

# Writing the Trenches or Why Students of Technical Writing and Literature Still Need Each Other



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**Texas Tech  
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# Texas Tech English: Feuding in 2005-6

- Literature, linguistics, and creative writing vs. comp and tech comm.
- *Chronicle of Higher Education*: “The Grading Factory”
- Comp review
- TC gets autonomy
- Should TC ultimately leave?

# Our Attempt at Fusion

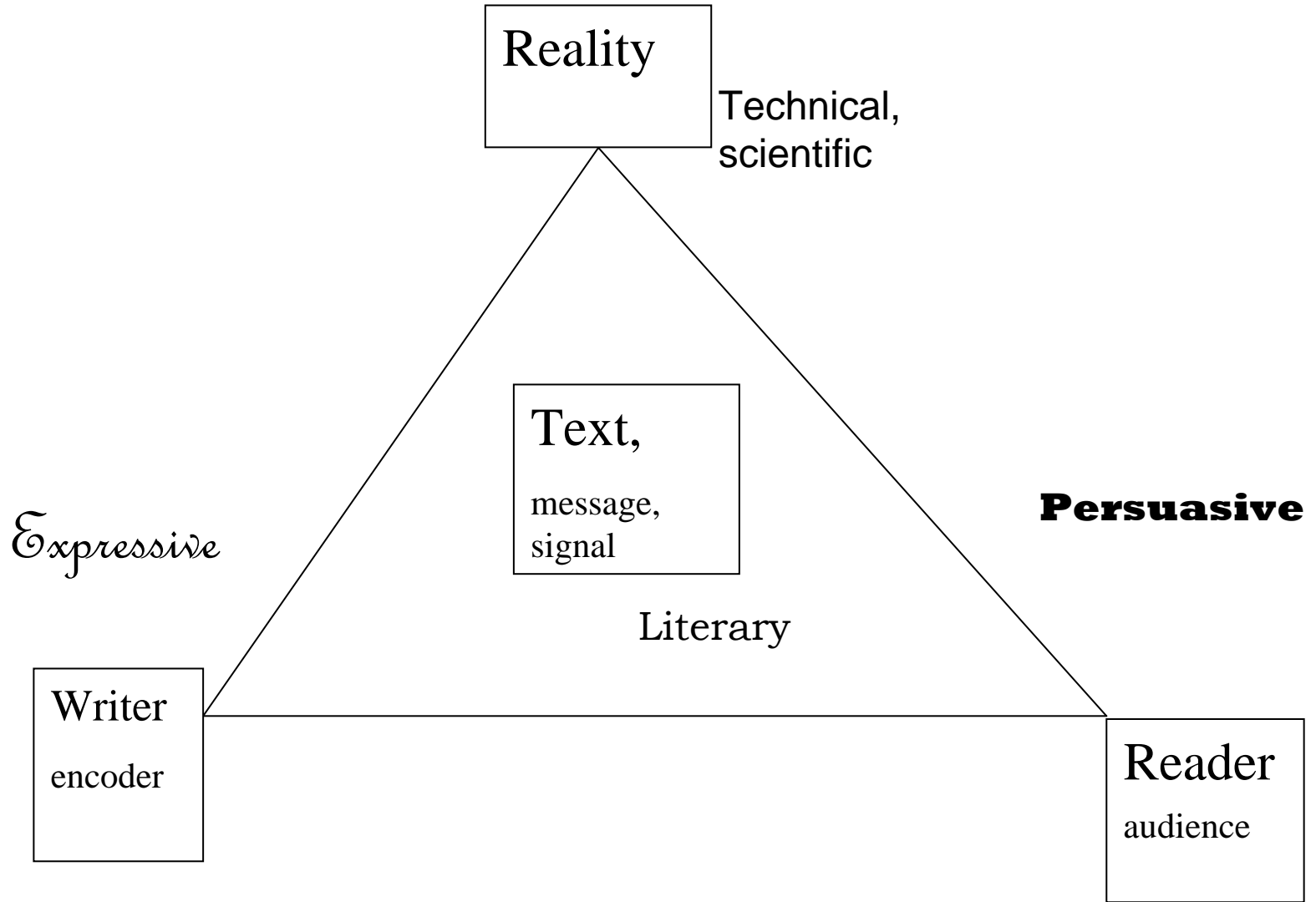
- Assumption: Prefer connective rather than discrete courses.
- Stephen North: Abandon “Magisterial” goal of reproducing ourselves for goal of fusion.
- Students need exposure to the gamut of courses under the English umbrella in order to teach such courses in public schools, community colleges, or smaller four-year colleges.

