

LITERARY REALITY: RHETORICIZING LITERATURE AND ENGLISH STUDIES

By

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**Abstract**

Drawing on conceptual metaphor theory and John Bender and David E. Wellbery's description of rhetoricality, I offer a reconceptualization of literature as a conceptual metaphorization of the experience of the cognitive concept of LIFE. I demonstrate the value of such a rhetoricized reconceptualization of literature and literary study by applying them to four American autobiographies written after 1970: Bill Clinton's *My Life*, James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces*, Audre Lorde's *Zami*, and Walter Dean Myers' *Autobiography of my Dead Brother*. I also speculate about what a rhetoricized English studies in contemporary American higher education – one that sees (what Pierre Bourdieu describes as) heteronomy rather than autonomy as its primary organizing principle – might entail.

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It has been my honor to be the final dissertation student of my director and mentor, Dr. James Hartman. He has been like an oracle in his foresight, like Solomon in his wisdom, a sphinx in couching revelations in wordplay, and a Zen master in weathering all my crises with calm and laughter. Dr. Hartman has been the ideal mentor and friend for a young scholar trying to find her way in the world. Because words cannot express the thanks and appreciation that I wish to convey to him, this dissertation must metonymize them instead.

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## Introduction

The question of whether English studies in higher education is in a crisis may be too well-worn to be of interest to most English studies scholars, occupied as they are with teaching, scholarship, and administration work. But scholars in the humanities cannot afford to ignore or dismiss the changes going on around them in higher education. As one of the largest and most culturally-influential fields of study in the humanities, English studies has the unique opportunity to demonstrate for policymakers, students, administrators, and fellow academicians the legitimacy of humanistic study. To do so, I argue, requires that English studies as a discipline eschew the tendency to autonomize itself from other disciplinary and institutional bodies in academia. Instead, English studies, including its subdisciplines, should embrace an attitude of “rhetorality,” which John Bender and David E. Wellbery describe as “the fundamental category of every inquiry that seeks to describe the nature of discursive action and exchange” (26). In what follows, I present a definition of literature via conceptual metaphor theory as an important step toward fully adopting a disciplinary disposition of rhetorality, or “rhetoricizing” English studies in American academia.

In the first chapter, I draw upon the work of Pierre Bourdieu, Terry Eagleton, and Gerald Graff, among others, in arguing that English studies has cast itself as autonomous from its institutional and intellectual context in academia. As Bourdieu clarifies, no field of human production – including the production of abstract phenomena such as values and knowledge – can ever actually be autonomous from its historical and social context(s). Rather, English studies like all other human activity is heteronomously affected by various contextual influences, such as economics, politics, and culture. As case studies of the residual troubles of the struggle for an impossible autonomy in English studies, I present two case studies: the official reactions of the

MLA to the Spellings Report, and a recent article in *Profession*, which reveals the intradisciplinary struggles for autonomy within English studies, and the official reactions of the MLA to the Spellings Report.

The second chapter presents a rhetoricized definition of literature as a conceptual metaphorization of the experience of lived human life. According to conceptual metaphor theory, metaphor is more accurately understood as a mode of thought and cognition than a type of linguistic figure or expression. In conceptual metaphor theory, the statement, “My schedule is getting full,” would be a linguistic expression of a tacit conceptual metaphor, TIME IS A CONTAINER. I argue that the work of (Western) literary and rhetorical theorists since Aristotle characterized literature as a discursive form that metaphorizes a reader’s experience of LIFE, or lived human experience, with the concept LIFE as it is depicted in the literary text. That is, as we read a work that, for various contextual reasons, we think of as “literature,” we measure whether and how the LIFE depicted in the work of literature is and is not our own experience and knowledge of LIFE. If we take the findings of conceptual metaphor theory seriously, then we can better understand and explain how literature comes to be influential for how readers of literature, individually and culturally, conceptualize LIFE.

In a third chapter, I analyze four American autobiographies written after 1970 to demonstrate the usefulness of this reconceptualization of literature for fulfilling the principles of rhetoricization in English studies. I examine the conceptualizations of the experience of LIFE presented in Bill Clinton’s *My Life*, James Frey’s *A Million Little Pieces*, Walter Dean Myers’ *Autobiography of My Dead Brother*, and Audre Lorde’s *Zami*, exploring opportunities to expand our interdisciplinary knowledge about the ways that human beings use language to construct themselves and their realities. Following Paul Ricoeur’s tension theory of metaphor, by which



metaphor is defined as the assertion that something *is* something that it *is not*, I examine the moments at which readers may be unlikely or unwelcome to recognize that their experiences of LIFE are the same as those of the autobiographer. Some autobiographies, like Clinton's *My Life* and Frey's *A Million Little Pieces*, maintain and reinforce conceptualizations of LIFE that are prototypical for the genre of autobiography and suggest that the kind of LIFE they depict is the kind of LIFE that readers should want or expect their own LIFE experiences to be. Other autobiographies such as Myers' *Autobiography of My Dead Brother* and Lorde's *Zami* operate on their readers culturally, cognitively, aesthetically, and linguistically to challenge mainstream notions of what LIFE is or should be. Because of its rhetoricized, interdisciplinary nature, this approach to literature could be helpful for validating the study of literature, rhetoric, and language for scientists, social scientists, fellow humanities scholars, higher education policymakers, and the general public.

In a fourth chapter, I explore the ways that this rhetoricization can ameliorate the institutional and intellectual problems in English studies outlined in the first chapter. In particular, I explain what a rhetoricization of literary and English studies can help us articulate our value within today's structures of higher education scholarship. A rhetoricized field of English studies would be open to cooperating across disciplinary and institutional lines to pursue the mission of university research – the development and refinement of a body of knowledge that is universally available and useful to all interested parties. As an alternative to autonomization, English studies could demonstrate that it has something to contribute to and gain from other disciplines and is therefore integral to the institutional structure of higher education.

I am indebted to the following individuals for their unflagging support of me and this project: Eva and Leland Maxwell, for my inspiration; Juanita and Floyd Williams, for showing

me what WORK really means; Marsha, Emmit, and Erica Williams, for letting me be me and helping me find ways to do so; Drs. Amy J. Devitt and Frank Farmer, for their leadership, guidance, direction, support, and good cheer, among other equally important things; Drs. Giselle Anatol and Philip Barnard, for helping me find the ways to say what I wanted to say; Dr. Sonya Lancaster, for her mentorship and encouragement; and Lennelle Gilpin, Darian Wigfall, Sarah and Dustin Crowley, and my other St. Louis and Kansas City friends, for supporting me even in my absence. I am also indebted to the collegiality and support of my students and my fellow graduate students and the other faculty (graduate and otherwise) in the Department of English at the University of Kansas. It has been my honor to be the final dissertation student of my director and mentor, Dr. James Hartman. He has been like an oracle in his foresight, like Solomon in his wisdom, a sphinx in couching revelations in wordplay, and a zen master in weathering every crisis with calm and laughter. Hartman has been the ideal mentor to have as a graduate student and the ideal friend for a young scholar trying to find her way in the world. Words (and perhaps worlds) cannot express the thanks and appreciation that I wish to convey to him, so it must suffice to write that I hope this dissertation itself stands for my THANKS and APPRECIATION.

