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Revision: The Literary Compass

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Abstract

Revision is necessary in the writing process; it is the creative stepping-stone towards a finished product. Throughout all stages in writing, revision exists. From the entry point of writing – after words meet the page – to submission, it is essential. Determining how to revise as a self-editor as well as receiving critiques and comments from others can be a difficult. Even understanding what constitutes revision can be unclear. In this thesis, understanding what revision is from its origin to application in writing today will be explored. Revision is a subjective process; it varies from person to person. In order to understand individuals' personal interpretation and application, interviews were a crucial step in the methodology in understanding the research on revision. Since revision is subjective and intimately interpreted, the best generalizable understanding comes from professionals in the field of literary writing. The sample interviewees included University of Nebraska at Omaha professors, several that I had taken courses from in the English department, as well as literary magazine editors and freelance authors. From these sources, information was gathered based on a series of questioning on the central idea of study – revision in literary writing. After conducting interviews, the subjectivity and personality of revision was highlighted. Revision is a concept that really cannot be generalized. Individuals have their personal standard for the process. However, similar threads within the writing process will be further discussed in this thesis. Conclusions can be drawn from where to start with revision and how to apply the framework for what constitutes 'effective' revision.

“The three most beautiful words in the English language are not ‘I love you’ but ‘to be continued’” (Kramer and Call 218). Tom French’s quote from “Serial Narratives,” in Harvard University’s *Telling True Stories* expresses the endless process of writing. Each individual piece of literature consists of a proverbial onion; layers of writing that can be peeled back, examined, trimmed and cut, and examined again. To corroborate this idea, author Joan Didion describes writing as “an attempt to find out what matters, to find the pattern in disorder, to find the grammar in the shimmer... The scene that you see in your mind finds its own structure; the structure dictates the arrangement of the words. All the writer has to do really is find the words” (Didion). Thus, the words that are chosen compose the prose, as well as the message. However, they still yearn for further revision. Dr. Todd Richardson, a professor at the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO), explains it as follows: “So much of revision is about finding the right place for words, not necessarily the right words.”

This quotation from Dr. Richardson really gets at the heart of revision. In order to immerse yourself in the process, you have to submit to the chaos and turn off the ‘self-editor.’ Writing, as Richardson says, entails much more than finding certain words. It is about the structural framework of a narrative. The key elements to a sound essay, article, etc. cannot be formed without the most developmentally important stage: revision. Dr. Troy Romero, a professor at UNO, explains that revision is a necessary and inevitable process. “Writing is rarely a one-shot, perfect from the chute process. Instead, it is an iterative process – pieces evolve and are tested through revision.”

In academia, revision, explained by the Oxford Dictionary, is “the act of revising; a revised edition or form of something” (Oxford). To assess the meaning behind this definition, a deeper examination is necessary. To revise, as defined by Oxford, is “to examine and make

corrections or alterations to written matter; to reconsider and amend, especially in the light of further evidence or to reflect a changed situation; to reread work done previously to improve one's own knowledge of a subject." These contemporary dictionary definitions give a concrete foundational understanding. Yet, even with the concise and succinct definitions provided, there is still much to question and unpack when it comes to revision. It is a very subjective, demanding process for writers. The Latin root for the word revision, *revisere*, really digs to the core of comprehension. *Revisere* translates to "look at again, visit again" (Waldert). This encapsulates the essence of literary revision.

Revision is not as simple as the Oxford Dictionary intends it to be. The concrete definitions given from a dictionary source do help build off of the abstract definition that can be drawn from the Latin root. Dr. Jill Fitzgerald, a research professor and professor emerita at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, gives a more applicable definition of revision drawn from her research study, "Research on Revision in Writing" (Fitzgerald), published in 1987. Dr. Fitzgerald describes it as follows:

Revision is commonly regarded as a central and important part of writing.

Revision is significant partly because under certain circumstances it may enhance quality of final written work and partly because, when writers use revision to rework thoughts and ideas, it may powerfully affect writers' knowledge. Revision enables writers to muddle through and organize what they know in order to find a line of argument, to learn anew, and to discover what was not known before (Fitzgerald).

Fitzgerald's applied definition of revision helps put into practice the concepts aforementioned from professors and the dictionary definitions. It also helps to conceptualize the Latin root for

revision or as Dr. Fitzgerald says, “to learn anew.” The idea of relearning or better understanding melds these ideas together in order to fully understand the depth and breadth of revision.

Revising written work can be a difficult task that requires a great amount of thought. The process is demanding and strenuous for the writer not only because it requires a great amount of time but also because it is not always easy to recognize the flaws in your own writing.

Understanding how to manage the changes in your writing style is something that is learned as writing technique improves. Throughout this thesis, several aspects will be touched upon in order to best understand how to grow with the revision process. The relationship between writing and revision is one of constant growth. Even experienced writers struggle with certain aspects of revision. Dr. John Price, a professor at UNO, describes the frustration that comes with the revision process:

I may be feeling frustration now, but I might not later on. I think it is very important to keep writing. It is sort of like exercising too, pushing through the cramps. And making sure you are working a little on it and not completely eliminating it from your attention. The revision process for me is not just what’s going on the page, but what you are thinking about and reflecting off the page. I just free myself sometimes of the responsibility of being perfect and go back to the beginning of the process and start to generate some new material. So if a scene is giving me trouble, I’ll just make that an assignment. Get back to that generating stage where there is no pressure to be perfect. Then being able to integrate some of that material back into the finished piece. That’s part of it. Not letting it chase you off, not abandoning it entirely.

Another area of revision that authors struggle with is submitting a piece for publication. There are many steps before this aspect of the process is dealt with, which will be discussed in more depth further on. However, the concise idea is that a piece is never entirely ready for submission; knowing when to let go of a piece is a skill that comes as your revision technique is developed.

In order to understand the scope of the revision process, this thesis will discuss the history of revision as it relates to current revision styles through Dr. Fitzgerald's research, examine case studies of authors, writers, and professors to understand the subjectivity of revision through their advice and experience, look into the aforementioned individual's writing and teaching philosophies that practice the act of revision, and apply examples of practical revision to bring the process full circle.

Project Origin

As writing develops, revision skills begin to follow a (simplified) chronological process: drafting, evaluating, peer editing, and redrafting. This cycle can be repeated several times before a piece is 'ready' for submission. As a fourth year English student at UNO, I have become very familiar with revision and the necessity of it in literary writing. The revision process is structurally important for every type of writing from literary to journalistic to research articles. However, the idea for this methodological study of revision was born out of my intimate relationship with literary writing that has grown over my years at university.

Revision is an overarching theme that can be applied to all forms of writing. However, it is subjective and personal on an individual basis. In its preliminary form, the research idea to study revision came from several long lists scrawled on notebook paper and meetings scheduled with different professors in offices with cups of tea leaving rings on desks. In the beginning, an overwhelming topic was created as ideas meshed into one; it came down to the process of

narrowing down where the idea would go. The list of ideas from interviewing editors on their writing process to compiling old manuscripts of famous literary works to taking personal writing samples and analyzing the creative content shaped into interconnecting them based on their core structural theme: revision.

