ences and his own. I will challenge him to become accountable to this history, to explore the specific ways in which he benefits—even today—from slavery and other past injustices, to recognize the role “white” privilege plays in his life, and to question the social inscriptions that have labeled him “white.” And I’ll take this conversation with me as I return to the classroom. Despite the risks involved, I’ll continue interrogating and exposing students’ assumptions about “race,” identities, and U.S. culture. Perhaps I’ll share my concerns with my students. Maybe I’ll even use my own experiences as a daughter of the African diaspora, bleached almost to “whiteness” by a family history of passing. Maybe I won’t. But whatever I decide to do, I’ll keep encouraging my students to recognize the limitations in Enlightenment-based views of self-enclosed identity and the relational nature of all identities. And this, I believe, is in keeping with Caughie’s argument.

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Reviewed by Elizabeth Ervin, University of North Carolina, Wilmington

In the first paragraph of Citizen Critics: Literary Public Spheres, Rosa Eberly confesses, “In writing Citizen Critics, I felt I was driving around in a place I had never been, using a map I had never seen. And I was never sure whether the map had not yet caught up to the road signs or the signs to the map.” I too felt this same sense of simultaneously exhilarating and frustrating disorientation. Eberly’s thesis is complex, and the range of scholarship she draws on to support it is vast. Yet, my effort to absorb her argument didn’t always pay off: concepts that are meticulously woven together early in the book never resurface, and the book ends without adequately exploring the implications of Eberly’s investigation.

Citizen Critics is organized around analyses of pieces of public discourse (mostly reviews, editorials, and letters to the editor of various publications) written in response to four controversial works of literature: James Joyce’s Ulysses, Henry Miller’s Tropic of Cancer, Bret Easton Ellis’ American Psycho, and Andrea Dworkin’s Mercy. Eberly believes that these analyses can illustrate the ways in which citizen discourse participates in social change alongside discourse produced by legal and aesthetic experts or in the interests of media and corporate elites. A central
premise of the book is that idealized, ahistorical concepts of “the reader,” “the audience,” and “the public” have been constructed and commodified mainly for and by critics without attending to the unruly discourse of actual readers and citizens—discourse that often disrupts those neat constructions. In the process, Eberly argues, the potential social impact of citizen discourse is neutralized. These concerns lead Eberly to adopt rhetorical and empirical rather than “rationalistic” means to study cultural texts, a method that, she believes, demonstrates “the discursive processes through which cultural works . . . affect society” and thus reveals much about the quality of our democracy. This form of analysis allows Eberly to focus on the topoi generated by citizens’ arguments—including community standards, the nature of art, the authority of expertise, and even publicity itself—rather than on the formal properties of their texts.

Intersecting Eberly’s rhetorical focus are theories of the public sphere, especially those of Jürgen Habermas and his commentators. From this vantage point she draws several useful distinctions. The first is between public intellectuals, who are primarily concerned with “explaining the views of experts to nonexperts,” and citizen critics, who produce discourse “from an ethos of citizen first and foremost—not as expert or spokesperson for a workplace or as member of a club or organization.” Another is between literary and bourgeois public spheres. Habermas sees “the public sphere in the world of letters” as a precursor to that of the world of politics because it allows readers to develop a public consciousness—that is, an understanding that the private act of reading is shared by others who have access to the same published texts. For Habermas, the vitality of public spheres can be maintained only through a kind of rigorous and reflective debate that he calls “critical publicity.” Eberly believes that the four novels featured in her study engender just this sort of debate, thus indicating that literary public spheres can “again create the structures for a robust extraliterary public sphere.” In one of her most innovative moves, she demonstrates the role of rhetoric in this process: “Literary public spheres are discursive spaces in which private people can come together in public, bracket some of their differences, and invent common interests by arguing in speech or writing about literary and cultural texts. They are able to do so because, by moving from reader to rhetor, they have begun to manifest a public-oriented subjectivity, that is, a self that is more or less able to turn private reactions about literary or cultural texts into discourses that address some shared concerns.” Eberly suggests that defining literary public spheres as rhetorically constructed and analyzing them rhetorically
can shed more light on the study of literature as a form of democratic praxis than even literary theory. Her argument is persuasive, and for that reason *Citizen Critics* may do more than any book since Wayne Booth’s *The Rhetoric of Fiction* to make the study of rhetoric and the study of literature mutually illuminating.

