Portfolio as Genre, Rhetoric as Reflection: Situating Selves, Literacies, and Knowledge

Kathleen Blake Yancey

> *In a hushed, almost basement-like second-floor auditorium at 8:30 am on a Saturday in late July, I stand before my colleagues at the 1995 WPA Conference: to share with them some of the observations I've made about reflection—based on theory, on practice, on reflection itself. I think I have something to say that is worth hearing. What I don't understand is what I will learn, what new directions this piece will take as a direct function of its being, at one point in time, this talk.*

Chuck Schuster—and by extension, the WPA—has been gracious enough to invite me to talk to you for about 40 minutes, and what I'd like to do during this time is to examine, somewhat discursively, the topic of reflection: to consider what kinds of reflection there might be, to outline what we gain by including reflection in our classrooms and in our evaluations, and to raise some of the questions about reflection that have yet to be addressed.

I want to begin this thinking about reflection by observing that quite apart from portfolios, reflection is valuable in and of itself. It's almost always been a part of my life—in much the same way, and with the same ritual-like regularity and tempo and value—as has been planting, then harvesting, and then putting to bed a spring and summer garden. At the end of every school year, for as long as I can remember, I have spent some time "figuring up": thinking about what I've done well as a friend, a student, a teacher, a parent, and a human being; about where I've fallen short and why, and how I might have done better; and about the kinds of questions that seem to be motivating my current thinking. Sometimes I share this reflecting with someone close to me, perhaps with my best Indiana friend Carol or my husband; sometimes it's for me alone. Sometimes—quite often—I share small pieces of this reflective project with different friends and colleagues. Just the process of "figuring up," of articulating what is important to me and what I value, seems to locate me—relative to where I've been, to where I'm going, to the communities of whom I am a part.

In the 1970's (and into the 80's, too, I think), we talked about getting "centered," which I take to mean being balanced and thoughtful and reflective. These reflective rituals are, in part, what center me, help me see when I should stay the course or take a detour, enable me to see that perhaps I should change the directions I've set to suit the selves I seem to be becoming.

So what I want to say here is that reflection—like all learning—is personal and is for the personal learner first, the academic learner second. (I'm not sure they are can be separated and bracketed off this way. But each deserves specification.)

That's my starting point.

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It's also true, however, that reflection has come to represent something more than just personal retrospective ruminations on one's quality of life, or projections about the direction in life one wants to take. In schools of all sizes, with students of all kinds, from small schools like Eckerd College in Florida and Hampton Sydney in Virginia to large state institutions like the University of Michigan and the University of Alaska Southeast, students are creating portfolios that are distinguished from folders primarily by a single feature: reflection.

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The reflection leading to and accompanying these portfolios can take various forms. Sometimes it's focused on a student's sense of "literate self." It asks, what kind of reader are you? What do you like to read, and when, and where, and why? What kind of writer are you? Of which of your writings are you most proud, and why? What goals would you like to accomplish as a writer? What are the relationships between your reading and your writing? Between your reading and your writing and your selves?

> *I've never really thought about myself as a writer [one student says]. I know I do a lot of writing in and out of class, but I never thought of myself as a writer.*

Sometimes reflection can include students talking about what they've learned about writing, and about their writing *practices*. Sometimes that learning involves how writers turn to different genres on different occasions. And sometimes reflection involves *uncertainty*, presenting what Polyani calls a real problem, a real question:

> *The poem "Last Bows" was written at the time that I was deciding what college to attend. It seemed like I had to plot my whole life before high school graduation. . . . I remember feeling a great sense of relief after I had completed "Last Bows." This was when I discovered that writing could be therapeutic. The curious thing about this selection is, at that time I had not written poetry in years, and since that time I have not written poetry at all. It seems strange to me that I should turn to such an unfamiliar form when I was feeling so uncertain.*

Sometimes reflection is focused on a specific text. We can use companion pieces of the kinds described by Jeff Sommers—what he calls Writer's Memos. We can use letters of the kind described by Sam Watson. We can use what Tom Hilgers calls post writes: reflective pieces that talk about the processes that went into the text. We can use what I've called Transmittal Forms, which include the writer's sense of what worked and what didn't, what questions are still unanswered, the composer's sense of what difficulties were evoked in the writing. In asking students to complete these companion pieces, we invite them to examine their writing processes in action; that gives us one perspective. We see the product produced by the processes; that gives us another. Both have something to offer.