## **Chapter 1**

### ***Part 1 – False Autonomy and the Rhetoricization of English Studies***

#### ***1.1 The Literary Field, Literary Studies, and False Autonomy***

*The present crisis in the field of literary studies is at root a crisis in the definition of the subject itself.*

Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction*

*And I agree to that, or in so far  
As I can see no way out but through –*

Robert Frost, “A Servant to Servants”

Is there a “crisis in the field of literary studies,” as Terry Eagleton claimed<sup>1</sup> in *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (186)? The answer to that question depends on the nature of the “crisis” about which one inquires. Eagleton, writing in the Conclusion to the 2008 anniversary edition of that book, seems to have in mind various crises: the trouble with justifying the existence of the study of literature in higher education; the economic woes attendant to both the existence and the justification of literary studies in higher education; and a clarification of what exactly proponents of literary studies in higher education claim to be “literature,” the object of “literary studies,” and the objective of “literary studies” if it is not the study of some clearly-defined “literary” object.

Is there a crisis in the field of *English* studies? This is a quite different question, though its answers also have to do with some of the variations of “crises” that Eagleton addresses, namely, the clarification of, purpose for, and justification of the study of “English” in academia. The question makes all the difference: the clarification, justification, and objectives of “literary studies” today seem particularly fraught with difficulty in the post-canon academy (which is itself living in a canon-friendly world, as the selection of *Grapes of Wrath* for Oprah’s book club some years ago or the segregation of “Classics” or “Literature” from general “Fiction” at any local bookstore may suggest), but the study of “English” may seem less problematic if it is thought to include some rather practical writing, communication, and analysis skills that our present economic situation, taxpayers, and our students demand.

Asking the latter question – “Is there a crisis in the field of English studies?” – draws attention to a particular, if not new, set of crises that face English departments today, ones that have to do with balancing disciplinary and institutional autonomy and cooperation. On a university level, this question could suggest that English studies not only has a right to exist, it

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<sup>1</sup> The 2008 Anniversary Edition of *Literary Theory* includes this quotation, but it was first included in Eagleton’s 1996 revised edition.

has a right to exist even in a troubled state or even when it doesn't know what "English studies" is or *why* it is or what it's supposed to be doing. Within English departments, this question at least points to a spirit of cooperation and interdependence that the former question does not. But it still suggests that English studies, as a discipline and an institutional body, is without a clear object and objective, which indicates that any of the subdisciplines<sup>2</sup> housed in "English" departments may or may not actually be concerned with or actually working toward any common objects or objectives.

In fact, the latter question indicates more clearly the nature of the problems of contemporary English *studies* as a discipline and its institutional incarnations in English (or Languages and Literature, or Comparative Literature and Writing, etc.) *departments*. What scholars in English studies have is failure to communicate, both with each other and with the academic and non-academic world around us, about some of the issues most fundamental to our existence. This failure has resulted in a crisis: we cannot answer the question "Is English studies in crisis?" without being able to answer the question "What is English studies?", and at the moment, we're incapable of satisfactorily answering either question. While Bruce McComiskey and others are right to say that English studies is perpetually in a new "crisis,"<sup>3</sup> the present crisis is real, and our reaction to it has the potential either to act as a vote of no confidence in the study of "English," whatever it might mean, in higher education, or to bring reconciliation to the subdisciplines of English studies and thereby, perhaps, clarify and justify its existence in the

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<sup>2</sup> I will from here on use "subdiscipline" to refer areas of scholarship that are generally contained in a larger umbrella discipline. In English studies, these might include English literary studies, linguistics, rhetoric and composition, technical writing, and creative writing. But I realize that not all of these disciplines necessarily and in all contexts see themselves as related to each other in this manner. Likewise, the terms "subfield" and "subinstitution" should here imply membership within a superordinate field or institution, respectively.

<sup>3</sup> For a summary of the debate about whether English studies is suffering from a crisis, what the nature of that crisis might be, and whether we've been in a state of constant "crisis" since the earliest formal studies of English language and literature, see McComiskey's Introduction to *English Studies* (1-66).

university. If done successfully, this reconciliation and the partnership in creating a universal body of knowledge in the context of the university might pave the way for the humanities in general to understand and better argue for their own existence in that context. The stakes of this crisis, which is admittedly only one of the many concerns that face English studies today, are quite high.

As regards these present troubles, to quote Frost, “I can see no way out but through” our disciplinary and institutional history. In this chapter, I construct a brief and admittedly reductive sketch of that history using Pierre Bourdieu’s field theory and his explication of that theory in terms of the structural transformation of the French literary field. Bourdieu’s account of that field’s transformation over time and specifically its division into an academic-aesthetic subfield and a mass-market subfield is homologous<sup>4</sup> with the development and structure of the Anglo-American field of English literature and literary studies from at least the late eighteenth-century unto today. Like the French literary academic field, the Anglo-American field of academic literary studies has derived from the field of English literature, in which literature has historically been defined and privileged according to a pure aesthetic that understood literature as autonomous from the context of its creation and important for its own sake. As a consequence of this genealogy, the *academic* study of English has considered its objects and objectives to be autonomous from any outside influence; it has considered itself worthy for its own sake.

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<sup>4</sup> Bourdieu uses “homology” in much the same sense that other sociologists and historical-materialists (as well as biologists and mathematicians) use it: to denote a structural correspondence or similarity between two distinct systems or phenomena. For Bourdieu, a homology might exist in either or both a structural position or structured system in a field (see *Field* 87-9). To say (as Bourdieu does, as I will summarize later) that the restricted production principle is homologous to the large-scale production principle in their respective hierarchies of power (autonomy and heteronomy, respectively) is to say that both production principles drive the system of production in the field of aesthetics and subfield of literature according to two distinct but related principles of power hierarchization that partly govern the structure of both fields.

The present crisis in English studies clearly follows from this false sense of autonomy and self-importance: across our history and even quite recently, as the case studies that conclude this chapter reveal, the justifications that English studies offers for its existence suggest that we know not what we do nor why we (or anyone else) should do it. Even the notion that we should offer a justification for our existence may seem distasteful to English studies academicians. But the path to disciplinary and institutional cooperation in our university context, if we still desire to reside therein, lies in the clarification and justification of our objects and objectives, and the lesson of history that Bourdieu explicates helps to light that path.

