

successfully provokes readers' interest as he explores the formative force of ethics and politics in the development and articulation of professional ethos in English studies including composition and rhetoric. Comas skillfully provides an occasion to, on the one hand, revisit (disciplinary) history and, on the other, listen to and reflect on our calling as writers, members of a community. Despite the prominence of the *topoi politikos* in composition and rhetoric, its detailed examination is eclipsed in Part 1 by literary case studies. This calls for further exploration of the *topoi politikos* in relation to composition and rhetoric. However, in part 2 Comas addresses the intersection of politics and ethics, focusing on figures like Burke and Levinas who impact the field in multiple ways. Yet, detailed analysis of specific events or historical moments authorizing critical writing in composition and rhetoric was direly needed. This could have included revisionary writers whose vocatives "[turn] an attentive ear" to absences or omissions.

Another key contribution is manifest in Comas's cogent parallel exploration of decisive dimensions of the writing of historiography, including a nuanced attention to layers of internal and external contexts and plurality of ethical and political imperatives. In addressing these imperatives, processes of composing a disciplinary ethos and creating an intellectual community, Comas elucidates forces, locations, and modes of engagement that deeply impact the act of writing and its reception.

*Madison, Wisconsin*

***Rural Literacies***, by Kim Donehower, Charlotte Hogg, and Eileen E. Schell. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2007. 240 pp.

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In *Rural Literacies*, Kim Donehower, Charlotte Hogg, and Eileen E. Schell provide insight into the myths and realities surrounding rural literacy. Each author draws upon their hometowns—in the rural South, the rural West, and the Great Plains—to provide examples for their individual chapters that illuminate multifaceted literacies of people in these places. The authors offer ideas for incorporating the concept of rural literacies into our composition classrooms. The idea of a place-based pedagogy that includes a critical analysis of rural literacy (along with suburban and urban ones) is furthered through pedagogical examples in the final chapter of the book. For composition instructors who guide their students in critically examining urban and/or suburban texts (and their ideas about

those literacies), this text adds another dimension—rural texts and rural literacies—for students to explore and write about.

Donehower's chapter deals with the identities and identifications of rural people in Appalachia and discusses the importance of allowing them to create and further a literate self that is not necessarily recognized by popular culture or the news. Examples from popular culture of "illiterate hillbillies to ignorant rednecks [as] the predominant representations of rural literacy" (37) further the misconception that all rural people are illiterate and also stigmatizes those who choose to be literate within their rural community (57). Interestingly, while Donehower discusses adaptation and assimilation of rural people to the "more standardized norms" of literacy practices offered by literacy sponsors who came to Appalachia, there is no mention of the possibility of a merger between the sponsored literacy and the literacy one acquires through living in the rural community.

Understanding the rhetorics of rural literacy, particularly in terms of the "farm crisis," according to Schell, is imperative. Schell calls for a focus on a rhetoric of advocacy instead of a rhetoric of tragedy to redefine critical literacy within rural communities and to create "knowledgeable, literate citizens who are prepared with the 'knowledge and skills for social and environmental justice'" (80-81). She refers to our identification with rural people—small family farmers like those in her own family who were apple and pear farmers in rural Washington State—with sympathy for their plight (loss of farm, livelihood), or through the lens of nostalgia for the heydays of the family farm (94-95). Helping students realize that they can become activists within a "food democracy" furthers their critical literacy as it relates to American agricultural policies and the effect on US citizens. Schell, like Donehower, draws upon a critical review of media (popular and news) that portray rural people as victims who lack the resources for obtaining literacy. She cites the Farm Aid website as a literacy sponsor that can be used pedagogically to assist students in becoming critically literate about the farm crisis, economic, political, and possibly personal issues involving food production in the US, as well as the role their choices play in this arena. An atmosphere of "mutual identification" can be created between consumers (specifically ourselves and our students) through which rhetorics evolve from those of tragedy (loss of the family farm), to those of advocacy (promoting local food sources/niche markets, sustainability of the remaining family farms) (117). Schell also uses examples of how small farmers gain specific, critical literacy about agricultural consolidation and how they can make choices that positively impact their livelihoods by sustaining quality production, biodiversity, and identifying alternative distribution practices.

Hogg's chapter draws on David Gruenewald's "critical pedagogy of place" to frame a discussion of the ways gendered literacy shapes the

identity of rural people and places. Hogg points out that the “masculine Jeffersonian agrarianist model . . . does not make a space for the lives [or literacies] of women in agrarian settings” (122). Women from Hogg’s Nebraskan community serve as literacy sponsors who care about the community and those within it more than “outsider” literacy sponsors who may seek to make the community adapt to external critical literacy practices instead of creating a place-based one within a rural community (132). These place-based critical literacies are able to “move the town forward” toward a sustainable future (134).

In the final chapter, the authors reveal that they have argued for an examination “of rural literacies in context and work against the urban biases that inform much of the literacy research in our field” (155). While they have provided a somewhat thorough examination of biases, identities, identification, and negative rhetoric regarding rural literacy (or the lack of literacy in rural areas), there is not much comparison to biases, identities, identification, and negative rhetoric regarding urban (or suburban) literacy. The sustainability metaphor they adopt is an interesting alternative to ones of preservation, modernization, and abandonment typically used to describe rural literacies, but it has not yet proven to be the best link between urban, suburban, and rural communities or literacies (and therefore the connection that “ensure[s] a stable future for all [members of those communities]”) (155). This text fosters an understanding of rural community members as indeed literate and capable of creating critical and place-based literacies, which can be positively connected to literacies created by urban and suburban community members, a significant connection from which our students can benefit.

Positioning their background studies within specific rural areas, the authors wrap up *Rural Literacies* with a presentation of composition course illustrations—specifically focused examples of composition readers, outcomes, and writing assignments—that use rhetorical analysis of media representations of rural literacy, critical evaluation of food politics, and a place-based pedagogy as the foundation for readings, writing assignments, and course outcomes. Having our students address issues of rural literacies and their position within the world alongside urban and suburban ones, using some of the ideas outlined in the book can further students’ (urban and suburban students especially) “mutual identification” and understanding of citizens from these places.

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