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An Interview with Charles Bazerman

T. Hugh Crawford and Kary D. Smout

Charles Bazerman, author of the influential textbook *The Informed Writer* and numerous articles on writing, has become a significant figure in studies of the rhetoric of science. His *Shaping Written Knowledge: The Genre and Activity of the Experimental Article in Science* (1988) is widely regarded as a key text in this emerging field. The following conversation between Professor Bazerman, T. Hugh Crawford, and Kary Smout took place in October of 1993 on the occasion of his visit to Virginia Military Institute.

THC: My interest in this interview is to develop a sense of the field that I suppose we can provisionally call the rhetoric of science. It is obviously a growth industry of some sort—a dozen books with similar titles have appeared in recent years, and you have just founded, along with Steve Fuller, the American Association for the Rhetoric of Science and Technology. What are the main contours of this area of inquiry and how does your work relate to them?

CB: To answer your question I first have to identify an important distinction that is suppressed within the highly visible discussion of rhetoric of science—a distinction that defines my position. I come to this field from composition with a production orientation, an attempt to understand how writing really occurs in the world and what we can say to other people to help them do what they are doing a little bit better. Much of what is called rhetoric of science comes out of departments of rhetoric that are trying to overcome their recent historical marginality by saying that science is merely rhetorical, that science does not use language free of rhetoric. I agree that science has a strong rhetorical element and should not be a privileged kind of knowledge, but that position does not necessarily lead to a concern for production or even a concern for the detailed working of science as a system. There is also a rhetoric of science coming out of sociology that makes science studies central rather than rhetoric. It uses rhetoric as a tool to unmask what has been perceived by some as the hegemonic authority of science. Now although I see my own work and the work of some other people as overlapping the projects coming from science studies and history of rhetoric, I don't share those same goals or hold the same positions, nor am I engaged in the same

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battles. A composition or production oriented rhetoric of science is more engaged in seeing how the practices are organized, what can be accomplished through the practices. It examines the history of the practices in order to help writers locate themselves as writers within them and to see what ways the practices influence the construction of the field, not to undermine the practices. This practical aspect to the rhetoric of science is very important but often neglected.

THC: This is an important distinction because the rhetoric of science, particularly the sociology of science, is overwhelming contentious—people debate over issues that seem unresolvable. Many people are interested in the theory that underlies those debates, but they are more concerned with the practical dimensions of this sort of activity. There are not a whole lot of people working out the practical implications of what is going on in the field.

CB: Some interesting work is coming out of the Writing Across the Curriculum movement. Although my school never had a WAC program, I got involved in rhetoric of science out of those kinds of interests. In some practical WAC programs there is a developing sensitivity to the differences in disciplinary discourses. In the beginning, WAC was a way of exporting English department attitudes across the campus so it was English across the curriculum, but over time (and it took different amounts of time for different groups), people began to see that others think differently in different disciplines; the characteristic styles of other disciplines are not just writing “badly.” They have reasons for doing what they do, and in order to cooperate with them, we have to start respecting their practice. This insight has led to a certain amount of real research as to what characterizes disciplinary styles and even more illuminating accounts of adventures in foreign “lands.”

KDS: I heard Richard Young once say that some early WAC proponents had changed from missionaries into anthropologists. Instead of proselytizing for a certain attitude toward writing in all of the disciplines, they decided to sit down to learn what the different disciplines did. I take it that is how you came into the field—your interest in teaching concrete things about writing to students in the sciences and other disciplines.

CB: My intent is slightly different, but that is it in essence. Over twenty years ago, in a composition class teaching the research paper, I started to think about how students’ life in college was embedded in certain kinds of textual practices. Most of the writing students do in college is about what they read, and the only textbooks we had at that time that dealt with how to write about what students read concerned writing about literary texts. We didn’t have textbooks teaching how to write a paper about a book students have read in political science, a task which

is far more relevant to most students. I began to realize that texts are organized and located in disciplinary ways, and that to really understand what was going on in undergraduate writing, in an undergraduate curriculum, you have to start understanding the disciplines. This doesn't mean that writing in freshman political science is the same as writing in political science journals. There are great differences, but we need to understand disciplinary differences if we want to help people to develop as writers in ways that will be relevant to their college education and relevant to their professional lives.

