

Genders of Writing

DAVID BLEICH

Writing has become an important topic in academic circles. Much of the attention has come through the traditional subject of “composition” because of a sudden national cry ten or fifteen years ago that students were coming out of college “without knowing how to write.” Other kinds of attention have come through literary theory, especially Jacques Derrida’s concept of “grammatology”—the study of all forms of inscription, including speech—and the related critical idea of “intertextuality”—the interdependence of any one text on an indefinite number of other texts. Because of this attention, both the theories of composition and the ideas of what writing is are changing.

So far, however, this theoretical activity has not led to many changes in the teaching of writing in the university. By and large, all universities still assume that their role is to help students achieve fluency in standard English by providing intensive technical assistance. While there has been some recognition that the so-called ability to write is not a single definable thing, that writing in different disciplines requires different kinds of teaching techniques, and that faculty in different disciplines must participate in writing programs, virtually no one in any discipline contests the belief that we all ought to continue to teach “expository prose,” the basic skill that underlies the ideal of academic discourse.

In this article, I will question this belief by suggesting that both expository prose and traditional academic discourse are constrained and distorted by ideological values that are carried along, invisibly, by the term “standard English,” and that are kept in circulation, in large part, by false conceptions of gender. I will try to show that if we reject these values and conceptions, writing will seem a much different and richer subject, no longer rigidly tied to either expository prose or academic discourse, no longer subject to obsessive remediation, evaluation, and testing, a subject many more of us will want to include in the pursuit of our disciplinary interests.

Gender and Heterosexism

Most of us take for granted that the sex/gender system that governs our lives is a collective process of interaction between two genders, two kinds of people. There is neither more nor less than these two kinds: female and male. With this assumption, sexism is understood as the masculine domination of women, a situation that would be “corrected” if only the two genders were

considered “equal.” Rigorously applying eighteenth-century principles of political enlightenment, and perhaps changing the Declaration of Independence to read “All people are created equal” would eradicate sexism without changing the view that there are two and only two genders in the sex/gender system.

I think more than this is involved, however. Adrienne Rich writes, for example, “I believe large numbers of men could, in fact, undertake child care on a large scale without radically altering the balance of male power in a male-identified society.” This statement is offered, in part, as a response to Dorothy Dinnersteins’s and Nancy Chodorow’s claims that mother-exclusive and mother-dominated child-rearing is one of the most identifiable causes of sexism. Although I don’t think I agree with Rich (I do, though, agree with Dinnerstein and Chodorow), Rich is making the case that a key element in the ideology of sexism is “compulsory heterosexuality,” a thesis which may sound strange and offensive to heterosexuals reading it for the first time. Rich implies that the ideology of compulsory heterosexuality precedes psychosocially, and perhaps historically, the practice that infants and children are to be cared for mainly by their mothers. She argues that the male sex drive and its enforcement by superior muscularity created compulsory heterosexuality, and it is from the continuing historical acceptance of the primacy of the male sex drive that sexism created mother-exclusive child-rearing and thereby defined narrow and unbalanced sexual categories into the present. As a result, heterosexuals do feel or think that their sexuality is natural and that homosexuality is unnatural, thus removing the question from ideological and political scrutiny. Heterosexuality is part of nature and is thereby exempt from cultural criticism.

Gerda Lerner’s recent account of the creation of patriarchy seems to support the views of Chodorow and Dinnerstein, since she begins her historical account with what she considers a given: the human infant’s complete dependency on the mother. She claims that mother-exclusive child-rearing was *originally* biologically necessary but then became fixed culturally to everyone’s detriment. She then uses this assumption to claim first that “sexual dominance underlies class and race dominance” (209) and then that “the system of patriarchy can function only with the cooperation of women” (217), cooperation secured by a variety of coercive practices. She does not go back in history “further,” so to speak, than the patriarchal family, but she does claim that other ideologies of domination like classism and racism derive from a primary sexism. Rich’s claim about the primacy of the male sex drive, however, might well situate the origin of sexism actually before the establishment of the patriarchal family. Because Lerner’s earliest historical evidence of the existence of sexism is the documented practice of the exchange of women among tribes and extended families, Rich’s claim that the male sex drive is more primary is plausible. I, at least, asked myself in reading Lerner’s book how she supposed the patriarchal family got into

position to “exchange women” to begin with. Rich’s view answers my question, even though I’m not so sure that there is such a thing as a “male sex drive” independent of or prior to culture and society.

