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ICONIC DISCOURSE: THE TROUBLING LEGACY OF MINA SHAUGHNESSY

ABSTRACT: *The "legacy" of Mina Shaughnessy takes the form of a particular discourse that has, until recently, directed the means of discussion of basic writing issues. This discourse is characterized by two prominent functions: it routinely returns to the Shaughnessy icon constructed since her death (a concept supported by Foucault's notion of the author function), and it treats the teacher-figure as an idealized embodiment of "authentic" knowledge and democratic feeling. Two debates within the Basic Writing community – the reaction against Min Zhan Lu's early theoretical work and the more recent acrimonious response to Ira Shor's defense of mainstreaming – reflect contending paradigms of the basic writing field, with "critical" discourse challenging the conventions and so authority of the Shaughnessy-based "iconic" discourse.*

The enterprise of Basic Writing seems to be undergoing a paradigm shift in its disciplinary formation. Whereas it once clearly operated as its own community of practitioners and theorists, in recent years its disciplinary existence has been enacted less by Basic Writing theorists per se and more by broader categories of research in rhetoric-composition — by placement and evaluation studies conducted by researcher-theorists not primarily defined as "Basic Writing" specialists (Elbow, White), by social constructionist and other poststructural/postprocess theories that subsume the formerly delimited concerns called "Basic Writing" (Berlin, Lu, Stygall), by issues tied to labor practices and professionalization of the rhetoric-composition field, most vividly obvious in discussions on the universal requirement (Crowley, Connors), and by critical pedagogy and moves to reconfigure practice (and so identity) through mainstreaming (Shor). "Basic Writing" seems to be shifting from a term for a specialized teaching and research area in the field of rhetoric-composition to a pedagogical and sociopolitical concern dispersed across the spectrum of composing issues, writing curricula, and socio-educational theory, with the continuing argument over mainstreaming serving as a central site of this transformation.

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That the field has been and is in foment is apparent from the number of intra-community ideological conflicts that have surfaced in the past decade. These clashes show not only the shifting paradigms of the field but the contending discourses that have enabled change in it. The disputes that have arisen allow examination of the constraining discursive rules that, I will argue, are the legacy of Mina Shaughnessy, whose name I use in the iconic sense Joseph Harris has identified (77), rather than solely as the designation of a particular historical person. By examining the discourse associated with the formerly entrenched version of the Basic Writing field, we can begin to understand the nature of the conflicts that have arisen in the Basic Writing community of the 1990's, and to identify some of the forces behind the changes it is undergoing. In this discussion, my purpose is less to "judge" sets of discursive values and establish a binary relationship between two discursive patterns than it is to explore systems of linguistic constraint and trace points of transgression that lead to a shift in the nature of discursive authority.

Threats to the Iconic Edifice

The first major intra-community conflict began in 1991 with the publication of Min Zhan's Lu's article, "Redefining the Legacy of Mina Shaughnessy: A Critique of the Politics of Linguistic Innocence," a critical rereading of Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations* which led to a controversy that has continued in subsequent conference and journal form. The second is more recent: a set of exchanges on the CBW listserv, a highly unusual, highly personal case of "flaming" involving two major figures in the Basic Writing field. One of the figures represents the paradigm of Basic Writing as Bruce Horner has defined it, as a field dominated by a discourse that has created space for basic writing courses and students at the university but which also cooperates with traditional public discourse that erases the social and historical contexts of basic writing and writers. The other figure speaks from the paradigm of basic writing[1] as subsumed into a larger social and theoretical enterprise. In this furious exchange, the first, Karen Greenberg, charges the second, Ira Shor, her CUNY colleague, with "selling out," and attacks his recent article in which he calls for the mainstreaming of basic writers and equates basic writing with apartheid. This heated conflict has been carried on in somewhat more professionalized language in the pages of the *JBW's* last three issues.

Each of these cases serves to surface conflicting discursive sets. In each, we see two central points of intense discursive conflict. The first is what can be called the status of the icon, the icon meaning the

symbolic representation of the basic writing field, its students, teachers, and pedagogy, embodied by the text *Errors and Expectations*, the name of Mina Shaughnessy, and the temporal and geographic site of Open Admissions, CUNY's City College of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The second is the teacher-figure that is constructed in Shaughnessy's text, Shaughnessy's image, and the discourse that is her legacy. The degree of intense debate and powerful feeling attending each of these controversies suggests that something integral to the icon and so discourse of the field is at stake. Should the iconic Mina Shaughnessy be displaced, the authority for the field itself will shift away from those identified with its past formation, in a kind of professional correlative to the mainstreaming movement. And recent challenges to long-held ideologies regarding Basic Writing and Basic Writing students — challenges put forth by Min Zhan Lu and Ira Shor, among others — represent a real threat to the authority of the icon. Working from poststructural and political contexts, Lu and Shor in particular have opened up the former "Basic Writing" field, calling into question the very categories of (Basic Writing) student and research. Their work has successfully transgressed "Basic Writing" and its icon: can there be a poststructural Shaughnessy?

