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Review Essay

Resisting Entropy

The Evolution of College English: Literacy Studies from the Puritans to the Postmoderns

Thomas Miller

Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 2010. 368 pp.

A Counter-History of Composition: Toward Methodologies of Complexity

Byron Hawk

Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 2007. 400 pp.

Toward A Composition Made Whole

Jody Shipka

Pittsburgh: U of Pittsburgh P, 2011. 192 pp.

Teaching with Student Texts: Essays toward an Informed Practice

Joseph Harris, John D. Miles, Charles Paine, editors

Logan: Utah State UP, 2010. 280 pp.

I sit here after long weeks . . . with an inward accumulation of material of which I feel the wealth, and as to which I can only invoke my familiar demon of patience, who always comes, doesn't he?, when I call. He is here with me in front of this green Pacific—he sits close and I feel his soft breath, which cools and steadies and inspires, on my cheek. Everything sinks in: nothing is lost; everything abides and fertilizes and renews its golden promise.

—Henry James, *Notebooks*, March 29, 1905

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Teaching writing is impossible. You have ten to fifteen weeks to do . . . what? Your course content, the genre(s) you teach, your classroom methodology should be . . . ? To have no set content and target goals (and of course I understand some don't have such dubious luxury) is as consternating as it is liberating. The best thing I ever did as a beginning scholar-practitioner in the field was to take a year or so to read through back numbers of *College Composition and Communication* and *College English*, especially the pedagogically oriented articles. I read and reflected, positioning myself in terms of the practices presented; I even photocopied and bound for future reference the articles I knew would become my personal canon. Hence, I formed, based on my idiosyncratic revision of the field, the tenets of a classroom gospel, one that I have continually re-articulated to myself and my students, in response to changes in texts and technologies. But one's faith in the enterprise is always tested, and hope is hard to sustain. On a personal, practitioner level, one always wishes for more sustained wonderfulness in the work of one's students and so turns to the classroom credos others have formed as a result of their own sustained practice in the field, looking hungrily for inspiration from their pedagogy. On the professional level, especially after doing historical scholarship and seeing, shockingly revealed, a recursive, abysmal spiral of the same essay-based pedagogy from the field's origin onward, one can't but wonder why the field on the whole seems so stunted and contrary and so looks for illuminating answers in how others have surveyed and interpreted the field, finding, perhaps, hidden avenues leading out of otherwise dead ends from the patient reconsideration of roads taken and not.

Thomas Miller offers a new history of college English in America in *The Evolution of College English*. Miller wants to change the world—good for him; it desperately needs to change. Except the world that bugs him is not one to which I can really relate. His history of the field amounts to a diatribe against English departments in research universities because they squandered their institutional and intellectual capital by privileging literature over composition, language, and English education, even allowing speech, drama, and journalism to drift from the fold. Miller is bitter enough that he proposes moving beyond *literature*, subsuming anything good in English studies under the sign of *literacy*. A historical survey like his, spanning “the Puritans to the Postmoderns,” is bound to paint with broad strokes, but he too often caricatures. Granted, any history is revisionist by definition, but Miller's is a reductive, univocal history,

