Students Becoming Participant-Observers in the Arthurian Tradition

Can creative writing be a method of critical inquiry to read Arthurian texts? This is the challenge I issue to my students. For a decade, I taught Arthurian literature from the *Mabinogion* to Sir Thomas Malory's *Works*, where students produced competent critical analyses with essays on topics such as legend, myth and history, gender studies, and the role of the otherworldly. I then paused and thought, how can I encourage the students to really think as critics of form? Not doing so in a department of budding writers, with most students on a creative writing pathway, struck me as an anomaly. I share here the methods I have been using and critically examine how to foster creative-critical exchanges, where the concepts and practices could be applied in medieval teaching beyond the Arthurian.

The creative writing student cohort is accustomed to a learning space in which experimental risk-taking is encouraged through imaginative activity. This cohort also takes classes in critical analysis to learn how to read the craft of other authors to help inform their writing skills. What, though, if they learned the creative processes involved in medieval writing traditions by participating in them rather than being detached observers? Do, though, creative risks and imagination conflict with critical study, and is it possible to translate such merging of boundaries into learning practices? Simultaneously, could the critical studies cohort also benefit from exploring creativity more? Another way to position this query is to ask if imitation is the best form of flattery, how might learning-by-doing help both creative and critical students' understanding of a genre's features, a writer's techniques, and of an editor's role? After all, as Aristotle notes: "imitation is natural to man from childhood, one of

his advantages over the lower animals being this, that he is the most imitative creature in the world, and learns at first by imitation" (Barnes, ed. 1944, 109).

The Context

Previously, I had been using a couple of passages from different texts and invited students to do close reading, in the manner first developed in the period from 1930 to 1970 (in America by the New Critics such as Cleanth Brooks and W. K. Wimsatt, and in the UK, William Empson and F. R. Leavis). This yielded an analysis of elements like chronicle structure, emotional registers and symbols in lyrics, heroic tropes, and Courtly Love conventions. The stylistics of the *Alliterative Morte Arthure* intrigued and challenged the most able students. After establishing this skill, the second assessment in the module was a critical essay (of 5,000 words). This enabled themes to be identified and analysed, as well as explorations of the shaping influences of historical, cultural, and political contexts, all using their close readings.

However, to enable students to find their voices, more participation by immersive walking in the footprints, or the voices, of the Arthurian writers became the aim. In effect, it was an argument to return to the essence of the New Critics but not to dissect a supposedly correct reading anatomically, that is to say, not to discern aesthetics that reached a threshold of earned seriousness, as practical criticism became renowned for. Instead, as R. P. Blackmur once urged:

> the composition of a great poem is a labor of unrelenting criticism, and the full reading of it only less so; … the critical act is what is called a "creative" act, and whether by poet, critic, or serious reader, since there is an alteration, a stretching, of the sensibility as the act is done (Blackmur 1940, 302).

An echo can be heard when the New Humanist Norman Foerster established the first academic creative writing programme in 1942 at the University of Iowa. He advocated:

> one of the best ways of understanding imaginative literature is to write it, since the act of writing – the selection of materials, the shaping of them, the recasting and revising – enables the student to repeat what the makers of literature have done, to see the processes and the problems of authorship from the inside (Foerster 1941, 26).

The idea of being the critic from within the field being observed is most recently heard in developments in autoethnography. As Laurel Richardson articulates, writing goes beyond recording to become a method of inquiry (2000, 923). Ostaszewska observes, "It is simultaneously ontological and epistemological; we 'word the world' into being at the same time as we come to know the world" (2022, 3). To imitate this, I invite the student into the auto-role of being an Arthurian writer and present the ethnographical subject of study as the medieval authors' processes in creating the Arthurian world. I ask the students to word the Arthurian world into being.

This reflection on challenging students to engage with mechanics, methods, and means of form in Arthurian literature is taken from my final year honours module at the University of East Anglia, UK. (American readers may be more familiar with the term *class* for *module*.) The twelve-week module is constructed of extracts of Arthurian material from the Latin chronicles, Wace and Layamon, the Welsh *Mabinogion*, and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia regum Britanniae*, a range of lyrics, the Romances of Chrétien de Troyes, Marie de France, the *Stanzaic* and *Alliterative Morte Arthure*, and Malory's Works. These texts provide the students with diverse approaches to the questions of form.

