

The English Department: A Personal and Institutional History, W. Ross Winterowd (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1998. 261 pages).

Reviewed by Rebecca Moore Howard, Syracuse University

W. Ross Winterowd's *The English Department: A Personal and Institutional History* blends a history of composition studies with poetry, fiction, and autobiography. The poetry and fiction appear early—in the dedication and at the opening of the first chapter, “Prelude”—and then give way to autobiography and argument. Argument occupies a larger space in the book than does autobiography, which takes a variety of forms. The autobiography at the beginning of chapter two, for example, focuses on Winterowd's training in English studies, which segues convincingly into his examination of the field of rhetoric and composition. Equally successful is an “interlude” in chapter three that recounts a wild anti-grammar presentation at an early meeting of the CCCC convention. “Die Leiden des junger Winterowds,” in the opening pages of chapter four, offers Winterowd's autoarchaeology of his own fascination with Romanticism—a discussion appropriate for a chapter on “Romantic Agonies.” When Winterowd describes his youthful rabbit-hunting exploits, however, at least this reader began skipping pages, searching for less gory autobiography.

This blend of autobiography, poetry, fiction, and exposition is part of Winterowd's project to rescue imaginative writing from the expressivists. “Imagination,” he says, “is a vexing concept that will pervade . . . this book; the point now is that *they*, the New Romanticists, have claimed it for their own, denying *us* any part of it and thus giving themselves an aura of holiness within the sacred halls of English.” Chapter two offers an aetiology of this conundrum: the canon split when George Campbell and others attributed imagination only to poetry and not to exposition, according to Winterowd.

By reviewing early composition textbooks, Winterowd offers a useful overview of the early influences on rhetoric and composition, and he blends this material skillfully with literary history, demonstrating how both Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Hugh Blair contributed to the precepts of composition studies. His purpose, however, is to argue against those precepts: composition studies, he says, is too much beholden to New Romanticism and its assertion that the imaginative belongs only to literary forms of composing—a perspective that inevitably devalues composition studies. Winterowd finds alternatives in places that have lately been much

ignored by compositionists; he believes, for example, that John Searle's speech act theory and Paul Grice's cooperative principle are more useful for “understanding the nature of texts” than is deconstruction. His focus, though (unaccountably free of any reference to the work of David Russell), is on the problems created by Romantic theory:

Neo-Romantic rhetoric places the “true,” “natural” voice of the writer above all other values, a hierarchy that leads to numerous dilemmas and paradoxes. For example, if the true, natural voice is more valuable than, say, the assumed, “unnatural” voice of academia, then the student and the teacher are in a double bind, for one goal of composition in colleges and universities is to initiate students into the community of academic discourse; again, if the goal of instruction is to help students discover or regain their “natural” voices, the teacher can do little more than help them regularize their texts (i.e., correct grammar, punctuation, and spelling).

But Winterowd has an antidote: “What I hope to bring to Romantic studies is a new viewpoint, that of one who looks at literature and literary theory as incipient rhetorical theory.”

That endeavor is remarkable for its selective engagement with other histories of composition. Robert Connors' *Composition-Rhetoric* was released in 1997, one year before Winterowd's history; hence, one could not expect that Winterowd had access to it before *The English Department* went into production. But none of Connors' influential articles on composition history make their way into Winterowd's account, even though one chapter of that account is devoted to composition textbooks, Connors' forte. Nor does Winterowd consult John Brereton's 1995 *The Origins of Composition Studies in the American College, 1875-1925: A Documentary History*. James Berlin and Sharon Crowley fare somewhat better: Winterowd revises Berlin's taxonomy of composition theories and endorses Crowley's “absolutely correct” characterization of how invention is represented in current-traditional rhetoric. He alludes to Xin Liu Gale's “useful terminology” (the reference is to her 1996 *Teachers, Discourses, and Authority in the Postmodern Classroom*; the 1999 *(Re)Visioning Composition Textbooks* had not yet been published), and he rejects C.H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon's *Rhetorical Traditions and the Teaching of Writing* (1984) as “erroneous.” One of Thomas Miller's books (*The Formation of College English* had not yet been published) provides authoritative evidence for Winterowd's assertions about the influence of Hugh Blair's work. Winterowd seems to be widely read in the history of composition, but given his notable silence concerning Connors'

and Brereton's scholarship, his taste seems to run toward taxonomies and critiques rather than to the type of history that Connors, in the introduction to his *Composition-Rhetoric*, wished he could call "objective" or at least "non-ideological." Reports of composition history, in other words, seem to be less interesting to Winterowd than are arguments about it.

