

WINNING AND WRITING: A BRIEF FOR THE OFFENSE

Don J. Kraemer

Already, in many quarters of our country, we are “beyond” the stage where we are being saved from Nazism by our *virtues*. And fascist integration is being staved off, rather, by the *conflicts among our vices*.—Kenneth Burke, “The Rhetoric of Hitler’s Battle”

The Problem: Inquiry Vs. Winning

Why call into question the current emphasis on teaching writing *as inquiry*? Teaching writing as inquiry is demonstrably effective (in fact, the most-effective of the four major modes of writing instruction: see Hillocks 223, as well as Smith and Wilhelm, *Reading Don’t Fix No Chevys* and *Going with the Flow*). Taught as inquiry, writing has more to do with truth and proof and proper procedure than with the questionable ethics of persuasion. Put another way, inquiry is more identified with learning than with winning, a contested (albeit traditional) aim of a rhetorical education. Whether writers should try to win is as contested today as ever—perhaps because, despite Plato’s critique, writers (anxious to win, not always satisfied with merely learning more) still dare to make the worse case appear the better.

I must put this more accurately: writers concerned with winning are represented as dangerous sophists, who in their desire to win may be tempted into making the worse case appear the better. Such representations are well intentioned, usually in the service of harmonizing, rigorously and fairly, the conflicts of public debate. Writing about writer-reader relations which, because of loving attention, are not divided but rather connected

by conflict, Catherine Lamb explains how to move beyond those aspects of rhetoric whose aim is winning:

Techniques of mediation and negotiation provide concrete ways to resolve conflict when the goal is no longer winning but finding a solution in a fair way that is acceptable to both sides. Argument as it is usually taught has its place at the beginning of the process, not the end, where one usually finds it. Participants use it to be clear about their own positions before the negotiating or mediating begins. (Lamb 259-60)

Argument early, the better to clarify the issues and interests at stake, seems conventionally rhetorical. Where Lamb and I may disagree is whether finding fair, acceptable solutions requires going beyond winning. The difference between us is not whether it is ethical to win at all costs. Susan Jarratt speaks (I'm pretty sure) for Lamb and me when she rejects argument that "is a one-sided, combative form of discourse: one that completely shuts out any opposing view" (Jarratt 117). Here is common ground.

The terrain quickly gets tricky, however. What if the ground held in common rests upon an uncommonly unpopular implication: eristic argument is rejected not so much because it is wrong as because it is less likely to win, to woo consent, "to *gain advantage*, of one sort or another" (Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* 60). As Lamb makes clear, after all, the parties in conflict are trying to negotiate a solution. Obnoxiously manipulative rhetoric would, one hopes, backfire. But what of manipulation that is less obnoxious and therefore (or for other reasons) more effective? Is manipulation necessarily sophistic? What Plato calls the worse case may indeed be, from this or that limited human perspective, the worse case, but that perspective will be partial—incomplete and interested and impure. What that perspective sees as the worse case I may be compelled to say (from my perspective—incomplete, interested, impure) only appears to be so; the worse case, for particular purposes and parties and contexts to be

specified, is better not only than what it appears to be but also than what appears to be better. And my (worse) case *will*, as Plato said, have to be made: made identifiable and given presence, value, logic, ethical appeal—and then made better.

For my specific argument, this general account of making the worse case appear the better can be filled in: While it is reasonable to believe that teaching students writing-as-inquiry will help them learn a lot about writing, we will serve them better by teaching them (1) how writers frame issues to gain advantage and (2) how themselves to frame their own arguments for advantage. Consistent with how Susan Jarratt imagines a rhetorical education, students will “argue about the ethical implications of discourse on a wide range of subjects and, in so doing, come to identify their personal interests with others, understand those interests as implicated in a larger communal setting, and advance them in a public voice” (Jarratt 121; on the identification of one’s interests with others’, see Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* 27). If it is objected that sometimes we write not to argue but to explore—to wander around in the possible meanings our exploratory writing generates—I ask the reader to entertain the possibility that Jarratt’s account, as well as the one I’ll develop, addresses such writing insofar as it partakes of what Kenneth Burke calls a “rhetoric of identification”:

To act upon himself persuasively, [the individual person] must variously resort to images that are formative. Education (“indoctrination”) exerts such pressure upon him from without; he completes the process from within. If he does not somehow act to tell himself (as his own audience) what the various brands of rhetorician have told him, his persuasion is not complete. Only those voices from without are effective which can speak in the language of a voice within. (Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* 39)

Such an education—not only listening to others but translating what others say into idioms that will affect us internally,

maximally, exerting *effective* pressure—is consistent with contemporary projects such as Krista Ratcliffe’s *Rhetorical Listening*. Consider one of her examples from the last presidential election, in which on one side were students claiming Kerry should have been elected, on the other students claiming it was right that Bush was “re-elected.” In rhetorical listening, Ratcliffe writes, our goal as teachers is not so much to help students establish who is right (let alone help that party’s candidate get elected) as to help them hear the “cultural logics” behind the competing claims (Ratcliffe 29). The phrase “cultural logics” strategically implies plurality, ideology, neighborhoods, lived experience, a range of difference.

