

## Deriving Backwriting from Writing Back<sup>1</sup>

by Rebecca Moore Howard

“Writing back,” a term from postcolonial studies, was the official theme of the 2003 conference of the International Writing Centers Association and the National Conference on Peer Tutoring in Writing. It provided

...an invitation to create responses to the common, everyday practices and beliefs in our writing centers. This evokes the closing segment of many letters and emails: “Please write back.”

The “writing back” being described here is *invited* writing back—writing back that the first writer *wants*.

The next month, another conference on *writing back* was held in Sweden (“Writing Back in/and Translation”). It was a conference about translation, and its call for papers defined *writing back* in this way: “In formal postcolonial jargon, *writing back* signifies an interplay where one cultural practice—commonly called the Western—is being modified, resisted or abandoned to give room for alternative modes of expression and creation.”

The fact that the writing centers conference and a European conference on translation both chose *writing back* as their theme should not go unremarked. What could conferences on writing centers and translation possibly have in common? Why would both invoke the notion of “writing back”? At first glance, postcolonial theory might seem to fit much more readily into a conference on translation. Yet the sense of synchronicity and discord that *writing back* brought to the IWCA/NCPTW conference made it an interesting theme to explore. My own exploration of the possible applications of *writing back* to writing centers—and the explorations of other conference-

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goers—led me to reflect on the ways in which compositionists in general and writing center practitioners see themselves and their students as outsiders in a hegemonic academy. What do we gain by claiming or recognizing our position as the disfranchised Other? From that perspective, how do we imagine our work in the academy, and how might that work best be accomplished? If we are, indeed, academically marginalized, how much and in what ways can we resist that which oppresses us before we find ourselves out of the academy altogether? In this essay adaptation of my IWCA/NCPTW keynote,<sup>2</sup> I reflect on the ways in which some of my work in composition has been taken up—by my institution and by the national press—in negative ways. In composition studies and in writing center work, critical discourse is a positive value. We encourage it in our students, and we admire it in our colleagues' work. I would go so far as to suggest that critical discourse is a value that both defines and connects composition studies and writing center work. *Writing back* comes naturally to us. But, as I explain in this essay, I have learned through personal experience that we are sometimes writing back without even realizing it, and that the critical discourse that we value can become not the tool of social and individual change that we imagine, but a weapon of punishment used against us.

### *Writing back*

Postcolonial theories of *writing back* help me think through such questions. Alastair Pennycook, an Australian critical linguist who has taught English in Japan and Hong Kong, promotes what he calls a "concept of worldliness" that takes into account both the ways in which English is imposed on students and citizens worldwide and the ways in which English functions as a global *lingua franca*. In Pennycook's account, the postcolonial *writing back* is part of this dual sense of worldliness, in which meaning derives not from a language system but is instead "produced in social and personal activity"; it not only reflects but *constitutes* social reality. Pennycook continues,

The production of such meanings, however, is always an issue of cultural politics, of struggles over meanings as they are located within language and discourse. Thus...language is as much a *site* as it is a *means* for struggle. (267)

In his vision of the worldliness of English and the role of writing back, meaning is more important than structure; struggles over meaning are struggles over cultural power; and writing back to the colonizers enables the subordinate members of a society to create new meanings.<sup>3</sup>

The 2003 IWCA/NCPTW conference program drew on these ideas explicitly:

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The connection between writing centers and the idea of *writing back* suggests ways to reflect on, revise or rewrite our familiar notions about writing center theory and practice, including writing center history, tutor and director roles and responsibilities, academic discourse, plagiarism, and our "canon."

But to whom would the writing center be writing back? Where is the imperial force of which the writing center constitutes the empire that would write back? Most immediately, in many cases, it is the English department. In all cases, it is the academy. And in all cases, it is the culture in which U.S. higher education participates.

