

COMMENT & RESPONSE

A COMMENT ON JOSEPH HARRIS'S "REVISION AS A CRITICAL PRACTICE"

In *A Teaching Subject: Composition since 1966*, Joseph Harris identifies five key words that reflect dominant pedagogical approaches to composition since the mid-1960s: *growth, voice, process, error, and community*. Following Harris, in *Moving beyond Academic Discourse: Composition Studies and the Public Sphere*, Christian Weisser proposes that with the social turn in composition, we might add *public* as the latest key word (43). Yet if we correctly understand Harris's recent opinion essay ("Revision as a Critical Practice," July 2003), it seems that he has a wholly different approach in mind, an approach that he sets in opposition to civic or publicly minded critical pedagogies, one that threatens to institute critical reading of texts—namely literary fiction—as the dominant approach to composition.

We fear that the types of English professors who see themselves primarily as literary critics and intellectuals

(O'Dair, July 2003) and who seem to resent being assigned to teach composition in the first place will find Harris's piece an encouragement to teach composition as courses in the close reading of literary texts. Consider every example Harris gives: in the basic writing and the more advanced courses he describes, his students are writing what could essentially be termed essays of literary criticism. The purpose appears to be for students to show their mastery of the text, their ability to be good readers/good explicators. There seems no audience beyond teacher, self, or perhaps Bakhtin's super addressee, the audience who would receive their interpretations in just the right way. Despite his statement, "I am arguing for a focus not on form but on function, on use in context," none of the assignments Harris describes seems to have a context—that is, beyond the context of the student writing for the teacher. Even the reflective writing that he has students do is reflection on their ability to write literary criticism.

Even though Harris claims that his main goal is to help students make

“stronger use of the work of others and of more clearly articulating one’s own project as a writer” (591), we have difficulty imagining how any of the assignments he describes helps students conceive of themselves as anything more than writers of literary criticism. He defines students throughout his essay in terms of their ability to read and write about texts, and focuses on the labor involved in “*drafting and revising a critical essay*” (590; emphasis added). Such goals would be somewhat productive for courses designed for English majors who intend to become literary critics, but even so, many literary critics would encourage students to engage more thoroughly with power dynamics present in and represented through texts and to do so with an audience in mind. Even literary critics—at least the more progressive ones—have moved beyond simple explication of texts with no real audience or purpose in mind. We’d like to hear more from Harris about the audience(s) for whom his students write these critical essays. For instance, does Harris discuss with his students the audiences who read various literary journals?

If we were to subscribe to this intrusion of literary criticism into composition classes, however, what changes would we be expected to make as instructors? The very critique Harris offers of critical pedagogy as a “vague [. . .] project” (591) could be leveled against his own pedagogy. What is Harris doing in his classroom that he considers superior to critical pedagogy? The lack of discussion of classroom activities, conferencing

strategies, or response styles struck us as profound for a piece that works to negate Ira Shor’s *When Students Have Power*, which, as Harris grants, gives a detailed account of the “lived experience of the classroom” (578). It’s worth noting that the first paper Harris mentions, based on Stevenson’s *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, does not implement the assignment suggested—working with competing versions of the same text. Rather, the student focuses solely on a critique of the horrific in a passage from the written version. The other meager details of the pedagogy include only some basic advice to one student, whereby Harris drew her attention to a problem in her essay, and one paragraph describing a reflective letter on revision. While we applaud the attention to student writing in Harris’s piece, the classroom practices that led to that writing are noticeably absent. We would be interested in hearing how Harris goes about teaching competing versions of texts.

Even with a fully described pedagogy, though, we would still wonder about the conclusions he draws regarding teaching toward critical consciousness. The question with which he challenges critical pedagogy could be posed in response to the moves his students learn to make to please him: “For how do you tell when students have actually been raised to awareness and when they’ve simply figured out what they’re supposed to say?” (591). Every instructor faces the dilemma of teaching toward a goal and hoping the students find that goal worthy, whether that goal consists

of achieving critical consciousness or changing actual practices within a writing process. We are looking for the key ingredient behind Harris's pedagogy—the difference he finds between Shor's work with student phrasing and language in the utopia class and Harris's endeavors with student phrasing and language in his examples—that would make one student response presumably insincere and the other sincere. If we look at his student Creg's revision, we can still see the influence of the instructor's goals. How, for instance, did the student know his paper “totally stunk”? We are not privy to the exchange between Harris and the student, only that Creg was “told” to make changes (586). Yet, Harris extols Creg's sense of agency. How does Harris know that this “agency” does not merely reflect the student's understanding of what his teacher wanted? It seems to us Creg could have hoodwinked Harris in his reflections about revision, that is, if we were to apply the same type of skepticism to Harris's quest to empower students as he does to critical pedagogy's goal to raise awareness. We would welcome an elaboration from Harris on how he distinguishes sincerity from insincerity and prevents students from merely giving him what he wants.