Framing to win is consistent with such rhetorical listening because framing to win also requires inquiring into others’ standpoints, listening to other people’s lived logics and embodied differences, taking into consideration the interests, ideas, and emotions that make them particular. What framing to win adds to inquiry is the privilege it grants the question Why cooperate? (Or Why listen, why negotiate, why symbolic action rather than motion?) The purpose inquiry serves is in considering whether (based on our symbolic actions) others’ consent could be wooed. Whether we are trying to ward off hate or illegal immigrants, we are trying to understand. We are trying to understand so that we can craft the identifications implicit in persuasion (Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives* 55).

In what follows, I will be trying to make the case that teaching winning—teaching students (1) how writers frame to win and (2) how themselves to so frame—is more likely to bring to light what Aristotle called the available means of persuasion in any case—and what we now call the hidden, silenced, *concretized* conflicts that a more-fully democratic reasoning must address (Benhabib 137; Crosswhite 112-13).

Inquiry And Argument: The Case Against Winning

In the 1990s, lawyer Jay Sekulow successfully argued in front of the Supreme Court that religious expression be allowed in public places. One of his arguments was that it was government censorship not to allow use of public-school facilities for student prayer groups. The real question, he argued, was whether there was a violation of “freedom of speech,” not whether prayer in school was “a violation of the establishment clause of the First Amendment.” Sekulow explained his strategy: “The first thing you always have to do is frame the issue, and I took a lot of heat from people on my side, who thought I was abandoning the religion clauses of the First Amendment . . . [,b]ut I wanted to win the case” (Toobin 36).

Framing the question at issue so that one wins—this is the issue here. It is at issue for us writing teachers not because we are teaching students how to cheat. Making the worse case appear the better is bad, we agree, but so, apparently, is trying to defeat the bad on behalf of the better. Writing to win has a bad name, one at odds with what we do: we represent a teaching culture, not a competitive culture. We teach argument as the art of discovering good reasons, not the art of presenting “whatever is successful in the sense of winning assent regardless of whether assent is justified” (Booth, *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent* xiv). In the popular textbook *Everything’s an Argument*, in a section subtitled “Argument Isn’t Just About Winning,” Andrea Lunsford and John Ruskiewicz claim that “not all language use aims to win out over others. In contrast to the traditional concept of ‘agonistic’ or combative argument, communication theorists such as Sonja Foss and Josina Makau describe an invitational argument, which aims not to win over another person or group but to invite others to enter a space of mutual regard and exploration” (5). Compared with Sekulow’s commitment to winning, invitational argument seems less likely to frame the issue a particular way than to explore possible ways of framing. (Here and below, note how

hastily argumentation is strategically dissociated from winning, as if winning were cheating, as if most students did not understand the difference between trying to win and cheating. Cheating is not the issue, though the centrality of “cheat codes” to gaming culture is a related issue. Anything can be taken to extremes, cooperation included [see Burke on “war” as “that ultimate *disease* of cooperation,” *A Rhetoric of Motives* 22].)

To demonstrate our resistance to competitive culture, I cite exemplary cases—not only to demonstrate this resistance but also to clarify what is at stake. In their textbook *Good Reasons*, Lester Faigley and Jack Selzer write, “Our culture is a competitive culture, and often the goal is to win” (3). But because in daily and workplace life, winners and losers have to continue interacting, Faigley and Selzer advise the student writer “to cast yourself as a respectful partner rather than as a competitor and put forth your arguments in the spirit of mutual support and negotiation—in the interest of finding the *best* way, not ‘my way’” (3). Notice how active this resistance is: “cast yourself” into a role. And why cast oneself? Because it is in the “interest” of finding the “best way.” This language prefigures my conclusion: the culture of sports, from which we get the figure of making or winning a “point,” is all about finding the best way, which is produced by competition. Best practices are widely imitated; widespread distribution of them and their variations raise the level of the whole culture.

But in the game of knowledge, we are imagined as being on the same side—hence casting oneself as a “respectful *partner*” (emphasis added): “**Try to think of yourself as engaged not so much in winning over your audience as in courting your audience’s cooperation**” (3; boldface in original). That the game of knowledge is challenging is acknowledged by the advice to “Try.” The seductive allure of courting one’s audience is justified for its inventive potential: dialogue with respectful partners can lead to new insights, better knowledge, more precise distinctions, etc. But the question to keep in mind is whether winning and cooperation are means, ends, or some mix of each. Is cooperation meant as an end that helps us transcend winning? Or

is winning temporarily put aside, the better to court an audience wary of zero-sum, win at all costs strategies—but an audience that can be courted, and thereby won over, by more-invitational strategies? (Given my interest in framing to win, I must acknowledge that Faigley and Selzer, the better to affect their intended audience, may have framed winning as the worse case so that cooperative courting appears better.)

