PENNINGTON, MARY BETH, Ph.D. From The Sticks: An Examination of Rural, Southern Literacies Within and Without the University. (2010)
Directed by Dr. Hephzibah Roskelly. 255 pp.

This dissertation examines rural, Southern culture's strained relationship with academia, specifically as it relates to the composition classroom, which is the place where students are formally introduced to academic discourse and standard, "public" literacy practices. Operating from John Dewey's principle of "warranted assertibility," I analyze the multiple ways in which the urban North has interpreted and defined the rural South in an effort to more accurately determine the population's cultural currency. Using Kenneth Burke's identification theory and George Herbert Mead's interactionist theory, I investigate historical, ethnographic and theoretical data in order to understand how American rhetorical identification with or dis-identification from rural, Southern populations influences the culture's treatment in academic circles. Using the work of W.J. Cash, Allen Batteau, Barbara Ching, Gerald Creed and others, I theorize how and why rural, Southern culture has become a national symbol of anti-intellectualism and thus a blind spot in most cultural studies efforts.

This investigation also calls into question the ways in which academics designate marginalized "others." Academia has become so preoccupied with global cultures that many regional literacies have been left unexamined and at times, devalued as too familiar or local for serious academic consideration. Ralph Waldo Emerson's belief that the "near explains the far" grounds my argument that we should continually turn our attention to local as well as global cultures in the spirit of Berthoff's dialectical model. The rural, white, South has long been regarded as ideologically dominant when in fact it is one of

the most economically, culturally, and academically marginalized populations in the U.S. I follow through the consequences of these associations for rural, Southern students as they consider and develop their academic identities in the university through the relation of personal experience and the ethnographic study of a former composition student who also hails from the rural South. Using a dialogic model, my ethnographic study operates as a kind of collaborative literacy narrative: the student and I speak from our own experiences as rural, Southern women at different stages in the academy. This form of scholarship is a new way for teachers to engage with students from a common background using sameness rather than difference as the impetus for research.

Since geographic or home literacy values factor in to our classroom contexts, the denigration of the rural Southerner – or any unrecognized marginal group – can and should inform the work we do as rhetoric and composition teachers. I argue that marginalized students are often intimately acquainted with "double-consciousness," what Paulo Freire calls *conscientização*, or critical consciousness, which if acknowledged and used, could help students who see themselves as culturally disadvantaged feel more competent and engaged in the composition classroom. Louise Rosenblatt's reader-response theory explains how a student's "experiential reservoir" affects not only her sense of self in the academy but her composing behaviors in the university as well.

Currently, the rural South figures into our work minimally, perhaps as part of a cursory inclusion of regional texts. In this dissertation, I describe how we might take this population's literacies more seriously by examining the ways in which rural educators have engaged their students. In much the way feminist pedagogy begins from the premise

of an alternative, feminine way of knowing, I argue that the literacies of rural, Southern populations can similarly ground our pedagogy through Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy. Freire's pedagogy, which can be traced to rural contexts, is often misinterpreted as revolutionary and impractical when in fact it was designed to address blind spots such as the marginalization of populations such as the rural, Southern university student. Myles Horton's Highlander Folk School serves as an example of critical pedagogy at work in contexts beyond Freire's Brazil. A rural Southerner, Horton used local knowledge and ways of knowing to more effectively engage and mobilize his students. From these examples, I articulate the possibility of a "rural" pedagogy in the composition classroom. Though philosophically defined by rural, Southern epistemologies and literacies, this pedagogical theory is designed to be re-made to address any classroom population.

FROM THE STICKS: AN EXAMINATION OF RURAL, SOUTHERN LITERACIES

WITHIN AND WITHOUT THE UNIVERSITY

by

Mary Beth Pennington

A Dissertation Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
the University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Greensboro
2010

Approved by:

_____

Committee Chair

For Daddy

APPROVAL PAGE

This dissertation has been approved by the following committee members of the

Faculty of the Graduate School of The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair _____

Dr. Hephzibah Roskelly

Committee Members _____

Dr. Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater

_____

Dr. Anthony Cuda

_____

Date of Acceptance by Committee

_____

Date of Final Oral Examination

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PREFACE

I grew up in rural, southwestern Virginia. Daddy was a chief diesel mechanic for a coal mining company in a tiny, forgotten place an hour away in southern West Virginia, and Mom stayed at home most of my childhood, keeping house, watching out for me, and trying to figure out ways to combat the silence. My house was a quarter mile from the "main" road, which was and is little more than a country route traveled only by the forty or so families who live up the valley. Our driveway was graveled, and our view was of trees and the base of a mountain. On particularly cold nights, we could hear the sound of tractor trailers on I-77 several miles in the distance, and every now and again the hum of a jet drawing frosted lines across the sky. Summer days as a child were the times I felt more resoundingly "rural" than any other time. Going to my small public school, 10-20 students in each class, during the fall gave me a sense of some connection to possibility, enabled me to identify as a 1st-7th grader who was a good student, an accelerated reader. But in the summers, though the lovely greenery around my house, the fields, the woods, the gullies, the thickets, the creek kept me busy, they also left me feeling empty, a set of eyes peering from sockets with nothing to sound against but the all-too-familiar scenery. I knew what "vacuous" and ennui" meant before I had even encountered the words; I had felt their meaning keenly and, as an adult, rejoiced when I learned words existed for those feelings. I had no way to hear my voice but through my own reading aloud and my

[1]As part of a 1990 speech on the theme, "The Sense of Place," delivered by Welty for the PEN/Faulkner Award for Fiction's annual fund-raising gala at the Folger Shakespeare Library.

attempts to interject in conversations with my parents and much older brothers. My parents went to a small country church that always had waning attendance, a broken furnace, and drafty windows. My exposure to other children was minimal, and while I knew and felt comfortable with the people in my "town," I rarely saw them. It was an ideal childhood in many ways, but one different from the experience of most American children, I now know.

Like most children of my generation, I had access to television, even if it was only two channels at that time, and I used that popular medium as a way of shoring myself up against the rest of the world. What was happening in that box was what was happening in the "world," and for me the world was a place that was not my home but rather a place that set the standard for the way real people lived. The television images I remember, even those of a distinctly "Southern" theme ("Dallas" comes to mind), rarely if ever, offered the rural South as a setting. My Mom and I would watch "The Waltons," a television show based on the childhood recollections of Earl Hamner of Aynor, Virginia. The family lived on a mountaintop and encountered some situations reminiscent of my life, mostly offering moral crossroads kinds of moments that programs like "The Andy Griffith Show" handled, but the series was set during the Depression, though the human issues were timeless, and the message seemed to be that this way of life was old and quaint; the details of such living were no longer applicable.

"The Waltons," though set in rural Virginia, did not come close to the kind of strange pastiche that was my life as a rural child. While I was exposed to the quaintness of the rural South, specifically rural Appalachia -- traditions such as women bringing

food to the house when a family member died; men coming together to help build sheds for one another or bring in the crop, I was also exposed to the trickle down of popular culture and very aware of the stigma attached to rural Appalachia. The strain of the two identities made me feel decidedly in-between. I once was struck by this dissonance when a local boy came to our house to help my Dad fall some trees. He came bouncing up our driveway in a Mustang blaring Prince but stepped out of the car wearing a flannel shirt and boots. As I remember, he left the music blasting for some time, and I was embarrassed for my Dad, who talked with the boy as though he heard nothing, but, standing to the side, hearing "we're going to party like it's 1999" echo off the mountain sides, I knew that being country for me was not the same as it was for the Waltons. I was angered by the inconsistency.

Ours was a straddling culture, one neither here nor there, decidedly not the place to be. To be "Appalachian" meant to be both within and without. While we were not the quaint exemplars of country resolve, we were also not the toothless hillbillies of Snuffy Smith cartoons. While we were not suburbanites living on clean Wisteria Lane streets, we were not cave-dwellers. The modern Appalachian was nowhere to be found in popular media. As a result, my peers and I developed a fundamentally ironical world view. Our culture was always represented as something we knew it not to be. We scorned "folk" renderings of our culture and begrudgingly copied popular trends that came our way (often a couple years after the height of the fad), always with the knowledge that we were outside of the norm, that we could never quite be what the nation wanted us to be. While my misunderstood cultural position humbled me, it also stoked an unreconciled anger.

Even before I was overtly exposed to Appalachian stigmatization in the media, I felt it in my own family. My cousins who would visit from suburban Ohio would feign exhaustion with the area as soon as their feet hit the dirt. "There is nothing to do in this hick-town!" they would lament, and I had to agree, though their insults made me bristle. After all, what they said only affirmed what I had felt for some time; I was on a losing team. Having experienced my identity as mostly "without," I defined myself more by what I was not.

My identity of "lack" carried through to my experiences in college. Soon after making my first friend in a college course, I was shamed and embarrassed when he asked me if my family made moonshine, went barefoot and wore overalls. Danny was from suburban Maryland, just outside of Washington, D.C., and his question seemed to be only minimally antagonistic. He was genuinely curious. Playing along, I made a bluegrass mix tape for him; the prologue of which was, of course, "Dueling Banjos."

As a university student, I found myself at times paralyzed by the difference assigned me because of my background, which was impossible to hide because of my accent. Upon first meeting or hearing me speak, students and teachers alike would sometimes look at me searchingly as I spoke, not hearing what I was saying, but how I was saying it: "where are you *from*?" they would ask bemusedly. "Your accent is really bad," was a line I got used to hearing from students, or even "come over here and say something for my friends. I want them to hear how bad your accent is."

Every modern university student at some point suffers derision, some more so than others. However, I soon learned that the university found it less important to protect

my culture from ridicule than it did for others. I could tell by the way professors would make off-hand cracks about "local rednecks" in town and the way the students I came in contact with, many from the suburbs of Washington D.C., openly and fearlessly shared their repulsion for the rural area and people surrounding the university and their firm belief in the backwardness of Southern country people in general. It was not just in fashion to scorn "hillbillies;" it seemed to be a civic duty. Politically correct peer pressure did not seem to protect rural Southerners from cultural chiding the way I had seen it work for other ethnic groups. I had come to the university fearful, anticipating a dizzying heterogeneity of peoples and activities – *that* I was prepared for. However, I had not anticipated that my rural, Southern background would come to define me so fully, that I would come to feel so marginal as a consequence of where I was from.

I relate these experiences because they directly influenced the way I saw myself and with time, the way I read and wrote my world as a university student. My writing played out these anxieties. At times, I would be incredibly blocked, unable to write a word as I was paralyzed with insecurities about how my writing would be received. I did not speak up in class even if I wanted to respond, as I was hyper-aware of the reactions of those around me. I worried that the way I felt most comfortable communicating might give away my background, which I had learned was *not* a social advantage, so I worked to fight my natural impulses as a writer and speaker. I distrusted my personal experience because I found no place for it in the academy. I was not a one-dimensional country bumpkin, and I knew I could not be a "mainstream" university student – which meant for me a northern suburbanite. I was decidedly "neither/nor."

These experiences haunted me, but I worked hard to discount them. After all, always it seemed there were other victims of marginalization who were more worthy of attention. For example, those people who received physical threats of violence because of their sexuality, race, religion, or even political affiliation certainly deserved a more sympathetic audience than I. How could I possibly bring up this widespread discrimination which operated more softly, subtly, without looking like a heel? Chalking it up to "just one of those things," a "coming-of-age experience," and feeling I had no right to publicly complain as a middle-class, white girl, I ignored my unease about the treatment of rural Southerners in the academy for some time. However, through my training and experience as a composition instructor, I have come to realize the unavoidability of background in the negotiation of meaning-making. Context and personal experience are not just corollaries to the rhetorical moment, they are absolutely essential to the interpretation of any rhetorical situation. Therefore, an individual's home values determine how he or she will think and solve problems. Similarly, when an individual is labeled "outside the center," *this* experience plays a part in how a student reads, writes, and ultimately self-reflects.

Louise Rosenblatt's *Making Meaning with Texts* is useful to this discussion. Rosenblatt's reader-response theory accounts for the role of experience in meaning-making and lends support to the idea that meaning is relational and context-dependent. Her work historically comes from the influence of Einsteinian thought, the idea that the observer must be taken into account when considering the observational process as a whole. In this sense, the perspective of the reader very much affects the way a text is

interpreted. Rosenblatt asserts that "because each individual's linguistic-experiential reservoir is the residue of past transactions with the environment, such factors condition the sense of possibilities, or the potential organizing frameworks or schema that each brings to the transactions (26). When an individual confronts a text, she brings with her a certain contextual residue which affects the way she will receive that text. This notion of the "text" can translate to any rhetorical context, of course, and the sizing up of these contexts in turn affects the ways in which a reader responds as an author. Rosenblatt further argues that "socioeconomic and ethnic factors, for example, influence patterns of behavior, ways of carrying out tasks, even understanding of such concepts as 'story'…Such elements also affect the individual's attitude toward the self, toward the reading or writing activity, and toward the purpose for which it is being carried on" (26). In short, how we read and write is directly related to what we have experienced and how we consider ourselves in relation to others. My rural Southern background was not something to be discounted, hidden, or dodged; it was and is the lens through which I interpret the world.

I choose to investigate rural, Southern discursive identity for several pragmatic reasons. First, it is an area of Cultural Studies that has thus far not been adequately analyzed. Common academic beliefs about this culture are rarely challenged or investigated even though, as Carl Dengler points out in *Place Over Time: The Continuity of Southern Distinctiveness*, the South is the most rural, the least urbanized, and the poorest region in the country (15-16). Since student experience is integral to the composing process, rural, Southern students, aware of their culture's obscurity and

devaluation in academic contexts, will write from and in fact, through that experience. In order to understand how the rural Southern student composes for a university audience, it is important to consider how this culture has been positioned against the goals of academic literacy. When students from rural Southern backgrounds compose, we should consider whether or not they feel a sense of intellectual inferiority as a consequence of their well-documented sublimation, and if so, how it affects their writing process and subsequently the development of their academic/public identity. Our field has given women, minorities, working classes and other groups similar attention but never before have we analyzed the composing behaviors of rural Southerners via their history and cultural experience as "other." Finally, rural Southern epistemologies can articulate a new pedagogy, one informed by the knowledge, values, and needs of this culture whose experience has been historically marginalized. These possibilities inform my initial investigation. On a personal note, I am compelled to pursue this topic because of my experience as a rural Southern student who is still working to make sense of my culture's place in the academy. I follow Eudora Welty's advice in this dissertation to "write about what you don't know about what you know."

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: "PLACEHOLDING" AS RHETORICAL NECESSITY

"Warranted Assertibility" and Terminology

> "If inquiry begins in doubt, it terminates in the institution of conditions which remove need for doubt. The latter state of affairs may be designated by the words belief and knowledge. For reasons that I shall state later I prefer the words 'warranted assertibility'." John Dewey, *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (118).

I begin with the common expectation that I define my terms. This dissertation will address three major concepts: "rurality" "American Southern culture," and "literacy studies." Though I use these terms to inform my argument, I do not wish to ignore their complexity as discursive formations fraught with promising uncertainties. The thick, multiple, and competing definitions of the individual terms suggest continual attempts to own them and therefore demand an interrogation of the socio-history of the ideas and experiences behind them. Therefore, I will consider rural, Southern literacies as a matter of what John Dewey calls "warranted assertibility," the workable status of a term whose successful use is tested and continually won through inquiry (118). While these concepts are distinguishable, they are yet unfinished. The parameters of our definitions become knowable only as a consequence of their continual testing against new knowledge. In *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, Dewey writes that:

> Were it not that knowledge is related to inquiry as a product to the operations by which it is produced, no distinctions requiring special differentiating designations

1

would exist. Material would merely be a matter of knowledge or of ignorance and error; that would be all that could be said. The content of any given proposition would have the values 'true' and 'false' as final and exclusive attributes. But if knowledge is related to inquiry as its warrantably assertible product, and if inquiry is progressive and temporal, then the material inquired into reveals distinctive properties which need to be designated by distinction names. As undergoing inquiry, the material has a different logical import from that which it has as the outcome of inquiry. (118-119)

Since this dissertation is primarily an inquiry, I do not intend to nail down my key terms but rather investigate how they have been used, habitually interpreted, and ultimately attached to powerful connotative beliefs.

The warranted assertibililty approach demands not only recognition of the instability of definitions but also a careful reflection on their contextual history and the ideologies behind their renaming. I linger over terminology here because it can help explain why the study of rural, Southern literacies, particularly in the composition classroom, is ripe for discursive investigation. To better understand why rurality has been virtually ignored in the academy, I must get a better understanding of who has been assigning definitions to the term and why. Since the interpreter ultimately determines meaning in knowledge making, it is important to understand real examples of these terms at work. Through multiple inquiries, I hope to achieve a kind of "warranted assertibility" for rural, Southern literacies in composition studies. How have the individual terms functioned in particular contexts up to this point? How might we use these accumulated interpretative layers to our advantage as composition teachers? What warrants the assertion of "rural, Southern literacies" pedagogically?

Ann Berthoff's description of meaning making supports my call for a more contextual investigation of my terms. Berthoff describes meaning making as *necessarily* chaotic and relative, and as Rosenblatt suggests, always mediated by an interpreter. Berthoff's work accounts for the overwhelming importance of the interpreter's experience in navigating the world/establishing beliefs through language (43). She stresses the interdependence of the interpreter and symbol, concluding that the best way to understand the process of meaning is by examining language since it gives us the "power of memory and envisagement" (92). Memory and envisagement ultimately allow for the seeming stability of definition. However, it is impossible to escape the perspective of the interpreter in this process of defining, and our definitions can become dangerous when we forget just how fragile and interdependent language is. Interpreters do not often arrive at new conclusions without prompting but rely on personal experiences and common beliefs as they read the world. Since memory and envisagement are responsible for our definitions and indeed our common beliefs, I pursue an understanding of what it means to be rural and Southern via historical accounts and analyses of persistent language and attitudes surrounding this culture.

Experience enables meaning. The kind of experience we bring to bear affects how we interpret what we encounter. Some never notice that they are interpreting their world via their past experiences; others see nothing *but* their past experience as they interpret new texts and contexts. For example, those who feel keenly the cultural stigmatization of their home place struggle to make room for the residue of place they carry with them into new contexts. Most interpreters rely on past experience – ethnic, geographic, racial, class,

gender, etc. roots – to inform their identity. When our past experience habitually differs from what we come in contact with, we may have a more difficult time negotiating the dissonance in order to make meaning successfully. So much depends then on "where we are coming from" in both literal and figurative ways, not only as students but as academics as well.

Therefore, in this study, I conduct a kind of archeological exploration reminiscent of Michel Foucault's work with discursive formations. I work to unearth the contextual layers of meaning that have come to define rural Southerners in the university. Foucault writes in *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, that because knowledge is discourse, what we regard as truth, definitions, and certainty depends upon the socio-historical and discursive system through which the interrogation moves, the conditions of that utterance. Foucault writes that knowledge is created through "relations . . . between institutions, economic and social processes, behavioral patterns, systems of norms, techniques, types of classification, modes of characterization; and these relations are not present in the object" (qtd. in Bizzell and Herzberg 1439). Beneath an individual subject's consciousness, discursive formations operate, describing systems of thought and knowledge governed by rules that are embedded even deeper than grammar and logic. These formations define the conceptual possibilities and boundaries of thought in a given period, what is and is not possible: "discourse is not the majestically unfolding manifestation of a thinking, knowing, speaking subject, but on the contrary a totality, in which the dispersion of the subject and his discontinuity with himself may be determined" (qtd in Bizzell and Herzberg 1444). Bizzell and Herzberg note that Foucault:

forcefully states that discourse is a form of social action, demonstrating the 'microphysics of power' that resides in the knowledge that is disseminated in discourse and embodied in laws, regulations, texts, and in the very architecture of hospitals, schools, and prisons, showing how seemingly diverse discourses come together in formations that affect social practices and social controls. (1434-35)

Foucault suggests, then, that definitions are in fact fundamentally reliant on social contexts, namely the "given domain and time period," as well as the ideological forces at play. Social context dictates how much we can challenge our most abiding beliefs.

From these observations, we can conclude that a definition can stand only as a matter of the interpreter's imposed connection between the word and the thing it describes. Therefore, pursuing conclusive definitions will not give us the full picture of the process of meaning. When we are dealing with oft-used terms with rich and deeply embedded connotations, we should be even more conscious of their context and history. We can better understand our terms if we investigate the habits of mind and beliefs responsible for those agreed upon meanings and if we turn our attention to the interpreter's role in the establishment of definitions and the institutional "givens" that dictate the boundaries of those definitions.

Place-holding Terms

Even though we recognize the danger of too conclusive definitions, we cannot escape them. In fact, we need them to get along. Since making meaning (which can include any form of confronting "texts") involves a confrontation with ambiguity, we are both hungry for and repulsed by the feigned stability of definitions. As composition

teachers we often flinch at the phrase, "Webster's dictionary defines," that sometimes opens our students' work. As scholars, we are often primed to question the carefully crafted definitions our colleagues provide in their research. As citizens, we are impelled to criticize the policy of our civic representatives. Why this impulse as a reader to shirk definition, to challenge it, and to work against it? As rhetors, we are encouraged to stake our claim, to demonstrate where in the "conversation" we are intervening, and to carefully define our terms. Why, then, is there a simultaneous urge as an author to impose definition, to will it into existence, and to take a stand?

Kenneth Burke's explanation of identification as articulated in *A Rhetoric of Motives* might get us closer to understanding, if not definition itself, then the conditions surrounding it, the motivation behind it. Definition is driven by the desire to identify, to distinguish one from another. For Burke, the desire to identify emerges as the result of our inability to be "substantially one" with our world, to know without struggle, to exist in an Eden-like state of complete and utter truth. It is the differences the world presents in something as basic as colors, something as subtle as human personality, or something as relevant to my study as where one lives that creates the impulse to identify or find a sense of individual purpose by working *with* or *against* the qualities of others. We notice enough patterns of similarity to compel us to commune, but we simultaneously encounter enough differences to wince and struggle with the picture presented. This state of dissonance – the simultaneous will to identify and repel – is named by Burke as the "characteristic invitation to rhetoric," and therewith the invitation to communicate, the conception site of language (25). Definitions are therefore rhetorical artifacts.

6

By investigating the rhetorical situation of my terms, I can come to better understand how division and faction have informed their meaning, investigating not only what they are but what they are not. Language gives us a way to articulate division and faction, and rhetoric makes these associations and disassociations possible. Berthoff extends Burke's explanation of rhetoric, reminding us that "rhetoric is what we do instead of omniscience" (43). Rhetoric is what keeps us moving along; it is what enables the continual renewal of truth, and "continual renewal" is an important distinction and one that we feel to be true even if we must cling to definitions to help us get along.

Using Burke's theory of identification as a model, I test the "warranted assertibility" of "rural, Southern literacies," how and why scholars often rely on stagnant associations rather than apply doubt and inquiry to existing beliefs about this culture. Rural, Southern literacies operate as a telling rhetorical counterpoint or "other" to standard academic qualities with which contemporary scholars most hope to identify: urbane, Northern (Ivy League), arcane. Instead of accepting the exclusion of rural Southern literacies, we should be asking: Why do scholars find the rural Southerner intellectually repellant? When and why do scholars find value in and "identify" with the literacies of rural Southern populations? Such questions help us to move beyond dead beliefs that inform dead definitions. These inquiries awake us to the rhetorical circumstances/social contexts that inform our reception of these concepts, namely how rural Southern literacies work as both rhetorical point and counter-point for American academics as they struggle to define themselves. As a discursive formation, this system of thought has gone unchallenged for some time.

In *Rural Literacies*, Kim Donehower, Charlotte Hogg, and Eileen Schell attempt to solve the shiftiness of the term,"rurality," by using what they call quantitative, geographic, and cultural iterations. In their opening chapter, "Constructing Rural Literacies," Donehower, et. al. define "rural" as a "quantitative measure, involving statistics on population and region as described by the U.S. Census; as a geographic term denoting particular regions and areas or spaces and places; and as a cultural term, one that involves the interaction of people in groups and communities (2). In this dissertation, I locate "rural" as primarily a cultural term, one in which both the quantitative and geographic become subsumed by the more qualitative performance of cultural identification.

I invoke the term "rural" because many students willingly embrace the descriptor, though the concept is dependent upon individual and varied cultural associations. For example, while one may not statistically or geographically qualify as "rural," one may still feel the association due to family ties or roots. I use the same approach in my treatment of "Southern" as a descriptor. Though one may live in Appalachian Pennsylvania, one may feel more kinship to the American South as a consequence of shared literacy values as "mountain folk." While the statistical and geographic properties of the terms are important for accuracy in some contexts, for my purposes, it is not so much a matter of who does or does not qualify as "rural, Southern" but more so how and why people do or do not *choose* to identify with the descriptor, specifically in academic contexts. In short, it is this identification or disidentification that is of most importance as it points to a shared and specific set of knowledge, values, and needs, as well as literacy

8

behaviors. In this way, my attention will not be directed at only the interpretative symbol (the definition) but rather the interpretational process as a whole (the conditions that afford these terms warranted assertibility). I will primarily focus on those moments when the university, as dominant culture, has defined itself using rural, Southern cultures as a counter-point.

Since "literacy" also demands a concrete definition, Donehower, et. al. use Deborah Brandt's modern interpretation to anchor their use of the term: "the skills and practices needed to gain knowledge, evaluate and interpret that knowledge, and apply knowledge to accomplish particular goals" (4). As this description attests, literacy scholars have amended stricter definitions of literacy as solely reading and writing to include now any skills and practices that accomplish goals related to knowledge, paving the way for looser interpretations of literate behavior and hence the shift from the singular "literacy" to the plural "literacies." My treatment of literacies here depends upon this more lenient, contemporary approach. By adding the "s," literacy scholars acknowledge that there are multiple ways to gain, evaluate, and apply knowledge. In the process, they also suggest that literacy is inherently cultural and political. Therefore, when scholars investigate a culture's literacies, they must simultaneously investigate that culture's relative position in the socio-cultural hierarchy from which they operate.

Definitions of literacy now must be qualified by a discussion of interpreter stance and the interpretative process: the three dimensionality of literacy as a discursive formation. When we speak of literacies, we are not only discussing how a group handles knowledge transmission but also how and why a particular interpretative agent has the

power to evaluate and compare another culture's specific transmission of knowledge with other literate systems. Scholars must address the questions: what are the socio-historical conditions that enable this naming process? What gives agent x the power to observe and report on the literacy habits of agent y?

In this way, definition becomes an on-going discursive performance rather than a closed product. We can trace distinct definitions to particular social scripts born of particular social contexts. The Western definition of literacy is obviously not definitive, though the dominance of Western culture certainly makes it seem so. Just as it is often cheering to remember that Noah Webster was a real person, our common beliefs about what does and does not count as knowledge are just as fragilely human. I wish to unearth the multiple reasons for the tense relationship between rural Southerners and the academy, and trace the ways in which their distrust of one another has in fact helped to strengthen the distinct, cultural identities of each. When I discuss "rural, Southern literacies," then, I simultaneously address three dimensions: 1) the way knowledge is habitually handled by rural, Southern peoples 2) how and why those literate habits are received and evaluated by institutions of authority, and 3) how rural Southerners' awareness of their place in the literacy hierarchy affects the tone and temper of their literate behaviors as a reflexive consequence. I explain the relevance of each facet in the following sections: I. Mapping Rural, Southern Literacies, II. Questioning Long-standing Concepts and Authorities, and III. Incorporating Rural Southern Literacies in the Composition Classroom.

Mapping Rural, Southern Literacies

The study of Digital Literacies has become popular in recent years, though you will not find much about it in my dissertation. I begin by addressing an area of study about which I know very little in order to provide a quick example of the kinds of questions Rhetoric and Composition scholars currently find of most value. I also hope to make clear my angle of scholarly intervention, which will be characterized by a running meta-cognitive analysis of how we assign value as academics, how scholars choose where the most promising research is to be found. Scholars who specialize in Digital Literacies investigate how people, including teachers, use digital technologies to transmit knowledge and track the emergence of habits and values specific to particular digital media. Rhetoric scholars who specialize in this area often analyze the rhetorical effects of technologies on concepts like identity, community, and language. As evidence of this growing trend in the area of Rhetoric and Composition, the 2010 Conference on College Composition and Communication hosted at least 24 panels which treated the subject of "digital literacies" in the teaching of Composition. Additionally, the 2011 conference proposal guidelines offer an entire area cluster for "Information Technologies." This separate distinction suggests that computer-based literacies and other digitial contexts are just as central to our field as "The Teaching of Writing and Rhetoric," "History," "Theory," and even "Research."

It is really little wonder that the cutting edge of rhetoric and literacy studies would be found in the study of our newest and most unusual technologies and media, i.e. Twitter, Skype, Facebook, e-Portfolio, and more. Academic study is predicated on the

concepts of "progress" and novelty. The buzz surrounding digital literacies is understandable since these technologies offer us new ways to think about how we make meaning. However, our preoccupation with the "new," the technologically current, could signal our inattention to other literacy habits, notably those which are perceived as resoundingly non-technical, archaic even. In straining to anticipate the "next new thing," scholars may forget that our past and familiar present can be just as rich with research ideas as our emerging presents and projected futures. Like the giddy schoolgirl who pursues the exciting boy from another school instead of the familiar boy next-door, scholars are sometimes too quick to discount the value of local people, places, and ideas.

In the roots of the term, "technology," we may find Aristotle's *techne*, which is often referred to as "craft," "skill," or "art." Though they drew a distinction between episteme (theory) and technê (practice), ancient philosophers generally considered the two reliant on one another, separately identified but mutually dependent. Aristotle interchanges technê with epistêmê or knowledge because it describes practice grounded in an 'account' — something involving theoretical understanding ("Aristotle"). When we discuss "technology," then, it is perhaps helpful to remember that "knowledge grounded in practice" need not be scientifically progressive. Technology describes a particular set of skills or demonstrated familiarity with a particular art or trade. Literacy is the performative element of technology, how people get things done. Literacy scholars should be careful not to become too starstruck with novel technologies. There are equally promising research possibilities with technologies from contexts that are not so overtly new.

Cynthia Selfe of Ohio State University uses digital literacies as a way to understand how people have learned to read, write, and know. Her work serves as an interesting mediation of "old" and "new" literacies. Selfe has launched a large-scale effort to capture literacy narratives of people from all walks of life digitally via her Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives project. Using digital video, Selfe represents a broader base of literacies, by asking people of various ages, backgrounds, ethnicities to share their literacy narrative on camera in the spirit of self-disclosure[1]. Selfe's work importantly reminds us that people come to know how they know in many different ways. Her work also suggests that literacies describe not just the medium through which we transmit knowledge but the cultural context through which those media operate. Amidst these exciting considerations of technological literacies and in the spirit of Cynthia Selfe's commitment to multiple literacy narratives, I propose an examination of a familiar cultural literacy that has been overlooked because of its lack of technological clout. Economically disadvantaged and removed from the center of civilization (Northern and urban), rural Southerners generally have less access to the technologies touted as "cutting edge." As a result, academics have often ignored rural Southern literacies in favor of the new, the digital, and the heady promise of a technological future.

In this dissertation, I argue that rural and Southern cultures deserve scholarly attention because even though they are used repeatedly as an "other" reference point, cultures against which many mainstream Americans traditionally position their identity in their quest for progress, they are virtually ignored in the academy. Rural Southerners

---

[1] For further information, consult the Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives homepage at http://daln.osu.edu/ where one can submit and view existing narratives.

have become an easy target for many Americans who identify the culture as anti-intellectual, ignorant, and intolerant. While these beliefs may have historically valid origins, they unfortunately saddle contemporary rural Southerners with a burden of cultural embarrassment and insecurity about their home literacies. University students who hail from rural, Southern backgrounds find themselves in a precarious position in their classrooms when they are confronted by traditional academic values, which sometimes actively and deliberately work against their specific cultural values. It seems especially important to identify those cultures whose literacies clash with traditional academic values since through this process we, as academics, can specifically question existing systems and incumbent beliefs.

My dissertation generally considers the marginal position of rural, Southern students in our national consciousness as well as their specific casting in the university. In an attempt to make sense of the cultural politics that defines the rural Southerner, I examine the way the culture has figured in our consciousness historically. My central claim is that Americans traditionally align the urban North with progress while the rural South serves as the antithesis to intellectualism and forward-thinking. Using James Dabbs' *Who Speaks for the South?*, I suggest that Southerners, from the moment of landing in Jamestown, arrived on this land-mass with different philosophical goals than their northern counterparts.

Other national incidents have contributed to the rural Southerner's marginalization. Clearly, Americans malign the South as a consequence of the Civil War and the struggles of the Civil Rights Movement. Southerners are familiar with this

disdain and often embarrassed by the association. The South's role in both national

events affirmed beliefs in the lowliness of the culture: lazy, stubborn, obtuse, and violent.

I use W.J. Cash's *The Mind of the South* to further illuminate the ways in which the South

has come to symbolize anti-intellectualism and de-evolution of a sort.

Rural populations have a longer, more varied history of cultural devaluation than

American Southerners, reaching back to the very beginnings of civilization. The country

has at times represented both idyllic comfort and frightening backwardness. The city has

at times represented chaos and immorality as well as excitement and growth. In Chapter

II, using Barbara Ching and Gerald Creed's "Recognizing Rusticity: Identity and the

Power of Place," I introduce the division between country and city, civilization and

rusticity that informs the devaluation of the rural student in university contexts. Ching

and Creed argue that place can be metaphoric, that it need not be tied to geography (7 and

12). This discovery lends weight to the idea that place is a cultural marker, that it can be

transported. When a person identifies with a place, he or she inherits the cultural politics

of that place and becomes thus defined.

My dissertation also suggests that rural Southerners offer a different set of

literacies from that which we currently value as academics. In their day-to-day lives, rural

Southerners value informality, homogeneity, sustainability, and rootedness. Many rural

Southerners seek simplicity in their work, family, religion, and education as a way of dis-

identifying with the fast-paced, alienating lifestyle of the Northern city. They often

celebrate unfavorable stereotypes assigned them in an effort to ironically reclaim their

cultural identity. Southern, or "rebel" pride often works from the premise that the rural

South should set itself apart from the urban North, claiming its "Southernness" and

rusticity by casting itself as a comfortable, friendly place that values God, nature, and

modesty – not getting "above one's raising." It is perhaps this inclination to hold back, to

not make a fuss, to avoid "charity" that has made the rural Southerner fade into the

periphery as a figure of cultural interest in academia. Nevertheless the separation between

the North and the South, the country and the city remains culturally relevant. Hank

Williams Jr., a Southern "cult" hero, outlines this distinction in his hit song, "Dixie on

my Mind," in which he describes a rural Southerner alienated and homesick in New York

City:

> If this is the promised land,
> I've had all I can stand,
> And I'm headed back below that Dixie line
> Well I just don't fit in,
> And I'll never come back again,
> I'm busted here with Dixie on my mind. (Williams)

It is impossible to define rural Southern literacies apart from their conflicted place in our

national consciousness as antithetical to the North, the city, and the progressive "center."

With these observations in mind, I investigate the way rural Southerners transmit

knowledge and the ways in which their literacy approaches have been historically

received by the academy.

Questioning Long-Standing Concepts and Authorities

A second aim is to locate where the rural Southerner may belong in our field of

study. Since Cultural Studies has helped to open Rhetoric and Composition Studies to

alternative epistemologies both theoretically and pedagogically, I begin by considering the discipline's scope and reach. While I acknowledge Cultural Studies as a stand-alone branch of English studies, I also use it as a label for the critically conscious trend that swept through English departments in the 1980s and continues to inform critical-feminist and liberatory pedagogies, as well as special topics courses and the development of the unofficial, "other" canon. As I make clear in Chapter II, I intend not to celebrate the Cultural Studies mission – though I do value what it has accomplished – but rather to ask how and why it has inspired scholars to value certain fringe cultures above others.

The study of rural, Southern populations has heretofore been subsumed under the category of Appalachian Studies, a rarely encountered branch of Cultural Studies. Appalachian Studies programs are typically found in universities that are located within or close by the Appalachian region of America. However, Appalachian Studies does not cover the experiences of all rural, Southerners, and even though Southern Literature concentrations in English departments study their regional texts, the culture of the rural South has not been given the theoretical treatment that other traditionally marginalized groups have received in universities across the country. Unlike African-American Studies, Feminist Studies, Queer Theory, or even Post-Colonial Studies, the study of the white, rural Southerner does not have a permanent home in university English departments. I find it urgently important that we incorporate rural Southern literacies in our discussions of marginal cultures, especially in light of the now waning interest in Cultural Studies in the field of Rhetoric and Composition. I wish to suggest that our work is not complete in this research area.

Since scholars have arguably removed marginalization and "other" studies from their desks as "of the moment" theories of interest, I find it necessary to consider the "other" in a different, more rhetorical way, via Kenneth Burke and George Herbert Mead's work in meaning-making and identification. In Chapter II, using the notion of division and faction as outlined by Burke's theory of identification, I work to reveal how othering persists in our English departments, though we may no longer actively entertain alterity as an urgent scholarly pursuit.

Our beliefs about what does and does count as academically worthy stem from our basic ideas about what is and is not progressive. The rural South is often set in opposition to progressive values because as Dengler notes, the modern distinctiveness of the South has its origins in the remote past (7). Chapter III investigates national narratives of progress and literacy and the institutions responsible for their shape and scope, namely the university and the church. By examining the historical relationship of the church and the university, I demonstrate the ways in which they have, in turn, challenged one another and maintained surprisingly similar goals. Both aim to enlighten, though for the university, this role of "benevolent patron" is often less apparent, hidden by perhaps intellectually nobler pursuits of inquiry and advancement. Yet, both institutions openly challenge individuals' confidence in local knowledge and ways of knowing. Both ask outliers to look towards the "light." This ever-future promise of truth translates to what we know to be progress. The church figures prominently in the rural South as an institutional refuge of sorts, while the university is heralded alternatively as both a panacea and a threat.

In an effort to extend the contextualization of profoundly large and familiar concepts, I also examine literacy as it has operated through the church and the university. Literacy is by default ideological. It operates as the way in which institutions identify who is "in" and who is "out," who participates in progress narratives and who works against them. Definitions of literacy tell us baldly who has power and who has not. Literacy is perhaps more readily applicable to what we know of the university, identifying those who can read versus those who cannot, for example. However, literacy is also part of the religious agenda, identifying who has been "saved" and who has not, who knows the "word" and who does not. Literacy, in any form, describes gate-keeping that insures cultural power and unity. It need not be negative, but it will always be ideological. When we consider those groups most valued by the university, specifically by our English departments, we must think of how and why their literacies jibe with our agenda, while others are ignored or forgotten.

Incorporating Rural, Southern Literacies in the Composition Classroom

My final aim is to offer ways in which we might incorporate rural Southern literacies into our scholarship and teaching. Multiple literacies can be represented in the class space via the inclusion of regional texts or authors in the syllabus, but I argue that these "add-ons" do little more than reify the culture's existing otherness. My contention is that we can build rural, Southern literacies into the very fiber of our pedagogies. By examining literacy behaviors which generally define rural, Southern cultures, we can articulate a series of classroom behaviors that will directly and critically speak to those

values. We can similarly fold the rural, Southern experience into our scholarship. The intimacy and informality that often characterizes rural Southern communities offer a unique research possibility for scholars.

Feminists have often challenged academic form with non-traditional methodologies[2]. Upon their acceptance in academic circles, feminists brought with them a necessary social history, which importantly called into question basic assumptions of research and traditional scholarship. Historically marginalized, rural, Southern literacies can be used just as feminine epistemologies have been used: to challenge existing methodologies via alternative forms that address culturally specific ways of knowing. In Chapter IV, I demonstrate such a form via an ethnography/dialogic literacy narrative.

The dialogic literacy narrative begins from the premise that a teacher-researcher and student share a common background; in my particular study, Fay and I both consider ourselves to be rural, Southern women in the university. Through the process of sharing personal experiences related to literacy experiences, student and teacher collaborate to form a single literacy narrative born of separate experiences. This newly forged research space is inspired by rural, Southern literacies: namely the impulse to "bond" rather than to "bridge." Rural, Southerners, though part of the United States' cultural diversity, are often characterized by their ethnic, religious, and political homogeneity *within* their communities. Beginning from a position of sameness rather than difference is perhaps antithetical to some academic missions, but, just as feminist studies challenges scholars to

---

[2] Ellen Carol DuBois et. al.'s *Feminist Scholarship: Kindling in the Groves of Academe* gives a broad overview of feminism's process of acceptance in academic studies. DuBois et. al. also discuss how feminism's emergence as a social movement influenced its academic reception.

re-think existing methodologies, rural, Southern literacies ask us to re-consider existing forms. Dialogic or collaborative literacy narratives provide one way scholars can use rural, Southern literacies to inform their scholarship.

To argue for the inclusion of "place-focused" literacies in our classrooms, I make central in Chapter V the importance of context or place in the rhetorical situation. Context can describe not only where we are when we communicate but how socio-historical forces have conspired to determine the register of a particular rhetorical moment. Similarly, the interpreter in the interpretative moment or the speaker in the rhetorical moment, are not simply points on a triangle but representatives of a particular socio-historical position that will determine the tenor of the communicative/interpretative situation. Geographic or home literacy values factor in as part of the context that proliferates the rhetorical situation, as do broader ideological conditions.

Throughout the dissertation, I consider the role of experience in the composing behaviors of students, lingering primarily over students who arrive at the university aware of their cultural marginalization. I use Mina Shaughnessy and Louise Rosenblatt to support my contention that composition teachers should use students' backgrounds to inform their research and teaching. In parts, I argue that marginalized students are often intimately acquainted with "double-consciousness," W.E.B. DuBois' term describing the divided sense of the African-American as an overtly marginalized population. Double-consciousness offers for students a kind of built-in critical consciousness, what Paulo Freire calls *conscientização*, which if acknowledged and used, could help students who

see themselves as culturally disadvantaged feel more competent and engaged in the composition classroom.

As with other marginalized groups, rural Southerners are meta-cognitively aware of their cultural marginalization. As Jacqueline Burnside writes, "being oppressed because of one's marginal status of race, gender, and social class creates defensive skills that evolve as part of a strategy for social mobility" (140). Rural Southerners feel a similar defensiveness as a result of their geographic and cultural marginalization and their struggle to escape these perceived limitations. Though born from discrimination, this divided perception anticipates the reflexivity and critical reflection composition teachers often work to cultivate in their students. Therefore, as instructors, we should openly discuss marginalization and the necessity of the other with our students, making transparent to them the forces which constitute the rhetorical situation. Such conversations can validate student experiences and leverage existing critical impulses.

