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Reviews

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REVIEWS

Anderson, Charles M., and Marian M. MacCurdy, eds. *Writing and Healing: Toward an Informed Practice*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2000.

Lisa Tyler

The first rough drafts of the quarter are in, and already my composition students have submitted drafts about a husband's near-fatal heart attack, a brother's funeral, and a son's survival (with brain damage) after being shot in the head. I am not surprised. After more than 10 years of teaching writing, I know that when prompted to write about a significant event in their lives, many students will choose to write about painful and sometimes nightmarishly traumatic experiences. Many of us who teach writing also know from both personal and secondhand experience the healing power that writing about trauma can have.

Writing and Healing: Toward an Informed Practice is a hefty anthology of nearly 450 pages even without the index and contributors' notes. The authors of its intelligent, engaging, and sometimes deeply moving essays argue passionately and persuasively for the value of writing in coping with traumatic experience. Co-editor Marian M. MacCurdy opens the work with a brief preface in which—by describing her students' reactions upon her return to the classroom a week after her husband's premature death left her to raise two young children alone—she establishes her credentials as a sufferer of trauma herself, as well as a teacher and writer. In their "Introduction," she and co-editor Charles M. Anderson, who have both been teaching for more than 20 years, place their topic in historical context by first formally defining Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder and then arguing for the role of writing in responding to trauma. The weakest point of their introduction is their dubious claim that the national and global traumas we have witnessed via the media have rendered us *all* trauma survivors. Anderson and MacCurdy go on to describe the continuing controversy over the appropriateness and ethics of students voluntarily writing about traumatic events for course assignments but are quick to point out that they are not advocating that students be *required* to write about trauma.

The opening section, "Finding Our Way In," consists of three essays the editors felt "address[ed] issues of how teachers and theorists have come to experience writing as healing and how they have come to practice it" (17). For example, in "Whose Voice Is It Anyway?" Anne Ruggles Gere writes of her struggle to find her own voice as a writer and of the ways in which her voice was formed by the voices of her family and her past. She also describes her efforts to give voice to both her mother, whose language skills deteriorated as the result of a stroke, and her adopted daughter, Cindy, an artist and college student who is working to overcome the lasting effects of Fetal Alcohol Syndrome.

In a lengthier essay, grounded in both autobiography and rhetorical theory, Tilly Warnock argues that writing provides us with what Kenneth Burke calls "strategies for coping" and "equipment for living" (36). She believes that both

writing and living are revisionary acts. In a highly accessible essay that draws (lightly) upon the work of Lacan and Derrida, Anderson theorizes trauma writing as a way in which writers negotiate their subject positions, drawing for examples upon two complete essays written by Karen Holt and Patty McGady, students in his advanced expository writing course.

The essays in the book's second section, "Traditions and Extensions," make connections to academic and historical traditions and cutting-edge neuroscience. T.R. Johnson traces the notion of writing as healing through the rhetorical tradition, drawing on the work of Jerome Bruner and Carl Rogers to argue that "the pre-classical, the expressivist, and the postmodern conceptions of the self and of truth imply directly analogous conceptions of writing as healing" (87-88). Michelle Payne analyzes historical accounts of sexual abuse, including one about the molestation of a seven-year-old girl from as early as 1660, another written in 1920 by a Chinese-American whose father raped and beat her, and a manuscript, written between 1788 and 1792, by a New Hampshire mother who suspected her husband of incest. Payne asks her students who write about sexual abuse to draw on research sources to contextualize their experience within a larger social and historical framework; she believes that the papers that result from such work lead the students towards critiquing their society and promoting social change.

In her well-researched essay, MacCurdy offers the collection's most explicit defense of what she calls personal writing (as opposed to academic writing) and buttresses her argument with the latest published research on the neurobiology of trauma. In a complex essay on modern neuroscience, complete with diagrams of the brain, Alice Brand explicates the cognitive biology that underlies the healing power of writing. Citing published books by Gilda Radner, Oliver Sacks, William Styron, Terry Tempest Williams, and Cornelius and Kathryn Ryan, Anne Hunsaker Hawkins explores the ways that writing autobiographies and biographies about illness promotes healing because it fosters the reinterpretation of experience.

