To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Stuart F. Swain entitled "Vygotsky and Composition: The Fusion of Social Experience and Personal Development." I have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

Linda Bensel-Meyers,
Major Professor

We have read this thesis
and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:

Vice Provost and
Dean of the Graduate School

STATEMENT OF PERMISSION TO USE

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a Master's degree at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, I agree that the Library shall make it available to borrowers under rules of the Library. Brief quotations from this thesis are allowable without special permission, provided that accurate acknowledgment of the source is made.

Permission for extensive quotation from or reproduction of this thesis may be granted by my major professor, or in her absence, by the Head of Interlibrary Services when, in the opinion of either, the proposed use of the material is for scholarly purposes. Any copying or use of the material in this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Signature Stuart F Swain

Date August 11, 1988

VYGOTSKY AND COMPOSITION:
THE FUSION OF SOCIAL EXPERIENCE
AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

A Thesis

Presented for the

Master of Arts

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Stuart F. Swain

December 1988

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

During the composition of this thesis, I have had the benefit of the patience and advice of my Major Professor, Dr. Linda Bensel-Meyers, and the members of my committee, Dr. Michael Keene and Dr. Allen Dunn. I appreciate their efforts on my behalf. I am also grateful for the interest and support that I have received from my parents and Steve Beauchamp and Kathy Croxton, my friends and colleagues.

ABSTRACT

Lev Vygotsky's psychological theories on egocentric speech and concept formation often have been used to support the work of writers concerned with finding better ways to teach written composition, or writing that makes a conscious effort to serve both the writer's conception of the subject and the reader's understanding of that conception, to beginning writers. These rhetorical theorists generally appreciate the utility of Vygotsky's view of egocentric speech as a diagnostic tool in evaluating immature written expression and the accuracy of Vygotsky's portrait of intellectual development in his work on concept formation. They often fail, however, to grasp Vygotsky's most important contribution to the theory of written composition: the insistence consistently pervading his work that social experience is essential to complete personal development.

This thesis explores this Vygotskian link between social and personal development by supplementing detailed examinations of Vygotsky's theories of egocentric speech and concept formation with an investigation into his seldom studied views of the aesthetic response. The concluding chapter ties these diverse topics together by suggesting that they work

together to imply a Vygotskian theory of written composition that can aid teachers in encouraging students to use the social conventions surrounding written expression to enhance their personal conceptual and expressive development.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	INTRODUCTION	1
	I: VYGOTSKY'S LIFE	7
	II: VYGOTSKY AND WRITTEN COMPOSITION	15
II.	THEORY	17
	I: EGOCENTRIC SPEECH	24
	II: CONCEPT FORMATION	37
	III: AESTHETIC RESPONSE	59
III.	CONCLUSION: PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS	76
	WORKS CITED	98
	VITA	102

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Lev Vygotsky's ideas on egocentric speech and concept formation have been widely cited by rhetorical theorists interested in the process and pedagogy of written composition, but in isolating any one segment of Vygotsky's thought they do a disservice to the most important contribution that the full body of his work can make to rhetoric. Vygotsky's work is important to rhetorical theory precisely because Vygotsky insists on such an intimate connection between social interaction and individual development. He believes that our highest, most specifically human, psychological functions lay dormant unless developed in a social context. Functions like writing are not inbred and waiting for a chance to come out; they must, and, more to the point, can be developed in the process of communicating with other people. Some rhetorical theorists stress invention and individual expression; others are more concerned with transmitting

traditional conventions and meeting audience expectations. Vygotsky's ideas seem to offer a sound foundation for considering how writing can serve both the writer's intellectual and emotional needs. These ideas work within the binding social context underlying both the audience's needs and the writer's social and personal development.

This thesis will concentrate on the potential rhetorical implications of Vygotsky's ideas on inner speech, concept formation, and the aesthetic response. Inner speech is important to Vygotsky because it arises from egocentric speech, the only context where many higher psychological functions are accessible to outside observers. Egocentric speech is important to rhetoric because Vygotsky makes a persuasive case that it is used mainly for solving practical problems in a social setting and seems to hold its social character when it goes underground to become inner speech. Thus, a child's egocentric speech may give important clues to understanding the thought of an adult during the writing process.

Vygotsky's work on concept formation goes farther in investigating how the mind functions in complex processes like writing. His clear and systematic distinctions between perception, thinking in complexes, and conceptual thought may have important

implications for the ongoing conflict between teaching writing as a product or as a process in composition classes. His work on the aesthetic response could be useful in formulating a Vygotskian theory of composition. In exhibiting the limitations of aesthetic theories that center only on our emotional response to art or on purely formal qualities of art, Vygotsky proposes a theory that resolves catharsis and the tension between the audience's expectations and the artist's conception of the work into significant form. This form reaches out to the world and helps the artist grow, just as writing should both communicate to others and instruct the writer.

Rhetoric in this thesis is limited to written composition. Writing limits my focus: speech, body language, painted signs, and the like are beyond my expertise and the limited scope of this project. All written expression doesn't qualify either because much writing either is tightly constrained by the conventions governing the rhetorical situation that prompts its production or serves as a vehicle for idiosyncratic self-expression. Composition implies a balanced attempt to use the writing process both to communicate with an audience and to foster the writer's conceptual and psychological development.

Vygotsky's emphasis on the social roots of individual development is echoed in the thought of Thomas Kuhn and T. S. Eliot and reflected in his own scholastic philosophy. In his essay "The Essential Tension," Kuhn insists on the importance of rooting any new scientific theory in the history of its discipline because

> in the mature sciences the prelude to much discovery and to all novel theory is not ignorance, but the recognition that something has gone wrong with existing knowledge and beliefs.

In fact, Kuhn believes that

> the productive scientist must be a traditionalist who enjoys playing intricate games by pre-established rules in order to be a successful innovator who discovers new rules and new pieces with which to play them (Kuhn 468, 470).

Eliot asks the artist to do much the same in "Tradition and the Individual Talent." He asks the poet to remember that

> the mind of Europe--the mind of his own country a mind which he learns in time to be much more important than his own private mind--is a mind which changes, and that this change is a development which abandons nothing en route, which does not superannuate either Shakespeare, or Homer, or the rock drawing of the Magdalenian draughtsman

and that his mind is

> a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together (Eliot 39,41).

Like Kuhn, Eliot believes that an understanding of the past is essential to working productively in the present.

Lev Vygotsky also connected his work to intellectual history. He followed a fairly regular pattern in his writings, not simply for consistency, but as a reflection of his beliefs about how we think and how we communicate with one another. Vygotsky began his articles and chapters by insisting on the importance of the topic to be discussed and went on to construct an argument that carefully considered the ideas of his predecessors in the field; only with this thorough background did he develop his concepts and explore their implications. Thus, his chapter on "Tool and Symbol in Child Development" in Mind in Society considers, among other studies, Karl Stumpf's botanical view of child development, Wolfgang Kohler's work with apes, K. Buhler's work with children, and Charlotte Buhler's work with infants before going on to his own very different conclusions. Similarly, his work on Hamlet in The Psychology of Art takes great pains to cover precisely the views of the play that Vygotsky finds most wrongheaded before setting out Vygotsky's explanation of the play's effect upon us. Vygotsky's scholarship isn't mere pedantry. Instead, it reflects

Kuhn and Eliot's belief that no ideas are completely original, that intellectual honesty demands that theory and art acknowledge the contribution of the past, that no present idea can be properly understood in isolation from the context constructed by its ancestors.

This respect for the past hardly seems unique in careful scholarship, but it is striking in Vygotsky's work because it complements his insistence on considering both the social context and the conceptual significance of all thought and language. Vygotsky was interested in uniquely human higher psychological functions like conceptual thought, speech, and the ability to write, and he believed that many of these functions develop only in response to some social need. Therefore, any complete intellectual analysis must incorporate what Vygotsky calls a genetic analysis: scholarship that puts the unique features of new ideas into perspective by uncovering their roots in their theoretical ancestors. In such a genetic analysis, no study of the shape of an idea is finished until the study considers the idea's history. The fact that Vygotsky consistently examined both the past history and present implications of his topics clearly indicates that he abided by his own

injunctions: the shape of his work matches the substance it contains.

I: VYGOTSKY'S LIFE

Given the care that Vygotsky took in uncovering the full context surrounding his ideas, it seems especially important to consider the influence of his life on his work. Vygotsky was born in 1896 and graduated from Moscow University in 1917 (Vygotsky Mind, 14). This places his youth and education squarely in the middle of the transition from the Czarist state to the Soviet system. James Wertsch notes the messianic effect of this transition on Vygotsky's generation. The period after the 1917 Revolution, especially after the 1922 Civil War, "was one of upheaval, enthusiasm, and energy unimaginable by today's standards" and was marked by the willingness of people like Vygotsky to devote "every hour of their lives to making certain that the new socialist state, the first grand experiment based on Marxist-Leninist principles, would succeed" (Wertsch Social Formation, 10). Vygotsky came of age at the beginning of the new Soviet age, twenty years or so immediately after the 1917 Revolution that were filled with "opportunities and challenges that remain unparalleled in the

twentieth century" (Wertsch Culture, 1).

Vygotsky's era, of course, was a Marxist era. For example, the Marxists first offered Vygotsky relief from Czarist repression; despite his perfect test scores, quotas against Jews forced Vygotsky to enter Moscow University as the winner of a blind lottery (Wertsch Social Formation 5-6). Vygotsky's relation to Marxism needs clarification because even though Vygotsky enthusiastically participated in the period of new ideas and social change brought in by the Soviets, his Czarist childhood and liberal education in medicine, literature and law gave him a broader perspective than an absorption in purely Marxist ideology could support. These early influences make it misleading to reduce Vygotsky's thought to dogmatic Marxism. Still, Marxism was intellectually congenial to him. No study of Marxism can totally explain Vygotsky, but a look at Vygotsky's place in the thought and social context of his time can help us understand his life and work. Like Thomas Jefferson, who brought John Locke's Social Contract and a classical education into the turmoil of the American Revolution, Vygotsky had the ability to bring the best of an old order into the process of building a new one. Therefore, while Vygotsky's thought is

hardly determined by Marxist ideology, an examination of how Vygotsky adapted to the key features of the Marxism around him can help illustrate how he functioned in the context of his own time.

First, Vygotsky liked the Marxist emphasis on the social history of ideas. Like the Marxists, Vygotsky needed to know the origin of ideas in order to fully comprehend their place in contemporary thought. In Thought and Language, for example, he quotes V. I. Lenin's comment on "Aristotle's critique of the Pythagorean concept of numbers and Plato's concept of Ideas," which ends: "For even in the simplest generalization, in the most elementary general idea ('table' in general), there is a certain bit of fantasy." In the paragraph before this, Vygotsky chides Jean Piaget for accusing autistic children of being incapable of practical thought, of being capable only of "hollow abstract formulas and logical fictions" (Vygotsky Thought 38-39). Although Vygotsky praises Lenin only for the dialectical clarity of his argument, the flow of the passage suggests that he is equally impressed by the concreteness of Lenin's language, by the human insight of "a certain bit of fantasy." Marxism offered Vygotsky a means of assessing both the abstract and theoretical and the human and

practical aspects of the problems he faced by giving him a mechanism for looking at their historical roots. Just as Lenin approached the fantasy inherent in generalization through Aristotle, Vygotsky saw the seed of Piaget's developmental psychology in Rousseau's insight that "a child is not a miniature adult" (Vygotsky Thought 13). Marxism's interest in the history of ideas may not account solely for Vygotsky's insistence on scholarly perspective in his work, but it did provide a climate that promoted Vygotsky's historical studies.

Next, the theoretical power of the Marxist dialectic appealed to the eclectic side of Vygotsky's intellectual personality. Wertsch cites Vygotsky's interest in literature, philosophy, psychology, theatre, semiotics, and medicine and applauds his "proposal for reformulating psychology as part of a unified social science." He also mentions Vygotsky's readings in a diverse body of work that includes Shakespeare, Aristotle, Buhler, Darwin, Dostoevsky, Engels, Freud, Goethe, Hegel, Marx, Tolstoy, and the Russian Formalists (Wertsch Culture 1-3). Obviously, building a new world requires whatever tools come to hand; Marxism helped Vygotsky choose the best tools for the work before him by encouraging his natural inclination to cross disciplinary lines in order to

find the ideas and theoretical frameworks he needed. Even his work on our response to art draws from sources as diverse as Freud, Marx, and Shakespeare. Again, this eclecticism stems less from doctrinaire Marxism than from a need to augment historical depth with a complementary intellectual breadth.