KDS: Working on the research paper was the first step?

CB: In a research paper course which I first taught in 1971, I had the same experience that everyone else has—it was a bust. It was very difficult to teach and I wound up getting cut-and-paste jobs because the students didn't know what they were doing. I looked at all the writing textbooks and all they did was indicate what format to use for footnotes, and maybe, if they were a little bit better, they had lists of resource materials, indexes and reference tools. But nobody told students what they really had to know in order to write those papers, so I worked out a course that led up to the research paper. Then I realized that the research paper was only a secondary phenomenon—an artifice—but that it wasn't a bad artifice; it could be seen as an emblem of a college experience where you receive knowledge of various sorts and you have to try to make some sense of it for yourself. Either you get caught in that cut-and-paste situation where you can make no sense of the information you reproduce, or you somehow learn to deal with this material, think about it, say something that is really important to say, something that might be important for others to hear.

THC: Did you also see that, because they were doing research, they were encountering various rhetorical models they wouldn't normally have encountered? I am interested in how you moved to the idea of looking at the particular forms used in various disciplines. When students are doing research papers, they are suddenly encountering specific rhetorical forms and trying to learn how to read them. It is not just that they are developing an understanding of what those texts say, but they also begin to understand how a particular form is appropriate to something they are trying to say.

CB: Before I had even encountered the term *intertextuality* and before *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* was published in English, I was working with the problem of how to write about the things you read, and I started to play around with ideas of intertextuality. In addition to issues of reference and embedded borrowings, I was thinking about how interaction defines a level of discourse, how your further comment follows through on a level of language established in prior statements—

this is part of what is entailed in Bakhtin's term "addressivity." I used the phrase "you are playing at the level of that game," speaking that kind of language, picking up those ways of talking about the subject. It was a kind of imitation model I was working with. Then I started to think about the different kinds of discourses you have to read as a student but not necessarily produce. When you do a research paper you don't necessarily have to write a newspaper article, but you may have to read one. You have to contend with the peculiar nature of various texts in order to transform them. What you constantly see in bad research papers are pieces of disparate genres and different ideas and orientations and all sorts of disparities jumbled together with no notion of what the project is and what genre is appropriate to it. Students have to contend with these differences and transform them into whatever they are writing. By thinking about what other genres students may have to write, I realized that the research paper is an emblem of the larger problem of transforming others' words to your purposes—what Bakhtin described as "inhabiting others' words with your own intentions."

KDS: Are there other genres that you noticed as you thought along these lines?

CB: I wrote *The Informed Writer* in part as a research paper book, but I began to see many other genres that turn up in other classes. As I was working this out, a book review seemed to be very useful to students, but in English classes students usually don't write book reviews. Book reviews are used often in history, political science, and ecology courses—areas studying issues of public moment where serious books are coming out for public consumption. The book review lets students consider current applications of these issues. Book reviews with a serious discussion orientation are in fact taught in these fields. I applied my initial dialectic between getting material out of a text and developing your own viewpoint and critical vantage point to a sequence of kinds of writings, writings that ping-ponged back and forth between on one side assignments like paraphrase and summary and on the other assignments like journal writing and rhetorical analysis—moving up in sophistication of reading, sophistication of critical stance as well as elaboration of meaning, elaboration of one's own position with respect to the work. Of course reading critical articles in order to write critical articles is also part of the game. I actually came to that as an explicit practice a little bit later—it wasn't until the second or third edition of the book that I included the writing in the disciplines section where examining the nature of professional discourse was highlighted—looking at the different disciplines and asking why they argued as they did.