Writing within the parameters of this Arthurian tradition is designed to enhance understanding of how the rich diversity of genre and stylistic strands work and, by extension, how a medieval edited text that we read today creates a critical reading. To imitate the

medieval texts, one must first consider the tradition, rules, discursive parameters, rhetorical strategies, and the kind of voice(s) that are in play. To then edit this text requires the student to think about how questions of authorship, provenance, audience reception, and how editorial choices continue the writing of the text.

Arthurian Beginnings

In the first class of the module, I introduce students to their roles as Arthurian authors. As an ice-breaker, I set up a three-part activity. Desks, with copious blank Post-its, are clustered into three groups. Since online teaching developed during COVID-19, we now have the option to invite students to replicate this electronically, with three Padlet sessions during class time. However, I find the good old-fashioned physical movement between desks and later physical collection and mixing Post-its makes for a good icebreaker. (See volume 2.2 in this series for a cluster on the experience of Pandemic teaching.) In step one, I invite students to note the titles of any Arthurian versions from any century that they have read/seen/engaged with in advance of this module – this can be television, children's versions, paintings, literary texts, video games, or any other form from any period. They are prompted to share their reviews and suggestions. Moving to the second cluster of desks, I ask students to note contextual elements that characterise how their suggested title relates to the time in which it is produced. This is an exercise in historicised readings. This might be the sound effects, the style of imagery, or a known narrative. Around the third cluster of tables, I then invite students to list one dominant feature of their title that makes it "Arthurian". This could, for example, be a character, an object, a setting, a mode, or a characteristic.

Students assume they have pooled together examples and shared their prior knowledge of what the Arthurian Tradition means. This, though, is only the start of the activity. I next invite the students to consider that they have just amassed ingredients for

making a dish of their choosing. I suggest that for the next ten minutes or so, they become Arthurian writers. I give them creative licence to mix and merge whatever they like, no constraints. I explain how this is a time-limited freewriting exercise – it is not the end product they create that will be shared, but rather their experience of the process. The ingredients to blend are any combination of the Post-its. They have another five minutes to circulate again to shop for their ingredients.

After students discuss their first attempt (including what crises were produced, what could not be mixed as much as how they could mix elements), this ice-breaking learning-by-doing activity always prompts much debate about whether the module title should be the singular or plural, Tradition or Traditions. After reflecting on what it is like to create when stepping into and intervening in the Arthurian world, it is only then that I introduce the assessment brief. The early introduction of the brief is to mitigate against summative assessment fatigue causing disengagement with formative exercises and to build: "students' knowledge of how and why assessment takes the form it does, raising awareness of ongoing as well as final processes … and revealing how critical thinking about assessment is an integral part of the learning process" (Smyth 2004, 369).

The Assessment Brief

Author an Arthurian extract and edit your text. This will consist of two parts.

Part A: Creative. Create an Arthurian text (or part of a text). This is your imaginative production, but it should be fashioned in the style of a medieval text from the Arthurian canon. Your writing should be a maximum of 2,000 words.

It might be, for example, a long-lost part of the *Mabinogion* or one of Marie de France's *lais*. It could be an alternative ending to one of the texts found in a different

manuscript. It could be a fifteenth-century response to one of the twelfth-century texts. It could be by a previously unknown and newly discovered Arthurian author. This will be marked according to imitation practices of stylistic conventions, genre awareness, characterisation, and use of Arthurian themes.

Part B: Editorial. Create a textual apparatus or manuscript features, as well as an editorial introduction. This should be a maximum of 3,000 words (to make the overall project amount to 5,000 words).

A continuation of the creative element is your role as a fictional editor of your creative writing. Your editorial work must include a title page, an introduction in a style appropriate to the edition you decide to make (see further guidelines for types of editions below), and an appropriate text layout, which may include glosses and end notes or manuscript features. Your editorial introduction may focus on textual production, imagined editorial and/or reception history as informed by your understanding of Arthurian texts. It must include a discursive analysis of your creative extract compared to other Arthurian texts. I.e., explore the arguments/themes/genre influences that can be raised, through close reading, about your extract compared to other Arthurian texts.

Auctor and *Imitatio*

Underpinning the formative writerly investigations that students perform throughout the module is an inquiry into what authorship meant in the Middle Ages, with investigations of the terms *auctor* and *translator*. This is important so students understand the historically situated contexts of writing rather than modern notions of creativity. Antony Bale's "From Translator to Laureate: Imagining the Medieval Author" is of particular use, emphasising changing ideas from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries, which is the timespan of our chosen

range of Arthurian texts (Bale 2015). These conversations surface throughout the weeks. For example, when encountering Monmouth's construction of authority through his frequent references to the "very ancient book in the British language", how in Romance, old tales meet new linguistic and social contexts, how in *Guigemar* and the Fables Marie de France names herself yet also becomes a character, taking on a persona. This shifts students' focus from constructing a personality for a fictional author to how they are going to craft a voice through debates on the authority to write.

