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## Teaching and Writing True Stories Through Feminist, Womanist and Black Feminist Epistemologies

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Since the 2016 election, the U.S. has seen a period of extraordinary dishonesty from the executive branch on everything from lies about political opponents, the blurring of what makes news “fake,” the audience at the president’s inauguration and rallies, the denial of global climate-change, discrediting the accounts of sexual assault survivors, denying the realities of disaster relief in Puerto Rico—the list goes on. Daniel Dale, The Washington Bureau Chief of the *Toronto Star*, maintained a regularly updated fact-checking page that attempted to record all of the lies told by Donald Trump during his presidency. The page claims 5,276 lies from when he took office on January 20, 2017 until June 2019, when the page ceased being updated (Dale).

One optimistic response to this crisis is that the students with whom I work are primed for the issue of “what makes something true.” They are seeing first-hand and frequently how power and privilege sculpt what publics consider “truth,” “facts” and “history.” They get it. They are ready. This situation makes a key question of creative nonfiction more urgent than ever: How does one teach students to write true stories—a term used here to describe all forms of creative nonfiction—when memory, documentation and the nature of “truth” all remain in flux? By bringing together feminist, womanist and

Black feminist<sup>1</sup> epistemologies with the creative writing workshop's exploration of true stories, educators can approach this question with a methodology that offers opportunities for intersectional feminist interventions in the writing classroom, which allows educators to demonstrate how reading and writing exist in social environments, not in a vacuum. For the sake of discussing the matter of truth in writing "true" stories, these epistemologies can be paired with existing feminist pedagogies for a radical revisioning of the creative writing classroom. Together they also act as a bibliography for methods of troubling "truth" in the genre of creative nonfiction.

The pyramidal shape of the "creative writing industrial complex" at the start of the twentieth century may make this shift difficult, as institutional change frequently requires investment from those with the power to make systemic change. Though there are already educators of creative writing who have found a place for feminism, critical race theory, postcolonial theory, and Queer, disability and Crip theories within the workshop (or other styles of creative writing classroom), many MFA programs across the U.S. continue to lack engagement in cultural studies. An epistemological shift is likely to require a shift in aesthetics, and such a shift is tied to the continued growth of creative writing programs and their effect on how readers and scholars define creative nonfiction as "true stories, well told" (Gutkind).

As such, change will require a commitment from engaged feminists, Black feminists and womanists throughout the academy (particularly those academics who can leverage any sort of privilege) to challenge notions of what is "true" in storytelling and what methods are worthwhile and fair. Likewise, it will take commitment from those interested in revising the workshop (and creative writing education generally) who do not yet identify as feminists, Black feminists or womanists, a commitment to educate themselves about

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<sup>1</sup> Though not directly explored in this essay, there is existing discourse about distinctions between Feminism (and its various waves), Black Feminism, Womanism, Lesbian Feminism, and Black Lesbian Feminism (in addition to various historical waves and sub-genres). Though some scholars may consider each of these movements under an ideological umbrella of "Feminism," Black scholars in particular have made a strong case for considering each position a distinct intellectual framework. This essay will delineate these distinct traditions where it is helpful for clarity.

these traditions and how they intersect with pedagogy, writing and reading. Such an approach can revise the creative writing workshop to be less binary and hierarchical by working *with* students to recontextualize what “nonfiction,” “fact” and “truth” can mean (and have meant historically).

### **Troubling the Foundations of “Creative Nonfiction”**

The trouble with creative nonfiction, at its root, is the trouble of truth in a postmodern world: the rejections of grand narratives and a shift away from hierarchical, singular “Truth” have left readers striving for new ways of knowing and confirming. To start, postmodernist thinking provides the social constructionist framework for understanding the categories of “creative nonfiction” and literary genre generally. Genre is an approximate taxonomy, not an absolute reality. The boundaries between any genre are historical, disputable, and descriptivist, not immutable. Further, “creative nonfiction” is a twentieth-century term to describe long-standing literary practices shared before such language was used to describe it. Even in the twenty-first century, a variety of terms are used to describe these practices and the sub-genres they produce. Like many socially-constructed categories, what is considered “creative nonfiction” may not be uniformly agreed upon, but an opportunity for discourse exists at loci of shared understandings of the genre.