Formation of the Icon

Discussions of Basic Writing over the last twenty years can be seen as proceeding according to one of two primary discourses — what can be called *iconic* discourse and *critical* discourse. The former reproduces the field according to certain laws, always in relation to the iconic text and figure; the latter is transgressive, challenging the laws and the icon, and so is received with hostility by the traditional Basic Writing community. If we borrow from Foucault's theory of the author function, we can understand the conflicts cited above as a kind of struggle for discursive dominance. In a research project described in her 1994 *CCC* article, "Resisting Privilege: Basic Writing and Foucault's Author Function," Gail Stygall uses the concept of the author function to elucidate the ways in which the discursive practices of graduate students corresponding with basic writing students helped construct them as "basic writers" — and so to reinscribe the privilege of the academy. I follow Stygall's lead in using Foucault's concept of the author function to examine how contending discursive practices in Basic Writing theory have led to the intra-community controversies, and how discursive practices associated with the "legacy" of Mina Shaughnessy have directed the discourse of the traditional Basic Writing field.

In "What Is an Author," Foucault shows how a proper name —

like "Mina Shaughnessy" — can come to serve an author function, through which one can "group together a certain number of texts, define them, differentiate them from and contrast them to others . . . . The author's name serves to characterize a certain mode of being, of discourse," coming to have a certain "status" (107). Such a name allows for a break from one discursive construct and the formation of another and its particular mode of being. Shaughnessy is typically acknowledged as having served this transgressive function, in that *Errors and Expectations* provided a way of speaking about and so constructing basic writers as more than remedial students producing unacceptably deviant language reflecting their innate intellectual deficit; her work established instead a mode of being for them as beginners whose errors have a linguistic logic decodable by the teacher, thus staking out a justifiable place for them within higher education.

Further, Shaughnessy might be considered what Foucault terms a "founder of discursivity," that is, someone who is "not just the author of [her] own works [but someone who has] produced something else: the possibilities and the rules of formation of other texts . . . [someone who has] established an endless possibility of discourse" (114). The work itself is not the limiting conceptual foundation; it is "the primary coordinate" (116) for the discursivity it produces — the work itself is continually modified through what Foucault calls "the return to the origin," which allows for a "transforming of discursive practice itself." He cites the many re-examinations of Freud's texts and notes that each modifies psychoanalysis; thus the original work is not an absolute, but a coordinate for further discourse. *Errors and Expectations*, a text that emphasizes formalistic instruction in syntax, punctuation, handwriting, spelling, and vocabulary, continues as the originary point of reference for the Basic Writing field, even as the text's particular set of pedagogical practices have largely been left behind.

While Shaughnessy's *ideas* can be altered, innovations must maintain a connection to Shaughnessy as the Ur-author of the field, must contain the trace of her authority. Through this authority-legacy and perpetual founder-status, the author serves a function of "impeding"; Foucault says "the author is . . . the ideological figure by which one marks the manner in which we fear the proliferation of meaning" (119). The author "Mina Shaughnessy," then, while allowing for "an endless possibility of discourse," also ensures a limitation and exclusion of other ideological figures, of other authors and founders of discursivity. And thus the icon is formed, and the foundation is laid for intense conflict should another ideological formation be placed before her. Iconic discursive authority is a repetitive exercise in heritage: in such discussions of Basic Writing, Shaughnessy is perpetually posited as the starting point from which later ideas flow and to whom they are attributed, not necessarily conceptually, but always relationally. Even where conceptual difference is significant, the invocation of the name/au-

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thor validates the legacy and subsumes later theory under the authority of the icon.