On the issue of whether to win or cooperate, some textbooks are emphatically clear. The game of knowledge is not about winning; it is about cooperating. Or, put another way, to cooperate *is* to win. John Gage's *The Shape of Reason* calls this game “inquiry”:

Inquiry may be generally defined as “looking into,” which suggests asking questions. It also involves exploring potential reasons for coming to a conclusion. In this book, inquiry is seen as one kind of argument, as in this definition by Jack W. Meiland: The term *inquiry* may be used to mean “the process of discovering what (if anything) it is rational to believe about a topic.” (Gage 3)

Inquiry, exploring, process, discovery—Gage's terms emphasize dialectical cooperation, an emphasis that remains even when the game shifts from inquiry to argument:

The word *argument* in the context of argumentative writing in college does not mean a verbal battle between opponents, each of whom desires to silence the other. It means, instead, the search for reasons that will bring about cooperation among people who differ in how they view ideas but who nevertheless need to discover grounds for agreement. Argumentative writing, then, may be seen as a process of *reasonable inquiry into the best grounds for agreement between a writer and an audience who have a mutual concern to answer a question.* (Gage 42)

As do Faigley and Selzer, who address an audience likely to associate argument with winning, Gage addresses an audience for whom the meaning of argument requires a “dissociation” (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 190-91). Although the dissociation is strong, the qualification “may be seen” makes it clear that this dissociation is still a matter of perspective, albeit a perspective that is (in textbook culture) hegemonic.

This perspective is itself a frame—an ideal frame that I do not wish to contest. But because the “mutual concern to answer a question” does not preclude framing that question in order to win, the question remains whether framing to win is incompatible with the framing we teach. The framing we teach aspires toward what Jürgen Habermas calls an “ideal speech situation.” In such situations, whose goal is mutual understanding, participants try to express clearly something worth communicating. Furthermore, as James Crosswhite puts it, certain discursive moves are ruled out, such as “attempts to dominate or act merely strategically. There are no threats, no inequalities, no corrupt procedures” (*The Rhetoric of Reason* 121). Aspiring toward these admittedly imaginary conditions fosters what our textbook culture wants, respectful partnerships directed toward discovery of what can be made to appear better to believe and do. For this reason, it is no surprise that we teachers regulate, creating classroom rules that reward ideal communicative behaviors, such as speaking clearly and listening well, and punish others, such as speaking threateningly and interrupting carelessly. The farther such behaviors’ distance from the ideal, the harsher their penalty.

Although no one is saying we should teach against (or away from) normative ideals, I am saying it is a mistake not to teach how writers frame to win. Framing to win does not necessarily violate the ideal—at least not anymore than, say, framing to explore. Consider when the ideal conditions apply: when “one wants to discover practically what the members of a society in any given situation might want and what they should do in their common interest” (Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* 82; see also Rorty xxv). Ideal conditions are needed as

regulatory correctives precisely because an economy of competitive urgency threatens: What if members of a single community neither want the same thing nor agree on a common interest? What about the wants and interests of other, perhaps competing, communities? And what of the interests that are common but can divide, such as money, property, food, titles, the benefits of membership, etc. (interests that, if powerful enough, we call “forces”)? How we go about getting what we want usually means sacrificing something else we want, and when others want the same resources we want, the more one party gets means other parties get less, if not nothing.

High-stakes issues worth writing about, then, come loaded with social investments, passions, and beliefs. Even how we define and describe depends on “our needs and interests” because all the “descriptions we give of things are descriptions suited to our purposes” (Rorty xxvi). If Rorty is right, this claim has powerful implications for how we teachers imagine ourselves and our work. Consider how *The Craft of Research* (a textbook written by Wayne Booth, Gregory Colomb, and Joseph Williams) defines “practical,” as distinct from “academic,” problems:

A practical problem originates in the world and exacts a cost in money, time, happiness, etc. You solve a practical problems by changing something out there in the world, by doing something. (Booth, Colomb, and Williams 50)

It would seem to follow that if an academic problem is the opposite of a practical problem, then no piece of academic/non-service-learning writing could be strictly practical, as it (a) takes place in the classroom and not “out there in the world” and (b) is thinking-about-doing-something rather than “*doing something.*”

This inference is close to the mark Booth, Colomb, and Williams set. They describe the academic kind of problem as a “*research problem,*” which

originates in your mind, out of incomplete knowledge or flawed understanding. You might pose a research problem because you have to solve a practical problem, but you do not solve the practical problem merely by solving the research problem. You might *apply* the solution of that research problem to the solution of a practical problem, but you solve your research problem not by changing anything in the world but by learning more about something or understanding it better. (50-51)

What this strong case of separating the “academic” from the “practical” makes clear, however, is that even abstract pursuits are socially motivated, driven by caring about something in particular. Learning “more about” X occurs under pressures that affect what is learned; X is understood “better” relative to certain purposes and hopes that frame what “better” means. Put another way, then, even the most-academic “research” problems are “practical.”

They are practical because they are purposeful, motivated not so much by the urge to know as by the need to act. Kenneth Burke calls such action rhetorical, “the use of words by human agents to form attitudes or to induce actions in other human agents” (*A Rhetoric of Motives* 41). Burke calls “attitude . . . an incipient act” (42) because if we want others to act on X a certain way, we also need them to think of and feel about X in certain ways, precisely because there is so little certainty where rhetoric is needed. From a rhetorical perspective, then, abstractly innocent questions such as “What is X?” translate into “‘How ought we use the word X given our needs and interests?,’ ‘What is the purpose of defining X?,’ and ‘What should count as X in context C?’” (Schiappa 168).