Also, Marxism's emphasis on social reform appealled to Vygotsky's practical side. Before his death of tuberculosis in 1939, he worked toward solutions for the major problems facing the Soviet Union in his time. Wertsch identifies these as

> Massive illiteracy...cultural differences among the peoples who were all supposed to become Soviet...and an almost total absence of services for those who were mentally retarded or otherwise unable to participate in the new society (Wertsch Social Formation 11).

Vygotsky helped attack these problems through conducting empirical research and establishing the Laboratory of Psychology for Abnormal Children (Wertsch Social Formation 11), but his main contribution may be in the "instrumental" approach that Jerome Bruner detects in his writings. Bruner praises Vygotsky's "way of interpreting thought and speech as instruments for the planning and carrying out of action" (Bruner in Wertsch Culture 23). This instrumentality can be seen in the interconnection between Vygotsky's developmental and pedagogical work. Vygotsky's developmental theories carefully

traced how changes in language affect both a child's internal thought and his social perception of the world around him. His pedagogical thought, especially the Zone of Proximal Development, sought to apply this developmental theory by offering practical help in testing the level of intellectual and social development. Thus, the Marxist imperative to improve social conditions catered to Vygotsky's desire to help in a society anxious, at least temporarily, to reform the way its citizens lived.

It is also important to note that the Marxist interest in examining the effects of economic and social reality suited Vygotsky's empirical bent. Wertsch cites Vygotsky's paraphrase of Marx's idea that "we could say that humans' psychological nature represents the aggregate of internalized social relations that have become functions for the individual and forms of his/her structure" as "evidence of Vygotsky's concern for creating a psychology that would be compatible with Marx's basic claims about the social origins of human consciousness" (Wertsch Culture 10). Vygotsky's experimental work was grounded in the social conditions around him: in his empirical research, he "searched the neighborhood of [his] institute for children who could serve as subjects" (Wertsch Social Formation 11). This method

reflected the bureaucratic confusion of the times, but it also fit Vygotsky's interest in working in the real world. In this and other cases, the Marxist interest in material conditions meshed with Vygotsky's desire to connect his ideas closely to the daily reality of the people he sought to understand.

Finally, Vygotsky agreed with the Marxist emphasis on revolutionary, rather than evolutionary, change. In "The Genesis of Higher Mental Functions," Vygotsky regrets the tendency to "latent evolutionism" in child psychology and its unwillingness to know about "the sudden, violent, and revolutionary changes that appear throughout ontogenesis and that are so often encountered in the history of cultural development" (Vygotsky Genesis 150). Vygotsky uses the development of the child's ability to point as an example of revolutionary change in development. Behavior that begins as random movement towards an object in an infant gains symbolic meaning only when the child realizes that "a response emerges not on the part of the object, but on the part of another human" and the movement itself changes from a "movement directed toward an object" to "a movement directed toward another human being" (Vygotsky Genesis 161).

The child's awareness of the power to influence another person immediately turns the movement into a

gesture, a tool for social interaction. The developmental revolution here comes with the child's recognition of his social context. Once a child can point, he has a new connection with the world around him: he suddenly lives in a place full of things that he can point out to others. Thus, while Vygotsky had nothing to do with the Marxist political upheavals of his time, he did insist on the power of revolutionary change in the individual psyche. To him, our growth is a series of jolting shifts in perspective, not a placid flowering of latent abilities.

Vygotsky's basic affinity for Marxism shouldn't undercut the singularity of his life. A. R. Luria hailed him as a genius and remembered his charismatic effect on his students and colleagues: when Vygotsky went on a trip, "the students wrote poems in honor of his journey. When he gave a lecture in Moscow, everyone came to hear him" (Wertsch Social Formation 10). Still, his intellectual and personal abilities were not automatically translated into tangible success. His early death in 1934 left many of his concepts relatively underdeveloped. He is more valuable for the questions he asked about existing disciplines and the new directions of inquiry he suggested than for creating any elaborate new psychological system during his lifetime. In fact,

his work was essentially banned at the height of Stalinism and left unpublished until 1956 (Wertsch Social Formation, 14). His official status, though, seems trivial next to the service he has performed in establishing the importance of social interaction to individual development.

II: VYGOTSKY AND WRITTEN COMPOSITION

The interplay between the new social context created by the Russian Revolution and Vygotsky's own development and the course of his career runs parallel to the views on written composition implied in his theories on other matters. Vygotsky is in favor of personal development, but he insists that it can only fully occur through social experience. At the same time, social institutions make sense only when they serve the needs of individual citizens. Thus, too much writing, certainly too much writing in the college composition classes that emphasize either five paragraph themes and the modes of composition or invention as a one-sided aid to romantic personal expression, probably is not written composition in this Vygotskian sense: we often have trouble balancing the need to take account of the conventions that shape our audiences' expectations and the potential

writing offers as an aid to thought and cognitive development. It is wrongheaded to put either convention or expression first. The writing process works recursively, and traditional expectations and the writer's personal voice nourish one another when true composition takes place. Still, even though most of us cannot compose writing in the same way that Beethoven composed music, Nabokov could, even in his nonfiction. Composition seems a worthy goal, even for the rest of us, and Vygotsky seems to point the way for us, the laymen struggling to keep the best of us in sight.

CHAPTER II

THEORY

Linda Flower uses Vygotsky's ideas about egocentric speech as a diagnostic tool in her essay "Writer-based Prose": she detects egocentric fragments in the work of writers who have yet to learn how to take proper account of an audience's needs and expectations. This application is certainly a legitimate use of Vygotsky's theories since inexperienced writers often share young children's social distance from a wider world they can't quite yet address, but it barely touches the main insight rhetorical theory can profitably carry away from Vygotsky: the interconnection between social experience and personal development. Vygotsky's work on egocentric speech reaches beyond an apparently ephemeral stage in childhood to the social character of all successful and complete human development by emphasizing its practical value in solving the problems presented by the social context we face both as

children and as adults.

The chapters on egocentric speech and concept formation that make up the bulk of Vygotsky's Thought and Language revolve around what Vygotsky sees as an essential difference between his developmental theories and those embraced by Jean Piaget. Vygotsky believes that development depends on a child's ability to incorporate the problems and conventions of the human society surrounding him and make them his own. By reacting to his cultural environment, a child begins to mature and constantly finds, through practice, more powerful tools for formulating an individual response to his surroundings. Vygotsky believes that Piaget maintains nearly the opposite view: childhood is intrinsically isolated from the outer world and development consists of the replacement of an egocentric childish mind with a socialized adult mentality. Thus, while Vygotsky views egocentric speech and concept formation as essential steps in the process of intellectual growth, he claims that Piaget treats egocentric speech as an inevitable but isolated detour children pass through on the way to acquiring an adult conceptual framework.

It's easy to see why Vygotsky feels the need to distinguish his developmental theory from Piaget's, but

why pick egocentric speech and concept formation as the appropriate topics for his debate with Piaget? To begin with, Vygotsky declares in Thought and Language that "the whole conception of speech development differs profoundly in accordance with the interpretation given to the role of egocentric speech" (Vygotsky Thought 35). Vygotsky insists that "egocentric speech emerges when the child transfers social, collaborative forms of behavior to the sphere of inner-personal psychic functions" (Vygotsky Thought 35). This egocentric speech is therefore important to Vygotsky because it serves as a bridge between early social speech and more mature inner speech: it marks the only time when the beginnings of the inner speech that directs our adult mind and behavior can be heard and directly observed.

Similarly, concept formation serves Vygotsky as more than a theoretical debating point with Piaget. Vygotsky's chapters on concept formation continue the emphasis on the critical importance of social interaction for the development of higher psychological functions begun in the chapters on egocentric speech and expand the scope of Vygotsky's analysis beyond the individual child. In considering concept formation, Vygotsky dwells heavily on pedagogy

and the urgent need for society to provide the cultural stimulus essential to the development of many characteristically human abilities that Vygotsky insists will not arise on their own. While several important offshoots of Vygotsky's views in current rhetorical pedagogy are considered in the conclusion of this study, the present section will concentrate on Vygotsky's distinction between spontaneous and scientific concepts and his theory that abstraction and thinking in complexes serve as the twin roots of concept formation. These ideas, along with Vygotsky's treatment of egocentric speech outlined above, should give a taste of how Vygotsky blends social influence and individual intellectual autonomy in his developmental theory.

Since so much of Vygotsky's theory is staked in opposition to Piaget's views, it seems only right to wonder about the fairness and accuracy of Vygotsky's charges against him. It is obviously important that Piaget outlived Vygotsky by forty-six years and refined his theories of development throughout his life. Therefore, Vygotsky's critique of Piaget's theory is necessarily based only on Piaget's earliest work up to the 1932 Russian combined edition of The Language and Thought of the Child and Judgement and Reasoning in the

Child. As the translators of the 1962 edition of Vygotsky's Thought and Language note, "Vygotsky's criticism, based on Piaget's early work, is hardly applicable to Piaget's later formulations of his theories" (Vygotsky Thought 9). In any case, the inevitable historical shortcomings of Vygotsky's critique are beside the point for the modern reader. We would be foolish to prefer an account written in 1934 to the many modern commentaries on Piaget's ideas if we were primarily interested in understanding Piaget's views of human development. Vygotsky's critique of Piaget is more important to comprehending Vygotsky than knowing Piaget's theory. It should be enough to share Jerome Bruner's assurance that Vygotsky's treatment of Piaget is "analytic and theoretic in the best sense" and Piaget's own belief that Vygotsky acted in good faith (Bruner "Introduction" viii). Vygotsky isn't simply being contentious in his disputes with Piaget. Instead he uses several very specific charges against Piaget's view of development as the main pillars supporting his own developmental theory.

Also, Vygotsky's specific problems with Piaget's theory shouldn't overshadow his generally high opinion of Piaget's work. Vygotsky straightforwardly concedes

that "psychology owes a great deal to Jean Piaget." He understands that Piaget "revolutionalized the study of children's speech and thought...developed the clinical method for exploring children's ideas," and "was the first to investigate the child's perception and logic systematically" (Vygotsky Thought 12). All of Vygotsky's objections to Piaget recognize how close Piaget comes to the truth; Vygotsky simply wants to come a bit closer.

Next, it is worthwhile to look at Piaget's own opinion of his treatment at Vygotsky's hands. In a note taken from his supplement to the 1962 edition of Thought and Language that is appended to the 1986 edition, Piaget agrees with Vygotsky's critique on some points and disagrees with it on others. For example, as will be seen more clearly in the section on autism later in this chapter, Piaget accepts Vygotsky's charge that he "overemphasized the resemblances between egocentrism and autism" but resists the notion of Vygotsky's that he found himself "obliged to conceive of realistic or objective thought as independent of concrete needs" (Vygotsky Thought 262-263). Piaget seems to respect Vygotsky's accuracy in reporting fact and to understand the differences in interpretation. If Piaget can't always agree with Vygotsky's readings

of his work, at least he can understand why Vygotsky feels as he does.

Finally, though, James Wertsch doesn't let Vygotsky off the hook so easily for his treatment of Piaget's stand on the critical issue of socialization. Wertsch believes that Vygotsky's critique of Piaget on the role social forces play in egocentric speech provides "some important insights into how these two scholars disagreed, not only about the role of speech in development but also the development of human cognition in general." According to Wertsch, "Vygotsky was either engaging in a bit of polemics here or did not recognize an important difference in his use of 'social' and Piaget's use of 'socialized'" in contrasting his own view that social speech precedes other speech and provides the impetus for its development with his view of Piaget's position that social speech follows egocentric speech and represents a late stage in development. Wertsch notes that Vygotsky sometimes shares Piaget's view of socialized speech as "speech behavior that reflects socialization into the speech community" and that Vygotsky and Piaget disagree profoundly over the "assumption that one must go outside psychology if one wishes to carry out a complete genetic analysis of the psychology of the

individual." Thus, Vygotsky either misunderstands or misrepresents Piaget because of very different theories of development, because "Vygotsky searched for the beginning of development in social life in a way that Piaget did not" (Wertsch Social Formation 114-115). Even here where Vygotsky seems to miss the point, his error fits into his larger polemical purpose.

