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Book Reviews

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Book Reviews

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Irene Papoulis, Dan Mrozowski, Jacquelyne Kibler, Christy I. Wenger, Mary Leonard, and Sharon Marshall

BOOK REVIEWS

Present and Feeling

Irene Papoulis

Imagine that most readers of *JAEPL* have at least some experience of meditation. You've probably sat for two minutes at least, taking some deep breaths and noticing your thoughts. Maybe you've done so more formally, sitting or chanting with other people, or maybe you are a serious meditator with a decades-long daily practice.

If you're a teacher, you've probably at least toyed with the idea of bringing contemplative practices into your teaching. Or maybe you've fully incorporated them into your classroom practice. Insisting that students move away from their phones and into their own inner experience, you might believe, could be a balm to students who surely long—doesn't everyone?—for more access to the depth of their own, and others', minds.

Or maybe contemplation somehow embarrasses you. Even if you might want to engage students in inner reflection, you might not be able to imagine how you could make explicit mindfulness work in class, maybe, or how it could fit with the things you're "supposed" to be teaching.

These books will meet you wherever you are. Two are concerned with emotions—embarrassment and rage—both insisting, without necessarily mentioning contemplative practices, on the need for self-examination. The others are explicitly concerned with bringing contemplation into the classroom.

Paradoxically, looking inward makes us more capable of looking outward with more clarity. Those who are wary of an explicit cultivation of the practice of looking deeply at oneself, especially in the classroom, often seem to worry that time spent thinking of ourselves is time away from exploring the intricacies of our social and cultural surroundings. However, in fact, as these books demonstrate, the more aware we, and our students, are of who we are—through the contemplation of the inside of our own heads and the examination of our own emotions--the more able we become to meet and change the world.

But self-knowledge is not easy. It can be quite embarrassing to look at, say, what makes us embarrassed as teachers. We've all participated in those faculty-room conversations in which colleagues gush about how wonderful their class was, how highly achieving their students have become. "That's *wonderful*," we might say, fretting privately that our own classes might not measure up. But admitting to embarrassments, to ourselves, and ideally to trusted colleagues, can help us move beyond them --an idea that Daniel Mrozowski explores in his review of Tom Newkirk's *Embarrassment*.

Contemplative practices can offer profound help with confronting our own embarrassments and rages, and three of our reviewers write of books that explore how. Jacquelyne Kibler writes about how Shinzen Young's *The Science of Enlightenment: How Meditation Works* can help teachers both understand and develop a relationship with the idea of reaching enlightenment. Christy Wenger looks at Alexandria Peary's *Prolific Moment: Theory and Practice of Mindfulness for Writing* with an eye to the complexities

of “the self” and to the practicality of truly integrating mindfulness into classrooms and writing programs. Mary Leonard, reviewing Geraldine De Luca’s *Teaching toward Freedom: Supporting Voices and Silence in The English Classroom*, brings us into a teacher’s personal as well as academic journey as she incorporates mindfulness into her classroom.

Finally, Sharon Marshall’s review of Brittney Cooper’s *Eloquent Rage* brings us back to raw emotions with a “homegirl’ intervention,” insisting that we look beyond ourselves at the interconnected social, cultural, and political realities that can rob us of freedom. Contemplative practices can help us do that. As they invite us to examine our own and others’ emotions, they encourage us to be open to the interconnectedness of feminism, race, and politics, and, as Marshall is inspired to do after reading Cooper’s book, to “focus [our] rage to accomplish good everyday.”



Newkirk, Thomas. *Embarrassment and the Emotional Underlife of Learning*. Heinemann, 2017. 207 pp.

Dan Mrozowski
Trinity College

In the humane spirit of Thomas Newkirk’s new book, I’ll start with my own story of Embarrassment: my very first day teaching as a graduate assistant at the University of Michigan in 2003. I was just a year removed from my undergraduate days at a regional state school in Western Pennsylvania, and the night before was miserable. I desperately wanted to be a great teacher, but I had no idea how to become one, so I clung to my lesson plan scripting every single second of the 60-minute discussion section. Still, I was literally shaking, from nerves and coffee, as I walked into the classroom. I barely glanced at the students as the attendance sheet went around. I started reading my syllabus, staring at the words, hoping my voice wouldn’t crack. Just as I was getting into a rhythm that might signify some semblance of authority, I noticed a bright drop of red on the paper in my hands. Another drop. A third. I was so nervous that my nose was bleeding.

The panic was almost total. I sped through the syllabus at an auctioneer’s pace, dismissed the class with fifty minutes left in that first hour session, and somehow teleported to the nearest bathroom, where I staunched my bleeding, betraying nose. I don’t know how I summoned the courage to leave that stall. I felt ruined as a teacher.

Thomas Newkirk’s *Embarrassment* is about that exact type of feeling as it erodes our confidence in pedagogical moments. As Newkirk suggests, those experiences, underlined by unspoken and often unspeakable emotions, are fraught with power, from the simple act of raising one’s hand to the immense “complexities of help seeking” in an office hours visit (56). Embarrassment is everywhere, across disciplinary lines and departmental allegiances, and Newkirk poses an elemental question to all educators: “how can we create conditions of support so that students can fail publicly without succumbing to embarrassment, or more likely, finding ways to ‘hide’ so they can protect themselves?” (15). His answers are woven from a broad range of approaches and sources: school psychology, composition studies, sociology, disability studies, self-help, coaching narratives and behavioral science. This interdisciplinary work, expertly introduced and

connected, becomes animate through Newkirk's writerly voice, so warm and genial that one feels accompanied by a fellow traveler or a teaching mentor.