THC: Many teachers are troubled by this approach from a practical standpoint. Writing in the disciplines is remarkably different, and developing this sensitivity is time consuming.

KDS: Yes, it is difficult to develop a writing program where one can introduce rhetoric to the faculty as a whole and, at the same time, try to do very practical things within individual disciplines. Your work helps explain how certain disciplines have created particular genres and used them at certain cultural moments, but for me the problem is that people often prefer rules. They want conventions; they want me to say that when you do a research report in a senior biology class, this is what to do—here are the five sections, and this is what you put into them. A colleague recently told me that I had just given an excellent overview of how to think about the process of writing a business case study; then he asked me if I would reduce this process to a set of rules and write them up so he could give it to his students. Many teachers desire the really practical, the conventions and rules, but in your work I sense a hesitancy to give rules. You suggest that certain things can be said—rules of thumb can be given—but you also argue that it is not enough for students to learn those rules. At one point you say that if students just learn the rules of thumb they will never be good writers. So how do you negotiate people's practical desire for rules with your awareness that rules cannot do what we demand of them? In other words, how do you resist the impulse to give a set of rules?

CB: My temptation is not to give a list of rules but rather to say that it is all historical, contingent, and local, and that you just have to figure out the dynamics—which is not necessarily helpful to students. Models do help, as long as students understand that the model is not the only solution, it is *a* solution. It helps students see the problems they are trying to solve and how those problems sediment into a particular form. If they can understand how a particular form works, then they can also start to make decisions about when the form is not quite working and look for something else. So in *The Informed Writer*, a strategy that I focused on was to discuss a certain general principle for a kind of writing and assign certain types of practice but not a full piece of writing. I would then give two very specific accounts about what the students were supposed to do. The first was to specify one plausible procedure to do a piece of writing—what would a process be that would likely result in the kind of writing we are looking for. The second was to present a formal target (a description of an appropriate paper) that would be a solution. At first I wanted to demystify things, in line with what everybody wanted to do back in the late 60s and early 70s—demystify, no secrets, no mysteries. But the desire to leave things open and to allow a variety of solutions, although historically accurate, can also have a mystifying effect, so I would give them one procedure in enough detail that it would drag them into doing much more than they might do on their own. That might seem compulsive, like a forced march, but it showed them how far a process could go. At the time,

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I defined myself as someone who was able to get through the system pretty well, and I knew how to do things, so I wanted to spell out in as much honest detail as I could how I would go about doing this particular task.

KDS: Did you feel that this approach worked well?

CB: This was during the time of the early process stuff which was very vague. Students could do it this way or that way; everybody had individual preferences and processes; or there was some kind of invisible process going on inside. I wanted to be a little more specific and not quite so mentalistic. Also in the early process movement there was another kind of mystification, one that rejected form as a consideration. Writing teachers understandably turned away from what had been viewed as a trivialized product orientation which latched onto a few formal aspects of certain kinds of writing that could be taught easily; instead, we went to process, but then forgot that the result of the process was a product that would be graded. In any process, if you know what kind of product you need at the end, you do it much better. You don't just say, "let's get together and build a car." If you have a plan for a car, you know how to organize your assembly line.

KDS: But how did you find out about the processes used in other disciplines?

CB: I saw it as a historical or research issue of learning what it is that people are actually doing in the various disciplines and how it got to be that way. I wanted to learn what the practices are, what the impulses are, the projects behind those practices, and what moral is to be drawn from that inquiry. When I started asking these questions, I found that although throughout the history of disciplines some people knew that there was often a great deal of formal flexibility and historical evolution in forms—that is what *Shaping Written Knowledge* is all about, that these were very fluid kinds of understandings—at certain moments people wanted for various reasons to reify these forms and identify them with a specific epistemology, a specific way of doing science, sometimes with tremendous reductionism. This was what my chapter on the APA style sheet showed. Experimental psychologists at that particular point in history did have reasons for those reductions. They wanted to carry out a behaviorist project and this way of doing it gave them a certain read on what science was. They took a specific interpretation of a scientific paper which helped define what it meant for them to do science and which got further embodied in style sheets. But overall, the history of scientific and other disciplinary writing doesn't wind up saying that there is one right form. It looks at the total projects and histories of these fields, asking how these fields have been changing, how individuals have deployed different strategies at given moments, and how these strategies evolve as the

