the work that writing can and does do in and beyond the classroom. I also am reminded of four artist-teachers whose work with at-risk youth I followed for six months, work I found emotionally exhausting; working collectively made it possible to construct generative questions in the midst of such uncertainty and even despair towards a fluid and dynamic sense of common purpose. Now that we are finally at a point in our professional history where we can risk telling stories of “failure”—or at least uncertainty, ambiguity, and perhaps, at times, exhaustion—we may be poised to “revision” the singular teacher in light of these new stories towards greater understanding our of “individual” choices in light of the collective purposes that Lee so aptly describes among and between herself and her students.

Fort Wayne, Indiana

WORKS CITED


Reviewed by Dale Jacobs, University of Windsor

In early January, I began reading Lynn Bloom’s *Composition Studies as a Creative Art*. It was a review that I had agreed to do months earlier, but that had been pushed back by the usual day-to-day concerns—teaching,
committee work (both inside and outside the department), mentoring graduate teaching assistants, writing memos, filing reports, and other duties that will be familiar to all Writing Program Administrators. By the end of the semester, however, none of these reasons seemed usual at all; in fact, my second year at a new institution seemed very unusual in its demands, stresses, and frustrations, pushing me to the point of emotional exhaustion. By the time the semester ended, I wondered what I was doing here and why I was subjecting myself to a job that felt so damaging. Being the first and only compositionist at my current institution, I felt isolated and cut off from the support that might help me understand my situation. It was in this frame of mind that I came to Composition Studies as a Creative Art.

It would be a gross overstatement to say that reading this book fundamentally changed my orientation towards composition studies or made me fully appreciate and accept my working conditions as a WPA. It did, however, make me think and reflect on the ways in which I perform my day-to-day work and on the ways in which this work is implicated in both the work of the discipline and the work of this particular university. Bloom reminded me that our involvement in composition is “an active, ongoing process” and that our experiences and the telling of those experiences should act as an important way of making knowledge and of understanding ourselves in relation to the world around us, including to our discipline and our institution(s). This is the essential philosophy that underscores this wide-ranging collection of essays, originally published between 1974 and 1998, which are grouped into four sections: Teaching Writing and Teaching Writing Teachers; Teaching and Writing Creative Nonfiction; Creative Scholarship and Publication in Composition Studies; and Writing Program Administration as a Creative Enterprise. In particular, the final section of this book pushed me to reflect on what happened last semester and on my current position as a WPA.

In the text’s final section, Bloom draws on her extensive experience as a Writing Program Administrator in order to theorize the experience of being a WPA across institutional lines. She does so not by explicitly working through autobiographical experience, but by explicating the structural relationships that exist between a WPA and her institutional situation. In doing so, she draws on her experience at a variety of institutions as the basis for her cross-institutional conclusions. (The exception occurs in an essay entitled “Why I (Used to) Hate Giving Grades,” which deals less with program administration than with assessment at the level of the individual classroom.) Reading such essays as “I Want a Writing Director,” “Initiation Rites, Initiation Rights” (with Thomas Recchcio), and “Making a Difference: Writing Program Administration as a Creative Process” put the experience of working as a WPA in some perspective for me, making me
feel less isolated, and pushing me to reflect further on my own experience and relationship to this particular institution. For example, in “Initiation Rites, Initiation Rights,” Bloom and Recchio enumerate ten “initiation rites” that compositionists will inevitably endure as they begin their new jobs as WPAs. Of the ten, I have experienced nine in the past eighteen months and now expect that the tenth is only a matter of time. Before coming to this job, I had spent three years at another institution at which I was not expected to be the WPA, but where I was nonetheless involved in the composition program. With this experience, I believed I understood what I was getting into when I accepted my current position. I was wrong. Initially, I thought that it was just me, just the institution, just this particular situation, when my duties were expanded (Rite Two) or when I was asked to propose and then chair a Writing Across the Curriculum initiative (Rite Nine) or when another faculty member “let slip a denigration of [my] job, [my] discipline” (225), as Bloom so diplomatically puts it in Rite Four. I could go on, but the point is that Bloom reminded me that these problems exist in institutions across North America and that instead of feeling sorry for myself, I could reclaim agency and theorize my experience in order to help both myself and others in similar positions. Importantly, however, Bloom does not stop with this essay; she immediately moves to an essay that emphasizes the possibility that is inherent in the WPA position. In “Making a Difference: Writing Program Administration as a Creative Process,” Bloom reminds us that “a WPA’s efforts, individually and collaboratively, can make a particular difference, and in a relatively short time: training teachers, influencing graduate education, influencing undergraduate education, and establishing or enhancing the institution’s reputation in writing” (230). In and of themselves, these words are neither new nor astonishing, but they are ones that WPAs need to hear more often. Bloom’s articulation of the ideas in this section act as important reminders for me and other WPAs of the importance of our work; they also serve to place it in a larger context that provides the space for us to reflect on and theorize our experiences.