The reason “What is X?” need not always be translated otherwise is that responses to it are often assumable, such as my implied responses throughout this text to one of its unasked questions, “What are our classrooms usually like?” I have silently assumed that our classrooms are (or should be) relatively safe spaces in which we collectively sort through more-or-less apt responses to the questions at issue raised for the students by the

assigned readings. This response is assumable, I believe, because it is part of a deep background against which more-telling specifics are taking shape. If the background itself were questioned, the implicit question “What is X?” might give way to polite versions of “Why should we care what *you* think?,” perhaps something like “Why should we imagine our classrooms as safe spaces for collective inquiry, and what difference would that make?”—followed by related questions such as “What is meant by ‘safe’?” “Wouldn’t ‘hostile’ practice in the relative safety of a classroom be a logical and human way to prepare students for relatively ‘cutthroat’ workplace environments?” “Is this ‘collective’ inquiry democratic?” “How does the coercive underside of regulative ideals affect outcomes?” And so on.

Addressing the embedded questions in “What is X?” questions occurs routinely in classrooms that inquire into the grounds for (including the lived experience behind) belief and seek out ways to understand, if not reconcile, the different reasons for competing claims. Such questions can expose what James Crosswhite calls the “covert conflicts going on beneath the claims being thematized in argumentation” (112). There are always such conflicts; furthermore, because they inform not only the quality of the claims and of the reasons to believe but also the very framing of the issue itself, there is very little chance in classrooms of escaping conflict in argumentative discourse, all the less chance the safer students feel in speaking their minds and responding to others. Even when one is trying to engage the conflict as a means to a cooperative, perhaps even harmonious, end, conflicts disrupt, animate, inspire, and justify the effort.

Crosswhite suggests that to “thematize these underlying conflicts could threaten the status of the argumentation, and could reveal the extent to which an ideal speech situation has not been achieved” (112-13). As I understand Crosswhite, he is *not* recommending that we try to avoid such threatening revelations. On the contrary, he is recommending the opposite: we educators should help student inquirers threaten the status of any given argument, for failure to thematize these covert (disappeared, as it

were) conflicts is failure to teach our students about the productive messiness of argumentation. It is failure, furthermore, to teach how speakers and writers frame issues so that certain actions and attitudes preliminary to those actions seem not only reasonable but also, in some cases, righteous. To see such framing at work in rhetoric acclaimed for its exemplary fairness and righteousness, let us turn to Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address and King's "I Have a Dream" speech.

Framing To Win: Lincoln And King

Lincoln's 705-word address is partisan from the opening frame: "The progress of our arms, upon which all else chiefly depends, is as well known to the public as to myself; and it is, I trust, reasonably satisfactory and encouraging to all" (CW 8: 332). In other words, the major conflict, "this terrible war," was finally "reasonably satisfactory and encouraging" to the *North*.

The war was the thematized conflict. As Lincoln frames the occasion, moving from questions of identity and policy (who we are, what we should do) to the question of meaning (why this war), "unthematized conflicts"—many in the form of unpremiered assertions—significantly inform the case he makes. Lincoln said the war was fought over slavery; the South said it was fought over states' rights. Lincoln said it came as a surprise to all that "the *cause* of the conflict might cease with, or even before, the conflict itself should cease" (CW 8: 333); it came as a surprise to the South (whom Lincoln was speaking for, not to or with) that the end of the war would mean the end of slavery, which was protected by not only the Constitution but also the Emancipation Proclamation and early drafts of the Thirteenth Amendment.

The South would no doubt also have been surprised to find itself linked with the economic, whereas the North was linked with God-given rights. Consider the second paragraph of Lincoln's four-paragraph-long address, in which he explains the conflict's origins: Whereas the North was "devoted altogether to *saving* the Union without war, insurgent agents were in the city seeking to *destroy* it without war—seeking to dissol[v]e the Union,

and divide effects, by negotiation” (CW 8: 332). Saving the Union is saving the concept of the nation, the harmonious community; destroying this good comes from “agents” who negotiate—secretive people of commercial exchange and compromise, who would accept partial “effects” in place of the whole—the common good. Effects and their division (dividing the spoils) are crassly material, suggestive of barbarism.

Lincoln continues, consolidating the distinction, demonizing the enemy: whereas the South “would *make* war rather than let the nation survive,” the North “would *accept* war rather than let it perish” (CW 8: 332). In this scenario, with the South clearly the aggressor, the question arises Why go to war? And Lincoln’s answer is slavery, “a peculiar and powerful interest. All knew that this interest was, somehow, the cause of the war. To strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this interest was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union, even by war” (CW 8: 332). The economic hegemony governing the South’s motives—to protect and expand their “interests” (even though the war was devastating to their interests as such)—again looks aggressively vulgar alongside the North’s, those of a modest trustee: The “government claimed no right to do more than to restrict the territorial enlargement of it [“this interest,” i.e., slavery]” (CW 8: 332-33). It had been made clear for his primary audience, the North, who had the daunting work of Reconstruction ahead of them, that not only had they got the better of the South; they had been in the better moral position, a position they would do well to continue holding.