In an attempt to succinctly define these practices, Lee Gutkind, the twenty-first century writer of the genre and founder of the magazine *Creative Nonfiction*, has famously called this sort of writing “true stories, well told.” This description is the starting point for many conversations about the genre, but it is only a start. In a sense, the definition merely sidesteps the big question at the front of this genre: what is true? Gutkind himself has gone on to define this aspect of the genre a bit more, and while writers may fall on every side of this issue, Gutkind is clear that he believes writers should strive for correctness of details in creative nonfiction. In an essay on the “Three R’s of Narrative Nonfiction,” Gutkind states, “Yes, truth in memoir is often a matter of memory and perception, but that doesn’t mean that the writer shouldn’t

strive for accuracy at every opportunity, even when ideas and information are presented in scenes.” He goes on to state the importance of both research and lived experience in creative nonfiction, both in that essay and throughout his long career. While Gutkind’s approach to research attempts to define the elements that make up nonfiction, such an approach can be weighed down by assumptions about what sort of detail and documentation makes up the nature of truth in true stories. Gutkind’s poetics and ethics of the genre are a helpful base from which to explore the notion of Feminist epistemologies, since the dichotomy of perception v. accuracy is also one of the central topics addressed by Sandra Harding’s notion of “strong objectivity.”

### **What is True?**

Examining this concept through a feminist lens, Donna Haraway and Sandra Harding, two foundational scholars on the concept of feminist epistemology, note how poststructuralism has deconstructed the concept of a singular narrative about any matter. This critical lens allows scholars to examine how discourse has defined both reality and history. It also offers that the language meaning-makers use, and who has access to defining and deploying that language, is a matter based in power and privilege. Feminist postmodernist scholars (like Haraway and Harding) interrogate the gendered elements of this discourse of power and meaning-making. In her 1988 essay “Situated Knowledges, The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective,” Haraway begins her argument by extending the Marxist criticism of the “supposed objectivity” of Objectivism. From here she builds toward an alternative to any claims on universal knowledge, an alternative which acknowledges that rational knowledge should not pretend to be from nowhere (and thus, everywhere) (582). Haraway calls this illusory claim of a removed, encompassing perspective “the god trick.” It is not pure pluralism that Haraway claims—she does not make the claim that all competing knowledges are equal. Instead she notes that one should reject the claim that *any* knowledge, including objective empiricism, is free from historical and cultural positioning. Haraway offers



an alternative to false objectivity, noting “the alternative to relativism is partial, locatable, critical knowledges sustaining the possibility of webs of connections called solidarity in politics and shared conversations in epistemology” (589). Writing just a few years later, Sandra Harding expands and elaborates on these notions from the perspective of “Standpoint Epistemology.” Harding builds into feminist epistemology the notion of “strong objectivity.” This idea is distinct from the “weak objectivity” of Objectivism in that it neither attempts to ignore its own historical and cultural positioning, and in the way feminist epistemology accepts that some standpoints are better suited to producing certain knowledge projects. This epistemology is a starting point for troubling the notion of nonfiction: before writers and educators of the genre consider the methods associated with uncovering truth (research), they might first consider the ways in which truth and reality themselves are historically, culturally and politically positioned.

Such a standpoint epistemology is also near the core of Afrocentrism and Black studies. Writing after the foundational works of Molefi Asante (most notably, *The Afrocentric Ideal*), Black studies scholar Dr. Ruth Reviere explain how Afrocentrism rejects a European understanding of objectivity. In “Toward an Afrocentric Research Methodology,” and “The Canons of Afrocentric Research,” Reviere builds upon Asante’s earlier work on Afrocentric epistemology, and offers five canons of Afrocentric research built around the idea that:

Objectivity is an impossible standard to which to hold researchers; rather, researchers should be judged on the fairness and honesty of their work. Because, as I am arguing, objectivity is an impossible ideal, the researcher should present sufficient information about herself or himself to enable readers to assess how, and to what extent, the researcher’s presence influenced the choice, conduct, and outcomes of the research. (“Toward an Afrocentric Research Methodology” 714)

Reviere—and by extension, Asante and the meta-disciplines of Black studies and Afrocentrism—reveals the connections between inequity and knowledge construction. She offers the five canons of Afrocentric

research as an alternative approach to scholarship steeped in such inequity: 1) *Ukweli*, truth is grounded in the experiences of the community, 2) *Kujitoa*, knowledge is constructed, and not dispassionately objective, 3) *Utuliva*, justice—measured “in terms of the fairness of its procedure and the openness of its application”—is required for legitimate research, 4) *Ujamaa*, rejecting the researcher/participant separation and recognizing a researchers place in the community, and 5) *Uhaki*, producing research that is fair to, and mindful of, all participants. (“The Canons of Afrocentric Research,” 262-269)