In closing, I rely heavily on the work of Myles Horton of the Highlander Folk School and Paulo Freire as I propose a "rural pedagogy." Though there has been some grumbling about the contemporary relevance of Freire,[3] I argue that the distinctive value of his critical pedagogy is its adaptability, the way in which it can be "remade," continually renewed to address the needs of *any* marginalized group at any point in time whose interests are eclipsed. For my purposes, I use the work of Freire and the equally relevant, Horton to design a pedagogical theory that, though it specifically values the literacies of rural Southerners, also provides a rich, philosophical approach for teaching

---

[3] See Richard Miller's "The Arts of Complicity: Pragmatism and the Culture of Schooling."

any population. This pedagogical theory is informed by sensitivity to context, reliance on student experience, and enactment of literacy values traditionally aligned with rural populations. Both Horton and Freire separately made similar discoveries as rural educators: 1) a teacher who ignores the concrete nature of his or her students' situation further widens the gap between; 2) educators cannot expect global results without local engagement, and 3) reflexivity and dialogue lead to solidarity between teacher and student, a necessary union for education to work beyond superficial instruction. I use these discoveries as the basis for my proposition for a different brand of "place" pedagogy.

Where might rural Southern literacies fit into our English departments? Chapter II, "Academic Marginalia" discusses the way in which the "other" has worked in our departments through the deliberate work of Cultural Studies and the non-deliberate sublimation of sub-fields. By considering the fractures in English departments between traditional literature studies and Rhetoric and Composition studies, I point out the ways in which scholars tend to parse out values of legitimacy. This chapter questions long-standing values of academic objectivity – by no means a new idea -- from the perspective of rural, Southern culture – a decidedly new interpretative position. In Chapter III, "Literacy, Progress, and Sublimation in the Rural South," I work to challenge the narratives of progress which define academy study and have traditionally marginalized rural Southerners. I compare the university to the church, as institutionally both have figured prominently in the lives of rural Southerners. Both institutions have used and at times, exploited, the rural South for missionary efforts, signaling the culture's historical

and national importance as designated other. I argue here that the rural South in all its stereotypical poverty, dogmatism, and backwardness is essential to maintaining national narratives of progress and advancement of both the terrestrial and celestial sort in the United States. Chapter IV, "An Ethnographic Study and Reflection on Being Rural, Southern, and Academic" is a case study of Fay, a college senior who identifies as rural and Southern and discusses the ways in which the residue of her background has affected her academic experience. This chapter also demonstrates a potentially new research methodology – the collaborative literacy narrative. Dialogic in nature, my project with Fay involves a kind of give-and-take as she and I share common experiences and come to understand our position as rural, Southern academics in the process. My final chapter, "Rural Contexts, Compositions, and Pedagogies," makes central the importance of context or place in the rhetorical situation and articulates the possibility of a rural pedagogy through the examples of Myles Horton of Highlander Folk School and Paulo Freire.

CHAPTER II

ACADEMIC MARGINALIA

Since the mid-1980s, the Cultural Studies trend has inspired a commitment to

ideological awareness in liberal studies. Stuart Hall notes that the political agenda of

Cultural Studies involves a "determination to stake out some positions within it and argue

for them" (264). Through this reclamation of space, scholars call attention to places of

union and disunion between cultural groups, not with the intent of mending them but

rather with the intent of exposing and normalizing pluralism, to a degree, through

recurring ideological analyses that reveal disproportionate power distribution. A quick

consideration of Queer and Feminist Studies might help to explain this critical agenda. As

Levinas[4] and other theorists who are associated with the movement note, Cultural Studies

is informed by a basic critique of absolute truth, particularly as the concept is enacted in

socio-political contexts (Zylinska 15). Teachers and scholars committed to the Cultural

Studies project identify the heterogeneity of human relationships when possible and

theorize the dissonance they see. The object, then, is not simply to celebrate the

oppressed but to push those in dominant cultural positions to question their own relation

to power.

---

[4] The concept of alterity was established by Emmanual Levinas in a series of essays entitled, *Alterity and Transcendence,* originally published in 1970.

As evidence of this critical impulse, Cultural Studies has encouraged an overhaul of the Western canon in English departments. Scholars, publishers, and critics sympathetic to the Cultural Studies cause work to include authors from non-traditional backgrounds in the developing canon as a way to account for those cultures whose values and literacies have been traditionally ignored or even derided. For critically conscious scholars, the real work is to be done on the margins with those groups whom mainstream academic and critical inquiry has left behind. Other disciplines which are tangentially-associated with English departments (Communication Studies, Sociology, Anthropology, and others) have demonstrated the same ideological sensitivity by incorporating non-standard cultural values and knowledge in their research and teaching.

As part of this trend, literacy scholars, for example, no longer focus their attention as much on the teaching of standard reading and writing skills. Self-reflexivity is now an integral part of literacy research. Literacy studies take into account, almost as a rule, power and the relationship of margin to center in any literacy mission. As theorists like Elspeth Stuckey have noted, the study and teaching of literacy are ultimately "regulations of access" in both theoretical and practical contexts (19). While Cultural Studies relies on ideology as its theoretical raison d'être, literacy studies, with an eye towards social justice and action, often serves as the practical realization of these theories, performing a telling account of the relationship of cultures and power at any given moment. Scholars now realize that to democratically educate, educators can no longer feign neutrality or objectivity; as representatives of the academy, they must disclose personal prejudice and privilege in order to honestly consider culture's role in knowledge transmission. Now

more comfortable with the field's ideological instability, literacy scholars have come to understand that fallibility and personal accountability come with the territory and can in fact work to sustain their scholarship by demanding questions such as, how do we decide who lives in the margins, and who are we to make that judgment?

Clearly, an inherently problematic part of this aim is the inevitability of the shifting center and the burning question of just who lives in the margins. When marginalized parties move towards the center, when power distributions change, what becomes of the center, and who, then, is to be found in the margins? If the goal is to democratically recognize the literacy values of various cultural groups, the necessary question becomes: "how do academics choose who to include in this 'other' canon?" Though it seems counterintuitive, we might generally assume that when cultural/literacy studies scholars avoid a particular group, they are signaling its dominance rather than its marginalization. A proposal for a Caucasian studies department, for example, would never take off, of course, because we have made the assumption, rightly, that Caucasians already own major stock in the center, and those who occupy the center do not demand the kinds of social justice that those shoved to the margins require. Yet, even the most liberal and self-critical scholars have failed to account for those blind spots created by this paradigm, perhaps straining their attention too far outside the figurative center, mistakenly assuming that the most foreign populations are the most marginalized, the most requiring attention.

Recent efforts by Kim Donehower, Charlotte Hogg, Eileen Schell and Katherine Sohn and others suggest that rural student literacy historically has not been taken up with

any real seriousness. In *Rural Literacies*, Donehower, et. al. re-examine the way we think of rural populations and have proposed a way we might use them in the classroom for just as rich a critical examination as has proved possible with other cultural foci including women, minorities, blue collar classes, and even urban populations. Though most universities enroll rural students, they rarely validate that population's experience, unlike the habitual acknowledgement of other anthologized, "alternative" discourses, including feminist, African-American, Hispanic, and even urban literacies. Heretofore the rural experience has been discounted as a validly othered population even though its culture's literacies conflict with that of the academy in obvious ways. Contemporary rural, *Southern* populations are even less academically fashionable.

A quick scan of any publisher's catalog of Composition readers with a Cultural Studies bent reveals the absence of Southern rurality as a focused theme[5]. If, in a cultural reader, there is *any* nod to rurality, it is usually through the cursory "nature" section, which may include essays from nature writers like Annie Dillard and Henry David Thoreau. Such selections offer little on the current cultural realities of rural peoples beyond their time spent prowling the woods. This is not to say that the contemporary rural Southern experience is completely missing from Composition anthologies. However, more likely than not the rural South is left behind in favor of stories from the rural West, in settings like Indian reservations and desert towns.

The absence of white, rural, Southern students in prominent discussions of individual agency, identity, and resistance suggests that traditionally they have been

---

[5] See *Reading City Life,* edited by Patrick Bruch and Richard Marback (2005), and *The City Reader*, edited by Richard LeGates and Frederic Stout from the Routledge Urban Reader Series (2003) for a start.

associated with the dominant cultural center, that academics need not stake a position for them because they either already have that claim or perhaps do not qualify for such petitioning at all. In pausing to consider the sub-fields in English study that have emerged as a consequence of the Cultural Studies movement (African-American Studies, Post-Colonialism, Women's Studies, Queer Theory, etc.), where might the rural, Southerner belong? There seems to be no argument that this group qualifies as disadvantaged. They have been culturally disenfranchised as a matter of economic exploitation, and most importantly, they have been devoured by the urban, academic cultural norm responsible, in part, for their persistent stereotyping. However, beyond Southern Literature and the rare Appalachian Studies concentration, mainstream university students have little to no awareness of this group as a valid member of the now given heterogeneity of academic studies.

This dissertation aims, in part, to address this blind spot in Cultural Studies through an investigation of what it means to be "literate" as a rural Southerner. Literacy no longer simply describes how one interprets and uses knowledge. Literacy studies now demand a contextual consideration of literate behaviors. Not only are we examining how people communicate; we are analyzing how their method of communication is culturally valued or devalued. We must recognize the implicit presence of a hierarchy and identify how and why non-standard literacies become peripheral.

Reclaiming "Otherness"

By calling attention to a specific group of people based on certain cultural associations, I am participating in a tradition of othering over which I have little control. Othering is inherently problematic. In one sense, it can seem to be an embarrassing oversight, in another, a useful, theoretical way to understand intersubjectivity. Admittedly, writing about rural or Southern students as "others" may lead to disfavor from some academics in the field: those who want to move completely away from now unfashionable theories of alterity; those who find problematic what Stefan Collini calls "victim studies" and perhaps those who have grown tired of non-academic literacies because they cannot find the leverage or means to effectively act on them (qtd. in Rorty 79).

Now pervasive, the other also carries with it some connotative unpleasantness, namely the belief that it is reaching its expiration date in the way of research possibilities. English scholars took up the post-modern concept of subjectivity with some fervor in the 1990s, often anchoring their work in race and gender theory. Now that English departments have embraced once peripheral areas of study such as race and gender theory, the push to understand the cultural other has lost its intensity even though the concept still has relevance, perhaps even more so now that our previous "others" are inching out of the margins and into the shared, "center" purview. Since many Cultural Studies agendas take a position of social activism, academics have also tired of the perceived antagonism that accompanies discussions of alterity. Additionally, Cultural Studies efforts are often results-driven but quickly become mired in theoretical

30

abstractions. In "An Excess of Alterity?: Debating Difference in a Multi-cultural Society," Ralph Grillo points out that the backlash against alterity across disciplines is in part due to the reliance on "fuzzy concepts [such as] integration, multi-culturalism, diversity and difference" (980). Some academics have understandably lost interest in Cultural Studies.

However, most academics would also agree that issues of subjectivity, alterity, and marginalization will not go away. The nature of academic marginalia will change as the socio-historical context changes, and as such, the cultures that comprise our Cultural Studies agenda will subsequently change. Unlike those literary studies dictated by time period, the "what" of Cultural Studies must by nature evolve. It is not just general approaches to scholarship that change (as is the case in any academic field), but the content itself that must be radically and often reassessed. To account for shifting academic marginalia, then, academic scholars who value the aims of Cultural Studies must critically account for themselves. Where Cultural Studies scholars direct their gaze can influence who, over time, gets left out of the conversation; thus, it as much our responsibility to critically analyze our own values as it is to critically analyze and interpret other subjects. In short, as academics and institutional representatives, we are a part of the subject we study. Apart from the disciplinary necessity of self-reflection, in a practical sense, we must be critically and personally accountable to prevent discriminatory practices that might work against our humanist mission.

We might alleviate the anxiety of otherness by making peace with its inevitability. The idea of the other is integral to meaning-making and consciousness and therefore must

be constantly negotiated as it functions contextually. The *contextual* aspect of the theorized other is the terrain I wish to map. I use "contextual" to denote local conditions since oddly, as scholars, it is often the most familiar, the most readily observable and verifiable that we find most objectionable. Yet, in the "everyday" we often find the most immediately compelling problems. Over the past decade, scholars have used alterity as a way to discuss cultural relations, yet most have turned their attention to global communities[6]. By investigating the role of the other in our everyday experiences as English academics, we may better understand how the other informs what we do and perhaps in the process, how the Cultural Studies mission to acknowledge the interplay of culture and power touches on long-standing issues in our discipline and departments.

To fully appreciate the value of the other in our work, it is necessary to consider how the concept of the other affects our common experiences. Charles Sanders Peirce suggests that the meaning of a clear idea consists in the entire set of its practical consequences, which implies that meaning is only meaning inasmuch as it has some sort of experiential "cash value," to the degree it can be related to empirical observations under specifiable conditions ("Charles Sanders Peirce"). This pragmatic reliance on experience extends to the belief that we can arrive at a better estimation of truth through multiple and varied examinations of experiences. The more experiences we can gather from multiple sources, multiple sites of inquiry, the more useful our conclusions. Note the attention to experience, to the observable and perhaps even the common. The ever-

---

[6] As an example, Ofalia Schuttte's "Cultural Alterity: Cross-Cultural Communication and Feminist Theory in North-South Contexts" from *Hypatia*, considers culturally differentiated positions between Latin America and the United States. In academia, the global context takes precedence since the concept of "North-South" means something far different in academic circles than it does locally for most Americans.

present other qualifies as a common and unavoidable aspect of human experience, one which we can better understand through an examination of relatively unexamined habits and beliefs in our discipline and departments. With this awareness of a hierarchy of otherness, it might be useful, then, to look at what English departments have considered, institutionally, valid and invalid fields of study.

If we can eliminate our sensitivity about the concept of the other, any ugly implications about power abuse or even general malaise with the term, we may notice its inevitability in both theory and practice and confront its presence with greater patience and intelligence. Ann Berthoff has noted that educational research must be predicated on a dialectic and dialogic foundation. The questions and answers must be continually re-formulated. It isn't a matter of finding new information, but of thinking about and reconsidering the information that we have in front of us (32-33). By pausing to reconsider the state of affairs in our departments, perhaps we can come to a better understanding of what we value and why, and since, as Berthoff points out, theory is there to help us explain what is already happening, before any serious kind of argument can be made, we must honestly report on the landscape (33). If discord and/or alterity cannot be eluded, we must search for the theory to explain its persistence. By examining existing patterns of marginalization, professionally, in terms of areas of study that inspire the most dissonance, perhaps we may begin to better understand the strange quiet on the rural Southern front.

Using the idea of *division and faction* as articulated by Kenneth Burke, I will explore the ways that rhetorical identification 1) informs the critical consciousness turn in

Rhetoric and Composition, 2) shapes our notions of academic and non-academic discourse, and 3) contributes to the failed consideration of the rural, Southern student. In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke asserts that if you put identification and division ambiguously together, so that you cannot know for certain just where one ends and the other begins, then you have "the characteristic invitation to rhetoric" (25). Rhetoric becomes, then, the ways in which individuals are at odds with one another or become identified with groups more or less at odds with one another. Thus, the impulse to identify is by the same token a confrontation of division. Marginalization occurs naturally, to a degree, as a result of our impulse to overcome division through rhetoric. It is not simply a bad habit we need to break, but rather for Burke, an essential motive of rhetoric and, for George Herbert Mead, an important component of the emergence of self. The dynamic of rhetoric and sociality works as a basic explanation for why we need the other and so leads to a consideration of which others we need and why.

"I am nothing without an(other)"

Kenneth Burke's theory of identification accounts for the rhetorical purpose of the other. According to Burke, *division and faction* define our lives through language. George Herbert Mead's theories of social behaviorism explain the necessity of the "other" in the habitual construction of a seemingly unified identity. Both theories give us a new way to understand the function of the other in meaning-making and identity politics.

The very core of our charge as a field of study – the analysis of meaning-making—demands a consideration of the other. We have this sense of duty because the construction of belief is, in fact, always a result of consensus *and* conflict. In fact, as Mead asserts, without this awareness of the other, there would be no awareness of the self, no language, no consciousness, and clearly, then, no literature. Burke reminds us that it is our *inability* to be substantially one with those around us that leads to meaning-making. We reside in an environment of faction and division that can only be negotiated through the use of language and therewith, rhetoric. Discord, then, is impossible to avoid, and it is at those moments of confrontation that identification occurs, over and again as a type of shuttling that affirms, reaffirms and disaffirms one's sense of social place (identity). Mead's work on emergence explains the necessity of the other in our own, evolving conceptions of self and poses an interesting paradigm from which to consider the relationship of public (academic) and private (non-academic) literacies, as well as the more specific relationship of the urban North to the rural South, which I will treat in later chapters.

According to Mead's social behaviorism, a *striving* for coherence and unity in the face of discord and distinction is, in fact, the very nature of the self. The self is never at rest but rather always emerging as a response to others. Therefore, though identification seeks unity, it never achieves it but rather constantly negotiates it through evolving interpretations based on our interactions with other people. Notably, this attention to social process illustrates a basic Cultural Studies touchstone as outlined by Schwoch and White, "an oscillating interest in sometimes drawing together, and other times pulling

apart approaches from the social sciences and the humanities" (3). In Cultural Studies, scholars rely on division and faction as the impetus for their study; instances of oscillating division and faction, in fact, drive their critical attention. Not only should Cultural Studies work to draw together and pull apart various approaches, it should also examine the conditions which determine its oscillating interests since the discipline's "terministic screens," to borrow Burke's term, provide the very sort of social commentary which the field itself wishes to illuminate.

Mead believes this kind of oscillation is essential to human consciousness. He writes, "The self is something which has a development; it is not initially there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity, that is, develops in the given individual as a result of his relations to that process as a whole and to other individuals within that process" (*Mind, Self and Society* 135). Our self-awareness is thus always an objectification, an experiencing of what we think our "self" to be via the reactions of others to us. Mead describes this volleying of attitudes and positions as the "conversation of gestures." What I know myself to be adjusts according to the reactions of others to me and the same for them in a continuous play of responses. Therefore, to understand the nature of ourselves, often, we must concentrate on those places where we stringently dis-identify. In some ways, our sense of a unified identity might be described through observable patterns of *dis-identification*. Who we are is just as much a matter of who we are not.

The mind, then, is a form of participation in an interpersonal process, which involves taking the attitudes of others toward one's own gestures. The individual,

36

according to Mead, "can enter as an object [to himself] only on the basis of social relations and interactions, only by means of his experiential transactions with other individuals in an organized social environment" (*Mind, Self and Society* 225). The freestanding self humans conceptualize is in fact always emergent and always dependent on the intersubjectivity of human relationships for its coherence and meaning. Fueled by critical consciousness and self-awareness, the reflective self emerges via a process of exchanging significant symbols – language. The use of language distinguishes humans from animals and makes self-consciousness possible.

This constant negotiation of faction and division echoes Burke's articulation of the motives of rhetoric and suggests that we are, at our conscious core, rhetorical beings. Language is the currency which makes this reflective process possible, so it is no great wonder that English Studies (in all its iterations) finds the "other" camped at its doorstep. The study of language forms necessarily demands a consideration of the composing and reading moment, the place where identity (authorship) arises through the communicative (social) act.

Mead's treatment of social groups is also relevant to Burkean identification, rhetoric, and therewith consideration of the other in English Studies. Mead describes two types of civilized social groups: "concrete social classes or subgroups" in which "individual members are directly related to one another," and "abstract social classes or subgroups." It is these abstract social classes that enable individuals to extend their social relations beyond definite social affiliations into more radical territories that can richly inform conceptions of self. As a consequence, individuals can hold membership in

different groups simultaneously and might therefore relate themselves to multiple "generalized others" at multiple times. The self, then, arises through an internalization of the generalized attitudes of others, and there is no limit to the self's capacity to evolve through the acquisition of new attitudes. This conception of social relations elides the question of whether to linger over consensus *or* conflict and instead recommends we concentrate on the *process* of both at work in human social life. Thus, it is premature to assume that our conversations about alterity can ever end. Cultural Studies, as a field sustained by investigations of subjectivity, is then by nature regenerative and descriptive, fed by the shifting exchange of margin and center.

The articulation of the self or subject as process also finds relevance in literary theory, namely the work of Michel Foucault and Mikhail Bahktin. Foucault's explanation of the "author function" in the act of meaning making emphasizes the instability of textual interpretation. If it is the author who gives a text its unity of meaning, then a "correct" reading of the text will only be possible through the author. However, that author will never be the same after that initial composing moment if we follow Mead's explanation of a seemingly "in progress" self, continually changed by the dynamic interrelation of organism and environment. As a result, the meaning of texts will always be dependent upon the situation of its reading, which questions the possibility of an objective meaning. Foucault's belief that knowledge is discourse itself discounts objectivity and lends strong support to the idea that literacies should always be considered in light of relative experience. We can never understand meaning without knowing who is responsible for the meaning as author or reader, speaker or audience. It is

38

interaction itself, the site of an interacting speaker and audience, which dictates meaning, and as such, an acknowledgement of context is essential to any pursuit of truth.

In *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, Mikhail Bahktin suggests that all language is dynamic and relational. Bahktin uses the "word" as evidence of this sublime reliance on the other in the construction of self/consciousness. For Bahktin, word is "the semiotic material of inner life" and "a two-sided act. It is determined equally by whose word it is and for whom it is meant." (qtd. in Bizzell and Herzberg 1215). Signs, then, are not sterile, nor can they function in isolation. Rather, once taken in and given meaning, they contribute to the unity of a verbally constituted consciousness.

Ideas such as Bahktin's and Foucault's have brought language itself into question, which has inspired a profound rethinking of our field and the systems in which we work. Foucault cautions that to pretend that objectivity is possible is to allow systems of power to go unchecked and unquestioned and to further the delusion that the domination of some groups over others is in fact natural, ordained by God, perhaps. While suspicion of objectivity is by no means a new position, a reconsideration of traditionally marginalized subject positions in fact is. Our canonized others may be a good example of a kind of system that has gone unchecked in some ways. By informally developing an "other" canon of sorts, English scholars are working to be more inclusive, but interestingly, as was the case with the standard Western canon, which remained unchanged demographically for many years, scholars are failing to be critical about the choices they make for who they deem "unheard populations."

The other persists in our field because we recognize its imperative in the construction of meaning. It is a reminder to us that our beliefs should never go unquestioned, that they are fallible as a matter of course, even in academic practices that pride themselves on inclusion. As William James warned, "systems uncriticized and unremarked could become 'monstrous'" (Roskelly and Ronald 130).

By opening English studies to these kinds of epistemic inquiries, we have invited discussions of the ways in which non-academic ideologies necessarily instruct our work. By studying the "outside," we are, in effect, studying ourselves, as academics, and testing the efficacy of our theories, following through on their relevance in the external field. It is important to note that I do not take issue with the efficacy of the Cultural Studies turn in English departments, nor do I intend to celebrate its influence. I am not seeking to make it seem more fashionable either. I do wish to look again at *how* scholars "stake out some positions. . . and argue for them" (Hall). Before scholars move away from the concept of the other, they should pause to consider who has historically qualified, who makes and has made the "other" cut and why.

Faction and Division in University English Departments

Interestingly, there are multiple fractures in English departments dictated by a persistent othering impulse, and perhaps part of academic fatigue with non-traditional literacies comes from the fact that there are no easy solutions to the issue of marginalization either in our classrooms or on our departmental halls. While marginalized studies offer clear and promising research avenues, they are still,

40

frustratingly, marginal, and thus always short of serious, academic value. As Stefani

Collini and Umberto Eco note:

> Much non-canonical material beckons, promising near-virgin lands for the rearing
> of a good crop of new interpretations…But the risk, for the young scholar with
> eyes fixed on the rapid establishment of a glittering reputation, is that these will
> be classed as minor or marginal achievements; attention is gained, and work of
> acknowledged significance performed, by offering fresh interpretations of works
> which are indisputably central." (20)

In multiple ways, the other becomes a rock in our shoes. Pedagogically, the other

operates as a sort of politically correct reminder that we need to be challenging tradition

in our classrooms through the celebration of unorthodox texts. Professionally, the other

ensures the kind of self-preservation, elitism, and rhetorical one-upmanship that scaffolds

our living as academics. Othering is what the job demands but also what we feel

compelled to argue against. This dissonance between theory and practice can be

uncomfortable. Many academics have pushed marginalization to an unkind place in their

minds even though it informs how they distinguish themselves professionally.

The Literature and Rhet/Comp split provides an interesting example of the ways

in which othering persists despite our best efforts to avoid it, though political fracturing

in English departments is certainly more nuanced than this familiar delineation. In some

ways the devaluing of Rhetoric and Composition Studies has become so ingrained that

we rarely pause to consider the reasons behind it. Much research has circulated on the

"feminization" of Composition Studies, incited first by the grumblings of incumbent

English Studies traditionalists who questioned it as a serious research area, and more

recently by the waxing of ambitious Rhetoric scholars who surreptitiously place

rhetorical theory at the top of a hierarchy in which Composition Studies once more falls

to the bottom. Both are efforts to establish rank and demonstrate the superiority of their

areas of interest. Yet, most importantly, both have at their defining core, a gendered

brand of rhetorical identification. To understand who we are is to see ourselves in light of

others. Gender difference is one of our first and most basic invitations to rhetoric, and is

just one of the many ways that we, as a field and as individuals, use the other as a way to

come to know ourselves.

Feminists have long criticized the age-old Western alignment of men with formal,

public affairs and women with informal, private affairs. This distinction is explored at

some length in Sherry Ortner's 1974 essay, "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?"

and has, by this point, reached a status of warranted assertibility; the preponderance of

evidence leads us to accept this association as functionally and historically accurate. Not

surprisingly, the "masculine ethos" of English departments comes from this same strain

and demonstrates identification through division, a necessarily rhetorical move. Janice

Lauer explains in "The Feminization of Rhetoric and Composition Studies?" that

"English Studies became professionalized through a process of dissociating from

feminine culture by making itself a body of scientific knowledge by specialists,

distancing itself from feminized composition instruction and the preponderance of

women teaching at the secondary and elementary levels" (277). English academics have

devalued Composition Studies because of its feminine associations as well as its

reputation as a more service-oriented course of study. Skeptics of Rhet/Comp often chalk

up their disdain to its blue-collar nature without fully considering the rhetorical and

historical significance of their response. Those who demonstrate these biases rarely pause to question their motivation. English Studies has thus distanced itself from Rhetoric and Composition Studies and vice versa as a matter of self-preservation – an example of identification through division.

Within the area of Rhetoric and Composition Studies are similarly dissociative patterns primarily defined by gendered associations. As Robert Connors notes, the distinction between Rhetoric and Composition studies came early with the surge of women pursuing higher education in mid-19th century America. The competition and antagonism that characterized (male) higher education at that time was perhaps best realized in oral rhetoric courses. Fearing the influence of such public rancor on the delicate, domestic sensibilities of female students, composition courses became the more "appropriate" alternative (qtd. in Lauer 276). As a result, the course was composed of and staffed by mostly women, and became, from its modern inception, a marginalized intellectual pursuit as a consequence of its gendered origins. This prejudice persists, even in my department, where I have overheard at least two of my Rhet/Comp colleagues scoff at the idea that Composition Studies could offer any serious research possibilities. To be publicly respected is to take a hard, dominating stance – an ethos imbued with masculinity – and most importantly, an example of the ways in which the terms used to create rhetorical identification work to include members in a common ideology, while at the same time excluding alternate terms, groups, and ideologies.

Rhetoric and Composition scholars recognize that ghettoizing is a part of the field and have developed ways to theoretically account for it. Social-epistemic rhetoricians,

especially, helped to open up the field to Cultural studies, Post-Colonial Studies, African-American Studies, and other non-traditional fields as the political dimension of academic work became nationally unavoidable. Starting in 1968, scholars in many fields were forced to view the university as economic servant, an idea heavily pushed by the Nixon administration. Subsequently, the field of Rhetoric and Composition became more meta-cognitively and ideologically aware. According to Jim Berlin's investigation of rhetoric programs after WWII, it was the confluence of epistemic rhetoric, poststructuralism and Marxism that inspired the later Cultural Studies movement. Epistemic rhetoric demanded that rhetoric see itself as ideological, acknowledging the economic, social, and political arrangements that made up its very structure. Social constructivists such as Karen LeFevre and Ann Berthoff made it their task to consider how rhetoric is dependent on social matrices and therewith underscored the role of ideology in the rhetorical moment (Berlin 6-20). As a result, not only were English departments struggling to know themselves inside and out, they were attempting to translate that hyper-awareness to their students as a way to better prepare them as members of a democratic society.

Rhetoric and Composition Studies has built critical self-awareness into its genetic structure. "Re-vision" in basic and theoretical ways is regarded as essential to what we do. The emergence of linguistics, literacy studies, anthropology, and other corollaries in English departments serve as evidence of this critically consciousness turn and the desire to look again at our work from striking angles. To some, this inclusion of outside disciplines has diluted the rigor of English studies; to others, it has opened up new research possibilities. In any case, it has made evident the role division and faction plays

in our struggle for identity as a discipline and has created interesting ways of analyzing our own prejudices as scholars.

There has been some suggestion that critical pedagogy – and with it, this critical disciplinary stance – is going out of favor. This line of thinking accompanies the Cultural Studies malaise. The devaluing of social justice movements in recent Composition scholarship might point to some fatigue with the self-critique prompted by Cultural Studies, as well as the valuing of private (non-academic) discourse practices. Scholars such as Richard Miller[7] and Kelly Ritter suggest impatience with liberatory and critical pedagogies inspired by Paulo Freire and feminist studies, which both work from the principle of promoting acute social and political awareness in an effort to achieve a more democratic representation of marginalized populations.

Kelly Ritter criticizes liberatory pedagogy as incommensurable to institutionalized learning and in some ways, as impractical. She points to the emergence of on-line courses as complicating the ideas of de-centralized authority and student empowerment implied by critical, feminist pedagogies. By insisting writing is a political act and the classroom a political space, teachers may alienate some students who long for a more traditional approach. She points out that:

> This may be an intractable consequence of liberatory pedagogy: in order to exemplify for students the range of political viewpoints that can be represented by or employed in the act of writing, that exemplification may cause some students to desire the "neutral" position of instruction, even if that position is accompanied by less-critical methodologies, leading to less complex student tasks. (8)

---

[7] See Richard Miller's "The Arts of Complicity: Pragmatism and the Culture of Schooling".

While the "political" certainly informs most versions of critical or liberatory pedagogy, it is important to note that there are more basic and adaptable versions: pedagogical philosophies that simply ask students to consider the other as a necessary part of meaning-making. A critical pedagogy does not acknowledge "neutrality as a pedagogical possibility," and while some leftist Freirians may solely focus on political issues and social justice content, the point of the paradigm is not to politicize politics, but to expose politicization in all aspects of everyday life, including writing, as a way of becoming better rhetors, more finely attuned to the necessity of the other in any act of meaning. To be a critical pedagogue might not always mean forcing leftist sympathies, though I imagine some instructors are deliberate in this effort. Critical pedagogies can also work to expose the ways in which the other works in all composing behaviors and the value of multiple experiences and literacy values in the composition classroom. This approach not only encourages student confidence but actively tests the canonical sensibilities of the academy, preserving critical consciousness, or what Freire called *conscientizacao* for both student and teacher.

The openness of Cultural Studies coupled with the feminized (subordinated) residue of Composition as a discipline explains its tenuous position in scholarly circles in the Rhet/Comp field. Cultural Studies, and the theory and practice it promotes, is by nature always subject to attack, opening itself up to the very kinds of critique it so readily applies. As Schwoch and White note, "many scholars celebrate and endorse the free-wheeling and extremely open nature of this intellectual pursuit, while others point to this openness as a sign of the relative intellectual weakness of cultural studies" (1). While

46

Cultural Studies scholars have their own niche and indeed their own field, many

Rhet/Comp scholars use Cultural Studies as a way to inform their teaching and

scholarship. However, these thinkers often experience condescension from academics

who identify with more objective, traditional theories in Rhetoric and Composition.

Despite an initially passionate interest in marginalized literacies, there is a now

real concern that the democratic goals underlying these pursuits have stagnated. If the

role of Cultural Studies in university English departments is to remind us of our academic

duty to uphold democratic ideals and to serve as safe places for intellectual, political, and

social inquiry, then should we not work to *enact* change rather than simply expose

unfairness? As Rorty has noted in *Achieving Our Country*, the Cultural Studies turn in

academia and the leftist, Marxist desire to preserve distinctions can, in fact, lead to little

more than gridlock from the bottom up and top down. An overreliance on theory and

abstraction can lead merely to contemplation, spectatorship, and an identification of

problems ("the man is still stickin' it to us") rather than a genuine attempt to wrestle with

and change them. The danger is potentially falling into the mire of "victim studies," the

preoccupation with exposing stigmas and evening the intellectual playing field in English

departments, through a kind of sustained otherness, with no real follow-through. Those

teachers committed to democratic pedagogy might ask, "Is it enough to include a non-

canonical text in my traditional literature course? How far do I push for social justice in

a system that denies agency at every turn?" Those teachers who wish to move beyond

the realm of the "other," may ask, "why should we admit questions of social justice into

our department at all? Why is it the English department's responsibility to even this playing field?"

A simple answer may come from David Bartholomae who notes in "Inventing the University" that as teachers of writers we necessarily ask students to appropriate a specialized discourse by mimicking its language and merging their personal histories with the requirements of convention (511). At stake here, are those "personal histories." Composition courses by their very nature and placement in students' plans of study invite students to "compose" themselves, to realize their "place" as meaning-makers in the academic hierarchy. The moment of rhetorical identification that every university student faces is unique; however, those students who readily identify with labels like "black," "Hispanic," "homosexual," etc. demonstrate an awareness of marginalization, othering, divison/faction, that contributes to their development as authors and "literate" members of a democratic society. Students learn to identify as university students despite personal histories that may threaten that affiliation. It is at those rhetorical moments of division and faction as navigated by groups eager to "belong" that we can learn more about what we mean by literacy, authorship, and democracy and most importantly how those meanings affect our students.

Unpopular Margins

With the Cultural Studies turn and with the help of thinkers like Mike Rose[8], now most academics accept or at the very least acknowledge the existence of ideological

---

[8] *Living on the Margins*

biases in education. However, as with most things, those attributes that most visibly

separate students from the standard become the qualifiers most accepted and most studied

by academics as markers that may affect student success. Race is perhaps the most

obvious distinction, as is gender and class. While some research has been done with

"inner-city" students, this label has less to do with geographic location than race since

most "inner-city" students are African-American or Hispanic.[9] Most students entering

the university experience some levels of stress associated with a basic change in their

scholastic habits: living on school grounds, navigating the college campus, taking more

responsibility for homework, meeting new classmates, new teachers, and other unfamiliar

literacy demands. However, the rural university student's experience is unique. Rural

students have not been traditionally known as a "marginalized group." Some might fall

into the category if they are considered economically disadvantaged, non-white, or have a

physical or learning disability, but their geographic identity is hardly an issue.

     Rural, Southern students, particularly, though their cultural backgrounds often

stand in stark contrast to academic culture, usually operate under the radar. If their

background is exposed – usually by their dialect --, it is often quickly discounted as an

interesting personality trait or perhaps even gently mocked by students and instructors

alike as "rustic," "backwards," or incredibly naïve. Katherine Sohn in *Whistling and*

---

[9] Michael MacDonald's memoir, *All Souls: A Family Story from Southie,* identifies poor whites from inner-city Boston, specifically South Boston, as also flying under the radar because they are not considered ethnically diverse or marginalized enough for comment. When a *U.S. News and World Report* reporter called MacDonald to discuss an article he was working on about the white underclass, MacDonald responded with disbelief: "No one had ever seemed to believe me or to care when I told them about the amount of poverty and social problems where I grew up. Liberals were usually the ones working on social problems, and they never seemed to be able to fit urban, poor whites into their world view, which tended to see blacks as the pervasive dependent, and their own white selves as provider" (3).

Crowin' recalls an experience at an academic conference in Tennessee that illustrates the general attitude many academics take towards rural Southerners. Standing in a buffet line, Sohn heard a fellow professor snicker to a colleague about the obvious country accents of the catering staff. Relaxed and obviously not aware of his coarseness or his biases, he casually referred to them as "redneck, white trash" without flinching. Sohn sites this experience as partial impetus for her ethnographic study of Appalachian women students and their literacy habits and values (1-8).

Though Cultural Studies has asked us to become more aware of how we value and devalue others, academics freely allow and even participate in derision of rural Southerners. Hephzibah Roskelly notes in "Telling Tales in School: A Redneck Daughter in the Academy," that she was shocked to discover, after moving to the Northeast, that the rural Southerner was fair game for ethnic slurs and off-color jokes. She writes:

> I discovered to my surprise that many people – even some enlightened academics who would staunchly fight the stereotyping of other minorities or 'fringe' cultures in American society – pretty much accepted the stereotype of the southern redneck as racist, sexist, alcoholic, ignorant, and lazy. . . I understood that few had come in contact with any rural southerners; the academic community, especially in the Northeast, is seldom called on to respond to the redneck as a group." (*Working Class Women* 293)

As an academic teaching in the Northeast, Roskelly used her scholarship to identify this asymmetry of thought in the cultural politics of her fellow academics. Rural Southern freshman entering the academy do not have the power or the agency to participate in this kind of critique.

Unless a student boldly embraces a divisive, yet politically potent label like "Appalachian" and has the gumption to defend herself from even the most subtle cultural attacks, she stands little chance of feeling protected from discrimination in the university if she exposes her background. While this discrimination is rarely overt, it operates and becomes reified not only as a result of the system's continued blindness to its biases, but through the student's continually renewed conception of self, as demonstrated in her writing. If a student is rural and Appalachian for instance, when she sits down to read or write she will continually consider her ideological position. This move is at times conscious as when a student feels insecure about sharing personal experiences that may "out" her as Appalachian. It can also be subconscious, as all of us essentially read "through" our experience. As Rosenblatt notes, meaning is primarily determined by what the reader brings to the text in terms of experience (5). When the student reads, her experience will be brought to bear on her interpretation of the text. She may consciously consider how her experience matches up to what she reads, or she may quickly discount what she reads as antithetical to what she knows and values. When she writes, she may consider herself at a disadvantage rhetorically with each turn of phrase, as all students have a tendency to do with academic discourse. In this student's case, however, the status of her cultural background – low – will impede her in specific and observable ways. Past cultural experience can be a particular hindrance for students in the composition classroom. We are freely willing to admit this possibility with "English as a Second Language" students. Certainly, we should accept it as a factor for rural Southern students and other regional cultures as well.

The trouble academics have with rural, Southern students perhaps begins with the longstanding break between the country and the city; the "rustic" and the "civilized." Academia historically has positioned itself against rusticity in the same way that civilization historically has been positioned against the country. These ideas will be treated in detail in Chapter III, but here we can quickly acknowledge the presence of this cultural split. For years the distinction between the city and the country has served as a basic difference between "common sense" and education, between the feminine and the masculine, between the blind and the enlightened. Quintilian even used the comparison as the first thesis for his students to consider. The theme runs throughout literature, as demonstrated in Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* when Jude, an ambitious country boy, climbs to the roof to look far into the distance to the crooked chimneys and steeples of Christminister, a village clearly representing Oxford. It is an age old distinction interestingly complicated by the specific American view of the South. The North has traditionally been positioned against the South, and, as we know, the idea of the "North" has been conflated with ideas of progress and urbanity as a result of the Civil War and before that, beliefs about the frontier Southern mountains. In short, rural, Southern university students have a socio-historical reason for feeling estranged in academic contexts.

Barbara Ching and Gerald Creed explore the systematic devaluation of rural peoples and the notion of "rustic" as a source of identity in "Recognizing Rusticity: Identity and the Power of Place." They point to the postmodern tendency to celebrate urban metaphors as evidence of the continued devaluing of the rustic in academia. They

trace the ways in which distinctions between the rural and urban function culturally

through activities like music and clothing selections. In this way, any inhabited place can

be experienced as either rural or urban, and as such, these social identifiers are significant

to discussions of cultural hierarchy regardless of physical geography. You might notice

when tuning your radio dial that traditional African American rap and hip-hop is now

labeled "urban contemporary" by some stations. Similarly, driving a truck, wearing

Carhartt clothing, and listening to David Allen Coe might be activities labeled "country,"

regardless of their location. Distinctions between the urbane and the ignorant are unique

in that they are anchored by historical and geographic origins (urban vs. rural; North vs.

South) but are not dictated by any literal boundaries as they function discursively: "place

can be metaphoric yet still refer to a particular physical environment" (7).

Ching and Creed's argument aligns with Mead's work on social groups,

particularly the concept of "abstract social classes," those affiliations people hold that

extend their social relations beyond non-local territories as a way to enrich their

conception of self. Place, when considered as metaphoric, begins to take a more central

role in the way we think about identity. The cultural details associated with a particular

place are mobile, fluid, and indicate that there is far more to identifying with a place than

location and geography. Place carries with it cultural histories that can be translated

beyond the local through particular cultural markers that provide ideological

commentary. Often times the rhetorical use of these markers can seem illogical, e.g. the

flying of a Southern rebel flag in the yard of a home in northern Maine; however, such

moves suggest that identification with place can mean far more than we may have

traditionally thought. The versatility of these distinctions makes them ripe for

consideration in Cultural Studies, but to this point, scholars have rarely considered them

as legitimate or compelling cultural markers.

Reising and Hill in "Comp and Circumstance in Rural America," explain that

non-ghetto, urban mindsets, manners, and habits often serve as reliable markers of the

quintessential, educated American, a habitual and tenacious belief which puts rural

students at an obvious disadvantage (11). Universities naturally choose to emulate the

values of urban centers of progress as a way of attaining pedigree by association in order

to, later, market themselves as adequately progressive and "in the know" (11). These

steps to identify with the hegemonic authority obviously translate to the goals of

academic discourse, and eventually to students, as a standardizing mechanism. These

associations are not contained by the academy. They are instead disseminated as cultural

givens through the teaching and transmission of academic discourses. While the form and

primary content of academic discourse makes a great difference in all students'

conceptions of self, it is the unquestioned implications that accompany the teaching of

academic discourse that perhaps do the most damage. What is the standard speech? Who

do academics ask students to dis-identify with through their own behaviors and through

the kinds of texts they read, the kind of examples they give? What does an academic

look like, speak like, act like? Often, the everyday articulations of academic discourse do

more to sustain its power than the deliberate aspects of its teaching.

