REVIEW ESSAY: EFFECTING CHANGE— THE FIRST YEAR WRITING COURSE AND THE CIRCULATION OF PRACTICE

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John Trimbur. *The Call to Write*. New York: Longman, 1999.[1] 656 pp. ISBN 0-321-01033-7. $49.00

Donald McQuade and Christine McQuade. *Seeing and Writing*. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2000. 363 pp. ISBN 0-3121-8016-0. $44.75.

Watkins, Evan. Work Time: English Departments and The Circulation of Cultural Value. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989. 290 pp. ISBN 0804716919

Nobody becomes an English professor in order to grade papers, write committee meeting minutes and letters of recommendation, or argue with the dean about the need for a Xerox machine in the departmental office... (Watkins, *Work Time*, 1).

Why *do* any of us become English teachers? What draws us and keeps us? What is it we hope to accomplish with our teaching, scholarship, *and* service? These questions are significant, on both personal and disciplinary levels. Evan Watkins, in *Work Time*, offers an answer: we become English teachers because of the relative freedom of work time the position allows—the tenured position, that is. Further, Watkins argues that in taking advantage of this freedom, we can effect political change through our work. I suspect that this potential to effect change has a great deal to do with why we become teachers. John Trimbur has written a textbook for the first year writing course which renders material the potential for change. Donald and Christine McQuade, too, have created a textbook for the first year writing course which

attempts to realize a potential for change, but which, despite its strengths, does not make that potential material. Watkins' theorizing about work in English departments allows us to examine these textbooks critically; Trimbur and the McQuades have published textbooks which are described by their publishers as "cultural studies" textbooks. Still, they share a desire for change, and also seem to want to effect change through practice (i.e., writing practices). They differ significantly, however, in their view of the role of practice in the first year writing course.

Watkins' book is often brilliant, occasionally amusing, and at times frustrating. He argues for a new understanding of the work done in English departments. This is important and necessary scholarship, of which we have not yet seen enough. He relies heavily on Marx's concepts of abstract and concrete labor to articulate patterns of circulation in English departments. He also devotes a significant chapter to his reading of Antonio Gramsci's work (on whom Watkins relies in part because of his "current popularity" (46)) and Perry Anderson's reading of Gramsci. Watkins calls on Gramsci's work to establish his claim that a "war of position" is necessary to realize the potential for political change we are afforded by our positions in English departments. Watkins goes on to argue that what makes a war of position possible in the first place is that the institutions in which we work, like the State which Gramsci discusses, "is not a monolithic instrument of the ruling classes" (52). At moments like this, I find myself nodding in agreement with Watkins. The institutions in which English departments are situated are not monolithic and are subject to change, as recent theorizing about institutional critique makes so clear (Porter, Sullivan, Grabill, Blythe, and Miles 2000). This potential for change is part of what makes Gramsci's work so popular and so exciting, and explains why so many of us are still "here."

Watkins also makes clear how English departments are situated within the larger intra-institutional and cultural contexts. It is this situatedness which allows us to enjoy a degree of autonomy we are not likely to find in many other work settings.

He says, quite insightfully, that the relative autonomy of positions in English is part of the strategy for recruiting people into English—"theory must promise in order to recruit" (8). Yet, despite the volume of theory and scholarship generated through work in English departments, Watkins argues that what circulates *from* English departments is abstract labor in the form of evaluation. And although Watkins makes clear that in a general sense, what gets done in English departments is ideological work, the values which are shaped by this work do not circulate directly from our departments. Of course, evaluations do circulate from English departments, in any number of ways, formally or informally, but is that the only "commodity" with an exchange value that really ends up circulating from English departments? Given Watkins' often narrow view of English departments and the work done in them, evaluations are all that might circulate from these sites.

In developing his argument about the results of abstract labor, Watkins draws a parallel between the histories of English departments and the advertising industry. Here, Watkins' claims make clear his very limited view of the discipline. In the chapter entitled "Work and Value," Watkins focuses exclusively on literature and literary study to build his argument and draw the connection to advertising. Literature circulates in ways similar to ads, and as such, literature has a "potentially decisive social influence" (153). In tracing these histories, which are interesting, but nonetheless do not seem to be essential to his larger argument, Watkins says that he "wants to . . . discover what opportunities exist for a praxis of cultural politics at the location of work, and how to take advantage of them to wage a war of position" (165).

If social action and political change can be realized through the work in English departments, then John Trimbur's *The Call to Write* is a handbook for how to make it happen. Trimbur is not a professor of English per se, but rather the Paris Fletcher Distinguished Professor of Humanities and Director of Technical, Scientific, and Professional Communication at Worcester

Polytechnic Institute (fit that on your business card!). Trimbur's work in the field of Rhetoric and Composition is both important and well-known (*The Politics of Writing Instruction: Postsecondary*, a collection he co-edited, is just one example, and one which won a CCCC Outstanding Book Award). Clearly, much of Trimbur's scholarship and research went into conceiving and creating *The Call to Write.* The book is built around genres of writing with a very explicit and clear eye toward social action through literacy practices.

