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Reviews

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REVIEWS

Visser, Frank. *Ken Wilber: Thought as Passion*. Albany: State U of New York P, 2003.

Edward J. Sullivan, Lebanon Valley College

So, who is Ken Wilber? According to Wilber, “I have often described myself as a northern European thinker with a southern European lifestyle who practices Eastern religion—or something like that” (xi). His biographer, Frank Visser, describes him as an “American autodidact . . . who has managed to evolve into a leading theorist in the field of psychology” (1) without holding any degree in psychology. When I asked several colleagues in the psychology department at my home institution if they ever heard of him, they replied, “Ken who?” When I posed the same question to some of my meditator friends, several recognized the name, but none had actually read his books. Falling into the second camp, I saw this book as an opportunity to acquaint myself with his work without reading his daunting canon. (Between 1977 and 2002, Wilber published twenty books.) Visser does an admirable job navigating the reader through Wilber’s theories. And Wilber has a lot of them. So much so that I thought a more apt subtitle might be “Thought as Compulsion.” By the end of the book, the reader may feel that Ken Wilber has never let a thought go unpublished.

Wilber made his mark early, at the age of twenty-three, when he published *The Spectrum of Consciousness* (1977). This book sparked some interest in the area of transpersonal psychology, “a school of religious psychology set up at the end of the sixties which endeavors to study the field of mystical spirituality in a scientifically sound way” (1). Visser’s Chapter One begins with a brief review of Wilber’s childhood and education. Graduating with dual baccalaureate majors in chemistry and biology, he devised a self-study program in Eastern philosophy, Western psychology, metaphysics, and religion. What spurred this program? Quite simply, unhappiness. Wilber writes, “The point is that I had to ‘read everything’ because I was trying mentally and emotionally to put together in a comprehensive framework that which I felt was necessary for my own salvation” (qtd. in Visser 23). In *Spectrum*, Wilber emplaces various schools of psychotherapy and spirituality into, well, a spectrum. Shortly after its publication, the book was critically hailed by transpersonal psychologists. The remainder of the chapter traces Wilber’s evolution from a transpersonal psychologist to a system philosopher, which Visser defines as “a thinker who seeks to establish the essential coherence of things, to gain an overview of the whole of reality in all its diverse facets” (36).

Chapter Two presents a useful summary of the intellectual underpinnings of Wilber’s thought, starting with a review of different schools of thought, such as behaviorism, psychoanalysis, and humanistic and cognitive psychology. Next, Visser introduces us to Wilber’s first model (dubbed by Visser as “Wilber 1”) with its five forms of consciousness. The first, *persona*, is a “mask we present to the outside world” (53). To deal with problems arising from this state of consciousness, Wilber recommends simple counseling and supportive therapies. Next, Wilber identifies ego as the second level of consciousness. Here, he introduces the Jungian concept of the “shadow,” that is, those aspects of ourselves which we wish to conceal from others and, possibly, from ourselves (53). When dealing with dilemmas arising from this state, he recom-

mends psychoanalysis and transactional analysis. Moving along the spectrum, Wilber adopts the mythological term *centaur* (author's italics) to describe the next level of awareness: a unity of the mental and physical (53). For attaining this state, Wilber prescribes humanistic approaches such as gestalt and Rogerian therapies. At this point along the spectrum, Wilber enters the transpersonal level of consciousness, which is composed of two subrealms—witness and Spirit. In the former, “one’s awareness transcends mind, body, ego, *centaur*, and merely witnesses the fluctuations of those lower realms. . . . But beyond that level of transcendence, there is a radical and ultimate state, where one no longer witnesses reality, one *becomes* reality” (54, author's italics). This latter state Wilber names Mind or Spirit. In addressing these states, extant schools of psychology fail us. Rather, one must look to Buddhism, Hinduism, or esoteric schools of Judaism, Christianity, or Islam for insight. While this chapter sketches the rudiments of Wilber’s first model of consciousness, it should be noted that contained in the various stages are more sublevels or “bands.” (In a later version, Wilber elongates his spectrum into seventeen stages; in the version *after that*, he trims it down to ten stages.)