Ultimately, we do not see how students would “gain more control over their work” (591) in this course based in literary criticism than they would in a course centered on civic virtue or critical consciousness. While we do not wish to draw battle lines yet again between literature and composition, Harris's

unexamined push toward the cooptation of composition by literary criticism concerns us. We fear that a basic writing class such as Harris describes would further alienate students already marginalized by high school writing classes based on literary classics. We simply do not see students picking up the challenge “to make writing work toward their own ends” (591) when the writing they would be exposed to in such a class does not prompt them to search for meaningful connections to their world, especially to race, class, and gender—an agenda Harris states specifically is not the goal of the course (583). When instructors do not help students expose ideology in their texts and the texts of others, the status quo prevails, tacitly given approval by the curriculum. Any discursive agency acquired in a writing course under these conditions, then, serves the dominant ideology and, in this case, the academic project of literary criticism. We do not understand how this result can be viewed as empowering.

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JOSEPH HARRIS RESPONDS:

In writing “Revision as a Critical Practice,” I was keen to distinguish between teaching toward critical consciousness and teaching a practice—that is, between forms of awareness and forms of work. I

was thus surprised to learn that Jennifer Beech and William Thelin saw an entirely different tension—the familiar disciplinary struggle between literature and composition—as driving my essay, and even more surprised to find myself cast by them as a champion of literature. For my training is in education rather than English, I work in an independent writing program, and I have not taught anything resembling a conventional literature course in over a decade. I have no stake or interest in teaching literary criticism.

I seem to have aroused Beech and Thelin's suspicions by describing my work in class with several students writing in response to fiction. While I will note that I mention working as well with students writing about rock songs, movies, fairy tales, poetry, psychoanalytic criticism, and social theory, I also have to admit to being caught out: Many of my examples in this particular essay do indeed involve students writing about novels. It simply hadn't occurred to me that some readers might find this sinister or distracting—perhaps because I am less concerned with what texts students are given to read than with what uses they are asked to make of them. Beech and Thelin have thus taught me a useful lesson in the rhetorical impact of examples.

If I might try to offer a lesson in return it would have to do with the need to avoid a slippage in terms and ideas. Beech and Thelin get it right when they say that I want to help students become critics, to learn how to take up positions of their own in a landscape of texts. But they are

mistaken when they go on to suggest that in advocating a close and critical work with texts I am arguing for a specifically *literary* criticism. I am not. On the contrary, I think we need to teach moves and strategies of response that students can draw on in writing about a wide range of issues and texts. I am arguing for criticism, not literature.

Beech and Thelin also overstate their case in claiming that I seek to “oppose” or “negate” critical pedagogy. The verb I actually use in my essay is *diverge*. I don't see myself as trying to head off or rebut the work of Ira Shor, James Berlin, or Patricia Bizzell. Rather, I view us as starting out with a similar set of aims and values, but ending up in different places, doing different kinds of work. Our approaches to teaching don't conflict so much as branch away from one another. We need to find ways of talking about such divergences that don't lock us into fixed antagonisms—and especially that resist valorizing some teachers for “empowering” students while dismissing others as serving the “dominant ideology.”

I believe that close work with texts underpins the writing of almost every person we might now consider a public intellectual—Barbara Ehrenreich, Cornel West, Richard Sennett, Patricia Williams, Christopher Hitchens, bell hooks, Louis Menand, and the like—and thus that we need to teach students how to make strong yet generous use of the work of others in their own prose. Where I think I know how to do this is between the drafts, in helping students become both more assertive and more nuanced

in responding to the views of other intellectuals. Beech and Thelin argue that I can't tell whether the changes that students make to their drafts are "sincere" or not, but I have trouble understanding that complaint. A practice is something you do, not something you believe. It makes little sense to ask people if they really mean it when they take on a new practice like growing rice or sewing trousers. Similarly, it makes little sense to ask students if they are sincere in selecting key words from texts for analysis. What matters is simply whether they can do so or not. The evidence lies in the work, not the intention.

