Brech and His Friends: Writing as Critique

AMITAVA KUMAR

September 22. First day of class. Fourteen in the morning class; sixteen in the afternoon one. Hand out the syllabus with course requirements. Spend most of the time discussing Brecht. Just three lines: “Ah, what an age it is / When to speak of trees is almost a crime / For it is a kind of silence about injustice.” The point, of course, is not whether we speak of trees but the uses of our doing so. In other words, let’s ask how—rather, why—we speak about anything.

September 23. Writing, cognition, contestation—I have these three words on the syllabus for today. I have a picture from an essay by Michele Barrett. It shows a billboard, an ad for a Fiat, which reads, “If it were a lady, it would get its bottom pinched.” Beneath it, someone has spray-painted the words, “If this lady was a car she’d run you down.” The students have ten minutes to respond. In the second class, three men sitting together chuckle at the picture. The women, almost uniformly, are angered by the ad. One of them, while reading out her response, explains that she is angry “because she is a woman.” This happens a few times. I wonder whether this is because the students are nervous about the male instructor’s response to what they so strongly feel. Later, I’m unable to decide whether I should have shared this point with my students; at that moment, I am only able to address the point obliquely by agreeing with a couple of the students that the person who spray­-painted the protest could have been a woman or a man.

These points of unease are markers of difference or, to put it differently, loci of conflict. I want to broach this issue today. After students have read out their short responses, I try to explain that the picture, like the social space we inhabit, is split by difference. My students agree with me (some of them smile) when I say that they are participating in the social production of knowledge. They are constructing contesting meanings with radically different consequences. In the case of the picture from Barrett’s essay, the ways in which we read the ad and the protest—that is, our own writings too—either contest or reinforce consumer culture’s inscription of violent male desire on women’s bodies.
September 27. I am trying to indicate to my class that ultimately the entry into language is political. I refer to the work of Roger Fowler and his coauthors and speak of how the conservative newspapers during the coal miners' strike in Britain routinely erased agency by presenting their reports in the passive. I pause and ask, "You know the difference between active and passive, don’t you? ‘John ate an apple’ is an active sentence. What is its passive form?" Jason smiles and replies, "John was eaten by the apple."

October 2. The class is reading Aime Cesaire’s Discourse on Colonialism and trying to work with the notion of critique.

"So, what do you think about this?" I ask as I hang my coat beside someone’s jacket which has the maps of several continents emblazoned on it—in color. But my question is about Cesaire’s piece.

“It’s true.” It’s Jenny.

Then Marlo removes his finger from beneath his chin—a sign he wants to speak. “This guy is blinded with anger. He doesn’t see that some good came out of colonialism. I mean, we wouldn’t have been here if there had been no colonialism.”

Melinda turns around at this. “What do you mean?”

“America was colonized.”

Melinda says, “Well, it is not America’s colonization that Cesaire has in mind. And anyway what about the American Indians?”

I say, “Yes...yes” and look at each face, inviting responses. Before we get to the idea of critique, we have to learn to be good readers. We must understand how Cesaire writes. Let’s try to discern how even though Cesaire seems to be repeating he is varying the argument, how even in repeating he is advancing his argument. If we read Cesaire carefully we begin to grasp the structure of his critique. He uses many ruses because he wants to drive home the message of how the West has deceived itself. That is why he quotes a passage not from a terrible speech by Goebbels but a book written by a humanist philosopher just after the second World War. The passage Cesaire quotes ends with the lines, “But the life at which our workers rebel would make a Chinese fellah happy, as they are not military creatures in the least. Let each one do what he is made for, and all will be well.” And Cesaire asks, “Hitler? Rosenberg? No, Renan.” And, let’s pause and pay attention not only to Cesaire’s clever deceptions but to the manner in which he anticipates opposition so that he seems to be working from a space within the discourse he is dismantling, or, to put it more dramatically, from within your mind. Only then do we begin to gauge the rhetorical force of his rebuttals.