Let me now turn briefly to an arguably unstable moment in Lincoln’s text, a moment in which he may well have been giving up, rather than seizing, an advantage.

In the third paragraph, which makes the case that the war was the Almighty’s way of punishing both South *and* North for their roles in perpetuating “American Slavery” (CW 8: 333), Lincoln’s rhetorical mask appears to slip. After declaring that both sides “read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other,” he adds, “It may seem strange that any

men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces." What immediately follows has been interpreted as his "higher religious reservation" (Miller 296): "but let us judge not that we be not judged" (CW 8: 333). To read this reversal as a pious admonition is to assume that, in a speech he spent some weeks crafting, Lincoln erred. To read this reversal as ironic—as a *paralepsis* or *occupatio*, the pretended sacrifice of an argument, such as Shakespeare's Mark Antony's telling the mob he has no intention of arousing their ire against Caesar's assassins, even as he is in the very process of doing so—is to see Lincoln deftly creating an affective identification, an ethical appeal. The very people who have righteously judged, the audience, have been called on it—but indirectly, in the person of the President, who has implicated himself in the irony, judging that all-too-human act of judgment. Ethically identifying with the speaker, the audience—its superior position reinforced, the justness of its fallibility acknowledged—can proceed with the more-taxing work of binding "up the nation's wounds." Advantage, Lincoln.

Just as Lincoln played the economic card only to transcend it, King played it only to trope it. Attributing economic motives (i.e., self interest) to one's opponent, even as one represents one's own interests as altruistic, has a long, successful history. Burke, in his analysis of Hitler's "snakeoil" manifesto, *Mein Kampf*, labels this strategy the "noneconomic interpretation of a phenomenon economically engendered" (201)—later restated as "a noneconomic interpretation of economic ills" (*The Philosophy of Literary Form* 204; fuller comparison of Hitler's rhetorical "magic" with King's, using those "snakeoil" techniques identified by Burke [mostly bastardly variations on "fundamentally religious patterns of thought" (219)], suggests how even the most revered among us—a King, a Lincoln—frames issues, beliefs, values, and diction in order to win). Noneconomic interpretations of economic ills seem rhetorically prudent ways of subduing the "unthematized conflicts" that could subvert one's advocacy of a particular policy.

“Hitler,” Burke said, “consistently refused to consider internal political conflict on the basis of conflicting interests” (206), most likely because the possibility that interests might materially conflict with others’ can impede the change it necessitates. King knew this, hence this extended passage a few sentences into his “I Have a Dream” speech, a speech delivered one hundred years after “a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand signed the Emancipation Proclamation”; yet

One hundred years later the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of material prosperity. . . .

So we have come here today to dramatize an appalling condition. In a sense we have come to our nation’s capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir.

This note was a promise that all men would be guaranteed the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is obvious today that America has defaulted on this promissory note insofar as her citizens of color are concerned. Instead of honoring this sacred obligation, American has given the Negro people a bad check which has come back marked “insufficient funds.” But we refuse to believe that the bank of justice is bankrupt. We refuse to believe that there are insufficient funds in the great vaults of opportunity of this nation.

So we have come to cash this check—a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice. (323-24)

Speaking of Hitler’s rhetorical acumen, Burke observed, “One knows when to ‘spiritualize’ a material issue, and when to ‘materialize’ a spiritual one” (216). No plodder himself, King

began by dramatically materializing the abstraction of “freedom” and, once he made spirit matter, re-spiritualized it.

King’s language is highly figurative, yet it refers pointedly to the material world: e.g., “lonely island of poverty in the midst of a vast ocean of prosperity” (language that would be far-more pointed in the last speech he would ever give, “I See the Promised Land”). The dissociation of material reparations from spirituality begins with “In a sense we have come here today to our nation’s capital to cash a check.” By itself, the phrase “In a sense” does not automatically cancel out material meaning; King may very well have meant that they were not there literally with a giant check for the government to cash on behalf of all African Americans. But “In a sense” does threaten to spiritualize the material edge of, the impoverished conditions beneath, inequality: i.e., the unthematized conflicts of generations of deaths caused by hard labor under inferior working conditions, of the restricted competition for education and jobs and the salaries these latter afford, of the lack of access to returns from investments in companies that capitalized on oppression.

This spiritual threat was, as it turned out, realized: the “promissory note” America owes “her citizens of color” is a “sacred obligation.” That the modifier “sacred” is, indeed, more spiritual than material becomes evident: the bank is named as “the bank of justice,” which houses “the great vaults of opportunity of this nation.” The check African Americans demand to cash will grant not property or health care or financial reparations but “the riches of freedom and the security of justice.” That these demands are of no little significance is granted (neither a radical, King and Lincoln were just moderate enough to be assassinated). But the promise of opportunity does not require material sacrifices on the part of those who have; it does not explicitly frame them as party to the conflict.

