[14]Jerome S. Bruner, *On Knowing: Essays for the Left Hand.* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979), 86.

[15]Bruner, p. 90.

[16]C. H. Knoblach and Lil Brannon, *Rhetorical Traditions and the Teaching of Writing.* (Upper Montclair, N.J.: Boynton/Cook Publishers, Inc., 1984), 2.

[17]Knoblach and Brannon, pp. 1-2.

[18]Gage, p. 100.

[19]James A. Berlin, "Contemporary Composition: The Major Pedagogical Theories," *College English*, 44 (December 1982), 766.

[20]Alfred North Whitehead, *The Aims of Education.* (New York: The Free Press, 1967). In particular, see "The Rhythm of Education" and "The Rhythmic Claims of Freedom and Discipline." I am grateful to Richard Young who shared these references in an NEH seminar at Carnegie-Mellon in 1983.

[21]Young, "Concepts of Art," p. 132.

[22]Sale, p. 15.

[23]D. Gordon Rohman, "Pre-Writing: The Stage of Discovery in the Writing Process," *College Composition and Communication*, 16 (1965), 106.

[24]Young, "Concepts of Art," p. 132.

[25]William E. Coles, Jr. *The Plural I: The Teaching of Writing.* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978), 11.

[26]Sale, p. 58.

[27]Coles, p. 12.

[28]Bruner, p. 90.

[29]Johan Huizinga, *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture.* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1950), 11. John Warnock first introduced me to this relationship between play and composing. See his "New Rhetoric and the Grammar of Pedagogy," *Freshman English News*, 5 (Fall 1976), 1-4, 12-22.

[30]Thomas Nash, "Derrida's 'Play' and Prewriting for the Laboratory," in *Writing Centers: Theory and Administration*, 183, 194.

[31]Young, "Concepts of Art," p. 134.

[32]Jerome S. Bruner, *Toward a Theory of Instruction.* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1982), 125, 127.

[33]Huzinga, p. 11.

[34]Young, "Concepts of Art," p. 136; hereafter cited in the text.

[35]G. Polya, *How to Solve It: A New Aspect of Mathematical Method.* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1973), 113.

[36]Young, "Paradigms and Problems," pp. 38-9.

[37]Young, "Paradigms and Problems," pp. 38-9.

[38]Huizinga, p. 10.

[39]Bruner, *Toward a Theory of Instruction*, p. 125.

[40]Jack Selzer, "Exploring Options in Composing," *College Composition and Communication*, 35 (October 1984), 276-83.

[41]"Introduction," *The Literary Journalists.* ed. Norman Sims (New York: Ballantine Books, 1984), 3-25.

[42]Sims, p. 9.

Ground of Hope: The Freshman English Class

Mary C. Savage
Albertus Magnus College

It is easy, these days, to be cynical about the kind of language learning at the heart of Freshman English. So much in the current educational climate encourages cynicism: our students are imbued with careerism; our institutions often treat teaching Freshmen as a "second class" function. The climate outside education encourages even deeper cynicism. Here our capacity to offset the structures in (and through) which we live is constantly questioned, even eroded. Given the larger picture, it is easy to be cynical about the Freshman English enterprise exactly because it is a rite of passage, a crisis point, deeply embedded in those social, political, and economic structures that seem so hard to affect.

I contend, nevertheless, that Freshman English is a place of hope — not for optimism, which is just the other side of cynicism — but of realistic hope based on the fundamental character of the Freshman English enterprise itself. Just because we — students and teachers alike — are about the business of understanding language and of learning how to write, for this very reason, we are at a focal point of powerful possibilities. In the moment that is Freshman English, students can come to consciousness about the power — as well as the problematic — of language in — and through — which they live.

I would like now to recount rather cynical (and well-founded) critiques made of Freshman English and then to describe more fully the ground of hope I see in the heart of the Freshman English enterprise.