The first three chapters help to define what Newkirk calls "the emotional underlife of learning," particularly those ways in which genuine awkwardness and vulnerability—devoid of pessimism or defeatism—are vital to the kind of growth we hope to foster in education. The sensitivity to definitions here is deft, as Newkirk carefully positions embarrassment as a fundamentally evolved emotion that is profoundly inflected by social forces such as racism and poverty. Chapter Three, on stigmas, parses out those factors that alter our experiences of embarrassment, from segregation to labeling, particularly how deeply those influences can drive us into the more morally disruptive emotion of shame. After these definitional efforts, *Embarrassment* moves into two chapters of speculative solutions. Some are more student-driven, as in the development of empathetic introspection and familiarity in educational settings, while others include the elusive qualities of great teaching and coaching, like "soft hands," Newkirk's pungent name for the ability to listen, reflect, and guide conversation in an inclusive fashion.

Chapter Six, "Math Shame," recognizes how specific disciplines enable specific types of feelings of embarrassment, as in the titular emotional paralysis occasioned by failed math equations, while the next chapter situates the role of remembering and forgetting as particularly powerful prompts for embarrassment. Chapters Eight and Nine will be of special interest to teachers of writing, as Newkirk describes both responsive commentary and coaching narratives as means to tell a "better, more generous story about the writing process" (137). This spirit of generosity becomes a clarion call in his final chapter, as he summarizes the problems and potential solutions in terms of habit formation—breaking the cycles of embarrassment for our students and for ourselves.

I was unequivocally charmed and inspired by this book, but there are two elements that warrant particular praise. The first is how deftly he approaches the provisional, contextual nature of embarrassment. Risk is not the same for everyone, he reminds us, as students come to the classroom with different resources and reserves in terms of their own accumulated or inherited emotional capital and their own familiarity with or estrangement from competence. His description of the more fortunate, privileged student who may have picked up academic conventions through a "network of supporting adults," comfortable with professional hierarchies and with expectations for expressed opinions and disagreements, registered immediately with my own experiences teaching at a small liberal arts college (70). But this book is unabashed in its attention to those students who bear the burden of embarrassment with the fewest supports, those who have been inescapably marked by stigmas, and those who have been systematically segregated. Newkirk implores us to recognize how race, class, sex and gender situate the impact and fallout of embarrassment differently for different students.

Relatedly, *Embarrassment* actively resists and frequently attacks the banal pabulum of corporatist self-help that now passes itself off as pedagogy in some circles. I found myself doing a mental fist pump as Newkirk savaged a culture that fetishizes and reifies failure as a pathway inevitably leading to greater and greater success. As he deftly suggests, this rank celebration and even enshrinement of failure ignores its provisional nature for those privileged few who cannot fall very far or very fast. In turn, Newkirk

defends praise with the sort of warm generosity one would expect from a writer so clearly in the wake of an Elbow or a Murray.

I wasn't ruined by my bloody nose. I've taught for sixteen years now, and that first day story has been molded into a quirky anecdote, the edges worn away by years of professionalism. Had I read Newkirk beforehand, I would have been kinder to myself. I was, of course, passing on that first day: sporting what could generously be called a professorial beard, wearing my dad's hand-me-down dress shirt, rocking the cheapest approximation of the shiny black leather shoes and thick black glasses my effortlessly cool undergrad mentor wore. I was unaware of my own unearned signifiers of authority and ease as a white, cis-gendered man in a tie and jacket (however ill-fitting and old); I was only conscious of what seemed the doom of failure, signaled by the revolt of my own body in a moment in which I wanted so much to evince control.

But I was able to break the silence of that embarrassment almost immediately. As I managed to hustle myself out of the bathroom to slink back to the English department, I ran into a friend from the MFA program, and I told the first rushed version of what had just happened. He listened, and by the magic of story and laughter, my embarrassment diminished. So I told it to everyone; I sought help processing it. And out of the general kindness of my cohort and professors, my experience transformed from damning indictment to foundational story. It wasn't just time or distance, but the active conversion of the experience into a narrative for a generous audience that buoyed me up. Newkirk calls this "self-generosity"—the alchemy of asking for help and getting it, in spite of embarrassment and not because of its absence.

Beyond the network of interests and evidence Newkirk so expertly weaves together here, perhaps nothing is so useful as the continual, thoughtful act of naming embarrassment itself, to counter what he sees as a pernicious, even systemic silence about a fundamental emotion embedded deeply into our professional and pedagogical systems. I found no claim more thrilling than a kind of existential gasp: "Enough silence. Enough" (13). This is a modernist slogan I can get behind. *Embarrassment* is a great starting note to counter this silence, filled as it is with such richly connected discourses, such frank and funny advice. We need more books this raucously readable on the fundamental emotions of learning.

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Young, Shinzen. *The Science of Enlightenment: How Meditation Works*. Sounds True, 2016. 264 pp.

