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“Rewrit[ing] the American Story” (Young)

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Last Thursday, our class had the rare opportunity to discuss a book with its author: Morris Young generously answered questions about his book *Minor Re/Visions: Asian American Literacy Narratives as a Rhetoric of Citizenship*. We also extended our discussion about literacy narratives by looking at [the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives](#).

First, Morris Young contextualized his research in terms of Hawaiian history and personal history. He delved into the complexity of Hawaii’s history in terms of colonization, literacy and citizenship. Referring to colonization and “settler colonialism”, he explained how languages and literacy have become a “proxy for social class and race” (Young):

- Hawaiian Natives, the poorest and most disenfranchised, speaking their Native language
- The people of color using pidgin, suffering from white colonialism as well but benefiting from it,
- The better-off white population middle/upper class using English.

We learned that, with Hawaii’s accession to Incorporated Territory status and then Statehood, Standard English also became part of a citizenship narrative, “a rhetoric of Americanization.” (Young 122)

As an Asian American from Hawaii, Young grew up with this legacy. He mentioned how his mother went to English Standard school and talked about it with pride. In contrast, he noted that when he went to school, English Standard schools didn’t exist anymore, but that the Asian American community still experienced the weight of English norm, however more with resentment than pride. Influenced by Anna Ruggles Gere’s *Kitchen Tables and Rented Rooms of the Extra-Curriculum of Composition*, Young thus looked at literacy outside the classrooms and placed the start of his research at the intersection of two Hawaiian archives: the historical archives (in English) and the literary archives (in Hawaiian pidgin) trying to figure out how narratives could bring them together. That is also when he heard the emerging term “literacy narrative” in the field of rhetoric and composition. His research had just found a vessel.

Young then developed his idea of *Minor Re/Visions* through literacy narratives, practice that he has reflected upon and adapted to different body of students. His approach to research has been reflective too as Young defined *Minor Re/Visions* as dated. He explained how *Minor Re/Visions* are now seen as conservative because they position themselves in relationship with the dominant narrative, when minority communities don’t want to define themselves in this relationship anymore. However, Young wondered if it would ever be possible for minority communities to totally abstract themselves from this relationship...

Young is pursuing his amazing research in literacy narratives in other areas as well. Lately he has been looking at how places shape rhetorical activities, especially within Asian American narratives. He gave the example of graffiti in Japanese classical forms used to warn and to advise new migrants about what they would face after they leave the immigration station. He closed our discussion by letting us ponder about the wall that the U.S. President wants to erect and what literacy it might generate.

After our discussion with Morris Young, many in the class expressed the idea that *Minor*

Re/Visions doesn't seem outdated when one looks at how Standard English is still so pervasive in the U.S. educational system. We acknowledged that it takes time for new forward ideas to actually seep into the structure of a system and be implemented in term of practices. One classmate noted that *Minor Re/Visions* could be the first step towards wider deeper change. The discussion also led us to reflect on the valence of literacy. We all agreed that literacy is not inherently good or bad but that it all depends on what one does with it. As an example, we talked about the complexity and ambivalence of literacy during slavery in the U.S. We also worried about how neoliberal argumentations contribute in pushing towards Standard English as a norm. We finally talked about what we could take from the discussion in term of research: a method. We noted how Morris Young connected fields for his research— literacy narrative/fiction and education policy. I am particularly interested by the pollination that can happen between different fields in term of research. How can research in poetry gain from rhetoric, and vice-versa?

B.