and opportunities to contemplate the world around them, the modern writer has the ability to be both introspective and collaborative.

I decided to quote Ong, one last time, as a testament to the importance of being both in touch with yourself and others while writing...

“It intensifies the sense of self and fosters more conscious interaction between persons” (175).



Our access to writing technology beckons us to explore the uncharted territory of the mind, to appreciate the process, to think to ourselves, to collaborate with others, and to understand:

To be a writer is to be human. To be a writer is to be alive.