Academics hesitate to acknowledge the legitimacy of the contemporary rustic.

The surge of anti-intellectualism in rural, Southern areas may partially explain their

pause. Ching and Creed argue that rural peoples often embrace their marginality through a celebration of anti-intellectual activities, namely rural conservatism, as a kind of protest to hegemonic urbanity (29). Owning a gun, driving a truck, voting for Sarah Palin, following Southern evangelical teachings, etc. are all symbolic representations that deliberately politicize rusticity. These moves are often deliberately "anti-intellectual," working against the liberal agenda of most universities and public intellectuals. James Dabbs points out that the rural Southerner, "having always lived in a closely knit society, or at least retaining the faint memory of such a society . . . has little experience agreeing to disagree" (309). The tendency to "bond" rather than to "bridge" is thus both inherited (unconscious) and deliberate. Since academic spaces are often defined by heterogeneity of thought, rural Southerners' seeming narrow-mindedness – valuing of sameness – can prove to be problematic. Rural people who directly reject intellectualism both collude in their own victimization and assert their agency out and away from the urban powers-that-be[10]. Osha Gray Davidson further articulates the complexity of "rustic obstinancy" by suggesting that rural people are often made conservative by the far right who understand rural alienation and exploit it (118).

This ambivalence is perhaps best illustrated by the rural, working class' puzzling commitment to conservative values and the Republican Party whose economic policies are often directly responsible for local hardships. Thomas Frank responds to this conservative backlash in his 2004 book *What's the Matter with Kansas?,* which works to explain why the poorest county in America (in rural Kansas) posted a more than 80%

---

[10] See Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb's *The Hidden Injuries of Class*.

vote for George Bush in the 2000 election. Frank writes, "the backlash imagines itself as a foe of the elite, as the voice of the unfairly persecuted, as a righteous protest of the people on history's receiving end…that its greatest beneficiaries are the wealthiest people on the planet does not give it pause" (5-6). As a result of this deliberate rejection of liberal elitism, rural peoples often completely disqualify themselves from serious, academic consideration, accidentally on purpose. However, by not considering cultural hierarchies when we talk identity politics, we are actually reinforcing existing stereotypes. Such complex associations with "rural" and "Southern," follow students into the university and dictate their conception of self through their previous experiences with the label and their instructors' and fellow students' subsequent attitudes towards them.

Composing and "Double-Consciousness"

Student authors, as we know, often struggle with writing because it requires constantly representing oneself to the outside world with each word, each punctuation mark. With every letter comes the possibility of harsh judgment. Writing, then, in many ways physically summons to the surface the author's ideological position in profound, frightening ways. If as Rosenblatt indicates, reading and writing are transactional, involving continual reflection and adjustment in light of one's experience and the perceived reception of that experience, then composition demands an acknowledgement of a unified "identity," recycled, but unified nonetheless for the purpose of "warranted assertibility." All writers and readers must necessarily position themselves in some relation to the text as they interact/transact with it. Who I am as a discursive identity in a

system of discursive identities will help me understand how to rhetorically position myself. Therefore, if a student considers herself an "outsider," she will necessarily approach composition differently than a student who is more familiar with the expectations of academia as a result of her discursive position – upper-middle class, white, urban-suburban from educated parents, exposure to prep-schools or other college prepatory training, etc.

The student who identifies as "outside," realizes that her "experiential reservoir" might be very different from her classmates, and as a result, may spend more time in that in-between literacy space, in that reflective flux, bouncing between who she is and what she feels she should be to conform to the academic identity she must assume. While this time spent bouncing may sharpen her ability to self-reflect, it is generally not the kind of literacy practice measured or valued in the university. As a result, this outsider might show poorly in her academic performance, though her critical thinking skills might actually surpass those of her well-adjusted classmates. The outsider might also surprise her instructors with her level of critical thinking but disappoint in terms of her level of self-motivation or in-class presence.

Mina Shaughnessy's *Errors and Expectations* speaks famously to the ways in which non-standard writing behaviors are often translated as error in basic writing classrooms. Shaughnessy reminds us that the issue of error is much more complex, and there are many interacting influences, different pressures, codes and confusions from a student's experience involved. These experiences present themselves in student writing as idiosyncratic elements, variant and standard forms mixing, evasive circumlocutions

and more. Shaughnessy argues rightly that even slight departures from code mean something and shouldn't be ignored (51-72). Basic writers are in many ways pre-disposed to feel insecure about their work as a consequence of being labeled deficient. As Shaughnessy suggests, this awareness alone does much to influence the ways these students read, write and subsequently stumble. Though true for some more than others, any student's perceived relationship to the dominant discourse makes a difference in the composing process.

When authors compose, according to Rosenblatt, they continually test their selection of words against their "inner gauge," how they expect these words to be received (20). Quite often, authors who identify themselves as an outsider in some way find this visit to the "inner gauge" quite familiar and therefore find reflexivity to be second nature. I know I did as a child and then later, more deliberately as a collegiate-level student writer, as evidenced by my recollections in the Preface. I spent a great deal of my time considering which details of my life to leave in and which to leave out in personal essay prompts, teacher conferences, and even informal conversations among peers, always fearing that I might embarrass myself by revealing elements of my home culture that would reify popular stereotypes already brewing under the surface. Such revelations held the possibility of not only eroding my credibility as a worthy student but of also shaming myself, giving university insiders further reason to denigrate my cultural heritage. As a consequence, my rhetorical decisions were always carefully run through a series of checks and balances before execution, a meta-cognitive regiment that made me incredibly adept at tweaking my message to meet perceived audience demands. These

visits to my inner gauge evoked time tested notions of identity, habitually formed through transactions with personal experience and the perceived perceptions of others; i.e. my experience as a rural girl matched against the portrayal of rural peoples on TV and through the eyes of my cousins and friends.

Our role as writers and readers is further influenced by how, in turn, our home culture may perceive the university and its relationship to a specific, ideological agenda. For example, the university might figure uniquely into the values and expectations of a Native American student who has grown up on a reservation and whose literacies reflect a historical ambivalence about higher education. As such, this student's experience in the composition classroom may prove treacherous. Yet, interestingly, he arrives at the university pre-wired in some ways with the ability to rhetorically self-reflect as a consequence of his sublimated status. The straddling of private and public discourses that most students have to do when they go away to college is therefore not unusual to the student who has already assumed the identity of an outsider. W.E.B DuBois dubbed this phenomenon "double-consciousness" in his description of the divided African-American identity: "one ever feels his two-ness." So far, we have not considered the way this phenomenon, as an unfortunate consequence of social prejudice, may actually prove useful to our work as composition instructors.

Carl Dengler draws a connection between DuBois' double-consciousness and the vexed position of Southerners. He openly wonders why scholars have not considered how double-consciousness might inform the lives of rural Southerners: "no Southerner, so far as I know, has yet seen fit to write about the two-ness of Southerners though I think

someone ought to; certainly the duality is there" (127-28). In *Who Speaks for the South?*, James Dabbs similarly describes the Southern mind as "split," almost permanently vexed, and always moving "unsteadily out of the past into the future" (67). Dabb's book was published in 1964, during the Civil Rights Movement and was perhaps inspired by the overt bias against Southern culture and beliefs during that time period. Since then, the prejudice against the American South, certainly understandable at the time, has perhaps lost some intensity but is still a legitimately felt national bias. By including "double consciousness" in this discussion, I raise the potentially controversial question: has the white, American Southerner, once considered the hegemonic "center," now found a home in the margins, occupying a space not equal but similar to the ghettoized territories of other derided populations?

Students from any marginalized background are sure to "feel their two-ness" in ways that signal an understanding of critical consciousness that perhaps moves beyond the capabilities of students from more standard backgrounds. "Standard" students are those who see themselves, their lifestyles, their dialects, their "home," reflected back to them in popular media images. While they are certainly capable of critical awareness, they are perhaps less aware of the ideological significance of their cultural background having never felt it called into question in ways that other marginalized groups have.

In many ways, though it indicates a marginalized status and an often painful feeling of dislocation, double-consciousness is ideally suited to the demands of the composition process. Mike Rose in his seminal *Lives on the Boundary* lends weight to the idea that habitual negotiations between a student's school and home lives can become a

kind of meta-cognitive literacy. When the gap between a student's perceived home and school identities is even greater, this literate activity of shuttling between becomes even more sophisticated and honed. Using his own experience as a student and teacher, Rose describes the conflict that students "from the margins" experience. These marginal students are usually considered "at risk" because they represent non-Caucasian, poor populations, and are often first generation college students. Just as Shaughnessy has proven, this label alone can do much to make a student more aware of his insignificance and sublimation in greater hegemonic systems.

Rose describes the space between two visions – one of individual possibility, as dictated by the academic literacy narrative, and one of environmental limits and determiners; "meaningful work versus the threat of the old neighborhood" (115). In his own life and in the lives of the students he taught, he realized that school fostered growth but also created social conditions for intensifying a child's marginality (115). Students, once they participate in the academic literacy narrative, are caught between the private literacies of their home lives and the public literacies of the university and often find they have no refuge in either. Writing becomes, in many ways then, the literal representation of this psychological, ideological, and linguistic strain.

Dan Bushman, using George Herbert Mead, points to this kind of self-consciousness as essential to student understanding in the effective negotiation of difference or opposition in argument. In fact, many writing teachers work to illuminate this kind of critical consciousness as an overall course goal. Mead's "conversation of gestures" works as an effective paradigm for theorizing rhetoric in digestible ways for

students. Yet, it also serves to underscore the idea that students who are more aware of difference might be more rhetorically apt as a consequence of their self-consciousness and habitual surveillance of the hegemonic other. This self-consciousness enables students "to discover both the relevance of other people's words to our predicaments and the relevance of our contribution to others with whom we share the world and the on-going dialogue about it" (qtd. in Bushman 256). In practical ways, this self-awareness speaks to the kind of adjustments and re-adjustments required for cultural groups made continually aware of their otherness. David Miller, using Mead's description of "life processes" as constant readjustment, argues that "one is never in a constant state of equilibrium but is striving and living 'in a future'" (qtd in Bushman 257). Bushman wisely links this inevitable tension to writing, while I would further specify it to the rhetorical moment of invention: "a dynamic process one undertakes in an effort to achieve personal and social equilibrium" (257). For marginalized groups, this negotiation is often most evident in linguistic behavior and is especially observable in contexts which highlight their otherness.

Composition, coming as it does for most students during the first year of their college experience, intercepts students at an opportune moment not only in the practical sense of acquainting students with the demands of academic discourse but in the more theoretical sense of capitalizing on their negotiations of identity, using their lived experience as a way to introduce more fundamental ideas of rhetoric and meaning making. As George Mead has made clear in his description of the "calling of gestures" in the process of self-awareness, we cannot help but look to the other's reactions as a way of

gauging/knowing ourselves. This preoccupation with the other cannot help but inform our lives. Attention to this familiar transactional process can provide us with an obvious opportunity to talk about ideological consequences and rhetorical implications with greater ease – using practice to inform theory in our composition classrooms.

CHAPTER III

LITERACY, PROGRESS, AND SUBLIMATION IN THE RURAL SOUTH

Progress and the University as the Beacon of Civilization

In recent years, with the rise of Cultural Studies, social scientists have taken new interest in the way certain cultural values can obstruct or enhance political and economic progress. As evidence of this trend, the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in Cambridge, Massachusetts held a symposium on Cultural Values and Human Progress in April of 1999 to address: "the link between values and progress; the universality of values and Western 'cultural imperialism;' geography and culture; the relationship between culture and institutions, and cultural change" (Harrison xxiv). Pre-eminent anthropologists, economists, politicians and journalists from distinguished governmental and academic posts all over the world convened to determine the relationship between culture and progress and what, if any, particular qualities contribute to the success of one society over another. Lawrence Harrison and Samuel P. Huntington detailed the arguments raised at the Harvard Academy event in their 2000 edited collection, *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress*. The goal of the book was to "develop the theories, elaborate the guidelines, and foster the links between scholars and practitioners that will foster the cultural conditions that enhance human progress" (xvi). The symposium and corresponding book address the questions: "If progress and culture are

inextricably linked, then which cultures have the power to inform the definition of progress and why? In short, what are the connections between culture and institutions?"

Though it is not a conclusion drawn by the authors, one might argue that the symposium attendees and contributors could easily find the answers to their questions by looking locally. As representatives of the academic and progressive elite, they are *performing* the answers to the questions they pose. These scholars might begin by interrogating their positions of power and influence as they relate to national definitions of progress and cultural clout. Why the decision to hold the summit in ivy-league Cambridge, Massachusetts? Why the impressive guest list? What makes this event "progressive" in nature? Since the university mediates the space between cultural values and human success, it is nearly impossible to interrogate the notion of progress without interrogating academia itself.

Sponsored by Harvard University, the Cultural Values and Human Progress symposium serves as a clear example of scholarly privilege and institutional authority at work. Though this kind of collective inquiry is, in fact, the noble core of academia, insiders and outsiders alike often fail to recognize the ideological significance of the faith (or telling lack of faith) in the university as it relates to common beliefs about colossally vague concepts like progress, literacy, education, and more. Exploring the role of the intellectual in the American conscience can do much to explain how and why the university comes to be cast in opposition to some cultural groups[11]. If certain cultural

---

[11] See Richard Rorty's *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in 20th Century America* for a more complete understanding of what Rorty calls the "cultural" versus the "progressive" left. Rorty criticizes the "cultural left," represented by thinkers such as Michel Foucault, for offering societal critiques with no apparent solutions. Rorty uses John Dewey's pragmatic theory of progress as an example of the ways in

representatives assume the expertise and are granted license to *define* progress, certainly their values will correlate with the assumed standard for success across more sublimated groups. The same can be said for literacy. As this Harvard-sponsored symposium and subsequent anthology illustrate, the university plays a *direct* and overt role in our beliefs about progress, literacy, and our place therein.

Harrison and Huntington's anthology signals two important points: 1) there is a direct correlation between cultural values and progress and 2) only some cultural representatives are qualified to make these correlations. In an effort to define "progressive change," Huntington describes "human progress" as "movement toward economic development and material well-being, social economic equity, and political democracy" (xv). Harrison attempts to further lay bare the fundamentals of progress, taking a cue from the United Nation's Declaration of Human Rights, articulating several apparently universal assumptions: "Life is better than death.; Health is better than sickness.; Liberty is better than slavery.; Prosperity is better than poverty.; Education is better than ignorance.; Justice is better than injustice" (xxvi-ii). Working from these basic premises, progress seems not only measurable but irrefutable, consistently defined across cultures. Such resounding certainty, though necessary for leveraging arguments, should nevertheless give us pause.

In an apparent effort to buck the ethnocentric nature of the inquiry, the authors in *Culture Matters* spend more time considering the "folk societies" of third world countries than they do their own. When they do consider their local context, they concentrate on

---

which the university might become more action-oriented and hopeful and therefore less bogged down in theory and impracticality.

the correlative relationship between progress and traditionally defined minorities (race and gender) -- worthy cultural groups, but categories so-oft considered that they have become obligatory, somewhat stock examples of sublimated peoples. These anthropologists, economists, and social scientists cannot realistically discuss the way progress figures or does not figure into the lives of *every* cultural group. However, they make telling decisions about who to leave in and who to leave out of their discussions, a move providing some insight into how some cultures become apparent obstructions to progress as a consequence of their seeming unimportance in scholarly conversations. When scholars ignore the relevance of their own decisions and favor observations of the distant rather than experience with the local, they are, in fact, demonstrating a disturbing level of unexamined comfort.

For example, Post-Colonialism, as a discipline that exposes and theorizes marginalization, rarely broaches the kinds of cultural "othering" that happen here in the U.S. While the rural South was not "colonized" in the same ways Eastern nations were invaded and transformed, the region and culture exist as historically defeated and economically exploited. Its culture has been subsumed in many ways, defined by its defeat and its continued resistance on the front of progressive efforts such as the Civil Rights movement. As a result, the rural Southerner's national identity is vexed, his beliefs about progress ambivalent. Dabbs points out that the Southerner's identity, not unlike other exploited populations in the U.S., is shaped by loss and dependent upon the past:

> For the Southerner has experienced here, on this soil, tragic reversals of fortune and the continuing hardship of life. Therefore, he doesn't have the excuse for

forgetting about the past that other Americans have – the three thousand miles of ocean lying between them and the Old Country . . . Southerners have been defeated here. . .". (330)

For rural Southerners and other exploited and defeated populations, such as Native American tribes, progress cannot mean the same as it does for populations with greater access. Those cultures that have had a contentious relationship with intellectual and governmental authorities in the past will define their "progress" as perhaps something much different. This point is especially salient when considering American regional cultures, which are often overlooked by academics in favor of global cultures. As the expectation of success in academia currently operates, the farther a scholar looks outward, the more globally relevant his work becomes, and therefore, seemingly, the more serious and advanced his work will be perceived.

Our conceptions of progress are inescapably ethnocentric, measured by and against the values of the dominant contention who are in this case, the Harvard Academy's assemblage, the Western intellectual elite. We assign credibility to their findings as a consequence of institutional and geographic affiliations that define our complex, yet rarely questioned cultural givens. We value the conclusions of these scholars because of the location of the summit – Cambridge, Massachusetts, and the institutions and governmental bodies that the attendees represent – Harvard University and the Federal Reserve Board of the United States, to name just two. These academic conversations are generative, but also intellectually complacent and self-assured, as all scholarship tends to and perhaps needs to be. Harrison, Huntington, and the symposium authors aim to sew up the loose ends of "progress" and side-step any relativistic

implications, offering a blueprint of sorts for national success. For example, when we hear from Harrison the assertion that "education is better than ignorance," it seems impossible to disagree. However, what kind of education are we presuming contributes to human progress? In practice, how does this unassailable assertion work?

Secular and Non-secular Faith

Seemingly sound claims from university authorities are reminiscent of the equally authoritative and inarguable edicts of the church. It is no great surprise that the university and the church share institutional characteristics since their complex relationship dates back to the medieval period. However, the current attitude seems to be that the church and the university are institutionally and politically at odds, a belief which distracts us from their foundational similarities. Just as the commandment "thou shalt not kill," is often loosely interpreted, there are always contextual issues dogging definitive claims from institutional authorities. By assuming progress is linear, consistent across cultures, and measurable, we ignore the ideological forces at play when the term is invoked. The church asks us to "do unto others," but we find that in practice religious authorities often make exceptions. Likewise, though the university encourages students to think critically, it is not often that academics turn a critical eye upon their own practices and privilege, though most maintain a healthy suspicion of institutional authority. Since academics freely and necessarily critique the scope and reach of religious organizations, they should also consider how the university colludes in similar narratives of dominance, sublimation, and authority.

The average American views the university and the church as oppositional institutions. This is particularly the case for rural Southerners who, aside from attending church for the "fellowship" and positive message, also rely on the church for epistemological stability, as the answer to all philosophical questions, a form of counsel which can also address political and social issues such as gay rights, abortion, and pornography[12]. The rural South uses the Protestant church as its knowledge bank because it is more physically and culturally accessible than university authorities or urban, public intellectuals. As a result, the rural South is often chastised by progressive intellectuals who cite the culture's allegiance to the church as evidence of its willful ignorance. In many ways, religious conservatism defines the rural South. In fact, as we know, the geographic region is known as the "Bible Belt," which demonstrates that geography is rarely a culturally neutral subject. The alignment of the rural South with the church should not be taken lightly since this "guilt by association" is in part responsible for the sense of exclusion Christian Southerners feel in university contexts. However, it is important to note that though their goals seem dissimilar, the Christian church and the university share basic principles: both define knowledge and regulate access.

Although the modern university embodies rational Enlightenment ideals, it can be likened to the church in ways even beyond its origins as a medieval clerical institution. As a consequence of their function as static and relatively closed repositories of knowledge, both the church and the university can be considered gate-keepers of a

---

[12] See *The Bully Pulpit: The Politics of Protestant Clergy* by John C. Green, Corwin E. Smidt, Lyman A. Kellstedt, Margaret M. Poloma, and James L. Guth for a detailed account of the ways in which Protestant leaders have influenced public politics over the last 30 years.

respectively celestial and terrestrial sort. Both institutions -- one secular, the other non-secular – certify "success" or "goodness" via ceremonial recognitions of one's progress on the journey towards enlightenment. Look through any family photo album, and you are sure to discover photographic evidence of religious milestones such as Holy Communion, "getting saved," bar or bah mitzvahs, wedding ceremonies, and more across religious faiths. Alongside these photos of religious milestones, you will likely find proudly displayed graduation photos from kindergarten through graduate school. Both institutions figure into family lives on parallel tracks, signaling individual spiritual and intellectual progress.

The university, as the capstone of intellectual training, functions as the secular church. It operates hierarchically, both internally by student and faculty rank and externally by school reputation in a way not so far removed from the stair-step positions that mark the Catholic Church from priest to pope. Cambridge, Massachusetts could be easily likened to the Vatican City as a kind of academic Mecca, though the educated public puts far more blind trust in Cambridge degrees than Vatican decrees these days. Consider the ways in which the university preserves sacred texts and maintains the "canon" in efforts not so unlike the preservation of the Eucharist and other holy sacraments. The pomp and circumstance of commencement ceremonies remind us of the authority and grandeur associated with university study, the preposterous yet intimidating academic robes affecting the same sense of reverence as the vestments of the priest. The university as secular church perpetuates the idea that literacy of a particular kind is "holy," and we can achieve affirmation of that holiness through the conferment of

degrees, again denoting various stages of intellectual development/progress. What follows is the necessary conflation of "sin" and "error." Those who pursue education are choosing the path of light; those who do not follow the traditional path choose ignorance and ultimately degeneration. It follows that those who can read and write to varying degrees are the fortunate, "saved" souls, while those who fall short are secular sinners, akin to the heathens of darkened continents that missionaries rush to convert.

Most Americans have an abiding faith in academic institutions that mirrors the trust placed in our religious organizations. Though in many ways imperative, scholarly efforts such as the Cultural Values and Human Progress Symposium are fraught with dangerous institutional presumptions and self-exemptions, exhibitions of entitlement similar to that of religious organizations. Both the university and the church function as a medium between darkness and light, success and failure, right and wrong. In the case of the university, its superior position ironically casts it as the kind of obfuscating institution its members are trained to question. While university study is essentially a human project, systems of learning often espouse elusive standards, hierarchical arrangements and competitive models that can be likened to something like the Catholic church's arrangement of bishops and dioceses, and rules of orthodoxy. The "commandments" of the university, like those of the church, ultimately aim to enlighten the masses, to help them get closer to the "light," which can be read as either God/salvation or Truth/enlightenment. As an unfortunate consequence of the eschatological association with history and progress, universities also become places to "save oneself," to make the

most of oneself, if not for the purpose of saving one's soul then for assuring intellectual, emotional, and physical comfort during one's time on earth.

Fundamentally, both the university and the church value the principle of moving "forward." For the church, our forward progress indicates our impending reunion with God. For the university, our forward progress indicates a newer and better understanding and control of our lives on earth. When Harrison notes unequivocally above, "education is better than ignorance," he points to a very basic human belief that we have a duty to make tomorrow better than today through the pursuit of knowledge.

In *Candide*, Voltaire mocked the scholarly allegiance to "metaphysico-theologo-cosmolo-nigology" via Dr. Pangloss and his delusionally optimistic creed:" every day in every way I am getting better and better" (2). Voltaire identifies the crux of both academic and religious pursuits and uses Pangloss as a kind of cautionary tale, reminding us that we should not become too comfortable with familiar paradigms, that we can become ridiculous and counter-productive when we abandon practice in favor of theory. Modern educational study was founded on Enlightenment concepts of human reason and in fact encourages self-criticism like Voltaire's. However, both institutions follow a similar trajectory as a matter of their allegiance to a narrative of Western progress that conflates change and improvement.

Modern scholarship has challenged the "fixity and coherence" of Enlightenment ideals for decades (Hyland 378). For postmodern scholars, Enlightenment ideas legitimate science in a way that leads to domination, knowledge control, and disturbingly unexamined institutional givens. Post-structuralist scholars such as Jean Lyotard, Michel

Foucault and Theodor Adorno find fault with the Enlightenment belief in a unified, rational self and accompanying narratives about the growth of knowledge. Feminist and post-colonial scholars have concentrated on the social contexts of the Enlightenment period, critiquing the movement's implicit cultural specificity and gender bias (Hyland 383-400). However, other scholars, such as Thomas Munck, take a historiographical approach, reminding us that "if the enlightenment was anything, it was about exposing all inherited beliefs to reason and open debate and ultimately replacing passive acceptance with active participation" (qtd. in Hyland 379). One point is clear: Enlightenment thinkers transformed beliefs about the goals of academic study, illuminating not only the value of reason and inquiry but also revealing the ideological inevitabilities of knowledge production and dissemination.

Though suspicious of the abstract reason of the Enlightenment, postmodern critics, despite their determined subversion, in fact operate from a model of "open debate" and "active participation," which thinkers such as Voltaire initially championed. Academic study is forward-thinking and institutionally-bound, even as it aims to question and perhaps even to undermine its own history. This is perhaps the lesson we can take from the "contradictions and paradoxes" left to us by Enlightenment thinkers: no institution, including the academy, is beyond criticism (Hyland 390). Though in contemporary society, the university and the church seem diametrically opposed – one the purveyor of doubt and inquiry; the other the purveyor of certainty and faith – a closer look reveals the ways in which both institutions perpetuate the same model of progress.

The university and the church have had a historically complicated relationship perhaps as a result of their commitment to delineate themselves from one another via their individual interpretations of human progress. Progress, as an Enlightenment concept, is associated with linearity: the belief that humans can produce a future that is better than the present via our reliance on a goal-oriented sense of history. Both institutions follow this model with some exceptions. For example, while Christianity as a religious philosophy operates from a linear model, the Christian church in practice often resists change, providing comforting certainty and faith in the status quo. The church may reject the flashiness of material wealth among church members, encourage modesty and conservatism, and question the consequences of scientific inquiry. In contrast, the non-religiously affiliated university often prides itself on its intellectual and technological exploration – the commitment to always push beyond the status quo. These attitudes have contributed to the seeming divide between the church and the university but have obscured the complex relationship between the institutions that marks them as more blood relatives than sworn enemies.

When Enlightenment thinkers began to doubt the efficacy of the church as disseminator and regulator of knowledge, the rupture between the church and the university began. Thinkers such as Voltaire and Locke placed great faith in nature and the potential of the *individual* to act rationally. As a consequence, the restraints of organized religion and the established monarchy posed a threat to not only human happiness but to human potential in general. The danger seemed to lie in the unquestioned nature of these institutions.

Around the early 18th century, questioning longstanding truths, such as religion, became a noble pursuit, and subsequently, the university emerged as a potential threat to the church. Voltaire famously wrote in a letter to Frederick the Great in 1767, "doubt is not a pleasant condition, but certainty is absurd." Interestingly, from the middle ages through the Enlightenment, the church, in various forms, had operated as the center of education and literacy, suggesting then, that Enlightenment thinkers were, in a way, biting the hand that had fed them, at once rejecting dogmatic principles and viewing blind faith in "certainties" as an obstruction to intellectual enlightenment. While religion had concerned itself with *assuring* one's place in heaven (the distant), science was concerned with *understanding* one's place on earth (the local). Integral to this approach was the subversion of institutional faith in favor of a reliance on observation, doubt, and inquiry. These ideas would later be translated to Empiricist and Positivist philosophies which stressed the importance of objective verification via the senses. Positivist principles have also been responsible for the popular belief that social progress is both inevitable and tied directly to science and technology[13].

Though Enlightenment thinkers such as Voltaire offered an alternative vehicle for self-improvement, valuing local experiences as a form of "truth," the modern university still fostered institutional reliance on a greater body of knowledge, a body of truths that in some ways replaced the traditional "gospel." In *Candide*, Voltaire portrays Dr. Pangloss as a relentless optimist so wedded to progress –time equals improvement – that he denies

---

[13] See *Technocracy and the Politics of Expertise* by Frank Fischer for a fuller understanding of "technocracy," a form of government in which those who have knowledge, expertise or skills hold the most power versus a democratically elected government. Technocrats look at societal problems as largely solvable, and many believe science and technology hold the answers.

his personal experience over and again by obsessively focusing his energy towards the future and a culminating greater good. Despite incredible misfortune, Pangloss denies the reality of those painful experiences and spends his time philosophizing instead of "doing." This disconnection from reality in many ways brings to mind both the church and the university. The church requires blind faith and trust in a happy ending; the university removes us from our local context and places great value on theorizing, often with impractical results. Indictments such as Voltaire's were not a complete rejection of institutional authority, though they did call to our attention the way institutional authority, if unquestioned, can become dangerous.

Enlightenment thinkers were committed to human reason and distrusted religious institutions, but they continued to operate under an essentially goal-directed paradigm, replacing religious worship as the means to an enlightened end with science instead (Richard Hooker). Although there seemed to be a clear conflict between the traditions of the church and the intellectual freedom the Enlightenment promised, the shift was, in fact, a substitution of sorts as academic literacy became the new religion. Hooker writes:

> When one takes the end of the world out of Christian eschatology, one is left with a model of history that resembles the Enlightenment idea of progress. History is still future-directed, as it is in Christian eschatology, but now there is no specific goal towards which history is directed. Add to this picture the notion that history is *made by human beings following predictable and rational laws,* then human beings become not the passive victims of history but its masters. If only the natural processes animating history can be understood, then human beings can manipulate these processes to produce a future that is better than the present, and this combined with the notion that history is directed towards some goal, gives us the Enlightenment concept of progress ("Progress").

Science, in short, became a more accessible religion, one which depended solely on the ingenuity and ambition of the individual. This common belief failed to address the ways in which academia remained hierarchical, insulated and thus still closed to the majority of the "common" people whose ambition was meaningless without access to proper training. By the end of the 19th century, with the adoption of the German model, universities were no longer as reliant on the church[14]. Recognition and negotiation of division had become crucial to intellectual pursuit, and literacy represented power in the way God's grace once had, leading to a monumentally conflicting charge: "knowledge is power, if you have access to the right kind."

The rural South remains largely Protestant in faith, and while the ceremony and overt hierarchy of the Catholic Church does not apply specifically to Southern Baptist, Methodist, or other more popular Southern sects, rural Southerners nonetheless maintain a firm belief in the church as the source of truth. In fact, the no frills approach of a country Baptist church may arguably encourage members to feel closer to God, more integral to the church's mission, and more individually valued than those members of a large Catholic Church, anchored as it is by formal rites and rituals conducted by priests who serve as reminders of the distance between members and God. By dropping a bit of the pomp and circumstance, contemporary American evangelicals have created a grassroots approach to religion that empowers marginalized people to feel they have agency, that their voices can in fact make a difference – a message that has worked to

---

[14] For further discussion of the development of the modern university, see Bill Readings' *The University in Ruins*. Readings also discusses the ways in which the modern university has shifted its mission from promoting and protecting a national culture to making a profit by using corporate business models.

great effect in the rural South. Not surprisingly, the non-secular brand of "knowledge as power" is still just as powerful and persuasive as the university's revised version.

Though Enlightenment philosophy made possible the historical separation of the university and the church, the institutions have not remained exclusively at odds. Modern day Liberty University and the political fury it has raised demonstrates how ideologically powerful an institution can become when it combines the lofty goals of intellectual and spiritual enlightenment.[15] So follows the highly debated split between church and state. Recently, the Texas Board of Education, staffed by members of the Christian Coalition, has made efforts to revise the state's social studies curricula to foreground conservative, Christian values under the claim that the country's founding fathers were Christian[16]. While the university is often considered the liberal foe of the church, religious organizations have long realized the ideological power of educational institutions.

As we know, colleges have been affiliated with religious organizations since America's colonial beginnings. Upon arriving in the "New World," colonial religious leaders soon realized the need to bring Western education to, what was for them, far-reaching, uncivilized territory. Religiously affiliated schools and colleges cropped up in the colonies and on the frontier with various educational missions, but the propelling aim of most were to assure that the intellectual and religious values of core, religious settlements reached the "children of God" scattered in ever more remote locations. While the idea was to insure that all persons had the opportunity to develop their individual

---

[15] Liberty University is a private, Baptist, Evangelical Christian, liberal arts university -- the world's largest Christian university -- located in Lynchburg, Virginia. It was founded in 1971 by Reverend Jerry Falwell, founder of the Moral Majority, one of the largest political lobby groups for evangelical Christians in the United States during the 1980s.
[16] See Russell Shorto's "How Christian Were the Founders?" in *The New York Times*. February 11 2010.

intellect, at the center of their charge was the desire to control both the intellectual and geographical landscape. This intention is noted locally in the challenge Methodist Episcopal Bishop Francis Asbury presented to every Methodist congregation in America in 1791: "give the key of knowledge in a general way to your children, and those of the poor in the vicinity of your small towns and villages" (Michael et al. 13). With this combined mission of church, state, and school to enlighten, people on the geographic fringes soon found themselves tagged as not only ignorant but also spiritually bankrupt and rustic.

The conflation of education and spiritual enlightenment with geographical taming is also echoed in past and present missionary efforts, including those in the Appalachian region of the U.S. during the 1960's "war on poverty." According to Allen Batteau, groups continue to define Appalachian distinctiveness in proportion to how they see themselves as the embodiment of civilization (200). This rhetorical identification/dis-identification is perhaps most apparent in the interface between Appalachia or the rural South as a symbol of ignorant defiance and academia as a symbol of progress and civilization, or to be reductive, the familiar anxiety between the country and the city. Martin writes, "to Americans, ambivalent about the rapid changes brought by industrialization, immigration, and urbanization, Appalachia represented a symbolic counterpoint to the progressive thrust of modern urban society," a thrust likely including the development of universities as standardizing centers of education and religious doctrine (152). Literacy of both the celestial and terrestrial sort became a quick and easy

way to identify the "haves" and "have not's." For the rural Southerner, religious literacy was and is often the more accessible and less culturally treacherous option.

Literacy efforts serve as a clear example of the way in which rhetorical identification and dis-identification "work to include the members of a group in a common ideology, while at the same time excluding alternate terms, other groups, and competing ideologies" (Burke 22). In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Burke notes that identification suggests more powerfully than persuasion the workings of rhetorical discourse in everyday language (24-26). Language is in effect our way of either identifying or dis-identifying with those around us since we are not capable of complete union or omniscience. Rhetoric offers the only way to make ourselves "consubstantial" with one another in order to act together. Since division and faction underscore every discursive (read rhetorical) event, our sense of "belonging," then, is inevitably rhetorical; we know who we are by identifying who we are not. Burke notes that "factional division (of class, race, nationality, and the like) make for the ironic mixture of identification and dissociation that marks the function of the scapegoat" (34). The "Bible Belt" culture's religious faith affords them literate currency in those groups with which they identify. However, by choosing to identify with the church, rural Southerners tap into this long-standing tension between the two institutions. Through the act of identification, the Southerner simultaneously dis-identifies with the literacy values of the university – often unknowingly -- and therefore becomes a rhetorical scapegoat of sorts.

Literacy of any sort, as a function of rhetoric, simultaneously excludes even as it aims to include. Beth Daniell in "Narratives of Literacy: Connecting Composition to

Culture," points to the "great leap theory" first articulated by Havelock and Ong as perhaps the most persistent definition of literacy. Havelock and Ong define literacy as the ability to read and write, positioning it in opposition to orality. With literacy comes a more superior awareness via critical and analytical thinking. From this conclusion, we can presume that all humans experience a "pre-literate" period in their lives. Some, through the acquisition of proper, literate habits, reach a state of functional literacy with the opportunity to advance to an even more highly literate status, while others, in cultures with little access to written language, might never move into an "enlightened" state of literacy and thus remain intellectually bankrupt. The more "advanced" one's reading and writing abilities, the more "literate" he or she becomes, and subsequently, the more social respect he or she can expect. Havelock and Ong's theory functions as a "grand narrative," to use Lyotard's autonomous model, which asserts that "if we understand the origins of say, literacy, then we will know how literacy changes the thinking of human beings and will understand how individuals progress and how cultures advance" (394). This preoccupation with origins functions not only to describe how individuals progress, but as a corollary, how to distinguish between those who "have" literacy and those who do not "have" it, between those who have progressed and those who still need saving.

An unfortunate consequence of this line of thinking is its hegemonic implications. Hierarchy governs literate practices as there are always, seemingly, more sophisticated degrees of literacy, even for those who are functionally literate. Fundamentally this basic understanding of literacy dictates that reading and writing serve as lines of demarcation separating those whose literacy contributes to greater intellectual thought from those who

operate in an apparent fog of ignorance. The "have nots" may rely on unconventional literacy practices ranging from the total absence of reading and writing skills to the peculiarities of certain dialects and cultural values discernible in their reading and writing behaviors. Obviously class, race, gender, sexuality, geographic location, and other cultural factors contribute to the perceived unconventionality of literacy practices. Therein lies the difference between those who have the power to observe, report, and train and those who remain perpetually observed. One need only look to the transformative narrative in George Bernard Shaw's "Pygmalion" and later *My Fair Lady* to see the ways in which literacy training can elevate an individual from "draggle-tailed guttersnipe" to royalty (*My Fair Lady*). Eliza Doolittle's thick Cockney accent and raw mannerisms disqualify her from important social circles. Yet, by softening Doolittle's sharp dialect to a chillier "King's English," Professor Higgins achieves an apparent miracle. This kind of transformational narrative is not only literary.

Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole's now much criticized anthropological work with the Vai tribe in Western Africa brought into relief the ways in which Western ideologies dictate what does and does not count as literate. Scribner and Cole come to the conclusion that the Vai script, an independently developed writing system, functions as "literacy without education" (130). The authors muse on the legitimacy of this system, posing the question: "should we conclude that these restrictions disqualify indigenous Vai literacy as 'real literacy'?" (132). Elspeth Stuckey in *The Violence of Literacy* criticizes the Scribner and Cole study for its reliance on the artifact of literacy as a way of identifying literate occasions. By using the lens of Western literacy to address the literate

behaviors of the Vai society, the researchers guarantee the sublimation of the Vai experience, staking everything on the power of literacy as we know it: "every time they see print, they see a target" (29). Stuckey points out that the Vai were taxonomized before they even met Scribner and Cole (28). Though literacy as we know it did not seem to factor into the cognitive, social, and psychology success of the Vai people, Scribner and Cole refused to admit that their research paradigm was flawed. To do so would be to deconstruct the very idea of literacy. Stuckey points out that this failure to practice self-reflexivity "mirrors the American practice of faith that there simply must be some good that comes from what we all know to be good" (33) – an error similar to that of Dr. Pangloss.

Researchers who fail to practice self-reflexivity also hold the unexamined conviction that there simply must be some good in only investigating that with which they are unfamiliar. When literacy researchers such as Scribner and Cole take the position of anthropologists and hone in on the behaviors of exotic cultures, they easily forget themselves – and their ideological baggage – in the process, but I would argue that researchers more frequently ignore their ideological positioning when they encounter cultures with which they are familiar. Researchers are understandably distracted by the preponderance of the differences before them when they look far beyond their familiar scope, but those everyday encounters with cultures in their "own backyard" are even more difficult to self-critique. Critics such as Stuckey wisely point out that researchers are often blinded by their allegiance to Western ideologies and thus make uninformed judgments about other cultures' literacy practices. For critics, these research faux pas

seem relatively easy to spot since the differences are obvious, the research presumptions baldly apparent from an outsider's perspective. One wonders how apparent these unexamined ideological slants might be for researchers working closer to home?

Instead of looking for the ways in which Western perspectives cloud our understanding of cultural literacies, perhaps we might think in finer terms, looking more locally. What if we were to consider the way urban, Northern ideologies affect the way the rural South is portrayed and studied (or not studied)? The rural South is just close enough to academia that it is often completely ignored or, if studied, approached from an unexamined position of ideological superiority. It seems necessary to extend our beliefs in the importance of self-reflexivity in literacy studies to include not only those moments when researchers potentially misrepresent the experiences of distant cultures but when they potentially misrepresent the experiences of American cultures as well.

When we consider higher forms of literate practices, it is important to consider specifically what kinds of reading and writing we find most intellectually worthy. From where does this authority come and why? Literacy is ideological, and as a matter of course, it tends to "subsume ideas according to powerful interests" (Eagleton, qtd. in Stuckey 22). Not only is the sublimated other essential to meaning-making; the concept becomes integral to our beliefs about progress and civilization itself. From the beginning, it seems higher learning as we know it has been based on a tension between the establishment and the individual, the individual experience and formal convention, the distant and the local, public and private, and so on. In modern iterations, this tension is perhaps most apparent in composition classrooms where students are asked to negotiate

their own experience against the literacy expectations of the institution. Instructors must similarly balance the demands of the university's bottom-line goals while empowering students to become active, individual agents[17].

Geographic Division and Its Consequences

The condition of marginalized rural Southerners is unique in that even though the population is clearly devalued, the idea persists that they are somehow more historically deserving of persecution and less worthy of intellectual attention than other victimized groups. One might consider why it is socially acceptable in virtually any part of the U.S., or indeed in any part of the world, to mock a "Southern redneck," who is essentially just as poor and disadvantaged as other economically marginalized groups (such as ethnic minorities) whose cultural integrity is treated with a kind of mindful solemnity. This abiding aversion from both within and outside the region signals a historical ambivalence. The mocking, though apparently harmless, is pervasive – the "Southern redneck" is an internationally recognizable symbol of unsophistication. The Oxford English Dictionary even has an entry for "redneck:"

> orig. N. Amer. (usu. derogatory). Originally: a poorly educated white person working as an agricultural labourer or from a rural area in the southern United States, typically considered as holding bigoted or reactionary attitudes. Now also more generally: any unsophisticated or poorly educated person, esp. one holding bigoted or reactionary attitudes. ("redneck")

The scapegoat status of the white, rural Southerner perhaps begins from the knee-jerk belief that the white South owes a debt to the rest of the U.S. and particularly to African

---

[17] See Peter Elbow's "Embracing Contraries in the Teaching Process." College English 45.4 (1983).

86

Americans that can never be fully recovered except perhaps through shaming and cultural disrespect. Even academics hesitate to treat the white South as much beyond the disdainful center or the historically despicable "Man."

