CHAPTER 1.

ANNE RUGGLES GERE: AN ENGLISH STUDIES SCHOLAR PAR EXCELLENCE

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Few scholars in English studies have the intellectual, methodological, and leadership vision of Anne Ruggles Gere. During her career, she fearlessly crossed disciplinary boundaries to fashion a legacy of research unparalleled in English studies. Gere created ecologies of thought that invited multiple forms of inquiry and teaching, always with methodological acumen and her signature graciousness.

I first met Gere in 1994. I was a second-year Ph.D. student at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute. I had been studying literacy in urban community settings, trying to understand how adult women came to learn and teach each other the reading and writing they needed to create and endure change. "Kitchen Tables and Rented Rooms: The Extracurriculum of Composition," based on her Conference on College Composition and Communication (CCCC) chair's address in 1993, was published in the February 1994 issue of *College Composition and Communication*. Her article sparked in me the sense that literacy studies outside of writing classrooms could be undertaken and needed to be advanced. It provided me the intellectual grounds and methodological foundation from which to advance research on community literacy with attention to inequity and power. Later that spring, I asked Gere if she would be willing to present on a panel at the CCCC together with myself, Arnetha Ball and Lee Odell. I was over the moon when they all agreed, and I submitted a panel proposal that was eventually accepted.

"Kitchen Tables and Rented Rooms: The Extracurriculum of Composition" presented a novel observation: "writing development occurs outside of formal education" (76) around kitchen tables and in rented rooms. The extracurriculum of composition presented a paradigmatic shift away from a focus on writing development as a solely individual enterprise unfolding in the cognitive and rhetorical moves of writers in classrooms. Based on a nascent area of emerging qualitative research in literacy studies (Heller) and historical accounts of

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women's clubs between 1880 and 1990, Gere suggested that writing development, teaching, and learning had long been practiced outside of classrooms and that these practices merited further investigation, particularly because they provided insight into power, inclusion, belonging, and social change. Central to the argument was the understanding that much disciplinary knowledge making at the time in rhetoric and writing "focused inside classroom walls" (78). With this article, Gere invited the field to consider literacy development as a social and collaborative activity taking place outside of school-based learning and teaching settings. She presented a paradigmatic shift, a university-community-boundary-bridging shift, for the field of rhetoric and writing and English studies generally.

Beyond creating a gravitation force that effectively helped to move the field of writing and literacy studies away from the individual, the essay, and the writing classroom as the primary loci to study writing development, "Kitchen Tables and Rented Rooms" offered the profession of writing and rhetoric a means to question its own professionalization practices. Importantly, Gere points out that the culture of professionalization "abhors amateurism, but composition's extracurriculum shows the importance of learning from amateurs" (88). She argued to broaden what counts as a literacy practice worthy of study. She urged the field to expand its focus to include expert writers in specialized areas as well as writers in communities who otherwise might have been dismissed as amateurs — "as the Latin root *amatus* reminds us" community-based writers teach each other to "write for *love*" (88).

Methodologically, the article prompted early-career scholars in the 1990s, myself included, to take up the call for qualitative research in communities and archives to better understand the ways in which writing develops outside of writing classrooms. Where the field of writing and rhetoric had focused on establishing itself as a legitimate area of disciplinary work within English studies, Anne Gere's scholarship and her 1993 leadership of the Conference on College Composition and Communication presented a viable path to pursue a broader understanding of writing development. For when we study and earnestly value the reading and writing practices of community members, we must necessarily understand what writing means to them, how it works for them, how they share and publish their work, and how they create knowledge together. The methodological shift here has had a lasting impact on the field and on pedagogical practice. Students could now be understood as "individuals who seek to write, not be written about, who seek to publish, not be published about, who seek to theorize, not be theorized about" (89). In other words, Gere's research provided leadership to rhetoric and writing as a field, encouraging it to move beyond the classroom into communities and even more into archives to establish for itself

a basis for professionalization that focuses squarely on understanding the close connections between literacy practice, power, and creating and enduring change with literacy practices.

Let me stay with the idea of moving beyond classrooms to study writing as a key moment of Gere's leadership in the field to highlight two ways in which this unfolded, the first through curriculum, the second through archival research. Published in 1998, Schutz and Gere's article "Service Learning and English Studies: Rethinking 'Public' Service" navigated the relationships between universities and communities to underscore the nuanced ways in which student projects outside of the classroom might be framed. In the article, Schutz and Gere question the strict distinctions being drawn at the time between public and private spaces for writing. They argue that the writing classroom could be constituted as a "'public space' in which students could begin to articulate and address" community issues that they identified (136). They detail outcomes of a student-led writing project responding to the practices of the University of Michigan student union, which had adopted practices that treated African American students differently, e.g. asking for IDs of all African American students, but not all students. Schutz and Gere argue that writing about the community within the university constituted a type of public writing precisely because it offered one way for students to experience "multiple public and private spaces, operating at multiple levels" with the effect of allowing "myriad kinds of difference to emerge into dialogue" (146). Service learning and public writing projects for students, they contend, allow "us to see the work of English studies, in all its different configurations, as always precariously poised between myriad locations, activities, and discourses—each with its possibilities and limitations" (146). Such reflections shed light on the ways in which English studies as a discipline could begin to carefully take up the call for service learning by inviting students to write about communities they encounter.

