JOURNALISM AND COMPOSITION

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For a few minutes, I am going to play Melville's Ishmael standing in the mast-head. As Ishmael stands watch in the mast, he bols himself into a Platonic dream and nearly falls to his death. He warnings, "Beware of enlisting in your vigilant fisheries any lad with lean brow and hollow eye; given to unseasonable meditativeness; and who offers to ship with the Phaecon instead of Bowditch [author of a seaman's manual] in his head. Beware of such an one, I say, your whales must be seen before they can be killed; and this sunken-eyed young Platonist will tow you ten wakes round the world, and never make you one pint of spermaceti richer." My Platonic meditation about teaching freshman writing may be familiar to many, and I would undoubtedly sight more whales with Corder and Perrin, 4th edition, as my guidebook; but let me tow you a few wakes with my Platonic scheme and hope the journey may make you at least one spoonful of spermaceti richer.

Since the beginning of the 18th century, almost every major writer in England and America flirted with journalism. From Addison and Steele to Dr. Johnson and Dr. Franklin, from Hazlitt and Hawthorne to Hemingway and Willa Cather, journalism has given many writers valuable experience and training in composition. It has also produced The Tatler, The Spectator, The Rambler, and more recently, the new journalism of Tom Wolfe, Hunter Thompson, and Norman Mailer. One may think as he pleases about the last writers on my list, but Addison, Steele, Johnson, and Franklin earned their literary spurs and reputations primarily as journalists. So did Mark Twain, James Thurber, and E. B. White. And the list goes on.

My Platonic scheme will not produce writers of the quality of those just named, but perhaps it will allow students to see their writing work in ways that other approaches do not. Of the several advantages of a journalistic approach to freshman writing, the most immediate is the definition of an audience other than the teacher. Contrary to what some journalism schools teach, the reading audience averages better than third to fifth grade. The best journalists always aim at a literate and well-informed audience, and the best journalism uses language with clarity and grace, those twin sisters of shapely prose. As composition teachers, most of us would settle for clarity — and pray for grace.

Besides defining an audience and giving students some models to examine and perhaps to imitate, a journalistic approach to composition offers students writing assignments that pose specific problems of communicating information and impressions to readers. It will also make those writing assignments more interesting, for a journalistic approach asks the writer to be an active participant in events outside himself. And if the teacher makes student writing the center of the in-class work, he can also teach the importance of editing — or perhaps more accurately, revision.

Before describing some writing assignments in my Platonic scheme, I might mention the problem of invention or prewriting. When I read William Irmscher's chapter on "Generating a Topic" in The Holt Guide to English, I find him describing the drama of thinking in the same language journalism teachers use to tell their students what to place in the lead paragraph of a news story. These old words gained their importance long before journalism appropriated them because they ask the questions that men and women have been posing since Adam and Eve swapped yarns with the Affable Archangel in the Garden. WHO? WHAT? WHEN? WHERE? WHY? and HOW? The marvelous simplicity of these questions strips away much of the verbiage that theories of invention impose upon students and allows young writers a framework for beginning. The business of invention or pre-writing has always been finding the questions, and by beginning with this simple set of questions and working all sorts of variations upon them, student writers can enrich their papers, their paragraphs, and their sentences with telling details, not needless baggage.

But asking the WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY, and HOW is not enough. If we place these questions in boxes arranged horizontally across the top of a page, we can show our students how to achieve one level of understanding and perception about the subjects, happenings, and people that concern simple news reporting. But if we shift the focus vertically to the WHO and ask about that WHO the five remaining questions (that is, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY, and HOW), we may harcnek to a little lower layer. When we begin to rearrange these questions in our scheme of boxes, those boxes may spread in all kinds of directions because the simple questions move beyond simple events and evoke other questions which begin to make the asker see beyond the surfaces. The permutations and shapes that the boxes might take will depend on how far a writer and observer is willing to go with his questions. Sometimes the questions will lead us to silly or fruitless answers, but one way to discover what is important is to find out what is fruitless and silly.

This WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY, and HOW can also help a student build better sentences, paragraphs, and papers. Let us start with a simple sentence like "John hit the ball." Here is the WHO (John), the WHAT the WHO did (hit), and WHAT received the WHO's action (the ball). Now, let's try a journalistic rendering of this sentence. "With two out and none on in the ninth inning, John Jones hit the ball out of Busch Stadium to give the Cardinals a 1-0 win over the Houston Astros." The journalistic sentence may not be pretty, but it contains information answering most of the six questions required by a lead sentence or paragraph. The sentence is clear, but it stays pretty much within the range of a horizontal scheme among our boxes. We can work vertically if we ask WHERE about the verb hit. Instead of saying "out of Busch Stadium," we might say "over the left-field wall of Busch Stadium." And if we ask HOW about the verb, we might find a better word — something like slammed or belted. My point is that by beginning with these six questions we can often show a writer what he has left out that might be important. We can show him how to enrich his sentences with details that count and with diction that is more precise.

I suspect that Francis Christensen had something of that sort in mind when he described the generative rhetoric of the sentence and the paragraph. The way to add to, to modify, or to accumulate is to ask the questions that matter. Christensen's approach to the sentence and the paragraph also illustrates for students the need for specificity in clear writing.

But I stay from my Platonic scheme to make scribblers of composition students. For this archetype of archetypes, one needs between fifteen and eighteen reasonably alive young men and women, one bedraggled but not broken teacher, a gathering place, many ditto stencils, and a machine and paper to go...
with them. I suspect one needs a Bowditch as a guidebook, and Coxter and Perrin, 4th edition, is more than sufficient. I would also like a book of readings so that students can see what other writers have done to solve problems of conveying information and impressions. Most important will be the students' papers, for student writing must be the center of the Platonic scheme. Before I send students out to write their letters to the world, I would arm them with ditto stencils so that every time a writing assignment is due, we will have at least two or three of their papers, wet from the press, to examine in class. In class, we will become editors — and by editing first individually and then collectively, we may discover some things about words, sentences, paragraphs, and designs. As city editor, I think the first assignment might be to send students to report on an event. For example, I might send two or three to report on the same public lecture; two or three more might attend a student government meeting; another trio might report on a sports event. My questions would be: "What happened?" My ditto stencils for this assignment would all go to the three students reporting on the public lecture. By examining three different accounts of the same event, we can talk about point-of-view and perspective; we can also discuss how and why three reports of the same event might emphasize different details and project the different voices of the writers. We would also want to do some editing of words, sentences, and paragraphs — and to examine the strategies each writer used to present his report.