Borrowing from Peter Elbow, we can ask for yet another kind of reflective companion piece, for a self-assessment that includes both believing and doubting: believing that the writer's text is terrific and writing about that, doubting that it's very good and writing about that, in the process maintaining simultaneously what Carl Sagan calls "dual modes co-habiting in the mind."

> *I believe that I have narrowed a possible focus for the article. I have opened some doors for data collection, and I have a clearer idea of the kinds of data that need to be viewed. I believe I have found a comfortable academic voice that is not so academic, and I intend to develop it even more. . . .*
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> *Other than my horriblr proofreading skills, I still have doubts about whether or not I am heading in the right direction in terms of how I view what we have accomplished in this class and a realistic/pertinent research goal.*

Sometimes reflection can invite a student to talk about what she learned and how she used that learning in a piece, and then to show us first, how that learning became a part of the piece and second, a means of representing in her composing repertoire. We begin to see the learning-in-action as a text is shaped by it, quite consciously.

> *A dramatic example of my new consciousness of voice developed within the first month of class and is included in the newspaper clippings portion of this portfolio. I wrote the cover story for Cabarrus Neighbors. The story dealt with a family taking care of its Alzheimer-stricken grandmother. Feeling was a necessity in this story to portray it in the way it deserved. I applied what I had learned by thinking more about who my audience for the story would be, about who the writer was (me with a grandfather of my own who has Alzheimer's) and about what the most dramatic quotes were to create the strongest voice. . . . I told the story through her pained voice. A quote from the woman caring for her mother that told it all read:*
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> > *OFTEN I AM ANGRY, FRUSTRATED, AND EXASPERATED. AND THEN ONCE IN A WHILE, YOU HAVE A GLIMMER—MAYBE A LAUGH OR A SMILE—THAT REMINDS YOU OF WHAT YOU HAD. IT'S LIKE THE SUN POPPING OUT DURING A RAINSTORM. AND THEN IT'S GONE.*
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> *I used a direct quote, so the learning was not so much in how to fabricate good voices through the words and thoughts that I chose; but rather to choose the most characteristic and telling quotes and events from the 20-30 pages of notes I often gather in an interview.*

And sometimes the reflection is geared quite specifically to the portfolio: just the process of thinking about how it might represent the learner suggests new ways of knowing, new connections for representation—some visual as well as verbal.

It helps the students see that meaning comes from multiplicity, from diversity, from connecting what goes on *outside* our classrooms with what goes on *inside.*

> *Then I got to thinking . . . Does everything I put into my portfolio have to be written? Does it have to be written by me? What are the limits to the creative aspect of this? Honestly, I would love to put this [video of a TV show] in my portfolio with a rationale, because I think it could tell more about what kind of teacher I want to be than a lot of the things I have written in the class.*

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Forms vs. **Kinds** of Reflections

We have many *forms* of reflection: companion texts, predictive texts, retrospective texts. What we don't have is a classification of these *kinds* of texts—or more to the point, a classification of the kinds of reflection that we see in these texts and that contribute to these texts. To undertake this task, I'll begin by calling upon Donald Schön's work in reflection, what we have generally come to know by the tag *reflective practice.*

Schön, the author of *Educating the Reflective Practitioner,* distinguishes between knowing-in-action and reflection-in-action. Many problems, Schön explains, are well defined, permitting (perhaps even encouraging) a "routinized" response. Such a response reveals knowing-in-action:

> [a knowing which] may be described in terms of strategies, understandings of phenomena, and ways of framing a task or problem appropriate to the situation. The knowing-in-action is tacit, spontaneously delivered without conscious deliberation; and it works, yielding intended outcomes so long as the situation falls within the boundaries of what we have learned to treat as normal. (28)

But much of writing, as we know, falls outside those boundaries, calls for novel responses based on new ways of seeing the situation, the purpose, the audience, the genre, and hence the material. Thus, the need for what Schön calls reflection-in-action:

> Reflection-in-action has a critical function, questioning the assumptional structure of knowing-in-action. We think critically about the thinking that got us into this fix or this opportunity; and we may in the process, restructure strategies of action, understandings of phenomena, or ways of framing problems. (28)

Put in my language, Schön's point: If I write something, it becomes real. I cannot take it back; I cannot forget it or deny it or pretend it doesn't exist. I have to acknowledge it, engage with it, account for it, challenge it: explore what it *means,* to me, to others. That's reflection.

Through reflection, we can circle back, to return to earlier notes, to earlier understandings and observations, to re-think them from time present (as opposed to time past), to think how things will look to time future. Reflection asks that we explain to others, as I try to do here, so that *in explaining to others, we explain to ourselves*. We begin to re-understand.

Reflection is thus recursive and generative. Reflection is thus also thoroughly postmodern; it's not either a process/or a product, but both processes *and* products.

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If what Schön is calling reflection-in-action brings with it vague echoes from the past, that's because it seems to be what researchers of composing processes used to call the processes of "reviewing" and "monitoring" and revising as a single text is written. Although these processes weren't identified or defined as *reflective* in past models of composing, what is currently called reflection-in-action was identified as crucial to the composing processes studied and described by Linda Flower and John Hayes, Nancy Sommers, Sondra Perl, and Susan Miller. Regardless of the ways these researchers framed their observations, they all found the same thing: expert writers rely on this reviewing during composing and between drafts, finding in it (1) a means of invention and (2) a way to read as the other in order to communicate with him and her.

Perl constructed her reflection-in-action by dividing the process into two components, almost like two selves, calling the one retrospection, the other projection, calling them collectively the "alternating mental postures writers assume as they move through the act of composing" (369). The first—retrospection—she says,

> refers to the way in which the writer turns back to lay hold of and take forward the sense, however, inchoate, of what is already there to say. Writing is the carrying forward of an inchoate sense into explicit form. This proceeds further when what has been written can be read, sensed anew and used to provide a further differentiation of the sense one has now of what one wants to say. (Perl and Egendorf 260)

In contrast to retrospective structuring, Perl says, projective structuring

> depends on a writer's capacity to distinguish between a felt sense of what is being intended and the formulations devised to say it. Only through this distinction can projective structuring proceed. One must be able (a) to lay hold of the sense of one's intention and (b) to compare it with one's sense of what readers will need to be told before they can grasp it, so as (c) to assess whether a given set of formulations provides an adequate vehicle for translating a private datum into publicly accessible form. (Perl and Egendorf 260)

For Perl, the dual modes of mind are focused both on the relationship between the writer and the text, and on the relationship between the reader and the text.

During this same period in the early 1980's, Nancy Sommers also posited two writers within the rhetor. Again relying (as was the custom then) on the expert writer for the model of felicitous practice, Sommers observed that

> experienced writers imagine a reader (reading their product) whose existence and whose expectations influence their revision process. They have abstracted the standards of a reader and this reader seems to be partly a reflection of themselves and functions as a critical and productive collaborator—a collaborator who has yet to love their work. The anticipation of a reader's judgment causes a feeling of dissonance when the writer recognizes incongruities between intention and execution, and requires these writers to make revisions in all levels. (378)

Sommers thus also seems to be positing two actors working together within a single writer; the distinction between them is not only clear but necessary, forcing a detachment of the writer from the text, even as the text is being produced, a detachment that makes possible another perspective on the text.