The book's third section, "Writing and Healing in the Classroom," focuses on pedagogy. Guy Allen describes the development and evolution of a course in effective writing and offers substantial evidence (including student surveys and case studies) to document his discovery that teaching students to write expressive narratives had extraordinarily positive effects on the expository writing traditionally favored in academia.

Jeffrey Berman and his former student, Jonathan Schiff, write of the benefits of having students keep a weekly journal in an emotionally challenging class on literary suicide. Students were asked to turn in to Berman one diary entry a week, and Berman read selected entries aloud anonymously (with the writer's permission): "A dialogic relationship soon developed in which students commented on their classmates' diaries without knowing each other's identities" (294). Perhaps because in the diary entries reproduced for this essay Schiff only *imagines* that his father committed suicide, this offbeat essay carries less weight than Berman's other (excellent) writings on this subject.

Jerome Bump writes of his attempts to teach emotional literacy in his writing classes, attempts that became increasingly successful until his college reassigned him to classes that were so big that he could no longer teach as he wished.

Drawing on Jungian archetypal theory, Regina Paxton Foehr reports on the salutary results of an innovative exercise in which student teachers identified in writing their greatest fears about teaching, described a worst-case scenario involving their worst fear, and then reframed those fears to discover what their fears reveal about their personal values.

The book's fourth and final segment examines "writing and healing that takes place outside schoolroom walls" (19). In a particularly fascinating essay, Laura Julier reads and analyzes the often heartbreaking texts of T-shirts hand-decorated for the Clothesline Project, which memorializes victims and survivors of violence against women. Emily Nye uses grounded theory to analyze the writings of two Denver-based community groups of people with AIDS. She coded the work of non-professional writers to determine recurring themes, such as anger (at the illness, family, and society), time and "the importance of living in the present moment" (401), and humor as a coping strategy. She found that the shift from private writing to public reading was particularly important in fostering emotional healing. Sandra Florence writes of her experiences teaching a writing group for women struggling with drug abuse, domestic violence, and poverty and gradually comes to realize that her difficulties with these students in part reflect her own discomfort with how much she has in common with them.

This collection joins Carole Deletiner's "Crossing Lines" in *College English*, James Pennebaker's *Opening Up: The Healing Power of Confiding in Others*, and Louise DeSalvo's *Writing as a Way of Healing* as part of a growing body of literature substantiating the benefits of writing about trauma: "It transforms stories that have never been told into texts that bear witness to lived experience; it opens confusion and pain to the possibilities of wholeness; and it encourages victims to become agents for personal and public healing" (Anderson and MacCurdy 16). ☐

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Cain, Mary Ann. *Revisioning Writers' Talk: Gender and Culture in Acts of Composing*. Albany: State U of New York P, 1995.

Fran Claggett

I gave serious thought to writing this review as a dialogue with the author, reflecting the format of nearly half of the book. I got bogged down, however, in attempting to “converse” with the dense, lengthy chapters that set forth her premises and her methodology. In fact, I got bogged down frequently in the early chapters, which are saturated with such sentences as this one: “Despite the fact that many teachers, students, and writers in general are restricted from access to and participation in the discourses by which cultural meanings are inscribed and regulated, social constructivists, taking their cue from postmodern theories of language, often treat change more as a matter of altering language practices than as a matter of social intervention and emancipation” (24).

If the audience for this book is limited to scholarly types who read and write this kind of academic prose, then it probably will reach the readers for whom it was written. There are, however, a goodly number of potential readers who might be intensely interested in her personalized research but are not willing to wade through the academic preamble. To them I would say, “Begin with Chapter Three, ‘Composing Ourselves as Knowers: Women Writers in a Male Tradition’; then, if your appetite has been whetted for the theoretical premises of the research, go back and read the first two chapters after you have finished the book.”

There is a great deal to be said for personalized research about the processes of composing, especially of women composing within a male tradition. In this area, Mary Ann Cain has presented a very thorough look at her own process of composing. She first narrates her experiences of what Carolyn Heilbrun calls “cultural inscriptions” in the composition of a short story. Before we read the entire story, we read how the author constructed her identities “as a writer, student, and woman” and how these identities “were affected by cultural myths informing education and the conflicts they generated.” (69) After we read the extensive narration about the story, we are to read the story. I actually found the narration about the story more intriguing than the story itself, but that is just a personal response.

