

"Reason is but Choosing": Ideology in Freshman English  
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This paper challenges the assumption that writing courses informed by the tenets of "critical literacy" make students more aware of the role ideology plays in their culture. It argues that instructors in such classes rarely acknowledge or critique their own under ideological constraints, believing perhaps that their non-foundational epistemologies protect them from authoritarian postures in the classroom. Yet such principles only cause them to assume that their understanding of social realities is more sophisticated and honorable than either that of their students or of their colleagues who question the primacy of political agendas in writing classes. Ironically, critical literacy provides the framework for a new ontological rhetoric operating within the realm of social reality; for advocates of social rhetorics, political action is typically authorized by a foundational commitment to utopian schemes--what Patricia Bizzell describes as the "attempt to create and share utopian rhetoric." In practical terms, advocates of critical literacy are apt to design curricula in which most or all of the syllabus readings, assignments, and discussions represent or endorse a single set of values and explore only subject matters (e.g. race, sex, ethnicity, difference) that conform to the political agenda of the instructor, program, or course administrators. Quite often the architects of such programs are themselves unable to articulate or understand the positions of the opposition except in terms which reduce them to crude stereotypes. So denying choice to themselves and their students, advocates of critical literacy create new silences in the classroom and in the canon. Their vaunted post-structural rhetoric proves upon examination to be less subtle at instructing students in logic than the most elementary forms of traditional dialectic and less adept at teaching writing than even current-traditional pedagogies.