However, even assuming that there is such a thing, this issue looks very much like a chicken and egg question, one that, for our purposes, need not, and perhaps cannot, be resolved with the establishment of some “proven” fact. I want only right now to entertain compulsory heterosexuality as a plausible and useful concept that will help provide a rationale for an enlightened concept of gender. In this connection, I would like to report on a recent event which makes Rich’s view seem even more important. Last December, I asked my class of 150 first-year students to write an essay responding to the following question, the essay to be written in a lecture hall in about 40 minutes:

Describe a conversation with someone either of your own or another sexual preference (lesbian, male homosexual, bisexual, asexual, heterosexual) on the issue of homosexuality. Give as many salient details as you can about this conversation, particularly how attitudes about homosexuality were *expressed*.

Perhaps as much as twenty percent of the class wrote essays that contained ideas like the following:

- (1) Homosexuality is the only topic on which Mad Max and I have the same opinion. He says homosexuality is a menace to society and that the faggots should be stoned.
- (2) We would joke about the homosexuals and make fun of their gay rights marches when we saw them in the paper. When the aids thing started we suggested shooting all of the queers or putting them on an island like lepers.
- (3) I feel it [homosexuality] is an act of *sexual perversion* and they [gays] all should be shot, but I guess we don’t have to waist the bullet; they are going to die of aids soon enough anyway.
- (4) I remember one comment made about how all homosexuals should be put in one building and have the building blown up.

Each of these comments was given by a man, and perhaps twenty more men in this class thought it fitting and proper to advocate the murder of millions of people. Other men who did not advocate murder did endorse a variety of incidents of gay-bashing, such as ganging up on male homosexuals and beating them. No women in the class advocated either the murder of homosexuals or gay-bashing, but many women repeatedly said that homosexuality was “disgusting,” swearing that they would never have a lesbian roommate. The strong homophobic feeling was present, therefore, in about sixty percent of this class.

In part, the behavior of the women is an example of what Lerner describes as the cooperation of women in the ideology of patriarchy; it is obvious from this sample anyway that the men are leading the way in a tone that may make heterosexual women feel that they had better agree. In a classroom in which all students thought that they could say and write what they really believed without penalty, we find this unabashed expression of fascism and genocidal wishes. Students who disagreed with one another about racism, sexism, and classism closed ranks on homophobia and let loose with this incredible outburst of sociopathic mob panic. Rich, of course, is much more aware than I that these sentiments exist on an almost universal scale, and in retrospect it seems clear to me that someone who wanted to explain such feelings would arrive at the conclusion that the ideology at work is compulsory heterosexuality, or as Rich also puts it, heterosexism. This is the belief not only that heterosexuality is compulsory but that the form of it forced on civilization by the hegemony of men is its only possible form.

I don't think that I nor anyone else can actually advocate some fixed taxonomy of gender. What I and many others do think, however, is that the flexibility and permeability of gender boundaries must be recognized and accepted by all. What has happened historically, I think, is that the fixed and hierarchical formation of gender arrangements in almost all known human civilizations has created values such as compulsory hierarchy and compulsory boundaries of thought. The evidence for this claim is not abstract. All authoritative social roles are held by men—in politics, medicine, law, religion, science, art, and, of course, the academy. It should come as no surprise that the style of thought developed by these men in the name of all people should correspond with the structure of social relations that sustains their social privileges. The young men in my class who advocate the murder of homosexuals feel that they are in the same class as those men who hold the “big guns” in our society, those men who believe without question what Joanna Russ observes in her story, “When it Changed”: “When one culture has the big guns and the other has none, there is a certain predictability about the outcome” (2267). These young men learned long before enrolling in my class that holding the big guns is the key to their identity and security as social beings.

Writing: Genres and Genders

The genders of writing show significant correspondences to the genders that govern social relations. The usual term in the study of different forms of writing is, of course, *genre* and not *gender*; but I now use the term *gender* (as many others have already done) to emphasize the political ingredients in the idea of a “kind” of anything, in this case writing. In using this term I also want to include reference to Lerner's thought that sexual dominance underlies all other dominance—and to the related thought that gender categories probably are historically older and more influential than other categories,

including race and class. Finally, I want to advance the idea that those kinds of writing produced by expository prose and academic discourse serve the traditional sex/gender system and inhibit what most of us accept to be the necessary and urgent task of reforming that system.

