

Introduction

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“The place where you came from ain’t there any more, and where you had in mind to go is cancelled out.”

—Joyce Carol Oates, “Where Are You Going,
Where Have You Been?”

OF ALL THE possible emotions that could be associated with the morning of September 11, 2001, I never expected to feel personal shame, yet I am unable to arrive on any term that seems more accurate. In the years since that day, as I have replayed my own actions and inactions in the classroom, I am left with an unshakeable feeling that I failed my students in some simple, fundamental way. Like many post-secondary instructors, I cancelled class rather than proceeding with business as usual discussing the events that were unfolding. On the morning of September 11, 2001, I watched the towers fall and saw the immediate pictures of the aftermath at the Pentagon. When I left for my office, I took with me the portable television purchased years before so my wife could watch the impeachment hearings of William Jefferson Clinton from her office. It still sits in a drawer in my filing cabinet, against unfortunate future need; as I revised this work, in fact, I pulled my television from its desk drawer once more to watch the news about a shooting at a local high school. Parents were being asked to pick up their children, and two members of my department immediately left on this errand. Only the gunman was injured, and the event was over before I became aware of it. Earlier in the year, on Saturday, February 1, 2003, I graded papers at my desk and used this television to listen to updates about the Space Shuttle Columbia. But on September 11, 2001, I used this

television to watch the live feed from New York and decided to cancel my business writing classes for the day. The university was not cancelling classes officially, but the unofficial closure was nearly complete. My business students, I assumed, would be in no better condition to learn than I was to teach.

When I entered the classroom, the television hanging in the corner was on, playing the same coverage I had been watching, and the students sat quietly. No one spoke above a whisper. As I finished my explanation of the homework, work we would have done during class time that day, Mollie L. entered the room and took her seat in the front. She is a small, studious woman who rarely spoke in class but enjoyed discussing her experiences studying abroad in Florence. Her hands often had specks of off-white paint on them, proof of the work she was doing for her landlord to offset the cost of rent. Mollie worked all night doing inventory at a local video store, had slept as late as possible, and had not watched the news that morning.

Before I could answer her question about why class was cancelled, there was a rush among the students to see who could share the incredible news. It was my first experience of the terrible glee with which horror is shared, and I was as stunned as Mollie. She struggled to process the news, removed her glasses as she neared tears, and focused her attention on the television, which continued to run its live footage from the scene of the destruction. I mumbled some final words I no longer remember and returned to my office, *retreated* to my office, I think now, where other members of the English department were still gathered around my tiny television.

Maybe this was a teachable moment—that label applied to so many classroom failures or near-failures. Maybe. But it shames me now that I didn't do more; I can find no point in the story of my memories on which to hang my image of myself as a strong, capable instructor, an instructor able to take his students in hand and to help them understand the world of which our classroom is a part. My failure that day was not unique, but company does not lessen my belated misery, although now, more than two years after the fact, I understand why I acted as I did. Why many of us acted as we did.

My failure that September morning, on the simplest possible level, came about because of a lack of preparation. There have been other traumas in my life as a teacher and student—the seizing of the American embassy in Iran, the attempted assassination of Ronald Reagan, the Shuttle disasters, the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City, the list could go on—but there has never, ever been anything like the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. Not in my experience. Not in anyone's experience. Those attacks were, as Tim O'Brien writes of a much smaller atrocity, "a new wrinkle . . . [a sin that is] real fresh and original." That morning, as the attacks and their aftermath unfolded, "We . . . witnessed something essential, something brand-new and profound, a piece of the world so startling there was not yet a name for it" (86). I was at a loss in

class that day because it had never entered my mind that I might have to be prepared for such an occurrence.

On one level, then, this collection of essays on teaching in times of trauma exists in the hope that others will not be caught flat-footed, as I was, for we are not alone as teachers in a traumatic time, and while the trauma of September 11 is at present unique in its scope, it is not entirely unique. There have been shared traumas in the past, as there will be others in the future, and teachers have always faced these traumas concurrently with their students.

