The Burkean Jam: Rhet/Comp, Revision and Blues, and the Universal Chorus

Marvin Diogenes

Imagine you enter a jam session. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated jam, a jam too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the jam had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the songs that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the set; then you put in your oar. Someone answers with a verse; you answer with a verse of your own; another riffs off of your chorus; another takes a solo off the bridge, to either the delight or dismay of the room, depending upon the quality of the player’s chops. However, the jam is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the jam still vigorously in progress.

Kenneth Burke and Harry Chapin, *The Philosophy of Literary Chords*

The Universal Requirement. We’ve all had to make our way through it, and the “all” includes every singer, songwriter, and band of the twentieth century. The experience of first-year composition has been endlessly explored and analyzed, but what hasn’t been documented is the trauma (and occasional joys), the deep psychic wound (and occasional levitation of the spirit) left by the experience. Such trauma leaves the individual and the community no choice but to repress the memory, to erase it if possible, to cover it over with less painful narratives of lost love, teenage anomic, and struggles with the Man.

The work of the Composition Blues Band is to return the repressed to consciousness, to bring the trauma of composition to light in the hopes that all of us can find peace with our lot and let the healing begin. This is arduous archival work, as the original lyrics of the rhet/comp canon are buried in dusty notebooks, on scribbled drafts, on restroom walls from Asbury Park Community College to the University of Texas-Lubbock. One might ven-
ture that the entire massive apparatus of pop music, the rock biz, the star-making machinery of the popular song, exists to keep the story of FYC well-hidden. The CBB will not allow this to continue. We will seek out the lost original lyrics of the rhet/comp canon wherever the search takes us, and we will continue to bring the lyrics to the rhet/comp community, as we have in presentations at CCCC, WPA, and other venues.

It’s a commonplace that great art comes from great pain, and what’s more painful than a life in composition? That’s why so many songwriters first found their voice in FYC, as students. What’s more surprising, and shamefully unknown, is how many of these artists followed their tsouris, extending their relationship with rhet/comp as writing teachers, scholars, and even as WPAs. We offer an overview of our archival work below.

A Note on the Cosa Nostradamus Effect

Early in our archival work, we noticed the astonishing prescience of the songwriters whose work we uncovered, a phenomenon that we came to call the Cosa Nostradamus Effect. This translates as, “It’s our thing, and we know exactly what’s going to happen.” How else to account for the Big Bopper foreseeing the political correctness controversy in “Sex, Class, and Race” or Elvis Costello anticipating the abolitionist movement in “Writing’s an Elective.” The Effect is particularly evident in the tech-savvy predictions of The Eagles in “Wiki Woman” and Cat Stevens in “Wired World.” As our work evolved, we accepted that everything about the field was “always already” in play.

Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Rocker: Topoi!

The renewed interest in classical rhetoric that flowered in Edward Corbett’s Classical Rhetoric for the Modern Student and such canonized articles as Wayne Booth’s “The Rhetorical Stance” was anticipated in the rhet/comp rock of the fifties. The rhetorical turn got off to a duck-walking start when Chuck Berry simultaneously reinvented the blues and retold the story of rhetoric’s spread to a new generation in “Rhetor B. Goode,” a project for his classical rhetoric survey course.

Before the modern era, five hundred B.C.
They overthrew a tyrant down in Sicily
The people there contested every point they could
Taught by a sophist boy called Rhetor B. Goode
He never ever learned to read or write so well
But he could argue both sides as persuasive as hell

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Go, go,
Go, Rhetor, go, go, go
Go, Rhetor, go, go, go
Go, Rhetor, go, go, go
Go, Rhetor, go, go, go
Rhetor B. Goode

When Rhetor got no tenure down at Syracuse
He went peripatetic, yeah, he got real loose
Wearin’ out his sandals ramblin’ Athens way
The Greeks all gathered ‘round to hear that Rhetor play
He said, “I bring you practical philosophy,
and the thing about the truth is its contingency”

Go, go...