October 3. And how might we understand the difference between criticism and critique? I return today to an example students have found useful in the past: Siskel and Ebert’s “At the Movies.” What’s the attraction of two guys on television discussing a film? Someone says, “Conflict.”
“Yes.” I draw on the board a diagram of a solitary figure peering out from a frame. I haven’t read Orwell’s *1984* but this representation is inspired by it. In both classes someone or the other has read the novel, so I ask them to correct me as I explain that in the diagram you have the univocal and authoritarian discourse of Big Brother speaking down to the small and isolated selves in society.

Then the second diagram: two figures in a frame facing one another. I draw it alongside the first one and ask whether it is more representative of Siskel and Ebert’s show and the social space they occupy. This is the representation of a more democratic order. Siskel and Ebert can be seen as presenting opposing views on the television and thereby being representative of the conflicts that might exist within, say, the space of one living room. If the second diagram represents the authoritarian nature of the set-up in the first one, then the third diagram shows the liberal falsity of the second. The third diagram alerts us to the reality that there are matters (movies, precepts, ideologies, what-have-you) that never infringe on Siskel and Ebert’s (or their audience’s) consciousness. In other words, what the third diagram shows is that the difference of Siskel and Ebert is no difference at all: their “opposition” hides their complicity in presenting only the obvious.

In our engendering of critical practices, we need to move away from liberal models that insist on “both points of view” to a more complex inquiry where the deconstruction of binaries allows an understanding of what is elided.

**October 5.** I draw smaller models of the diagrams on the blackboard in my office and repeat the points when Sue stops by. Barbara is grading papers in the office, and while I am offering my explanations to Sue I keep wondering whether there are holes in my argument. When Sue has left, Barbara quotes this paragraph from Alice Jardine’s *Gynesis: Configurations of Woman and Modernity*:

> Nietzsche: ‘Insidious Questions: When we are confronted with any manifestation which someone has permitted us to see, we may ask: what is it meant to conceal? What is it meant to draw our attention from? What prejudice does it seek to raise? And again, how far does the subtlety of the dissimulation go? And in what respect is the man mistaken?’

**October 9.** Extracts from students’ journals:

Brent: I suppose another way to get people to think about what I’m writing is to attempt to confuse them. *(Know you mean I what?)*

Kelly: Producing a sense of informality in the class should theoretically allow the reader to feel more relaxed so that s/he can concentrate on critique and collaboration. Do you know what I mean? Reading an essay by Emerson makes me feel like his entire purpose is to lecture; he doesn’t seem to communicate that he has any need for others’ opinions on how to make his essay more productive.
Dave: I am really frustrated because my reasons for writing in the near future, as an engineer, have nothing to do with what I seem to be studying. I could really care less about the garbage we are reading now. I have no use for this information.

Ted: It's so damn confusing being eighteen. Each day there's something new! It's like driving across country and trying to remember all the scenery, state by state. . . . It's weird how words like corruption, scandal, mismanagement and protest don't seem to invade one's thoughts or vocabulary until around this age.

Matt: In class we went over everyone's critiques of Aime Cesaire's writing. Although I probably could have learnt something from this, I found myself thinking of the Rolling Stones concert.

Sue: When people read what I have written, ideally I want them to see a new opinion or idea, not a regurgitation of what is obvious. I want to trigger an emotion, maybe anger or sadness, or even fear—and none of that joyful crap that you can get from the funnies.

October 16. The morning class is really an early morning class. At 8:15 I look around the room and begin to read from Bell Hooks' "Coming to Voice": "Placing black women at the center was not an action to exclude the others but rather an invitation, a challenge to those who would hear us speak." I try to explain from this position the trajectory of my own course, and why we are reading and writing about James Baldwin, Alice Walker, Richard Rodriguez, Gary Soto, Wendy Rose. I remember Dave's statement about his not knowing why we are doing this crap. And, if one understands Hooks' point, it is also not simply a matter of replying, "Well, why the hell should I teach your crap? It has nothing to do with me!" To approach the matter somewhat obliquely, isn't it actually worth asking how the idea of this being an early morning class does not constitute an explanation for any or all the resistance that students might have to what is being taught? The idea that it is too early to have a class does not constitute an explanation for any or all the resistance that students might have to what is being taught? The idea that it is too early to have a class does not so much conceal a truer explanation as it offers symptomatically a truth about an ideology that represents its desires in terms of early morning sleepiness rather than the questions posed by big bad words like patriarchal, oppression, and racial discrimination.