Now, in the words of songwriter Tom Waits, we are "mov[ing] right into the religious material": the daily realities of composition in general and writing centers in particular. In her conference presentation at IWCA/NCPTW 2003, Melissa Nicholas explores the ways in which the writing center legitimates composition studies by being even more marginalized.<sup>4</sup> Nicholas draws on the work of Sharon Crowley and Susan Miller, who talk about the ways in which composition studies—its teachers, its students, its courses—and of course its writing centers—are *scripted to be* in an institutionally marginalized position. And her argument is confirmed at my own institution, where our administration has discouraged full-time faculty from working in the writing center, instead wanting to concentrate all our teaching efforts in the classroom, which is presumed to be a more important site of pedagogy. The Syracuse Writing Program is (often) valued by university administrators; they therefore support the idea of tenure-track, full-time compositionists and are justly proud of the scholarly work conducted by the Writing faculty. The writing center, however, is a place of academic *labor*—no place for "real" faculty.<sup>5</sup> Writing center work at my institution is therefore the almost-exclusive work of contingent faculty, teaching assistants, and peer consultants. I agree with Nicholas: composition is low on the academic yardstick; writing centers, even lower.

It's not that the value of composition pedagogy and writing center work has yet to be recognized and appreciated by the academy; rather, it's that our value was *always already* recognized and appreciated: writing programs and writing centers are the gatekeepers, the border police, the enforcers of standards, the transmitters of *basic skills*. According to the commonsense logic of the academy, these skills are so basic that any literate person can transmit them. Hence, people who lack the credentials or good sense to pursue better jobs are consigned to teaching composition and working in writing centers.

This hierarchical logic is not an error made by an uninformed academy, an academy to which correct information (the “correct information” being that composition and writing center work are socially important, intellectually vibrant activities) can be delivered. This hierarchical logic *is a necessary part of* the academy. *We can't* be valued as high-level intellectuals; if that were to happen, the academy would be acknowledging that its linguistic and rhetorical standards are something other than or more than the necessary tools of good thinking, and the already-“mastered” tools of the highly literate. In a hierarchical academy obsessed with measuring students, teachers, courses, and learning, such an acknowledgment could be disastrous.

Our collective recognition of and resistance to the marginalization of the teaching of writing is part of what I am referring to as the “religious material” of composition studies, in which the subaltern Good—the compositionists and tutors whose lives are dedicated to liberating students—struggle against Evil, the unfeeling institutions that oppress the compositionists and the tutors, as well as the students whom they are endeavoring to liberate. In this religious context, the notion of *writing back* holds great appeal. Students write back to teachers; tutors write back to curriculum; scholars write back to institutions; composition courses built on critical pedagogy write back to hegemonic society; and so on. All of us marginalized subjects in the academic enterprise have, in *writing back*, the possibility of winning; of rescuing the academy from itself; or at least of explaining (to ourselves and others) why losing is the honorable choice, and perhaps of establishing a comfortable dialogue across boundaries that results in a feel-good consensus.

But here's where the notion of *writing back* in its application to writing centers ruptures: *writing back*, as it is deployed in postcolonial theory, speaks to the experience of a colonized community after the moment of political independence, as it begins to forge a hybrid, syncretic language in which a national literature can be developed (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin). We can establish no analogous position for the writing center, because the writing center had no existence prior to an imperial moment. On the contrary, the writing center, like composition courses, is a creation of and tool of the academic endeavor to maintain linguistic and rhetorical standards; to mark writers who do not meet those standards; and to demand that they willingly accede to and adopt those standards. Nor do the students who come to the writing center constitute an identifiable culture; those students, as we well know, are heterogeneous, indeed. Hence, to speak of *writing back* in the writing center is to speak of something different from though in some measure resonant with the postcolonial experience of developing a national literature.

### *Backwriting*

I propose to differentiate these two meanings of *writing back* by using the term *backwriting* to refer to the practices whereby writing center directors, tutors, and students might variously critique, respond to, confront, and revise the dominant academic structures whose hegemonic operations become so painfully evident in the institutional space that is the writing center. *Backwriting* incorporates elements of argument and critique but specifies the negotiation of cultural value in a context of unequal power relations. Unlike *writing back*, which functions for two distinctive cultures in conflict—one the former imperial power, the other the former colonized culture—*backwriting* can be the act of a single individual (if such a thing exists), even while it negotiates and challenges cultural premises and subject positions.