That Shaughnessy is an icon, and that her name functions as an author, in Foucault's sense, seems amply evident. She has been cited in dozens of publications as the founder of Basic Writing, a contestable fact of the field (see Horner on the ahistorical notion of Basic Writing as a "new frontier," 211-213). The author function operates not on literal fact, however, but on discursive practices, and so one speaks of the field as having been founded, developed, popularized by, or identified with Mina Shaughnessy. Certainly Shaughnessy was a founding co-editor of the *Journal of Basic Writing*, tying her name to the national journal of the field, and her name continues to be cited in every issue, typically several times. Again according to Foucault, the name of the author also exceeds the specific works written by the author; here, too, Shaughnessy functions as an author's name, since she and her primary texts are more invoked than actually cited; *Errors and Expectations*, for example, is typically referred to foundationally, rather than noted for particular conceptual attribution. By "foundational," I mean citations introduced to establish a relation to the iconic Shaughnessy herself, as in recent *JBW* articles in phrases, often part of a rhetorical conclusion, such as "Twenty years after the publication of Shaughnessy's landmark *Errors and Expectations . . .*" (Gray-Rosendale 48); "Echoing Mina Shaughnessy . . ." (Gay 14); "Mina Shaughnessy expressed much the same sentiment . . ." (Stan and Collins 15). Her authority does not depend on what she has written, nor does what many consider the outmoded nature of her work undermine her authority.

From the start of Basic Writing, because of Shaughnessy, authority has been tied as much if not more to an ethical rather than a content-based credential, intermixing the personal and professional in ways that have infused the practice and theory of the field. That Shaughnessy's name has transcended her individual works is in part the result of her ethical claim, but also the result of the name constructed for her by those who worked with her at CUNY, seemingly all of whom loved and revered her. Part of the difficulty in examining the conflict over her name and "legacy," as her influence has been termed, derives from the ethical dilemma of critiquing work that is always also personal; the critic is caught between the demands of his or her method and the desire to respect the deep feelings of love and loss expressed by colleagues. These have been expressed in print, in addition to their existence in personal discourses over the years; the print record reflects the inextricably personal and professional construction of Shaughnessy. If we examine the print record, the list is extraordinary not only for its length and contributors, but also for its continuation over time. When Shaughnessy died in November, 1978, her obituary was printed

in the *New York Times*. Janet Emig wrote a eulogy published in *CCC* in 1979. A 1980 issue of *JBW* ("Toward a Literate Democracy") reprints the proceedings of the First Shaughnessy Memorial Conference and includes colleague Robert Lyons's keynote address at a 1979 CUNY conference as well as five speeches and essays written by Shaughnessy. Lyons's essay, "Mina Shaughnessy," appears in a collection of essays edited by John Brereton in 1985. In 1986, Don McQuade's edited collection on the teaching of composition, *The Territory of Language*, appeared, dedicated to Shaughnessy, its title taken from *Errors and Expectations*. The Spring 1994 issue of *JBW*, marking what would have been Shaughnessy's seventieth birthday, includes a section entitled "Remembering Mina Shaughnessy," and reprints the 1979 *CCC* obituary and E.D. Hirsch's 1979 MLA remarks made at a session dedicated to Shaughnessy, in addition to other past "tributes" and two essays by Shaughnessy. And an NCTE-published biography of Shaughnessy by a former CUNY student Jane Maher appeared in 1997, the first chapter of which earlier appeared in the Fall 1996 issue of *JBW*. Thus the legacy not only continues, but continues to turn back—back to the years at CUNY, back to the colleagues of the times, back to the person and her works, though these are reprinted at least partially as tributes rather than "new" work, and all these elements are fused together and published in the major disciplinary venues, two of which include notices of Shaughnessy memorial awards.[2] Thus the name "Mina Shaughnessy" has come to be and continues to operate as an author and icon, and so to exercise a controlling influence on the later discourse of the field.

This name is grounded in a specific era and location as well: "Mina Shaughnessy" invokes "CUNY," or a particular construction of CUNY, whose geographical-temporal coordinates are political and material. "CUNY" as a discursive element serves to situate Basic Writing discourse in a sociopolitical context of hostility to access and to race-, ethnicity-, and class-based difference. The CUNY open admission struggles of the 1960's and 1970's thus form a multiple context for the struggles of the 1990's, a context that is both site-specific and site-iconic. The institutional site exceeds its own historical facts, and, in Basic Writing discourse, "CUNY" becomes an overdetermined term. In Basic Writing discourse, one cannot speak of Mina Shaughnessy without invoking the personal, and one cannot speak of (or from) CUNY without invoking a particular material and political meaning, making it impossible within the discourse to reconceptualize without seeming at once to betray and dehistoricize. Through its claims on the origins, the icon, the author, directs and constrains.