Together with Harding and Haraway, these scholars offer that accepting the notion of situated knowledges is an act that can begin to examine why women and racial minorities have historically been excluded from the creation of knowledge that is celebrated by Western institutions, why supposedly impartial scientific method and empiricism have historically benefited men over women (and people of European descent over those of African descent), and why an epistemology centering “strong objectivity” can work toward a liberatory mode of meaning-making. Applied to the topic of creative nonfiction, their findings reveal how notions of truth are often gendered and racialized, even in the sciences and in the history that scholars choose to document.<sup>2</sup>

### Memory, Record, and Objectivity

Standpoint epistemologies can complicate any genre defined primarily by its veracity. This complication can create significant fault lines when memory, documentation, and journalistic objectivity become troubled too.

One concern is that the lines between fiction and nonfiction stories begin to blur. Among the notable writers and scholars who have sounded off on this subject is Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison.

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<sup>2</sup> Before going any further, the discussion of these scholars may insist on revealing the researcher’s relative position to privilege and power. I am a Queer scholar born in the U.S. who has historically benefitted from male- and white-privilege. My preparation in feminist, womanist and Afrocentric scholarship stems, in large part, from graduate study at an HBCU.

Writing in a craft anthology on memoir, Morrison connects the fiction that she writes to the liberation autobiographies of early American literature. She notes how these narratives were written with a rhetorical purpose of convincing white readers to empathize with people who were enslaved in order to end the practice. In doing so, these narratives often left out details that such readers might find “inflammatory.” Morrison states that one such detail is the interior life of the narrators, and that her work, classified as fiction, attempts to tell the true story of that interior, to put that element back into the narrative of slavery and liberation in the United States. Discussing her own writing, Morrison notes that fiction is generally drawn in contrast to fact, but that she considers it her responsibility not to lie in her work. She states that, for her, “the crucial distinction. . . is not the difference between fact and fiction, but the distinction between fact and truth” (93). She notes how her work attempts to seek out the image that is most true, and that she believes that all fictions are inexorably tied to memory—thus, Morrison combs her memory as one of her truth telling tools in her “true” fictions.

The functions of memory and truth come up frequently in the stories that are widely accepted as nonfiction too, especially when either function fails: in *The Year of Magical Thinking*, Joan Didion discusses how trauma caused by the death of a loved one altered her notions of memory, time and even reality. In *Chronology of Water*, Lidia Yuknavitch presents a Bildungsroman in which her memory is troubled and fragmented by trauma and drug use in a narrative that both represents this fragmentation and discusses its incongruity. In *The Night of the Gun*, by David Carr, a long-time journalist questions his own means of memory and documentation as he compares his recollection of significant life events during a period of heavy drug use alongside the memories of other friends and family who experienced them. He reveals not only inconsistencies, but sometimes outright reversals of significant details of the events—often details that implicate the memoirist.

Among classic memoirs, Richard Wright’s *Black Boy* is one book around which the discussion of truth has been long-standing. The veracity of Wright’s 1945 book has been challenged by many scholars

throughout the years, including W.E.B. DuBois, who said the story “makes one wonder just exactly what its relations to truth is.” Yet his story of coming-of-age amidst Jim Crow laws has also been praised for the honest ways in which it outlines and condemns America’s racist practices. Though it is now well established that the memoir fictionalizes many aspects of the story, how to classify it—fictionalized autobiography or autobiographical fiction—remains contested.

In more contemporary literature, Tyrese Coleman’s *How to Sit* exists at a similar intersection between fiction and nonfiction. Coleman, however, embraces the ambiguity between fiction and nonfiction, calling her book on family, grief, growing-up and Black womanhood “a memoir in stories and essays” and “nonfiction and not-quite-nonfiction.” In a 2018 interview on her work, Coleman acknowledges the fallibility of memory and how it relates to writing: “I think some memoirists...feel uncomfortable admitting to themselves that their memories aren’t infallible, and that sometimes they are fictionalizing some aspects of what they’re writing. What I’m saying is: embrace it” (qtd in Kasbeer).