The writerly approach means that I begin with the Arthurian extracts in the Latin Chronicles (using those in the Lacy and Wilhelm edition, 2015) as a means to introduce stylistic issues and heroic culture in the Wace and Layamon's *Brut* extracts compared with the historical narratives such as Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britania* and the *Alliterative Morte Arthure*. Compiling their own variety of Chronicle extracts as they encounter these other texts over the weeks allows students to practice with short extracts to address how to record and narrate history, and how questions of history, myth, and legend related to genre and narrative forms arise. Likewise, to introduce the Romance texts, the Arthurian lyrics (also in Lacy and Wilhelm 2015) involve looking at the registers, stylistic patterns, repetition of themes (such as eyes and sight, light and dark, pain and love, and nature in the lyrics). Beginning with lyrical and chronicle writerly investigations, students build a formative Writing Journal throughout the module before progressing to an *imitatio* of some of the larger texts. The fact that the journal has a no-stakes formative status is important: it reiterates that writing is to be as much of the learning process as weekly reading for the seminars.

The students' first questions about their writerly investigations are always about whether they should simulate a range of features or be more creative with ideas of expansion – plots, characters, and intertextualities. They ask, can they introduce new narrative elements absent from earlier narratives, such as creating new characters and storylines or new

narratorial perspectives? (Many students are keen to prioritise marginal voices, such as those of different ethnicities or women.)

This is when I introduce students to Petrarch's fourteenth-century rhetoric of *imitatio*. The guidelines to be found in Petrarch's letter to Bocaccio are an ideal starting point:

> An imitator must take care to write something similar yet not identical to the original, and that similarity must not be like the image to its original in painting where the greater the similarity the greater the praise for the artist, but rather like that of a son to his father … seeing the son's face, we are reminded of the father's, although if it came to measurement, the features would be all different, but there is something subtle that creates this effect ... Thus we may appropriate another's ideas as well as his coloring but we must abstain from his actual words; for, with the former, resemblance remains hidden, and with the latter it is glaring, the former creates poets, the second apes […] we must write as the bees make honey [*mellificant*], not gathering flowers but turning them into honeycombs, thereby blending them into a oneness that is unlike them all, and better [*melius*]. (*Familiares* XXIII.19)

One student responded that Petrarch's description of the process, "cloaked in decorative metaphor, made me more confident in building an intuitive understanding of imitation". Some students, though, feel uneasy and ask, "So do Arthurian authors not create anything themselves? Is no individuality allowed? How does a tradition adapt with the times then?" This is where other lines from Petrarch's letter come into play:

> I much prefer that my style be my own, uncultivated and rude, but made to fit, as a garment, to the measure of my mind, rather than to someone else's … Surely each of us naturally possesses something individual and personal in his voice and speech as well as in his looks and gestures that is easier, more useful, and more rewarding to cultivate and correct than to change. (Petrarca 22.2, 213.)

The supposed dichotomy between individuality and imitation has to be addressed to help students move into non-dualistic thinking. Ziolowski's study (2001) helps by showing how opposition in imitation between individuality and conservation is not intrinsic or automatic, but that in the Middle Ages, there was a complex interplay as well as non-dualism between reading and writing.

While Ziolowski's study introduces students to the classical philosophical and rhetorical traditions of imitation that influenced medieval authors, specifically in Medieval Latin, how do poets, more subtly than announcing the doctrines, do the applied arts? By looking at various Arthurian texts with this in mind, students develop the insight captured in one of their remarks: "So, it's not about regurgitating, just plagiarising. We're not to be AI robots mining the texts for data to slavishly imitate out of context. It's more like refashioning vintage clothes in new contexts but re-imagining honest to the initial essence".