But, of course, even the word think doesn't mean anything by itself. Hence our attempt the other day to give specificity to the notion of critique.
I see the resistance on Denise's face, so I ask, "What does this have to do with writing?" Why I write. We had taken up Orwell's essay last week. I tried to present Hooks' essay as another, different "Why I Write." Why I should write. And this "I" not as the single, indivisible subject as Orwell presents but the multiple subject of Hooks who must write, at once, as a woman and a black. The multiple subject, the subject of oppression. The subject tied to others in solidarity. Hooks, as a writer, engages in the critical practice of articulating the enabling conditions of this solidarity.

This critical practice is inevitably tied, I suggest, to what Marx in the Brumaire calls "the poetry of the future." Let's choose our examples from our readings. Consider the hollowness of the white, very male, middle-class utopia of Orwell: "But girls' bellies and apricots, / Roach in a shaded stream, / Horses, ducks in flight at dawn, / All these are a dream." Examine in contrast the utopia that Hooks constructs or, more accurately, calls for the construction of, because "speaking becomes both a way to engage in active self-transformation and a rite of passage where one moves from being object to being subject. Only as subjects can we speak, as objects we remain voiceless—our beings defined and interpreted by others." Let's also begin to recognize the conditions under which such a utopia—of a self-enabling coming to voice under exploitative circumstances—gains its desperation and energy. Let's look at Hooks' use of Audre Lorde's lines: "And when we speak we are afraid / our words will not be heard / nor welcomed / but when we are silent / we are still afraid / So it is better to speak / remembering / we were never meant to survive."

We are out of time, but let's begin tomorrow with what Brian said was a useful way to begin negotiating the different uses of Orwell and Lourde: that the former offers reasons why he writes, but what we get from the latter is an invitation to consider why we write—rather, must write.

October 19. I've left the text we use, the reader, at home. I borrow Jenny's. In Hooks' essay there are the words: "I am afraid. I am and will always be afraid. My fear is that I will not be understood. I try to learn the vocabulary of my friends to ensure my communication on their terms. There is no singular vocabulary of 120 people. I will be misunderstood; I will not be respected as a speaker; they will name me Stupid in their minds; they will disregard me. I am afraid." In the margins I read in Jenny's hand the words "my thoughts exactly."

It makes me eager to address the next point that Hooks makes. We go over the passage in class: "Encouraging students to speak, I tell them to imagine what it must mean to live in a culture where to speak one risks imprisonment, torture, and death. I ask them to think what it means that they lack the courage to speak in a situation where there are few if any consequences. Can their fear be understood solely as personal expression of shyness? Or is it an expression of deeply embedded, socially constructed
restrictions against speech in a culture of domination, fear of owning one's words, of taking a stand?"

Such a line of inquiry alters the primary question confronting the class. The emphasis is no longer on the "how" but on the "why." It is not simply a matter of substituting the question, "How can I write a well-formulated sentence?" with another, "Why should I write a well-formulated sentence?" Instead, the analysis shifts to another level entirely where the frames of intelligibility themselves (what Zavarzadeh in a recent essay calls "intelligibility effect") become subjects of critique, so that what might constitute the well-formulatedness of sentences itself becomes a matter of historical, that is political, contestation.

October 20. So you take the mundane article (I slip in a pun) and inscribe it with meaning. That's what Alice Walker is doing here. Discovering the sedimentation of meaning in ordinary things, finding there a layered history and an irreconcilable drama of protest. Reading in the weaving of a shawl a writing of resistance.