Trimbur's preface makes clear his belief in what can and does circulate from English departments or departments in which writing is taught and practiced:

> *The Call to Write* offers students an education in writing, with the goal of enabling them to see how writing connects individuals to others and to the cultural practices and social institutions that shape their lives. In this regard, the call to write—the felt sense that something needs to be said—presents writing not just as a skill to master but as a means to participate meaningfully in the common life and to influence its directions. (xxv-xxvi)

Further, one of the unique features of this book is an emphasis throughout on the ethics of writing and writers' responsibilities. In each chapter, Trimbur has included at least one "Ethics of Writing" section, each of which is marked off visually. In each case, readers are presented with guidelines or scenarios in which ethical practice is central. It is through the ethics sections that Trimbur makes the connection between student writing practices and the larger institutional, social, and cultural contexts in which they find themselves working. In other words, this textbook for the first year writing class is all about effecting change through the circulation of practice from the English department. Trimbur argues for this view of writing in his more recent work as well:

> I am trying to . . . amplify the students' sense of what constitutes the production of writing by tracing its circulation in order to raise questions about how professional expertise is articulated to the social formation, how it undergoes rhetorical transformation . . . and how it might produce not only individual careers but also socially useful knowledge. (214)

A key concept in this book is the call to write—what it is, how we recognize it, how we respond to it. That is, context, and subsequently, genre are important in this textbook. Trimbur offers a wide range of specific, real-world contexts, and responses to those contexts, to teachers and students working to connect academic and literacy practices to social and cultural contexts and change. Writing is presented here as a complex, multi-faceted act, no part of which should be overlooked, from the act of writing itself to document design and ethical practice. In every case, every example, every genre Trimbur approaches, the relationships between these practices and institutional or social and cultural contexts are drawn out, imagined, commented on. And in Trimbur's genre approach, it seems that every conceivable genre is included: shopping lists, party invitations, signage, web sites, letters, reports, reviews, and more. As a result of this genre approach, teachers and students then also have opportunity to work across disciplinary lines, or intra-institutionally, as Watkins would say.

The Call to Write is a carefully crafted and theoretically informed textbook for the first year writing context. It is also innovative, forward-looking, and challenging, but user-friendly. And, not incidentally, I'm sure, it is one of the few writing texts which looks like textbooks in other disciplines—hard cover, a lot of graphics, full trim size, a pleasantly hefty weight. In many ways, it is a fresh and exciting approach among so many surprisingly stale and decidedly unexciting textbooks. In fact, if readers, student or faculty, are likely to find fault with this text, it may be that it is so new, so vastly different from a current-traditional

approach, for example. Trimbur doesn't subsume his ideological or political identifications, even if he doesn't name them specifically. In the history of composition textbooks, this is a relatively new development. Further, Trimbur's pedagogy presupposes an active citizen, a writer working in the polis to effect change, stir up controversy and dissensus. As such, Trimbur's approach to writing asks a great deal more from students and teachers than just writing—it asks for involvement, for investment, for a stake. In other words, it offers many calls to write, all of them demanding. I am excited enough about teaching writing and about effecting change to believe that my students will share that excitement. I am also cynical enough to believe that it can take a great deal to inspire an 18- or 19-year old student to overcome his or her inertia and become active and involved. Trimbur helps in both cases.

The Call to Write is a textbook which can provide instruction that will circulate practices to effect social change. *Seeing and Writing*, too, is a textbook which at first glance promises something new and innovative, and is, in fact, marketed with just that message. The promotional material for this book describes it consistently as a 'first': "You've never seen anything like it before." It is also described as a "cutting-edge 4-color reader that re-invents the composition reader." And finally, "*Seeing and Writing* is the first composition reader to treat seriously the connection between the verbal and the visual in today's culture—the first to introduce the skills students need to read both kinds of texts and then to effectively write about them" (www.bedfordstmartins.com/seeingandwriting). In one primary respect, *Seeing and Writing* is a first—no other reader I've seen has made such extensive and interesting use of the visual. It is simply lush. Donald and Christine McQuade, a father and daughter collaboration team who describe themselves as having the perspectives of "professional literary study and professional dance,"[2] (xv) have created a textbook which is incredibly rich in visual text. However, as is so often the case with a reader, this book is short on pedagogy or useful curricular components. As a

result, this book would serve to bolster Watkins argument that what gets circulated from English departments is evaluations; there is little or no attempt to address or shape practice in *Seeing and Writing*, at least with respect to writing. Change comes, rather, in the realm of textbook design and genre of the reader itself, and with respect to design, the changes are exciting.

The "Preface for Instructors" makes immediately clear that this book is best used as a companion, in much the same way that we might use any number of other "readers," like *Patterns of Exposition*. Again and again, the McQuades make connections among critical thinking, careful observation, and good writing, which makes good sense, of course. But, at no time do they offer any explanation or speculation about why or to what end students might write. Their three goals are (1) to provide opportunities for composition students to think perceptively and critically about compelling visual and verbal aspects of American culture, (2) to help students write effectively about how they perceive themselves, especially in relation to the images and words that compete for their attention, and (3) to give instructors the flexibility to work with these materials in ways best suited to the interests and abilities of their students (ix).

So the students who might use this book just write, for no apparent reason other than satisfying evaluative criteria. I'm aware that the "preface to the instructor" is a sort of genre in and of itself, and one which is often overlooked. I would argue, however, that we can learn much from the prefaces and introductions to textbooks, not the least of which is what pedagogical theories and practices inform the production of textbooks. I am also aware that instructors are often able to take both unexceptional and innovative readers and use them as a single part of a solid curriculum, but how many readers are needed?