reading like a pastiche of focus-grouped buzzwords; some, like *belle-lettrism*, *taste*, *MLA*, and *elite*, designed to produce chilled shudders by evoking a mandarin class of effete, mannered intellectuals who conspired to drain everything vital out of the field; others, like *community-based*, *pragmatic*, *working-class*, *NCTE*, and *people of color*, are designed to elicit fervent, nodding agreement from politically engaged academics. His heroes are people like Princeton's John Witherspoon, who "revitalized the civic orientation of classical rhetoric" and refused to "subordinate composition to criticism or romanticize creative genius" like that villainous Hugh Blair (69). Everything elite is bad, everything demotic is good; extracurricular writing is enabling, work in an English class is constraining. What counts for Miller is the civic, not the poetic. Interestingly, though, Miller's *civitas* is populist, not popular—so don't expect him to prize any of the pop cult texts that were for too long excluded from the canon; he's more interested in political oration as the nonliterary genre of choice. His most mind-boggling dismissal in this regard is how he chaffs Francis Child for "disdain[ing] the duty of commenting on compositions ever since he became the fourth Boyston Professor of Rhetoric and Oratory in 1851 . . . reshap[ing] his senior course from Rhetoric and Criticism to English Language and Literature to relate it to the research he had undertaken on Chaucer" (112). I don't think anyone is *obliged* to teach composition or grade papers, and I personally am willing to cut all sorts of slack to the person responsible for amassing the greatest collection of folk ballads in music history, a collection of populist texts that has had a greater effect on American literacy, and a more deeply humanizing cultural potential than anything Miller cites in his book. Miller's history is more a series of half-truths: he bemoans a teacher/researcher split in English (but such a split is endemic throughout the university); he claims elite English academics never cared about teaching, then discusses lit profs known for their work in the classroom (he even puts *Understanding Poetry* under suspicion, after acknowledging its status as a central teaching text); and he makes it seem like people who worked in composition were at the mercy of the literati's whims (which certainly robs agency from the historical membership of CCCC). To refer to my departmental colleagues and myself as an elite class of research faculty is amusing; compared to TAs, sure; but compared to the psych or med school faculty, folks juggling twenty-some grants? There are no research dollars in the humanities, as Miller well knows. He makes the classic leftist mistake of pitting poor slobs (i.e., compositionists and lit faculty) against each other while the real churls are let off the hook.

The axe he grinds is too heavy. To take such a prickly attitude toward the teaching of literature, trashing it in favor of literacy (whatever that is), is incomprehensible. “There’s more to life than just books,” Morrissey sings, “but not much more.” You know what’s great? Henry James is great. You want to teach students how to be more conscious writers? Show them Henry James—what he wrote, how he wrote, what he thought about writing, his technologies of composition, and how they impacted his prose. “Writing studies,” you say? His is, indeed, writing worth studying. If you’re not going to teach a course exclusive of outside reading, why not use the most interesting reading there is? It’s long past time to revisit how and why literature became exiled from the composition classroom. Here’s where Henry James apparently fits in Miller’s argument: “Unsullied by rhetoric, literature was set out as an ennobling study of masterworks of the imagination. By instilling the tastes of the ‘aristocracy’ in the ‘bourgeoisie,’ such histories of the ‘cultured classes’ would help the educated appreciate the virtues of well-ordered subordination” (135). I’ve never felt like a Republican in my life, but I’m ready to cry class warfare here. Sure, there have been too-precious lit profs, but there have been too-zealous compas-critical-pedagogy teachers as well. The idea is unswerving faith in what’s valuable and teaching it the best you can. Tarting up the teaching of language and literature as literacy results from a defeatist sense that we need to bring a virtual *social* into our courses to politically legitimize what we do. Teaching students the enormously rich possibilities of language is justification enough; the poetic, putting language into high relief, makes it an obviously useful course material. And to so smarmily dismiss New Criticism, as Miller does, as some sort of cloistered fraudulence perpetrated on innocent students, thirsty for honest, blue-collar, public engagement, is disingenuous indeed. All one needs to do is read Cleanth Brooks discussing Wordsworth with his students to see how relevant close reading could be to life and history. *Belle-lettrism* is a coded sneer—as if moments of any sort of beauty weren’t a precious commodity in this awful modern world. Even in the most radically challenging modernist art, there is an aesthetic, a sense of formal interest, a shimmering sheen. There’s a reason why people are still talking about Henry James and why they’ll be talking about, say, Bob Dylan for the rest of time—because they are shining examples of the extraordinary in verbal creation. Shakespeare, as a colleague of mine has noted, is our brand, culturally, for better or worse. Part of refiguring English studies means rethinking composition’s sniffy attitude toward literariness; it means our subfield’s reimagining literature as a cultural value and practice, refiguring how it fits in a first-year course centered around writing.

Miller takes, for me, a disappointing tack by championing community-based politically “pragmatic” texts over literature. If he truly feels that attending to the work of, say, Henry James, with its concern for beauty, love, kindness, and goodness in the face of the world’s evils, isn’t pulsating with political potential, then he must have no faith in the power of literary art to affect lives and effect change. If he prefers to romanticize Progressive pedagogy, such as a curriculum organized around interdisciplinary themes like “Health” and “Vocation” (165), that’s his choice—great student work can come from almost any content source—but he doesn’t have to concomitantly denigrate the power of literature to change lives. There’s nothing in his enshrinement of a community-based, transactional, pragmatic curriculum that leads me to believe a richer sense of form and language will be achieved than what’s possible in a literature-based course. Students are not wholly unenlightened about public writing—just ask them to analyze the writing on *FailBlog* and *FMyLife*, as I do, and you’ll hear a very savvy group of public rhetors. You may also find it compelling to teach writing using, in part, genres and contexts like that, literary sites for which they have some affinity.