Richard Ohmann (134-171) takes a critical view of Freshman English that is almost cynical. The primary functions of Freshman English, he tells us, are to select students with a high potential for leadership in business and government and to train them in necessary verbal skills. Robert Pattison, in his book *On Literacy*, writes that there are actually *three* kinds of "English" taught in American colleges: one in prestige universities like Yale where well-trained students are further trained toward facility in the critical use of language; one in technical schools, those two-year schools (and some four-year schools) where students are trained in mechanics and basic skills; one in "second-rank" colleges where students who aspire to the status generally achieved by graduates of prestigious institutions demand (and often receive) "English" courses that are "useful" for their careers. Pattison projects that students from prestigious institutions will achieve positions of power, that graduates from vocational schools will work for them. Those from "second rank" institutions will probably work at the same level as their peers from vocational schools, but resent this situation more fully and bitterly (187-190).

This "tracking" of students, so offensive to a liberal or enlightened understanding of school as an institution that develops equally the potential of each (Bowles and Gintis), would be cause enough for cynicism, but its implication for how little Freshman English changes systems is even more debilitating. Richard Ohmann, who analyzed samples of writing done by persons in leadership positions ("think-tank" forecasters, liberal writers on foreign policy, government officials writing memos about the Vietnam War), found that the writing done by these

public figures had in common with Freshman English textbooks and "successful" student writing the tendency to treat things as abstract problems, to distance people, to objectify things away from their historical roots and contexts, and to behave as if writing were not an act involving cooperation and power (171-206). You can see, I think, how this kind of writing gets the work of government officials and opinion-makers done, but such words and ways of thinking also tell lies. Reducing complex situations to abstract problems encourages us to find mechanical answers; removing history and people from our thinking and writing allows us to talk about "escalating" a war without considering the human consequences of such an act. Pretending that cooperation and power are not part of every act of writing allows us to believe that we are just doing our job — or that we are doing nothing at all. If students succeed at thinking and writing in this way, at what have they succeeded? At using language and writing to further subject themselves and others, I think.

In the face of this critique that only the few will achieve what is aspired to by the many and that the few will succeed because they are suited to roles requiring detachment and repression of consciousness, what hope is there? The very grounds on which the critique rests are also the grounds of our hope. By its very nature Freshman English is an enterprise in using and understanding language, and language, exactly because it is a process embedded in and environed by social and economic systems, is, like those systems, a human creation. We both make our language and are made by it. Language is never neutral. There is always something at stake when human beings use language, even if it is only keeping the conversation going in a kind of phatic communication. That phrase "use language" doesn't say what I want to express here. "Language" is not a "thing" people "use." It is something people do — in the case of conversation, it is something people do together. "Talking" would be a better word, but I also want to include "writing," which you will probably agree is "using language," but not "talking." "Languaging" might be a good word, but I don't want to use words that sound like jargon. So "using language" it is. But please think of people doing something and not of an abstraction like "language." As I said before I was interrupted by all that talk about the difficulty of talking about language, I think there is always something at stake when human beings use language. Using language, even (perhaps especially) in ordinary, daily situations involves us deeply in values, ways of thinking, ways of making relationships with others.

Consider a conversation I had with my sister during a visit which, although it may appear ordinary, was really one of those ritual occasions for which contemporary society does not have a name. The visit was a "bring the new child before the relative to see what she will call it" ritual, and its purpose was that I respond to my sister's new baby in my sister's presence and thereby continue my relationship with her and establish some relation with this new member of the family, whom I had not yet met. To do this, I fondled the child, embraced my sister, suffered the child's spitting up on my shoulder and trying to eat my hair, but mostly I created (recreated) those familial relationships through language.

At one point in the visit, after I had held the baby in my arms, against my chest, flat on her back along my thighs, and had realized that there was no surface on my 5′3″ frame along which her four-month-old body could extend with comfort, I said, "Kay, she's a B-I-G kid!" And my sister replied, "She's not big: she's long."