Beyond a literary troubling of memory, science might offer scholars the tools to do the same. Dr. Elizabeth Loftus is an expert in memory, specifically the phenomenon of false memory and how such memories can be altered or generated. In a lecture titled “How Reliable is Memory?” Loftus explains how memory is not like a recording device, a true, exact and recallable method of recording events, but rather, it is faulty and easily altered through both intentional and unintentional contamination. Loftus has built a celebrated career around research showing how subjects allow suggestion to alter their memories, either through the shaping of the questions used to recall that memory, or through intentional generation of false memories, created through misinformation from experts or fellow eyewitnesses to an event or situation. However, Loftus is not without controversy. Her work (and her testimony) are often used in criminal cases, and the notion of faulty memory has significant implications regarding the testimony of survivors of violence; this application is a particularly volatile consideration in the feminist and Black feminist context, as justice systems worldwide have historically diminished or disregarded the testimony of

women. For example, it was not until *White v. Crook* in 1966 that the U.S. Supreme Court even affirmed an equal right of women to serve as members of a jury, a case that involved Alabama's attempt to retain the right to exclude women and Black Americans from juries. According to the Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network (RAINN), out of 1,000 instances of sexual assault, five cases will lead to a felony conviction. In May of 2020, the Trump Administration set new Title IX guidelines for reporting sexual assault on college campuses that advocates, legal experts, and leadership at universities across the country have explained make the process of reporting sexual assault on campus more difficult and painful for survivors. The context of violence has far-reaching legal implications for survivors, particularly when those in positions of power do not have experience in the ways that memory reacts to trauma.<sup>3</sup>

Viewed through the epistemological lens of Harding and Haraway, Loftus' work might be best viewed while considering its impact—if no research is objective and *unpositioned*, how might scholars instead consider Loftus' work in a way that can support the lives of women, particularly survivors of violence? How might scholars consider the value of this research without ignoring its adverse impact?

If memory is an imperfect tool for the nonfiction storyteller, what about documentation? Creative nonfiction is a genre that often runs parallel and sometimes overlaps with writing for news; some educators cite the “New Journalism” movement as a key moment in the genre of creative nonfiction, while others, including Lee Gutkind, consider the term as a once-trendy synonym for creative nonfiction (“What’s the Story”). In the writing classroom—be it the research, journalistic or creative writing classroom—many educators teach journalism as part of the historical record, and as such, a major research tool. As a research tool, students are taught how this style of writing, its ethics, and the fact-checking devices that support it can be considered primary or secondary sources for “facts.” Yet the problem of

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<sup>3</sup> This is an aspect necessary to mention here, but worth further exploration in another time and space. Christian Exoo's “[Using CNF to Teach the Realities of Intimate Partner Violence to First Responders: An Annotated Bibliography](#)” and Christian Exoo and Sydney Fallone's “[Using CNF to Teach the Realities of Sexual Assault to First Responders: An Annotated Bibliography](#)” are good brief introductions to the subject.

objectivity is well documented in this field. In “Rethinking Objectivity,” former deputy editor of the *Columbia Journalism Review* Brett Cunningham collects perspectives on the subject from some of the most notable journalists of the period just after the turn of the millennium. As he documents the history of “objectivity” and its failings, Cunningham notes how so much of what journalists do—choice of language, choice of source, how a story is framed, what positions are considered as ‘both’ sides—is subjective, stating “[w]hen we move beyond stenography, reporters make a million choices, each one subjective.”

Cunningham also notes how the real bias in journalism is not toward a left or right partisanship, but a class-based bias. He notes that “most newsroom diversity efforts, though, focus on ethnic, racial, and gender minorities which can often mean people with different skin color but largely the same middle-class background and aspirations.” The 2019 Diversity Survey of the American Society of News Editors suggests that the efforts Cunningham mentions have yet to be fully successful, as women and ethnic minorities continue to be underrepresented in the newsroom, particularly in leadership positions. Polling from the Pew Research Center suggests that this imbalance may also be reflected in the sources with whom journalists speak: a 2019 survey shows that people who are white, older and college educated are more likely than others to have spoken to a journalist. Writing for *Teen Vogue* in early 2020, journalist and cultural writer Sara Li collected testimony from nine young journalists and editors who are comfortable speaking about the problem with an imagined “objectivity” or “neutrality.” The responses Li shares reveal a snapshot of young professionals in this field already working toward overcoming the historical deficiencies of such an imagined objectivity. For instance, Allegra Hobbs, staff writer for *Study Hall* considers the issue one of power, stating “there is no such thing as journalistic objectivity, and attempts to maintain it often result in reporting that is overly generous to the powerful.” *Vogue* writer Emma Specter echoes a similar sentiment when she states in her response: “when we talk about objectivity, more often

than not, what we're really talking about is privilege." These data and commentaries trouble the notion of objectivity, which troubles journalism as a record of truth for both writers and researchers.<sup>4</sup>