Of the four studies featured in *Citizen Critics*, Eberly’s discussion of *Tropic of Cancer* strikes me as the most compelling. She limits her analysis to public discourse in the Chicago area, where the publication of *Tropic of Cancer* was accompanied not only by extralegal censorship measures (such as a police action to remove the book from stores), but also by an unusually active literary public sphere whose participants ultimately influenced court decisions about that book as well as about books embroiled in future obscenity controversies. Eberly attributes the vigor of debate to clashes of loci of quantity ("what is best for the most people") and loci of quality (often linked to issues of rights or principles, such as freedom of speech or choice)—terms she adopts from Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca’s *The New Rhetoric*. These loci affected the shape of virtually every topoi generated by the debate over *Tropic of Cancer*: how “the public interest” was defined; how censorship issues were justified, denounced, or evaded; and whether “social value” (the central legal criterion used in censorship decisions related to the book) implied widespread cultural importance, literary merit, or endorsement of some elusive “community standard.” Public efforts to define “community standards” were especially complicated, evoking questions regarding both the geographical boundaries of “the community” (local or national?; urban or suburban?) and its most authoritative members (“average readers” or literary critics?; “individual readers” or “the people” who would not read *Tropic of Cancer* and therefore could protect those who wished to do so?; “mass audiences” or elite audiences?; newspaper editors or judges?). Eberly’s analysis suggests two conclusions that reveal a central tension that continues to characterize public discourse in the United States: that “public discussions can often so delegitimate institutional power that institutions and their authority need to be reconsidered”; and that when aesthetic discussions of literary texts displace those about the social effects of literature in the context of public debate, “the arguments of uncredentialed public critics lose their legitimacy.” While the former suggests that citizen critics can play a subversive role in discussing matters of shared concern, the latter reminds us of the ways in which public intellectuals can actually constrain the very forms of participation that they think they’re advocating.
Like the discussion of *Tropic of Cancer*, the other studies in *Citizen Critics* consist mainly of carefully historicized close readings of public discourse and the inference of relevant topoi. Although these discussions are fascinating, their contribution to the overall argument is somewhat muted by the fact that Eberly does not invoke more consistently the densely imagined theoretical context she establishes in the introduction. For example, in reading the chapter on *Mercy*, I developed some reservations about the author's empiricist orientation. While Eberly clearly identifies why the novel *should* have been controversial, she is somewhat surprised to find very few reviews of *Mercy* and no responses to reviewers' comments on the part of citizen critics; she interprets this as evidence of the difficulty of making personal voices and experiences politically authoritative within increasingly specialized public spheres. Eberly understands the risks of this interpretation—admitting, for example, that it is "impossible to support a claim based on silence"—but she does not problematize it. Looking back, I see that she explains her approach in the book's introduction, citing Michel Foucault's belief that discourse—including silences—has agency outside of authors' intentions. It's an intriguing point of analysis, but it would have been useful for Eberly to reiterate it in the context of her discussion of *Mercy*. The same is true of several other theoretical assumptions she articulates early on, such as those related to reader response criticism: they simply do not carry through the text.