This would be the pattern we would follow for many of our class meetings and for most of the semester. But I would want the range of writing assignments to parallel those of the so-called rhetorical modes. And the journalistic approach would supply most of these modes by its assignments. We could write description, narration, exposition, and argument and persuasion. For example, we might write a letter to the editor. Some time during the semester, everyone ought to write an editorial. Perhaps we could write an interview with some campus personality. We might visit some places on campus and write for readers an account of that visit. We might conduct a small poll by interviewing a half-dozen people on a controversial issue. We might review a movie or a campus theatrical production. Another assignment might be to write an article for the woman's page or the Sunday gardening section or a hobbies page. We could find out how to cure crabgrass, repot plants, or raise tomatoes. In other words, a process paper. We might write a feature story about oscilloscopes or some other unusual device or gadget. What is it? Define it, describe it, tell what it does. We might analyze a public address; what did the speaker say and what were the implications of his attitudes and point of view? We might want to play with some "what if" pieces — what if Hester Prymne were alive today and wrote to Ann Landers asking advice? Or what if some figure from the past were here (say Benjamin Franklin) to comment on Watergate? This last assignment often produces amusing essays — and often provides readers and writers with interesting insights. This list includes most of the kinds of writing that rhetorics and handbooks define as classification, comparison and contrast, process, definition, argument, analysis. And by sending students into the world to report their findings to their classmates (to be published, that is), we might show them how the world of the written word is more important and interesting than they think.

I suspect the editing we might do in class is almost as important as the writing itself. We might start with a paragraph like the one below. Editing someone else's work is always easier than editing our own. For many students, editing at first seems like an unclean or immoral act, but once they unlearn their fear of the printed page and begin to understand that editing also means "aiding," such exercises can be fun. And here we can do much of our teaching about words, sentences, grammar, logic, conciseness, and clarity.

The paragraph below comes from a manuscript I recently read for a publisher. The authors, both experienced writers, were well aware that their copy was in rough and early draft form. They were more interested, at this stage of writing, in the shape or design of their work than in its style. I gave my students copies of the paragraph and asked them if they, as editors, could make the paragraph more concise than it is in its draft form. While they were editing, so was I. Here is the paragraph, with each sentence numbered:

1. The opening paragraph is an important one. (2) It should announce your topic and the restrictions and limitations that you yourself have placed upon that topic. (3) It should make clear your point of view, your style, your tone. (4) However, it should demonstrate your confidence and control, the assurance that you as author know exactly where you want to go, and how you plan to get there. (5) Sounds easy and obvious. (6) And yet opening paragraphs — or, to be more precise, effective opening paragraphs are often the most difficult of all to sit down and write. (7) Very often, to be sure, the stumbling block is largely a psychological one of our own making. (8) Having invested a fair amount of time and energy in deciding what you want to do and how you are going to proceed, the initial act of engaging pen with paper becomes a task of herculean proportions. (9) You try, only to tear it up and try again, squandering your energy and your patience in one false start after another. (10) Either the paragraph just won't take shape (which may be a sign, of course, that you don't really know what you want to write about after all) or it comes out lifeless, contrived, formulaic. (11) Either way, of course, you're in trouble. [This paragraph is reprinted with permission of the authors.]

Only one student edited the first sentence. He deleted the words on and one. Everyone in the class touched the second sentence. The most radical editing changed the sentence to read, "It should announce the topic and your restrictions and limitations on that topic." All left the third sentence as it stands. Every student altered the fourth sentence, most by taking out the words at author. One student put a period after the word control and crossed out every word thereafter. One student deleted "Sounds easy and obvious," but most left this construction intact. Everyone edited out "to be more precise" from his sixth sentence, and four students dropped out "sit down and." From the seventh sentence, all deleted "to be sure"; only three students crossed out "of our own making." Thereafter, most of the editing was minor, with several students deleting parenthetical elements like "of course." Though no two students edited alike, collectively they had done an admirable job. As we discussed the reasons for our editing, the students were teaching each other how to make their prose more concise. And I reminded them that the authors of this paragraph, during a later stage of composition, would scrutinize their work in the same way we had edited the prose in class.

The journalistic model of teaching composition offers ample opportunities for such editing exercises which focus upon paragraphing, diction, organization, sentence structure — all those qualities associated with effective prose. A teacher can plan such exercises as I did with the paragraph or can simply tackle these problems as they appear in the dittoed papers.

Once students begin to see how to make prose lean and lithe, some begin to be murderous with others' prose. Instead of editors, they become butchers; they strip the prose of important qualifiers and modifiers — and sometimes of its character. Other students in the class will usually temper the
judgments of those going for the jugular vein, however. What students learn by editing is a healthy disrespect for the written word, and once they learn this disrespect, they will begin to respect what writers can do with words, sentences, and paragraphs. They will learn that language can both reveal and conceal. And that lesson is one of the most important they can learn. They may also learn to enjoy the fallibility they share with their classmates, their teachers, and the rest of the human race. Some composition teachers might say that these are peripheral values of learning to read and to write, but to me they seem essential.

Pursuing my Platonic scheme has nudged me to the brink of sentimentality. Like Ishmael, I have almost fallen from the mast. But Ishmael had enough Bowditch in his head to keep him from toppling, and I have enough journeying to recognize that any approach to composition is partial and flawed. Those of us interested in teaching writing are always looking for new ways to do old things, and because we are interested, we search for that archetype of archetypes—that perfect system for introducing our students to the loveliness of language and the fun of creating worlds of words. Like all other approaches, my journalistic model, alas, has its flaws. Its principal strength is that it is both interesting and flexible.

Melville’s Ishmael warns us that after many repeated and prolonged experiences he has learned that man must eventually lower or at least shift his conceit of attainable felicity. The attainable felicity of a journalistic model is probably no greater than that of other models composition teachers have used. It will, in all likelihood, produce no B. B. Whites or James Thurbers. Despite its deficiencies, the model can be interesting and can help students see their words at work.

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**READING AND WRITING MOVIE REVIEWS IN FRESHMAN ENGLISH**

Ralph Alan Cohen Madison College

Teachers of freshman English courses spend a good deal of their time searching for materials that will interest students generally hostile to required composition courses. Judging from the examination of copies of freshman readers that come across my desk, collections of politically "relevant" material are dying a natural death. The trend appears to be back to classic essays or "popular writing" which emphasizes such areas as advertising and "new journalism." Though this material is usually provocative and sometimes of quite high quality, it has one severe limitation: it provides poor writing models for the great majority of students. An ad for Marlboro, for example, may lend itself wonderfully to a discussion of audience, sublimation, and connotation, but imitating the techniques of the ad is of dubious value to most students. By the same token, Norman Mailer’s report of the All-Frazier fight is masterful writing, but the value of the article is almost wholly in the style, and one could hardly expect a student to find the piece an easy model to use. In short, readings in freshman English courses should deal with a subject of interest to students, but they should also be written in a form that provides a usable model for their writing. An ideal source of such material is movie reviews.

