Modern Language Association of America

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Writing in Multicultural Settings

Edited by
Carol Severino,
Juan C. Guerra, and
Johnnella E. Butler

The Modern Language Association of America
New York 1997

Writing in Multicultural Settings. Ed.s Severino, Guerra, & Butler,
MLA 1997. p. 150-171

Composition Readers and the Construction of Identity

Sandra Jamieson

As our composition classes and teaching loads have continued to grow, textbook readers have become the most popular tools for teaching advanced literacy skills. These collections, which present essays and fiction within frameworks of explanatory text and assignments, are designed to teach classes practically by themselves, providing teachers with what appears to be a wide choice of material and allowing students to read additional essays at home if they wish. While some teachers use supplementary readings or use the anthologies for only part of their courses, many others depend on the readers to structure their courses and to provide most of the readings and assignments. The anthologies are therefore continually being published, and new types appear every five years or so in response to movements in the field, such as the spread of the process approach and of writing across the curriculum (WAC). The increasing centrality of readers in writing programs and courses since the mid-1970s has led some scholars to consider their content and message, much as Richard Ohmann did for rhetorics two decades ago. Kristine Hansen has found that many essays in WAC texts are not drawn from across the disciplines at all, and Nancy Shapiro has critiqued readers' emphasis on narrative prose. A more insidious problem is the image presented in readers of who writes and what they write about and the potential effects this image has on our students. Many teachers have criticized traditional readers for lacking serious essays by women and people of color and emphasizing "classics" such as George Orwell's "Shooting an Elephant" and Bruce Catton's "Grant and Lee" (which are among the pieces in the textbook canon that Robert Perrin has identified).

Initiatives such as the Conference on College Composition and Communication's 1989 resolution supporting a "policy that represents the inclusion of women and people of color in the curriculum at all levels"

have encouraged a revision of the material in what I call traditi
readers and the development and adoption of the multicultural rea
("CCCC Secretary's Report," 365). To a great extent, composition t
now reflect the makeup of our classes, providing the female role m
els that feminist writers such as Elaine Showalter and Joanna R
have long called for and the positive role models for people of c
that James Baldwin recommended in 1963. Although most rea
since the 1960s have been somewhat multicultural, more recently
have begun to emphasize multiculturalism. Traditional readers, s
as *Patterns of Exposition* (Decker) and *Norton Reader* (Eastman et
have incorporated more pieces by men and women of color and w
women, creating an alternative canon of writings "from the margi
Publicity materials proclaim the numerical increases but stress
the structure and principles of the collections remain unchanged
Jamieson, Rev. of the *Norton Reader*). The apparently more radica
sponse has been the birth of multicultural readers, with titles
Rereading America, *Intercultural Journeys through Reading and W
ing*, and *Emerging Voices: A Cross Cultural Reader*, organized by th
rather than rhetorical strategy (although frequently indexed un
rhetorical categories also) and featuring what prefaces describe a
wide spectrum of writers" designed to "educate" their readers from
"mainstream" and "empower" readers from the margins. For all t
differences, though, these readers share many characteristics and p
lems with their forebears.

Most modern textbook readers, whatever their format, reflect
work of composition and education scholars who emphasize the
portance of providing models for students. They also draw on scho
ship developed from the work of Paulo Friere, which demonstr
that when students feel they have a stake in the issues they read ab
they become more engaged and show more involvement with and
fort on writing assignments. Thus the collections feature more re
ings about personal identity, a strategy intended to unite both tre
by focusing on an issue that most students care a great deal ab
(identity) and providing model writers for them to identify with
they practice the personal essay. Many composition teachers find
approach appealing because of our egalitarian tendency to try to c
pensate for all the omissions of the modern academy in our comp
tion classes, perhaps thus challenging the social hierarchies that ca
students to be differently skilled as writers in the first place. Whe
we are committed to the politics of diversity or simply want texts
students will enjoy, multicultural texts seem to make sense.

In this essay I examine the unexpected and unintended result of the education these texts provide: the beliefs and attitudes they teach along with reading and writing skills. I do not intend to single out specific texts as good or bad; the examples I use could have been drawn from many readers on the market, and I do not recommend one over another. Instead, I recommend careful analysis of any reader under consideration or in use. My purpose is to explain why I consider that analysis important, to suggest what requires particular attention, and to propose some pedagogical strategies to counter problems in writing texts. I hope that my questions will create openings for more questions and that my descriptions of the problems will alert teachers in mono- and multicultural classrooms to other potential problems, both local and general. Then we can each begin to generate questions and solutions appropriate to our own teaching environments.

Models of Writers and Writing

To fully explore the ways these texts empower—or fail to empower—we must first consider the larger role of language in our sense of who we are and in the ways we represent ourselves and others. As David Bartholomae has argued, students must invent an academic audience before they can write for it because they don't yet know who it is or how to join its conversations ("Inventing" [1986]). They must also *re*invent themselves as writers who have something to say to that audience and a voice in which to say it. Readers are crucial in this process of reinvention because they provide students with models of writers and writing. Such models are especially important for students who have been taught to formulate less ambitious life goals; without more ambitious goals, they cannot be expected to hold the higher-order writing goals described by cognitive development theorists. Students who don't believe they have places in higher education cannot insert their written voices into the academic discourse community or represent their thought as valid. So our task as writing teachers would seem to be to help our students learn to reinvent themselves first as the academic writers they need to be to write for the academy and later as the business, technical, or professional writers they may become. This, then, is also the first task of readers.

