

is no such thing as an 'experience of being in the world and in time' prior to language."

Critical catechisms now carry deconstructionists' imprimatur and teach us to intone the inevitabilities of misreading, trace the illusoriness of meaning, and hunt down the ideologies lurking in our concepts of reality. Harold Bloom, the veritable magus of misreading, "hails the critical act of 'strong' readers as a misreading" (Booth, *Critical Understanding* 244). Of this posture Wayne Booth asks, if every reading is inevitably a misreading whence the criteria for "strong" readers? What do strong misreaders do once they have learned their craft? Booth's irreverent answer: "Critical discussion is not pointless; indeed it is our main task to revitalize it. It is best kept alive by recognizing that it is finally validated only in the individual who deconstructs what he reads, and then offers his own creation, an inevitable misreading. Nobody who is anybody these days tries to solve by the end of the book the problems raised at the beginning" (*Critical Understanding* 244).

This practice is precisely one of the theory-induced relativisms that Hirsch and Bloom think has gone too far. That many rank and file English teachers agree with this particular point explains the appeal of Allan Bloom, William Bennett, and Hirsch within academia. How can students who have not yet learned to read as "naive" or "sentimental" readers jump in at the level of problematizing such reading? How can anyone learn to problematize something that has not yet been known or imparted? Do we impart traditional modes of reading and writing only to hastily—and cruelly—grab them away? Our writing classrooms are full of students whose "self" is mute because they have never come into contact with the cultural conventions of post-Cartesian, post-enlightenment, or post-romantic conceptions and practices of self and voice. To tell such students that there is no such thing as accurate reference because there is no reality is—many feel—a pathologically arrogant pedagogical act. This verdict would be accepted, I believe, by a large number of writing teachers and marks a point of compatibility between many educators and some of the points defended by Hirsch and Bloom. The left wing critical theory mandarin, despite its claims of political correctness and reformist virtue, has manifested what many regard as a scandalous disregard for the epistemologies and voices that students bring with them to entry level courses in college.

J. Hillis Miller, a major promontory among the cartographers of misreading, reversed himself in a recent defense of Paul deMan that alludes, seemingly without irony, to a "crescendo" of "errors" and "distortions" in treatments of deMan's collaborationist editorials during World War II (*NB* 676). Suddenly the epistemology of fidelity to reality is back in vogue. The reports of deMan's wartime writings have been produced, he alleges, by "academics who also write journalism," a suspicious lot, Miller implies. These writers have failed to provide "an accurate and adequate reading of the facts in the case," and have engaged in the worst kind of "journalism," full of "resentment, malice, and undisguised xenophobia." It has not been a quiet year in Lake Wobegon.

The bullies of the left and the bullies of the right are bullies in equal measure. That is the problem, and that is why both groups, despite their differences, are enemies of literacy. Their similarities in tone, manner, and attitude are clearer now, after the storms of last spring and summer: the invective that followed the publication of Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy* and Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*, the reform of the Stanford curriculum, and the deMan/Heidegger exposés. The ensuing invective, whether of the right or of the left, is an *agon* of the old (read clas-

sical) style. Vituperative display oratory has always been a mode in which the persona of the speaker is far more prominent and palpable than the substance of anything said. As it was in the beginning, *ethos* is a mask that when well wrought is not only persuasive but can become a marketable commodity as well. Who profits from this marketing and who remains watching, still disenfranchised, on the sidelines? To whom is this rhetoric addressed? Who will, or can, buy these carefully crafted products? Who will begin to emulate them? The manner adopted by right and left alike is one of mounting public debates. These serve more as display cases for very senior academic personalities than as vehicles for consensus and dialogue and change. Literacy itself becomes a commodity and no longer a crucial reality for large numbers of people who still live "in the world and in time."

The Allan Blooms, William Bennetts, and E. D. Hirsches have been decried by the academic left wing along these lines, for profiteering, drawing personal gain from the recent hysteria about literacy that—the liberals charge—they have helped create. It is neither uncomfortable nor unexpected for a traditionalist like Allan Bloom to defend traditional hierarchies of content, salary, and rank and to promote the orthodox conservative notion of education of, for, and by an homogeneous elite. That is precisely why he and his kindred are denounced by the academic left wing. However, the physicians may need to heal themselves, for is it not contradictory when exponents of a liberal (politically) and radical (epistemologically) left wing speak and write in a tone that conveys disdainful contempt not only toward the misguided classical nostalgia of the Allan Blooms and William Bennetts but also, and more problematically, toward the "naive reader" and the epistemologically "soft"? This is the very problematic tone and manner that the spring season of reviews brought with it.

More than two decades ago, Kenneth Burke characterized the manner and sensibility of the literary professorial elite as "comic primness, or prim irony," which he defined as "an attitude characterizing a member of a privileged class who somewhat questions the state of affairs whereby he enjoys his privileges; but after all, he does enjoy them and so in the last analysis he resigns himself to the dubious conditions in a state of ironic complexity that is apologetic but not abnegatory" (*A Rhetoric of Motives* 126). He gives this example: "In keeping the Negroes' [read: Composition teachers'] wages low, it sets competing lower standards for wages generally, except insofar as 'outside union organizers from the North' can exert pressure for higher rates. A deliberate cult of the irrational, the Absurd, would obscure the perception of such conditions, even suggesting that there is a certain bad taste or literary crudeness in the mere mention of them; but a 'dialectical' way of deriving these same absurdities can be 'rational'" (259). One question suggested by this characterization is, who today promotes and profits from the blurring of realities Burke defines here—the neo-conservative marketers of neo-classical curricula or the radical left cultists of the irrational and the absurd? Both groups, in their disdainful loftiness, eschew and obscure mention of "the conditions," and "the state of affairs" that holds for basic and advanced literacy. Both the students and the teachers of basic literacy and basic writing suffer from this state of affairs.