Beech and Thelin urge teachers to "help students expose ideology in their texts and the texts of others." I don't wholly disagree. But I think one can only learn how to expose ideology through learning to read cultural texts closely and skeptically. I am brought back, that is, to the idea of teaching a critical practice—not to elide questions of ideology, but to share with students the strategies we ourselves use in writing about politics and culture.

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TWO COMMENTS ON SHARON O'DAIR'S "CLASS WORK: SITE OF EGALITARIAN ACTIVISM OR SITE OF EMBOURGEOISEMENT?"

I read Sharon O'Dair's article "Class Work" (July 2003) with a mixture of genuine excitement and profound disappointment. The excitement arose from

two sources. First, 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" (602). This argument, though it may run counter to the deeply held beliefs of many *College English* readers, is not easily dismissed and ought to be considered seriously and thoughtfully by all in English studies who wish to be genuinely reflective about our pedagogical and intellectual practices. The second source of my excitement was that O'Dair, a self-identified "literary critic," had chosen to participate in the discourse of composition studies. Though not a unique occurrence, this is certainly uncommon. As Sharon Crowley notes in *Composition in the University*, "[C]omposition studies is nearly invisible within the academy" (4). Composition studies is invisible, that is, to the vast majority of those who are not "in" it, including a great many who are "in" literary and English studies, and including a great many (ironically) who teach courses in composition.

On balance, however, my disappointment with O'Dair's article far outweighed my excitement. Her portrayal of composition as a field is reductive, either unwittingly or selectively, and her never-fully-articulated arguments about how composition pedagogy might be reformed are, in a word, ludicrous. O'Dair's argument is based (at least in large measure) on the premise that a "Standard Model" of composition pedagogy based

on “critical literacy” has displaced a putatively “better” model based on inculcation into the (primarily grammatical and mechanical) norms of Standard English. While it is true that a vast array of theoretical innovations and pedagogical practices that might be drawn together under the umbrella of “critical literacy” have left their marks on composition classrooms, it is a stretch to argue or assert that they constitute a single model. Further, although many college composition courses today are taught by people with graduate-level training, degrees, and scholarly interests in composition studies, a great many of these courses are also taught by people with no preparation, and frankly no interest, in composition studies—including many (though certainly not all) adjunct and part-time instructors, many (though certainly not all) graduate teaching assistants in literature-dominated English departments, and even many full-time literature faculty in English departments where everyone must, by necessity, teach composition. In some of these cases, teachers have learned their theory and their pedagogy from the very textbooks they or their supervisors have chosen. Good or bad, the “Standard Model” pedagogy critiqued by O’Dair is nowhere to be found in many composition classrooms.

In place of the so-called Standard Model, O’Dair appears to prefer a model of composition pedagogy based on “normative notions of [grammatical and mechanical] correctness” (599). While she is not especially clear about what such a pedagogy might look like, she does offer

such an account elsewhere. In “Stars, Tenure, and the Death of Ambition” in Peter C. Herman’s edited collection *Day Late, Dollar Short: The Next Generation and the New Academy*, O’Dair bemoans the “star system” that has allowed a few literary scholars to achieve celebrity while most of the promising younger ones either cannot find jobs or must settle for dreary positions at “East Podunk” or “West Jesus State” (55). Composition, in O’Dair’s universe, is a large part of the problem, since an increasing number of the tenure-track jobs in English are going to compositionists. Further, O’Dair claims, because the prospect of teaching composition, even occasionally, is “horrifying,” most graduate students in English would rather risk choosing a specialty which would qualify them for only one or two jobs in the entire country than specialize in composition. The reason? Because “teaching composition isn’t fun or challenging” since—in dramatic departure from the allegedly idyllic days of the 1950s and 1960s—college students “cannot construct a coherent sentence” and therefore the teaching of composition “is—or should be—a matter of rudimentary drill, dull and dulling, although necessary and important” (50–51). Aside from demonstrating a troublesome contempt for students, O’Dair’s account here demonstrates a level of ignorance about the history of U.S. higher education in the twentieth century and the arrogance of believing that “rudimentary drill,” despite all the evidence to the contrary (evidence far too voluminous to summarize here), is the