If writing is connected with one's sense of self, students' writing processes begin long before they enter college, at the moment when they first begin to think of themselves as writers—or not writers, in many cases. Regardless of writing ability, they must retrace their steps

to that moment if they are to become more effective writers. They must understand how they came to think of themselves as writers if they are to learn how to overcome their writing blocks and error patterns and modify their concept of what it means to write for their new scholarly audience. If they are to learn writing as a recursive process, they must also understand how they came to think of themselves as readers so that they can learn to reread and edit their writing effectively. And reading assignments can help, as proponents of multiculturalism and personal narrative essays attest.

However, there are many dangers here. If we become consciously involved with our students' sense of themselves, we risk influencing those senses negatively because of our beliefs and prejudices. I. Hashimoto warns us that much pedagogy tends to construct our students as failed writers so that we can "save them" (72), but this is probably the most obvious criticism, and once it has been pointed out we can easily see how it forces students to occupy the position of failed writers in relation to the academy and to their writing classes before they can learn. And we have all seen students who never lose that sense of themselves. Judith Butler's analysis of the feminist movement in *Gender Trouble* and Shelby Steele's analysis of African Americans' inheritance from the civil rights movement in *The Content of Our Character* warn of similar dangers. Although Steele's argument is flawed by, among other things, his emphasis on the individual and his failure to consider the role of ideology, his discussion of the limitations of constructing oneself as a failure or a victim is powerful. Steele asserts that for African Americans to claim the victories won by the civil rights movement, they must embrace the notion of themselves as "the victims" (14) and represent themselves as such to whites, who were reconstructed in that era as "the guilty" (8). Steele argues that such a polarity prevents any real progress because members of each group must remain in their preassigned roles to achieve anything, but the victim role necessarily limits the achievements of African Americans. Butler gives a more theoretically sophisticated argument but makes a similar point. She draws on Michel Foucault's analysis of the juridical process and the subject it creates "before the law" to explain how feminism has had to create a "universal" woman in order to be her representative (2, 4). Like the universal black "victims" on which claims of racial entitlement are based according to Steele, feminism's "woman" must reconstruct herself primarily as a victim of a universal patriarchy—despite her race, creed, or nationality. Doing so has won her certain rights and freedoms, but at the expense of her larger freedom to define herself. By constructing "woman" within the terms of the old binary

structure responsible for the very hierarchy that oppresses her, feminism has inevitably mystified that structure and prevented analysis of so-called Third World women in terms other than those of the West or analysis of women of color in terms other than those of the predominantly white, middle-class "woman" of modern feminism.

As we intervene in our students' struggle to represent a self, we must be careful to avoid such limiting images. When we select what we consider to be representative models for our students, we must beware that we do not determine their suitability on the basis of subtle stereotypes. This is much easier to say than to do, as examination of contemporary readers reveals. In the rush to produce multicultural and more representative texts or in response to the publisher's economic imperative to appeal to the widest possible market, many textbook writers have paid insufficient attention to the images these new inclusive "models" represent, to the importance of their messages, and to the effect of their contexts. More important, these textbook writers also seem to ignore the complexity of identity construction and the role of language and ideology in that process. Because most readers are produced by composition theorists and experienced teachers, few of us question their choice of readings or ask whether the models they provide are equally empowering for all students. I contend that the inclusions and juxtapositions of these texts help create student writers who are differently skilled according to race, nationality, and gender and that if teachers do not actively intervene in the identity construction that composition textbooks unwittingly perpetuate, we will undermine whatever liberatory pedagogy prompted us to adopt these books and whatever politics encouraged us to rethink the issues of race and culture in the first place. I hope my examination of the writings and writers modeled in a variety of textbooks will help us develop teaching materials that will be equally beneficial for all our students.

Ideology and Writing

The first question we need to consider is, What kinds of essays are most frequently included in composition readers, and what role do these essays play in our students' reinvention and representation of themselves? Nancy Shapiro's 1991 review essay on readers answers the first part of that question. Shapiro found that the overwhelming majority of the pieces in readers—even most so-called WAC readers—are personal narratives rather than the various forms of academic

writing that students will be asked to produce for other classes. As I observe above, personal narratives seem to meet the needs of a multicultural curriculum by allowing students to interact with the experiences of cultural "others" and encouraging a student-centered pedagogy through which the students learn to value their own knowledge and feel validated by the university that has asked them to write about themselves. But the effect of personal narratives runs deeper than that. The power of the personal narrative is its realism; a successful personal narrative engages its readers in a one-to-one correspondence with the narrator. We visualize what the narrator saw and feel what the narrator felt. What better way to help our students enter a multicultural world?