Asking our students to reflect in these ways invites them to behave as expert writers when they compose: to read their emerging texts not only as writers but also as readers, to consider what strategies can be useful, to determine what truths they are to tell. The forms of reflection identified above thus invite writers to construct and verbalize these other selves and this other knowledge, as they compose. This, then, is one kind of reflection: reflection-in-action.

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Constructive Reflection

At the beginning of this paper, I said that reflection *seems always* [to have] *been a part of my life—in much the same way, and with the same ritual-like regularity and tempo and value—as has been planting, then harvesting, and then putting to bed a spring and summer garden.* Upon reflection, I see that one problem with this metaphor is that its image of the garden suggests that reflection is *natural*, that like a healthy plant (and almost effortlessly, but predictably), it will grow, produce fruit, and benefit human beings. Isn't it pretty to think so?

About reflection, we know better: we look at our general culture, filled with racial tension, with hate crimes, with poverty and hunger. We look at our schools, often as unreflective as the culture from which they cannot be divorced, and we see that if we want students to be reflective, we will have to invite them to do so, may need to reflect with them. Reflection, it seems (so Vygotsky would have us believe, and Schön concurs) is social as well as individual. Through reflection, we learn to tell our stories of learning: in the writing classroom our stories of writing and of having written and of will write tomorrow. This story-making involves, as Bakhtin suggests, our taking a given story, and our lived stories, and making it anew. And I suppose I think this reflection is so important because without it, we live the stories others have scripted for us: in a most unreflective, unhealthy way. The stories we make construct us, one by one by one, cumulatively. So I think it's important to tell lots of stories where we get to construct many selves for us to attempt, some we continue to inhabit.

I think this is part of what Jim Berlin meant when he talked about the portfolio as a place to explore the competing discourses that make up any writer:

> [t]he portfolio in a postmodern context enables the exploration of subject formation. As students begin to understand through writing the cultural codes that shaped their development, they are prepared to occupy different subject positions, different perspectives on the person and society. The narratives of their developments as writers recommended by the portfolio become accounts of their larger intellectual, personal, and social growth. (65)

In other words, through reviewing texts in multiple genres and through choosing which of those to share in a portfolio, a student constructs an identity. These texts are what Chris Anson calls primary and secondary—in the case of writing, the primary texts are the final drafts, the secondary texts all kinds of texts: journals, quick freewrites, peer responses, research notes, companion pieces. Through reviewing all these texts, the writer sees herself assuming various subject positions. Pat Belanoff makes the same point when she talks about the portfolio as a place for "a polyvoiced statement whose voices are not necessarily harmonious": "We are forced," she says, "to face the writer, not just the writing" (23).

So: here we have a second kind of reflection, one based in multiple texts, one whose purpose is to construct a tentative, polyvoiced identity, a reflection I'm going to call *constructive*. An important kind of reflection, I think, but also one really quite different from reflection-in-action. Reflection-in-action tends to be embedded in a single composing event, tends to be oriented to a single text, its focus squarely on the writer-reader-text relationship and on the development of that text. But when we begin to ask writers other kinds of questions—"who writes here?" "is that the same writer who wrote earlier?" and "how does this writer know?"—we are asking questions that are as autobiographical as they are reflective.

Constructive reflection is like autobiography, where as William Gass tells us, the self divides, not severally into a recording self, an applauding self, a guilty self, a daydreaming self, but into a shaping self: it is the consciousness of oneself as a consciousness among all these other minds, an awareness born much later than the self it studies, and a self whose existence was fitful, intermittent, for a long time, before it was able to throw a full beam upon the life lived and see there a pattern, as a plowed field seen from a plane reveals the geometry of the tractor's path (51).

This is the kind of reflection—on a *shaping self*—that we ask of our students when we ask them to think about who they are as writers, when we ask them to discern patterns among subject positions they have taken, when we ask them to plot their own cumulative development as an increasing accretion of writing selves.