During this stage of her career, Gere had been undertaking serious historical study of U.S. women's clubs between 1880 and 1920 through archival research. Her 1997 book *Intimate Practices: Literacy and Cultural Work in U.S. Women's Clubs, 1880–1920* details the diversity of these clubs, pointing out the ways in which the women's club movement included Mormon, Jewish, working-class African American, and white Protestant women. She notes, "Women representing a rich variety of social positions formed clubs in cities and towns across the country" (3). She chronicles through rich archival textual analysis the ways in which women's clubs enacted cultural work crucial to civic life during these decades. The book's publication fell in line with Gere's earlier arguments on the feminist's alternative to rhetoric and writing, an alternative that chose to understand and create space for collaboration, women's writing, and the importance

of personal writing. Gere had an eye on creating a space to value these writings in scholarship, the field, and in classrooms.

This scholarship during the early stages of her career illustrates the ways in which she worked at interdisciplinary intersections in the field of rhetoric and writing and English studies. It's small wonder that Gere herself was field-forming and interdisciplinary given her own intellectual history. She was among the earliest cohorts of Ph.D. students to graduate from the Joint Ph.D. Program in English and Education, a program she would later lead at the University of Michigan. Patti Stock would later gather essayists, including Gere, who traced the intertwined historical legacy of close connections between English education and composition. While working on her dissertation that explored West African oratory and fiction, her experience teaching high school English would prompt her to better understand writing instruction. She sought out Richard Enos, who was a rhetoric professor in the department of communication at the University of Michigan during the time she was working on her Ph.D. She wanted to "understand more about how rhetoric could help" her appreciate writing curriculum and instruction (50). Her dissertation research, on West African fiction and oratory, primed her to study texts closely to present their rhetorical force. But as a graduate student who was also a high school English teacher, she understood that English studies had to be broad and embracing of multiple dimensions of humanistic study of textual practice.

As chair and co-chair of the Joint Program in English and Education at the University of Michigan, Gere helped to launch the careers of several authors in the present collection and many others recognizable in literacy studies and education.[1] Graduates from the program she led or co-led have benefited from her interdisciplinary blend of English and education—the study of literature and literacy, the teaching of reading and writing, the practices of literacy outside of classrooms and across disciplines—and the power of these disciplinary perspectives to shape a broad use and understanding of text and textual practice. With Jay Robinson's legacy of work to build upon (Stock), Gere trained key figures in rhetoric, writing, literacy studies, and English education. Her trajectory as a knowledge maker and doer melded inquiry into writing, teacher training, and the history of women teachers and writers.

She asked the field of English studies and education to identify a broader conception of valued texts and textual practices that moved beyond the transactional and generic. She has modeled leadership in these endeavors, seamlessly weaving her own scholarly innovations and interventions into her professional

1 Students of Anne's in this collection include Aull, Beitler, Buehler, Day, Farris, Hammond, Hutton, Kaufman, Limlamai, Minter, Robbins, Sassi, Sinor, Thomas, Thomson-Bunn; Villanueva, Willard-Traub, Wilson, and Young.

style and philosophies, and with a steadfast commitment to equity, inclusion, and creating a space for belonging in scholarship, teaching, and knowledge making with communities. She provided innovative methodologies for bringing students and scholars to the place she helped to envision. In a staggeringly brilliant career spanning nearly fifty years, Gere has always anticipated where English studies needed to be. And she always modeled for scholars and teachers ways in which we could enact these possibilities in our own professional lives.