Louis Althusser's analysis of the role of realistic literature in transmitting ideology and reinforcing social hierarchy should give us pause, though. His discussion of ideology provides us with valuable tools with which to analyze readers and their effects on our students. Althusser asserts that social systems are maintained through two structures: the "Repressive State Apparatus" and the "Ideological State Apparatus" (ISA). The former is the overt system of control achieved through such organs as the military and the police, which clearly serve the interests of the dominant group (143–47). The ISA achieves a more complex and subtle form of social control through ideology, which we can define as a system of beliefs and assumptions about how and why things are. Because schools, the media, the legal profession, government, and so on are run by people with the same kind of education (which was designed by and for the dominant class and hasn't changed its basic values even if it has changed its pedagogy), they tend to teach the same beliefs and assumptions, which are then reinforced by everything from self-help books and religion to everyday conversations. This dominant ideology ranges from beliefs such as that democracy is good and that the family is important to acceptance of the notions of reward and punishment and the image of the individual. It rests on notions of hierarchy—that some things are better, more valuable, or more important than others and that everyone is qualified to make that determination. Dominant ideology thus reinforces the social hierarchy originally established by the Repressive State Apparatuses by teaching us to accept that hierarchy and our roles in it (it teaches us, for example, that if we are college-educated, we deserve higher-status jobs than those who did not finish high school; if we can write, we can contribute more to society than those who are illiterate; if we have stable incomes, own houses, and belong to nuclear families,

we will be better parents; and so on). Ideology thus shapes our beliefs and values and prepares us to accept our role in a hierarchical (classed) society.

Althusser asserts that ideology is both "real" and "imaginary." Because most of our decisions and experiences are grounded in the beliefs, images, and social structures of the dominant ideology, that ideology feels "real," causing us to imagine that it reflects rather than shapes reality. To work effectively, then, the dominant ideology ("the system of . . . ideas and representations" of the group that dominates society and controls the Repressive State Apparatus—however indirect that control may seem) must continually reinforce this imaginary side (158). If it does not, people might begin to question the status quo and their own positions in the social hierarchy. Dominant ideology serves this function in our classrooms, for example, through the widely accepted idea that Standard English (the dialect of the dominant social group in America) is better than other dialects and that those who use it are more educated or intelligent.

Realistic literature, especially descriptive and narrative prose, plays an important role in the work of the ISA by helping to shape what we perceive as "real" and making it seem so "natural" that we act accordingly and thus help reinforce the "imaginary representations" of social relationships in others (164–65). Personal narratives epitomize this function because they encourage us not to question their "truth," or doubt the coherency of the "I" presented by the narrator. This last point is crucial, because the coherent "I" narrator is the one Bartholomae says our students must invent before they can write ("Inventing" [1986]). But first, Althusser would argue, they must learn to see themselves more broadly as "subjects" occupying a fixed subject position from which to perceive their experiences. Althusser argues that the function of ideology (171) is to create individuals who imagine themselves to be freethinking "subjects" so that each one will "(freely) accept his subjection . . . all by himself" (167–68; 182).

Literature helps create such subjects by addressing itself to a particular imaginary reader to whom the text is most intelligible and who we must unconsciously "become" to read the piece. The most obvious examples include the use of *we* to refer to the reader and the author and *our country* to refer to the United States, but on a more subtle level the process occurs whenever writers assume that they and their readers share values or a notion of reality and whenever writers represent people according to the dominant ideology (strong men, nurturing women, and so on). If a representation is repeated enough times, we will come to "recognize" it as "obvious" or "true" and take it

for granted. We will, for example, recognize a caregiver named Mary as "a woman" (because we believe that Mary is a woman's name, that nurturing is a female characteristic, and that women have more female characteristics than men). Similarly, we might initially suspect a nonnurturing woman of being less "womanly" or even "unnatural"—regardless of our political beliefs.

Althusser calls this process "interpellation" (170). The text, he says, literally "hails" its readers, who respond just as we turn when we are hailed on the street whether by name, or even as *Sir, Miss,* or *Ma'am* (173–75). Because ideology always addresses me as the same person, I come to recognize myself as that person; thus I recognize myself as a woman, as white, and so on, and along with these identifications come all the dominant representations of what it means to be a white woman and how one "naturally" behaves, which is "obviously" different from how those in other categories, such as women of color or men, behave. I therefore come to see myself as a noncontradictory unified subject; although I might seem a totally different person to, say, my students and my friends, we accept that difference as natural and perceive me to have only one "real" identity (because it is "natural" to be a subject with one unified identity). Our language doesn't even allow me to think of myself as many selves, rather, "I" am one self who behaves differently in different situations. Catherine Belsey cites Emile Benveniste's challenges to the "obviousness" of the unified subject to further explain this point. It is through language, they argue, that I constitute myself as a subject because language allows me to make the I–not I distinction. Benveniste states, "Language is possible only because each speaker sets himself up as a *subject* by referring to himself as *I* in his discourse" (Belsey 47). It is, then, a relatively simple step for ideology to reconstitute this "I" as the signifier of a unified subject. Thus we come to believe our real identity (as "I") to be fixed and basically unalterable, providing the foundation of our sometimes-contradictory actions, unifying them, and giving them larger meaning. This belief is important because only unified subjects can imagine themselves as larger than their parts and, thus, as able to escape ideology and be the originators of "meaning, knowledge and action" (Belsey 51). If we did not believe ourselves able to transcend ideology in this way, we would see that we are subject to it, resist its image of reality, and denounce it as indoctrination.

Ideology, then, speaks to us as if we were particular individuals occupying a given place in the social hierarchy. Through repetition, we come to "recognize" ourselves as the persons hailed and so act as if we were "really" those persons. Because ideology has taught us that we

are unified subjects with free will, we do not imagine our identities to have been created in this way. Our actions and choices seem to be the result of some fixed character or unfettered choice rather than the product of ideology. My concern in this essay is with the specific actions of reading and writing and with the ways the readings and assignments in textbook readers might influence our students' reinvention of themselves as academic readers and writers. If ideology causes some people to imagine themselves as "bosses" and others as "workers," we should be able to see this process in action by looking closely at the readers and writers addressed in textbook readers. Students already have a sense of where they are placed in the social hierarchy when they enter our writing classes, so we must ask whether our texts challenge that hierarchy and help our students reinvent themselves as equals or whether the texts reinforce that hierarchy and thus help preserve the status quo.