Ralph Cohen is now writing a study of literary history and theory in which the central focus is the concept of genre. One of his main aims is to revise this concept from its traditional use as the way to create literary taxonomies to a historically and socially informed concept. Cohen starts with his critique of Derrida's general term "writing" and Derrida's apparent advocacy of the meaninglessness of generic categories. "One does not write 'writing,'" Cohen observes, "one writes novels or plays or poems or letters, and the like." Any piece of writing comes to us in specific forms that are connected with other works in the same or similar forms and which use still other forms as "subgenres" in a variety of ways. Both the principal and marginal genres are rooted in social purposes and historical circumstances while they are in the process of helping to change these purposes and circumstances. In this way, a genre becomes an identifiable kind or species of language that cannot be understood in and of itself but as it exists in social and historical situations. Cohen's argument is not that writing must take one main form, but that it always appears in at least one form and is always made up of several other forms which, like the principal form, must be understood as being in the midst of social and historical change. Even though, for example, one could conceivably think of *Finnegan's Wake* as a dream tract, its present-time historical form is the novel, though this way of knowing this book may very well change into a dream tract or a joke, or whatever else one may see it as retrospectively.

Cohen's first principle is, therefore, that every work of literature is both a text and a kind of text and that the relationship between a text and how we identify it is historically and culturally determined. A second main point that Cohen makes is that genres themselves are always mixed or "combinatory." At each point in history, Cohen says, any one genre has been made up of a variety of others. Therefore, part of any genre's identity is its "manner of combination." Examples Cohen gives of genres whose manner of combination is more obviously part of their identity are the television spot, the miniseries, the prime-time soaps, women's journals, slave narratives. Here is part of Cohen's explanation of what he finally calls "mixed genres":

Naming a text a "novel" or a "non-fictional novel," a "miniseries," or a "soap" identifies it and pins down what is unpinable; in Derrida's terms, genre-naming fixes what is necessarily unfixable, encloses in boundaries that which crosses boundaries. Nevertheless if we think of people instead of maps, we know that border crossings are common practice in some countries (like our own) and that the reasons for such crossings are social and economic. Every time such a crossing occurs, it places the person in a dual relation—with

his [or her] own and with a foreign country. . . . The point is that if texts cross borders or boundaries, they must have borders or boundaries to cross; they need group or class names to identify them. If all we have are textual crossings, we can make no distinctions between novels, non-fiction novels, and autobiographies that are also fictions and non-fictions. Genre naming or grouping is inevitably both necessary and loose. Critics may change the boundaries and the name. But they then continue with other strategies that, nevertheless, involve renaming and remapping.

What I want to emphasize here is Cohen's idea that genres—and I will add genders—are *both* necessary and loose. Traditional approaches to this question of genre have been of an either/or nature, and Derrida is traditional in this regard. Either there are boundaries or there aren't; for boundaries to be both necessary and loose challenges the axioms of hierarchy and noncontradiction and thus represents an unfamiliar use of academic discourse.

The key to the matter is Cohen's insistence on historical, social, and cultural practice, as opposed to abstract principles (writing), as being the point of reference for understanding literary kinds. This different social assumption changes his own academic discourse from being the sole authoritative determiner of cultural categories to being one participant among many in the task of understanding genres (and genders). Cohen continues:

The purpose of naming a type of writing "feminist literary criticism" or "slave narratives" or "legal briefs" is to establish an identity that is socially and literarily related to other identities, to make a political assertion that is for one group and against another, to announce that a literary act cannot be dis severed from social action, to reject the belief that anonymity stimulates fairness.

Here Cohen establishes the principle that generic categories are necessarily political. In addition—and just as important, perhaps—he rejects the belief that "anonymity stimulates fairness." It is not hard to see how this silent axiom of our culture has kept varieties of gender and other political expression "in the closet." This axiom lies behind the false ideological commonplaces that "it doesn't matter what your race, gender, economic class, or national origin is." Letting students write out of the grading system—that is, out of the system of enforcement in schools—shows how much these categories, and many others, really do matter. Similarly, as Jesse Jackson pointed out in 1988 during his campaign for the presidential nomination, those Democrats who were making anonymous statements that he really couldn't win were cowards; in this case, I would add, anonymity attempts to hide, by appeal to some alleged objective fact, the political acceptance of racism. Not to give one's name and not to name is unfair because we know anyway that the categories and names are being assumed.

Finally, we have known for a long time that genders are themselves mixed, that there is actually a range of possible gender identities that exist in society, and that it makes a big difference to say that heterosexuality is a historically developed majority rather than a biologically compulsory category. In this instance in particular, the principle of “majority rules” turns out not to be a fair one, and the logical principle of the more “ruling” over the less does not serve the social principle of “justice for all.”

