# CEAMAGAZINE

# Contents

# Contributors

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# Rhetorical Invention As Social Engagement

When I assign to my students a persuasive essay or speech, two consistent problems arise: the first, mental paralysis at the freedom to choose whatever topic they'd like; and the second, the inability to address audience reservations about their arguments. When we discuss these problems, it becomes clear that they originate from the invention stage of the writing process. Students conceive of invention as a nebulous, solitary act of mandatory creativity, occurring in a world in which "there is nothing new to say." Because they believe so strongly that only *their* individual ideas inhabit their brains, students doubt their ability to address counterarguments to their assertions. Finally, students think of knowledge as an object, found externally and memorized.

As frustrating as these excuses can be, I find them to be indicative of a larger condition: a Western value of individualism, combined with epistemological assumptions that privilege scientific reasoning at the expense of associative reasoning. These preconditions to the rhetorical invention process are quite different from the social conditions that fostered the creation of robust inventional strategies in Greco-Roman rhetorical theory. Sharon Crowley argues that "rhetorical invention goes in and out of fashion because it is intimately tied to current developments in ethics, politics, and the epistemology of whatever culture it serves. It has ties to ethics and politics because rhetoric is always situated within human affairs" (1). I believe

3

that an understanding of the social situatedness of rhetorical invention can help our students break out of writer's block.

In the following pages, I will offer a condensed history of rhetorical invention in order to illuminate the social situatedness of this process. Tied to the role of the individual in society and the epistemological assumptions of the time, the needs of rhetorical invention shift along with social norms. I will conclude by using this history to reframe how we teach our students to think about rhetorical invention, retying the classical notion of invention to the consideration of audiences and situational context as sources of creativity. Because "human knowledge never begins at zero with a *tabula rasa*" but "finds itself placed in the cultural milieu, in tradition and in discipline," teaching students to consider that cultural milieu as a backdrop to their beliefs can provide a useful tension against which they can work (Perelman 131).

Classical rhetorical scholar George A. Kennedy locates the roots of the rhetorical tradition in the needs and abilities of Athenian citizens in the fifth century BCE (20). The newly emerging Athenian democracy carried two features central to the development of rhetorical theory: an expectation that adult male citizens would participate in political and legal activities, and the "literate revolution" which made written suggestions for speechmaking accessible to significant numbers of the population (Enos 190). Given the constraints of the Athenian legal system, there was a need for instruction on how to create and deliver successful legal arguments. This need was met in several ways. One way to learn the art of judicial oratory was to imitate a successful orator, either by purchasing and memorizing speeches, or by paying to study with a sophist (Kennedy 30-31). Several notable sophists went beyond imitation to teach functional elements of public speaking, including organization,

style, and philosophies. Particularly useful to the invention process was the sophistic focus on the concept of *kairos*, defined as "the right moment" or "the opportune" (E. White 13). For most sophists, conflict and situational contingencies were the starting places of discourse (Lauer 13).

The earliest attempts to offer technical instruction on rhetorical skills have been attributed to Corax and Tisias of Syracuse, who, for a fee, offered oral instruction on techniques of argumentation and presentation. Corax- and Tisias-inspired technical books were prescriptive in nature, offering suggestions for organization and parts of argument, and sometimes accompanied by examples (Kennedy 22). Aristotle's *Rhetoric* marked a turning point from prescriptive rhetorical handbooks to a more descriptive, theoretical treatment of rhetoric (Kennedy 22). Aristotle defined rhetoric not merely by its persuasive effect but also by its inventional tools to aid in discovery and judgment; logical conclusions about philosophical truths arrived at dialectically may not win before a broader audience, Aristotle argued, without rhetorical strategies such as the ability to "argue persuasively on either side of a question . . . in order that it may not escape our notice what the real state of the case is" (34). Furthermore, abstract philosophical principles become incapable of speaking to the nuance of specific situations if divorced from the situation-specific argumentative forms of rhetoric, which bring equity to abstract rules of justice (Aristotle 105).

For example: when explaining the invention process for forensic discourse, Aristotle posited that the first goal of the speaker was to figure out which of the typical legal issues was central to the specific dispute— that is, to determine the *stasis* of the issue (Pullman 224). In arguing about written laws, the issues included whether or not the act occurred, whether or not the act caused harm, the extent of the harm, and the

justifiability of the act (Aristotle 87-117). The proof used to support arguments for any of these issues take on two forms, according to Aristotle:

> some are *atechnic* ["nonartistic"], some *entechnic* ["embodied in art, artistic"]. I call *atechnic* those that are not provided by "us" [i.e., the potential speaker] but are preexisting: for example, witnesses, testimony of slaves taken under torture, contracts, and such like; and artistic whatever can be prepared by method and by "us"; thus, one must *use* the former and *invent* the latter. (37)

Some argue that Aristotle's categorization and systemization of Plato's rich ideas of logic, law, and philosophy formed the basis for a scientific approach to logic that stifles creativity and growth. For instance, Huntington Cairns argues that "the systemization of formal logic as a distinct domain of knowledge, if not as an independent science, is undeniably an achievement of Aristotle. . . . Aristotle's works represent the first example of the use of a precise scientific method in the exploration of legal propositions" (78). At the very least, argues Janet M. Atwill, the bridge that Aristotle's works built between philosophy and rhetoric called into question the proper home for the study of invention: "When Aristotle defined rhetoric as the art of observing the available means of persuasion, he placed the art in a particular place between theory and practice, subjectivism and empiricism, the aesthetic and utilitarian. *These binary oppositions have never served invention very well*" (xi; emphasis mine). Forbes Hill observes that Aristotle's approach to invention was relatively formulaic:

> Throughout the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle conceives of invention as a conscious choice from a fixed stock of alternatives. He does not recognize creative imagination, or insight issuing from the unconscious in a dream, or inspiration from above. His word for invention—*heuresis*—puts the emphasis on finding rather than creating. (57)

Chaim Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca counter Hill's assertion with the argument that the classical *loci* have been misused and thus depreciated in value (84). The consequences of this misuse include "a tendency to forget that *loci* form an indispensable arsenal on which a person wishing to persuade another will have to draw, whether he likes it or not" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 84). Eileen Scallen similarly argues that Greco-Roman rhetoricians offer nuance to contemporary arguers because of their "blend of the utilitarian use of rhetoric and the creative quality of rhetoric" (1722). Bernard Jacob concludes that the very *utility* of topics comes from their seeming simplicity: "When we speak of topics, we are speaking of a collection of generalities that are definitely not organized into a system or under some single schema. Inadequacy of this sort permits one to focus on the actual problems" (1666).