What might the relays between *backwriting* and postcolonial *writing back* offer the writing center? Although the social structures postulated by postcolonial theory do not apply in U.S. writing centers, the depiction of the power of writing does. First, postcolonial theory imagines writing in the midst of conflict—a conflict over both language and culture, with language the focus of the struggle (San Juan 75). Second, it imagines writing as a tool (or, if you will, a weapon) in the conflict (Pennycook 267). Third, postcolonial theory imagines writing as a way in which those who are on the losing side of social conflict can nevertheless not only assert a place in the world but also explain to the winners that the losing side has something to offer them (Said, qtd. in Hutcheon 48). This sort of writing is a liberatory action not only for the oppressed but also for the oppressor.

It is in this vein that I interpret Stephen North's writing center ultimatum to English faculty, as well as Jesse Rosenfeld's grievance filed at McGill University.

North's famous 1984 essay, "The Idea of a Writing Center," is addressed to the English departments that often house writing centers. Having lamented the ways in which English faculty mistakenly construct the work of the writing center, North writes,

[W]e are not here to serve, supplement, back up, complement, reinforce, or otherwise be defined by any external curriculum. We are here to talk to writers. If they happen to come from your classes, you might take it as a compliment to your assignments, in that your writers are engaged in them enough to want to talk about their work. (440)

This sort of discourse, in which the marginalized (here, the writing center director) confronts the dominant (here, the English department) is familiar in our field.

Less common is the phenomenon of students using their writing to confront the dominant forces in the academy. When students do engage in confrontational writing, it is usually in cynical student newspaper editorials or in one of those wretched rate-your-professor websites.

Yet a McGill University undergraduate has dramatically confronted his institution, which had insisted that he submit his paper to Turnitin.com before it would be graded (Buckell; "McGill Student"; Schmidt; "Students Decry"). According to the October 16 *Vancouver Sun*, McGill University sophomore Jesse Rosenfeld filed a grievance when he received a zero for the assignment.

Rosenfeld says he doesn't like being treated as though he's guilty until proven innocent. Besides, he doesn't consent to the way the California-based company plans to use his original academic work.

"I'm supposed to hand in my paper to a private company, which is then entered into a data base, which the company in turn profits from. I'm indirectly helping a private company make a profit off my paper," said Rosenfeld. (Schmidt)

Few undergraduates are brave enough to risk their grades in resistance to instructors' demands. When it comes to academic assignments—which is typically what students bring to the writing center, whether they are "sent" there or whether they turn themselves over to its auspices—the resistance from students is much more subtle. And, as all of us who work in writing centers know all too well, student motivation in the writing center is often as much about grades as it is about writing. As Richard Haswell has demonstrated in his scholarship, grades matter. Students determine their major in part based on the grades they receive in courses. "Course grades, more than just a ranking among other students, predict and affiliate" (Haswell 292). Describing the ways in which educational institutions contribute to the maintenance of social order, Nancy Grimm observes that grades are a primary mechanism for that operation. Jesse Rosenfeld is a rare exception to the trend that Grimm describes: "Because universities reward and punish academic behaviors with grades and because corporations later use grades to make hiring decisions, students seem to have no choice but to conform" (57).

In other words, the backwriting that we might expect, encourage, and participate in as writing center students, tutors, and directors may be more subtle than what Stephen North and Jesse Rosenfeld dared. This does not, however, mean that it is not important. Backwriting does not have to be agonistic to be valuable. It can, for

example, make space within a course assignment for students to voice their objections in non-confrontational ways. Judith Rodby describes such a dynamic at play, and the tutor's role in it. Her writing center, she says, is staffed by tutors from the English department who disdain not only the literacy values implicit in some of the assignments but also some of the writers that they encounter from the disciplines (224). Rodby observes one tutorial session in which the tutor shifts subjectivities, aligning herself first with the assignment, then with her own literary ideals, and finally with the resisting student (228-229). Reading Rodby's chapter, I am compelled to wonder what kind of paper might result from this collaboration between writer and tutor. It might very well be a paper that reveals the traces of the writer's resistance to the assignment, as well as the tutor's alliance with that resistance. The paper would very likely accommodate the assignment, but perhaps with some unexpected twists and turns. Rodby's essay acknowledges that the instructors of the course believe that their dissatisfaction with the students' writing comes from the students' not following the very explicit directions in the assignment (231). But what the instructors may not be recognizing is the element of *backwriting* implicit in a student's failure or refusal to do the assignment exactly as directed.