The next two chapters are, for me, the heart of the book: Cain presents another of her stories (some ten pages) first to a graduate-level fiction workshop, then to a self-directed writing group. In these chapters she reconstructs—from taped discussion, from her own extensive interpretation of that discussion, and from conversations with the other members of the groups—the dialogical experience of the discussions of her story. In the academic class, we have two internalized voices: one, the author of the story, and two, the instructor of the writing class. This presentation is followed by a careful analysis of the talk.

In the self-directed workshop, Cain uses a “trilogue” as well as a “monologue” as the discourses “break in and out of three voices, represented by the three-column format” (126). This is the section that, for me, moves this book from a somewhat strange personal/academic hybrid to a memorable experiment.

Although my responses may not be those which the author intended, I reveled in the poetry of the 26-page trilogy. It actually stands alone as a piece and is, to my mind, infinitely more interesting than the story that is the subject of the re-constructed and interpreted discussion. The reader is treated to such reflections as these:

**We want a conversation,
different from
classroom talk,**

reflective of our effort to teach ourselves

Different ways to talk

**We know the kinds
of talk we crave**

have a different
rhythm and tempo
and texture.

yet it is easy to fall
into old patterns,

**we know what they
are.**

but not easy to name
the new ways, only to
say what they are not.

.....

**Denise keeps talking. "The writing is beautiful.
The open-endedness is hopeful. How can I talk
about the potato rock and not say I liked it?
The connotations in the landscape were
powerful."**

Careful words. But no
power to move us.

**listening to listening,
the shape of shapelessness.
Swirling in on herself, enfolding
the merest speck of sound, a
stray mote to feed her. Flakes of
skin an irritation in the oyster's
shell. Vibration in the dissonance.**

**In the silence, spiders
spin invisible webs;**

Between us, vibrating
threads capture the
dance of dust and mi-
tochondria, binding
us as

we fold into ourselves, listening.
(130)

Following the workshop “trilogue,” Cain engages in an extensive analysis and comparison of the work of the two groups, carefully coming back to explore her original questions:

What, in fact, is the relationship of models of composing to the “myths of culture,” of institutional arrangements of power and authority? What are the stories that inform our view of the “real world”? Outside the classroom, where we know our students must go, both within and outside of academia? How do these stories affect our view of composing, the instruction we subsequently give, as well as the writing we do ourselves? And how can we, finally, act to change these stories and offer alternative views for ourselves, our students, our field of study? Can we rewrite the history of composing to include “woman” as one who is not only composed but who composes? (18)

While Cain explores the myths of power, using the Persephone story in conjunction with her own story, I’m not sure that the two workshops demonstrate her assertion that “all writers, in a sense, enact Persephone each time they enter their own chaos of meaning making, bringing language to thought and thought to language” (183). She certainly demonstrates her own processes and documents her “inquiry into the paradoxes of institutional inscriptions” placed upon her as “a woman in the academy” (186). One would hope that her inquiry will encourage others to engage in such scrupulous and soul-searching analysis of what we do as we attempt to revision the multiple roles that we take on as writers, as teachers, and as women, both within and without the academy. ☹

Eisler, Riane. *Tomorrow's Children: A Blueprint for Partnership Education in the 21st Century*. Boulder: Westview P., 2000.

Bruce Novak

I write in a dark time. It is December of the year 2000. The principles of democracy are being overturned in the name of political expediency. Our nation is severely divided, politically, economically, and morally. It looks as if the only issue on which cooperation between liberals and conservatives can be expected in the near future lies in the further swelling of the wave of politically-initiated educational standards and standardized tests, vaunting the possibility—and, worse, the desirability—of mass-producing minds as we do refrigerators or floppy disks. It seems our national perspectives on learning may be about to disastrously contract.

What better time to take heart from a book from a major world thinker that advances a holistic and practical vision of how a changed notion of education can be the pivotal factor in a systemic re-envisionment of the world we inhabit? Its very title, *Tomorrow's Children*, points us away from the obsession with yesterday's standards and today's technology and towards our desperate need to discover a better model of living for our children than we have yet found for ourselves. Perhaps the main thing standing in our way is our mutually-enforced disbelief that this transformation is really possible.