The final pages of *Citizen Critics* are devoted to a sketch of what Eberly calls "a pedagogy of publics and public spheres, in which the classroom plays a processual role as a protopublic space." Here the author distinguishes her pedagogy from those that are more commonly discussed within the discipline of rhetoric and composition; she is rightly critical of assignments of the sort that ask students to write "imaginary" letters to the editor for generic public audiences. At the heart of her pedagogy is a shift from focusing on the formal qualities of texts (What makes a good letter to the editor? or What makes this letter more effective than this one?) to focusing on the topoi generated by those texts (in effect, the same strategy she employs in her own analysis). This shift does indeed strike me as significant, but within a few lines Eberly's pedagogy quickly begins to sound just as hypothetical as the practices she decries. For example, she acknowledges that "classrooms can never be truly public spaces" because of such institutional constraints as grades and academic schedules, but she argues that in a protopublic space, "students can engage in the praxis of rhetoric, an art whose *telos* is *krisis*, or judgment." However, she then
adds, cryptically, that such a space can allow students to "study and practice the discourses of literary public spheres as well as write arguments that they may choose to send out for publication, thus engaging with and possibly even forming publics.... [T]exts are invention prompts for discussion about various publics and their possible reaction to the texts in question" (emphasis added). In other words, the classroom environment once again precludes what we might consider to be genuine engagement with public spheres, merely allowing further practice in exploring the contours of such a discursive space.

Eberly includes in the appendix an interesting assignment in which she asks students to call a local radio talk show and record themselves making and supporting an argument, but in the end I’m not sure how this is substantively different from those assignments that ask students to write and send grant proposals and letters to the editors or to negotiate the complexities of service-oriented writing. Her analysis essentially ignores the sophisticated work on public discourse being done in rhetoric and composition—work that moves students into complex analyses and engagements with actual publics. (Eberly’s discussion might likewise have benefitted from some of the literary theory that deals with vernacular voices in the public sphere—Thomas McLaughlin’s *Street Smarts and Critical Theory* [Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1996] comes immediately to mind.) In short, then, while Eberly’s pedagogical innovations might indeed suggest a consequential shift away from genre-based pedagogies that likewise share “a passion for the habit of public writing as a means of reinvigorating public life and citizenship,” her discussion is so brief (less than five pages out of nearly two hundred) that I’m left with more questions than ideas.

The notion of protopublic spheres also raises more broadly ideological questions, and, in fact, my most serious reservations have less to do with Eberly’s book than with the ambivalent attitudes that academics, specifically rhetoricians, have forged in relation to various public spheres. As Eberly shows in the *Ulysses* case in particular, literary “experts,” in their defense of “art,” can often be scornful of nonexpert audiences. Perhaps academics most engaged in public discourse do not share this sense of themselves as generators of privileged discourse; perhaps this is an unfair stereotype that members of nonacademic spheres use to dismiss the well-intentioned efforts of “cultural elites.” Fair enough. But the fact remains that many letters to the editor (and other forms of citizen criticism, such as protest signs) invoke values and discourses that are racist, sexist, homophobic, violent, reactionary—in short, inimical to
those of many academics. We might have a great deal of respect for the right of these writers to express their opinions publicly; we might even admire them for their courage in expressing perspectives contrary to those who are presumed to have more cultural authority. But do we really want to perpetuate such perspectives? It seems that when we teach public discourse and support our students' (and neighbors') efforts toward citizen criticism we are in fact hoping that a certain kind of discourse prevails: a discourse that manifests our sense of what is valid, persuasive, and just, even if it doesn't assume the formal properties of academic writing. In other words, I'm not sure whether academics want to prepare students to be citizen critics or to be public intellectuals, and I wish that Eberly's study had wrestled more with this conflict. I wish that she had given me more insight into how to critique citizen discourse without obliterating it, how to value such discourse without tacitly supporting its (often offensive) underlying premises.

Citizen Critics ends without grappling with many of the important questions that it raises. Nevertheless, while I don't think the energy and complexity of Eberly's introduction are sustained throughout the book, it is still an important and worthwhile read. Among other things, it offers one of the most lucid and inspiring explanations of why rhetoric continues to matter beyond the composition classroom: "[It] matters because, in literary public spheres, rhetoric—which demands engagement with the living—enables literary and other cultural texts to matter." Anyone who doubts that rhetoric will continue to matter would be well advised to read this book.


Reviewed by Donna LeCourt, Colorado State University

Many of us in composition have developed a rather complicated relationship to technology in the years since Cindy Selfe and Kate Kiefer edited the first issue of Computers and Composition in November, 1983. While early work in computers and writing put composition at the forefront of educational technology initiatives, many of us have felt somewhat uneasy about more recent initiatives. That technology has become a key site of