I: EGOCENTRIC SPEECH

However inaccurate Vygotsky's version of Piaget's theory may be, Vygotsky and Piaget agree that egocentric speech consists of language that seems meant for no apparent audience and that is uttered by young children, but they differ over the purpose and origin of egocentric speech and over what happens to it as children grow up. While Vygotsky consistently pushes egocentric speech into a social matrix, a context dominated by the need to adapt to the demands of everyday human life, he believes that Piaget dismisses egocentric speech as a merely ornamental and self-contained stage that children soon outgrow. Because of this basic conflict, Vygotsky uses Piaget's views as a contrasting backdrop for his own theory. Unlike Piaget, Vygotsky insists that "the child's

intellectual growth is contingent on his mastering the social means of thought, that is, language" (Vygotsky Thought 94). If language is the social means of thought, it can hardly be outgrown. Vygotsky claims that the first speech of children "is essentially social" and that "egocentric speech emerges when the child transfers social, collaborative forms of behavior to the sphere of inner-personal psychic functions" (Vygotsky Thought 35). In other words, the child's first amorphous gestures towards the outside world are gradually developed into the egocentric speech that children use when faced with a problem. Vygotsky believes Piaget "clearly indicates that the originality of a child's thinking is inherent, without socially influenced development" (Vygotsky Thought 54). Piaget's willingness to divorce development from social influence keeps it from working as what Vygotsky considers a truly developmental theory.

Vygotsky, then, places purpose at the center of his dispute with Piaget. On the most general level, Vygotsky objects to the uselessness of egocentric speech in Piaget's theory. According to Vygotsky, Piaget believes that "egocentric speech is...useless" because it is only "speech for the child's sake, which is incomprehensible for others and which is closer to a

verbal dream than to a conscious activity." To Piaget, egocentric speech only "appears as a stigma of the child's cognitive egocentrism" (Vygotsky Thought 28-29). This egocentric speech serves no practical purpose; it gets in the way of desirable cognitive growth. It is important to note that Piaget only observes egocentric speech as an interesting anomaly that functions as a way of marking time pending the only truly social segment of child development in Piaget's system, the period in adolescence when adult mental patterns replace the childish mind, much as permanent teeth replace baby teeth (Vygotsky Thought 155). He doesn't establish how it affects a child's ability to solve problems encountered in his surroundings, and he doesn't find any traces of egocentric speech in adults. Since these are the main developmental functions Vygotsky assigns to egocentric speech, Vygotsky must criticize Piaget's conception of useless egocentric speech in order to defend his own developmental theory.

Piaget can isolate egocentric speech within the individual child because he believes that there is "no real social life between children of less than seven or eight" (Piaget Language 40). If young children are not truly social, then they have no need of egocentric

speech that really communicates. Piaget believes that egocentric speech functions to "'chant' one's thoughts or actions" and reflects thoughts that are also egocentric (Vygotsky Thought 27). Vygotsky is obviously struck by the insularity of egocentric speech in Piaget's theory. In Piaget's theory, egocentric speech and thought seem to feed upon one another, creating a loop that encircles a maturing mind, that distracts a growing child from the wider world. Piaget seems to stand apart as a detached observer noting an interesting but ephemeral phenomenom. Unlike Vygotsky, Piaget doesn't establish egocentric speech as an essential developmental function; Vygotsky believes that Piaget dismisses egocentric speech as an illuminating, if inconsequential, quirk that always accompanies development but has no real effect on a child's adaptation to his surroundings or lasting impact on the adult mind. According to Vygotsky's view of Piaget's theory, even though egocentrism of thought is "intimately related to the child's psychic nature," this egocentrism is "impervious to experience" and unique to childhood (Vygotsky Thought 19).

Vygotsky opposes this isolated view of egocentric speech. The key to seeing why Piaget's view seems so isolated from a Vygotskian perspective is to compare

Piaget and Vygotsky's concept of the origin of egocentric speech: Vygotsky roots the phenomenon in a lifelong process of development while he believes that Piaget does not. Piaget establishes egocentric speech as an observable feature of a child's development without recognizing it as a functional part of the developmental process as seen in Vygotskian terms. Here, as in the concept formation stage examined later in this chapter, this developmental stage functions mainly as something to be supplanted by a distinctly different adult mentality. Vygotsky also sees qualitative differences between the thought of children and adults, but he insists that egocentric speech is crucial in developing the adult mind and leaves traces in adult thought.

Piaget places egocentric speech "midway between autism in the strict sense of the word and socialized thought" (Piaget Judgment 208). This is important because while Vygotsky notes that egocentric speech works in Piaget's system as "the bond uniting all the specific characteristics of the child's thinking," it is also obvious in the Vygotskian critique that Piaget has simply located egocentric speech's place in the larger developmental process and done little to explain its presence. Vygotsky goes on to note that Piaget

"stresses the traits that egocentric thought has in common with autism rather than the traits that divide them" (Vygotsky Thought 15).

Vygotsky believes that Piaget emphasizes the similarities between egocentric thought and autism in order to support preconceived theories about the child's mind. As mentioned earlier, Piaget concedes Vygotsky's point that he "overemphasized the resemblances between egocentrism and autism without bringing out the differences sufficiently" in a supplement to Vygotsky's Thought and Language (1962 edition). Piaget also admits that Vygotsky has grounds for reproaching his over-reliance on Freud's insistence on the priority of the pleasure principle over the reality principle in children, the idea that children always satisfy internal emotional urges before responding to their surroundings. This may seem like an arcane point until we recall that the core of Vygotsky's dispute with Piaget's theory revolves around the difference between self-contained and socially oriented views of development. It is important, then, that Piaget agrees in hindsight with "Vygotsky's point that adaptation to reality goes hand in hand with need and pleasure, because even when assimilation predominates it is always accompanied by some

accomodation" (Vygotsky Thought 262-263). Piaget corrects these errors in his later work, but it is important to note his willingness to accept and profit from Vygotsky's critique of his early work in the passage just cited. Vygotsky shows how Piaget's admitted overemphasis on autism and the pleasure principle in his description of egocentric speech reflects a view of the child's mind incompatible with Vygotsky's conception of a true developmental theory.

Vygotsky believes that the "premise taken from psychoanalysis that the child's thought is originally and naturally autistic and becomes realistic thought only under long and sustained social pressure," though "never presented by Piaget in a coherent, systematic, fashion, is the cornerstone of his whole theoretical edifice" (Vygotsky Thought 18). Piaget makes a distinction between autistic, or undirected, thought and directed thought. Vygotsky counters this distinction with Eugen Bleuler's attack on its Freudian assumptions, but we need to begin with Piaget's theory. Autistic thought

> is subconscious, which means that the aims it pursues and the problems it tries to solve are not present in consciousness; it is not adapted to reality, but it tends to create for itself a dream world of imagination; it tends, not to establish truths, but to satisfy desires, and it remains strictly individual and incommunicable

as such by means of language.

Piaget contrasts this with directed thought that

> pursues an aim which is present to the mind of the thinker; it is intelligent, which means that it is adapted to reality and tries to influence it; it admits of being true or false (empirically or logically true), and it can be communicated by language (Piaget Language 43).

Vygotsky contests this Piagetian view of both the nature and timing of autism in children.

We have seen that Piaget "stresses the traits that egocentric thought has in common with autism rather than the traits that divide them" (Vygotsky Thought 17). This fact is emphasized in his belief that "play, when all is said and done, is the supreme law of egocentric thought" (Piaget Judgment 244) when play is seen as "the most spontaneous form of thinking" and consists of "wishful imaginings that make the desired seem imaginable," according to Vygotsky's reading of Piaget (Vygotsky Thought 18). Thus, Piaget's views on autism are important to Vygotsky's reading of Piaget's theory of egocentric speech. Egocentric speech is characteristic of children up to the age of seven or eight. To Piaget, the thought of these children "begins to serve immediate satisfaction much earlier than to seek truth" and makes it "very hard to distinguish deliberate invention from fantasy that the

child believes to be the truth" (Vygotsky Thought 18). Social reality is beside the point for children in this egocentric stage. Vygotsky observes that Piaget classifies speech as egocentric "partly because the child speaks only about himself, but chiefly because he does not attempt to place himself at the point of view of his hearer." This egocentric monologue contrasts sharply with socialized speech, where a "child does attempt to an exchange with others--he begs, commands, threatens, conveys information, asks questions" (Piaget Language 26).

Piaget's distinction between egocentric and social speech runs parallel to Eugen Bleuler's view of Freud's relationship between the influence of the pleasure and reality principles on human behavior. This biologically oriented psychologist believes that Freud

> claims that the mechanisms of pleasure satisfaction are the primary ones. He assumes that a baby whose needs are all satisfied by its mother lives a purely autistic life resembling that of a chicken still in the egg. A baby 'hallucinates' about the satisfaction of his visceral needs, manifests his irritation by crying and motor reaction, and then experiences hallucinatory satisfaction (Vygotsky *Thought 21).

Both Piaget and Freud believe that children must go through an autistic period that is preoccupied with

pleasure and centered around the isolated self before an age when reason and social communication come into play.

Vygotsky clearly rejects Piaget's sequence that leads from autism to egocentrism to directed thought and speech. Again following Bleuler's lead, Vygotsky insists that "to let the pleasure principle become a starting point of development is to make the origin of thinking and intelligence absolutely obscure" (Vygotsky Thought 22). This "primacy of autism is biological nonsense" because, as Bleuler observes,

> I do not see a hallucinatory satisfaction in a baby, but I do see a satisfaction after the actual intake of food. And I must say that the chicken finds its way out of the egg not with the help of imagination, but because it physically and chemically assimilates available nutritious substances (Vygotsky Thought 21).

In citing Bleuler here, Vygotsky accuses Piaget of shaping fact to suit theory. In using egocentric speech to establish "the objective interrelatedness of the child's thinking," Piaget "passes from facts to theory, and incidently shows how much his analysis of facts was influenced by theory" (Vygotsky Thought 15). Vygotsky accuses Piaget of trying to make egocentric speech explain more than it can. Common sense clearly shows that a newly born crying child is more likely to be hungry than dreaming of hunger, but

Piaget and Freud nonetheless insist that self-contained pleasure overpowers social reality, that a sense of physical reality comes only as the result of considerable development. Vygotsky certainly agrees that a well fed child is likely to be a happy child, but to Vygotsky the child's pleasure arises from the satisfaction of a biological need. The child's hunger comes from within, but food to ease it comes from the outside world and only in response to the child's request.

Vygotsky, to the contrary, insists that a reality function must precede autism. Like Bleuler, Vygotsky cannot "imagine a living creature who would not be concerned first of all with the reaction to reality" or "imagine how the autistic function, which requires a complex memory, can exist below a certain stage of development" (Vygotsky Thought 22). Indeed, Vygotsky follows Bleuler in reserving autistic function for a time when "a child is able to combine concepts without direct stimulation from the external world" and extend accumulated past experiences to "new unknown situations" (Vygotsky Thought 22). Vygotsky and Bleuler turn Piaget and Freud inside out. Interaction in the real world is absolutely essential in providing the experience needed to think autistically. We must

live in the real world before imagining new worlds within us and not the other way around, for we can only seek pleasure once we have satisfied basic social needs. Where else can we find the raw materials for constructing even the most autistic, self-contained fantasy but in the world around us? Even the most solipsistic expression at least rearranges elements common to general experience. Once we get beyond basic pleasurable or painful feelings, we need language, human language, to have any content in our thoughts. Even Salvador Dali's melting watches derive much of their incongruity from their resemblance to real watches. This play between conventional social expectations and original thought will form the basis of the Vygotskian theory of composition in Chapter III of this study.

If the reality function precedes autism, where does egocentric speech fit in? In contrast to Piaget, Vygotsky believes that "egocentric speech does play a specific role in the child's activity." According to Vygotsky, since Piaget believes that egocentric speech "is but a system of weakness and immaturity in the child's thinking," his data show it become "weaker and weaker until it completely disappears from the routine of the child's speech." However, because Vygotsky

believes that egocentric speech serves a practical purpose in the child's problem solving process, his experiments are designed to stimulate it by adding "a series of frustrations and difficulties" (Vygotsky Thought 28). For example, "when a child was getting ready to draw, he would suddenly find that there was no paper, or no pencil of the color he needed" (Vygotsky Thought 29-30). Vygotsky found that "in these difficult situations" that simulated the difficulties of adapting to the surrounding world, "the coefficient of egocentric speech almost doubled." Egocentric speech withers in Piaget's experiments because the tasks eventually become too easy to require its aid. Vygotsky, conversely, designs experiments that push children into unfamiliar tasks and require the help of egocentric speech (Vygotsky Thought 29).