Riane Eisler concurs with Rudolf Steiner, James Moffett, and others that we need a fundamental shift in our notion of what schools do. She calls for, as Moffett says, "elevating schooling to a spiritual level heretofore unknown in public education" in order "to think now not just about personal success and class mobility but about planetary survival and human co-evolution" (Moffett xii). Eisler goes beyond these thinkers, though, in offering a focused, overarching goal for this transformation: to make the transition from a culture of systemic domination to one of systemic partnership, relinquishing our entrenched insistence on relationships of forceful, top-down control to a faith in the power of mutual nurturance.

This single paradigmatic shift in focus from domination to partnership can renew our hope in our potential to alter the destructive direction in which we are taking our planet—but only when we make this shift holistically, extending it not just in intimate, like-minded partnerships, but also to the economic, institutional, and political partnerships we too often assume are signed over once and for all to the devils of domination.

Near the beginning of the book comes a moving paragraph in which Eisler phrases both the partnership and dominator outlooks in personal terms:

We are all familiar with these two models from our own lives. We know the pain, fear and tension of relations based on domination and submission, on coercion and accommodation, of jockeying for control, of trying to manipulate and cajole when we are unable to express our real feelings and needs, of the miserable, awkward tug of war for that illusory moment of power rather than powerlessness, of our unfulfilled yearning for caring and mutuality, of all the

misery, suffering, and lost lives and potentials that come from these kinds of relations. Most of us have also, at least intermittently, experienced another way of being, one where we feel safe and seen for who we really are, where our essential humanity and that of others shines through, perhaps only for a little while, lifting our hearts and spirits, enfolding us in a sense that the world can after all be right, that we are valued and valuable. (xiv)

For many of us, it is easy to be satisfied with *moments* of seeing and being recognized, with *moments* of clarity within the general psychic fog of our lives of dominating and/or being dominated. To a large extent, we are satisfied with these moments because we are the products of an education that teaches that the world we inhabit is, by and large, an evil place, a place where we will be frustrated, disappointed, perhaps even punished, if we expect too much. Better to burrow within it to make a cozy little nest where we won't be found or to imagine another place we will be taken to if we behave properly. The immense power of the partnership education Eisler espouses in this book is that this idea of the world, of other human beings, perhaps even of ourselves as irredeemably evil, is eradicable. And all we have to do is change the way we think:

Once we understand the cultural, social, and personal configurations of the partnership and dominator models [. . .] [as] systems of belief and social structures that either nurture and support—or inhibit and undermine—equitable, democratic, nonviolent, and caring relations, [we can begin to cure the] pathologies that afflict and distort the human spirit. (xiv)

Eisler's earlier, groundbreaking work *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* is a bold, holistic synthesis of research in archaeology, feminism, and whole systems thinking. It has been called, by anthropologist Ashley Montagu, "the most important book since *The Origin of Species*." Now that Eisler has centered her focus on the issue of education, we see more precisely why her ideas are *that* important. Darwin made the case against *creationism*—against the *neutralizing* idea of the basically inert, fixed, only-once-created nature of the world¹—by painstakingly presenting the physiological evidence of the gradual evolution of current species from environmentally-adapted varieties of former ones. Eisler makes an equally convincing case against *original sin*—against the *repressive* idea that human beings somehow need to be ashamed of themselves for disturbing the world's inertia with their desires. She does this by painstakingly presenting the historical and archaeological evidence of how this idea came to be acquired and spread; by revealing how it is embedded in the social institutions that exploit women, children, minorities, and the earth; and, most importantly, by outlining how the grip of this idea of irreme-

¹This is not to say that one cannot believe at the same time in evolution and in God. It is possible to see ourselves as co-creators with God, rather than simply as either destroyers or protectors of the Divine Plan. Even Pope John Paul II has recently stated that evolution is "more than a hypothesis" and not inconsistent with belief in a Creator (ctd. in Eisler 60).

diable evil on our collective consciousness can be overcome by our collectively deciding to change systemically the educational institutions through which it is socially instilled. We need to undermine the cultural model of domination and promote the model of partnership at a time in most people's lives when their psychic wholeness is still intact. This single, all-encompassing change in the enculturation of "tomorrow's children" may hold the key to "human happiness, if not survival itself," as Nel Noddings says in her passionate Foreword to *Tomorrow's Children* (xi).