Jacquelyne Kibler
Arizona State University

Right around the publication of this book, I attended a week-long silent retreat led by Shinzen Young in Oracle, Arizona. Before the silence began, Shinzen, in a white t-shirt and cargo-like shorts, spoke with the group. Our chairs encircled in the cafeteria area of the property. He laid out essential info for the retreat and asked us to introduce ourselves. As part of this introduction, he asked what our intentions were for our practice and for the retreat and included the pursuit of enlightenment as an example. That

seemed rather lofty to me. I have long considered myself a bare-bones practitioner with a renegade meditation practice—five minutes here, twenty minutes there. The intentions of my practice tend toward a series of “nots.” I practice mindfulness and meditation to *not* yell at my kids, to *not* be indifferent to my partner’s needs, to *not* be a disconnected and unpleasant human being. The idea of pursuing enlightenment had never occurred to me. When it was my turn to share, I described a gentler version of those previous ideas, ending with something like “I had not considered enlightenment as a goal, but sure, why not?”

Reading this text three years later, I understand why Shinzen casually included enlightenment as a goal of practice. In *The Science of Enlightenment*, Shinzen systematically works to dissolve the ethereal and exclusive connotation around the concept of enlightenment. He claims it as something inherent in our beings, as an activity fostered by, but not absolutely contingent upon, Buddhist meditation practices. Shinzen acknowledges that defining enlightenment is “notoriously tricky,” but he offers the reader a “a place to start,” inviting the reader to “think of enlightenment as a kind of permanent shift in perspective that comes about through direct realization that there is no *thing* called a ‘self’ inside you” (2). However, there is an *activity* called a self, he clarifies. Meditation unblocks the mind-body sensory experiences, so that one realizes “that the thingness of the self is an artifact caused by habitual nebulosity and viscosity around your mind-body experience” (3). In other words, the thingness of the self might be described as the collected clutter from our life experience, from the nuances of living in the particular body we do, so like the other humans around us but “unique in its becoming” as I have heard Michelle Marks, a yoga instructor and mental health practitioner, describe. We often attach stories to our pains and joys, perhaps ones that exonerate us from blame or plunge us deeper into self-loathing, or, in joyful moments, stories that quantify our happiness, transform it into something we can cling to and store, like a type of currency. These habits can cloud or thicken the space around the naked emotional or physical experiences that circulate through our days. Meditation, then, fosters skills to connect with the emotional or physical sensation just as it is, without the stories that obscure its core manifestation. As these sensations are always changing, meditation also encourages a connection to this sense of change or movement, the “activity” rather than the “thing” as Shinzen states. Shinzen further claims his definition of enlightenment is a bare minimum one and acknowledges that each perspective on enlightenment “has its own characteristic hazards” and that his “chosen” perspective “is to explicitly describe enlightenment and present it as a feasible goal for ordinary people” (4).

In his foreword, Michael W. Taft, the editor of this book who spent a decade compiling and revising hundreds of hours of Shinzen’s talks and evolving teachings, claims the text is not intended for the beginning practitioner (xiii), and that is somewhat true. The book contains little information on how to begin a meditation practice. However, I argue it is a fitting gateway text for academics. Taft describes Shinzen as “a classic nerd, the kind of guy who wants to talk about arcane minutiae of word etymologies, and is highly conversant in science and math,” and “he relates such topics [science, meditation, and spiritual practice] to each other, interweaves them, and shows them to be interconnected facets of greater and deeper ideas and teachings” (x). The text skillfully puts in conversation ideas from science, philosophy, Buddhism, poetry, and fiction, all in an

accessible yet sophisticated structure, incorporating the cognitive puzzlement and heavy lifting that we in academia enjoy as part of our professional playground.

Shinzen first offers his own experience in “My Journey,” describing how he arrived in Mount Koya, Japan to write a dissertation on Shingon Buddhism and instead began initial steps, reluctantly at first as he describes himself as “by nature an agitated, impatient, and wimpy sort of guy” (11), toward studying with several masters, circulating through the three main forms of Buddhism: mindfulness (Theravada), Zen (Mahayana), and Tantra (Vajrayana) (20). In “The Most Fundamental Skill” and “Mysticism and World Culture,” Shinzen grounds meditation in its basic effects and how it works in ourselves and in the world. Following that, he discusses major religions, focusing on the “high cultivation of concentration” (52) that is involved in the minority feature of main religions, mysticism. These opening chapters provide a baseline for the headier chapters to come. From there, Shinzen weaves, unpacks, and humorously and poetically punctuates the very largeness of science and the very ephemerality of enlightenment. Pulling from etymology, T.S. Eliot, the periodic table (87), a theory of meditation (103), general relativity (207), emptiness, no-self, and impermanence, Shinzen diffuses between spirit and science, constructing a platform for analysis and exploration.

As a writing instructor, I was impressed by his consistent attention to audience. He thoughtfully and thoroughly addresses various viewpoints that might engage this text. This is most notable in his final chapter “My Happiest Thought” where he describes the three life goals he set for himself upon returning to the United States from Japan. His first goal was to “reformulate the path to enlightenment in a modern, secular, and science-based vocabulary” (206). His second goal was to “develop a fully modern delivery system that would make the practice of that path available to any person in the world . . .” (206). His final goal was “to help develop a technology of enlightenment powerful enough to make enlightenment readily available to the majority of humanity” (206). In this discussion, he includes an “Objections” section that begins with, “Sometimes, my happiest thought causes people to freak out” (210). He then proceeds to lay out a continuum of possibilities, conceding concerns and describing the goals of his happiest thought in terms of probabilities, of the likelihood of positive outcomes.

