

# **Lexia: Undergraduate Journal in Writing, Rhetoric & Technical Communication**

Volume IV

2015–2016

**The Future Writers of America**

Stephen Roddewig

*James Madison University*

From the writer

The Future Writers of America site was started in Fall 2014 as a project for my WRTC 200 course. The purpose was to showcase my half-finished novel *The War of the Rose* to a broader audience, mirroring how other authors release parts of their novels in advance to drum up publicity. I also used the blog format of TFWOA to showcase some of my other writing talents.

The pieces below represent some of my favorite pieces written for the class project. I have since continued to keep the blog, and it has evolved into a collaborative project that includes posts from a variety of writers. You can check out my full blog and read more at <https://tfwoa.wordpress.com/>.

~Stephen Roddewig

### **Writing to Stave off Insanity**

My name is Stephen Roddewig, and I'm a writer. I made this page so I could write and share my work, and hopefully by the time you're reading this, others will be too. Think of these posts like a telescope into the inner workings of my mind, the thoughts of a (hopefully) successful author. That's right, prepare for the insanity.

I first delved into the world of creative writing after a personal tragedy which rocked my young life to the core: the end of the *Guardians of Ga'Hoole* series at *Book*

*Eight, Outcast*. Desperate to read the future exploits of Coryn, Soren, and his intrepid owl band, I took things into my own hands, deciding that I would write Book Nine myself. Typing with merely my forefingers as weapons, I fought my way through approximately thirty pages of manuscript (probably less, my memory's hazy). But alas, fate stepped in, or I got lazy. Either way.

Kathryn Lasky eventually continued the Coryn-Soren story arc with *Book Twelve* after a quick detour for some owl mythology. Unfortunately, there was no special thanks to Stephen Roddewig—not that a professional writer would have appreciated a third grader trying to show her how to write her own series anyways. But this setback was not the end of the war. The seed had been planted, and though it would take several years to sprout, my life had been forever altered by that unpublished book.

Five years later, eighth grade me, long-haired and disenchanted with the education system, awoke to find the world covered in four feet of snow. Virginia was declared a state of emergency by the governor. I couldn't go anywhere, I couldn't hang out with my friend Josh, I couldn't even walk off the front porch. It would only take two more feet of frozen precipitate and I would be buried standing. At first, reading and copious amounts of television kept my mind placated, but soon cabin fever was set in. Days passed without outside company or anything to break the monotony.

Just as I thought my mind would snap and I would just keep shoveling that same patch of sidewalk until I died, an idea formed. My eyes had digested so many novels over the last seventy-two hours, why not write one of my own? Like so much of my inspiration, it was a complete shot in the dark, but the concept took hold as the walls of

my room started to close in on me. I sat down at my desk, opened up Microsoft Word, cracked my knuckles, and let the ideas flow.

Thus arose *Red Riding Hood the Assassin*, the story of Wonderland on the brink of civil war, society and government brought to the brink by an innocent fairy-tale-character-turned-killer. It was strange even for me, but the creativity was certainly there. There were many ideas since then, most, I'll grudgingly admit, still unfinished. Many were odd, many ill-conceived, many ridiculous. Some of my more notable exploits included *Outcast*, a full-length attempt to emulate the tone and characters of *Bambi: A Life in the Woods*. If the name seems familiar, you're thinking of Walt Disney's hijacked butchering of the actual novel (though I confess I enjoyed the movie too). This version is much darker, more vivid, and its resounding message more haunting, to say the least. I highly recommend it, but more on that another time.

Another good memory was of "The Morgue," the short story of a detective investigating a spree of gruesome murders within a moratorium, only to discover the killer's identity lies close to home. Eleventh grade saw a Coast Guard Ensign trapped inside a haunted lighthouse as a storm bears down on him in "The Dying Light." While most of my ideas never got off the ground, every half-written piece contributed to my craft, allowing me to practice the cultivation of a plot and the development of my own style.

This brings us to the present, and the work I show here wouldn't have been possible without those bumpy early days. I am not ashamed of those unfinished pages moldering on my old desktop; it is a source of pride to say that my "Work in Progress"

folder was the largest use of memory on my computer. Without accidents, how would we know success? My personal mantra is that writers are people who write, regardless of whether or not they are ever published, regardless of whether or not they even finish their work. So long as you dedicate words to paper, so long as you strive to improve, so long as you express yourself, you are a writer.

### **Commentary Saturday #3: Why I Do What I Do**

(Okay, it's Sunday, I know. The calendar and I don't get along sometimes. My bad.)

It's broad questions like these that I love to just ponder whenever I have a quiet moment. And as with all vague queries, there are about a million different solutions to that one.

Sociology says I act along logical guidelines based on the label society has bestowed upon me, whether that be "student," or "male," or "writer."

Darwinism says that my mindset, during a process of thousands of years, has been found to be the most advantageous by my ancestors and passed on accordingly.

Marxism says that culture and society are really just engineered by the capitalist system, therefore the economy decides my actions.

As a self-proclaimed Marxist-Darwinist, I would love to dedicate this post to fleshing out my theories on society and the inevitable cliff our individualistic culture is going to drive off of, on the back of a super-charged economy of self-perpetuating

exploitation—but then I’d sound like a radical. Instead, we’ll be delving into “Why I Do What I Do” when it comes to writing, and why I think so many more should.