To begin with, movie reviews are good material for composition courses because movies are a popular subject. Indeed, of all contemporary intellectual and artistic endeavors, the movies have the strongest grip on popular culture. Now novels are designed to become movies, and it is the movies of *The Graduate* or *The Godfather* that win critical acclaim, not the novels. A cultural event like Woodstock is metamorphosed into film, and even a very bad film like *The Great Gatsby* shapes society more dramatically than its far superior ancestor. The teacher that can work film into his course taps a wealth of interest and enthusiasm in his students—an interest and enthusiasm which, unknown to them, contains the seeds of aesthetic, philosophical, and moral judgment.

Movie reviews, then, deal with a subject that, in one way or another, all students find interesting. The student who has not seen the movie will discover that a large part of the reviewer’s art lies in encouraging the reader to see or to avoid the film (persuasion). The student who has seen the movie will discover the fun of having his impressions and subjective responses challenged or reinforced (argument). The form, as well as the subject, of movie reviews is well suited to the tastes of students. Because the film critic, unlike the book reviewer or drama or music critic, is reviewing an artifact that must depend for its survival on a mass audience, it follows that his review must address itself to a larger and less specialized group of readers. True, film critics such as Andrew Sarris, Pauline Kael, and John Simon presuppose a cultured and well-educated reader, but they nonetheless allude most frequently to other films and thus remain within the scope of a "popular" art. Since part of the reviewer's job is persuasion, the good reviewer will make every effort to entertain and amuse his reader, and such writing is more likely to hold the interest of the student than essays whose intrinsic moral instruction excuses the writer from stooping to such tactics. The most attractive feature of a movie review for teacher and student alike may be its length, or more precisely, its brevity. A movie review is the right size. For the student who is assigned such reading, it is brief enough to allow him to find it in the library, read it, and take notes on it in thirty minutes. It lends itself, therefore, to multiple assignments ("Find out what Sarris, Kael, and Simon had to say about *The Sting*.") For the teacher its brevity makes reading it in class or preparing a ditto a reasonable undertaking, but more importantly, it makes it possible for an instructor to do a thorough job of dealing with all of the nuances of the re-
viewer's writing strategy in a 50-minute class. (Implementing such a program, at least on a small scale, need not be difficult. Most colleges provide some sort of film series, and all an instructor has to do is obtain a schedule and work his syllabus around the movie or movies he wants the class to see. The instructor who is interested in a closer treatment of film but who has strict budgetary and equipment limitations can show silent classics in the classroom at a very low cost. Many community libraries loan one-reelers from the golden age of Chaplin, Keaton, and Laurel and Hardy. These films are in 8mm, and it is a simple thing to borrow or rent an 8mm projector. Such films can also be purchased for about $10 per film.)

The reviewer's strategies are as numerous as the critics who review movies, and no manageable list of movie critics could be compiled without serious omissions, but I should like to discuss here the work of several critics which I have found particularly well suited to the goals of a composition course. A brief introduction for each will be followed by an examination of how movie reviews in general and their reviews in particular work as rhetorical models.

Two of the best, James Agee and Dwight Macdonald, offer little help on contemporary films. James Agee (1909-1955; collected reviews in Agee on Film) is perhaps the most profound of movie reviewers. His frequently reprinted review of Chaplin's Monsieur Verdoux transcends the artifact which is its ostensible subject and becomes a treatise on the survival of modern man as an integral personality. Though Agee's writing is often so poetic that it scans, his syntax is frequently as convoluted as poetry, his ideas as abstract, and he is best reserved for study by superior students. Dwight Macdonald (collected reviews in Dwight Macdonald on Movies), like Agee, is a heavyweight, but students enjoy him because he is more direct, more on the subject of film, more biting, and more amusing. On Charlton Heston in Ben-Hur, for example:

Misdirected by Wyler, Heston throws all his punches in the first ten minutes (three grimaces and two intonations) so that he has nothing left four hours later when he has to react to the Crucifixion. (He does make it clear, I must admit, that he disappears.)


We read Agee for wisdom; we read Macdonald for wit.

In my view, the four most important movie critics dealing with contemporary film are Pauline Kael, Andrew Sarris, Stanley Kauffmann, and John Simon. John Simon, the most caustic critic, writes for Esquire (collected reviews in Movies into Film; Film Criticism, 1967-1970), and his abrasiveness ("as stuffed with suburban-sub-urbanite epigrams as a Victorian sofa with horseshoes") makes him entertaining enough to compensate students for his constant showing off. Stanley Kauffmann (writes for The New Republic; collected reviews in A World on Film and Figures of Light) does not write so well, and in many ways he is not so profound, as the others on this list, but his habit of filtering his responses to films through his politics makes his criticism interesting as a measure of the social import of film. Students enjoy him because he is unapologetically "relevant." The film buff's high priest is Andrew Sarris (writes for The Village Voice; collected reviews in Confessions of a Culiist: On the Cinema, 1955-1969). Sarris is the most important proponent of the "auteur" school that maintains that films, like novels, reflect the idiosyncrasies of their creators, who are usually directors. His criticism, therefore, is more concerned with cinematic theory and aesthetics than that of other critics. I have found, however, that students like his heavier use of technical terms which they find "scientific" (and thus, I suppose, more reliable). His writing, though clever, is not consistently good, but in one respect, the examples he uses to support his observations, he is an excellent model. Pauline Kael's writing, on the other hand, is consistently excellent (writes for The New Yorker; collected reviews in I Lost It at the Movies, Kiss Kiss Bang Bang, Deep into Movies, and Going Steady). She approaches her craft with a healthy skepticism about her subject, a skepticism reflected in her strong, direct prose. The simplicity of her style, however, belies the complexity of her thought, for her analysis of a movie more frequently than not explains the culture that produced it, and though she may be wrong about a film, she is rarely wrong about society. Kael's capacity for surprise and individuality disarms the reader, and she often endears herself to students by her willingness to appreciate the unpolished energy of films like Billy Jack. Other film critics are sometimes of special interest — Wanda Hale (New York Daily News) speaks well for the "movies are just entertainment" school of thought, Rex Reed does delightful hatchet jobs on the personalities in movies, and Gene Shalit (Ladies Home Journal and NBC's Today Show) has brought respectability back to the epigram — but the best writing models are the six I have mentioned above.