History can only take us so far in understanding the dissonances within our field. From there, we must recognize that the distinct subdisciplines within English departments are only relatively autonomous, one having no right to disciplinary or institutional privilege over another. Then we must *act* accordingly, rejecting a false autonomy and self-imposed isolation from other disciplines and academic and social institutions. What English studies needs isn't so much a *revolution* as it is a new *resolution*: it needs to adopt the institutional disposition and disciplinary, critical-analytic approach that David E. Bender and John Wellbery call "rhetoricity." Readers here should find rhetoricity familiar, given the tenor of English studies today. But the case studies in the second part of this chapter – an analysis of the Modern Language Association's response to the Spellings Report and a recent article in the journal *Profession* about English studies' changing disciplinary focus – reveal just how important it is for contemporary English studies to confront its history honestly and to rhetoricize its disciplinary and institutional structure.

### **1.1.1 "Fields" of Human Action and Interaction**

We can conceptualize a “field,” as Bourdieu uses the term, as a three-dimensional sphere rather than the two-dimensional area that the word “field” might initially suggest.<sup>5</sup> Fields in this sense consist of constantly-shifting constellations (*Field 23*) of *capital, people, (and their relationships of and between) time/history, power, and positions. People vie against each other for capital and positions of relative power or importance in the field. Capital, the means of power in the field, is divided into three categories. Economic capital empowers its beholders with financial and material wealth. Symbolic capital is determined by some combination of a person’s generally-recognized importance in the field and his or her relative expertise regarding the field’s objects, functions, and purposes. Types and expressions of symbolic capital include prestige, honor, and fame. Finally, cultural capital derives from cultural knowledge or competencies as well as legitimated or field-sanctioned dispositions toward the field’s objects, functions, and purposes. Power, then, is whatever force people use to acquire more capital or to attain a more advantageous position within a field (Bourdieu and Wacquant 76). The matrix of relationships that connect capital and people together in history and power differentials forms what Bourdieu calls the *habitus*, “the set of dispositions, reflexes, and forms of behavior that people acquire through acting in society” (Siisiainen 19).*

### **1.1.2 The Field of Cultural Production**

“Field,” as Bourdieu uses the term, can be used to describe quite abstract structures of human action and interaction such as economics, politics, and power. The field of power, like those of economics and politics, demonstrates the necessary interrelatedness of fields, particularly at the level of general, abstract structures of interaction. Power influences all fields since, Bourdieu explains, it “is the space of relations of force between agents or between

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<sup>5</sup> I am indebted to Dr. Philip Barnard for sharing with me this illuminating three-dimensional reconceptualization of Bourdieu’s notion of “field.”

institutions having in common the possession of the capital necessary to occupy the dominant positions in different fields (notably economic or cultural)” (*Rules* 215). The fact that such far-reaching, abstract systems of power, economics, or politics overlap with potentially all other distinct fields is of vital significance for Bourdieu’s characterization of the “field of cultural production,” which is “the system of objective relations between these agents or institutions and the site of the struggles for the monopoly of power to consecrate, in which the value of the works of art and belief in that value are continuously generated” (*Field* 78). The significance, as his history of the fields of aesthetics and literature show, is of two kinds: first, it indicates that no field can ever be entirely autonomous from all other fields. Second, it reminds us in the Western world that there is what Bourdieu would call an “objective” or undeniably real relationship between power and culture that art and artists cannot escape.

The specific constituents of the field of cultural production include people interested or invested in the production and consumption of cultural products. Such cultural products include any artifacts, works, and ideas that impact the ways that people create, represent, and systematize their social practices. Economic capital, of course, is exchanged in this field anytime these cultural artifacts are exchanged, such as when we purchase theater tickets or when a magazine publisher pays a music critic for writing a review. It is assumed that legitimate participants in the cultural field – the “consumers capable of recognizing the work of art as such” (*Rules* 229) – already possess sufficient cultural capital, which in this field is that capacity of recognition, to have even gained entry into the field. But the primary form of capital in the cultural field is symbolic capital: “For the author, the critic, the art dealer, the publisher or theatre manager,” Bourdieu writes,



the only legitimate accumulation [of capital] consists in making a name for oneself, a known, recognized name, a capital of consecration or persons (through publication, exhibition, etc.) and therefore to give value, and to appropriate the profits from this operation. (*Rules 75*)

Even the production and exchange of symbolic as opposed to economic or cultural capital involves power relations – the exertion of force in the service of acquiring the “recognized name” or field-specific “consecration.”

Bourdieu’s accounts (particularly in *Distinction* and *The Field of Cultural Production*) of the historical changes in the cultural field focus on the changes in the spheres of aesthetics and literature rather than other culturally-influential fields like religion or politics. Bourdieu characterizes the aesthetic and literary fields<sup>6</sup> within the field of cultural production as the “*space of literary or artistic position-takings*, i.e., the structured set of the manifestations of the social agents involved in the field – literary or artistic works, of course, but also political acts or pronouncements, manifestos or polemics, etc.” and include “the *space of literary or artistic positions* defined by possession of a determinate quantity of specific capital (recognition)” and a position in the field appropriate to that capital (*Field 30*, original emphasis). Bourdieu selects the fields of aesthetics and literature specifically as a demonstration of his field-centered method of socio-analysis<sup>7</sup>:

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<sup>6</sup>Bourdieu sometimes uses the terms “literary and artistic field” or variations thereof interchangeably with “field of cultural production.” But there is a certain distinction, even if only that which is to be made between a superordinate category and its subordinates.

<sup>7</sup>This is the name which Bourdieu has given his sociological method, which he describes at length in *Distinction*, *The Field of Cultural Production*, and *Homo Academicus*. In fact, *Homo Academicus* largely consists of a meta-analysis of Bourdieu’s own position in the field of academics and how his disciplinary objects and methods have been affected by his context. Socio-analysis, as described in *Homo Academicus*, is neither utterly objectivist nor subjectivist in its stance toward what is knowable; it adheres neither to the scientism of structuralism nor to the nihilism implied by some post-structuralist/deconstructionist theories. Instead, Bourdieu writes, “far from destroying its own foundations when it brings to light the social determinants which the logic of the fields of production brings to bear on all cultural products, sociology claims an epistemological privilege: that conferred by

Few areas more clearly demonstrate the heuristic efficacy of *relational* thinking than that of art and literature. Constructing an object such as the literary field requires and enables us to make a radical break with the substantialist mode of thought (as Ernst Cassirer calls it) which tends to foreground the individual, or the visible interactions between individuals, at the expense of the structural relations – invisible, or visible only through their effects – between social positions that are both occupied and manipulated by social agents which may be isolated individuals, groups, or institutions. ... To take as one's subject of study the literary or artistic field of a given period and society (the field of Florentine painting in the quattrocento or the field of French literature in the Second Empire) is to set the history of art and literature a task which it never completely performs, because it fails to take it on explicitly. (*Field* 29)

Here, Bourdieu clarifies his objective: by analyzing the very real, interconnected relationships of history, capital, people, and positions in these fields whose participants see themselves as “derealized” (30) or autonomous from their circumstances, Bourdieu can prove that such isolation or decontextualization never actually exists and that any complete understanding of a given human phenomenon requires an analysis that takes into account the range of relationships that the notion of a “field” brings to bear.