Academic Discourse: An “Official” Gender

The teaching of expository prose and academic discourse itself may not even represent a majority value even though these two closely related genres (they are not the same, I think) appear in textbooks as the basis for “standard English.” Richard Ohmann, in his classic essay, “Use Definite, Specific, Concrete Language,” summarizes and examines this standard. His title is a composite of an instruction given by almost all composition handbooks. The instruction is a series of substrategies that add up to what Ohmann characterizes as a “preferred style” with an implied set of both language and social values. This style “focuses on a truncated present moment”; it “favors sensory news, from the surfaces of things”; it “obscures the social relations and the relations of people to nature that are embedded in all things”; it “foregrounds the writer’s own perceptions,” leading to an excessive involvement in oneself; and it urges the “denial of conflict” by picturing a world in which, for example, “the telephone has the same meaning for all classes of people” (396). In general, Ohmann continues, these handbooks

push the student writer always toward the language that most nearly reproduces the immediate experience and away from the language that might be used to understand it, transform it, and relate it to everything else. The authors privilege a kind of revising and expanding that leaves the words themselves unexamined and untransformed. (396)

This is a standard not of language use in its full and complicated range of genres but of the writing skill of transmitting immediate information. Uses of language that give attitudes, opinions, generalizations, guesses, doubts, confusions, and similar commonplaces of socially interactive behavior are understood to be interferences to the basic need for “clear information.” The affirmative purpose of this standard, Ohmann suggests, is to train people to use language as a kind of servant of large corporations, language that is neither interrogative nor challenging in any other way. The more negative purpose of this standard, Ohmann says, is to suppress the potential of language to encourage social involvement and activism; to discourage and discredit any gender of writing that does not fit into the hegemonic ideology.

Under the aegis of “standard English” given in expository prose and academic discourse, students are taught to separate language from them-

selves, their local interests, their groups and communities, and their own history of language use. The alternative to this strategy, Ohmann observes in *English in America*,

would mean having students develop their writing skills in the process of discovering their political needs, and as an aid in achieving those needs. It would mean encouraging students to form alliances with one another based on real life interest, and letting the skills of writing grow through collective work. And of course some of these alliances would come into conflict, since different students are of different classes, races, and ages. In short, it would mean bringing politics—everyone’s politics—into composition, rather than just the politics of the establishment, which are now implicit in the course and made to look like no-politics. (160)

Ohmann here points out that the actual politics of standard English is anonymous and thereby given out as objective or fair. But I don’t think it requires us to accept any one political view to admit simply that what kinds or genders or genres of writing get taught in schools is related to *some* politics and that our task as teachers will be much better served by not suppressing the political forces that emerge in our writing any more than society is served by suppressing its variety of races and genders. As outrageous as it was to read all those essays I cited above, without having gotten those essays, I would have failed to engage the political realities of my students, and I would have failed to recognize just where I stand in relation to those students.

Janice Moulton’s essay on the “adversary paradigm” in philosophical writing pertains to academic discourse in ways analogous to how Ohmann’s essay pertains to expository prose. Moulton claims that the adversary paradigm has been a tacit principle of almost all philosophical writing. Under its aegis, philosophy

is seen as an unimpassioned debate between *adversaries* who try to defend their own views against counterexamples and produce counterexamples to opposing views. The reasoning used to discover the claims, and the way the claims relate to other beliefs and systems of ideas are not considered relevant to philosophic reasoning if they are not deductive. (153)

In this description, Moulton contrasts the technique of the dyadic contest or competition through deduction with the technique of trying to inter-relate whole belief systems and reasoning with one another. Notice how the insistence on deduction maintains a certain generic purity: in inquiring adversarially, each thinker is forced to assume the premises of the other, even if erroneous, and the argument must proceed point by point. A mutual evaluation of premises is not considered part of the process and can, very likely, yield no “winner” of a dispute. Without this evaluation, Moulton argues, proponents of certain views remain locked into their systems, and

understanding is retarded or completely missed because the less deductive, less certain path of mutual evaluation—and perhaps the consequent combination of premises—is inadmissible.