October 23. Paul is waiting to see me when I return from Coffman with my poppy-seed muffin. He laughs politely when I joke about testing positive on a drug test with this stuff inside me. He has the first assignment in his hand. I had said in class, "Do not simply quote the text, problematize it." Paul wants to know whether I can explain the difference. I tell him that I don't want him to be looking at any of the readings so much for proof or support but as a critical elaboration which is attentive to the contradictions in any text. Hoping to make the point clearer, I draw an analogy from film-making. A shot of a man with a hole in his forehead. Blood. Cut. Bloodied footprints leading to another man, asleep, with a gun and empty bottle. Cut. That's crude causality for you. Think now of another mode of organizing these shots, with disruptions, editing, flash-backs. Think of an attention to the enunciation. Of the film inviting this or your own attempt to read into it the mechanism of its articulation. Who speaks? From where? Are there divisions even within what seems to be a unified point of view? Think of the camera turning back upon itself, a spoof on the genre of detective filmmaking. Any attempt at problematization, in short, would entail a degree of self-reflexivity.

October 25. There is a better way to approach the question of problematization or enunciation. We have to go to Terry Eagleton's "Brecht and Rhetoric," where he discusses how Brechtian theater, through its attention to rhetoric, understands the real as social practices. Students find very useful in this regard Brecht's list of questions which Eagleton tells us comprise an unpublished fragment headed "representation of sentences in a new encyclopedia":
October 26. I was flipping through this week's copy of The Nation that Richard had left in my mailbox. I was going over a review of Tiananmen Diary: Thirteen Days in June. The review is interestingly titled, "Very Quiet. Too Quiet." I tore out the page because I thought it would amuse the students. (It did. But is that too quiet?) Here's the part we found of greatest interest:

The book is virtually monosyllabic—not just in words but sometimes even sentences.
Here are two full diary entries arranged to consume a quarter of a page:
Beijing Hotel, 8:53 P.M. Spatter of fire.
Beijing Hotel, 8:54 P.M. More.
Salisbury's main stylistic influence appears to have been John 11:35, the shortest verse in the Bible: "Jesus wept."

Even though the fact remains that there is no essential law that thirty words are better than ten, the point that the reviewers are trying to make is that we get to learn next to nothing about what happened in Tiananmen and why. To follow another route to the same point, unless you want to slip into narrow formalism, the issue of style has to be linked to its effectivity. I think Brecht is offering that lesson in his short poem, "On A Chinese Carving of a Lion":

The bad fear your claws.
The good enjoy your elegance.
This
I would like to hear said
Of my verse.

October 27. In the afternoon class our discussion moves toward an analysis of the importance of abstraction. Bruce says this is a mode of thinking we should adopt; it's the difference between simply saying "ouch!" when an apple falls on your head and the somewhat more bizarre response that involves formulating the law of gravity.

November 1. In my responses to students' papers, the notion of "structure" keeps coming up. I go back to Orwell's text and discuss how Orwell does not merely enumerate the reasons why he writes; that, in fact, we see a clear hierarchical organization of these reasons, and, further, Orwell in some sense can also be seen as justifying this by presenting his reasons in a historical frame. So, it's not merely a matter of mechanical organization of the four reasons that Orwell offers as his motivating factors for writing. Orwell uses...
the concept of history as that which mobilizes and sets in relation to each other all these reasons that he offers. At the same time, we must also be careful to admit that there is no real sense in which history is present outside its constitution through these reasons.

I find it useful here to go back to what I learned over the summer in John's Cinema and Ideology course. In the last ten or fifteen minutes of class I offer students fragments of Sergei Eisenstein's piece headed "A Dialectic Approach to Film Form." Eisenstein's interest in "montage" lies in its ability to explain the specificity of cinema. In cinema, shots of motionless objects can be mobilized, but not because they are mechanically used as building blocks. Instead, the placing of one shot on top of another—and, hence, the superimposition, in the mind, of one impression by another—creates through the drama of their difference what Eisenstein calls "the feeling of motion." The point is best illustrated by Eisenstein's own example from his film Battleship Potemkin when, "in the thunder of the Potemkin's guns, a marble lion leaps up, in protest against the bloodshed on Odessa's steps." This image is produced from three shots of three stationary lions at the Alupka Palace in the Crimea. The length of the second shot is carefully calculated and that image superimposed on the first one, and the third image, in turn, is superimposed on the earlier one. As a result, from three separate shots of a sleeping lion, an awakening lion, and a rising lion we get the image of the lion leaping up in protest.