Hill's observation can also be explained by considering the structure of the Greek systems of government. Take the Greek legal system as an example: James Boyd White argues the lack of established precedents in Greece meant that the *topoi* were especially important, because to a certain extent "every question would be argued as an original matter, without the advantage of the collective experiences over time that the judicial opinion provides" (1363). The intended audience for the rhetorical textbooks on forensic rhetoric was that of the male citizenry, with the goal of discovering, choosing, and delivering arguments to juries. The invention stage of the rhetorical process was meant to avoid overlooking important arguments—as an exercise in creativity and flexibility, rather than as a toolbox of stock arguments (Frost 617-18).

The transition from Greek to Roman periods brought with it a shift from citizens speaking on

their own behalf in court to representation by paid professional advocates (Kennedy 25). Unlike the Greek system, the Roman legal system distinguished between the roles of judge and jury, and between questions of law and questions of fact (Greenidge 15). As legal institutions changed, so did the legal questions under consideration. This, in turn, prompted different exploration of different sources of discovery for arguments. Cicero's early work entitled *On Invention* highlighted in meticulous detail the rhetorical forensic *topoi* most suitable for Roman jurisprudence. Extending Aristotle's *topoi,* Cicero identified four general starting places of legal argument: the issue would always be either a question of fact, about a definition, about the nature of the act, or about legal processes (21-23). Within this, Cicero focused in detail on the interpretation of texts, a focus influenced by the increasing codification of laws in Roman jurisprudence. The five main issues involved in the interpretation of texts include an exploration of the relationship between the words and the intent of the author; the degree of conflict between two or more laws; ambiguities or multiple meanings in a text; questions regarding the meaning of a word, or a definitional argument; and finally, reasoning by analogy, or exploring the moments when, "from what has been written something is discovered which has not been written" (35).

Classical orators analyzed "with characteristic thoroughness" judicial audiences when crafting their legal arguments (Frost 619). Legal reasoning was also practical reasoning; rather than formulaic equations, classical rhetoricians encouraged in legal actors rhetorical thought "characterized by reasonableness and by the taking into consideration diverse aspirations and multiple interests, defined by Aristotle as *phronesis* or prudence, and . . . so brilliantly manifested in law, in Roman *jurisprudentia*" (Mootz 322-23). Rather than using the rhetorical and dialectical *topoi* as tools

to be pulled from a shelf, classical rhetorical scholars explored the ways that particular audiences and situations could be met by fundamental assumptions, and conversely how particular audiences and situations lent new meanings to traditional arguments. This, asserts Michael Leff, "is the difference between viewing rhetoric as an activity conducted in public and rhetoric as a subject to be learned in school" (206).

Whereas Greco-Roman rhetoricians privileged invention as a primary and central step in the rhetorical process, both the exploration of rhetorical invention and the level of nuance accorded to the invention process have fluctuated in importance throughout rhetoric's history. The *topoi* remained part of the Roman educational process from at least the third century BCE, and the *trivium* of grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic were used as staples of a liberal arts education in the early Middle Ages, even after the social structure that supported the public orator had evaporated (Viehweg 43-46). The pagan and political roots of rhetorical theory became burdens on the discipline, however, in the increasingly Christian beliefs of the fourth and fifth centuries (Murphy 46). A much more limited inventional process was put into the service of Christian ministry, with scripture serving as the starting point of discourse where various proofs had once offered different forms of knowledge (Murphy 51-60).

The ancient notions of rhetorical invention —as well as arrangement, style, and delivery—were similarly usurped throughout the Middle Ages to meet the evolving needs of oral and written discourse. Portions of rhetorical treatises were used to offer suggestions for letter writing, for the art of preaching, and for grammar, under the "basic postulate of the medieval arts of discourse: that the past should serve the particular needs of the present" (Murphy 87). The study of grammar, which in Roman times had been an introduction to the study of rhetoric and

in Augustine's time an introduction to the study of scripture, became both more complex and foundational to discourse as the written form became a primary form of communication (Murphy 137-38).

A more general separation of invention from rhetorical studies took root in the sixteenth- to eighteenth-century academic tug-of-war between theological scholasticism, the humanist movement, and the preoccupation with method (Howell 299-310; Ong 53-165; Walton 152-64). The most representative, and widely produced, scholar endorsing this separation was Renaissance humanist and arts professor Peter Ramus (Ong 7). At the time Ramus was being educated, "the humanists were replacing the practical medieval rhetoric with a more elaborate art designed to teach perfect Latin expression as a literary and stylistic instrument" (Ong 21). Ramus furthered this emerging definition of rhetoric as ornament by endorsing a mathematical, diagrammic logic that divorced the inventional process from rhetoric altogether, placing invention under the category of dialectic, and dialectic within the field of philosophy.

Ramus's popular and widespread works relegated rhetoric to the study of style and delivery, and are representative of "the rationalist traditions of medieval philosophy [wherein] rhetoric [is] stripped of any epistemological importance, its sole value understood as the means of influencing and persuading through the use of language" (McNabb 80). Corresponding in time with the rise of Ramism was the ability to mass produce findings, via the printing press, out of which "an epistemology based on the notion of truth as 'content' begins to appear" (Ong 315). Copies of Ramus's attack on Aristotle's rhetoric and writings of his followers, explicating his dichotomized, diagrammatic logic, spread throughout central Europe and took root in seventeenth- century New England universities such as Harvard (Ong 3-8).

Before the 1700s, Aristotle's rhetorical theory, including the inventional process, "shaped the intellectual presuppositions of educated men, whether or not they were conscious of his influence" (Siegel 30-31). However, as Western culture turned to a more individualist political and ethical philosophy and to a scientific epistemology, so turned the notions of rhetorical invention (Wellman 46-47). This cultural turn has been problematic for the vitality of the inventional process, because the fertility of new ideas only occurs with a corresponding value of inventional playfulness and belief in the collective and ever-changing nature of human values and knowledge (Scott 259-60). Frank J. D'Angelo describes the contemporary approach to the invention process as one of "a solitary act in which the individual, drawing upon innate knowledge and mental structures, searches for the truth, using introspective self-examination and heuristic methods of various kinds" (x). This belief in internally derived truth has resulted in a notion of invention as a one-way system that "assumes and promotes the concept of the atomic self as inventor; abstracts the writer from society; neglects studies of writers in social contexts; and fails to acknowledge that invention is collaborative" (x). Thus, argues Perelman, "the evolution of rhetoric and of the theory of argumentation follows the fate of the epistemological status of *opinion* as opposed to *truth*" (90).

In response to this limiting inventional shift, Karen Burke LeFevre offers a contrasting view of the invention process—one that conceives of invention as a necessarily social act and that is infinitely more beneficial to students who struggle with invention. LeFevre argues that "invention often occurs through the socially learned process of an internal dialogue with an imagined other, and the invention process is enabled by an internal social construct of audience, which supplies premises and structures of beliefs

that guide the writer" (11). Similarly, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca proclaim the value of the mental construction of the *"universal audience,"* a "universality and unanimity imagined by the speaker" of an ideal audience moved only by reasons "of a compelling character . . . [that] are self-evident, and possess an absolute and timeless validity, independent of local and historical contingencies" (31-32). Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca argue that this imagined audience is useful for exploring current issues, beliefs, and systems of proof, and they note the cultural-situatedness of such a construct: "each individual, each culture, has . . . its own conception of the universal audience," and we can "learn from it what men, at different times in history, have regarded as *real, true,* and *objectively valid*" (33).