result of various individual deployments. I came to the end of that book, and I wanted to make it clear that it was a book about composition and not a book about the rhetoric of science as a philosophical endeavor. So I gave general kinds of statements. Not “this is the way you write science,” but “this is the kind of dynamic that you have to understand”—you have to understand that each piece of writing is not a final statement but is part of an ongoing conversation. I suggested a general interpretive orientation to a local situation. One needs to understand style within the formal expectations of one’s field.

THC: When you talk about giving examples, giving some targets, there is a strong empiricist streak in your work. For example, in *Shaping Written Knowledge* you are very careful to lay out your methodology, how you are going to analyze these particular articles. This precision can be tied to your interest in science writing that uses empiricism as a touchstone, and your rejection of what you just called mentalistic in favor of more empirical methods of teaching composition. The language you are using here—production, assembly line, etc.—is material.

CB: I believe that we live in the world although I also believe we have minds and I think a lot about cognitive issues. Nonetheless, sociology was an important social science for me.

THC: Do you have any formal training in sociology?

CB: When I started to get interested in writing in the disciplines [at CUNY], I met a sociologist who asked if I was aware of the field called the sociology of science. The founder, Robert Merton, was just a subway ride uptown [at Columbia], so for five years I sat in on his seminar. He opened his graduate seminar to visiting scholars. I never got a degree in sociology and there are large gaps in my knowledge, but I did learn a great deal from him. Early on I wrote a review of the literature on scientific writing as a social act, and I view that as my field exam in sociology of science.

THC: It is interesting that you describe your encounter with the sociology of science in that way. Most people who have been trained in literature who started getting interested in science studies have found themselves suddenly stumbling into the various versions of the sociology of science. I think probably the most common route today would be through Bruno Latour.

CB: Sure, *Science in Action* has been a very useful book. Merton was extremely kind to me and I feel he has a much broader ranging intellect and a much more open attitude on a number of subjects than he has been cast by the people who came after him. Nonetheless, through him and the people around him, I became involved in social studies of science and became aware of people like Steve Woolgar and Bruno Latour. This was when they were just starting to emerge on the American scene.

KDS: Can I follow up on intellectual autobiography? How did you decide to choose optics and then later Priestley as subjects for rhetorical analysis?

CB: That gets us back to the empiricism question. My freshman year in college I thought I was going to be a physics major. I was very involved in that. (Today one reason I am working on Edison and patents is that my brother is a patent attorney.) You learn about things as opportunities come up. That early interest is one of the reasons I gravitated toward physics. Before I did Newton, I did a contemporary study of physicists—the one where I worked through the *Physical Review*—and I had to make a methodological decision. I knew I wanted to get a historical cut from the early journals to the modern journals. I wanted a field that would be relatively stable in terms of other projects and methods that I could also understand. Curiously, optical spectroscopy is one of the few fields that has been stable in this way, so the major variable would be the overall style of doing physics and the way of writing about physics as opposed to changes in the project of the field. From there, I moved to Newton's optics. This choice was opportunistic in that the new edition of Newton's optical writings was coming out, with the lesser known texts. By that time I had already done the piece on *Philosophical Transactions*, and I was trying to get more of a sense of historical changes. Because there were all these different versions of writings about optics, optics was an interesting problem.

KDS: I can see from what you have said that you wanted to focus on the practical and to see what choices were available to the writer at a given moment. Newton is a good choice, both for his influence and for the self-consciousness of his writing.