Chapter Three addresses Wilber’s own discontent with his first model of consciousness. Visser writes, “[R]ather than seeing the transition from baby to adult as a fall out of Paradise, we need to see it as a difficult *emergence* out of a state of unconsciousness—a way forward” (71). Thus, Wilber identifies three main phases of consciousness: the prepersonal, where “the child comes to associate itself increasingly with its body as the boundary between the self and the outside world becomes ever more sharply defined”(83); the personal, where the “individual has lost virtually all contact with his body and functions primarily as a mental self or, in other words, as an ego” (85); and, the transpersonal, which involves the “gradual dissolution of subject-object duality”(88). In sum, this chapter provides an excellent explication of Wilber’s “ladder model” and sets the stage for what Visser identifies as “Wilber 3.” (Actually, Visser identifies five phases, but it became difficult for this reader to delineate the rest. Given his penchant for publishing, there are probably several more Wilbers yet to come.)

In the following chapter, Visser details Wilber’s attempts at applying his models to a variety of fields other than psychology. Among the more interesting topics included is Wilber’s critique of Fritjof Capra (author of *The Tao of Physics*), who argues that physics and mysticism essentially confirm each other’s view of reality. While Wilber acknowledges that there are certain similarities between their worldviews, ultimately the differences are too profound. He concludes that trying to support a spiritual viewpoint with data from the physical sciences is “to misunderstand the nature and function of each” (132). In *A Sociable God: A Brief Introduction to a Transpersonal Sociology* (1982), Wilber holds forth on the sociology of religion. Again, applying his models, Wilber explains why traditional religions have waned in credibility. Essentially, the once faithful have “outgrown this kind of religiosity and now seek those forms of religion that match the stage of religious development that they as individuals have reached” (135). From his standpoint, such secularization actually reflects the will of God. More to the point, God or Spirit-Geist wants “us to grow up and to trade in infantile forms of religion for real, postrational forms of mysticism” (134). One must admire the intellectual chutzpah of Wilber. Armed with his dual bachelor degrees in chemistry and biology, he sallies forth into the diverse terrains of physics, sociology, and the mind of God.

Alas, by the early 1990s, Wilber experiences something of a fall from grace. Visser notes, “[V]irtually all of the concepts he had in his works . . . were now re-

garded as highly suspect and had been declared taboo, even in transpersonal circles” (179). Rather than re-examine his own theories of rationality and spirituality, he regards his ostracism as a result of the anti-intellectualism and anti-spirituality of the times. His response? Not one, but three books known as *The Kosmos Trilogy*. Apparently, Wilber has a lot to say—the first book alone is 800 pages. Visser closes the chapter with a discussion of Wilber’s modestly titled *A Theory of Everything* (1996). Here, Wilber applies his “integral psychology” not to everything, but, rather, to political science. Among his more novel suggestions is drawing up an integral Constitution “which not only ensures that all people are treated equally, but also acknowledges the possibility of the growth of consciousness” (236).

What is one to make of this “autodidact”? What is one to do with his canon? Certainly, the field of composition studies is one site where Wilber’s melding of life’s journeys with abstract theorizing could provide an eclectic and challenging model of “personal-academic” writing. His speculations on the nature of consciousness could enter into a compelling dialogue with students’ thinking of selves in texts, although teachers of writing may be critical of his all-too-frequent totalizing assumptions.

In the final chapter, Visser does a heroic job trying to contextualize Wilber’s critics—not an easy task, since Wilber has quite a few in many different fields. Clearly, Wilber is a provocative thinker. In the view of *this* reader, he should think more and publish less. Since I do not feel competent in recommending a list of alternative readings in physics or political science, I would suggest that those interested in gaining insight into issues of the spirit (which first launched Wilber on his literary odyssey) read Evelyn Underwood’s *Mysticism* (1911). A rich and evocative text, it is still in print, which, I suspect, in the coming years will *not* be the case with most of Wilber’s works. ☐

A Way to Move: Rhetorics of Emotion and Composition Studies.
Ed. Dale Jacobs and Laura R. Micciche. Portsmouth, NH:
Heinemann, 2003.

Gabriele Rico, San Jose State University

There is time
to tell you
the only story I know
A youth sets out,
a man or woman returns;
the rest is simply incident
or weather.
And yet what storms
I could describe
swirling
in every thumbprint.