The purpose in adversarial technique is extremely narrow: “to convince an opponent” (159). However, Moulton shows that because many others, in addition to opponents, may need to hear a point of view, other kinds of reasoning may be more suitable. Adversarial behaviors lack this social alertness and are virtually obsessed with the local task of merely prevailing in an argument. In this way, philosophy—and, I add, most academic discourse—loses its social bearings as it becomes ever more deeply immersed in the characteristically socially masculine value of competing and winning according to strict rules. Basic questions, Moulton continues, such as “Why is this argument important?” are usually not considered pertinent in the argument itself: “one can consider not only whether Descartes’ proofs of the existence of God are valid, but what good reasons there are for proving the existence of God” (161). It is considered unfair or beyond the “rules of the game” to raise the question of *why* Descartes wanted to offer his proofs to begin with, rather than simply going along with the premise that a proof is necessary. This unspoken rule about accepting one’s opponents’ premises makes it possible for one thinker holding more social authority to dominate a particular inquiry, and this is just what happens in the ordinary university classroom; the premises of the professor—as given, for example, in the reading lists, the kinds of writing required in a course, the style of classroom conduct, and the conception of what counts as a useful contribution—are not usually open to scrutiny and change. Lerner warns, in this connection, that a “thinking woman stays far longer than is useful within the boundaries or the question-setting defined by the ‘great men’” (227).

Moulton makes another point about how academic discourse is restricted. She says that “experience may be a necessary element in certain reasoning processes” (162). Yet, most philosophical discussion, she observes, proceeds “as if experience plays no essential role in the philosophical positions one holds.” Moulton is saying that in the discourse itself, reference is rarely made to actual human experience even though it is assumed that *some* aspects of *someone’s* lived experience renders the discourse rational to begin with. In philosophical discourse, the arguments usually proceed as if their reference to experience were either self-evident or unnecessary or both. Because winning the argument is the most important thing, particularizing one’s points with clear reference to lived experience may reveal the argument’s false generality, thus making it only partially valid and thereby losing the chance of winning. The obvious likelihood that two opposing arguments are both partially valid and thus complementary—a very productive result—is eschewed in favor of the unquestioned wish to establish some “winning,” transcendental, or prevailing principle. This is also true in many other kinds of academic discourse, which is often marked by the citation of authoritative

and published opinions but not the kind of experience that appears in conversation or other informal, “unofficial” sources.

Even if philosophers or historians or critics carefully reported their own experience, that would be a good start to establish a movement between experience and argument that would change academic discourse radically. (Shortly, I will give an example in literary criticism of what such a radical change might be like.) Academic discourse works in a tradition of deliberately *excluding* experience, of aiming to purify thought of both experience and feeling so that some ideal of pure truth, linked to the intellectual formulations of one or a few men, may somehow miraculously come to preside over everyone’s common experience of living. This, too, is what Lerner is warning against in the historical role of so-called “great men.”

Recognizing the Range of Genders

In *Research in the Teaching of English*, Stephen North reports on an interesting experiment. His aim is to give evidence that when a variety of kinds of writing and reading are used by students in an ungraded course in philosophy, a new “kind of individuality” emerges “that defies market surveys, political polls, and standardized test scores, and that bedevils an educational system designed to treat the class and not the student as its basic unit” (257). In his citation of many different styles of student writing, North argues for the necessity of taking all of it very seriously by using hermeneutic techniques normally applied to canonized texts in academic disciplines. In one case, for example, he sifts through many different kinds of statements to show, finally, how a student’s religious beliefs enabled her to strike a certain consistent point of view, and to create her simultaneous awareness *both* of her own perspective as it developed in class and the philosophical issues presented to her by teachers and textbooks. Without claiming that the boundaries of his students’ knowledge were permanently fixed, North shows that hermeneutic attention to the students’ journals, to “their own experience as philosophers and thinkers, in and out of school,” to the class discussions, to the syllabus, to the textbook, and to the influence of the instructors are all necessary ingredients for a responsible interpretation of a person’s range of writing “genders” (233).

North further emphasizes the intersubjective character (255) of the literacy context he studied—the tendency of both writers and readers to assume a conversation with other members of the class—the instructors, the textbooks, or the other students. This assumption, permitted in part by the ungraded classroom, leads to usages not normally found in either expository prose or academic discourse. For example, there’s the informal interrogative: “How come there is no Reese [the teacher] entry?” There’s the generic use of the second person: Truth “is what you are aware of in your world, but it is not solipsism because your ego is the dichotomy of a world which is you and the objects which are not you” (253). (Notice how in this statement “you”

becomes an enriched and philosophical category just following the informal uses.) And there's the use of colloquial black English to understand the teacher: "If what you put in the journal is insufficient he like, give you like give you different philosophers to—He ask you how you feel about them, y'know, you write your opinion on what you think, y'know, they mean to you" (244). Those who doubt that black English contributes to the cultivation of everyone's literacy can see in this citation its oral premises—the repeated y'know's—and how such premises exist in other forms in white English and in all people's writing and speech.