Representations of the "Man" in popular culture often depict "him" as nameless and even faceless, but nearly always white and racist (and more likely than not, provincial); "he" is dominant but infuriatingly dense. For example, films set in the rural South often rely on visual symbols of impenetrability and obscurity as a way to convey the helplessness of the victimized and exploited who have come up against an ignorant but nonetheless prevailing oppressor: the Ku Klux Klan hood (as in films such as *Places in the Heart* and *O Brother Where Art Thou?*) or mirrored sunglasses (as in *Cool Hand Luke*). The connection to racial bigotry has made the "Man" generally white, historically Southern, and an effigy of oppression for counter-culture groups. The trouble with this association is its logical impossibility in contemporary society.

As controversial author and comedian Jim Goad indelicately notes, "white trash" and white privilege are not interchangeable terms: "rednecks are portrayed as the embodiment of white power when the only time they're likely to encounter a powerful white man is when the boss barks at them down at the factory" (*The Redneck Manifesto* 23). While Southern culture is often portrayed as intellectually backwards, poor, and lazy, it is also often puzzlingly portrayed as representative of the "powers-that-be," the hegemonic incumbent. This ambivalence bespeaks a complex social history that has laid the groundwork for a now commonplace national division.

In *Who Speaks for the South*?, James Dabbs suggests that we can not object to the idea of the rural South as culturally distinct because of its nuanced role in our national history. His observations help to explain why the South is continually viewed as clinging to a past directly at odds with the forward motion of progress which marks the Northern (read modern) mindset. The New England and Virginia settlers' goals were divergent from the moment of landfall. Dabbs explains that:

> The Virginian was not irreligious; he was only more conservative in his religion. Being therefore more under the influence of the vanished Middle Ages, he was more accepting of the totality of life than was the Puritan; he was not so deeply concerned to purify the spirit from all early influences and set the individual naked before God. As it turned out, he was less abstract, less modern; he moved more hesitantly into the modern world. This foothold in the past has always been the basic strength of the Southerner; it has also been his chief misfortune because it set him in opposition to the future-oriented Puritan-Yankee of New England." (19-20)

Dabbs' thoughts on the early rural Southerner help to explain the culture's obstructed social progress. Interestingly, the Puritan arrived with the goal of starting anew, "naked before God," but still sought to maintain the same rigid hierarchy from which he had fled, only replacing those in power with figures sympathetic to his cause. The Virginian was not interested in revising religious hierarchy in any sense, but rather sought space, physical distance between himself and former regimes. The Puritan inclination to start fresh by relentlessly challenging himself both spiritually and intellectually became the blueprint for American ingenuity and success. The Southerner's apparent complacency with existing systems and desire to be "on his own" set him at odds with these defining values early on. These initial tendencies do much to explain the common beliefs that not

only perpetuate the distinctiveness of Southern identity but define our working notions of progress and explain their geographic relevance. Dabbs writes, "The Puritan mind stressed intellectual tautness. The early mind of the South did not" (23). This initial distinction also helps to explain why academic literacy has traditionally challenged rural Southerners. At the root of the *perceived* character of the rural Southerner is a kind of willful ignorance, a naïveté at once to be pitied and scorned.

Dabbs, himself a Southerner, does not hesitate to describe the South's story as a tragic one marked by the presence of a fatal flaw. He writes, "The Southerner let himself be made too easily at home. Like a child he entered the dark wood of the modern world and was tragically – or perhaps pathetically – lost therein" (25). Clearly, the South's allegiance to slavery is a blemish likely never to fade. While the antebellum period is generally remembered with embarrassment, a great portion of the shame and perpetuation of the tragedy comes from modern Southerners themselves.

The humility often attributed to Southern hospitality can also be explained by the belief that the rural South is a team of losers, automatically starting from a sublimated status at any given point for any given project. Dabbs describes the Southerner as making a fatal error of judgment when he decided that the life he sought could be successfully based upon slavery: "This was the Southerner's basic error. He tried to do what neither he himself nor his times permitted" (51-52). Just as women are often saddled with the guilt of "original sin," so is the American South strapped with an epic burden which no future deed can undo; no one is more conscious of this liability than rural Southerners themselves who broach the territory outside their insulated communities tentatively and

89

often apologetically as though to pre-empt the automatic blame they anticipate.This humility is often muddied by the perception of rural Southerners as religiously extreme, yet unwilling to accept responsibility for their perceived sins. According to Dabbs, this tendency is partially explained by the Calvinist influence of the immigrating Scotch-Irish who settled in the American South in large numbers. Dabbs points out that "the effect of this strict and limited moral and theological education, given both in school and in the logical Calvinistic sermon, was to increase the dogmatism and pride of a people already stern, hard and proud" (89). Though this brand of religious fervor became a way to account for sin, it also worked to tighten community bonds, leading to clannish values that even further alienated the South from within and without. Dabbs explains, "The South, which had in it the makings of a healthy provincialism, became unhealthily provincial. It became enamoured of the ideal of the 'loyal Southerner,' and skeptical of all outsiders, especially outsiders from the North" (260). The division between the North and the South was most resoundingly defined by the Civil War, but the cultural differences were interminable from the beginning, it seems.

This division is most keenly felt by the modern rural Southerner, who, finding himself generally defined by what he is *not*, must always negotiate the ambivalences of just who he *is* within his culture and the ambivalent attitudes about what he *represents* when he strays outside his culture. Dabbs points out that "we have now in the South a mixture that it is almost impossible to define, a mixture of inwardness and outwardness, of individual and community, of satisfaction in the present and drive into the future, of this world and another, of acceptance of life and sharp rejection, and, in regard to the

racial problem every white Southerner faces, a mixture of shame and guilt" (94). Dengler identifies this hyper-awareness as a kind of "double-consciousness," hearkening DuBois' term (127-28). Division defines the lives of rural Southerners in nearly every capacity, but their cultural alienation is perhaps most evident but least considered in the area of university study -- in those moments when the rural Southerner, bearing the "willfully ignorant" cross, confronts the narrative of progress and civilization against which his or her culture historically has been cast.

The South as Antithetical to Progress

The literacy mission has worked unkindly for rural Southern populations. Unlike other minority populations who are generally given license for their literacy struggles, the rural, Southern white is often cast as lazy, a symbol of the savage, dogmatic antebellum South, and therefore unworthy of attention beyond superficial community outreach efforts. It is not often that academics care to know who these people are and how they get along apart from mainstream public discourse.

In "Redneck and Hillbilly Discourse in the Writing Classroom," Jennifer Beecher describes several informal occasions when peers at academic conferences spoke with open contempt about the "rednecks" in their classes who refuse to accept their part in race and gender discrimination problems (173). Beecher writes that "terms like 'redneck' and 'hillbilly' are regularly constructed as racial terms that work to identify for mainstream whites other white people who behave in ways supposedly unbecoming to or unexpected of whites" (175). The redneck reminds us of who we are striving *not* to be; he

or she is one of many "others" our national identity continually works against as we move forever onward and upward.

The derogatory term refers to a highly stylized image and can be applied to any poor white; however, the versatility of the term does not shake it from its solidly rural, Southern roots. To be called a "redneck" is not just to be "trashy" or "uneducated" but to share most characteristics with the Southerner, an equally maligned American population. The stereotypes and statistics are more accessible and less treacherous touchstones for most, particularly mainstream media who have capitalized time and again on the redneck as cultural icon[18]. These stereotypes work as a telling kind of cultural short-hand for mainstream America's anxieties about their place in the narrative of progress.

In "Sophisticated People versus Rednecks," Lucy Jarosv and Victoria Lawson argue that redneck representations are in fact efforts to displace racism onto poor, rural whites or "rednecks" in ways that "obscure or ignore everyday acts of racism within mainstream white America" (15). These representations also work to perpetuate the belief that class is a myth or perhaps even a lifestyle choice (Beecher 175). Just as importantly, the "redneck" demonstrates the ways in which geography can be as much a determiner of prejudice as other cultural markers. Jarosv and Lawson note that "the term also marks the cleavages within white, America along the fault lines of class, rurality, and rural identity that retain a resonance with its Southern regional origins" (12). Unexamined stances and off-hand prejudices suggest that rural Southern culture somehow deserves to be mocked and/or ignored perhaps because it reminds us of unresolved tensions.

---

[18] The image is in fact so pervasive that I do not even find it necessary to offer sensational examples.

W.J. Cash, in his profoundly influential book, *The Mind of the South*, explains the ways in which, historically, the North has looked ambivalently upon Southern culture. Written in 1941, Cash's book tracks the epistemology of the Southerner from the antebellum period through the 1930s. Southern identity has historically been undergirded by a kind of admiring legend of aristocracy, individualism, and honor perpetuated by the Northern media and Southerners themselves. Even amidst the years of reconstruction following the Civil War, the Northern media presented what Cash calls a "Janus-faced attitude" towards the South, damning the South in some newspapers, while also writing and reading histories which "not only accepted the legend but embroidered it" (62-63). Cash cites *The Liberator* specifically.

These legends of the romantic South were likely part of a feminization of the culture following the South's loss in the war and a furthering of the sentimentalizing rhetoric about the superiority of Southern tradition as exemplified by the Southern female, an icon of all things good. For both the North and the South, the Southern woman represented a kind of innocence the nation was ambivalent about sacrificing for the sake of progress. She also represented a weaker, more naïve figure to be at once protected and dominated, an attitude demonstrated by the North towards the South post-war. As a counter to the perceived femininity of the South, the North also saw a masculine frontier way of living, a rugged individualism that they couldn't help but admire in the place of their vision of urbanity and progress. In the South, right and wrong were not questioned; honor was of utmost importance. The culture seemed to represent an Old World tradition

that, while it inhibited progress, also offered a kind of nostalgic representation of where America had been, a residue of a finer, simpler time.

In this way, the South's *otherness* contributed to the construction of a new American identity following the Civil War, one developed and advertised by the "civilized" North and dependent upon a geographically inspired rhetoric. As Kenneth Burke notes, war is the ultimate "perversion of communion," suggesting a confrontation of divisions that serve as the impetus for rhetorical identification or dis-identification (22). Cash is quick to note that "when we say 'Yankee thought' and 'Yankee mind' we are in effect saying modern thought and the modern mind, and this comment is essential to the argument that there has been and continues to be a conflation between Northern, urban and urbane, intellectual (137).

In fact, by the early 20th century, the term "Yankee" had become synonymous with "American." As an example, during WWII, the newspaper for American soldiers was called *The Yank*. To the international community, "yankee" meant and still means, the quintessential American citizen. For Southerners, this term is obviously derisive, left-over from the Civil War's "damn Yankees" and therefore quite emotionally stirring. As Senator J. William Fulbright of Arkansas once noted, "The very word 'Yankee' still wakens in Southern minds historical memories of defeat and humiliation, of the burning of Atlanta and Sherman's march to the sea, or of an ancestral farmhouse burned by Cantrill's raiders" (Woods 548). The conflated use of "Yankee" and "American" obviously sends a message to Southerners about their national and international insignificance.

The American media has especially contributed to the identification of the Yankee as quintessentially American. Major news outlets in the north have always served as the authority on U.S. affairs for international readers, and the construction of the Southern stereotype became an easy contrast to set into relief the nation's advancing culture. Just as the universities we consider top-notch, Ivy League schools are nearly all to be found in the northeast, the intellectual center of the country was always to be found in northern cities, and following the war, the belief that the Northerner was not only the victor, but the more humane, more progressive thinker became solidified. The South became an important rhetorical counterpoint to the goals of a progressive, forward-thinking America fueled by long-standing Puritan ethics[19].

Following the war, denigration of the South was not just reserved to popular rhetoric. The South was openly exploited by northern businessmen who moved south to capitalize on cheap labor; so developed the concept of the mill town, and with it came the same paternalistic approach found in the antebellum plantation system. In many ways, the South became "re-colonized." The "fiefdom" that was mill working established a kind of retributive arrangement: the white southern man became servant to the northern master, though the men who worked the mills had likely never even seen a plantation. The squalor and insulation of the mill town soon replaced the relative freedom of agrarian living, and many southerners fell into the arrangement out of necessity and with few

---

[19] It can be easily argued that the American Midwest and West have also suffered derision as a consequence of the perception of the North as America's "mind center" in more recent years.

reservations. The paternalistic system of the unquestioned benevolent master taking care of his people was one of which the culture was quite familiar and comfortable.

Yet, with the realization of unfavorable work conditions in the late twenties and thirties and the accompanying labor movement, Southern workers began to rightly fear they were being duped. The glad-hand system between the manufacturing barons and their workers was soon matched by an even more stringent suspicion of outside authority as laborers began to realize they were being exploited. Violent skirmishes such as the Loray Mill strike in Gaston County, North Carolina and the Battle of Blair Mountain in Logan County, West Virginia signaled an end to the blind faith in authority that had sustained Southern industry for some years[20]. Southern workers developed a solid "us versus them" mentality anchored by a clear awareness of not only their economic exploitation but also their denigrated cultural status in the national consciousness.

Additionally, the South had experienced a kind of intellectual drought following the war as the region's values of sentimentality and nostalgia came into direct conflict with the values of the philosophically minded North. It was not until the turn of the century that higher education became a clear priority in the South, and as a result, the value of doubt, inquiry, and tolerance – those defining characteristics of progress -- fell dramatically in that time between the end of the war and the start of land grant programs and other concerted efforts to re-energize the South intellectually. It certainly did not help that during the war, the South was considered morally inept as a result of their ignorance

---

[20] Sally Griffin's dissertation,"Lintheads and Barons: A Rhetorical Study of the Discourses of the Loray Mill Strike," offers an extensive analysis of the events of the Loray Mill strike, one of the most recognized in labor history. Denise Giardina's *Storming Heaven* offers a compelling, fictionalized account of the Battle of Blair Mountain, the largest organized armed uprising in American labor history.

and rigid persistence in their God-given right to own slaves. As a result, the idea of the South as intellectually dead became a common and integral part of its identity[21].

From the mid to late 19th century, in the minds of many, the South made little to no profound artistic or intellectual contribution to American philosophic or scientific thought, at least few that were nationally recognized. Cash writes that "the intellectual and aesthetic culture of the Old South was a superficial and jejune thing, borrowed from without and worn as a political armor and a badge of rank" (94). If the Old South's idea of high culture was superficial, the high culture of post-war South was considered to be historically nonexistent, despite evidence to the contrary.

Though the post-war South had its fair share of inventive minds, their contributions were and have often been minimized, as in the case of Nathan Stubblefield. A melon farmer from Murray, Kentucky, Stubblefield experimented with wireless telephony in the late 19th century, making several public demonstrations of voice and music transmission in large northern cities. There is strong evidence to support the claim that Stubblefield invented the radio before the Italian, Marchese Marconi. However, the relative obscurity of Stubblefield's name is evidence enough of his absence in mainstream history books. Southern writers of this era shared a similar fate of obscurity and omission from mainstream canons. Those writers who did contribute to the American canon were often classed as "local color" or "regionalist" -- qualifiers for a brand of literature that emphasized and at times exploited cultural differences through nostalgia and sentimentality. Authors such as Mark Twain wrote in the local vernacular and often

addressed themes that highlighted the clash of rural ways with impinging urban values (Campbell). Though Twain eventually made it into the mainstream canon, contemporary critics generally overlooked the literary value of regional authors, though later scholars and critics would pick up on their innovative threads, as was the case with Kate Chopin in New Orleans. It wasn't until the 1930s that southern universities began to thrive and so signaled the arrival of the Southern Agrarians led by John Crowe Ransom and the start of the South's slow acceptance into the mainstream literary canon[22].

The Rural South as Balm and Bane

Rural, Southern cultures are particularly tied to concepts of progress since their identity is largely determined by the term, often operating as the obvious antithesis to progressive non-Southern urban cultures in what Katherine Stewart calls the "bourgeois imaginary" (qtd. in Bell 150). The rural South finds itself doubly vexed by its association with regional generalizations and "country bumpkinhood," a prejudicial distinction likely as old as civilization itself. Though culturally maligned, the rural South is also considered a land of bounty, nostalgia, and endearing sentimentality. It is not just the American South's history which explains this ambivalence.

Historically, the rural or the country has always served as a place for civilization to work out its anxieties about progress. Brian Short explains that "the recurrent popular feeling that there is moral value in agricultural life, and that all progress detracts from

---

[22] For further reading on the development of the Southern Agrarian movement, see Paul Conkin's *The Southern Agrarians*, as well as *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: Modernism and the New Criticism*, Volume 7, edited by Walton Litz, Louis Menand, and Lawrence Rainey.

some earlier Golden Age can be charted within Roman writings" (134). As an example, in *De Re Rustica*, Varro (116-29 B.C.) writes, "Divinia natura dedit agros, ars humana aedificavit urbes" ("Divine nature gave the fields, human art built the cities") (qtd. in Short 134). The association is namely a consequence of the conflation of the rural with agriculture. There seems to be something sacred about the place where our food is grown; thus, the country represents the earth, the "basics," while the city stands as a man-made thing, evidence of man's progress, but also a frightening reminder of how removed civilization has gotten from its "roots." While progress, as in change, certainly seems inevitable, it is a constant reminder of death or "the end" as a consequence of a type of residual eschatology, revealed by the feeling that though progress (technological, intellectual, and so on) is an essential human project, it unfortunately sets us on a fast-track towards ultimate destruction.

As a response to common beliefs about idyllic rural life, in literature and the arts the city is often represented as a confrontation of chaos, disorder, and perhaps even madness. This theme can be traced from early civilization to the present, from canonized literature to seemingly trivial cameos in popular culture. Plato's *Phaedrus* contrasts the strange allure of the country with the bustling intellectual fervor of the city. When Socrates asks Phaedrus of his encounter with the fraudulent Lysias, he asks "Then Lysias, it seems, was in the city?" Phaedrus affirms. Socrates, then, gently leads Phaedrus outside the walls of the city to the banks of the Illissus under a tree to conduct a seemingly more authentic dialectic in a purer setting. Yet, hitting on the ambivalence of the country setting, Socrates says to Phaedrus, "You see, I am fond of learning. Now the country

99

places and the trees won't teach me anything, and the people in the city do. But you seem

to have found the charm to bring me out" (qtd. in Bizzell and Herzberg, 140). Jumping

ahead some centuries, Thomas Hardy's 19th century "Ruined Maid" highlights the

experience of a hometown girl who has "made it big" in the city only to emerge

hardened, cynical, and perhaps even morally compromised. Another century later in

American popular culture, Jimmy Reed's 1961 Country and Western hit, "Bright Lights,

Big City," touches on the same fear of urban corruption in the chorus, "bright lights, big

city, gone to my baby's head." And perhaps our most common association of the

complex cultural relationship between the rural and the urban comes from Aesop's

"Town Mouse and Country Mouse" fable. After a country mouse's disruptive and

harried visit to his town mouse cousin, he gladly returns to his quiet, rural home, and

offers the signature moral: "Better beans and bacon in peace than cakes and ale in fear."

These assorted examples not only highlight the regularity of the country/city trope, but

remind us of its fixity in our cultural consciousness as a part of our aesthetic literacy.

  While the rural is sometimes considered a rustic safe haven, it is equally regarded

with disdain as culturally backwards and a worrisome obstruction to progress. Running

parallel to the longtime association of the rural with the pastoral is what David Bell calls

the "anti-idyll," which "relies on processes of denial and expulsion, which together

produce a category of . . . *the rural abject* – those people and things dispelled from the

idyll, rendered other, cast out (151). The rural South is clearly an example of the rural

abject as a consequence of its vexed history and reputation in the American conscience.

The anti-idyll operates as a response to the inevitable nostalgia that accompanies great movement or change. While valuing what comes before (either historically or through the kind of conceptual nostalgia that is the country and city phenomenon) is a natural response to our own fears about acceleration as it relates to our dread of death, we recognize and value with equal conviction the inevitability of time and change: progress. This ambivalence can be clearly discerned in the rural abject who function as the excess, the waste product of civilization's existential tug-of-war.

Stewart's ethnography of Appalachian culture describes the way anti-idyllization plays into the image of the people there: "It became a site of a culture that was irredeemably white, poor, rural, male, racist, illiterate, fundamentalist, inbred, alcoholic, violent, and given to all forms of excess, degradation, and decay" (119). The figure of the hillbilly or redneck has come to function in the imagination of the American bourgeois as an embodiment of both authenticity and backwardness, thus serving a "tense and contradictory" role (Stewart 119). The poor, white, rural Southerner is "exotic" but not the colorful, thrilling brand of exotic that Post-colonialists and other social justice scholars traditionally petition for; the rural Southerner is all-too-familiar and all-too-revealing of our own national anxieties about the nature of progress and the role of education in that ambivalent pursuit.

Since the university is clearly aligned with our beliefs about civilization, "outreach" efforts inadvertently widen the gulf between the lacking rural South and the enlightened academic culture, furthering beliefs about the inherent inferiority of the region. Behind the benevolent intentions to rescue the impoverished is a national

narrative of progress still reliant on the subordination of the rural South. Collegiate service volunteers perhaps unknowingly articulate the same guiding principle as churches in early America: to enlighten the frontiersmen and spread the "gospel." For example, some collegiate service efforts are missionary in nature, and while they seek the noble goal of helping one's fellow man, they inevitably further the premise that progress comes from the outside, from the urbane and educated.

The confluence of religion, education, and service is aptly represented through the work of organizations such as the Appalachian Service Project (ASP), founded in 1969 by Rev. Glenn "Tex" Evans, a United Methodist minister. From the organization's website, ASP's primary mission is "to eradicate substandard housing in Central Appalachia and equip and inspire lives of Christian service" by repairing homes throughout Kentucky, West Virginia, Virginia and Tennessee in an effort to fortify them against the elements ("Appalachian Service Project"). While ASP clearly markets itself as "open to all people" on its website, it offers a specific program for "college volunteers," by partnering with university clubs, campus ministries, and organizations as an option for fulfilling their group's respective service requirements/ambitions. Overtly Christian in nature, ASP offers progress not only in the form of carpentry projects, but also through the furthering of the United Methodist Church's interests and the enrichment of community service lines on college student resumes.

To discount a well-meaning non-profit organization is far from my intent, but it is important to consider how these kinds of projects affect the ways people from these serviced areas think of themselves and subsequently the way outsiders think of them.

What is to be said for the university student who hails from these "outreach" areas? How do these kinds of efforts figure into the complex chronology of the rural South's relationship with progress and civilization? The benevolent efforts of these kinds of service organizations should be respected, but they should *not* be disqualified from criticism simply because of their apparently charitable aim. Service projects such as ASP can be read as ideological narratives articulating again and again the nature of the relationship between civilization (as either city or university) and the country, a dynamic made more potent by Northern and Southern affiliations. The attitudes of these kinds of university-affiliated service projects suggest an unspoken ideological hierarchy embedded in many university missions, which invariably casts the rural South as low on the "cultured" totem pole.

James Moffett's widely read *Storm in the Mountains: A Case Study of Censorship, Conflict, and Consciousness* works as an example of how university literacy goals can be perceived as unwanted, secular, missionary efforts and further illustrates the way in which rural Southerners often case the university in opposition to the church. In his case study, Moffett operates from a common academic perspective of Appalachian culture, at once sympathetic to and aggravated by its religious obstinacy and celebrated anti-intellectualism. In 1974, when Kanawha, West Virginia protestors raised concerns about the content of textbook materials he edited, Moffett journeyed south to understand why. The materials, designed for high school English students, were created by Moffett and others to take a "strong stand for pluralism and multi-cultural expression that went far beyond wooing of minorities" (Moffett 6). Ignited by the intrusion of outside texts

and by the sense of being ignored and intellectually disrespected, the "miners, fundamentalists, and industrial workers" leading the ban used what Moffett described as "the one weapon they have to wield in a world over which they feel they have little control" – striking (22). Formal protests read like the following from Kanawha County PTA materials: "Many of the books are literally fully of anti-Americanism, anti-religion and discrimination. Too, these books are woefully lacking in morally lifting ideas. Many of the statements flout law and order and respect for authority. Several passages are extremely sexually explicit" (15).

Moffett responded to these complaints with a mixture of disgust and self-congratulatory empathy. Clearly aware of the delicate position the protest put him in as a celebrated liberal educator, Moffett reveals his strategic thinking as he decides how to address what, for him, are ridiculous religious rants:

> I have broken two rules of liberals. I do not patronize poor, ill-educated, or disenfranchised people by exempting them from the same critical examination I feel free to direct towards the rest of society; however much I might champion the same minority or disadvantaged group in the forums of that society. The case at hand has made me realize that our old garden-variety liberals have never fully faced up to the painful dilemma that the people they take under their wing may be the most likely to violate their liberal principles, precisely because cultures of poverty, ignorance, and rejection more readily generate bigotry, racism, and violence. It's easier to behave well if you're well off (though some who are don't). (Moffett x)

Moffett constructs a framework from which to safely criticize the beliefs of a people whose values he admits he would champion in theoretical conversations, perhaps in the safety of an academic hall among peers. He carefully reflects on the dissonance he feels as he attempts to negotiate feelings of sympathy for the Appalachian people with his own

firm beliefs in the rightness of his position. Moffett decides not to exempt the Kanawha County residents from critical examination in an apparent show of equal opportunity criticism. However, he fails to give his own agenda the same critical treatment. He writes further in his introduction:

> In fact, I have taken most seriously what was for them the heart of their outcry – their religious beliefs. This is how I came to break another rule of the liberal tradition. In an understandable reaction to superstition, bigotry, and church corruption of the past, intellectual and academic circles usually avoid treating religion seriously except as an object of study. Certainly it is a professional risk to admit that one might really believe such stuff, a breach of taste at the least. But I feel closest to the book protesters in their insistence on a spiritual framework and in their repudiation of materialism. (xi)

Religion, for Moffett, gets in the way of the mission of the textbook materials. Protestors read the tension surrounding the textbooks as a "religion versus education" match-up, an "us versus them" battle that started from their sense of being disrespected and put upon by outside forces. This move was far from reductive. It spelled out clearly the ways in which the university and the church functioned as outside, at times invasive authorities for Southern Appalachia. When given the choice between the university and religion, as is sometimes the presented case, rural Southerners often choose religion (fundamentalist Christianity quite often) as it offers a refuge for their ideas and a sense of across-the-board rewards and punishments without the pitfalls of cultural snobbery. Though, as Moffett wisely points out, the Appalachian people's blind faith in fundamentalist principles leads to unsavory acts of violence, bigotry, and racism, their reactions should signal a re-examination of the role of the university in the lives of Southern Appalachians.

The fundamentalist conservative Christians protesting the books raised questions

for Moffett about cultural politics and education and how to negotiate issues of pluralism,

tolerance, and parental rights without giving in to censorship. He ultimately identifies the

book rebellion as symptomatic of a "not-wanting-to-know" pandemic, what he calls

"agnosis," that signaled the entrance of the "Moral Majority" in cultural politics and

education. His observations are historically accurate and clearly describe the infiltration

of evangelical Christians into national politics, yet they fail to address the ideological

reasons for this particular stand-down.

In "Rhetorics and Realities: The History and Effects of Stereotypes about Rural

Literacies," Kim Donehower outlines the history of cultural stereotypes, focusing

primarily on the Southern Appalachian region. She discusses the ways in which literacy

operates as an "othering" device and deftly critiques Moffett's rhetorical approach in

Storm in the Mountains. Donehower points out that in Moffett's transcribed interviews

with protest leaders such as the Reverend Ezra Graley, he adopts a position of assumed

authority and works repeatedly to "convince his informants of the wrongness of their

stance" (51). Using didactic Socratic rhetoric, Moffett attempts to "teach" Graley by

presenting a series of leading questions, a move suggesting perhaps less concern for his

interlocutor and more for his eventual audience – educated, upper-to-middle class, non-

Appalachians such as himself. Donehower explains the disconnect between Graley and

Moffett as a difference in literacy traditions. For Moffett, variety in interpretations is

most valued – the post-modern celebration of dissonance as a sign of intellectual

progress. For Graley, agreement in interpretation is of foremost importance – a value

reminiscent of the bonding behaviors that define many rural societies (53). Graley's

response also echoes Dabbs' observation of Southerners as having "little experience

agreeing to disagree" (309). Without the recognition of this fundamental difference in

literacy expectation, neither Graley nor Moffett could find common ground.

The stakes were especially high for the Appalachian protestors, who, as

underdogs, became more emotionally invested in the cause. Though the subject matter of

the textbooks fueled original complaints, the furor seemed to become more about

protecting the local contention than squabbling over specific content. Moffett notes that, "

'the books' became for many people 'the dirty books,' including for some people who

never examined them or even saw them but took the word of others whose values they

knew to be their own" (17). Now, reviewing the controversy with more contextual

sensitivity, we can conclude that an awareness of personal history is just as important to

amelioration as the use of "sound" logic. Donehower points out that:

> Within this context, for Moffett's informants to submit to his teacherly
> questioning and accept his kind of logic meant tacitly agreeing with the system
> that identified them as inferior, a system of which Moffett was both a symbol and
> a practitioner. Thus the mountaineers refused to engage Moffett with any of his
> rhetorical tools and relied exclusively on their own – heavy scriptural quotation,
> parables, and local anecdotes and analogies." (54)

As Donehower demonstrates, by ignoring the obvious disconnect in literacy expectations,

Moffett, though humbled by the experience, does little to consider the fallibility of his

own world view and so fails to question his choice of rhetorical strategy and ideological

worldview during the interviews and later during his written reflections.

While Moffett was generally praised as noble for demonstrating sympathy for the protesters, he did not seriously consider the literacy behaviors of the fundamentalists beyond a rather blunt discounting of their literacy practices, demonstrating at times his own "not wanting to know." Moffett and the majority of his readership presupposed a kind of intellectual and literate superiority. The contents of Moffett's textbook represented an accepted example of academic inquiry and progress at work, but his response was a move not so different from Scribner and Cole's criticized study of the Vai tribe. To question his text, as Graley and others did, was to question not only Moffett, not only intellectual pursuit in general, but also a ubiquitous and presumptuous literacy narrative. Flinching at issues of censorship and fundamentalism are and should be an integral part of an academic's profession, but the danger comes when academics do not pause to consider their reasons for flinching. Scholars such as Moffett are often enticed to serve as "benevolent benefactors" to only those populations whose values do not directly assault the legitimacy of their democratic mission. To recognize the relativity of literacy values would mean sacrificing the university's role as the seeming last bastion of civilization.

Our universities are considered not only mind-centers but civilizing mechanisms, and from their early American conceptions, have operated from a kind of missionary paradigm as the beacon of civilization shining out to enlighten the darkened edges of the nation. Consequently, "frontier" people who we may characterize, then, as either geographically or figuratively marginalized, may find implicit in this cultural syllogism, the belief that local experience should be tested against the Truth, which will always be

housed by institutional authorities such as the church and colleges and universities. These perceptions are important, particularly in the way university students buy into the idea of learning and legitimacy. Rural Southerners are taught to devalue their lived experience and local contexts by media culture, advertisements, and even their assigned educational systems in favor of distant technologies and theories that, though they may hold little bearing on their immediate home contexts, still play into the way they think about themselves and their potential. Thomas Newkirk calls this tendency the "conspiracy against experience," which is revealed through a still valorized belief in objectivity in our classrooms. Clearly, the further a student places herself from "civilization" in these terms, the more provincial she will be and therefore the less qualified her experience feels. Progress, as we know it, then, comes with the necessary sublimation of others in a process of devaluing the local in favor of the distant.

Experiencing the University "at home"

Even though the rural South is generally considered the antithesis of education and progress, Linda Flowers suggests in *Throwed Away: Failures of Progress in Eastern North Carolina* that there has always been a general consensus, particularly with the rural poor she knew and studied, that education was highly valued, "somethin' nobody can take away from you," and to a large extent this belief still popularly holds true (Flowers 90). Our familiar narratives of progress seem to demand a reliance on a greater system to grease the gears for us, to move us from point A to point B in a standardized, socially acceptable way whether it is through religious institutions, the military, the university

system, etc. A college education is popularly thought to set you up with the credentials and the esteem required to open most doors, even though undergraduate degrees are quickly becoming the norm and are therefore no longer the keys to success they may once have seemed.

Faith in the university is not just reserved for the rural poor in places like eastern North Carolina where Flowers conducts her study. Most of us would agree that higher education is essential to professional success in America; we would be hard pressed to ever discourage a student, no matter his or her academic record, from pursuing some form of higher education if the opportunity existed. Recent literacy studies have reported on the unquestioned faith in education in rural areas, but have failed to fully consider the significance of this cultural given. Sohn's recent study of Appalachian women returning to college affirms an abiding faith in the transcendent powers of higher education:

> The power of literacy relates to their sense of accomplishment in finishing the college degree, something the women praised whether they found jobs or not. Their power rested in their awareness of being role models for their children, for the chance to be 'somebody' (Luttrell), and for moving from a 'passive to an active role . . . to see themselves as instruments of knowledge and influence' (Neilson 132). (43)

With academic literacy comes an acceleration of knowledge, power, and personal satisfaction. While this belief is in large part true as a matter of the system's own design and the reification of its own laws, it is important to consider how this narrative of acceleration is experienced by populations who find themselves painfully local, far from the prized distant that a university education seems to both demand and promise. The university seems to stand in as a symbol for literacy itself, which Deborah Brandt

describes as "economic, political, intellectual, spiritual – which like wealth or education, or trade skill or social connections, is pursued for the opportunities and protections that it potentially grants its seekers" (5). The farther populations are from academic culture whether physically or intellectually, the more likely they are to idealize its virtues and mythologize its power and/or reject its mission altogether. Thomas Hardy noted this tendency when commenting on his own *Jude the Obscure*, remarking that the "grimy" feature of the story shows the contrast between the "ideal life a man wished to lead and the squalid real life he was fated to lead" (xxviii).

Mike Rose writes of his own "trouble sense of exclusion" as a working class kid in California who initially found the "impenetrable formulas and terms" of school so far from his own literacy values that he responded with sarcasm and stubbornness. Mistakenly put onto the vocational track, Rose found himself playing into the role he felt was expected of students of this sort: cultivators of stupidity whose disappointing presence was essential to highlight the intellectual successes of college track students. Rose experienced conflict between two visions – one of individual possibility and one of environmental limits and determiners; "the vibrant power of meaningful work versus the absorbing threat of South Vermont," his working class neighborhood (114-5). The school became, for him, a stage for playing out this drama – a place that fostered growth but created the social conditions for intensifying his marginality (115).

Particularly in the rural South, a university education is still something to be respected and feared in much the way Rose remembers as a working class kid. The opportunity to attend a four-year college is hard-fought, and while federal aid now makes

111

it possible for students from impoverished areas to go to college more easily, the cultural disruption that accompanies the transition can make it all the more difficult for students to follow through and graduate. Flowers points out that there is real difference between people nurtured on the expectation that a successful life is something into which they will move with relative ease and those who know for sure that "there's not likely much out there for them" (178).

Flowers describes the ways that "college" began to figure into the lives of the rural poor of eastern North Carolina in the mid-late 1960s with the creation of the community college system, an apparent attempt to meet marginalized students half-way. When federal education finally reached the area in the 1960s, the rural poor "awakened to a new sense of their place in the world," realizing, it seems, their role in the greater national consciousness (93). While technical and community colleges offered a way for children of the poor to become more competitive professionally, it also afforded them a certain sense of prestige that came with holding a degree. Flowers points out that the creation of the community college system signaled the transition from farm to factory in the area and marked a change from the perception of "college" as an idealized, distant goal to an accessible, local possibility.

The initial belief that college had become more attainable was short-lived, however, as competition for jobs made higher education that much more desirable, leading to higher enrollments in community colleges, and finally a much more typical population of job candidates with associate's degrees. It did not take long for the job market to become once more elusive, and pride in community college educations began

to suffer as a result. Soon, this most viable option for children of the rural poor became popularly mocked as an inferior alternative to the seemingly improbable university degree, signaling again the necessity of the sublimated other in narratives of progress and success. Community colleges are now jokingly referred to by titles like "Harvard on the Hill," and students who attend often build into their academic identity a sense of modesty and shame about their education.

Many poor rural Southerners view university study as the key to a better life and regard their own lives as ugly, unrecognized and thus unimportant. The farther one is from the perceived "center" of civilization, the longer the intellectual and physical journey one faces and the more profound the transformation one expects. The need to move up and out of one's local context is clearly experienced by blue-collar, rural Southern children who often view leaving home as an "escape" of sorts. In *The Hidden Injuries of Class*, Richard Sennett speaks of the pain of leaving a class behind brought on by the almost obligatory sense of the need to move up (139). He identifies this narrative as "the dream of dignity through upward mobility" (169), an American ideal. The popular belief stands that in order to progress one does not just physically move but drastically changes habits, perhaps through a four year or beyond education (outside of the community college system) or through exposure to city life or international travel – those values that society places at a premium. As Sennett points out, "schooling is supposed to develop your internal powers, make you as a person more powerful in relation to the productive order of society; the move to white collar work is in this way a consequence of your having become a more developed human being" (179). This belief persists even

though as Sennett later points out, "most of those flowing into white collar work find the reality quite different – the content of the work in fact requires very little mind at all" (179). What does our local experience tell us about progress? What does the step from one class, one culture to the next demonstrate?

Experiencing Progress "at home"

Though any move from the familiar to the unfamiliar can signal an important disruption for *any* group, the rural Southerner's situation is just as unique as any particular group or affiliation's experience heretofore accepted as distinct by Cultural Studies scholars. Lewis Killian, in his book, *White Southerners*, treats southerners as an ethnic group (qtd. in Degler, 9). Victor Villanueva has pointed out that there is a "racialization to Appalachia," something more than simply class reference, something akin to "ethnicity" (qtd. in Sohn, xiv - xv). Purcell-Gates calls it a "color with no name," this "white underclass, minority within the nations' white majority" (qtd. in Sohn, 2). Hailing from the most rural, the least urbanized, and the poorest areas in the country, rural Southerners deserve at least as much attention in their acquisition and negotiation of literacies as other plighted groups, it would seem (Degler 14-15).

The popular casting of the rural as antithetical to civilization, the South as antithetical to American progress has inspired in some rural Southern cultures a kind of self-defeating humility when it comes to higher education. When I entered the university, I did not know that my experiences were useful. In fact, like many university students, I experienced a period of mourning, recognizing that with the acquisition of academic

literacies and the accompanying intellectual cachet came the necessary purging of who I was before. This purging was not deliberate, at least not on my part, nor was it particularly reasonable. It was an unspoken expectation, one which was built into cultural narratives about "leaving home for college."

Janet Carey Eldred and Peter Mortenson in "Reading Literacy Narratives" identify Appalachian areas as particularly susceptible to narratives of progress/literacy which encourage near complete abandonment of home literacies. They write, "Appalachia has…to teach its young that 'advancement' does not necessarily mean leaving the region, that 'progress' does not entail migration to what are seen as higher centers of learning and culture" (525). Eldred and Mortenson point to the persistence of the "primitive/civilized" distinction, borrowed from anthropological discourse, as responsible for our beliefs that literacy acquisition demands drastic, individual change. Such narratives imply that social desirability is contingent upon literacy. The authors use George Bernard Shaw's "Pygmalion" to illustrate: "though Eliza starts out as a character who is 'not at all a romantic figure,' once literate, she becomes a suitable romantic heroine" (532).

In small, rural places like my home, those who leave for college often never return, and if they do, it might only be for holidays or funerals, and they re-emerge perhaps much changed in appearance, speech, attitude, and carriage. In our community, stories circulated about a local woman who had left her home – a little gray house that sat across from the post office – to earn her PhD in Archaeology, only returning a couple times after. As a young girl, I imagined her returning to town again one day, pulling the

traveling trunks from old-fashioned movies covered by colorful stickers of far-away countries and talking in the animated fast speak of 1920s newsmen about the places she had seen, the things she had done. In my daydreams, the rest of the village (myself included) stood around her, colorless and mute, a mere backdrop for her lovely foreignness – a fantasized distinctiveness attributable to not only her physical move but also, and perhaps most notably, to the epic transformations I imagined as a consequence of her extensive schooling.

While any move signals change, for rural, Southern communities, which historically consider themselves homogenous, there are certain physical "moves" that are more culturally disruptive than others. When a member decides to move to the "big city," there are reservations about the safety of the individual but primarily the concern stems from a kind of fear of not only what the hometown girl or boy might be exposed to but how this exposure may alter them, taint them, even. Many rural, Southern communities are aware of their close-minded reputation and, in fact, pride themselves on their conservatism. For example, the more evangelical churches and Christian schools in the South often caution their college-age students to "beware the liberal intelligentsia," which they will most certainly encounter in their humanities courses as university freshmen[23].

However, it is not just fear of the unknown or the liberally untamed that drives their concern for hometown members who choose to stray, it is the concrete belief that a move to the city/university equals loss and the denigration of what came before in favor

---

[23] See David Noebel's textbook and religious curriculum, *Understanding the Times*. This one or two semester video-based curriculum is designed specifically for 12th grade students in order to help them "understand the tenets of the Christian worldview and how it compares with the tenets of other leading worldviews of our day: Islam, Secular Humanism, Marxism, New Age, and Postmodernism." http://www.summit.org/curriculum/hs/

of something newer and more attractive. This impulse helps to partially explain the rural

South's frequent suspicion of the university. The new is unfamiliar and typically aligned

with happenings of "town," where traditionally tradesmen have always lived and worked,

interacting with diverse populations and experiencing the material excesses that

accompany economic success. Traditionally, the rural experience is agrarian, built upon

efforts of conservation, sustainability, and is defined by isolation. When members of

culturally devalued areas such as the rural South move away, they not only imply that

home is dead, a place to move *from* rather than to, they also affirm their community's

suspected sense of inferiority therewith re-inscribing their culture's subordination. The

loss of community members often rallies those who choose to stay into a kind cultural

fetishism performed through doggedly inexplicable values that function as a means of

survival in the face of cultural demise[24]. Those who move beyond are often unable to

reconcile with emerging cultures because they feel guilty for abandoning their home

culture and seemingly, their home identity as well.

Still, it is not always geographical distance that creates this sense of loss or

irretrievability but rather the narrative of progress that goes along with assimilation to

public or outside institutions such as the university. Such feelings of loss owe their

potency to multitudes of binaries, but primarily to the split between academic and non-

academic pursuits and the cultural assumptions that accompany this dichotomy as a

consequence of class, race, gender, and even geographic origin. A colleague shared with

me recently that even though she lived at home when she first went to college, attending

---

[24] See Ching and Creed.

a local university literally on the other side of town, she still felt a notable sense of distance from her working-class family and non-university friends. This feeling of change can perhaps be described by Homi Bhabha's notion of the "unhomely," those moments of conflating the inside and outside world, when "private and public, past and present, the psyche and the social develop an interstitial intimacy" (19).