It is perhaps not from writing center directors nor from the center's student clients but from the tutors themselves that the most dramatic forms of writing center *backwriting* can take place. I am thinking here of Irene Clark's calls for a post-Romantic writing center in which tutors would collaborate with student writers much more freely than noninterventionist approaches would sanction. "Concern with plagiarism in writing center instruction reflects a pervasive cultural concern with intellectual property rights that has gained particular prominence in academia," Clark says (157). Collaborative writing, a collaboration between tutor and writer in which the tutor demonstrates possibilities for the text (rather than engaging exclusively in the effort to draw them forth from the writer's subconscious) certainly functions as a form of *backwriting* in a hierarchical academic culture that is predicated on the figure of the individual, isolated, hapless, hopeless student writer whose failure (just prior to failing the paper, the course, and out of the college) is in being *sent* to the center. Collaboration between tutor and student thwarts that culture of the marked individual, asserting an alternative discourse in which learning and literacy are shared projects, the result of dialogue, debate, the trying-on of language and personas. Justin Bain describes his experiences of moving from a noninterventionist writing center to a collaborative one:

As I work with students, I am free to offer ideas, to engage them in discussions, to question them, and to discuss the implications of

rhetorical choices such as resisting and accommodating the assignments they are given. I am also free to model sentences for them, to make some marks on their papers, to offer wording suggestions, and to discuss the implications of each of these actions. In turn, students are allowed to question me, to pose their own ideas, and to negotiate or even discount what I have to say.

As a practice for the writing center, *backwriting* holds out great promise. The writing center is the place where every teacher in the university consigns the students whom they cannot or do not want to teach, the students whose writing marks them as outsiders, the students who, by virtue of being "sent" to the writing center, are yet again being marked. In an all-too-familiar pattern, these students are not being "sent" to the center in order to become members of the dominant; they are being sent in order to classify them as insufficient. The student's own complicity in this labeling is complete when she does, indeed, turn herself in to the writing center Authorities, the border police. As Tracy Hamler Carrick has demonstrated, this function of the writing center is quite different from the special tutoring that members of the privileged class receive in order to better prepare them for high-stakes examinations, examinations on which their successful performance will affirm the privilege already accorded these students, a privilege that includes never being "sent" to the writing center.

*Backwriting* holds out the promise of empowering marginalized students, not to mention their tutors and the writing center itself. And the writing center may be the academic space best positioned to forward the project of *backwriting*; their mega-marginalization, as Nicholas describes it, may also provide ideal conditions for critique and innovation. Peter Carino characterizes writing centers as the most pedagogically innovative units on their campuses, because they resist classroom- and discipline-based instruction (91). (Interestingly, Carino sees that innovation as a source of rather than result of marginalization.) Writing center directors therefore occupy "difficult rhetorical space" as they balance between conservative institutional goals for the writing center; their own marginality; and writing center traditions of innovation (Carino 92).

### *Consequences of backwriting*

*Backwriting* is not, however, an innocuous exercise in which the marginalized can happily vent their frustrations and critique the mechanisms of their own subordination; my own experience as a compositionist has made that clear. I'm a scholar of



authorship, and my particular interest is in the cultural figure of the plagiarist. Why, I ask, is that figure so important to our culture? It is, after all, a figure of recent vintage: although the word *plagiarism* derives from an ancient Latin concept, the specter of plagiarism did not become important to our culture until the nineteenth century (see McCormick; Rose; Scollon; Simmons). And now, in the early twenty-first century, the specter of plagiarism incites widespread cultural panic.

A variety of scholars (e.g., Mallon; McCabe) track contemporary plagiarism, collecting anecdotes and compiling statistics. My own scholarship tracks the trackers of contemporary plagiarism; my interest is not so much with the plagiarists themselves but with those who worry about them and who worry about the dangers they pose to civilization as we know it (see, for example, Hastings; Naude; Perlstein; "Plagiarism Soars"; Sokoloff). Mine is very much a cultural studies approach, looking at the ordinary, everyday practice of plagiarism *and* at the ordinary, everyday practice of worrying about plagiarism, and asking how these link in "creative and consequential fashion to the social order and the formation of class consciousness" (George and Trimbur 73). And my writing tends to take the form of *backwriting* to a culture that would pit students against teachers and that would deploy composition pedagogy, in writing classes and writing centers, as a way of sorting the worthy from the unworthy, the grammatically correct and citationally orthodox from the practitioners of broken English and plagiarism.