answer to the “literacy crisis,” which is now allegedly worse than ever. Many of my own composition students, who have read and admired Mike Rose’s accounts of these very issues in *Lives on the Boundary*, could dismantle O’Dair’s argument. But my overall point here is not to dismiss O’Dair entirely (she does, as I noted above, offer compelling and thoughtful arguments about other issues), but to suggest that she 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. If a diatribe like the one in “Stars, Tenure, and the Death of Ambition” can be said to represent—in any way—the relationship of the “next generation” of literary scholars to their colleagues in composition studies, then I fear that the next generation of literary scholars is very much like the generations that preceded it.

Perhaps O’Dair is aware that her argument might be construed in this fashion, since, in “Class Work,” she asks readers to pause before branding her “an uncaring, neoconservative elitist, or even as just a garden-variety elitist produced by a literature program” (597). Though the first characterization, in my estimation, would be unfair to O’Dair, the second might be accurate. But more precisely, again in my estimation, O’Dair’s positions in “Class Work” (further illuminated by those in “Stars, Tenure, and the Death of Ambition”) would qualify as culturally and politically progressive but institutionally reactionary.

O’Dair argues (rightfully so, I believe) that “we cannot talk about class and higher education without talking about class in higher education” (602). Ironically, though, O’Dair seems thoroughly unable or unwilling to talk (or write) about class within the institutional structures of English studies. As institutional historians like Sharon Crowley, James Berlin, and many others have demonstrated extensively, literary studies was constructed as a vast empire of privilege during the twentieth century, and required composition courses were the economic engine driving its construction. The emergence of composition studies as a field of academic inquiry has begun to disrupt the mechanisms through which literary studies’ empire of privilege is kept intact. It is thus possible, I believe, to read O’Dair’s essay (at least in part) as an attempt by the empire to “strike back” at the forces that might undo its power.

O’Dair claims that “the expansion of higher education has deformed or diluted the intellectual mission of the university, and threatens to turn English professors into social workers or the functional equivalent of high school teachers” (603). She also writes, “I see myself as a literary critic and an intellectual, and the job description I read when I set out on this career did not include teaching composition to first-year graduate students.” I assume, in this context, that O’Dair is defining composition very narrowly and reductively, since she wonders, just a few sentences earlier, “Should we confer masters’ degrees in English on students who demonstrate an inability to

punctuate or to construct subordination?” (597) In other words, O’Dair seems to yearn for the “good old days” (which, like most “good old days” exist not in any actual past but in the nostalgia of those who yearn for them) in which “literary critics” like her never had to be bothered by students’ difficulties with Standard English because such difficulties had been “cleaned up” by invisible and underappreciated composition-teaching drones who carried out their work in dank basement classrooms.

The sad part of all this is that if English studies is to remain “together” as a single discipline in the twenty-first century, then we need more literary critics, like O’Dair, who are willing to venture into the discursive field of composition studies. But if they do so, they must do so as equal intellectual partners, not as imperial operatives bent on reasserting the superiority of their area of the discipline over all others—especially by insisting that the only real “work” of composition is ensuring that professors engaged in supposedly “higher” and “purer” pursuits never have to suffer the indignity of seeing grammatical errors in student writing. As a compositionist, I have never ignored issues of grammatical correctness, and I do not personally know of any compositionists who have. But I know that grammatical errors cannot be fixed through rudimentary drill, and I would insist that grammatical errors are a concern, but certainly not the sole concern, of composition studies. I consider composition a field of intellectual work every bit as important, and ev-

ery bit as intellectually challenging, as literary studies. Is it too much to ask those in literary studies to do the same?

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So let me get this straight. Sharon O’Dair wants working-class people to stop attending college because higher education does not offer entrance into the middle class. For those who do not heed her advice to lead satisfying lives without advanced degrees, O’Dair suggests 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” (604). Yet she cites statistics showing that increased schooling accounts for all of the growth in average hourly compensation since 1973 (601) and clearly feels the middle and upper classes enjoy a “superior cultural world” (600). If I am reading her correctly, she then wants to feed working class students a line about middle-class culture’s not being superior (603–04) and, once colleges get rid of working-class students, hopes that higher education can get back to doing what she thinks it ought to—helping teach students “how to become middle-class” (604).