Because they write well, these critics use all the major rhetorical types, sometimes in the same review. Description, of course, is a necessary element of any movie review; the reviewer must describe the film to his readers. A good movie review is, therefore, an ideal way to show students the difference between bare plot summary and a critical mixture of description and judgment. Compare, for example, a Newsweek movie review with one by Pauline Kael; while Newsweek will devote at least an entire paragraph to almost unadorned plot summary, she maps the basic territory in a way that teaches while it describes. Note the economy with which she describes Dirty Harry:

Dirty Harry is a kind of hardhat The Fountainhead; Callahan, a free individual, afraid of no one and bowing to no man, is pitted against a hippie maniac (loosely based on San Francisco's Zodiac Killer) who is a compendium of criminal types.

(Deeper into Movies [Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969], p. 386)

That is as close as any of her description comes to detaching from her ideas, and even this passage (1) makes an analogy to a novel, (2) suggests an historical source, and (3) makes a judgment on the construction of one of the characters.

Good reviews share this economy in plot summary and reserve elaborate description for those telling moments in the film which support the reviewer's interpretation. This is how Sarris describes the famous conclusion of Antonioni's Blow-Up:

Antonioni's camera begins following the action of the imaginary ball back and forth across the net until it is "hit" over the fence near where the photographer is standing. He walks back to the spot where the "ball" has landed and throws it back. He then begins swiveling his head back and forth and even hears the ball bouncing. He smiles at his own susceptibility, but suddenly an expression of pain flashes across his face. The camera cuts to an overhead shot of the photographer, a self-judgment of both contempt and compassion. Antonioni, the tennis player who once sold his trophies to live, has come out in the open with a definitive description of his di-
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vided sensibility, half Mod, half Marxist.


Here is impressive detail of observation, but note that Antonioni, the director, not one of the characters, is the true subject of this passage. By shifting the emphasis from what happened to what the director was doing, Sarris transforms plot summary into analysis. In discussing reviews, a helpful exercise is to ask students to point out any sentences whose sole purpose is plot summary. They are generally amazed to discover how few there are in good reviews.

The "trendy" nature of the film industry makes definition by classification an indispensable rhetorical approach for reviewers. Less than a year ago, a "disaster picture" meant an unusually unsuccessful film. Now, of course, it means a movie about some revolting catastrophe and big box office. "Horror movies," westerns," Biblical spectacles, "spy spoofs," "tear-jerkers," "screwball comedies," "nostalgia flicks," etc., are all terms that critics have had to invent and define. Such definitions serve as particularly good models for students, because the invention is so immediate that they can judge the type out of their own experience of the genre. For example, in the definition by classification (my own) of "nostalgia flicks" — "a nostalgia flick is a movie about the recent past that supports a sentimental story with soft music and soft focus" — a student can understand clearly that The Godfather fails to fit the definition, largely because he is so familiar with the types that are used to classify it.

Comparison and contrast is another rhetorical device frequently used in film reviews. In the first place, magazine reviewers like Kael, Simon, and Kaufmann may need to deal with more than one film in each issue. It is logical that they would try to play off two or more films against one another, either by taking too superficially similar films and contrasting them or by taking two seemingly dissimilar works and showing what they share in common. Pauline Kael is especially adept at this latter technique, and, in fact, in her last two books she has organized two to four disparate films under such headings as "Somebody Else's Success," "Private Worlds," and "Americana," which make ideal models for discussion of comparison and contrast. In the second place, since reviewers must be alert for any genuinely new developments, they tend to place films in a tradition by comparing and contrasting new films with old ones. This process is particularly helpful in teaching students the importance of a historical context. It also helps them see beyond the superficial distinctions of convention and technical advances to the more immutable issues of art. Finally, since movie makers so frequently try to revive older material, reviewers have a responsibility to compare "updates" with the originals. So far, this kind of comparison invariably enhances the older film and unsettles the student who assumes that cinemascopic and color are guarantees of improvement. Such comparisons (The Maltese Falcon and Chinatown, for example) can fuel endless discussions on changing priorities and mores and are invaluable to the classroom experience.

Analysis is the most frequently used technique in film reviews and is too obvious to need discussion here. Though Kael uses the technique well in discussing acting or society, Sarris is the master of cinematic analysis. His essays are fine models of assertion and support.

Movie reviews are good hunting grounds for thesis sentences because students must learn not to be decayed by the general statement of pleasure or displeasure with the film. In Agee, Kael, Macdonald, and Sarris there is always some essential point about the film that goes beyond subjective response to

objective idea. If a student can be taught to find the statement of idea that supports the review as a whole, then the same student can be taught to separate feeling from thought in his own writing. In the same way, movie reviews are excellent models for paragraph transition, because one of the largest problems that faces a reviewer is covering all the elements — plot, character, acting, directing, camerawork, score, theme, etc. — of the film. To do that the good reviewer must master the art of paragraph transition. Look, for example, at the way that Dwight Macdonald gets from the question of "spectacle" in Ben-Hur to the matter of violence in the film:

The color photography was the glaring kind that makes the people stand out like waxworks, with no relation to the background. There was not even a decent, or indecent, Roman orgy, the only valid excuse for making a Biblical picture.

Instead of sex, Ben-Hur gives us sadism. As G. Legman demonstrated long ago in Love and Death (published by The Breaking Point Press), our mass culture compensates for its prudery about sex by the broadest license in portraying violence.

(Dwight Macdonald on Movies, pp. 463-464)

Movie reviews can be used, as we have seen, as models for all the major rhetorical types. On the simplest level a student can be told to describe a film and persuade the reader to go to it or not. More ambitiously, he might be asked to describe the film (avoiding plot summary), define its type, and argue its social significance. The student with some background could turn such a review into a comparison and contrast. And the student who has an interest in the narrative arts (literary or cinematic) can analyze such elements in the film as plot, character, tone, camerawork, and editing. The instructor, moreover, by varying the conditions of the review, can alter the priorities of the assignment. He can, for example, simulate a newspaper deadline by insisting that reviews be turned in within a number of hours after the student has seen the film. This condition stresses the viewer’s experience (description) and emphasizes the persuasive nature of film. An in-class theme, by contrast, should de-emphasize description and let students reflect on a certain element in the film. Even a term paper is possible if the library has adequate sources, and at the very least a student could weigh the critical responses to a movie in the major newspapers and periodicals.

The movie review is a useful pedagogical device because it offers familiar and interesting subject matter in a brief and entertaining form. That form, nevertheless, uses the traditional rhetorical strategies and thus serves as a practical model. Beyond that, it shapes the student’s mind into a critical and receptive attitude toward questions of art and narrative and prepares him for — perhaps even converts him to — humanistic studies.