Not that this is an easy thing: quite the reverse. And, as important, it's quite different from reflection-in-action. For one thing, it requires different skills, as Schön explains: "Clearly, it is one thing to be able to reflect-in-action and quite another to be able to reflect on our reflection in action so as to produce a good verbal description of it; and it is still another thing to be able to reflect on the resulting description" (31). So what we are doing when we ask students for multiple texts is not only asking them to make choices that begin to construct a writer but also choices that lend themselves to a *good verbal description* that *itself* can be reflected upon.

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Reflection-in-Presentation

Which of course leads me to a third kind of reflection, that good verbal description, what I'm going to call *reflection-in-presentation*. In some ways, this is the reflection we are most familiar with, regardless of the form it takes: the introductory "Letter to the Reader" that fronts the portfolios used for exemption at Miami University; the annotations upon single pieces that accompany selections in the Missouri Western portfolio-in-the-major; and the final reflective essay that summarizes the exhibits we often see in classroom portfolios. All of this reflection is presentational, though as Laurel Black, Don Daiker, Jeff Sommers, and Gail Stygall point out, what's valued in these presentations shifts from context to context. Part of that context is the situation within which a portfolio is read. Is the course or program grounding the portfolio one that favors cultural critique, for instance, or is it oriented more to issues of voice and expression? This context will have much to do with what is valued in the reflection-in-presentation.

Another part of that context is the *genre* within which the reflection-in-presentation occurs, a factor that is among the less-examined issues in portfolios and thus one that I'd like to consider briefly here. As Berlin suggests, any genre always excludes more than it includes, and nowhere is this more true than in the two most popular genres for reflection-in-presentation: the introductory letter and the final essay. The introductory letter is marked by several features: it welcomes a kind of personal address to the reader; it overviews the portfolio contents, which the reader presumably has not yet read; it provides a place to tell various kinds of stories, particularly about the writer developing (often from writing occasions long since passed); and it sets a context for the reader and thus may considerably influence the reading of the rest of the portfolio. The reflective essay, on the other hand, typically comes at another point in the reading process—after the "evidence" of primary (and perhaps secondary) texts has been presented. It's both more analytical and interpretive in nature, more typically academic, more single-voiced and single-pointed. In terms of gender, the letter seems more oriented to the female, to the writer whose textual identity has historically been composed of personal writings like diaries and journals and letters, whose sense of self is located between and among relationships, as biographers of women like Linda Wagner-Martin will attest. The essay, by contrast, seems more objective, more school-like, more oriented to the texts themselves and to the institutions framing them.

Given these observations, which genre should we assign our students? Asked differently, which discursive site is more hospitable to reflection? One response is to envision the essay more capaciously than I've done here, to see it as a site less rather than more scripted, to use it for exploration as well as for assertion, for associational thinking as much as for thrust and parry, for connecting as well as prioritizing, to do with the essay what Wendy Bishop recently did in a *CCC* interchange with David Bartholomae and Peter Elbow: work around and between and among the issues they raised to get at the issues she was interested in, in collage-like, associational, multi-vocal modes. Such an essayist genre would allow the kinds of insights characteristic in the introductory letter, would resist the control exercised by a unitary governing mind. In Belanoff's terms, it would be multi-vocal. A second suggestion is entailed in Berlin's observation about why we value education in the first place:

> The point of education in a democracy is to discover as many ways of seeing as possible, not to rest secure in the perspective we find easiest and most comfortable or the perspective of those currently in power. (66)

If this is indeed our aim in education, and if genre is (as Kenneth Burke argued) a way of not seeing as much as it is of seeing, then perhaps we ought to ask our students to do both kinds of reflection-in-presentation: the one that sets the stage for our reading and the after-one that interprets the contexts and develops evidentiary claims for an over-riding argument.