Official composition has persisted as a bland, sanitized pedagogy, teaching clear, correct, citation-based essay form to students, using a literarily thin corpus of nonfiction readings as prompts. This is so limited, it’s unbearable. If you want to find the stuff in the field that really glitters, you’ve got to root through the discard heap. Your history has to be alternative or, as Byron Hawk calls his, “counter.” For Hawk, something as nothing as the footnotes in a couple of composition articles leads him on a fascinating scholarly journey. One of those footnotes concerns Richard Young’s misinterpretation of Coleridge and the theory of vitalism, a misreading that turns out to trivialize an entire strain of composition theory and practice as “romantic,” establishing the split between rhetoric and poetics. But Young’s work becomes canonical, and a certain kind of pedagogy becomes marginalized as personal, subjective, irrational, genius oriented; another, opposing curriculum dominates as “real-world” and teachable. Hawk proceeds to follow his adventitious leads in a scholarly work that I consider to be one of the signal histories of the field, one that does more to identify our recurring problem and how it arose than any other work I’ve read.

For Hawk, it’s the misreading of the possibilities of vitalism (i.e., an epistemology “which situates life within complex, ecological interactions” [5]) that has created a field stuck in the stale, irresolvable dichotomies of personal/social, rhetoric/poetic, art/method, thereby reducing the complexity of the scene of writing and its teaching. Hawk’s ultimate locus of misprision is James Berlin,

whose histories and taxonomies of the field helped transform the teaching and practice of such a complicated practice as writing into a strictly cognitive operation, instantiating composition as a mind-centered process, dismissing, say, body-knowledge in order to insist on the development of student consciousness as the key focus of the classroom enterprise. Hawk realizes that the misrepresentation of Coleridge and vitalism in our history has robbed our practice of that *misterioso altero* quality, resulting in a diminishment of adventurousness in the work done in our classrooms. He builds his case slowly and methodically, like a preternaturally calm DA bringing in his first murder case. Our most egregious crime is the insistence on dumbing down the complicated process of composition to a scrupulously teachable method, reducing the roles of chance and the imagination in the production of textual knowledge. Especially, it's the fetishization of invention: we have to show students exactly how to generate, we have to deny that it might just be inspired or accidental (even though that's how it works: James, for example, hears an anecdote at a dinner party, records it in his notebook, and a few months later, there's *Daisy Miller*). Maps of the field, most of which place vitalism under the suspicious sign of *romanticism*, describe a composition achievable by a strictly formal, teachable method. As a result, battle lines are drawn between actual reality and "real-world" writing. Hawk sums the problem up with depressing succinctness: "Art comes to stand for natural genius at the expense of technê, and method comes to stand for a rigid formalism at the expense of heuristics" (41).

Hawk's reading of the field not only explains our persistent stasis but also allows him to see the price we're paying for staunchly remaining in that formalist cul-de-sac, now that technology has put pressure on the tools and venues of composition, underscoring the need for a complexity in our theories heretofore missing. Some of the most interesting analysis in his book concerns the way composition instruction has become an exercise in political consciousness raising. It's beyond me why we've decided, as a field, we are more interested in savoring ideas than savoring prose; nevertheless, stylistics and the study of rhetorical figures has given way to ideology and critique. Possibly another legacy of Berlin: "race, class, and gender," Hawk notes, "are his primary topoi for reading the world. This is a limited lens for invention, not to mention students thinking about their own lived culture and modes of production" (246). Hawk acknowledges the "overly simplistic narratives" (197) that result from a 'critical pedagogy' approach to composition, a curriculum in which the crucial question is "does this pedagogy seek to produce the proper political subject and

corresponding critical text?” (207). The alternative he advocates is a classroom practice based in the fantastic possibilities of form and content, rather than a guaranteed efficacy leading to power or authority or jobs or whatever we use to sell our transactional approach:

Rather than promising our students some instrumental value in taking our curriculum, which may or may not actually turn out to have that value for them, it may be better to seduce them into studying rhetoric even if they do not know why it is seductive. It may be better to let them follow that desire to create whatever composition or constellation that they desire, let them determine what use-value the curriculum may ultimately have for them in their particular contexts. (218–19)

Screw teachability. The most effective teaching just might be what slips through the cracks: “All the contextual elements that affect a technique, pedagogy, or method can never be fully accounted for” (169). But we can try harder, I think, to enrich our students’ contextual field. Maybe this enrichment, this escape from dullness, is a material effect: Hawk, for example, draws on a wide range of theory (not just Coleridge, but Heidegger, cybernetics, and systems theory) not often found in our field’s literature. What depresses me about composition (or comp studies or comp/rhet or writing studies or college composition or FYC or FYW—it has as many aliases as a career criminal) is how unflinchingly narrow it is, the timidity of its materiality. I once argued that our field was stuck in a Greenbergian modernist rut, but I’ve come to realize we haven’t even made it into modernity: we’ve never broken forms and questioned assumptions; we haven’t come any farther than antiquity in the sophistication of our mythologies, still guided by a notion of rhetoric as language and form for social action. Too many of us teach a textuality inflected more by adjudication than imagination.

But not Jody Shipka. She is the figure Hawk imagines, one whose pedagogy is boldfaced by his notion that “perhaps seduction is the ethical thing to do” (219). With *Toward a Composition Made Whole* this scholar-practitioner has published what I think is the most compelling study of student writers since Janet Emig’s *Composing Processes of Twelfth Graders*. Like Emig, she uses her study to extrapolate a powerful, enlightening process-model, one with the potential to turn writing classrooms into some of the most exciting spaces on campus. Shipka calls for a recuperation of process-theory; learning from the behaviors of writers who create interesting, substantive work; using that observational knowledge to educe a pedagogy that recasts the writing class as vibrant workshop space. That Shipka is able to do this in a novel, holistic way is also remarkable: because she doesn’t just assume that contemporary

writing means digital text, she knows how much of a writer's work is done while walking, watching TV, doodling, shopping, listening to music, dancing, even daydreaming in class. Her theory conceives of student writers as truly community based, with *community* here referring to a richly nuanced reality, not as an arbitrary, ideological construct. In fact, for her, any piece of writing is always already community based, in the way it's what Barthes might call a tissue of quotations from a writer's quotidian engagement in all the many communities of her world.

There is no failure of imagination in Shipka's pedagogy: she affords her students some of the most dazzling occasions for writing I've ever read. She feels challenged to catch students off guard, so they won't bring to their work the same rote tedium toward writing they've learned in too many other school-sponsored writing occasions. I've found this in my own classes: not to be too cornball, but I see the gleam in students' eyes when they hear I want them to write an annotated mixtape setlist or a hip-hop top ten list or a manifesto. (All are easy, serial genres with rich possibilities; students love doing them, and why not? We've all got at least one manifesto in us, and music remains a passion.) These are genres that allow short, focused writing, but writing that lets us discuss rhetorical figures and how they lend sublimity and vibrancy to one's writing (so yes, of course, we read Longinus and Shklovsky). "I couldn't believe we got to do that kind of writing in class!" is a recurring comment I'm grateful to hear. Shipka also wants to widen the eyes of her students and get them interested in the craft of composing something original and evocative. Her students might do a research-based essay, sure, but they'll choose for their composing medium ballet slippers. Or there's her "History of 'This' Space" assignment, one of the most amazing curricular achievements I've ever seen. It's simple enough: she offers each student "the opportunity to function as an ethnographer or historian and to both carefully and critically document . . . something about the people and/or practices related to this class" (153). Students are free to choose media and form; the only requirement is that they're conscious of their role as rhetors, deciding how to craft, package, and present to the class their ethnographic work. Required, as well, is a written document to Shipka, explaining the rhetorical choices made. It's those materially bold choices, and students' consciousness of the significance of what they've accomplished, that prove the power of her pedagogy. Shipka goes in depth in her book with one of her student's work on this project, someone who chose to choreograph a dance piece in which some of her dance team members helped to capture the styles and personalities of

the other students in the class; reading the student's process restores faith in what college composition can achieve.