For my efforts, I've had hellfire and brimstone rained down upon me in the national media and by administrators and alumni of my own institutions. And here comes the other part of *backwriting* that our religion can too easily overlook: unlike *writing back*, it is multidirectional. Backwriting proceeds not just from the marginalized to the dominant, but also from the dominant back to the margins. Ashis Nandy, Edward Said, and Alastair Pennycook can talk all they like about how the empire's writing back benefits all the participants of a culture. But the dominant members of the culture may not see it that way. Let me supply two examples from my own experience. None of these is derived from writing center work, but rather from work in the more general discourse of composition studies. As will become apparent, however, principles and phenomena that inform these anecdotes are directly applicable to writing center workers who (as is so often the case) find themselves engaged in backwriting, writing back, institutional critique, or simply critical discourse:

- In March 2000, when I wrote in *College English* about how the metaphors used to describe plagiarism converge with those used to establish a culture of compulsory heterosexuality, I believed I was

writing to an audience of composition and rhetoric scholars. On the Writing Center listserv, WCenter, Jon Olson generously described the article as “interesting and challenging.” But when the national press picked it up, I was a lunatic who, in the words of the *Flummery Digest*, was “call[ing] on fellow scholars to embark on the ‘revisionary/revolutionary’ task of making room for less novelty.” From the perspective of the *National Review*, I was either an “idiot” or one of those “tweedy, French-bathed barbarians in pursuit of destroying Western Civilization.” The *National Review* writer continues, “Either way, someone’s going to hell” (Goldberg). The “someone” to whom the *National Review* writer referred was me. According to Jonah Goldberg, I was going to hell for my backwriting. From him, the hellfire and brimstone was literal.

- Then, in November 2001, I published an essay in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* suggesting that the furor over student plagiarism might appropriately occasion revisions of pedagogy and not just better mechanisms for catching plagiarists. I called that article “Plagiarism, Policing, Pedagogy.” The *Chronicle*, after securing my approval on their editorial revisions to my text, gave that text a new name and published it as “Forget about Policing Plagiarism—Just *Teach*.” That title misrepresented the argument of my essay, and it also fueled a whole new round of media *backwriting*. This time it was Tucker Carlson, the host of CNN, backwriting to me in his debut column for *Reader’s Digest*, a column ominously titled “That’s Outrageous!”

As the director of the writing program at Syracuse University, Howard would, you’d think, abhor plagiarism above all academic sins. Sure, she feels obliged to say it’s wrong to download someone else’s work in toto. But in the end, she sounds more like a skillful apologist. (40-42)

Soon I found myself having to explain my work to the university chancellor, who was receiving irate mail from alumni.

I won’t belabor the point, which is that backwriting is multidirectional. It’s not just the marginalized who are backwriting to the dominant. The dominant may not be all that crazy about this backwriting and may decide to do some backwriting of their own, in the form of *writing up* or *writing down*.

I must acknowledge that my own motivations in backwriting are aggressive; it is my earnest desire to diminish the ability of educational institutions to require that members of historically underrepresented groups join the academy only on the condition that they uncritically accept its premises. While I do indeed want to make the materials of the academy available to all those who are willing to exert the effort to gain them, I also want those materials changed, diversified, reformed. The academy is the creation of the privileged U.S. white middle class,<sup>6</sup> and their values and beliefs are drastically limited. As Said (and before him, W.E.B. Du Bois) has asserted, the privileged U.S. white middle class is itself a deprived class when it has access only to itself and its own values—when the inclusion of Others means only that those Others are generously allowed to participate in privileged U.S. white middle-class intellectual culture and that the texts and culture of the Other will be politely added to, acknowledged by, and bracketed by an unchanged U.S. white middle-class intellectual culture.<sup>7</sup>

I want instead to make my own contribution to the widespread efforts to create in the educational system means not only for those historically underrepresented groups to gain access to social power but also for them to change the terms of the game. And I fully recognize that not everybody in the United States welcomes that project; many see it as ineluctably contributing to a decline in literacy and an increase in social chaos—not to mention its threatening their own positions of privilege. So I cannot express surprise that my work is not always welcomed—even though, each time I find myself under attack, I am wounded and aggrieved that the inherent justice and nobility of my cause is not immediately recognized and acclaimed. It is only in hindsight that I can make such wry assessments of my own belief that I am in possession of foundational truth.