To understand what my sister said and what happened between us you need to know that the size of the child was remarkable only in relation to me and not in relation to her parents. (My sister is 5′8″ and my brother-in-law is 6′4″). You also need to know that the conversation is embedded in my sister's personal history. Although she is a beautiful woman and, to my eyes, had always been a beautiful child, she had suffered a great deal from thinking herself unattractive, especially because she considered her hips and thighs too large. Also present in (behind) the conversation is a cultural notion of a woman's acceptability that I had brought into play by my word "B-I-G." Acceptable women are beautiful, and beautiful women are not big (read, fat), although they may be tall.

What was at stake in the conversation was what could be said (predicated) about the child's acceptability. What happened was that my sister said *no*. She would not allow the word "big" to stand in the ritual. She would not group her child with fat, unacceptable women. Her child would not suffer from those names as she had. The child would not be called "big," but "long." She would be beautiful; she would be acceptable.

Granted that this was a particularly significant conversation for my sister and me, a kind of ritual, as I have said, but even ordinary, everyday language is full of such significance, background, and relationships. It is through our language, moreover, that we create and recreate our relationships.

The fact that one thing always at stake in using language is creating and recreating relationships is dramatically represented in several episodes of the Book of Genesis. The first human speech directly quoted in the Bible takes place in a scene very much like the ritual I have just described as occurring between my sister and me. God intends to make a companion for *adam*. (This word is not a proper name, but a "generic" name for human being, actually a pun meaning something like *earthling*). So God brings the birds and beasts before the *earthling* to see what the human being will call them. Adam names the creatures in a way that suggests that naming establishes the identities of the birds and the beasts in relation to the earthling. The text says: "The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for man there was not found a helper fit for him (2:20)." Adam names the creatures, but not as creatures *fit for him*. God then creates the woman from a bit taken from the earthling, and brings her to (not before) adam, at which point he exclaims:

> This at last is bone of my bone
> and flesh of my flesh. (2:23)

Adam certainly is much less shy than I was in my ritual. He pours himself out in this recognition scene: At last you have brought me one which makes me exclaim! I recognize this one! This one, this other, is like me! I name this one "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh"!

This act of naming, which ends the earthling's being alone and completes the creation of the world, portrays something fundamental about what happens when human beings use language. We name things *in relation to ourselves* — the beasts are not like adam; the woman is "flesh of my flesh," my niece is *long* in relation to my body. In some fundamental way, naming things is also relating to them. In naming we go out to things (just as *adam* expresses — presses outward — his recognition of the woman) or at least we commit ourselves to the relationship implicit in the names we give.

The relationship that Adam's naming establishes is one of human solidarity, but it is a solidarity that is short-lived and that

begins to unravel in the very next scene, one that begins with the language of the "subtle" serpent and ends in a curse of alienation, hostility, and domination. If we can use language to establish solidarity, this scene shows us we can also use it to tempt, prevaricate, and cast blame. Language's potential for creating and recreating relationships is thus presented—in these opening scenes and throughout Genesis—as problematic. The account of how Isaac comes to bless his younger son, Jacob, instead of his older son, Esau, can show us at least two coordinates of the problematic: the use of language to create realities that are not true and the use of language to go beyond the immediate context in which it is used.

Jacob gets the blessing (and so is made his father's heir) by pretending to be Esau. The old, blind Isaac has sent his favorite son to get some game and to have it cooked in a special way the old man likes so he can eat and then bless his son. While Esau is looking for game, Rebecca, the wife who prefers the younger son as Isaac does the older, prepares food the way Isaac likes it and advises Jacob to bring it before his father and so get the blessing. They dress Jacob in Esau's clothes and put animal skins to cover his smooth hands and neck in case his father should feel for the rough, hairy body of Esau. Jacob comes thus prepared before his father. He identifies himself as Esau and attempts to start the blessing ritual, but the old, blind Isaac thinks he hears the voice of Jacob and wants to assure himself that it is his hairy, older son before him. He feels the animal hair and smells the garments Jacob has taken from Esau and asks again: "Are you really my son Esau?" Jacob answers, "I am."

