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Read-around One: One Year in *College English*

For this assignment, I undertook a close reading of 7 articles from 6 issues of *College English* covering the period from July 2003 through May 2004. *College English* terms itself "...the professional journal for the college scholar-teacher", presenting articles that "may work across traditional field boundaries [...from] authors represent[ing] the full range of institutional types" (NCTE "*College English*"). I find it interesting they actually use the term "the" professional journal, but since the publication "covers a wide spectrum of topics relevant to the discipline of English at the level of higher education[...] publish[ing] articles on both literature and composition as well as other disciplinary concerns, and ... are open to all theoretical approaches and schools of thought" (NCTE "*About College English*"), this word choice may be warranted. A cursory examination of abstracts of all articles published during this period, as well as the close reading of the seven I selected, supports the alleged breadth of topics covered.

Articles submitted to/published in *CE* include work on "literature, rhetoric-composition, critical theory, creating writing theory and pedagogy, linguistics, literacy, reading theory, pedagogy, and professional issues related to the teaching of English" (NCTE "*CE*"). In a move to further ensure the appeal of the journal to a "broad-based" readership, "[they] try to insure that articles appeal to nonspecialists as well as specialists in particular areas" ("*About CE*"). There seems to be only one restriction: "because [they] are a scholarly journal, [they] do not publish narrowly practical articles about classroom practices" (NCTE "*About CE*").

Each issue includes several articles (generally four per issue), as well as:

- at least one review essay covering at least two books;
- one or more Comment & Response exchanges--comments readers send in on particular articles, usually with a response from the author;
- Announcements and Calls for Papers...;
- and, of course, advertisements, above all for books of interest to English teachers (NCTE "About *College English*").

I found that this year's worth of *College English* does, in fact, represent the true breadth of our field, with articles covering a very wide-ranging set of topics. It was, in fact, difficult to represent the true breadth [DCL1]of the journal by using only seven articles. I attempted to do so by choosing those which seemed either situated at the margins of this year's variety of topics, though in at least one instance I later found thematic connections (though with extremely different arguments and suggested applications) between works.

#### **July 2003, Volume 65, Issue 6**

The July 2003 issue of *College English* four scholarly articles covering Sharon O'Dair's "Class Work: Site of Egalitarian Activism or Site of Embourgeoisement?" (on teaching and activism), Jane Greer's "Refiguring Authorship, Ownership, and Textual Commodities: Meridel Le Sueur's Pedagogical Legacy" (a personal profile), R. Mark Hall's "The 'Oprahfication' of Literacy: Reading 'Oprah's Book Club'", which focuses on literacy teaching and learning, and Christina Crosby's "Writer's Block, Merit, and the Market: Working in the University of Ethics". In addition, there is one opinion piece by Joseph Harris, "Revision as Critical Practice", and a book review by Judith Harris

O'Dair's primary objection to this is that it demonstrates the "bad faith of the middle-class professoriate" whose goal of critical literacy "conflicts with the goals of students and of higher education itself" (593-4). She suggests that while the intention is to "ease [students'] transition", helping them "to succeed in the middle-class institutions of higher education" (594), what is really happening is that teachers are failing to "accept certain norms of those institutions—standard English, taste, manners, and the like." (594).

O'Dair believes that the transition into college "...will never be seamless unless the research university becomes a working-class institution, responsive to (rather than merely sensitive to) racial and ethnic diversity" (Heathcott qtd. in O' Dair 594). She suggests that, by what she perceives as a now "standard" reliance on the development of critical literacy, we are, instead of helping students become, simply further reinforcing the perceived superiority of all things middle-class/institutional over home lives/values/skills of students. While this does not, to me, initially square with her criticisms that in teaching critical literacy skills we are ignoring the need to teach students conventions of Standard English, she goes on to explain that rather than "transform[ing] the research university into a working-class institution," we are creating, she argues, another kind of bourgeoisie (595). We are creating, she argues, students who have lost the connection to their home cultures, and the values those homes may place on certain ideas (including even sexism and homophobia) (596). What makes this problematic for her, it seems, is the idea that higher education does not necessarily guarantee students a way to move from the working class to the middle class in any way except their outlook on things (596).