Although I do think that *Seeing and Writing* is a bit short on responding to the inevitable "so what?" that readers elicit from both teachers and students, it is an outstanding reader in terms of design. Bedford/St. Martin's hired the design firm 2x4 to work on this book. The layout and design are both creative and easy to

read. The colors are vibrant. The visual images are of a wide variety. To the extent that this book does include so many visual texts, it does live up to its publisher's claim of "re-inventing the composition reader." However, it is only in this regard that the claim stands up. As is the case with most readers, *Seeing and Writing* overlooks student texts in favor of the professional, thereby reproducing the expert-novice paradigm. Finally, *Seeing and Writing* relies on the modes—narration, exposition, comparison, and argumentation—for its writing prompts and assignments. One of many such writing assignments is the following: "Write the first draft of an analytic essay in which you explain the nature of the appeal of superheroes" (323). In and of themselves, there is nothing "wrong" with the modes, but nothing new here, no suggestion about why a student might want to write such an essay, or how it might be connected to their lives or their practices beyond the classroom.

This point brings me back to Watkins and the question of what work gets done in English departments. *Seeing and Writing* is a book well-suited for a professor in Watkins' kind of English department: it recognizes that faculty members have and value the freedom and autonomy of their work time. This textbook also recognizes that the people who teach composition often have little or no interest or investment in it. The following passage from Watkins makes clear the vexed positions Composition and readers like *Seeing and Writing* occupy in a department or pedagogy in which the value, importance and potential of Composition and student writing are overlooked:

> [E]ven very experienced literature teachers who don't, or who don't any longer, teach composition regularly often face a moment of panic at the prospect. What exactly do you have students work on? What possible material could they write about? Likewise, it's taken a great deal of often ingenious theorizing to permit the use of so-called "popular culture" forms, "propagandistic" texts, "Exits" signs, and the like in English classrooms. For it's not until these texts can

> be constructed as the occasion for something comparable to the familiar, extended labor of reading "literary" texts that they are deployed as material work in English. (253)

It seems to me that Watkins could not have anticipated a book like Trimbur's.

Watkins' larger goals are admirable and no doubt resonate with a majority of people working in literary studies. Perhaps a more appropriate subtitle for his book would be something like, "Literary Studies and the Circulation of Cultural Value." His goals for effecting political change rest on a perspective (like McQuade's?) which values literary studies over other kinds of work and on several gaping elisions: the very real presence of Rhetoric and Composition in English departments and the equally real presence of anyone other than white, male, tenured faculty, and of course, administrative and support staff, or students who are more than bodies circulating through our classrooms. At no time does Watkins recognize the decades of scholarship and discipline formation in Rhetoric and Composition which precede his analysis of work in English departments. For most of the book, Composition is mentioned infrequently and only in passing. In his final chapter, "Cultural Work as Political Resistance," Watkins enumerates the current and historic conflicts in English, and suggests, finally, that Composition may be a good site for conflict resolution because it is "singularly appropriate for the practical elaboration of theoretical directions initially worked out across the more familiar domain of a literary canon" (259). A left-handed compliment, disciplinarily speaking. In Watkins' work, Composition remains a junior sibling to literary studies. And nowhere does he consider the ways in which the significant numbers of adjunct faculty might factor into and alter patterns of circulation or potential for political change. Similarly, the presence of women or anyone of color is overlooked in the formulation of his theories. The elisions are not unusual in work which proceeds from a Marxist approach—feminists have taken to task many Marxist theorists for failing to consider gender—but

they are nonetheless troublesome. Specialists in Rhetoric and Composition, adjuncts, administrative and facilities staff, women, and people of color, all of whom work in English departments, would certainly argue and have argued, in fact, for the ways in which the potential for political and/or social change can be effected through the circulation of practices, not just evaluations. All of this is to say that Watkins' study of the work in English represents a beginning.

So why do we become teachers? More specifically, why do we become teachers of writing? With *The Call to Write*, Trimbur offers some answers. We become teachers to effect change by altering practice. We become teachers because we believe it is possible to do this. We also become teachers because, as a colleague of mine says, it's a "cool job." Of course it is, and Watkins argues that it is also a highly desirable job, especially if it comes with a tenure track. *Work Time* is worth reading simply for all the contradictions of this profession which Watkins makes clear. These contradictions result in a tension-filled reading, at times brilliant, but much too narrow in scope, a view which is not fully explained by its publication date. *Seeing and Writing* does, in one sense, deliver on its promise of newness. Its design is fresh, and it makes clear the extent to which faculty members value their curricular autonomy. If it happens that I am looking for a reader to use in a class I'm teaching, I will seriously consider this one.

Taken together, these two textbooks offer us some insight into the ways in which we can effect change through altering practice. They offer us an opportunity to revisit our reasons and goals for teaching, an opportunity always welcome and always needed. Finally, they speak to the very complicated realities of the institutional and social lives in which we find ourselves on a daily basis, and in this, offer powerful suggestions on how we might negotiate these lives as we circulate through their systems. Taken together or separately, these three books offer instruction, directly or indirectly, on how to re-invent our work so that we don't limit ourselves to circulating evaluations.

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[1] A second edition of *The Call to Write* is in process, with an expected release of late 2001.

[2] I find this description of Donald McQuade's perspective interesting. McQuade has been working and involved in Rhetoric and Composition for years as a teacher, writer, textbook author and editor, and an active member of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, and the promotional material for the book identifies him thus. Curious, then, that the description in the acknowledgments section of the book identifies literary study as the lens through which he reads and works, and his identified interests on his department's website, at the University of California-Berkeley, lists American literature as his primary field.

REVIEW ESSAY: INTERROGATING THE POPULARITY OF STRUNK AND WHITE

Jodi Lundgren

White, William, Jr., and E. B. White. *The Elements of Style*. Foreword by Roger Angell. New York: Allyn and Bacon, 2000. 105 pp. ISBN 0-205-20902. $14.95. $7.95 (pbk).