What is at stake in this conversation is the blessing—a blessing that will create a relationship between the blessed and the whole family of inheritance. Because Jacob presents himself as Esau and because in addition to the evidence the blind, old man has through his senses, he joins Jacob's lie. Isaac blesses his younger, not his older, son. We are all in Jacob's position in that we *can* use language to lie. Equally, we are all in the position of Isaac, not blind perhaps, but always in the position of putting together language, the evidence of our senses, and future action. How do we know what a thing is except that we have experienced it and have been told its name. What we come to know as "mother," "cat," "work," "love," we come to know from experience mediated through language. When you were a child, for example, the name you called your primary care-taker was probably not one you made up yourself, but one that you inherited from your family or that your family agreed to recognize. As you grew, moreover, you related to this care-taker, say your "mother," along lines laid down by your family and friends, etc. We inherit our names and along with them we inherit ways of relating.

Because we don't give each moment or thing in our experience a unique name, however, but instead use names inherited from our families and peers, etc., we tend to take the "truth" of our names pretty much for granted unless reflection or experience proves otherwise. This tendency is helpful in that it allows us both to communicate with others who hold the names in common with us and to think about our experience in a common stock of words that are related to us and each other in powerful ways — all the associations that came along with "big" and "long," for example. But what if these names are not "true" or what if they leave huge chunks of experience unrepresented? Consider the tendency of English to be man-centered (males and male experiences tend to be taken as a norm from which women are said to deviate, if they are noticed at all). The dictionary contains proportionately more positive words referring to men than to women (Spender, 15). Now, this does not mean we cannot say things — even positive things — about women, only that there are more names for men in the inherited language. Maybe we need more names and more names that name things from a female perspective. Susan Brownmiller reminds us that "the sex act has as its 'modus operandi' something men call *penetration*. Penetration however describes what the man does. . . . If women were in charge of sex and language, the same act could be called *enclosure* (quoted in Spender, p. 178)." *Potency* is the name for normal sexual ability or power in men. What is the name for this in woman? Again, this does not mean that women are not sexually active, just that the inherited vocabulary tends to name things from a male perspective.

Even when we do not take names ("the truth") for granted, even when we are wary or suspicious as Isaac was, to the extent that we use or "go along" with a name, to that extent we believe it and act on it. Consider this situation. You learn someone whom you almost believed to be madly and exclusively in love with you (because they said so) is "seeing" another person. If you feel angry, isn't it not only because another person has misrepresented herself or himself but also because you believed the misrepresentation and acted accordingly?

A third aspect of the problematic quality of the human ability to use language to name and relate to reality is the ability of language, both spoken language (and especially) written language, to go beyond the immediate context in which it is used. When Isaac tells Esau to kill the game and prepare the food he uses language to project himself beyond the situation in which he and Esau are immediately located. Isaac can *talk* about the game, but it isn't there with them; he can *talk* about his intentions to bless Esau, but he does not actually bless him then and there. With language we can name (and relate to) things that are not actually present. We can plan a trip, or give directions, or talk on the telephone, write a research paper. Like naming itself, however, naming things not present is problematic. It is problematic exactly because the things are not present. Isaac can, as it were, project himself into the future and even attempt to bring that future into being by using language, but he can't *be* in that future or actually bring it into being. As we have seen, the future he projects does not come to be; he blesses Jacob, not Esau.

Although, like Isaac, we can only *be* in the present, language gives us the ability to talk about absent things, future things, past things, even imagined things, and to talk about these so vividly and with such conviction that we act accordingly. Being literate is related to this capacity. Writing is a way of using language beyond the present context. The words that I have just written will stay here after I stop writing, but the words I am now speaking, because they belong to this present moment, cease to be even as I say them. I can use these written words that will stay on this page to talk to you, even though they are not here. At least I can talk to the you I make up as a part of this written discourse. And I can put into these written words references to things that are in the future or that don't exist, or that exist now with me in my present as I write these words to you but that do not exist in your present (wherever your present is as I write this) or will not exist in the future when these written words are present for you. You see how problematic things become as soon as we are the least bit removed from the immediate context in which conversation occurs?