CB: But there were also other things, a strategy of publication, of drawing attention to your own work. Those writers who get to the top of their fields are often the most self-conscious writers because they make the strong statements. Making strong statements is not an accident. These writers have figured out what kinds of things ought to be said and how they ought to be said. Our work will also get noticed if we write about things that people recognize as consequential because the concepts we are working with are not in themselves so foregrounded.

THC: The *Physical Review* chapter is, in a sense, the emblem of your empirical method?

CB: That is the paper in which I most explicitly lay out a method. The *Physical Review* chapter was the first study I did not of a big name but of a big journal. There is a name for this kind of work in literary studies—the study of the history of a journal—but I had looked at those studies and they were kind of loose and impressionistic. They didn't get at the changes in form and rhetorical impulse that I was trying to understand.

Also from my work in composition classes trying to spell out exactly how you produce a particular kind of paper, I had become very aware of the importance of the process of doing such a study. I became very disenchanted of the general literary attitude that did not specify how many times you had read a text, when you first came across it, what you looked for when you were reading it.

THC: That set of questions could be directed toward anybody working in any field, which is why the methodology of that chapter is intriguing. You could do this kind of study with literary critics. What kind of journals do they read? How do they go about doing this kind of research? And so forth.

CB: I am delighted you have pointed that out because you are one of the first people ever to mention that possibility to me. That study was meant as a prod toward a different form of literary studies, to lay out what it is the critic does. How do you get from here to there, how is it that you are reading? I remember when I was a freshman, I had to write an analysis of some sonnet or another and I wondered how to do it. What I decided to do was to type the poem over with five carbon copies; on one I marked out the meter, on another I circled images, etc. Maybe this was a standard method for the time, but I followed a very definite procedure to try to pull out the elements that were at play and tried to see a larger pattern in order to come up with my critical argument. It wasn't mysterious, the process by which I found what I found, but in literary studies we don't specify that process. We just produce these wonderful results. It reminds me of Priestley's complaints about Newton—that it is truly amazing what he has found but it is just as if someone has climbed to the top of a cathedral and kicked out the ladder, so that nobody sees how he got there. This evasiveness is very discouraging for new people in the field. Priestley was very interested in recruiting people to the field.

KDS: It would also be interesting to see what kinds of historical forces have led literary criticism to that point. Why does the literary critic feel that it is better to come up with the reading almost magically than to lay out the process? I think this has something to do with the definition of literary studies as a non-pragmatic field, in part because it inhabits the very same department as composition, which is so practical.

CB: Some work on the history of English departments points in certain directions on this issue. These studies trace the history of how certain positions and certain kinds of authority for certain kinds of knowledge are established and acquired—a certain ethos.

KDS: Yes, there are Graff's and Appleby's books, but they do not do the close textual analysis that you do, which seems to me to be part of this empiricist strain in your work.

CB: I have often been struck by the division between church and state in the United States and the way that English departments have

become a secular place for the teaching of values—which is a very crucial part of this history. There has been some contemporary work in this area. It's enlightening to find out what kinds of activities are carried out in the unfolding of interactions in any particular setting. I feel a very great affinity with ethnomethodology and conversational analysis though I don't agree with a number of their positions. Language is a crucial point at which society and mind get worked out—this is the playing field where we have to look if we are going to try to understand these issues in a non-mentalistic way. What makes people happy is realizing their needs and participating with each other; you negotiate through language to let it be known what it is you want. If you use language well, situations evolve moment by moment successfully instead of falling apart because someone says the wrong thing and starts an argument. Conversation analysis, a strong self-reflective approach to language use, helps us develop understanding—not control—autonomous processes. We must be able to produce a picture of what is going on in language use, the more detailed the better if we are to know the landscape.

KDS: I often ask my students to watch the way they use language and notice how others react. If they become self-conscious about the way they use language in the ordinary, mundane things of life, they will become more successful at whatever they choose to do for a career because the main skill that people need is the ability to deal with other people. The secondary skill is intelligence to bring their knowledge to bear on the task.