November 2. What if we now take up our discussion of montage and superimpose on it the question of memory?

But, let me backtrack a little. It bears repetition that the course is titled "Remembering to Write," and the syllabus introduces the course thus: "Remembering is not merely the act of recall, it is a broader process of reconstruction. This process, instead of simply referring to the practice of recovery in the sense of restoring the past to the present, actually involves the complex tasks of building, connecting, and altering the past, the present and the future. In this difficult sense, remembering is not even a narrowly personal act: it relies on forms and languages that are shared and it labors under imperatives that are historical. The texts that we will be using in this course can be viewed as united in the work of creating that awesome mirror called the collective memory in which we might be able to better mould our utopias."

It is against this background that we ask: what if we now take up our discussion of montage and superimpose on it the question of memory? I think this question allows us to investigate the poetics of change. We begin to ask how Rodriguez tracks the conflicts of his achievements and his desires as a talented Hispanic in white America, and how our own articulation of this conflict produces the dynamism of opposition and change. The students see this point clearly. Almost all of them have paid the price for being good enough to be in the classroom. For example, there are those who are from
small farms, and they are experiencing the pain of both estrangement and alienation from all that had been familiar.

**November 3.** The students in the second class are collectively writing an introduction to their second assignment. They're enjoying working together. Kelly says my presence isn't required. I wander up and down the corridor, returning to the classroom a couple of times. After a while I find they've locked me out. I stay out, reading in the corridor, slightly distracted by my students' voices arguing about words.

**November 6.** In both classes we are trying to formulate for ourselves what the practice of *collective writing* might mean. One way of approaching the issue is through the concept of *intertextuality*. Thus, we ask, how can we begin to understand that this is not a single, bound text? How might we also see that the notion of unitary author gets displaced once we admit multiple subjectivity? Further, when meaning becomes plural and the text is seen as traversed by contradictions, in what ways can we stake claims to political effectivity? We return to Alice Walker's essay in order to take up an example from her text with which everyone in the class is familiar, her quote from Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*:

> Any woman born with a great gift in the sixteenth century [insert "eighteenth century," insert "black woman," insert "born or made a slave"] would certainly have gone crazed, shot herself, or ended her days in some lonely cottage outside the village, half witch, half wizard [insert "Saint"], feared and mocked at. For it needs little skill and psychology to be sure that a highly gifted girl who had tried to use her gift of poetry would have been so thwarted and hindered by contrary instincts [add "chains, guns, the lash, the ownership of one's body by someone else, submission to an alien religion"], that she must have lost her health and sanity to a certainty.

Here, Walker's appropriation of Woolf is significant in that it suggests that any writing is always a *rewriting*, in both senses of the word. Walker is here "leaning against" Woolf (to borrow Wlad Godzich's phrase from another context) in the sense of both "relying on" the latter but simultaneously "pushing against" her. Hence Walker's appeal to Woolf who protests as a woman and an artist, but at the same time, as her insertions make clear, Walker is also inscribing another history, one that has been marginalized even in Woolf's protest. To put it differently, collective writing is not an entry into organic community but a dialogic interaction which is both historical and coalitionist.

**November 8.** There is another way of approaching the issue of collective writing, and this route passes through the writings of Benjamin and Brecht. The dominant approach to writing and composition currently relies on clichés like "process" and "revision." While such an emphasis is useful in that it helps conceptualize writing as a practice instead of a product, what
Benjamin and Brecht allow us to do is interrogate what one might grandly call the "mode of production of writing" and the place of the writing subject within it. In "The Author as Producer," Benjamin writes that the radical writer's work "will never be merely work on products but always, at the same time, on the means of production." Hence, Benjamin's enthusiasm for the Soviet press of his times where the reader became a producer through an entry into the means of production. Benjamin's understanding of the means of production deals primarily with the apparatus, and he considers it the writer's task to appropriate improved apparatuses. What is crucial here is Benjamin's insistence that "this apparatus is better the more consumers it is able to turn into producers—that is, readers or spectators into collaborators." The exemplary instance of such an apparatus, for Benjamin, was Brecht's epic theater.