Linda Pastan, *A Fraction of Darkness*

It is high time we address Pastan’s “swirling” emotions in the unique “thumbprints” of each of our students in composition studies. For far too long

teachers have tried to keep separate the proverbial work of the “head” and the work of the “heart.” Recent books, such as Antonio Damasio’s *The Feeling of What Happens* and Daniel Goleman’s *Emotional Intelligence*, have demonstrated that *both* logic and emotion are governed by the brain. Both are necessary for real learning and play key roles in writing.

Dale Jacobs and Laura R. Micciche have collected thirteen essays tackling different aspects of the emotional spectrum in teaching composition. The essays are divided into three sections: “Theorizing Emotion” focuses on the validity of emotion in the composition classroom, including the neurobiology of emotion; “Classroom Emotions” focuses on what pushes the buttons of teachers of composition, such as surface-level errors in the writing of ethnically-diverse students, and how to harness the emotional dimension of writing instead of sweeping it under the carpet; and “Academic Workplace Emotions” concentrates on ethics, anger, satisfaction, collaboration, conflicts, and convergences.

What do we mean by “educating the emotions” or “emotional literacy”? Having studied the workings of the human brain for years, I know the limbic system, located directly beneath the neo-cortical brain’s “thinking cap,” is the seat of the emotions. Simply put, the limbic brain is the yea/nay-sayer to learning. If the limbic brain says “no” to incoming information, it cannot be learned, no matter how often we “cover” the material or how many “corrections” we make or how many “handouts” we duplicate for students. Genuine writing cannot take place without the limbic brain’s “yea-saying” involvement. Moreover, this limbic brain juts forward into the pre-frontal cortex, the executive part of the brain which acts as the motivator, planner, empathizer, visionary, and actor on ideas and images—in short, the “mover” of *A Way to Move*. Not until we begin to articulate the centrality of the emotions in writing, the often unverbalizable, murky, ambiguous, uncertain aspects of “feeling” in academia, will emotions no longer be relegated to a no-man’s land or to “therapy.” “Move,” from the Latin *motere*, is not only the root of “motion” but the root of “e-motion.” “Move” asks us to become emotionally in-volved in order to e-volve. Ironically, awareness of the emotions, though largely suppressed in formal educational settings, is as old as Aristotle.

Ellen Quandahl’s essay places Aristotle as the “indisputable predecessor for . . . working with rather than against emotion in rhetorical education,” arguing that the very fabric of the *Rhetoric* shows us how citizens can flourish through persuasion instead of aggression, engaging “heart,” implying the “disposition to act and feel” (15). Gretchen Flesher Moon’s essay on pathos also draws on Aristotle’s understanding, acceptance, and promotion of emotional appeals. She writes, “We have for centuries pitted reason against emotion, logos against pathos, nomos against physis . . . [D]espite Aristotle’s admonitions, we have scant experience even in naming the emotions. In fact, these opposites are complementary, not binary” (37). Indeed, the point of this slim volume is to reconcile the polarities of logos and pathos. Tom Kerr and Mary Ann Cain separately acknowledge the on-going neglect of the emotions in composition studies. Kerr avers that “the gulf between what is regarded as personal and thus linked to one’s emotion, and what is political, and thus somehow beyond individual lives . . . is still wide . . .” (33). Susan Kirtley writes, “[in teaching] I feel compelled to hide what I have been taught is a weakness: my emotions” (58). However, citing Plato who writes that the emotions are “a source of movement” (63), Kirtley insists that “eros can then be seen as a continual movement forward, a perpetual striving that

emerges in emotion and leads to wisdom" (63).

Donna Strickland and Ilene Crawford focus on student errors and academia's "deeply entrenched emotional response to error" (78). Wendy Ryden's essay reaffirms the squeamishness with which academia has dealt with emotional intelligence: "Emotions are marked for the personal sphere and are not valid areas of public knowledge to be tampered with in the classroom" (86). Citing her own reluctance to confront these binaries, Ryden admits to responding to pathos with logos, "forc[ing] students and myself to frame emotional responses in terms of rational debate" (90).

Piper Murray addresses "hateful teaching" (93) when teachers encounter "bad students." She recounts a story from Richard H. Haswell and Min-Zhan Lu's *Comp Tales* about a senior professor whose "bad" students get returned a "zip-lock plastic baggie containing the shredded contents of their paper" (92), thus "torturing developing writers with acts of shame and humiliation."

Janet Bean, in exploring resistance in narratives of working class students, argues that "we need to discard binaries that oppose feelings and reason" and that we should "question our own reluctance to acknowledge emotion as intellectual work" (112).

