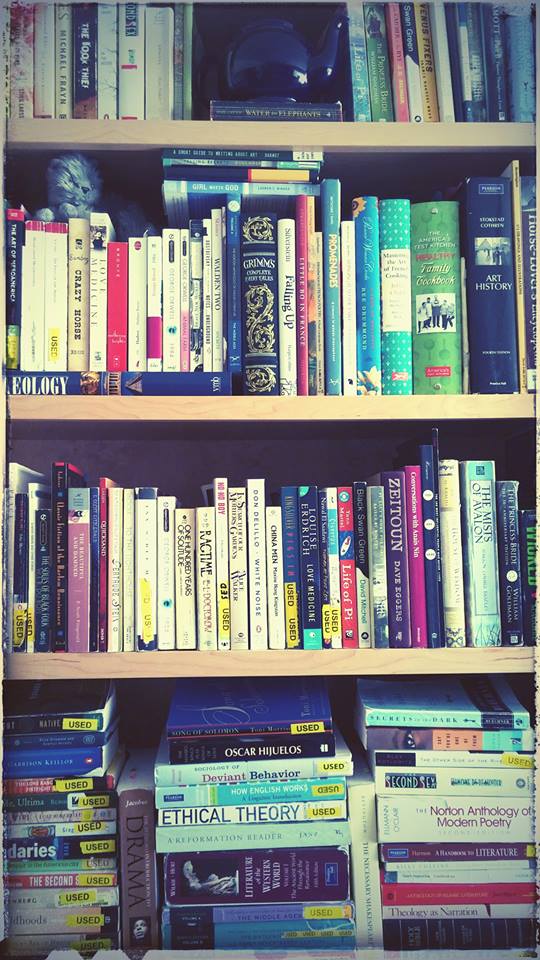
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| WRITING SAMPLES | MORGANNA E. PIEGOLS |

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| WRITING SAMPLES | excerpts from critical essays, examples of professional work, poetry, creative prose, writing for speech |



**CRITICAL ESSAYS**

Excerpt: Language Discrimination in American Classrooms: A Sociolinguistical Analysis of Language Pedagogies

Wealthy, educated, northern, white individuals have maintained a position of power in the American public schooling system from its very beginnings in the late nineteenth century and into early twentieth century. As the dominant class, this group of elites enjoyed (and continues to enjoy) the political and social clout necessary to construct a national school system in which the norms and values of its culture, including the norms of its language usage, are enforced through formal and informal sanctions. Requiring that members of the underclass deny part or all of their cultural identity (one’s language, cultural or religious customs, history, aesthetic preferences, etc.) in order to gain access into powerful institutions (schools, the government, places of business, etc.) is a strategy utilized by the dominant class to maintain their position of prestige, power, and influence. Informally, the use of Standard Academic English is enforced via negative social sanctions such as labeling the usage of nonstandard English (as well as the people who speak nonstandard English) as inferior, substandard, and deviant. We derogatorily refer to AAVE (African American Vernacular English) as “black slang,” “street slang,” and “talking black” and deter its usage in American schools because that kind of talk “belongs on the street,” “belongs at home,” and belongs to people who are viewed as culturally and socially inferior.

Formally, we require speakers of nonstandard dialects, such as AAVE, Chicano English, Hawaiian Pidgin English, Appalachian English, etc. to alter their speech and writing in order to participate and “succeed” in the American schooling system. Merits, such as high school diplomas and high test scores on standardized tests, are contingent on how well one is able to comprehend and utilize American Standard English. (This, consequently, benefits the dominant class because they are precisely the people who comprehend and utilize American Standard English best.) Students who refuse to or are unable to conform to the norms and standards of Standard Academic English experience negative formal and informal sanctions such as low test scores, denied entry into places of higher education and certain places of employment, personal negative encounters (also known as microaggressions) as a result of language discrimination, and so on. These negative sanctions reinforce the need for nonstandard speakers to deny their linguistical identity in order to conform to the norms and standards of white, wealthy, educated America.

…

If it is our aim to mend the broken relationship between nonstandard English speakers and the American schooling system, to foster learning environments in which all speakers are truly welcomed and valued, we must drastically reevaluate our standards of language usage. A pluralistic language pedagogy allows each speaker to decide for her/himself how s/he will represent her/his identity through language while the American schooling system accommodates and recognizes her/his right to do so. The obvious critique of this approach is that it is difficult to practically implement in the short term. The way that we communicate in our classrooms would change. The way we do standardized tests would change. The way we do job applications, college applications, loan applications would change. And yet, if we are committed to justice, reconciliation, and equality in our schools, in our communities, in our nation, that is exactly what is required of us. The alternative is that we continue to violate, maim, and silence the language identities of nonstandard speakers throughout our American schooling system.