Perhaps the feature of Brechtian theater that is most relevant to our present discussion is that of "alienation." Benjamin, in his brief piece on epic theater, writes that the aim, according to Brecht, is to discover or alienate the conditions of life, and this is achieved "through the interruption of happenings." This activity of interruption can be understood in various crucial ways. In one sense, it is the principle of montage where the superimposed element disrupts the context in which it is inserted. In another sense, it is the production of critique aimed at the denaturalization of ideology. "The task of the epic theater, according to Brecht, is not so much the development of actions as the representation of conditions."

Benjamin's description allows us to construct our own agenda in the writing class, not in terms of the writing of new things but of the writing of the conditions under which we write. With such a goal in mind, we work toward understanding the institutional positioning of a composition classroom, the cultural definition of a writer, the historicity of the practice of writing. The re-writing of texts through small-group discussions in class allows the transformation of readers into collaborators. The texts that students write get changed in class as their readers participate by bringing in their own experiences or by demanding clarification or elaboration. The students' papers cannot be subjected any longer to fantasies of individualist creation and demand instead to be understood as social texts.

November 11. Melinda took part in a Pro-Choice Rally in Washington during the weekend. Part of her journal is about the slogans that interested her. Her favorite one: "Every Ejaculation Doesn't Need A Name."

November 17. Melinda, again.

First, some details about what has been the backdrop for the week. The leftist guerrillas of the FMLN launched a massive offensive in El Salvador and have continued to gather support in the country. The death-squad Arena government has responded with brutal repression, including the strafing of
civilian populations by fighter planes and helicopter gunships made available by U.S. aid. The latest act that has outraged world public opinion has been the assassination of six Jesuit priests in San Salvador.

The Progressive Student Organization had called for a protest today outside the Humphrey Center where a local law firm, Hannan and O'Connor, was hosting a banquet. This firm does public relations work in the U.S. for the Arena government. I too join the protesters. We're outside in the cold chanting: "One, Two, Three, Four... U.S. out of Salvador" and "Hannan-O'Connor you can't hide... We charge you with genocide." Policemen are protecting the city's elite, whom we can see through the glass walls. We keep up the chanting while Hannan and O'Connor's guests drink wine and converse amidst lighted candles. Then, someone says we should move and stand outside a door in another part of the building. We knock, no response. A minute later, the door opened. It's Melinda who, I learned later, had hid in the bathroom earlier in the day in order to let us in.

The banquet is disrupted and the local television stations present our protest on the nightly news. The law firm has clearly been embarrassed and the reality of civilian killings brought out in a manner that will be impossible to hide for any public relations firm.

November 22. Students have been working on paper proposals for the final papers. Though the final assignment has to critically engage with what has already been done during the quarter, the students are free to design their own projects. There are proposals for critical essays, memoirs, stories, a play, some poems. We've been reading poems in class. A couple of students have also written poems, but both of them absolutely forbid me to discuss their poems with others. I read aloud an old poem of mine in order to address, however inadequately, the issue of race that certainly mediates the student-teacher relationship in the classes I teach:

I leave the door open
when I teach. And turn back
to spell on the board the word
they said they "didn't get."
"Oh that!" they say, moving
quickly to the next point. Sometimes
I apologize. They understand
I don't have to. "No big deal."
"Doesn't bother me." We agree
to hide our embarrassment.
And put everything within
quotes (like "they" and "I")
to keep things manageable.
I turn from the board: black
wall with weak ribs of chalk.
My voice rises, fills the room
and moves out of the door.
It dances in the corridor, tripping
with its foreign accent
those calmly walking past.

November 27. The course's last section: Self-Critique ("Lest we forget . . .").