In 1989, *Harper's Magazine* reprinted correspondence between Dan Quayle and John Kenneth Galbraith in which the latter took Quayle to task for grammatical faults. That the editors titled this exchange "Dan, You're No Strunk and White" suggests that Strunk and White featured then in the contemporary popular imagination as arbiters of English usage, and in the succeeding decade little has changed. Despite the premise of the recently released *Adios, Strunk and White* that the new "visual-oriented, computer-literate, cyberspace writing generation" needs new rules undreamt of by the now-deceased pair, evidence suggests that Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style* has survived the transition to a hypertext environment (Hoffman and Hoffman, qtd. in Ward-Hiley 50). Cyber catalogs offer to ship the title within twenty-four hours; better still, the computer literate can access the text–in its original edition, if they so desire–online, cost-free. The visually-oriented can order *The Elements of Style* video featuring Charles Osgood, and "just watch and listen" to "learn the fundamentals of precise writing in under 2 hours." And if this were not enough, QUE Corporation, in defiant anachronism, lists William Strunk (1869-1946) as the author of their "RightWriter" software (copyright 1990, 1991).

Amazon.com currently lists the fourth edition as number 123 out of more than a million books ranked. Strunk and White, it appears, are alive and well.

An instructor of writing at Cornell University during and after World War I, William Strunk Jr. privately published his own text in 1918 and made it required reading for his course, "English 8." Although re-released by Harcourt, Brace and Howe in 1920, and again (in a revised edition) in 1934, Strunk's book did not rise to prominence until 1957, when Macmillan unearthed the out-of-print text (by then forty years old) and commissioned E. B. White, a former student of Strunk's, to revise and introduce it. A nostalgia for pre-war certainties may have motivated the text's resurrection; in his introduction to the third edition, White writes that he still finds "the Strunkian wisdom a comfort, the Strunkian humor a delight, and the Strunkian attitude toward right-and-wrong a blessing undisguised" (3rd, xvi-xvii; 4th, xviii). The conflation of grammar and morality in the phrase "right-and-wrong" helps to explain the book's enduring appeal: it offers conservative reassurance to those unsettled by shifting cultural values.

Continuously in print since 1957, the book was revised in 1972, again in 1979, and yet again in 2000. The third edition ran for twenty years before the current revision, offered with a foreword by White's stepson, Roger Angell. The book can be found in the reference section of virtually any general bookstore or library in the country. Often prominently displayed in the textbook section of college and university bookstores, it makes frequent appearances as required reading on syllabi for courses as diverse as business management, ecology, sociology, history, psychology, philosophy, oceanography, accounting, forest resource management, chemistry and engineering. (Notably, courses on *writing* do not typically assign the text.) With such a widespread and enduring presence–the publishers claim "millions sold"–this book may well define "writing across the disciplines" as it is popularly understood. In its very ubiquity, *The Elements of*

Style merits scrutiny, especially for what type of student-writer it constructs.

E. B. White characterizes the author of the original text as "Sergeant Strunk snapping order to his platoon" (4th ed., xiv). According to White, "Professor Strunk was a positive man. His book contains rules of grammar phrased as direct orders. In the main I have not tried to soften his commands, or modify his pronouncements, or remove the special objects of his scorn" (4th ed., xiv). Having spent the war on campus instead of at the front, Strunk compensates by positioning himself as sergeant and his students as soldiers to be disciplined. Obedience to rules is emphasized, and the ordering of information establishes the book's priorities: "Elementary Rules of Usage" precedes "Elementary Principles of Composition." Given pride of plan as rule number one is an arbitrary convention of punctuation: "Form the possessive singular of nouns by adding 's'" (4th ed., 1). The triviality of this opening rule bespeaks an autocrat who demands obedience for obedience's sake. Such quasi-military obsession with surface neatness and correctness predominates the text, whose subject is "the rules of usage and principles of composition most commonly *violated*" (1st ed., vi; emphasis added). The *a priori* existence of those violations rationalizes the punitive tone that pervades the text.

In addition to its militaristic qualities, *The Elements of Style* exhibits what Susan Miller calls "a pedagogic obsession with mechanical correctness" that "participated in a broadly conceived nineteenth-century project of cleanliness" (57). White calls Strunk's original text a "forty-three page summation of the case for *cleanliness*, accuracy and brevity in the use of English" (1st ed., x; emphasis added). White's introduction places much emphasis on what Strunk "dislikes" and "despises" (1st ed., x). He is disgusted, for example, by wordiness: "the *vile* expression 'the fact that' . . . causes him to *quiver with revulsion*" (1st ed., ix; emphasis added). Strunk (and White's) physical disgust with "vulgarisms" (4th ed., 62) bears out Susan Miller's contention that early composition practices "offered a way to suppress, while

noticing, 'the body.'" Writing faults "took on 'dirty' associations that the nonelect, nonpredestined study could embody" (55). Unsurprisingly, Strunk despised the expression 'student body,' which he termed "gruesome" (1st ed., x). Despite belonging to a younger generation, White shares most of Strunk's prejudices: in the third and fourth editions he urges readers not to "*personalize your prose*; simply make it good and keep it clean" (4th ed., 56). As Joseph M. Williams notes, the "unusual ferocity" of many of these reactions to errors of usage is disproportionate, since the errors do not "offend" in the ordinary sense (152-3). At the root of and feeding the vehemence may be class-based prejudice.