All writing has one thing in common – revision in the drafting process. Writing is a continual process. Even the most skilled, published authors still have room for growth when it comes to self-critiques and revision. There is no set limit on how many drafts will be written before a piece is rendered complete. As mentioned earlier, some professors struggle with knowing when a piece of writing is finished enough to submit it for publication.

In order to understand revision in its entirety, I undertook this project of interviewing professionals in the field. However, to first understand the methodology, application, and scope of revision as it relates to this study, the history must first be examined.

Revision History

“Each word is a house of history,” says Emily Hiestand in “On Style” in *Telling True Stories* (Kramer and Call 200). In writing, words create an impact that resonates with readers. The importance of revision relies on many things, but nothing creates a greater impression than the structural wholeness of a beautifully crafted literary piece. Words in any form or medium create a weaving piece of linguistic identity that move, teach, inspire, and most importantly relate readers. The placement of words, phrases, and sentences create the structure to achieve completeness; purpose is created. As Dr. Price describes it: A writer is “in service to the text and not the other way around.” Revision is the tool used to achieve the means to the end of the writing process.

As Hiestand said, behind every word is a history of writing. The construct of language has evolved over centuries and with it, revision. As all words have created the basis of writing, revision created the way writing has been constructed and reimagined. The study of revision and its historical implications create a lens to view how revision has become such a necessary component in writing. Dr. Fitzgerald's study, as aforementioned, looks at the role revision has played through a historical context and how that relates to the present.

The earliest recorded views of revision date back to around 367-347 BCE during Aristotle's Rhetoric. Revision during this time period focused heavily on content structuring. Dr. Fitzgerald described this method as "theoretically dry and uninteresting." Unlike our contemporary approach to revision, Aristotle's Rhetoric was not focused on creating content. It deemphasized creativity, which allowed for little revision opportunity. Most of the revision emphasized sentence-level polishing and minor edits (Fitzgerald).

After Aristotle's Rhetoric, "the conception of revision as error correction lingered for many centuries," according to Dr. Fitzgerald's research. Revision throughout the years was limited to a linear process of prewriting, writing, and postwriting. It wasn't until the 1970s that a new definition of revision emerged. The 1970s held some of the century's greatest writers including Stephen King, Kurt Vonnegut, and Hunter S. Thompson. The 1970s saw a rise of human dramas with a focus on realism and its relation to setting, character, and overall themes (University of Groningen). Along with this was the rise of perspective shifts relative to revision. The shifts in perspective reflected the changes in writing in general as well as revision. Donald Murray was an American journalist and English professor at the University of New Hampshire. He directed the discussion on revision during the shift perspective of the 1970s. Dr. Fitzgerald cites him extensively in her research in order to create an understanding of the 'new' revision.

“Donald Murray defined revision as ‘what the writer does after a draft is completed to understand and communicate what has begun to appear on the page’” (Fitzgerald). Murray also defined revision as “seeing again.” This directly relates back to the earlier mentioned Latin definition of the term, bringing the idea of revision full circle as it developed throughout history. Murray also introduced two major forms of revision: internal, everything that writers do to discover and develop what they have to say, and external, what writers do to communicate what they have found.

The specification of internal and external revision was a forerunner to later explorations of the process of revision (i.e., mental workings) and the product of revision (i.e., the marks made on the page). Murray’s focus on “seeing again” and on internal mental formulations was central among his contributions to the development of an understanding of revision. His work can be seen as a transition (a) from a time when revision received little to no theoretical attention to a time when the meaning of revision began to take shape, (b) from a longstanding view of alterations in text as relatively minor editorial changes to a new view of text changes as including reflections of major and/or meaty reconceptualization of ideas and meanings, and (c) from a product-focused view of revision to an increasingly process-oriented one (Fitzgerald).

Murray helped to shape revision, as it is known today. After Murray’s contribution in the 1970s, the educational community as well as the public became increasingly interested with writing skills and psycholinguistics – the study of the relationships between linguistic behavior and psychological processes such as language acquisition. This is where Dr. Fitzgerald’s research originated. She describes it as a methodological turning point for writing research, where as prior

to the 1970s this was very uncommon. During this time, the increased interest in this area of study as well as other methodologies such as case studies and naturalistic inquiries, allowed for more research to be done on the process of writing. The prospering research discredited Aristotle's model and "supported a dynamic hierarchical cognitive theory of writing, involving planning, transcribing, and reviewing" (Fitzgerald).

Over the decades, after the surge of research on writing, revision began to be viewed more and more as meaning-based; it became a more personalized term based on subjectivity. Researchers in the early 1980s seemed to disagree about whether the term 'revision' referred to the product, that is, the changes that are made, or to the process authors go through in their minds, or both. Sommers (Nancy, Sosland Director of Expository Writing at Harvard), for example, believed it was both. She said that revision is bringing the writing into line with the writer's intentions.

This disagreement on which category, product or process, revision falls into highlights the subjectivity of the process.

Even though disagreement occurred during the 1980s on the labels for revision, some consensus was formed based on Dr. Fitzgerald's research:

1. Writers identify discrepancies between intended and instantiated text. For writing to be judged successful or high in quality by others, identification of discrepancies most likely requires knowledge of characteristics of 'good' writing, ability to recall and represent relevant knowledge, and ability to write/read one's own writing from a reader's perspective.
2. Writers diagnose; when problems are identified, authors determine what changes can be or need to be made, as well as alternatives for how the changes can be made.

3. Writers operate; actual changes are carried out. Explicit, detailed written definitions of revision rarely exist in literature. However, the following paragraph gives an implicit contemporary definition of revision, broadly conceived to encompass both process and product:
 - a. Revision means making any changes at any point in the writing process. It involves identifying discrepancies between intended and instantiated text, deciding what could or should be changed in the text and how to make desired changes, and operating, that is, making the desired changes. Changes may or may not affect meaning of the text, and they may be major or minor. Also, changes may be made in the writer's mind before being instantiated in written text, and the time text is first written, and/or after text is first written (Fitzgerald).

Dr. Fitzgerald, after her study on revision in writing, created an overarching definition to encompass the idea of revision. Her definition broadly describes the actual process of revision. However, since it is such a subjective process based on the author/writer, it is still difficult to create a blanket definition. The interpretations of revision and its role in writing have changed extensively as shown by Dr. Fitzgerald's research. She does a good job of creating a framework for revision to be understood and advanced. To put revision into practice, the conceptual baseline definition she created as well as the methods drawn from this thesis can be applied to create a full understanding of the term.

Dr. Fitzgerald explains that revision research is at a pivotal point. Revision is a complex concept that has potential to really be understood and breakthrough the research field. As she describes in the concluding paragraphs of her study, most research still has yet to study how much revision is necessary and when to revise and what kind of revisions need to be made as it

relates to what goes on in the writers' minds during the process. Dr. Fitzgerald begs the question of what kind of definition is needed for the essential development of revision. It is important to understand not how much is done/how many revisions are made, but what is actually done to constitute revision. This is the role that this thesis plays in further developing revision in the research field. This thesis looks at the role that revision plays in the mind of the writer and how that relates to published text and the historical perspective. In order to apply the knowledge already gained from past studies, this thesis has been developed.