One solution may be expanding what we consider our systems of meaning-making and making room for those who have historically been excluded. This is the Black feminist and intersectional approach proposed by Dr. Patricia Hill Collins. She explains in her 2000 collection *Black Feminist Thought* what such a Black feminist epistemology might mean for Black women as she observes how Black women have been excluded from the act of meaning-making by being denied participation in epistemological systems historically controlled by white men. Beyond participation itself, a major factor in this exclusion is the way in which systems of validating knowledge—such as peer-reviewed research—exists within a white, male epistemological framework. New ways of knowing are expected to align with previous epistemological framework in some manner, and they cannot be too far outside of established meaning-making structures. This situation has a disparate effect on Black women in particular. (Which is to say, institutions of higher learning and academic publishing in the U.S. have evolved within an environment of laws and culture built by and for white men. As such, the devices that exist within them too often still favor white men. Though this situation is historical, it is also ongoing. However, it is worth recognizing the ways in which Black women have excelled in this environment despite policies that are not designed to support them.) Hill Collins calls for an alternative epistemology that articulates the standpoint of Black women, one that accepts the wisdom of “lived experience” as criterion of meaning. Such a framework expands who is

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<sup>4</sup> One of the topics explored by theorist Patricia Hill Collins is the matter of which sources scholars consider worthwhile for academic discourse. This essay on epistemology is subject to the same pressures as the broader discourse Hill Collins explores. Though established as a spin-off of *Vogue* (which covers fashion and celebrity news) written specifically for an audience of teenage girls, in recent years *Teen Vogue* has become an online platform for thoughtful coverage of politics and current affairs delivered in straightforward language. In its 2020 media kit, the publication brags of an audience primarily made up of women aged 18-24. Though it may be easy for some academics to dismiss *Teen Vogue* as outside of the purview of academic discourse, a small part of this essay's thesis (and the work of my interlocutors) is to suggest that scholars might be better served to ask “what role can a roundup of voices from young professionals, in a publication written for young women, play in providing a more comprehensive understanding of a subject?”

accepted as an authority on “truth” by acknowledging the voices that such white patriarchal systems have excluded from meaning-making.

How can personal experience be both an inconsistent method and a criterion of meaning? The epistemological frameworks offered by Harding, Haraway and Reviere offer tools with which nonfiction writers might make sense of this contradiction of “lived experience.” By applying a strong objectivity, writers engaged in research can consider how no method will capture a singular objective truth, but that each approach can offer partial, positioned truths. By expanding the list of valued methods, while also acknowledging the shortcomings of any given technique, practitioners of nonfiction make the genre more equitable by troubling existing “god-trick” claims through the act of positioning them, and by recognizing the social, cultural and political effects of any claim on “truth.”

### **Application in the Creative Writing Classroom**

In a critique of the creative writing classroom from a feminist perspective, creative nonfiction author Dr. Kass Fleisher explores the problematic and hegemonic nature of the workshop model of teaching creative writing. Among the issues that she examines are the conservative origins of the model, the gendered imbalance in who receives tenure in English departments, and the resulting aesthetic that these factors create. For instance, Fleisher cites a history of writers and scholars who have noted how themes traditionally viewed as masculine (war) are favored in literature and writing courses over themes associated with femininity (home, the internal self). Theory, she says, may be the tool with which one can critically analyze and resist these shortcomings of the classroom. Fleisher concludes with a call for a radical pedagogy that dismantles the binaries that hinder the classroom: teacher/student, right/wrong grammar and the works/doesn't-work aesthetic (114).

Radical and feminist pedagogies have been emerging in the creative writing classroom for several decades, and, where applied, these pedagogies have begun to address the shortcoming of the existing



model that, according to Dr. Pamela Annas and Joyce Peseroff in “A Feminist Approach to Creative Writing Pedagogy,” aims to “toughen and prepare practicing writers for criticism from the outside world.” In their chapter from *Creative Writing Pedagogies for the Twenty-First Century*, Annas and Peseroff address some of the methods to revise such a model. These include offering creative and analytic writing assignments in both composition and creative writing courses, allowing the writer to introduce the work before it is read, encouraging students to speak up to challenge identity-based assumptions in the classroom, providing feedback in small groups rather than whole-class workshops, writing letters to the small group participants that include any feedback that you did not have the opportunity to tell them in class, and more. Each of these revisions are meant to work against a hierarchical model that favor a particular writing style or classroom style, and that engage in the sort of binaries that Fleisher describes in her essay.

