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Review of *Feminism and Composition Studies: In Other Words* by Susan Jarrett & Lynn Worsham

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figures” or groups of writers and the terms of analysis are invariably ways of arguing these writers’ status, proving why they belong in the canon, why they are great writers, and why we should devote so much time and attention to them. (This advocacy is characteristic of those arguing for a revised canon, and explains why the movement has had less impact than it might have had: as we have pointed out in several articles on Willa Cather, the canon is invariably expanded by making the strongest possible case for the work of a new author without questioning the criteria for inclusion.) This form of advocacy limits our terrain, we argue, and by implicitly accepting this as what we do, what our job is about, these critics are unable to see beyond these disciplinary constraints to imagine what we might do instead. (Tuman, of course, explicitly accepts the role of advocate and would resist our or any other challenge to the primacy of the canon.) The lesson seems clear to us: unless you critique disciplinarity, you can only replicate its terms. And it is precisely the persistence of such definitions of our jobs and goals that limit the manner in which we can engage the broader demands of education.

Reviews

Feminism and Composition Studies: In Other Words, Susan C. Jarratt and Lynn Worsham, eds. (New York: MLA, 1998. 401 pages).

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In *Teaching to Transgress*, bell hooks proclaims that “all of us in the academy and in the culture as a whole are called to *renew our minds* if we are to transform educational institutions—and society—so that the way we live, teach, and work can reflect our joy in cultural diversity, our passion for justice, and our love of freedom” (34; emphasis added). This call for renewal is heeded and passed on in Susan Jarratt and Lynn Worsham’s admirable collection *Feminism and Composition Studies: In Other Words*, which invites readers and contributors to renew their thinking about feminism, about composition studies, and about the “alliances and discontinuities” of the two.

This call for renewal is textually (re)presented by the collection’s organization. Framed by Jarratt’s notable “Introduction” and Worsham’s impressive “After Words,” *Feminism and Composition Studies* is divided into three sections: “Feminisms for Composition,” “Specifying Locations,” and “Exploring Discontinuities.” Each section contains its own set of articles as well as its own

responses, enabling the texts to converse with one another and with readers. Offering savvy theoretical critiques and pragmatic pedagogical practices, this collection tackles issues as seemingly diverse (though obviously connected) as language function, identity, agency, collaborative writing, computers, writing program administration, writing in the disciplines, racism, and history. By mapping such important sites of feminist theory and praxis within composition studies, this collection carves out a unique space for itself.

Feminism and Composition Studies differs significantly from its predecessors. Like Louise Wetherbee Phelps and Janet Emig's *Feminine Principles and Women's Experiences in American Composition and Rhetoric*, it adopts a wide selection of topics. But unlike the Phelps and Emig collection, whose articles are organized alphabetically so that readers may impose their own schemata upon the text, Jarratt and Worsham's collection exhibits a more marked theoretical focus, what Suzanne Clark calls "a discursive, historically situated epistemology." Jarratt elucidates: "All authors share three orientations. Each writes from a vantage point informed by poststructuralist language theory and postmodern cultural theory. Each is committed . . . to an intellectual, scholarly endeavor combined with a social movement. And each accepts the necessity of working from a feminism taking shape among other kinds of social difference." Other predecessors—Andrea Lunsford's *Reclaiming Rhetorica*, Shirley Logan's *With Pen and Voice*, Cheryl Glenn's *Rhetoric Retold*, and even my own *Anglo-American Feminist Challenges to the Rhetorical Traditions*—all invite historical women, such as Aspasia, Ida B. Wells, and Adrienne Rich, into the rhetorical tradition, in part, to inform composition practices. In contrast, *Feminism and Composition Studies* focuses not on historical figures but on rhetorical figures—that is, on language and its consequences for feminism and composition studies.

The theory of language underpinning this volume assumes that words and their attendant lines of reasoning must be continually critiqued to test their currency and then reaffirmed and/or refigured. The responsibility for such action falls to everyone; this responsibility should generate not a consumerist rejection of the past but an historically-grounded appreciation of where, how, and why history moves us and we move history. Worsham explains,

If there are words we cannot choose again (and these words will vary from time to time), then there are still other words to choose that speak their truth with a sense of history, with gratitude for what the raging stoic grandmothers made possible in their time and place, and without bitterness for what they could not, would not see—merciful words that take no shortcuts through anyone's storied experience.