1974-75 SUBSCRIPTIONS EXPIRE

WITH THIS ISSUE
LINGUISTIC ETIQUETTE: GIVING STUDENTS THE CHOICE

David M. Higgins
Central Michigan University

It is the first day of a freshman composition class. Without a word of introduction I douse the lights and begin the slide show. In an old-time newsreel reporter's voice I read the paragraph on the first slide: "Now the mini has a man in it. In a spontaneous fashion happening miniskirts for men have begun showing up in Paris, Munich, London and Tokyo. In Scotland the minikilt raised the line to nine inches above the knee. In Japan the outfits include tops and can be worn by both men and women. 'You can tell the men by their hairy legs,' one lady said, 'or at least I think so.' " The second slide shows a man and woman doing the bugaloo in a Munich nightclub. Both are wearing miniskirts. Next is a miniskirted man and a pant-suited woman walking down a busy London street. Londoners in the background stare and smirk.

After three or four more slides of men walking, dancing, courting, and cavorting in miniskirts, I turn on the lights and ask my now-rowdy class what they think. "Too far. They're going too far," proclaims one male student. "They're a bunch of fruits, that's what they are," offers another. Looking at a female student in the front row, I ask: "What would you do if a blind date showed up at your house wearing a miniskirt?" "I'd shut the door in his face and get my father to run him off the porch," she replies, with feeling. Guffaws and witticisms from the class. "I'd get my brother to go out with him. I'd laugh in his face." "Hello, I'd call the police." "I'd say 'Sorry, but it's that time of month. You know how it is yourself.' " Finally, the tolerant types (five or six at most) speak up: "It's just a fashion. The first guys who wore their hair long got the same reaction," "Hell, those guys are probably more masculine than you guys, who are obviously threatened and insecure."

The argument continues, and the students — who should be nervous and reserved on the first day — laugh and fight. It is a good first-day lesson for that reason; but the main reason why I begin with it is that it leads easily to a consideration of the Big Question: "Does the student have a right to his own language?" After spending a considerable amount of time inducing the connection between men wearing miniskirts and students learning alternate dialects, I ask the students to vote on the Big Question. I contend that it is crucially important that (1) the students understand the connection, with all implications, and (2) they vote on the Question. But permit me to back up a bit.

Returning to the melee after the students have exhausted themselves in argumentation and noisemaking, I am eventually able to convince the majority (primarily by asking them to explain themselves, examine their assumptions, and defend their terms) that there is nothing inherently 'feminine' about skirts (or purses, or a willingness to weep), or necessarily 'fruity' about men who wear them. This leads easily to a consideration of the larger principle: the meaning of a symbol resides in the perceiver. The students can usually provide their own examples (flags, beards, words). I ask "What does the word 'kid' mean?" "Baby goat," someone quickly replies. "So, if your roommate tells you she has a date with a neat kid she just met in the lounge you assume she has a crush on a baby goat and you call the local chapter of Americans Against Perversion? O.K. so the first meaning of 'kid' in our society is 'young person'; your mother was wrong (unless, of course, you lived on a farm)." I then explain what dictionary makers do — try to keep up with the way people are using words (i.e., giving meaning to symbols) — and I spend some time on the meaning of "Swear words are symbols. Are they inherently obscene?"

All of this is a good clear-thinking exercise which has applicability to writing, and is a necessary prelude to consideration of the Question. Since it is so necessary, I refer the students to materials on symbolic meaning, perception psychology, definition of terms, and examination of assumptions and evidence.

Eventually, most of the students admit that they cannot rationally condemn the miniskirt wearers. Most will still be disinclined to associate with such types, however, because (1) while they (the students) "understand" the rational principles, their emotional conditioning (against such things as men in women's clothing) is still dominant, or (2) they still condemn such people who refuse to dress and behave appropriately and follow the norms operant at a given time. While most of the students think of themselves as liberal and tolerant, it is not very difficult, at this point, to convince them that most are only so within certain peer and parental conditioned parameters. This realization of the power of conditioning is of obvious importance in the decision whether or not to learn linguistic etiquette.

A consideration of appropriateness in general follows naturally. "Who determines the rules of etiquette?" I ask. "Who decided that you are allowed to stick your fingers in any hole in your head, except the nose? What, exactly, is wrong with swear words? Why do you refrain from using four letter words while talking to your Aunt Voigal, when they flow like fertilizing spring rain at your nightly 'TKE' kegger? Why do you change your language and behavior when you come to class? Are there any actions or words or dress which would shock and perhaps repulse you if you encountered them in a classroom?"

After a lengthy discussion of societal norms, and whether they truly "distinguish men from animals" and indicate "civilized behavior," I write some examples of "bad English" on the board: "It's me; "I didn't get no beer;" "I ain't goin';" "Why you be jivin' me honky?;" "I bought four book;" He's prejudice against us;" Everybody get their mugs."

I ask, "What do you notice about these constructions?" "They're wrong," say the students. "What do you mean, wrong?" I ask: "Who says so? Parents? English Teachers? Grammarians? Why should we obey these people? Who gave them the right to decide? Where did they get the rules? What happens if we disobey them?" All of this leads to a comparison of appropriateness in dress and manners with appropriateness in language, and to an explanation of dialect, levels of usage (which are, of course, symbolic — and here the earlier discussion about symbolic meaning comes into play), descriptive and prescriptive grammar, language superiority and deterioration confusions, and speaking and writing for different audiences. I then ask the students to read the first two chapters of Robert Hall's eminently readable study, Linguistics and Your Language, which goes over much of the above in an orderly and convincing fashion, and to respond and conceptualize in their journals.

When the students return to class the next day they have a fairly understanding of the problem: their various dialects (like their various modes of dress and behavior) are no better and no worse than any others, but there are at least two deterrents to using whatever dialect one chooses, irrespective of audience and situation. I summarize for them: "First, very few people realize that one dialect is as good as another, and if you use an inappropriate dialect you are not as likely to be accepted. You are not as likely to get a good grade on your history paper. You are not as likely to get the job you want. You are not even as likely to be asked out on a second date. Second, infractions of propriety hinder communication. If intentional/effective communication is to occur, the receiver has to be willing to receive, to listen, to read. If he is distracted or put
off by inappropriate language the intended message will, in varying degrees, be distorted or blocked out. The Vietnam War veteran who appears before an American Legion group to argue for 'The Abrogation of All Ties with South Vietnam,' while wearing a miniskirt, will surely communicate a great deal; but what he communicates is not likely to be his coherent, sissive argument."

Understanding this, the students are probably ready at this point to vote—for pragmatic reasons—to learn their linguistic etiquette. I always feel compelled, however, to give them an overview of the other arguments which I must consider in deciding whether or not to teach linguistic etiquette (the rationales for and against teaching it seem to be identical to the rationales for and against learning it).