Here she moves into what is for me the crux of her argument, and the most objectionable point at that, asking the questions “How far do we go in promoting egalitarianism in the academy? How many students who require remedial instruction in English and mathematics should we admit to undergraduate study?” (597). Even if, she says, “President Clinton, the high school seniors cited above, or the contributors to *Teaching Working Class* are correct in their assumptions that access to higher education will become universal, colleges and universities will continue to be part of middle class culture” (601), and, though “many think a degree janitor an excellent outcome; a person who has been trained in critical literacy will be a better and more responsible citizen: (601); however, O’Dair is not one of these people. She seems to be asking what the good of all this is, if a college diploma does not guarantee upward financial and social mobility, if all we have managed to do is to further indoctrinate the working class to believe the middle class is superior?

Instead, O’Dair suggests, “...it is time for society to rethink its attempt to ameliorate via ever-increasing amounts of education the invidious distinction between the working class and the middle and upper classes” (602). Our classrooms should become sites for “‘class activism’ by promoting the value and worth of working-class people and working-class culture” (603) a place “...where the differences between those worlds are clearly expressed, and expressed without privileging the middle-class world of the university” (604). I agree with this in theory, but have a hard time squaring it with her notion of composition as a place where “proper”, “correct” English is more important than critical literacy (though I am willing to concede it a position of “as” important). I further disagree with her notion that there are far too many “remedial” students taking up her

time as a teacher, and the idea that we should use our composition classrooms as a place to disabuse working class students of the notion of reaching higher, as a place to weed them back out to become bartenders, or janitors. Certainly, college is not for everyone; however, I don't believe that making this a pedagogical move is a step forward. I realize this line of reasoning is improper in a report, but I bring it up because the May 2004 issue also makes the "conversational" nature of academic inquiry I am becoming enmeshed in here visible with the appearance of two commentary pieces (as well as a rebuttal) focused on Sharon O'Dair's July 2003 article (which apparently incensed others as it did me!). I will return to this point later in my report.

#### **September 2003, Volume 66, Issue 1**

The September 2003 issue of *College English* is a special issue on "The Personal in Academic Writing." Though the articles contained here may vary in their approach, style, and definition of what constitutes personal writing, they are all tied together by that theme. Offerings include "Written through the Body: Disruptions and 'Personal' Writing" (William P. Banks), "Composing Culture: A Place for the Personal" (Patricia A. Sullivan), "Confessionals" (Melissa A. Goldthwaite), and "It's Time for Class: Toward a More Complex Pedagogy of Narrative" (Amy E. Robillard). The texts reviewed for this volume include *Shanghai Quartet: The Crossing of Four Women into China*, *Exiled memories: Stories of Iranian Diaspora*, and *Personal Effects: The Social Character of Scholarly Writing*.

The issue opens with an article by Jane E. Hindman ("Thoughts on Reading 'the Personal': Toward a Discursive Ethics of Professional Critical Literacy"), guest editor of this special issue. Overall, Hindman's article is directed at both scholarly producers and

consumers of texts. She relies upon both theory and analysis to make her point, and applies her arguments to several sample texts in order to demonstrate both the necessity and application of the tactics she is promoting.

In this piece, Hindman discusses the submissions for the issues as demonstrating the variety of apparent definitions of “personal writing” and makes the criticism that “personal writing” for publication should not “free [the author] from the constraints of writing for readers” (Hindman 9). Because of this, the pieces ultimately selected for this issue share a focus on “embodied personal writing” (10).

Hindman explains that “embodied rhetoric requires gestures to the material practices of the professional group *and* to the quotidian circumstances of the individual writer, such as the writer’s affect, motive(s), history, and/or stakes in the argument or position adopted” (Hindman qtd. in Hindman 10). She further argues that such “expansions” in the form and functions of academic essays, indeed in “professionals’ critical literacy”, “require similar expansion in the conventions for scholarly consumption of academic texts” (11). It is difficult, in other words, for the reader to follow these personal essays, because even if they are embodied, as she and others believe the best of them must be, they require more of the reader. She references several “new textual practices” demonstrate in personal feminist writings, and points out that these new practices “involve ‘demanding, time-consuming tasks which ask readers to carry out much of the interpretive and analytical work usually done by authors [...]. This is an unusually hard burden for readers to bear, one for which readers expect a significant reward” (Kirsch qtd. in Hindman 12). Because Hindman believes that these new composing practices can yield a new literacy which “ends oppression”, then we need to