Reframed as an internal argument with an imagined audience, the act of self-deliberation endemic to the invention process can be seen as an extension of general argumentation, and "agreement with oneself" as "merely a particular case of agreement with others" (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 41). Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca accord a level of sincerity and rigor to self-deliberation, making it "highly desirable to consider self-deliberation as a particular kind of argumentation," without reaffirming a search for inner truth via dispassionate demonstration (41). One particularly useful feature of this deliberative process, they argue, is its tendency to cast a wider inventional net:

> . . . when a person is thinking, his mind would not be concerned with pleading or with seeking only those arguments that support a particular point of view, but would strive to assemble all arguments that seem to it to have some value, without suppressing any, and then, after weighing the pros and cons, would decide on what, to the best of its knowledge and belief, appears to be the most satisfactory solution. (41)

English pedagogy scholar Paul Kemp asserts that,

"For many of our students . . . speaking and writing have lost their 'authenticity.' Far from being 'socially contingent,' speaking and writing tasks have become the dispirited (and uninspiring) attempts to please the teacher and earn an 'A'" (1). Having students envision an audience other than the teacher can free them from the tendency to parrot the teacher's arguments. By approaching rhetorical invention as an imagined conversation with an audience embodying the reigning beliefs of the day, students can tease out new approaches to existing topics. Most importantly, "the interplay between a particular audience, the communicator's own inclinations, and the 'universal audience' 'makes the inventional process and the argumentation that flows from it rational'" (Makau 379). This perceptual approach to invention moves students beyond a search for facts, argues Judith Dobler, because "perceptual invention assumes that facts are in and of themselves useless without a way to relate them to one another, without an angle of vision that connects them together" (8-9).

Thomas Kuhn's germinal book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, suggests that big theoretical changes occur, not because of a vast gathering of facts or a breakthrough in new information, but because of a shift in perception—that classically messy inventional process of allowing new situational contexts to mix with existing ideas, beliefs, and knowledge to illuminate old topics in new ways. If students can learn to view authorship as a discovery process, wherein topics are framed by existing issues and systems of proof, grounded in cultural and situational factors, tested against general and field-specific audiences, and open to change when we embrace the sophistic notion of *kairos*—embracing what is new about the moment, or the writer's perspective—then they have a better chance of breaking out of the writer's block that impedes original thought.

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*E*

# The Middle Passage and the *Mayflower:* De-classing and De-gendering Race and Education in Postmodern America

dwin Gaustad argues that American literary history was heavily influenced by Puritanism from the arrival of the first 100 settlers at Plymouth in 1620 on the *Mayflower.* Of the settlers, about forty-one were Puritans. Gaustad observes that for a century, these reli-

gious dissenters and their heirs were committed to cre-
ating, in America, a paradigmatic Christian society that
has had a profound impact on the nation's education,
literature, politics, ethics, and religion. David Laurence
asserts that American literature took off in earnest after
1630, a year in which John Winthrop and his group
of 700 Puritans landed at Cape Cod in Massachusetts.
Indeed, not only did literature flourish, but also, with
the founding of Harvard University in 1636, education
became a quintessential thread woven into the nation's
progressive fabric over the years. However, before the
*Mayflower*'s arrival, there was the Middle Passage.

Two of the questions addressed at the 2008
conference of the College English Association, Middle
Atlantic Group, were "Where have we been?" and
"Where are we going?" Racism, race, and gender
relations, sometimes referred to as the triple oppression,
have been an intrinsic—and problematic—part
of the nation's political, cultural, and economic
landscape since the early Spanish and English settlers
dehumanized Native Americans, and, as Bartholeme De
Las Casas has suggested, since Africans were brought to
the New World through the Middle Passage to till the
land.

In recent years, editors of anthologies have made a
point of including writing by Blacks, Native Americans,
and Hispanics in an effort to de-color, de-class, and
de-gender education in postmodern America. Many
literary works by minorities have as a central theme
the dramatic impact race has had on education over
the years. Frederick Douglass's *Narrative of the Life of
Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*, Frances Harper's
*Iola LeRoy*, W.E.B. DuBois's *The Souls of Black Folk*,
Richard Wright's *Native Son*, Ralph Ellison's *Invisible
Man,* Ernest Gaines's *A Lesson Before Dying*, and Toni
Morrison's *Paradise*, as well as Langston Hughes's poem
"A Dream Deferred," reveal how lack of education
dramatically marginalize a people.

Hughes's poem aptly captures and resonates with images of the trials, travails, and tribulations of people of color in America from antebellum to contemporary times. "What happens to a dream deferred?" Hughes asks in the first line. In words which are as timely now as when Hughes first wrote them, he continues to question:

> Does it dry up
> like a raisin in the sun?
> Or fester like a sore—
> And then run?
> Does it stink like rotten meat?
> Or crust and sugar over—
>  like a syrupy sweet?
>
> Maybe it just sags
> like a heavy load.
>
> Or does it explode?

The dreams of African Americans, who first arrived in this country in 1619, were deferred for over three centuries. For many, the dream simply withered. A few, like Phyllis Wheatley (1753-1784), the first African-American poet to achieve publication, discovered the sweetness in the raisin and transformed their marginalization and misfortunes into art, prefiguring the greatness of later, more widely recognized black writers. Others, such as Harriet Tubman (1820-1930), were compelled by the festering dream to assist others to escape from the chains of misogyny, emasculation, and debauchery that had entangled them. For still others, like Nat Turner (1800-1831), rebellion resulted in a fatal explosion. For Frederick Douglass (1818-1895) the dream crusted over, even as it sagged like a heavy load. That then was the story of the African in the New World, the story of the African in antebellum

America.

In his b*ildungsroman*, Douglass starkly reveals that the reason the enslaved were not allowed any form of education whatsoever was that slave masters knew it would enlighten them on the inequities and injustice of the times they lived in. Thus, the masters ferociously frowned on any form of education for the enslaved—be it covert or overt—to keep the enslaved in a perpetual miasma of ignorance. The American Dream is about education and diligence, values whose ultimate objective is success, liberty, and independence; but the enslaved in antebellum America started with a nightmare instead of a dream. Douglass and his fellow abolitionists would labor for decades before slavery was terminated with the Emancipation Proclamation.

Frances Harper's *Iola Leroy,* written during the Reconstruction era, is an uplifting story celebrating the perspicuity of colored people as they develop their own secret codes of communication at the apogee of the Civil War. Education of the newly freed is carried out invisibly in the basements of churches. The characters in the novel know that education is critical; and in spite of the tremendous limitations imposed on them because of their marginalization, they struggle for enlightenment. As a result, they are able to help their less fortunate brothers and sisters.

