Editor's Introduction:
Displacement of Emotion and Identity in Composition Studies

LIKE MANY ACADEMICS, I turn to the simple games on my computer when I'm either stressed, facing a writing block, or wiling away time before a meeting. I play Solitaire, Free Cell, Spider Solitaire, and especially Hearts. I know this practice does not vary from the norm too much. However, I have always had a strange imagination, and it has taken over my playing of these games. Whenever I click on one of these games, I pretend I am a sports broadcaster of some sorts and do a running play-by-play in my mind. Since I cannot be both the broadcaster and the player, I refer to myself as the card player in the third person (occasionally verbalizing to the puzzlement of my colleagues; my family does not care as much. They know I'm weird). I imagine I am in some Las Vegas casino and that spectators are cheering and booing my every decision.

For Solitaire, Free Cell, and Spider Solitaire, I am, of course, playing alone so the broadcaster has no one else's moves to scrutinize. Since, in this little world of mine, I am the premiere player of these games, I am subject to all sorts of criticism during the broadcast. The color commentator can be especially harsh when he shows up. But essentially, the game is just me against the cards. I either win or lose. But Hearts is not that simple. You have to play Hearts against someone. The computer, thus, has to create three players to make it a competitive game. For whatever reason, the computer names them Ben, Pauline, and Michelle.

When I first started playing Hearts on the computer, I cast myself in the role of the rookie. The broadcaster thought I was a hotshot with too much ego and too little knowledge. And, indeed, the other three players had their way with me as I experimented with strategies to beat them consistently. As I learned the game, though, I realized I was developing a dislike of the other players, especially Pauline and Michelle. They seemed to make plays designed to favor each other, holding onto the Queen of Spades, for example, until they could dump it on me. The broadcaster would note the collusion between the two of them, but I couldn't seem to strike an alliance with Ben to counteract it. Eventually, though, my strategy developed to a point where I could outsmart them. Their hatred for me grew as they lost game after game.

When I bought a laptop computer for my home a few years ago, I did something drastic. I wanted to start fresh and get away from the animosity between myself and the others. So I switched the default names. I created three new novices who were going to try their luck against Bill the Master—Veronica, Ed, and Jackie. They were reverent toward me and took their losses stoically. I liked playing against them, but I found after a while that I did not respect Veronica's game as much as I did the others. She seemed to make silly plays and, frankly, did not appear ready

to play in this upper tier of Hearts players, in front of all these fans, in this prestigious Las Vegas casino. My disdain for her became a topic of conversation between the play-by-play announcer and the color commentator. They often found fault with me, claiming I played in ways to expose Veronica's weaknesses and often undermined my own play against the others, resulting in defeats that were simply not necessary. But I liked playing against the three of them.

For my new office computer, though, I created other players, so I now compete against Jeff, Susan, and Kelly there and Veronica, Ed, and Jackie at home. I have immense respect for the new players. They all employ sound strategy, and I find myself in very intense games. Susan knows the game well. Her cleverness confounds me. Jeff can play wildly, seeming to hold high cards for no good reason, but he wins often enough to make it interesting. Kelly is shrewd but quiet. We have some awesome contests. When I beat them soundly, I am proud.

My daughter, Katrina, now attending my university, will stop by my office once or twice a week (or more if she needs money), and she will catch me playing Hearts, wondering what it is I'm muttering under my breath. One time, as she sat down with her lunch, she heard me complaining about a particularly tricky move Susan had made that threw a wrench into my strategy. The broadcaster was wondering what Thelin would do now. I looked at Katrina and said, "She's so smug," referring to Susan. Katrina, who, again, knows I'm weird, still thought this behavior was odd. "Daddy," she scolded me. "Susan's not real. You're the only real person in the game."

I thought of Katrina's remarks as I was preparing this issue of *Open Words*. Too often when compositionists talk about students, we will impose identities upon them. While in Hearts, I have created identities for players whose moves are determined by a program, our students are very real, even the ones we might only know from a projection in a distance learning classroom or as a mere name in an online community. We perceive little clues based upon patterns in their writing and start constructing identities for them. Some of these identities are ubiquitous among composition practitioners—the struggling student, the ESL writer, the student with proficiency who just won't push herself harder. While we create positive identities from time-to-time, the negative ones stick with us.

When we create negative identities, we have an emotional response. We react to caricatures, really not all that different from my reactions to Veronica—some of those reactions appearing in our written comments to students, some of them affecting the manner in which we teach, some of them finding their way into hallway discussions with colleagues. In so doing, I fear, we fail to explore the genuine feelings that these very real students have. In fact, the more that we create an identity for the students, the more the students become those identities, at least in the way the institution treats them. Certainly, one of our roles as educators should be to respond to the emotions of the students—their needs, their concerns, their joys and sorrows—rather than the emotions we generate toward caricatures that end up defining students.

Through historical and case study research, I believe the articles in this issue respond to the

challenge of allowing students to create their own identities, especially in relation to the place in which they find themselves. Our lead article for this issue is Nathan Shepley's "When the Margins Move: Lessons from the Writing of One University's First Female Graduate." Shepley studies Margaret Boyd, the first female graduate of Ohio University, and traces her development as a writer, which seemed to parallel the amount of nurturing she received. "Affective Matters: Effective Measures for Transforming Basic Writing Programs and Instruction," written by Kim Davis, Suzanne Biedenbach, Cara Minardi, Amanda Myers, and Tonya Ritola, looks at one institution's efforts to transform remediation, arguing for an affective pedagogical model of instruction. Readers will hear real students coming to grips with their writing. William DeGenaro's "'Where Did All the White Girls Come from?': Difference and Critical Empathy in and out of the Service Learning Classroom" picks up on the notion of critical empathy as an important teaching goal. DeGenaro views empathy as a rhetoric and problematizes a service learning incident at a foster home through that lens, showing critical empathy as something moving beyond sentimentality toward consciousness raising. Finally, Lisa Lebduska studies the history of the G.I. Bill and the reaction of English departments toward it in "Composing in the Wake of War: The G.I. Bill and the Teaching of English." She shows the many identities placed upon returning soldiers and connects the outcomes of the bill to aspects of teaching writing still with us today.

I suspect that many instructors possess enough reflection to realize how much we rely on profiles of students and how damaging they can be. In Basic Writing scholarship, for example, much has been done to complicate notions of who the "Basic Writer" is. We understand that such a student really does not exist. Yet, I worry that we continue to fall back upon such caricatures, often in subtle ways. As I look at some of the suggested assignments in textbooks advocating the genre approach, I see the caricature of the successful student emerging—students who have life experiences appropriate for a memoir assignment, students who have a sub-culture they can study through an ethnography, students who have read enough to craft an effective literacy narrative. In defining the type of student who will succeed, we also implicitly create the type of student who will struggle. My hope is that this issue of *Open Words* will problematize some of the assumptions we make. For while I will continue to impose characteristics on Veronica and the rest during my Hearts contests, our students deserve better. When I log out, Veronica is gone. Our students still remain, even when we log out, figuratively or literally.

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