Such disruptions signal opportunity and are, essentially, in-between spaces where selfhood is constructed. Yet, the "space between" only becomes possible through the articulation/confrontation of cultural differences that enables someone like my colleague to become critically aware of the fragility and elusiveness of her cultural identity. Bhabha explains, "the recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions. In that displacement, the borders between home and world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting" (13). Without critical awareness, the "unhomely" occupy a strange gray space, a neither/nor position that complicates the assertion of self that is so crucial to university study and particularly the demands of academic discourse. In the U.S., we often choose to ignore our marginalized ethnicities in favor of Post-colonial "others;" however, Bhaba's concept of the "unhomely" also aptly describes the strained position of rural Southerners.

As I longed to understand the romanticized world of the hometown archeologist as a child, I was erecting a boundary between the local and the distant, between the present and the future or the "beyond." I did not impose these borders on my own but rather was inspired by my community, which enacted cultural tradition and historically

118

valued binaries as a rule. My awareness of a different culture, though mostly fantasy at that point became affirmed as a matter of identification via proximity; the public had crept into my private space. The lady who had lived across from the post office, less than a mile from my house, had moved "beyond" and had made that shift from private to public, from here to there. The realization of something beyond registers for subordinated populations especially, the inability to comfortably occupy "identity" as a unified, unchallenged space. Bhabha, describes this jarring recognition of the instability of identity as the moment when cultural boundaries become real to us. He writes, "the negating activity is, indeed, the intervention of the 'beyond' that establishes a boundary: a bridge, where 'presencing' begins because it captures something of the estranging sense of the relocation of the home and the world – the unhomeliness – that is, the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations" (13). Bhabha's interpretation of this moment in fact reminds us that we can not participate in progress, or in time for that matter, without the urge to move beyond a present which often relies on an assumed hierarchy – the devaluation of what comes before in favor of what is to come. While there is possibility for agency in this liminality or through this experience of "thirdness," as Bhabha explains, this discord is often experienced as a personal and/or cultural defect for the members of those cultural communities who repeatedly find themselves on the losing end of the progress narrative.

Rurality and Language

Mikhail Bahktin has noted that each person's inner world (thought) has a stabilized social purview based upon ideological sensitivities from which it forms (qtd in Bizzell and Herzberg 1217). It is this rhetorical projection that comprises the environment in which motives and values are fashioned. Consequently, the structure of an utterance is completely dependent on the immediate social situation and this broader social milieu which informs the perceived reception of one's "voice." When one speaks, especially in a situation that brings into relief the particular ideological landscape, each utterance takes on a particular social potency.

One might consider Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, which began as a series of lectures, the style of which seems fueled by recognition of the impossibly potent, "two-sided" nature of words. In chapter one, Woolf describes her anxious musings while dining at Oxbridge men's college, feeling keenly her outsider status, and most importantly feeling very self-conscious about the potential impact of her words: "the best course, unless the whole talk was to be distorted, was to expose what was in my mind to the air, when with good luck it would fade and crumble like the head of the dead king when they opened the coffin at Windsor" (19). Through the observation of "Signifying[g]" in the Black vernacular, Henry Louis Gates Jr. demonstrates a similar understanding of utterance as always representing complex social interactions -- in this case as an impetus for subversion. French feminist, Helene Cixous's *ecriture feminine*, also argues for a subversion of our Western system of language, which is, by her estimation oppressively dictated by male consciousness. Gloria Anzaldua's *Borderlands*

explores the ways in which geography and place also infuse utterances from inception to reception. Each example operates from Bahktin's belief that a word is always defined by whose word is and for whom it is meant, a contextually dependent moment of inventive possibility.

This sense of "two-ness" is particularly evident in the language habits of marginalized groups. One can detect elements of Bhaba's "unhomeliness" when cultural groups "code-switch." Groups often fall into this behavior when they find their physical and cultural space infringed upon. Code-switching has been most researched in linguistic studies through traditionally bilingual populations. Yet, I have found that speakers with rural, Southern accents, when facing a situation of some public seriousness will often – during class presentations, in traffic court, when being interviewed for radio or TV, when interviewing for a job, etc. -- attempt a Northern dialect by forcing their "ing" sounds and sharpening their long "I" sounds as if subconsciously pleading for intellectual respect. Such moves are not reserved to rural Southerners struggling to fit in. If we consider any group who falls outside the linguistic "norm," we would likely find the same attempts to assimilate and/or dissimilate as the context demands. Language variationists call this phenomenon, "performance speech," the "register associated with speakers' attempting to display for others a certain language or language variety, whether their own or that of another speech community" (Schilling-Estes 53). This brand of speaking is highly self-conscious and often shows up in populations whose language practices have become an "object language" of curiosity or even distaste.

Natalie Schilling-Estes' study of Ocracoke Islanders' performance speech in North Carolina indicates that this kind of linguistic style-shifting is pro-active rather than re-active indicating that speakers *deliberately* highlight those features of their speech of which they are most aware (77). In Schilling-Estes' study, the Ocracoke Islanders', in fact, exaggerate those elements of their speech found to be the most quaint as a result of constant requests from non-Islanders for stock phrases that highlight their peculiar dialect. One can more easily observe style-shifting in the reverse, the covering up of prominent dialects for the purpose of assimilation and standardization. In fact, populations' softening the edges of their obvious dialects accounts for the continual evolution of dialect variations. This hyper-awareness of dialect suggests that the sound of language can be just as hegemonically charged as the apparent meaning.

It seems that American Southerners can demonstrate their transformation from a feminized, supercilious caricature to a learned, respected, public citizen through the acquisition of Northern manners, dress, and language use. I have suffered derision from family friends who, in fact, hail from the South: "how can you be an English teacher if you say 'ya'll'?" This denigrated view of Southern culture is also observable in the reverse. On a recent visit with a friend to his hometown in Ohio, I watched him repeatedly chided by friends and family for acquiring a Southern accent while in graduate school at North Carolina, a linguistic difference which was to them antithetical to his intellectual pursuit of a master's degree in English. While I imagine he could expect some comment on the difference in his speech, regardless of his new address, it was the Southern dialect that seemed most problematic and most worthy of comment.

The equation of a Southern accent with laziness or stupidity is a persistent trope in American popular culture. At a recent conference on the teaching of writing, a respected professor in the field tapped into this same unquestioned belief about Southern dialects. In his presentation, he shared models he had prepared for his students in preparation for an assignment requiring them to write a dialogue about immigration issues. In his example, the uninformed interlocutor speaks with an exaggerated Southern dialect and comes across as close-minded and obstinate. [The audience chuckled at the professor's clever transformation of words like "tomato" to "tomater" and "aren't" to "ain't."] The second interlocutor, a Hispanic service worker at a fast food restaurant, is cast as the rhetorically savvy one, working to explain to this bumpkin that he is not Mexican, as the Southerner insists, but Puerto-Rican. No one seems to question this kind of type-casting, even in academic circles. The professor enacted, himself, the same kind of ignorant presumptions which his position on immigration issues seemed to argue against. Couldn't the uninformed interlocutor just as easily and more profoundly have been a person such as the professor himself?

This professor relied unquestioningly on the belief that the stylized rural Southerner is the quintessential American ignoramus. In his audience were dozens of composition instructors from rural, Southern community colleges and universities. These off-hand discounts of rural, Southern culture when viewed in isolation may seem harmless, but when you consider the rate and occurrence of this unchecked cultural discrimination in everyday conversation, and as in this example, in formal, academic

settings, I cannot help but wonder about the effect on students and teachers who identify with the rural South.

Rural Southern students, as well as teachers, have a unique interstitial intimacy in the public space of the university that has not been seriously considered. Americans have felt historically ambivalent about the region, and academics and religious organizations alike have used the culture as a way to further their individual goals of progress. Thus, Rural Southerners have become figuratively "in service" to our country as a consequence of an unfavorable history as well an unfavorable position in the rhetorical hierarchy of identification. Mainstream Americans identify who they are by who they are not, and the "rural abject" or the Southern country bumpkin helps to clarify their vision of legitimacy and progress. Henry Giroux notes that "colonizing of differences by dominant groups is sustained through representations in which the Other is seen as deficient, in which the humanity of the Other is posited as either cynically problematic or ruthlessly denied" (130). As a consequence of this often unacknowledged sublimation, the rural Southerner continues to suffer an academic identity crisis. She is at once in the center and in the margins, and she is always poised ambivalently in the national conscience. To respond to this culture's curious positioning, our scholarship and teaching should flex to acknowledge in theory what we know to be verifiable in practice.

CHAPTER IV

YOURS, MINE, AND OURS: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY AND REFLECTION

ON BEING RURAL, SOUTHERN, AND ACADEMIC

Impinged upon by outsiders for centuries, Rural Southerners are famous for "taking care of their own." Their communities are notoriously homogenous, which can create a heightened sense of intimacy and familial interdependence among members. As a result, the South has a reputation for being mild and hospitable to outsiders but fiercely loyal to their communities and region. This characteristic has cast the culture as both charitable and malevolent by turns. Segregation perhaps most grotesquely demonstrated this impulse to bond rather than bridge, to nurture sameness rather than to network difference. In popular culture, antagonistic outsiders and Southern Gothic enthusiasts like to refer to this tendency as incestuous (see the film, *Deliverance*, and read nearly any Tennessee Williams' play), suggesting that clannishness leads to degeneration and sin. Also part of this association is the "old boy system" -- the crooked Southern lawyer, the cigar chewing police chief -- institutional corruption resulting from an over-reliance on personal relationships and favors. Southerners have found it difficult to buck these associations while embracing their cultural heritage, which does indeed value homogeneity and personal relationships but not always to a fault.

Rural Southerners band together via shared world perspectives, childhoods, geography, and hardships. Their sameness is often their strength. W.J. Cash writes, "the

very marrow of this tradition of the backcountry . . . was a sort of immense kindliness and easiness – the kindliness and easiness of men who have long lived together on the same general plane, who have common memories, and who are more or less conscious of the ties of blood" (40-41). In academia, the now post-post-modern utopia is characterized by diversity and healthy discord, a confluence of differences. For the rural Southerner, who historically views difference as a threat, this does not bode well.

Students who arrive in the composition classroom valuing sameness are not often rewarded. Academics, particularly those of a Cultural Studies bent, do not always herald consensus. They celebrate diversity, difference, and the clash of multiple perspectives as imperative to the critical classroom. In his interrogation of "community," Joseph Harris discusses the importance of "complicating" students' use of language as a way of preparing them for the "changing mix of dominant, residual and emerging discourses" they will confront beyond the university (17). Harris cites "polyphony" as the ultimate aim and not surprisingly uses the city as a model for this anticipation of the public forum: "a place where competing beliefs and ideas intersect and confront one another" (20). Implicit in this metaphor is the traditional narrative of progress marked by a move from the country to the city, from the private to the public space, from the safety of homogeneity to the necessary rigors of heterogeneity.

"Polyphony as progress" is not only a mantra in the classroom; Rhetoric and Composition scholarship similarly values the confrontation of difference as the site of our most promising research. Jerry L. Martin, a representative of the National Endowment for the Humanities, calls attention to this inclination across all humanities disciplines: "I

sometimes think of the essence of the humanities as being Difference. In the humanities, one studies what is different, what is Other, and this is the source of the remarkable power of the humanities" (18). Martin's observation hints that pedagogues and scholars have become almost singularly intrigued by division. In the process, they may easily forget that the essential drive of rhetoric, according to Burke, is to identify, to attempt to become consubstantial with an Other: "Put identification and division ambiguously together, so that you cannot know for certain just where one ends and the other begins and you have the characteristic invitation to rhetoric" (25). While we often acknowledge sameness, we rarely use it as a basic premise or starting point. Plato believed sameness and difference were fundamental categories of thought -- another gentle reminder that we rely on both for making meaning. Martin suggests that difference is often our focus as scholars, but sameness is an integral and overlooked part of this dialectic as well: "As often happens, Plato has a good point. The study of Difference is meaningful only if there is also Sameness" (19).

To give rural Southern literacies their due, as teachers and researchers, we can begin to value sameness as a starting point in our work -- not the scary, distorted, panic-inducing kind of Southern Gothic lore, but a more basic brand, beginning from the premise of faction versus division. As Martin suggests, a preoccupation with either sameness or difference, the distant or the local, can signal a disturbing singularity of purpose. So often our teacher researchers recount their experiences as "a fish out of water." The anthropological roots of ethnographic study explain this tendency to approach our subjects as "outsiders," to visit the most exotic sites and report on the most

127

unusual behaviors to not only highlight difference but also to tell an interesting story. Our stories as teacher-researchers, however, need not begin from the traditional anthropological stance of a "stranger in a strange land." As academics, too often we equate formality and coldness with objectivity and legitimacy. While difference should be part of our academic study, it should also be balanced by an attention to local realities and a consideration of those ideas which have become so familiar that we have disqualified them from close examination. The pendulum has swung so far towards "difference as impetus for study," that as academics, we might consider how to reverse that momentum, not to the exclusion of difference, but to a more reflexive appreciation of both. To embrace rural Southern literacies as scholars, we may begin by telling stories about students who we feel to be "one of our own" in some way, students with whom we identify. Such an approach lends itself to informality, affection, and self-revelation, qualities not typically embraced by traditional scholarship but enthusiastically heralded by feminists and other marginalized cultures.

Hephzibah Roskelly notes in "Telling Tales in School: A Redneck Daughter in the Academy," that "for many cultures on the margin of white, male middle-class America, the personal and the narrative are ways to come to know. Like some of these other cultures, the redneck teaches the way the fiction writer does, by making the story so good that the 'thesis' is laid bare by its very telling" (299). By relying on the personal, rural Southerners open themselves up to attack for being unpolished or gushing. W.J. Cash characterized the quintessential Southerner as romantic and hedonistic with a "tendency towards unreality" (44). Consequently, intellectuals have often remained

suspicious of Southern rhetoric of any brand. Mark Twain's folksy, wise-cracking heroes in some ways capitalize on this suspicion; rustic, disarming, but unsettlingly perceptive, Southern storytellers can be complicated figures who, as Roskelly notes, use the intimacy and jocularity of story as a way to both bond with and teach their audience.

Sameness, Story, and the Dialogic Literacy Narrative

Southern universities can not consistently address rural, Southern literacies since most universities are built upon the idea of a shared academic conversation space punctuated by theoretical trends, which are often dependent upon academic "authorities" from more well-respected, culturally celebrated institutions to the North[25]. Also, since part of academia's mission is to encourage intellectual diversity, new professors often find themselves far and away from their original localities. More often than not, then, even though a rural, Southern student may attend a Southern institution, her professors may likely be from regions far different from her own. Those professors with a rural, Southern background who *are* available to students of similar backgrounds in their institutions may sometimes feel a conflicted allegiance to the "word" of the university. Their journey into academic acceptability may have been especially difficult, and they may hesitate to reveal their roots. Some professors may have had to deny their backgrounds over and again in order to make it where they are today; this personal investment can make it especially difficult for them to identify with populations which the institution has historically ignored.

---

[25] Clearly there are growing numbers of respected institutions in the South but there is little question of the Ivy League's staying power.

Rural Southerners are hard-pressed to find allies in the academy. Therefore, to address rural Southern literacies in our scholarship, I suggest that teacher-researchers in the composition classroom 1) begin from a premise of sameness, allowing ourselves to linger over those students who remind us of ourselves and 2) investigate these relationships via story, the medium perhaps most associated with the rural Southerner. While the rural Southern student is the focus of this study, the rural Southern academic is an integral, abiding presence (me). However, scholars from rural, Southern areas are not the only academics who can benefit from the premise of sameness. Accounts like Roskelly's "Redneck Daughter," Rose's *Lives on the Margins*, Rodriguez's *The Hunger of Memory* and many others suggest that the residue of "home" never leaves us as academics. Even though home literacies directly inform our academic identities, there is often little room for autobiographical narratives in "serious" scholarship. By allowing ourselves to follow threads that speak to our experiences, we are simultaneously opening up new avenues for research *and* including rural Southern literacies in our scholarship.

The use of story can be a deliberate political act for not only marginalized populations but also for non-traditional scholars eager to better capture the realities of their teaching. Glynda Hull and Mira-Lisa Katz note that "how we represent ourselves in storied worlds depends on who we are trying to be in relation to others in the present" (45). Stories can work not only to delineate identity but to provide dialogic proof of the ways in which the self is emergent through what Mary Buchholtz and Kira Hall call "intersubjective accomplishment" (587). Social science and humanities scholars are now

learning to appreciate the performative possibilities of narrative inquiry as the realization

of Ernest Boyer's call for a "new knowledge of practice" (Lyons and LaBoskey 5).

Narrativity offers a way to use our personal experience to construct a more

process-centered research methodology that accounts for the way student and teacher

literacy experiences dovetail. In their 2008 *Handbook of Emergent Methods*, Charlene

Hesse-Biber and Patricia Leavy assert that social scientists and humanities scholars are

increasingly using autobiographical narratives as a method of inquiry that provides

insights into human behavior, psychology, and cultural practices, including literacy

values, acquisition, and development. These approaches, generally rich in self-disclosure,

can enhance the intersections of the personal and political, a theoretical moment

impossible to conceive of without the backlighting of story.

As a rural Southerner, I have a story to tell, but my personal anecdotes would

never be enough to leverage a compelling academic argument about rural, Southern

university students. However, as a teacher-researcher, I can come to better understand my

story by telling the story of someone *like* me, in the process, achieving the

"intersubjective accomplishment" Buchholtz and Hall describe. The critical narrative that

follows is the product of a semester-long ethnographic project in which I studied a former

first-year composition student's reflections of her literacy practices from freshman to

senior year. After developing a relationship with this student, whom I will call "Fay," I

realized that the real purpose of this study was not what I was learning about Fay, but

what my *relationship* with Fay was teaching me about myself. What follows is a

narrative of reciprocity, necessarily dialogic in nature. The tale is decidedly qualitative;

the voices are not always equally represented, and while Fay and I begin from a shared perspective, our experiences are far from identical. However, my intent is not to strictly define a new method of scholarship, but to find a way to make central to my scholarship two important elements of rural Southern literacies: bonding and story-telling. As Roskelly suggests, I can only hope that my thesis will be "laid bare by its very telling" (299).

Rural Matters

I am a woman (once a girl) from rural, southwestern Virginia who attended a large state university, and through the confrontation of conflicting literacy expectations have come to terms with my own significance *and* insignificance in startling ways. Raymond Williams has described this assimilation process as an "odd double movement," coming to understand the place one is from only after having left it (11). Now finding, as Williams did upon attending college, that I am culturally marked in multiple ways, I seek to understand how students consider their geographic identities retrospectively in light of the often conflicting literacies of the university that they must inevitably negotiate.

My identification with Fay clearly and deliberately casts doubt on the objectivity of my study through the projection of my own beliefs or experiences on her behaviors. In this way, what follows qualifies as both an auto-ethnography and a literacy narrative, operating against more accepted notions of silent authorship, which often mark "mature scholarship" (Charmaz and Mitchell 194). As a consequence of its messy, dialogic

nature, autoethnography sometimes falls under what Church calls "forbidden narratives," along with forms like "critical autobiography." I align my work in this chapter with these forbidden forms following Church's explanation of their assumptions: "first, that it is possible to learn about the general from the particular; second, that the self is a social phenomenon." And like, Church, "I assume that my subjectivity is filled with the voices of other people" (Church 5). While Donehower, et. al. remark on their rural identities in *Rural Literacies*, they resist the temptation to actively use and disclose their own undergraduate experience to primarily inform their conclusions about rural university students, and thus elide the more highly relational implications of their study.

Donehower et al.'s work does much, however, to consider the ways we might build the rural into our composition curricula, using rhetorical theory to investigate how these populations are defined and ultimately de-valued in academia and beyond. I extend this consideration by examining in detail: 1) how a specific rural, Southern student experiences the literacy expectations of academia, and 2) how interacting with a teacher who also identifies as rural and Southern affects the academic identities of both. Donehower, et. al. offer an important primer for incorporating rural student populations' long ignored voice in composition studies. Yet, there is still more to be learned about the *interaction* between students and teachers who identify as "rural," "Southern," and "female" in decidedly non-rural university settings. A narrative inquiry methodology allows me to linger over the contextual importance of my relationship with this student, considering primarily the ways in which our exchanges have brought to light new understandings of my own experiences as a former student. I unpack here the

implications of the "rural, Southern" label for a particular student from a small North Carolina town.

A senior at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, Fay identifies herself as "rural" and willingly offers a self-reflexive perspective on what this label has meant for her going through college. Through the testing of my experience against Fay's, I hope to simultaneously discover and rediscover the ways in which the residue of our home place influenced our conception of self in the academy – a kind of collaborative literacy narrative. Fay did not co-author this study, so the literacy narrative is all my own; however, in light of my multiple interactions with her, I have come to better understand my own brand of literacy as a rural, Southern woman.

As Fay's Teacher

Fay was a student in my ENG 101 course in Fall 2005, the very first semester I taught as a graduate student instructor at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Fay endeared herself to me early on because she was so tentative, so openly uncertain of her capabilities, and as her mannerisms and accent indicated to me, she was "country," a girl with a background that seemed similar to my own. "Country" is a term often used interchangeably with "rural," though sometimes as a pejorative meaning "coarse" or "unpolished." As Ching and Creed have argued, any inhabited place can be experienced as either rural or urban, and oftentimes, even individuals who do not live in rural areas will espouse the "country" label as an indication of their taste in music, politics, or fashion (7). I use the term here to describe Fay as I also describe myself, as simply

characteristic of what *I* know to be rural. Petite, and reminiscent of Scout from *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Fay reminded me of the antique description, a "little slip of a girl." Her hair cut in a loose brown bob around her ears, her hands small and quick, she had a child-like air about her: small face, skinny legs, and squinty grin. She wore no make-up and her clothing was simple: jeans and sweatshirts. Fay approached me very early on in the course to let me know that she struggled with writing, that she might need extra help in the course. She was often apologetic about her work, turning it in with a shrug that suggested little confidence but with nothing of the listless apathy of other students. She took my directions shyly, usually not making eye contact, and she rarely expressed enthusiasm about the work she turned in. Yet, it was clear from the way she would beam when she received positive feedback that she was emotionally invested in her writing and cared about it immensely.

As a relatively young teacher just starting work on my PhD, I was similarly insecure and sensitive. Like Fay, I was in a new place, suddenly confronted with new academic and social demands. The stakes suddenly seemed very high for me, and I imagine it's fair to say the same for Fay, who was a first semester freshman with her own set of dizzying stimuli to make sense of. I remember feeling affection for Fay that I didn't really take the time to process as her teacher. I now see that I related to her uneasiness and admired her ability to come through on assignments, sometimes with brilliant results, despite her obvious self-doubt. I also detected in her, even then, an abiding awareness I admired, an edginess that her retiring behavior in class couldn't hide. When given the writing prompt, "Discuss something you do that you know isn't good for you," Fay wrote

135

about her smoking habit, begun at age 15: "After taking a test or sitting in a class for an hour, there is nothing that I enjoy more than a cigarette . . . everyone who does not smoke tells me that I am killing myself but the way I see it is that smoking this cigarette will not make the difference in today and tomorrow." This air of rebelliousness translated to her writing and subsequently to her success as a writer in my class, as I tried so hard that semester to encourage students to embed honesty in their writing. I recognized the kind of country resolve that I had seen in women from my home county in southwestern Virginia, including myself, a certain demureness matched by an equally intense independence, perhaps even an anti-authoritarian obstinacy when pushed.

Ching and Creed suggest that rural people are often suspicious of authority as a matter of their history of economic marginalization, of so often and resentfully being cast as the "victim" who needs intellectual and cultural rescue (29). As perhaps a validation of this observation, studies of rural, Southern women often cast them as compellingly ambivalent: at once helpless and fiercely capable, the stereotypical "steel magnolia." In *Two or Three Things I Know For Sure,* Dorothy Allison marks the "at odds" personality of Southern, blue collar females when reflecting on her mother: "beautiful, that hard thing, beautiful" (20). Similarly, in *Whistlin' and Crowin'*, Katherine Sohn uses the metaphor of wild, resilient mountain flowers to describe each of the Appalachian women in her ethnography who were at once delicate and doggedly determined (22). Akin to these reflections, Fay's soft uncertainty was tempered by a penetrating self-possession that served her well as a writer and anchored her in a tradition of Southern femininity.

136

Fay is from Balesville[*], a small town in rural North Carolina located near a mid-size town, Beesboro, and about ninety minutes east of Greensboro. Nestled against the central Virginia line, Balesville is a "country place," according to Fay, and the population as of 2007 was recorded as 6,917. Fay confided in me that at first she felt conflicted about coming to Greensboro for school. Her freshman year, she was homesick, went home every weekend, but then, slowly, with more experience away from home and with exposure to diverse people, she began to notice a certain "Beesboro state of mind" that she wished to shake. She soon began to think of Beesboro as a place she could easily be "sucked back into," and her desire to stick with the people she knew from home soon died.

Sohn notes that many of the women in her study, primarily non-traditional, returning students, were not able to resist the pull of home, in part because they were tied to the community, perhaps in ways that Fay was not -- married with children, commuting to classes, with therefore more at stake. Sohn's women feared a loss of their home culture's shared conceptions of the world – plainly, "common sense." Working from popular beliefs from friends and family, they feared that any educational gain ("book smarts") meant a loss of everyday capability ("common sense"). To avoid the potential alienation caused by such a sacrifice, many abandoned university study altogether by dropping out (53-54). Fay's description of her hometown as "sucking her back" hints at this same belief: by assuming an academic identity, one denies a "home identity," and for rural students, particularly, home cultures often view this denial as a deliberate affront.

---

[*] Name changed.

People who stand to lose culturally what they gain socially can find the acquisition of literacy for socioeconomic power especially difficult. This loss can be especially significant for rural Southern women who often face overt criticism for going back to school and abandoning traditional familial roles.

Paternalism is perhaps most entrenched in the American South; Margaret Wolfe writes in *Daughters of Canaan: A Saga of Southern Women* that "in a figurative sense, it seems not inappropriate to suggest that southern women, by design or by default, have often found themselves shackled to pedestals just as surely as Jehovah's chosen people had been enslaved by the pharaohs" (2). As noted in the previous chapter, the cult of Southern femininity is tempered by an equally powerful belief in the biblical subordination of women. Wolfe notes, "the degree of this paternalism and the pattern that it established intensified the subordination of women, making it all the more difficult for southern females to escape from positions of inferiority" (9). Seemingly aware of the grave implications of her decision to pursue her independence, Fay wrote continually about her family and home, as though attempting to memorialize a part of herself in my course during that first semester, a move perhaps not unlike the very work I am doing for myself with this study.

While she was very shy and insecure, Fay was also refreshingly candid when pressed. Fay's honesty and openness about her background was her strength in both her writing and her timid offerings in classroom discussions. I didn't sense in her the desire to hide the idiosyncratic parts of her background. As a college freshman, I was hesitant to share information about the particulars of my home life – especially with peers in

informal settings. However, in writing courses, I felt more comfortable showcasing those distinct aspects of my home life because I knew they would translate well as an aesthetic; I had become accustomed to experiencing my home culture as an object of curiosity. Also, the nature of the personal essay seemed more comfortable for me because, unlike other academic forms, it demanded self-revelation rather than discouraged it. When I wanted to be taken seriously in a Geology class, accentuating my peculiar dialect and mannerisms certainly did not help. However, recounting the unique behaviors of locals in my town could work to my advantage in an English class' personal narrative essay. Charlotte Hogg found the same freedom in college writing classes where she "wrote to impress the urban Omaha students, constructing (and trying to exoticize) her hometown through the strong sense of place she witnessed in her grandmother, hoping to show in her writing what she could not say in class" (Donehower et. al. 31). Fay echoed these feelings about our composition class and described the creative possibilities it seemed to afford: "At first I was a little uneasy but I quickly realized that our composition class was a place that I was aloud (sic) to be myself. I found that I could share anything I wanted or felt I needed to share through my writing. I felt it was a safe place to share my feelings about family, school, and being in a new, unfamiliar place with only a few friends" (e-mail correspondence 10/16). Through these examples, we might gather that the reflective element of the personal narrative creates the opportunity for "thirdness" articulated by Bhabha as essential to making sense of "unhomely," culturally intrusive moments (19).

When given the opportunity to pick her own writing topics, Fay often wrote openly about her family. When writing about her mother's marriage to her stepfather, Fay talked candidly about her troubled relationship with her biological father: "As a young girl, it was hard growing up without a father at home because I was never able to talk to a dad about problems that only a dad could understand (such as Mom troubles), and I wasn't able to be a 'daddy's little girl' to the man of the house." Her writing struck me as boldly simple in its deliberate honesty. Sensing her ability to test the boundaries however, I often pushed her in my written comments to take more risks in the details she provided. I wrote in one set of end comments, "you are unique and your *specific* thoughts and experiences need to be shared." I worked to make her understand what a strong writer she actually was in comparison to the other students in the class.

In retrospect, I now suspect that I urged her to put her background forward as a response to how *I* had come to terms with my rural background. As a freshman in college, I hid my background from my peers not so much out of shame as much as out of an intense protectiveness, a fear that it would be mocked. My accent was a continual butt of jokes in classes; a new friend from my Geology class once asked me with a straight face if my family wore bibbed overalls and no shoes. Feeling homesick and defensive from the get-go, I wasn't prepared to handle jabs at my cultural or geographic identity – that was a weak spot that I had never had to mind before. It wasn't until I went out on a limb my sophomore year and wrote a culturally revealing paper for a sympathetic writing professor in an Advanced Composition class that I began to understand the strength of my background as a way of finding my writing voice. The short paper was about my

140

grandparents' carport and all the interesting people who visited them; my professor

shared that paper with the entire class, and I learned a profound lesson. Perhaps I was

hoping to force the same lesson on Fay.

For one of her papers in my class, Fay wrote about tutoring and the way it felt to

both be tutored and to tutor. Having had a tutor in high school who helped her with her

reading, Fay was very comfortable with mentoring relationships. The purpose of this

paper, however, was to demonstrate how, through her tutoring of fourth graders, she had

learned that the tutoring process is not always one-sided. She wrote, "More often than

not, adults believe that they have learned all that they can, so they do not take the chance

to learn anymore. However, I have realized at a young age that children can teach adults

things that no one else can." Interestingly, I find this line from her paper aptly illustrative

of the relationship Fay and I have now developed, as well as the defining aim of this

project: to hone in on the dialogical nature of meaning making and identity formation.

Seeing Fay Again

When I met Fay again after having not seen her for three years, she warned me

right away over e-mail, in a gesture reminiscent of her approaching me when I was her

teacher, that she had changed very much, that I might not find her to be the same as she

used to be. I expected nothing less, I told her, but still, she was right, and I appreciated

the warning. While she still seemed quiet, tentative, she also seemed more self-possessed.

Her accent had been glossed over now, and she told me that her mother and brother,

especially, had given her much grief for whittling away the sound of Balesville, her

hometown, from her voice. She still *looked* essentially the same to me. She now wore

glasses, and was still the same relative weight, but there was a certain difference in her,

as she had indicated on the phone, that I couldn't quite put my finger on. Perhaps it was

just the years of experience that had altered her. I began to see clearly in her many of the

subtle mannerisms of her boyfriend, Greg: her careful enunciation of each phrase a bit

interrogatively stressed on the ends, the distinct accent of northern Virginia that I had

learned over time spent at Virginia Tech where many students from "NOVA" attended.

She wore her hair longer, in a loose, high twist on the back of her head, and she was

colorfully dressed, several rings on her small fingers. After that first meeting, three years

after we had interacted as teacher and student, Fay and I established a routine, and I felt

very comfortable with her – never apprehensive to talk with her. This need to be

transparent with Fay regarding her story and my research continues in my making public

this narrative of our rural upbringings.

I met with Fay every Tuesday at 11:00 a.m. in the lobby of the Humanities

building on campus. I found that Fay was working on her degree in Special Education,

and had done very well academically, and so, clearly, I did not now wish to be her tutor

in the strict sense of the term. However, I had shared my experiences with her of

navigating the university as a woman from a rural area and had encouraged her to do the

same, in the hopes we might learn something mutually along the way. Since we had a

history as teacher and student, our tutoring relationship was unique; we operated on

friendly, more intimate terms than most tutors/tutees. I hesitate, honestly to even use

those terms now because they don't really suit the purpose of our talks. I offered to help Fay with any difficulties she had with her coursework, but Fay is a special case.

The degrees of separation between Fay and myself are relatively minimal. She is functionally quite literate. She shares much of the public literacies I carry with me. In fact, we easily and pleasantly converse about popular culture, personal experiences, and other social observations with little to no discord. While we were not born in the same town, are not the same age, and are not profoundly similar in terms of personal tastes, we do both identify as rural, Southern, women – a degree of mutual identification quite different from most ethnographic work. Even the recent work of Katherine Sohn and Shirley Brice Heath's seminal *Ways with Words* both operate from an anthropologically traditional paradigm, which, though nuanced, still maintains a high degree of cultural distance between observer and observed. While both Sohn and Heath identify with Southern culture, they do not explicitly claim "rural literacy" as part of their primary discourse community, a dis-identification worth considering in their studies of rural communities. While I still occupy a position of ideological power as Fay's former teacher, I also complicate that authority through my active identification with her.

By narrowing the degrees of separation between observer and observed, I raise the personal stakes for myself, as observer. Studying less familiar cultures enables ethnographers to hide behind the scientific objectivity of an "outsider." In my case, the obvious *similarities* between Fay's and my culture define the ethnographic event, which makes crucial our dialogic relationship and my own personal reflexivity. Edward Bruner notes the impossibility of divorcing the personal from the ethnographic in *any*

ethnographic event since "every ethnographer inevitably leaves traces in the text" (qtd in Pack 2). With a high level of identification between observer and observed, cultural overlaps are *expected*, so disclosure on both sides is imperative to unearthing distinctions, which foregrounds the necessarily interactional nature of ethnography – the reliance on the other for definition of the self.

I am mostly interested in watching the ways Fay negotiates the academic world now, knowing as I do a little about her "primary discourse," to use Gee's term in light of this acquired "secondary discourse" that is directly related to her experiences in school and away from "home." Gee defines "primary discourse" as those literacy practices that we first use to make sense of the world and interact with others; "secondary discourses" are access restricted, arising as we interact with various non-home based social institutions (527-28). I talk with Fay to hone in on those moments when her home identity has become particularly evident to her as a college student, when her cultural identity has been challenged, called upon. I have been looking to draw forth from Fay the ways in which the university has tested her, particularly in light of her background as a student from a rural, Southern area.

During our first interview over lunch, Fay walked me through the highlights of her last three years in college. Surprisingly, Fay told me she always tried to avoid the "rural" label, preferring instead to say "small, country place." When I asked her "why?" she simply said that she never really understood what "rural" meant and so didn't feel comfortable using it. As a college freshman, I also avoided labels like "rural," and in my case, "Appalachian." For me, it was a matter of avoiding accompanying stereotypes, a

144

way of blending into the crowd. It was not until I became a master's student that I began to reflect on my experiences as an undergraduate from a cultural or geographic perspective. Fay strikes me as also having reached a position where she can reflect objectively on her experience; perhaps this is merely a function of the questions I am posing. We both seem to have found, as Raymond Williams did upon attending college, that we are culturally marked in ways we might never have known had we not learned how we are viewed from the outside looking in; the university, rightly or wrongly, forces that perspective (6). Perhaps I am also forcing, or have forced, this perspective on Fay.

Fay articulated two types of university students from her home area of Beesboro: one set who spend most of their time together and intend to return to Beesboro after graduation; and another who use their university experience as a way of escaping Beesboro. Fay has embodied both types and seems to find herself now occupying a third space due in part to her reflection on the experience – she now seems capable of appreciating Beesboro, but she realizes like Thomas Wolfe, that she can't go home again, at least not in the way she once could. For example, Fay's first roommate was also from Beesboro, a nurturing girl who kept in contact with Fay's Mom, who often urged her to "take care of my Fay." It wasn't until her second semester when she moved in with a new roommate from Pennsylvania that Fay began to reconsider her attachment to home. She suspected that her feelings for home had dramatically changed when she went home for the summer after her freshman year and no longer felt the urge to spend time with old friends. By sophomore year, Fay had joined a co-ed honors fraternity and had developed a clear aversion for Beesboro, a feeling that now waxes and wanes.

Generally, the strain Fay feels from her family has to do with the geographic distance between them. Recently, her grandmother had a medical emergency and her decision to stay in Greensboro was the source of much concern for her family and much angst for Fay. During an interview, Fay and I discussed first a test she had taken and other academic miscellany, but our talk soon turned to personal issues – as our talks often do, and Fay became emotional when I asked her about the transition she experiences when driving back to Greensboro after visiting home – a time I know from personal experience can be very emotionally disruptive. Fay's emotional reaction indicates how at odds her allegiance to school are to her allegiance to home, family, and the kind of close-knitted community she was once such a part of. She feels guilty leaving her family but equally resolved to maintain her independence here in Greensboro.

Fay describes Beesboro as a place that requires people to be "real with one another." She found that most of her friends there were adults and as a result, she felt she matured quickly. Clearly, Fay was comfortable in her skin when she lived in Beesboro. She was very much a Beesboro student of the first type when she began school in Greensboro. Like me, Fay went home every weekend her first semester. Not completely a Greensboro resident, not completely sure what a college student should be, and not completely a girl from Beesboro, Fay was caught in a interstitial space and suffered a bit of an identity crisis that first year. She explained to me that she had suddenly turned into a person she did not know: "I was insecure, not out-going, just going along with things, keeping to myself, only with people I knew." As a member of her primary discourse community in Beesboro, Fay described herself as "sarcastic, but a nice, honest person,"

clearly comfortable enough to exercise her wit and make observations without fear of retribution. When she first arrived on campus, she no longer felt that foundational comfort, and for a time, she expressed to me that she lost sight of who she was. This period of flailing was both socially and academically prompted.

Fay was disappointed in her freshman year grade point average – 2.9. At her old high school, Fay had been able to talk personally with her teachers, who all knew her and took a personal interest in her success. Often her high school teachers would offer extra assignments for students in order to boost their grades. In the university, the professors did not know Fay and did not take the vested interest that her high school teachers had. Fay described herself during her freshman year as often "stressed out and aggravated," explaining that there were days "when it seemed like I failed at everything." Fay contrasted her initial struggles to her success now as a senior: "I'm much more confident, not afraid to start conversations. I'm more of *myself*." She shared with me that she did not feel like she was allowed to be who she was in Beesboro when she first came to college; though her personality and willingness to succeed stayed the same, her morale suffered.

Fay's insecurity was not just a matter of freshman year jitters. Fay has been diagnosed with a reading disability and currently has, through the campus disability services office, extended time for taking tests and a quiet setting requirement. While Fay does very well at math, she has always, since elementary school, struggled with reading. During elementary school out-loud reading tasks, Fay would count ahead to find out which paragraph she would be responsible for reading and discreetly ask classmates to help her with words she did not recognize as a way to avoid embarrassment when it

became her turn to read aloud. Fay's choice to approach me as her freshman year English teacher was not just an "aw shucks" display of humility but a genuine effort to warn me that she would most likely struggle in my class. She remembered feeling ashamed of her disability then, though now she says that she's learned the importance of asking questions to clarify directions that she would have before misunderstood but never questioned: "I won't figure it out unless I ask."

It is clear to me that it is not just the disability but the anxiety surrounding the disability that Fay has had to combat the most throughout her college career. Though she claims to be more confident, I can still detect elements of self-doubt in her academic work through the writing she has allowed me to view and through my observations of her in an in-major course. I feel that Fay still requires some validation that her experiences are worthy, that they make sense, that what she is experiencing and observing can be trusted. She shared with me an example from one of her classes that illustrates this need. In a reading course for her major, Fay and her classmates were asked to place certain words under categories of phonemic sound. When given the word "dove," Fay read it as the past tense of "dive" and placed it accordingly. The rest of the class had viewed the word as "dove," the bird. While the distinction was made clear, Fay never truly felt like her reading of the word was appropriate. She still felt as though she had done something wrong and did not receive the validation from her teacher and classmates to make her feel otherwise. She called this experience an issue of "overthinking."

Fay told me that through her interactions with friends, classmates, and her fraternity brothers, her vocabulary has grown, and she now feels like she can carry on

more structured conversations. She feels that she has "picked up on intelligent conversations," and thus does not feel as isolated as she once did as a freshman.

Forging a Method

The conflict I experienced as a rural student who became an undergraduate at a large, state university was chiefly represented in my struggles between academic discourse and my own primary discourse/identity. This struggle was profound and led to a few intense years of ambivalence about home, about authenticity, and about cultural values. I talked with Fay to discover if this experience is continually replicated for students like her and like myself. My intent was never to make Fay feel "observed" or analyzed like an object in a scientific study. Instead, I have hoped that she will feel comfortable enough with me to share experiences that *she* feels to be relevant to my project. I have hoped to create a genuine dialogue in the hopes of highlighting a form of marginalization so familiar to us that we have overlooked it continually.

As Paulo Freire and Donaldo Macedo point out, the most democratic education is the kind that recognizes people's fundamental right to be the subject of research that is attempting to know them better, not the object of research that specialists do around them (40). Dialogic interaction, in its rawest, most honest iterations, values process over product. The disclosure of the observer is thus integral to the meaning of the study. Elspeth Stuckey reminds us of the importance of identifying our ideological positioning as researchers: "The researcher is the one who turns the other into an object, she must ask therefore why she is in a position to do so and what might the consequences of her

149

actions" (56). Reflexive ethnographic work thus requires a surrender to the process of

meaning as it arises through interaction. The researcher must be accountable to *all*

components of the process, including observer, process, and observed (Pack 157).

Hence, this study is predicated on Fay's initiative to identify with my experience, to name

it herself, not to operate as a dead piece that I fit into a puzzle I have created. As a result

of this mutuality, I welcome and accept the messiness of this project. Using Fay as a

metaphor for my own experience, I derive a theory from practices that are multiply

similar; I am testing the feasibility of my own experience. In this way, I operate from

John Dewey's premise of "warranted assertibility," using inquiry and observation of

similar experiences to test the legitimacy of my own. As such, there is little to no design

but rather a commitment to accurate reporting.