The overriding themes in W.E.B. DuBois's *The Souls of Black Folk* are education and racism. DuBois was furious at Booker T. Washington for his embracing of the accommodation and pacifism that eventually robbed the newly freed of their civil liberties. Education of colored people, DuBois observes, should not be limited to artisanship but must range from vocational training to the liberal arts and beyond. For it was the firm belief of DuBois that lawyers, doctors, teachers, and philosophers were just as important to the progress and survival of the race as farmers, bricklayers, plumbers, and artisans. DuBois even boldly predicted

that racism or the color line would be America's quintessential problem in the twentieth century. And so it came to pass.

In *Native Son*, Richard Wright paints a vivid picture of how tenements grotesquely helped to erode the confidence of many young men, including an uneducated black man, Bigger Thomas, who loses trust in white people to the extent that not even the promise of a scholarship to help him realize his dream of becoming a pilot can save him from himself. He ends up committing murder and is sentenced to death.

Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* also emphasizes the importance of education. After winning a contest and thinking he has been given a powerful letter of recommendation, the protagonist discovers that he has been deceived by his white recommenders. This compels him to return to his roots in the South. Ernest Gaines's *A Lesson Before Dying* tells of the plight of his uneducated protagonist, Jefferson, who finds himself at the wrong place at the wrong time. A murder he did not commit is pinned on him, and despite his innocence, he is sentenced to death. Significantly, his lack of education is mocked at his trial. In *Paradise*, the uneducated African-American founders of the town of Ruby seem to have been so furiously desensitized by the racism perpetrated against them that they end up killing an innocent white woman who symbolizes for them the pain, torture, and suffering of people of color.

Since 1619 and 1620, for both the heirs to the *Mayflower* and the descendants of those Africans who endured the Middle Passage, education has been central to the attainment of the American Dream. Education equips men and women with the necessary tools to extricate themselves from difficult situations; it also opens the floodgates of opportunities to those who are wise and prudent enough to seek it. Wheatley sought it in the 1700s, and it elevated her to a position of rever-
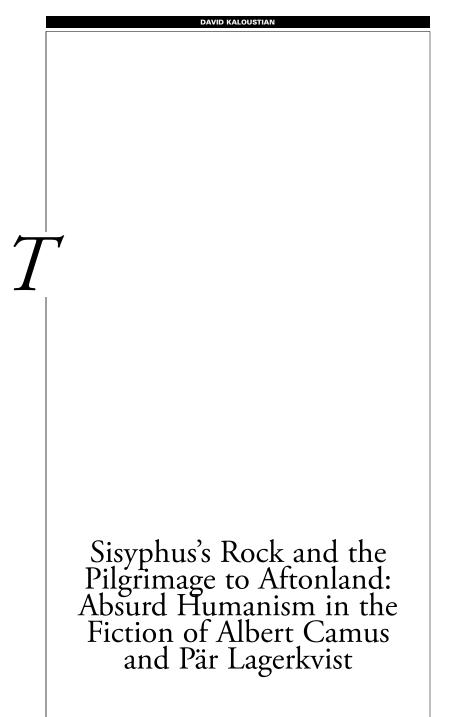
ence in antebellum America; Douglass sought it in the 1800s, and it brought him fame and made him a wily statesman; Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., sought it in the last century, and it endeared him into the hearts of all those who heard him speak. And in the twenty-first century, Barack Obama is living proof that America is about to turn a new page in her dealings with people of color, that she will no longer judge people "by the color of their skin but by the content of their character."

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# Sisyphus's Rock and the Pilgrimage to Aftonland: Absurd Humanism in the Fiction of Albert Camus and Pär Lagerkvist

he short title essay by Albert Camus from his collection *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942) identifies the mythological figure of Sisyphus, condemned by the gods for all

eternity to roll a rock to the top of a hill, only to see it roll down again into the depths, as the quintessential absurd hero. It is not any particular achievement, but rather the effort itself against insurmountable odds, indeed the rebellious attempt that flouts fate itself that is heroic, according to Camus. In this myth, Camus reads a wonderfully apt metaphor for the human condition. Sisyphus, knowing full well that ultimate fulfillment is unattainable, nevertheless continues to strive, and it is this consciousness of the ineluctable disparity between effort and attainment that interests Camus and that he sees as constituting the absurd. But absurdity in this sense is not the same as futility, for there is a derivative ennoblement from this struggle that makes Sisyphus, as agonist, heroic. Themes complementary to Sisyphus's struggle may also be detected in Camus' most celebrated pieces of fiction: *The Stranger* (1946), *The Plague* (1948), and *The Fall* (1957). In *The Plague* in particular, it is the struggle against the human condition that is paradoxically the humanizing factor.

Pär Lagerkvist, the Swedish playwright, poet, and novelist, who won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1951 (six years before Camus was awarded the Nobel prize), presents the theme of the absurd spiritual pilgrimage in a series of novels which belong to what Roy Arthur Swanson terms the "crucifixion cycle," beginning with *Barabbas* (1950) and including *The Sibyl* (1956), *The Death of Ahasuerus* (1960), *Pilgrim at Sea* (1962) and *The Holy Land* (1964). Lagerkvist portrays in these novels a series of characters who are god-cursed sinners, cast adrift and forlorn, wandering through a bleak existential wasteland, agonizing over humankind's relationship to deity, and seeking a holy land which may not exist. And if that description sounds bombastic, that is my fault, not Lagerkvist's, for these themes are handled deftly by a novelist who becomes increasingly given to parabolic understatement as his career progresses. The pilgrims of Lagerkvist's

fiction find out along the way that although the holiness and salvation that they initially identify with a localized holy land might not actually exist in the form in which they seek it, their journeys confer something else which is not without its own value. The present essay will sketch some connections between these two writers in their literary explorations of existentialist themes, particularly in their respective handlings of a humanist philosophy of the absurd.

Camus famously begins "An Absurd Reasoning," the first essay in *The Myth of Sisyphus,* with a statement of his point of departure:

> There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest—whether or not the world has three dimensions, whether the mind has nine or twelve categories—comes afterwards. These are games; one must first answer. (3)

Living, for Camus, is therefore an affirmation, an act of the will which presents a decision, a determination of value. He acknowledges that we may sleepwalk through our lives numbed by routine, and indoctrinated by custom, but that ultimately, habit, law, and fate itself are neither substitutes for, nor excuse one from, making a more lucid assessment of the value of existence. When Camus' erstwhile friend Sartre maintains that "man is condemned to freedom," he does no more than point out that we are responsible for our actions, through which the essential self is created. Many of Sartre's novels and short stories depict characters in various states of self deception and unawareness who either continue on their paths of obliviousness, or, like Roquentin, the protagonist of *Nausea*, suffer through the uncomfortable process of sloughing off the conventional demands of the Universal and moving toward authentic self-

determination. Camus, likewise, in his first novel, *The Stranger*, shows the
disorienting consequences of one character's coming into existential consciousness and his subsequent refusal to abide by the rules of the Universal. As Meursault, the protagonist, drifts further and further from mainstream perceptions, his own actions and the actions of others increasingly appear to him as socially determined and devoid of a self-actualizing purpose. Ultimately, Meursault is condemned by the Universal not so much for his murder of the unidentified Arab as for his "criminal" indifference to his mother's death and, by extension, his indifference to social mores. The novel ends with Meursault's resigning himself to the "benign indifference of the universe," awaiting the "howls of execration" that would greet him on the day of his execution (154). But this resignation is, ironically, a movement toward authenticity.