In both cases, we will get more writer, because that is what portfolios inevitably invite. Nor is such a move new in the composition curriculum or in the assessment of student writing. As both Lester Faigley and Jim Berlin have demonstrated, American English teachers have taught writers since at least the middle of the last century. At Harvard it was an aesthetic reader and writer, one who knew what the upper classes knew about literature. As Faigley reminds us: "literacy instruction was closely associated with larger cultural goals, and writing teachers were as much as or more interested in whom they wanted their students to be as in what they wanted their students to write" (113). Much more recently, English teachers shifted from the writ*er* to writ*ing* as they moved to holistically scored single samples of writing. This shift was seen as appropriate—we were no longer evaluating the person, but rather the performance. The hitch was that when we looked only at a this sample and tried to match it with a scoring guide, what we got was *the match with the scoring guide.* It didn't seem to look much like writing. We didn't get the writer or the writing or thinking or any of the other things that we seem to think we and our students and education are about.

So now we shift again, asking for multiple writings in multiple genres and reflections on that writing, and what do we get? It's more what we don't get, in the first place. Multiple texts make it more and more difficult to get at "just" the texts. The criteria governing those assembled texts are more difficult to articulate, given the variables involved. What we *do* get is a writer who emerges from the texts. The very multiplicity of those texts, combined with the invitation to construct a governing intelligence creating those texts, a reflection, makes plain a *writer*

The question, as Faigley suggests, is which writer we acknowledge, which we encourage, and which we reward. And that of course takes us back to genre; the genre we permit, and the way we define that genre, will itself also construct the writer—as finally, do we, for we are the ones who issue the assignments, award the A's, and valorize the truths and the selves telling those truths. We are the ones who decide which reflections-in-presentation—often narratives of uninterrupted progress, narratives of (interminable) revision, and narratives of academic salvation—will be permitted, will be seen as universal truths. Portfolios and reflections don't change these conditions of teaching and learning within the academy. They just complicate it considerably.

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In the July 1995 issue of *Harper's*, G. J. Meyer excerpts from his then-forthcoming book *Executive Blues* an article entitled "Dancing with Headhunters: Scenes from the Downsized Life." You get the idea: he's lost his job (in this case as a public relations/communications executive), he has a year's severance pay to find another job, and the pickings, he finds, are thin indeed. This prompts a good deal of reflection on Meyer's part: about how he grew up, went to school, and found himself earning annually, as nearly as I can tell, more than most of us will in the next three years. His terminal degree? An MA in English.

What's interesting to me about the piece are several things. First, the guy writes well. When Meyer describes himself in the midst of searching for a new job, we see a man in the process of having his identity dismantled—and it's a disconcerting, unsettling picture that is all too easy to identify with.

> Ten working days at most [until I would hear from the recruiter, he writes]. Late on Monday afternoon, at the end of the first day of the week when nothing can possibly happen, I tear a long, narrow strip from the edge of a sheet of yellow legal paper. I tape one end of the strip to the bottom edge of a picture frame across the room from my desk. It hangs there like a ribbon, like some award I've given myself for getting through a whole day of final-phase waiting. On Tuesday afternoon I do the same thing. And on Wednesday. When the week is finally over, five shreds of paper hang like a row of miliary decorations, one for every twenty four hours of agony endured. It pleases me to look at them. They represent the only kind of achievement that seems to be within my grasp these days.
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> The next five ribbons come harder. (56)

Not that Meyer can't see himself as more and other than the melancholic victim this excerpt suggests. He tracks both complications and implications of jobs and job loss in general, and of executive positions in particular. When he in fact "loses" a job prospect to a woman, and then another to an African-American, he sees the larger picture, the one where social justice might this time count him, as a white male, out. Likewise, and more poignantly, he also writes of the cost of executive careers:

> Ultimately, having given away almost everything that matters we end up defining ourselves by our possessions. Gradually we become incapable of imagining goals higher or more meaningful than a fine house or a fine car. We abandon hope without even realizing we've done so. (44)