Shipka gives her students long-haul compositional instruction, attuning them to how complexly their behavior is socially mediated and allowing them to experiment with a variety of tools to fashion kairotically effective texts, always reflecting on their own practice for a specific assignment. She is, then, what Hawk might term a Coleridgian theorist of situatedness. That she can at once teach traditional goals of academic prose (research, thesis, argument, point of view) and yet thrill students with the experience of exciting composition, interrogating all the forms and tools at their disposal, is breathtaking. Her book also contains some brief but smart historical overview, showing, for example, how communication studies courses refigured English *avant la lettre*, with an experimental attitude regarding media and a willingness to let students play. Should English departments have embraced this? No doubt. But Shipka's take-away from her historical survey is simply to learn how the social and personal are inextricably linked and the potential for letting students do interesting work that has cachet in the academy and beyond, "providing students with the tools to 'cope intelligently' with their language environment . . . whether this involve[s] negotiating the languages of the dining room, dance floor, and the church, or the language worlds associated with reading great works of literature, 'serious' books and articles on social and political subjects, sports pages, comic sheets, ads, editorials [or] news articles" (25–26). Her metaphor is student as "traveler" (36). Composition scholars and pedagogues are not the beleaguered victims of the literary elite in Shipka's history; rather, they marginalized their own relevance through ignoring the work of communications scholars, insisting solely on one genre of written prose.

I don't think we can hear enough from reflective practitioners. *Teaching with Student Texts*, on first glance, seemed like a welcome throwback to those NCTE collections that came out with great regularity in the 1980s, where a host of practitioners talked about what they did in the class and why. We need such books more than ever, now that *CCC's* editors have apparently decided to let die the journal's "Staffroom Interchange" feature, that formerly ongoing series allowing teachers to describe and tout their pedagogy (one of the most intellectually stimulating series of texts in our field's history). But this new collection was, for me, unnerving, the unfortunate downside of an insistence on writing as reduced to the strictly teachable. Its contributors, for the most part, limn a composition pedagogy I find misguided. The purported aim of the

collection is to make student writing “a legitimate area of academic inquiry” (7). Any class I teach in which students write, I’m going to feature their work (as I assume most all of us do), using it to discuss strategies and effects, and I’m going to learn from it, too, and draw on it in my research. (I’m not sure how you can really theorize writing pedagogy without drawing on student writing. Oddly enough, though, not too many essays in this student-centric collection actually feature student text; it’s discussed, but not represented.) So, in terms of pedagogic and scholarly inquiry, the value of student writing is crucial, but to use student texts as the central content focus of a course? I could never teach such a course. We are fortunate to work in a fine-art field, being able to study and appreciate the products of verbal imagination. Choosing content from the entire cultural heritage of writing around which to build a course that teaches students to savor and practice writing can be kid-in-the-candy-store daunting. But my students’ writing exists in my courses alongside other writing, writing that I choose to help excite students further into language and form. My students are, by definition, still learning the craft; one learns, in large part, from those who have mastered it. I wouldn’t expect, for example, to learn vocal technique by listening merely (or even mainly) to recordings of other music students; I would need to listen and learn from Caruso, Bjoerling, Corelli, Domingo. Not only is genius writing seemingly absent from the courses outlined in this book, but the way in which most student writing gets produced is remarkable: first a rubric or checklist of criteria for the writing is produced (and the genre is almost always a source-driven, thesis-focused, expository argument); that checklist is often co-generated by students and teachers (in order, perhaps, to make sure blame is evenly diffused). The rubric, then, acts as the genetic code to manufacture the simulation text; then peer-response or -assessment documents, themselves based on the rubric, are used to evaluate the faithfulness of the reproduction. It’s a perfect, hermetic pseudo-economy (that hermeticism is compounded in the book with a strange editorial decision: each chapter seems to cross-reference two or three of the other essays in the book, as if all you really need to read about writing is right here in your hands, every article corroborated by every other one). Several of the authors in this collection claim that circulating such writing beyond the actual classroom (collecting it, say, in a published book) will confer true value on the work—it’s a nice thought, and I hope student writers become culturally *célèbre*, but given that the writing is generated from such a third-degree simulation scenario, the only use value I can see in such counterfeit scrip is in the board-game world in which it was generated. I don’t doubt the dedication and concern of any one

of the teachers and theorists in this book; I simply question the process model and curricular aims guiding most of the pedagogy represented here. (There are some admitted exceptions: Michelle Eodice and Kami Day, for example, build their classrooms around coauthoring, and they show a sample session—and the writing produced—that has me entertaining the method for a future assignment.) On the whole, though, too many of the contributors to this book describe a curriculum of linear reproducibility. Let me add, in sad disbelief, that some of the contributors to this volume actually have their undergraduate students read composition scholarship. Oh, my people, my people!