My purpose in using both Bourdieu's field theory and his history of the French fields of aesthetics and literature reverses Bourdieu's objectives. I wish to use the same understanding of fields as structured structures (*Language* 164) of human action, but its explication is not my primary objective. Rather, the useful concept of “field” will prove to be the fortunate byproduct of the history that I draw from Bourdieu of the French aesthetic and literary fields' structural

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the fact of being able to reinvest in scientific practice its own scientific gains, in the form of a sociological increase in epistemological vigilance” (*Homo Academicus* xii-xiii).

transformations from the late eighteenth-century through the twentieth-century. The historical, economic, and cultural transformations that introduced the pure aesthetic and a false autonomy to prominence in these two fields are homologous to those that resulted in similar structural transformations in the Anglo-American literary field and field of literary studies. Explicating those homologies as well as their implications for English studies in American higher education today is my objective here.

### **1.1.3 Structural Transformations of the French Aesthetic and Literary Fields**

Bourdieu points to the economic and social pressures on the youngest members of the aristocracy in the early nineteenth-century as a primary force that moved the field of cultural production toward a pure aesthetic. Industrialized capitalism began its domination of the economic field in the nineteenth-century, empowering “industrialists and businessmen of colossal fortunes ... [who] were self-made men, uncultured *parvenus* ready to make both the power of money and a vision of the world profoundly hostile to intellectual things” (*Rules* 48). Children of some aristocratic families found themselves at a unique disadvantage. Given their *habitus* – their disposition and will to retain or to acquire more of a specific sort of capital and more advantageous positions than they inherited – these aristocratic youth found no satisfaction in abdicating their positions of power by taking industrial or trade jobs and thereby entering the bourgeoisie.

This left a generation of youth from relatively wealthy and powerful families in a difficult situation, economically and culturally speaking. Their families saw to it that they received the highest possible education, partly as a way to protect their monopoly on cultural and symbolic capital. In their education, these youth were “nourished in the humanities and in rhetoric but deprived of the financial means and the social protection indispensable for taking advantage of

their degrees” (*Rules 55*). From this demographic of French youth emerged the bohemians at the end of the eighteenth-century, a “society of writers and artists in which scribblers and daubers predominate, at least numerically, has something extraordinary about it, something without precedent” (*Rules 55*). These youth rejected the industrial and trade jobs available to them in a lower position of power but they also rejected the futile battle for any of the shrinking aristocracy’s remaining power. Instead, the bohemians felt the influence of the Romanticists’ desire for an existence free from the corrupting effects of industrialized or denaturalized life. Their ideal world would subsist on the self-sustaining exchange of symbolic capital that artists create and provide for each other; this world would be at once independent of the economic and cultural capital that the bourgeoisie and aristocracy retained and also communal rather than the individualist isolation often valorized in Romanticism (*Rules 55*).

The new economic model of industrialized capitalism offered a common ground to both bohemians and the bourgeoisie for a time since both parties rejected the cultural and economic power of the aristocracy. In the new class-power structure, the “relationship between cultural producers and the dominant class no longer retain[ed] what might have characterized it in previous centuries, whether that means direct dependence on a financial backer,” approbation from aristocratic salons and clubs, or the patronage of the monarch or appointed officials who set policy regarding censorship, copyright, and access to symbolic and economic capital by way of “appointment to academies and institutes” (*Rules 49-50*). Now, artists had to eke out their own living by selling their products to people of sufficient economic capital and interest in art, a process that the bourgeoisie invested in as an affordable way to wrest power from the powerful via cultural capital.

At this point, a crisis in the structure of power arose in the aesthetic and literary fields. Power in fields operates according to principles of *heteronomy* and *autonomy*, Bourdieu writes. *Heteronomous* power is created via the interrelated value of capital, people, and positions across multiple fields; it is the principle by which economic capital is created and recognized, since the attribution of monetary value to a non-monetary object or service requires that the field of economics overlap into another field. *Autonomous* power is power created in a self-contained system, a force exerted against itself for itself. This power is usually exerted in a struggle for the symbolic capital that, too, is created in a closed system and exchanged for other symbolic capital. The encroachment of the burgeoning bourgeoisie on the interests of the bohemians and the historical, economic, and social factors that led to that encroachment “are no doubt one of the major determinants (or at least a precondition) of the process of autonomization of the literary and artistic fields and the correlative transformation of the relation between the world of art and literature and the political world” (*Rules* 55).

The bohemians attempted to extricate themselves from being measured by the same heteronomous metrics of success that they rejected “such as book sales, number of theatrical performances, etc. or honors, appointments, etc.” (*Field* 38). Instead, they declared themselves wholly autonomous from any external field in which success would be measured by “the degree of recognition accorded by those who recognize no other criterion of legitimacy than recognition by those whom they recognize” (*Field* 38), while any economic success or cultural notoriety would signal an indenture to “the new masters of the economy” (*Rules* 59). The starving artist or posthumously-esteemed artist became the new standard of success, one that turned the principle of heteronomous power on its head.

The autonomy espoused by the bohemians, of course, was always a false autonomy. Money was still required for necessities such as food, art supplies, studio space, and the exchange of art itself. But the struggle for autonomy had three important effects: the “production of belief” as the principle of valuation for symbolic capital; the reinforcement of what Bourdieu calls, following Kant’s use of the term, the “pure aesthetic”; and the division in the field of literature between the large-scale, commercial production of literature and the restricted-scale, autonomous production of literary art. For the aesthetic and literary fields of the nineteenth-century, absolute autonomy was the *currency* rather than the reality of power in the fields: an artist or art object was valued for being seen as actually autonomous, under the “pure” influence of art. In this system, people are asked to *believe* that the value of art is original and inherent and therefore authentic and authoritative. In reality, such value is established by people with sufficient symbolic capital to justify such valuation and to have others believe in it. What becomes more important is the authoring of authentication rather than the authoring of art because only the former indicates that one has sufficient symbolic power to determine what is and is not worthy of authentication.

