

Prufrock measured out his life with coffee spoons. I have measured out my (professional) life with CCCC conventions. Next year, it's Minneapolis, and Don, Ed, and the two Jims will be there with me.

Kinneavy, old pal, I'm not willing to let traditions die. On an afternoon in Minneapolis, I'm going to find a secluded spot and sip one cold beer for me and one for you.

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James Kinneavy and the Struggle over Composition

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Most of us who have been kicking around composition studies for awhile can recount with affection a number of stories about Jim Kinneavy, and these stories are without exception positive. Jim, by his very presence, brought wit, fun, insight, and enlightenment to those around him.

A truly learned individual, Jim took scholarship very seriously. He knew that the discipline of rhetoric and composition could become much more than it aspired to; that because the study of discourse is central to so much that is transpiring right now in contemporary thought, composition is perfectly situated to become a significant force in the development of original, creative, and perhaps even revolutionary understandings of how discourse works—scholarship that would have influence far beyond the borders of our own discipline. As early as *A Theory of Discourse*, he argued that composition studies had the potential to become a fundamental and respected component of the humanities. In fact, the book's very thesis is that "the field of composition—or discourse as it will presently be termed—is a rich and fertile discipline with a worthy past which should be consulted before being consigned to oblivion, an exciting present, and a future that seems as limitless as either linguistics or literature" (2).

That is, Jim was not satisfied—as so many were in 1971 and as too many still are in 1999—with defining the discipline of rhetoric and composition as simply a service provider for the rest of the academy. He knew that the study of discourse was far from peripheral: it was to

become the preoccupation of postmodern theory across all disciplines, even in the sciences. And he understood that the field would only be able to fulfill its immense potential if it became more theoretically sophisticated; it would need to abandon or at least orient away from the solipsism of the expressivists and the scientism of the so-called cognitivists.

This is precisely why Jim was such a champion of *JAC*. Then as now, the journal stood for and encouraged rigorous theoretical scholarship that was interdisciplinary and that therefore resisted the intellectually protectionist, inward-looking tendencies of many in the field. And this is why he was eager to endow an award honoring the most outstanding theoretical scholarship published in the journal each year. In his typically humble, self-effacing way, he felt honored that some in the field would wish to create a national award in his name; yet, he realized all too well that such an award was a material way to engage in the hegemonic struggle over how the field would define itself. Endowing the award was, in effect, a political statement: at once a demonstration of support for theory and an inducement to us all to advance the struggle to make composition a true academic discipline, a site of serious intellectual inquiry.

Jim fought hard for these causes on any number of fronts. For example, I remember a cold, dreary day in 1987, shortly after I had been appointed editor of *JAC*. The journal and ATAC were a shambles thanks to a number of events that had occurred over the previous few years. Jim and I sat in a hotel room at the CCCC convention, and I explained that by the end of that day ATAC would be defunct and that the journal would be independent of a professional association (there were no officers, no constitution, and ample resentment over the state of both the journal and the association). We both agreed that this was not healthy for the field, that an independently “owned” and operated scholarly journal was in effect an oxymoron, and that the field did not need journals associated more with personalities than with legitimate scholarly institutions. Jim discerned that I was reluctant (as the newly appointed editor) to conduct the scheduled ATAC meeting, and I commented that what was needed was someone who had the seniority and respect to chair the meeting, establish order, and create a structure to rebuild a vital, healthy organization.

Jim didn’t flinch: “What room? What time?” Two hours later, Jim presided over the meeting, spoke eloquently about how we simply could not let this important organization slip into oblivion, convinced all present that we had to recreate ATAC as an organization that would be even stronger than ever, and came away with a structure that enabled us to transform ATAC into the strong, robust organization it is today. For those who want real insight into the man who was James Kinneavy, this eminent scholar—whom most credit with being one of the founders of

the discipline—even composed and typed the minutes of that meeting, despite the fact that he could have asked any number of people to do such “menial” yet important tasks. As many have repeated, Jim was truly a person of character.