Perhaps the core of Vygotsky's opposition to what he believed to be Piaget's view of child development as a series of isolated stages resides in his conviction "that the true direction of the development of thinking is not from the individual to the social, but from the social to the individual" (Vygotsky Thought 36). Vygotsky doesn't force us to choose between the individual and the social good: his point is precisely that social interaction is essential

to individual development at any age. Vygotsky's chapter on "The Genetic Roots of Thought and Speech" in Thought and Language extends this basic theory of egocentric speech to cover its eventual metamorphosis into the inner speech of adult thought, for "egocentric speech is inner speech in its functions; it is speech on its way inward, intimately tied up with the ordering of the child's behavior" (Vygotsky Thought 86).

II: CONCEPT FORMATION

Vygotsky's work on egocentric speech helps establish an intimate connection between social experience and personal cognitive development, but his work on concept formation pushes the link a bit farther. First, the role external instruction plays in stimulating the ability to think conceptually extends the part society has in individual development beyond childhood to the whole of life. Secondly, conceptual thought demands the ability to not only hold and manipulate ideas, but also to consciously recognize them as personal intellectual property--to note one's place in a community of other thinkers, for in order to conceive of one's own idea, one must distinguish it from the thought of others.

In this sense, Vygotsky's work anticipates the work of thinkers like Donald Murray, Peter Elbow, and Ken Macrorie on the need for writers to develop a personal voice, but Vygotsky lays more stress on social context. When Murray writes well, he finds that

> writing is often like looking at a blank screen and then seeing the pattern of an intellectual problem and solution appear at the same time. A click. Another problem and another solution....Some of these appear on my notebook page, more are just in my head. Many do not have words connected to them, but they are writing (Murray 48).

He also notes that when we listen to our "evolving writing," we find that our work

> will develop its own shape and form, its own destination,its own voice, its meaning, and it will finally detach itself from its maker and find readers who may hear things in it [we] never heard (Murray 63).

Vygotsky could never put the matter so mystically, or detach our voice or its meaning so far from us, but his concepts do reside and develop within us much as Murray's voice does. Vygotsky escapes Murray's romanticism by tying the conceptual voice in us to social experience. Concepts reflect our higher human capacities and must develop in a human context.

The rest of this chapter on egocentric speech and concept formation, then, will extend the social character of thought and language underlying

Vygotsky's discussion of egocentric speech to his work on concept formation. Vygotsky emphasizes his belief that we cannot develop the ability to form and manipulate concepts without social interaction by again pointing out the differences between his and Jean Piaget's views on the matter, but this dispute, unlike the disagreement over egocentric speech, doesn't revolve around the origin and purpose of the phenomenon. The origin of any psychological function is always important from Vygotsky's developmental perspective, but instead of focusing directly on the purpose of concept formation, Vygotsky approaches purpose indirectly: he examines the identifying characteristics of different kinds of concepts and shows them to be socially generated, not developmentally innate, structures. This distinction comes out clearly in the two psychologists' view of spontaneous concepts: Piaget simply identifies them as a temporary but significant stage in childish thought, while Vygotsky places them at the end of an involved developmental chain that begins with thinking in complexes and demands an awareness of systematic scientific concepts and a course of systematic instruction.

Before examining the differences between Vygotsky

and Piaget on how spontaneous and nonspontaneous concepts are related, it is important to establish that Vygotsky disagrees with Piaget on developmental grounds. The connection between nonspontaneous and spontaneous concepts leads to the second major difference between Vygotsky's and Piaget's theories of concept formation. Vygotsky believes that Piaget treats the child's ability to construct spontaneous concepts as innate: from Vygotsky's point of view, Piaget ignores the entire prehistory of spontaneous concepts. Just as he believes that autistic thought requires social experience, Vygotsky is convinced that spontaneous, self-derived concept formation requires extensive experience in preconceptual thought along with the structural guidance provided by nonspontaneous concepts. Vygotsky's purpose in making this distinction between an innate ability to think conceptually and the need to develop the capacity for conceptual thought is clear: to Vygotsky, conceptual thinking is neither inborn nor instinctive. Instead, conceptual thinking, like all higher human psychological functions, must be self-consciously developed in a social context if it is to ever reach its full potential.

This central Vygotskian need to root the development of conceptual thinking in social experience means that any attempt to teach as pure expression is bound to fail on two essential levels. Purely expressive writing ignores the rhetorical needs and expectations of any real audience, and Vygotsky's ideas perform a service by showing that such a dubious goal is probably impossible anyway. Like any other conceptual exercise, effective writing must arise out of social experience to reach anything close to its full potential.

Vygotsky believes that thinking in complexes precedes true conceptual reasoning. Children begin in the syncretic stage, where "in perception, in thinking, and in acting, the child tends to merge the most diverse elements into one unarticulated image on the strength of some chance impression." They soon pass beyond this stage, where "word meaning denotes nothing more" than "a vague syncretic conglomeration of individual objects that have somehow or other coalesced into an image in his mind," and reach the complex stage, where "individual objects are united in the child's mind not only by his subjective impressions but also by bonds actually between these objects" (Vygotsky Thought 110, 112). Note the absolute

insistence on the importance of development reflected in Vygotsky's reasoning here. Conceptual thought is impossible until we first learn to refine our focus on the world down from sheer associative coincidence to intellectually verifiable connections between objects.

Vygotsky specifies that "in a complex, the bonds between its components are concrete and factual rather than abstract and logical," as in concepts and that "the factual bonds underlying complexes are discovered through experience" (Vygotsky Thought 113). Vygotsky distinguishes between five types of concepts: associative concepts, collections, chains, diffuse complexes, and pseudoconcepts. Associative complexes are typical. They are built around one central, or nuclear, object. For example, one block may be the center of any number of blocks grouped together for any reason--color, size, shape, or whatever catches the child's eye. The bond "need not be a common trait, such as color or shape; a similarity, a contrast, or proximity in space may also establish the bond." The bond that the child perceives isn't a cognitively exploitable concept. It can't be held in mind and changed to suit changing circumstances. It simply

functions as "the family name of a group of objects related to one another in many kinds of ways, just as the relationships in human families are many and different" (Vygotsky Thought 114).

The other four kinds of complexes share the concreteness and lack of abstraction found in associative complexes, but pseudoconcepts look deceptively close to actual concepts. In Vygotsky's experiments, a "child produces a pseudoconcept every time he surrounds a sample with objects that could just as well have been assembled on the basis of an abstract concept." For example

> when the sample is a yellow triangle and the child picks out all the triangles in the experimental material, he could have been guided by the general idea or concept of a triangle. Experimental analysis shows, however, that in reality the child is guided by the concrete, visible likeness and has formed only an associative complex limited to a certain kind of perceptual bond (Vygotsky Thought 119).

Vygotsky's contribution here is interpretative. Anyone could observe the behavior, but Vygotsky notes the similarity to thinking in complexes in spite of the apparently conceptual structure.

Pseudoconcepts function as a bridge between complexes and concepts: "pseudoconcepts and concepts look alike, as a whale looks like a fish" (Vygotsky

Thought 121). Their real significance lies less in this resemblance than in what it reveals about the process of concept development. Even in this preconceptual stage, the child shows his dependence on his social context. Vygotsky states the relationship in this way:

> Adults, through their verbal communication with the child, are able to predetermine the path of the development of generalizations and its final point--a fully formed concept. But the adult cannot pass on to the child his mode of thinking. He merely supplies the ready-made meanings of the words, around which the child builds complexes (Vygotsky Thought 120).

Pseudoconcepts represent the child's attempt to copy adult concepts without an adult mind. This dialogue between the child's mind and his social context sets the stage for the relationship between nonspontaneous and spontaneous concepts later in concept formation.

Vygotsky's disagreement with Piaget is both semantic and substantive. On one level, the syncretic phenomena Vygotsky identifies with thinking in complexes comes very close to his contention that Piaget's spontaneous concepts are "devoid of objectivity, critical approach, understanding of relations, and stability " quoted above (Vygotsky Thought 156). The possibility that Vygotsky is

simply giving new names to old ideas disappears when we consider how much more intimately Vygotsky ties complexes into both further development and the child's social experience. In his supplement to Thought and Language, Piaget admits as much in making a positive case for "a more productive form of instruction," the "active" schools which

> endeavor to create situations that, while not 'spontaneous' in themselves, evoke spontaneous elaboration on the part of the child, if one manages both to spark his interest and to present the problem in such a way that it corresponds to the structures he had already formed himself (Vygotsky Thought 271).

Piaget's comments reflect an honest disagreement with Vygotsky. Both theorists want to promote individual conceptual development, but Piaget emphasizes internal processes while Vygotsky emphasizes the help we all need to reach our full potential.

Thinking in complexes is only one root of conceptual thought. The ability to think abstractly is also a prerequisite. As Vygotsky puts it

> Complex thinking begins the unification of scattered impressions; by organizing discrete elements of experience into groups, it creates a basis for later generalizations. But the advanced concept presupposes more than identification. To form such a concept it is also necessary to abstract, to single out elements, and to view the abstracted elements apart from the totality of the concrete experience in which they are embedded (Vygotsky Thought 135).

Conceptual thought requires that we go beyond pulling the world together and begin to choose only those elements of experience that suit our purposes and clarify our world view. Children use abstraction even in thinking in complexes since "associative complexes, for instance, presuppose the 'abstraction' of one trait common to different units," but in complex thinking "the abstracted trait is unstable, has no privileged position, and easily lends its temporary dominance to other traits" (Vygotsky Thought 139). The resulting complex, however, is a clumsy mental tool based on chance associations instead of on true conceptual thought. In contrast

> Only the mastery of abstraction, combined with advanced complex thinking, enables the child to progress to the formation of genuine concepts. A concept emerges only when the abstracted traits are synthesized anew and the resulting abstract synthesis becomes the main instrument of thought (Vygotsky Thought 139).

Complex thinking is essential to conceptual thought as a way of pulling the world together, but abstractions are needed to recognize and work with the differences and similarities that give our mental world coherence.

Vygotsky does not rest after describing how children learn to form concepts. His consistent emphasis on the connections between social experience

and individual development lead him to investigate the ways in which external concepts and intellectual systems affect the concepts we devise within ourselves. Once again, Vygotsky builds his ideas on a critical topic around his disagreement with Piaget, and once again we must wonder if Vygotsky is being fair to Piaget. Vygotsky begins by giving Piaget credit for going "farther and deeper than any of the other students of children's concepts" for his work in

> 1) drawing "a sharp line between the child's ideas of reality developed mainly through his own mental efforts and those that were decisively influenced by adults,"
>
> 2) designating "the first group as spontaneous," and "the second as nonspontaneous" concepts, and,
>
> 3) admitting "that the latter may deserve independent investigation" (Vygotsky Thought 153).

In applauding this position, Vygotsky recognizes that Piaget avoids the extremes represented by the traditional view underlying "most educational theories and methods" that scientific or nonspontaneous concepts "do not undergo development, but are absorbed ready-made through a process of understanding and assimilation" and a more romantic approach epitomized by Leo Tolstoy's impulse to abandon "any attempt to direct the acquisition of concepts" and call "for

natural unhindered development" (Vygotsky Thought 149-151). Vygotsky admires Piaget's refusal to dismiss either the nonspontaneous concepts that come to children from the outside or the spontaneous concepts that children devise on their own.

However, Vygotsky cannot admire three "intricately interconnected" errors that he sees in Piaget's theory of concepts. First, Vygotsky insists that Piaget believes that "spontaneous concepts alone can truly enlighten us as to the special qualities of the child's thought." Next, he suggests that Piaget's "attempts to present spontaneous and nonspontaneous concepts as firmly divided and self-contained entities whose interaction is impossible" are wrongheaded. Finally, Vygotsky claims that these first two positions inevitably lead to the conclusion that "the inner development of the child's thought had no relation to socialization, while socialization had no relevance for the development of the child's concepts." This disjunction between development and socialization leads to a military metaphor for development that postulates "a ceaseless conflict between mutually antagonistic forms of thinking, with a series of compromises at each successive

developmental level, until adult thought wins out" (Vygotsky Thought 155).