Despite how many of the contributors to *Teaching with Student Texts* mouth stirring pieties about treating students as real writers, archiving their work, citing it, building a course around it, what their students really do is sadly limited by target goals and formal strictures. Hawk reminds us of Richard Young's insistence on *technê* as "knowledge necessary for producing preconceived results by conscious directed action" (27), and that closed loop seems to circumscribe much of the pedagogy in this collection. Further distancing their students' writing from any notion of the real is how courses are centered overwhelmingly on the artifice of peer response, rather than on an actual writer's single most important need, the notebook. For James (for all great writers), it was essential: he speaks, in the preface to *The Princess Casamassima*, of "the rich principle of the Note":

If one was to undertake to tell tales and to report with truth on the human scene, it could be but because "notes" had been from the cradle the ineluctable consequence of one's greatest inward energy: to take them was as natural as to look, to think, to feel, to recognize, to remember, as to perform any act of understanding. The play of energy had been continuous and could n't change; what changed was only the objects and situations pressing the spring of it. Notes had been in other words the things one could n't *not* take. (*Literary Criticism* 1101)

In addition to notebooks serving as records of observed experience, Leon Edel remarks how the notebook became the only sort of peer response James needed, "a continuing conversation with himself" (xi). Instead of the rich inner colloquy of real writers engaged in writing that matters to them, we get a strangely stilted discourse cued to the grading-rubric criteria students are given (or generate themselves—it hardly matters):

First off, your essay is very good. You stayed on topic throughout your whole paper. I never once got confused on what you were talking about. It sounded like you agreed with the author, so that showed your point right away. Your examples

were perfect for this paper and they fit in well. You also had very good quotes in your paper. I didn't see any grammar mistakes that were noticeable. I think your length of your paper is good because it's not too short and not too long. You did a very good job on this paper! (Harris, Miles, and Paine 50)

Let's please end the sham of this all-too-common editorial board/peer review practice: I've received good feedback from editors, but never such that I radically rethought a piece or even did more than tweak. More often, I've received misguided, even atrocious editorial advice. Outside feedback never really enters into what I'm doing. James writes to Wells in 1902: "certainly I shall not again draw up detailed & explicit plans for unconvinced & ungracious editors. . . . A plan for *myself*, as copious and developed as possible I always do draw up" (Horne 376). Peer response remains popular, I suspect, because a certain fiction of audience is easily teachable and helps reduce the complexity of creation into a simplified sort of flow chart—do X to cue Y in your reader, do Z to give your writing authority. My students are taking a class with me; one of the benefits is that they get to have an ongoing conversation about their writing with someone who knows something about writing, who can help coach their work, identify strengths and weaknesses. The thought of blowing off a class in a coffee shop, listening to students' pleasant, phatic comments on their assignments, would make me wonder if the whole thing was worth it.

In my darker moments, I'm ready to call FYW a doomed enterprise, one fated to generate a series of head-shaking counter-histories. Until other departments are willing to take ownership for teaching students to do the writing in their field (either in first-year seminars or writing-intensive [WI] courses), it seems composition programs will remain a compromised, scapegoated service unit, having to fulfill their required, impossible mission by addressing presumed goals of academic writing, having students perfect the re-representation of thinly voiced, unimaginative prose, written in response to middlebrow nonfiction essays, in courses inflected more by politics than poetics, ideology rather than desire. Unsurprisingly, we're at yet another crossroads in the field, this one driven by vortices of both budget constraints and new media. I'm continually heartened, though, by the work of scholar-practitioners who bring enormous energy to finding new methods or reinvigorating old ones, sifting through the scholarship and pedagogy of the past in order to determine a compelling new present. Their work becomes a challenge to me to shake off the gloom, to remain naively excited about new tools and genres for writing, to dedicate my scholarship to finding just which literary and rhetorical theory holds even the faintest hints of life, and converting them into revelations.

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