So I recur to the religious material, offering some cautions about the hellfire and brimstone that await the *backwriting* that would seem to be celebrated and invited in the IWCA Call for Papers. All of us in marginalized positions—which means all of us in composition studies in general and writing centers in particular—must be aware that we are not, despite all our posturings, the heroes of our culture. Our actions will not save academia from its own hierarchical impulses. And our backwriting may be punished, whether in teachers' tenure decisions, students' grades on papers, faculty complaints about what is deemed excessively collaborative tutoring in the writing center, or (somewhat less frequently) the national media.

Figuring out how much to risk requires realistic calculation of possible benefits and punishments, and it requires careful consideration of how much one is *willing* to risk. Can writing center directors assert a generative rather than punitive role for their units

without risking a negative tenure decision or a terminated contract? To what extent can student writers negotiate the terms of the assignments given them, writing back within the assignment as a way of creating space for something the writer finds meaningful or at least tolerable, before their grades suffer? How much can tutors model and collaborate, before the writing center is accused of sanctioning plagiarism? Can the writing center become a hush harbor (Nunley), a space of critical reflection, a space for backwriting, without the institution deciding to outsource the tutoring and teaching of writing to the proprietary companies that will not be troubled by questions of subjectivity, hierarchy, and social power?<sup>8</sup> Even as we explore the possibilities inherent in the notion of *backwriting*, we must also forge ways to make the practices of backwriting work for us—to make backwriting accomplish our goals and not become yet another means whereby we scholars, directors, tutors, and students are kept in our place, or forcibly removed from it. When it is working *for* us, backwriting can help us explore possibilities, establish alternatives, and engage in dialogue—or better yet, in dialectic.<sup>9</sup>

The collaborative work of Anis Bawarshi and Stephanie Peklowski provides both conclusion to and illustration of my argument. In a 1999 article in the *Writing Center Journal*, they limn constructive ways in which the writing center can collaborate with its students in practices of what I am calling backwriting. Because of “its physically and politically peripheral place—marginalized from and yet part of the university,” Bawarshi and Peklowski argue that “the writing center is an ideal place in which to begin teaching and practicing a critical and self-reflective form of acculturation, what Edward Said calls ‘critical consciousness’” (42). This critical consciousness, Bawarshi and Peklowski explain, “is about both being critical of discursive formations and how they are in the service of reproducing certain power relationships...as well as critical of one’s own subject positions and social relations within these formations” (43). Reading Bawarshi and Peklowski, Frankie Condon argues that in a U.S. writing center, this critical consciousness should be focused on issues of race, and she endorses critical race theory as the necessary starting place.

Bawarshi and Peklowski propose a writing center pedagogy in which students learn “how self-consciously to use and be used by [academic discourse]—how rhetorically and critically to choose and construct their subject positions within it” (44). What they offer, in my reading, is a writing center ethos that can be deployed not just by writing center students but that can enable strategically successful backwriting from writing center directors, tutors, and students—a backwriting that not only allows writing center subjects to find a space in the academy from which to speak, but that also facilitates their constructive, revisionary contributions to that academy. And it is here that

writing center backwriting converges again with postcolonial *writing back*: both are critical techniques that respect the experiences and insights of the marginalized and forge discourses in which they may be not only expressed but implemented. The IWCA Call for Papers points writing center workers in an important direction. It is a call that we should heed—with our eyes open; in a dialectic rather than evangelistic tone; and with a canny assessment of the potential benefits and penalties that might attend our critical discourse.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from Howard, "The Consequences of Writing Back: Negotiating Cultural Premises with the National Media." Keynote address to the 2003 IWCA/NCPTW conference.