pay more attention, as a profession, to “our practices of *consuming* the alternative discourse(s) that we too-not just our students—produce” (13-14). If we do not develop our ways of reading, “our practices undermine, if not censure, innovative textual production, disciplining their subversive potential” (13-14). We must address, she argues, “the ethical imperative for a professional critical literacy that demands that *readers*, as well as writers, be accountable for the interpretive burden” (Lunsford and Ede qtd. in Hindman 14). This goal requires what Hindman terms “a ‘discursive ethics’ of professional reading practices,” one that “commit[s] to confronting masculinist and racist privilege” (14). To do so, readers must “attend to *all* aspects of their experience (thoughts, feelings, memories, or associations) when they grade, review, or otherwise consume texts” (14-15). Her argument, then, is that not only should academic personal writing be embodied, so must our individual and professional reading of such texts (15).

As part of this “ethical professional critical literacy” we must demonstrate “...a willingness to read and respond in order to *empower*, rather than have power over, the writer” (15). A second “crucial element of embodied reading” demands that we exercise “...relentless self-reflection; the self-reflexivity of an ethical textual economy demands that [we] continually call attention to the ways [we] use rhetoric to position [our]sel[ves] to texts and authors and to the motives [we] have for doing so” (15). Thirdly, embodied, ethical reading “...requires relentless awareness of emotional responses to texts” (16), and asks that we “intervene” in our “conditioning” as readers (16).

#### **November 2003, Volume 66, Issue 2**

The November 2003 issue of *College English* again demonstrates the breadth of the journal. In addition to the piece by Marc Bousquet, which I am surveying, this issue

includes articles on “Nineteenth-Century African American Women’s Autobiography as Social Discourse: The Example of Harriet Ann Jacobs” (Johnnie M. Stover), “Distributed Authorship: A Feminist Case-Study Framework for Studying Intellectual Property” (Sarah Robbins), a Symposium piece by Laurie Finke, Barbara Johnson, Vincent B. Leitch, John McGowan, and Jeffrey J. Williams on “Editing a Norton Anthology”, and a review by William DeGenaro centering on “Work as Text” (which explores several non-fiction books on men and the steel industry).

I chose to survey “The Rhetoric of ‘Job Market’ and the Reality of the Academic Labor System” because, in that it focuses on the field as a field of employment rather than as an academic discipline (or a portion thereof), it seemed the only piece of its kind in this year’s worth of *College English*. Using criticisms of Bowen and Sosa’s 1989 “job market” study “Prospects for Faculty,” which predicted that from 1997-2002 there would be “substantial excess demand for faculty in the arts and sciences” which would require “...some appreciable tightening of academic labor markets to begin as early as 1992-1997” (Bowen and Sosa qtd. in Bousquet 207) as his frame, Bousquet traces the shift of “job market” from its conception a physical event staged at the MLA convention to facilitate the matchup between prospective employers and applicants through the shift to “job market” as a physical and economic force coming from outside the academy, a function of market and economy against which the academy has no power.

Bousquet traces two waves of thought about the academic labor system. The first wave, which “emerged before 1970” (208), “propel[ed] the self-organization of the academic work force” (208) through such moves as the MLA “Job Mart” (212) and increased unionization (208). This first wave of “labor awareness was contested by the

administratively oriented second wave (of which Bowen's 'job market' study is emblematic), generally informed by a neoliberal ideology idealizing market epistemology and naturalizing market relationships" (208). In other words, the second wave is what led us to apply "market" as an economic, societal function of supply and demand against which the only defense of the academy is to stifle "overproduction" of degree holders "... 'from the supply side' by reducing admissions to graduate programs" (209).

Bousquet's argument, overall, is that "because the incoming flow of graduate students is generally tightly controlled to produce 'just enough' labor, graduate departments really can't reduce admissions without making other arrangements for the work that the graduate students would have done" (209). This has led to an increase of non-degreed and/or less-experienced teachers taking over the lion share's of the work in most departments, particularly in labor-intensive, required courses in the humanities and sciences, which has led to the exact opposite of the dearth of tenure-track positions predicted by Bowen and Sosa. Bousquet posits an alternative: he believes that the remedy for this situation is not "... primarily better modeling and the 'rationalizing' of the Ph.D. production" (211), or a "modernization"/Fordist mentality of "graduate production lines"; instead, we should admit, as a field, that the market is not something external, and be "... willing to see [our]self as an agent" (214). This can be accomplished, he argues, by focusing on the "... real problems of 'demand' (the willingness of administrations to utilize nondegreed flexible labor instead of degreed persons in jobs) (Orr qtd. in Bousquet 215).