To Vygotsky, these errors show once again that Piaget fails to recognize the social ties that link the mind of the child with that of the adult. Piaget denies Vygotsky's last point, insisting that "Vygotsky in fact misunderstands me when he thinks that from my point of view the child's spontaneous thought must be known by educators only as an enemy must be known to be to be fought successfully." Still, he feels "real joy" at Vygotsky's approval of his distinction between spontaneous and nonspontaneous concepts (Vygotsky Thought 267-268).

Whatever their validity from a Piagetian perspective, the best way to understand Vygotsky's objections to Piaget's views on spontaneous concepts is to compare Piaget's positions to a crucial idea for rhetoric to take away from Vygotsky's work: the conviction that social experience is essential to the development of many intrinsically human abilities. The three errors in Piaget's theory covered in the last paragraph work together to isolate spontaneous concepts in two ways. First, spontaneous concepts are isolated in the childish mind: to the extent that they alone are characteristic of the unique qualities of

the child's thought, they differ from concepts found in adult thought. This rather insular view is anathema to Vygotskian development, as it echoes Piaget's theories of egocentric speech by treating childhood as a self-contained stage that leaves few lingering traces in maturity.

Secondly, spontaneous concepts are isolated from the socializing influence of nonspontaneous concepts. While Piaget correctly observes "that the child, while assimilating adult concepts, stamps them with characteristics of his own mentality" (Vygotsky Thought 154), he fails to accept Vygotsky's notion that "the development of spontaneous and nonspontaneous concepts" is related and the two processes "constantly influence one another" (Vygotsky Thought 157). Instead, spontaneous concepts, which mark thought that is "devoid of objectivity, critical approach, understanding of relations, and stability," are eventually replaced with nonspontaneous concepts in Piaget's model of development at age eleven or twelve after a "continuous confrontation between two antagonistic forms of thinking" (Vygotsky Thought 156). In this system, the child doesn't so much develop in a social context as languish in

self-centered oblivion until he's ready to accept adult ideas ready-made. When the adult ideas do come to children, they don't change the child's mindset so much as linger inside the child's worldview until the adult mind finally and completely wins out. Vygotsky, believes that nonspontaneous concepts reshape a child's thought, but he thinks that Piaget believes that they have little impact until they reach a certain threshold of influence and take over.

Vygotsky's comments on Piaget's theory of concept formation demonstrate his disagreement with Piaget's view of both how nonspontaneous and spontaneous concepts are related and how spontaneous concepts arise. These issues are closely related, but it is worth following Vygotksy in considering them separately. First, Vygotsky doesn't separate spontaneous and nonspontaneous concepts into antagonistic camps as Piaget does. Nonspontaneous concepts from the adult world don't simply replace the child's spontaneous concepts as they do in Piaget's model--instead nonspontaneous concepts are essential in developing the child's ability to form spontaneous concepts in much the same way that Vygotsky insists social interaction is needed in stimulating autistic thought in his work on egocentric speech. Just as

social contact provides the material needed for autistic, imaginative thought, nonspontaneous concepts provide a sense of structure children need before forming concepts spontaneously.

Thus far, Vygotsky's theory of concept formation has been unfolded in thoroughly scientific terms: it may be difficult to spontaneously reach an intuitive understanding of these terms. He corrects this cognitive imbalance by using the learning of a foreign language as an extended example. Vygotsky draws a direct parallel between the relationship between spontaneous and nonspontaneous or scientific concepts and native and foreign languages. He claims that "in a certain sense, one may call the development of one's native language a spontaneous process, and the acquisition of the foreign a nonspontaneous process" because "in learning a new language, one does not return to the immediate world of objects and does not repeat past linguistic developments, but uses instead the native language as a mediator between the world of objects and the new language" (Vygotsky Thought 161).

Children learn native languages through interaction with the objects and people around them

in a relatively spontaneous process; we shouldn't have to go to school to learn the basics of our own language. Conversely, acquiring a new language leans heavily on systematic instruction. After all, an English speaker doesn't need to repeat the experiences of a French child in learning French. Instead,

> while learning a foreign language, we use word meanings that are already well developed in the native language, and only translate them: the advanced knowledge of one's own language also plays an important role in the study of the foreign one (Vygotsky Thought 159).

Thus, instruction, which introduces concepts outside of the learner's direct experience, aids in the development of what should become a spontaneously useful skill. A systematic study of French vocabulary and syntax can lead to an unsystematic result: the ability to speak and think in French. An apparently unnatural preoccupation with nonspontaneous concepts leads to a natural and spontaneous facility in a foreign language.

This process of using scientific concepts to provide the framework for developing spontaneous conceptual abilities can be brought closer to the teaching of writing by considering Vygotsky's ideas on grammar. Vygotsky identifies grammar as "a subject that seems to be of little practical use" that "does

not give the child new skills" (Vygotsky Thought 184). Vygotsky does not believe that "grammar and writing help the child to rise to a higher level of speech development" because it helps him "acquire new grammatical or syntactic forms" but because it leads him to "become aware of what he is doing" and learn "to use his skills consciously" (Vygtosky Thought 184). Unlike most advocates of grammar in the schools, Vygotsky cares little for a product oriented emphasis on traditional forms and testable skills. Instead, he believes that grammar can promote verbal self-awareness and a conscious feel for the writing process. Vygotsky's affection for grammar may seem old fashioned, but he suggests that grammatical instruction is valuable because it can give students the structure needed to feel their own way into writing. Again, a social convention serves as a prop supporting personal development.

Finally, it is worth noting that when Vygotsky leaves Piaget's theory and goes on to his own, he refers to nonspontaneous concepts as scientific concepts. Scientific here refers to the system underlying the concepts and not their content. Vygotsky could cover literature as easily as psychology

or botany under a scientific concept: scientific simply denotes the presence of a coherent system and a reasonable cognitive distance from the subject matter under consideration. Scientific concepts afford the luxury of using a meta-language, or language about language, in dealing with the concrete reality that we perceive around us. These scientific concepts give us intellectual leverage by treating ideas as cognitive works in progress that can be changed to fit changing circumstances.

The emphasis on system in Vygotsky's scientific concepts is crucial because systems provide the support we need in developing the ability to think on our own. As always, Vygotsky insists on the link between the social context and personal growth. Therefore, Vygotsky's chapter on scientific concepts in Thought and Language is based upon the proposition that "the development of scientific concepts runs ahead of the development of spontaneous concepts" (Vygotsky Thought 147). This statement is intimately related to the Vygotskian interconnection between social experience and individual development because it insists that the scientific concepts that come from outside of the child must precede his ability to spontaneously form his own concepts. Piaget, conversely, believes that

nonspontaneous concepts confront and overcome spontaneous concepts in the process of establishing the adult mind. Vygotsky treats the introduction of scientific concepts as a prerequisite for the full development of spontaneous concepts because they provide a structure for the child's conceptual experiments and because they introduce system to the child's world view. Vygotsky's emphasis on system here anticipates Thomas Kuhn's belief in convergent thinking in the sciences which insists that "only investigations firmly rooted in the contemporary scientific tradition" and its disciplines and procedures "are likely to break that tradition and give rise to a new one" (Kuhn 460). Both Vygotsky and Kuhn believe that we must work within inherited systems to develop the skills needed to construct our own.

Vygotsky emphasizes the benefits of systematic development throughout his discussion of scientific concepts. In Vygotsky's theory, "systematic learning plays a leading role in the development of schoolchildren" (Vygotsky Thought 148). System in scientific concepts is so important to Vygotsky because it supplies the systematicity lacking in spontaneous concepts. At the same time, spontaneous

concepts bring scientific concepts closer to the concrete reality that we attempt to communicate to one another in scientific discourse. Vygotsky sums up the relationship in the following way:

> The weak aspect of the child's use of spontaneous concepts lies in the child's inability to use these concepts freely and voluntarily and to form abstractions. The difficulty with scientific concepts lies in their verbalism, i.e. in their excessive abstractness and detachment from reality (Vygotsky Thought 148-149).

Thus, Vygotsky postulates a synergistic relationship between the two types of concepts based on the weaknesses of each: scientific concepts provide the structure needed to lend coherence to the child's spontaneously generated concepts, while spontaneous concepts flesh out the arid abstractions of scientific generalizations by supplying concrete applications. Vygotsky goes on to suggest that "the very nature of scientific concepts prompts their deliberate use," but "at about the fourth grade, verbalism gives way to concretization, which in turn favorably influences the development of spontaneous concepts." When this happens, "both forms of reasoning reach...approximately the same level of development" (Vygotsky Thought 149). Children then become equally well equipped to learn outside

systems or reason independently.

Therefore, Vygotsky refutes what he considers to be Piaget's position on the relationship between nonspontaneous and spontaneous concepts. Instruction doesn't supplant self-derived conceptual thought after a long and antagonistic struggle. Instead, nonspontaneous concepts introduced by others give the child's conceptual abilities room to grow and structure to build to upon. They provide the supporting social and intellectual context that Vygotsky believes is always essential to full individual development.

Some of our higher functions arise without these nonspontaneous concepts that others can lend us. Vygotsky's ideas on the teaching of foreign languages and systematic grammar presuppose a preconceptual acquisition of basic language, but the fact that these skills remain basic in a conceptual vacuum is Vygotsky's point. If we want to speak another language or understand the principles underlying our own, we need to think conceptually and examine the structure of the language systems that convey our thoughts in order to use these systems more skillfully and consciously. Indeed, any attempt to explore the full range of human potential requires that we use the

conceptual abilities that have become part of what we are. Vygotsky most fully probes the implications of these abilities in his work on aesthetics covered in the next section of this chapter.

III: THE AESTHETIC RESPONSE

Although Vygotsky wrote The Psychology of Art in 1924, ten years before Thought and Language, the book that presented his ideas on egocentric speech and concept formation, his work in The Psychology of Art suggests a theory of composition that anticipates the links between social experience and individual cognitive development so prevalent in the later book. The Psychology of Art seeks to explain our response to art, but because it concentrates on literature, its conclusions often touch on the processes underlying many kinds of writing. Vygotsky works to show that we neither respond purely emotionally to art nor do we only recognize the formal qualities residing in a work of art. Instead, we recognize both the social conventions underlying the work's genre and the artist's personal expression. Vygotsky's approach to the aesthetic response can form the basis of a general theory of written composition that states that

individual thought and expression is enhanced, not hindered, by both the writer's and the reader's understanding of the social conventions surrounding the writing process. A feel for the role formal conventions play in personal aesthetic expression allows writers to distance themselves far enough from what they have to say to use their craft to say it better. This same intuitive understanding demystifies the writing process for readers and permits them to recognize the role convention plays in shaping their expectations of and reactions to what they read.

Just as egocentric speech and concept formation blend social experience and personal development, the writing process works best and does the writer the most good in a social context. Suzanne Langer's concept of significant form "as an articulate expression of feeling, reflecting the verbally ineffable and therefore unknown forms of sentience" is akin to Vygotsky's view of the symbiotic connection between form and expression since this expression of feeling is connected to a process in which "the making of a symbol requires craftsmanship as truly as the making of a convenient bowl or an efficient paddle" (Langer 39). Langer believes that craftsmanship and feeling must work together to create significant form, form that

transcends mere formalist mechanics. Vygotsky's aesthetics put this theory into a more explicitly social context, especially when read in the light of his work on egocentric speech and concept formation in Thought and Language which insists on the link between social experience and personal development. The artist provides a more complex and advanced example of the continuing developmental processes that begin in childhood.

Vygotsky concentrates on this aesthetic theory and never intends The Psychology of Art as a tract on written composition. It takes an imaginative, maybe even a fanciful, reading of the book to draw such a theory out of it. Still, Vygotsky's view of the aesthetic theory of his time provides an analogy that could be useful in looking at the rhetorical theory underlying written composition in our time. The best way to distill a theory of composition from The Psychology of Art is to begin with Vygotsky's reading of Shakespeare's Hamlet and work through his theories and readings of other literary works to the ideas that can give us a new perspective on the theories that we use today in teaching written composition. Vygotsky consistently demands both respect for the artist's personal expression and recognition for the formal

aesthetic context surrounding the work in explaining our response to any work of art. Vygotsky's interest in uncovering the full implications of the catharsis accompanying authentic art can function as a useful corrective to any one-sided theory of the composing process. In order to demonstrate what this view of catharsis has to offer both literary and general written composition, this chapter concentrates on Vygotsky's reading of Hamlet. This study's concluding chapter uses Vygotsky's views on catharsis and the competing schools of aesthetic criticism that he covers in his essay on Hamlet as a standard for evaluating competing theories of written composition.