CB: Yes, there are many tricks you can use, and I don't mean tricks in a bad way. Autonomous processes come in here because this does not mean at all that you are withholding yourself, or being fake in any way; you are just watching who you are. Who you are will come out in an autonomous process unless you keep suppressing it. You just watch what is happening. This is very much like rhetoric, only in rhetoric you are doing it more reflectively, because you can go back and rewrite it, you have time to think about it.

THC: You are also doing it historically. You have a consciousness of the history of the forms you are employing to do whatever it is that you wish to do. Conversations have a certain immediacy that often flattens or suppresses the historical consciousness of form that writers bring to bear on a task.

CB: When you are writing, you can review the literature, but you must rely on memory in conversation. Insofar as you have a certain history and certain dynamics within you, those forces are let loose in conversation. Therefore you must learn to be autonomous, spontaneous.

KDS: Is that what you mean by autonomous processes then—that you are not faking it or coming up with something that is all planned and

prescriptive but instead you are letting things come out, but at the same time watching them come out?

CB: That is right and of course it applies to writing too. I am very interested in modes of tapping whatever it is that is inside you. I could give certain behaviorist accounts of how we got to be that way, but there are things inside you.

THC: We seem to have come full circle here from the notion of teaching prescriptive form to your business colleagues who wanted a list of rules to reflexive conversational dynamics to autonomous processes which need watching at the moment of writing—particularly writing in a class. This is an awfully tough situation for a writing teacher.

CB: Well, one consolation is that you don't teach everything at once. This is one of the great benefits of the process orientation. It allows you to slow down and just do a couple of different things at a time instead of doing it all at once. But that means you have to be aware of some of the other things that you are going to do later. In the classroom, you need to try to raise the level of play. The teacher's presence can serve as a very strong prompt because almost all of us operate at a much more intense level of language use in class. Just by asking a question of a certain order, you set up a prompt that invokes a certain kind of behavior. I am talking about a variation of Vygotsky. Every time anybody says something and sets up a rhetorical situation for you, it is a kind of a prompt which evokes a certain kind of behavior from you. Now certain kinds of questions are likely to evoke a more serious type of response, a kind of intensity. That is one of the ways you can work as a teacher in class: your presence, the kinds of issues you set up, your questions. Then, if you make it interesting, you may really tap into topics that students will want to talk about spontaneously—that old stuff about finding interesting material. I think that really is important because then students have more ambitious things to say. This sets up more writing problems for them. They are almost overtaken by words.

KDS: I have had this happen. In fact, just the other day I asked a question and one of the students grabbed it and said something so surprising that the rest of the class sat back in shock—as if the words came out before the student realized what the words would be. This moment did have an almost mystical quality. Perhaps it is something about the teacher, a commitment, this person sitting here saying we are here and we are going to spend all this time together this semester, so do we want to just talk about stupid things? It is very uncomfortable sometimes because some students don't know how to deal with it. When an intimate statement comes from a student they do not know well, they kind of back off.

CB: You raise an important point. I was just talking about the role of the teacher—the person who is just setting this up, your ethos, etc.—but

it depends on the students as well. And sometimes you will have a student who will push you beyond anything that you anticipated. This gets the students working with each other to create that kind of climate. Some people call this authenticity—a level of reality of involvement which is extremely important for any kind of writing class. There are certain things you can teach in a kind of distant, training way, but in writing you are trying to make difficult statements, statements that you do not yet know how to make. In order to really grow in writing you have to be taking on new kinds of problems, feeling an urge to say things that you do not yet know how to say. You haven't figured out how, and you only will if there is some kind of stake or involvement. Otherwise you will just do what you know how to do. You will write that five-paragraph essay because that will get you through.

