

Jennifer Rich and Ethna D. Lay, Eds. *Who Speaks for Writing: Stewardship in Writing Studies in the 21st Century*. *Studies in Composition and Rhetoric*. Volume 8. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2012. 205 pages.

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In his 2005 CCCC plenary address, Doug Hesse asked, “Who owns writing?” His refrain that compositionists and rhetoricians must assume not only control, but also responsibility for writing and writers struck a deep cord for Jennifer Rich and Ethna D. Lay. In response, they organized the 2008 “Who Owns Writing?” Revisited Conference at Hofstra University. Though envisioned as a smaller conference, the event drew more participants than anticipated, proving the timeliness and urgency behind the topics of possession, boundaries, and obligation. This 2012 collection is less a solid answer to Hesse’s question than a testament to the power behind it.

Rich and Lay begin with Hesse’s “Who Speaks for Writing? Expertise, Ownership, and Stewardship,” his keynote from the 2008 Hofstra conference, a piece that provides much needed contextualization. With candor, Hesse assesses the professionalization and individualization of writing studies, concluding with three strongly worded suggestions: Writing studies must produce writing about writing for non-experts. Writing studies must expect instructors to know composition theory and history. Writing instructors must share scholarly and professional pursuits with students, creating collaboration--what one might see as a sense of dual ownership--between the two (21). He concludes by addressing the feelings of futility inherent to being a writing instructor: “to fancy ourselves as stewards of writing then, may seem as foolish as tending a timber against uncountable bugs” (22). While Hesse treads the tightrope between pessimism and hope, he continuously calls for writing instructors to claim the torch of stewardship and, with it, a voice.

Rich and Lay have placed Hesse within a rich context, addressing where the field has been, where it is, and where it is going. They have cast a wide net, calling upon scholars with a solid pool of interests and specializations, from WAC and WID to feminism. The collection is divided into 3 sections: Stewardship in Institutional Contexts, Theoretical Perspectives on Writing Studies, and Classroom Practice and Innovation. The book has a clear progression, moving from broad to specific, with a logical shift between the higher order concerns of the university to the more localized aspects of the individual classroom.

Part 1, Stewardship in Institutional Contexts, addresses the powerlessness many writing programs face in the shadow of the institution. Part 2, the strongest section, gives meaning to stewardship. Brian Gogan considers replacing “contract systems” with reciprocity, while Letizia Guglielmo contributes a feminist perspective that values interruption (as a form of ownership) in the classroom. Frank Gaughan’s engaging take on “fake writing” and authenticity forces the reader to reconsider risk-taking and uncertainty in student work.

Part 3, Classroom Practice and Innovation, loses some of the momentum of Parts 1 and 2. The often-neglected voice of community colleges and non-traditional institutions (the United States

Military Academy, for example) is appreciated, yet the political charge buzzing underneath the first two-thirds of the text suddenly and unexpectedly quiets.

Many of the writers speak to the long-heralded identity crisis of writing studies. The bright-eyed student new to the discourse, the young professional entering the job market, and the tenured professor turned department chair can equally benefit from mulling over this collective identity crisis, specifically within the timely framework of stewardship. Paul G. Cook charges the identity question in “Disciplinary, Identity Crisis, and the Teaching of Writing.” He writes, “when one asks the question ‘who owns writing?’ what’s really at stake is, ‘Who is in control of the formation of identity?’ ‘Who gets to say what writing is--compositionists, rhetoricians, The National Commission on Writing, someone else?’ ‘Who is authorized to give an account of rhetoric and composition studies’ ” (100). This line of questioning returns (once again) to Hesse’s plea for ownership, claiming that writing teachers must understand that, with this move, the questions and answers may change (101).

One area that deserves further attention is the problem of learning transfer, which has become increasingly central to writing studies since the 2005 address. Because students are expected to apply what they learn in first-year composition to their work in the various disciplines, transfer is intertwined with who “speaks” for writing. Is it critical thinking specialists? Writing instructors? Practitioners in the disciplines?

As writing studies continues to carve its disciplinary niche, Rich and Lay have pulled together voices that push forward the dialogue of identity, control, and accountability, but there is still much work to be done. While the definition of stewardship and its relation to writing studies may still feel sticky and unformed, malleable and fickle, the process of working through that definition is necessary. The power behind stewardship in writing studies is only now beginning to be tapped.