Bloom makes both an explicit and implicit argument throughout the collection that narration is an important form of knowledge, picking up on strands of argument that appear in Joseph Trimmer’s Narration as Knowledge. Two chapters in particular (both of which appear in the section on Teaching and Writing Creative Nonfiction) exemplify this principle: “Teaching College English as a Woman” and “Subverting the Academic Masterplot,” which first appeared in Trimmer’s Narration as Knowledge. In both of these essays, Bloom narrates her experience and then moves on to theorize that experience in productive ways that neither essentialize her experience as universal nor downplay it as isolated and particular to her. In
these pieces, Bloom uses her experience as a way both to critique and envision possibility with regard to teaching. Moreover, “Teaching College English as a Woman,” originally published in 1992, acts as a complement and precursor to current and ongoing work on labor issues, gender and the teaching of composition, including Eileen Schell’s *Gypsy Academics and Mother-Teachers: Gender, Contingent Labor and Writing Instruction* and the more recent collection, *Moving a Mountain: Transforming the Role of Contingent Faculty in Composition and Higher Education*, edited by Eileen Schell and Patricia Lambert Stock. My only reservation about this essay is that it would have been useful for Bloom to engage more current scholarship in this area in revising this already published piece for inclusion in this book. In fact, my major critique of *Composition Studies as a Creative Art* is that despite her stated commitment to revision, Bloom was apparently reluctant to engage current theory and scholarship as she revisited these essays.

In addition, there are points in the book where Bloom’s dislike of theoretical positions—which she couches in negative terms like jargon—simply get in the way of full engagement with important ideas. For example, in an essay entitled “Why Don’t We Write What We Teach? And Publish It?” Bloom quotes a passage in which Mary Jane Dickerson theorizes how the self is constructed in autobiographical narratives. Bloom then goes on to immediately dismiss Dickerson’s idea by saying, “I have never in my reading of some three-thousand autobiographies in the past decade seen an autobiographer explain the process in either the critical jargon or the concepts that Dickerson uses” (123). She goes on later in the essay to say that “Unlike far too many academic writers and journal editors, I’d eschew the critical jargon, especially trendy language, which I do not wish to valorize, whatever the pretext, in texts, subtexts, or intertexts” (125). Unfortunately, her desire to “eschew the critical jargon” too often means that she is simply dismissive of ideas that do not get at “the essential truth,” an undefined idea that is repeated often in the collection. Such a position, however, is at odds with her claim at the end of the book that “Everybody comes to their own creativity through their own sense of possibility, and in their own ways” (242). Despite Bloom’s objections, theory is about possibility, the act of reflecting on experience and on action. bell hooks once said that theory saved her life because it gave her a way to think about her experiences in ways that allowed her to intervene and to make change. To me, that is theory in the best sense of the word, a project not unlike that which Bloom pursues in the last section of the book on WPA work and in essays such as “Teaching College English as a Woman” and “Subverting the Academic Masterplot.” At these points, Bloom is at her best.

There are, however, other times in *Composition Studies as a Creative Art* when Bloom overgeneralizes from her experiences, not taking into
account the variety of factors that affect how teachers and students are situated in relation to teaching and learning. For example, in “Teaching My Class” and her famous essay, “Freshmen Composition as a Middle-Class Enterprise,” Bloom argues that all teachers share her middle class background, values, and assumptions and that all students are striving uncritically towards a middle class existence. In this argument, she assumes that schools/universities only perform a reproductive function in society, never acknowledging, as argued in critical pedagogy, that schools can also be sites of resistance. Despite some interesting ideas in these essays, by overgeneralizing and by failing to engage the theory implicit in her argument, Bloom forecloses on the possibility of productive engagement and reflection by her readers.

There is much to recommend this collection of essays which, in many ways, represents a life in composition. At its best, Composition Studies as a Creative Art forces us to see the connections between all of us as compositionists and invites us to be self-reflective about our own teaching and professional lives, as it did for me early this January. At these moments, Bloom opens a discussion about important issues in the field. There are, however, times when Bloom does not fulfill this potential, giving us instead glimpses of the possibilities in her scholarship.

Windsor, Ontario

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Reviewed by Lynnell Edwards, Concordia University-Portland

In his introduction to Linda Myers-Breslin’s Administrative Problem Solving for Writing Programs and Writing Centers: Scenarios in Effective Program Management Douglas Hesse remarks that “Certain kinds of

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