Such student responses are, in themselves, useful pedagogical tools to encourage dialogue with the past. Just as contemporary narratives about Artificial Intelligence or upcycling vintage clothes creep into their metaphors, I prompt them to think, what kind of historical metaphors can we find and blend into our understanding? We turn to St Augustine's Israelites melting down gold from the Egyptians (*De Doctrina Christiana* II. 40) or Seneca's bees collecting pollen from multiple flowers to create honey (*Epistolae* 84). Students start to examine which Arthurian authors are turning something old into liquid gold, such as Latin chronicle entries into a legendary narrative. Alternatively, they use multiple sources (the flowers) to create an intricate honeycomb of a whole new experience (the taste of honey in the form of new retellings, as Malory does in his massive compilation). These metaphors help students to move past poaching to copy and paste Arthurian characterisations (less of the AI algorithm outputs and more of the upcycling imaginative engagement). The students then compare these metaphors to AI and upcycling vintage clothes to practice Petrarch's textual

weaving of old metaphors and, by extension, what we seek to discern in the Arthurian texts by both medieval authors and themselves. Developing such critical thinking skills requires students to understand how they learn, and in this case, it is understanding how the Arthurian authors create within a Tradition. Petrarch and others have supplied the rhetoric that can be used during such processes to raise students' awareness.

Nonetheless, as NK. Denzin maintains, "Theory as interpretation should be grounded in the worlds of lived experience (1989, 3). What more can students learn by doing these imitations rather than only discerning where others have? Students begin to conceptualise their writing inquiry as that of a painter who is also trained as a DNA expert to inform the paintings. By examining their medieval Arthurian texts as exemplars of this practice, students develop confidence in borrowing plot elements (the "pollen") from alternative sources, but not as a pastiche. Instead, they weave them based on the same narrative conventions and modes of address in the texts they were reading to make new pots of honey. Students now ask questions about what Arthurian authors built traditions around and where and how innovations were created. This leads to a study of how the *Mabinogion* has familial DNA with tropes and oral traditions in Celtic folklore, and how knightly virtues might be seen as a repainting of the *imitatio Christi* tradition, with a focus on Chrétien de Troyes and Malory's styles.

The vast majority of students embraced such ludic leaning, selecting various forms of writing: imitation, parody, and transposition between styles and forms. The narrative of Malory was transposed into lyric; the chronicle matters of the Brut were refashioned into Monmouth's narrative history style. New dreams and prophecies were created with vatic diction, while new female authors (such as Malory's wife, for instance) and readers (with intricate networks of readers, scribes, and patrons intersecting with known Arthurian ones) were brought into the tradition.

It was, though, more than play. This exercise in prose and poetic stylistic imitation involves detailed and careful analysis of the original forms, reaching an understanding far beyond that evidenced in the traditional essays. Key compositional features of the styles and genres are learned, with the students' diction nicely tied to blends and expansions of source materials, with stylistic poetic flourishes defamiliarising the modern language. (Most students write modern English translations, though a brave few souls have attempted to write in Middle English.) The outcome of this learning by doing is that students ask fundamental questions about style and form, how to shape meaning, and make possible certain kinds of writing and thinking. As one student remarked:

> I now know what it means when someone says literature lives. The characters are less Lancelot or Gawain; it's the style and modes of presentation, and what the authors are doing with them. And then we, as readers, we are the audiences, affecting each and every performance of the words. When you see styles and modes as the players, the text kind of becomes live theatre, doesn't it? (W. Lilley, 02/24).

This was the cue for a lively conversation about reception theory.

Students' writerly investigations with expansions while retaining some elements of reprisal enabled them to seek repetition of elements of the medieval Arthurian narratives that perform important functions without any substantial changes or additions across texts, but also to be astute to medieval authors' blending and creating, as Petrarch advocates. The subjectivity of important judgements by students led to scrutiny of the medieval Arthurian exemplars as evidence of what could be permitted and played with; they were becoming true Ciceronians, speaking and writing appropriately to the occasion, audience, and age. As Colin Burrow says, using exactly what the original author used "is not true imitation, but mere aping, parroting, or shadowing, and produced merely ghosts, simulacra and shadows" (Burrow 2012, 113, 116).

By the end of the module, when we encountered Monty Python's *The Quest for the Holy Grail*, students immediately identified this process of blending and creating with Malory's text. Students saw the echo of Malory's use of a series of stone inscriptions and representations of epistles to play with and against traditional literary forms, all to exploit the dissident and redeeming allure of the written word. Students built on this and offered critiques of how Terry Jones *et al.* play on these mnemonic images and do the same kind of play with the film form, and whether or not they would do similar – students act as participant observers.