Methodology

To better understand the process of revision as it relates to the subjective lens of the writer, a series of thirty questions was asked to the participants in this study. The questions are as follows:

1. How would you define revision?
2. Could you give me a brief overview of your process for revision?
3. Do you have a plan before entering revision?
4. What environment do you place yourself in for revision, physically and mentally?
5. Joan Didion is quoted by saying that she drinks in order to loosen her up during the process; do you have any habitual practices to help your revisions?
6. What structural elements almost always need revising?
7. What order do you revise your draft in from title to body?
8. How are the different elements of your piece affected (dialogue, exposition, scenic construction, sensory details, etc.)?
9. How do different mediums affect your revisions?
10. How does the first construction of the draft affect the revision?

11. How do you deal with preconceived ideas of what you want the draft to be?
12. How do you let go of an initial idea that you intended for the draft to achieve the end result?
13. How do you deal with frustration during the process?
14. What have some of your most dramatic revisions entailed?
15. What do you do between revisions of the draft to aid the process?
16. Do you take a certain amount of time between drafts before revisiting and revising again?
17. Writing consists almost exclusively of rewrites, what does that mean to you and how do you go about the process?
18. How many drafts until you're 'satisfied'?
19. Who (if) do you ask to read over your drafts for comments/edits?
20. How many people do you typically have read your draft?
21. What constitutes revision? How minor can the changes be in order for it to be a new draft?
22. How do you know when the draft is ready for submission/publication?
23. How has the digital age affected your revision process?
24. How is the process different in print versus digital? (Journalist focused question)
25. What (if any) are the major differences between journalistic and creative writing revision?
26. Has anything in your life affected your revision methods (experiences, advice)?
27. Joan Didion's essay "On Keeping a Notebook" outlines some of her writing methods. Do you have a note taking process that aids your writing/revision?

28. Claire Messud, novelist, describes revision as “creative destruction.” Do you have any thoughts on this?
29. Do random thoughts spur on what to revise in your draft as you go about the day?
30. What advice would you give beginners/professionals alike?

The participants who agreed to be interviewed for this thesis included the following professors, editors, and freelance writers: Dr. Todd Richardson, Dr. John Price, Dr. Troy Romero, Professor Jody Keisner, and Kara Schweiss.

Dr. Todd Richardson is an associate professor in the Goodrich Scholarship Program at UNO. Within the scholarship program, he teaches Autobiographical Reading and Writing, Perspectives on American Culture, and English Composition. He also teaches courses in American folklore and literature through the English department. Dr. Richardson’s current research interests focus on creative thinking and expression and its relation to community and loneliness. He is also the founder and editor of *Louise Pound: A Folklore and Literature Miscellany*. Dr. Richardson also taught a special topics class for the University Honors Program on nostalgia in literature that I was a student in.

Dr. John Price is the director of the Creative Nonfiction Writing program at UNO, which is the department in which I am getting my English degree focus. Dr. Price has authored several creative nonfiction books and has received a prose fellowship from the National Education Association. Dr. Price has also published several essays in journals including his essay “Charlton Heston is God,” published in the Iowa Writer’s Workshop Journal. The Iowa Writer’s Workshop writing program is the top program in the nation for graduate students.

Dr. Troy Romero is an associate professor in the Goodrich Scholarship Program at UNO. He teaches classes that vary from Autobiographical Reading and Writing, Humanities such as

Latin American Studies, and Lifespan Development. Dr. Romero also teaches classes in his field of study – psychology. He earned his Ph.D. in Industrial/Organizational Psychology. He is also a faculty member for the Office of Latino/Latin American Studies (OLLAS). Dr. Romero’s research interests focus on organizational justice, diversity, identity development, stereotype threat, and intellectual/developmental disabilities. Over the course of my college career at UNO, I have spent numerous hours with Dr. Romero as a student and teaching assistant. His knowledge base is extensive, from research article writing to creative writing. One key piece of information that Dr. Romero always offers is to immerse yourself in your subject. “Nothing substitutes total immersion within writing because language is not a discipline. It’s not a subject. It’s a way of life. People don’t learn English; they learn to communicate. And if English is around you, that is how you learn to communicate, verbally or through writing.”

Professor Jody Keisner is an assistant professor at UNO. She currently teaches Form and Style in Creative Nonfiction, Autobiographical Reading and Writing, Modern Familiar Essay, Creative Nonfiction in Digital Environments, and Research and Argument. Her literary works have been published in several journals including *Brevity: A Journal of Concise Literary Nonfiction* and *The Threepenny Review*. Professor Keisner also oversaw the publication of my first multimodal essay that included graphics, text, and audio.

Kara Schweiss is a successful freelance journalist with over 1,000 published articles. Schweiss completed her undergraduate degree at UNO. Her perspective gives insight through the lens of a self-made freelance writer. She started her career in marketing and from there branched off into freelance writing for magazines, such as *Omaha Magazine*, web articles, hard news stories, and grants. Schweiss gives a great look into how revision is impacted from a journalistic standpoint compared to the research and literary writing of the other sources.

Overall, the participants in this study followed the same interview structure to better understand their revision process. The questions were structured in order to understand the subjectivity of the revision process, but also if any themes occurred throughout. Several themes appeared throughout the participants' responses in the study including revision as: necessary and deliberate, audience-centered, habitual, disciplined but also imperfect, idiosyncratic yet collaborative, challenging, emotional, and a textual philosophy. These themes will be discussed further as the interview responses are dissected and compared to other sources. Even though several themes were gleaned from the interviews, some responses did produce outliers. Due to the different philosophies and practices among sources, the subjectivity of the revision process was highlighted. This will also be shown further in the dissection of the interview responses.

Interviews

Necessary and Deliberate

Revision is a necessary, deliberate process, as said earlier by Dr. Romero. Other participants responded with this same sentiment. Dr. Richardson explains the value of revision. "I remind myself that we write our way into our best ideas, that whatever it was I set out to write was a flimsy notion and that the work I've put in to reach something sensible is far more valuable." *Creating Nonfiction*, a writing guide and anthology, exemplifies Dr. Richardson's point on the value of the uncertainty and necessity of revision. "A first draft is the messy phase of fortuitous accidents and utter slop. The best writing in a draft often comes only after the mediocre" (Bradway and Hesse 95). Jon Franklin, a Pulitzer Prize winner in journalism, speaks for writers on this sentiment towards the revision process, "The first time most of us try most things, whether it's driving or riding a bicycle or love, it's a mess. Early on in any work as a

writer, I gave an editor a draft, and he said it was a piece of garbage. It's not that it wasn't *true*, it's that it wasn't *helpful*. Good writing demands a nurturing relationship" (Kramer and Call 197). Dr. Price explains the necessity of his revision process through his obsessive note taking.

I have notebooks, tons of them. A lot of my revision thinking takes place in those notebooks. Especially if I have set the piece aside for a little bit, I will get this moment of inspiration and having the notebook there and being able to write it down slowly overtime you can sometimes write the piece, revise the piece just through the notes alone. It's so frustrating if you just sit there for days in front of a piece, struggling, and then you take a shower and something comes to you. Or you're just about to fall asleep and inspiration comes to you and you don't have any writing material.