In English-speaking societies (as in many others), white men are positioned—and thus addressed—differently from men of color, white women, and women of color. To return to Althusser's hailing metaphor, not everyone turns around when someone calls out, "Excuse me, Sir." The phrase speaks to those who have already come to think of themselves as male ("Sir") and worthy of respect ("Excuse me"). Middle- and upper-class white men who believe that "Excuse me, Sir" might refer to them act on that image of themselves and turn around, and when the phrase does refer to them, the image is reinforced. Age, nationality, regional origin, religion, ethnic origin, and physical ability are among the other elements of the identity we "recognize" as ours and respond to. And, of course, part of the definition of these elements is their hierarchical status, so that in "recognizing" ourselves as the identities ideological apparatuses call us into, we also recognize our place in society, as the example shows. Because this "recognition" of "ourselves" is based on a system of beliefs about what it means to occupy specific social positions and because the noncontradictory unified subject is simply a convenient fiction, we are not really recognizing ourselves, Althusser points out; we are "misrecognizing" ourselves as the subjects ideology is calling us into or interpellating us as. He says, "The 'obviousness' that you and I are subjects—and that that does not cause any problems—is an ideological effect, the elementary ideological effect" (172). Because the notion of an individual subject is created by ideology, our recognition of ourselves is always really a misrecognition.

In the United States, perhaps more than in any other nation, the image of the autonomous individual dominates our beliefs and makes it possible for us to imagine that social hierarchies are just and natural.

Those images are challenged by the assertion that ideology creates an imagined self for each of us. If we want to make our students question social and racial hierarchies, then, we need to look at how these hierarchies are constructed by language. We might expect textbooks designed for language instruction in multicultural college classes to resist simple stereotypes and traditional ideologies, but if we find instead that they reinscribe and reaffirm the image of the autonomous individual, we must conclude that they unwittingly serve to perpetuate the status quo. If they represent "individuals" of different races and genders in ways that reinforce the hierarchical location of those groups, we must conclude the same thing. If they also obscure the workings of language, they will, of course, be even more effective. And they do. The failure of textbook readers to treat language as anything other than a tool for learning or a vehicle to express our thoughts encourages students and teachers to ignore its role in shaping those thoughts and our notion of our unified identities and membership in discourse communities.

The Implications of Writing Assignments

Language, as part of the symbolic order Jacques Lacan describes, constructs a fragmented self, and literature produces a similar fragmentation between the reader, the reader the text addresses, the social relations the text portrays, and the social relations the reader experiences as real. But this fragmented self is hidden from most students by the imaginary readers the texts address and the model individuals the texts present. When the experience narrated could lead to a discussion of the issue of the unified subject or call into question established patterns of belief, the introductions, commentaries, and questions for further writing close the piece off from such discussion and focus students' attention on style or use the piece as a jumping-off point for writing about tangential issues instead. An example of this can be seen with the questions following E. B. White's immensely popular essay "Once More to the Lake." In all the readers I have studied, the questions distract attention from the fascinating shifts in perspective as the father actually confuses his own body with his son's (such as in his description of how he felt while they were fly fishing: "I looked at the boy, who was silently watching his fly, and it was *my* hands that held his rod, *my* eyes watching. I felt dizzy and didn't know which rod I was at the end of" [G. Miller 80–81; Eastman et al. 48–49]). Instead of raising issues of identity and identification, texts ask students to "pick a particular event from [their] childhood, make a list of what [they]

remember, then, in a paragraph, narrate [their] experience" or "write an account of an experience, real or imagined, in which [they] return to a place [they] haven't seen for a while" (G. Miller 87; Eastman et al. 52).

The ideology of what a composition reader should do is so firmly entrenched that, instead of asking students to engage with the content of the piece as they would in other classes, suggestions for further writing such as these ask them to place themselves at the center of the text and use its style to write about something they might believe to be a similar experience. A stunning example is the suggestion following Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal" that students "select an activity which offends [them], such as people who throw trash from their car windows or surly and rude salesclerks [and] offer an exaggerated alternative to improve the situation" (Lester 361). A similar assignment suggests, "Write your own modest proposal for something, keeping in mind Swift's technique" (Eastman et al. 529). Instead of being asked to consider issues raised in the text, such as the hypocrisy with which we treat poverty, exploitation, and death, students are invited to use satire to expose trivial issues—thus littering and homelessness can be easily equated. Although such supposedly student-centered writing can have pedagogical value, there are several dangers in asking students to write about themselves in response to another text. Such an assignment renders their own experiences and observations more important than those of the author of the piece they have just read, and thus does not encourage them to engage with the emotions or experiences of others—one of the goals of multiculturalism. In addition, the influence of the reading on students' narratives remains unacknowledged.

