
Letter from the Editor

At the end of "The Star Thrower," Loren Eiseley stands on a desolate beach, pitching washed-ashore starfish into the surf. The gesture is largely futile: too many starfish, too many waves. No matter. Eiseley has just conquered a crisis of faith and spirit, and even—perhaps especially—futile action redeems.

As much as I'd like to picture WPAs as heroic star throwers, the image is too romantically overwrought. But there is something in the gesture, if not the figure, that makes the metaphor appealing. As I write, this is the seventh autumn I've served as a WPA, and I've come to understand the vanity of my early imagining that the writing program would be neatly "fixed" by now. Each fall brings a new wave of teaching assistants, each change in higher administration a new need to justify pedagogies and policies. Our theoretically sound curriculum of 1988 is twice revised, and three generations of computer hardware and software in our classrooms promise only many more, in shorter wave-lengths. Marriage, I've learned, doesn't always last forever.

The coastline itself changes. The summer of 1995 brought scattered public attacks on the goals and practices of college writing teachers. Facing powerful cultural forces and numberless issues that we can never finally resolve, WPAs might understandably retreat to status quo-ism. That few of us do so enlivens us all. When Loren Eiseley confronts the ocean at Costabel, significantly, he joins a fellow star thrower.

With this issue Eric Martin, colleague and friend, joins *WPA* as Managing Editor. Anne Greenseth continues her extraordinary work as editorial assistant, Kelly Lowe having taken the tenure track to Ohio. As I enter a second year working with the current editorial board, I continue to value their smartness and generosity. I also continue to value the fine work I'm privileged to read.

In the pages that follow, Nedra Reynolds reads instructors' manuals as artifacts of our assumptions about teaching and teachers. Chris Anson, David Jolliffe, and Nancy Shapiro describe a powerful strategy for staff development. Suzan Harrison discusses an across-the-curriculum portfolio assessment, reminding us in the process that small colleges, too, have WPAs and writing programs, something often lost in the world of state universities that may seem to constitute this organization. Chris Burnham and Cheryl Nims look at assessment from another vantage point, grounded in business management. Nancy Thompson and Rhonda Grego offer a strategy for teaching "basic" writers when institutions decide no longer to give credit for "basic" courses. Finally, you'll find the journal's first attempt at an e-mail directory of members. Happy reading and Happy New Year.

Doug Hesse