

(Inter)views: Cross-Disciplinary Perspectives on Rhetoric and Literacy—ed. Gary A. Olson and Irene Gale; Southern Illinois University Press; 1991; 269 pp. ISBN 0-8093-1737-0.

Composition and rhetoric specialists have long taken pride in their eclecticism, and never more so than in recent years, when theory and practice have been increasingly informed by such diverse fields as philosophy, linguistics, psychology, anthropology, feminism, and other postmodern cultural criticisms. *(Inter)views* is a collection of interviews with seven major figures outside rhetoric and composition whose work has been particularly influential: psychologist Mary Field Belenky, linguist Noam Chomsky, deconstructionist Jacques Derrida, literacy scholar Paulo Freire, anthropologist Clifford Geertz, philosopher Richard Rorty, and cultural critic Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Following each interview are two responses, often by equally distinguished figures in the fields of composition and rhetoric, among them Gary A. Olson, James A. Berlin, Lisa Ede, Sharon Crowley, and Kenneth A. Bruffee. Originally published in the *Journal of Advanced Composition*, these interviews and responses are framed with a substantial introduction by David Bleich and a briefer afterword by Andrea A. Lunsford.

Bringing together major contributors to the field, this collection is clearly of great value. It provides both a convenient introduction to individual figures who may be unfamiliar and the opportunity to hear each subject discuss the applications that have been made of his or her own work. Olson and the other interviewers have tried to cover some of the same material with all the subjects: they often question the subjects about their conceptions of themselves as writers, their own writing processes, their views on feminism and on the literacy crisis. Predictably, the interviews are somewhat uneven in length and quality. So, too, are the responses, ranging from boosterism to thoroughgoing rebuttal, with the territory between well represented. Among the many valuable insights to emerge in these conversations, the unexpected things they reveal about our "allies" outside the field and their attitudes toward our work are of particular interest.

Especially telling are the conservative attitudes toward pedagogy expressed by the most avant garde critics. Derrida insists on the importance of his own rigorous classical training and the centrality of the canon: "If you're not trained in the tradition, then deconstruction means nothing. . . . I think that students should *read* what are considered the great texts in our tradition If deconstruction is only a pretense to ignore minimal requirements or knowledge of the tradition, it could be a bad thing" (131, Derrida's emphasis). The number of questions begged in the phrase

"minimal requirements" is mind boggling. Still more surprising is Spivak's willingness to separate skill and content: "I think there have to be places where you do nothing but the skill, and then the application of the skill develops. I'm not saying...you should confine yourself to nothing but the skill itself, as a subject matter, but...where the teaching of the content is important, you also must emphasize content" (253).

On this subject, Spivak seems hesitant, self-consciously presenting these "convictions" as "old-fashioned." Rorty is more assured, and even more old-fashioned: "[Writing across the curriculum] strikes me as a terrible idea. I think the idea of freshman English, mostly, is just to get them to write complete sentences, get the commas in the right place, and stuff like that" (232).

Moreover, Rorty seems unwilling to acknowledge connections between his work and the applications that have been made of it. At one point he asks that the interviewer define "social constructionist"; then, hearing Bruffe's definition, he merely comments, "That seems true enough" (229-30).

Such attitudes are not representative of all the subjects interviewed, of course. Belenky, for example, appears eager to consider the implications of her work for composition studies, even suggesting ways to deal with collaborative learning and gender issues in the classroom. Geertz, too, is clearly convinced of the importance of interdisciplinarity. Nevertheless, one of the less immediately evident values of this collection is the opportunity to learn how others view our discipline and the uses we are attempting to make of their work.

In short, reading these interviews and responses is a sometimes surprising, sometimes heartening, and sometimes disturbing experience. As the occasion for such wide-ranging self-evaluation, this collection provides a valuable service.

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