Most of the first part of the book is devoted to explaining the three essential and interrelated components in this educational shift to partnership that will be required if we are to accomplish a more general cultural shift. These are "partnership *process*, partnership *content*, and partnership *structure*: how we teach, what we teach, and what kinds of educational structures we build" (14). Eisler finds a great deal of attention already being given to partnership *process*. It is, however, a serious mistake to imagine that a change in process alone is enough, to imagine that the *how* will eventually take care of the *what*, or—even more importantly—of the *for whom*. We urgently need to expand our perspectives, not just on how learning is conducted, but on the basic subject matters upon which it focuses, and on the all-determining institutional structures within which it takes place.

Most of the second and far longer part of the book takes up the issue of partnership *content*. Here we find its main contribution to educational practice. Parker Palmer has asked, "Why, in our culture, is there so little life-giving power when we use the words *education*, *teaching*, *learning*? Why are these words and the things they point to so flat, so dull, so banal?" (19). Eisler answers this with an awe-inspiring account of natural and human evolution, an account that places the co-creation of human beings, through the processes of teaching and learning in nurturant partnership, at the farthest reaches of the creative expansion of the universe. Perhaps a sentence or two from each of the three chapters will suffice to entice you to read the rest:

This approach does not negate a spiritual dimension in evolution. On the contrary, it shows that the emergence of spirituality—of our human yearning for oneness with other living beings and with what we call the divine—is part of the evolution of consciousness. (60-61)

Since violence is what ultimately maintains dominator relations, as women's and children's human rights are asserted, violence against them has also increased to literally beat them back into submission [. . .]. Precisely because the movement toward partnership is intensifying and deepening—for the first time focusing on the foundational "private" sphere of human relations where we first learn and continually practice either partnership or domination—the resistance to change is stiffening. (127)

One of the difficulties teachers of current events face in a time of backlash is how to teach without being accused of being "too lib-

eral.” “Is this fair?” they are asked. Isn’t fairness the American way? And doesn’t it mean that teachers must counterbalance the “case” for all “liberal” views with the “case” for all “conservative” views? What the partnership educator needs to keep in mind is that, in issue after issue, what is at stake is not liberal or conservative perspectives, but *human* perspectives and the fundamental American perspective of *democracy*. Freedom, peace, and equality are no longer ideological variables to be debated. Rather, they must be the “givens” from which debate is launched—debate as to how they can be better achieved. (193-94)

Eisler touches on one aspect of partnership *structure* in the book’s last chapter, “Living and Learning: Interweaving Student Interests and Concerns,” which deals, in part, with the need to make students co-creators of the curriculum. Perhaps everyone would agree with the statement that “children are our most precious resource.” The question is what *kind* of resource we treat them as: whether we treat them the same way as we currently do most of our natural resources, as material to be mined and exploited in the service of an economy that symbolizes our collective wealth and power, or whether we treat them as co-creators in the growth of the human spirit. It will take another full-length book to formulate a plan of how to change the overall structure of our system of education, and, hence, the overall structure of society, to this end.

Ultimately, it must be said, we will fall short of Eisler’s vision of partnership, in education and elsewhere, unless we can find a partnership *politics*. George Lakoff has posed the problem in these terms:

Women have known throughout history that nurturance is a way of life. Many men have instinctively learned it from their mothers and their nurturant fathers. But the challenge in contemporary America is to create a nurturant society when a significant portion of that society has been raised either by authoritarian or neglectful parents. (378)

We’re back to December 2000, where the threat of “compassionate conservatism,” an ideology of condescending empathy for all those who have not been educated in the severity of dominator morality, looms over the cultural and political horizon. It is fully possible that the *cultural* fundamentalism represented by regressive educational standards and standardized tests may succeed in infiltrating far more minds than religious fundamentalism would ever have swayed. In our hurry to assure that “no child be left behind” in the race for purely material prosperity, we may be putting in ultimate jeopardy the health of the planet and the very process of evolution that has brought forth, one by one, the wonders of plant, animal, and human life—of the biosphere, the zoosphere, and what might be called the “nurturesphere,” the life of consciously co-created experience, of teaching and learning, that characterizes what is best in the human spirit. The triumph of partnership is by no means assured. It remains to be seen whether the human race at this point in history is indeed capable of nurturing itself and the planet upon which it abides, fulfilling the highest potentials of both, or whether

it is destined to be little more than a passing cancer in the history of the earth. So much depends on how far we will be able to expand *everyone's* perspectives on the power of teaching and learning! ☹

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Briggs, Lynn Craigie, and Meg Woolbright, eds. *Stories from the Center: Connecting Narrative and Theory in the Writing Center*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2000.