This concept, revising through note taking, is something that author Joan Didion stresses in her essay, "On Keeping a Notebook." Didion is a habitual note taker and constantly works on her writing in her everyday life. "It is a good idea, then, to keep in touch, and I suppose that keeping in touch is what notebooks are all about" (Didion). This relates back to Dr. Fitzgerald's idea of studying what goes on in the writer's mind during the revision process. Dr. Price's response on his note taking, to focus his revision, exemplifies necessity as well as contributing to the better understanding of revision as a whole.

Even though revision is a necessary and deliberate process, it does not mean the process doesn't come without its vulnerabilities. Dr. Romero explains how even through his weaknesses, his process is deliberate. It is the understanding of his weaknesses that makes his revision purposeful by allowing time and space for the weaknesses to unfold and be corrected.

Out of all the processes that I go through the one thing I try to do is understand my weaknesses. I'm really pretty good about being deliberate during all the stages of writing. Having a draft, being iterative, looking at it, breaking down the pieces. It is when I get towards the end when I am the most vulnerable and not meticulous. I tend to be like, 'I've worked really hard it's good enough'. And, it's not that it's not good enough but when I go back and review something that I've written, I know that there is a paragraph that I just added, it's good it fits, but in my head I'm also like 'There's a sentence in there that doesn't need to be there.' And, in every other paragraph there's a purpose for everything that I write; there is not much wasted space. But, when I get to the end I'm just exhausted and if I don't refocus myself I am prone to saying this is good enough. I need to understand when to say enough is enough.

Audience-centered

Revision is a personal process that happens to a written product and also in the mind of the writer. Dr. Fitzgerald's study went into depth about how the area of thoughtful revision is related to the cognition of the writer. However, revision is very much an audience-centered process according to the answers from the interviews conducted. Participants discussed how they focus a lot of their revisions on how the final product will come across to readers.

Dr. Richardson explains it as writing for an audience outside himself. "When I draft, I just dump sentences on the page, paying no attention to their readability beyond me. When I revise, I think about how to make those sentences compelling for other people." Dr. Richardson also discusses how revision and writing both require putting aside your ego. "Write as much as you can for other people, putting your ego aside and doing exactly what they want." Anne Hull,

journalist and Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter, says in *Telling True Stories* – “Revising Over and Over Again” – “Successful rewriting requires a fierce sense of competition with yourself, not anyone else” (Kramer and Call 205). Hull clarifies that revision is not a time to protect your ego. “It’s an opportunity to re-explore your story and force yourself to delve even deeper” (Kramer and Call 207). Revision is both self-indulgent due to the subjectivity of the author, but also, it focuses heavily on who will be reading the published content. As outlined earlier, revision is categorized as necessary and deliberate. Dr. Richardson says that for his deliberate revision process, as it relates to putting aside ego, he refuses to indulge his personal preferences. This means that he puts himself in a mental space that does what needs to be done to make sure the writing connects with his audience. He doesn’t allow for distractions. He says he completely lets go of his ego to do what needs to be done. Hull elaborates on this by saying:

Set aside your ego while you revise a story draft so you can concentrate on the work that must be done [...] Revision requires patience, a quality many journalists lack, and a long attention span, also rare. Some reporters [writers] get bored and don’t want to take the final steps. Some journalists consider redrafting a form of punishment, but I consider it a luxury – the chance to make the story better (Kramer and Call 207-08).

Dr. Richardson and Hull are focused in different areas of writing – literary and journalistic. However, revision spans across all forms of writing. This is evident through the conceptualization of their processes.

David Sedaris, comedian and author, discusses how writing and revision is an audience-centered process in an interview with New York Public Radio (NPR). “I wish I’d understood that people were actually going to read what I wrote. For some reason, that came as the biggest

surprise to me” (Rypl and Sedaris). Dr. Price references Sedaris when talking about focusing on the audience during revision.

Reading it out loud is very important in my revision process. That immediate response from an audience – performing your essay – gives you immediate feedback. Stuff you thought was funny isn’t funny. Stuff you thought wasn’t funny is funny. Places where people are clearly attentive; places where you are starting to lose them, where you are getting the yawns. David Sedaris does this. You will see him during readings when people laugh, he will mark in the margins because that’s going to affect the revision of his piece later on. And, that’s certainly true for me.

Schweiss uses a slightly different tactic when approaching revision. She focuses her revision on understanding her audience through reviewing other freelance authors’ writing samples. She does this not to emulate, but to understand how to connect better with her audience.

Habitual

Once writers become more familiar with the revision process, best practices turn into habit. Dr. Romero discusses his process of habit forming in depth:

So many best practices just become habit for me that I don’t even know which are best practices or my own personalized habits. Generally, what I try to focus on every time I write is to put my writing away for a little while to give it some room to breathe. When I read it with fresh eyes again, it makes sense to me. How long I set it aside depends on what my deadline is. If my deadline is tomorrow, I set it aside for two minutes then come back to it. But, if it is something I have time with, I try and set it aside for a couple of days. Also, I really try and organize my

material so that it makes sense. I try to figure out what my organization strategy is and then I walk through that. The organization strategy is usually one of the key things because it connects with the minds of the readers. I want them to understand what is going on. Professional writing, such as journal articles, is where people know their material really well. But, if you get too ‘jargon-y,’ start using psychology-ese, for example, too much, you can lose people. I always try and have an eye for the reader so that if I can understand what the organization strategy is, then it should be clear for the reader to pick out. This makes the writing more palpable. If readers don’t necessarily know the material, then it becomes easier to read. And, it makes it more fun to read. Too many people get caught up in their own writing; they want to be esoteric. They want people to have a hard time reading it so it looks like they are really smart. I try to make my writing as reachable to as many people who might read it. This sometimes can be hard for me because I really have to break it down. When I come back to it after I haven’t been with the writing for a while, one of the first things I’ll do is look and see if I remember the organizational strategy I had. *What was my order? Is it going in the order I want?* That is probably one of my main habitual revision strategies, especially after just writing a draft and coming back to it. As I get further along, I usually try and look at it piece-by-piece. If I get to a point where it’s almost ready, I look at every paragraph and make sure each word matters.

Those are the things that really matter to me.

Dr. Romero highlights a lot of different areas throughout the revision process. His response encompasses the entirety of his key revision points. One thing that is reiterated is the audience-

centered concept aforementioned. Throughout revision, concepts overlap in order to produce a final, polished product.

Dr. Price affirms Dr. Romero's thoughts through his habitual revision practices. Dr. Price, however, says that his depends more upon the specific piece he is working on. He discusses one of the habits that Dr. Romero mentioned – giving his writing room to breathe between drafts. “In the midst of trying to finish a piece, I will often step away from it and take a walk. Even something like that, to get fresh air, a little exercise to think about something, helps. It helps me to come back to it with fresh eyes.”

The idea of giving a piece of writing time to breathe is a common practice in revision. In *Telling True Stories*, the authors discuss how editing requires fresh eyes as stated by both Dr. Romero and Price. “But to edit, one must come to the text fresh, mimic the sensibility of a first-time reader, and make the parts work together” (Kramer and Call 197). This is something that Dr. Romero really emphasized – looking at his writing through the lens of his readers. This idea gives a different perspective for the author to view their writing.