Although I would concede that what was at stake for King and Lincoln may be greater than what is at stake for our students and us, such a concession does not mean that learning is independent of motivation. It does not mean that what we are trying to achieve

is so insignificant we do not or should not care whether we are successful. It does not mean that students should not learn nor teachers teach framing to win. Learning how writers frame to win, learning how to do it oneself—such learning takes years, perhaps a career of many failures gradually understood. Why defer this experience for students—people who, in my experience, want it?

Conflict Of Interests And Student Writing

But I know, somehow, that only when it is dark enough, can you see the stars.—Martin Luther King, Jr., “I See the Promised Land”

In *Deliberate Conflict: Argument, Political Theory, and Composition Classes*, Patricia Roberts-Miller argues that we should not advise student writers to imagine their audience’s “socioeconomic interests” or analyze another writer’s:

If our students cannot experience disagreements as anything other than interpersonal and discursive coercion, it may be because that is what we tell them it must be. In general, the more that we encourage students to think of identity, interest, and argument as interchangeable, the more we reinforce the interest-based model of the public sphere, and the less we make the public sphere (or our own classroom discourse) a place of argument, and the less we enable our students to resolve conflicts discursively with people with whom they deeply disagree. (117)

If I must respectfully disagree with Roberts-Miller, it is because I agree with King that in the darkness of deep disagreement, it is exigency that illuminates competing interests and the character of the classrooms in which they assume shape. Roberts-Miller worries that we “encourage students to think of identity, interest, and argument as interchangeable” (117). We don’t, however,

encourage students to think of these elements as *interchangeable*; we encourage students to think of them as *related*: in argument, interests must be identified with (and dissociated from) others. Roberts-Miller worries that reinforcing the “interest-based model of the public sphere” degrades the classroom as “a place of argument,” yet arguments are conceived in and thoroughly contaminated by interests (not least socioeconomic interests). If arguments were not interested, who would be interested in arguments? Who would bother? What incentive would there be for students “to resolve conflicts discursively with people with whom they deeply disagree”?

Imagining and analyzing competing interests as unthematized conflicts that, by willful or unwitting neglect, perpetuate the disagreements they would settle, need not lead to degraded models of argumentation. The voices that had to lose if Lincoln’s and King’s projects were to win were strategically excluded; insofar as those voices were given a hearing, they were inclusively framed, *their* point silenced by such framing. If students read exemplary texts for their unthematized conflicts—their framed inclusions and strategic exclusions—then students stand a good chance of not only writing more effectively but also accounting for their reasoning and others’ more ethically. Such outcomes are more likely to be initiated by rhetorical reading that analyzes how writers frame to win than by varieties of reading that assume writers are either framing not to win but to frankly relate (the truth, their opinions) or not framing at all.

Consider in closing student writer Todd Pittman’s essay “Non-violent resistance: A More Courageous Show of Power” (*The Shape of Reason* 159-62), an essay that responds to and works with King and Gandhi. Pittman’s argument is that “Nonviolent resistance is not the same thing as doing nothing. Indeed, it is much more courageous and difficult to challenge violence with peace than to resort to the temptation of physical violence” (159). Much the same as the rest of us, Pittman wants his inquiry, his work, to serve a purpose. His inquiry into X is less a neutral exploration than a committed comparison: X is more this and that

than Y, where “this and that” refer to virtues (courage, the sacrifice of hardship) and where Y just is “temptation,” although “resort” raises the question of just *when* the oppressed turn to violence (as a last resort, perhaps, rather than as what easily presents itself).

As Pittman elaborates his terms, the superior morality of nonviolent resistance, scrupulous and exacting, asserts itself: King “understood that violence could not raise his people to the level of the people oppressing them, let alone above them and their evil ways. His deep faith in God convinced him that violence was not the answer” (160). Let us note here the ambiguity in “raise,” which may imply the high ground of not only righteousness but (socioeconomic) power. As Pittman continues, he seems to limit what “raise” can mean: “King, like Gandhi, knew that it would be morally wrong to answer violence with violence” (160). What matters is not whether nonviolently is the most effective way to resist; what matters is nonviolently is the *right*, the most ethical, way to resist.

When Pittman goes on to say, however, that King’s “sense of pragmatism told him that his people stood no chance of winning if they chose to use violent force to resist the entrenched racism of the American South” (160), King’s high ground becomes unstable, shaking along the fault line between ideal behavior and actual results. As I read Pittman on King’s pragmatism, two qualities that could be evinced in a losing cause, courage and hardship, are subordinated to what it would take to win. Doubtless pragmatism is a principled practice, but it is not necessarily based on the set of principles with which Pittman began supporting nonviolent resistance.

Once pragmatic considerations come into play—as they should, for inquiry into ethical action should account for resources, constraints, and consequences—they trouble the integrity of Pittman’s argument to the very end. He concedes that “violence will never be removed from our psychological makeup—and even Gandhi acknowledges that it has its place” (161).

About these concessions, Pittman's and Gandhi's, two questions must be asked.