We must claim agency, Bousquet argues, and turn away from the oversimplified, if not false, notion of "... 'the market' as empirical reality" (217) and "... instead of

constantly adjusting ourselves (and our compensation) to ‘meet the needs of the market,’ [...] start[...] to *adjust or regulate the ‘market’ to meet our needs?*” (225). To do so, “...faculty would have to take more control of their workplaces and rather than lower faculty wages to the level of graduate employees or adjunct instructors [...]”(225) --or replace distressing numbers of degreed faculty with nondegreed “alternatives”—“...*raise the wages of graduate employees and adjunct instructors to the level of the faculty* (or even higher, in order to eliminate the motivation for replacing faculty workers with discounted labor” (225). Bousquet believes that “...at these reasonable wages, the university [would have] little motivation to admit ‘too many’ graduate employees or rely unduly on term faculty”; therefore, “...all of the problems of ‘the market’ would vanish” (225-6).

### **January 2004, Volume 66, Issue 3**

The January 2004 issue of *College English* seems to focus heavily on classroom practices from as explored from theoretical perspectives. It contains pieces on using literature (“Who Killed Annabel Lee?: Writing about Literature in the Composition Classroom) and creative writing (“Research and Reflection in English Studies: The Special Case of Creative Writing”) in the college composition classroom. The texts reviewed in this issue (focused this time under the title “Truth and Method: What Goes on in Writing Classes, and How Do We Know?") share this focus. Here, too, we see the first of this year’s “comment” pieces written in reply to an article appearing in an earlier issue of *College English* (a topic to which I will return). Additionally, there are two historiographical articles focusing on rhetoric and language education: “Democracy, Capitalism, and the Ambivalence of Willa Cather’s Frontier Rhetorics: Uncertain

Foundations of the U.S. Public University System” and, the one I’ve chosen to survey, “Tlaltelolco: The Grammatical-Rhetorical *Indios* of Colonial Mexico,” by Susan Romano.

Romano’s article in and of itself demonstrates the interdisciplinary work of the journal; it discusses the history of a “grammar-rhetoric-composition program at the Colegio de Santa Cruz de Tlaltelolco, a sixteenth-century institution of higher education for sons of the indigenous elite ...in the valley of Mexico” (257) as a matter of interest to linguists, students of colonialism/post-colonialism and cultural studies, and those interested in the politics of higher education and schools in general. This article (which was fascinating to me, given my interests in Hispanic rhetorics and the intersections of language, power, and politics) traces the development of Tlaltelolco as a site of linguistic interaction and exchange, the colonizers’ desire to use the school as a site of cultural and religious indoctrination and their related fears (which eventually, it seems, led to the school’s closure) of an uprising, or “worse”, a blending of bloodlines and cultures, stemming from an educated indigenous population. There is too much history and political analysis presented in this piece to easily trace the argument in the space allotted here; however, this gets at the crux of it.

Romano’s overall purpose, it seems, is to reveal the politicization that often accompanies grammatical instruction. She argues for “...Tlaltelolco’s place in North American composition-rhetoric history,” and “...aim{s} for an analysis that looks into institutional sponsorship of activities that systematize and regulate reading and writing; that observes how the rhetorics of schooling bring teachers, learners, and writing into relationship, thus mirroring *and* distorting the broader cultural landscape; that connects

curriculum with social anxieties about the implications of rhetorical education and writing instruction; that examines transformations of power relations during the course of teaching writing; and that affirms our contemporary sense that literacy education within institutional settings is not easily unpacked in terms of its social agenda” (275-6). These ideas tie directly to the first article I surveyed (O’Dair), and reveal the only real recurrent theme I found throughout this week’s reading.