In this chaos, I think of Thomas Newkirk's "mythic narratives" as I decide how to

tell the story of Fay and myself. Newkirk reminds me that writers of the most successful

case students look at their data as "culturally grounded narratives" that offer an

aesthetically satisfying moral framework for an audience (135). He notes that revelations

of the particular become most universally meaningful when an ethnographer/author

transforms the "idiographic" to a neat tale that embodies those cultural myths an audience

anticipates aesthetically (136). If the best case studies are those which best fit the

dramatic requirements of the situation, how do I make Fay and myself relevant (Newkirk

133)? Shall I cast Fay as an Eliza Doolittle? The diamond in the rough who, through the

help of the academy, has abandoned her bumpkin ways? Or shall I stick to the country

mouse/city mouse comparison and endear her to my audience through accounts of her

naiveté? None of these narrative frameworks appeals to me, and I realize suddenly that I need not cobble together an archetypal narrative of Fay to tell her story. What is of most importance here is the *transaction* between Fay and myself since the crisis of representation can only be resolved through an examination of the manner in which representation takes place. Anthropologist Sam Pack points out that "although revealing how texts are constructed may spoil the aura of inviolability, it also lends credibility to the research" (106). By focusing on my transactions with Fay, I am able to get at the necessary adjustments that happen in any dialogic event (ethnographic or not) and highlight them, rather than only begrudgingly acknowledge their existence. When we acknowledge the differences that emerge in these events, we reach a finer understanding of what happens when the private and the public develop Bhabha's "interstitial intimacy" out of which comes the construction of previous and future identities (19). These gaps between observer and observed can help to not only explain the nature of identity in dialogic meaning, but can also overtly expose ideological forces. Ideologies are inescapable only if we fail to disclose their role in the process, and for ethnography, ideological positioning can often, in fact, dictate the entire story, as Elspeth Stuckey has pointed out in her criticism of Scribner and Cole's study of the Vai tribe[26].

We already understand the importance of positioning when we read. By considering the ethnographic process as a form of reading, I am able to better account for my relationship with Fay. Louise Rosenblatt in her theory of reading texts (of any and all

---

[26] From *The Violence of Literacy*. Stuckey criticizes Scribner and Cole for taxonomizing the Vai before they had even met them, for relying on Western definitions of literacy (namely print) as a way of defining the aptitude of the Vai people, and for failing to acknowledge that as literacy scholars they have a vested interest in finding certain kinds of results in their study. See further discussion in Chapter 3.

kinds) desires to change our interactional view of meaning to a transactional view, one which is necessarily relational, mutually dependent, an "unfractured observation of the whole situation" (2). This understanding of meaning, then, is primarily determined by what the reader brings to the text in terms of experience, what William James called our "experiential reservoir." It therefore is not optional, but necessary, for the reader to consider what she observes in light of her past experience (Rosenblatt 6-10). In this case, both Fay and I are texts for one another, and, as we have "read" one another, we have changed; we have developed new ways of thinking about ourselves, new ways of making and appreciating meaning as a function of our interaction. And, since we share some cultural experiences, we are that much more capable of discovering the kind of meaning for ourselves that can make a clear difference in not just our beliefs about literacy and assimilation, but also in the execution of those beliefs. Researching the familiar then becomes, in a reverse move, the most novel and effective way to serviceable results.

"Do you realize how special you are?"

Though I was well-acquainted with homesickness, home for me, was never sentimentalized in a way beyond simply missing familiar people and things until I fell in love with a boy from the suburbs, and I saw my home through his eyes. I was a senior in college, and though very proud of my home, I still distanced myself from any rural or Appalachian affiliations. I was still too close to it to see its value. When I began dating a fellow senior from suburban Atlanta, I was insecure about taking him to my home over the holidays. What if he makes fun of it? What if he is disappointed and thinks of my

hometown as "trashy" or "hillbilly?" I felt incredibly vulnerable, but I pushed forward. To my surprise, my boyfriend was enamored with southwestern Virginia – the landscape, the people, the customs.

As time went on, I felt more comfortable sharing with my boyfriend some of the negative experiences I had gone through as a "country girl" at our university. His outrage validated my own anger at having fallen through the cracks as a discriminated-against population, and with swelling pride, I realized that my story had some value. He would continually say to me, "do you realize how special you are? This story must be told." It is professionally embarrassing for me in some ways to admit that I needed validation of my own experiences from a man, especially in light of my feminist leanings, but I feel the connection needs to be honestly drawn. I tell this story because it reminds me in some ways of the relationship that Fay has with her boyfriend, Greg, in light of her own home situation and academic struggles. It is by no means exactly comparable, but Greg plays an important role in Fay's academic work and in her self-conception, and observing Fay's reliance on him has led me to reflect on my own experiences.

Greg is also a senior, the president of Fay's honors fraternity, and an aspiring medical school student. Accomplished, academically confident, and from an upper-middle-class family, Greg has added an interesting dimension to Fay's life. Greg grew up and attended school in the bustling northern Virginia suburbs of Washington D.C, and his family now resides in Chapel Hill, NC. Fay and Greg live together off-campus with a third roommate and have been dating for a couple years. Fay works as the treasurer of the

same honors fraternity, so she and Greg spend a great deal of their time together doing work for the organization, holding meetings, working at charity events, etc.

In our conversations, Fay has mentioned several times that she uses Greg as a resource when she is studying and doing homework. Since Fay still has moments of frustration in class, and sometimes does not get the answers to the questions that she needs, she asks Greg for help at home. She describes these interactions with him as soothing, in a way, because he is usually able to calm her fears through playful admonishment for being so hard on herself. These bits of information about her and Greg in some ways have helped me to learn about Fay's interface with the academy. Greg, in many ways, represents what many consider to be the "academy" – male, white, upper-middle-class, intellectual.

As a rural, Southern woman from a blue-collar background, Fay in no way represents the academy beyond her white skin. As Sohn writes, students who do not identify with the dominant discourse and who feel particularly sensitive to social judgment may also begin to internalize a kind of self-hate. Through the process of assimilation in their attempts to speak the dominant discourse, they downgrade themselves (148). Mary Belenky's seminal study on the stages of women's intellectual development, though perhaps problematic in its cognitive and essentialist assumptions, highlights this phenomenon. According to Belenky, women often live at the behest of those around them, looking to external authority for answers and identification. They struggle to occupy a public sense of self. Finally though, at the phase of constructed knowledge, women begin to reclaim themselves by attempting to integrate knowledge

they feel intuitively with knowledge they have learned from others (15). Both Fay and I embody that paradigm.

In a conversation with Fay in mid October, she and I talked about her plans for Christmas vacation. I asked her specifically if she felt comfortable with Greg's family, and she talked at length about how validated she felt by his parents' approval of her. Unlike Fay's family, Greg's background seems more traditionally upper-middle class. His family seems to value education, intelligence, and the kinds of creative leadership and problem solving that Jean Anyon mentions children of wealthier or more powerful classes are trained to appreciate (79). For Fay, who is often made to feel like a turn-coat by friends and family from home who begrudge the way education has altered her, what she sees in Greg's family is not just a welcome change; they offer a way to feel ok about who she is and what she's doing. Like the working class kids Anyon writes about, Fay seems to have fallen into a kind of passive, powerless relationship with literacy that she is now beginning to notice. In Greg's father, particularly, Fay has discovered a new way to think about her own background.

Greg's father, originally from a small town in Kentucky, has now, after twenty plus years and much traveling, started to really appreciate his Southern, small town roots. After having a conversation with him about these reflections on his upbringing, Fay told me, "it's just nice to read, see and hear these things from him because he is such a successful person. . . so I know that I can still appreciate my southern roots without being in Beesboro." While Fay is developing the kind of critical consciousness Freire believes can lead to empowerment, her behavior plays into this notion that working-class students

are very much concerned about obedience and conformity to rules, codes and systems (students from backgrounds that do not value education in the same ways upper classes might). Fay doesn't feel that she can trust her own experience, but by seeing herself reflected in Greg's father, she feels that she has permission to both reject and embrace her hometown without guilt or regret. While this is a positive, transformative step, it also shows me how Fay views herself in relation to those around her, and ultimately, how much cultural capital she feels she has compared to others.

It would be easy for me to write about Fay's tentativeness, her self-doubt, her softness as all indications that she communicates in a traditionally feminine way. I believe that there is in the academic setting a very real "feminization" of our private discourses, especially when they seem so different from the mainstream, "culturally superior" discourse of the university, institutionally-designed as such. Elizabeth Chiseri-Strater's *Academic Literacies* lends weight to this argument with her ethnographic discovery that students' academic personas can not be separated from their overall identity kit, though the university often discourages students' private literacies (155). Feminists have cited the public space as traditionally "masculine," the private as traditionally "feminine," and I would argue that Fay's hesitance in the public space of the university comes not only from being a woman at times trained to deny the validity of her own experiences (as women are wont to do), but also as a result of this very real gap between public and private that even further excludes students from culturally rich, more isolated and thus, tightly-integrated community backgrounds. In this way Fay has been doubly-exiled at times from gaining the kind of literacy access she would need to

successfully gain entry within the university culture. This "exile" extends to the way she has been received at home after having left Beesboro and the trappings of that culture to become a university student. In many ways, the isolation and identity-crisis Fay experienced during her first semester is not at all surprising. She was anticipating the inevitable break from her home culture necessary to successfully integrating into the university culture – one famously disdainful of private experience.

In fact, all of Fay's close relatives still live in Balesville or neighboring Stevenstown, Virginia[*]. Her grandparents live in the same town; her older brother, Kyle[*], works with her father at a local business that makes septic tanks; her step-mother works at the local bank. Her mother works in the human resources department of a local school uniform company, and her step-father is the county executive director for a local farm service agency. Her family has strong community roots, and as a result, the changes they have observed in Fay's behavior, attitude, and beliefs as a result of her time in college has concerned them.

When I asked Fay to talk a bit about her language practices, she volunteered that she felt like she has become a more sophisticated thinker over the past few years: "I use bigger words," she told me, "I sound smarter, like I know what I'm saying and writing about now." She seemed surprised to have discovered that she now enjoys reading for pleasure. Over the summer, when babysitting a school age girl, Fay found books to read aloud to entertain her. This process of reading aloud was somehow more satisfying to Fay than reading alone, and she became so invested in the book she was reading – *City of*

---

[*] Name changed.
[*] Name changed.

Ember – that she purchased the second book in the series to read on her own. The series is rated at a 5th grade reading level, so the stakes are not as high, but this newfound appreciation for reading pleases Fay, who has admittedly struggled with reading most of her academic life.

These multiple and varied discoveries of her intellectual ability continue to gratify Fay, but her feelings of pride are measured by a sense of guilt for the strides she is making. She struggles with the feeling that she is abandoning the lifestyle and expectations of her family in Balesville, who, though superficially quite proud, demonstrate passive aggressive behavior in response to her success in creating a new life with a new set of ideas and mannerisms. While her family is technically savvy in foundational ways – both families have internet access at home – and they work at jobs requiring specific intellectual skills, there is still an element of reproach on their part toward Fay for seeking out a more intellectually challenging life. Her brother in a playful, though bitingly resentful way, has said to her frequently, "you don't talk or act like you're from here anymore." She has heard similar comments from her aunt and her mother, who has openly lamented the fact that Fay no longer seems to fit in to her hometown. Fay says her mother often says, "I want my old Faybird back." Fay is ambivalent about these reactions from her family. While at once indignant that they would begrudge her for changes she is proud of, she is also deeply saddened and ashamed that she can't be the "old Faybird," that she can't be as close to her family as she once was, that she can't slip back into old behaviors, old ways of looking at the world.

Interestingly, Fay's stepmother is very proud of Fay for moving beyond

Beesboro, shaking most of her accent, and academically succeeding, but Fay shirks her

stepmother's approval. While this refusal to celebrate her displacement may stem from

residual problems with her stepmother, it also indicates a very real ambivalence about her

culture; while she can no longer comfortably identify with Beesboro, she cannot, without

a heavy conscience, openly abhor her hometown. During our talks, I have learned that

behind her reproachful comments about Beesboro, there is still an allegiance, a desire to

make peace with this displacement somehow.

As a consequence of my discussions with Fay, I understand that we have altered

ourselves and importantly our identification with the "rural, Southern woman" label.

Thankfully, though, through the mediation and synthesis of experience, we have achieved

a kind of Peircian thirdness, articulating a connection between a one and a two and using

that synergy to understand our represented experience. In a turn that really led me to the

conclusion that Fay had reached "thirdness," a reflective perspective mediating her

experiences and those of the people around her, Fay offered that she felt that *not* having a

family member away at college when she was going through high school to mentor her

led her to a more closed perspective on life outside of Beesboro. Without this outside

experience, Fay acknowledged that she was much less open to new experiences, much

less willing to travel outside her comfort zone in both geographic and metaphorical ways.

Fay seems proud that she is able to be a mentor to her stepsister, Holly[*], who is able to

see the world through Fay's eyes when she visits Greensboro. Fay hopes that giving

---

[*] Name changed.

Holly an alternative perspective to that of Beesboro will make the transition easier for her. As a family member affiliated with the dominant discourse, Fay may lessen the pull of home via her shared experience and introduce some fundamental ideas to Holly about academic discourse that may help her prepare for the literacy expectations of the university.

Transparency and Transaction

Throughout this process, I have tried to make my findings, what I take from our conversations, very transparent to Fay. I want to know if the way I see her experience is in fact the way she embodies it. I have asked Fay to offer a response to this study, as I am above all committed to making this project a real dialogue, and this is only the first step. Fay will most likely struggle to respond to my narrative, in part, because as she has told me before that the attention is overwhelming at times. But also, she has demonstrated a real insecurity about her ability to read and understand what I am writing. When I gave Fay an excerpt of this study to read, she shocked me by crying after she finished reading it. Scared that I had somehow offended her or made her feel inadequate by my musings (in this case, on her relationship with Greg's family) I began immediately apologizing and inquiring about the source of her tears. She expressed first a feeling of pride for being the subject of such observation and concern, and second, a feeling of personal disappointment for not being able to understand my language about feminism and the bit I wrote about exile. The potency of her reaction warmed me but also disturbed me.

With finals week bearing down on Fay and also considering her sensitivity about the project, I decided to meet with her once more before and read my paper to her, recording her thoughts and reactions in real time this way via recorder. I had sent the first three pages to her over e-mail a week before, asking her to respond in any way she saw fit, and I did not hear from her. So, instead, we met at the university student center, and I read the paper straight from my laptop, pausing after each paragraph or so to ask Fay her thoughts. While at first Fay could only smile and say quietly, "that's right," or "that's all me; I'm sorry but that's all I know to say," she eventually opened up a bit and offered some feedback. Below is an excerpt from our transcription; these first responses from Fay came as I was reading to her, perhaps during the last quarter of the paper.

Fay: I don't know the right words to describe it. It's like interesting. I want to know more, but it's me, and I already know.

Fay: It all makes sense. Listening to it – that's who I was and who I am.

Fay: I've always been sort of picked on for being country. When people in the fraternity would pick on me, Greg would never do that, he would always try to make the situation better even before we were boyfriend and girlfriend. I think he finds Beesboro interesting: how I feel about it and then going there to see how it really is. Comparing this is what Fay thinks about it, and this is how it is. That kind of thing.

As I was reading to Fay from another part of the narrative, she again started to cry. I anticipated this reaction a little because discussing her family can be emotional for Fay. When I winced, she said to me:

Fay: This is who I am. Don't let my reaction disturb you. It's nothing to make you feel bad. I don't know. It just makes me emotional too, I guess, like, to… I know, I've lived my life this whole time, and I know how I felt along the way, but to have it somewhere else outside of myself and to hear it, is emotional to me. But I'm an emotional person sometimes, so that's why I keep tissues in my purse.

Below is the final exchange about the project we had before our conversation slid into a back-and-forth on boyfriends, laundry, and marriage, and we parted ways.

Me: Did you find this experience helpful?

Fay: It's helpful in a reflective sort of way just because I feel like this may sound stupid but because someone is interested in it; it makes me feel like it's ok the way that I've gone about things in life. Does that make sense?

Me: Yeah. Well, I think. I don't know about you, but maybe all college students feel like this, but you go through thinking you're barely making it and the decisions and things you do aren't like the experiences of other people, that somehow you're an exception, and so it helps to find out that there are other people like you, or other people who appreciate what you're going through or see it as educational or interesting even.

Fay: And it makes me feel good too.

Me: Does it really?

Fay: Yeah. How many people can say they got to do this? It's just been an experience for myself, to sort of explore myself and try to understand why things have been the way they are or have been. And, how things, the way things *can* be.

Me: Since we've been talking about family, home, and even Greg, whenever you're with them now do you think about the things we've talked about? When you go home, do you have a different commentary in your head now? What are you thinking?

Fay: I guess more like, how, like if I say something, like the responses that different people have to what I might say. I think more about that, like why is that their response, or like, I think I ask "why?" a lot more, like why do they do these things.

Me: Is this distractive, productive?

Fay: I don't know that it's necessarily productive, but I enjoy it because I get to sort of analyze myself, like this is what I think and why.

Me: And were you doing that before we started focusing on it?

Fay: I would say some, but not as much, and not as much on the things that I do now.

As Chiseri-Strater reflects on her ethnographic experience after carefully observing two university students' literate behaviors over the course of a semester, she calls forth Kenneth Bruffee's argument about the importance of understanding social context, of "understanding what it means to know something by working within the social matrix of a community rather than in isolation" (qtd. in 160). Thinking of education in terms of community should incite educators to share their personal experiences, when appropriate or useful, as a way of helping along their students, as a way of showing them the way "in" to the academy, to the "public" sphere. As educators then, our responsibility becomes to make this transition into the academic community transparent to our students. My experience with Fay has taught me the value of this

163

exchange, particularly when educator and student share cultural and/or geographic backgrounds. The small gain of reflective currency Fay feels she now has as indicated by her above comments is enough to satisfy my belief that our relationship and conversations have proven useful.

While the work of Donehower, et. al., Sohn, and even Heath continue to inform and draw attention to oft-ignored rural populations, they cannot express the whole story without the kind of critical self-exposure and attention to process that we can agree dictates meaning-making. The dialogic literacy narrative provides a way for us to get at the way literacies are constructed, enacted and ultimately changed. It also provides a way to use rural Southern literacies in our scholarship: to deliberately seek sameness as impetus for research and to use story to relate our experiences, drawing our audiences and our subjects close to us without fear. The story of Fay and myself operates as part of what Alexandra Georgakopoulou has called a "third wave" of narrative studies that re-situates analysis "from narratives-in context to narrative-and-identities" (125). This story continues to complicate as Fay and I encounter new experiences and reflect on the time we spent together, the discoveries we made. As Michael Bamburg notes, it is the:

> 'inconsistencies, contradictions, and ambiguities' arising from human interaction around literacy, the *knots* in narratives, that most interest us. Literacy is a fundamentally human activity, we recognize, and as such it is always complexly situated in cultural contexts. These knots, for us, represent the rich weave of literacy practices and values as they constitute human identities. Thus, we don't consider narratives as 'too obvious, challengeable, or immature.' (222)

We are conscious of these knots; they insist upon our attention and demand to be worked at, representing our efforts to manage our shifting social identities.

Fay has since graduated and is now working in a rural, eastern North Carolina middle school as a special education teacher. She continues to make sense of her identity as a rural, Southern woman and interestingly, still struggles with ambivalence about the country and the city; the academy and "home," and her place therein. In a recent e-mail to me, she wrote:

> As you know, going from Beesboro to Greensboro was very eye opening. Well I have found the same to be true about coming to [this new town] and working in Clayton[*]. When I moved from Beesboro to Greensboro I felt like I was moving up in the world. When I would travel back to Beesboro for a weekend, I was glad that I no longer lived there. I felt that I known (sic) there was life outside of that place I used to call home. Comparing this to where I now live, I feel about the same. There aren't places to go and things to see like there was in Greensboro. All it seems that the people in this area do is drink (and over drink) and go to football games. I have come to understand that if [the university] where (sic) not in this town, it would be nothing and quite possibly another Beesboro. I certainly understand that I have a place here and that I am making my life better by being here but at the time I feel that I have taken a few steps backwards in my life. Not mentally, physically, or socially but geographically. I have come to realize just how much I love the city but also appreciate a rural area. (e-mail correspondence 11/30/09)

Her reflection reminds me that this inquiry is not about tying up loose ends, reconciling tensions, or drawing immediate conclusions. Rather, it is about shedding light on the complex nature of literate identities, taking time to reconsider the persistent and familiar in practical, politically mindful ways.

---

[*] Name changed.

165

CHAPTER V

RURAL CONTEXTS, COMPOSITIONS, AND PEDAGOGIES

On my first day of teaching at a small college in upstate New York, my composition students immediately recognized my Southern dialect and mannerisms. I had anticipated their curiosity. Before we could comfortably talk about the course or even go over the syllabus, the students pressed me to know where I was from, where I had been, and why I was there. For the students, my cultural residue trumped my authority as a teacher; their curiosity overcame any fears of potentially offending me. Their queries were gentle, but clamorous nonetheless. They did not know how to receive me until they knew my contextual history, and honestly, I felt the same way about them. After we discussed our cultural differences in several open and friendly conversations, we were ready to listen and respond to one another. We could read the syllabus and get down to business.

As teachers, we might like to think that the exchange of knowledge can be objective, but as rhetoricians, we know this cannot be the case. Physicality can be just as much an issue of meaning-making as intellectual ability. It makes a difference whether we teach in a sterile, windowless classroom, around a fountain at the agora, or behind a computer screen. Similarly, though we would like to think that our students' geographic identities do not influence our reading of them or their reading of us as representatives of the academy, as rhetoricians, we know this cannot be the case. Even as teachers, we carry our contextual past with us. It shows up in the way we carry ourselves,

in the stories we do or do not share, in the way we speak, and subsequently, in the way we regard our students.

Where we are and have been is inextricably tied to what we know as emergent beings. Multi-dimensional in nature, context not only describes where we are at a certain rhetorical moment; it also holds the history of past contexts and how these habits of place shape our interpretations of new communicative events. The concept of place has become an important topic in Rhetoric and Composition studies. We have come to realize that context can be actual as in the study of where we are and what the current situation demands, or residual as in the study of how where we have been influences how and what we know. Theoretically, place informs our field as a consequence of the rhetorical import of context in all meaning-making events. Place also has begun to figure more concretely in our field with the arrival of place-conscious pedagogies and more ecological approaches to instruction and community engagement.

Paul Theobald, Robert Brooke, and others[27] have laid the groundwork for place-conscious education, primarily lauding a specific brand of intradependence, meaning to "exist by virtue of necessary relations *within a place*" (Theobald 7). Place-conscious educators translate this goal to their classrooms by stressing the importance of academic and non-academic community relationships. Students not only think about their place within the classroom but also participate physically in the workings of the local

---

[27] See Wendell Berry's *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture*, as well as Tony Haas and Paul Nachtigal's *Place Value: An Educators' Guide to Good Literature on Rural Lifeways, Environments, and Purposes of Education* for further discussion about the importance of community connectedness and sustainability in both rural and non-rural schools.

community, reflecting on their civic identities as students, church-members, family members, neighbors and more.

This approach is largely born out of the pedagogical philosophies of rural educators and has become particularly salient in rural schools[28]. Rural communities sustain themselves through a balance of independent and intradependent habits. While rural people value the familiarity of local people and places, they are also deeply invested in the pioneering spirit prompted by their relationship with the natural landscape. Rural people often feel a strong sense of stewardship towards the land and a sense of responsibility for the people in their community (Brooke 4). Place-conscious educators tap into this existing civic impulse by encouraging students to invite their class space into their life and work spaces as well. In this way, the curriculum acknowledges the physical context of the school – where we teach and how the place within which our school operates influences what our students know and how they know what they know. Taking a lead from Theobald, Brooke explains:

> Place-conscious education asks us to think of context as something more than the personal background and interests that each individual brings to writing . . . Place-conscious education also asks us to think of context as something more than sociopolitical realities, as defined by race, class, and gender . . . Place-conscious education asks us to think of the intradependence of individual, classroom, community, region, history, ecology – of the rich way local place creates and necessitates the meaning of individual and civic life. (10)

---

[28] See the efforts of rural high school teachers such as Mr. John Dodson (my former social studies teacher) of Rocky Gap High School in Bland County, Virginia, who has created The Bland County History Archives, an Appalachian oral history and technology project maintained by local high school students. Driven primarily by interviews with older local residents, the program requires students to move out and into the community to not only gather and transcribe interesting stories of times past but to become more familiar with their immediate surroundings and the physical and cultural geographies of their local communities. The Bland County History Archives website: http://63.160.254.53/gap.html.

While this approach is exciting and important to our developing appreciation and use of rural literacies, this definition seems to have jumped a few steps in the process of foregrounding place in our consciousness as educators. When we shift context and think of place-conscious education in the university (rather than in primary and secondary schools) and then hone in specifically on the composition classroom, we recognize that highlighting context in the classroom should involve more than local community involvement. Though place-conscious education smartly values context as more than "personal background" and "sociopolitical realities," we cannot assume that our work is done in these areas. We are not in a position to move "beyond" them as our experience likely attests. Additionally, when we adapt place-conscious education into the university composition classroom, we must think of intradependence as including teacher commitment as well. A context-sensitive pedagogy, then, should not be considered a service-learning add-on but rather a complete investment on the part of student *and* teacher to the subtleties of place in all its forms and functions, including those of personal background and sociopolitical reality. I would further argue that this concept is not just place-conscious pedagogy, but rather a pedagogy inspired by *rural* literacy values. It is important that this designation not be lost in the process even as it drives home the significance of actual *place* in the philosophy of the approach.

In my ethnographic study with Fay, the idea of place loomed large as both a real and symbolic site of meaning-making in our interviews. She and I focused our attention on our relationship in light of our sense of place, which is necessarily geographic *and* ideological. In short, we honed in on the context of our experiences as a guide for re-

seeing and subsequently re-composing our roles as rural, Southern, female academics. Fay and I primarily discussed the dimensions of cultural and physical geography as they related to developing our academic persona as well as our academic "voice." By reflecting on this dynamic, we moved to new understandings of ourselves and our "place" as academics, women, and citizens.

My work with Fay hints at the kind of work we can do to adapt place-conscious education to university scholarship: the informality of our interviews; the personal investment of both teacher and student; the centrality of rural, Southern values in our reflections and discussions; the recognition of place as an agent in perceived capability, and the ongoing critical reflection of the exchange. This method offers a novel approach to "place conscious" education and could work as a pedagogical blueprint for addressing "rural literacies" and/or, I would venture, "rural, Southern literacies" in the composition classroom. It not only brings to the forefront the centrality of context in rhetorical studies but also considers the inextricability of physical and cultural place in any meaning-making event, considering the abstractness of composing identities along with the concreteness of physical community.

Place as Rhetorical Constraint

Composing can not help but be self reflexive, and it should follow that student experiences and our own be a part of our agenda as composition instructors. Whether we think of composing as revision, shuttling, or Berthoff's "audits of meaning," mediation and dialectic generate knowledge and are therefore essential components of the

composition process. Bronwyn Williams notes, "writing is a deliberate construction and expression of identity on page (or today, often on a screen). . . The way we arrange words, choose to disclose or not, assume our audience, construct our sense of credibility through language are all inextricably bound up with issues of identity" (6). Identity and our respective "places" or contextual perspectives are therefore central to rhetoric and composition: "reading and writing in any context, then, is not simply a matter of decoding symbols, but is always inextricable from cultural forces in the context in which the act takes place" (Williams 3). Composition instructors are not just teaching writing; they are teaching/modeling the negotiation of public and private literacies, the balancing of identity and place.

As I discussed in Chapter II, Mead reminds us of the necessity of the other in our construction of self-awareness, which is achieved through role-playing. Part of this process involves what Mead calls, "the game," in which the individual internalizes the roles of *all* others who are involved and the rules which condition those roles (*Mind, Self and Society* 151). This configuration forms the "generalized other," which the individual uses to define her own conduct and subsequently her sense of self through the achievement of self-consciousness (*Mind, Self and Society* 154, 195). This consideration of self culminates in the "me" of Mead's "I and me" paradigm, the internalization of roles which derive from symbolic processes. Though Mead does not address specifically the function of place in this paradigm, he asserts that reality is made up of a field of situations which "are fundamentally characterized by the relation of an organic individual to his environment or world. The world, things, and the individual are what they are

because of this relation [between the individual and his world]" (*The Philosophy of the Act* 215). Who we are is fundamentally a matter of our relationship to the outside, what Emerson might call "nature." Our sense of self is not only to be found in the matrix of our relationships but also in the internalized context of our identity against which those matrices are organized. We might think of this internalized context as a combination of where we are and what our relationships have led us to believe about ourselves, in short these properties constitute our "home." As a consequence of interactional self-evaluations matched against a perpetually superior "generalized other," "home" can often feel maligned. This is especially the case for those groups who feel their "home" culture is overtly denigrated by the popular press for deviating from standard cultural mores.

Lisa Knopp's 1996 essay, "Local Geography," describes her experience as a young girl from rural Iowa and demonstrates the way home context inevitably shapes identity: "Gradually I saw Burlington [Iowa] as the end of the world where nothing ever happened or ever would. Certainly what I learned in school reinforced, perhaps created, this attitude. American history never happened in my part of America; world history never happened in my part of the world" (7). Mead's "conversation of significant gestures" insures that we see ourselves again and again matched against the perceived standards set forth by media, educative, religious, and other national institutions. More often than not, non-dominant cultures seem to fall short of the intellectual standard. These perceptions – the habitual reflection of ourselves through the eyes of others -- serve as the lifeblood of identity. People like Lisa Knopp, Fay, and I learn to devalue our personal experience and question our internalized contexts in the process. This is the
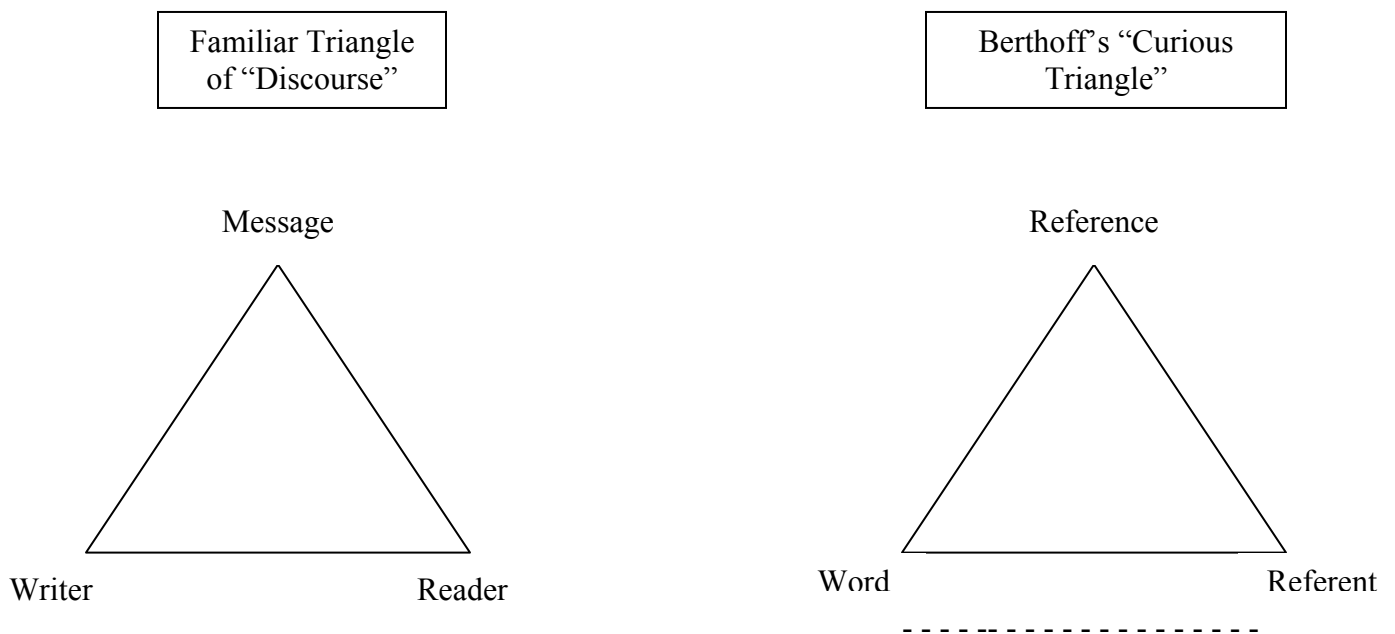
function of literacy – "context" on the y and "power" on the x axis. Street writes that "literacy is a social practice, not simply a technical and neutral skill; that it is always embedded in socially constructed epistemological principles" (7 in Williams page 3). "Place," bound up as it is in what Williams calls the "cultural maelstrom of forces," describes a relevant brand of non-traditional literacy in this sense -- even if it is simply the double-consciousness achieved by continually standing in the shadow of a dominant discourse/culture (7).

What is missing from our instruction of rhetoric and composition is appropriate attention to context, a consideration of the situation which demands utterance and determines the construction of any discursive exchange. The introduction of culture, gender, and class studies into the composition classroom via course theme and readings has helped to highlight often ignored epistemologies. Place-conscious pedagogies have made explicit the importance of physical context in the teaching of writing. Yet, composition teachers often still cast discourse or the message as sacred, forsaking in the process those rhetorical constraints such as beliefs, attitudes, and traditions that actually provide impetus for rhetorical exchange. After all, accompanying every rhetorical act is a telling ideological story just as every ideological story holds a telling rhetorical message. This story permeates the rhetorical triangle with an unobtrusive potency akin to radon, undetectable but decidedly powerful. Lloyd Bitzer calls this the "rhetorical situation," stressing the importance of context in any rhetorical act and reminding us that "it is the rhetorical situation which calls discourse into existence," not the reverse (2). We

might consider then the way literacy expectations figure into every rhetorical moment/triangle with just as much relevance as "audience" or "speaker."

In *The Making of Meaning*, Ann Berthoff's revised version of the rhetorical triangle, influenced by Peirce's model of triadicity, accounts in many ways for the presence of literacy in the process of meaning. For Berthoff, meaning is not to be found (as in an Easter egg hunt) but determined via relationships, which are necessarily unstable and dependent upon the interpreter's stance (42).

FIGURE 1: BERTHOFF'S REVISED TRIANGLE

| Familiar Triangle of "Discourse" | Berthoff's "Curious Triangle" |

```
        Message                           Reference
          /\                                /\
         /  \                              /  \
        /    \                            /    \
       /      \                          /      \
      /        \                        /        \
     /_____\                      /_____\
  Writer      Reader               Word          Referent
                                   - - - -- - - - - - - - - - - - -
```

Berthoff writes:

> the curious triangle with the dotted line can help us remember that what we know, we know by means of mediating form. The triangle represents the mediation, the

174

interdependence of interpreter (what he already knows), the symbol (image or word), and the import or significance it has. Ironically, by not being quite a triangle, this triangle represents the triadicity of meaning relationships. It can help us keep in mind that we must include the beholder, the interpreter, in our account of texts; that texts require contexts and that contexts depend on perspective. ("The Making of Meaning" 44)

Her model underscores the importance of including the interpreter in texts. She writes that "perception itself is making of meaning, a construing, an interpretation, a composing" (37), and as a result composition is always contextual, always dependent on the situation. This notion of "situation" extends from merely the site of communication to the ideological conditions undergirding the perceived identities of all interlocutors. Berthoff, evoking George Mead, suggests that we are reliant on others not only for meanings in language but for our own sense of self, our own sense of what to do next. This "dialectic of forming" recognizes that language is always an exchange and always a matter of adjustment based on renewed observations and perceptions (Berthoff 69). Clearly in this model, place, power, and therefore, literacy, have found expression as equally vital components of any rhetorical act.

Relying on interactionism as a basis for meaning making can be slippery; it can seem far too relativistic or far too essentialist, depending on your interpretation. The philosophy requires the admission that where you are from can dictate what you can do and how you can do it, a notion that flies in the face of Horatio Alger and the American dream. However, it can also suggest that talking about relative positions and access to power can help us to re-conceive our "places" and subsequently our identities, moving us

"farther along," to borrow a term from Ronald and Roskelly[29]. To achieve this reflexive movement, we can recognize the possible influence of geographic memory or home context on composing identities. We can invite discussion of it in our classrooms just as we have done with other multi-cultural literacies. When students are allowed to look the expectations of the academy in the eye and honestly weigh them against their individual ways of knowing/being in the world, they become active participants in their education and more critically minded writers and readers. Literacy suddenly becomes multi-faceted, not simply a matter of moving *up* a ladder. Similarly, teachers can use their personal experience and residual sense of "home context" as a way to model for students how one juggles public and private literacies.

Therefore, the restlessness our students bring to our classrooms should not be assuaged but rather exposed and analyzed[30]. In "Inventing the University," David Bartholomae keys into the vexed position of *all* student writers who are trying to imitate a specialized discourse while also trying to include their personal histories within the confines of the conventions (511). James Ottery concurs: "the university discourse impersonally carries and conveys the weight of personal and cultural prejudices" (129). Our composition classrooms are generally spaces to make academic literacy expectations clear to students and to teach them how to insinuate themselves into these conversations. Since literacy cannot help but be ideological, academic literacy expectations, as a rule, must marginalize as they represent the dominant discourse. This idea has been taken up

---

[29] See Ronald and Roskelly's edited collection, *Farther Along: Transforming Dichotomies in Rhetoric and Composition*.

[30] See also Roskelly and Ronald's *Reason to Believe: Romanticism, Pragmatism, and the Possibility of Teaching* in which they refer to this restlessness as a key element of Romanticism and Pragmatism, philosophies that require mediation in the quest for truth.

at some length by Elspeth Stuckey, Mike Rose, Lisa Delpit and others. It is therefore to our advantage to make transparent to our students the ways in which these ideologies define the rhetorical situation. Ideological revelation in our teaching and research can disrupt problematic cultural narratives and importantly, help us to better address the complexities of any rhetorical situation for students as both readers and writers.

All too often teachers ignore these ideological sensibilities which clearly and importantly play into the composition process. The nature of relationships is, after-all, is the basis of rhetoric and discursive reality. As instructors, particularly instructors of rhetoric and composition, our responsibility is to make obvious to students the *relationship* between these personal histories and the academic standard. It is not a matter of rejecting either dominant or marginalized discourses but rather of drawing our attention to the mutually dependent nature of both.

This relational necessity undergirds Rosenblatt's reader-response theory. Rosenblatt defines interpretation as the continual effort to clarify the evocation that happens in the reading process, which is a matter of continual reflection and adjustment. This movement is the restlessness demanded of us in any communicative event as we size up the "text," using what William James called "selective attention," focusing on the interplay of certain parts of our experience with certain parts of the text. Rosenblatt deems this a reader's "stance," as the reader continually stakes a position, deciding in a generally subconscious way to concentrate on certain parts of the texts to the exclusion of others as she reads. The term "stance" implies physicality, which invites us to consider the ways in which a reader's geographic identity or "home" may also contribute to the

177

selectivity of any reading moment. This transactional process can be traced in the writing

of texts as well, since the author carries on what Rosenblatt calls a kind of "spiraling,"

constantly reading her own work and weighing it against the anticipated reception of her

audience as a way to inform what to leave in, what to leave out, and generally, what kind

of impression to make (Rosenblatt 5-10). This back and forth is reminiscent of Mead's

conversation of gestures previously referenced, an unavoidable urge to "clarify" and

"adjust" in an effort to achieve a more adequate and/or effective "reading." This

reflexivity subsequently informs the intense self-consciousness responsible for double-

consciousness. The negotiations required in both reading and writing outlined by

Rosenblatt suggest that one's experience is always relational, always interpreted as a

consequence of how we assume others may read us. Integral to any interpretative event,

these selective experiences become rhetorical stances, primarily informed by ideological

conditioning.

 Taking Rosenblatt's theory as a lead, we might think of student identity as

functioning in two ways: first, as a type of reservoir in the most common sense, including

all that has happened to them in the way of personal experience, including home literacy

skills, home values, worldviews, and memories, and second as a kind of ever-changing

series of mediations, burgeoning experiences that are in the process of being interpreted.

Rosenblatt's aesthetic and efferent continuum of reading further explains the function of

experience in interpretative processes. Aesthetic reading deals with the more personal,

affective kind of reading we do when we focus on our senses as we read. We might

consider the aesthetic end of the continuum as aligning with our "reservoir" experiences,

reading (of a text or situation) without the need to immediately react or perform. While this kind of reading calls forth student experience, it does not require obvious interpretative performance. Efferent reading moves us to the opposite end of the spectrum, reading with the immediate intention to react or use something from the text afterwards. Student identity on this end of the spectrum is obviously more attuned to the rhetorical situation at hand since the demand to perform requires readers to not only use their reservoir experience but balance it actively with the ideological constraints of the rhetorical context. Part of this reflective process involves one's interpretation of his or her "place" in the rhetorical moment. The stakes rise with the awareness of audience, and one becomes that much more attuned to how he or she may be perceived as the context becomes more unfamiliar.

Many teachers address student "linguistic-experiential reservoirs" through writing prompts that require the description of a memory or the relation of an important event in their lives. While these assignments wisely invite student experience into the classroom, instructors often fail to follow through by linking these past experiences to the current rhetorical situation. For students whose backgrounds fall outside the academic standard, these exercises can be particularly difficult and lead to uncomfortable feelings of exposure. Some students choose to check their real experiences at the door rather than deal with the possibility of being exposed as an "outsider." This impulse is often responsible for the tiresome papers about "the big game," "my graduation day" and other tedious personal essays, in which students try, often unsuccessfully to elevate their experiences as way to rise to the intimidating occasion of academic discourse. As a

composition teacher, I have often preached against the trumped-up personal essay. I ask my students to instead write their everyday experience as a way to address their fears about the adequacy of their past. While I like to think this request has been a noble one, I must ashamedly admit that I have more times than not made this request without explaining the reasoning behind it. This is an oversight which suggests my own inattention to the second and perhaps most important type of student identity – experience as a continual process of mediation and interaction. As an instructor I am equally obligated to engage in that process, perhaps even more so because of the power I represent.

Academic literacies demand a presumption of cultural dominance which can make both educators and students feel uncomfortable. Academic discourse throws students into a spiral of self-questioning that will ultimately change them – a shift which can be both gratifying and frightening for us as educators. Ottery notes, "the reciprocal effects of the university discourse structure – one assimilates it in order to become assimilated into the world of those who function via its design – reshape identity" (126). Students are tense and hyper-sensitive as they grapple with this situation. Even if we choose to ignore it, our students are restless. Even if they aren't able to confidently articulate it, students can feel the pressure to purge their "non-standardness." They are aware of how the acquisition of academic discourse can lead to power and privilege, and they are experts on the ways their cultural background affects their perceived success as academic writers.