Concerns with controlling the body and with cleanliness further a class agenda in which student writers are constructed as the unwashed masses. Strunk's students, entering Cornell, an Ivy League school, had to meet an elite standard of "politeness and good breeding"; and, as Miller argues, freshman composition functioned to enforce this socialization (55). Terms suggestive of etiquette, such as "blunder" and "vulgarism," recur throughout *The Elements of Style*. For example, the authors characterize the word "certainly" as "a mannerism, bad in speech, even worse in writing" (4th ed., 42). Bad grammar, then, is simply bad manners. Interestingly, the misused words in the 1957 edition include "can't hardly" (35) and "don't" characterized as an incorrect contraction of "does not" (37); these entries are omitted from the revised edition, suggesting a shift in audience. Indeed, Strunk and White make a point of circumscribing and excluding a certain population from their readership in entries such as the following:

> *Like* has long been widely misused by the illiterate; lately it has been taken up by the knowing and the well-informed, who find it catchy, or liberating, and who use it as though they were slumming. If every word or device that achieved currency were immediately authenticated, simply on the ground of popularity, the language would be as chaotic as a ball game with no foul lines. (4th ed., 52)

Anyone who uses "like" without consciously intending to "slum" belongs to the illiterate, who are beneath the notice of Strunk and White, except as potential instigators of chaos who must be kept in their places behind "foul lines." This delegitimizing of certain speech patterns works to justify and naturalize class stratification and class-based prejudice.

Though *The Elements of Style* focuses almost exclusively on surface correctness, it deliberately shuns a womanish fussiness, a "Miss Manners" approach to solecism, both by linking grammar to deeper moral issues and by emphasizing virility. Beryl Lang reads the text as an allegory that depicts "a continuing moral struggle between the forces of good and the forces of evil" (98). Indeed, moral virtue is emphasized in warnings such as this one against using "and/or": "It destroys the flow and *goodness* of a sentence" (1st ed., 34; emphasis added). In discussing sentence structure, Strunk and White note that "an occasional loose sentence prevents the style from becoming too formal and gives the reader a certain relief. Consequently, loose sentences of the type first quoted are common in easy, unstudied writing. The danger is that there be too many of them" (1st ed., 5). The example given to illustrate this point is "The situation is perilous, but if we are prepared to act promptly, there is still one change of escape" (1st ed., 5). "Loose," "easy" sentences lead to "perilous" "danger": the connotations of moral laxness are clear. Proper grammar can combat moral waywardness, especially of a sexual nature.

At the same time as Strunk and White admonish their reader about "the immorality of error-ridden writing" (Miller 75), they enjoin "him" to "Make definite assertions. Avoid tame, colorless, hesitating, noncommittal language" (4th ed., 19). They favor a "plain English style" (1st ed., vi). They want writing to be "vigorous" and "bold" (4th ed., 18) and to exhibit "toughness" (4th ed., 72); they want it to resist "weakness" (4th ed., 20), "softness" (4th ed., 48), and an "unwholesome . . . nauseating ornateness" (4th ed., 72). The evil to be avoided is construed as feminine: "Do not prettify" (4th ed., 57); "avoid . . . the coy, and the cute" (4th ed., 76). White depicts *The Elements of Style* itself

as unmistakably phallic, "standing . . . erect, resolute, and assured" (4th ed., xviii). The feminine is thus construed as morally wayward and emotionally shallow in sample sentences such as "Her father's suspicions proved well-founded. It was not Edward she cared for, it was San Francisco" (4th ed., 9); "Polly loves cake more than she loves me" (4th ed., 12); and, "Well, Susan, this is a fine mess you are in" (4th ed, 3). Compare these to a typical sentence using the masculine pronoun: "He has several years' experience and is thoroughly competent" (4th ed., 5). The student writer is explicitly constructed as a heterosexual male in such passages as, "If you admire fancy words, if every sky is *beauteous*, every blonde *curvaceous* . . . you will have a bad time with Reminder 14" (4th ed., 77). In the third edition, White added a stubborn, defiant defense of gender-exclusive language:

> The use of *he* as pronoun for nouns embracing both genders is a simple, practical convention rooted in the beginnings of the English language. *He* has lost all suggestion of maleness in these circumstances. The word was unquestionably biased to begin with (the dominant male), but after hundreds of years it has become seemingly indispensable. It has no pejorative connotations; it is never incorrect. (3rd ed., 60).

While the fourth edition finally makes a concession to contemporary usage–"Currently, however, many writers find the use of the generic *he* or *his* to rename indefinite antecedents limiting or offensive" (4th ed., 60)–the advice for the section concludes with "No one need fear to use *he* if common sense supports it" (4th ed., 61). This advice leaves the feminine pronoun free for such uses as White put it to in his last sentence, which, he has established earlier, is the most emphatic position in a text. Referring to a cow in a poem by Robert Louis Stevenson, White says: "Like the steadfast writer, she is at home in the wind and the rain; and, thanks to one moment of felicity, she will live on and on and on" (4th ed., 85). In Strunk and White schema, a "she" can at

best be "like" a writer; she is excluded from actually writing (and indeed from being human). As Roger Angell's foreword indicates, the fourth edition "has been modestly updated . . . with a *light* redistribution of genders to permit a feminine pronoun or female farmer" (x; emphasis added), but this barely touches the deep masculinist bias of the work.

As well as a masculinist bias, the text's focus on making "definite assertions" conveys a positivist approach to language. Strunk and White promote the use of language to convey concrete facts. The belief in a transparent correspondence between words and world, with an emphasis on "adapting" content to "the minds of the hearers" characterizes the current-traditional approach to composition (Berlin 237-8). Strunk felt that "the reader was in serious trouble most of the time and that it was the duty of anyone attempting to write English to drain this swamp quickly and get the reader ["his man" in the 3rd edition] up on dry ground, or at least throw ["him" in the 3rd edition] a rope" (4th ed., xviii). This vision of the reader corresponds to the current-traditionalist view that "when the individual is freed from the biases of language, society, or history, the senses provide the mental faculties with a clear and distinct image of the world" (Berlin 238). The current-traditionalists' belief that "college rhetoric is to be concerned solely with the communication of truth that is certain and empirically verifiable" (Berlin 239) is borne out when Strunk and White advocate using definite and concrete details "with such accuracy and vigor that readers, in imagination, can project themselves into the scene" (4th ed., 22).