Although North does not discuss it explicitly in his essay, collaborative work is one of the classroom procedures that is also part of the approach to writing he describes. Because voices as well as texts are now included in what we mean by literacy, students can be urged, more and more, to write directly to one another. The underlying idea of engaging others directly is becoming essential to the teaching of language use. The interpersonal emphasis is helping to expand the actual written forms, and the context for writing is increasingly expected to be a living one—real people as opposed to hypothetical audiences. Insofar as writing and speaking are considered as one, new forms of writing can include a variety of combinations of styles both coming from traditional formal habits and those coming from the richness of everyday conversation, gossip, banter—forms which make it easier to include candid feelings, doubts, opinions, guesses, and other "subjunctive" moods.

The need to make the context of language use a living one is not limited to one discipline. Stiff formal, purely written writing is boring and inhibiting to everyone and every subject. But please note again the key ingredients for change: the inclusion of a variety of writing styles in the subject; the reduction or elimination of grading of various pieces of writing; the change in role of the teacher from an assumed authority to a reliable, participating respondent and guide; the regular oral and written engagement of all writers with other writers in the class; the pursuit of both individual language history as well as the set of social belongings and political interests brought to school by each person. In this last connection, I want to enlarge and change North's description of a "basic" unit in school. The "student" can no longer be understood as a single person; in fact, there is no longer any single basic unit. As we think more in terms of permeable boundaries, or categories that are both necessary and loose, no one item is necessarily basic, but each new class, each new course, establishes its own new categories.

In order to show finally that two or more mutually implicated but nevertheless flexible "genders" of writing are needed to mobilize each person's contribution to the language community, let me recount a development from one of my own classes. In my introductory graduate course in modern criticism, a folklore student, Ms. W, read Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's short story, "Old Woman Magoun." She wrote one commentary in a formal

critical voice and another in an informal personal voice. I want to show that her criticism could not exist with only one of those voices, and that more than two genders of writing appear in her work.

Here, first, is a brief summary of the story. Old Woman Magoun, by holding out the promise of a good home-cooked meal, bribed the men in her town of Barry's Ford to finish building a bridge leading out of town. On the afternoon of the day that the men were about to finish work on the bridge, Old Woman Magoun sent her fourteen-year-old granddaughter and ward, Lily Barry, to the store for salt, something she was very reluctant to do because the store was a hangout for men. On the way to the store, Lily met Jim Willis, the handsome friend and possible cousin of Lily's estranged father, Nelson Barry, "the fairly dangerous degenerate of a good old family." Although Willis was "nicer than some," he was somewhat too interested in Lily. At the store, Lily meets her father, who gives her some candy. This event alarms Old Woman Magoun. After the dinner for the bridge-builders is over, Nelson Barry comes to Old Woman Magoun's home to inform her that he intends to take over custody of Lily. Magoun sees that Barry intends simply to give Lily to Jim Willis to pay off a gambling debt. On the way back from a futile attempt to have Lily adopted by a couple in another town, Greenham, Magoun does not stop Lily from eating deadly nightshade berries; she lets Lily die, promising her that she will go "to a beautiful place." After her death, life goes on in Barry's Ford as usual.

Here is some of Ms. W's critical commentary. Its voice and tone should seem familiar:

On the surface it is the story of the building of a bridge in Barry's Ford, a community depicted as isolated, traditional, and stagnant, set apart from the world by both mountain and river. When one seemingly spiritually living creature in this community, an assertive Old Woman Magoun, shames the men into activity, the disruption in traditional stagnation signals a challenge to Nelson Barry who seemingly has the most to lose in authority from this innovation. The construction of the bridge, then, forms a frame for the first part of the story. . . . By separating herself from her granddaughter Lily in her preoccupation with the bridge, Old Woman Magoun thereby unknowingly sets out on a path which has only one recognized ending in view, as Freeman utilizes at this point the tale of Demeter and Persephone.