And he was a man of character at all times. I remember one of the many times that he came to the University of South Florida as a visiting scholar. He volunteered to attend a doctoral seminar that I was teaching. The students had just read and analyzed a recent book in which the authors sharply criticize Jim and some of his more well-known theoretical positions. Somewhat mischievously, I played the role of the authors, articulating their criticisms of his work and inviting him to respond. Undaunted yet gracious, he snatched a piece of chalk, strode to the blackboard, and proceeded to dismantle each argument systematically and convincingly. Later over a few ales at a local pub (Jim was quite the connoisseur of imported ales and once, on a similar occasion, delivered a learned dissertation on the alcohol content of some twenty ales and the state laws regulating such content), I continued to question him about the newly published criticism of his positions. Unruffled, he quietly and cogently explained how his detractors would never have made this or that assertion had they only read this or that scholar. I’m convinced that Jim had at one time or another read *everything* and that he could successfully debate *anyone*.

It would be a cliché to say that Jim’s death is a great loss and that the field really needs him. We may, however, need him more now than ever, since we seem to be entering—yet again—a time of renewed hegemonic struggle over how the field of composition studies should be defined. Composition is witnessing a revitalized backlash against theoretical scholarship, especially that associated with efforts to draw connections between the work we do in composition and the critical work done in other disciplines. For example, one might read the recent special issue of *College Composition and Communication* on “teaching writing creatively” (51.1, 1999) as an opening salvo in what undoubtedly will come to be known as “the new theory wars.” The attempt to drag composition back to its expressivist roots constitutes a direct assault not only on a two-decade long tradition of substantive theoretical scholarship but also on a particular *kind* of work: that which attempts to lead the field *away* from a debilitating preoccupation with individual psychology, “genius,” “talent,” and “creativity” and *toward* a recognition of how and why dominant discourse enacts a kind of violence on people, particularly women, minorities, and members of other groups who do not share fully if at all in the privileges that society reserves for the few.

Given the vigor with which a powerful handful in composition (Jim Sledd calls them “boss compositionists”) are struggling desperately to set back our disciplinary clock, we simply must continue and intensify

the valuable and empowering work we have been doing—thanks in part to Jim—for twenty years. What is needed is resistance—resistance to unthinking expressivism, resistance to the growing anti-intellectualism in the field, and resistance to those boss compositionists who have a vested interest in the status quo and who dread theoretical challenges to it. Too bad Jim won't be here to lead the way.

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Tribute to a Benevolent Patriarch

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Mr. Kinneavy used to say that everyone was either a Platonist or an Aristotelian. He, obviously, was an Aristotelian, I always thought: consummate systemizer, omnivorous thinker to whom nothing was foreign. His major book, *A Theory of Discourse*, was built on an Aristotelian semiotic model: the famous Kinneavy triangle, with reality, sender, and receiver at the three points and language in the middle, permeating all. He was Aristotelian in the way that he could catalogue sources and evidence in a dispassionate, list-like way from every realm of knowledge. He was a Peripatetic, walking with a halting gait between two departments (English and Education) and across the rest of the campus at the University of Texas at Austin, both literally and figuratively taking in all manner of things and speaking well of them. He was Aristotelian as well in his style of writing: methodical, exhaustive, and learned—with only the hint, on occasion, of a dry, scholastic humor.

This Kinneavy was the consummate scholar of classical rhetoric. His depth of learning in the field was legendary: we often joked about the long boxes of pink file cards, containing his notes on every imaginable aspect of the subject, that he carried into class. He was somehow able to perpetuate a venerable scholarly tradition of classical learning, while, at the same time, devoting himself to the practical art of teaching writing. It was the latter “Kinneavy” I met first—not the man but his book. As a high school teacher, I took my first course on the teaching of writing (at the University of Texas at San Antonio in a Master's degree program), during which Eileen Lundy waved *A Theory of Discourse* in front of us, claiming, “Finally, finally, we have a theory for what we do.” Kinneavy's wasn't the only theory we read in that class, and I never heard him make an exclusive claim for his work. That would not have been his way. He placed himself among others, always connected with