Words and their meanings propel this project. Like the narrator in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, who ponders the meanings of "women and fiction" by first wondering "what the words mean," Jarratt and Worsham's collection invites contributors and readers to ponder the meanings of *feminism* and *composition* in all their multieity. Initiating this conversation, Jarratt offers "porous rather than impermeable" definitions, not just to establish the param-

eters of the study but to invite further redefinitions. She names *rhetoric* as that which “mobilizes an interaction between representation (political) and representation (cultural)”; *feminism* as a “thoroughly rhetorical” political movement “whose aim is to supersede itself”; and *composition* as “a complex set of symbolic practices, textual inscriptions being one among many.” Laying these words and their disciplinary lines of reasoning side by side, Jarratt exposes the intersections of feminisms and composition studies as fruitful sites of inquiry:

Both . . . seek to transform styles of thinking, teaching, and learning rather than to reproduce multifying traditions. They share a suspicion of authoritarian pedagogy, emphasizing instead collaborative or interactive learning and teaching. They resist the purity of approach and the reduction of their scope by moving in and around many contemporary critical theories and disciplines.

If the aims of this anthology are to “push the boundaries of knowledge in both feminism and composition” and to “transform disciplinary knowledge,” then they are achieved. Feminist studies will benefit, for example, from Gail Hawisher and Patricia Sullivan’s exploration of the question, “What constitutes feminist action in e-space?” But for this audience, it seems more appropriate to focus on how composition studies will benefit.

Part I, “Feminisms and Compositions” offers multiple definitions of gendered subjectivities and multiple rhetorical tactics for producing and analyzing such subjectivities. In her insightful response to this section, Clark notes that “the writers take an unsentimental look at the category of woman and raise questions about feminist differences.” For example, by questioning earlier feminist researchers’ transparent use of personal experience as evidence, Laura Brady argues for a more complicated use of gendered experience (as one of many differences) and for a more “contingent rhetorical analysis of citation and tropes [that] emphasizes the intersections between language and ideologies (such as the ideologies of gender).” By questioning the invisibility of nineteenth-century African-American women teachers in the history of composition, Shirley Wilson Logan not only charts previously uncharted disciplinary territory but demonstrates how this remapping affects contemporary attempts “to speak the unspeakable, to talk about and have students write about issues surrounding race and gender in composition classrooms and in all classrooms.” By questioning the dearth of women in the history of cultural studies (both inside and outside composition studies), Nedra Reynolds offers interruption as a tactic of agency, which she defines “not simply [as] finding one’s voice but [as] intervening in discourses of the everyday.” By questioning the “ethic of care” that haunts feminist pedagogy, Eileen Schell wonders whether this ethic traps non-tenure track women in “a form of exploitation sweetened by emotional or psychic rewards” and tempts tenure-track women into a cycle of privileges made possible by the former’s exploitation. In response to this section, Deborah Kelsh admonishes feminist colleagues for abandoning classical Marxism, which she believes “offers important concepts from which to develop a third-wave

feminism.” The “unsentimental look” that Clark ascribes to these writers manifests itself in their implied views of history. Reynolds rejects patriarchal history by arguing for a more inclusive rendering; Brady and Schell, in differing degrees, call for a break from past feminist practices and a move toward more sophisticated ones. Logan most astutely articulates a process of rethinking history, a rethinking that does not reject the past but renews it, exposing its (in)visible presence in our daily lives.

The second section, “Specifying Locations,” offers locations for feminist praxis, locations that emerge both as subject positions and as cultural spaces that we may choose, however limitedly, to inhabit. In her arresting response, Ellen Gil-Gomez pinpoints this section’s focus: “what engages me the most in these essays is how the authors view the subjects they position as well as the positions they are subject to.” What engages me most about Gil-Gomez’s piece is her concept of “piece-making,” which emerges as her processes of writing and pedagogy. Defined as “nurturing my fragments and accepting the conflicts they raise inside me,” piece-making serves as a metaphor for each writer’s contribution to the idea of feminist locations. Pamela Caughie’s contribution is a concept of passing, defined as “that always slippery difference between standing *for* something (having a firm position) and passing *as* something (having no position or a fraudulent one). She shrewdly assesses our field’s drift toward cultural studies, a drift that, in her opinion, often leaves students, teachers, and scholars with no means of negotiating the double bind wherein the imperative to speak for others collides with the risk of appropriation. Recognizing that one need not be trapped in such a static standpoint, Caughie offers passing “not as a solution to the double bind . . . but as a descriptive theory” that enables us to understand how “[s]elf critique without a postmodern effort to detach concepts of identity from their metaphysical foundations leaves us with a choice between the confessional and the fraudulent.” Wendy Hesford’s contribution is a pedagogy of witnessing, or asking students “to bear witness to the particularity of their struggles, privileges and agency” when investigating historical moments that may not fit neatly into their existing frames of references; such pedagogy, she argues, functions as a kind of feminist activism. Christy Desmet’s contribution is a pedagogy of friendship “that respects lived individuality”; she grounds this pedagogy in theories of feminist jurisprudence because they advance a subject defined “by negotiating the distance between a person’s particular circumstances and the place assigned to that person by a system of legal definitions.” Hawisher and Sullivan’s contribution is a feminist praxis in e-space; they argue that “women must confront issues of gender and power in the construction of their views of e-space,” rethinking “public and private spaces” in ways that serve women’s “political and social goals.” Finally, Margaret Morrison’s response is a smart, ludic, must-read meditation on how “polymorphing into polyethoi” resists the seduction back into “the apparently stable humanist subject, the ‘I.’”