Alice Gillam writes of the emotionally-draining struggle of Writing Program Administrators to gain legitimate standing in the face of dismissive institutions (123). She recounts, after her Faculty Senate eliminated writing proficiency requirements, that a colleague at a meeting which they both attended, said, "I hope you will think this is funny . . . when I mentioned your name, he said, 'Oh, I heard she died.'"

William W. Wright focuses on emotions triggered by job loss (anger, embarrassment, distress, discomfort) but also discusses the other end of the emotional continuum ("pleasure, wholeness, soul") (132). Citing Aristotle that "Pleasure is a movement, a movement by which the soul as a whole is consciously brought into its normal state of being," Wright insists that "rhetoric has had to find a place for pathos . . . which has been in service to logos" (132).

Similarly, Brad Peters is interested in radical anger and conflict management. Peters recalls for me linguist John Lamendella's research indicating that language is under the control of two separate systems, "one for normal speech and the other for speech under stress or in situations of strong emotion" (qtd. in Rico 113): in fact, bilinguals like me often revert to their mother tongue under strong emotion, possibly because this first language has the deepest ties to limbic expression.

Mara Holt, Leon Anderson, and Albert Rouzie address the rigors of "emotion work" despite the bleak reality that the WPA is "invisible": "Daily emotion work is crucial to accomplishing the goals of literacy widely espoused in higher education" (151). They recognize that nurturing and outlaw emotional expression are valuable, in a free society; for them an emotional vocabulary is essential to emotional literacy.

Lynn Worsham concludes: "It will be a shame if the new interest in emotion as a category of critical thought does not move us into a new orbit of . . . possibility" (163). Philosopher Susanne Langer in *Mind: An Essay on Human Feeling* states that the source of language initially lay in making inward feelings manifest in sound. I wrote in *Pain and Possibility* that "we can . . . think of language as a flashlight illuminating the jagged, irregular, swirling patterns of the incho-

ate” (112). Consider the emotional roots of language in human consciousness: life is matter and motion, nouns and verbs, an emotional grammar of multiple colorations of feeling. William Stafford in “Any Time” builds on the metaphor of a life-saving parachute, speaking for the heart of *A Way to Move*:

I have woven
 a parachute out of everything broken, my scars
 are my shield; and I jump, daylight or dark,
 into any country, where as I descend I turn
 native and stumble into terribly human speech
 and wince recognition. (qtd. in Rico 112)

Language, particularly written, cannot help but be a potent organizing principle of our students’ emotional expression. I repeat: we cannot ignore the emotional power of *in*-volving them both emotionally *and* logically in order to help them *e*-volve as thoughtful, articulate writers. The writers in *A Way to Move* address head-on the mostly inarticulated dimension of composition studies. Bravo! ☺

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Megan Brown, Drake University

My college roommate never got her senior thesis proposal approved, but she went ahead and wrote the thesis without institutional blessing. The English Department’s thesis committee decided that Susan’s project—a narrative-based exploration of college students’ struggles with eating disorders—was not sufficiently grounded in “capital R” Research even though Susan had provided a tentative bibliography. The committee suggested that Susan resubmit the proposal after reframing the project as “creative fiction,” but she refused. After all, the project that she had in mind was not a novel or a series of poems but a presentation of research through the telling of individual students’ stories. In the end, Susan wrote the thesis that she wanted to write, but—despite her faculty advisor’s passionate defense of the final product—Susan could not graduate with honors, as most of the “approved” thesis writers did.

The events described above took place almost a decade ago, but the basic debate underlying Susan's struggle to gain institutional acceptance continues today. The role of narrative in college classrooms and student writing remains a controversial question that manifests itself in a variety of ways. Should students—even graduate students—be encouraged to explore their personal lives in their writing? Should they be permitted to use personal examples and anecdotes to support their claims about culture and society? Should they write about their friends and families? Should they use “I” in their writing at all? In *Living the Narrative Life: Stories as a Tool for Meaning Making*, Gian Pagnucci explores all of these questions and answers each one with an unabashedly enthusiastic “yes.” Indeed, the book's arguments in favor of narrative's central place in writing and thinking are strengthened by Pagnucci's own narrative approach. The author skillfully integrates commentary on contemporary composition theory and classroom practice with stories about his students, teachers, friends, and family. For example, he shows how his childhood love of reading and collecting comic books inspired his pedagogical philosophy, illustrates the connections between his teaching experiences at Indiana University of Pennsylvania and his commitment to helping students write about their lives, and demonstrates the many ways in which his Italian heritage profoundly shaped his ongoing interest in language and memory. Overall, Pagnucci presents a strong case for narrative, not only as a powerful communication tool but also as a crucially important thought process: narrative is one way in which people make sense of the complex world around them.