#### **March 2004, Volume 66, Issue 4**

This particular issue was a bit different in that it contained only three articles: “The Daughter’s Disenchantment: Incest as Pedagogy in Fairy Tales and Kathryn Harrison’s *The Kiss*” (Elizabeth Marshall), “Invisible Hands: A Manifesto to Resolve Institutional and Curricular Hierarchy in English Studies” (Karen Fitts and William B. Lalicker), and, the one I chose to read, “Forgetful Memory and Images of the Holocaust,” selected because I have a deep interest in visual rhetoric and this was the only article in this year’s *College English* dealing directly with this aspect of the field. Marshall’s article demonstrates a continuing focus in literature and literary criticism. Fitts and Lalicker’s piece, while focuses on the “crisis in English,” which “involv[es] the so-called culture wars and the declining prestige of canonical literary texts”(Fitts and Lalicker para. 1), could be said to bridge the schism between Literature and Rhetoric/Composition studies in that it “present[s] an argument for a structural revolution in English studies by assessing the status quo, [...] in particular the MLA’s representation of ‘rhetoric and composition’ as a subfield of English language studies” (Fitts and Lalicker para. 1); therefore, this piece both fits into the current issue’s (primary) focus on literature, and demonstrates again the character of *College English* as “the” journal for English language

is a way to use these images to “look forward” (400), but we are instead, he argues, through such mechanisms closed off by these ways of seeing from “... writ[ing] or remember[ing] the events whose object is apparently depicted [...] (401).

**May 2004, Volume 66, Issue 5**

This issue again demonstrates the breadth of topics (almost “disciplines” given the fractures between the various fields of study which make up “college English”) treated by this journal. This issue includes articles on chaos theory and the implications for process/post-process teaching (“Meaning Finds a Way: Chaos Theory and Composition”), oral tradition and literature (“Transforming Audiences for Oral Tradition: Child, Kittredge, Thompson, and Connections of Folklore and English Studies”), and the history and teaching of literacy skills (“Drafting U.S. Literacy”). The books reviewed for this issue again demonstrate the editor’s attempts at representing the variety of the work that we do; in this issue, they focus on assessment (which actually seems valuable to practioners teaching any and all aspects of “English” in college settings, regardless of the specific nature of the course).

Deborah’s Brandt’s article, “Drafting U.S. Literacy,” is a historiographical piece that focuses on tracing the historical conceptions, development, measurement, and demand for literacy from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to present, focusing especially on the crucial WWII period, which seems to have most transformed the supply of and demand for “literate” citizens. Her point of departure is “...nineteenth-century rationales for mass literacy,” which focused on “literacy” as “...a knowledge of right behavior...” (488). At this time, literacy was viewed as something that “...signaled that personal contact had been made with the word of God,” and “...certified membership in a community of

believers” (488). This conception of “literacy” “...guide[d] selection of reading material as well as interpretation of the printed word” (488). Literacy was viewed as a “...contribut[ion] to social stability” and illiteracy as a “...dangerous condition, a suspicious sign of family neglect, cultural different, or susceptibility to evil” (488). Literacy, then, was “...value[d] [...as a] moral” not as “...functional in the work sense,” (488), and, “economically, the supply of literacy exceeded demand, as many more people knew how to read and write than needed to read and write as part of their work” (489). Literacy, during this period, “...mattered most for what it supposed did to people, not for what people supposedly could do with it” (490). We will witness these conditions changing as time passes.

The next stop in Brandt’s survey is “...the First World War, often called the first modern of high-tech war” (490). Throughout WWI, the “...surplus of literacy generated by the moral imperative would hold up,” and even those who argued that “...universal literacy should be an aspect of universal service did so within the framework of the moral imperative” (490).

During this period the armed services developed and began administering IQ tests as a way of sorting recruits into various positions (490). A huge number (700,000 of the ten million men registering for the draft during the summer of 1917 alone) were functionally illiterate and signed their draft papers with a mark (491); this was of little concern to the services, as the supply of literate soldiers still exceeded the demand. Nonetheless, it was a concern to those guided by the moral imperative, such as Cora Wilson Stewart, who had, a few years earlier, instituted an evening adult learning program in Kentucky aimed at literacy with the result of “...community uplift: by her

reckoning, literate citizens were more inclined to support local schools, attend church, and adopt progressive outlooks” (491). *The Country Reader*, which Stewart wrote for use in these classes, made use of sentences that would help to indoctrinate learners in such lessons, including items such as “I will build a silo” and “I will keep my money in the bank” (492).