The most salient take-away from this book is enlightenment is accessible to ordinary people through the “systematic cultivation of concentration, clarity, and equanimity” (138). All three elements are strengthened through meditation. Concentration is described as “extraordinary focus” (27), clarity includes “observing, analyzing, and deconstructing sensory experience” (68), and equanimity is “the ability to allow sensory experience to well up without suppression and to pass away without identifying with it” (10). Shinzen states, “The goal of meditation is to gain insight, to know that spirit energy is simply what happens to ordinary experience when it is greeted with extraordinary attention” (123).

The overall claim is that the systematic practice of meditation can make enlightenment possible for everyone, but “spirit energy” can be intense, which could cause ethical issues with integrating meditation into education. Shinzen elaborates on what some of these more intense experiences might look like. For instance, he includes a chart outlining the three levels of the spiritual journey: Everyday Consciousness, The Subconscious, and The Source (enlightenment, nirvana), showing the spiritual journey as being like

the “geological strata of the earth” (135). He posits that we make ninety degree turns, turns toward the earth, to move forward in our spiritual journey. Shinzen discusses the subconscious or “intermediate layer” as being conditionings or blockages that obstruct our everyday experience from being in contact with the Source, or enlightenment. He claims that while not typical, unusual things can happen in the intermediate layer such as “weird images, monsters, or skeletons” or the experience of physical sensations of hot or cold or emotional or hypersensitive states without cause (140). After five or six years of practice, Shinzen states he experienced visions of large, vivid insects, visions that popped up in everyday life as well as during meditation. Therefore, if enlightenment is accessible to all *and* meditation brings us closer to enlightenment *and* it is possible to experience some disconcerting visions and sensations, then incorporating meditation into the classroom suggests some risks to students worth taking into account.

Studies examining meditation in higher education, such as Shauna Shapiro et al.’s “Toward the Integration of Meditation into Higher Education: A Review of Research Evidence,” for instance, contains no mention of monsters or skeletons or other scary archetypes as outcomes of student experience. In fact, many current studies show positive benefits in self-regulation, anxiety, and executive functioning. However, as we progress in our use of meditation in the classroom, it would be helpful to understand the scope of experience, the complexity, and the variation of meditation practice. Shinzen Young presents a structure helpful to these efforts.

On the sixth and final day of the retreat, I wrote of feeling parallel to where I began, unfinished in my initial hopes of growing my practice. The term “retreat” seems a poor fit with what seems to happen there. Like Shinzen’s description of taking a ninety degree turn toward the earth rather than a one-eighty away from it to experience enlightenment (135), a retreat can be a pulling in rather than a pulling away as the term “retreat” implies. While I may have staggered a few steps toward the deeper strata of the earth, I simultaneously felt agitated and clear, as if I’d been half-dipped into an undercooked enlightenment fondue.

In re-experiencing Shinzen’s teachings through *The Science of Enlightenment*, I found myself going through some of the same phases as I had on retreat—blissful enthusiasm for attainable enlightenment, despair at its complexity, and frustration with my own practice as I stagger and sway toward the next geological stratum of spirituality. Then, finally, a sort of huffy settling in of something new, a kind of shift or expansion. In my notes from one of Shinzen’s dharma talks, I quote him as saying, “you don’t become enlightened, the world becomes enlightened to you.” This statement reinforces a key element of Buddhist practice. It’s already there, simply breathe and allow it a clear path. In finishing the book, I understood the messiness of my retreat experience and meditation practice a little better. Giving up the practice, renegade as it is, has never seemed an option. So with hope and despair, I found myself settling into the same phrase I began the retreat with—enlightenment, sure, why not?

Work Cited

Shapiro, Shauna L., et al. “Toward the Integration of Meditation into Higher Education: A Review of Research Evidence.” *Teachers College Record*, vol. 113, no. 3, 2011, pp. 493–528.



Peary, Alexandria. *Prolific Moment: Theory and Practice of Mindfulness for Writing*. Routledge, 2018. 202 pp.

Christy I. Wenger
Shepherd University

The doctrine of *anatta*, or “no self” is central to Buddhist teachings. One such teaching, the parable of the chariot, is presented through a dialogue between King Milinda and a monk named Nagasena. To promote Nagasena’s enlightenment, King Milinda encourages a rethinking of the self by comparing it analogously to the chariot in order to illustrate the lack of the permanent, inviolable presence of either. Of the chariot, King Milinda asks, “Is the pole the chariot?” to which Nagasena replies, “No, Reverend Sir!” (Buddha Sasana). The dialogue between King Milinda and Nagasena continues by cataloguing each piece of the chariot:

“Is then the axle the chariot?”

“No, Reverend Sir!”

“Is it then the wheels, or the framework, of the flag-staff, or the yoke, or the reins, or the goad-stick?”

“No, Reverend Sir!”

“Then is it the combination of pole, axle, wheels, framework, flag-staff, yoke, reins, and goad which is the ‘chariot?’”

“No, Reverend Sir!” (Buddha Sasana)

As evidenced by this dialogue, a chariot, standing in for the self, is a “conceptual term, a current appellation and a mere name” (Buddha Sasana). We are left to consider how human beings are similarly aggregate collections without individual egos. We too are not our legs, or arms, or names or heads: none of our parts, like the chariot’s, integrally constitute our beings. The parable urges us to release attachment to the idea that we are freestanding with a solid presence and to accept the nonpermanence and essential emptiness of self. We are, in turn, freed from the suffering of our individual egos and open to see our connections and relations to everything beyond and yet within ourselves.