# “Writing the Trenches: Literary, Rhetorical, and Technical Texts About WWI”



- Instead of focusing on how a specific genre covered a subject or rhetorical challenge, focus the subject on World War I and how multiple genres approached it.
- Uncover the different “aims” of discourse.

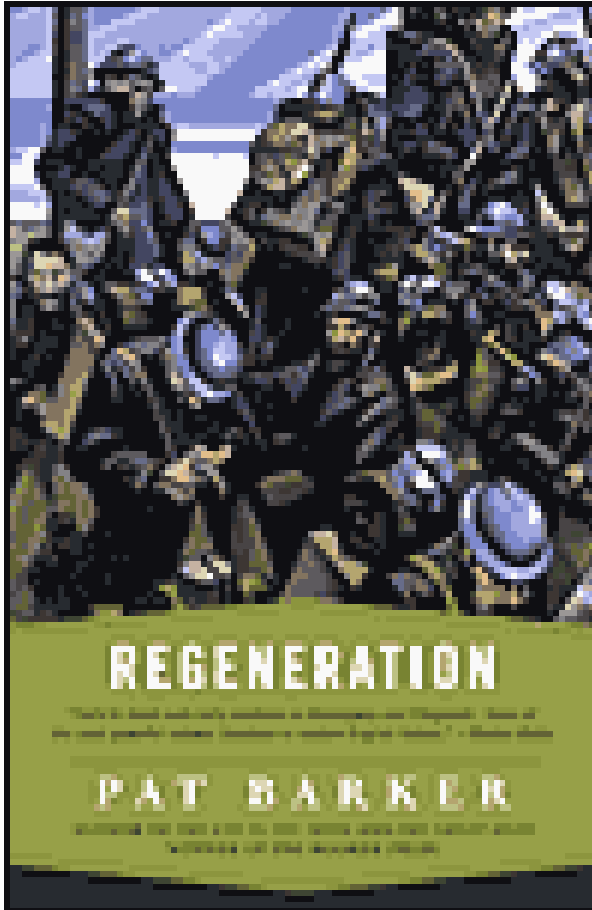
# Kinneavy Rhetorical Triangle



# Who We Were and What We Did

- Three cohorts:
  - Four pursuing the MA in literature
  - Three pursuing MA and one pursuing PhD in technical communication
  - Three non-English majors (those in education, interdisciplinary studies, or holding a temporary graduate status)
- Read non-fiction essays about the war, U.S. army manuals and military reports, poems, and novels
- Online class, Web Board discussions, research project

# Theme of Technology and Modernism



- Isaac Rosenberg's "August 14"  
Iron are our lives/  
Molten right through our youth./  
A burnt space through ripe fields/  
A fair mouth's broken tooth./ (lines 10-13)
- Cubism, Stravinsky

# Technology Outpaces Ethics

- Prolific technological and industrial growth
- Society (including military leaders) still clung to 19th century, romanticized views of set-piece battles honorably resolving conflict among worthy opponents.
- Human consciousness and ethics lagged human tool-making abilities.
- Some peaceful technology, e.g. wristwatch

# Referential and Literary Classifications

- 1907 “Hague Conventions Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land.”
  - Unclear meanings of terms such as “projectile.” “diffusion,” and “unnecessary suffering” allowed for liberal interpretations by all the belligerents of what was acceptable, including gas.
- Referential writing turned literary; tools of destruction were characters in the drama.
  - Tanks could be “male or female.”
  - Battleships named “Indefatigable”
  - Airplane pilots as “aces”