Lagerkvist's *Barabbas* also ends with a resignation of sorts by the protagonist. Barabbas, we remember, is the thief in whose stead (quite literally) Jesus was crucified. The novel opens with Barabbas watching the crucifixion scene and being oddly moved despite his ingrained cynicism hardened by his criminality. He becomes increasingly preoccupied with the image of the sacrificed man; and as his guilt continues to haunt him, he eventually drifts toward Christianity, though he can never fully accept Christian faith. At the novel's end, he too, is crucified:

> When he felt death approaching, that which he had always been so afraid of, he said out into the darkness, as though he were speaking to it:
> —To thee I deliver up my soul.
> And then he delivered up his spirit. ( 48-49)

The ending is equivocal, because if he doesn't actually have faith in god, then to whom is he delivering up his

spirit? Lagerkvist here, and in many of his other works, dexterously mines the fields of indeterminacy. It is, for example, a central motif in his collection of meditative poems entitled *Aftonland*, translated into English as *Evening Land*, which in Lagerkvist's terms signifies a twilight land of uncertainty. The ambiguity with which Barabbas's life ends in this first novel of Lagerkvist's crucifixion pentalogy sets the stage for the later pilgrims Lagerkvist describes, most of whom are cursed by god and search for redemption or at least peace without quite knowing where to seek.

In the next novel of Lagerkvist's crucifixion cycle, *The Sibyl*, we meet Ahasuerus, whose story is also well known. While walking the *via dolorosa*, Jesus stops to rest against the house of Ahasuerus, who tells him to move along. Jesus, as the story goes, curses Ahasuerus to wander eternally without rest; and, in Lagerkvist's version of the story, alienated from his former life and with this curse upon him, Ahasuerus comes to the abode of the Sibyl, the priestess of Apollo. The two exchange stories about how their lives have been destroyed by their respective deities. Toward the end of the novel, the Sibyl launches into a sneering invective against god that I think would make even Captain Ahab cringe. The novel ends with this intense questioning of the benevolence of the gods' dispensation for humankind resonating in the foreground.

The third novel is *The Death of Ahasuerus*. As with the Sibyl, Ahasuerus gives voice to a sense of bitterness over the way in which he has been treated by god, but something else, too, emerges in the following thoughts he has on his deathbed:

> "Beyond the gods, beyond all that falsifies and coarsens the world of holiness, beyond all lies and distortion, all twisted divinities and all the abortions of human imagination, there must be something stupendous which is inaccessible to us. . . . Beyond all the sacred clutter the holy thing

itself must exist. That I believe, of that I am certain.

"God is nothing to me. Indeed he is hateful to me, because he deceives me about this very thing, and hides it from me. Because, believing that we long for him, he withholds what we do long for. . . .

"Yes, god is what divides us from the divine. Hinders us from drinking at the spring itself. To god I do not kneel— no, and I never will. But I would gladly lie down at the spring to drink from it—to quench my thirst, my burning thirst for what I cannot conceive of, but which I know exists." (114-15)

This beautiful biblical image of the spring will reappear in the final novel of the pentalogy; but for now, the important thing to note is that Ahasuerus's yearning for the holy *apart* from god turns death into a blessing inasmuch as he, unlike the Sibyl, has finally overcome god's curse. Lagerkvist ends the novel saying that Ahasuerus's "peace was great. That one could see" (118).

We actually meet the next pilgrim, Tobias, one of the main characters of *Pilgrim at Sea,* in *The Death of Ahasuerus*, where he is depicted as a thief who makes his living by robbing pilgrims bound for the holy land. Tobias oscillates between spiritual cynicism and resolute commitment to honor a vow he made in a moment of epiphany to journey with a group of pilgrims to the holy land. (I use the word "epiphany" here in a Joycean or secular sense, because it is not a direct revelation of deity that eventually moves Tobias to become a pilgrim, but rather a spectacle of human suffering. Thus, his journey is motivated by human sympathy rather than a longing for an abstract deity.)

At the beginning of *Pilgrim at Sea*, Tobias reaches the harbor too late to get on board the regular pilgrim ship bound for the holy land, so he asks a couple of shady characters if they will take him on board their ship. When he hands over all his ill-gotten gains, they do so, though it comes out later that they have no

intention of taking him to his preferred destination. Once on board, he meets Giovanni, a defrocked priest, who befriends him and tells him his story. Giovanni, like the Sibyl, had been dedicated to deity at an early age. His mother had sent him off to a monastery, and he had been ordained. However, after hearing a married woman confess her adulterous love, he falls in love with the woman, follows her back to her home, and they begin an adulterous affair. When the affair is discovered, she betrays him by saying that he seduced her, the priests expel him from the order; and the rest of the town, including his own mother, ostracize him, forcing him to leave, his faith in humanity and god alike shattered. And so Giovanni throws in his hand with the pirate crew of the ship that Tobias has found; and though he moves among them and carouses with the best of them, still he does not relish engaging in overtly violent acts with them, and we can see that he is not as thoroughly evil as the rest. The fact that he saves Tobias's life by disarming Ferrante, a truly evil shipmate, does not hurt the reader's sympathy for Giovanni, either. Upon their first meeting, Giovanni, though not exactly trying to dissuade Tobias from continuing his pilgrimage to the holy land, nevertheless urges him to recognize the holiness of the sea, which Lagerkvist spins into an extended metaphor of existence—including life and death itself. And after Giovanni saves Tobias's life, Tobias contemplates the sea of existence:

> To surrender to the sea—the great and endless sea which is indifferent to all things, which erases all things; which in its indifference forgives all things.
> Primeval, irresponsible, inhuman. Freeing man through its inhumanity, making him irresponsible and free—if he will only choose the sea and surrender to it. (55)

Giovanni's lesson to Tobias about the "indifferent" sea is akin to the lesson of Meursault and his surrender to

the "benign indifference of the universe." Camus uses the character Meursault to describe the initial movement of casting away from whatever moorings had previously anchored one and thereby dispelling a false sense of freedom in favor of the real thing. We normally live from goal to goal, directed and enslaved by goals both imposed from without and created from within, but both equally full of false hope for the future, suggests Camus; and all the while we shield our thoughts from the final reality, which is death. Camus writes in "An Absurd Reasoning":