This closed system of belief in consecration suggests that art, like producers and consumers, really can or should be autonomous – decontextualized, disinterested, having no other purpose than itself. The pure aesthetic provided a complement to this autonomy since both assume that the fields in which they operate are or can be absolutely isolated from other fields. “The invention of the pure gaze,” Bourdieu writes, “is brought about in the very movement of the field towards autonomy. In effect, the assertion of the autonomy of the principles of production and evaluation of the work of art is inseparable from the assertion of the autonomy of the producer, that is, of the field of production” (*Rules* 299). Within this aesthetics, value can

only be attributed to art objects *qua* art – autonomous from any heteronomously-oriented system of economic or cultural capital – by “apprehending the work of art as it demands to be apprehended (in itself and for itself, as form not as function)” (*Rules* 288).

A fervent belief in the autonomy of art caused artists to reject any outside investment or interest in the fields of aesthetics and literature. Bourdieu points to the protests of Flaubert, Baudelaire, and Champfleury – artists who

gradually invent what will be called “art for art’s sake” (and *at the same time, the norms of the literary field*) have in common with social art and with realism the fact that they, too, are violently opposed to the bourgeoisie and bourgeois art: their cult of form and impersonal neutrality makes them appear as the defenders of an “immoral” definition of art, especially when those such as Flaubert seem to place their formal research in the service of a debasing of the bourgeois world. (*Rules* 75, emphasis added)

The collaboration with the bourgeoisie that gave this pure, autonomous aesthetic its popularity and relative power in society came to an end when consecrated members of the aesthetic and literary fields realized the hazards of maintaining any heteronomous relationships. The pure aesthetic and art-for-art’s-sake movement disposed of social responsibility so that it could better police access to art, demanding that art be approached as a sort of religious fetish rather than an object with any connections to the actual world.

In the literary field<sup>8</sup> particularly, this rejection of bourgeois interests and social connection in favor of an absolute (however false) autonomy based on a pure aesthetic divided the field according to two principles of production – *large-scale* and *restricted* (*Rules* 113).

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<sup>8</sup> The same sort of change also occurred in the field of aesthetics more broadly speaking, but insofar as this change has to do with these particular literary genres, I will restrict my comments here to the literary field. Readers who would like more detail regarding the nature of this shift for the field of aesthetics more broadly may wish to consult *The Field of Cultural Production* 37-46.

Before the pure aesthetic, the standards of literary success set in seventeenth century French culture were heteronomously interrelated with those of the economic field and thus with large-scale production. In this structure, the genres of literature that promised the largest profit were the most highly-valued; theater was most highly valued, followed by the novel and then poetry, which could potentially survive with no market (*Rules* 114-5). But by the 1880s in French literary circles, “there develops a more autonomous sector – or, if you will, an avant-garde. Each of the genres [theater, the novel, and poetry] tends to cleave into a research sector and a commercial sector, two markets between which one must be wary of establishing a clear boundary, since they are merely two poles defined in and by their antagonistic relationship” (*Rules* 120). Poetry, the literary art form “Consecrated as the art *par excellence* by the romantic tradition,” assumed the position of highest value in this hierarchy since its success lay in its continued ability “to attract a large number of writers, even if it is almost totally devoid of a market,” while the novel remained centermost, balanced by its potentially aesthetic and “mercantile” uses, followed by the most profitable and mass-marketable genre, theater (*Rules* 114).

The larger structure of the literary field mirrored this duality, cleaving into a “commercial” side that was structured by heteronomous power relations and oriented toward large-scale production by the unconsecrated consumer, and another side that saw itself as the autonomous realm of restricted access to fetishized art products. Literary studies as the “research sector” of the literary field, according to Bourdieu, derived from the aesthetically-oriented, autonomous area of the field. This derivation, Bourdieu writes, partly explains why literary critics



pass over in silence the question of the *historical and social conditions of possibility* of this experience; they exclude, in effect, the analysis of the conditions under which works considered as worthy of the aesthetic gaze were produced and constituted as such; and equally, they ignore the question of the conditions under which the aesthetic disposition they call for is produced ... and continually reproduced in the course of time. (*Rules* 285-6, original emphasis)

In essence, the literary field reproduced itself when it bifurcated into the field of academic literary criticism and scholarship. Literary scholars and critics came to see themselves as autonomous within their own academic context, just as artists saw themselves as autonomous in their socio-economic context, by virtue of their participation in the production and reproduction of (knowledge about) pure, autonomous art. And when enrollment increased in institutions of higher education at the end of the nineteenth-century and beginning of the twentieth-century, academic literary critics and scholars helped to disseminate the tastes of the falsely autonomous side of the field to their students.

### ***1.2 Aesthetics and the False Autonomy of English (Literary) Studies***

Even today, we witness the same problems of a false autonomy of the literary field and literary studies in the fields of English literature and English literary studies as they developed in the United Kingdom and in the United States. We see it at work anytime English studies scholars refuse to answer calls for program assessment and then lament the riches of science departments. But we also see it in the genealogy of these fields, which is homologous both in terms of history and structural development to that of the French literary field and the field of French literary studies. These fields consist of the same types of important people (writers, professors, publishers, consumers of both mainstream and esoteric literary products, etc.),

products (genres, productions, specialized knowledge, profits, etc.), principles of power (heteronomous versus autonomous), principles of production (large-scale versus restricted), capital exchanged (primarily symbolic), and some of the same historical events (industrialized capitalism, empowerment of the bourgeoisie, etc.) that changed the fields of economics and power in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Just as the prominence and privilege of autonomized aesthetics developed relatively recently in the history of the French literary field, the prominence and privilege of autonomized aesthetics in the English literary field and the dominance of literature in English higher education are relatively recent developments. In the Anglo-American world, these developments derive from some of the same large-scale or global heteronomous structural transformations in the fields of economics, power, and class relations that Bourdieu claims are the primary causes of the transformations of the French cultural, aesthetic, and literary fields. But the transformations in the Anglo-American literary field resulted in the rise of a specifically Romanticist, as opposed to bohemian, brand of pure aestheticism and literary privilege as it was popularized by the bourgeoisie, like the bohemians' pure aesthetic as it changed into the art-for-art's-sake movement. In this section, I will trace these transformations in the Anglo-American literary and academic literary fields, focusing in particular on the influence that the falsely autonomous Romanticist conceptualization of literature has had on the self-defeating intellectual-disciplinary and institutional autonomy that English studies pursues even today.