# Parallels and Perils of Literary Themes, Rhetorical Commonplaces

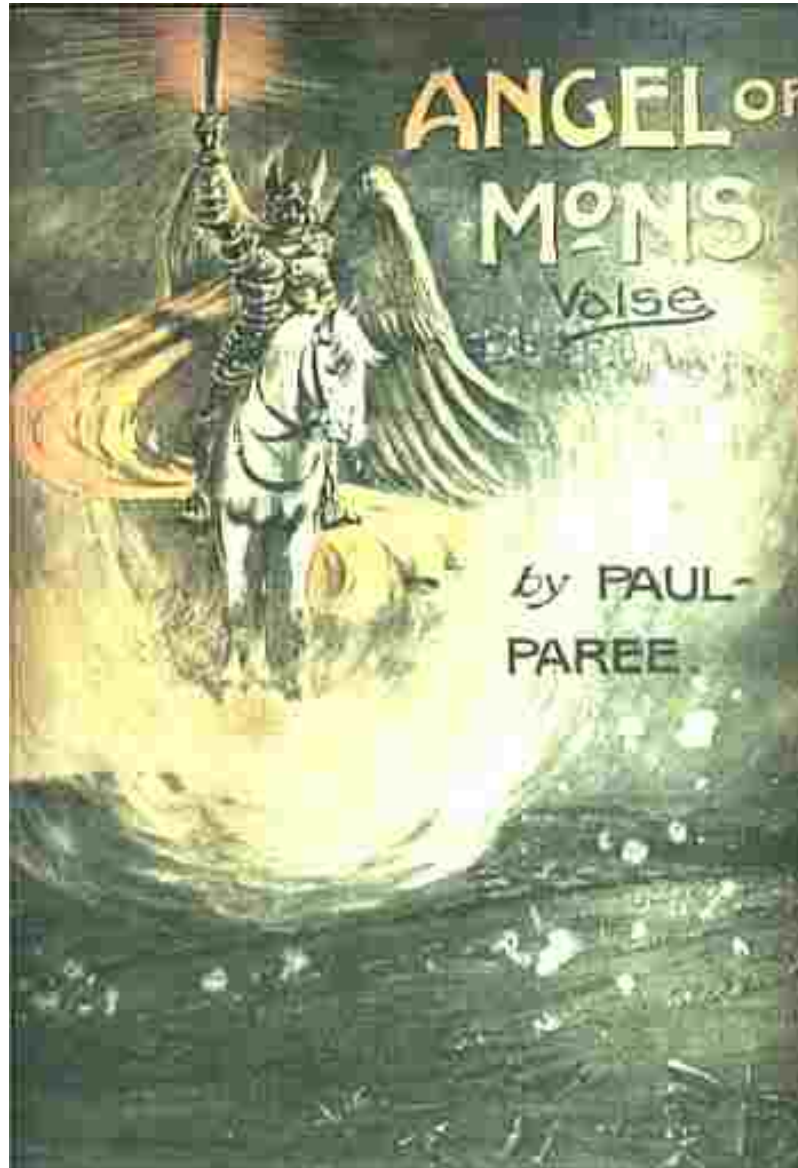
- Coming of Age
- World War I generals caught in their youth stories that valorized outdated military strategies.
- Archetypes of possibility: “Let’s roll!”
  - 1918 Sgt. York
  - 2001 Todd Beamer
- “Any job worth doing is worth doing right.”
  - or
  - “Don’t throw good money after bad.”
    - General Haig at Ypres in World War I
    - George Bush in Iraq