As a daughter of a steelworker, I cannot but feel offended by O’Dair’s indif-

ference to the education of working-class students. While reciting the old line that K–12 educators do not properly prepare students for the university, she denies the benefits workers receive from exposure to higher education, even if they do not complete their degrees. She then dares to explain how working-class students “might” perceive the work of critical literacy to reconceive the university as a more egalitarian enterprise (597) without citing evidence to support her hypothesis. Let me say firmly, coming from the background that I do, that working-class people do not judge egalitarianism foolish, as O’Dair claims, but rather view the elitism evidenced in her ideas as such.

Let me grant that O’Dair is correct that most students attend colleges and universities to give them access to better occupational opportunities. Let me also grant that statistics do not bear out the success of open-admissions policies, although I think she takes a very narrow view of success. To use these beliefs to attack the project of critical literacy, however, strikes me as asinine. Critical literacy hardly dominates education. The most prevalent method of teaching composition, for instance, still smacks of current-traditionalism, if I judge by the reliance on the modes of discourse and other such curricula present in the best-selling textbooks. Very few students receive more than an occasional opportunity to experience the educational benefits of democratic pedagogies, cultural politics that reshape the classroom, or assignments that actively seek challenges to the status quo. Rather, stu-

dents experience “endullment,” to use Ira Shor’s word, in the form of lectures, frontloading of instructors’ agendas, nonrelevance to the students’ lived experiences, and the privileging of elitist tastes and attitudes. Obviously, O’Dair should have targeted traditional processes of education, not critical literacy.

With this in mind, better pedagogy and a more pertinent curriculum—the type sought through critical literacy—might be better goals for O’Dair to pursue. But what of her claim that we then produce educated janitors, which she assumes to be a negative consequence of open access to higher education? She misses one of the key goals of critical pedagogy—practice toward active, democratic citizenship. Wouldn’t workers be more able to participate in unions and in politics and to challenge the current distribution of income, as she desires, if they were taught in their university courses the inequities of the status quo? The university—not to mention K–12 education—must, indeed, change, but, along the lines critical literacy advocates, that is, the creation of a working-class university.

Ironically, O’Dair claims that such a university has not been described adequately by the sources she cites (596). She understands the concept clearly, though. She knows that the present educational system preserves the “individualistic, hierarchical, and consumerist” culture of the middle class (603). She describes working-class culture as the opposite of these tendencies, adding that “privileging family over work [. . .] and

valuing strength of character more than material success” constitute admirable traits of the working class (603). Wouldn’t a working-class university, then, preserve and replicate those qualities? Hasn’t she given the blueprint for the working-class university?

While it is hard for me to contain my hostility toward someone who so represents the ivory-tower thinking that alienates working-class students—that alienated me when I maneuvered my way through my degrees—I would invite O’Dair to rethink the value of critical literacy. Perhaps ideas do need to be firmer. Maybe the contradiction she notes in goals has to be addressed. But she needs to work with us toward a more egalitarian university that produces the knowledge and skills she desires rather than isolating herself in the romantic illusion of the esteemed intellectual who preserves the superior culture.

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SHARON O’DAIR RESPONDS:

In the *Random House Handbook*, fourth edition, which I used throughout the 1980s in my composition classroom, Frederick Crews defines the ad hominem argument as “a fallacious shortcut” that attacks a writer’s self rather than the position she or he espouses. In comments by Leann Bertoncini and Tim Mayers about my essay, I’ve been scorned not only as being offensive to my readers but also as provoking “profound disappoint-

ment” and even barely containable hostility. All of this results from my “asinine” arguments (Bertoncini), my “contempt for students,” my sense of myself as an “imperial operative” (Mayers), my “indifference to the education of working-class students,” and my elitism, “the ivory-tower thinking that alienates working-class students” (Bertoncini). Such rhetorical treatment is disturbing in any case, but is particularly so here, since my concern in “Class Work” is the academy’s treatment of working-class students.