But what Meyer doesn't do is every bit as remarkable. He doesn't position himself except within the rather small community of executives. Accordingly, he doesn't see that perhaps getting paid a six-figure sum for hawking seed corn or farm implements is unreasonable, and that's why his former employer doesn't need him anymore. He doesn't make the connection between his situation and that of an unskilled laborer who has also lost his job forever, in spite of his having been very good at it. He doesn't see the larger economic picture, the capitalistic system that rewards and punishes arbitrarily. Ultimately and most personally, he doesn't see how to rewrite this story—*his own story*—that has gone so awry.

What Meyer does is hope. In defending his refusal to do more than this, he settles on the word responsible to characterize his rhetorical stance:

> After some experimentation I settle on the word responsible as particularly good. . . . It seems to suggest that although I am, of course, rich in options, and although, of course, I know the right thing for me would be a spot in academia or in the world of authors (someplace where I would be free not only to share my wisdom with the human race but to do so in sneakers and a sweatshirt), I also need to remember my obligations to wife and children and all that.
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> Declining to suggest these things would involve an admission that I have at present no options at all, that as a matter of hard fact I would grab the first really solid job opportunity that came along, regardless of whether it was back in the defense business or back in the agency business or at East Jesus Community College. But I don't seem capable of that kind of truthfulness. I can't admit how naked I feel and how helpless, can't admit that if anyone gave me one more shot at the fat-cat world I would snatch at it like a hungry beggar snatching at a dollar bill. (46)

Rather like the Great Gatsby or the Ancient Mariner (choose your trope), Meyer cannot invent a new story, can only cling to the old story, to his narrative of progress rudely derailed. He cannot get outside himself to see the contradictions, the associations, the incongruities that inhabit the new story he is living but that he still doesn't quite grasp. Indeed, as well-written as they may be, these reflections are little more than the reverberations of victimhood. It would be interesting, informative, and instructive to know, for example, what Meyer would make of his story for *Mother Jones* or the *Village Voice*. But such story-making, such reflection is not in evidence. In sum, this writing may be "good" in the conventional sense of the word: it is clear, its images are evocative, it's got a point of view that is consistently developed. On the other hand, that's part of its problem, for me: *it's got a single point of view, it's got a single story, and it's got a single voice*. The author seems unable to generate multiple versions of his own (life) text.

It may be, of course, that Meyer achieves a richer reading of his story—a more complicated, problematized reading—in his book-length volume. And to be fair, one thing I've learned in this analysis is that I think Meyer is at a decided disadvantage. I think he is missing a critical element here: more than a single community in which, through which, and against which he can locate and create himself.

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Without such inter-textual communities, it's difficult to see how he could, in fact, say anything meaningful at all.

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To be meaningful, reflection must be *situated*: the writer creates meaning in context, in community. So, too, in writing assessment: it too occurs *in situ*. This idea—that writing assessment itself should be located within a community, and that in order to be valid it should consider its effects on community—is a late-in-the-day idea. But as it becomes more the stuff of currency, we should make use of it. Alan Purves puts it this way:

> The importance of communities is that they restore us to that important state of union or communion with the other . . . that we have lost in our misguided attempt to be individual, to have a career at the expense of others.
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> So it should be in the world, in the classroom, and in life. So it should be in the assessment of writing. Assessment is a matter of community . . . . (19)

In my language: reflection offers writers the opportunity to tell multiple stories in multiple genres for others in community to hear, to respond to. The *others' hearing* is crucial, for Meyer and for our students and for us, for our own reflections and for our own stories.

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So: three types of reflection that contribute to this story-making:

(1) *reflection in action*, the process of reviewing and projecting and revising, which takes place within a composing event;

(2) *constructive reflection*, the process of developing a cumulative, multi-selved, multi-voiced identity, which takes place between and among composing events; and

(3) *reflection in presentation*, the process of articulating the relationships between and among the multiple variables of writing and the writer in a specific context for a specific audience.