Yet, Susan Miller's polemical arguments about composition history are also absent from these pages. They would, I believe, take Winterowd too far afield from his own intention, which is to establish that a common interest in theory will bring literary studies and composition studies together. Miller's widely cited assertions in *Textual Carnivals* (1991) that composition provides—*necessarily* provides—the low carnival to the high-status study of literature cannot easily be dismissed; Winterowd cannot dispatch them as handily as he does the more dated, now-less-influential Knoblauch and Brannon study. Not surprisingly, then, Richard Ohmann's *English in America* is also absent from *The English Department*.

Winterowd is disdainful toward his literature colleagues (the "literatists"), whom he does not expect to read his book, and he describes *The English Department* as "admittedly sour chapters." This is not a happy story. Yet, it is a story that includes hope for the future of English departments. But Winterowd's hope is, finally, personal rather than institutional; it lies in the common ground of composition theory and literary theory: "Reading theory is the juncture at which rhetoric and literary theory have met and are becoming one." Yet, for the present and for the foreseeable future, a great deal of composition studies is little involved in theory-making or even theory-reading—much less reading and writing theories of reading. Our discipline argues, for example, that writing program administration is intellectual work, and indeed it is. But "intellectual work" and "theory" are not the same thing, and both are needed in composition studies. Indeed, I have argued elsewhere that when composition theory diverges from lay precepts about writing and writing instruction, composition practice tends to abandon theory and go with those lay precepts. If we compositionists must all become theorists in order to salvage our relationship with our colleagues in literary studies, our task is an impossible one. If, on the other hand, it involves theorists like Winterowd making personal-professional-institutional liaisons with like-minded colleagues from literary studies, the project is not only valuable but possible.

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Writing/Teaching: Essays Toward a Rhetoric of Pedagogy, Paul Kameen (Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 2000. 172 pages).

Reviewed by Patricia Donahue, Lafayette College

An abiding issue in composition studies is that of disciplinary self-identification. What constitutes our primary goals and methods of inquiry? What kind of institutional capital do we possess? How and where should we distribute it? What kind of research is suitable to our academic domain? How can our scholarship nourish our teaching? How can our teaching speak to our scholarly concerns? These are questions woven throughout the chapters of this remarkable book, one whose publication would be significant at any moment but is especially welcome at this juncture, when the pressure to answer such questions is particularly intense. Surveying the contours of our professional problematic, it engages us in a highly reflexive reading of our disciplinary project, encouraging us to formulate answers for ourselves.

In *Writing/Teaching: Essays Toward a Rhetoric of Pedagogy*, Paul Kameen examines some of the prevailing tensions and oppositions in our professional world: research/teaching, personal/scholarly, reading/writing, literature/composition. He calls into question their traditional configuration so as to create new alignments and stimulate new habits of mind. Because he puts his interrogative aims into play as much through formal experimentation as through direct statement, the structure of the book is important to consider. It is divided into two parts. The first, "Race, Gender, and (Teaching a) Class," is apparently "personal" in approach; the second, "In Dialogue with Plato," is apparently "scholarly." One of the surprises of this book, however, is how gracefully it dismantles such longstanding, seemingly rigid taxonomies.

The impetus for the "personal" chapters is Kameen's experience co-teaching a graduate seminar at the University of Pittsburgh, *Race and Gender in Twentieth Century Poetry*, with poet and colleague Toi Dellacorte. While laying out their goals and strategies, Dellacorte and Kameen decided that if the course were to be more than "heavily endorsed departmental window dressing," every participant would need "to bring to the table and put at stake [his or her] unique personal attitudes and histories in relation to matters of race and gender." Aware that his own knowledge of these issues as a white middle-aged male was more abstract than experiential, aware that "the ideological intensity" concerning issues of race and gender tended to "vaporize them almost beyond the range of