Rhetor was a speaker of such wizardry
Made the best appear the worser for a modest fee
His potent words had power close to absolute
Don’t ask about his ethics, boy, that point is moot
When Plato had a problem with the oversight
Begged him, “Rhetor be good tonight”

Elvis Presley was given the syllabus and reading list from the course
Berry took by his manager, Colonel Tom Parker, an act that many
still characterize as an unjust appropriation, and some more bluntly
as an act of theft. Berry’s influence can be observed clearly in Presley’s
“Rhetoric Hotel,” in which Presley struggles to find a home within
contingency, bereft of the certainty offered by Plato’s stern metaphysics.

Ever since my Plato left me
I found a new place to dwell
Among doubts and probabilities
In the Rhetoric Hotel

I’m so uncertain
I’m so uncertain, baby
I’m so uncertain I could cry
I said to Aristotle
Please get me back on track
He handed me some lecture notes
Read these and you’ll get the knack

It’s just a techné
It’s just a techné, baby
It’s just a techné, don’t you cry

A guy dressed in a toga
Said his name was Cicero
“Everything about everything
is all you need to know”

Along came old Quintilian
Instituting oratory
He said, “Be a good guy all your life,
then you can be hortatory”

Knowledge and virtue
Knowledge and virtue, sonny
Knowledge and virtue show the way

The path wasn’t without obstacles for “The King of Rhet ‘n’ Comp.” His plan to teach at the university level never came to fruition, leading him to celebrated but bittersweet appearances on The Steve Allen Show and later The Ed Sullivan Show. The rockabilly poignancy of “Adjunct Blues” documents the painful failure that led Elvis to a life in the spotlight and an untimely end. When he was singing to a basset hound on national television, or on Sullivan with the camera aimed high to avoid showing his hands at work on a prospectus for a book growing out of his dissertation, he was dreaming of a 2-2 load and generous research funding.

One was my B.A.
Masters made two
Finally got past ABD
My Ph.D. is through
Now don’t you
give me those adjunct blues
Cause I did everything
Lay off of those adjunct blues
Took all the classes
Read all the books
Listed the sources
Cited the schnooks
Wrote a dissertation
insightful and true
Then I wrote it all again
when you said to make it new

Now don’t you…

Got me a vita
long as my arm
Letters testifyin’
to my scholarly charm
Sent out my vita
from Quebec to Peru
No one wants to hire me
My loans are coming due

Now don’t you…

I’d work in the city
Breathe in the smog
Wouldn’t mind the country
Sleep in a log
I’d serve on committees
plus a heavy teaching load
I’d swallow all my theory
Heck, I’d even teach the modes

Now don’t you…

Not everyone embraced the rhetorical turn or the wild newfangled music
that served as its vehicle. Current-traditionalist Peggy Lee spoke out breath-
ily for focus in “Thesis,” a reductive though seductive view of the relationship
between writer and reader, with exigency and purpose mere afterthoughts.

Some folks justify exploration
Think the journey’s really the key
Let’s just say I don’t have the patience
That’s just navel-gazing to me
I want some thesis to assist me
Thesis gotta be in plain sight
Thesis in the opening, thesis to shine like a light

Everybody’s gotta have thesis, that is something you all know
Thesis isn’t such a new thing, thesis started long ago

Romeo loved Juliet
With a feeling that he couldn’t name
Stood there under the balcony
Julie didn’t know why he came
He had no thesis, to assist her
Thesis to focus the tropes
Thesis to inspire, with no thesis Romeo’s on the ropes

Now I’ve finished reading your essay
Crystal clear the point that you made
Thesis there to guide my reading
Original or readymade
You gave me thesis to assist me
Thesis there at every turn
Thesis till the ending, it’s the only way to learn
It’s the only way to learn

Buddy Holly answered by putting forward the importance of invention strategies in “Topoi.”

All of my trying
All of my squinting
I need to know
How to do some thinking
Topoi, so orderly
Topoi, they help me see
They do invent for me

All of my time
Staring and waiting
For the available
Means of persuasion
Topoi, so orderly
Topoi, they help me see
They do invent for me

THE DAY THE MUSIC DIED: BUDDY, RITCHIE, AND THE BIG BOPPER R.I.P.