The third section, "Exploring Discontinuities," offers us not just concrete examples of feminist pedagogical tactics but also exemplary models of reflective pedagogy. Andrea Lunsford and Lisa Ede in their letter of response to the contributors thank them for, among other things, enlarging our sense of pedagogy by associating it not only with classroom practices but with writing program administration and writing in the disciplines. For example, Joy Ritchie and Kate Ronald self-critically narrate two of their courses, lucidly articulating how their "attempts to teach rhetoric as feminists have changed [their] rhetorical choices as teachers" and resulted in feminist pedagogies that "nurture possibilities for agency, resistance, and change" for their students and themselves. Min-Zhan Lu cogently argues for a feminist pedagogy of sequenced writing assignments that refigure *experience* as that which "should motivate us to care about another's differences and should disrupt the material conditions that have given rise to it." Gail Stygall tests her assumption that collaboration in the writing classroom is not necessarily empowering for women by analyzing three classroom collaborations via "a feminist-critical linguistic analysis"; she concludes that "women fare better in collaborative talk when the feminist teacher explicitly teaches and models new forms of talk." Amy Goodburn and Carrie Shively Leverenz ask the important question, "What does it mean for feminism to inform a site of composition studies that remains surprisingly undertheorized: that of writing program administration?"; they then insightfully reflect on how a shared experience became a site of desire for and resistance to feminist management principles, such as dialogic collaboration, multiple sources of authority, and shared leadership. Harriet Malinowitz purports that because Writing in the Disciplines (WID) inadvertently reinforces "existing disciplinary structures," women's studies may offer WID a better model of a field operating in "a resistant mode, attempting to disrupt learning as usual." What these essays all remind us is that feminist pedagogy is located not simply in pedagogical tactics (group work, journaling, or circled chairs, for example) but in the *who* and the *how* of these tactics. In her response, Margaret Lindgren aptly identifies another connecting thread: "[I]f the issue of change is important enough, . . . we will find ways to identify our complicities and then to narrow the gaps between our principles and the particulars of our lives."

For me, the most intriguing thread running throughout this collection is that the tactic of choice for narrowing the gap between principles and particulars is a storied cultural critique—that is, a critique that discursively maps the inextricable interwindings of the personal and the cultural. Jarratt claims that such self-reflective feminist narratives are necessary for feminism if feminists are to recognize the differences among us (the many *I*s) while still making possible the political movement (the *we*). For the same reason, she argues that distinguishing the "theoretical, political, and rhetorical" differences between "self-reflective feminist narratives and [unmarked] expressive paradigms" is necessary for composition studies.

As a storied cultural analysis necessary for both feminism and composition studies, Worsham's "After Words" richly reinscribes hooks's call to renew our minds. Always conscious of historical moment(s), Worsham delineates the challenge now facing feminism:

The immediate and most pressing task for feminism's third wave is to forge a collective subject capable of making mass movement—if not sisterhood, exactly, then surely an alliance that does not protect us from our differences but finds in difference, disagreement, and even despair occasions to hear one another's words; an alliance that recognizes that our histories and experiences are not only diverse in all the ways we have learned to name them, they are also intertwined in complex and mutually determining ways.

After deftly demonstrating that a similar challenge also faces composition studies, Worsham offers means of meeting these challenges. Positing piecemeal as peacemaking, narrative as radical, and whiteness as loneliness, Worsham imagines an ethical agent working within language toward the coexistence, not the consilience, of differences. (Re)weaving the narrative histories of feminism, composition studies, whiteness, her family, herself, and Blue Betty (you *must* read this one), Worsham textually enacts the third-wave feminism that she so desires, one figured via "merciful words that take no shortcuts through anyone's storied experience," least of all her own.

By identifying "other words" to define *feminism* and *composition*, Jarratt and Worsham's collection forwards conversations in feminism and composition studies. In 1979, Julia Kristeva argued that because both historical women and the category Woman have historically been missing from history, the "insertion into history" of women and Woman also demands a "radical refusal of the subjective limitations imposed by this history's time" ("Women's Time" 1256). In 1998, Jarratt and Worsham's collection embodies this argument, demonstrating that the "insertion" of women and Woman into the ongoing history of composition studies demands a continual rethinking of existing categories (not the least of which are *feminisms* and *composition*), which in turn demands a continual renewing of our own subjectivities, our politics, and our culture. This insertion-as-renewal process is important, then, not just to women who desire to see themselves in the history of the field but to everyone in the field who must necessarily be affected by the resonances of such a move. For this reason alone, *Feminism and Composition Studies* speaks not just to feminists but to everyone within our field.

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