Disciplined but Imperfect

Revision is a very disciplined process, which is shown throughout the habits that the participants discussed. However, several responses were given in the interviews on how perfection is never reached no matter how disciplined a writer is because an artist is never truly satisfied with their product. Dr. Price exemplifies this notion in detail.

Never. It's never done and writers are perfectionists in some ways. People read a piece and go, “Oh, it couldn't have been written any other way.” It just is inevitable that as a writer you see everything that isn't there. Stuff you wish was

there. Mistakes you made. Struggles you had. Things you resent that you had cut. You are always rethinking pieces, especially if it was published. And then, if you are writing a book and you want that piece to be a part of that book, a whole new array of revision questions come up. Are you going to keep the piece the way it was when you first wrote it? This is especially a nonfiction thing. Do you pay honor to the person you were then, when you wrote it for the people you wrote it for, or are you now going to integrate all the wisdom and experience and the things that you have accumulated since then? Do you honor your new perspective?

To further express this frustrating endeavor towards perfection, Dr. Price introduces Jo Ann Beard. Beard is an American essayist. Her most famous work is an essay published in the *New Yorker* titled “The Fourth State of Matter” (1996). Dr. Price knows Beard personally and talks about her difficult revision process. “She writes one sentence in the revision process and she doesn’t move on until that sentence is perfect. That’s a very slow, difficult process but it works for her.” Similar to Beard’s almost painstaking process towards perfection is Dr. Richardson’s example of author Kurt Vonnegut. Vonnegut has written several famous novels including *Slaughter-house Five* (1969) and *Cat’s Cradle* (1963). Dr. Richardson cites Vonnegut’s process of ‘banging.’ The idea is that you write a sentence, delete it, write it again, delete part of it, add some more, delete some more, and on and on until you get the sentence the way you want it to be. Vonnegut said it was an unhealthy way of doing things. This is where revision can become dangerous. According to Dr. Price, revision can “become the land of the lotus-eaters; you can just stay there forever. There is always something more to do. It becomes a way of avoiding allowing the piece to go out with all its imperfections. To go out and do some work in the

world.” Dr. Richardson carries the same sentiment. “Experience has made me care so much less about getting things right. I have learned through the years that finished is always better than perfect.”

Idiosyncratic yet Collaborative

As mentioned earlier, revision is a personal process. It is individual and idiosyncratic. Dr. Price explains it as follows:

The revision stage, or any stage of writing, is so idiosyncratic. Some people need to have their apartment super clean before they can do it. They have to have classical music on. Dead silence. To me I have to have, in the revision process, solitude. I have a basement study that allows me to be there with the piece and have full on concentration without distraction. Because a lot of revision for me is trying to listen to the piece and what it’s trying to do and what it’s asking me to do as an author rather than what I want it to do. And for me to accomplish that I have to be free of distraction.

However, there is a differentiation to be made. Besides being an individual thought process that keeps the reader in mind, revision is a collaborative process with peers. One thing that moves the revision process forward is peer critiques – allowing others, chosen at the author’s discretion – to comment and review the work-in-progress.

Besides Dr. Price allowing himself solitude to focus during revision, he mentions how collaborating with peers is also a necessary element.

A lot of the people I have read my writing are friendships from graduate school. They are my trusted readers. They know my strengths/weaknesses as a writer so they have a kind of shortcut to getting to the heart of what I have to work on. On

the other hand, I try to seek out new eyes, new perspectives on my work. So my colleagues can be very helpful. I think the more diverse readers you have the better.

Dr. Romero goes through the peer review process as well.

When I started writing I probably went through a couple different phases. One, I didn't let anyone read it because I didn't think I needed to. Because I'm really smart, I'm really good at this. And, the more I started writing the more I realized it doesn't matter how smart you are. You know what you know, but you also don't know what you're leaving out because it's intrinsic in your knowledge base. So as I got feedback from people I found that I needed to enlist more people. So I went through a phase where I let more people read it than I probably needed to. So now I actually have two or three people who I really trust their opinion, which are different enough from me. I really trust their ability to break down material; they have a perspective that is different enough from me that captures what I need. I went from nobody to lots of people to now just a couple people.

Dr. Price and Romero both have several people look at their drafts for critical feedback; this is a common exercise for writers. However, Dr. Richardson embodies the idea of idiosyncrasy and collaboration. Dr. Richardson trusts one person more than anyone to read his drafts for true feedback – his wife. “I know she'll be honest and I can take hard truths from her better than anyone else out there.”

Challenging

Revision never comes without frustration. All the participants agreed that writing, through all the stages, comes with its difficulties. Schweiss says that one of her biggest struggles

during revision is dealing with her preconceived ideas of where she wants a piece to go. Since a lot of her freelance writing requires interviewing sources, the structure of the piece can be driven by the content taken from the interview. Writers begin with questions and an end in mind, however, that doesn't always follow a linear path. Schweiss says interviewees tend to stray or offer new information that makes for an even better story. "Journalists have to have flexibility. Between sources and editors, a lot can change." Editors pitch story ideas a lot of the time in the journalism world. They have an idea for where they want your story to go, but it doesn't always work out like that. Schweiss gave an example of a story her editor gave to her about a woman who runs an African-inspired restaurant in West Omaha. Her editor was expecting a story about a refugee who now runs a small business in the Midwest. It was a very different story. The woman was nowhere near what the editor expected, requiring Schweiss to reroute her interview and story on the spot.

Another difficulty that she describes throughout the process is the actual structure of her article. She describes her revision style as 'chunking.'

I tend to overwrite so I have to map out where I want everything to go as I'm structuring. I color code my information and chunk it together. It's a process of elimination. I really have to focus myself on identifying information that I need to trim. Articles these days, compared to earlier years of freelancing, tend to be more compressed. However, I still write as if I am publishing a 4,000-word article. I write with the idea for a big story. Then, the revision becomes painful. I start to trim the information straddling the line between necessary and unnecessary.

Dr. Price also explains how he has a tendency to overwrite.

One of the challenges is trying to condense the language down. One thing I do is take a big essay and boil it down to a fifteen minute, eight page essay to force me to do the really hard trimming, down to the core. But, every essay for me is different. Every piece of writing is different, the kinds of challenges that it presents. So, revision is the same. Sometimes a piece will come together relatively quickly and that always feels good when that happens, but I know enough given my experiences as a writer to know that the next piece could be the exact opposite. I just published a piece this fall that I started to write in 2002. And I've been working on it kind of steadily, not everyday, but I would revisit it, do some revisions, step away from it, and revise it again. Then have somebody read it, give me feedback. It blew up to this huge piece, 60-70 pages long. Then it shrunk back down to fifty pages. It settled at about twenty. But it has taken me sixteen years. And I've got others that I've put together in a month. So, it's a long answer to your question, but that's just how revision looks to me. I just never know sometimes what it's going to take.

Emotional

For many authors, revision can be an emotional process. Writing is an art form; authors become attached to their piece in the same way an artist connects with their painting or sculpture. "Every time we draft a story that includes emotion, we're crawling out on a limb. Our insecurities tell us to crawl back to safety, but doing so eliminates the story's heart and soul. Emotion lives in nearly everyone, though it's sometimes asleep. The writer must awaken it. We can do this in our stories" (Kramer and Call 212). Dr. Price talks about how writing became a life-changing decision.