The idea for this collection predates the events of September 2001, however. As early as the fall of 1996, I was exploring the idea of a collection of essays focused on the experience of teaching English at the post-secondary level in American universities during the Vietnam War. Various contributors—some of them represented in this volume—responded positively to the idea, but their responses were more favorable than those of any publisher. This lack of interest was, logically enough, based in an understanding of market forces: A book for such a narrow audience—professionals in rhetoric and composition—on such a narrowly focused topic—teaching and the Vietnam War—simply would not, it was thought at the time, sell enough copies to be worth the publisher's investment of time and resources. That collection exists only as notes in a manila folder, slowly shuffling to the back of a file drawer.

That Vietnam-oriented collection is the parent of this book, and a number of essays in these pages would have fit comfortably within its pages. In important ways, this is that book, for the focus on the Vietnam War was, I think now, a misrepresentation of the focus I had in mind. It wasn't Vietnam that was important; rather, it was the act of teaching in a world operating under the weight of that ongoing trauma.

In the preface to *Teaching Hearts and Minds*, a very fine reflection on the experience of teaching Vietnam War literature to the post-war generations, Barry M. Kroll sets forth his book's purpose primarily by describing what the book is not:

Although this is a book about teaching and learning, it is not, strictly speaking, a pedagogical work. . . . Nor is it primarily a theoretical book. That is not to say that pedagogical and theoretical issues were unimportant to my project or that they will be ignored in the following pages. [. . .] But readers who are looking either for explicit pedagogical advice or for detailed theoretical argument will be disappointed. Instead, they will find a book based on my investigations of college students' processes of reflective inquiry. (vii)

The same is true, with minor changes, of this collection of essays. It is not, primarily, a pedagogical work on the healing effects of writing in times of trauma, nor is it primarily a theoretical work on a new field in composition that could aptly be named "trauma studies." Yet pedagogy and theory feature

prominently in some of the essays that follow. This collection is not, primarily, about the reflections of students, in writing, following shared traumas, but the voices of students in such times do appear. Instead, this is a collection of reflective essays by both new and established scholars and teachers in rhetoric and composition, reflections on the work we do in the world we share. And in this present time, it is impossible to ignore the past as we reflect on circumstances. This is the thread that connects the essays that follow.

The essays in this collection defy easy categorization, for even the most analytical is personal—just as the most personal is analytical. Most exist, instead, within a tapestry of understanding and experience, where history, memory, and trauma cross with pedagogy and rhetoric/composition theory. It is a tapestry where there are as many—or more—questions as there are answers, questions both posed and tentatively answered by the contributors to this collection. Richard Miller, in *Composition Studies in the New Millennium: Rereading the Past, Rewriting the Future*, asks, “Where were you when the planes hit the towers?” (252). Many contributors to this collection answer this explicit question and its implicit follow-up: “As a teacher and scholar, what did you do then?” Some extend this line of questioning even further, particularly into the past, asking “As a teacher and scholar, what did you do then and what have you, or others, done before?”

When I solicited the essays for this collection, I asked an open-ended question; I asked teachers and scholars to reflect on their experiences in the writing classroom during moments of shared national trauma and tragedy. This general question produced a wide range of responses, most falling into a general category defined by Stephanie Dyer and Dana C. Elder as “suasive” essays, “persuasion [that] reinforces the values of the community for the benefit of the community” (137). Rather than arguing the inherent rightness of a given response to moments of trauma, the essays in this collection support a range of responses, all meant to deepen and broaden our understanding of what it means to teach in times of trauma. Within this general category, the essays that follow range from historical analysis through reflective narrative, and nearly all rely on a foundation in the personal responses of the writers.