The first question is Why doesn't Pittman resist his own concession? If the case he is making matters, he should. What implications the legitimacy of violence might have for the principles and practicality of his argument—such as how situationally flexible he is willing to be—go unthematized. This is most unfortunate, for when he concludes that for “whatever reason, nonviolence seems to take a back seat to violence. Or, as Theodore Roszak put it, ‘People try nonviolence for a week, and when it “doesn't work,” they go back to violence, which hasn't worked for centuries”” (161), he has lost control. The emphasis is meant, I believe, to be on the time-tested failure of violence. But because rhetorical considerations have not been addressed—such as how Gandhi hoped to affect his audience by “conceding” that violence had its place in human psychology and what he hoped to gain—they sneak back in, under the guise of pragmatism, for (possibly) the final word: as people are likely to try nonviolent resistance for only a short time and then go back to violence, why bother with the gesture of nonviolence? Why not, in the absence of viable nonviolent resistance (whose proponents may, for all we know, scorn merely strategic considerations as insufficiently spiritual), continue perfecting the means of our violence?

The second question is Why doesn't Pittman ask why Gandhi acknowledged that violence has its place? What was Gandhi up to? What did he hope to gain by conceding a place for violence? (Gandhi's inclusion may have been as strategically exclusive as Lincoln's, symbolically exiling violence from all probable places.) Unless such questions are asked, unless Pittman engages the interest-based roots of not only violence but non-violent resistance as well, by default the pragmatic perfecting of violence is left as the privilege of the powerful, while the weak are left wondering what Gandhi meant.

An appropriate pedagogic response to the problem that both questions represent is to teach our students to read arguments rhetorically—that is, to read for how writers frame to win, to

gain advantage, to woo consent. Such reading logically precedes, or at least must inform, activities that aim to help students frame to win, such as Troyka and Nudelman's simulation games or Weinstein's devil's-advocate exchange. The reason I privilege such reading, the reason I apply pressure on students so that they read this way, is that it is reading that matters to their own writing. Students, whether as some version of their proper selves or in some assigned role, learn to re-read drafts (theirs and others') the way they have read published arguments: for how efficaciously the arguments are framed, for how strategically the inclusive frame excludes—and *whom*.

This kind of attention need not compromise our goals as educators; it can, on the contrary, advance them. If we mean our communicative claims on others to be open to correction and argument, then we will be better off giving room to the oppositional voices that substantially constitute the conflicts at the core of our claims. Imagine the right enemy getting her hands on Pittman's draft—or on mine—and asking herself, What does this text ask me to do? Or imagine the draft as asking its reader not whether it is, in fact of formal criteria, an argument, but whether it has, to some degree, resolved a conflict between them, led her somewhat closer to agreement with the author. When the conflicts have been made explicit, when the writer experiences more materially what is at stake for others, then he can better honor his audience's concerns, in the process clarifying his own character.

I have in mind Crosswhite's suggestive meditation on how war is like rhetoric. Writing about war, Crosswhite claims that one advantage of "high-intensity conflicts" is that "hierarchies of goods are established explicitly and by choice instead of covertly through the accidental struggles of the most powerful competing forces within the state" (116). In argumentation—inside its dynamic, our senses on the alert—if we experience the disagreement surrounding the question at issue as a "high-intensity conflict," then we will feel forced into more-explicit articulation of our own character and that of our enemies:

Intensifying conflict is one way we achieve clarity, one way we demand integrity of ourselves and one another. If we hold a number of incompatible beliefs, and use one in one situation, one in another, we never achieve clarity about what we really believe; we never really become one person, responsible for our beliefs. When we allow other people to express incompatible views, we fail to recognize them as people of whom we expect integrity. (Crosswhite 117)

Scenes of intensified conflict are creative forces, can even be playfully so: writers try to frame as inclusively as possible; readers try to reconstruct what the inclusive frame has strategically excluded. Aware that figures as idealized as Lincoln, King, and Gandhi framed to win, aware also of an audience unwilling to cede principle to expedience, Pittman would do more to link moral principle and political efficacy, framing them as logically, ethically, ideologically related. I am saying most students would better develop their rhetorical and civic resources, under this pressure. Made uncomfortable by the exclusionary craft of a reasonable case, readers would demand of the draft no less than greater clarity, coherence, and comprehensive attention to—an accounting for, a tallying of—their points.

The question is at what cost this conflict, even under playful, game-like conditions. Even when simulated, when experienced by students playing roles, discursive conflict can be physically painful, so much so that some people may prefer silence, even absence (see Roberts-Miller 56). Insofar as we are committed to the value of student writing that tries to make a point—to win the right to be heard—we must also take responsibility for the unequal experience such writing may create.

But if our research evidence about written reasoning and classroom conflict is any indication, then the pedagogical model I am advocating does not disadvantage certain groups of students while favoring the usual suspects. On the contrary, traditionally “meeker” students may well find themselves substantially reaffirmed in the analysis of the written record (women, for

example, are far more likely to reason and to give more reasons than men—Hiatt 124), even as male students—the group that fares least well with argumentation (see Smith and Wilhelm, *Going with the Flow* 128)—are likely to make improvement because the game is clearer, the rules less arbitrary, the contradictions fewer.