And we know that for reflection (as for other kinds of knowing) genre is crucial: the genre we privilege will have a great deal to do with the kind of reflection-in-presentation students will compose, and accordingly with the kinds of constructive reflection they engage in.

This reflection upon reflection marks only the beginning of what we know, however. We have much to learn. I'm interested in how we foster the ability to see a text from different, competing, and complementary perspectives, how we create multiple stories from a single text. I'd like to know more about how we might respond to reflection so that it becomes as rich and generative as our hopes for it. I'd like to see the reflective essay pushed to its limits—wherever those are. I'd like to know what I'm supposed to *do* with reflection. Read it? Respond to it? *Evaluate* it in a gentle way so that it "improves?" And how would I know what that improvement looked like? (What is, after all, "good" reflection? Is there such a thing as bad reflection?) What's the relationship between that improvement and a person's learning? A person's multi-vocality? A person's sense of self-knowledge? What happens to our assessment when we include such reflection? And what will happen to our curricula when we invite our students' lived experiences—their other stories—into our schools?

These are the questions that provide my point of departure for more thinking more about reflection, for my reflective project.

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Back in that hushed auditorium, now alive with conversation, at 9:45 a.m. . . .

A text only means in context: the context for this talk is provided by thoughtful, reflective colleagues. Chris Farris asks about what Bartholomae has called student "road to Damascus narratives" and about how to discourage them in student reflection, how to get beyond them at least: *rule out effort and time as evidence,* I say. *Integrate reflection into the curriculum; don't graft it onto what exists.* Donna Qualley: What about the reflexivity that we look for? Isn't that a better word than reflection? *Good point, and you can choose your word, I say. If we want to call it reflexivity, that's ok by me, but the point here, for me, is to generate those multiple interpretations.* David Joliffe wants to know if we have to dichotomize between primary and secondary texts: if there are tertiary texts out there as well. *Yes, many texts; many* **kinds** *of texts. That's the idea, not the categorization.* Diana George: But some students do find the road to Damascus. Who are we to deny them that? *Ah, yes. But is it Damascus as terminus or Damascus as a site on a journey going elsewhere?* I ask. Then Chuck: are we looking for reflection in the writing, or reflection apart from the writing? *Bothand,* I say. The one, we hope, will lead to the other.

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Six weeks later. I'm home in Charlotte now, walking and running my favorite 6 mile course, listening to NPR, and hearing Meyer being interviewed.

The book is out, he's found a job, life is good. Perhaps my story of Meyer is wrong.

It turns out not. When asked why he couldn't find a job, Meyer explains that no executive really could, that they were all "swimming against the stream" of "outplacement, downsizing, lean and mean." That he had turned the "magic age" of 50, and we don't understand that kind of discrimination. Meyer is asked if he couldn't have used the opportunity of joblessness—particularly given $100,000 to support it for year—to invent a new life. He hastens the answer: he was glad to consider inventing—going back to school; starting a business; looking seriously (very seriously) at teaching. What he doesn't say: those inventions will not support $800 handmade suits. When asked if he had learned anything, Meyer reveals that he too has travelled on the road to Damascus: he's learned something he says he knew all along but forgot, that in the eyes of God a beggar has the same value as a CEO.

I wish I'd been wrong.

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So. I stop now. The essay (if that's what it is) is already longer than the recommended length for publication in *WPA: Writing Program Administration.*

But I want to say: perhaps the most important thing I learned in this reflective project is how collaborative reflection is, how we need communit*ies* within which to work and talk and think—and even laugh. And that what we are looking for in our writing as well as in our students' writing is twofold: text that is more reflective as well as reflective texts per se. Perhaps reflection is merely a vehicle to the first end. But I don't think it's either/or; it's bothand.

That, at least, is my reflection upon reflection, today.

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