(4) Literature and Criticism: James Baldwin, *Nobody Knows My Name: More Notes of a Native Son*, New York: Laurel-Dell, 1986; Edward Hoagland, *The Courage of Turtles*, San Francisco: North Point, 1985; Philip Larkin, *High Windows*, New York: Farrar, 1984; Yukio Mishima, *Death in Midsummer and Other Stories*, New York: New Directions, 1966; V. S. Naipaul, *The Return Of Eva Peron*, New York: Vintage-Random, 1981; Louise M. Rosenblatt, *Literature as Exploration*, Third Edition, New York: MLA, 1983; Stevie Smith, *Stevie Smith: A Selection*, ed. Hermione Lee, London: Faber, 1984; William Carlos Williams, *Selected Poems*, ed. Charles Tomlinson, New York: New Directions, 1985; Sloan Wilson, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, New York: Arbor House, 1955; Virginia Woolf, *A Room Of One's Own*, New York: Harcourt, 1957.

(5) Philosophy/Aesthetics/Education: Susanne K. Langer, *Problems of Art*, New York: Scribner's, 1957; Robert M. Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry into Values*, New York: Quill-Morrow, 1984; C. P. Snow, *The Two Cultures*, Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1984.

(6) Psychology/Psychoanalysis: Sigmund Freud, *On Dreams*, trans. James Strachey, New York: Norton, 1980; Freud, *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, Revised Edition, Norton, 1969; Karen Horney, *The Neurotic Personality Of Our Time*, Norton, 1964; Anthony Storr, *The Art of Psychotherapy*, New York: Methuen, 1980.

(7) Social Science (Other): Clifford Geertz, *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretive Anthropology*, New York: Basic, 1983; Erving Goffman, *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Garden City: Anchor-Doubleday, 1959.

(8) Science: Roger S. Jones, *Physics as Metaphor*, New York: U of Minnesota P-NAL, 1982; Heinz R. Pagels, *The Cosmic Code: Quantum Physics As The Language of Nature*, New York: Bantam, 1984; James D. Watson, *The Double Helix: A Personal Account of the Discovery of the Structure of DNA*, ed. Gunther S. Strent, New York: Norton, 1980.

[5]The following is a typical list of required books for a *text*-based freshman-level expository writing course (in order of use): MAJOR PAPER (MP) #1: Robert M. Pirsig, *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance: An Inquiry into Values*. MP #2: Sigmund Freud, *On Dreams*; Virginia Woolf, *A Room Of One's Own*. MP #3: Stevie Smith, *Stevie Smith: A Selection of Her Poems*; Philip Larkin, *High Windows*. MP #4: Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz* and *The Reawakening*. We also regularly use Roger Garrison's *How A Writer Works* (New York: Harper, 1985) as a central textbook on the "nuts and bolts" of written expression. Garrison's book has been praised repeatedly by an overwhelming majority of my students for its clarity, good sense, and highly instructive chapter on revision.

[6]The term "academic argument" is Rose's. He defines it as "a special kind of argument, . . . not a series of emotionally charged appeals and exhortations, as one finds in oratorical persuasion, but a calculated marshalling of information, a sort of exposition aimed at persuading" (111).

[7]This practice of both *oral* and *written* peer review of first and seconds drafts for all MPs is a central component of my *text*-based writing course and is consonant with Bruffee's position on peer criticism: "The conversation about writing encouraged by collaborative learning takes two forms. It can be *face to face*, or it can be *displaced into writing*. Peer criticism is an important part of a writing course because it displaces into writing the *conversation* that goes on continually between writers and constructive readers . . ." (*Short Course* 141; emphasis added).

[8]Sample MP assignments (with peer-review and self-edit materials) and scoring guides will be sent to interested readers who contact the author at UT-El Paso, Department of English, PWR Program, Hudspeth Hall, Rm. 319, El Paso, TX, 79968.

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THE VOICE IN THE MARGINS: PAPER-MARKING AS CONVERSATION

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"I feel like my brain is turning to mush," my husband occasionally laments after a stint of marking papers. I know the feeling well — the sense of being awash in a murky sea of words — and it's not a pleasant state for anyone whose livelihood requires an alert mind. When I ask what causes our brain-mush, I find many possibilities: unstimulating assignments, uninvolved students, and unceasing volumes of papers, to name a few. For each of these problems, there's already a wealth of insight in the literature on writing instruction, and it's not my purpose here to review those guidelines. I want to look instead into another facet of the lethargy we sometimes experience when marking papers — our own attitude toward the whole process.

My attitude is that talking with people is more enjoyable, less like work, and yet more productive than writing comments on papers. However, despite extensive use of group work and individual conferences, I still take papers home to read. So, when I get ready to face a batch of papers, I find it helpful to rename what I'm about to do. I'm not just going to mark papers; I'm going to have a series of conversations with some apprentice writers.