THC: This focus on class material takes me back to something you mentioned earlier—this idea of the separation of church and state where English departments become a place for the teaching of values or addressing social and moral issues. Given the work that you have been doing—writing in science with a practical, composition perspective—what then becomes the role of the traditional English department, the department that is concerned with “culture” and, in an abstract way, with these moral and ethical issues, but at the same time is concerned with the pragmatic instruction in writing? Now, because of all the work being done on other forms of writing—writing in other disciplines—the writing instructor, who has been trained in English department procedures and practices, is finding himself or herself ill-equipped to deal with the types of issues you and others have been raising. The role of the traditional English department as the hub of writing instruction is in many ways being questioned very strongly by your research and the research of many others in the rhetoric of science.

CB: I think there are many different questions in what you are saying. First off, English departments configure themselves as literature departments. Literature is often constructed as the repository of human values. There are interesting historical questions of how this got to be that way. Some interesting historical work argues that in the 20s and 30s science became academic and socially privileged, so literature had to carve out a justification for itself within the academy and in the culture as a whole. The questions I am interested in are how you live a life in the world, what the projects are you carry out with others, and what your stance should be in these projects. These questions are asked in terms of an empiricist, pragmatic, micro-view. These are the grounds on which ethics are created—the little bit of interaction. Ethics is not adherence to some distance principle stated in some poem that you don't refer to. If you carry that poem around in your head, and you use it as a justification for

behavior (of course the justification is not the same as the cause), then it really enters into your representation of your values or your representation of your behavior.

I am not ruling literature out; literature is a source of many representations of life. At different times, the literary and cultural system has taken on different functions and produced different interactions; it creates many representations of the world. Today we have many other places where we create representations of the world, many more than we had in the previous centuries. These are evolving historically—the way we represent what life is like to each other. Literature was one of the main ways of giving people views on the landscape in which we live and thus can be very helpful to people to construct an understanding of where they are. But so does science. In part I am interested in the rhetoric of science because at times science has claimed to be above that and we are saying it is part of the construction of value, part of human life—it is not other than human life. It may be a powerful and successful part of human life, but it is not apart from life.

KDS : If we see the implicit values in both fields, then how should literature be taught?

CB: I have no simple answers. I have had some extreme positions at various times, some of which are truly scandalous: that literature departments ought to be of the same order as art history departments. They study a specialized body of symbolic practices that are highly interesting. There is certainly a place for interpreting literary texts and there is also a place for cultural studies reflecting on society and all of our representations. We live in an information-heavy and an eclectic age, so we do want to know how other people have lived and what they have thought; we grow from that, and we extend the possibilities of being human ourselves through texts. In a more radical version of this position, I would argue that chess is interesting too so there should be chess departments. Still, some literary texts are extremely interesting and are remarkable exercises in the use of language, drawing on complex resources of culture, experience, thought, and imagination; but on the other hand, that doesn't mean that their values are any better. That is one of the dilemmas that people are currently finding as we are reexamining them. We are finding that many of the values we have lived with for thousands of years are pretty repugnant, and the literatures we have worshipped are just saturated in ways I don't think many people have understood. For example, one of the things I realized way back was that, with all we know about Shakespeare's sexism and his hierarchical royalist aristocratic views, we may want to reject his idea that there is an aristocracy of the spirit: that certain people are more noble in spirit than others. That is a purely aristocratic notion, one that we seem to hold to very tenaciously, that is reproduced by our readings of Shakespeare.

THC It is also reproduced by a mystifying literary critic who engages this text in some kind of spiritual way without showing the underpinnings of those strategies of reading.

Given the situation as you have been outlining it, what is the role of the writing instructor who is still located in an English department but who now must have some knowledge of the rhetorical styles and strategies of other disciplines and who must now recognize that traditional English composition is not a privileged or superior form of writing but instead is just one rhetoric among many equally valuable ways of communicating?

CB I think the role of both writing instruction and the study of writing depends much on how English Departments reconfigure themselves in the coming years, and it is a process within which writing instructors and researchers can attempt to take an active role. The response to that attempt to take an active role will in part determine whether we have a future within English Departments.