The definition of *trauma* within this volume is not fixed, not codified; instead, many writers define the term, explicitly or implicitly, as they reflect. The baseline definition, perhaps the cultural definition, of trauma that exists behind the definitions offered here is well articulated by Marian MacCurdy in “From Trauma to Writing: A Theoretical Model for Practical Use”:

“Trauma” to many connotes mental “unhealth” if not outright illness. Yet trauma does not only refer to catastrophic moments. Dictionaries define trauma as a bodily injury produced by some act of violence or some agency outside the body; the condition resulting from the injury; or a startling experience that has a lasting effect on mental life. Trauma can be a single inci-

dent or a series of incidents. . . . In popular language we speak of one who has been “traumatized” by some terrible experience, but in point of fact no one can reach adulthood without some moments of trauma. (161)

While she is defining personal trauma, such as rape, MacCurdy’s definition does articulate the general understanding of trauma held by teachers. The definitions offered by the contributors to this volume are based upon this understanding, but they are also refutations of MacCurdy’s qualifier, specifically that *trauma* “does not only refer to catastrophic moments.” The definitions of *trauma* put forth here are all about trauma that is a direct result of shared moments of horror—personal trauma that transcends the personal, shared traumas affecting the national (and international) community, historical approaches to trauma that inform current practices.

Darin Payne, in “The World Wide Agora: Negotiating Citizenship and Ownership of Response Online,” explicates a range of possible understandings of trauma, particularly situated in an historical and cultural context. His explication begins with a begged question and the situating of his own definition: “The very idea of September 11th as a ‘national’ event—a national trauma—begs the question: Whose event, or trauma, was it? (Whose is it still?) Such ownership needs to be as contingent and variable as other events in America’s history have finally become.” To understand trauma—particularly those considered to be “our” shared national traumas—in the writing classroom, he argues, “we must work to redefine *national* with a sense of *inter-* or even *trans-*national.” Only through such a repositioning of our understanding of shared trauma can we, as students, teachers, and citizens, avoid “the general tendency . . . towards homogenous reductivism rather than heterogeneous complexity.”

Further complicating the range of possible definitions of *national trauma*, Peter N. Goggin and Maureen Daly Goggin, in “Presence in Absence: Discourses and Teaching (In, On, and About) Trauma,” explore a trinity of definitions of *trauma*—national, natural, and personal—with the intention of “conceptualizing trauma and ways of understanding the discourses both generated by and surrounding it.” Their analysis covers both “*metadiscourse on writing* (about trauma) and *writing during trauma*,” concluding with a description and analysis of their own pedagogical work in the writing classroom after September 11. “For those who teach writing,” they argue, “the terrorist attacks [of 9/11] and the aftermath of grief, retribution, and reconstruction on a national scale have challenged us to re-examine and reconsider scholarly theories on and pedagogical assumptions about the teaching of writing.”

Building upon Payne’s argument against reduction and homogenization and Goggins’ analysis of the writing classroom and trauma, Richard Marback, in “Here and Now: Remediating National Tragedy and the Purposes for

Teaching Writing,” argues that the trauma of September 11 “should lead compositionists to take a hard evaluative look at the purposes of teaching first-year writing.” As teachers and scholars of composition, we must, he argues, consider the ways in which we “direct the attention of students to the audiences, contexts, and purposes of their making of meaning here and now.” This is particularly true, given that most of our students did not experience the immediate tragedies in New York City, rural Pennsylvania, and at the Pentagon; instead, “They experienced images of wreck and rubble, reports of death and destruction, and representations of despair and heroism, again, and again, and again.” The composition classroom, for Marback, is a place where these images can be reimaged, reinterpreted, and reframed. A place where meaning about past events can be meaningfully formed.

Patricia Murphy, Ryan Muckerheide, and Duane Roen continue this analysis of and reflection on the writing classroom, particularly after September 11, through a focus on Abraham Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. They write of students’ needs changing as the events of September 11 played out on that Tuesday and into its aftermath: “[We] quickly understood that the events of 9/11 made it necessary for us to shift attention from students’ esteem needs and self-actualization needs—the standard focus of much university teaching—to safety needs.” Forcing students to remain focused on business-as-usual “would not result in much learning,” they felt, while investing “a modest amount of time addressing safety” allowed students to come to terms with the trauma and then return meaningfully to the work of their education in rhetoric and writing. Murphy, Muckerheide, and Roen broaden the scope of their reflection by beginning with a focus on an English 101 instructor’s reaction to the events of September 11 as they unfolded, moving to the reflection of an instructor adapting his syllabus for Spring 2002 to address students’ needs, and ending with the reflections of a campus administrator who trains new teachers.