Alexandria Peary’s recent book serves as a meditation on the nature of the writer’s “no self” and the consequences this lesson of impermanence has for the teaching of writing. When we approach writing with the goal of composing for a future audience, Peary argues, we approach it as if it were the inviolable chariot, a predictable entity with a fixed form, and accordingly we silence the integrality of factors like intrapersonal rhetoric, the preverbal, and preconception. We become attached to writing’s outcome, limiting our approach to process, and, like all attachments, this can cause undue suffering because it hides writing’s inherently transient nature. Through analogy, Peary sets up an entry point for mindful writing, attained through present-centered awareness, which can liberate the writer from suffering by creating conditions where detachment can occur: “A pedagogy and theory of mindful writing can alleviate writing struggle and stress and diminish aversion to writing while bolstering interest, confidence and fluency” (1). If

practicing mindfulness through meditation creates a habit we can apply to the whole of life, practicing mindful writing helps us to detach from the product-based outcomes toward which we too often skew our practices, pedagogies and national policies.

The lesson of the no-self from King Milinda is the ultimate transience of being. Impermanence is a lesson of interest for first-year writers and their teachers, according to Peary, because it leads them to the practice of mindfulness, or moment-to-moment, nonjudgmental attention (Kabat-Zinn 4). The perspective of the meditator, who encounters the present through every inbreath and outbreath, focused only on what is unfolding in that “now” moment of meditation, can be applied to the rhetorical situation of composing, what Peary chooses to call the more present-focused “rhetorical moment” (3). It invites writing to take on the characteristics of meditation and the similar outcome of awareness. Like meditation, mindful writing increases students’ awareness, so that mindfulness becomes “synonymous with the development of rhetorical and metacognitive awareness” (3). The connection between mindfulness and metacognition is key for Peary.

For readers wary of introducing spiritual beliefs into the teaching of writing, Peary is quick to point out that while she theorizes mindful writing on the precepts of Buddhist philosophies, she does not propose a practice of writing synonymous with Buddhism. Hers is instead the more pragmatic goal of getting writers to fluency, or helping them develop mindfulness as a writing strategy with the goal of composing always in mind. Indeed, Peary persuasively claims that “inspired mind/lessness” or undirected thinking (63, my italics) is an important balance to the mindfulness for which she advocates. And while Buddhist mindfulness is typically seen as an end in itself, the process and the reason for engaging in meditation or yoga, Peary suggests “mindful composition operates with a goal that is antithetical to Buddhism: to help students reach a state of full absorption in a writing task with a possible outcome up ahead...this pedagogy favors a mix of directed and undirected thinking” (63). By separating the pragmatism of mindfulness from its historical connections to spirituality, Peary echoes the contemporary mindfulness movement—advanced by practitioners such as Jon Kabat Zinn, founder of the secularized mindfulness-based stress reduction method, and scholars like Robert Boice and Ellen Langer, who import mindfulness into the territories of writing and educational philosophy—and capitalizes on the recent surge of interest in contemplative practice advanced by compositionists like Donald Murray, Ellen C. Carillo, Gesa Kirsch, Irene Papoulis, and me.

Though she anticipates an audience mostly unfamiliar with mindfulness, Peary’s commitment to the present rhetorical moment to promote student’s invention, engagement, and fluency is one to which I suspect many who teach first-year writing can relate. Her book therefore offers us ways to revisit the significance of some of the “low stakes” writing we may already be doing with our students. I, for instance, often use a freewriting “snowball” prewriting activity. Like a standard freewrite, students document their moment-to-moment ideas; unlike a standard freewrite, they then wad up their freewrites and throw them like snowballs—in the recycling bin. Students are often resistant to throwing away what they created, but quickly find it liberating to detach from their words, a skill they have little guided practice in developing. The first time is usually marked by student surprise, but when we repeat the activity, students tend to write fear-

lessly—after all, they won't be bound to their words or be judged by an audience. The activity is a lesson in writing's impermanence, as Peary might suggest, one that leaves only their *experience* of writing intact and purposefully refuses questions of audience at the earliest prewriting stages where first-year writers' ideas are most vulnerable. Rather than using such activities as present-centered pauses in otherwise future-oriented curricula, Peary presents an important challenge to our pedagogies by having us consider these pauses, these moments of mindfulness, to be part of the central work of our classes.

Peary adeptly critiques current discussions of metacognition for too easily normalizing the processes of retrospection and forecasting without taking stock of the present rhetorical moment, the only moment in which we can compose. Peary theorizes the present moment *as* the writing moment, correcting a future-minded outlook on writing that includes "premature audience consideration, anticipation of criticism, and unreasonable expectations of outcome" (25). Guided by the Pali Sutra from "The Foundations of Mindfulness," Peary argues that mindfulness furthers metacognitive insight by making us aware of our attention and awareness and teaching us how to detach from our self-talk and ruminations. The difference, as I take it, is one between metacognition as rumination, a projecting forward or looking back, making stories about where we were and where we want to go, versus mindful metacognition as an abiding in the present moment as the moment of invention and the embrace of ambiguity and acceptance without attachment (27-31). As she later notes, the practice of mindfulness generates a "bare attention [that] fosters metacognition through realization of the otherwise obscure workings of the mind, providing critical thinking capacities" (91). I remain surprised that outside of a few general references Peary does not do more to explicitly connect mindful writing to transfer, even as she ends her book by exploring mindful writing's connections to writing policy. How mindful metacognition impacts our development of transfer theory is certainly an area that future scholarship might address.