The potential influence of a text's ideology on student narratives written in response to such assignments can be seen most clearly in the example of "Once More to the Lake." This essay addresses itself to a reader who shares the narrator's fear of change, his romanticization of the American dream and the image of the family, and his representation of "girls" as sexual objects. Sitting with his son on the dock with the "American flag floating against the white clouds in the blue sky," the narrator fears that the newcomers to the lake will be "common" rather than "nice" (G. Miller 82; Eastman et al. 49, 50). He implicitly connects fear of the loss of land, space, freedom, plenty, paternal authority, and American values with fear of death, of castration, and of the loss of sexuality, certainty, and self. And it is change, especially the intrusion of "common" people into his "cathedral-like" lake, which represents that fear (G. Miller 79; Eastman et al. 48). In order to enter into the narrative or even make sense of it, the reader addressed by this text must identify with and recognize *him*self as an American nostalgic for a golden age and fearful of change. Then, still in that identity, she or he must narrate a "similar" formative experience. Reconstructing one's past in these terms reinforces the sense of self created by the text—the students must "become" the text's implied reader in order to read it and must remain that person as they narrate formative events from their own pasts. Literally, then, they reinvent themselves as the person the text called on them to be. Moreover, the student proposing a solution to the problem of littering comes to see herself or himself as a unified individual who is the origin both of understanding and of action in accordance with that understanding. Perhaps this helps explain the enormous popularity of these two essays.

Ironically, we do not find student-centered assignments where they might encourage students to articulate their frustrations and explore their locations in the social hierarchy: after pieces dealing with racism, sexism, and anger. Such pieces are approached in ways that minimize these elements; one example is Maya Angelou's recently canonized "Graduation," which describes the pain and humiliation the narrator and her fellow students felt while listening to the racism of their white graduation speaker. Some textbook writers, such as the *Norton Reader*'s, simply decide not to follow it with any questions (a decision Eastman et al. repeated for "Mommy What Does 'Nigger' Mean?" by Gloria Naylor, and "Letter from Birmingham Jail," by Martin Luther King, Jr.—although they include several questions for "focusing reading" after less controversial pieces). Other texts ask students about tone or style but do not give them space to discuss the institutional racism at the heart of the piece or the anger just below the surface of many multicultural classes. Some textbook writers, such as Janet Madden-Simpson and Sara M. Blake in *Emerging Voices*, ask what Angelou has learned about herself, "how effectively she learned it," and "what Mr. Donleavy's speech teaches his audience" (298), but they avoid the larger issues the piece raises about differential spending on education and the effect of racism in America. Such questions differ from those following other essays in that they fail to generate student-centered writing on their reaction and relation to the issues raised by racism or sexism, even though student-centered assignments are the norm after other essays.

Writing Identities

In all the texts I have studied, the writing assignments following essays by white men, such as "Once More to the Lake," ask students to write

from the same identity as the one they were required to adopt to read the piece (in general, an identity just like the author's). In sharp contrast, almost no assignments following essays by white women and by women and men of color ask students to adopt the voice of the narrator (or even the implied reader, if that is different). Instead, these assignments ask students to step back from the text and discuss it from another perspective or identity.

Because we must imagine ourselves as unified subjects in order to represent ourselves in any form of writing, it is particularly effective for the texts designed to teach students to write within the academy also to offer them a carefully defined identity from which to write. Many students in composition classes, especially since the 1960s, are there because they write in a voice that is unfamiliar to the academy and speak from a position that might challenge the status quo by revealing the arbitrariness of its hierarchy. Instead of changing its basic values and standards (such as Standard English) to accommodate these new students, academic ideology maintains that we have to change the students: help them to reinvent themselves. Composition readers have been used for this purpose since their introduction in fifteenth-century England (originally to help regulate the language of French mercantile traders, later to help assimilate Huguenot refugees and working-class students, and then as part of the colonial expansion; see Jamieson, "United Colors"). But this reinvention is complex. It must produce students who share the values and beliefs of the dominant culture without sharing the personal expectations of the dominant class. It must, in other words, create educated people who reaffirm the social hierarchy even as they prepare to accept lower positions in it than others with similar educations.

Thus if the pieces collected in readers can help reinvent students as "individuals" who "willingly" adopt identities that reinforce the structures of the dominant culture, those texts will be particularly effective at teaching students whose "difference" might otherwise have challenged those structures. To read a text, students who do not recognize themselves in the position of the reader the text seems to demand must learn to become that individual and allow themselves to be addressed by "him." Once they read the piece, they must adopt identities as writers to respond to it.

Although the issue of authorship is obscured in most textbooks and has been called into question by Foucault ("What Is an Author?") and others, the name and brief biography of "The Author" always precedes the text in composition readers, establishing the notion of the autonomous author. The emphasis on each author's race and gender provides models of *who* can write in the academy, *which* styles of writing are permitted, and *whose* interpretations are accepted. In a classic example of mixed messages, the texts created for use in contemporary composition classes reinforce beliefs about who is authorized to write and who is not, while at the same time telling the students that they are all to become writers and appear to give them the skills to do so.