In “Teaching Writing in Hawaii after Pearl Harbor and 9/11: How to ‘Make Meaning’ and ‘Heal’ Despite National Propaganda,” Daphne Desser further complicates the rhetorical situation of teaching writing in times of shared trauma through a localized, situated analysis of both the present and the past. She argues that often the drive to reframe and reinterpret ongoing trauma falls into a trap wherein “interpretation, analysis, and argumentation . . . make the ‘seemingly incomprehensible’ safe for consumption by transforming it into material that is manageable, orderly, civilized, and palatable”—a transformation that “[ignores] trauma’s inevitable inability to be fully defined, processed, or understood.” Arguing that the composition classroom is a site where the master narratives of a culture can be explored—explored in a way that allows “the mystery of trauma [to] remain in [students’] writing”—Desser supports “a redefinition of healing that emphasizes our disciplinary knowledge of rhetorical analysis and production” while arguing against the

superficial image/narrative of the “writing teacher as healer” that can unwittingly support a superficial sense of closure.

Exploring another angle on the master narratives by which trauma is defined, Theresa Enos, Joseph Jones, Lonni Pearce, and Kenneth Vorndran, in “Consumerism and the Coopting of National Trauma,” argue that the writing classroom, particularly in times of trauma, “presents opportunities . . . for both self-reflection and cultural critique.” They focus their analysis specifically on “citizenship and consumerism [. . . and] on the reactions of [their] students to a call [by the media after 9/11] that intimately links citizenship with consumption.” Like Desser, their analysis of the present is situated in an historical context—particularly the modern call to consume against the “call to conserve” during the traumas of two world wars. Between these two “calls,” though, the authors analyze another: “The Call to Question,” the call answered by instructors who wanted to “ensure that [their] students [have] a space to participate in civil discourse” in the writing classroom.

While Enos, Jones, Pearce, and Vorndran write of recent coopting of national discourse, Keith Miller and Kathleen Weinkauff write of the wholesale coopting of the past, particularly within the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. Specifically, they argue that “in order to teach the rhetoric of the civil rights movement effectively, faculty must recognize its female pioneers, the sexism that these women faced and often overcame, and the wholesale erasure of their efforts by the news media.” While their analysis is focused solely on teaching the misappropriated texts of the past, Miller and Weinkauff’s message for writing teachers serves as a cautionary note. The cultural appropriation machine that drives the production and reproduction of the dominant American ideology functions in both the present and past. The present is the product of the past, and this product is defective and dysfunctional if understanding of the past is itself fundamentally flawed and incomplete.

Examining the present through the production of a specific product, Lynn Z. Bloom argues in “Writing Textbooks in/for Times of Trauma” that “in a changed world, a collection of readings intended to stimulate students’ reasoned discussion and critical thinking and writing [must] respond to” the cataclysmic events of a day such as September 11. Analyzing her own experiences as she revised the seventh edition of *The Essay Connection*, Bloom argues that readings on international terrorism—allowing for an in-depth focus on this topic in English composition classes—must be included in a reader such as this “not because of morbid reasons, or a sentimental desire to memorialize a past that will never come again, but as an ethical response to a world [the students] did not ask for but will nevertheless have to live in.”

Focusing on another genre of writing common to the composition classroom, Wendy Bishop and Amy Hodges, in “Loss and Letter Writing,” argue that as writers “we use letters to investigate the conditions of daily life [and concurrently] make meaning of our worlds via the written word.” Drawing

from the saved letters that have meaning in their own lives, Bishop and Hodges argue that letter writing, used in the composition classroom, “created a space where classroom authors could rehearse and revise, could investigate place and personas.” Like Desser, they worry over the issue of teacher-as-healer and make suggestions about assignments “that will tap issues of importance and interest to . . . a first-year writer” through letter writing—while still allowing for some distance between teacher, writer, and the sometimes-intimate subject under discussion.