This view of paper-marking as conversation expands a comment made by Lawrence Sterne's Tristam Shandy: "Writing, when it is properly managed (as you may be sure I think mine is) is but another form of conversation" (II, ii). If there's any truth in that (as you may be sure I think there is), it applies not just to

the essays our students write but also to the comments we make in response.

When we read papers and respond to them, we are not only absorbing language, we're also using language of our own. As Mary Hayes and Donald Daiker point out, "each response we make to a student's writing involves a rhetorical situation as sensitive and as complex as any that we, as teachers, are likely to face" ("Using Protocol Analysis in Evaluating Responses to Student Writing," *Freshman English News* 13 [Fall 1984]: 4). That phrase "rhetorical situation" reminds us of the delicacy of our task, but it also suggests that our task is more enjoyable and effective when we follow the advice we give our students: size up your audience; anticipate their questions; suit your language to their needs and capacities. Acting on that responsibility means recognizing, for instance, when it's enough to say, "Correct those fragments!" and when we need to explain once more what a fragment is and how it can affect the reading process.

Just the reminder that marking papers is a rhetorical act can give us a new perspective; in fact, Erika Lindemann, in *A Rhetoric for Writing Teachers* (NY: Oxford Univ. Press, 1982), defines all teaching as a form of rhetorical activity. But there are many kinds of rhetorical situations—so why think of paper-marking in terms of conversation? What difference doees the conversation image make? In general, it makes the kind of difference that metaphorical thinking always makes: by seeing A under the guise of B, we allow for the discovery of previously unnoticed elements in both A and B—and in ourselves, the ones who are looking. In particular, the conversation image beckons us to see the parallels, the differences, and especially the complementarity between conferences and written comments.

The chief parallel, of course, is that whether we talk face to face or through the medium of written comments, we begin by listening: has this writer found a voice that "works" for this piece? Then we let the students know what we've heard and how they might achieve a better fit between what they've said and what they meant. In the process, they're usually finding out, along with us, what they intended to say in the first place.

If the main similarity between conference and written comment lies in this listening, then the main contrast is the one that always exists between speaking and writing: our listening is mediated by an object, a piece of paper with words on it—which, ideally (and simplistically) carries meaning between people who don't have to be in the same room, or on the same continent. The effort to imagine the receiver, to compensate for that person's physical absence, is the biggest challenge facing most student writers—and, for that matter, it's a major challenge for us teachers as well. Helping us meet that challenge enjoyably and effectively is, I believe, the contribution of the conversation image. Let me show what it does for me.

First, and perhaps most importantly, thinking of paper-marking as conversation helps me enjoy myself as I respond to papers. A good talk with a friend or two is a pleasure: I like hearing other people's views and ways of putting things, and of course I enjoy sharing my own thoughts and feelings, especially when I know that someone else is really interested. To me, then, conversation means a subtle blend of alertness and relaxation; a good conversation involves both leisure and the "zing" of at least a little surprise or discovery. That's the case when I read papers: Sometimes the discovery arises from what I read (new facts, insights, felicities of expression; or astounding misconstruals of information about the topic or about the nature of writing). Sometimes the surprise comes from my own response as a reader. And always there's the potential discovery of a way of saying things that will click for this writer.

I also like paper-marking better when I think of it as conversation because I find the process less tiring. When I keep the image in mind, I find that making the same suggestion over and over again doesn't feel so mechanical. I may say, repeatedly, "Show us how each sentence connects with the one before it." But that recommendation takes on a different color for each student if I can say to one, "Look at the section on page four that I marked 'good transition.' What did you do there? Can you do that all the way through?" So I'm linking up my advice with the unique text of this particular writer.

Besides expanding my enjoyment and diminishing my tedium as I mark papers, the conversation image offers another benefit: it encourages me to regard myself in a positive light and to work toward an image of myself that *I* would want to write for. I would rather think of myself as a collaborator—a midwife, a coach—than a ruthless judge. So I'm faced with the challenge of responding in such a way that students will hear in my comments the kind of voice that I'm trying to project. What does that voice sound like? I hope it's very encouraging, very specific as to both strengths and limitations, and very clear about ways to improve the piece of writing that already exists.

That's the kind of voice that is called for by the teachers and writers who have inspired me. When Ken Macrorie, Peter Elbow, Stephen Tchudi, Donald Murray, and others talk about evaluating writing, they highlight several points: that it's important to read a whole text before commenting on individual aspects, that it's useful to deal with major concerns (unity, organization, etc.) before moving on to questions of mechanics, that it's vital to point out the strengths of the piece of writing, that it's good to focus on just a couple of major suggestions for improvement, and that it's useful to be specific in both our praise and our suggestions.