An example of this occurs with the inclusion of Langston Hughes's piece "Salvation," which, along with Swift's and White's, was one of the eight most often reproduced essays in readers published before 1990 and which was the most consistently included text by an African American in readers published since the 1960s (Jamieson, "Rereading" 131–33). The "writer" addressed by this essay might at first appear to be like Hughes (although not necessarily African American). As with "Once More to the Lake," the textual apparatus requires students to replace Hughes's experience with their own, to write from a vaguely similar situation and, maybe, with a similar purpose. They are asked to "describe an experience where group pressure forced [them] into doing something [they] did not believe in" (McCuen and Winkler 97) or "narrate an incident from which [they] learned something" (Lester 69). But if they turn back to the introductory sections explaining how to write narratives, the students will learn that they must not write as Hughes did; instead they must have a "clearly defined point" rather than simply "tell what happened." A narrative must "clearly reveal its intentions" and state its "reason for being" (G. Miller 60). Despite being one of the most frequent examples of narrative style offered by readers, "Salvation" does not do what readers tell us "good" narrative writing should.

We find a similar pattern with the anthologized portion of Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech. Although it is generally included in sections on persuasion, it does not fit the definitions of persuasive writing in the introductions to those sections. These introductions warn students to avoid repeating themselves, to make statements and then back them up carefully and logically, and to provide premises and justify all claims, injunctions that King's piece does not observe because it is not a piece of persuasive *writing*. King's and Hughes's pieces seem to serve as models of what not to do, and students who imitate their styles in other classes will be told, "This is not how we write in the academy."

It could be argued that in the context of the readers, these texts address (and thus "hail") a white audience, especially since the questions

following them, unlike those for other pieces, don't invite students to adopt the voice of the writer. But the emphasis on the race and gender of the author before each piece suggests that some students were intended to identify with, and thus "misrecognize" themselves as, Hughes and King, and see themselves as African American writing subjects. If they do, they will learn that, although their stories and beliefs are interesting and they are encouraged to give them, the writing styles identified as "theirs" are not appropriate for the university. The only logical conclusion for students who have reinvented themselves after the models presented to them is that they cannot write for the academy, despite their admission into college. Once they have been called back (reinterpellated) into their racial identities, it is hard for them to unimagine those identities again. The other possibility, that they reject the notion of the individual altogether, would require analytical skills that we rarely teach; it would require them to reject "the obvious," as Althusser points out (172). Their real choices are to accept the standards explained by the text and internalize the lesson—that people like them fail to meet those standards despite the importance of their message—or to reject the standards and rules and write as these models do. In the former instance students will come to accept the values of dominant culture and thus accept their own status as inferior; in the latter their writing will "fail," and a judgment of inferiority will be conferred on them and recorded on their transcripts.

We see the same hierarchical structuring occurring in *Models for Writers*, a collection offering "sixty-five short, lively essays that represent *particularly appropriate models* for use by beginning college writers" (Rosa and Eschholz v; emphasis mine). In it we find one Latino, one Native American male, six African Americans (three of them women), thirteen white women, and forty-four white men. Among the so-called models who are not white men, we find Shirley Chisholm explaining that she would "rather be black than female," Susan Jacoby re-posing the question "What does a woman want?" and Rachel Jones explaining "what's wrong with black English." As in all readers I have seen (traditional, like this one, and multicultural), the essays by women and people of color are *about* women and people of color, often placing the two identities in competition. Their discussions explain what it's like to be a woman or a person of color, so their imagined audience must be people who do not know that, that is, white men—or white women and people of color who imagine their experiences differently and so are assumed to need this instruction in what it is "really" like. In contrast, among the representatives from the dominant group, Jason Salzman discusses "the suicide pill option"; Michael Korda asks, "What makes a leader?"; Robert Veninga and James Spradley inform us "how the body responds to stress"; and so on. The content of the models considered "particularly appropriate" for white male writers is clearly different from that presented as "appropriate" for people of color and women, who are shown writing about themselves or issues of race and gender while white men are seen discussing apparently universal and academic topics. This hierarchy has remained largely unchanged in the new readers I have seen, both traditional and multicultural.

Joanna Russ argues, "Women need models not only to see in what ways the literary imagination has . . . been at work on the fact of being female, but also as assurances that they can produce art without inevitably being second-rate" (87). But the models provided by composition readers consistently present very trivial "ways the literary imagination has . . . been at work" in women's writing, and most of the writing by white women and people of color is nonacademic (as in the example above) and, by the standards carefully described in these texts, "second-rate." If we accept that academic topics are more important, the lesson we internalize is that white women and people of color are permitted to address only second-rate topics and thus must be second-rate and occupy a lower position in the social hierarchy as people and as writers.

Florence Howe describes her "women students [who] constantly consider women writers (and hence themselves, though that is not said outright) inferior to men" (qtd. in Russ 89). Most teachers have heard similar admissions from African American, Asian American, Latino or Latina, Native American, and working-class white students, although the assertion usually simply takes the form "I can't write" because the *"I"* they imagine has not been represented to them as a writer. Students entering college and trying to write for the academic discourse community need to construct adequate definitions of an "I" who does write, and they need to find images of that "I" in what they read (which, of course, allows them to be called into specific identities all the more effectively). If they look in what is often their first university textbook, the composition reader, and do not find "themselves," or, worse, find what they misrecognize as "themselves" in the examples of what the text calls incorrect writing, they have only two options. They may try to "become" the subject the text seems to address, or they may simply accept that they are not that subject and thus accept the apparently obvious conclusion that they are not the legitimate subjects of the academy either—that they literally cannot write there. Some students are able to understand their absence instead as part of what

Mike Rose terms a "language of exclusion" or as the result of a larger politics they seek to change, but these students seem increasingly rare.

