

Remembering a Past—Revising the Present

James D. Williams, ed. *Visions and Revisions: Continuity and Change in Rhetoric and Composition*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP. 2002. 288 pages. \$25.00 (paper).

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In James D. Williams's *Visions and Revisions: Continuity and Change in Rhetoric and Composition*, four respected figures in composition's twentieth century renaissance reminisce and report: Ross Winterowd (to whom the book is dedicated), Richard Lloyd-Jones, Frank D'Angelo, and John Warnock. In Part Two, five others (Irene Clark, David Fleming, Randy Allen Harris, George Hillocks and Williams himself) "Examine [. . .] the Legacy" of this renaissance. The book's tidy, two-part, generative organizational structure promises to lead readers, especially ones like me, to experience a sense of old, familiar territory re-explored, reawakened, and revitalized and to follow threads from the (lived as well as public) past spun, in Part Two, into a continuous, more highly-textured, new weave.

To some extent, Williams's book lives out its promise. As Winterowd speaks, his voice transports me, vividly, to the seminar room in which I first discussed his work. There, across the table from Ed Corbett in the mid-1970s, I reported on an essay from an early Winterowd work and spoke with the enthusiasm inspired by my first CCCC, where I had encountered Winterowd, the living, breathing human. My report was one of the intellect and of lived experience, simultaneously.

Winterowd and the other "pioneers," as Williams calls them, do provide invaluable records for historians. We learn that Winterowd studied under Alfred Kitzhaber, for example—a direct link from the earliest historian (according to Bob Connors) to the originators of one of the first doctoral granting rhetoric and composition programs. We hear Lloyd-Jones contextualize the "Students' Right to Their Own Language" and offer interesting insights into CCCC's relationship to social problems and scholarly knowledge. We are reminded of the role linguistics played in composition. We follow the conference get-togethers (and high jinks) that led to the formation of the Rhetoric Society of America. We hear inside stories on how conference programs were put together (and what they represent about the field's evolving scholarship). And we realize how many important figures clustered in the midwest plains (Nebraska, Iowa) and the southwest (Arizona and California), a realization that gives a sense of geographical and/or familial "explanation" to our field's recent history. Reading these four, I

had a strong sense that one could construct a geography and genealogy, a family tree branching out from pioneers across certain geographical locations that could help explain the field's recent intellectual history. (The family in William's book, we might note, is with only one exception male.) Equally strong, however, is my sense that readers without an already developed contour of the field's history since, roughly, the 1960s, could easily get lost because of the microcosmic detail and the meandering style of reminiscence that some of the chapters follow. Others may find both valuable and/or charming.

More problematic (for me) are the remaining five essays and their "fit"—with each other and with the history laid out in the first section. Williams indicates that each chapter in Part Two will examine "some [. . .] revisions" (vii) to the field in the decades between the 1970s and now. Setting us up to expect revisions "in detail," Williams perhaps indicates that the view in Part Two does not intend to be comprehensive. And so we get, from Clark, a discussion of genre that calls for genre awareness, explicit genre instruction, pedagogical emphasis on argument, and a blurring of genres. We get from Fleming a prediction for the end of composition-rhetoric that argues from premises established by Douglas Ehninger, a speech communications rhetorician, an argument that leaves me wanting Fleming to acknowledge how institutional, disciplinary segregation impinges on the prediction. We read Williams's gloss on liberal democracy, individualism, and more, plus Harris' argument on knowing, rhetoric, and science in the disciplinary style of linguistics. And we read a useful qualitative addition to Hillocks' meta-analytic study of epistemic (and other) classrooms. (This chapter, in its case study transcripts of classroom interactions and Hillock's fine-grained analysis of them, would be superbly useful for new teachers.)

While the term "rhetoric" in most of the chapter titles intends to link them, its varied definitions, its multiple meanings, and its links to composition are only acknowledged, not explained. As a result, I leave the book feeling that except for Part One and Hillocks' chapter in Part Two, I have read about a field I hardly know. Rhetoricians of science might feel more at home, as would readers who agree with E.D. Hirsch's variety of cultural literacy, Francis Fukuyama's analysis of technology, and conservative views toward democratic education.