Aided by rhet/comp rock’s common and special topics, Buddy Holly generated dozens of key works, but his career was tragically cut short as he was flying out of Clear Lake, Iowa after performing at a meeting of the Iowa English Teachers Association, en route to another NCTE affiliate in Fargo, North Dakota, part of a whirlwind tour of Midwestern pedagogical gatherings. Traveling with Buddy was Ritchie Valens, who had been discovered as a high school student in Pacoima, California, delivering his bilingual tongue-in-cheek take on the rules he was learning in 10th grade English, “La Comma.”

Para usar la comma
Para usar la comma
se necesita coordinating conjunction
coordinating conjunction
si no tiene, si no tiene semi-colon
Yo no soy comma splicer
Yo no soy comma splicer
Soy capitan punctuation
Soy capitan

Comma, Comma
Comma, Comma
Comma, Comma
Comma, ay

Para poner un punto
Para poner un punto
se necesita una sentence completa
una sentence completa
con subject y verba se hace completa
Yo no soy fragment maker
Yo no soy fragment maker
Soy capitan punctuation
Soy capitan
Comma, comma...

Nunca usa first person
Nunca usa first person
no necesita opinion subjectiva
es opinion subjectiva
si no tiene, si no tiene los facts todos
Yo no soy ego hombre
Yo no soy ego hombre
Soy rational, no digo “yo”
Soy rational

Comma, comma...

Also on the flight was the Big Bopper, JP Richardson, a North Central Texas State English department head who had hit it big with “Sex, Class, and Race,” an eerie but boisterous anticipation of the political correctness debates that would follow decades later.

Sex, class, and race are in my face
They pin my tale to the ground
They’re crippling up my walk
and tripping up my talk
Classroom spinnin’ ‘round and ‘round
Ain’t nothing I observe
that don’t strike a nerve
They say it’s all malarkey
from the patriarchy
I was always boss
Paradise is lost
I’ve been tossed
Oh, baby, my goose is cooked

Spoken:
Hello, Baby
I mean Ms. Baby
You say be there by eight
And don’t pontificate
You say don’t be such a shmendrick
Don’t be phallogocentric
Oh, Baby,
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Ms. Baby,
I don’t know what you want

Sex, class, and race don’t know their place
Turn my tale upside down
They just cannot forgive
my master narrative
My masculine pronouns
I can’t say a word
they can’t make absurd
They heap condemnation
on my strong foundation
They say I’m obtuse
‘bout my privileged roost
I’ve been plucked
Oh, baby, my goose is cooked

The music may have died that snowy night, but the universal requirement has far more than nine lives, and countless thousands continued to enroll in classes, compose essays, and ultimately turn the experience into song.

RANTS ACROSS THE WATER: THE BRITISH INVASION

The roiling rhet/comp rock scene in the States couldn’t help but snag the attention of British wannabe rockers. Driven by insecurity about their lack of standardized writing courses (grousing that the term “universal requirement” carried with it the same xenophobic arrogance as baseball’s blithe staging of the “World Series”), the Rolling Stones, struggling through assignments at the London School of Economics, wrote “Three to Five Sources.” The song dramatizes both their raiding of American rhet/comp rock and their parallel anxiety about poaching intellectual property.

Research assignment
One-third of the grade
Teacher’s intention
to see of what I’m made
Now it’s the last minute
And the library’s closed
My internet connection
is kind of indisposed

Three to five sources
That’s what the guidelines say
Three to five sources
I will find them some day

My choice of topic,
which the teacher must approve
Should be in the public interest
So there’s opinion to move
So I started with abortion
‘Cause it worked back in high school
Teacher said that was off limits
So I switched to welfare rules

Three to five sources...