Neal Lerner

Should I have been forewarned when my copy of *Stories from the Center: Connecting Narrative and Theory in the Writing Center* arrived with its front cover graphic not particularly centered on the page? Well, yes and no. The problem I have with this book is not that it is off center in any way, despite the intent of its editors, Lynn Craigie Briggs and Meg Woolbright. No, the problem I have is that this collection of essays is far too centered, far too like many essays that have attempted to characterize the complexities of writing center work. With a few notable exceptions, the chapters in this book tread what has become the mainstream path of writing center scholarship; the usual names are invoked: Pratt, Bakhtin, Foucault, hooks, North, Cooper, Knoblauch, Miller. Certainly, these scholars are important to understanding the one-to-one work of writing centers, but, unfortunately, this book on the whole gives us very little that is new, fresh, or "off-center." In fact, in writing this review I was reminded of Christina Murphy's critique of another relatively recent collection of writing center scholarship: "Unfortunately, very little new will be found here—most of the ideas explored represent very familiar territory to most writing center practitioners and scholars" (86). Thus, *Stories from the Center* represents a disturbing trend.

Nevertheless, the editors, in their opening chapter, offer up quite a promise for this collection. We are told that its chapters constitute a new form of academic writing: "academic narrative[s]—that tangle story and theory inextrica-

bly” (xii). The editors also contrast academic narrative with what they feel is the dominant discourse of writing center scholarship—“study” discourse or “the distance, measured telling of events” (xi), which is characterized by “other people’s lives, with others’ voices and others’ authorities dominating” (xi). To the editors, most writing center literature “offer[s] simple ‘solutions’ to ‘problems’” (x). Instead, the chapters in this collection are narrative in intent, are “stories” that allow the contributors “to speak things otherwise unspeakable, to give voice to that which would otherwise go unheard” (xi). According to the editors, the genre of this text is “more humanistic, more humane, more ‘fun,’ [as well as] rigorous and truthful. We want to suggest that stories can and should offer insights into theory, thus enlarging our concepts of the field” (xvi).

Most readers of this book will be left scratching their collective heads over this argument. And *Stories* ironically comes at the same time (in terms of publication year) as Cindy Johanek’s criticism of writing center and composition scholarship for being too grounded in narrative or as she says, “the more private worlds of personal stories” (11). Johanek warns us that “while such stories can always help illuminate our work and give meaning to our theory, research, and practice, they, alone, cannot be the primary knowledge-making vehicle that defines our field” (11). Our privileging of the story too often results in an abandonment of multiple ways of examining and understanding our work; knowledge making in the discipline as a whole suffers.

I salute Johanek’s call for multiple ways of exploring writing center work. Nevertheless, I agree with Briggs and Woolbright that the use of rich narrative remains relatively unexplored in writing center research, and that is my primary problem with most of the contributions to this text: generally the chapters were not narrative *enough*, not particularly compelling stories or, more typically, a hint of story packed within a multi-page analysis steeped in critical theory. Perhaps Stephen Davenport Jukuri’s accurate characterization of his chapter—“with tiny strings of theory, I attempt to stitch together a number of writing center stories” (51)—is with a slight adjustment the best way to characterize the majority of these contributions: little strings of story stitched together with a number of theorists’ views (for example, Joseph Janangelo’s discourse on “carnal conferencing” consists of a “story” that is three paragraphs long amid an eight-page chapter). As I note above, quite a few theorists make multiple appearances in the nine chapters, leading me to wonder about the editors’ concern for “others’ authorities dominating” (xi).

Thus, for *JAEPL* readers or anyone looking for non-standard approaches to the complexity of writing center work or just some compelling narrative, this book is sure to disappoint. Perhaps peer tutors and others new to writing center work will find these chapters refreshing, but it seems to me that the form or genre that dominates writing center scholarship is just what most of these contributors offer: an account of a student with whom they worked who “challenged” their assumptions about “good” tutoring or “student-centered” pedagogies or literacy practices of the academy. These brief anecdotes are then followed up with “revelations” of sorts as revealed in the theory and writing of the scholars whose canonical texts fill the reading lists of rhet/comp graduate seminars. There is a certain evangelistic quality to this scholarship, a certain holding up of the lan-

tern so that “others may see what has been revealed to me.” We readers are mere babes with our heretofore simplistic notions of writing center work, misguided in our attempts to “sweep away complexity” as the editors charge, holding fast to our naïve view that when it comes down to tutor and student sitting side-by-side, the detritus of power, authority, and confusion will fall away, and we will engage in real dialogue, real learning that reinforces our belief that writing center work is true, is genuine, is as powerful as, say, compelling stories.