In "The Politics of Literate Discourse," Lisa Delpit cautions that, as educators, then, we cannot simply choose to teach or "not teach" the dominant discourse (551) since to do so ignores the realities of the classroom and the culture. We paralyze our students when we concentrate solely on home literacies to the exclusion of academic literacies and vice versa. Students can recognize when their experiences aren't adequately anticipated and acknowledged, and their resistance against academic discourse often has more to do with the fact that their individual experiences are either completely disregarded or too eagerly heralded. For example, as Shaughnessy has noted in her studies of basic writers, many students do not want the problem of error ignored because learning grammar is to them a way of regaining control. Yet, they often feel alienated by the prescriptive nature of academic form. Students are attuned to the differences in their literacy values and the "correct" literacies espoused by the university and often feel confused by these competing values. It follows then that if students regard literacy acquisition as a necessary rejection of one language or cultural identity for another, then they will be more likely to reject academic discourse than to sacrifice their home culture, a move which can potentially damage their ability to authentically engage with texts of any kind.

Bartholomae suggests that part of this tension is due to the nature of academic discourse and the self-confidence it requires. The academic author must presume a kind of knowledge and power equal to or more powerful than his or her audience. Students are rarely ready to assume this role with much success since it requires them to imagine themselves "insiders" (516). A rural Southern student, for example, might find this kind of role-playing particularly difficult, for, as I was once told by a fellow graduate student

after a conference presentation, "it's hard for you to sound like you know what you're doing when you have such a country twang."

The interstitial space between cultures, languages, geographies, and more should therefore be prime real estate for composition teachers -- spaces to not only discuss perceived disparities but to interrogate them, modeling reflexive awareness. When teachers acknowledge that literacy values influence communicative acts and talk candidly about those ideological dynamics, they demonstrate a keener rhetorical awareness and attention to reflexivity that can enrich their research and instruction. Teaching from a non-traditional canon is not enough since rural, Southern literacy, as a legitimately nuanced human experience, is still devalued in the classroom and beyond as the previous chapters have hopefully proven. We should practice teaching from non-standard epistemological stances instead. Feminism has given us a blueprint for accomplishing this shift. We already approach learning in ways that may or may not jibe with student home literacies, so why not raise the stakes of this transformative pedagogy and consider the ways we might teach a course steeped in "rural values," in which the philosophies that sustain rural communities inform our methodologies? The key to this more theoretically place-conscious approach is the open discussion of ideological positioning, and the revelation and analysis of the academy's and our own biases. Without directing our attention to these blind spots, we fail ourselves and our students. Including the rural Southerner in discussions of pedagogical theory will democratize our classrooms and push our teaching and scholarship into more self-aware and personally accountable directions.

While this proposed disruption is not a new idea, as feminist and queer studies have established, the inclusion of the rural Southern student in the canon of "others" certainly is. As has been demonstrated in previous chapters, rural Southerners often experience a unique brand of marginalization, suffering significant cultural stigmatization as a nationally recognized antithesis to intellectual progress and "high culture." It is perhaps a more reasonable first step to encourage more discussion of the rural Southerner as other. Consequently, we must not only investigate these students' experiences more carefully via ethnographic research and course content, but also consider what this group's oft-overlooked status may indicate about the democratic agenda our own classrooms. As composition teachers, we owe it to our students to come clean about how their identities, their set of experiences will be received by academia, since, when they write, they will necessarily bring to bear their past experiences on the new texts they will be asked to both interpret and generate. We already do this with other more popularly marginalized groups – women, minorities, homosexuals, even students from blue-collar backgrounds – all have been and continue to be legitimate populations whose literacies have been historically devalued in academia.

Attention to rhetorical constraints is important for marginalized groups who know first-hand the impact of cultural narratives on identity and expression. Scholarship in queer studies has highlighted the importance of identifying constraints of the rhetorical situation as a way to transform discourse and achieve ideological transparency. Proposing a kind of intervention, David Wallace points out that:

As Judith Butler explains, any act of discourse, any action taken in a cultural context, is a performance, not an independent act 'but a ritualized production, a ritual reiterated under and through constraint, under and through the force of prohibition and taboo, with the threat of ostracism and even death controlling and compelling the shape of the production' (95). Thus, to be transformative, discourse must break apart the usual ideologies that have accrued as 'the effect of fixity.' Not surprisingly, queer people as well as others who have been defined as 'other' by dominant culture have a vested interest in exposing the performative nature of discourse and in finding means to change the underlying ideologies of dominant culture. (53)

Wallace explains that since dominant ideologies define the conditions of academic discourse, we must "find language and actions that expose the ideologies of dominant culture and engage those who espouse these ideologies in substantive discourse" (54). This proposal for transformative discourse asks us to describe our interpretative frameworks, their limitations, their demands, and where and how we fit in. A first step is through our own teaching and scholarship, through the continual invitation to read "texts and situations from perspectives that engage differences according to race, gender, class, sexuality, and other social positions" (54). The "other social positions" Wallace references should include geographic identities or home contexts, and more specific to this project, the ever excluded rural Southerner. Wallace's call to "expose ideologies of dominant culture" implies that our scholarship should stay attuned to the shifting nature of marginalized populations within academia; we should reorient our positions as pedagogues continuously based on the ways in which ideological relationships continuously change.

Teachers are aware and at least minimally prepared to address this dissonance for students from populations who have traditionally been labeled "marginal," though they

may not be primed to transform traditional discourses. Rural, Southern students pose a problem because so often we like to think of them as part of the wicked conservatism directly responsible for the racist, sexist, homophobic rhetoric that marginalizes other cultural groups in the first place. They are generally white, generally quiet, and therefore go generally undetected. As a consequence, rural Southern students are rarely considered marginal themselves unless they are economically disadvantaged, but even then, they are resigned to representing the anti-intellectual, NRA celebrating, close-minded rednecks as an important counter-point in discussions of diversity politics.

In Fall of 2008, *Composition Studies* published an engaging article by Danielle Mitchell entitled, "'I Thought Composition Was About Commas and Quotes, Not Queers': Diversity and Campus Change at a Rural Two-Year College." The title is arresting, not only because of the irreverent opening line, but because it points to a familiar trope in composition pedagogy, the combating of rural anti-intellectualism with a cruel-to-be kind cultural "contact zone" approach. Mitchell describes a gender and sexuality course she designed directly aimed at confronting the heterosexist conservatism of her students, who are primarily rural, northern Appalachian and poor. Mitchell points out that, "Given their geographical and cultural profiles, diversity instruction is not only part of the ethical imperative of rural open admissions colleges [. . .] but also, I would argue, of composition programs in those colleges, programs that focus on critical reading and writing as well as critical thinking" (1). Mitchell's central argument here strikes me as noble, but problematic. As a rural, Southern student and academic, I have become fascinated by the ways in which composition teachers describe their classes as places to

introduce students to diverse cultural contexts but repeatedly fail to critically self-reflect on the ways in which they, as the instructor, may also benefit from uncomfortable moments of self-reflection, moments that call their own ideological stance into question.

Mitchell tells the story of her course, casting herself as the representative of the academy, as the voice of reason; her reactions speak from the indisputable position of not only her institution but of presumably any thoughtful academic in this situation. The profound certainty implied by this stance, specifically as it relates to the treatment of a historically sublimated cultural group strikes me as not only unfair: it seems willfully ignorant. Our duty as writing teachers is to improve students' abilities to communicate and persuade; enacting social change is not part of our core charge, as Mitchell might have us believe. If we do it successfully, the process of teaching writing indeed triggers for students an awareness of ideological relationships. However, the course of action they take from this awareness should ostensibly be their own in a democratic classroom. Our teaching should ask them to speak their own ideas and listen to others in ways that will hopefully further empower them to seize individual opportunities and recognize the differences they can make in increasingly more powerful social systems. Teachers who concentrate on the process of rhetoric and writing should not only be willing to teach these changes but also demonstrate them as well through a willingness to expose, test, and potentially change their own beliefs. Teachers who take an active, reflexive posture acknowledge the dynamic nature of marginal studies and account for their inevitable role in the process.

Regrettably, it has become a knee-jerk belief that it is our responsibility to guide the course of students' rhetorical "awakenings," especially in composition classrooms where contact zones are most obviously ripe for discussion. Teachers sometimes misunderstand critical educators' calls for more self-reflexive pedagogy, connecting it less to critical awareness and more to political pontification. This profoundly certain stance, though oft-occupied by teacher researchers, presumes an ideological dominance that is especially troubling when the aim of such projects is to encourage critical reflection in the confrontation of diverse opinions. When Mitchell writes that "simultaneously, then, the goal is to facilitate improvement in student writing while also broadening their range of cultural experiences in order to better foster diversity, making room on campus for difference," (1) I can't help but wonder what *Mitchell* hopes to take from the process. What difference will her research make in the furthering of this goal in her *own* life? If we ask our students to doubt their long-standing beliefs, we must be willing to do the same ourselves. What does Mitchell learn, aside from how to introduce controversial subject matter to unwilling students and how to diffuse their subsequent hostility?

In order to make a real difference researchers like Mitchell need to do more than reflect on their frustrations with students whose worldview clashes with their own. If we ask our students to challenge their prejudices by divulging their own biases and using their personal experience, we should be doing the same in our research. The authority invested in us as representatives of the academy positions us as role models for our students whether we embrace the idea or not. When we fail to challenge our ideological

187

assumptions in our scholarship, we are reifying the systems responsible for the kinds of obstinacy and conservatism we see in students like the rural poor at Mitchell's institution. Our research should not continually pit "us" against "them," but work on ways to use those interactions to prompt core-shaking self-reflection on both ends. For instance, what might Mitchell have learned from her "heterosexist" students had she begun from the premise that diversity instruction goes both ways? We might similarly ask, what might Mitchell have learned if she started from a premise of sameness rather than difference when engaging her students?

Pedagogical *Nisba*

 "You don't know who you are until you know where you are." -- Wendell Berry

We can begin to see the usefulness of terms like "rural literacies" when we are reminded of the importance of context, manifestly "setting" or "place," in meaning-making. Clifford Geertz, author of *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretative Anthropology*, investigates the concept of self-hood through a culture's symbolic forms in an effort to understand how place affects identity. He points to the Arabic concept of *nisba* as an example of how symbolic forms can be influenced by relational properties in dramatically telling ways. The word "nisba," "derives from the triliteral root, n-s-b, for 'ascription,' 'attribution,' 'imputation,' 'relationship,' 'affinity,' 'correlation,' 'connection,' 'kinship.'" (65). Among the elements of the Arabic name, the nisba perhaps most closely resembles the Western surname, but interestingly, it functions to contextualize the person which it describes, their occupation, geographic home area, or

descent. The nisba is not stable; rather, when the context changes, the nisba changes. A man recognized by a nisba in his home location will be identified by a different nisba outside of his home. The idea seems strangely familiar, but it is made more profound when we consider the way this kind of shifting title plays into notions of identity. Geertz writes, "the social contextualization of persons is pervasive and, in its curiously unmethodical way, systematic. Men do not float as bounded psychic entities, detached from their backgrounds and singularly named. As individualistic, even willful, as the Morrocans in fact are, their identity is an attribute they borrow from their setting" (67). In this case, acknowledging one's geographic identity is not an option but rather a fundamental requirement. We might consider the implications of this concept in our classrooms. If geographic identity became central to the way we address our students, how might that acknowledgement affect student identity and more interestingly, how might it affect the perceived gap between public and private literacies?

Though Geertz's concern is with ethnographic study, the idea of an observer and observed and an educator and educated are closely related, especially now that teachers are commonly taking on the role of "teacher researchers." To address the messiness of ethnographic empathy and objectivity, Geertz adapts the concepts of "experience-near" and "experience-distant" from psychoanalyst, Hans Kohut. Geertz explains that "people use experience-near concepts spontaneously, un-self-consciously, as it were colloquially; they do not, except fleetingly and on occasion, recognize that there are any 'concepts' involved at all" (Geertz 58). Experience-distant concepts are ones that "specialists of one sort or another – an analyst, an experimenter, an ethnographer, even a priest or ideologist

– employ to further their scientific, philosophical, or practical aims" (Geertz 57). These concepts explain ethnographers' struggle to "see through the eyes" of the observed, Geertz points out the arrogant presumptuousness and impossibility of such a feat. Since identity is always socially and contextually determined, especially for non-Western cultures, the experience of an "other" cannot be known. However, through "continuous dialectical tacking between the most local of local detail and the most global of global structure," ethnographers can get closer to an accurate reporting of experience (Geertz 69). The researcher must not too eagerly immerse herself in the colloquial, nor too hastily lose herself in the romantic idea of human universality. This advice is reminiscent of Delpit's warning to teachers sometimes too eager to transform the dominant ideology by unwisely ignoring its instruction altogether in the classroom.

Geertz's paradigm reminds us of the potential loss when we too quickly dismiss the value of the "experience-near" in our research. While any agent who takes on the role of observer or reporter faces ideological criticism, those agents who use their immediate experiences to inform their investigations begin from a place, colloquial as it may be which, though likely overlooked, has already passed the test as observable verifiable data. As researchers or teachers, our attention should not be drawn too closely in or out, but rather work to repeatedly and mindfully cover the distance between.

From Geertz's suggestion, we can see that an ethnographer's primary loyalty should be to the negotiation of place, that any interpretative moment but especially those of an ethnographic nature demand a keen sensitivity to context. Place affects symbolic forms; rhetorical situations remind us of the relativity of context. Since we can never

190

know an "other," context explains the eliding of easy conclusions and thus demands dialogic engagement: "rhetoric is what we do instead of omniscience." It seems but a short leap to the composition classroom where "experience-near" and "experience distant" negotiations are the order of the day.

While, as teachers, the negotiation between practice and theory is the order of the day, all too often, we ignore the "common sense" or practical knowledge our students bring with them to the classroom. This is especially the case for students whose cultural backgrounds are far different from the perceived mainstream. While we may try to work against the idea of "mainstream" in our classrooms, the preponderance of evidence suggests that most of us believe in the existence of a standard. In an assimilative fashion, we consequently move towards the vanilla, non-disruptive, rhetorically benign center. This is often the consequence of teaching academic discourse when we fail to interrogate what we do and why in the full view of our students. Geertz's anthropological work led him to the conclusion that as researchers, we often ignore people's common, everyday experiences. The same is often true in our classrooms. As instructors, we sometimes fail to consider how our students navigate "everyday problems in everyday ways with some effectiveness" (76). These everyday habits define student literacies and can be useful to understanding how to adjust our pedagogies to better meet "the tone and temper" of things that people feel they already know (92). As Geertz points out, common sense been frequently overlooked, and just as in other forms of cultural expressions, it is based on historically defined standards of judgment. The "everyday" in all its forms can be more ideologically interesting than the high profile projects we ask our students to produce for

191

us. Once again, drawing attention to context gets us closer to articulating the way alternative literacies could work in the composition classroom.

In *Throwed Away: Failures of Progress in Eastern North Carolina*, Linda Flowers recounts her time spent with Miss Ray, a teacher in her rural elementary school who had taught several generations of local children. During recess, Miss Ray would often call children over to sit on her lap as the others scurried, dodged, and yelled on the playground around them. While gently circling them with her arm or perhaps braiding the girls' hair, Miss Ray would tell stories of siblings who had been former students and take time to "make" over the child's accomplishments in class thus far. The daughter of a tenant farmer, Flowers remembers this small gesture fondly as we are all wont to do when adults are especially kind to us as children. Yet, Miss Ray's little talks represent much more, namely the rural sensibilities of "old timey" country teachers whose love and personal commitment to their students left them with an indelible sense of belonging and purpose.

What made teachers like Miss Ray effective was their genuine interest in the lived experiences of their students. In the 1950s, many of Flowers' teachers lived in the communities in which they taught and since "everyone in the country lived remarkably alike," students relied on their teacher as a trusted authority, in part, because the teachers knew what it was like to live as they did (19). Rarely were teachers driving far outside of their district to teach in neighborhoods that in no way resembled their own as frequently happens now. Flowers' teachers were home, and as such, made it clear that their ambitions did not lie elsewhere. They managed to project both a sense of familiarity and

192

difference that in turn both comforted and challenged students. It was as though, Flowers writes, they "had a claim like a relative who had left home before we were of age" (21). Miss Ray's act of physically reaching out to her students may likely strike modern readers as an inappropriate broaching of students' personal space, an incredibly bold presumption of intimacy, or at the very least a lovely though useless bit of nostalgia, but for Flowers, the warmth and familiarity of her teachers helped to make her experience as a student in a peripheral school -- poor, rural, Southern, and somewhat forgotten -- less alienating and, in fact, personally empowering. The consequence of this simple act should therefore not be ignored.

By showing sensitivity to the unique experiences of each student, Miss Ray enacted an important tenet of critical pedagogy, the reliance on student lived experience as the basis for trust and subsequently honest engagement. This approach was especially important in the rural context of Flowers' home region. Flowers and her classmates, many the children of tenant farmers, were just coming to know themselves and their relative inconsequentiality as poor, Southern whites, nationally defined as intellectually and economically sub-par. As Flowers explains, the transition from farm to factory in the mid-late 60s signaled a distressing change in the fabric of community with the weeding out of the personal in public affairs. Parents were no longer working at home all day; many were taking on factory jobs in local towns. As a result, children no longer had a clear vision of their or their parents' "place" in the community. The networks of familiarity – the common knowledge of who worked for which landlord and whose family owned and worked what land – had begun to dissolve, and the confluence of the

personal and public was no longer a given. While tenant farming had been in many ways disempowering, the system had been familiar and was in fact, based on a variety of intimacies with places and peoples that informed the literacy values of the Eastern North Carolina people. Deliberately or not, Miss Ray and others like her demonstrated a keen sensitivity to the context of their students by reminding them that they had roots, an important history, and that their experiences mattered.

Though rural America is vastly different from region to region – from desert communities to Appalachian "hollers" –, most of the rural U.S. experiences similar kinds of economic and cultural marginalization. Many rely on the same strategies for community sustainability. These habits of mind contribute to the idea of a "rural sensibility." People in rural communities often have less disposable income, less formal education, and are more intradependent, relying often solely on the social capital generated *within* the place they call home (Preston 7). Many rural areas are perpetually suffering from population decline as there are often few white collar career opportunities available for college graduates. As an example, in 2007 legislators from Maine, one of the country's most rural states, passed the "Opportunity Maine" bill in an effort to retain Maine college graduates by raising the number of graduates who stayed in the state upon degree completion from 46% to 75% (Ellis). Despite their exodus, many graduates have "overwhelmingly expressed a desire to live in Maine if feasible," which suggests that even though they feel pressured to leave in order to find higher paying jobs, many still feel a strong attachment to place (initiative document). Jane Preston notes that "the educational system may be more successful in its ability to provide its young citizens

with the talents and skills needed outside the rural community rather than the talents and skills needed to contribute to the revitalization of home communities" (32). As a result, rural peoples are often strapped with a sad ambivalence about their home, its significance in the national conscience, and their futures therein.

Despite picturesque renderings, the close-knit values of rural communities are often a consequence of both geographic and cultural alienation. Rural people generally feel a strong allegiance to community and place and seek stability and consistency in their lives, the kind of values which can threaten perceptions of national progress[31]. Rural communities seem most defined by bonding social capital, which Robert Putnam describes as "good for undergirding specific reciprocity and mobilizing solidarity" (22). These behaviors are inward looking and tighten intra-community networks. Examples of bonding habits in rural communities may be church activities, county fairs, or even "loafing" at the local gas station. Unlike bridging social capital which links external assets and diffuses information, bonding social capital provides an essential psychological and social support to a community (Putnam 22). As such, many social interactions are evaluated by their relative familiarity and intimacy. As a child, I can remember my mother fuming when the check-out girl at the local grocery store would ask for her driver's license before accepting a check. "You must be new. Everyone here *knows* me," she would say, as I cowered in embarrassment at her side. My mother's

---

[31] Paul Theobald, a leading scholar in rural education, outlines four shared characteristics of rural cultures: attachment to place, strong commitment to the community's well-being, connection to the outdoors and concern for the stability of the community (qtd. in Preston 40).

indignation came not from the inconvenience of showing her ID, but from the implied accusation that she did not belong, that she wasn't to be trusted.

The rural impulse to band together likely accompanies an awareness of difference or the anticipation of outside threats, the kind historically demonstrated by missionary efforts and industrialization. Putnam describes bonding behaviors as "creating strong group loyalty" but often leading to "strong out-group antagonism," (23) a possible explanation for the stereotypical suspicion of outsiders attributed to country people. Rural *Southerners* exhibit an even more specific epistemology complicated by traditionally rural values as well as Southern stigmatization. Consequently, communities in the rural South may rely primarily on bonding social capital as a way to sustain threatened cultural customs and psychologically insulate themselves from external persecution. These habits of mind are generally second-nature and can quietly inform any and all social rituals.

Miss Ray's act of generosity, then, when considered in context begins to look less like merely the gesture of a warm-hearted teacher and more like a naturally effective pedagogical move. Deliberately or not, Miss Ray knew the literacy values of her students and addressed them on *their* terms. Even though there are similarly gracious teachers in schools across the nation in urban settings, we can confidently attribute acts of kindness such as Miss Ray's to geography alone. Evidence suggests that rural educators, the most effective ones, address the needs and values of rural students while also strengthening bonds of community and solidarity that traditionally define rural populations.

In addition to movements such as feminism, Marxism, and Cultural Studies, critical pedagogical theory owes much to rural literacies and the particular circumstances

that continue to define the educational needs of rural populations. Interestingly, pedagogies specifically developed to reach rural populations not only align with the goals of critical feminist pedagogical theory but have historically informed their development. In fact, the teaching philosophies that have mobilized rural communities from elementary schools to adult literacy programs throughout the 20th century continue to be co-opted by teachers in any and all localities, eager to address the problem of "community" in their own classrooms. The critical literacy movement was in fact almost singularly inspired by Paulo Freire's literacy work with the rural "peasant class" in Brazil who were an openly exploited but silently marginalized group. Concurrently, in the U.S., Myles Horton's Highlander Folk School practiced a nascent form of liberatory pedagogy, working to mobilize rural, Southern peoples to define and successfully act on community problems. Highlander was actively involved in the labor and civil rights movements, training citizens to rely on their existing literacies to develop strategies for democratic action.

Even though the epistemologies of rural peoples have been largely responsible for gains made in the critical pedagogy movement, scholars rarely consider the rural ways of knowing which have inspired these changes. The focus in composition studies has been mostly on urban schools. These communities suffer similar economic strains but often garner more scholarly attention than rural schools. Urban landscapes offer the clash of diverse populations, the threats of violence, and the possibility of a generally more productive cacophony that resonates with our post-modern sensibilities[32]. Though all

---

[32] See Joseph Harris' "The Idea of Community in the Study of Writing" in which he suggests that the composition classroom should encourage polyphony and discourage consensus . Harris uses the metaphor of the city here – a place where competing beliefs and ideas intersect and confront one another.

students struggle in some respects to use academic discourse confidently, rural students' experiences are different. They are shaped by the negative national attitude towards rusticity as well as the disregard for their home literacies in the college classroom. While class, gender, and race are considered important determiners of epistemology thanks in part to gender studies and Marxist theory, geographic culture is rarely given the same attention. As we redefine critical pedagogy in the 21st century, it seems necessary to first, at the very minimum, credit the rural populations responsible for innovations in critical pedagogy thus far. Secondly, we must attempt to organize and describe what we know of "rural literacies" and/or "rural, Southern literacies" in an effort to further use those ways of knowing to inform classroom instruction for students of *any* background, as well as for students who openly identify with those labels.

Now, as composition scholars move to territories of post-process and post-liberatory theories, it seems important to look back on what we might have missed in our enthusiasm over the critical literacy/pedagogy movement. If, as Paulo Freire has noted, we must proceed from an anthropological view of culture, building our curriculum around the everyday lives of our students, then it seems important to go back and scrutinize the ways in which he and other rural educators lived, worked, and eventually developed their educational philosophies on the ground. Freire and Horton managed to design a brand of critical pedagogy that, though specifically aimed at rural populations, became universally salient. Horton's focus on rural, Southern populations narrows our attention even further to how we may begin to understand, use, and value rural *Southern* literacies in our classrooms as well. In an effort to define just what we mean when we use

the term "rural literacies," it is perhaps best to look at the ways in which educators have most successfully met and mobilized rural populations, for to give rural literacies the attention they deserve, teachers need to do more than simply introduce rural themed texts into the curriculum. A philosophy of meaning-making, defined by its attention to context and simple commitment to democracy, undergirds the mild, unpretentious acts of teachers like Miss Ray as well as the transformative pedagogical philosophies of educators like Paulo Freire and Myles Horton.

Though nations apart, Myles Horton and Paulo Freire relied on rural literacies to re-frame the concepts of democracy, education, and the role of praxis therein. Myles Horton was born in 1905 in rural Tennessee, an area economically defined by its poverty and absentee landlords. Paulo Freire was born in 1921 in northeastern Brazil, an area comparable to America's rural Appalachia, historically plagued by illiteracy, hunger, and poverty. Their backgrounds influenced their commitment to place, lived experience, and social justice, which made them profoundly successful as rural educators. Though Freire conducted his adult literacy work in third world Brazil, and Horton's Highlander Folk School was located in the first world U.S., both recognized the centrality of social experience in meaning making, and both applied this philosophy to mobilization efforts of the rural and rural-displaced poor in their respective home regions.

Freire and Horton were familiar with the double-consciousness of the poor, working class, who were geographically alienated and popularly believed to be

intellectually inferior[33]. Their intimacy with the injustice of class/geographic prejudices

inspired them to return to their home regions after college. Once home, however, they

experienced something of the "odd double movement," Joseph Harris mentions (11). As

former insiders, they were privy to the concrete issues that defined the lives of the people,

but their return as outsiders marked them as suspicious and grouped them in the class of

missionaries, men with good intentions but little awareness of the everyday happenings

of the people they were so bent on rescuing. This realization humbled both and made

them hyper-aware of the way in which authority and power infiltrates any educative

gesture, no matter how well-meaning. Once they both recognized that context was

defining the educational moment more than content, they turned their attention to

highlighting rather than downplaying the ideological realities of their students. Freire and

Horton's approach hearkens Rosenblatt's description of the student reader's identity,

which operates simultaneously as: 1) a reservoir of home literacy skills, values,

worldviews, and memories, and 2) an ever-changing mediation of burgeoning

experiences.

In both cases, context had to be simplified from academic abstraction to concrete

reality. The rural peoples' social conditions, personal experiences, and resulting

epistemologies were clearly defined by physical geography. By tuning into the

importance of place for the people they hoped to teach, Freire and Horton came to several

conclusions: 1) a teacher who ignores the concrete nature of his or her students' situation

---

[33] Brenda Bell and John Gaventa recorded a dialogue between Paulo Freire and Myles Horton entitled *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change.*

further widens the gap between; 2) educators cannot expect global results without local engagement, and 3) reflexivity and dialogue lead to solidarity between teacher and student, a necessary union for education to work beyond superficial instruction. Via these discoveries, Freire and Horton eventually empowered the people to not only feel proud of their non-mainstream literacies but to use them as a way to organize and subsequently resist exploitation. It was their experience with the marginalization of rural peoples that led them to the radical conclusion that education is necessarily political, and knowledge can never be neutral.

Freire came to these conclusions as an adult literacy worker attempting to teach the Brazilian peasantry – many rural and rural-displaced—not only how to read but also how to negotiate authority and freedom in their local schools in the 1950s. Freire arrived back in Recife, the city of his birth, with the results of an investigation sponsored by the Brazilian government. His study tracked the way rewards and punishments at home affected students' perceptions of authoritarian ideology in their schools. He hoped to present his investigation to the working class families touched by the findings. Many in his audience would be migrants from forest and agricultural regions that had been destroyed by industrialization: wood processing, mining and 'modern' corporate farming (Aronowitz 14). They would be a tight-knit group, and likely, a tough sell. Though Freire's educational philosophy was at that point already dialogically charged and informed by a strong commitment to love based on his Christian ethics, he had not envisioned himself as a representative of the "dominant elite." He was prepared to be met

with some resistance, but he did not anticipate that he, the educator, would also suffer a lesson in humility.

Freire held a seminar with local parents, using a Jean Piaget study on children's moral codes as the springboard for their discussion – a decision he reflects on with some regret in *Pedagogy of Hope*. Freire writes ashamedly of his pedagogical approach:

> Back then I was accustomed to give long talks on the subjects that had been selected. I was repeating the traditional route of discourse *about* something that you would give an audience . . . despite some years of experience as an educator, with urban and rural workers, I still nearly always started out with my world, without further explanation, as if it ought to be the 'south' to which their compass ought to point in giving them their bearings. It was as if my word, my theme, my reading of the world, in themselves, were to be their compass. (*Pedagogy of Hope* 15)

Note here, Freire's use of location as a metaphor. It is interesting to consider the ways in which education is imagined to be a journey. All too often this figurative journey begins in a small village or country setting and ends in the bustling, home-to-the-sages city or university campus. Freire's reflection reveals that the missionary mind-set relies on the same location metaphors, always with the intent of moving students far and quickly away from where they are, reminding them every step of the way of what they do not know, have not seen.

It was at one of these meetings that a brave audience member interrupted Freire and asked him, simply, "Dr. Paulo, sir, do you know where people live? Have you ever been in any of our houses, sir?" (17). Freire cites this jarring inquiry and reminder of physical place as the "culmination of the learning process I had undertaken long ago – that of the progressive educator: even when one must speak *to* the people, one must

convert the "to" to a "with" the people. And this implies respect for the knowledge of living experience" (*Pedagogy of Hope* 19). Freire initially failed to mobilize the people in this situation because he was oblivious to their life situations and did not attempt to get close to their syntax, their ways of speaking and knowing. He insisted that they follow him, as a pied-piper figure, rather than meeting them with the humility of the outsider he was. Freire used these lessons to inform the development of his philosophy of dialogical education, realizing that "at the point of encounter, there are neither utter ignoramuses nor perfect sages; there are only men (and women) who are attempting together to learn more than they now know" (*Pedagogy of Hope* 79).

Freire's most widely read book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, was translated to English in 1970 and became foundational to the critical pedagogy movement. It was in this text that Freire famously indicted the "banking concept" of education, positing instead a dialogical education. This approach would be "based on the process of praxis in which the cultural experience of the student seeks to define the social world and to challenge theory from the perspective of her/his oppression" (McLaren and Leonard 4). Implicit in this dialogic philosophy was the centrality of lived experience and honest interaction, recognition of the necessity of "reading the world" before "reading the word"[34]. Freire revealed that literacy is implicitly political. To become fully literate, then, was not simply to learn to read, write, or speak the dominant tongue. It was becoming fully aware, critically conscious of his or her relative position in national power

---

[34] See Freire's *Literacy: Reading the World the Word.*

structures; this reflexivity goes both ways for educator and educated. This philosophy was the only way to educate fairly in a democratic society.

To address these discoveries, Freire rejected institutionalized learning, and in the 1960s, began organizing "culture circles," which "replaced traditional school buildings, teachers, students, lectures, and syllabi with nonthreatening community sites, coordinators, group participants, dialogue, and codified learning units, respectively" (Perry 108). By moving away from the trappings of institutionalized power and towards the familiar places of the people, Freire "allowed participants to express orally their existing and experiential knowledge, without concern for their inability to read and write" (Perry 108). This process enabled learners to discover for themselves the necessity of learning the dominant discourse only as it afforded them solutions to problems *they* identified and analyzed on their own. In short, the order of the day was not learning to read and write, but discovering the circumstances surrounding that perceived deficit and coming up with solutions to address it. Freire called this process "conscientization," when "learners as knowing Subjects become intensely aware not only of the realities that shape their lives, but also of their own capabilities to transform those realities, an awareness of consciousness that achieves the power of two, a duality of consciousness, knowing that they know" (Perry 110). This double-consciousness, the same brand identified by Dubois needs only the dialogic commitment of the educator and the community to become transformative, liberatory.

Critical educators have used these discoveries to create and inform the development of feminist, post-colonial, cultural studies-sensitive pedagogies over the last

twenty years. A. Juma, O.A. Pedcador, C. Torres and R. Van Heertum describe Freirian

pedagogy as:

> ennobling mutual learning that creates culture, knowledge, and social movements
> that extend beyond the classroom to the level of community and ultimately to the
> structure of institutionalized knowledge. This knowledge, which is traditionally
> embedded in banking notions of fact regurgitation and standardized tests, can
> unearth deeper understanding of structural and institutional power and
> mechanisms to alter it. (90)

Peter McLaren and Tomaz Tadeu da Silva outline the task of the critical educator as

providing "the conditions for individuals to acquire a language that will enable them to

reflect upon and shape their own experiences and in certain instances transform such

experiences in the interest of a larger project of social responsibility" (49). Clearly the

concentration here is on the bridging of the private and public, the local and the global,

creating a dialogue between as a way of not only achieving critical awareness in the

Marxist sense but also developing rhetorically savvy thinkers in a democratic society.

Place, in both the abstract and literal senses, is crucial to this project, though it can get

lost in translation from the "field" to the "classroom."

Myles Horton's Highlander Folk School was founded in 1932 in rural Tennessee,

some twenty years before Freire's literacy work began in Brazil. Though his focus on

interactional, dialogic education and the salience of place anticipated the later

philosophies of Freire, his efforts remained largely hidden. While Freire was a prolific

writer, speaker, scholar, and an internationally significant figure as a consequence of his

political exile, Horton was not deliberately public. He preferred instead to act by

empowering community members to take on leadership roles directly as they saw fit to

handle problems *they* defined. Not surprisingly, American academics are more familiar with the work of Paulo Freire than the work of Myles Horton, likely due to historic prejudices against rural Southerners. Though his efforts went long unnoticed, the impact of Horton's work can be directly traced to high-profile social movements, including the success of the Southern citizenship schools and the initiatives of pivotal figures such as Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King Jr. who both trained at Highlander.

Though I can only speculate, it seems fair to say that the rural, Southern location of Highlander has kept it hidden from serious scholastic consideration. Rural Tennessee was and is perhaps the last place anyone would think to look for progressive adult educational programs, especially during the turbulent civil rights movement. This eclipsing is perhaps also due to the human – American? -- inclination to reject the familiar in favor of the "exotic" or unfamiliar when it comes to notions of progress and change, a habit of mind popularly addressed by Ralph Waldo Emerson in his 1837 "American Scholar" speech: "Man is surprised to find that things near are not less beautiful and wondrous than things remote. The near explains the far." Our rejection of the familiar, the "experience-near," as Geertz calls it, often keeps us from understanding the common, everyday literacies which define our lives. It is no wonder that the localness of Myles Horton's labors contributes to his relative obscurity in the academic world. Myles Horton and Highlander, though active for over fifty years, went relatively unnoticed until the celebration of Freire brought Horton's actions and existing philosophies into relief in the late 1980s, early 1990s.

Horton began his work with the intention of giving mountain workers and their families a place to organize and educate one another in response to crisis situations. At the time of the school's opening, the rural South was embroiled in social unrest from labor rights disputes[35]. Horton realized early on the importance of non-classroom instruction, of moving out and in to the community, observing, listening and understanding particular groups of people and their problems as they defined them. Like Freire's "culture circles," Highlander's educational activities were carried out in a variety of contexts and classrooms, though the primary gathering spot was the site of Highlander Folk School in Monteagle, Tennessee.[36] There, community leaders of all races and social strata could gather in problem-centered sessions, informal in nature, to carry on conversations and develop strategies for implementation upon their return to local situations. The synergies of those sessions dictated the Highlander learning environment forces of the student group and the staff.

Horton has made clear that his educational philosophy was a direct outgrowth of his rural, Southern upbringing. He attributes his desire to move away from authoritarian institutions to his Southern mountain background (*Moyers Interview*). As has been noted in previous chapters, the Appalachian region has and continues to be what Horton describes as "missionaried to death." Disempowered by these efforts (Batteau uses the strong term, "castrated'), rural Southerners quickly developed and cultivated a reputation

---

[35] Highlander later became very active in the civil rights movement, and today concentrates its efforts on Mexican immigrant human rights' issues.

[36] Prompted by claims from the Southern media of communist affiliation, in 1961 the state of Tennessee revoked Highlander's charter and confiscated its land and property. Highlander staff moved the school, re-naming it the "Highlander Research and Education Center" from Monteagle, TN to Knoxville, TN. In 1971, Highlander moved to its current location in New Market, TN.

of stereotypical obstinacy and suspicion of outsiders. Horton, having winced himself

under the strain of cultural stigmatism, knew that traditional educational approaches

excluded the literacies of rural Southerners, which led to intellectual isolation and

economic stagnation. Reflecting on his personal experience and fueled by a desire to

reach his audience, not alienate them, Horton came to several conclusions about the aims

of Highlander: 1) educators need to identify with what the people think are important

first, 2) efforts need to stay small; educators need to trust that leaders will multiply, 3)

students need to perceive their teachers in solidarity with them, not as representatives of

an institution, and 4) the way to educate is by example, namely through the

demonstration of humanity and love. These guiding principles were a direct outgrowth of

personal experience and attention to context. Unlike the current composition classroom or

even Freire's early literacy instruction -- initially governmentally funded, Highlander was

not hindered by institutional pressures, though the U.S. government tried multiple times

to close its doors citing communist affiliations as the reason. Yet, as Freirean scholars

have done with critical pedagogy, we can imagine using Horton's approach to inform the

concept of a "rural pedagogy," one which blatantly uses "place" to anchor methodology.

Conceiving a Rural Pedagogy

In the previous decade, pedagogical theorists reconceived of educators' roles,

suggesting they be answerable to "questions of justice rather than to criteria of truth"

(Readings 154). Scholars such as Bill Readings, influenced by Freirean pedagogy,

recommend a process of de-centered teaching wherein teachers cannot assume a

privileged point of view because theory and practice "cannot be understood apart from a reflection of the institutional context of education" (154). Implicit in this pedagogical stance is the belief that educators must continually consider their relation to "wider social practices and the subjugation of education to predetermined or externally derived social imperatives" (153). De-centered teaching requires a continual mediation of public and private literacies and an abiding awareness of their incommensurability as a consequence of institutional constraints. Such an approach accounts for the "problem" experience can pose in composition classrooms where assimilation to standard academic literacies is often most expected. "De-centering" implies that the teacher should feel deliberately out of balance, unsteady, and should therefore be critically vigilant of not just her students, but herself as well. Though a popularly discussed theory, de-centered pedagogy rarely, if ever, has been presented as a "rural-inspired" concept, though if we look at the work of rural educators like Freire and Horton, we may learn more about the ways in which rural literacies invite and inspire this approach.

At present, we find ways to work in marginalized groups by either designing courses completely and directly devoted to their cultural issues and/or literature, or through the creation of pedagogical strategies that seem to better address their non-mainstream literacy practices. Critical feminist pedagogy has given us a way to 1) include other ways of knowing in our curriculum and 2) hold us as pedagogues to a self-reflexive oath which requires us to recognize and perhaps even communicate to our students the ideologies that undergird mainstream literacy expectations or acceptable public discourse. This pedagogical stance has been heretofore the most useful for addressing the case of the

rural, Southern student. It requires that all-important reflexive component that not only holds the teacher accountable to his/her ideological prejudices but also requires students to openly consider how they see themselves in relation to the university and how this perceived identity influences their composing behaviors. This meta-cognitive double-duty teaches students to use how they feel they fit into the university as a way to speculate on how they come to know themselves as academic writers and simultaneously how they expect their voice to be received.

Through the development of critical pedagogy and corollary approaches, scholars have aimed to translate liberatory goals to the classroom. Yet, critics such as Richard Miller have expressed doubt about their practicality. Miller speaks cautiously of Freirian pedagogy, suggesting students will ultimately respond with complicity to any form of instruction we provide: "Freire presents the recipients of his pedagogy as coming to their own conclusions, as learning to think for themselves. He doesn't linger of the fact that all this self-motivated thinking leads his students to think exactly what he would like them to think" 19). It is not easy to take the stance of educators like Freire and Horton in a composition classroom. The setting is unavoidably institutional, and we are thrust into an artificial community, asked to make meaning without any obvious impetus for the act. Teachers who work to incite passionate responses and harp incessantly on marginalization can seem overly-excited, out-of-touch even. Unlike Horton, we can not ask our students to name the "problem" as they see it when there is no clear problem at hand. We cannot expect our students to all hail from the same place or share the same kinds of ideological constraints. In what ways then might we enact these pedagogical

philosophies of place? In what ways can we extend the efforts of critical pedagogy to save it from a too-early demise?

It is clear that our students *do* share a common trait: the rhetorical constraints assigned them as a consequence of their geographic identity. For each student, this constraint will be different, but talking openly about place and context in both physical/geographic and abstract terms invites students to address a defining aspect of their experiences often disregarded in the composition classroom. We cannot rely on our students to identify and work to solve a common problem, and we cannot re-enact Freirean culture circles or Highlander fireside conversations. Yet, we can work from the educators' fundamental aim: to address students' lived experience. As Miller notes, per the nature of schooling, students will always be complicit with instructor requests; however, teachers can disrupt this traditional narrative of schooling by also demonstrating a kind of complicity with their students.

Horton and Freire adapted their critical pedagogy to a rural audience, remaking it for their own purposes and audiences. Therein lies the power of critical pedagogy, and therein lies its resistance to fashion. Horton and Freire were successful because they used context as their guiding principle in their teaching, not only the immediate local context, but the context that their and their students' personal experiences delivered to the rhetorical moment of instruction. A rural audience was particularly amenable to this kind of approach based on their epistemology: their reliance on personal experience and common sense to navigate everyday affairs; their value of place and kinship; their familiarity with the land and the changing of the seasons, etc. However, it is not just a

rural or a rural, Southern audience who can benefit from this approach. Critical pedagogy asks teachers to bring personal experience and context to the forefront in the classroom and necessarily adapt their approach to meet the unique rhetorical moment of instruction. Horton and Freire's teaching strategies should serve as examples of how critical pedagogy can be remade to address the needs of a specific audience; it is not presented as a kit that can be dropped into a course wholesale without modification or reflection.