Evaluate assertions
Build an argument sublime
Try some academic journals
Not just Newsweek and Time
Documentation
Proper form for every cite
It is called plagiarism
when you come off too erudite

Three to five sources
MLA or APA
Three to five sources
I will cite them some day

The Kinks, blessed with a sunny irreverence, didn’t worry about attribution or influences when they cheerfully aligned themselves with their Greenwich Village friends, the TA staff at NYU, generating the anthemic “Oy Vey, I Wish They Could Write” out of a sense of the solidarity of rhet/comp rockers everywhere.

I’d be content to read their work in the daytime
Seems I have to read their work all of the time
The only time I sleep at night is by desk side
Seems I have to read their work all of the time
Oy veh, I wish they could write
Oy veh, I’ll be up all night
Oy veh, I wish they could write

I believe that every theme lasts forever
Out of a thousand million words, ten are clever
The only time I sleep at night is by desk side
Seems I have to read their work all of the time
Oy veh, I wish they could write
Oy veh, I’ll be up all night
Oy veh, I wish they could write

The sixties didn’t end the synergy of the U.S. and U.K. scenes. While he was still Declan McManus, son of a bandleader/teacher in Paddington, Elvis Costello pledged allegiance to a father of the rhetorical turn in “Rhetorical Stance,” a banner heralding the new wave of interest in rhet/comp.

Romeo was desperate, he had pages to fill
Crossed out every sentence ‘cause his purpose was nil
Wayne Booth he was waitin’ with a classical net
He said, “Listen to me and we’ll save your ass yet”

You gotta know about rhetorical stance
You gotta know about rhetorical stance
You gotta know it
Cause you’ve tried and you’ve tried
But you’re decontextualized
Yes, your subject is unfocused, your audience too wide

You gotta have a character sincere but not uptight
Cater to their feelings while you instruct and delight
Writing in a vacuum is just not gonna do it
It’s a fluid situation and you gotta adapt to it

You gotta know about rhetorical stance...

Romeo denied that Wayne could help him out
If everything’s rhetorical, there’ll always be doubt
You can learn the lingo from any TA geek
What’s the use of learnin’ if it’s certainty you seek

You gotta know about rhetorical stance...
BABY, I’LL SHARE MY CRAFT: STUDENT LORE

Ritchie Valens’ “Comma” was by no means the last word on student lore devoted to negotiating the first-year requirement. Bob Dylan spoke for his generation on every important classroom issue, though he insisted he was “just a writer,” not a messiah. He addressed the ubiquity of the dominant essay forms of the time in “Everybody Must Use Modes.”

It’s Narration when you have to tell a tale
Description when you must have more detail
Exposition when your facts are on parade
Persuasion when your aim is to persuade
Old man Montaigne just hit the road
Everybody must use modes

They’ll mode you when it’s causes you assess
They’ll mode you when you discern more from less
They’ll mode you when you draw a clear contrast
They’ll mode you when you compare first and last
How can you tell the tadpoles from the toads
Everybody must use modes

They’ll mode you when you must define your terms
They’ll mode you when you classify earthworms
They’ll mode you when the sets must be discrete
They’ll mode you when your sets must be complete
How can you tell the line’s been toed
Everybody must use modes

They’ll mode you when you want to find an answer
They’ll mode you when you divide dance from dancer
They’ll mode you when you want to ponder why
They’ll mode you when you want to sit and cry
Let’s break Ma Nature’s secret codes
Everybody must use modes

The Bard of Hibbing articulated the exasperation of students dealing with the pedagogical flavor of the month, whether it be the early stirrings of expressivist techniques or cultural critique in “All I Really Want to Do.”

I don’t want to express myself
Coalesce or confess myself
Address myself, outguess myself
Undress, assess, or duress myself
All I really want to do
is get a good grade from you

I ain’t lookin’ to write too well
Cite, delight, or recite too well
Extemporize well, categorize well
Apprise, surprise, or analyze well
All I really want to do
is get a good grade from you

I don’t want to describe my kin
Explore my sin or delve within
Be selective or reflective
Be directive or be effective
All I really want to do
is get a good grade from you

I don’t want to explore the world
Abhor, deplore, or implore the world
Valorize, problematize
Theorize, contextualize
All I really want to do
is get a good grade from you

A decade or so later and some hundreds of miles to the east, Bruce Springsteen brought his ironic insouciance to a rousing celebration of perhaps the most durable staple of old-fashioned rhet/comp ‘n’ roll in “Five Paragraphs.”