Vygotsky begins his chapter on Hamlet by discussing the play's central enigma: Hamlet's hesitation in avenging his father's murder through killing Claudius. Some critics present expressive theories of Hamlet's behavior that center around his character. Other critics rely on formal theories that root Hamlet's puzzling hesitancy in the technical requirements of the Elizabethan theater. Vygotsky finds serious limitations in both approaches and tries to find Shakespeare's motive for writing such an unconventional play in the interaction between the conventions of Elizabethan drama and Shakespeare's own

expressive needs. This blend of social convention and personal expression runs parallel to the interaction between social and individual development in egocentric speech and concept formation. Vygotsky explicates Hamlet largely as an advanced concept: an extended and successful attempt to manipulate dramatic convention to suit individual goals. An understanding of Vygotsky's reading of Shakespeare can uncover insights that can help writers in general better understand the composing process. The best place to start is with Vygotsky's critique of purely expressive readings of the play.

Most expressive readings of Hamlet try to explain the play's enigma by examining aspects of Hamlet's personality. Vygotsky traces the ideas of critics who believe that "the problem lies in Hamlet's personality" and that "the reason for Hamlet's delay in taking revenge is that his feelings rebel against an act of violence, that he is irresolute and weak-willed, or that, as Goethe claimed, too heavy a task was placed on his weak shoulders" (Vygotsky Psychology 166).

Critics who center on character traits "explain Hamlet's lingering as a manifestation of his state of mind, as if he were a real person." Vygotsky believes that

> these critics usually argue from true life

> experience and human nature, not from the artistic structure of the play...They regard Hamlet as a tragedy of weakness and the absence of will, despite the scenes in which the hero exhibits just the opposite character traits and appears as a man of extraordinary determination, courage, valor, and implacability in the face of moral considerations (Vygotsky Psychology 167).

Note that Vygotsky attacks these critics for taking one element of the play, Hamlet's personality, out of context and mistaking it for the play as a whole. By treating Hamlet as a person rather than as a dramatic character, critics misunderstand the dramatic significance of his actions: instead of considering how Hamlet's behavior affects the play as an aesthetic artifact, they wonder what they would do in Hamlet's place.

In Vygotskian terms, this expressive approach is conceptually naive because it ignores the social component in the genesis of individual expression by confusing an artistic construction with the history of a man's life. It acts as if the play "were a case from actual life which must be explained and understood on the basis of common sense" and fail to understand that by depriving the tragedy of the riddle of Hamlet's personality, they "deprive the play of its most essential element" (Vygotsky Psychology 168). In trying to reach back towards the conceptual basis of

the play in Shakespeare's mind, Vygotsky recognizes that the enigma of Hamlet's personality must be seen not as an awkward flaw but as the source of the play's unique and persistent value.

Thus far, this chapter has covered the limitations Vygotsky finds in purely expressive theories of the aesthetic response. In his survey of critical approaches to reading Hamlet, Vygotsky is also concerned about the opposite error: an over-reliance on purely formal explanations of Hamlet's frequently enigmatic behavior. In order to discuss the effects of overzealous formalism, he turns to a group of critics who "seek the solution to Hamlet either in the requirements of dramatic technique...or in the historic and literary roots of the tragedy" and believe that "it is obvious that the author's talent is defeated by the rigid rules of technique, or that the historic background of the subject exceeds the possibilities of artistic treatment" (Vygotsky Psychology 169-170). In Vygotskian terms, these critics successfully avoid a preoccupation with Hamlet's expressive qualities only to bog down in an abstract fixation with the play's technical features or its historical antecedents. Neither approach rises to a full conceptual understanding of the interplay between personal

expression and the social impact of the formal literary context in the play's composition.

An example of an excessively formal approach to Hamlet is Brandes' assertion that "an inactive hero...is required to some extent by the technique of the play," for "if Hamlet were to kill the king immediately upon receiving the ghost's message, the play would have to be restricted to one act. Hence, it becomes imperative to find delaying tactics," which means that "Shakespeare artificially delays an action that could be completed instantly, and introduces four superfluous acts into a play capable of being resolved in a single act" (Vygotsky Psychology 169). Vygotsky notes that this means that we must conclude "that technique wholly dominates the poet, not vice versa, and that Hamlet procrastinates during acts merely because Elizabethan plays were written in five acts rather than one" (Vygotsky Psychology 174-175).

Vygotsky counters Brandes by attacking his overbearing formalism. Vygotsky asserts that "formalism, which began with a healthy respect for concrete form, degenerates to the point of reducing certain individual forms to algebraic formulae" (Vygotsky Psychology 176). He also realizes that an understanding of formal requirements can "establish

perfectly correct rules that may help to understand the tragedy," but insists that these rules "are totally inadequate for its explanation" because even a complete understanding of formal rules can hardly exhaust all the levels of meaning in a complex work of art (Vygotsky Psychology 175). Vygotsky also cannot "understand why the same technique that confines and restricts Shakespeare exactly as it does other authors creates one aesthetic in Shakespeare's work and another in the tragedies of his contemporaries" and has difficulty seeing "why the same technique compels Shakespeare to write Othello, King Lear, MacBeth, and Hamlet in completely different ways" (Vygotsky Psychology 175). In other words, Vygotsky wonders why these critics believe that these formal conventions put Hamlet through contortions that they don't see in Shakespeare's other tragedies or in those written by other Elizabethan writers. He also believes that "within the limits allowed the poet by his technique, he retains freedom of creation and composition" (Vygotsky Psychology 175).

Vygotsky doesn't completely dismiss the impact of formal rules on aesthetic expression, but he thinks that a purely formal description of a work of art is as limited as a purely expressive one. Once again,

Vygotsky's demand for a balanced and complete reading of Hamlet reflects the interaction between social experience and individual development seen ten years later throughout Thought and Language. Vygotsky's respect for formal conventions runs parallel to his interest in social experience, and his interest in artistic expression matches his emphasis on individual growth.

Vygotsky uses Aristotle's concept of catharsis as the basis of a reading of Hamlet that does justice to both its expressive and its formal sides. If we can understand how catharsis operates in Hamlet, how the play's form, which reflects the social conventions of Elizabethan drama, goes against the grain of the content, which carries the play's expressive agenda, we can see how form and content in art work together to create the full aesthetic effect. We also can better see an example of an advanced process of conceptual thought that can carry over to written composition.

The best way to understand how Vygotsky uses catharsis in explicating Hamlet is to look at what he means by catharsis in the first place. Vygotsky uses the concept of catharsis "despite the indefiniteness of its content because "there is no other term in psychology which so completely expresses the central

fact of aesthetic reaction." Vygotsky believes that catharsis "comprises an affect [or emotional reaction] that develops in two opposite directions but reaches annihilation at its point of termination" (Vygotsky Psychology 214). This definition's emphasis on conflicting emotions makes it especially suited to aesthetics, but Vygotsky explores its implications in ways as important for the relationship between form and content in all written composition as in literature itself. Vygotsky insists that "the artist always overcomes content with form" and that "if we study the psychological effect of individual formal elements, we find that they fit precisely the requirements set by the task" (Vygotsky Psychology 214). This can mean that the artist consciously filters content through form and manipulates his expressive burden in order to make it come through more effectively. It can also mean the opposite: it is as possible to look for the proper subject for a poem meant to fill out a sonnet cycle as it is to decide that a sonnet is the best form to choose for a short lyric musing on the peculiar nature of love. In either case, neither expression nor form is enough to create the kind of art that interests Vygotsky. Catharsis is conceptually valuable to Vygotsky because it demands fusion between form and

expression.

For example, in his story "Gentle Breath," I. Bunin has "described murder, shooting, and passion with a rhythm of cold, detached calm," so that "instead of the painful experiences forming the content of the short story, we experience the delicate transparent feeling of a breath of fresh air" (Vygotsky Psychology 214-215). Vygotsky quotes Schiller on this relationship between form and content in catharsis:

> the secret of the master is to destroy content by means of form; the more majestic and attractive the content, the more it moves to the fore, and the more the viewer falls under the spell, the greater the triumph of art which removes the content and dominates it,

and Vygotsky adds that

> a work of art always contains an intimate conflict between its content and its form, and the artist achieves his effect by means of the form, which destroys the content (Vygotsky Psychology 215).

The artist bears the responsibility of craftsmanship: he must be prepared to use all resources that have accumulated about his chosen art form to do full justice to his own expressive needs. An ideal audience also understands craft and reacts consciously to the work's place in the genre, but Vygotsky focuses on what the artist can do in the writing process, not on what he can expect from his audience. In any case the

social dimension of aesthetic interaction is essential to Vygotsky's theory. Just as Thought and Language shows how social experience consistently enhances rather than retards individual development, this central chapter of The Psychology of Art shows that attention to form amplifies rather than overshadows personal expression.

It is important to understand the relationship between expression and form in Vygotsky's cathartic theory and to see that neither element dominates the other. In expressionist theories, personal expression comes before the formal requirements of art and obscures the essential contributions of craft in intensifying personal expression. Formalist theories stray from the truth in the opposite direction: they ignore the artist's personal contribution to the conventions of his art form. Cathartic theories avoid both extremes: neither expression nor form precedes the other because each is necessary for the other to come across in the work of art. Both writers and readers need to see that neither element is logically or chronologically prior in genuine art. Pure expression registers as self-indulgence, while pure form alienates any reader interested in anything more than a technical five finger exercise. Writers who cannot understand

that expression and form inherently need one another are condemned to neither fully satisfy their expressive needs nor to reveal themselves to their readers.

Vygotsky uses the principles he outlines for catharsis when he looks at how Shakespeare manipulates his source material and the audience's expectations throughout Hamlet. Vygotsky begins to answer "the question of why Shakespeare makes Hamlet delay" by comparing "the Hamlet legend with the plot of tragedy" (Vygotsky Psychology 181). Vygotsky finds that Shakespeare distorted the rather straightforward legend to the point that "it appears as if Shakespeare had set himself the task of pushing the plot from its straight path onto a devious and twisted one" (Vygotsky Psychology 186). Vygotsky also notes "the tremendous distortion of the concept of time" in the play and the way Shakespeare "plays with the audience's impatience" as "it observes the drama of Hamlet evolve, torn by contradictions, evading the clearly set task and constantly straying from the path which is so clearly outlined" by the legend (Vygotsky Psychology 185). These ways in which content is subordinated to form demonstrate that the contrast between the simple revenge tragedy the play's opening leads us to expect and the complex artifact Shakespeare delivers fuels the

emotional conflict that triggers the audience's catharsis at the end: Vygotsky's view of catharsis the artist's creative options in inducing catharsis as much as the audience's experience in undergoing it. The cathartic conflict between play and source and content and form doesn't dilute the full expressive impact of Shakespeare's play: instead, it makes it possible.

Vygotsky's reading of Hamlet provides the clearest and most complete exposition of his conceptual theory of artistic composition and the aesthetic response. Although The Psychology of Art predates Thought and Language by ten years, it anticipates the latter book's consistent emphasis on the social roots of individual development by showing how socially conventional formal features of art shape the clarity and force of the artist's personal expression. While Langer's concept of significant form echoes Vygotsky in its realization that "technique is the means to the creation of expressive form, the symbol of sentience" and "the art process is the application of some human skill to this essential purpose" (Langer 40), I feel that Vygotsky goes farther in his emphasis on the conceptual possibilities of art, the power of form to bring expression to life.

Vygotsky's work on catharsis does more than show

how Aristotle's concept describes how a modern audience reacts to Shakespeare's Renaissance play. Instead, Vygotsky's emphasis on the social pattern surrounding catharsis, on how the writer induces a cathartic reaction by merging expression and form and altering both in the process, shows how a conscious use of a conceptual approach to expression and form transfigures art. The Psychology of Art thus complements Vygotsky's later work by exhibiting perhaps the most advanced example of an extended concept that uses all of our higher psychological functions available: aesthetic composition. It also brings Vygotsky's ideas even closer to written composition by showing the importance of the interplay between social forms and individual expressive development in literature for both writers and readers.