The Iconic Teacher-Figure

A further impeding feature of iconic discourse derives from its construction of an idealized identity for the basic writing teacher. In iconic discourse, basic writers are treated with respect, though, as David Bartholomae and Min Zhan Lu especially have shown, the basic writer is also reified as an other, a radically alien being who is a stranger to academic discourse. The basic writing teacher, however, occupies a position of honor. The teacher is constructed as a kind of hero, one who identifies with and champions basic writers, and who enacts a Virgilian role of guide into academic discourse or a Wordsworthian validator of expressivism. Like Dante's Virgil or Wordsworth's Romantic poet, this teacher is positioned as a kind of outsider—as one who is outside the institutional hierarchy and the traditional academic values that have been seen as hostile and unwelcoming to basic writers. The primary credential of such a teacher is individual commitment, a sense of mission to teach, initiate, inspire, and defend basic writers. This model of the teacher emphasizes individual will over systematic conceptual or political theorizing. Establishing this set of values as the other side of a teacher-scholar binary, iconic discourse, following Shaughnessy, posits a moral hierarchy in which Basic Writing instructors supersede the traditional "meritocracy." The highest category in this new hierarchy is reserved for teachers; membership requirements are flattened out to be respect for the student and a will to see teaching as the center of true academic value.

Thus iconic discourse establishes four rules of construction regarding the teacher-figure. First, knowledge is based in experience and agency in will, a Kantian and Coleridgean formation of the subject. The teacher-figure works from individual feeling, inspiration, and creativity rather than socially-grounded scholarship. Second, curricula and pedagogies are to be self-made, since knowledge emerges from the individual self; the lecture model, for example, produces an inauthentic teacher (and note that the question of curricular validity is not posed; in this value, current-traditional methods and grammar-based courses are seen as neither more nor less informed than other approaches). The teacher serves as the inspiring, awakening model of "how," rather than the dominating, disciplining mouthpiece of "what". Third, the teacher-figure's goal is altruistic, with negation of the self as the ultimate form of teaching. The Mina Shaughnessy icon clearly symbolizes this ultimate self-negation. Fourth, the teacher-figure works against the repressive social givens of a particular age, operating in a space of ethical imperatives rather than political agendas; while unallied with a particular political movement, Basic Writing teachers are nonetheless depicted as radically democratic.

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Shaughnessy's works are replete with this will to restructure the academic value system in order to raise the teacher-figure to the highest category of worth. In her essay, "The Miserable Truth," she writes of her colleagues at CUNY,

> Probably at no school in this country is there such an accumulation of wisdom and know-how in the field of compensatory education as there is within this university at this moment. [This group of teachers] is a special fraternity joined not only by our common purposes and problems as teachers but by our having come to know, through our students, what it means to be an outsider in academia . . . . We reject in our bones the traditional meritocratic model of a college." (113)

In this passage, the teacher-figure is the site of "wisdom" and "know-how," in contradistinction to the traditional credentials of scholarship and expertise, locating the source of the teacher-figure's knowledge in experience instead, the result of identification with basic writing students and their marginalization. Shaughnessy goes on in the essay to juxtapose what she calls "the responsibility of teaching" with "merely presenting a subject" (114), placing ethical feeling over possession and transmission of content-knowledge. The implicit division of teacher and scholar is most fully developed in her article "The English Professor's Malady," in which she opens with the term "professor," using it to critique traditional attitudes and practices and citing such faculty as "provincial" (121). She then equates the "real" teacher with the "altruistic teacher" (122), establishing iconic discourse in an agonistic relationship with the traditional academy, an effect Susan Miller notes in *Textual Carnivals* when she cites Shaughnessy as having caused an increased "wedge between composition and literature" by actually publishing basic writers' writing; Miller argues "These brief encounters called for a new boundary, which appeared in the form of the paradigm that removed composition even further from its origins" (173).

This anti-literary stance can be seen in the early work of David Bartholomae, who, in addition to extending the discussion of error and student ability begun by Shaughnessy, also extends this opposition of the traditional academy and the superior Basic Writing teacher-figure, cast in terms of literary specialist versus what might be called the "authentic" reader, one whose value system is attuned to more than the narrow literary text:

> This method [of determining the "grammar" that governs the idiosyncratic discourse of writers] is certainly available to En-

glish teachers, since it requires a form of close reading, paying attention to the language of a text in order to determine not only what a writer says, but how he locates and articulates meaning. When a basic writer violates our expectations, however, there is a tendency to dismiss the text as non-writing, as meaningless or imperfect writing. We have not read as we have been trained to read . . . . We have read, rather, as policemen, examiners, gate-keepers. The teacher who is unable to make sense out of a seemingly bizarre piece of student writing is often the same teacher who can give an elaborate explanation of the "meaning" of a story by Donald Barthelme or a poem by e. e. cummings. ("Study" 339; 1980)