The "common sense realism" of current-traditionalist rhetoric implies that the writer's function is to reflect pre-existing reality; there is no question of intervening in its discursive shaping. Thus students are taught to "write only intransitively, as, to, and about nothing in particular" (Miller 196). Questions of the content and purpose of writing are indeed elided throughout most of *The Elements of Style*. When Strunk and White mention the notion of developing an argument within literary criticism— "aim at writing an orderly discussion supported by evidence, not a

summary with occasional comment"–they do so as an aside under Rule 21: "In summaries, keep to one tense" (4th ed., 31). Miller's image of the composition course as a "national course in silence" is dramatized in the figure of the tight-lipped Professor Strunk, a man who "omitted so many needless words, and omitted them so forcibly and with such eagerness and obvious relish, that he often seemed in the position of having short-changed himself–a man left with nothing more to say yet with time to fill" (4th ed., xv). His students, too, are reduced to making terse assertions for fear of incurring his wrath.

Still, a competing ideology emerges within the text. In White's own chapter, "An Approach to Style," a neo-Platonist or expressivist doctrine emerges in contrast to current-traditional rhetoric. White makes concessions to the form–"since this book is a rule book, these cautionary remarks . . . are presented in the form of rules"–but mystical pronouncements precede the rules: "creative writing is communication through revelation–it is the Self escaping into the open" (4th ed., 67). And, "[a] careful and honest writer does not need to worry about style. As he becomes more proficient in the use of the language, his style will emerge, because he himself will emerge, and when this happens, he will find it increasingly easy to break through the barriers that separate him from other minds, other hearts" (3rd ed., 70; 4th edition version switches to the "you" pronoun). The notions of individual emancipation and discovery of inner truth through writing are central tenets of the expressivist school; and it is perhaps unsurprising that White, a creative writer before the age of post-modernism, should espouse them. He does not, however, break with his early training in current-traditionalism. Although White professes some reticence about couching his comments on style in "rule" form, his section "An Approach to Style," after a few introductory pages from which the above quotes are drawn, lists twenty-one "reminders," eleven of which begin with either "do not" or "avoid." These numbers and proportions far exceed those of the earlier parts of the book, originally written by Strunk: out of eleven "Rules of Usage," only two are framed as "do not's"; of

the "Principles of Composition" only one begins with "avoid." In intensifying the imperative tone of the book, White remains distant from the "anything goes" expressionism of, for example, freewriting proponent Natalie Goldberg, who emphasizes in her "Rules of Writing" that "[y]ou are free to write the worst junk in America" and adds "[d]on't worry about punctuation, spelling, grammar" (4). With his list of forbidding commands, White reins in the expressivism incipient in the beginning of the chapter. Still, the expressionist and current traditionalist rhetorics both pertain. Though they form a rather uneasy hybrid, their co-presence likely contributes to the continuing popularity of *The Elements of Style*, since these two approaches still dominate the field of composition.

In its promise of emancipation through gaining a voice, expressionism has been criticized for its failure to take historical and social constraints into account (Berlin 690). True to form, *The Elements of Style* holds out its promise of self-discovery only to a specific audience: "Your whole duty as a writer is to please and satisfy yourself" (4th ed., 84; in the 3rd edition the pronouns are male). As cues throughout the text have indicated, this self-determining writer is a white, middle-class, heterosexual male who is here not enjoined to interrogate his privilege but to revel in its self pleasure. In their disregard for social inequities, expressionism and current-traditionalism are united. In addition, from the latter position flow a number of other disturbing assumptions. A case in point: between the first and third editions, White revised his stance on "Junior," deciding that it is to be treated as restrictive, not non-restrictive, and punctuated accordingly (4th ed., 3). But that conventions are arbitrary and can change over time is precisely what the text's rule-oriented approach does not acknowledge. Even in the section on style, White makes very little mention of rhetorical choices. Instead of offering various options, the book divides its examples into two columns: wrong ones on the left, right ones on the right. This format reinforces a simplistic binary between right and wrong that militates against context-based choices–such as disciplinary-based conventions–not to mention multiplicity, plurality, and tolerance.

The overall organization of the book, which begins with apostrophe rules and buries any points it makes about argumentation within other rules, prioritizes superficial correctness and trivializes consideration of writing as an act of communication or social intervention. Given the range of assumptions this text reinforces, its continued popularity should be a cause for concern.

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REVIEWS

Silva, Tony, and Paul Kei Matsuda, eds. *On Second Language Writing.* Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2001. 241 pp. ISBN: 0-8058-3516-6 and (-4). $49.85. $24.50 (pbk)

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The product of Purdue University's first Symposium on Second Language (L2) Writing, *On Second Language Writing* is a welcome addition to the body of scholarship pertaining to the field of L2 writing. However, as the editors note in their introduction, the title is somewhat misleading as "second language writing" in this case — as in most L2 writing scholarship — is really English as a second language writing, as the collection deals exclusively with the extremely heterogeneous population of students enrolled in American universities called ESL or non-native speakers of English. Indeed, Silva and Matsuda recognize this "problem," and note that they are involved in several projects to "make the field more inclusive" of L2s other than English (xvi). Nonetheless, the collection is a timely one, revealing both how much the field has grown in the final decades of the twentieth century and also how much farther the field can grow in the twenty-first century and beyond.