<sup>2</sup> My thanks to Nick Carbone for an exceptionally constructive review of my IWCA keynote; he helped me adapt that address to the print medium and specifically to this journal.

<sup>3</sup> These new meanings, according to Pennycook, benefit not just the colonized but also the colonizers, for both are victims of the colonial process. Ashis Nandy explains that the colonizer "should not be seen as a 'conspiratorial dedicated oppressor' but rather as a 'self-destructive co-victim with a reified life style and parochial culture' caught in the hinges of history" (Pennycook 323–324). Pennycook offers this endorsement of Nandy's idea: "Writing back offers, therefore, not only possibilities for the former colonized but also for the former colonizers, as new meanings, new counter-discourses come into play in our shared language" (325). Widespread in postcolonial theory is this assertion that remedying the effects of colonialism does not pit colonized against colonizer but instead benefits both. As Edward Said makes evident in *Culture and Imperialism*, "colonizer and the colonized are mutually implicated

at all times, rather than being simple antagonists" (qtd. in Hutcheon 48).

<sup>4</sup> When I summarized Nicholas' argument in my address at the 2003 IWCA, the audience laughed heartily—not, I believe, because her assertion is ridiculous, but because it is so obvious, so logical, so outrageous in the hierarchy that it reveals, and hence so seldom spoken aloud. Nevertheless, the argument is sometimes articulated in print; Nancy Grimm, for example, acknowledges that writing centers are marginalized within composition studies (xiii).

<sup>5</sup> See Horner for a detailed discussion of the differences between academic work (i.e., scholarly research) and institutional labor (e.g., tutoring). See Atherton for a historical treatment of the logic in which literacy tutoring is culturally regarded as a demeaning task.

<sup>6</sup> My choice of the adjective *privileged* calls attention to the fact that the entire U.S. white middle class is not included here. For example, those who, like me, come from the white middle class in what is sometimes called Third World U.S. (in my case, Southern Appalachia) must, like middle-class African Americans, undergo border checks. Once inside the enclave, however, white Third World subjects blend in more easily, often marked only by their spoken dialect, which, with some effort and vigilance, itself may disappear in time. Whether that easier assimilation is actually an advantage, though, depends on whether one considers membership in the dominant class a desideratum.

<sup>7</sup> Here I append the adjective *intellectual* to specify the dominant class of the academy. This dominant class is comprised not just of the U.S. white middle class (exclusive of the U.S. Third World), but all of those who appreciate and are oriented to the analytic temper that is, above all, valued in humanistic U.S. higher education. Bourdieu explains this division in the middle class as one of *taste*. For example, whereas popular audiences—including many in the middle class—want a participatory experience at the theatre and cinema, the intellectual middle class privileges a detached aestheticism that is enabled by standards of judgment that are transmitted not just educationally but socially.

<sup>8</sup> Outsourcing is, I believe, a great potential solution to the pesky theorizing of compositionists. Administrators who want "Just the skills, ma'am" can get them from for-profit writing merchants—which would in turn put the pesky theorists out of business, or compel them to work for instrumentalist writing proprietors. We

cannot take this threat too seriously. For more on the possibilities and realities of outsourcing, see Herrington & Moran; Turnitin.com; and Smarthinking. Murphy & Law speak directly to the specter of outsourced tutoring in writing.

<sup>9</sup> *Dialogue* assumes too much cozy consensus or a convivial acceptance of difference, and it pays too little attention to unequal power. *Dialectic*, on the other hand, assumes an agnostic if not antagonistic relationship between participants. Andrew Low offers a useful exploration of the various types of dialectic, and John Briggs explores the ways in which Peter Elbow maintains a dialectic in his own work as a compositionist. Instead of Hegelian dialectic (which pursues the steps of thesis-antithesis-synthesis) or Marxist dialectic (which postulates a struggle with an eventual winner), I advocate a form of dialectic that I would associate with both Nietzsche and Mouffe, one in which the dialectic does not end. No transcendent truth or stable regime can result from dialectic; but in the process of dialectic, the members of a culture can seriously engage difference, not for the purpose of its assimilation into the normative status quo but for the development of a pluralist status quo whose base is always shifting, always under (re)construction.

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