In terms of practically implementing pluralistic language pedagogies, the American school system should incorporate basic linguistics training as a standard component of English studies. This will benefit speakers of nonstandard English dialects as well as Standard English speakers. Both nonstandard English dialect speakers and Standard English speakers will: 1.) learn in an environment which does not privilege particular languages, dialects, pidgins, or creoles and instead cultivates an atmosphere of inclusion and mutual respect; 2.) be able to recognize the systematic features of her/his own speech in addition to the speech of her/his classmates; and 3.) be able to better advocate for her/his self and others with the use of facts and concrete evidence as we attempt this process of language reconciliation.

Reconciling the language divide between nonstandard and Standard English speakers is important not only for the health and wellbeing of those who are marginalized but for those who are denied the right to experience other cultures, other voices, other ways of communicating because of their place of privilege. The rigid enforcement of Standard English in American classrooms is detrimental to both standard and nonstandard speakers in that the cultural capital exchange among diverse linguistical communities is severely limited. The Anglocentric literary tradition of the contemporary United States emphasizes reading as a personal, individual, solitary act. As a result, the American English curriculum privileges writers and genres that fit into this private mode of reading, and, when works do not fulfill this standard, they are either consumed improperly or omitted from course curricula entirely. Unlike the contemporary Anglocentric literary tradition, oral literary traditions, such as the black literary tradition, emphasize the role of the reader as part of a greater community—not only is the way in which this art is consumed contrary to Western individualism, the entire system of value and meaning making are dissimilar. Through our intransigent enforcement of Standard English within the context of the modern Western literary tradition, American students are unlikely to experience and recognize the intellectual and cultural value of literary genres such as gospel music (as a distinct poetic genre), folklore, proverbs, slam poetry, and collaborative storytelling because 1.) the nonstandard language used in these genres are devalued and 2.) the cultures and the people associated with these genres are devalued. And, for this, we are all culturally, socially, and intellectually diminished.

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Excerpt: In Defense of Ethical Reading: An Analysis of the Hedonistic Utilitarian Utopia in Ursula K. LeGuin’s “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas”  
  
Of course, it would seem that “gaining happiness at the expense of the pain of others” is morally wrong and ought to be a rejected practice. And yet, I need only look at the label inside of my t-shirt to be reminded of the extent to which I participate in a culture of hedonistic utilitarianism without very much thought as to how I justify my actions as well as the implications of my actions in terms of what is morally good. In failing to recognize and to seriously contend with the complex moral issues in literature, we threaten to diminish ourselves both critically and humanly. I do not mean to suggest that we ought to neglect issues of form or the use of rhetorical devices, but to do so at the expense of ignoring or disregarding the moral significance of a work is critically unsound. And, more importantly, when we fail to recognize that it is we—the educated, wealthy, privileged readers—who are the true citizens of Omelas, we do a great disservice to the text and to those who suffer for our benefit.

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Excerpt: St. Augustine’s Conception of the Ethical Reader

In both *The Confessions* and *On Christian Doctrine*, St. Augustine considers what it means to live a morally consistent life within the codes of Judeo-Christian moral law. Like many early church fathers, many of Augustine’s basic philosophical assumptions are highly influenced by Classical philosophy, particularly Plato. St. Augustine’s basic metaphysical assumptions align with a Platonic view of the nature of substance and being. Like Plato, St. Augustine privileges the nonphysical over the physical, often depicting the material world as inherently evil and the non-material world as transcendent and good. St. Augustine’s affinity for Platonic philosophy has important implications for Augustine’s conception of morality and, for our purposes, his understanding of what it means to be an ethical reader. In order to live a morally consistent life, one ought to pursue her perception of “the good” in all areas of her life. And so, the task of the ethically concerned reader is to interact with literature in such a way as to promote the good within herself and in her world. In his *Confessions* and *On Christian Doctrine*, St. Augustine addresses the ethical issues of how the reader ought to react to suffering, the role of metaphor, the purpose and interpretation of scripture, and other literary concerns. St. Augustine, like Plato, recognized the value of striving toward a virtuous existence. However, Augustine’s understanding of the highest moral good is ultimately informed by his Christian faith. As a Christian, St. Augustine argues that the good cannot be obtained through via one’s virtuous nature—the ultimate good is to love God and to love people.