Iconic discourse reflects a repeated insistence on a qualitative difference between literature teachers and writing teachers. In Bartholomae's "Writing Assignments: Where Writing Begins" (1983), he describes in the opening section an anecdote about a composition course taught by one of his colleagues, "a full professor and a distinguished [literary] scholar" (300) whose pedagogical approach is to lecture students on form and mechanics and to assign the "copying out [of] longhand essays by Lamb, Macaulay, Ruskin and Carlyle" (301), in the expectation that students, after such immersion in canonical style, will improve as academic writers, an approach Bartholomae terms the "Big Bang theory of writing instruction." In "Released into Language: Errors, Expectations, and the Legacy of Mina Shaughnessy," Bartholomae again points out the inability of a teacher trained in literary studies, who has "spent most of his adult life perfecting his skills as a reader of texts" (76) to interpret the texts produced by students in a Basic Writing course. The literary scholar is by definition unable to be the kind of (real) teacher that the Basic Writing teacher by definition is.

In much of Basic Writing discourse, the heroic teacher-figure is not the speaking self but the lost ideal. Thus teaching is always an altruistic activity, since it entails self-negation in the effort to recover this ideal. The altruistic stance of the teacher-figure appears after Shaughnessy most frequently in the work of Mike Rose. This stance requires a certain humility and erasure of the self, allowing the writer to function rhetorically as a kind of space holder for the unsung, silenced Basic Writing teacher—a "rule" of the discourse which helps to explain the extraordinarily deep sense of community it creates among those who consider themselves Basic Writing professionals, the "special fraternity" Shaughnessy cites. In this, the teacher becomes a St. George figure, as Shaughnessy writes in *Errors and Expectations*:

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[T]he teacher as mediator between the languages students bring to class and the language of the academy must himself serve the students both as translator and model . . . . The [teacher shows his] personal use of the language, his attentiveness to the words he, as well as his students, uses, his pleasure in precise language and his courtesy in offering . . . ways of understanding unfamiliar words . . . [nourishing] the student's will, without which the academic language is too large and tedious and complex a dragon to slay. (225)

In *Lives on the Boundary*, Rose's discourse, mixing the personal and professional, an icon-approved and icon-reinforcing transgression of traditional scholarly discourse, celebrates colleagues and students, and powerfully invokes the model of the altruistic teacher-hero. The actual representation of teachers in the text is especially interesting. We meet the high school and college teachers who helped guide Rose in his movement away from a vocational location to the discourse of the academy, and then we follow Rose as he himself moves through graduate studies and his own early teaching experiences. His work with veterans, his development of a tutoring center for remedial students — these marginalized teaching activities are feelingly documented. The text ends at a point in the author's experience that precedes his later career as a gifted and dedicated instructor in a more traditionally professional context — in UCLA Writing Programs, where for close to twenty years Rose taught and where he served first as Director of Freshman English and later as Associate Director of the program, and in the Graduate School of Education, where Rose now holds a professorship. In his own story, Rose declines the hero's position — leaving it open for his ideal reader, the basic writing teacher, and marking the space of the lost Mina Shaughnessy.

Iconic Transformations

The work of Bartholomae, Rose, and Patricia Bizzell embodies the discursive transformations of the author-function that are "impeded" by the ideological figure of the author. Writing within the Shaughnessy legacy, they complicate the terms of the discussion by introducing theoretical issues in student- or teacher-based form. In Rose's ground-breaking article, "Remedial Writing Courses: A Critique and a Proposal" (1983), the critique portion at once lays out the deep conceptual flaws in then-current Basic Writing practice and defends the teacher who enacts them, preserving the idealized iconic teacher-figure. After reviewing evidence on the uninformed notions of many

writing teachers on the writing process and their accompanying assumptions about the role of error, Rose writes,

> But let me be quick to point out that I am not trying to lay blame on the remedial writing teacher alone, if at all. For there are powerful reasons to explain why some teachers reduce the process, conceptual, and rhetorical possibilities of composing. The public . . . make a teacher feel negligent and vulnerable if he or she does not attempt to clear up error. Furthermore . . . our scholars have not provided us with a comprehensive theory of error . . . . Thus there is little for the conscientious teacher to do but keep marking. To do less in the absence of any other guidelines seems like shirking responsibility. (359)

A division between practitioner and theorist is drawn. It is, however, also problematized: the teacher-figure is allied still with ethics, not expertise, but the difference between teacher and scholar is seen as a debilitating gap. Thus Rose opens a space for the theorist without attaching any deficit to the teacher-figure. Through the first-person plural form, the author speaks as a member of the teaching community — one of "us," as opposed to "them," the scholars, even as he creates the justification for their inclusion. Theorists are to serve practitioners — a relation that preserves iconic authority, even as it transforms the prevailing foundation of knowledge from self- to research-based experience.[3]