We read sections of Lionel Trilling's "Of This Time, of That Place."
Howe, the narrator, is going through his students' papers. We pause at the
following passage: "Howe picked up Tertan's paper again. It was clear that
none of the routine marginal comments, no 'sent. str.' or 'punct.' or 'vocab.'
could cope with this torrential rhetoric. He read ahead, contesting himself
with underscoring the errors against the time when he should have the
necessary 'conference' with Tertan . . ." Here, we go back to the previous
paragraph and note that Howe had not been moved to call for a conference
or even offer the routine comments when he is done reading another paper
where the student had answered the question "Who am I?" with the words:
"I am Arthur J. Casebeer Jr. My father is Arthur J. Casebeer and my
grandfather was Arthur J. Casebeer before him. My mother is Nina Wimble
Casebeer. Both of them are college graduates and my father is in insurance.
I was born in St. Louis eighteen years ago and we still make our residence
there."

In trying to understand what has been the pedagogical mode in our own
class, I propose to the students that a more productive class must differ from
Howe's in two salient respects. First, the routine marginal comments are
clearly inadequate in either case. Second, the issue cannot be resolved in the
course of a private conference; rather, it has to be discussed collectively in the
class. In a course titled "Remembering to Write" it was not at all inappro-
priate, I think, to recall that in our work we had consistently tried to
problematize the commonsensical and, further, to always address it as a
social problem.

November 30. Yesterday we discussed Maya Angelou's essay "Graduation."
Today, we try to continue that discussion in relation to the last text in the
course, Roger Rapoport's "Listen to the White Graduate, You Might Learn
Something." We try to ask what it is that burdens Angelou's discourse with
such responsibility? ("I was no longer simply a member of the proud
graduating class of 1940; I was a proud member of the wonderful, beautiful
Negro race.") And, what compels Rapoport's discourse to assume the irony
that would lampoon any pompous assumption of worth? ("Afterward we
rushed off to a friend's party and pondered our glorious futures. Here, amidst
piles of potato salad, cold cuts, and brownies, was the educational elite of
civilization's most advanced state—the breast-fed generation off to conquer
the world.") There are many other questions. As someone who must self-
critically offer an explanation for what we have done during this course, I find
myself switching between the discourses of Angelou and Rapoport. This
seems necessary from a position which acknowledges that there is a resistance to theory; or, to put it in another way, I must understand that I am teaching middle or upper-middle class students in midwestern America. So, I end the class by pressing on them the need to understand themselves as writers within history—even if that means recognizing that they are produced as, and are comfortable with, being outside it.

**December 15.** Such a cold vacation! To add some warmth to a rather cheerless existence, all I have are small bits of good news. Today, the local *Star Tribune* reports, "Four partners and one associate lawyer in the O'Connor and Hannan law firm resigned Thursday because of the firm's refusal to sever its links to Salvadoran President Alfredo Cristiani." The article also says that the Minneapolis City Council is almost certain to drop the firm because of the latter’s ties with Cristiani:

After the slaying of six Jesuits last month in El Salvador, the protesters, organized under the banner of the O'Connor & Hannan Campaign, persuaded a majority of the council to support a resolution cosponsored by Council Members Johnson, Brian, and Coyle. That resolution would end the city's $500,000-a-year contract for legal work with O'Connor and Hannan on January 15. At least nine of the 13 council members have indicated support for it.

*University of Minnesota*
*Minneapolis, Minnesota*

**Works Cited**


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**Winterowd Award Winners Announced**

The second annual W. Ross Winterowd Award for the most outstanding book on composition theory published in 1990 was awarded to Sharon Crowley for *The Methodical Memory: Invention in Current-Traditional Rhetoric*. Honorable mention went to Deborah Brandt for *Literacy as Involvement: The Acts of Writers, Readers, and Texts*.

The award, which was generously endowed by Professor Winterowd, includes a cash prize and an attractive framed citation. The selection committee was chaired by Lynn Z. Bloom. Professor Winterowd presented the awards during the Association of Teachers of Advanced Composition meeting at the CCCC Convention in Boston.

Send nominations for the 1991 W. Ross Winterowd Award to Gary A. Olson, editor; *Journal of Advanced Composition*; Department of English; University of South Florida; Tampa, FL 33620-5550.