Well, now I’ve had my share of schoolin’
So I know just what to do
Ain’t no matter what topic I’m doin’
Got a plan and it’s clearly foolproof
Well, baby, I got the secret
It’s such a simple thing that you’ll laugh
Though the teacher don’t want me to leak it
Baby, I’ll share my craft
It don’t take a whole lot of thinkin’
It comes down to basic math
You gotta have your five paragraphs
Thesis in the front, thesis in the back
Between there are three chunks
Thesis fore and aft, then you got it right
Gotta have three reasons and you’ll sleep sound at night
Honey, don’t you worry if you got them you’re on track with those
five paragraphs, five paragraphs

Well, now, way back in the Bible
Eve and Adam had a writing class
And the Lord he was the teacher
He wanted them to do well and pass
So he assigned a personal essay
about what Eden meant to them
He wanted them to be authentic
Tell the truth and then say amen
But the serpent, he had a method
that would make that assignment a snap
He told them ‘bout the five paragraphs
Eden in the front, Eden in the back
Between there are three chunks
Eden fore and aft, ain’t this garden nice
Eve, just list three reasons and you’ll stay in paradise
Adam, don’t you worry, God will pat you on the back
for those five paragraphs, five paragraphs

Now, some folks say it’s scary
That I never use less or more
Some say it’s arbitrary
It could even be six or four
But I love how they’re always stable
I count on how they’re always true
Just one number to remember
And the fingers of one hand will do
I can do it with my eyes closed
‘Cause I’m always walkin’ down the same path
I gotta have my five paragraphs
Thesis in the front, thesis in the back
Between there are three chunks
Thesis fore and aft, then you got it right
Gotta have three reasons and you’ll sleep sound at night
Honey, don’t you worry, if you got them, you’re on track with those five paragraphs, five paragraphs

MEET THE NEW BOSS: THE WPA BLUES

Even though his life was short, Buddy Holly’s love affair with all things rhetorical led him to see the future allure (and trap) of WPA work, as detailed in the earliest song about writing program administration that we’ve recovered, “WPA.”

WPA
Why do I comply
WPA
I can’t tell you why
I say I’m gonna leave
I know that’s a lie
‘Cause WPA’s never die

Well, they’re fundin’ all my sections
Give me some discretion
An office, an assistant, a reduced load too
They say they love me dearly
and then they cut severely
Come next year Comp may be through

Oh, WPA...

Well, they give me some release time
Some planning and police time
The budget and the schedule and the complaints too
They say they need me sweetly
But as for tenure, we’ll see
Your publications are too few

Oh, WPA…
WPA (Cuckoo)
WPA (Cuckoo)
WPA (Cuckoo)
Bob Dylan, with his ability to occupy all subject positions in the national myth, saw the same bleak future for WPAs, voicing his warning with the world-weariness he brought to so many of his early songs in “Writing Czar.”

I ain’t gonna be the writing czar no more
I ain’t gonna be the writing czar no more
I can’t sleep at night ‘cause I overuse TAs
They’re enriched by the training if not by the pay
A few years down the road they’ll be out the door
I ain’t gonna be the writing czar no more

I ain’t gonna be the writing czar no more (2)
I sponsor program parties at least two times a year
I put out beer and pretzels and say “Glad you’re here”
Between bites they want to know when I can pay them more
I ain’t gonna be the writing czar no more

I ain’t gonna be the writing czar no more (2)
One hundred writing teachers writing comments till they drop
The teachers may turn over but the comments never stop
And still the students’ writing is fair to poor
I ain’t gonna be the writing czar no more

I ain’t gonna be the writing czar no more (2)
I go to every conference regardless of the cost
Jim Sledd hurts my feelings by calling me a boss
when all I do is mind the company store
I ain’t gonna be the writing czar no more

Elvis Costello weighed in on the counterpoint to dissatisfaction with WPA work with his imagining of a future without the universal requirement in “Writing’s an Elective.”