I faced a difficult choice with my first book *Not Just Any Land*, which was my graduate school dissertation. It was really about trying to decide if I was going to stay home as a writer, here in the Midwest, and dedicate my career to writing about this place and natural environments and family, or if I was going to leave. My wife is from Idaho; we always sort of planned on moving out to Rocky Mountain West. At the end of my dissertation, when I ended my graduate school years, I wasn't sure what was going to happen. It really came down to deciding on what perspective to write about in my book. Do I put in my new perspective and decisions after going through graduate school or do I honor where I was at that point in the past? In the end I decided to both honor where I was and stay here in the Midwest. I decided to honor the past perspective for the young people who are facing the same kind of decision. But it was hard, not only leaving some material out, but also going back and writing in the voice of the person I was then. My voice on the page had changed tremendously since then. So my revision process was about replicating the voice and the style and the sentence structures that I used when I was 25-26 years old.

This idea of honoring your past self or adding in a new perspective is something that surfaces a lot in creative nonfiction writing. It is about honoring the truest form of self. This is something Dr. Romero instructs to his students.

In autobiographical writing, I always suggest students be honest. Papers don't ring true if the writer isn't honest about the story s/he is sharing. This doesn't mean it needs to be divulging or avant-garde – it just needs to be told in a way that exposes the writer's true feelings. Too often, students write in clichés or

protect their egos – readers pick up on this very quickly and lose interest in the story.

Authors Gretchen Clark and Kim Barnes, in a *Brevity: A Journal of Concise Literary Nonfiction* Q&A titled “Balancing Music and Meaning,” talk about how honesty and language impact writing. Barnes says, in her definition of short nonfiction, that “...we heighten our use of language and shape our story; we impose a narrative of meaning that represents our individual emotional truths” (Clark). When asked about her approach to her writing, Barnes says, “I think intuition has a great deal to do with it. Allowing images to carry, phrases to resonate.” Language certainly plays a major role in the construction of an essay. Words carry a lot of weight. It’s like the quote from before, “Each word is a house of history.” Language is cosmic. This idea carries into something else Dr. Price believes.

Whatever is going on right now with the piece isn’t the last word. Don’t be too private with that struggle. There are other people out there that are struggling with the same thing. Share your story with them. I love it because suddenly the piece isn’t just yours anymore entirely. It has taken on a life of its own. They’re helping you with these choices in the past that you have struggled with alone, privately. Think about the community, inviting the community in to help you, to help you through those final tough stages of revision of the piece because you will be exhausted, frustrated, and angry. Other people can help you.

This translates into an idea in *Creating Nonfiction*. “It’s at the point of revision that many writers quit. They like the creative rush and the workshop but grow impatient with the lonely phase of refinement. Writers either love their words or hate them” (Bradway and Hesse 94).

Textual Philosophy

Revision is a textual philosophy – meaning it is way of thinking about writing, a way of understanding/asking questions about writing, and developing the connections in writing.

Revision is an overall appreciation and interpretation of the writing process and where it is going. There are always going to be surprises in writing and revision, positive and negative. Dr. Price really delves to the core of this idea of revision as a philosophy.

There are always going to be things you thought were great that other people don't think are great. And there will be things that were throwaway images or phrases that someone will say is the heart of the piece. And it will be thought to be brilliant and intentional, but you put it in at the last second. But those are the moments that get you thinking intentionally about revision; what the piece wants you to do. And realizing in that moment that revision is about being in service to the text and not the other way around. This is all part of the organic whole of revision – listening to the piece and trying to get where it is taking you. It is a cumulative effect of wisdom in writing. Revision is not just intellectual or an artistic exercise; it is also a kind of philosophy for living. And that is what I love about revision because it is one of my favorite stages of the writing process. I hate drafting. A lot of stuff about it I hate. Writing is actually really hard for me.

Revision, though, can be very joyful for me because what it seems to communicate is that with a piece that you may be unhappy with, or you struggle with, there is always new possibilities. The next week your attitude towards this piece could change dramatically because of an insight that you had or piece of advice a reader gave you or something you heard. And that piece will find itself and that's exciting. I think that's true about life too. Whatever you are

experiencing right now, it sounds so hokey, but it's true. Whatever we are experiencing now, whatever we think we are now, it could change in a week, a year. That is an incredibly hopeful, for me anyway, way of living. And it requires, like the writing process, attentiveness – living with intention, not letting things happen but actually examining the language on the page and the life that you are living – thinking about positive changes moving forward. For me, that's what I picked up from a lot of people along the way. To me, that is what makes revision rewarding.

Dr. Price really gets at the heart of applying revision to more than just words on the page. Revision is a textual philosophy and a philosophy for life. However, it also is a philosophy for teaching. Throughout the interview process, several participants discussed how revision shapes their teaching. Through revision, their teaching philosophies have shaped their message to students and how they effectively convey the importance of sound structural writing.

Dr. Richardson focuses his teaching style on the importance of immersing yourself. “Dig deeper. By which I mean, keep interrogating the idea. Lately, I've been encouraging students to engage in metacommentary, by which I mean they should comment on whatever *they* just wrote. Young writers are too eager to dispose of an idea, and I try to get them to plumb the depths before jumping in another lake.”

Susan Sontag – American writer, filmmaker, political activist, and philosopher – explains writing as “If you have the idea of *literature* in your head, it is formidable, intimidating. A plunge in an icy lake. Revising is the warm part: when you already have something to work with, upgrade, edit.” These ideas both get at the core of how revision requires some self-understanding. Dr. Richardson says that he doesn't care *what* students think, just *that* they think.

“By exploring ideas more fully and deeply, students get necessary practice thinking, and hopefully, get closer to whatever it is they really think about things.” This gets at Dr. Romero’s teaching philosophy of student-centered thinking.

Student-centered has become a trope in teaching circles, but that is how I have always focused my teaching. There needs to be some staples in teaching – the teacher needs to be knowledgeable and prepared, and the students need to be challenged. But beyond those necessities, a great teacher needs to be able to teach to the student. It is too easy for students to either check out when they are bored or not identify with the content of a class (or the instructor). If my job is to educate students, then I see a necessary part of my job is to engage the students so they want to learn.

Allowing students to understand and comprehend is at the core of the participants’ philosophies, which comes from their years of experience in writing. Revision is a driving force behind comprehending the writing process, which has shaped the way instructors learn and how they teach that to students. Professor Keisner takes her philosophy very seriously. She has created a document to hand out to students and faculty alike so they can fully understand and revisit her philosophy guidelines. It is as follows:

My experience as both a teacher and writer shapes my teaching philosophy. My pedagogy is informed by the rich and varied experiences I have had throughout my education in English studies, American Literature, and Creative Nonfiction. It is also steeped in the wisdom I have gained from being a published creative nonfiction author. Teaching both composition and creative nonfiction has helped me understand my own writing and also discover what is possible in the classroom. In short, I believe that creative writing can be taught. I take inspiration from

scholars who specialize in composition and creative nonfiction studies, like Stephanie Vanderslice and the late Wendy Bishop. In her 1994 essay “Crossing the Lines: On Creative Composition and Composing Creative Writing” Bishop observes, “Students are well prepared for future academic writing when they explore creativity, authorship, textuality, and so on, *together, all at once*... they are more prepared to think about and perform the complicated act of writing when they study in this way.” Based on theory and practical application, I use craft-based pedagogy in my writing classrooms. Together, my students and I look at the aesthetic qualities and techniques that writers use to transform fact and memory into prose that extends beyond the realm of private discourse and that connects literature, creative writing, language studies, and composition to a public discourse that resonates with a variety of readers.