Writing, just because it can go beyond the immediate present, is a powerful capacity. Writing can separate me from my experience to allow me to objectify it so I can analyze it and explain it to someone else who wasn't even there when I had the

experience in the first place. Writing decontextualizes experience and re-contextualizes it again as writing. It was this kind of thinking I used to analyze my conversation with my sister. To do that, I had to be able to de-contextualize our words, analyze what they meant, and explain them to you — you who weren't present when we had the conversation and who never met my sister anyway. See? To the extent that I am conscious of myself as talking, acting, thinking, to the extent I think like a member of a culture in which writing is important, to that extent I have become a member of a literate culture.

For a Freshman, Freshman English is a crisis point, a rite of passage into aspects of that culture. What happens in the Freshman English moment may affect how she or he acts in that culture, names and relates to the reality around her or him, how in effect, she uses and is affected by the problematic of language.

If Pattison is at all right, your students can judge at least one aspect of these complex relations for themselves. They will be able to assess how difficult or easy it will be for them to succeed in college simply by looking at their texts more closely. Whose words and pictures are there? Who — what — does the text sound like? Who — what — does it think like? How like them does it sound? You can do the same thing with syllabi. Look at the writing assignments. What are they about? What will the language in them do? Who will they sound like? How like the students will they sound? The ease or difficulty with which your students will succeed or fail in college is closely tied to how like them the words and thinking patterns of their texts and assignments are. If their ways of talking and thinking correspond rather easily to those of their texts, then they will probably succeed rather easily; if they do not, then they will have a more difficult time with college (and college with them).

What leads their ways of talking and thinking to be like or unlike college texts? If the student is analytical, has grown up in a middle class community, is white, and a man, he will probably find a fairly high correlation between his ways and the ways of texts. Writers of textbooks tend to be rather like him. If, however, the student is highly intuitive, or has grown up in a working class community, or is Native American, or a woman, she or he may find less correlation. Women looking at texts, for example, are not likely to find many pictures of women in them, but they *are* likely to find ways of thinking (especially about moral judgments) that are abstract and rule-bound while their own are contextual and flexible (Gilligan). This is not to say that women cannot succeed in college. Women certainly can be successful, and their chances of doing so are increased if they are white, have grown up in middle class communities, and have practiced analytical thinking.

And what if students' ways of talking and thinking are *not* like those characteristic of successful college students and powerful persons in public life? If they don't know how to act in this language, they will probably not succeed — at least not in government or as an opinion maker.

But wait a moment. Is not this where we began the critique? Students are predestined either for relative failure or success. Even if they succeed, they do so, according to Pattison, because they are already talking and thinking like a government leader, just as they succeeded in college because they were already talking and thinking like their college textbooks, that is, in the detached, repressed style Ohmann described.

This ground, this critical awareness of language as created by culture and as recreating ways of acting in and relating to the world, is also the ground of our hope. Because it is through language that we learn how to mean and be in the world, it is also through *learning how we learn to mean* that we may come to have choices about how we will be in the world. By learning about language we learn to have choices and to resist being narrowly formed by the systems around us toward pragmatic and unreflected ends. The power of language and the possibility of the Freshman English moment is the power of coming into language aware of its problematic, but empowered, too, to claim its recreative capacity. This is our hope, this too, our challenge, to be in solidarity with students as they pass over to a realistic and recreative relationship with their culture.

Works Cited

Bowles, Samuel and Herbert Gintis. *Schooling in Capitalist America*. New York: Basic Books, 1976.

Gilligan, Carol. *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Woman's Development*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982.

Ohmann, Richard. *English in America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1976.

Pattison, Robert. *On Literacy: The Politics of the Word from Homer to the Age of Rock*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1982.

Spender, Dale. *Man Made Language*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980.

The New Oxford Annotated Bible. Revised Standard Version. Ed. Herbert May and Bruce Metzger. New York: Oxford, 1977.