also wants to find ways for writers, students, and teachers to write themselves differently. Given her desire to connect how we write with how we teach, then, it is important not to overlook the contributions this book makes to composition pedagogy. Anglo-American Feminist Challenges demonstrates that both rhetoric and composition studies are concerned with the composition of subjects and cultures in language. Ratcliffe’s book thus truly joins rhetoric with composition studies, raising and answering questions that drive each field: how does language compose subjects and cultures? How can we use language to compose subjects and cultures differently? How can rhetoric and composition studies be a way to theorize our own positioning in relationship to an Other? What possibilities are available and unavailable to us and our students in canonical and non-canonical discourses? Ratcliffe’s provocative study demonstrates that feminist work on writing and language must inform and transform rhetoric and composition studies.


Reviewed by Merry G. Perry, University of South Florida

Since the early 1980s, feminist scholars have become increasingly interested in considering multiple aspects of women’s lives: the public and the private, the autobiographical and the theoretical, the meditative and the pedagogical. In order to illustrate how speaking, reading, writing, and teaching represent intertwined and crucial ways to construct meaning in life, Women/Writing/Teaching presents twenty women’s autobiographical visions of their own experiences. The contributors represent a variety of women, including instructors of composition, creative writing, and women’s studies. Each author explores particular configurations of her gender, class, ethnicity, personality, culture, and history to reveal how her teaching and writing identity has been shaped. The text is divided into three parts: Silence and Words, Authority and Authorship, and Visions of Embodied Teaching. Although the authors of these collected essays come from diverse backgrounds, many of them discuss similar struggles with gaining a voice in a patriarchal society. Eleven of these essays were written specifically for this collection, while nine are reprinted from previous publications.
Women/Writing/Teaching represents a welcome addition to the increasing number of texts that apply a feminist lens to theoretical and pedagogical works. If you enjoy reading autobiographical narratives of women's struggles, then you will appreciate most of the essays in this collection. If instead you prefer a more theoretically focused work, then a few of these essays might disappoint you. Although I am somewhat disappointed that the text's primary focus is on narrative rather than theory, I hasten to add that several of the essays exemplify some of the best feminist autobiographical writing.

The text begins with one of my favorite essays: Lynn Bloom's "Teaching College English as a Woman." Bloom juxtaposes her early struggles as an adjunct and temporary instructor in the academy—what she terms "my job as a ventriloquist's dummy"—with her increasing commitment to her profession. Bloom's voice is refreshingly candid: she discusses her escape from a rapist in a dormitory shower in Stockholm, the trials and tribulations of cross-country commuting, and why the women who taught first-year writing at a midwestern university were referred to as "Heights Housewives" by the male full-time faculty. Bloom's empowering narrative teaches us that women will gain autonomy and power when they learn how to gain voice and refuse to be treated as potential victims.

Another outstanding essay that explores links among authority, autonomy, and work is Linda Brodkey's "Writing on the Bias." Brodkey uses a sewing metaphor to illustrate how both her writing and her mother's sewing result from a union of their physical, emotional, intellectual, and imaginative capabilities. Just as clothes are created using fabric cut on the bias, writing is constructed by words that reveal an author's own bias or "angle of vision." Brodkey contends that writers who attempt to negate the bias by using the objective third person only reveal their own attempts to silence the arguments of others.

Most of the authors in this collection describe at least one personal experience in which they were silenced as women. Gaining a voice often requires one to cross a crucial barrier: language. Both Min-zhan Lu and Judith Ortiz Cofer describe how a bilingual upbringing had an impact on their sense of self. Lu considers her childhood experiences in Communist China, where she spoke Standard Chinese at school and both English and a Shanghai dialect of Chinese at home. Ultimately, only her school language was sanctioned. This situation resulted in tremendous frustration and confusion for Lu, frustration that she was unable to articulate until adulthood. As revealed by Lu's later work, this linguistic conflict and cultural struggle taught her how to negotiate between different languages and identities. Similarly, Cofer describes the problems and resulting anxieties of her bilingual upbringing. She acknowledges that while such difficulties were painful, they also taught her how to be flexible and how to be a "survivor in language."
Many of these essays reveal the powerful influence of family upon one’s sense of identity, self, and voice. For example, in a fascinating coauthored essay, Elaine and Gillian Maimon connect authorship with a web of three generations of mother-daughter storytelling. While Elaine reveals how her mother’s passion for reading endowed her with a love of drama and performance that she translated into personal authority, Gillian describes how a legacy of reading and writing contributed to an emerging sense of voice during her teaching internship, prompting her to challenge her supervising teacher. Similarly, Nancy Sommers explores her family background and her early career in academia to determine the reasons for her dependence on false notions of authority that constrain her voice as a woman. She conceives of a place “between the drafts” where one can feel the “pull” of one’s own voice as it struggles to create knowledge in relation to and against other voices. She envisions genuine authorship as a way to unite life and writing so that one may develop a sense of personal authority.