In the same way, reviewing the progression of Bizzell's ideas in her collection of articles, *Academic Discourse and Critical Consciousness*, we see how the social and political nature of her work can co-exist with the rules of iconic discourse. Bizzell treats her work as an extension of Shaughnessy's, relying especially on Shaughnessy's "Some Needed Research on Writing" to establish the iconic foundation for her ideas, which contextualize Shaughnessy's original teaching insights in ways that "rescue" Shaughnessy's work as relevant theoretical contributions. Bizzell cites Shaughnessy in the Introduction and all but two of the collection's thirteen essays. "Some Needed Research" is cited nine times, *Errors and Expectations* seven; no other work by Shaughnessy is cited. This continual invoking of "Some Needed Research" shows Bizzell's desire to construct her own work as part of the Shaughnessy heritage, thus preventing any reading of it as transgressive. Bizzell makes it clear that she considers her ideas to be intellectual outgrowths of Shaughnessy's work (at one point she writes, "I learned . . . that the kind of research other composition specialists seemed to feel was needed did not match what I, and I thought Shaughnessy, desired"; 8), even as her ideas have helped reconstruct the figure of

the basic writer and redefine the task of Basic Writing as Shaughnessy depicts these. In the Introduction to the collected essays, which functions as a true *curriculum vitae*, Bizzell shows how her thinking evolved over time, moving her away from the formalism of Shaughnessy to the liberatory thought of Freire and today to a more poststructural orientation in her work; all of this, though, is presented through the lens of a teacher's life. The iconic teacher-figure, though now more theoretically informed, remains as the central value in the academic enterprise.

These transformations illustrate the ways in which iconic discourse contextualizes and so constrains its subject(s). That it does so is also evident in the degree of resistance met by authors whose works follow a different rhetorical path—who speak not from the Basic Writing community, but from a position not identified with the iconic origins—from what I've termed "critical discourse". Iconic discourse invites us in on very special terms. Critical discourse in basic writing issues no such invitation. It constructs no heroes. And it is highly theoretical and political, in its relations within the academy as well as in its curricular and intellectual agenda. The role of the teacher in this discourse is given no special status; in fact, it is sometimes used as a site of ignorance, as anyone who has read the tale of the "Fuck You" essay in Bartholomae's 1993 "Tidy House" article knows[4] For the most part, critical discourse openly interrogates what it considers suspect pedagogical practices, a common move in Min Zhan Lu's writing especially. Its language merges the practitioner with the theorist, creating the voice of the expert and replacing lore with scholarship. It also replaces the agonistic stance with a self-critical voice, reflecting the historical change in rhetoric-composition's disciplinary status. It transgresses iconic discourse by speaking outside the established discursive parameters, by doing what those who operate within iconic discourse can see only as attacking or subverting the icon and so the field. Because iconic discourse tends to the agonistic, those who transgress it are assigned the identity of the traditional academic system, and hence Greenberg's construction of Shor as an "insider." To not return to the icon can only be seen as betrayal.

The first such "betrayal" came in the form of John Rouse's 1979 *College English* article, "The Politics of Composition," in which he argues that programs such as Shaughnessy's at CUNY serve an unacknowledged political function of social control. He directly attacks the Romantic teacher-hero model: "Teachers must be free to ignore evidence or theory, free to rely on their own intuition or insight. Oh, how we love to hear that!" (426). His article is an early version of Lu's "Politics of Linguistic Innocence" and Shor's "Our Apartheid"; each critiques what is seen as the unexamined ideology inherent in iconic discourse, and each provokes censure by some portion of the Basic Writing community. Their work has been attacked because they speak

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against the discourse, whereas others who have modified Shaughnessy's basic concepts have worked from within the discursive set she established, as seen in the pedagogy espoused by Rose, Bartholomae (in his later works), and Bizzell, which is only relational to Shaughnessy's; each diverges from the actual practices Shaughnessy describes in her works. Where Rouse, Lu, and Shor differ is in their transgression of the ostensibly apolitical nature of iconic discourse, their redefinition of professionalism for the Basic Writing field, and their different refigurings of the teacher-hero. Lu published "Conflict and Struggle: The Enemies or Preconditions of Basic Writing?" in *College English* in 1992, extending her critique of Shaughnessy and basic writing, and setting off enough of a furor that the journal devoted a special "Symposium on Basic Writing" the following year to the angry responses. Consider how the following lines from Lu's article read from within iconic discourse:

> Because of the contributions of pioneers like Bruffee, Farrell, and Shaughnessy, we can now mobilize the authority they have gained for the field, for our knowledge as well as our expertise as basic writing teachers. While we can continue to benefit from the insights into students' experiences of conflict and struggle offered in [their] writings . . . we need not let their view of the cause and function of such experiences restrict how we view and use the stories and pedagogies they provide. (909)

Though carefully writing according to the conventional tribute given Shaughnessy within iconic discourse, Lu moves outside of it and effectively relegates the work of early pioneers to past paradigms and the realm of limited historical worth. After Lu, it is no longer necessary to invoke Mina Shaughnessy.

This attempt to resist the "return to the origin," already evident in Lu's earlier *JBW* piece, evoked a heated response from Patricia Laurence, Shaughnessy's colleague at CUNY. In "The Vanishing Site of Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations*," a *JBW* article recognized in 1994 with the journal's Mina Shaughnessy Award, Laurence argues that "No rereading of Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations* can occur in a neutral field without [the] landscape of place" (21), meaning the CUNY of the open admissions time period, suggesting that rereadings must be retellings, one of the more reactionary reactions to Lu, but useful in delineating the ways in which Lu's work is intolerably transgressive. Laurence and others "correct" Lu in their "Symposium on Basic Writing" pieces in clearly iconic terms, especially in their use of the name of Mina Shaughnessy. CUNY's Barbara Gleason writes, "It is a bit misleading to quote Shaughnessy in the

present tense, even though this is a commonly accepted academic convention. Shaughnessy thought and wrote 15-20 years ago" ("Symposium" 888), reclaiming the name "Shaughnessy" for a discourse that resists the traditional scholarly academic one. Thomas Farrell, writing in the same issue, criticizes Lu, in a circumlocutory way, for not being "aware of the impact [Shaughnessy] had on people by virtue of her personality, which may have been a bigger factor in her influence on the basic writing movement than anything she ever wrote. Shaughnessy's influence on the basic writing movement cannot be assessed properly by just reading her publications without considering the impact of her personality" (890) — meaning Lu "fails" to acknowledge the icon. The issue of *JBW* that appeared the next year, 1994, is the one which reprints the eulogies and some of Shaughnessy's works; the rationale, according to the editors, is "to remind ourselves of the breadth of Mina Shaughnessy's influence and the diversity of her friends" ("Editors" 1) — a catechismal utterance of a kind not found in critical discourse.[5]

The language of the Shor-Greenberg exchange illustrates the multiple ways in which Shor is perceived to have transgressed iconic discourse. Both are CUNY faculty members, and so their exchange also exists within iconic discourse's claim for the geographical origins of Basic Writing. Writing "against" Basic Writing, and writing from within CUNY, Shor ends up in a contemporary version of *The Furies*. In "Our Apartheid: Writing Instruction and Inequality," Shor opens with a statement first situating Basic Writing as a product of the 1960's, but in the next paragraph he recontextualizes this origin: "The collegiate language enterprise of which BW is the junior partner began over a century ago when Harvard instituted freshman composition" (91). He thus repositions Basic Writing as a subfield within rhetoric-composition, and thus alters the historical claim of the CUNY location. He cites scholars such as Crowley, Berlin, and Miller to review the argument of freshman composition as a class-based, gatekeeping institution, and he then places the advent of Basic Writing in this legacy of social oppression, calling it "an extra sorting-out gate in front of the comp gate, a curricular mechanism to secure unequal power relations" (92) and "part of the undemocratic tracking system pervading American mass education" (93). He defends critical pedagogy over other forms. He calls for teachers to join together in collective action to bring about material change, and quotes Freire's advice, "Don't confront the lion alone" (100), in all these ways speaking against the iconic rules for the teacher-figure's representation. Shor writes, "So many gifted and dedicated writing teachers devote themselves to their students' success. Is their devotion being mistaken for basic writing itself saving students?" (96). When Shor criticizes testing practices as one means of social control, he invokes Mina Shaughnessy as support for his view,

rehistoricizing her stance and place. In his only other naming of Shaughnessy, he shifts the authority from her to "Adrienne Rich, companion to Mina Shaughnessy in the heroic Open Admissions days at City College" (101), quoting from Rich and positioning those "days" as nostalgic, not originary.