During a typical class meeting, students and I study selected passages of writing that illustrate the basic craft elements of creative nonfiction. For instance, I have students examine narrative persona via Ian Frazier’s middle-aged non-Indian ‘wannabe’ in *On the Rez*, Esmeralda Santiago’s self-reliant, beguiling child narrator in *When I Was Puerto Rican*, and Joan Didion’s disillusioned, detached narrator in *The White Album*. A student who learns to read as a writer learns to identify the craft choices each author makes. I follow-up with a writing prompt focused on the craft lesson, for example, Lockie Hunter’s “Exploring Intersections,” which asks students to make a list of self-adjectives and then to pair contrasting adjectives. Students find that exploring these pairs in their writing, a process Hunter calls ‘straddling two worlds,’ helps them to craft distinct narrative personas. These low stakes weekly writing assignments encourage risk taking and innovation and further require students to focus on the foundational elements of creative nonfiction. The effectiveness of these prompts can be measured in the number of students who choose to expand them for their longer essay assignments.

Because I am equally invested in my students' artistic and intellectual development, I teach my students to both create their own original works and to critically question existing works. Thus, the remainder of the class is generally devoted to plenary class discussion about assigned readings, where we focus our discussion on topical and thematic concerns and the authors' historical and cultural contexts. Other class time is spent in small group discussion and workshops. Before students workshop their own writing, I present a list of questions to guide workshop discussions, model best workshop practices, and engage students in a trial-run workshop. I host a minimum of two trial-run workshops for each course, providing students an opportunity to build the necessary skills and confidence to participate in student-led workshop, with myself in the role of facilitator. Students and I also contemplate ethical questions that are unique to creative nonfiction, such as: What separates responsible, truth-seeking nonfiction from self-serving, indulgent nonfiction? I want my students to own the 'I' of creative nonfiction, to feel proud of the genre's history, and to understand writing as an act of social relevance.

Recognizing diverse, and especially marginalized, voices is an endeavor that I believe should be at the heart of any writing curriculum. I expose my students to a variety of voices, perspectives, and cultural experiences through careful selection of readings. To illustrate, in *Form and Style in Creative Nonfiction*, we read Jamaica Kincaid's "Biography of a Dress," paying close attention to Kincaid's experimental use of parenthetical asides to fully actualize the idea of double consciousness, "one having the experience, the other observing the one having the experience." We examine Michel de Montaigne's "Of Fear" in *Modern Familiar Essay* and discuss the relevancy students find over four hundred years later in Montaigne's bold exploration of how religious conflicts cause people to "charge, wound, and kill one another." In *Autobiographical Reading and Writing*, we study Bernard Cooper's "A Clack of Tiny Sparks:

Remembrances of a Gay Boyhood” noting Cooper’s revelation that language can be used to signify and even create sexual identity. These essays offer opportunities to discuss unique perspectives on cultural diversity and invite students to engage in other ways of seeing their world.

In addition to teaching students traditional forms of creative nonfiction, such as the memoir and personal essay, and introducing them to canonized writers, I teach contemporary forms and introduce students to developing genre movements and emerging writers. We study the blog essay in places as wide-ranging as *Brevity’s Nonfiction Blog*, *Vela Blog*, and *Huffington Post*, food writing in *Leite’s Culinaria*, and the video essay in *TriQuarterly*. The blog essay, in particular, is at the frontier of creative nonfiction and has forever changed the way writers compose and disseminate information in the 21st century. I make my reasoning for my reading selections transparent and ask students to choose readings for one or two units so that they, too, learn to select texts based on their developing aesthetic sensibilities. My success as a teacher is evident in the evolution of my students’ writing and publishing, in their active involvement in classroom discussions, in their growing confidence in themselves as writers and thinkers, and in their determination to apply the knowledge they have gained in my classroom throughout their college careers and beyond.

Professor Keisner covers the extent of revision as a teaching philosophy and conceptualizes a lot of the ideas examined in this thesis. Understanding revision as a textual philosophy, life philosophy, and teaching philosophy brings the idea of revision to a more applicable process. In order to bring the concept full circle, the ideas and interview responses will be applied to actual professional writing to bring revision into context.

Application

To understand the validity of the styles, philosophies, and teaching methods – revision will be practically applied to essays and deconstructed.

Sonia Nazario is an American journalist and Pulitzer Prize winner known for her work in the *Los Angeles Times*. Her main focus is social issues. In *Telling True Stories: Transforming One Hundred Notebooks into Thirty-five Thousand Words* (Kramer and Call 208-12), Nazario discusses her series “Enrique’s Journey.” The series narrated the experience of a fourteen-year-old boy, Enrique. He was one of the thousands of Central American children who travel alone from their home country to the United States. Nazario’s series re-created Enrique’s life from five-years-old, when his mother left him to work in the United States, to when he found her eleven years later in North Carolina. Enrique’s journey was 122 days long and covered twelve thousand miles. Nazario’s final series only included one-tenth of the information she gathered. Over the course of the project, Nazario had obtained 110 notebooks, hundreds of hours of taped interviews, and notes from more than a hundred phone interviews.

