her discussion of Cintron’s shadow system via brief analysis of Perry Gilmore’s “‘Gimme Room’: School Resistance, Attitude, and Access to Literacy” and Phaedra Pezzullo’s “‘National Breast Cancer Awareness Month’: The Rhetoric of Counterpublics and Their Cultural Performances.”

Chapter 9 sifts through the challenges of applying community-literacy research to composition pedagogy by exploring five distinct pedagogical approaches: interpretative, institutional, tactical, inquiry-driven, and performative. Long carefully delineates these five pedagogies, explaining how each approach develops a particular relationship to local publics through a series of concerns given from students’ perspectives. These concerns are followed by a discussion rooted in research that outlines one or more strategies instructors might develop in response to the concern raised by Long. Additionally, Long situates her explanation of each pedagogical approach not only in the context of current community-literacy research, but she also usefully connects each approach with at least one of the prior current-views chapters (4-8). Thus Long works to develop a holistic view of how community-literacy research may be applied in classrooms that, taken together, address the following set of concerns: how can we best support our students’ movements across community borders? How can we best support students’ intellectual development in community-based pedagogies? And, how can we best support the circulation of student writing?

Detroit, Michigan


Reviewed by Lori Ostergaard, Oakland University

In graduate school I had the privilege of working alongside a particularly savvy graduate teaching assistant who had at his disposal a number of effective appeals that he would call on during heated exchanges about composition pedagogy. Among the most effective of these appeals was the one I came to call the “I’m sure we all know” appeal. At a moment when it seemed the group had reached an ideological impasse, he would baldly and perfunctorily announce, “as I’m sure we all know, research has proven that grammar instruction is of little value in the writing classroom.” Or “now we all know that students learn best by doing, not observing.” By appealing to what professional compositionists are collectively “supposed” to know about pedagogy, my friend was able to fashion a serviceable consensus
through our shared disciplinary knowledge. This is one of the concepts at the heart of Susan Miller’s latest book: the “everyone knows” appeal, which assumes that both speaker and audience have been schooled in the commonplaces of their culture at a specific moment in time (45).

Miller’s Trust in Texts: A Different History of Rhetoric—a recondite and syntactically byzantine work a decade in the making—provides a history of rhetoric that takes as its center pedagogy, trust, and emotion. For Miller, the term “rhetoric” signifies trusted discourse practices that employ not just logic but also “infrastructures of trustworthiness” that speakers and audiences have been “schooled to recognize” (2). Inasmuch as Miller asserts the power of such assent in the face of what “everyone knows” (45), however, she also argues for an acknowledgement of the rhetorical power of the unknown, of the charisma of a speaker whose “trustworthy self-presentations” are not the result of that speaker’s qualifications or personality but of their “enculturation, not into knowledge but into knowledge of knowledge systems” (31).

In its focus on the fundamental importance of trust in persuasive acts, this work further examines aspects of rhetoric that Miller asserts have been overlooked in many histories of the field: emotion and emotional appeals. While she notes that some historical treatments of emotion challenge our traditional histories of rhetoric, she bemoans the fact that the majority of those traditional histories, however unintentionally, telegraph the assumption that emotion is “subordinate to reason in explanations of ancient rhetorical schemata” (13). In contrast, Miller’s work posits that emotion is a culturally learned, shared, and situated response. To support this claim, she examines the emotional training evidenced in the ancient Greek paideia, a system of schooling that Miller contends acted as a “civilizing force” providing students with a “shared emotional code” embedded in the texts those students “parsed, read, recited, and [took] as models for their compositions” (22). Miller emphasizes that such pedagogies are not unique to paideia; instead, they can be discovered in everything from the Decalogue to textbooks and handbooks providing language instruction and, simultaneously, teaching students “appropriate gestures and responses” (29).

In earlier works, Miller argued against the supposition that contemporary composition is descended from the rhetoric of ancient Athens, and in a similar vein, her current work is articulated against the assumption that fourth century Greek culture was the “cradle of development that nurtured all linguistic bases of Western civilization” (39). Because she critiques the origin stories that place the birth of rhetoric in an alphabetic, Athenian democratic state, Miller’s work spans millennia to provide comprehensive support for her claim that rhetoric is “one of many variously interested sources of trust in discourse” (x). Thus, one of the most important claims of this book that “any history of rhetoric has many plausible beginnings, or many rhetorics to account for” is illustrated in the organization and focus of its three main
chapters, each of which examines a distinct historical era: the classical era, the early modern period, and the Enlightenment (55).