Like most discursive acts, teaching argumentation as I have recommended will, for all my sunny words, nevertheless fail to measure up as an ideal speech situation, falling short of its norms. Strategic inquiry into this inevitable falling-short, however, is part of our pedagogic mission. As long as instructors serve to mitigate, not ensure, coercion, except towards that ideal speech situation—which is the strategic exclusion framed by our inclusive procedures—then teaching how writers frame to win is honorable. We need not, then, feel reluctant about saying “I teach my students how writers frame to win so that they themselves might learn more-effective framing,” for saying this rather than something like “Reason with others” is to model the kind of argument we habitually assign to and, all the more so the more open the classroom is, conduct with our students, as distinct from the contradictory model of argument we and our textbooks sometimes present to them.

Our disciplinary and disciplined reluctance to teach win-at-all-costs persuasion, as well as our curricular economy (adding more dialectical responsiveness at the expense of presentational finesse—in the form of style and correctness), might come under interrogation, giving us the welcome opportunity to discuss the needs and interests that underlie our arguable commitments, our peculiar reluctance. It is in *our* interests, after all—in our interests as professionals, as reflective practitioners of a discipline—to want to unearth the values, the desires for goods, the modes of experience that underlie our symbolic acts of persuasion. That our academic interest isn’t (just) academic, that it may be in (many of) our students’ interests, insofar as our students identify with communities on their way toward greater democratic activity, is one of our arguments with our students—a point we are trying to

win. If we do not let our students in on that frame, we're framing them. And that *would* be cheating.

Works Cited

- Basler, Roy P., ed. *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, Vol. 8: 1864-1865*. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1953.
- Benhabib, Seyla. *Situating the Self: Gender, Community and Postmodernism in Contemporary Ethics*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Booth, Wayne C. *Modern Dogma and the Rhetoric of Assent*. Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame P, 1974.
- Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *The Craft of Research*. Chicago, IL: The U of Chicago P, 1995.
- Burke, Kenneth. *The Philosophy of Literary Form: Studies in Symbolic Action*, 3rd ed. Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1973.
- . *A Rhetoric of Motives*. 1950; Berkeley, CA: U of California P, 1974.
- Crosswhite, James. *The Rhetoric of Reason: Writing and the Attractions of Argument*. Madison, WI: The U of Wisconsin P, 1996.
- Faigley, Lester, and Jack Selzer. *Good Reasons with Contemporary Arguments*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2001.
- Foss, Sonja K., Karen A. Foss, and Robert Trapp. *Contemporary Perspectives on Rhetoric*, 3rd ed. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 2002.
- Gage, John T. *The Shape of Reason: Argumentative Writing in College*, 4th ed. New York: Pearson Longman, 2006.
- Habermas, Jürgen. *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*. Trans. Frederick Lawrence. Cambridge, MA: MIT P, 1987.
- Hillocks, Jr., George. *Teaching Writing as Reflective Practice*. New York: Teachers College Press, 1995.
- Jarratt, Susan C. "Feminism and Conflict: The Case for Conflict." *Contending with Words: Composition and Rhetoric in a Postmodern Age*. Eds. Patricia Harkin and John Schilb. New York: MLA, 1991: 105-23.
- King, Jr., Martin Luther. "I Have a Dream." *75 Thematic Readings: An Anthology*. Boston, MA: McGraw Hill, 2003. 323-27.
- Lamb, Catherine E. "Other Voices, Different Parties: Feminist Responses to Argument." *Perspectives on Written Argument*. Ed. Deborah P. Berrill. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 1996: 257-69.
- Lunsford, Andrea A., and John J. Ruskiewicz. *Everything's an Argument*. Boston, MA: Bedford/St. Martin's, 1999.
- Miller, William Lee. *Lincoln's Virtues: An Ethical Biography*. New York: Knopf, 2002.

- Perelman, Chaim, and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca. *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation*. Trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver. Notre Dame, IN: U of Notre Dame P, 1969.
- Ratcliffe, Krista. *Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, Whiteness*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 2005.
- Roberts-Miller, Patricia. *Deliberate Conflict: Argument, Political Theory, and Composition Class*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 2004.
- Rorty, Richard. *Philosophy and Social Hope*. London: Penguin, 1999.
- Schiappa, Edward. *Defining Reality: Definitions and the Politics of Meaning*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois UP, 2003.
- Smith, Michael W., and Jeffrey D. Wilhelm. "Reading Don't Fix No Chevys": *Literacy in the Lives of Young Men*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2002.
- . *Going with the Flow: How to Engage Boys (and Girls) in Their Literacy Learning*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2006.
- Toobin, Jeffrey. "Sex and the Supremes: Why the Court's Next Big Battle May Be About Gay Rights." *The New Yorker* 1 August 2005: 32-37.
- Troyka, Lynn Quitman, and Jerrold Nudelman. *Taking Action: Writing, Reading, Speaking, and Listening through Simulation-Games*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975.
- Weinstein, Larry. *Writing at the Threshold: Featuring 56 Ways to Prepare High School and College Students to Think and Write at the College Level*. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 2001.