The Role of Victim

In contrast to, say, Toni Morrison's images of African Americans as complex characters who act and influence their environment (for better or worse), readers present simplistic images of people of color as disempowered and lacking any agency (Angelou's fellow students may be cheered by James Weldon Johnson's poem, but they cannot change their situation, they can only respond to it). In the readers I have studied, I have not read one piece by a writer identified as a person of color that does not deal in some way with racist victimization. It may conclude with an overcoming of sorts as do Angelou's "Graduation" and "Momma, the Dentist, and Me" or an assertion of identity like that in Toni Cade Bambara's "The Lesson" or King's "I Have a Dream," but the writer is still constructed as a victim. Moreover, that writer is too often a child (as in three of the four examples above) and thus lacks power and mature agency. He or she is often a victim of language or linguistic complexities, as are Langston Hughes in "Salvation," Richard Rodriguez in "Aria," Maxine Hong Kingston in "Girlhood among Ghosts," Ernesto Galarza in "Growing into Manhood," and Dick Gregory in "Shame," and thus cannot prevent the problem, protect himself or herself against it, or even, for that matter, comprehend it as an adult would. Because the questions and assignments after these texts never challenge this notion, this is the writer our students of color are forced to "misrecognize" and reinvent themselves as if they are also to represent themselves as part of a racial group. Thus negative self-images are perpetuated and the students "recognize themselves" as unable to overcome or even theorize their victimization but also unable to write about anything else.

In addition, by reconstructing people of color as "other," with special needs and unique problems that "we" can seek to solve for "them," these texts mystify the implicit structures of racism that most white students and teachers have been taught. In a fascinating development, at least a dozen of the 1992 readers I examined featured a new inclusion whose appearance made its author the most rapidly canonized to date. This newly embraced author was Shelby Steele, and the extracts were taken from *The Content of Our Character*. What is significant is which pieces editors decided to extract and what effect these pieces have in juxtaposition with the pieces around them. The selected extracts are all narratives of incidents in Steele's life interspersed with

his conclusions about the events and unsupported generalizations about black complicity in systems of white racism. They might make some white students question the status quo as one assumes the editors hope, but I suspect few black students would be comfortable discussing them in a racially mixed class (even if they were not asked to verify the experiences). And, as with the models described above, essays written in that style would be unacceptable in most classes because the generalizations are based on the author's experience and make no reference to other case studies or research.

While using personal experience to formulate theories is one way students can learn the rhetorical strategies required in academic papers, if we do not then encourage them to research other articles on the same subject, cite documented studies, and test their theories against other statistical, sociological, or psychological analyses, we leave them unprepared for the real requirements of the academy. None of the texts I have seen comment on Steele's lack of supporting evidence, although the more conscious ones ask questions such as whether "bargaining [is] an available and acceptable alternative for all African Americans" as Steele claims (Columbo, Cullen, and Lisle 358). If the content remains unquestioned, students will do what they have been taught to do all their lives: they will read to learn. And what they will learn is that African Americans have a hidden investment in victimization and poverty and do not advance because they depend for power on their collective status as victims. The sections in which Steele qualifies these claims and suggests solutions are never anthologized, nor is most of his analysis. Thus he seems to be presenting facts about the world rather than theorizing about it. Many readers encourage the students to learn from the extract instead of simply responding to it. These readers ask questions such as "In what ways and for what reasons do blacks understand that they are innocent?" (Layton 557) rather than "In what ways and for what reasons *does Steele claim* blacks . . ." That Richard Rodriguez is also included in most of these texts and appears to echo Steele's position on affirmative action and the need for a strident individualism to counter the damage done by liberal social programs seems to support this lesson further. Steele's assertions overwhelmingly support the image of the victim of color presented throughout these texts and support the ideology on race increasingly presented in other areas of culture. His theory that "there is an unconscious sort of gravitation toward [victims], a complaining celebration of them" (15) is also implicitly supported by the editorial decisions (whether or not they are motivated by what he calls "white guilt" [80]) to select other extracts by people of color narrating their victimization. Thus Steele's lack of corroborating data can be ignored

because the composition readers themselves appear to provide it and support his assertions.

These victim narratives also allow white students to ignore what Peggy McIntosh calls "white privilege." She argues that white Americans have been taught "about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage, but . . . [not] its corollary [aspects], white privilege, which puts [whites] at an advantage" ("Unpacking" 10; "White Privilege" 1). Essays like these allow white students and teachers to continue to avoid the painful reality that they benefit from being white, even if they strive to overcome the racism that their culture has inscribed in their attitudes and practices. These essays therefore support the dominant ideology that racism is the problem of "others" who have made themselves victims and support the more liberal ideology that they have been rendered victims by a corrupt system but can be helped by good whites who are somehow above that system. Both ideologies reinscribe the traditional hierarchical model reaffirming the supremacy and innocence of those of us who are of Anglo-Saxon ancestry and justifying both our position at the center and the notion of people of color as helplessly balanced on the margins.

Although Steele's argument is seriously flawed by his failure to consider ideology or structures of power, his description of the paralysis resulting from "misrecognizing" one's subject position and thus allowing oneself to be interpellated as victim is, in my opinion, accurate. It is therefore doubly ironic that so many multicultural and traditional readers have decided to include Steele as the only apparently theoretical voice in their collection of victim narratives by people of color. His discussion reinforces the identities presented and addressed in the rest of the text, helping to construct the very victims that he rejects. Once these powerless and marginalized student writers have been created, Steele's essay tells us (the white, male readers the textbook has forced us to become as we read) to blame the victim for this state of affairs, allowing responsibility to shift from the hegemonic structures governing these texts to people of color themselves. Not only is the hierarchical model reinforced, but those who benefit from it are absolved of responsibility.