I’d like to defend myself, if only briefly. Bertoncini uses her class origin to position herself both to condemn me and to speak for the entire working class—“As the daughter of a steelworker, I cannot but feel offended” and “Let me say firmly, coming from the background that I do, that working-class people [. . .] judge the elitism evidenced in O’Dair’s ideas as [foolish]”—and she implies, thereby, that any working-class person would be offended by me, think me a fool. But I was raised in a working-class family, too, and I can assure you, as the daughter of a construction worker, that my arguments offend neither me nor my working-class family or friends. I do not appear to myself or to them as foolish or as indifferent to the education of working-class students. (Nor do I appear indifferent or contemptuous to my students, working-class or otherwise, who were instrumental in my being honored by my College as a Distinguished Teaching Fellow.) Further, let me say that by Bertoncini’s criterion, I am as well positioned as she to speak for what the

working-class deems foolish. But I do not do so. I ask readers to “please consider how working-class students *might* judge our apparent desire to abandon our expertise and distinction” (597; emphasis added). I then offer a hypothesis—“I suggest that they would judge us fools”—and support it by pointing out what research shows and what we all know, that working-class students are in college primarily because they, too, want to develop some expertise, which will offer them better occupational opportunities when they graduate.

I want to thank Mayers for his kind words about my essay’s main point, which he calls “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’ (602).” Perhaps had we wrangled about that point, considered it “seriously and thoughtfully,” as Mayers suggests we ought, we would not have to wrangle about Mayers’s preferred topic, that is, intellectual or institutional turf, the long history of slights suffered by compositionists at the hands of literature professors. Indeed, we might not have to wrangle about what is, or should be, going on in composition classrooms. For, if my “compelling challenge” is viable, then a lot less would be going on in composition classrooms. Or, perhaps more accurately, many fewer composition classrooms would be going on, thus reducing the fuel that supports literary study’s “vast empire of privilege” and

ameliorating the class divide Mayers apparently is most concerned about, the one between those who specialize in matters literary and those who specialize in composition.

Mayers asserts that I am “thoroughly unable or unwilling to talk (or write) about [this class divide],” but this is not true. I do so in my essay, “Academostars Are the Symptom; What’s the Disease?” which appeared in the *minnesota review*, and I even do so in “Stars, Tenure, and the Death of Ambition,” which Mayers cites, humorlessly, to suggest I represent “the willful refusal on the part of so many literary scholars even to recognize composition as anything other than dreary, deadening classroom experience.” In fact, in the paragraphs of that essay from which he selectively cites, I write with deliberate zest—at one point I admit that I exaggerate—to mock the pretensions of graduate faculty around the country who, like Michael Bérubé, would call the job crisis a “conundrum” rather than face the fact that we continue, decade upon decade, to overproduce literary scholars, and this despite an educational context that demands professionals who can teach underprepared students to read critically and write cogently and correctly. Further, I support the very position Mayers supports. I think graduate students tend to choose an arcane literary specialty over composition—despite the much better job prospects of the latter—not because teaching composition isn’t fun or challenging but because it isn’t “fun or challenging or respected or rewarded.”

Mayers asserts that “the emergence of composition studies as a field of academic inquiry has begun to disrupt the mechanisms through which literary studies’ empire of privilege is kept intact.” I think he may be correct about this, 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. According to social scientists who study such matters, one of the principal rules of professional life is that status depends on distance from messy, everyday human affairs. The more abstract the problems one deals with, the more status one achieves in one’s field; the more one deals with messy human beings, and in particular with messy low-status human beings, the less status one achieves in one’s field. (If you must deal with undergraduates, better they be at Harvard than at the strip-mall campus of your local community college.) Therefore, in the attempt to gain status and, no doubt, better financial rewards within the profession, compositionists have gotten theoretic-

cal—eschewing the textbook and aspiring to theorize critical literacy or produce the next *Writing Degree Zero*—and they have dissociated 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. Thus, some compositionists, quite probably those with the status Mayers covets, are as guilty of the supposed sin of institutional reaction as Mayers claims I am. Perhaps they are more guilty, since they emulate the professional model long used to subordinate them. At least I am on record as supporting the professionalization of lower-division teaching, and even of radically reforming, if not abolishing, tenure—structural reforms that just might ameliorate the class divide Mayers observes “within the institutional structures of English studies.”

I want to thank Bertoni and Mayers for their impassioned and challenging criticisms of my work and *College English* for allowing me to respond to some of them.

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