With mindful metacognition in place, Peary asks us to revisit widely-accepted conceptual metaphors of writing as a process and the rhetorical situation, "two vehicles of mindlessness in composition pedagogy" (31). Ellen J. Langer's work on the importance of context within mindful learning helps Peary build an exigence for her own argument about the place-based situatedness and temporality of writing. When we strip the present moment from the process or the rhetorical situation, we gear it toward an eventual written product, taking away the immediate conditional context---taking, as it were, part of the chariot for the whole. New rhetorical factors that emerge from a present-centered focus are impermanence, intrapersonal talk, the writer's "interior river" (31; 37), and the writer's and writing environment's materiality, which "stimulates invention, sets up a realistic audience interaction, and allows the writing moment to become a source for connection with others" (40).

Peary follows Chapter One with an interchapter that works to flesh out her theory and show how she enacts mindful writing within her first-year classes. By that first interchapter, I was indeed craving some practical import to the classroom, so I found it helpful that Peary spends time detailing specific mindfulness activities she uses with students, from a version of open awareness meditation called "The Mind List," to an embodied freewrite called "yoga for hands" that asks students to pay attention to the physicality of writing and generating ideas, activities I would love to try in my own

application of mindful writing pedagogy. This interchapter, along with the others of its kind, is short but pulls a great deal of weight for the book's development of mindful writing. Peary's format of chapter-interchapter works well to give space to her theories of mindful writing; however, I sometimes wish for more specific examples within the chapters themselves to help develop and illustrate her concepts.

Chapter Two takes a closer look at intrapersonal rhetoric, the rhetoric of the present moment. Peary heads off critique by addressing constructivist concerns regarding how the intrapersonal is intertextually constructed by the material of the social. Awareness of this intertextuality is a fundamental goal of Buddhist mindfulness as outlined by the chariot dialogue in my introduction: the no self is recognized through the self's dissolution within a larger network of other beings and connections. Even so, the inner talk of intrapersonal rhetoric is often devalued within writing studies, and Peary approaches this chapter admitting that she is swimming upstream as she attempts to reclaim its value for her theory of writing. What stands out about Peary's discussion of the intrapersonal is her effort to make it rhetorical, to argue for its internal discursivity.

The goal of claiming intrapersonal rhetoric for mindful writing is to loosen the grip audience has on writers so that they can open a receptive space for self-dialogue. When writers invite self-dialogue and value the persuasive nature of self-talk, Peary suggests, they develop an "advanced" mindful writing practice during which they can attend "to those passing, unrecorded bits of intrapersonal to return [their] awareness to the present" (59). Such practice not only validates the intrapersonal as a form of rhetoric, it also develops mindful metacognition as the writer learns to see and accept the internal river.

At this point in Peary's book, I found myself wondering about the students who resist her present-focused methods. While her second interchapter overviews the difference in word output depending on whether students are writing for an audience or not—anticipation of an audience restricts output (77-78)—students conceivably struggle with more than establishing their authority to write. In my decade of teaching mindfulness to student writers, I've encountered students challenged to find the present because previous (and concurrent college) educational experiences have trained them to focus on anything but the present moment. They are habituated to mindless writing behaviors, and these are difficult to break in a one-semester class. Others find it easier to remap behaviors with the help and guidance of mindful pedagogy, but for myriad reasons find the present frightening because of its unpredictability; they often see the inner talk of intrapersonal rhetoric as a daunting "river" (35), where a toe plunged in means getting pulled under. To continue my framing metaphor, they have no desire to grapple with the ambiguity of the chariot's presence. Peary's self-interview assignments (wherein students question themselves about the composing process in self-study form) and her internal rhetorical analysis papers that engage students in analysis of the ways the rhetorical appeals function intrapersonally to shape the writing experience and outcome are certainly tools that could be used to help such wary students find control over the rivers of their self-talk; I'd love to see more developed and diverse examples from Peary's students' in their own voices.

Chapters Three and Four argue for the discernment of no self and verbal emptiness as a metacognitive skill. Peary engages further with the Buddhist views on emptiness, particularly as represented within the Heart Sutra. She suggests that we encour-

age students' radical acceptance of verbal emptiness by spending much more time on rewrites for its own sake rather than persistently treating it as a means to the end of producing a final draft. The third interchapter offers an interesting variant on freewriting, "momentwriting," during which students are not instructed to simply keep writing for a designated period of time but are told to dwell in the present moment and observe, which may include a kind of freely written documentation of their thoughts and self talk but may also account for pauses in the process: "[m]omentwriting allows people to track impulses and sensory experiences and to honor them as part of their writing experience" (111).