All writing isn't literature, and all literature certainly isn't tragedy. Therefore, Vygotsky's ideas about catharsis are not directly applicable to most written composition. The real value of the material on catharsis lies in Vyogtsky's belief that it is possible to take a conceptual approach to writing. The proper concept will vary according to the writer's expressive needs and the formal resources he has at hand. Vygotsky's ideas throughout The Psychology of Art and

Thought and Language demonstrate that writing can be conceived and executed conceptually. The concluding chapter of this study looks more closely at the relevance of Vygotsky's ideas to composition by classifying rhetorical theorists along the lines suggested by Vygotsky in The Psychology of Art: it suggests that theories tend to be either expressive, formal, or cathartic.

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSION: PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

As I conceded at the end of the last chapter, most written composition neither is nor pretends to be literature. College freshmen, also, have grown past the childish stage of egocentric speech and have developed the ability to think conceptually. None of Vygotsky's ideas on these topics are aimed directly at either the process underlying written composition or at any pedagogy that could promote its production. Still, Vygotsky points out new ways of thinking about writing in the process of investigating them. His work on egocentric speech establishes the social roots of self-exploration and self-expression in early childhood and shows how they persist throughout life. His work on conception formation emphasizes the role of formal education and other social forces in providing the developing mind with the structure needed for creative and spontaneous individual thought and expression. Finally, his aesthetic theories distinguish between expressive, formalist, and cathartic theories of

literary composition and our aesthetic response to literature. Vygotsky's view of catharsis, in particular, suggests that form and expression must join together in the production of authentic art and that composition is both a social and a personal process for both writers and readers. Form and expression work together to allow the writer to create a complete work of art that is neither completely isolated from its genre nor hopelessly self-indulgent and to give readers the clues they need to both comprehend the author's work and to recognize his personal vision.

All of these ideas have indirect implications for written composition. They touch on many of the intellectual processes underlying the writing process and can be drawn into the rhetoric of written composition by a process of conceptual transference: it is often very easy to see how Vygotsky's ideas on another subject can be applied to composition. In this concluding chapter, I want to concentrate on the analogies that can be drawn between Vygotsky's views on the critical approaches surrounding Hamlet and a hypothetical Vygotskian critique of current conceptual and pedagogical theories of written composition. I also want to look at the potential impact of his work on egocentric speech and concept formation on these

same theories. However, since Vygotsky appears to have never specifically investigated the writing process in adults, we can never be sure of his ideas on the subject. Still, I believe that his opinions of expressive, formalist, and cathartic literary theories help us better understand the expressive process oriented theories, traditional product oriented theories, and collaborative theories that run parallel to them in contemporary theories of written composition.

Vygotsky has nothing against individual development and expression. Even his attacks on excessively expressive readings of Hamlet recognize their power to illuminate a profound, if limited, source of the play's power: Hamlet's quirks and hesitations do fascinate us and are part of the play's enigmatic appeal. Vygotsky's main quarrel lies with the severely limited scope of this argument. Instead of recognizing the roots of Hamlet's power in the symbiotic interplay between form and expression that makes the play work as an aesthetic whole, they settle for a myopic focus on expression in isolation from the social conventions of Elizabethan drama. They mistake an obvious but superficial feature of the play's appeal, Hamlet's odd yet fascinating behavior, for an

intricate complex of factors underlying the play's enduring interest. Because the narrowly expressive critics ignore the social forces that make Shakespeare's individual expression come through, they confuse the play's striking effect with its cause.

Vygotsky's dispute with Piaget over the origin and purpose of egocentric speech runs along a parallel path. Piaget correctly notes a curious phenomenon in young children, speech apparently directed at no identifiable audience, but Vygotsky believes that Piaget misunderstands its true significance because his narrow focus excludes its social origin and utilitarian purpose. Piaget rightly senses that children are different from adults, but in making egocentric speech the cornerstone of his explanation of this difference, he tries to make it mean more than it can. According to Vygotsky, Piaget's view of egocentric speech is meant to support Piaget's own view that young children "have no real social life" (Piaget Language 40) and are bound by an egocentrism which is "impervious to experience" (Vygotsky Thought 19).

While Piaget's theory accounts for the differences between children and adults, it also isolates children from the social forces around them. Vygotsky finds this approach unacceptable. He insists that egocentric

speech arises out of the need to solve problems encountered in the society around children and represents their attempts to find practical ways to survive the difficulties presented by everyday life. Piaget treats the child's unique behavior as an expression of a intrinsically self-contained personality and bases all his conclusions around this egocentricity. By working to uncover the origin and purpose of the child's actions, Vygotsky demonstrates that even the most self-centered stage of our lives takes place in a social context.

Vygotsky's insistence on the link between social experience and the development of personal expressive abilities helps us see the strengths and limits of expressive process oriented theories of written composition. Like Piaget and the expressive Shakespearean critics, these expressive rhetorical theorists address a valid problem in their field. The expressive qualities inherent in composition are ignored far too often, as, for example, James Britton indicates in his finding that very little academic writing satisfies the student's need for a type of "expressive writing" that "may be at any stage the kind of writing best adapted to exploration and discovery" (Britton 197). Peter Elbow wants us to "think of

writing as an organic, developmental process in which you start writing at the very beginning--before you know your meaning at all--and encourage your words gradually to change and evolve" (Elbow 15). Britton and Elbow treat writing as a kind of self-analysis, as a way of forcing ourselves to discover what we really think and feel.

Vygotsky would hardly disagree. Neither his reading of Hamlet nor his view of egocentric speech ignore the expressive elements in their subjects: they simply place them into a social context. Vygotsky would, however, quarrel with a rhetoric that sought to correct the lack of attention paid to individual expression by prescribing a purely expressive pedagogy. Elbow's "Preface" to Writing Without Teachers, for instance, decries the social context traditionally surrounding writing. He believes that

> many people are now trying to become less helpless, both personally and politically: trying to claim more control over their own lives. One of the ways people most lack control over their own lives is through lacking control over words. Especially written words (Elbow vii).

Elbow introduces social experience only to dismiss it: society's expectations of our writing take it out of our hands. Elbow links writing to personal expression and individual freedom. Ken Macrorie takes a similar

tack by regretting the pressure on the writer

> Not to write truths that count for him. Not to connect his experience to what he reads and hears about the classroom, but to master an academic tongue and a manner of footnoting and snipping out other persons' words and rearranging them in a new introduction-body form (Macrorie 8).

Both Elbow and Macrorie react to the abuses of society by largely dismissing it in their pedagogical prescriptions for improving writing: Elbow advocates a teacherless classroom that emphasizes spontaneous freewriting in order to explore personal feelings and seeks to break down the assumption of a "necessary connection between learning and teaching" (Elbow ix), while Macrorie seeks to neutralize the impersonal blandness of most academic writing by asking students to publish their works by submitting them to an audience of other students. In each case, a repressive social influence on writing leads to a rejection of all social constraints outside of the classroom. Even though expressive rhetoric generally places a high premium on editing and revision, it operates in a social vacuum and depends too much on the subjective judgement of both teacher and student: without some sort of formal, nonexpressive standard, how can we recognize effective from ineffective personal expression? From a Vygotskian perspective, any purely

expressive view of the writing process is bound to fail to reach its professed goal. Without some understanding of the general conceptual outlines of the composing process, each writer must reinvent his genre and lose the benefits gained in the confrontation between expressive content and form, as I established in the section on concept formation in Chapter II. Once again, social experience is essential to individual development.

If a Vygotskian perspective must insist on the inadequacies of pure expressionism, it must also point out the problems inherent in any purely formalist approach. In his reading of Hamlet, Vygotsky notes that formal distinctions can help put the play into its dramatic context and help explain its technical qualities but that any complete reading must also consider how the play's formal elements interact with Shakespeare's personal expression. Similarly, Vygotsky's work on concept formation illustrates the role nonspontaneous concepts derived from formal education and social experience play in providing the structure needed by children to create and manipulate concepts on their own, but Vygotsky never suggests that formal learning should ever replace personal expression and individual intellectual initiative. Instead,

Vygotsky treats form instrumentally, as the only way to promote full development of our higher psychological abilities.

Vygotsky's treatment of traditional product oriented theories would almost certainly fit this pattern. Vygotsky consistently recognizes the need for formal input into even the most personal expression, but he never confuses form with the combination of form and expressive content. The eighteenth and nineteenth century theorists discussed in Janet Emig's article "The Relation of Thought and Language Implicit in Some Early American Rhetoric and Composition Texts" continue to influence the product-oriented theory of composition that generally does mistake form for the whole of composition.

At least for rhetorical purposes, these associative theorists believe that the state of the world is clear enough to make individual expression irrelevant. Emig notes that traditional theorists "regularly state or suggest that the most important feature" of the writing process "is a clear and distinct conception in the mind of the communicator, with language serving as a means whereby that conception reaches the mind of the hearer or reader in the clearest form" (Emig 4). The view reflects a

fairly naive epistemology: the idea that external reality can be accurately seen and understood if observed clearly and objectively. Emig believes that this attitude is also reflected in the traditional fascination with cartographical and architectural metaphors for the writing process; written expression serves as a map of one's thought or a building to house it (Emig 12-13). If the intellectual world is as easy to chart as a landmass or the structure of a building, there can be nothing left to express: reality stands clear and intact before the honest and persistent observer. Students need only learn the proper rules and conventions necessary to make the chart accurate or the residence fashionable.

The rhetorical consequences of this epistemology seem obvious. Hugh Blair's notion that style "is a picture of the ideas which arise in the writer's mind" echoes the traditional faith in the reliability of language as a medium for the direct transmission of thought (Emig 6). Emig correctly notes that in this traditional view "it is clear that the act of writing does not or cannot facilitate the writer's understanding of his subject" (Emig, 10). Indeed, there is no reason to write with anything less than a complete understanding of the subject, except to

intentionally distort it. The cardinal rule of this traditional theory is that expression, especially carefully written expression, should precisely mirror thought. Writing that changes thought is failed writing. Innovative writing cannot contribute to clear thought; it can only compromise the accuracy of the original conception that the writer communicates to the reader.

This position stands opposite to the expressive theories treated earlier in this chapter. It denies the writing process any role in generating, much less improving, thought. The obsession with clarity is closely related to a reliance on forms of discourse. If the battle to generate and organize content is fought before pen touches paper, then writers need only choose the proper form in which to present their ideas to their readers. Using the language as an expressive tool is irrelevant to intellectual development in this traditional view; writing and speaking simply report on the progress made within the mind. When personal expression works only to obscure thought, what can be left to teach but grammar and organization?

The limits Vygotsky places on form have already been seen in his literary criticism and in his theories on concept formation. His treatment of grammatical

expression from the section on concept formation bears repeating because it supplies a good rhetorical example of what Vygotsky believes that form can and cannot do. Vygotsky rejects the usual formalist argument that "grammar and writing help the child to rise to a higher level of speech development" because they help him "acquire new grammatical or syntactic forms" in favor of the idea that grammar allows the child to "become more aware of what he is doing" and to learn "to use his skills consciously" (Vygotsky Thought 184). Grammar amounts to more than a decorative bag of tricks for dressing up preformed thoughts. Vygotsky values grammar, as he does all sound formal structures, as a means to the end of promoting verbal self-awareness and drawing us consciously into our social context.

Product oriented approaches to teaching written composition would fail from Vygotsky's perspective for the same reason that excessively formal approaches to literary criticism and concept formation fail. They isolate formal qualities from the expressive content they mold and serve. Purely expressive pedagogies fall short by ignoring the contribution that social experience makes to the quality of personal expression and development. Vygotsky's theory of literary catharsis suggests a way of joining form and expressive

content. Taken at face value, catharsis holds little value for anything except literary tragedy, but when Vygotsky's application of catharsis to Hamlet is examined, it serves as a general example of writing as a conceptual act in its demonstration of the mutually beneficial interaction between form and personal expression for both writer and reader in constituting Shakespeare's famous play. To Vygotsky, Hamlet belongs exclusively to neither Shakespeare nor to Elizabethan audiences and dramatic conventions: it arises from both and continues to draw strength from the social processes that shape subsequent readings and productions. Vygotsky's views here are reminiscient of the position staked out by T. S. Eliot that is cited in the introduction to this thesis. Eliot links the individual artist's mind to nearly the largest possible social context, "the mind of Europe," a mind which is "much more important than his own private mind." The fact that this individual mind is submerged in a larger social mind portrays the individual as a catalyst for larger social forces to come together and his mind as a place where "numberless feelings, phrases, images" can "unite to form a new compound" (Eliot 39, 41). To Eliot, social experience does more than enhance personal expression; it alone makes the most profound

aesthetic expression possible.