Nice plan, just one little defect
Selling a course they must elect
No more ensured enrollment
No more first-year requirement

Now that writing’s an elective
There’s no loot
Now that writing’s an elective
We’re so moot, moot, moot, moot
We acted up and then we got too smart
Now we’ve been booted, yeah, we’ve got no part

Back then we should have seen the signs
Critiques and quibbles up and down the line
All so disgusted by the status quo
Eminent voices saying “We got to close”
They said “We can no longer aid or abet it”
Now that abolition’s here, we may soon regret it
We don’t know how much more of this they will take
We’re scheduling sections but they’re not going to make

Now that writing’s an elective…

We’re alone now and we realize we’re finished
We still staff the standard courses but the staff will be diminished
They call it market logic when we’re below enrollment limits
Someone’s laughing at our problems cause we screwed up our business
We don’t know what to say to the TAs and adjuncts
Who are ready to hear the worst about their sections’ disappearance
It took a lot of history to make things this way
It only took our middle finger to blow it away

THE SAD WOMEN (AND MEN) IN THE BASEMENT:
JUST FOLKS, NEW WAVE, AND GRUNGE

They will always be with us? Perhaps. It’s certainly true that renderings of adjunct and part-timer experience have always been with us. An early example is folk rocker John Prine’s tender account of his teacher, a freeway flyer with sections at three colleges, “Adjunct from Montgomery.”

I am an old teacher
Can’t be none other
My manner is mild
I’m not one to be bold
The outlook is frightening
No one wants to hire
From Little Rock to Atlanta
The answer is no
Make me an adjunct
I’ll drive from Montgomery
Give me the rosters
Show me where to go
Don’t need an office
Just a class I can go to
The wages ain’t livin’
And there’s no parking, I know

I once was a young turk
I knew me the topoi
I was something to look at
Rhet/Comp theory man
But that was a long time
And no matter how I try
The quarters just fly by
Like a screen full of spam

Make me an adjunct…

The students are bitchin’
I can hear them buzzing
Don’t want to do nothing
But they all want an A
I am that poor person
Drive to work in the morning
Drive home in the evening
And still have mountains to grade

Make me an adjunct…

Every generation has to rewrite its key narratives, just as students need to rewrite essays about family crises and alternative energy sources. Chrissie Hynde had done her share of adjunct work in and around Akron, Ohio before she became the front woman for The Pretenders, as evidenced in “Big Old Teaching Load.”

Got a big old teaching load
It’s starting to grind me
I’m standing in the middle of life with my dreams behind me
Go the extra mile for every one I teach
As long as they don’t try showing up late
Or using the Web just to cheat

Now come on baby
I’m in crisis mode
Come on now
Got a big old teaching load, yeah

With a big old teaching load you see the darnedest things
Sleepy eyes drooping down and sneers without pity
Staring at your bloodshot eyes and old shoes
Give you outdated research loaded with fibs
Oh, I don’t see a line I want to read
When you teach a big chunk of the writing third world
The typos just come with the scenery

Now come on baby…

A big old teaching load is like anvils in a sack
I can’t get from the desk to the car
Without stopping to straighten my pack
All their words are readymade
When I get home, I have to grade
No ivory tower Ph.D.
I tend the kids, all ninety-three

Got a big old teaching load
Come on now

From Alabama to Ohio to Seattle and its grunge scene, the plight of adjuncts wouldn’t leave a sensitive soul alone. Kurt Cobain vented his rage in Nirvana’s “Smells Like Adjunct Spirit.”