The text is composed of fifteen chapters, each written by a leading scholar in L2 writing. The chapters themselves address a variety of topics related to writing instruction: assessment, politics, theories of writing, methodology, English for academic purposes, standards, gender, responding to student writing, and others. Equally diverse are the genres employed by the writers, genres which range from personal reflection, to syntheses of research, to more traditional academic arguments: one of the

book's strengths is that editors give contributors ample space to theorize, to reflect, and to critique the state of the art.

It is fitting that Barbara Kroll's "The Composition of a Life in Composition" begins the collection, as the pioneering collection she edited,1990's *Second Language Writing*, will likely be replaced by Silva and Matsuda's volume in graduate student seminars across the country. Kroll's chapter in *On Second Language Writing,* written in the first person, reflexively examines the long and winding road which led to her career as a teacher of L2 writing and as a teacher who trains future teachers of writing. Kroll argues that she has always been an "improviser" and a "pioneer," roles that suit writing teachers quite well because "to understand how and why our students succeed in their learning requires not only constant willingness to be a pioneer but also ongoing willingness to examine our actions with insight and to maintain openness to change" (15). Her chapter demonstrates these traits, making it well written, engaging, and informative, all the while giving a history of L2 writing, from a practitioner and theorizer's point of view.

Ilona Leki's "Hearing Voices: L2 Students' Experiences in L2 Writing Courses" claims that while much L2 writing scholarship has been published as a "public transcript," this public transcript has elided the "hidden transcript," or the voices of L2 students themselves. Thus, her essay begins to rectify this situation by giving voice to those for whom so much of our work purportedly speaks. Leki does so by studying five published qualitative studies, each with significant contributions from L2 students who reveal in their own words their opinions on their (often negative) experiences in writing classes. In so doing, Leki concludes that the negative experiences of L2 students can help foster more positive experiences in the future; that qualitative research which listens to and then articulates L2 learner's tales can be most helpful in our work; and that, most disturbingly, a clear sense of "how dim our students' voices are in our literature about them" emerges when the body of L2—and mainstream (L1), I would add—writing scholarship is analyzed. Like Kroll, Leki is a pioneer, and

her essay reminds us what can happen as we continually theorize about, and sometimes away from, the population we hope to serve.

The increased scholarship relating to the political and ideological elements of L2 writing instruction, especially during the 1990s, best reveals how the field of L2 writing itself has matured in the last decade. Sarah Benesch's and Terry Santos's contributions in *On Second Language Writing* update the political argument, each taking a differing perspective. Steeped in critical pedagogy, Benesch's chapter, "Critical Pragmatism: A Politics of L2 Composition," argues that all teaching is a political act and should be embraced as such. Despite this, however, she notes that the dominant approach in L2 writing—as evidenced by "service" EAP courses like the one Joy Reid discusses in her chapter—argues that "L2 writing theory and practice should be driven by the pragmatic mission of preparing students for target situations and not by the political concerns, such as power relations and social inequities" (161). Benesch argues against such an approach, as she advocates "critical pragmatism," which "is not a compromise position but rather a way to broaden the discussion of students' needs to consider not only *what is* but also *what might be*" (her italics, 162). Benesch then outlines the various pragmatist objections to critical pedagogy, explains the rationale behind critical pedagogy, and in what might be considered the most valuable element of her chapter offers one of her own EAP classes as an example of critical pragmatism in action.

Santos's chapter, "The Place of Politics in Second Language Writing," might be considered not only a response to Benesch's chapter but to critical pedagogy more generally. Arguing from a "centrist and pragmatic perspective," Santos outlines the goals of critical theory, critical pedagogy, and critical applied linguistics as well as their instantiations in L2 writing and critical EAP (181). She then critiques the critical approach to L2 writing instruction, before concluding with a none-too-optimistic appraisal of the future of critical pedagogy and critical EAP, claiming that the critical perspective "will probably always be peripheral to the

mainstream, inhabiting and representing an alternative and marginalized space" (188).

While the exchange is heated, at the same time it can also be viewed optimistically, as the discord can be interpreted as a sign of a healthy and growing field, particularly as political discussions such as these were receiving very little consideration in L2 writing scholarship ten years ago. Moreover, as Trudy Smoke notes in "Making ESL Students Integral to the University," our pedagogical choices take place in a "politicized" atmosphere and should be viewed as such (130). Regardless of the choices a writing teacher makes, however, one way to find common ground between the political and the pragmatic approaches to writing pedagogy is through the very field in which writing instruction must begin: rhetoric. Rhetoric embraces the political, just as it heeds the practical, and thus it would seem to offer a way out of the either/or, political/pragmatic binary. Indeed, it should be noted that one of the original scholarly approaches to L2 writing, contrastive rhetoric, receives little attention in the collection, with the exception of Carol Severino's chapter, "Dangerous Liasions: Problems of Representation and Articulation." Although contrastive rhetoric itself has received considerable attention—some quite rancorous—in L2 writing scholarship, its possibilities and shortcomings should not place rhetoric itself in the background of L2 writing scholarship. While some claim that writing instruction need not be apolitical, certainly no one would claim that writing instruction should ever be arhetorical.