Vygotsky would not believe that our most effective composing processes are either spoon-fed products of formal instruction or spontaneous fruits of courageous and prolific self-expression. It is certainly as possible to learn writing as an elaborate set of rules and patterns as it is to learn it by simply practicing it as a vehicle for self-expression without ever studying its social conventions, but neither is likely to lead to true composition. Instead, written composition that serves both convention and individual expression most closely resembles the Vygotskian concept, an extended mental construct that uses the nonspontaneous structure and content provided through education and social experience as the basis for spontaneous self-exploration and self-expression.

The New Rhetoric of the last few decades has often shared Vygotsky's unifying and balanced vision. Wayne Booth emphasizes the need of a communicator to "achieve [a] rhetorical stance by relating himself and his message to his audience in a proper way" (Golden 303). Achieving this rhetorical stance requires conscious consideration of social factors in composition because effective communication "presents us with the spectacle of a man passionately involved in thinking an important

question through, in the company of an audience" (Booth 145). Kenneth Burke's concept of identification also sounds a Vygotskian note. It roots our ability to communicate in a social context in individual psychology:

> identification is compensatory to division. If men were not apart from another, there would be no need for the rhetoricians to proclaim their own unity. If men were wholly and truly of one substance, absolute communication would be of man's very substance (Burke 22).

Like Vygotsky, Burke bases his theory of personal expression and communication on his observations of contemporary social life and the mechanisms that run it. Burke, however, can't share Vygotsky's faith in a brave new socialist life and focuses instead on our need to escape the alienation and loneliness arising out of life in a fragmented world. Booth and Burke present theories that share Vygotsky's belief in the interaction between social forces and individual development and expression, but Vygotsky's emphasis on the genesis of higher cognitive functions makes his theory uniquely useful in tracing how social experiences help individuals learn to reach their full human potential.

Burke and Booth tie Vygotsky to the central theoretical underpinnings of the New Rhetoric, but

later, more pedagogically inclined writers suggest some of the more directly practical implications of Vygotsky's theories in formulating a workable definition of written composition. Linda Flower's "Writer-Based Prose," for example, demands that beginning writers reach beyond the self-centered language imposed by the all-too-common academic cycle of many hastily written papers that never get revised and translate the words that they write in order to understand their topics into terms that reach a plausible audience. Walter Ong's "The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction" uses the author/audience relationship to speculate on the social implications of the private act of writing. Even though writing "normally calls for some kind of withdrawal," Ong concurs with Maurice Merleau-Ponty in concluding that "words are never fully determined in their abstract signification but have meaning only with relation to man's body and to its interaction with its surroundings" and goes on to show how, either consciously or by default, writers make decisions during composition that largely determine the audience their work finally reaches (Ong 10).

Edmond Weiss also shows Vygotskian tendencies in How to Write a Usable User Manual, a primer on

producing effective computer documentation. Weiss resents the normal corporate process that reserves technical writers for the purely product oriented task of translating engineer's notes into readable form after a product is finished and ready to market. In this context, the writer has virtually no expressive agenda: he has no control over the content of his work and can only tinker with the form of its presentation. Weiss believes that this process almost inevitably produces unreadable manuals and less usable products. By involving writers in the early stages of development, he insists that writers can both better understand their subjects and function as nontechnical experts on the needs of ordinary users--they can express what users need in ordinary language so that programmers and engineers can express what will do the job in computer programming language and integrated circuits. This interactive process pulls both groups closer to reaching the Vygotskian goal of blending social experience and personal development and helps produce better products.

Although these writers incorporate strong Vygotskian elements in their work, the thinkers that come closest to a fully Vygotskian view of composition set forth collaborative theories. I have already Kuhn's

thought on convergent scientific thought in the introduction and the section on concept formation of this thesis, but I want to cite the work of Kenneth Bruffee and Ann Berthoff, two rhetorical theorists with strongly collaborative perspectives, in wrapping up its conclusion. In "Social Construction, Language, and Knowledge," Bruffee reports with approval Richard Rorty's conclusion that

> we do not generate knowledge...by "dealing with" the physical reality that shoves us around. We generate knowledge by "dealing with" our beliefs about the physical reality that shoves us around. Specifically, we generate knowledge by justifying those beliefs socially (Bruffee Social Construction 777).

This passage begins by denying the positivist epistemology underlying traditional rhetorical pedagogy and ends by affirming the Vygotskian connection between social experience and the development of an individual worldview.

In "Getting Started," Bruffee goes on to hint at a conceptual view of composition by saying that in beginning any piece of writing

> until we have some sense of what we are going to say--of the overall structure of the whole utterance--we cannot get started. We may not have to know all that we are going to say, but before we can introduce whatever we are going to say we have to have some idea of how we are likely to say it (Bruffee Getting Started 107).

This sense of "the overall structure of the whole utterance" functions very much like Vygotsky's view of catharsis in Hamlet. Like a grain of sand in an oyster, it works as an organizing irritant that makes worthwhile production possible. Coming up with an overall structure separates written composition from simple writing: it establishes a conceptual basis for writing by melding the socially oriented "overall structure" with the personal expression implicit in "what we are going to say." Like Vygotsky's true concept, it supports spontaneous expression with nonspontaneous structure, for, in introducing structure, we exhibit a concern with how our expression looks, if only to our own eyes.

Ann Berthoff's "Abstraction as Speculative Instrument" examines conceptual composition in more detail. In deploring both Coleridge's view of abstraction as "the opposite of [concrete] reality" and the positivist view of abstraction as generalization, Berthoff seizes on Vygotsky's theory of concept formation (227-229). She believes that "experimenting with ways of developing the rhetorical counterpart of concept formation is the research composition pedagogy most needs" (232) because

> the composing process <u>is</u> the process of forming concepts. Thinking with the concept of forming could help us assure that purpose had a chance to come to life--which is to say, we would never have assigned A Descriptive Essay in the first place (235).

Note that Berthoff links composing, not writing, to concept formation. She means a special kind of writing that consciously forms around a coherent core, just as Vygotsky believes that <u>Hamlet</u> employs catharsis as a structural center. This kind of conceptual composition uses structure and expression to symbiotically enhance one another because "it is the nature of syntax to bring thought along" (Berthoff 235) and can come close to true composition in a Vygotskian sense.

All of the topics covered in this thesis work together to confirm the central unifying principle of Vygotsky's thought: the dictum that social experience is essential to full human development. Vygotsky shows how egocentric speech displays the social roots of the earliest and most apparently self-centered personal expression. Vygotsky's theory of concept formation helps make the world safe for teaching again after teaching's decline under the influence of excessively expressive pedagogy because Vygotsky's theory insists that external guidance gives us the structure we need to form and manipulate concepts spontaneously.

Finally, Vygotsky's reading of Hamlet shows how catharsis functions as a concept on a grand scale and points the way to a general conceptual theory of written composition. The questions such a conceptual theory would need to investigate include:

> 1) the general relationship between social experience and individual development. How do the social and personal spheres interact? What kinds of social actions best promote effective personal expression?
>
> 2) the dynamics of small groups. How can the process oriented emphasis on peer publishing and editing be expanded to bring an awareness of broader social expectations and conventions to student writers?
>
> 3) the relationship between form and content. How can the traditional emphasis on grammar and modes of composition be stripped of its reliance on arbitrary formulas? How can formalism shed its association with empty pedantry and be restored to its functional significance? How can the service external rules play in helping writers learn the structure to think on their own be more clearly revealed? Also, how can the gains achieved by expressive pedagogy in giving students a sense of having a personal voice be transferred to relatively impersonal kinds of writing like business and technical communication?
>
> 4) the pedagogy of conceptual thinking. How can Vygotsky's theory that conceptual thought requires both a socially acquired sense of structure and historical precedent and a personal sense of commitment that responds to and manipulates this social input help us see both how people learn and how they express what they learn?

I have only been able to suggest the vague outline

of this conceptual theory in this thesis, but I agree with Ann Berthoff that it may represent the best hope for giving both form and expressive content their due in the writing process. Vygotsky never published work on adult composition, but his work on other topics suggests that the sooner we can stop treating social integration and individual development as antagonistic forces, the sooner we can harness both the social and the personal in promoting effective and satisfying written composition.

WORKS CITED

WORKS CITED

Berthoff, Ann E. "Abstraction as a Speculative Instrument." The Territory of Language. Ed. Donald McQuade Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1986. 227-37.

Booth, Wayne C. "The Rhetorical Stance." College Composition and Communication 14 (1963): 139-145.

Britton, James. The Development of Writing Abilities (11-18). London: Macmillan Education, 1975.

Bruffee, Kenneth A. "Social Construction, Language, and the Authority of Knowledge: A Bibliographical Essay." College English 48 (1986): 773-90.

--------. "Getting Started" in in The Territory of Language. Ed. Donald McQuade. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1986. 103-113.

Bruner, Jerome. Introduction. Thought and Language. By Lev Vygotsky. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1962. v-x.

--------. "Vygotsky: A Historical and Conceptual Perspective." Culture, Communication, and Cognition: Vygotskian Perspectives. Ed. James Wertsch. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985. 21-34.

Burke, Kenneth. A Rhetoric of Motives. New York: Prentice-Hall, 1950.

Elbow, Peter. Writing Without Teachers. London: Oxford UP, 1973.

Eliot, T. S. "Tradition and the Individual Talent" Selected Prose of T. S. Eliot. Ed. Frank Kermode. New York: Harcourt 1975. 37-44.

Emig, Janet. "The Relation of Thought and Language Implicit in Some Early American Rhetoric and Composition Texts" The Web of Meaning. Upper Montclair NJ: Boynton/Cook, 1983.

Flower, Linda "Writer-Based Prose: A Cognitive Basis for Problems in Writing." College English 39 (1977): 19-37.

Golden, James L. The Rhetoric of Western Thought. Dubique: Kendall/Hunt, 1983.

Kuhn, Thomas. "The Essential Tension." A World of Ideas. Ed. Leo A. Jacobus. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's 1986. 455-476.

Langer, Susanne K. Feeling and Form. New York: Scribner's, 1953.

Macrorie, Ken. Uptaught. New York: Hayden, 1970.

Murray, Donald. Learning by Teaching. Montclair NJ: Boynton/Cook, 1982.

Nicols, Marie. "Kenneth Burke and the 'New Rhetoric.'" The Rhetoric of Western Thought. Ed. James L. Golden. Dubique: Kendall/Hunt, 1983. 313-323.

Ong, Walter. "The Writer's Audience is Always a Fiction." Proceedings of the Modern Language Association 90 (1975): 9-21.

Vygotsky, Lev S. "The Genesis of Higher Mental Functions." The Concept of Activity in Soviet Psychology. Ed. James Wertsch. Armonk NY: Sharpe, 1979. 114-188.

--------. Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1978.

--------.The Psychology of Art. Cambridge: MIT, 1971.

--------. .Thought and Language. Cambridge: MIT, 1986.

Weiss, Edmond H. How to Write a Usable User Manual. Philadelphia: ISI, 1985.

Wertsch, James V. Vygotsky and the Social Formation of Mind. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1985.

---------.Ed. The Concept of Activity in Soviet Psychology. Armonk NY: Sharpe, 1979.

---------. Ed. Culture, Communication, and Cognition: Vygotskian Perspectives. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1985.

VITA

Stuart F. Swain was born in Norfolk, Virginia on October 19, 1954. He graduated from Tucker High School in Tucker, Georgia in June 1973. Mr. Swain earned a Bachelor of Arts degree in Early Childhood Education from St. Andrews Presbyterian College in Laurinburg, North Carolina in May 1977. He went on to do graduate work in English at the University of Georgia from 1977 to 1980 and will earn a Master of Arts degree in English from the University of Tennessee, Knoxville in December 1988. Mr. Swain has taught in the Freshman Composition program at UTK since spring 1985 and will enter the Ph.D. program in English there in August 1988.