It’s adjunct fun
It never ends
You get to choose
We get to bend
No long accord
Nothing assured
I know, I know
You’re quite concerned
Hell, no (16 times)

Got no rights now
We’re not dangerous
Here we are now
Underpay us
We do good work
For low wages
Here we are now
Underpay us
We ain’t got no
Nowhere to go
We can’t get no
No quid pro quo
Yeah

We’re cursed for what we do best
Like knock off jeans we’ve been distressed
This adjunct group has always been
We’ll be right here until the end

Got no rights now…

Canaries in the Coal Mine: Professional Challenges

Just as Russian writers in the 19th century were said to all have come out from Gogol’s overcoat, many songwriters can be said to have come out of Elvis Presley’s adjunct blues as they dealt with a range of professional disappointments and challenges, beginning even before they got their first jobs. Tom Petty, for instance, stalled at the dissertation stage at the University of Florida before, heartbroken, he led his band to California to find stand-in fame and fortune. He recounts his situation in “ABD.”

I passed quals, I passed comps
I don't talk too much about it
TA stipend has run out
There’s no way I can revive it
Everybody likes to tell me
“Enough already with the anomie
Hey, you don't have to live like an ABD”
Somewhere, some time
Somehow I gotta make it happen
Do the research, draft the draft
Find a way to hold my angst in
Don’t like people tellin’ me
“You’re in thrall to your lethargy
Hey, you don’t have to live like an ABD”

Adjunct work is the worst
Freeway flying, like the Dutchman I’m cursed
It wasn’t supposed to be this way
I was supposed to be a star at MLA (A!)

Somewhere, some time
Some mentor must have approved my proposal
Checked the oil, kicked the tires
of my bibliographic U-Haul
Now that mentor’s surly and mean
He’s disgusted by my time-to-degree
Hey, I don’t want to live like an ABD

Finishing the dissertation doesn’t solve every problem, though, as the job search has pitfalls of its own, as chronicled by Neil Young in “Four Jobs in Ohio.” (Bandmate David Crosby covered similar ground in “Almost Cut My Hair,” as did Stephen Stills in “Fellow Ships.”)

October—the job list coming
Two chapters down, three to go
My dossier’s out there drumming
Four jobs in Ohio

Gotta get down to it
Interviews coming around
Trim the hair or let it grow?
What if they ask me
To be both glib and profound
Can I pretend like I know?

Four jobs in Ohio
Three jobs in Ohio
Two jobs in Ohio
One job in Ohio
No jobs in Ohio

Finding the grail of a tenure-track position does not guarantee an untroubled future either. For all his fame as an international ambassador of reggae music and Rastafarian philosophy, Bob Marley never escaped the judgments of his peers at the University of Kingston, as recorded in “Publish or Perish.”

Publish or perish, and the journals must be refereed
Publish or perish, and the books must come out steadily

All around my department
They’re trying to break me down
They say they can’t bring me through safely
If my articles are less than three
If the new work is less than three
They say

Publish or perish, with decorum and deference
Publish or perish, write nothing that will give offense

Senior colleagues always baited me
For what I don’t know
It seems that they are all agreed
They say, “Your vita is just so-so
You can’t make it here on just so-so.”
They say

Publish or perish, and the presses must have pedigrees
Publish or perish, no fly-by-nights or vanities

Review came my way one day
And the rumors were flyin’
All of a sudden I see Chairman Top Down
Aiming to shoot me down
And he shot, he shot me down
And he say,

Publish or perish, no reward for mediocrities
Publish or perish, you talk too much, like Socrates
Diogenes/ The Burkean Jam: Rhet/Comp, Revision and Blues, and the Universal Chorus

It’s not only that you publish, but what you publish, as Bruce Springsteen learned when he joined the Rutgers faculty, with testimony in “Born in the MLA.”

