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The Muses on the Mountains: Mentoring Relationships Among Creative Writers

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THE MUSES ON THE MOUNTAINS:
MENTORING RELATIONSHIPS AMONG CREATIVE WRITERS

A Dissertation

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Brent Shawn House

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This dissertation questions the traditional creative writing workshop, with its process of readings and discussions of student texts in the presence of a master teacher, and offers mentoring as an alternative to this marginally functioning pedagogy. The traditional workshop can marginalize student writers, allowing the master writer to serve as the primary voice of response. Often these masters direct their students to write in a style that imitates them. Wendy Bishop defines the traditional workshop that relegates the apprentice writer to imitation of the master's style as "elitist, often sexist, and falsely collaborative" (*Released into Language* 87).

Providing alternatives to the traditional workshop that focuses on finding fault and avoiding communication, this dissertation positions the mentor/protégé relationship in juxtaposition to the traditional master/apprentice relationship. A mentoring pedagogy is distinctive, providing the protégé with professional and personal support, allowing the mentor to serve as a role model for the protégé. Through classroom narratives, I present five locations where a mentoring pedagogy can develop: in conferences between protégé/mentor, in the proteges' notebook, in the proteges' correspondences, and in the mentors' responses, and in the preparation of the proteges' presentations of their work.

Foundational research in the field of creative writing studies claims: "The chief purpose for a class in writing, poetry or otherwise, is [...] to respond to what seems to be

our students' underlying request: that we spend less time telling them what they should do when they write and more time showing them who they can be" (*Responding to Student Poems* 13). This dissertation offers mentoring as a means for guiding student writers to reach their fullest potential as writers, as an intimate relationship of student and teacher, as the work of "building character" and creating a "constructive legacy to be passed along to future generations of leaders" (Dungy xvi), and as a pedagogical model as urgently needed by the current generation of students as Mentor was needed by Telemachus.