What is the “narrative life” promised in the book's title? In a sense, the concept is quite simple; Pagnucci writes, “Stories are how we think. How we talk. They form our governments, our religions, our culture. . . . Stories are what make us human” (7). A person “living the narrative life” embraces and celebrates the role of stories in his or her everyday activities and beliefs. Given this description, a reader might wonder why anyone would resist or reject the narrative life, but, shortly after the lines quoted above, Pagnucci recounts the story of a graduate student, Brandon, whose narrative-based dissertation project on literacy trends in Pennsylvania is frowned upon by most of his advisers. At a committee meeting, Pagnucci defends Brandon while the other faculty members deliver sharp criticisms: “You need to ground the study in the relevant literature. . . . I'm worried you're going to take away from [your participants'] voices with all this stuff about yourself” (13). Pagnucci alone understands the worth of Brandon's project and argues that the writing style of most academic books, journals, and dissertations is deeply problematic: “Academia celebrates not clarity but obfuscation. We don't say what we mean. . . . In academia we prize abstraction and critical reflection. The piercing clarity of a story is too simplified for the hallowed halls of academia” (17). For Pagnucci (and Brandon), autobiographical stories foster insights and understandings too often squelched by standard, and standardized, “five paragraph essay” prose structures.

Living the Narrative Life neatly encapsulates Pagnucci's solution to the standardization and abstraction of academic work: a narrative approach to writing and scholarship. Each of the six themed sections of the book includes a short story, a poem, and an essay that blend theoretical discussion with short narrative anecdotes. These three genres illustrate three different approaches to writing and thinking about the following issues: “The Perils of the Narrative Life,” “Narrative Ideology,” “Telling Your Own Story,” “Telling Family Stories,” “Telling Work Legends,” and “Telling Stories with Students.” The book also includes “inter-

ludes”: chapters comprised of quotations and conversation fragments that explore narrative theory. All of these components are engaging and witty, with arguments directed not only at professional teachers of writing but also at graduate students, who, after all, frequently work as teaching assistants for undergraduate composition courses.

Pedagogy is a central concern of *Living the Narrative Life*. The later sections of the book describe various methods that instructors can use to include narrative in university writing classes. Pagnucci contrasts his work to seminal research by David Bartholomae and Linda Flower when he insists that narrative should not be solely relegated to brainstorming exercises meant to get student writers started before they move on to more abstract and argumentative academic writing. Bartholomae and Flower are mentioned only briefly in *Living the Narrative Life*; I leave it to readers to decide whether Pagnucci’s assessment of these writers’ ideas is entirely accurate. Several of the activities and assignments that Pagnucci describes could be incorporated into almost any kind of writing course. He teaches research methodology by asking his composition students to investigate their family trees, and he advocates “co-writing” for creative projects; one of the book’s longest narratives describes his work with Dustin, a home-schooled teenager with whom Pagnucci collaborates on a science fiction story. While co-writing is probably best left to one-on-one time with students rather than classroom time, Dustin’s example allows Pagnucci to elaborate on one of his most important themes, letting students decide for themselves what they’d like to write: “When I quit pushing Dustin away from the literacy stories he valued and tried instead to find my own meaning in the stories he was drawn to, Dustin finally responded to my teaching” (144). Readers who teach “Writing in the Disciplines” courses may be surprised and intrigued by one of Pagnucci’s technical writing course assignments: a collaborative journal in which students exchange suggestions about each other’s research projects.

A tendency toward overstatement occasionally undermines the strength of Pagnucci’s arguments. Given narrative writers’ struggles to be taken seriously as academic scholars, Pagnucci’s passionate defense of narrative is understandable. Though he does acknowledge some scholars who applaud narrative approaches, the author may still be giving short shrift to recent trends in academic writing, trends that simultaneously make room for narrative and challenge traditional conventions of what constitutes “publishable” or “serious” prose. For example, a 1996 *JAC* article by Daniel Mahala and Jody Swilky convincingly argues for a turn toward personal storytelling within academic discourses; they note that such writers as Patricia Williams, Trinh Minh-Ha, and Jane Tompkins use narrative forms to “present themselves as historically situated subjects exploring how their knowledge has been shaped by lived experience” (364).