Working from Myles Horton's distinctly rural, Southern pedagogy, we can begin to envision the blueprint for a pedagogy defined by: **trust** – an important quality of small, marginalized communities who rely on bonding activities to strengthen their interdependence and foster a unified front to threatening outsiders; **humility** – historically, the expected attitude of marginalized groups who venture outside the safety of their communities and are confronted by the dominant discourse; and **critical thinking** – the much considered "double consciousness" or Freirian *conscientização* -- which simultaneously drives cultural insecurities and sharpens the analytical prowess of marginalized groups such as rural Southerners. In our writing classrooms, a critical pedagogy inspired by rural literacies might ask students to:

- **Reflect on place and power:** Teachers should not be afraid to ask students to share and describe where they are from. Once students reveal their backgrounds to the class, it is important to ask students how this revelation made them feel and then invite them to talk openly as a class about why some groups may feel more protective of their home cultures than others. This attention to place should be stressed as part of any rhetorical analysis. When we read essays or other texts, we

212

might not only offer a response but also theorize about how place may have determined how and why we responded as we did. For example, writing students at a private, Catholic college in upstate New York may have difficulty appreciating the value of a writer like Dorothy Allison or even Flannery O'Connor. Students in a public university in North Carolina may have difficulty appreciating the value of a writer like Allen Ginsberg or someone like Sherman Alexie. Or perhaps students find themselves celebrating *more* those writers whose backgrounds differ markedly from their own. It is important to press students to understand these reactions and to determine how place affects these value judgments.

- **Take on more leadership roles**: Highlander Folk School "classes" were more times than not led by "students" who had emerged as leaders over the course of several class discussions. Students may elect their own class leaders to handle specific discussions each week, or teachers may ask students to take on the leadership of class activities, course selections, course direction and content as it seems useful. Such confidence in student's existing knowledge may help to encourage further investment in the classroom community.

- **Think carefully about the university, their local context**: Robert Brooke's place-conscious philosophy helps us here to think about how to ecologically approach our writing instruction. We are not only asking students to think carefully about their home cultures; we are also asking them to consider their new "home" and expanding social matrix. On a larger scale, we can talk to our

213

students about how they interact with the university, what their impressions are of the institution, and in what ways they have felt their legitimacy questioned or their confidence strengthened by institutional representatives. On a smaller, more physical scale, we can become familiar as a class with our building, campus, and perhaps even our city or town by moving out and about when opportunities arise to escape the classroom. Thinking about "where" we are physically as well as ideologically can help students to orient themselves and can perhaps help them to articulate why they may have felt culturally clumsy.

- **Conduct ethnographic research on their "homes"**: Ethnography allows students to embody the interstitial space they already experience as university students, neither here nor there, no longer "at home" but not yet "of the world" – in many ways, an observer. When students conduct an ethnography on a specific, home culture – the more prosaic to them, the better – they can critically reflect on how their "home place" changes when their perspective changes. When students conduct ethnography on a specific, local culture (not necessarily familiar) they can critically reflect on how their home culture influences the way they interpret new places.

- **Reach consensus. Allow themselves to be influenced by others**: Rural communities are sometimes defined by their homogeneity, a trait for which they are often intellectually discounted. Imagine the possibilities of a class in which students have to reach a consensus, as in a mock jury activity. Such exercises allow students to not only find solidarity as they work together to solve a

problem, but also provide the perfect opportunity for them to think critically about persuasion and power.

Rural-inspired teachers may:

- **Meet with students in small groups**: Horton believed that individualism is enhanced by being part of a group rather than being alone. This is not just the case for the individual student. The establishment of groups in the classroom early on helps students to not only consider their personal identity within their group but also their group's identity within the larger classroom space as well. In *Breaking (into) the Circle: Group Work for Change in the English Classroom,* Roskelly advises that students remain in the same group all semester long (138). Permanent groups establish trust, familiarity and what Roskelly calls "interactive beliefs" among its members, an investment nurtured by sustained contact and accountability to one another. *Interactive belief* should involve the instructor, as well. It is equally important for teachers to meet with groups individually, apart from the other groups, as a way to acknowledge the group's legitimacy, addressing their *particular* situation, and demonstrating respect for their specific dynamic.

- **Create more opportunities for informality**: Horton has reflected that his most productive conversations among Highlander "students" were held in front of the fireplace in rocking chairs, after supper (*Moyers Interview*). Rural, Southerners have been both celebrated and denigrated for approaching formal situations with a

decidedly informal and unsophisticated attitude – think Jed Clampett. However, the urge to "get to the heart" of a matter, sidestepping pomposity along the way, hints at a greater awareness of the way our most practical knowledge gets exchanged[37]. Apart from arranging excursions out and away from the classroom, teachers can insinuate moments of informal learning in regular conversations with individual students or small groups as in conferences. Teachers may also participate in "pre-class" chat sessions with some students or the entire class when the stakes seem lower before class has officially begun. By taking these opportunities to speak informally about course subject matter, teachers demonstrate curiosity, passion and a confidence that the issues covered in class relate to life beyond the allotted 50 minutes together.

- **Divulge their own experiences, where they are from, and how where they are from has influenced who they are, how they manage in the academy:** The basic pedagogical format of Highlander was the sharing of personal experiences among people with common problems. This was enough. Highlander was successful in creating strong affiliations among its students, which led to readily observable triumphs in social movements over a more than 50 year period. In our composition classrooms, when teachers share where they are from and talk about their personal backgrounds, they validate the role of "home" literacies in meaning making and (most importantly) in the academy. Teachers who freely share their

---

[37] See Lev Vygotsky's discussion of zones of proximal development -- the difference between what a learner can do without help and what she can do with help -- in *Mind and Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*.

personal experience demonstrate that it is ok for students to also talk about "home," whether cultural or geographic, as it relates to their academic work and evolving conceptions of self. Teachers also assure students that their problems are not unique and that sharing what we observe to be true as individuals can help us to come to a greater understanding of one another and ourselves, thereby acting out Emerson's adage to "trust thyself, every heart vibrates to that iron string."

- **Talk less**: Most teachers would be embarrassed to know how much of the class-time they spend talking, lecturing, and generally "holding court." Educators have long pondered the benefits and drawbacks of uncomfortable silences, and most of us agree that it is not only difficult but also professionally questionable to hold back too much in our classrooms. However, teachers might recognize those moments when students seem particularly engaged with an idea and accordingly, do what they can to resist the urge to drop in a comment or steer the discussion into a different direction. Consider it a triumph when, after chewing on an idea for some time on their own, your class looks to you and asks, "what do *you* think?"

- **Check-in multiple times with students to ask them to discuss how their sense of 'home" has been challenged:** By periodically asking students to write out or discuss the way "place" has affected them, teachers make clear the centrality of context in meaning-making. As the class progresses, teachers may ask students to keep a journal of observed events or scenes that have inspired them to think about or reflect on their home or cultural background. At the end of the course, students

217

may wish to go back and in double-entry fashion, question these observations either individually or collectively.

- **Offer up what they *do* and *don't* know, what they would like to learn. Ask students to do the same**: Paulo Freire's experience of being "called out" by one of his adult literacy student (as previously described) made obvious to him the necessity of humility in any teaching act. Teaching does not have to be a flawless performance of proselytizing. "Not knowing" is part of learning. We can demonstrate this awareness by asking students to make a list during or after reading a text, participating in a discussion, watching a film, etc. about what they now do and don't know. Teachers can do the same. Revelations of what we "don't know" can pose interesting problems for students, perhaps inspiring them to come together in an attempt to enlighten their peers *and* their teacher.

- **Make connections between themselves and their students whenever possible, particularly with students who remind them of themselves in some way:** Teachers often try to convince themselves that they like or respect their students equally, that they can be objective and emotionally detached. Ethically, this often seems a wise stance since "playing favorites" seems to be a fundamentally bad idea; however, teachers should never overlook an opportunity to connect with a student whose experience is reminiscent of her own. No matter how hard we try, educative experiences can never be completely standardized (thankfully). There is nothing to suggest that all student experiences should be the same, and there is

nothing to suggest that we cannot compare ourselves to our students in private and public ways.

While these methods could easily be translated to any classroom in any geographic context, they are especially applicable to rural, Southern students whose literacies are particularly anchored in cultural values of familiarity, politeness, informality, and kinship. Unlike the "city" classroom, a concept now interchangeable with most beliefs about a diversified class space, a rural pedagogy sends the message to students that "it matters where you are from," and "it matters whether or not your teacher knows you and cares about you." The value of Horton and Freire's pedagogies comes from their attention to personal experience and context – their students' as well as their own – and their investment in Piaget's belief that to understand is to invent.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

"There are times when personal experience keeps us from reaching the mountain top and so we let it go because the weight of it is too heavy. And sometimes the mountain top is difficult to reach with all our resources, factual and confessional, so we are just there, collectively grasping, feeling the limitations of knowledge, longing together, yearning for a way to reach that highest point. Even this yearning is a way to know."
--bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress* (92)

In Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women*, Professor Bhaer, Jo March's mentor, advises her soon after their meeting that she should "study simple, true, and lovely characters wherever she found them." In order to succeed, Jo believed she had to ignore her personal experiences and concentrate on exotic contexts, writing dark tales of bandits, gypsies and murderers, of which she knew nothing. Jo famously discovers that her success as a writer comes from writing about what she knows, using her personal experience as both subject matter and method. Early Roman statesman, Cato the Elder, offered the same basic advice: "Rem Tene Verba Sequentur," "Know the subject. The words will follow." This simple advice often eludes academics who reject Emerson's belief that "the near explains the far" ("The American Scholar"). Unlike creative writers, scholars are particularly quick to resist the "local" as potentially instructive and innovative. Composition teachers have extended this preoccupation with the distant to their classrooms. Many have misunderstood liberatory/critical pedagogy's aim, concentrating on its success in foreign contexts to the exclusion of its heuristic relevance in local settings.

Current academics who question liberatory pedagogy often assume the position of "voyeur," as bell hooks describes (41). They overlook local forms of oppression in favor of the exotic, non-Western kind, which is, not surprisingly, incompatible with issues faced in contemporary American classrooms. Rhetoric and Composition scholars, particularly, often confuse critical or liberatory pedagogy with coups d'états, the fighting of governmental oppression in foreign locales. Though important to Cultural Studies efforts, Post-Colonial Studies, as a discipline, investigates the cultural legacy of colonialism, but more times than not its scholars direct their attention globally, at times overlooking marginalization within Western culture and even more locally, in Western universities. As Chapter V indicates, our greatest blind spots as educators can be explained by our lack of attention to concrete context, our tendency to theorize apart from actual experience. We often fail to see the "other" as a local phenomenon. More times than not, it is human nature to assume that oppression is something that happens elsewhere, in another country or in the distant past.

By fixating on the distant context of Paulo Freire and the Brazilian peasants he taught, academics sometimes fail to see the utility of his philosophy, straining to "import" his story wholesale into their decidedly non-Brazilian classrooms. As might be predicted, finding this approach untenable, some teachers quickly dismiss critical pedagogy as too idealistic or impractical. Educators often read Freire's work too literally, forgetting that his aim was to set an example of critical consciousness for both student and teacher. Critical pedagogy, in fact, asks teachers to consider the theoretical context *only* as it works in "dialectical unity with the concrete context," not Freire's context or the context

of other critically minded pedagogues but *each* educative context in turn – yours and mine as our experience allows (*Politics of Education* 33). To make proper use of the virtues of Freire's philosophy, then, is to re-make his ideas to address our own blind spots as educators.

This dissertation has in part aimed to demonstrate what Kate Ronald and Hephzibah Roskelly identify as the "untested feasibility" of Freirian-inspired pedagogy/literacy: its catalytic reliance on context and therefore unlimited potential to locate a method of change that can initiate change ("Untested Feasibility" 623). In "Untested Feasibility: Imagining the Pragmatic Possibility of Paulo Freire," Ronald and Roskelly importantly align Freire's critical pedagogy with the work of the American Pragmatists: "For both the pragmatists and Freire, inquiry's aim is to overcome obstacles by observing concrete experience, doubting the generalities of the status quo, experimenting with solutions, testing results, and maintaining faith in the process" (619). Critical educators are restless; they are alert to experiences that contradict common or comfortable beliefs, and they, in turn, call those beliefs into question as experience demands. This is not an approach dictated by fashion, but rather a philosophy that thrives on change, that improves as contexts shift. It is progress-driven, but not in a linear sense. Rather, it is experimental, its success measured by its adaptation to contingencies.

Freire's literacy mission has special resonance with my interest in the marginalization of rural Southerners; his "students" were mostly poor, rural or rural-displaced, and popularly considered "illiterate." However, it is not Freire himself but his method that offers the most possibility for this specific population and context. Though

his influence and insight can not be questioned, it is important to be reminded that Paulo Freire did not create "critical consciousness." His brand is perhaps the most popular, but to confuse the method with the man/place is to completely undercut the purpose of the philosophy.

Myles Horton's work at the Highlander Folk School allows us to re-see Freire's brand of philosophy in an American context, to understand the ways in which critical consciousness can be "re-worked" to meet the needs of a specific place and people. Horton's pedagogical approach parallels Freire's work, in fact pre-dating much of Freire's literacy efforts. Neither knew of the other's work until some time after their professional prime. Horton practiced liberatory pedagogy before it had a name, before it had become distinctly "Freirian." It becomes clear, then, that critically conscious pedagogy is not limited to a particular time, place, or group of oppressed persons, but is rather by nature, self-sustaining and constantly changing – begging to be re-worked to meet the needs of peripheral groups whose concerns remain hidden or silenced. Like Freire, Horton believed that students must be connected to their learning, that they must see themselves as part of the learning process (Ronald and Roskelly, "Untested Feasibility" 615). This approach requires attention to physical location as well individual student experience. As indicated in Chapter V, Horton's iteration of a critically conscious pedagogy met the needs of a specific population – the rural South, but like Freire's work, can and should be generously applied to other contexts. As follows, the "rural pedagogy" I propose in Chapter V not only suggests a method for addressing the needs of rural,

Southern students but provides a blueprint for addressing the concerns of other silenced groups whose literacies have yet to find an audience.

Rural Southerners are often mistakenly assumed to be part of the oppressive center when history and experience clearly provides evidence to the contrary. A disconnect between theory and practice such is this is quite common. We might consider a few scenarios that demonstrate how experience tells us when it is time to revise an existing theory, locally: a liberally minded English teacher spends many class hours admonishing the racism she has seen in the local community, then expresses shock when a local student includes surprisingly potent racist commentary in his paper; an outspoken, non-traditional Composition teacher refuses to address grammar in class because of its prescriptive nature but is puzzled by her students' lack of interest and blatant carelessness in their writing; a Writing Center consultant, schooled in the theory that "correcting" a writer's grammar is not appropriate, struggles with the realization that manipulating the text himself is the only real way to help an ESL student understand a problem. These examples describe the kind of everyday experiences that teachers too often dismiss as anomalies, yet they reveal themselves as opportunities disguised as problems, and in many ways force us to re-think our previous habits.

Our systems often become so fixed that we forget their humanness, and subsequently forget that they, too, are organic and require re-visioning to work. These systems can be as great as our educative system-at-large or as local as our individual teaching philosophies. There will always be eclipsed populations, practices, and possibilities, and a mindful educator watches for glimpses of them and inquires into their

existence, heeding the pragmatic call to discover "what difference does this make?" When we pause to reflect on our experiences and potentially backtrack, when we acknowledge the fallibility of our common beliefs, we subscribe to a definition of progress that is no longer relentlessly future-oriented.

Likewise, when we seize our personal experience and use it to inform our theories, we are accounting for a different kind of progress, one which is driven by solving a problem, "one which may one day seem obsolete and a satisfaction which may someday seem misplaced" (Rorty 28). Yet, it is this tentativeness that informs the most lithe and useful scholarship. Just as there is power in calling attention to stories that have not been told, there is power in acknowledging their fleetingness, once told. Just as Freire's tales cannot always be relevant to our work, the stories I have told will not always be relevant; however, through their telling, they unleash a chain of consequences that open the way for other stories to be told, and in this way, become crucial.

I illuminate the struggles of rural Southerners to demonstrate how we can use our experience and the collective experiences of others to "to make visible the languages, dreams, values and encounters that constitute the lives of those whose histories are often actively silenced" (*Literacy* 40). Modern feminists have often heralded the use of personal experience as proof, famously reminding us that "the personal is political." Writers such as Mike Rose, Dorothy Allison and Michael MacDonald illustrate the ways in which personal narratives and testimonies of marginalization can draw our attention to cultural blind spots. In *Two or Three Things I Know For Sure*, Allison talks candidly about her experience as "poor, white trash" in Greenville, South Carolina. She recounts

intensely intimate, family moments as a way to convey a political message about the tragically ignored lives of poor, Southern women. In *Lives on the Boundary*, Mike Rose offers insight into the lives of students labeled as "lower-development" in public schools. Having been a vocational track student, Rose speaks to the very real sense of exclusion he felt in educational contexts where more economically advantaged, "college-bound" students were granted access to exciting ideas and opportunities, while students such as himself took a mandated "backseat."

Finally, Michael Patrick MacDonald, in his memoir, *All Souls: A Family Story from Southie*, speaks frankly about his experience as a poor, white, Irish Catholic boy from South Boston. His daily life of violence and poverty was and has been largely ignored by social representatives and political figures. The "whiteness" of MacDonald's neighborhood has disqualified it from serious consideration as an area of economic and cultural marginalization even though the Irish mafia and other threats keep it dangerous, drug-infested, and very poor. By most accounts, this community is culturally isolated and nearly forgotten. Yet, MacDonald's reflections of his neighborhood's heightened sense of exclusion and intense local pride help to explain how academics, social crusaders, and the government itself have missed it. Just as rural Southerners are often prone to respond, MacDonald's community members have resisted the idea of "charity" and thus have suffered social injustices silently with the resolve not to call attention to themselves as "victims." MacDonald's memoir clearly reveals how the preoccupation with one delimiting factor, such as race, can blind us to other less popular but nonetheless compelling examples of oppression. Like the rural Southerner, the white man from South

Boston lives his real life on the margins, while in theory, he exists somewhere in the

center as "the man" with access to all available opportunities and no reason to complain.

In the urbane *New Yorker* magazine, current evidence suggests that the

intellectually elite are slowly coming to understand the ways in which selective cultural

lenses can not only marginalize but also lead to political detonation. Matt Wray, Assistant

Professor of Sociology at Temple University, wrote a recent letter to the editor of *The*

New Yorker magazine in response to a book review by Kelefa Sanneh of Nell Irvin

Painter's *The History of Whiteness*. Wray points out that when Painter describes the

"weird heterogeneity of whiteness" that makes up our nation today, she fails to mention

the major category: "white trash." Wray explains:

> First appearing circa 1824, the term started out as a label for the Jacksonian rabble
> and morphed into a symbol of dysgenic threat, a people thought to be fit neither
> for citizenship nor for factory work. While their social exclusion was not as
> complete or as codified as that of blacks, poor rural whites nonetheless became
> objects of extreme contempt among whites and blacks alike. Educated elites may
> dismiss the grievances of poor rural whites as little more than thinly veiled
> racism. But the reality is that whatever privileges whiteness has bestowed on rural
> whites in poverty have not really amounted to much. The result is a powder keg of
> political resentment with a fuse made shorter by the recession. The Tea Party and
> the rural militias now hold the match." ("Another Category" May 3, 2010)

While our blind spots may seem to be harmless oversights, they can in fact oppress and

ignite, leading to the kinds of cultural uprisings that we associate with other countries in

places where oppression seems more pronounced and dire. A democratic educator can

give voice to unheard populations and in this way, adapt to fit the changing nature of

cultural politics and the subsequently changing needs of university students. While our

classrooms may not be the hot, cramped classrooms of Freire's Brazil or even the fireside

rendezvous' of Horton's Highlander, they are sites of real and potential resistance, even if that resistance is not obvious or directly expressed. Critical pedagogy embraces the notion that "the personal is political" and asks us as educators to test this belief through our work as teachers and scholars.

In order to accommodate the changing nature of cultural marginalization, academics may more seriously consider the critical and political power of memoir and auto-biography, which more than any other research method, provides experiential evidence that can accurately inform our theories. In literacy research, scholars are growing increasingly interested in ethnography, auto-ethnography, and personal narrative as a way to transform traditional definitions of literacy and academic scholarship. This dissertation and the work of writers such as MacDonald, Rose, and Allison serve as examples of how scholars can use their personal experience to inform their scholarship and subsequently transform incumbent beliefs about whose stories belong in academia.

Rural Southern populations, specifically, carry with them into the university literacies and epistemologies which demand a reconsideration of our current pedagogical philosophies and research agendas. The literacy behaviors of rural Southerners – the fervent sense of place and desire to "belong," the inclination to bond rather than bridge, the reliance on informality and story, etc. – can help us to re-think our work as composition teachers in any context, not just in universities which serve rural Southern populations. This project does not simply ask composition instructors to adjust their teaching and research to meet the needs of this culture. It instead reminds us of the importance of "re-working" our theories to meet the needs of student populations which

experience tells us have been overlooked. These populations will never remain the same; cultural marginalization is an organic process and thus, changes. However, as educators, we have a responsibility to accurately report these changes and apply them to our work, using what Freire called "praxis," the culminating action of experience informing theory.

To account for the specific experience of rural Southern students, we might think, as researchers, how starting from a position of sameness rather than difference may encourage more self-reflexivity in our scholarship and teaching. Instead of searching for dissonance as impetus for research, what if we lingered over those moments when we saw ourselves reflected back to us in our students? What if instead of fostering antagonistic relationships for the purposes of forcing polyphony and crisis, we worked to listen and establish common ground? We might better understand the muddled concept of academia and also the muddled process of adopting academic discourse, if we use our experiences to instruct our interactions with students facing the same apparent problems we had.

As teachers, we might remember the importance of local context in meaning-making. We need not dismiss Paulo Freire's ideas simply because they seem to have been around too long, and therefore no longer academically fashionable. Freire's charge is to re-work his ideas to address our local needs, not to reiterate his exact approach over and again. By paying attention to our actions and the local impact of our work, we can work to draw together those gaps between practice and theory which can be most problematic.

Finally, scholars may begin to consider how Post-Colonial theory can apply to the experiences of the rural South and other marginalized regions in the United States.

Postcolonial scholars seek to include in the "canon" cultural voices that have been previously silenced. They discuss the ways in which previously colonized nations work to establish a national identity after a history of perceived inferiority. The rural South faces these same issues, but, as a less directly colonized region, it is given little to no serious attention in this area of scholarship. Much is left to be discovered about the ways in which the rural South has colluded in its own victimization. For example, scholars may examine the rural South's art and literature to understand how the cultural narratives assigned them by their "colonizer" – the urban North – has influenced their national identity.

Those of us who are teachers/scholars from the rural South should not be afraid to talk about where we are from. Whenever possible, we can insinuate what we know about oppression, discrimination and injustice from our own cultural experiences into our scholarship, teaching, and day-to-day professional lives. In fact, though arguable, I believe this to be our academic duty. Similarly, teachers/scholars of any background need to use their feelings of cultural shame as impetus for inquiry, investigation, and conversation -- as Wendell Berry maintains, "one's travels should begin at home" (184).

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Allison, Dorothy. *Two or Three Things I Know For Sure*. New York: Dutton, 1995. Print.

Anyon, Jean. "Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work." *Journal of Education*. 162.1 (1980): 67-92. Print.

Appalachian Service Project. The Appalachian Service Project.2009. Web. 22 Sept. 2009.

"Aristotle." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. 25 September 2008. Web. 15 Apr. 2010.

Aronowitz, Stanley. "Paulo Freire's Radical Democratic Humanism." *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter.* Eds. P. McLaren and P. Leonard, 1993. Print.

Bahktin, Mikhail. "Marxism and the Philosophy of Language." *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*. Eds. Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg. New York: Bedford St. Martins, 2001. Print.

Bartholomae, David. "Inventing the University." *Literacy: A Critical Sourcebook*. Ed. Ellen Cushman, et. al. New York: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001. Print.

Bamburg, Michael. "Narrative Discourse and Identities." *Narratology Beyond Literary Criticism: Mediality, Disciplinarity*. Ed. J. Meister, T. Kindt, & W. Schernus: Berlin, New York: de Gruyter, 2005: 213–238. Print.

Batteau, Allen W. *The Invention of Appalachia*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1990. Print.

Beecher, Jennifer. "Redneck and Hillbilly Discourse in the Writing Classroom: Classifying Critical Pedagogies of Whiteness." *College English*. 67.2 (2004): 172-186. Print.

Bell, David. "Variations on the Rural Idyll." *Handbook of Rural Studies*. Eds. Paul Cloke, Terry Marsden, and Patrick Mooney. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006. Print.

Belenky, Mary, et. al. *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*. New York: Basic Books, 1997. Print.

Berlin. James. "Rhetoric Programs after WWII: Ideology, Power, and Conflict." *Rhetoric and Ideology: Compositions and Criticisms of Power*. Ed. Charles Kneupper. Arlington, TX: Rhetoric Society of America, 1989: 6-19. Print.

Berthoff, Ann. *The Making of Meaning: Metaphors, Models and Maxims for Writing Teachers*. Montclair, NJ: Boynton/Cook, 1981. Print.

---. "Dialectical Notebooks and the Audit of Meaning." *The Journal Book*. Ed. Toby Fulwiler. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton/Cook, 1987: 11-18. Print.

Berry, Wendell. *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture*. San Francisco,CA: Sierra Club Books, 1977. Print.

Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994. Print.

Bill Moyers' Journal: Adventures of a Radical Hillbilly. Part One and Part Two. PBS. New Market, TN: Highlander Research and Education Center, 1981. Television.

Bitzer, Lloyd. "The Rhetorical Situation." *Philosophy and Rhetoric*. 1.1. (1968): 1-14. Print.

Bizzell, Patricia and Herzberg, Bruce, Eds. *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present* New York: Bedford St. Martins, 2001. Print.

The Bland County History Archives. Rocky Gap High School, 2000. Web. 20 Apr. 2010.

Brandt, Deborah. *Literacy in American Lives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Print.

Brooke, Robert, editor. *Rural Voices: Place-Conscious Education and the Teaching of Writing.* New York: Teacher's College Press, 2003. Print.

Bruch, Patrick and Richard Marbeck, Eds. *Reading City Life*. New York: Pearson Longman, 2005. Print.

Bucholtz, Mary and Hall, Kira. "Identity and Interaction: A Sociocultural Linguistic Approach." *Discourse Studies, 7*. (2005): 585–614. Print.

Burnside, Jacqueline. "A Farmer's Daughter in Academia." *Working-Class Women in the Academy : Laborers in the Knowledge Factory*. Ed. Michelle M. Tokarczyk and Elizabeth A. Fay. Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993. Print.

Bushman, Dan. "A Conversation of Gestures: George Herbert Mead's Pragmatic Theory of Language," *Rhetoric Review*. 16. 2 (1998): 253-267. Print.

Burke, Kenneth. *A Rhetoric of Motives.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969. Print.

Campbell, Donna M. "Regionalism and Local Color Fiction, 1865-1895." *Literary Movements*. Dept. of English, Washington State University March 21, 2010 Web. 15 Oct. 2009.

Cash, W.J. *The Mind of the South.* New York: Random House, 1991. Print.

"Charles Sanders Peirce." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. 25 December 2009. Web. 15 Oct. 2009.

Charmaz, Kathy and Richard Mitchell. "The Myth of Silent Authorship: Self, Substance, and Style in Ethnographic Writing." *Reflexivity and Voice*. Ed. Rosanna Hertz. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997. Print.

Chiseri-Strater, Elizabeth. *Academic Literacies: The Public and Private Discourse of University Students*. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1991. Print.

Church, Kathryn. *Forbidden Narratives: Critical Autobiography as Social Science.,* 1995. Print.

Conkins, Paul. *The Southern Agrarians*. Nashville, TN: Vanderbilt University Press, 2001. Print.

Creed, Gerald and Barbara Ching. "Recognizing Rusticity: Identity and the Power of Place." *Knowing Your Place: Rural Identity and Cultural Hierarchy*. Ed. Barbara Ching and Gerald W. Creed. New York: Routledge, 1997. Print.

Rosenblatt, Louise. *Making Meaning with Texts*. New York: Heinemann, 2005. Print.

Dabbs, James McBride. *Who Speaks for the South?* New York: Funk and Wagnalls Company, Inc., 1964. Print.

Daniell, Beth. "Narratives of Literacy: Connecting Composition to Culture." *CCC* 50.3 (1999): 393-410. Print.

Davidson, Osha Gray. *Broken Heartland*. New York: Macmillan, 1990. Print.

Delpit, Lisa. "The Politics of Teaching Literate Discourse." *Literacy: A Critical*

Sourcebook. Eds. Ellen Cushman et. al. New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 2001: 545-555. Print.

Dewey, John. *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1938. Print.

Digital Archive of Literacy Narratives. The Ohio State University. 2006. Web. 15 Apr. 2010.

Donehower, Kim, Charlotte Hogg, and Eileen E. Schell. *Rural Literacies*. National Council of Teachers of English: Studies in Writing and Rhetoric, 2007. Print.

DuBois, W.E.B. *The Souls of Black Folks*. Stillwell, KS: Digireads Publishing, 2005. Print.

DuBois, Ellen Carol et. al. *Feminist Scholarship: Kindling in the Groves of Academe*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1985. Print.

Eco, Umberto. *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*. Ed.Stefani Collini. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Print.

Elliot, Michael T.; Dillard, Diane; Loeffler, Renèe G.; and Weeks, Kent M. *To Give the Key of Knowledge: United Methodists and Education, 1784–1976*. Nashville, TN: National Commission on United Methodist Higher Education. Print.

Ellis, Justin. "Opportunity Maine bill awaits governor's approval." *Portland Press Herald*. 21 June 2007. Web. 26 February, 2010.

Eldred, Janet Carey and Peter Mortenson. "Reading Literacy Narratives." *College English*. 54.5 (1992): 512-539. Print.

Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *The American Scholar*. New York: American Book Company, 1911. Print.

---."Experience." *Self-Reliance and Other Essays*. Mineola, NY: Dover, 1993. Print.

"Fay." "Re: Hi!" Message to Mary Beth Pennington. 30 October 2009. E-mail.

---."Re: A First Question for You." Message to Mary Beth Pennington. 16 October 2009. E-mail.

Fischer, Frank. *Technocracy and the Politics of Expertise*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage
   Publications, 1990. Print.

Flowers, Linda. *Throwed Away: Failures of Progress in Eastern North Carolina.*
   Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1993. Print.

Foucault, Michel. *Archeology of Knowledge*. New York: Rutledge Classics, 2008. Print.

Frank, Thomas. *What's the Matter with Kansas?: How Conservatives Won the Heart of
   America.* New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2004. Print.

Freire, Paulo and Donald Macedo. *Literacy: Reading the World the Word*. Westport, CT:
   Bergin and Garvey, 1987. Print.

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of Hope: Reviving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. New York:
   Continuum, 1992. Print.

   ---. *The Politics of Education*. South Hadley, MA: Bergin and Garvey, 1985.

Gee, James Paul. "Literacy, Discourse, and Linguistics: Introduction and What is
   Literacy?" *Literacy: A Critical Sourcebook*. Eds. Ellen Cushman et. al. New
   York: Bedford/St. Martins, 2001: 525-544. Print.

Geertz, Clifford. *Local Knowledge: Further Essays in Interpretative Anthropology*.
   New York: Basic Books, 1983. Print.

Georgakopoulou, Alexandra. "Thinking Big with Small Stories in Narrative and Identity
   Analysis." *Narrative Inquiry* 16.1 (2006): 122–130. Print.

Giardina, Denise. *Storming Heaven: A Novel*. New York: Ivy Books, 1987. Print.

Giroux, Henry A. "Liberal Arts Education and the Struggle for Public Life: Dreaming
   about Democracy." *South Atlantic Quarterly*. 89 (1990): 113-138. Print.

Goad, Jim. *The Redneck Manifesto: How Hillbillies, Hicks, and White Trash Became
   America's Scapegoats*. New York: Touchstone, 1997. Print.

Guth, James. et.al. *The Bully Pulpit: The Politics of Protestant Clergy*. Lawrence, KS:
   University Press of Kansas, 1997. Print.

Griffin, Sally. "Lintheads and Barons: A Rhetorical Study of the Discourses of the Loray
   Mill Strike." Diss. University of North Carolina at Greensboro, 2009. Print.

Grillo, Ralph. "An Excess of Alterity?: Debating Difference in a Multi-cultural Society," *Ethnic & Racial Studies* 30.6, (2007): 979-998. Print.

Gubrium, Jaber F. and Holstein, James, A. "Narrative Ethnologrphy." Eds. S. N. Hesse-Biber and P. Leavy. *Handbook of Emergent Methods*. New York: Guilford Press, 2008, 241-264. Print.

Haas, Tony and Paul Nachtigal. *Place Value: An Educators' Guide to Good Literature on Rural Lifeways, Environments, and Purposes of Education*. Charleston, WV: ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1998. Print.

Hall, Stuart. *Critical Dialogues in Cultural Studies*. Eds. David Morley and Kuan-Hsing Chen. New York: Routledge, 1996. Print.

Hardy, Thomas. *Jude the Obscure*. New York: Penguin Classics, 1998. Print.

Harris, Joseph. "The Idea of Community in the Study of Writing." *College Composition and Communication*, 40.1 (1989): 11-22. Print.

Harrison, Lawrence and Samuel P. Huntington. *Culture Matters: How Values Shape Human Progress*. New York: Basic Books, 2000. Print.

Heath, Shirley Brice. *Ways with Words: Language, Life, and Work in Communities and Classrooms.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983. Print.

Hesse-Biber, Sharlene N. and Patricia Leavy, Eds. *Handbook of Emergent Methods*. New York: Guilford Press, 2008. Print.

hooks, bell. *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.

Hooker, Richard. "Progress." *The European Enlightenment Glossary*. 1996. Web. 20 Oct. 2009.

Horton, Myles and Paulo Freire. Eds. Brenda Bell and John Gaventa. *We Make the Road by Walking: Conversations on Education and Social Change*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 1990, Print.

Horton, Myles, Judith Kohn, and Herb Kohl. *The Long Haul: An Autobiography*. 1990. New York: Teachers College Press, 1998. Print.

Hull, Glynda A. and Katz, Mira-Lisa "Crafting an Agentive Self: Case Studies on Digital Storytelling." *Research in the Teaching of English, 41*(1) (2006): 43-81. Print.

236

Hum, Sue. "Theory and Pedagogy: Binary Oppositions, Artificial Divisions, and Dialectics." *Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies*. 21.4 (1999): 339-352. Print.

Hyland, Paul, Olga Gomez and Francesca Greensides. Eds. *The Enlightenment: A Sourcebook and Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2003. Print.

Jarosv, Lucy and Victoria Lawson "Sophisticated People versus Rednecks: Economic Restructuring and Class Difference in America's West." *Antipode*. 34.1 (2002). Print.

Juma, Aly, et. al. "The Educational Praxis of Paulo Freire: Translations and Interventions." *Pioneers in Education: Essays in Honor of Paulo Freire*. Eds. M. Shaughnessy, et. al. New York: Nova Science Publishers, 2008. Print.

Killian, Lewis. *White Southerners*. University of Massachusetts Press, 1970. Print.

Knopp, Lisa. "Local Geography." *Field of Vision*. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1996. Print.

Lauer, Janice. "The Feminization of Rhetoric and Composition Studies." *Rhetoric Review*. 13.2 (1995): 276-286. Print.

LeGates, Richard and Frederic Stout, eds. *The City Reader*. New York: Routledge, 2003. Print.

Levinas, Emmanual. *Alterity and Transcendence*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999. Print.

Lieblich, Amia; Tuval-Mashiach, Rivka; Zilber, Tamar. *Narrative Research: Reading, Analysis, and Interpretation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1998. Print.

Litz, Walton, Louis Menand, and Lawrence Rainey, Eds. *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: Modernism and the New Criticism*, Volume 7. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000. Print.

Lyons, Nona and Vicki Kubler LaBoskey, Eds. *Narrative Inquiry in Practice: Advancing the Knowledge of Teaching*. New York: Teacher's College Press, 2002. Print.

Martin, Jerry L. "Sameness and Difference." *The English Journal*, 79.8 (1990): 18-19. Print.

MacDonald, Michael Patrick. *All Souls: A Family Story from Southie*. Boston, MA:

Beacon Press, 1999. Print.

McLaren, Peter and Tomaz Tadeu da Silva. "De-centering Pedagogy: Critical Literacy, Resistance, and the Politics of Memory." Eds. P. McLaren and P. Leonard. *Paulo Freire: A Critical Encounter.*, 1993. Print.

Mead, George Herbert. *Mind, Self, and Society: From the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist.* Ed. Charles W. Morris. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967. Print.

Mitchell, Danielle. "I Thought Composition Was About Commas and Quotes, Not Queers: Diversity and Campus Change at a Rural Two-Year College." *Composition Studies* Fall 2008. *Find Articles* Web. 25 October 2009.

Moffett, James. *Storm in the Mountains: A Case Study of Censorship, Conflict, and Consciousness*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1989. Print.

Newkirk, Thomas. "The Narrative Roots of the Case Study." *Methods and Methodology in Composition Research.* Eds. Gesa Kirsch and Patricia A. Sullivan. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992. Print.

Noebel, David. *Understanding the Times: The Religious Worldviews of Our Day and the Search for Truth*. Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1994. Print.

Ortner, Sherry, B. "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?" *Woman, Culture, and Society*. Eds. M.Z. Rosaldo and L. Lamphere. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1974. Print.

Ottery, James. "Who Are They And What Do They Have To Do With What I Want To Be?" *Identity Papers: Literacy and Power in Higher Education*. Ed. Bronwyn Williams. Logan UT: Utah State UP, 2006. Print.

Pack, Sam. "How They See Me Vs. How I See Them: The Ethnographic Self and the Personal Self." *Anthropological Quarterly*. 79.1 (2006): 105-122. Print.

Perry, Patricia H. *A Composition of Consciousness: Roads of Reflection from Freire and Elbow* Counterpoints ; v. 101. New York: P. Lang, 1999. Print.

Preston, Jane. "Rural and Urban Teaching Experiences of Eight Prairie Teachers." MA Thesis. University of Saskatchewan, 2006. Print.

Putnam, Robert. *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community.* New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000. Print.

Readings, Bill. *The University in Ruins.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996. Print.

Reising, R.W. and Ralph J. Hill. "Comp and Circumstance in Rural America" *Freshman English News*. 6.1 (1977): 4-13. Print.

Ritter, Kelly. *Who Owns School? Authority, Students, and Online Discourse.* New Dimensions in Computers and Composition Series. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 2010. Print.

Rodriguez, Richard. *The Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez.* Boston, MA: David R. Godine, 1982. Print.

Ronald, Kate and Hephzibah Roskelly. *Farther Along: Transforming Dichotomies in Rhetoric and Composition*. Portsmouth, NH: Boynton Cook, 1989. Print.

---. "Untested Feasibility: Imagining the Pragmatic Possiblity of Paulo Freire." *College English.* 63.5 (2001): 612-632.

Rorty, Richard. *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in 20th Century America*. Boston: President and Fellows of Harvard College, 1998. Print.

Rose, Mike. *Lives on the Boundary: The Struggles and Achievements of America's Underprepared*. New York: The Free Press, 1989. Print.

Roskelly, Hephzibah. *Breaking (into) the Circle: Group Work for Change in the English Classroom*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003. Print.

---. "Telling Tales in School: A Redneck Daughter in the Academy" *Working-Class Women in the Academy : Laborers in the Knowledge Factory*. Ed. Michelle M. Tokarczyk and Elizabeth A. Fay. Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993. Print.

Schilling-Estes, Natalie. "Investigating 'Self-Conscious Speak:' The Performance Register in Ocracoke English." *Language in Society*. 27.1 (1998): 53-83. Print.

Schuttte, Ofalia. "Cultural Alterity: Cross-Cultural Communication and Feminist Theory in North-South Contexts." *Hypatia* 13.2 (1998). Print.

Schwoch, James and Mimi White. *Questions of Method in Cultural Studies*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006. Print.

Scribner, Sylvia and Michael Cole. "Unpacking Literacy." *Literacy: A Critical Sourcebook*. Eds. Ellen Cushman et. al. New York: Bedford/St. Martins, 2001: 123-137. Print.

Sennett, Richard and Jonathan Cobb. *The Hidden Injuries of Class*. New York: Vintage Books, Random House, 1973. Print.

Shaughnessy, Mina. *Errors and Expectations: A Guide for the Teacher of Basic Writing*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1977. Print.

Short, Brian. "Idyllic Realities." *Handbook of Rural Studies*. Eds. Paul Cloke, Terry Marsden, and Patrick Mooney. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006. Print.

Shorto, Russell. "How Christian Were the Founders?" *The New York Times*. February 11 2010. Print.

Sohn, Kathy. *Whistlin' and Crowin' Women of Appalachia: Literacy Practices Since College*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2006. Print.

Stewart, Kathleen. *A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an 'Other' America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996. Print.

Stuckey J. Elspeth. *The Violence of Literacy*. Portsmouth: Boynton/Cook Publishers, 1991. Print.

Theobald, Paul. *Teaching the Commons: Place, Pride, and the Renewal of Community*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997. Print.

Voltaire. *Candide and Other Stories*. Ed. William F. Fleming Translator Tobias Smollett. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006. Print.

Vygotsky, Lev. *Mind and Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978. Print.

Wallace, David L. "Out in the academy: Heterosexism, invisibility, and double consciousness." *College English*, 65.1 (2002): 53-66. Print.

Williams, Bronwyn. *Identity Papers: Literacy and Power in Higher Education*. Logan, UT: Utah State UP, 2006. Print.

Williams, Hank Jr. "Dixie on my Mind." *Hank Williams Jr.'s Greatest Hits*. Curb Records, 1993. CD.

Williams, Raymond. *The Country and the City*. New York: Oxford UP, 1973. Print.

Wolfe, Margaret Ripley. *Daughters of Canaan: A Saga of Southern Women*. Lexington, KY: The UP of Kentucky, 1995. Print.

Woods, Randall Bennett. "Dixie's Dove: J. William Fulbright, The Vietnam War, and the American South." *Journal of Southern History*. 60 (1994): 533-552. Print.

Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. New York: Harcourt Brace Modern Classic, 1957. Print.

Wray, M. (2010, May 3). Another Category [Letter to the editor]. *The New Yorker*. Print.

Zylinska, Joanna. *The Ethics of Cultural Studies*. New York: Continum, 2005. Print.