As we are all aware, both writing programs and English Departments have been in ferment. Decreasing numbers of English majors and changing institutional demands on English Departments have challenged those departments to provide justifications for their large size and their chunk of university budgets, at the same time that changes in literary theory have made unavailable the mid-century justifications for humanistic knowledge (which no longer fit the commitments of even many younger members of the literary part of the profession). At the same time, the success of writing programs and writing across the curriculum initiatives has given teachers of writing greater institutional credibility and clout than they have had previously. To some extent this credibility is independent of the standing of English Departments in which the writing programs may or may not be housed. Moreover, research on writing has become more substantial and intellectually creditable to colleagues throughout the university as well as in English—so no longer must we gain individual respectability by doing literary scholarship (with a bit of composition and rhetoric commitment on the side). And again literary theory has at least opened possibilities for this work—work on non-canonical writing and on the activity of writing and representation in society—to be meaningful for the intellectual projects of English Departments, even though strong prejudices remain.

All these and other factors I will not enumerate mean we have more of an ability to negotiate as equals with our colleagues in English Departments. English Departments may look very different before the ends of our careers. The kind of reflectivity we can provide on the activity of literary criticism and scholarship, on the favored discursive styles and practices fostered by English Departments (including through traditional

composition teaching), and on the literary system itself as a social discursive formation may provide one of the major wedges to create change in English Departments.

That is the optimistic scenario—that we can become major players in reconstructed English Departments.

The other scenario is that we will have to strike out on our own, that the traditional pull of English Departments will continue to be so strong that we remain marginal, if not outcast. I think this would be unfortunate not just for ourselves and our colleagues, not just for the students whose literacy needs will not be attended to in as direct and full a way as possible, but for the academy and society as whole. One thing that all members of the profession of teaching of writing share, no matter what kind of writing they value and promote, is a rich visceral sense of writing as both a personal psychological and social mechanism of life. Together they carry an understanding of the diverse, manifold importance of one of the most important elements of modern life, and one of the least investigated and understood. So if we remain peripheral to English Departments, the force and value of what we are learning may lead us at some point to strike out on our own. What the institutional and economic basis of this move will be may depend on a variety of ad hoc arrangements at different schools, but obviously it will have to be built in great measure on the practical value we provide in writing programs, writing across the curriculum initiatives, technical and business writing programs, and the like. These are the points of social delivery of what we know and what we value.

So I cannot give you an exact answer of what our role should be, but only to say we must assert our value within both English Departments and the University based on the value we actually deliver to others and how we can make that value visible. As we do, we will find a place with those who recognize that value, and we will find it no longer attractive to sue for acceptance by those who will not, for their own reasons, ever value what we do.

KDS: What do you think the future holds for rhetoric of science?

CB: As for the narrower specialty of rhetoric of science, I see it expanding through the work of many people to a much fuller examination of the complex discursive workings of all knowledge-producing specialties, ranging from the natural sciences through the social sciences, humanities, arts, law, and governmental policy. I know of current projects, finished and in process, that pretty much cover the entire map of professions, including architecture, monetary policy, religion, social work, education, psychiatry, and literary studies as well as psychology, sociology, biology, and physics. These studies take as their units of analysis everything from legal codes to journals, to individual texts, to conversational turns, to sketches incorporated into talk, to hand gestures that

integrate words and other representational realms—as well as the unrepresented. These studies employ methods and theories from fields as diverse as linguistics, rhetoric, psychology, sociology, history, aesthetics, and phenomenology. As we start gaining more and more pictures of the role of knowledge formulation, transmission, and application throughout society, we will be able to articulate more precisely the complex and wonderful way language and other representations are an integral part of the way the world works—and in the modern, literate world, the way written language, particularly, is part of the fabric of society in its greatest extension and most local interaction. As we make our developing knowledge visible, I have little doubt that others will find the value in it and will help us construct whatever institutional location we need to carry on our work and share its benefits as a kind of reflection to guide action in professional and daily life.

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