Peary encourages students to come to terms with two types of mental formations that she calls "mind waves" and "mind weeds," borrowing from Shunryu Suzuki's classic treatise on Zen meditation, *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind*. Mind waves are fleeting, nonverbal moments driven by urges such as shifts in position, body responses like clearing one's throat, or movements at outside noises (117). Mind weeds are discursive nets that entangle thoughts with narratives, storylines that root our attention away from the moment (117). Mind waves and weeds help writers identify the affective dimensions of writing, those feelings that may take them away from the present writing moment. Labeling these moments helps writers develop a mindful metacognition of the writing moment (119). Peary's focus on these two mental formations allow her to attend to the students' affective experiences of writing as an act occurring in real time, what she calls "real-time pathos, or the emotions students feel as they write, emotions about needing or wanting to write the project at hand" (121). Acceptance of waves and weeds also helps writers examine their self-talk to see how self-pathos impacts how and what they write.

In her final chapter, Peary loops back to her first chapter's argument about the importance of reclaiming the present rhetorical moment to address more pragmatically how writing studies at a national, disciplinary level might better support mindful writing. Of course, traditional metaphors of process and rhetorical situations don't just underlie classroom pedagogy; they are used as a foundation for national writing policies like "The WPA Outcomes Statement for First-Year Composition" and the "Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing." Peary faults these documents and others for their future-forward thinking, which propels teachers and students out of the present moment and shifts the focus of writing on anticipated future audiences and writing products and away from "the real-time, fluctuating experiences and perceptions of writers" (145). Large scale institutional change must be accompanied by revisions to these national policies: "[m]indlessness in writing policy can be redressed through learning outcomes that emphasize process and rhetorical theory based on the present rhetorical moment" (147).

As a writing program administrator, I am struck by Peary's critique of the unaddressed gulf between the individual classroom and our national standards. I see promise for the average reader inside that gulf. Individual readers can react faster than national policy can change. One promise-filled middle ground might be the administration of writing programs. WPAs are always adjusting curricula to better represent national trends and growing ideas; programs therefore are inherently more flexible and responsive to new perspectives on writing than national policy. As someone already practicing mindful writing pedagogy who is also a WPA, I accordingly take from Peary's book a renewed commitment to apply mindfulness at the programmatic level and am encour-

aged to engage my writing colleagues in discussions of creating mindful writing programs and rethinking the future-oriented rhetoric of writing program curricula. Perhaps instead of always being focused on what students “will” be able to complete by the conclusion of our courses, we might spend more time on what students are already encountering in the present.

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De Luca, Geraldine. *Teaching toward Freedom: Supporting Voices and Silence in the English Classroom*. Routledge, 2018. 118 pp.

Mary Leonard

Bard College M.A.T. program

In her introduction, Geraldine DeLuca points out that ever since the Common Core was introduced students are being tested continually. However, that program is being challenged in many states, which to DeLuca is liberating (3). In her resistance to assessment culture, De Luca does not claim to be writing anything original, but her passion is clear and her stories are useful and inspiring. She reviews the research and the pros and cons of “rigor” vs. “process” approaches to teaching, and finally explores a solution that grows out of her own contemplative practice and the use of meditation in classrooms. Thus her book takes us on a useful journey with a satisfying destination.

DeLuca begins by questioning the practice of college teachers who compile charts for evaluation—syntax, punctuation, grammar, etc.—and presents the story of a college teacher who kept failing an immigrant student’s papers because of poor results on those charts. The student was finally transferred to a colleague’s class who claimed the student was a poet. This story presents a question that underlies DeLuca’s explorations: how do teachers have a right to stifle students’ creativity in the name of “correctness?” Of course in the corporate or academic worlds students need to be literate and write in standard English. However, De Luca argues, standard English can productively be balanced with students’ desires to be expressive.

In a dynamic section of her book, De Luca recounts June Jordan’s story about assembling an “in your face” paragraph composed of student responses after the murder of a classmate’s brother by the police. The paragraph was sent to various journals and television news shows but was not published. De Luca reminds us of Jordan’s question about whether the paragraph would have been published if it were in “standard” English (18). She goes on to raise questions regarding race and class in the elusive race to the top and acknowledges that Peter Elbow was way ahead of his time in the seventies

when he encouraged freedom through freewriting and resistance to Standard English. Acknowledging Lisa Delpit's questions regarding exploratory writing vs. preparation for the writing standards required in the "real world," De Luca suggests including students in an initial conversation about what they need from a writing class (49). This resonated with my own teaching: just recently one of my MAT students suggested a similar idea—a conversation among teachers and students about the needs and wants of all involved before beginning any college composition class. It could be revolutionary in its resistance to traditional teacher-student hierarchy.

De Luca moves from there to the confusing message we all give students: do research on others' work but be original. She claims that even in writing this book her mind became "a tissue of stuff." It's fortunate that she has shared some of that "stuff" with us; the book is valuable for her summary of the academic theorists underpinning her ideas. However, in keeping with her point, I would have liked to hear more about DeLuca's own mind and her experiences as a teacher.

In her sixth chapter DeLuca makes an interesting analysis of original thought versus plagiarism. She tells the reader that she submitted her own essay on plagiarism, co-written with a colleague, to *iThenticate*, a plagiarism detection program. It was deemed 11.06 percent deliberately plagiarized, with a note that since it was under 15 percent it was acceptable (78). The absurdity of such an assessment is striking and points to the dangers of a world in which writing is seen not as expression of thinking but as a quantifiable product.

In the final section of *Embracing the Contemplative Life*, we finally learn what is central to De Luca's thinking and teaching. However, even when she arrives at that useful moment of contemplation she feels the need to be scholarly, presenting the reader with lists of the many Buddhists who have influenced contemporary meditation practices. As someone who has read quite a bit about meditation, I had the impulse to skip another section of lists. However, I was really pulled in when De Luca wrote about her own journey into contemplative practice, which started for her with yoga. I found this section to be very engaging, especially her preparation for doing a headstand, which took years, and her insight: "I can't rush it. ...But I don't have to give up" (87).