**EXAMPLES OF PROFESSIONAL WORK**

Author Headnotes composed for Dr. Brian Ingraffia’s *Theorizing Religion and Literature: An Anthology of Modern, Postmodern, and Postsecular Essays[[1]](#footnote-1)*

**Jacques Derrida** (1930-2004) was born in the French colony of Algiers to a Jewish family. As a child, Derrida experienced discrimination under French law which prevented him from attending the French public school system because of his family’s Jewish identity. This experience had a profound impact on Derrida as he later built his career in post-strucutralist theory. In his work, Derrida deconstructs oppositional binary dualisms in order to question the authority that gives hierarchical structure power via privileging that which is primary, thereby perpetuating systems of inequality and violence. Derrida’s interests extended beyond the scope of academia as in his protesting of the war on drugs and the death penalty, his advocating of animal rights, and various other issues of social justice.

**Edward Said** (1935-2003) was a postcolonial theorist who discusses the social construction of the West and the “Orient” in his work, the most famous being *Orientalism* (1978). He was born in Jerusalem, Palestine, but his family immigrated to Egypt due to the political unrest in Palestine in 1947. Once in Cairo, Said received his education in British and American colonial schools. Later he attended American universities, completing his postgraduate studies at Harvard University where he studied comparative literature. Said’s personal and educational background provided the framework upon which he later analyzed the effects of Western imperialism. Throughout his life, Said advocated for the civil rights of Palestinians. Said received the National Book Critics Circle Award nomination for *Orientalism* and was the “runner-up” for the Nation Book Awarcriticism.

**Michel Foucault** (1926–1984) was born in France and is associated with New Historicism, queer theory, and post-structuralism. While studying at the elite École Normale Supérièure d’Ulm under Althusser, Foucault specialized in the philosophy of psychology. Foucault’s interests included prison reform, the institutionalization of mentally ill individuals, and gay rights as well as the history of prisons and the history of sexuality. In his many works, such as his influential text Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison (1975), Foucault examines the use of surveillance by the modern medical establishment, the military, prisons, and other institutions of power as a means of enforcing social control.

**POETRY**

In the Afterlife

In the afterlife,  
we release our tired leaves  
so they may gracefully   
dissolve into dust,  
for love is no longer a sacrifice.  
In the afterlife,  
we hunger bravely  
as we offer our unclean hands,  
for we know we will be fed.  
In the afterlife,   
we dream as if we are dancing,  
for time cannot contain our joy.  
And, yet, there is  
no distance nor darkness nor death  
that will erase you  
from my memory.

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No. 6  
  
How long does the vase remember yesterday’s flower?  
Her petals’ hue? The taste of her wilting body?

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No. 14  
  
In your arms, I am  
surrounded by sunlight’s warmth  
like a springtime bloom.

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No. 22

With your hand in mine,  
I could wander all my days  
and never be lost.

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A Dadaist Retelling: Aesop’s The Lion, the Hound, and the Fox  
  
being immediately moment roaming away  
rounded was chased Fox, There HOUND,

game, coward running HOUND chase,  
quarry. short, fled. “Ho! being

AND ran him he Presently FOX  
jeered pursuer to roared well loud  
THE the seeing thinking pursued; A  
lion THE lion, spied in the perceived  
and so, roar. the and he gave a  
gave would on Hound lion goes  
used and him ho! make turned The  
stopping the at away, and said, lesser  
he forest, a fine and who tail he  
that his !” A a a

**CREATIVE PROSE**

No. 15

The bird knew she did not belong to the trees, but to the wind. So the tree held her feathery body as she wept in the moon’s ashen glow. Each of his dewy leaves bore the burden of time’s brittleness, but, on this night, he believed in her song. And that was enough.[[2]](#footnote-2)

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My Father’s Briefcase

Sunlight’s final breath drifted through the dust particles that danced every evening along the window panes of our small house by the railroad tracks. The scent of burnt plastic followed my father the way memories follow a lonely wanderer. It clung to his bones which creaked and cracked as he set his lunch pail, with its red paint chipping away, on the worn carpet beneath him. He sat down to unlace his heavy, steel-toed work boots. He removed them slowly, unfastening their laces one eye-hook at time. Black smudges were on his face and fresh burns were on his hands and arms from fixing machines all day long. He closed his tired eyes and filled his ruined body with a substance that was less caustic.