Demeter, the Greco-Roman goddess of agriculture, had a single daughter by Zeus, the husband of Hera. That daughter, Persephone the "flower-faced maiden," was promised by Zeus, unbeknownst to either mother or daughter, to his brother Hades, ruler of the dead. While "playing apart from her mother," Persephone is lured by a deceptive display of flowers into Hades' clutches and is carried off. Her mother, grief-stricken, ravages the earth until she is returned to her. Demeter discovers, however, upon questioning the girl that she had innocently accepted "something edible, covertly, namely a sweet pomegranate seed, just one." Thus deceived Persephone "should not abide

the rest of her days at the side of her mother," but must redescend into the underworld," Hades' realm.

In this sample, so far, while both phases are recognizably academic discourse, only the second paragraph is expository prose. In the first paragraph, words like "stagnant" and "spiritually living creature" invoke values of criticism and represent the informed judgment of a responsive adult and a future academic. Statements like "forms a frame for the first part of the story" are part of conventional critical jargon, both inoffensive and useful in this context, I would say, but of a different type of authority from the earlier judgments I cited.

What Ms. W finally does with the expository narrative and the critical presentation of the story is to combine them toward a mixed genre; she develops a formal critical reading with reference to the myth. She notes that Lily is named for a flower, that Willis, like Hades, is related to the main villain, Lily's father, "who is 'looked up to . . . as to an evil deity'" in Barry's Ford. Ms. W also notes that at the time the story was written, people believed "that in past ages young, virgin women were sacrificed in propitiatory rites upon the completion of bridges. The assumption, on the part of these 'enlightened' scholars, that female blood and lives were appropriate complements to male labors would seem to tell us more about their own society than it would about that of hypothetical 'primitive' ancestors." Thus far, her combination of voices has given a straightforward mythological and/or folkloric reading of the story, which, of course, enlightened everyone in class, myself included. This reading then led Ms. W to the nub of her critical work, an interpretation of the story with special emphasis on the symbolism of the bridge:

Built by men, the bridge is physically deceptive, its very structure, "a primitive structure built of logs in a slovenly fashion," shows its safety to be illusory. And as an opportunity of escape it is equally illusory, for the outside world, Greenham, is no different in essence than Barry's Ford. Mrs. Mason [the woman whom Magoun asked to adopt Lily] is denied Lily by her husband for the most arbitrary of reasons, despite her overwhelming need for a daughter. The bridge is a structure built by men, leading from a world of men, to a world of men. Attempting to use men's work, Magoun becomes a participant in men's work; Lily is first deceived by the men, believing "that man who walked to the store was nicer than some" and crossing with her grandmother is then deceived by her also, "those berries look good to eat, Grandma . . . they look real nice." Refusing to give Lily to the Barry's, Magoun instead gives her to the berries, a significant word play by the author signifying the basic equivalency of both actions.

With this reading, Ms. W brings her criticism into the contemporary scene. After using the myth to help solve the riddle of why a grandmother would

sacrifice her own granddaughter, Ms. W then exposes the political situation which existed in classical times, in Freeman's time, and in our own time—the fact that a spiritually alive and assertive woman is forced into cooperation with the degenerate patriarchal villain, the best choice in her life being the murder by default of her own female kin—a theme, by the way, apparently revived recently by Toni Morrison in *Beloved*.

By traditional standards of critical discourse, there is nothing missing in this intelligent and courageous piece of work. You might wish to note what a good idea it is to completely ignore the grammatical errors in Ms. W's writing, the fragments, the run-ons, the misuses of apostrophe, as we are taken over by the sheer intelligence and conviction of the writing. But what we have no way of seeing in this piece of academic discourse is its rootedness in, as Moulton discusses, the actual experience of the writer. Ms. W, however, included this experience in her work, as well, and I would like to note the difference it shows in its "gender":

Leafing back through the mental catalog of past experiences, I realized that I had in fact been there before. Years ago, in another country altogether. In fact, I had forgotten—purposefully—all about it. . . .

I was hired by a family in a village in France called Malchamps. In terms of my personal experiences there I think it is appropriately named. . . . Transportation out of the village was obtained by hoofing it to the highway and hitchhiking from there. . . .

It seemed ordinary enough. Big cheerful father, small invalid wife need household help to do housework, look after two very small children, ages one and two. When I saw the house it was very obvious that the wife needed help—it was frankly a filthy shambles. She was pregnant, and very ill, and the children were very healthy and extremely active. So I went to work for Daniel and Flory. . . .

Flory was an Asian-Indian who spoke neither French nor English very well. She could not speak at all with her neighbors. . . . She seldom left the house because she was always so ill, this illness directly caused by being pregnant She has been continually pregnant since she had married Daniel. Curious. Daniel also had two children [from his first marriage] who lived next door with his parents. Curiouser.