### **1.2.1 A Brief Genealogy of the Autonomization of English “Literature”**

The etymology of the word “literature,” as insightfully explicated by Raymond Williams and corroborated by the *OED*, lays bare this shift toward aestheticization and autonomization of literature in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. “Literature” began its life in English in the

late fourteenth century as a word that denoted awareness or familiarization with “polite or humane learning” and the books that contributed this variety of learning. Williams remarks that “learning” of this sort in the Anglophone world before the Renaissance would have had to do with a proficiency in rhetoric and grammar, which located “literature” within the provenance of rhetoric from its first use in English (47). It took another four-hundred years – in 1779, according to the *OED* – before “literature” would come to mean (the body of) esteemed writing, which Williams claims is a shift from defining the literary process to the product (47). Tellingly, a note in the *OED*’s entry for the third sense of “literature” – the sense that denotes a more “restricted” body of written works “which has claim to consideration on the grounds of beauty or form or emotional effect” – explains that “This sense is of very recent origin in both Eng[lish] and Fr[ench].” Indeed, the origin of this denotation coincides with the moment in history – the mid- to late- nineteenth-century– at which the aesthetic and literary fields solidified their claims to autonomy and cleft the fields according to new principles of production; the duality within the fields necessitated a new “literature” to set apart products of restricted access and products made for large-scale consumption.

In *Literary Theory*, Eagleton’s account of the historical influences that moved the Anglo-American field of literature toward a pure aesthetics and false autonomy begins with Romanticism. “It was, in fact,” Eagleton writes, “only with what we now call the ‘Romantic period’ that our own definitions of literature began to develop. The modern sense of the word ‘literature’ only really gets under way in the nineteenth century” (16). Like the French bohemians, British and American Romanticists saw art and literature as a way to counter changes in the fields of economics and power, but whereas the bohemians saw art and literature as a vehicle through which they could achieve autonomy from any social system structured

heteronomously by economic and cultural capital, the Romanticists saw art and literature as a corrective for a system corrupted by the influences of industrialism, capitalism, and utilitarianism. “At the center of aesthetic theory at the turn of the eighteenth-century,” Eagleton observes, “is the semi-mystical doctrine of the symbol. For Romanticism, indeed, the symbol becomes the panacea for all problems” (19). In their symbolic capacities, art and literature unified material experience and higher, purer spiritual truths and made them accessible to human beings who are trapped in a material world and searching (whether they know it or not) for a spiritual transformation. Literature could be in the world and not of it, working to save the world from its own context.

British Romanticists in particular, Eagleton suggests, thought of literature as imaginative rather than efficiently uniform, spontaneous rather than manufactured, transcendental or spiritual rather than material or empirical, and individual rather than mass-produced yet simultaneously universal rather than historical; imbued with these characteristics, literature possessed the capacity “to transform society in the name of those energies and values which art embodies” (16-7). This estimation of literature is evident in William Blake’s explanation of his blend of spirituality and art, in the first chapter of *Jerusalem*: “I must Create a system or be enslaved by another Man’s.” And Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth similarly used poetry – for them, an otherworldly medium – to express political reactions to the French Revolution. But insofar as Romanticism understood art and literature as decontextualized and autonomous, Romanticism, like bohemianism, could not sustain a social and political agenda in perpetuity. Bourdieu’s history of the bohemians and other consecrated members of the fields of aesthetics and literature who followed them reveals that it was never possible to extricate art, artists, or the rest of humanity from the allegedly corrupt condition of our material existence since both human

beings and the world we exist in are necessarily material. There is no complete transcendence from heteronomy to a pure autonomy – every level of an aesthetic or literary experience is influenced by a matrix of fields at the moment of both its creation and consumption.

Because all human activity is inherently heteronomous, it was foolhardy for both the Romanticists and the bohemians to undertake the futile task of escaping the forces that shaped them by merely trying to ignore those forces, as Coleridge's and Wordsworth's reactions to the materials condition of war should make clear. In fact, part of the reason that Romanticism gained popularity in the nineteenth-century is that art and literature is a matrix of heteronomous forces from the fields of power, economics, and class relations. In this matrix, art and literature "[became] a commodity like anything else, and the Romantic artist little more than a minor commodity producer; for all his rhetorical claim to be 'representative' of humankind, to speak with the voice of the people and utter eternal verities, he existed more on the margins of a society which was not inclined to pay high wages to prophets" (Eagleton 18). To preserve the "absolute spiritual truth" of art from these corrupting influences, Romanticists were "driven back into the solitariness of [their] own creative mind[s]," disclaiming their connection to their social or moral context, as the bohemians had similarly done (Eagleton 19). Autonomy became the *raison d'être* of the Romantic literary field from the late eighteenth through the early nineteenth-century: as Eagleton notes, the literary field at this moment thought that "The whole point of 'creative' writing was that it was gloriously useless, an 'end in itself,' loftily removed from any sordid social purpose" (18). Accordingly, any attempt at critical analysis of texts by those who lacked sufficient symbolic capital seemed "almost as blasphemous as seeking to analyze the Holy Trinity" (Eagleton 19).

But during Victorianism, morality was returned to the Romanticists' variety of pure aesthetics. Art and literature were thereby converted into a literally religious force. Eagleton finds that literature filled the vacuum left by religion in the mid-nineteenth-century, both when science eroded the need for a supernatural explanation of the natural world and when changes in the economic order revealed that centuries-old structures of power, cultural tradition, and social mores weren't divinely set outside the range of humanity's influence. "This was particularly worrying for the Victorian ruling class," Eagleton writes, "because religion is for all kinds of reasons an extremely effective form of ideological control" (20). Where religion failed to moralize, pacify, unify (particularly along national lines), and homogenize the masses, literature could succeed even more subtly than religion ever did. Not coincidentally, then, the metaphor of literature-as-religion that Bourdieu uses to describe the faith in art and consecration of artists that characterized the French field of literature at the end of the nineteenth-century becomes quite literal in the Anglo-American field of literature. Witness, for example, the complete conceptual conflation of religion and literature in the words of Matthew Arnold, who in his 1873 book *Literature and Dogma* writes, "[I]n truth, the word 'God' is used in most cases as by no means a term of science or exact knowledge, but a term of poetry and eloquence, a term *thrown out*, so to speak, at a not fully grasped object of the speaker's consciousness — a *literary* term, in short" (12 original emphasis).

### **1.2.2 English in the Modern University**

It was not by coincidence that at the same time, institutions of higher education introduced the study of English into their curricula. Whereas the monarchy in Britain and the aristocracy in both the United States and the United Kingdom used religion to impose a top-down reinforcement of the socio-economic status quo, the study of English in colleges and

universities was intended as a concession to the changing socio-economic times. Up to the Victorian period, students in Britain's and America's most prestigious institutions of higher learning studied Latin and Greek language and literature but not their vernacular English. English, as a "modern" language, carried no high-cultural significance, no cultural capital won by the rigorous study allegedly required by the Classical languages. Women constituted one new demographic for whom colleges introduced English courses. This foray into English, however, wasn't always an exercise in equality. Gerald Graff reports in *Professing Literature* that the new American "women's colleges founded after the Civil War challenged the assumption that women's minds were incapable of rigorous intellectual tasks ... [but the] more ornamental the conception of women a college entertained the more likely that that college featured modern languages and literatures" because "the modern languages and literatures were considered mere social accomplishments [and] were looked upon as feminine preoccupations" (37-8).