Students as Editors

We do not end with the creative output. The learning by doing continues with the students editing their own work. This responds to Katherine Brown's call to go beyond the trend in medievalism of focusing on creative adaptations of content (such as medieval themes and character), and to use editing as an "avenue to investigate the form and structure, [as a] process of constructing medieval processes of reading and writing" (Brown 2016, 11). E The value of inviting students to engage with editorial poetics is that editing is a critical art form that encourages them to wrestle with a text, actively collaborating with authorial endeavours (style, rhythm, and writerly interactions with sources) while also addressing more technical layout, critical textual apparatus and emendation pragmatics to hold open multiple possibilities for new readers. The intention of placing students in this interpretive role is to challenge any assumptions that our access to medieval texts is trans-historical, or the text we read is "accurate". The creativity in critical text reconstructions becomes the learning focus.

Thus, students are invited to edit their text in one of three styles, including an introduction and textual apparatus. The first choice is the student edition, following the form of a TEAMS edition. The second option is a critical edition, where we use the Early English

Text Society and the Exeter Medieval Text series as exemplars. The third format some students select is the manuscript facsimile with a catalogue description, imitating the British Library and Bodleian Library manuscript descriptions styles.

Students with etymology and socio-historical interests, and those interested in introducing comparative readings of their creative output in relation to canonical texts and genres, tend to pick the student edition. The critical edition attracts those who become curious about linguistic and manuscript variations, reflecting on textual emendations and inventing manuscript transmission histories. Meanwhile, the artistic students enjoy mocking up a manuscript with physical features and they follow Ralph Hanna's guidelines on processes of transcription, reading the "witnesses", the source manuscripts, and the steps in editing medieval texts (2015). Such attention requires them to craft textual features through close readings of source material as well as their own created manuscript. All these activities students do across the three edition types are editorial "imitations" in being fictions created by the students for their own creative output.

What becomes transparent when teaching is that hands-on experiential editorial crafting sessions are not wholly sufficient. Rather, as Jillian Holt observes, the "challenge of teaching the creative editing practice is less tangible in that it requires a great deal of contextualising in terms of content and problem solving, as aligned with creative outcomes" concerning flow, rhythm and style. This aligns with Hanna's emphasis that the editor has to make storytelling choices, as the aim of editing is to hold open multiple possibilities to allow the text to move into a new cycle of life. Any creative-critical distinctions are blurred for students by placing them with responsibility and agency in devising editorial poetics to make their edition "provide what [is] considered 'first order research tools' for the basic questions about the text (Hanna 2015, 99).

In seminar sessions, we use Greetham's textual scholarship introduction, especially making the text and describing the text sections (Greetham 2015). Each week, students are tasked to bring in various editions (from online sources and the library) or manuscript descriptions of the Arthurian text we are studying, and they are encouraged to practice their descriptive skills first. In the latter half of the course, after beginning their creative outputs, they are encouraged to trial small parts in different forms of editions.

In turn, in their own productions, new narratives for the story of creation, including, for example, manuscript circulation, are narrated by many students. Fabricated catalogue numbers, marginalia, and descriptions of scribal hands bring transmission histories to life. Before the exercise, many students ask, "Why do I need to know provenance history or manuscript descriptions?" After the exercise, plausible provenance accounts are invented, ingeniously framed, and humorously presented "discovered" texts are detailed. Such creations reveal the extent of understanding of source texts and contexts/paratexts while giving sophisticated reflections on creative processes concerning stylistic and genre close readings.

One example is from Daisy Chapman about her creative output "Dame Ragnelle", which illustrates the critical insights that can be gained in a creative instance of gender role-reversal and comparative reading skills with the source text (Malory's Works). There is a clear impact on genre conventions as she explains in her editorial voice:

> In Malory's text, Dame Ragnelle is portrayed as riding on a 'palfrey.' (Lacy and Wilhem 2015, 485) A palfrey is a small saddle horse for a woman, suggesting women have lesser horse-riding skills, and require placid, gentle horses. In *Dame Rowan*, however, the connection she has with her father's "untameable colt"(L. 11) is given a lot of attention and she utilizes qualities often associated with the feminine - intuition,

gentleness, softly-spoken words - to build trust with the colt and create a strong relationship between horse and rider. The gray mare, too, is described as a "war horse," exemplifying Rowan's horsemanship, and rejecting the need of the palfrey. The trope of the horse (alongside the armour) being an external signifier of the heroic qualities of the knight has been role (gender) reversed in *Dame Rowan.* This allows for idealised female virtues to be emphasised, but in so doing, shows how agency is authored for the female.