In conclusion, Silva and Matsuda, along with their fifteen contributors, must be commended for this book. It is an important and valuable collection, one that both L1 and L2 teachers of writing will find most useful. Moreover, one hopes that as the development of L2 writing scholarship has grown over the last twenty-five years, so too will a dialogue between mainstream and L2 composition begin to blossom. Thus far, the relationship has been a mostly (and regrettably) one-way monologue, from the mainstream to L2. Perhaps this book will help further a more democratic and rhetorical dialogue between

the fields, for without question, practitioners and theorists in both camps, as well as those who inhabit the borderlands between, will find great value in *On Second Language Writing.*

Libby Allison, Lizbeth Bryant and Maureen Hourigan, Eds. *Grading in the Post-Process Classroom: From Theory to Practice.* Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997. Cross Currents Series: New Perspectives in Rhetoric and Composition. 179 pages. ISBN 0-8670-9437-0. $24.00 (pbk).

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The essays contained in *Grading in the Post-Process Classroom* provoke powerful, visceral responses. Not surprisingly, given the agonizing nature of the topic, these responses seem to originate in the anecdotal — whether veteran professors or newly initiated graduate teaching assistants, we all have battle scars, and have inflicted and received wounds upon the field of grading student writing. In his foreword, *Cross Currents* series editor Charles Schuster (University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee) offers two stories from his own experience, yet refrains from providing easy answers to one of the most contentious issues English teachers face. The essays in this volume likewise do not provide infallible answers, but they go a step beyond recent theoretical statements that feint away from the issue by suggesting we abolish grades entirely. Although appealing, this solution is unlikely to be implemented in the current environment of increased teacher and institutional accountability and calls for grade deflation and tougher standards. Instead, these essays confront the opposing realities of calls for less grading and more evaluation like the NCTE's 1993 resolution to "encourage teachers to refrain as much as possible from using grades . . . using instead such techniques as

narrative evaluations, written comments, dialogue journals, and conferences" (1) and societal and institutional demands for stricter numerical evaluation of students.

None of the authors would deny that grading, as the reinstatement of institutional authority, represents the antithesis of much of what good writing pedagogy has brought to our classrooms. These advances suggest that writing is a continual and recurring process of rewriting and participating in dialogue with others within a given discourse community. Grading puts a stop to these processes, to the conversations themselves. Further, the contributors suggest, we are moving into a "post-process" era, an era in which we cannot simply apply the formula of writing-as-a-process and expect to achieve results. Instead, we are faced with the complicated theoretical positions of postmodernism, and with the admission of the influence of race, class, and gender on the rules for participation in our discourse communities (Chapter 4: B. Shiffman, "Grading Student Writing: The Dilemma from a Feminist Perspective"). We must, say the contributors, develop grading practices that take into consideration the social construction of knowledge and expertise, practices that allow for teacher-student roles to be questioned and transformed (Chapter 6: T. Peeples and B. Hart-Davidson, "Grading the 'Subject': Questions of Expertise and Evaluation"; Chapter 8: J. Flores, "Grading from a 'No-Curve' Pedagogy").

The collection is divided into two sections: "The Ideology of Grading" and "The Post-Process Classroom: Theory into Practice." The essays in the first section consider the question of grading itself, and admit that even though our theories of how students learn have moved into the post-process stage, many of our grading practices and expectations have remained fixed in pre-process theoretical frameworks. Even more, these authors candidly relate the conflicts that arise between a writing pedagogy that is socially and intellectually responsible (read: fewer grades) and an academic environment that is pressuring for more accountability (read: more, and lower, grades) and stricter evaluative processes (Chapter 1: D. Bleich, "What Can Be Done

About Grading?"; Chapter 2: E. Agnew, "Cross Purposes: Grade Deflation, Classroom Practices"). A stark reminder that we cannot simply throw up our hands in disdain and abdicate responsibility for grading, these essays suggest the necessity for engaging in meaningful conversations about student evaluation. In an environment where grades are viewed by administrators in stark numerical formats (Chapter 3: J. Sandman and M. Weiser, "Departmental and Institutional Influences on Grading: Conflicts of Accountability"), we are constantly forced to justify our often higher composition grades. That we are better teachers because of our maturing pedagogy is not an acceptable answer without careful documentation and negotiation between instructional and institutional authority.

The second section of the collection provides a number of innovative, theoretically sound alternatives and revisions to current grading practices. Several articles suggest ways to include students in the grading process—through collaborative generation of grading criteria (Chapter 7: W. Dolphin, "Taking Students to Task: Grading as a Collaborative Engine"; Chapter 10: K. and J. Strickland, "Demystifying Grading: Creating Student-Owned Evaluation Instruments"), through contract and modified portfolio grading (Chapter 5: X. Gale, "Judgment Deferred: Reconsidering Institutional Authority in the Portfolio Writing Classroom"), and through ongoing conversations between students and teachers about the grading process (Chapter 9: A. Malone and B. Tindall, "Dear Teacher: Epistolary Conversations as the Site of Evaluation"). All of the selections concur on the need for narrative and dialogue—if we are to remain faithful to our theoretical positions, we must *include* students in the evaluative process. Another selection provides a framework for grading writing in an internet environment and suggests a model of teacher-student relationships that mimics the work environment of an actual online journal (Chapter 11: J. Sosnoski, "Grades for Work: Giving Value for Value"). Taken together or individually, these essays provide important considerations for teachers at all levels of writing instruction. Nevertheless, the strategies outlined

are more immediately applicable in college and university classrooms and in situations where students have the maturity to take responsibility for their own development as writers.

The essays in *Grading in the Post-Process Classroom* tread on ground that many of us would like to avoid, and they do so within the current environment. Rather than theoretical posturing about the detrimental effects of grades, these essays acknowledge that grades are, for the foreseeable future, inevitable. They move beyond our desire to ignore grades and suggest practical and useful ways to implement them.