Gere's personal life is the background against which her inquiry figures. In 2001, Gesa Kirsch and Min-Zhan Lu collaborated on a symposium with Gere, Deborah Brandt, yours truly, Anne Herrington, Richard E. Miller, and Victor Villanueva. Together, we began a conversation among rhetoric and writing scholars about the ways in which "uncritical celebration of personal narrative" had created "expectations to story our lives within the personal narrative" even when a person might have multiple ways of narrating what has prompted their scholarly and professional lives (Brandt et al. 42). In Gere's contribution to the symposium titled "Articles of Faith," she describes how she and her daughter, Cindy, had begun to co-author a double-voiced memoir about their spiritual journeys and family's lives. She soon realized that their writing "required some attention to religion" (46), yet, as she had learned early on in her career, she ought not to mention being Christian and being married to a Presbyterian minister in academic contexts. But, her understanding of religion broadened as she followed her daughter Cindy, an Athabaskan from the Yukon, into "talking circles, autumn moon ceremonies, women's sweats, and other sacred rites" that Cindy experienced "as she moved into womanhood" (46). As they wrote, Gere saw two tensions emerging between the desire to understand her daughter's ceremonies and the desire to write about her growing understanding of religious beliefs: "the available language for talking about religious faith is impoverished; expressions of spirituality that fall outside traditional norms risk being exotic" (46). In literacy narratives of personal becoming, she observes, "It is much more acceptable to detail the trauma of rape or abuse than to recount a moment of religious inspiration" (47). Anyone wishing to write about religion "not only lack the highly complex and compelling language of, say, queer theory, but they confront an implacable secularism" (47). Her words resonate in interesting and profound ways today in the age of tell- and show-all social media feeds and public rhetoric where evidentiary basis for claims, if it exists, is routinely stretched beyond credibility and too often trucks in the sensational or panders to the cultivation of outrage.

Gere's provocative insight about the study of religion and its intersection with literacy, civics, and learning provides a steppingstone to a nascent body of scholarly literature on the connection of religion and education (Juzwik et

al.; Weyand and Juzwik). She also takes up the still-relevant insight concerning why and how the personal comes to be constructed, valued, and circulated, or overlooked, devalued, and silenced. Gere's work has everything to do with who is constructing the other and what values are placed on the literate practices of the other.

Throughout her studies of literate and teacherly lives, she has threaded an emphasis on populations who have been excluded or marginalized, e.g. with a focus on women's literacy in communities and through personal stories, on students of color and more just standards of assessment, and on Native people's teaching and learning ("An Art of Survivance" and "Indian Heart / White Man's Head"). One of the most admirable aspects of Gere's legacy of research rests in her understanding of teaching and teacher training from historical examples of teachers. Gere has always illustrated the subtle and lasting ways power circulates in the literate lives of individuals beyond and within the academy's walls.

I'll never forget seeing Anne at a mid-Michigan conference celebrating Native writers around 2007 or 2008.[2] At the time, she had pulled up a chair at the table of Indigenous scholars and writers where I was sitting. I greeted her with surprise and took the liberty of introducing her as the leader of both the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) and the CCCC. I went on about her work with teacher preparation, English education, and community literacy. Folks at the table looked at me, then at her, politely nodding, and waiting for me to get to the punchline—what was this woman's connection to the assembled Indigenous literary scholars and creative writers? My enthusiastic introduction trailed off. I was reluctant to mention her familial and personal connection to the work of the conference. That was her personal story to tell about her family and her story of learning and moments of growth with her daughter Cindy that was close to her heart. With a warm smile, Anne Ruggles Gere stepped into the opening left by my overly exuberant if superficially professional introduction of her. She generously added a fuller and personal description of her work. Folks smiled and visited with her. Looking back, I see now that I proved the points she had made in "Articles of Faith." Hers was a personal a story that had brought us together around the conference table that day, and I only felt comfortable to gush on about her professional accomplishments in English studies. Yet her story was precisely what everyone there wanted to hear and needed to hear. As is her way, Anne was forgiving and kind about my awkwardness. To the table assembled, she offered her intellectual origin story, but for me, she modeled again another way to weave artfully and seamlessly the personal with the professional, to bring heart and integrity to inquiry, and to make everyone feel at ease.

2 About this time, we were on a first name basis.

The next time I saw Anne Ruggles Gere in person was in 2017 at the CCCC in Portland, Oregon. I was making my way through the cavernous convention center, and she was quickly walking toward my direction. I stepped in front of her with a smile and congratulated her on becoming first vice president of the Modern Language Association. As I tend to do when Anne Gere's around, I gushed on about her being chair and president of three major organizations at the intersection of teacher education, writing studies, and English studies: CCCC, NCTE, and MLA! Was her hat trick a first for English studies? Well, maybe. She smiled.

We agreed to stay in touch, and we have. She's kindly supported me with letters of recommendation and shared a book project description with me she's been working on about Indigenous women teachers. She and I have been in a parallel headspace for some time, reading and writing about similar topics: teaching and learning, sustaining literacy practices, and writing with and for the Indigenous peoples and learners in our lives. When our paths do meet, however briefly, I'm left feeling stronger, gleaning light from her presence, insight from her wisdom, and inspiration from her model. In the times between, though, I read her work and aspire to do better. She's been that kind of professional role model. Able to talk across disciplines, research with rigor, support and mentor so many, run programs and lead organizations, and somehow through it all, she writes books and articles about the topics that have always mattered most to her and to the many fields of English studies.

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