With the onset of WWI, “Stewart saw...an opportunity to leverage her campaign to the national level” (492). She composed *The Soldier’s First Book*; “readings changed from ‘peaceful lessons on building roads, spraying fruit trees, rotating crops and conserving soil’ into something more ‘martial in tone,’ including information about camp life and, given the unpopularity of the draft, the honor of military service” (493). Though the National War Council, operating under the auspices of the YMCA, would eventually adopt Stewart’s methods and text, “Stewart failed to convince the federal government to legislate compulsory literacy instruction for inductees” (493). It simply wasn’t necessary to them at that time, as the supply of literates did still far outstrip the necessity of them for production. Still, we see in her efforts and the governmental response “...the [continued] vitality of the moral imperative for literacy in the early decades of the twentieth century” and the fact that “...literacy remained associated with the most basic of civilian practices—voting, writing letters, [and] engaging in private devotion...” (493). Literacy was still, “in 1917, [...] associate more with the moral and spiritual needs of [citizens and] troops than with effective warfare” (494) or economic production.

Brandt points out here that the fact that literacy, throughout WWI, “...as a human attribute remained embedded in its traditional social and moral contexts even as the military made its first concerted efforts to extract and manage intellectual skills in the

production of a modern war [...] would set the stage for confusion and frenzy in the conscription stations of World War II [...]" (494). In WWII, with the advent of much more technical and modern warfare, "...literacy became good in the functional sense—like a good trigger finger, something workable, usable. [It] was no longer emblematic, proof of your contact with the faith or with the school, but rather something actual" (496) and for the first time the need for literate citizens began to outstrip the supply (496). "...literacy [had] bec[o]me fuel for a changed military and a changing economy, [and] uses for it—consumptive and productive—expanded quickly, expending the surplus" (496).

Though there had always been very real biases to who was offered literacy education and how the ideology surrounding it was received (488-489), it seems that bias became much more clearly delineated during WWII, with discrimination now focused as "cost-benefit analysis" (497). In earlier years, when literacy education was guided by the moral imperative, "...second-class citizenship could exclude you from the rights and responsibilities of literacy or vice versa" (497). Though the need to find enough men to operate the war machine caused the military to cross, somewhat, racial and class boundaries a bit more during WWII, educating those who had the most potential to do the work deemed necessary; however, "...access became contingent and pragmatic—made available or not depending upon vacillations in monthly manpower needs" (497). We were moving from a moral imperative to a productive imperative; "under this imperative, those of low literacy were no longer morally less deserving or opportunity but rather, objectively, less cost-effective" (497). Brandt points out here that "...the draining away

of public support for urban education over the last forty years” demonstrates “a direct legacy of the cost-benefit mentality” (497).

By WWII, literacy was no longer tied to morality, but “...to the life of technology” (498), “...loosen[ing] its ties with tradition and stability and affiliat[ing] itself more centrally with change” (499) and, Brandt argues, with production. This notion of literacy persists today. Brandt points out that President G.W. Bush’s “no child left behind” act, while it “...rings with the evangelical and democratic fervor of the old nineteenth-century moral crusades for literacy and education [...] is really motivated by grim demographic projections that will require today’s youths to significantly boost their economic productivity as adults in order to support a large, aging population” (500). We are still, then, caught in the “production” model of literacy. This suggests, Brandt states, that we are in a “period of reevaluation” similar to that experienced earlier in our history, with our schools, “perhaps for the first time in history [...] running behind if not against the dominant cultural imperatives for literacy” (501).

Also this issue there is a return to the article I began this report with, Sharon O’Dair’s “Class Work: Site of Egalitarian Activism or Site of Embourgeoisement?” Two comments are published, and O’Dair is offered a chance to rebut. The first response, from Tim Mayers, reveals that he had a two points of positive reaction to O’Dair’s argument. Mayers states that “...O’Dair offers a compelling challenge to the notion that increased access to higher education in the United States has ameliorated, or can “ameliorate [...] the invidious distinction between the working class and the middle and upper classes” (O’Dair qtd in Mayers 558). Mayers is quite correct in his belief that “this argument, though it may run counter to the deeply held beliefs of many *College*