Another outstanding essay in this collection is an excerpt from bell hooks’ *Teaching to Transgress: Education As the Practice of Freedom.* Here, hooks makes a compelling argument for “engaged pedagogy”—teaching as the intellectual and spiritual growth of both our students and ourselves. Drawing on the ideas of Paulo Freire and Nhat Hanh, hooks encourages teachers to embrace the challenge of personal self-actualization, resist dominant and normative discourses, and challenge students to engage in critical thinking. This essay provides one of the most persuasive and empowering arguments in this entire book.

*Women/Writing/Teaching* provides readers with a wide variety of women’s autobiographical voices. In my opinion, the essays that successfully articulate the theoretical implications of autobiographical narrative make the book worth owning. While I am certain that the autobiographical narratives in this book will be empowering to some readers, I worry that feminist scholarship in composition will continue to lag a decade or two behind that in other fields. Instead of continuing to focus on recognizing women’s shared difficulties in gaining a voice—a subject central to 1970s and 1980s mainstream feminist theory—feminist compositionists need to focus on critiquing issues of difference, power imbalances, and representations of both sexes based on gender, race, class, ethnicity, sexuality, and age. In other words, we need to move beyond a politics of “recognition” to a politics of “representation.” Feminists have identified numerous ways in which women are silenced, disenfranchised, and subjugated by patriarchal forces. Now, we must critique the numerous power imbalances reflected in ideology and reinforced by culture. Rather that focusing on the fact of women’s oppression, we need to determine why oppression occurs by critiquing the cultural forces, beliefs, forms, and representations that reinforce
existing hierarchies. Feminist compositionists need to explore these issues to effect change, and the writing classroom provides the perfect environment to read, discuss, and write about culture and ideology. However, in the meantime I applaud Schmidt’s efforts to add to the multiplicity of feminist voices contributing to contemporary composition theory and pedagogy, and I look forward to hearing future voices join the conversation.

_Dramas of Solitude: Narratives of Retreat in American Nature Writing_,

Reviewed by Christopher J. Keller, University of Florida

On first glancing at the title of Randall Roorda’s new book, few would find reason to think it related to composition studies. But _Dramas of Solitude: Narratives of Retreat in American Nature Writing_, whatever its title indicates, provides an engaging account of how retreat narratives function, how they resist standard labels and generic classifications as “nature writing,” and how they can be used in the writing classroom. Roorda analyzes retreat narratives not just as texts that merely facilitate traditional literary analyses, but as works that offer the necessary resources for ecological literacy and “participatory” readings, those which readers may reasonably aspire to produce.

_Dramas of Solitude_ has two main goals. First, it narrows the field of “nature writing,” delineating the genre according to “repeated instantiations of a certain core story” that depicts specific narrative movements—keeping in mind that “not every text depicting nature ranks as ‘nature writing’ any more than every story containing mystery is a ‘mystery.’” Second, it makes retreat narratives important to rhetoric and composition studies by questioning how student literacy and identity are formed; how writing, or composing, differs in solitude and society; and finally, how rhetoric and composition as a discipline might be restructured by new examinations, definitions, and uses of these texts.

In refiguring the field of “nature writing,” Roorda looks at some of the genre’s canonical authors in order to “identify as one further condition of the genre that the destination of retreat be figured as a community or web of relations that the writer feels implicated in and is concerned to comprehend.” Thus, nature is not meant to be only a backdrop for human events and representations. Roorda focuses much