Perhaps the dogmas of epistemological relativism and semantic indeterminacy, and particularly their bombastic delivery system, will be more effective in waking up the slumbering Freshman than were the dogmas of correct diction, cohesion, and effective argumentation. The jury is still out. In the meantime, the classroom dynamics, the state of affairs, the condi-

tions, remain soberingly consistent. Sylvia Plath characterized some of it this way. What she says of women here can be extended to any group of marginalized, underlings, or lessers. "Every woman adores a Fascist, / The boot in the face, the brute / Brute heart of a brute like you. / You stand at the blackboard, daddy, / In the picture I have of you" ("Daddy," Barnstone and Barnstone, eds., *Women Poets* 537). Students, teachers of basic literacy, the ranks of Freshman English teachers can be edified—or brutalized—"for their own good" in ways they come to consider normal or even enjoyable. Plath traces the potential for psychopathology in this relationship. For inculcating and perpetuating this pedagogical psychopathology the Allan Blooms of the right and the Harold Blooms of the left are equally culpable. They are equally guilty as well of creating an air of rarefied mystification surrounding language use and interpretation that can prolong the dependency of student on teacher. Instead, dare we hope for pedagogies that clarify and deepen, that focus and expand, and that equalize the relationship between the "best that has been thought and said" and the newer voices only recently encouraged by our reading and writing curricula?

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CLASSICAL "ELEMENTARY EXERCISES" AND IN-PROCESS COMPOSING

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Renaissance schoolboys studied language through sequences of exercises. Their teachers specifically inherited this tradition from two Greek rhetoricians and teachers: from Hermogenes, whose work was first published sometime during early second-century Greece and passed on to sixteenth-century English schoolboys through Latin translations; from Athonius, whose work was first put into early Renaissance Latin by Reinhard Lorich, and then made even more accessible to school teachers and their pupils by the handbook writer Richard Rainolde, whose *Foundacion of Rhetorique* was a free translation of Lorich in 1563. Quintilian, in various parts of his *Institutio Oratoria* (especially the early chapters on the early education of the Roman schoolboy), had also fostered exercise learning in the language arts, but within a much more flexible and progressive educational system.¹

Why start a paper on teaching writing in today's community colleges with a reference to such a seemingly rigid system of activities, and why do this at a time in the history of recent composition studies when process rather than classical pedagogy seems so firmly in place in our writing classrooms?

To answer that question, I must explain a paradox in our field. Much recent work on writing pedagogy, exemplified best by Knoblauch and Brannon's argument against the classical tradition in current classrooms (*Rhetorical Traditions and Modern Writing*, where they call classicism "That Ol' Time Religion"), sees classical pedagogy as essentially product oriented, as centered on a type of imitation and rote learning that seems, at least on the surface, to contradict all that teachers have recently learned from developmental psychologists and their English-teaching interpreters. There is no arguing the inflexible and rule-governed nature of classical elementary exercises, particularly as those were appropriated from Hermogenes and Athonius by Renaissance schoolmasters of the sixteenth-century. Certainly, used as self-contained, uncontextualized activities in today's composing courses, these elementary exercises would cause a quick drop in enrollment and a corresponding increase in teacher ennui. But such a position on classical exercises is needlessly extreme. We can put together sequences of exercises that are fitted to today's more enlightened psychological or process perspectives on learning by adding two general elements to these exercises that are missing from sixteenth-century classrooms: a sense of rhetorical purpose and a sense of context and community. Used with these two rhetorical elements, process-oriented exercises such as free-writing, drafting, and revision establish a sense of writing as process without sacrificing attention to those product-oriented skills (copying, summarizing, paraphrasing, translating, amplifying) that our students, cut loose as they are from their oral traditions, must learn as they learn to immerse themselves in process.²

II

Before I go on to describe such a combined classical/contemporary composition unit, I need to give you a condensed description of classical composing exercises. Both Hermogenes and Athonius followed this basic plan:

1. They defined a type of writing: a fable, a tale, a refutation, a description, a proverb.
2. They provided a general description or outline of the rhetorical principles that previous writers had used to produce this discourse type—for example, a list of common and special topics appropriate to the discourse, some brief descriptions of how previous writers had arranged their materials, and some account of the style that had been used by previous writers. These descriptions of method never included analysis of texts or contexts. They were simply provided as background information students used as they imitated the type of discourse being given attention.
3. They provided an annotated example of the discourse type (fable, tale, proverb, and the like). Annotations simply marked the discourse sections with the topics, elements of arrangement, and stylistic qualities that had already been described in the brief descriptions of principles.
4. Students were then asked to run through the basic imitation exercises (They copied, they translated, they paraphrased, they summarized, they reported on; only later would they write their own versions of the discourse type, or would they interpret the meaning of the piece.). Often,