Perhaps there is a strong contingent of practitioners out there, ones who will need the shaking up that this book provides. “Complex work,” they will say, “and I have stories to share, too.” Yes, we all have stories, and I wish that the writers could have provided far more of them in this collection. The work of writing center tutoring is indeed complex, as just about every publication in the last 10 years has shown, either through sustained research, personal narrative, or a combination of both. Collections such as *Writing Center Perspectives*, *Intersections: Theory-Practice in the Writing Center*, and *Landmark Essays on Writing Centers* have explored this complexity and have shown us that literacy work is imbedded in multiple contexts that radiate out from tutor, student, and text in ways both visible and hidden. Tutors bring their own literacy practices and experiences, expectations and assumptions, ideologies and theories to the interaction with students. And tutors are placed within a writing center that is positioned politically within an English department or a composition program or a learning center or within the ways that institutions of higher learning seek to regulate (explicitly and implicitly) the teaching and learning that occurs. Students bring their own sets of assumptions and experiences, as well as the “ghost presence” (to use a concept offered by contributors Michael Blitz and Mark Hulbert) of the classroom instructor. Indeed, it amazes me just how crowded those tutoring rooms can become, how the stories we tell of our work only begin to uncover this complexity, and how difficult teaching writing in writing center settings can be.

A few chapters in this collection do stand out for the ways that they succeed at intertwining narrative and theory, either through particularly compelling narrative or interesting theoretical approaches. Lynn Briggs’ opening chapter, “A Story from the Center about Intertextuality and Incoherence,” describes her work with Mary Ann, a non-traditional student who challenged Briggs to reconsider the “safe” practices she had grown accustomed to as a tutor. Mary Ann did not fit the usual “slots.” As a result, Briggs notes that her “relationship with Mary Ann allowed me to touch the heretofore theoretical intertext, and forced me to abandon any vision of the writer as an individual creating in isolation” (12). While Briggs’ “romantic vision of writing/reading/consulting” seems difficult to imagine these days, given the bulk of the composition and writing center literature decrying such a view, her honesty in presenting herself as naïve, insecure, questioning, and tentative is quite refreshing for the reader, and her rich description of her evolving relationship with Mary Ann offers a model that, unfortunately, few of the other contributors chose to follow.

Another solid contribution is Elizabeth Boquet’s chapter, “Intellectual Tug-of-War: Snapshots of Life in the Center.” As opposed to Briggs’ sustained narrative, Boquet provides brief but compelling “snapshots” of “moments when tutors do things ‘wrong,’ either intentionally or unintentionally” (18). Boquet’s analy-

sis of these moments is always refreshing as she captures the uneasiness that many tutors feel: “I don’t know how I would have done it differently. I only know that I never felt more acutely that I had fallen short of my own ‘ideal’” (22). Boquet resists easy answers or easy theorizing; the result is a chapter that challenges the reader to examine his or her own practices in light of Boquet’s experiences and analyses.

Stephen Jukuri succeeds in similar introspective/reflexive fashion by intertwining brief accounts of particular students or particular sessions with explorations of the ways that the multiple subjectivities of tutor and student are present in any writing center session and any reading of those sessions. The result is a multi-layered narrative and analysis, one that pushes the forms of both narrative writing and academic writing and, perhaps, is the collection’s best realized example of the editors’ offer of “academic narrative.”

There are moments in other chapters that readers may find compelling or insightful or creative (Michael Blitz and Mark Hurlbert’s mix of perspectives, prose, and poetry offers one such example); however, on the whole this collection was a disappointment. When I saw the title, I was hoping that this book would operate just as compelling stories often do, connecting with the reader and offering particular insight into both the commonplace and the complex. Compelling stories do not tell us how to act, but instead show a writer’s or character’s actions and allow us an opportunity for reflection and learning. It’s too bad that more of these chapters did not offer such opportunities. ☹

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