The first stop on this trip is a small text message that I wrote a couple months ago. During a time of frustration and isolation, I began to wonder why I defined myself so starkly as a writer. These words entered my head, and I scribbled them down the first chance I had:

*It is my firm belief that everyone deserves a voice. The downtrodden, the forgotten, the outcast, the hated, the revolutionary, the ostracized, the banished, the weak, the weary, all deserve to have a say. No matter how small, how quiet, how ignored—their opinions demand the right to be heard, should someone choose to listen. This is why I turned to writing, and this is why I write to this day. It is a call, a call into the darkness.*

Back when “the revolutionary” was trapped in the alien social climate of middle school, a girl approached me. As if that wasn’t jarring enough, she seemed interested in my writing, my dabbling with fiction, that I’d personally never held much love for. Danielle inspired me to continue onwards, to flesh out larger and fuller works. I was more than eager to write the part, to message her the final result over Facebook, to hear her thoughts on *Outcast* and “The Beast” and many others.

So, yes, even the Marxist is motivated by more basic things than the creation of a worker’s paradise from time to time. But my work evolved from just cool stories into something else—a faucet for my voice. Even in those earliest of times, the pen served as a way for me to express my frustration with the alienating social system, my

disenfranchisement with the “best years of our lives.” Veiled by fictive settings and characters, I channeled these emotions into my pieces, the “writer” articulating them where the “quiet student” never could.

The message here is not that everyone has the inherent right to be listened to, but that there must be the potential to be heard. Society can never accommodate nor accept every opinion, and I admit that I accept majority rule as the most legitimate form of government. However, even if the majority holds sway, the minority must be able to articulate their beliefs on par with the majority.

This is why I write—not so that everyone will hear and embrace my thoughts, but so that those who seek such ideas may find them. Come what may, if they’re ever even heard at all is not what counts. My voice is out there, it speaks within this blog, and that is what truly matters.

So go out. Put pens to paper. Write your thoughts, write your ideas, write whatever it is you wish. Poetry, fiction, commentary; all capture an aspect of the writer, speak back to their mindset, their beliefs. Know that your words shall remain long after fate comes knocking, and the unique individual, the unique voice you hold, shall be immortalized.

## **Music and Writing**

(Yes, another opinion piece, but this time it’s more than just my personal tastes.)

I'll just go ahead and say it. Music is awesome. It's a common medium for human interaction and the expression of ideas, and has been for thousands of years. There are many parallels between poetry and song lyrics: rhyme, rhythm, message, etc. I love and embrace both arts in my daily life.

But just as music is exhilarating entertainment and a great distraction from the doldrums, it is also a useful tool for crafting prose and poetry. More often than not, it is crucial to be able to articulate a particular feeling of a character, perhaps their immense conflict over loyalty to their fellow warriors or to their values, or something as simple as joy over their promotion. Obviously, we all have ideas of how these things would feel, and hopefully we'd have personal experience with the happier ones. There is, however, a way to experience these feelings and translate them into palpable descriptions.

That's right—music. How many times has Frank Sinatra's "Drinking Again" thrown me into such a deep gloom that I have to listen to the upbeat "Cliffs of Dover" just to salvage my mood from depression? Too many times to count, but that is precisely the point. Music allows me to experience these emotions as my own, as well as the thoughts and actions that coincide with them. This makes your descriptions all the more vivid when it comes time to describe your character's failure, success, conflict.

Some particularly good selections include soundtracks, not only for their length and immersion, but also for the varied content, meant to match the tone of the plot at that particular point. For instance, I turned to the "Harvey Dent Suite" to develop a character in one of my pieces. Having been betrayed and disfigured by his own police officers, the District Attorney of *The Dark Knight* launches on a murderous spree of

revenge. The tragic pain and conflict in this fall from grace are captured powerfully in this music, helping me to envision the thoughts of my own betrayed and vilified character.

These arenas also aid in capturing the mood of events within your story. For instance, say the army of noble knights is riding brazenly through the ranks of the invading barbarians. The glory and triumph of the moment can be felt in the “Ride of the Rohirrim,” making these feelings all the more tangible to you, and, in turn, the reader. I’d also recommend the Lord of the Rings soundtracks as decent tracks for anyone looking to find inspiration (as previously endorsed by **Ryan Lanz**).

But, more often than not, I use music as a way just to keep myself focused. Living in a dorm is rarely peaceful, but there is nothing better than Creedence Clearwater Revival blaring in my ears to ward off distractions and stay immersed in the world I’m sculpting. For these purposes, choose songs you’ve heard a thousand times before, songs you know so well you don’t even notice when they’ve stopped (sometimes they keep playing in my head, it’s trippy). The familiar serves to block out external noise while providing white noise, as in sounds that don’t distract you.

Since starting this blog, I’ve realized that perhaps I talk a bit too much about myself and that there are more writers out there than myself (much better ones too). This is my way of giving back, by offering ways to better focus our talents, whether it be by finding ways to emulate our characters’ emotions or to stay on task and block outside stimuli. If only one other person finds this helpful, then I will be happy knowing I did some good.