Went to school for my Ph.D.  
Great books were my pedigree  
I planned to make it on the theory scene  
Gonna tell the grad students what the theory mean  
Born in the MLA (4)

Woke up from those elitist dreams  
Lost my taste for universal themes  
In my profession now I’m just a slob  
Cause I teach composition to the human mob  
Scorned by the MLA (4)  
Scorned by the MLA

In my department I’m a mystery  
Colleagues call my work a travesty  
Don’t teach the best that’s been thought and said  
Don’t spend my time with white guys long dead  
Scorned by the MLA (4)

Up for tenure, case was strong  
Publications were all wrong  
Taught too much, same old song

Couldn’t list any MLA panel  
They wanted tweed but I come in flannel

Still tryin’ to re-make history  
Want to find a site that’s right for me  
MLA’s got the biggest show  
But 4c’s is the place I want to go  
Born in good old 4c’s (4)

Born to Be Wired: Living in New Tech City

The profession has been transformed by technology, but there are persistent truths related to the travails of the human heart, as Cat Stevens, in an example of the Cosa Nostradamus Effect, noted in “Wired World.”
Now that I’ve made a website for you
You say that you’re a Webmaster too
And it’s breakin’ my heart, you’re surfin’
Baby, I’m lurkin’
But if you want to link, take good care
Hope you make a lot of nice links out there
But then a lot of nice links go dead out there

Oh, baby, baby, it’s a wired world
It’s hard to get by on a cyber-smile
Oh, baby, baby, it’s a wired world
I’ll always recall you like a file, girl

I’ve seen a lot of what the web can do
Need the latest downloads just to make it through
And I never want to see you crash, girl
A virus can thrash you
So if you want to chat, take good care
Hope you cruise a lot of nice MOOs out there
Just remember that MOOs can turn bad out there

Oh, baby, baby, it’s a wired world
It’s hard to get by on a cyber-smile
Oh, baby, baby, it’s a wired world
I’ll always recall you like a file, girl

La la la la la la la dot.com
La la la la la la dot.com
La la la la la la dot.com

Oh, baby, baby, it’s a wired world...

Also ahead of their time, the Eagles predicted the rise of open information banks in “Wiki Woman.”

Maven fair, in she digs
Really loves that wysiwyg
Quick loads changes into the night
She’s a restless writer on an endless site

Woo hoo, wiki woman
See her wise replies
Woo hoo, wiki woman
She got a jones to revise

She runs the spell check into the night
Don’t use CamelCase, cause it don’t look right
Sketchy content from that same buffoon
She blocks that IP address
No more blithering loon

Woo hoo, wiki woman…

Well, you know she wants to cover
This, that, and the other
She don’t have no time for nested tags
And for every stub she’s found
She adds something more profound
She can write straight through to morning
Till her eyes have bags

Woo hoo, wiki woman…

In an example of disciplinary crossover (as well as the Cosa Nostradamus Effect), the Sons of the Pioneers saw clearly the temptations that technology would bring in “Ghost Writers on the Web.”

As each semester lumbers on, the last assignment looms
Explore an issue of your choice, let innate genius bloom
But the teacher is a puzzle, each lecture sounds like Greek
Just set your browser roamin’...give free enterprise a peek

Http (http)
“W” three (“W” three)
Ghost writers on the web

We’ve got ten thousand papers here, each one is tailor-made
to satisfy the keenest eye if scrutiny is paid
Proper documentation, each assertion circumspect
Don’t even have to proofread....the spelling is correct
Http (http)
Term papers free (term papers free)
Ghost writers on the web

They say the process movement will make us obsolete
Some teachers only give a grade when process is complete
We have outlines to prove inquiry, journal entries for each day
We even have some early drafts, evolving straight to “A”

Http (http)
Process pain-free (process pain-free)
Ghost writers on the web

**THE SONG REMAINS THE SAME: DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

The canon is vast. As Burke notes in his originary narrative, the “hour grows late,” and ultimately all of us must depart. The Composition Blues Band will do what it can before last call to restore as many songs as possible to the rhet/comp songbook.

**Notes**


**Editorial Post Script:**

While we acknowledge Diogenes’ remarkable contribution, we must wonder how he managed to ignore Bob Seger’s immortal:

Here I am, marking red again
Here I am, full of rage
There I go, grading hard again
There I go, turn the page.

*Finis*