> The absurd enlightens me on that point: there is no future. . . . Losing oneself in the bottomless certainty, feeling henceforth sufficiently remote from one's own life to increase it and take a broad view of it—this involves the principle of a liberation. . . . [I]t takes the place of the illusions of freedom, which all stopped with death. The divine availability of the condemned man before whom the prison doors open in a certain early dawn, that unbelievable disinterestedness with regard to everything except for the pure flame of life— it is clear that death and the absurd are here the principles of the only reasonable freedom: that which a human heart can experience and live. This is a second consequence. The absurd man thus catches sight of a burning and frigid, transparent and limited universe in which nothing is possible but everything is given, and beyond which all is collapse and nothingness. He can then decide to accept such a universe and draw from its strength, his refusal to hope, and the unyielding evidence of a life without consolation. (*Myth* 43-44)

But this initial movement of resignation is not the whole story for either Camus or Lagerkvist. At the end of *Pilgrim at Sea,* although Tobias and Giovanni throw in their lots together to drift, for the moment, on the unfathomable sea of existence, Tobias casts his thoughts beyond:

He thought about the highest and holiest in life and
of what nature it might be: that perhaps it exists only as a
dream and cannot survive reality, the awakening. But that it
does nevertheless exist. That perfect love exists and the Holy
Land exists; it is just that we cannot reach it. That perhaps
we are only on our way there—only pilgrims at sea.

Yet the sea is not everything: it cannot be. There must be
something beyond it, there must be a land beyond the great
desolate expanses and the great deeps which are indifferent
to all things: a land we cannot reach but to which neverthe-
less we are on our way. (115-16)

"Perhaps it exists, but we can't reach it"—this is the
perfect expression of the absurd, which has been
defined as "the sustained juxtaposition of two incom-
patible factors." It may take the form of a kind of
hopeless hoping. In one of the poems in *Evening Land*,
Lagerkvist writes:

> If you believe in god and no god exists
> then your belief is an even greater wonder.
> Then it is really something inconceivably great. (127)

Tellingly, Lagerkvist termed himself "a believer without
faith, a religious atheist" in *The Clenched Fist*, a human-
istic travel account of his own journey to the holy lands
of the Middle East. His belief, as he makes clear in that
essay through the central image of the clenched fist, is
in a militant humanism, which expresses its heroism
through a spiritual longing and questing for whatever
magnifies humanity and through a recognition of the
commonality of suffering.

All of this has affinities with the absurd heroism
embodied in certain characters in Camus's monumental
novel of 1948, *The Plague*. Often fruitfully read as
an allegory of the Nazi occupation of France (and,
by extension, of the French occupation of Algeria),
the central metaphor of the plague may be extended
to stand in for whatever oppresses or dehumanizes.
After plague is discovered and the city of Oran is

quarantined, some characters, such as Dr. Rieux and his friend, Jean Tarrou, a journalist, embrace the absurd and act with grace and heroism. Others—such as Father Paneloux, who maintains that the plague is the wrath of god visited upon a sinful city; and Joseph Cottard, a petty criminal who, under cover of the plague, is able to ply his trade and escape detection, and actually profits from the plague—are inauthentic characters whose beliefs and actions do little or nothing to succor or even attempt to aid those suffering around them. Paneloux's views are particularly odious to Rieux, who, in a discussion with Tarrou following Paneloux's first sermon strikes an unmistakable note of rebellion. Tarrou asks if Rieux agrees with Paneloux that the plague has "its good side" inasmuch as "it opens men's eyes and forces them to take thought," but the doctor answers:

> "So does every ill that flesh is heir to. What's true of all the evils in the world is true of plague as well. It helps men to rise above themselves. All the same, when you see the misery it brings, you'd need to be a madman, or a coward or stone blind, to give in tamely to the plague." (119)

Rieux goes on with his rebellious confession of humanistic faith by saying that he cannot put his faith in an all-powerful God to cure the ills of the world; otherwise he would need not struggle. Thus he feels it is his task to fight "against creation as he found it." He adds:

> ". . . since the order of the world is shaped by death, mightn't it be better for God if we refuse to believe in Him and struggle with all our might against death, without raising our eyes toward the heaven where He sits in silence?"
> Tarrou nodded.
> "Yes. But your victories will never be lasting; that's all."
> Rieux's face darkened.
> "Yes, I know that. But it's no reason for giving up the struggle."(121)

The plague worsens, and Rieux continues to care for his sick patients, though in reality, there is not much he can do to save them; yet his example inspires Tarrou and others to fight alongside Rieux. There are, however, moments of respite and, despite the alienating effects of the plague, of friendship. It is in these moments, according to Camus, that the human spirit triumphs, if only momentarily, over the Sisyphusean rock. Indeed, Camus ends his meditation on Sisyphus as follows:

> I leave Sisyphus at the foot of the mountain! One always finds one's burden again. But Sisyphus teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He . . . concludes that all is well. This universe henceforth without a master seems to him neither sterile nor futile. Each atom of that stone, each mineral flake of that night-filled mountain, in itself forms a world. The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy. (*Myth* 91)

In the concluding section of *The Holy Land*, the final book of Lagerkvist's pentalogy, Tobias is, like Sisyphus, in the foothills, and casts his gaze up into the mountains beyond, longing to continue his absurd pilgrimage to a holy land that might not exist. He wanders up into the mountains and finds himself in Aftonland, this evening land between night and day, life and death. In this twilight land of uncertainty, Tobias comes upon the three crosses, which of course we are to understand as the three crosses of Golgotha. It is not so much the cross of the innocent one that interests Tobias, but the other two crosses, which evoke for him memories of human suffering that he has witnessed as well as thoughts of the universal sentence of death under which all mortals labor (a theme that permeates *The Plague*). He finds the aforementioned spring and drinks from it, but it turns out to be not simply the spring of life, but also the source of the river of death, on whose banks he now gazes across to the

other side. It is only at this point that he recognizes that he has been a "pilgrim to a land that doesn't exist" and that his "pilgrimage has been meaningless, aimless" (42). But this is not to say that his journey has been futile or without value, for he also believes that the very roads of his pilgrimage have themselves become holy (43); and so we see that the journey itself confers its *own* value. Similarly, the slight and sporadic relief that Rieux and others impart to victims of the plague results not so much in the saving of lives as in the redemption of the humanity of those who imperil themselves to aid others.

In the lead essay of his *Existentialism and Human Emotions*, an essay written in defense of existentialism, Sartre attempts to dispel the notion that the absence of a transcendental absolute leads to quietism and despair. His refutation of this charge rests mainly on the premise that the situations in which people find themselves are not direct determinants of action, but only conditions in which free choice may be realized. Thus far do Camus and Lagerkvist go in their novels. But they go further to suggest that the forlornness of subjective choice in such a universe may be mitigated in unexpected ways, in paths of indirection in which the self is absorbed and realized in the projection of a goal that also involves the recognition of the subjectivity— and often the suffering—of the Other. Those who expect to travel a straight road to redemption, whether religious or extra-religious, are often disappointed; but through absurd indirection, Camus and Lagerkvist give us characters who are through their free choice visited with a mode of existential grace.