# Paradoxical ways of knowing found in World War I writing

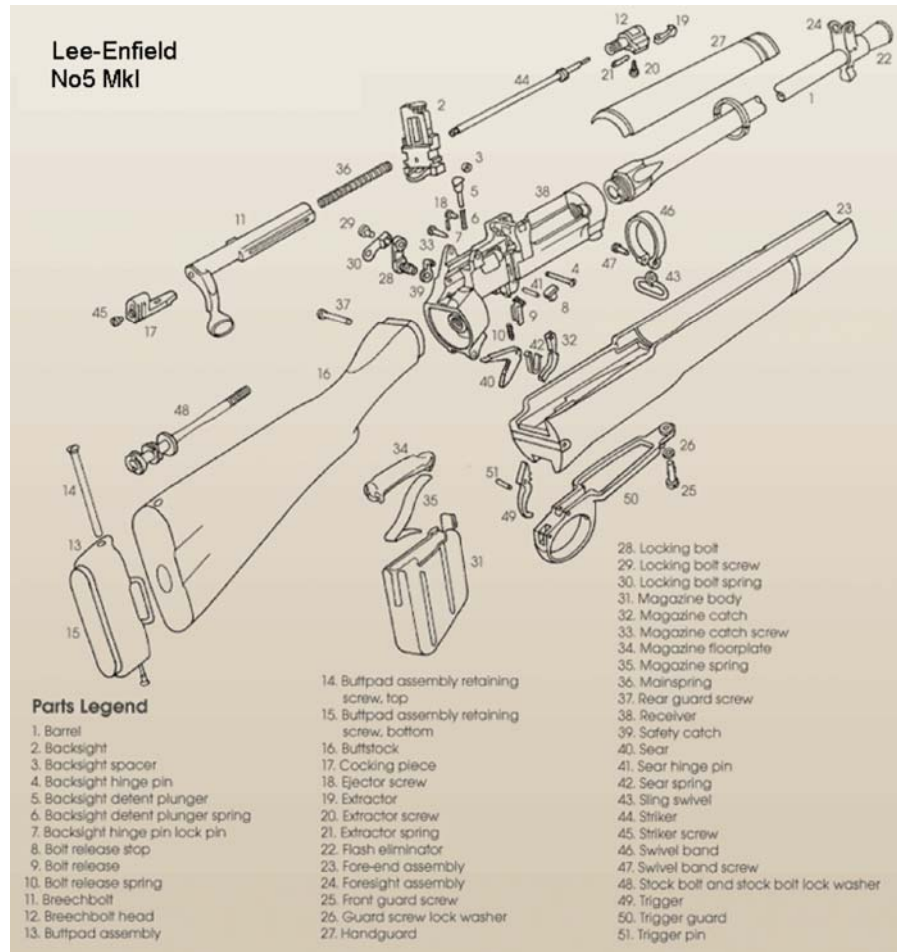
Sincerity Spiritualism Enthusiasm	Irony (modern or (postmodern) Ennui Disengagement
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Why did the British prevail at the Battle of Mons in 1914? →

# Mystical intervention...



# ...or better weapons?



# Challenges for the Class

- TC assumption that non-fiction means factual or non-rhetorical seemed naïve:
  - Historical account: unit coming into battle for the first time that "had not yet been blooded."
- Lit post-structuralist theory, slick or formulaic responses to assertions of unambiguous plain truth did not convince.

# Legitimacy of the Writer

- Edna St. Vincent Millay's poem "Conscientious Objector"
  - Won't serve "on his [Death's] pay-roll" (l.14).
  - Written by a woman after the war.
- Poet versus persona.
- Ironic that lit students more detached from personal beliefs while TCers responded more emotionally

# Detached or Stunned? Shell Shock

- In 1922 British “Report of the War Office Committee of Enquiry Into ‘Shell Shock’”
  - “No human being, however constituted, however free from inherent weakness, however highly trained to meet the stress and the wear and tear of modern warfare, can resist the direct effect of the bursting of high explosive shells,” the report asserted”(93).
- In Woolf’s 1925 novel *Mrs. Dalloway*.
  - “What business had the Bradshaws to talk of death at her party?”



# Conclusions from the Class

- Ethical obligation to help students understand their world by employing analytical skills uniquely acquired through intradisciplinary English text studies
- Literary genres present reality in many dimensions, offer an impressionistic range of possibilities involving characters.
- Technical genres collapse reality into fewer dimensions, offering goal-driven linear discourses designed to cut a path of action through all the possible outcomes or interpretations.
- Literature expands understanding, empathy for characters, leads to one kind of action, while rhetorical and technical writing delimits that focus so that we can take, perhaps, another kind of action.

Questions or comments?

