

their pedagogical practices, and they have done so by inventing new and recovering old ways for their students to learn about and engage in rhetorical action. The ultimate benefit of this volume, however, is that it brings greater attention to a vital conversation about the connections between research and teaching, theory and practice, and it invites others to ask and answer this pressing and important question: what does it mean to teach *rhetorica*?

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

***Composition and Cornel West: Notes toward a Deep Democracy***, by Keith Gilyard, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008. 176 pp.

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Christened “the first book to comprehensively connect the ideas of one of America’s premier scholars of religion, philosophy, and African American studies with composition theory and pedagogy,” enticing readers with the claim that the book “contains the only interview in which Cornel West directly addresses the field of composition” (back cover), *Composition and Cornel West* offers much more than an introduction to West. What emerges is a significant addition to critical composition studies and the Gramscian notion of educational space as political and ideological. By defining the project of composition as rhetorical education in the service of deep democracy, Gilyard uses West’s pragmatism to both reclaim and substantiate the democratic origins of freshman writing. Gilyard’s theory of composition demands commitment to continual inquiry, a repudiation of imperialist capitalism and its discourses, and engagement with democracy as a way of thinking and acting.

Through a review of Cornel West’s “dedisciplinary” *oeuvre*, including the now canonical *Race Matters* and the more recent *Democracy Matters: Winning the Fight Against Imperialism*, Gilyard suggests that West’s work is a valuable, but neglected resource for critical pedagogical and composition studies. Gilyard acknowledges composition scholars who have already approached West, a very long and growing list including, but not limited to, Min-Zhan Lu, Geneva Smitherman, Linda Flowers, Susan Kates, Steven Mailloux, and Beth Daniell. What Gilyard adds to the conversation is an enlarged engagement with pragmatism, politics, and democracy. For example, he observes that, while Hephzibah Roskelly and Kate Ronald’s *Reason to Believe* perceptively engages John Dewey and West, they do not

take up West's critique of capitalism and empire (11). Gilyard would have compositionists fully understand West's project of prophetic pragmatism, a project of cultural criticism, and engage the political activism of West and other pragmatists, such as W. E. B. Du Bois. Prophetic pragmatism locates politics in everyday life and resists Marxist dogmatism while it embraces emancipatory social experimentalism and our indigenous left political traditions; composition with this orientation would embrace emancipatory social experimentalism. Potentially pragmatism, our indigenous theoretical orientation, justifies and invigorates many US pedagogical projects.

*Composition and Cornel West* is structured as six chapters. While the first and second chapters establish the "roots" of the project, subsequent chapters make the connections between West's philosophy and composition more explicit, with the West interview on composition as the culmination of Gilyard's undertaking. By drawing on West's discursive strategies of Socratic commitment, prophetic witness, and tragic comic hope (5), Gilyard sketches a path for the education of politically healthy and responsible citizens.

The chapter "Socratic Commitment and Critical Literacy" develops a theory of critical literacy, using Freire's concept of "authentic education" and Socratic commitments to questioning, argument, and the interrogation of power as a route to activism. In analyzing interactions among literacy, literacy learning, and literacy assessment, Gilyard augments Socratic commitments to posit "Socratic commitment *plus*" through his reading of Linda Flower's work with urban teens, work distinctive in her acknowledgements of "radical difference." In developing a prophetic rhetoric of "rival" viewpoints, Flower along with Elenore Long and Lorraine Higgins provide a project that foregrounds cultural positioning and accepts potential incommensurability. Strong rivaling, observes Gilyard, foregrounds the role of disputation, while questioning power and action agendas, and so offers composition a project in the service of strong democratic.

Prophetic witness, not simply seeing, but acting for justice and against its violations is a strategy for calling our attention to human hurt, and it helps the witness to imagine the wounds not as limits, but as beckons to action. Building on Christianity's prophetic tradition and the earlier insights of West and bell hooks, Gilyard argues that faith matters, race matters, and class matters. We find this the most controversial part of the book. Take, for example, his quote of West: "The battle for the soul of American democracy is, in large part, a battle for the soul of American Christianity, because the dominant forms of Christian fundamentalism are a threat to the tolerance and openness necessary for sustaining any democracy" (59-60). In arguing that fundamentalisms threaten democracy and in privileging prophetic theologies as politically liberating, both Gilyard and West recognize a participatory democracy, but it is not so deep, strong or radical, for it depends on the right type of religion rather than

the agonistic dynamics of the political. As well, for many—those committed to the separation of church and state and those committed to open dialogue, reason, and evidence over faith—the promotion of any religion within political deliberation and writing pedagogy is problematic, if not disruptive. Finally, while Gilyard is attentive to race, class, and religion in the classroom, he is surprisingly silent about gender and sexuality, perhaps assuming that gender doesn't matter. This is all the more disquieting given his engagement with Michel Foucault, an engagement limited to analysis of power and the limitations of Foucault's subject. In developing the concept of prophetic witnessing, Gilyard critiques Foucault, recognizing him as a resource for understanding the genealogy of discourses, a justification of radical teaching, and a discursive theory of subjectivity. Gilyard, however, follows West in theorizing the agency necessary to a critical citizen and characterizes Foucault as thin in radical impulses.

West's third discursive strategy is tragicomic hope. By raising questions about how one is to witness and to stop human hurt with hope and without despair, West posits a psychological posture that enables citizens to "keep-on-pushing." This fifth chapter contains echoes both of West's and Paul Gilroy's use of contemporary music as an entrance point into discussions about the African diaspora, slavery, and politics. Gilyard elucidates how West uses artists such as Aretha Franklin, Marvin Gaye, and Curtis Mayfield to situate the importance of music by African Americans as an expression of adversity, struggle, and resilience. The discussion starts by contextualizing West's vision of being "a jazzman in the life of the mind" (102) and quickly transitions to an overview of African American music and its ability to appear as both trivial and political, hence, the "tragicomic hope." Positioned against the blues and other African-American forms, Gilyard argues that forces, such as corporate rap, counter the development of an authentic tragicomic hope.

While they are not comprehensive in describing the discourse of citizens, West's three symbolic formations—Socratic commitment, prophetic witness, and tragicomic hope—are sympathetic to contemporary composition practices, forming one model of a critical, speaking citizen. In addition, they form a forceful standpoint and focused lens for critical examinations of pedagogical practices. Augmenting West's three strategies and making careful connections between West's philosophy and composition theory, Gilyard provides anecdotes from his own educational experiences as he analyzes the work of scholars who utilize West's pragmatism and practice composition in the service of democracy. He connects Socratic commitment to ethical educational practice, defines prophetic witness as transforming educational and political practice, and sees tragicomic hope as linking pedagogical and political with the resources of popular culture. In the end we had to reread West to more fully comprehend Gilyard's defining relationships among the

citizen, composition, prophetic pragmatism, Socratic commitment, and tragic hope, but this is not a criticism. Rather it is a statement of how Gilyard's thinking has evolved beyond introducing West and offers as well a model of a deliberative classroom.

*Buffalo, New York*

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