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# Upward Mobility in Writing Portfolios for

# Minority Students Through Delpit's Lens

n the past five years, there has been a significant amount of scholarly work devoted to the benefits of writing portfolios in academia. Although many scholars and practitioners agree that writing portfolios serve as an excellent tool to assess student writing, does the current approach meet the needs for all students? While portfolios are an excellent way to see how a student's writing abilities improve over a period of time, they offer too much flexibility and openness for some middle-class and lower- class African-American students in community and junior colleges. Writing portfolios are designed to give students the freedom to work at their own pace and take control of their writings; yet many African-American students are not used to student-focused writing courses. Many of these marginalized students come from a social discourse that entails discipline and precise instructions. As a result, as a number of scholars have pointed out, some Black students are often forced to adapt to openness versus discipline, process versus a culture of power, and indirect versus veiled commands in English composition classes. While many scholars and practitioners continue to incorporate writing portfolios into their writing courses, some African-American students continue to struggle to produce quality work. Although more English classes should implement writing portfolios, theorists and practitioners must reevaluate how to make the writing portfolio beneficial for some African-American students. In order to reassess writing portfolios for various marginalized students, I will reevaluate the writing portfolio through Lisa Delpit's lens.

## Fluency over Structure: Controversies in Academia

Prior to the 1970s, students in many college writing courses were expected to produce carefully structured essays on assigned topics. By the mid-1980s, the process approach had been widely adopted. In her book *Other People's Children: Cultural Conflict in the Classroom*, which includes several essays first published in the late 1980s and early 1990s, Lisa Delpit expresses strong reservations about the appropriateness of the process approach for some African-American students, specifically those from lower-class social discourse, who may be at a disadvantage if they are not taught how to write and speak in the academic English vernacular.

Some writing instructors are oblivious to the necessity for educators to be more structured while teaching African-American students how to write effectively. Many simply explain to students that they can free write without thinking about grammatical errors or essay structure. However, if more educators explained writing assignments in a more structured manner for minority students, then more Black pupils would begin to submit quality writings. Delpit asserts that

> writing process advocates often give the impression that they view the direct teaching of skills to be restrictive to the writing process at best, and at worst, politically repressive to students already oppressed by a racist educational system. Black teachers, on the other hand, see the teaching of skills to be essential to their students' survival. (18)

Although teaching a writing class in a structured manner where the class is teacher focused may appear to be harsh, educators must acknowledge the fact that teaching pedagogy is not a matter of "one size fits all." In the twenty-first century, we cannot continue to assume that implementing fluency in the class is the remedy for every student who struggles with English.

37

Francis Bailey and Ken Pransky observe that

> if educators embrace pedagogical theory that claims their
> own cultural best practices are best for all children, it follows
> that they also believe these practices must be superior to the
> pedagogical traditions of other cultures. . . . It is difficult to
> recognize that our preferred ways are not preferred by all.
> Most people never have to think about this issue at all in
> their professional lives. However, one of the great challenges
> of teaching CLD [culturally and linguistically diverse] chil-
> dren is that we must. (21)

If we continue privileging a particular method, such as
fluency over structure, and ignore the needs of some
African-American students, then they will continue
to struggle in the attempt to produce more structured
genres of writing—such as research reports, persuasive
essays, and critical analyses—for their portfolios. Given
that the ability to write in a structured manner may be
essential to success in the world of work, students who
lacks that ability are being set up for failure.

## Openness versus Discipline with African-American Students

In addition to Black students' struggling to produce
good quality essays, many minority students in compo-
sition courses have a difficult time interpreting direc-
tions for writing essays in preparation for the portfo-
lio. In order to understand the root of this problem,
one must understand the historical context of many
African-Americans' social discourses and the differ-
ences between such discourses and those of academia.
According to Lisa Delpit, a student's performance in
school can be closely linked to how he or she was raised
as a child. Many students from marginalized groups
come from social discourses where their guardian(s)
have disciplined them in an authoritative manner with
direct commands. Because many of these students are
unfamiliar with any other form of discipline and teach-

ing, they often identify only with this same form of instruction in academia. As Delpit explains, "Black children expect an authority figure to act with authority" (35). They are usually disciplined with commands instead of given open options. When some instructors examine students' rough drafts for a particular writing assignment, many will write questions about the drafts directly on the students' papers in order to help them revise. Minority students often respond better to a more directive approach for revising their essays.

Unfortunately, many educators avoid using direct commands as a form of teaching in their classes because they want to keep the class student focused instead of teacher focused and adopt a more open teaching style, one which requires that the student be self-disciplined. Several contributors to *New Directions in Portfolio Assessment* believe that incorporating the portfolio into writing classes can serve as a way to reclaim the composition course as a student-focused environment as opposed to a teacher-focused class. Kathleen Yancey states that when the portfolio methods is used correctly, it is "first, longitudinal in nature; second, diverse in content; and third, almost always collaborative in ownership and composition" (qtd. in Berlin 61).

However, those who are unfamiliar with a teaching approach that stresses openness may feel alienated if they are not already a part of the academic discourse. These students are coming into an environment that is totally foreign to them. As Delpit explains, ". . . black people often view issues of power and authority differently than people from mainstream middle-class backgrounds. Many people of color expect authority to be earned by personal efforts and exhibited by personal characteristics" (35). In addition, African-American students tend to be more responsive towards educators who "push" students to learn. She believes that teachers should be authoritative while conducting class. If the instructor verbalizes to the students that they can be

successful in writing and really push them to learn, then more African-American students will succeed in class.

Although Delpit suggest that instructors should begin teaching some minority students who struggle with writing more authoritatively, in his Foreword to *Portfolios: Process and Product,* Peter Elbow contends that

> . . . indeed, the use of portfolios throws light on the very process of measurement or evaluation. For portfolio assessment occupies an interesting in-between area between the clean, artificial world of carefully controlled assessment ("Take out your pencils. Don't turn over your books till I say 'go'.") and the swampy real world of offices and livingrooms where people actually write things for a purpose and where we as actual readers look at texts and cannot agree for the life of us . . . about what they mean and how good they are. (Belanoff and Dickinson xii)

However, Delpit argues that for some marginalized students, direct commands are expected and that many African-American students respond positively to this form of teaching.

While Elbow views direct commands as "artificial," we must ask if this is true for all students. Many African-American students respond to writing assignments more effectively if they are given precise instructions and continuously guided through the process of developing a portfolio. After these particular students improve their writing structure and grammar, then perhaps they will be ready to write "freely."