Continuing the discussion of student engagement, Dana Elder, in “How Little We Knew: Spring 1970 at the University of Washington,” reflects on the seemingly apathetic students he now teaches by contrasting them with the students who surrounded his own educational experience, arguing that this disinterestedness may be a natural result of lessons that were hard-learned by his generation of first-year college students. “I think this should be an easy story to tell,” he writes. “It is not because it is a tale of the end of innocence, reflected in the lives and attitudes of college students and colleagues today.” He writes of student protests, often met with violence; student demands, largely ignored; and, ultimately, student efforts to effect cultural change, efforts that remain “largely unfinished.”

Writing in a similar mode to Elder, Richard Leo Enos in “This rhetoric paper almost killed me!” reflects on his experiences as a visiting scholar at the American School of Classical Studies at Athens in the spring of 1974—and expounds on the lessons he learned then “that bear on our own discipline.” Specifically, he argues that “In a country such as ours, where we take for granted not only the availability of information but also access to various sites, the constraints of governmental control are not taken seriously.” Elaborating on this aspect of the American scholar’s attitude, he writes, “We assume a natural peace and tranquil environment for study.”

In “Are You Now, or Have You Ever Been, an Academic?” Edward M. White and I explore this American attitude to which Richard Leo Enos points—reflecting on the traumas of academe, from FBI investigations of students and the censoring of great books to the post-9/11 world for exchange students and the often murky popular understanding of academic freedom. Ultimately, we argue that as teachers and professionals in rhetoric and composition in the new millennium, “we may be facing trauma as a permanent state, rather than an occasional anomaly. We may have always faced trauma in this way, in fact—trauma as an ongoing condition—without fully realizing it.”

The final essay in this collection, “We have common cause against the night,” presents responses from the writing program administrators listserv (wpa-1) hosted by David Schwalm and Barry Maid at Arizona State University East. Unlike the previous essays, this work presents the ongoing responses of a diverse group of academics to the events of September 11, 2001. That difference aside, the posts to the wpa-1 show the same depth of caring—for students and for one another—clearly articulated throughout all of these works.

In the end, the suasive essays in this collection are reflective inquiries, as Kroll defines that activity in *Hearts and Minds*; they are “connected as well as critical, responsive as well as reflective, an activity of heart as well as mind” (156). Contributors to this volume situate their analyses historically, pedagogically, and theoretically within the field of rhetoric and composition; they also situate them personally, situate them in the individual experience of shared trauma. At the end of *Hearts and Minds*, Kroll shares one of his most personal, and illuminating, reflections:

When I got off that plane in Oakland in July 1970, I never imagined that I would teach a class about the Vietnam War, an experience I was determined to put behind me. As a soldier, I had seen firsthand the hollow rhetoric of that slogan about winning “hearts and minds.” As a teacher, I have tried to reclaim and redeem that phrase, using it to describe a course that fosters personal connection and critical reflection—a course that stirs students’ hearts and challenges their minds. (166)

The essays in this volume are stirring testimonies by pedagogues and theorists on their own experiences within and beyond the writing classroom during times of trauma. My own motivation for editing this collection is similar to that motive suggested by Kroll, although I came to this knowledge very late in the process of writing and editing the work. In the introduction to *Writing and Healing: Toward an Informed Practice*, Charles Anderson and Marian MacCurdy write, speaking of all who survive the traumas of the past and seek to understand them in the present, “As trauma survivors, we share one very important characteristic: We feel powerless, taken over by alien experiences we could not anticipate and did not choose. Healing depends upon gaining control over that which has engulfed us. We cannot go back and change the past” (5).

With this collection, I want to help future teachers take an early hold on the shared traumas they will face with their students—a hold solidified by a better understanding of the traumas of the present and the past. But this is also an act of atonement, if not of redemption. On the morning of September 11, 2001, I failed 48 business writing students on a simple, fundamental, human level; this is my attempt to reclaim and redeem the part of myself that did not act on that day, or that wishes to have acted differently.

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