*English* readers [...] ought to be considered seriously and thoughtfully by all in English studies who wish to be genuinely reflective about our pedagogical and intellectual practices” (Mayers 558). Mayers also states that he was “excite[d] [...] that O’Dair, a self-identified ‘literary critic,’ had chosen to participate in the discourse of composition studies” (Mayers 558). (This point introduced a second theme I found; as I noted earlier, one of the articles, Fitt’s and Lalicker’s March 2004 article “Invisible Hands” also addresses the division between areas of study in English departments.) Despite his pleasure at these two points, Mayers’ “...disappointment with O’Dair’s article far outweighed [his] excitement. Her portrayal of composition as a field is reductive [...] and her never-fully-articulated arguments about how composition pedagogy might be reformed are, in a word, ludicrous” (Mayers 558). He also notes (to my pleasure) that “...the ‘Standard Model’ pedagogy critiqued by O’Dair is nowhere to be found in many composition classrooms” (Mayers 559) (a point that I, with sadness, as a believer in the need for critical literacy, concede). Further, Mayer says that O’Dair’s article “...demonstrate[s] a troublesome contempt for students” and “...a level of ignorance about the history of U.S. higher education in the twentieth-century” (Mayers 559), and that his pleasure at seeing a “literary critic” taking an interest in the discourse of composition cannot outweigh the fact that O’Dair “...represents the continued and perhaps willful refusal on the part of many literary scholars even to recognize composition as anything other than dreary, deadening classroom experience with allegedly ‘inferior’ students” (Mayers 560), revealing that many from “other” fields who venture into the conversations surrounding composition do not “...do so as intellectual

partners [...but] as imperial operatives bent on reasserting the superiority of their area of the discipline over all others” (Mayers 561).

The second comment, penned by Leann Bertoncini, does not put forth any points of agreement with O’Dair. Bertoncini, herself the child of a working class family, is incensed at O’Dair’s argument that “...working class people [...should] stop attending college because higher education does not offer entrance into the working class” (Bertoncini 561). She also takes exception to O’Dair’s notion that “...first year composition courses become sites where the differences between the working and middle classes are ‘clearly expressed’ and where the ‘frank talk [...] would enable working-class students to get out of the university classroom [...] if they are there only because there are no alternatives and because it seems they need a bachelor’s degree in psychology to become a bartender” (O’Dair qtd. in Bertoncini 561). Bertoncini finds this not only offensive, but flawed in that: 1) O’Dair “...cites statistics showing that increased schooling accounts for all the growth in average hours compensation since 1973 and clearly feels the middle and upper classes enjoy a ‘superior cultural world’” (O’Dair qtd. in Bertoncini 561) and 2) O’Dair “...misses one of the key goals of critical pedagogy—practice toward active, democratic citizenship” (Bertoncini 562) something which would benefit a student whether or not they complete their degree or make a jump in social/financial class as a result of their education. Sharon O’Dair’s response reiterates her argument, thanks Mayers for noticing her main points, and attempts to defend herself against Bertoncini by (at this late date) revealing that she too is the child of a working class background. This dialogue did not change my initial opinion of O’Dair’s article, but it was refreshing to see the “academic conversation” so publicly presented, and also

very revealing to see that this was published a solid year later. This demonstrates something about the time it takes to move from writing to publication.

As part of her defense, O'Dair introduces one "new" point, this in response to Mayers' commentary. She says, "I think [Mayers] may be correct about" (O'Dair "Comment & Reponse" 565) the emergence of composition studies "disrupting the mechanisms through which literary studies' empire of privilege is kept intact" (Mayers qtd. in O'Dair "Comment & Reponse" 565), and in that "...and compositionists are slowly gaining more rewards from and respect within the profession. What we might question is how this is being achieved. Compositionists appear to have discovered that status must be wrested from others in accordance with the rules of the profession" (O'Dair "Comment & Response" 565). She goes on to say, "therefore, in the attempt to gain status [...], compositionists have gotten theoretical [...] and they have disassociated themselves from low-status clients, that is, undergraduate students. The successful ones publish books for one another, and they rarely teach composition themselves, preferring to supervise others who do, whether adjuncts, graduate students, or instructors" (565). In my experience, this is not always the case, and even when it is, there is something to be said for new and less-experienced teachers learning from those who are most successful in the field. In any case, this hardly seems a defense of O'Dair's own distancing from "low-status clients," the general student population she treats with such disrespect in her article. I expect there to be another commentary and response on this. This dialogue reveals that, despite *College English's* best attempts to provide a space wherein the varied "fields" that comprise the larger discipline of English can peacefully co-exist, we have a long way to go before that happens.

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