Why does the conversation-image make all those recommendations easier to follow? Because, as I mentioned earlier, it does for us as teachers what our advice about picturing an audience is meant to do for our students: it concretizes the awareness that we're communicating *with someone*. Conversation is first of all holistic: if we're good conversationalists, we make sure we understand each other before—or at least in the process of—disagreeing or modifying. In contrast, students expect that we're going to start fixing up their every sentence, pointing out errors from the moment we begin reading. I don't think they expect conversations about their writing to follow any of the patterns they would find normal in other kinds of interaction. They simply assume (at least if they're insecure about their own writing) that we're going to show them what's wrong. So, to counteract those fears, we need to keep our mouths shut (or our pens still) until we know what's going on in the essay.

Seeing "what's going on" means looking for the life and interest that gave rise to this piece of writing. Again, the conversation image helps us to remember to use what we know. Our talks with one another would feel deprived if we never used phrases like "Oh, yeah," "That's a good idea," "I hadn't thought of that," and so on. And, of course, in spoken conversation, gestures, tone of voice, and facial expressions all help to let us know whether we're making sense to our conversation partners.

Letting students know when they're making sense to us is part of helping them develop as apprentice conversationalists and writers. In turn, we help them make sense of *our* responses by emphasizing what we see as the major features of their work—

what's outstanding in their success, and what alterations would make the biggest difference in the essay's next incarnation.

Those major features are easier to remember if we've covered specific details along the way. Just as it's often the jokes or anecdotes that help us recall the points of a speech or a sermon, so it may be our comments on particular passages that stick with the writers and keep them mindful of the general principles we're trying to reinforce. For instance, one of my students, in an essay about a wine tasting, mentioned the category of "dry sweet wines." In my written comments, I asked her about the term, and later she reflected that my question had brought home to her the need to check her information before turning in an essay.

In that instance it wasn't only my wine-tasting author who turned to the world around her to check her terminology; I ended up doing the same thing — was there a category of wine that I, with my rudimentary knowledge of the subject, had been overlooking? Of course, an element of sheer ego came into play: I wanted to know that I was right. But I would have been equally satisfied to discover new realms of thought, language, and liquid refreshment. Though in this case the new realms turned out to be a matter of misundestanding, the point remains that paper-marking, when seen as conversation, has one final, all-encompassing benefit: it lures us back into the world of language and experience that gave rise to the initial piece of writing.

In that larger world, both we and our students move about a little more knowledgeably because of what we've learned in the smaller universe of writing and responding. Once students have begun to write about a topic, they feel a special bond with it, and they're excited to find hints of it everywhere. After they've shown a draft to us or to someone else — in other words, after they've presented their writing as a topic of conversation — they carry away new questions, new things to look for when they begin to do further searching. I know that's been true for me; for instance, in my first graduate research course, I was given the assignment of compiling a bibliography on James Dickey. Though I haven't yet followed up on that project to become an expert on Dickey's work, I've always enjoyed the ring of familiarity when I've come across his poems or essays. The project fulfilled its aims: it pushed me into the world of scholarly research.

In the areas where I have moved from bibliographies to actual writing, the best readers of my work have been the people who asked thought-provoking questions — questions that have elicited complementary movements, both deeper into the text and my own reflections, and farther out into the world. My dissertation adviser, Stephen Tchudi, once taught a course in which he asked us to list our major beliefs about the teaching of writing. When he returned our lists, his one question about mine was, "What part do grammar and correctness play?" That question, of course, has stayed with me.

When we turn from the student's role to that of the teacher, we recognize that asking good questions requires that same kind of dancing between the world of the text and the world of the topic. As conversationalists, we want to keep our ears open to what *this* person is saying about the subject; we also want to attend to any unanswered questions that the writer raises along the way. Clearly, the more in touch we are with what's going on in the world, the more intelligently we can respond to what our students write. Too, the more fully and imaginatively we are involved in the world around us, the better we can see our students as they are, and say things that will make sense to them as developing writers. So, as we talk together on paper or in person, we widen each other's knowledge of the world and of ways to create our place in it. In short, when we think of paper-marking as conversation, we create for ourselves and our students further opportunities to participate in humanity's ongoing conversation.

We orchestrate those opportunities best when we do so with a light touch; it's easy, but not helpful, to become overly solemn about our responsibilities to promote civilized conversation. Thus, we might benefit from an occasional not-so-Sterne reminder to jump off our hobby horses, stand still, and listen to our own voices in the margins. Do we like what we hear? Would we want someone else to talk to us that way? If so, there's a good chance that we and our students are collaborating in a lively conversation — the kind with the potential to entice these apprentice language-users, and ourselves, into becoming more expert and engaging talkers and writers.

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