Like a complete idiot I never gave any of this appropriate thought until other things began to happen. Daniel began to become more and more attentive to me. He would be constantly requesting *petit baiser* but they seemed to constantly miss my cheeks and land square on my mouth. He always found occasions [sic] to accidentally cop feels under the table. I began to dread Flory leaving the room because this seemed to signal for him a new opportunity to corner me and grab. But the worst was the night I went to bed at the same time as Flory. When Daniel came up he stopped in my room and insisted on his good night kiss, but oh no he didn't want to disturb me, just stay there in bed, I'll come in . . .

Ms. W goes on to narrate how Flory knew about Daniel's behavior, his fondling of female guests at their wedding reception, and how she deceived her in order to keep her on to help. She reported how Flory "hated her life, she hated Daniel, she hated the village, but that she was trapped. I believe she hated me too because I *could* leave." Finally, Ms. W observes,

I think that maybe I have been to "Barry's Ford" but had ample opportunity to leave. I know of someone who isn't leaving, however. I was acquainted [sic] with a large, sloppy degenerate who was very fond of his liquor and cigarettes—who seemed to be "nicer than some" when I first met him. And I was acquainted [sic] with the woman married to him, and was told how she felt. This places a bit of perspective on the type of choice Old Woman Magoun made, for me at any rate.

Historically, this experience preceded Ms. W's reading and interpretation of "Old Woman Magoun." In the essay, her account of the experience followed her critical discussion. Actually, however, there is no way to separate the two genders of writing. There is no way to separate misspellings, usages which directly integrate dialogue into the narrative without markers, and phrases like "hoofing it" and "cop feels" and "like a complete idiot," from thoughts such as "female blood and lives were appropriate complements to male labors." The same mind lives in both genders. The same person was a citizen of Malchamps, Barry's Ford, Fairmount (Ms. W's hometown in Indiana), Indiana University, the Folklore department, the English department, and my criticism course. Of course, neither expository prose nor academic discourse is essentially or intrinsically masculine. But the social isolation of these forms from other oral, colloquial, informal, and technically relaxed forms such as Ms. W's narrative of actual experience is maintained in the service of a masculine ideal of a pure discourse, like the private masculine language of Learned Latin described by Walter Ong, the language of abstraction uncontaminated by the loose ends and ragged edges of the mother tongues.

Mother tongues and any other tongues do not have no gender any more than expository prose as now taught has no politics. And they do not have *either* this *or* that gender. But as you can see from the various samples of writing I cited, including those in a more traditional idiom, even the most apparently homogeneous writing includes elements of other genres; any one piece or kind of writing turns out to include other kinds. Because of this fact, I think different genders of writing enjoy life in each subject matter, each discipline. To recognize this range of genders—why, *that's* the bridge out of Barry's Ford!

Works Cited

- Chodorow, Nancy. *The Reproduction of Mothering: Psychoanalysis and the Sociology of Gender*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1978.
- Cohen, Ralph. "The Autobiography of a Critical Problem." Midwest MLA Convention. Bloomington, IN, Nov. 1984.
- Dinnerstein, Dorothy. *The Mermaid and the Minotaur: Sexual Arrangements and Human Malaise*. New York: Harper, 1987.
- Freeman, Mary Eleanor Wilkins. "Old Woman Magoun." "The Winning Lady" and Others. n.p. Harper & Brothers, 1909.
- Lerner, Gerda. *The Creation of Patriarchy*. New York: Oxford, 1987.
- Morrison, Toni. *Beloved*. New York: Knopf, 1987.
- Moulton, Janice. "A Paradigm of Philosophy: The Adversary Method." *Discovering Reality: Feminist Perspectives on Epistemology, Metaphysics, Methodology, and Philosophy of Science*. Eds. Sandra Harding and Merrill B. Hintikka. Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel, 1983. 149-64.
- North, Stephen. "Writing in a Philosophy Class: Three Case Studies." *Research in the Teaching of English* 20 (1986): 225-62.
- Ong, Walter J. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. London: Methuen, 1982.
- Ohmann, Richard. *English in America: A Radical View of the Profession*. New York: Oxford UP, 1976.
- . "Use Definite, Specific, Concrete Language." *College English* 41 (1979): 390-97.
- Russ, Joanna. "When it Changed." *The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women: The Tradition in English*. Eds. Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar. New York: Norton, 1985. 2262-269.