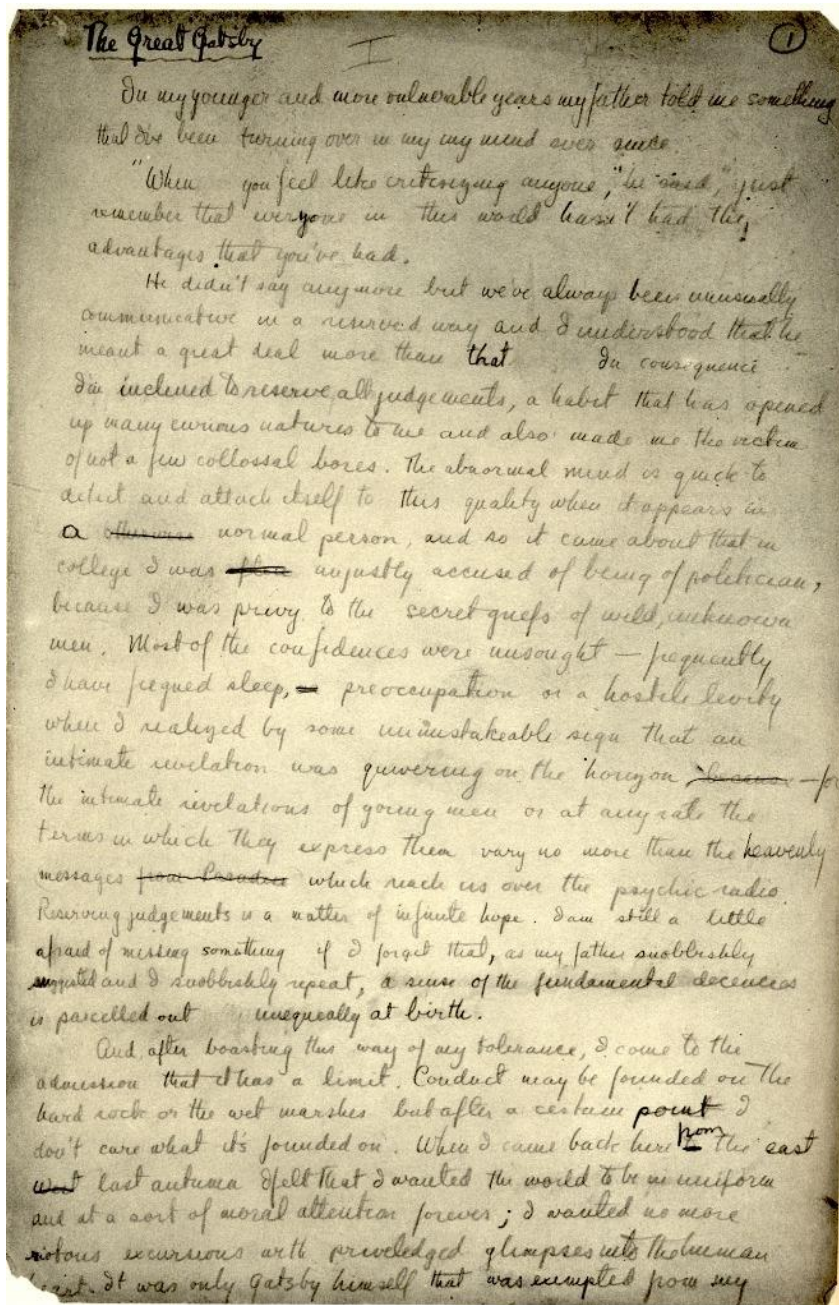
Nazario’s process of ‘garbaging down’ – compressing her notes into a very first rough draft – to her final draft is a great in-depth example of revision from start to finish. Nazario says that as she worked her way towards a draft, she “tried to disengage the left side of my brain. I didn’t want to dwell on the enormity of the overall project” (209). This is a great example of the beginning process of revision, making sure to focus on the correct things as the process moves along. It took Nazario almost six months to complete the first draft. She then reduced the draft from 95,000 words to 35,000 words. Obviously, the project Nazario undertook is on a much grander scale than most essay and article revision. However, it creates an understanding of the complexity of the revision process.

I deleted the beginning or end of several chapters, although that meant leaving out major parts of the story's chronology. I learned that it's okay to skip ahead, to go from A to C and skip B. I cut some of the things that happened to Enrique to shorten the narrative and to avoid repetition. For example, he was robbed several times, but I described only one of these incidents. Rather than explain in my own voice why something happened, I included a series of short quotes, one after another, without attribution, of people explaining it themselves. Once the draft was down to a manageable size, I turned to shaping the story. [...] After I had a solid story structure, I tightened the narrative. The final version that appeared in the newspaper included a 25,000-word main story, five sidebars totaling 9,000 words, and 7,000 words of endnotes.

Nazario took on a difficult project of compressing and revising. She explains that 'trimming fat' in her writing is difficult as the drafting process moves towards completion. She tried to take a fresh look at each sentence and asked herself: "*Is this really necessary? How much is lost by cutting it? How much would be gained by speeding up the narrative? If I keep it, how can I make it better, shorter?*" (212).

By asking herself these questions, Nazario was able to successfully revise and complete her draft.

Another example of revision application is through F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. This photo is one of the manuscripts of Fitzgerald's famous novel (F. S. Fitzgerald).



This manuscript copy dates back to 1924, the year before Fitzgerald published *The Great Gatsby*. As shown, Fitzgerald edited several different structural elements in his novel. This is only one example of the lengths of revision that were required for his finished product. Revision is something that has spanned the length of time. This has been shown through Dr. Fitzgerald's study of revision history and the applications of revision through different time periods with Nazario more recently

and F. Scott Fitzgerald in the 1920s. Throughout this thesis, I have grown to understand revision in more depth through the study of the concept. As a graduating senior, I have developed my revision process over the years. However, nothing has really expanded my knowledge of revision more than this project. My revision style, over the years, has mainly focused on minor edits. After constructing and completing this project, my revision style now encompasses much more

in-depth processes such as peer edits, self-commentary, and reflection. One of the focuses of the interview process was the participants' advice towards beginning and professional writers alike.

Dr. Romero's advice is as follows:

Always allot for two to three times more on a project that you think it's going to take. That's a conservative estimate because professional writing takes a lot more time than people imagine it will, even if you are really good at writing. I know right now that if I dedicated the whole week to it [writing], I could do it. But, my life doesn't allow for that so I know if I'm going to work a couple hours everyday it will take me a week. I'll give myself a month to do it. I know the expectation. The other thing that I would say is write about something you like. Find something that you're going to do because it's intriguing to you. Just like anything else in life, your interest in something will make it that much more exciting. If you don't like it, it doesn't matter how well you write it. It's a really tough task. So find the joy in what you are writing about.

Dr. Romero's advice is very relevant, especially for college students. Time crunches are something that can hinder effective revision. Schweiss' advice also aids in effective revision. She recommends to "overwrite and cut back." This is reiterated in *Telling True Stories*. "As the clutter in any draft is carted off, you may discern within the remaining text some wonderful passages and sound structural elements. Several drafts and edits and declutterings later, one of writing's hard earned but still magical moments often transpires: You suddenly have a vision for the entire structure" (Kramer and Call 198). Schweiss also recommends, "revisiting ideas you have thrown away." This relates to Dr. Romero's idea of writing about what you enjoy. Some

ideas for an essay or article may not fit at the time, but hold on to a list of writing ideas that is important to you.

Conclusion

Revision can devolve into a never-ending cyclical process. Through the understanding of interviews and written sources, it is evident that many authors never feel as if they have reached completion. However, knowing when to shut off the ‘self-editor’ and trusting the application of the revision process and the advice given will constitute effective revision. The themes discovered from the subjective responses given in this study help to further conceptualize the revision process.

As author Joan Didion wrote in her opening line of *The White Album*, “We tell ourselves stories in order to live” (Didion). Writing is a narrative process that affects the way we understand life. Revision is just a piece of that process. As Emily Hiestand says, “There are usually two forces at work in a piece of writing: a forward motion (this happens, then this) as well as a sense of dwelling in place. Dwelling is a way of dropping a plumb line for meaning and pleasure” (Kramer and Call 201). Finding the meaning and pleasure in writing is what Dr. Price conveyed in his response on revision as a philosophy for life. On an ending note with Hiestand:

By its nature a narrative implies order in the world. Very appealing. And yet the past is imperfectly known, the future uncertain. Biological order is based on dynamic change; the earth itself proceeds with the open-endedness of radical creativity, neither rule-bound nor chaotic, but creative within evolving forms. So we also need storytelling that experiments with structure and creates clearings for new ways of thinking and being. Perhaps narrative is at once daring and humble in the way that science is – offering provisional truths, saying in essence: *This is*

the best story we can tell now, based on limited knowledge (Kramer and Call
201).

This encapsulates the essence and necessity of revision. In order to tell a story, creativity must evolve to new forms. Revision in literary writing is the center of creating something new.

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