In addition to the women's colleges such as Vassar and Wellesley, new institutions of higher education emerged at the turn of the nineteenth-century to serve another new demographic – members of the expanding bourgeoisie. As in France at roughly the same historical moment, the children of newly-affluent working-class families found themselves in a position to seek an education that would acculturate them to the standards of high culture previously set by the aristocracy – and consequently increase their cultural capital – at the same time that it prepared them for a trade-based profession and the opportunity to multiply their families' economic capital. Students in these new colleges and universities – such as the Morrill Act land-grant universities in America, the British Mechanics' Institutes, and other British "nonsectarian and nonresidential institutions" including the Universities of Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, and Newcastle in Britain (Ferreira-Buckley and Horner 195) – had no need for

Latin and Greek. Instead, they studied rhetoric and composition in their vernacular English “since proficiency in writing English was now considered an indispensable component in education” and for economic and cultural success (Ferreira-Buckley and Horner 195).

But the point worth iterating here is Raymond Williams’s. “Literature,” in the sense of highly-valued art *products*, had no home in the earliest curricula of English higher education. Rather, an Education in English centered on matters of rhetoric and composition – proficiency in “literary” *processes*, both oral and written, following a Classical rhetorical pedagogy. But as institutions of higher education abandoned the Classical languages in favor of the vernacular during the mid-nineteenth-century, the teaching of written literacy trumped oratorical literacy. The primary cause for this shift, Elizabethada A. Wright and S. Michael Halloran write, was the change in society’s uses for education vis-à-vis the industrial, capitalistic economy (223). What followed, Wright and Halloran observe, was “a new emphasis, both in the colleges and in society at large, on *belles lettres* – poetry, fiction, drama, essay – that had occupied a less prominent place in the older oratorical culture” (223). In this context, as Robert Connors notes, writing proved more important than oratory, so students found themselves writing term papers and research papers instead of learning taxonomies of figures and strategies for delivering speeches (210-56).

Rhetoric, however, did not occupy the seat of privilege in American higher education for long. As enrollment increased in the late nineteenth-century, colleges used entrance exams to separate out unprepared students and to preserve the cultural and economic capital of those who were accustomed to possessing it. James A. Berlin points to the establishment in 1874 of Harvard’s entrance exam as “the first step in replacing the classical languages and the curriculum based on them” as well as “ensur[ing] that the new open university would not become too open”



(*Rhetoric* 23). Similar entrance exams became more common among elite colleges and universities, and rhetoric and composition instruction became synonymous with remediation (*Rhetoric* 24; see also Soliday, *The Politics of Remediation*). Not coincidentally, in 1876, Johns Hopkins appointed Harvard professor Francis James Child as its Boylston Professor of Rhetoric by promising him the opportunity to pursue his literary and philological studies, thereby securing their “first specialist in literature who was without responsibility for teaching freshmen” (*Rhetoric* 23). Rhetoric, as the province of either the mundane drudgery of teaching freshmen or the pointless endeavor of studying (and teaching) taxonomies of oratorical tropes, “petrified in a positivistic” and utilitarian “configuration while [the] poetic continued to develop and grow” (*Rhetoric* 25).

Philology took a similar turn from significance in the university first, then English departments. Graff, quoting Wilhelm Grimm, reports that in the German university system philology had come to mean “not only linguistics but ‘the whole study of the history of cultures’” (*Professing* 69). But Anglo-American universities’ shift from a German university model to a system of departments presented philology with what ultimately proved to be insurmountable problems. To some, it seemed too general for the new university, belonging to no particular discipline or department and yet potentially belonging to all of them. To English studies scholars in particular, philology’s attention to grammar, composition, and context aligned it with rhetoric, and so “philologists were suddenly being asked to shoulder general education responsibilities that to many of them, trained as professional research men, seemed no part of their proper business” (*Professing* 79). At the end of the nineteenth-century, philology could often be found in its own department, institutionally autonomous from more aesthetically- and

spiritually-oriented literary studies where it could be left to more scientific textual analysis and research.

### **1.2.3 The Creation of the Subfield of English Literary Studies**

For the same reasons and at the same time that rhetoric's power and prestige in the modern university waned and philology separated into its own departments in the university, literature came to prominence in English departments. At first, English literature was a convenient version, as Eagleton asserts, of "the poor man's Classics – a way of providing a cheapish 'liberal' education for those beyond the charmed circles" of aristocratic education (23). But because literature had, by the end of the nineteenth-century, come to be synonymous with Romanticist notions of an autonomized aesthetic object, it proved to be a useful tool both for unifying the narrative of common person's experiences and giving them order in a world without religion and for certifying the workforce of the industrial-capitalist economic system. It is significant that just as the French literary field split into subfields oriented toward heteronomous power and large-scale production and consumption of literature, on one hand, and toward falsely autonomous aesthetic-academic production and consumption of literature on the other, the English literary field also split such that a falsely autonomous subfield oriented toward pure aesthetics distinguished itself and came to prominence, and that its appearance in academia derived from this falsely autonomous aesthetically-oriented subfield.

Naturally, the study of English literature wasn't immediately popular among all consecrated members of the English literary field or of the field of higher education. It took World War I to validate the study of an English canon on the basis of patriotism and the need for a socially-unifying faith in something outside the realm of reality. When "Neither the Christian religion in any of its varieties, nor positive science, nor humane culture proved self-evidently

capable of making sense out of the entire range of knowledge and opinion,” literature seemed capable of straddling both the “real” and the metaphysical, the human(e) and the spiritual and thus capable of making sense of an apparently senseless world (Veysey, qtd in Graff, *Professing* 60). The rise of the field of literary study was not only rapid but decisive. “In the early 1920s,” Eagleton explains, “it was desperately unclear why English was worth studying at all; by the early 1930s it had become a question of why it was worthy wasting your time on anything else” (27). While the search for spiritual or transcendent truths in literature undoubtedly had its roots in Romanticism, after the 1930s Romanticism had come to be synonymous with foolhardy optimism in the inherent goodness of humanity. In this context, poets including T.S. Eliot and the Imagists presented a new aesthetics that dismissed the seemingly naïve or superstitious parts of Romanticism and valued literature that used concrete depictions of reality that would have primitive, psychological connections to the collective unconscious (Eagleton 35). The fingerprint of Romanticism is still clear here in the subfield of English literary studies, despite the best efforts of Eliot and his cohort to distance this aesthetic, psychic transcendence from the religious, spiritual transcendence of the Romanticism of Wordsworth and Whitman.