What the texts from Annas, Peseroff and Fleisher describe is a historical (and ongoing) deficiency in the creative writing classroom not only to support women writers, but to find more complete and humanist ways of supporting students of any gender by applying feminist pedagogies. They also present several revisions that have had success in improving the incomplete model of the workshop. Likewise, while Afrocentric, womanist and Black feminist epistemologies were designed to overcome a historic whiteness of both the academy and society as a whole, all students benefit from a more equitable approach to learning and knowing. I have intentionally placed these pedagogy texts alongside the literary criticism and epistemological work in order to show how scholars who are interested in dismantling patriarchal and Eurocentric norms in the creative writing classroom might also consider how the notions of genre and truth contribute to the model’s deficiency, and how addressing issues of truth in narrative storytelling—in reading and in discussion—might support the workshop’s revision.

Though using different terms than Harding, Haraway, Reviere or Hill Collins, the work of Annas and Peseroff examines the situatedness of creative writing pedagogies (and by extension, epistemologies), that favor historically privileged positions. In doing so, they make space to challenge which skills,

processes, and documentation styles should be favored in the classroom, and to train new practitioners. Many of those practitioners will go on to publish work in the genre; generate new scholarship on nonfiction; become editors of journals, anthologies and books; and/or become feminist educators themselves. Even in undergraduate and non-major workshops, where fewer students are expected to participate as continuing knowledge creators in the discipline, feminist educators have the opportunity to recontextualize what the genre means to emerging readers of creative nonfiction. As with any change, it is a slow process, but it is in this space that feminist epistemologies may help educators break open the “nonfiction” aspect of this genre by educating its future writers and readers.

## Conclusion

Applied to Gutkind’s explanation of nonfiction, these texts give writers and educators grounds for considering how the divide between research and real-life might be reconsidered, along with his simple explanation of the genre as “true stories, well told.” The work of Reviere and Hill Collins proposes an epistemology that puts wisdom on equal footing with knowledge and rethinks the parameters of what many scholars call “research.” Such an approach shows how the lived experience that Gutkind describes *is* research. Their work also suggests that undoing this distinction supports the project of undoing the disadvantages women have had in recognized fields of meaning-making. Morrison’s work shows how Gutkind’s definition itself is troubled. If scholars are to consider Morrison’s work an act of returning truths that were deleted from liberation narratives out of necessity, then one might also consider Morrison’s works—in her essay she mentions *Sula* and *Beloved*, both generally categorized as fiction—as “true stories, well told.”

One might dwell on how Loftus’s work on memory troubles this emphasis on recollection, but when examined alongside the epistemological work of Haraway and Harding, one can view how it remains as reliable as other modes of documentation, and better suited for a classroom that emphasizes the

liberatory project of education. Memory, even imperfect, can play a role in producing the “partial, locatable, critical knowledges” that Haraway describes. Haraway and Harding (along with the postmodernist theorists with whom they engage) recognize the incomplete abilities of scientific and journalistic methods that attempt to position themselves as *unsituated*, that is, universal, standing nowhere, and thus everywhere at once. One of the results of Haraway and Harding’s usurping this “god-trick” epistemology is that they establish that all knowledges are positioned—all ways of knowing possess strengths and shortcoming, but only some of these positions are well suited for projects that attempt to overcome the marginalization of women. Hill Collins and Morrison show how memory and the wisdom of lived experience are epistemological methods positioned to develop such a project, and thus, from a Black feminist/womanist standpoint, most capable of truth telling.

Thus, if educators are interested in revising the creative writing workshop in ways that overcome the problems discussed by Fleisher and addressed by Annas and Peseroff, they might consider their definitions of creative nonfiction and truth in storytelling alongside classroom management strategies and assignments. By offering students the tools to examine truth and methods for uncovering truth, educators work against elitist, white, masculine epistemologies. None of this is to say that other research methods—historical and narrative documentation, scientific method, etc.—are not useful tools for creative nonfiction, or that Gutkind’s entire approach to the genre be thrown out. Rather, these methods must also start from a standpoint that acknowledges how history, science, philosophy, writing and even research have been knowledge projects that have historically excluded women and racial minorities, and have written about their experiences incompletely.

Scholars engaged in feminist and Black feminist epistemologies can begin by acknowledging these shortcomings with their students and discussing various responses to them. When they do, they open up the opportunity to address these issues. By doing so in a way that acknowledges situatedness and celebrates memory and lived experience as academic (as well as narrative) tools, educators can create new

approaches to the genre and the creative nonfiction classroom that benefits all students, writers, educators and readers.

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