These transgressions, not surprisingly, set off the angry e-mail exchange. In her messages, Greenberg's criticism of Shor follows the rules of iconic discourse: she calls him "self-serving," as opposed to occupying the altruistic position; she asserts that he is "not a basic skills teacher," that "Ira . . . was never one of us," proved by "[Ira's] current position as a professor in the CUNY Graduate Center's new graduate program in composition and rhetoric," which is membership in the community of inauthentic teachers, one of "them," following the iconic discursive binary of teachers and scholars; and she terms his argument for critical teaching "ludicrous": "Does anyone out there believe that we can provide what basic writers need by simply putting them into . . . 'Critical classrooms'? . . . Political enlightenment is wonderful, but students need much more to succeed in college courses that require academic literacy skills," reinscribing the committed, heroic teacher-figure and rejecting the political. Again, in her published response to Shor's article, we see the rules of iconic discourse deployed. The response begins with the contested definition of context, positioning the term in the relationship of access and institutional hostility, elitism and difference, as opposed to the kind of Marxist-historical situating favored in critical discourse. The student is constructed as a teacher-dependent outsider, and an appeal is made to the authority of the icon (". . . if Mina Shaughnessy were alive today, I believe she would think so, too"; 93). Overall, Greenberg's language enacts the ideological discourse that Lu critiques in "Politics of Linguistic Innocence" and "Conflict and Struggle." As Shor writes, "Question basic writing and all hell breaks loose" ("Inequality" 104).

The Shor-Greenberg exchanges mark points of discursive conflict, points of conflict that repeat in each instance of the conflict. Speaking from oppositional discursive and so value systems, Shor and Greenberg become the latest victims of this discourse clash, suggesting that the identity or author-function of Mina Shaughnessy is a demon-genius haunting all who write about basic writing today. More conflicts seem inevitable, as the disciplinary turn toward the re-formation of basic writing as a dispersed set of theoretical and political interests continues. The icon-based "Basic Writing" community in which individuals with very different values and beliefs once co-existed peacefully takes on an oppressive cast, demonizing those who transgress its discursive rules. And critical discourse persists in its primary operating rule, the critique of iconic discourse as a source of the binaries that divide certain students and faculty from other students and faculty,

and which rely on a student deficit model to maintain the privileged status of the basic writing teacher-hero, as Horner's discourse reveals:

> Defining Basic Writing as frontier territory effectively constructs the differences between those students labeled Basic Writers and those not, establishing the legitimacy of the distinction . . . . Such categorizing, stripped of its politics, ends up instituting "Basic Writing" as an objective reality rather than a set of social practices . . . . As the dominated members of the dominant, teachers can use such representations to negotiate their own interests and those of their students . . . . But this "objectification" of basic writing also masks the role of basic writing instruction in the larger ongoing social, economic, and political drama of history. (212-213)

Horner seems to announce a new era: "Teachers of basic writing seeking advice on improving their marginal institutional positions will find nothing on such matters in Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations,* despite her noted administrative expertise, nor in much of the other Basic Writing literature . . . " (218-219).

Will an iconic response once again follow? How much authority remains to and for it? As the current pressures on remediation and working conditions increase, as political issues intrude on practice, as paradigms of "context" shift, critical discourse will continue to engage its points of conflict with iconic discourse, and Mina Shaughnessy, now become a Name, may perhaps be reconstructed along the historical lines that Lu and others have advocated. The implication is not a judgment on the worth of one discourse versus another. Rather, with "Mina Shaughnessy" in play, basic writing is at a point at which the conventional discourse no longer fully serves, and so the authority determining its disciplinary formation seems itself to be in process.

Notes

1. Following Horner, I capitalize the term "Basic Writing" when the reference is to what he describes as the ahistorical construction of it.

2. Since 1980, the MLA has awarded the "Mina P. Shaughnessy Prize," which, as announced in the annual Directory issue of the journal, is awarded for "an outstanding research publication in the field of teaching English language and literature." And since 1986, the *Journal of Basic Writing* has announced in its "Call for Articles" page that a "'Mina

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P. Shaughnessy Writing Award' is given to the author of the best *JBW* article every two years," courtesy of funding by a CUNY colleague.

3. Mike Rose served as a helpful interlocutor on these ideas. I am grateful to him for his time and thoughts.

4. Bartholomae's writings show a shift over time from an iconic to a critical discursive positioning. He directed Lu's doctoral dissertation; it's unclear whose critiques influenced whom.

5. The religious undertone is of course not uncommon. Shaughnessy's work has been called the "gospel" of Basic Writing (see Horner 207). In a post-presentation discussion at the 1998 Writing Program Administration conference, one of the keynote speakers mentioned Mina Shaughnessy, paused, bowed his head, and said in a low, reverential voice, "Shaughnessy: such a wonderful person and project."

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