Although she uses meditation practices in various ways in her classroom, DeLuca's final thought about teaching is this: "My yoga experience dramatically supports my belief that my students are already okay. Their sentence fragments, their various vernaculars, their second language influences--whatever they got going for time, it's all okay. ... yet yes they should learn the standard. Of course I hear you Lisa Delpit" (91). De Luca then goes on to explain how she uses meditation practices in her classroom and does give us lists of *how to*. She also journeys outside the classroom and acknowledges the importance of a contemplative practice for world-awareness as well as self-awareness.

While reading *Teaching Toward Freedom* I was engaged in DeLuca's academic and personal journey and found the process liberating. This book is useful as a reference for theories of learning and as a guide for teachers. Perhaps most importantly, though, it is useful as the story of how one teacher has used contemplative practice as a guide for her life and work.



Cooper, Brittney. *Eloquent Rage, A Black Feminist Discovers Her Superpower*, St. Martins, 2018. 288 pp.

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A Black Girl's Magic

Tyler Perry's movie version of Ntozake Shange's *For Colored Girls Who Have Considered Suicide When the Rainbow is Enuf* ends with the eight women whose stories have been dramatized in the film and narrated through their respective poems, gathered together on a New York City rooftop in a colorful group embrace that follows the revelation of the she-ness of the god that has been missing in their lives. I watched the movie on Netflix while I was reading Cooper's book, and that scene reminded me of a statement Cooper makes in her chapter devoted to Beyoncé, whom she calls *her* feminist muse, "One of feminism's biggest failures is its failure to insist that feminism is, first and foremost about truly, deeply, and unapologetically loving women" (26). After reading *Eloquent Rage*, I'm thinking that the feminist love for women and for freedom—Cooper says, "Freedom is my theological compass and it never steers me wrong" (143)—may well be the she-god whose power is missing from all our lives.

Cooper, who describes herself as "fat, black and Southern," is a professor of Women's and Gender Studies and Africana Studies at Rutgers University. In the preface she says the book is for "women who know shit is fucked up" and who want to change things but don't know how to begin. She writes, "Black women have the right to be mad as hell. We have been dreaming of freedom and carving out spaces for liberation since we arrived on these shores" (4). She tells the story of her student Erica who upset her when she pointed out how angry Cooper appeared in class, but who went on to say that her rage was "eloquent." Cooper explains that Erica helped her realize that focused with precision, her anger could be a powerful force for good—that it, in fact, could become her superpower.

Eloquent Rage is intended as a "homegirl" intervention for readers, similar to the ones that saved Brittney Cooper over the years, when her mother, grandmother and friends called her out and "demanded that I get my shit together, around my rage, around my work in the world, and around my feminism." "America," she says, "needs a homegirl intervention in the worst way. So in this book, I am doing what Black women do best. I'm calling America out on her bullshit about racism, sexism, classism, homophobia, and a bunch of other stuff. And I'm using feminism to stage [it]" (5).

For Cooper, feminism is far from being an historical abstraction or platform reserved for white women in pussy hats. She asks, "Why is it so easy for Black women to ignore how important feminism is to our lives?" (34). Then she shows us how her own Black feminist identity, politics, and praxis are a direct response (sometimes prompted by interventions) to lived experience—or that, as she might say, this shit happens to real people. In this way the book is a memoir, one I often found poignant and that resonated with me personally, as when her mother is shot by an ex-boyfriend while she is pregnant with her, or when young Brittney is rejected by other Black girls who do not understand

her intellectual ambition in middle school, or when she tells her mostly absent father she doesn't love him because he hurts her mother, or when she graduates from Howard without having had a single date. However, these stories are not sentimental, especially when they become the basis for an almost surgically precise code-meshing, signifying critique of sexism, white supremacy, and neoliberal agendas that have so constricted and often taken the lives of Black women and men. In eight chapters Cooper analyzes, among other things,

- Black women's rejection of feminism
- Black men's lack of solidarity
- White women choosing race over gender
- Toxic masculinity
- Black women who stand up to white male authority and pay the price, like Sandra Bland
- Christian theology that "sets up a false binary between flesh and spirit, mind and body, and sacred and secular" (140)
- Respectability politics
- The danger of "white-girl tears" to people of color
- Hatred among Black men for Black women
- Rape and power
- The obsession with curtailing reproductive freedom in this country
- White fear ("cultural refuse of white supremacy" 210) and violence against people of color
- The requirement that Black people manage their fear
- Black women and marriage
- The myth of Black exceptionalism

It's been a long time since I've been a Black girl, but reading Cooper's book took this Black woman back to early encounters with feminist thought in the 1960s when I discovered Betty Friedan, in the 1970s when I read Alice Walker, and the 1990s when bell hooks changed my life. Brittney Cooper's twenty-first century "homegirl" intervention has allowed me to share in her story and has given me insight into the ways current social, cultural, and political realities impact Black women's lives and rob us all of freedom. She has helped me reconnect cherished beliefs with my righteous anger and reminded me that, "My job as a Black feminist is to love Black women and girls" (35) and to put that love into action by focusing my rage to accomplish good everyday.