### Skills Versus Process in Writing

Composition instructors have been taught that writing is a process. Therefore, many students are required to follow the process of writing in preparation for their writing portfolios. Delpit refers to "the estrangement that I and many teachers of color feel from the

progressive movement when writing process advocates dismiss us as too 'skills oriented'" (23). Fortunately there are many Black English instructors who have argued for decades that some minority students do not respond well to a process approach in writing classes; instead, they respond better to a skills-oriented class. Nevertheless, many Black educators' issues regarding the best teaching approach for African Americans who compile work in a writing portfolio remain unresolved. Delpit is not trying to identify what is the best instructional methodology for marginalized students, but she does explain that the differing perspectives on the debate over skills versus process approaches can lead to an understanding of the alienation and miscommunication experienced by students (24).

In her chapter titled "The Silenced Dialogue," Delpit acknowledges that in academia, "Child-centered, whole language, and process approaches are needed in order to allow a democratic state of free, autonomous, empowered adults, and because research has shown that children learn best through these methods" (31). Yet "there is little research data supporting the major tenets of process approaches over other forms of literacy instruction, and virtually no evidence that such approaches are more efficacious for children of color" (31).Delpit further states:

> Teachers do students no service to suggest, even implicitly, that "product" is not important. In this country, students will be judged on their product regardless of the process they utilized to achieve it. And that product, based as it is on the specific codes of a particular culture, is more readily produced when the directives of how to produce it are made explicit. (31)

Therefore, educators should be cautious about telling students to express themselves through writing and to

avoid thinking about any grammatical or organizational errors. It is the instructor's responsibility to reveal the rules to some minority students who struggle to produce acceptable writing.

While some educators may assume that they are "giving a voice" back to oppressed students who are not used to openly expressing themselves through writing, they are setting these students up for failure if they do not individually meet with each student frequently to help improve his or her writing. For many African-American students, writing in the academic-English vernacular is like learning a new language; therefore, it is important for the teacher to make sure that the students completely understand the new language that they are learning. Merely adopting direct instruction is not the answer. "Actual writing for real audiences and real purposes is a vital element in helping students to understand that they have an important voice in their own learning processes" (Delpit 33).

Some educators feel as though they are not teaching correctly if they do not implement the teaching styles they were taught in academia, but sometimes we have to adjust our teaching pedagogy to accommodate certain students. According to Bailey and Pransky,

> Universalized theories are naturally attractive to progressive educators in their promise that, because all humans learn in fundamentally similar ways, all children will naturally flourish in classrooms based on certain "ideal" learning dynamics regardless of race, ethnicity, or class. However, we believe that the very concept of universalized best practices is really a chimera in light of the wide body of research that conceptualizes learning as a profoundly cultural process. . . . Ironically, a universalized educational orientation may *prevent* caring educators from recognizing the actual learning needs and strengths of "other people's children." (20)

### The Culture of Power in Writing Portfolios

African-American students who are not part of the aca-

demic discourse may find it problematic to successfully complete a writing portfolio. If no one who is already part of the academic discourse explains to minority students the rules for earning a high grade on their writing portfolios, then some of these students risk not doing well on their writings. Delpit argues that in academia, people who are part of the academic discourse have a set of rules, which she refers to as "the culture of power." Yet many minority educators and students often are not part of this particular discourse. In her chapter "The Silenced Dialogue," Delpit explains the rules of the culture of power: "[They] are a reflection of the rules of the culture of those who have power" (24). She maintains that "success in institutions—schools, work places, and so on—is predicated upon acquisition of the culture of those who are in power. Children from middle-class homes tend to do better in school than those from non-middle-class homes because the culture of the school is based on the culture of the upper and middle classes—of those in power" (25) . If more educators enlighten African-American students regarding the "culture of power," this can be used to liberate marginalized students in writing classes.

While numerous portfolio scholars have addressed the benefits of writing portfolios for students, they do not offer any in-depth literature for ESL students. Today, many scholars are beginning to recognize that African-American students who speak the Black English vernacular are themselves in a sense ESL students. While Liz Hamp-Lyons and William Condon note that "it has often been claimed . . . that portfolios offer a special benefit for nonmainstream writers," both theorists admit that writing portfolios can be an issue for ESL students and even African-American students: "We might expect that international students, who are penalized in the academy by having to write outside their dominant language, would be even more severely handicapped on tests, especially essay tests, which

demand the use of the full gamut of written language skills under stressful circumstances" (60).

During a 1997 study on non-mainstream writers' ways of handling the stresses of an essay test, Hamp-Lyons and Condons discovered that students from different cultural and educational experiences brought different expectations and strategies to the essay test and responded to the essay topic in various forms. They demonstrated that minority writers were failing at a high rate on essay tests and concluded that "a "portfolio-based assessment would be less intimidating because students have much more latitude to choose the kinds of writing they do, the subjects they write about, and the conditions under which they write" (61).

## Directness and Veiled Commands

Many African-American students in writing courses do not respond well to instructors who give them veiled or indirect commands for writing assignments. Some of the students actually experience writer's block when they are given too many choices for an essay; for this reason, many of their writing portfolios are not up to par. As mentioned earlier, Delpit explains that many lower- and middle-class Black students respond more positively and perform better as writers when teachers behave in a way that echoes their parents' distinctive approach to assigning tasks. As an example, if an African-American parent would like a child to do particular chore, he or she might say to the child, "Wash those dishes!" The African-American style of discipline is a form that many Blacks have become accustomed to; many of them relate to this authoritative form of instruction. In contrast, a Caucasian parent might say, "Would you like to wash the dishes or dry the dishes while I wash them?" This form of veiled command where a child has options to think critically is very similar to the style of teaching used in academia

(Delpit 33-34). Upper-class White parents prepare their children for academia by mimicking educators' styles of teaching students in schools; therefore, many White students are well prepared for the academic discourse when they enter college. However, many Black students who were not raised in such a social discourse have a difficult time adapting to choices and critically thinking about their work. Rather, they identify with educators and schoolwork that mimic their social discourse.

Students from different cultures respond differently to certain commands. In her book *Ways with Words*, Shirley Brice Heath argues that students who are not used to veiled commands may have a difficult time adjusting to indirect commands by teachers. She notes that working-class children—both black and white—whom she studied "had difficulty interpreting these indirect requests for adherence to an unstated set of rules" (qtd. in Delpit 34). Likewise, if a teacher gives indirect commands regarding an African-American student's rough draft orally or in writing, that student may have no idea how to revise the essay effectively.

Today writing portfolios are widely considered to be the ideal form for assessing students' work in English composition courses. To this point, there has not been much research on the value of portfolios for some marginalized students. Many African-American students continue to struggle to produce acceptable portfolios in academia, and many composition teachers wonder why some of their African-American students are not succeeding. If more practitioners and scholars will implement Delpit's ideas regarding teaching these particular students with more discipline as opposed to openness, enlightening the students regarding the culture of power, and avoiding the use of indirect and veiled commands, then more African-American students will successfully pass English composition courses.