One argument I spend some time on is that teaching and learning linguistic etiquette impedes whatever progress we are making toward an open society, wherein any dialect would be acceptable to any audience in any situation: "Inappropriate" translates easily in the typical hierarchy mind into 'inferior,' and the closed society is able to retrace its fading lines. Perhaps if we stopped attempting dialectal adjustment, audiences would stop expecting it, and would be more tolerant of infractions of propriety, the result being a more open, egalitarian society. When everyone disobeys a law, the law soon fades in the psyches and eventually disappears from the books."

"Another point to consider before voting is that the teaching and learning of linguistic etiquette is exceedingly difficult and time consuming. Certainly, it is task enough to teach you to write with precision, clarity, and emphasis in your own dialects, without trying to teach you to do the same in a foreign dialect. To divert a large amount of time from the former task, to the study of proper linguistic etiquette, seems, in many ways, as arduous as devoting half of every English class to the study of Anne Landers. Can we really justify twelve to sixteen years of courses in etiquette?" "Certainly not," say some students. "Etiquette is important," say others.

Depending on the interest of the class, I sometimes go on at this point to explore some extremely speculative but nonetheless cogent arguments from the social sciences, which uphold rules of propriety—or social norms—as valuable and necessary. I quote from anthropologist Joseph Campbell's *Myths to Live By*: "In all areas of social intercourse, ritualized procedures de-personalize the protagonists, drop or lift them out of themselves so that their conduct now is not their own. But of the species, the society, the caste, or the profession... Without such game rules no society would exist; nor would any individual have the slightest idea how to act. And it will be only by virtue of the game rules of his local social group that anyone's humanity will unfold from the void of undefined potentials to its one and only (temporally, spatially, and temperamentally delimited) actualization as a life." After discussing this with the class, I spend some time explaining the Talcott Parsons—functionalist-school theory that group and caste norms are absolutely necessary to the preservation of (what the functionalists consider to be) a well-functioning American society.

"At the base of such arguments," I explain, "is the notion—considered truistic by many of the bet thinkers throughout science, philosophy, and art—that form-structure-order-unity must always be sufficient to counter-balance spontaneity-freedom-chaos. Nietzsche, Einstein, and Langer have written volumes on the deep necessity for Apollonian-Dionysian synthesis. (Philosophy, science, and music majors can sometimes pick up on these ideas and spur an extremely interesting and relevant discussion.) Volumes are being written today—by the functionalists primarily—on the necessity for such a synthesis even in the realm of social behavior and linguistic etiquette."

"Moreover," I continue, "is it not apparent from everyday experience that most groups apparently have a deep-seated need for rules of propriety, and hold steadfastly to them, even after they have become aware that such rules are irrational and even destructive? English professors—even those who have read in modern linguistics and are aware of the confusions of prescriptivism—perpetuate in their expectations of proper linguistic etiquette. Quite apart from any pragmatic considerations, most still get quite snotty when they receive a letter or report which contains spelling errors, sentence fragments, and split infinitives. At the same time, they are generally deferential to such behavioral mentors as Ann Landers or Emily Post. Whatever their motivations (perhaps a need for order even in the realm of etiquette, perhaps a need for cohering and uniting rites for the group or caste, perhaps a need for shibboleths which will set the group apart from and/or above others), it is obvious that even the groups which is most informed about linguistic superiority confusions is largely intolerant of improprieties. That, in effect, they treat these improprieties as inferior behavior, is the negative side. The positive side is that the group's rules, rites, and shibboleths function as distinguishing, unifying, and actualizing structures."

"Thus, class, I propose that we work on writing with precision, clarity, and emphasis within our own dialects. Whether or not we move on to the study of proper linguistic etiquette (which, of course, can also call for the use of non-standard English, in situations when standard formal English is not appropriate) is up to you. It is crucial that you understand that various dialects are not inherently inferior or superior. The notion of dialectal inferiority is destructive; it is a sturdy handle for bigots. From a practical point of view, however, the ability to speak and write according to the nature, prejudices, and expectations of various audiences is necessary for acceptance and communication. Moreover, while rules of propriety have been, and will continue to be, enormously destructive, they also appear to serve certain beneficial and perhaps necessary functions. Do you vote to stick entirely with improving your powers of exploration, expression, and communication within your own individual dialects, or do you wish to learn—also—proper linguistic etiquette?"

My classes have always—nearly unanimously—chosen the latter course.

**SOME QUESTIONS FOR COMPOSITION TEACHERS**

Lilllian Collingwood
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In an article entitled "Whatever Happened to Freshman English?" (The Educational Forum, March, 1973) Professor George H. Douglas, of the University of Illinois, Champaign-Urbana Campus, asserts that "freshman English was traditionally the very center of liberal education, a pivotal point from which everything else was supposed to swing." If this seems a not too extravagant description of the "traditional" function of freshman English, then the question "Whatever Happened to Freshman English?" looms rather ominous—and prompts another question: Is Freshman English alive and well and living in Texas?

To answer this question, we prepared a questionnaire which asked about many phases of freshman composition programs. We sent the questionnaire to sixty institutions of higher learning in Texas, and we received thirty-seven responses—from a variety of campuses: private liberal arts colleges and public universities, prestigious denominational schools and urban community colleges; and from places so diverse as the Panhandle plains, the Gulf Coast, the "piney woods," the oil fields, and the westernmost desert. If these responses can be said to constitute a profile, then we sketch the following—
ing silhouette of Freshman English in Texas; and we dare a few implications about the physiognomy of "liberal education" which we read in the features of that silhouette.

We discover, first, that courses titled "Freshman Composition" or "Freshman English" do certainly exist in Texas: 78% of the responding institutions require six hours in the subject; and 5% require nine hours; 11% have reduced their requirements to three hours, and 8% (three institutions) have no formal requirements—though they respectively require "demonstrated competence in effective use of the English language in writing" (Our Lady of the Lake College), "an acceptable level of skill and effectiveness . . . in use . . . of language" (Trinity University), and "a minimum of five essays from each student enrolled in a freshman-level literature course" (Rice University). We detect also an apparent dissatisfaction with the reduction to a three-hour requirement at the University of Houston, which "needs a step program: 9 hours for a few, six hours for the majority."

Yes, Freshman English seems to be "happening" in Texas. In the thirty-seven institutions there are, at this writing (April 1974), 51,540 people enrolled in freshman composition courses. But do these courses constitute a "happening"—an event which, if not the very center of liberal education, still stimulates and excites, encourages the student to think critically about what he reads and sees and hears, propels him to follow an argument, to formulate thoughts and images through the very process of setting words to paper, to develop an exposition, to have something important to say?

Seeking to answer this difficult question, we examine the conditions under which freshman English is taught, the composition of its curricula, the goals it variously specifies, the quality of its instruction, and the status it holds in departments of English.