**WRITING FOR SPEECH**

Transformation in Louise Erdrich’s *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*

“The devil works with a shrewd persistence, Miss DeWitt, and is never known to give up a soul merely because it is a thing willed in heaven. Our labor is required here on earth, in the ordinary world. Evil, oh yes, evil…”

[Agnes replies,] “What do you know of evil? ...I’ve seen evil…It has blue eyes and brown shoes. About size ten. The feet are narrow. The hands are square. The build is slight and I’d say the face, though not handsome, has an intriguing changeability about it. Though I am only now repossessing my memory of all the specifics, Father Modeste, I’ve seen the devil himself and he was disguised in a rumpled cassock.” (35)

The Actor, the one “who took on…disguises,” he sometimes clothed himself in the likeness of “an old man, other times a pregnant woman, a crippled youth” (23). But on the day he encountered Miss DeWitt, he clothed himself in the robes of a priest.

In Louise Erdrich’s *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*, there are two figures who don the garb of a priest without the sanction of the holy order: Agnes DeWitt and the Actor. Is there such a difference in their deception? Or, more adeptly, we might consider: is it inherently sinful to cloth yourself in a fabric, a skin, a likeness that is not one’s own by nature? Are we to condemn Agnes DeWitt as a falsifier, a fraud, an “Actor”? Or are we to believe that Agnes DeWitt’s transfiguration is sincere and ordained by God as a part of his “good, pleasing, and perfect will?” (Romans 12:2, NIV). In considering these questions, perhaps we ought to consider another story of transfiguration in the novel.

Having survived the great flood, Agnes is weakened both in spirit and in flesh. “Exhausted [by] fear,” Agnes wakes to the “smell of cooking.” “Starving,” Agnes “moved toward [the spoon]” of warm broth as if she were being “lured like an animal” (42). Only then does she realize that the spoon is held by a man. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul writes,

In your relationships with one another have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in the appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:5-8, NIV)

You see, the Actor and Agnes are not the only individuals to transfigure themselves in *The Last Report*. Christ himself alters his form, his appearance, his likeness in order to offer “comfort” to a lonely young woman exhausted by the storms of life (72).

And herein lies the difference, I believe, between Agnes DeWitt and the Actor. Beneath his “rumpled cassock,” the Actor, the devil in the flesh, is a heart “entirely ruthless,” “[caring] nothing for human life” (23). The Actor disguises himself with the clothing of a priest, but he is not transformed. 1 John 3:14 says, “We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death.” Unlike the Actor, who not only remains in death but revels in it, Agnes DeWitt is transfigured into the likeness of Father Damien Modeste because she has, as Paul describes in his letter to the Colossians, “put on a new self” (Colossians 3:10, NIV).

In one of his letters to the Pope, Father Damien writes,

“Having met Him just that once, having known Him in a man’s body, how could I not love Him until death? How could I not follow Him? Be thou like as me, were His words, and I took them literally to mean that I should attend Him as a loving woman follows her soldier into the battle of life, dressed as He is dressed, suffering the same hardships” (43-4)

Transformed by the love of Christ, Agnes DeWitt “trimmed off her hair and…buried it with [the corpse of Father Damien Modeste] as though…he was the keeper of her old life” (44). Though “[t]he devil works with a shrewd persistence” and is “never known to give up a soul merely because it is a thing willed in heaven,” Agnes follows down a strange path as Father Damien because Christ has already “[broken] the trail” (23; 123) Agnes DeWitt, “a woman created of impossibility,” alters her form just as Christ altered his form so that the Ojibwe people might also be transformed (28). Paul writes,

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God--that is your true and proper worship. Do not conform the ways of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:1-2, NIV)

As the narrator observes, “Through You, in You, with You. Aren’t those beautiful words?” (43).

Works Cited

Erdrich, Louise. *The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse*. New York: Harper Perennial, 2001. 1-361. Print.

*Holy Bible: New International Version*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994. Print.

1. I wrote these author headnotes while completing a research assistant position as a student at Calvin College. Dr. Brian Ingraffia’s *Theorizing Religion and Literature: An Anthology of Modern, Postmodern, and Postsecular Essays* is currently in the process of being published by Oxford University Press. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This piece is composed entirely of words derived from Anglo-Saxon. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)