As well as plot interventions, the editorial role asks students to pay attention to text layout and how micro editorial interventions, such as the insertion of punctuation, or interpretation of the size and placing of floriated initials to structure a work, or the positioning of side text (as in the bob and wheel) affect interpretation. I cannot resist but introduce them to Moorman's 1977 edition of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,* on the grounds that "*any* punctuation, scribal or modern, occasionally dictates interpretation". (The italicisation is Moorman's 1977, 7). The idea of not bothering with punctuation delights some students at first, until they try to read it. The case of how just two editions have created such writerly readings in lines 3 - 5 of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* shows students what is possible in their role as editors. The question as to who "the tulk" is - Aeneas or Antenor - revolves on whether line 5 is connected back to the reference of the traitor, necessitating a somewhat contrived grammatical construction as Andrew and Waldron have with a full stop, or is interpreted as a parenthetical allusion to Antenor, as Tolkien and Gordon did with the colon. The second option is a smoother political option as it does not highlight the fact that the descent of the Britons was treacherous. The authority for such grammar arrangement that these editors cite is paralleled in the other works in the Cotton Nero manuscript. Andrew and Waldron compare with *Cleanness,* whereas Tolkien and Gordon do with *Pearl,* but this raises the contested issue of common authorship. The danger and risk the editors create is that by

positioning Aeneas as the subject, the reader can interpret another significance of the allusion to Aeneas' treachery than the "blysse and blunder" theme suggested by Andrew and Waldron. Instead, Aeneas as a subject can be read as an indication that Gawain's treachery is not that of being a traitor to his host but of not having the lack of faith in the woman temptress that Aeneas had in Dido. What better way to build close comparative reading skills than inviting students to create their own ambiguity by departing from the editions they read to experiment with how punctuation can shape interpretation?

As well as title pages, critical introductions, punctuation, glosses or scribal interventions in facsimiles, the reason for encouraging students to create paratext is evidenced in just one example from a student's work. In creating an Eddic-inspired Song, Evan Dennison glossed over his use of the term "barbarians" in his imaginative role as an editor of his student edition text:

> The term "barbarians" is used inconsistently throughout the text. Kolgrim and his brother Baldulf are repeatedly called "Saxons", and yet the term "barbarians" is also later used to refer to the Picts. This muddling of "northern" and "southern" barbarians may perhaps also be attributed to cultural confusion.

Not only is there close attention to the kind of scholarly edition he is imitating, but also this level of intertextual and paratextual engagement with the broader Arthurian (and Norse) traditions underpinned the development of his story. This footnote delicately subverted and complicated his framing, thus showing an extra dimension to how he had skill in playing with sources and the historical context.

Conclusion

This learning by doing conflates creative and critical definitions, turning literature into an event rather than a thing, with critical thinking moving from what is said to how it is

happening. The creative output becomes analytical in creating a text by learning medieval processes. In developing the critical discourse of the editor, the critical commentary on the creative output becomes creative criticism. This reawakens interest in seeing the analytical essay as imitating, not to ape; imitation becomes a much subtler and nuanced craft than what "writing like an Arthurian" might first seem to suggest.

Inviting students to do critical analysis from inside the world of Arthurian text creation is driven by the same autoethnography impulse that we find articulated by the American historical non-fiction author James Spradley:

> I want to understand the world from your point of view. I want to know what you know in the way you know it. I want to understand the meaning of your experience, to walk in your shoes, to feel things as you feel them, to explain things as you explain them. (Spradley 1979, n.p.).

As the autoethnographer Laurel Richardson describes, reflection and writing about the process of writing and the context in which that writing occurs creates a "writing story" (Richardson 1994). Working from insider knowledge, while students can feel vulnerable in creating their own voice, as they are working with multiple perspectives where they have agency in determining sources and influences, norms of analytic research and creative practice are disrupted (or arguably reinstated). Students' writing ways to read Arthurian literature steps into a long tradition of experiential authority, responding not least to Jane Austen's urgings in a 1926 lecture:

> To read a book well, one should read it as if one were writing it. Begin not by sitting on the bench amid the judges but by standing in the dock with the criminal. Be his fellow worker, become his accomplice. Even, if you wish merely to read books, begin by writing them.

This module now confronts the challenges and obstacles, not least in the crisis between originality and imitation, which provokes the ability to perform the critical acts, between imitator and imitated, imitator and their own culture, their own culture and that of the past. By the end of my Arthurian Traditions module, the non-dualistic attitude change to reading and writing is the most significant outcome of the students' learning.

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