We find, generally, that the classes are small. In the four-year college and university English departments, 11% limit their freshman English classes to fewer than 25 students; 54% limit to 25 students; and 35% specify a limit which ranges between 25 and 30 students. In the two-year colleges, however, 80% have no policy on class size. One of these, Galveston College, averages 50 students in its "lecture" composition classes, but does limit to 15 students its "writing labs." Except in the two-year colleges, then, considerable attempt is being made to give the freshmen of Texas an atmosphere where dialogue is possible, where sparks can be ignited, where students can receive individual attention.

The statistics on class loads reveal that in the four-year colleges and the universities 73% specify no policy as to the number of freshman composition classes which a faculty member may be assigned to teach per semester/quarter. In the junior and community colleges, 80% specify no policy; and we discover that in most of the two-year colleges instructors regularly teach four freshman composition classes—and sometimes, five.

An interpretation of these statistics on freshman English class loads is complicated by the fact that some of the large public universities apparently specify no policy because so few members of the regular faculty teach freshman composition as to make a policy statement unnecessary, the bulk of the freshmen being taught by Teaching/Graduate Assistants whose class loads are regulated by the exigencies of simultaneous teaching and studying. However, to attempt some conclusion on this issue, we offer this whisper: while English departments recognize the need for small freshman English classes, they seem to disregard the possibility that as in all challenging and difficult operations there is a threshold of "best performance."

Let's look now at the curricula and the goals of freshman composition programs in Texas and then at those who would implement these goals.

Barrett Wendell, who is usually credited with having "invented" freshman composition (at Harvard University in the 1880's), believed that "The only way to say something well is to have something to say." Using this dictum as a guide, we phrased our questions on the curricula of freshman English so as to elicit information on these areas of course content: Do the freshman English courses attempt to answer the needs of many young people today, needs deriving from cultural disadvantage, inadequate preparation, the impact of electronic technology? Do the programs respond to the steady cabbing of entrance requirements and to the flood tide of open admissions? Do the courses make provision for individual interests and talents? In short, we wanted to find out whether freshman composition courses in Texas do or do not contain the raw material out of which may be refined the "something to say" as well as the what to say it with.

We find that 49% of the responding institutions include, as an informal feature of the first-quarter course, a "review of the fundamentals" of written composition, that 57% offer separate courses or writing labs for the inadequately prepared, that 30% include in some part of the freshman program a study of electronic communication and its impact on human beings, that 20% appeal to individual interests through an offering of a variety of special-topic freshman composition courses from which each student may choose the number required, that 29% offer Honors sections, and that 65% employ the touch of imaginative literature to fire ideas and insights. These statistics, we feel, indicate considerable strength, innovativeness, and versatility in the curricula.

Hear now a sampling of the goals of freshman English programs in Texas: "to teach a student to write . . . effectively" (Baylor University); to help the student "gain control of material through effective organization, . . . express himself clearly and concisely, . . . analyze an expository writer's logic and style, and . . . recognize and discuss the literary artist's techniques and themes" (Southwest Texas State University); "to develop in the student those skills that will enable him to communicate effectively in contemporary American society with special emphasis on the communication skills required of him in his role as a college student" (Our Lady of the Lake College); "to teach reading, writing, and thinking, as well as to introduce students to varieties of cultural experience in literature and other arts" (Southern Methodist University); "to help students learn to read and write and to enjoy both" (Stephen F. Austin State University); "to introduce all our students good literature in a way which they may consider relevant to themselves and to provide them with opportunities to develop and improve their communication skills in a variety of media, especially in writing" (Rice University); "to write well organized, effective essays . . . " (Houston Baptist University); "to achieve competence in expository techniques" (Odessa College).

Now these are ambitious goals. Even those which sound uncomplicated, such as Odessa College's aim for "competence" or Baylor University's desire "to teach a student to write . . . effectively," demand considerable expertise. Professor Wendell knew this, and he gave to his freshman composition classes all the force of his great talents as a teacher. Dr. W. Ross Winterowd, Director of Freshman English at the University of Southern California, also recognizes the teaching of freshman composition as an enormous challenge requiring specialized training, experience, scholarship, talent. Addressing an informal gathering of Directors of Freshman English and their colleagues from Texas and from several adjacent states on November 7, 1973, at Ft. Worth, he outlined an "Ideal Freshman English
Course," describing the "ideal" freshman composition teacher as a "responsible scholar" versed in all the modern theories of style, rhetoric, invention, and form and as a professional disciplined through learning and experience to create an atmosphere where ideas develop and take a "miraculous leap from a mental form to a scriptural form." When you add to these abilities a wide acquaintance with "literature and other arts," social issues, "a variety of media," and when, as at Stephen F. Austin State University, you want the student "to enjoy"—when you require all these competences, you are asking for an expert of the highest professional order and a human being of integrity, enthusiasm, and a profound commitment to his discipline. And if you do get scholar-teachers with these abilities, then unqualifiedly freshman English is a "happening"—functioning in its "traditional" way.

And here we ask this question: Do the institutions of higher learning in Texas have enough qualified teacher-scholars to implement their stated goals so as to serve the 51,540 students represented in this report?

Let's examine a few facts. In the four-year colleges and the universities, 14,100 of the 37,861 freshmen enrolled in composition courses are being taught by Teaching/Graduate Assistants. Although many eloquent cases argue the advantages of assigning T/G A's to the teaching of freshman composition, none convince us that a young and/or inexperienced apprentice whose teaching time is circumscribed by his obligation to his graduate studies and whose "tenure" at a given university is limited to something between two and five years is the same thing as a dedicated, committed scholar-teacher, even when that apprentice is closely supervised by one of Dr. Winterowd's "ideal" teachers—as indeed may not be feasible in at least one large university in Texas where 4300 of the 4800 students in freshman composition classes are taught by Teaching Assistants. The two-year colleges, of course, employ no T/G A's; but we remind you of our earlier "whisper" about a threshold of "best performance" and of the fact that in 80% of these colleges the English faculty teach four or five freshman composition classes per semester/quarter. To these reminders we now add that in all of the institutions covered by this report some 3500 freshmen are being taught by part-time teachers carrying no academic rank. Thus, some 17,600 of the 51,540 students we're talking about are sitting in classes conducted by apprentices or part-time teachers. And this figure doesn't include those freshmen enrolled in a two-year college teacher's "fourth" or "fifth" freshman English section.

Here is seems appropriate to note that senior faculty in the four-year colleges and the universities rarely teach freshman English. Maybe one course a year. Or better, every two years. Or best, not at all. Does this mean that departments of English so little value their specialists in freshman composition that they neglect to promote them to Associate Professor or Professor? Or does it mean that they have so few specialists in freshman composition as to be negligible?