Also, Pagnucci writes that “[w]hat is placed on the highest pedestal of all [in academia] are not stories but rather theory, densely written works of abstract concepts” (21). This statement sets up a false dichotomy because “theory,” however formalized in structure, reveals an elaborate “story” of our thinking; in its manifold variety, theory is an emergent narrative with appropriate abstract and particular parts. Similarly, to say, as Pagnucci does, that the narrative life is “the only life really worth living” (2) may alienate readers who simply prefer to write (and think) in different, and perhaps more abstract, ways. Not every writer is comfortable with narrative, particularly autobiographical narrative.

Arguments about composition course content—especially the fraught question of helping students to enter an academic or professional discourse community by teaching them discipline-specific writing conventions—may never be resolved in a way that satisfies all involved parties. Though most instructors would probably agree that completely dismissing certain types of writing is an unproductive approach that might discourage students (like my college roommate) from working to their fullest potential, Pagnucci persuasively argues that such dismissals of narrative remain disturbingly routine. Pagnucci's invitation to "live the narrative life" is not only a refreshing, enjoyable read, but also an important intervention into contemporary debates about writing skills, practices, theories, and pedagogies. ☐

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Kim McCollum-Clark, Millersville University of Pennsylvania

Here's a personal story for you: I spent a couple of weeks with Candace Spigelman—at least in the context of her cogent, enormously thoughtful examination of personal writing in academic discourse. I felt invigorated, as if I had found a new mentor in teaching writing, someone who managed to call into question my unexamined assumptions and inspired me to dig as deeply as she did at the same time. And she even lived in my state! And then came the shock: she is no longer with us. Spigelman, a rhetoric professor at the Pennsylvania State University, Berks campus, died unexpectedly in December 2004 at age 57. Many of her colleagues, former students, and peers in the discipline have eulogized her in many places and forms, always mingling their praise for her principles, groundbreaking publications, sensitive pedagogical practice, and upbeat professionalism with their fond memories. As she points out in her recent book, *Personally Speaking: Experience as Evidence in Academic Discourse*, Aristotle even calls for brief stories to support the claims of epideictic rhetoric. But this isn't why Spigelman's colleagues employ them in remembering her. They do so because that is how their impressions of her were constructed: they are telling themselves and others stories about Spigelman to make the case for her attributes, for the transformative nature of their relationships with her. In a very real way, they are actualizing the arguments she is making in the text under review here, and I think she would appreciate how her friends unconsciously emphasize her position with *encomia* supported by personal experiences.

Personally Speaking is an offering of Southern Illinois University Press's Studies in Writing and Rhetoric series. In this work, Spigelman's project is to

carve out both theoretical and pragmatic instructional space for integrating the “personal” in traditional academic writing. To create opportunities for this integration, she interrogates the standard objections to the inclusion of personal writing in the composition classroom and subsequently makes a powerful argument for the special contributions personal writing can make within the construction of academic arguments. In both cases, she succeeds brilliantly in creating new space for the serious consideration of hybrid or “blurred” forms of writing.

Spigelman defines “personal writing” as writing in which writers “make sense of their lives by organizing their experiences into first-person stories” (3). Early in the book, she foregrounds her discussions with an exploration of the “narrative turn” in many disciplines, often in the form of ethnographic research and narratives. I was especially taken with her exploration of the use of personal writing in the academic essays of well-known compositionists (Linda Brodkey, Kathleen Blake Yancey, Lillian Bridwell-Bowles, Karen Surman Paley, and others) and with her wry observation that, while writing teachers often make use of the personal as evidence in their own writing, they are reluctant to make the same rhetorical tool available to their students.

Her hope—her call to action—is for the modification of academic discourse through inclusion of personal writing. Such a blending of personal writing “in and as academic argument” results in what she calls “personal academic argument.” Spigelman describes this integration as a hybrid or “blurred genre” of writing that will help writers overcome the “public” vs. “private” dichotomy that often constrains academic writers as they come to terms with what is meaningful and worth sharing. She examines how the thinking of feminist rhetorical and pedagogical theorists lends support to the inclusion of the personal—as the politics of location—in all arenas of communication.