Students who do not become the traditional writers of the academy and adopt its interpretive schema are accused by many of our colleagues in other disciplines of "not being able to think." I would argue that in fact the real problem is that many of these students have thought carefully about what is expected of college writers. Struggling to "reinvent" themselves, they have modeled their writing and their academic identities on the readers and writers their textbooks seem to

tell them they should be: the models in their textbooks who are most like them (i.e., who they misrecognize themselves as). But the writers that they have reinvented themselves as, like their models, are deemed inappropriate for the academy. As a result, students who "misrecognize" themselves as the apparently white male writers in their readers and write accordingly occupy a stronger position as fledgling members of the academic discourse community, while those who "misrecognize" themselves as the white women and women and men of color presented to them are placed in a weakened position vis-à-vis academic discourse. Thus the essays and questions in composition readers help teach students what values are acceptable in the academy and to construct reading and writing identities that frequently contradict and subtly undermine whatever more egalitarian pedagogical strategies we composition teachers may have adopted. They demonstrate how effectively the academy, as what Althusser calls the "number-one . . . Ideological State Apparatus" (153), and we, as composition teachers within the academy, can modify the appropriation of discourse in response to social conflict. They also reveal just how much is at stake when representatives of the status quo raise the overused charges of political correctness against pedagogical strategies that might reveal the workings of language and the hierarchical construction of the subject and thus challenge that status quo.

Effective Intervention in Students' Identity Formation

But if we can unwittingly cause students to "misrecognize" themselves as failed or nonacademic writers, we can also deliberately select texts that construct them as equally empowered writers. Although there are no totally unproblematic readers on the market, we can balance our assignments and encourage students to analyze the texts we select. The following suggestions are certainly not new, but what is important is that they be selected specifically to counterbalance the effects of textbooks and readers in use in our classroom rather than simply as effective writing pedagogy. That is, in addition to helping us teach writing, these strategies can help us effectively intervene in our students' processes of identity formation. To decide which ones to select, we must be hyperconscious of the texts we use in our classes and their implicit ideologies.

Assigning narrative writing before the students read a narrative essay and inviting them to compare their narrative strategies and concerns with those in the reading prevents students from being

reconstructed with the voice of the writer of the text and also helps them learn comparative reading and writing skills. Selecting supplemental "victim" and "success" narratives by white men *and* men of color and inviting students to analyze the writers' voices and strategies teaches them analytical reading and writing skills and subtly challenges dominant stereotypes. Assigning additional readings such as those in the annual collections published by Graywolf Press (Rick Simonson and Scott Walker's *Multicultural Literacy* and Walker's *Stories from the American Mosaic*, for example), pieces from Henry Louis Gates's *Bearing Witness*, and essays by white women and people of color from journals and the popular press can balance even the most unbalanced reader.

A more radical step is to teach students to see the patterns of oppression and inscription in their textbooks, perhaps including all of or brief extracts from Frantz Fanon's *Black Face, White Masks* (145–46 or 165 are especially useful), Peggy McIntosh's "White Privilege and Male Privilege," Ward Churchill's *Fantasies of the Master Race* (consider 1–4, 17–19, or 24–29), Edward Said's *Orientalism* (perhaps 1–4 or 20–21), or David Mura's "Strangers in the Village" (esp. 141–43). The last might also help begin to address the anger that such an analysis will inevitably produce—anger that Mura says tends to be repressed into depression and reduced self-worth and must instead be rechannelled into analytical skills (a sentiment also voiced by Fanon and many other activists and theorists).

I suggest, then, that after determining the academic and political goals of a class (including the goal of "not being political"), we first ask, How will this reader teach the writing skills central to this class? and What reading and writing subjects does it call into being? We might also ask, What model of diversity does it present—inclusion of the other in the mainstream, understanding of the other, or challenging the notion of social hierarchy? If we accept that we and our students will always be engaged in the process of creating and re-creating selves to write from, then the danger remains imminent that we will "misrecognize" the selves that others (and ideology) address as "real." This danger is compounded by the fact that in other realms ideological structures encourage us to desire the security of believing ourselves to be "concrete, individual, distinguishable and (naturally) irreplaceable subjects" (Althusser 173), so we are always susceptible to such representations of ourselves—especially those students who are engaged in the process of absolute reinvention in an effort to be successful college writers. Our task as writing teachers becomes to ask what identities are most likely to enable our students to satisfy the academy's

demands in their writing without ceasing to be aware that they are doing so. They must remain able to move in and out of several "identities" rather than submit to the one, unified individual demanded by the ideology of the dominant culture, especially where that individual identity is one of a disempowered nonacademic writer. To achieve this goal fully, we must call for or create collections of readings that fulfill Foucault's demand that education be "the instrument whereby every individual, in a society like our own, can gain access to any kind of discourse" (*Archaeology* 227). In this way we can fracture the hierarchical model that keeps our students diversely skilled, and give them all the prospect of learning to become successful academic writers. Only then can we fulfill the dual demands of the composition class and the multicultural campus, instead of unwittingly undermining our good intentions with our choice of texts.

Works cited are in a combined list at the end of the book in which this was published--and which I highly recommend!