The completed questionnaires provide some possible answers to these questions. Seemingly, English departments in Texas make faculty appointments with no eye toward the special competences needed in the teaching of freshman composition. In the four-year college, university group 85% do not recruit faculty especially for freshman English; and in the two-year colleges 70% do not—in spite of the fact (as expressed with serene professionalism by Professor B. J. Mooney, Jr., Chairman of the English Department at Amarillo College, which does "recruit for freshman English") that the teaching of freshman composition is the "chief job in junior college." One remark, the author of which shall remain unidentified, seems expressive of the prevailing attitude toward the teaching of freshman English: "It is understood that every junior faculty member will teach freshman comp." Any specialist in some limited area of literature, it seems, can (during the hour between "real" classes) transform himself into the kind of generalist who is able to inspire the "something to say" and into the kind of specialist who can teach a person "to write . . . effectively," "to develop those skills that will enable him to communicate effectively," "to write well organized, effective essays."

Now: money. There isn't any. At least not any especially allocated for freshman composition. Oh, a little here and there for "media assistance," for a "limited select few," for the "economically deprived," for the "English Writing Lab." It all comes down to this: 89% of the four-year college, university group have no funds allocated especially for freshman English, except the salaries (no doubt low) of the T/G A's and the (mostly) junior faculty who teach the freshman composition courses; and 60% of the two-year colleges have no special budget for their "chief job." And apparently it does not occur to English departments that anything can be done about this situation. No, that's not true. To the question asking whether funds are allocated especially for freshman composition, Professor Kirby L. Duncon (Stephen F. Austin State University) answered: "No, but I want to get all Directors of Freshman English to approach the legislature about increasing the formula for composition courses." What does it mean that only one English professor in thirty-seven perceives the uniqueness of Freshman English programs, the consequent necessity of separate funding, and a method of possible solution?

We are led, finally, to ponder a number of other questions: Can it be that in most English departments freshman composition is shunted off to the side and quite snubbed by the senior faculty, who, presumably, formulate the budget, request the funds, and recruit for the various specialties? Are English departments jeopardizing "liberal education" by neglecting to request adjusted formulas for a highly specialized discipline within the larger discipline labeled "English?" Is freshman composition even recognized as a scholarly discipline? Are freshman composition programs failing to achieve their estimable aims because English departments treat their freshman English faculty like intellectual cooies and expect them to perform like intellectual mandarins? And, as a consequence, are those faculty unable to muster the kind of spiritual reserve to make freshman English a "happening?"

That this report on freshman English in Texas should end on questions rather than assertions seems appropriate—suggesting further study on the possible correlation between enrollment trends in upper-division English courses and the attitude toward freshman English. And questions, rather than answers, might also indicate that Professor Douglas's question ("Whatever Happened to Freshman English?"") is neither frivolous nor irrelevant. And that considerable work needs to be done before we can effect a positive response to our own question: Is freshman English alive and well in Texas?

THE FAITH OF SOME GRAFFITI
Joan Baum
York College of CUNY

In a recent essay, "The Faith of Graffiti," Norman Mailer, calling himself A.I., Aesthetic Investigator, makes the now familiar psycho-cultural assessment of wall scrawls and declares for them a "faith." From the likes of "Cay 161" he draws an apocalyptic release that he sees at once as the outcast artist's need and a symptom of society's schizophrenia—an "ecstasy of an excrescence." In gang-style graffiti he reads a harbinger of modern art and a "new civilization... stirring in its roots." Mailer's always extravagant prophecies, however, here mistake a poor part for the whole. His universe of graffiti is
defective. Where A.I. sees only gang numbers and names — warpaint of armies of the night, gathering on a darkling train — others recognize more extensive graffiti. A.I.'s is a faddish but partial account. Other writing on the wall could better illustrate "faith."

I am thinking of the graffiti I saw a few weeks ago on the walls of a restroom at City College. The occasion was a conference of high-school Chairman of English and teachers of remedial composition at the City University of New York. The restroom was the first-floor ladies lounge of old Finley Hall. Call me R.O. for Rhetoric Observer. On dull pink walls I discovered grounds for "faith" in freshman English and for a sense of compassion in the young. It was a decided gain over what the conference tried to instill.

The graffiti were essentially three kinds: 1) frustrations about Capitalist America; 2) confessions of failure in love; and 3) fears about life after graduation. They were serious problems, expressed seriously. Questions expected answers, statements demanded response. Many political pieces were by third-world students who betrayed their origins only by allusion and reference; there was no problem with dialect interference. Advice was full and various, given occasionally in predictable placard form, but more often than not, in hard, lively street lingo. A frustrated freshman berated her seventeen-year old lover for caring more about dancing than about making love. Many respondents jumped on the complaint: you ought to be grateful to have a friend who has an outside interest: dancing is an art, appreciate its demands; dancing is better than shooting up; if you love him, join in the dance.

Graffiti rolled from door to wall, from stall to stall, topic sentences cascading into full paragraphs. There were examples, prescriptions, and challenges to return and write some more. R.O. was amazed. She had not seen so much City University prose relatively free of gross errors in a long time. Although it was apparent that the writers needed help in composition, it was also clear that there were sufficient reasons for "faith" that prose could be style.

Faith is belief not based on proof. No one has ever demonstrated that a particular method or text was the key to success in teaching freshman composition. Many teachers in fact do no more than declare faith in studies which purport to measure stimulation, motivation, and the so-called sincerity of first-person prose; "faith" in self-expression, that seemed to R.O. a kind of extended signature graffiti. The stuff on the walls of Finley Hall, however, suggested to her faith in something else. A.I. had written, "... the kids work together. The cave painting is now collective. One rushes in to prevent the drip of another." But it seemed to R.O. that A.I.'s observation more properly belonged to the activity in Finley Hall. The kids there rushed in to prevent each other's pain. And some had come back, magic marker at the ready, to offer additional expository and persuasive discourse.

Many freshman texts and many teachers of English regard self-expression as the means and goal of courses in composition, a kind of pedagogical equivalent of A.I.'s faith in "Cay 161." But R.O. was beginning to think that much of the trouble in teaching freshman composition arose from a misplaced faith in self-expression. Not even A.I., she observed, was an authentic spray-word excessive, asking that the uncensored act be taken as art. Rather, she noted, he was much like the writers of Finley Hall, self-conscious and stylizing, suiting his word to intention and desired effect: a man with a message. It was time to stop celebrating theory, she thought, whose only application was an advertisement of itself. Signature graffiti is adolescent and anti-social. Even A.I. wants art to be more than spectator sport.

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