Spigelman does not take up directly a question that persisted in my thinking as I read, and that is, “Why do students seem to gravitate toward personal stories first?” She does answer it indirectly, I think, explaining that personal writing gives students authority over their topics and the meanings they are working through in their writing. They begin with the familiar and take the opportunity to bring their own intra-textual knowledge to writing, a more certain bridge to traditional academic writing than the unreflective “borrowing” of the objective voice and unfamiliar genres of academic prose. Spigelman reminds us that the inclusion of the personal often invites audience engagement and identification. As readers and writers, we are always more attuned to “faces” than we are to “facts.”

Integrating the personal into academic discourse then provides a kind of mediating structure or space, as Vygotsky might explain it, between the kinds of thinking students have internalized and the kinds of academic habits of mind they are reaching for. Spigelman argues further that the inclusion of personal writing provides a kind of “surplus,” a change in thinking about both personal and academic topics. This surplus, the recognition of insights that the writer “cannot fully reconcile” and perhaps would not have gained access to, makes possible more complex and sometimes contradictory perspectives. She states, “when we use personal experience as evidence in scholarly writing, we simultaneously frame our subject narratively and deductively, and thus offer our readers (at least) two kinds of understanding or conceptualization” (91). Spigelman describes her work with several first-year writers, especially a student named Michelle, to integrate first-person stories to deepen and complicate their “first takes” on the analytic

topics Spigelman had assigned. In these discussions, Spigelman emphasizes the use of the personal as a rhetorical tool, asking to what purposes personal writing is employed in the construction of the text.

Spigelman is similarly thorough in addressing frankly and without prejudice the ubiquitous objections to the use of personal writing. She acknowledges the concerns and risks many teachers try to avoid by proscribing first-person stories outright. She anticipates and answers the critics' caveats in regard to personal writing: the difficulties of personal "disclosure" in academic writing, the disconnect between the goals of "academic discourse" and the motives of personal writing. She is at her most definitive, however, when she considers the concerns of many postmodern critics that the use of personal writing leaves uninterrogated naive understandings of a kind of unitary "identity" whose observations are irrefragable, unimpeachable, and "true."

She responds to these concerns with a fascinating counterpoint, defining experience itself as a "construct." We commonly conflate experience with "expertise," and this is the mistake we make. We must instead acknowledge that the experiences we write about or tell are a kind of fiction; they are always narrated. Spigelman quotes Judith Summerfield, who explains: "There is no return to the event, except 'virtually.' The event is overtaken, always mediated by language" (63). We translate experience into mini-narratives and stories that we tell ourselves about the events we experience. Thus, "experiences" are always shot with ambiguity because they are at least at one remove from the actual event and may have been reconstructed many times. Thus, using these mini-narratives in academic writing should not be viewed as naively unified and irrefragable, but as fulfilling rhetorical purposes that may "signify the complexities and contradictions of experiential representations of self and others" (81). When we employ personal stories, we "select strategically the most appropriate versions and representations to complete our rhetorical purpose, while acknowledging as postmodern thinkers our inability to access a stable, singular psychic core" (45).

Spigelman acknowledges forthrightly that employing personal writing can be "challenging and risky" in the writing classroom, but she leaves no doubt of its potential for writers and readers. After living with Spigelman's book for weeks now, I see that this text provides a substantial theoretical foundation for many contemporary trends in composition that urge writers to experiment with "alternative discourses" and "mixed forms" to create new rhetorical spaces. Spigelman and alternative discourse writers share a sense of the emphatic importance of personal and experiential voices as grounds for more traditional argumentative claims, and Spigelman's book helps to solidify their position theoretically and pedagogically.

Other readers who could be invigorated by Spigelman's thinking are teachers who have shunned the use of personal writing. They will be likely to re-examine their objections in the context of Spigelman's candid considerations of the very real paradoxes initiated by the use of first-person stories in academic arguments. Teachers who have encouraged their students to experiment with personal experience as evidence in support of larger claims will take away a keener sense of what might be possible and a set of new pedagogical strategies to try. Many of these readers will feel somewhat bereft, as I do, that the rhetoric and composition studies community has lost Spigelman's voice, but, in a very real sense, we still have a remarkable mentor available to us in this and her other texts. ☹