In chapter 1, “Decentering Rhetoric,” Miller fashions her argument against the Athenian origin myths of rhetorical history and examines how cultural commonplaces embedded in shared educational experiences served to shape a speaker’s credibility. Trust between speaker and judge in ancient Greece was based on “shared responses” that were learned in a variety of textual spaces (49). To contrast the “sequential march towards rationalism and democracy” (72), which she believes characterizes most origin myths associated with Athenian rhetoric, Miller identifies and examines the sites of poetry, drama, cures, sophisticated rhetoric, and divine rhetoric in this chapter. She includes these genres as examples of alternative origins that both “precede rhetoric’s canons” and contribute to the “cultural education through discourse” that makes trust possible (55).

Miller’s expansive treatment of the early modern period in chapter 2, “Trusting Texts,” focuses on the circulation of print and epistolary rhetorics and the consequent anxiety caused by the distance these rhetorics created between writer and reader. She suggests that one response to this anxiety is the “pedagogic energy” of the time, which is characterized by moves to restore trust in texts through language stabilization or “regulation” (81), particularly of the vernacular (80). That energy is reflected in letters, handbooks, “instructive novels and picaresque stories” which instructed early modern writers and readers on the composition of “trustworthy characters” (94).

Chapter 3, “The Mobility of Trust,” examines the eighteenth century, particularly as this period constructs “literary literature” and the readers of that literature (111). Miller notes the Enlightenment era’s shift to demarcate “aesthetic discourse as a distinct ontology” (111) and a related shift to measure texts against an “abstract standard of quality” or “universal taste” that, nevertheless, conceives of eighteenth-century readers as individuals, “not members of communities” (119). Miller concludes this chapter by attending to the eighteenth-century interest in elocutionary rhetoric, noting that elocution represents a “cold spot” in histories of rhetoric (108). According to Miller, the field’s “trivializing attitude” (130) towards elocution has resulted in histories that ignore how the standardization of pronunciation parallels moves to standardize the definitions and spelling of words. This oversight is significant as elocution lessons served as “a new paideia” for an “emergent literate middle-class” in this era (131).

While Miller’s writing style renders some of her most innovative claims opaque, Trust in Texts has much to offer the advanced doctoral student or scholar of rhetoric who appreciates the vital contributions she has already made to composition historiography. And while the readers of this journal may wish, as I did, that Miller had more thoroughly examined the practical
and political implications of her historical analyses for the work we perform in contemporary writing and rhetoric classrooms, this text represents a comprehensive bibliographic contribution to the history of rhetoric. Miller combines primary sources with current analyses of those sources; employs historical studies composed by contemporary scholars in Philosophy, Linguistics, Cultural Studies, Speech, Literature, Education, Rhetoric, and Composition; and examines a variety of genres, including drama, poetry, letters, novels, dictionaries, and handbooks to work against a “singular conceptual rhetoric” (37) in favor of analyses that consider instead how “discourse is produced and deployed in multiple circumstances” (6).

Miller’s work should be read alongside traditional histories that place the origin of rhetoric in ancient Greece as well as those that examine rhetoric in more inclusive, global traditions. While it may be tempting to fault Miller’s text for her almost exclusive focus on the Western traditions of rhetoric, Trust in Texts provides the historiographic and theoretical support for conceiving of rhetoric as a “multiplicity of metadiscursive pedagogies that constitute cultures” and for understanding how those pedagogies are culturally-situated and autonomous rather than simply movements toward or away from an Athenian rhetorical tradition (106).

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Reviewed by Michelle F. Eble, East Carolina University

As a Director of Undergraduate Studies in a Department of English that includes most, if not all, of the areas of study falling under the nebulous term English Studies, I especially looked forward to reading and reviewing this work. At the same time, I was skeptical that an edited collection on the topic of English Studies could hold together under analysis given the varied uses of the term to define a group of similar disciplines under one umbrella, a group of different sub-disciplines that all fall within the same department, or a group of scholars concerned with “how texts are made, how they mean, and why they matter” (Hesse 253). In perusing the table of contents, I wasn’t convinced that I would recognize a common thread that brought these chapters together. Much like English departments at various schools, I wondered if the chapters in the collection would build on similar ideas about what constitutes English Studies in the same way that