If Eliot and his cohort presented a post-World War I, post-Romantic aesthetics and concomitant adjustment to the literary status quo, the Leavises introduced a complementary method of study – “practical criticism” – during the 1930s that restructured the intersection of the literary field and the field of higher education. “Practical criticism meant a method which spurned belle-lettristic waffle and was properly unafraid to take the text apart,” Eagleton finds (37). In this respect, practical criticism preserved some of the empiricism and research credentials of that erstwhile discipline, philology, which by the 1930s ceased to exist *qua* philology, its practitioners having departed variously for the new social science disciplines of

anthropology and linguistics (Andresen 200). However, practical criticism “also assumed that you could judge literary ‘greatness’ and ‘centrality’ by bringing a focused attentiveness to bear on poems or pieces of prose isolated from their cultural and historical contexts” (Eagleton 37). Just as Eliot rejected the explicitly individualist strains of Romanticism while retaining its hope in a transcendent universal order (the “Tradition,” to use Eliot’s idiom), the advocates of practical criticism broke with the Romantics’ aversion to the blasphemy of careful textual analysis while maintaining a Romanticist faith in the mysterious unity of literary texts. In fact, both practical criticism and its cousin, “close reading,” underscored the Romanticized sense of literature’s autonomy from its context in a matrix of overlapping fields and “encouraged the illusion that any piece of language, ‘literary’ or not, can be adequately studied or even understood in isolation. It was,” Eagleton continues, “the beginning of a ‘reification’ of the literary work, the treatment of it as an object in itself” (38).

Practical criticism was popularized in America in the form of New Criticism, in which aesthetics and literary critical and scholarly method are paradoxically conjoined: a literary text is at once “functional” in that it “correspond[s] in some sense to reality itself,” but the only way to understand that reality is to analyze the work in isolation, ignoring or dismissing its contextual relationship to the reality *surrounding* it (Eagleton 41). Ironically, the New Critics were very much the products of their own historical and academic context: their promotion of “literature” from a metaphysical phenomenon to an objective instantiation of “reality” that *must* be studied (not just apprehended or appreciated) empirically on these grounds squares with the pragmatic, post-war climate of higher education in the first half of the twentieth-century. The young French bohemians of the mid-nineteenth-century received a primarily humanistic education, having no desire to descend from their positions of inherited affluence into the trades. But Americans who

entered college in the early twentieth-century enrolled with the expectation that their education would prepare them for both cultural and economic success. Men returning from war went to college to secure jobs, and the women who had entered the workplace in their stead went to college to maintain the economic and cultural capital they'd gained in the meantime. For a while, New Criticism provided these groups of students with both science and faith – the existence of a systematically-discernible “reality” in literary texts, and a belief in this characterization of literature that is untested, given that literature is external to any context and frame of understanding. By the late 1950s in America, New Criticism had mostly run its course, but it had done its part to entrench a mysticized autonomy of both literature and literary study in a strange blend of Romanticism and scientific pragmatism.

Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), exemplifies the shifts in the field of literary studies subsequent to this disciplinary division. The critical approach that Frye proposed was still a rather duplicitous mix of “science” and Romanticist aesthetics: on the one hand, Frye's critical method consisted of a rigorously systematic approach to textual analysis that mirrored Classical rhetorical approaches, despite the fact that Frye distanced this method from the systems of psychoanalytic and Marxist criticism that he considered external impositions on the literary experience. On the other hand, Frye preserved the mystery of the literary object by asserting that literature possesses an inherent quality that an external perspective such as Freudianism and Marxism can't account for. And as Eagleton notes, Frye went a step further than “New Criticism [which] finds in literature a *substitute* history [by insisting] that literature is an ‘autonomous verbal structure’ quite cut off from any reference beyond itself,” transcending beyond any possible history (80). While systematic, then, this approach clearly departs from the empiricist bent of New Criticism and embraces “the liberal humanist tradition of Arnold,

desiring, as [Frye] says, ‘society as free, classless and urbane,’” saved by its careful attention to the “mighty mythological system” that held together the Tradition (Eagleton 81-2).

Frye’s systematized critical method presaged the turn in English literary studies to structuralism beginning in the late 1960s through the 1970s. Structuralism provided literary scholars with a way to retain the pragmatic analysis of clearly defined systems while still implicating literature in specific systems using non-literary critical-analytic methods like psychoanalysis and Marxism, which Frye denounced for their remoteness to the literary object *qua* literature. But finding and analyzing self-sustaining systems and structures became the *raison d’être* of this strain of literary study and, consequently, it often went too far in effacing the individual language user in a closed semiotic system. Over time, literary scholarship entrenched itself in deeper and deeper areas of specialization such that a critic could analyze literature only in the framework of her chosen area of specialization (psychoanalysis, historical-materialism, etc.) away from the influence and interests of outsiders to the academic literary field. Ultimately, despite the fact that structuralism took the religiosity and mythology out of literature, it nevertheless allowed literature and literary studies a degree of mystification insofar as it situated both literature and the study of literature in homologously autonomous positions vis-à-vis other cultural phenomena and other fields of study.

Post-structuralism and deconstructionism challenged the myth perpetuated in structuralism that literature and people operating within the fields of literature and literary studies could actually be autonomous or decontextualized. To the contrary, as Derrida claimed, structures that are understood to exist in isolation from all other phenomena cannot but be understood in the same way that one understands the metaphysical – by a faith in that which

cannot be seen and may not actually exist.<sup>9</sup> In fact, the task that the earliest post-structuralists in Europe set for themselves in the 1960s was to reveal the interrelatedness of all human knowledge and action and, consequently, that such activity is neither eternal nor universal but contextualized in a discernible genealogy of historical events. Unfortunately, post-structuralism in America came to be synonymous with a sort of epistemological atheism or agnosticism. The Yale school of deconstruction, whose ranks included Paul de Man and J. Hillis Miller, took their post-structuralist method beyond observing the constructed nature of “reality,” exposing all constructions as being based in a never-ending string of self-referential, tautological, and meaningless signifiers.

Back in Europe, cultural studies put post-structuralism to a higher purpose than nihilism. The British scholars Richard Hoggart, Stuart Hall, and Raymond Williams led the cultural studies movement from the mid-1960s, basing it in historical-materialist research of the interaction between economics, culture, and society; by the 1970s, the work of Antonio Gramsci and Michel Foucault expanded the scope of what cultural studies and various cultural theories could treat (Storey 3). Cultural studies led to cultural theories that postulate systems in order to help us understand and explain human activity in its historical, social, and material contexts. Clearly, such attempts bear the marks of structuralism, but as Eagleton remarks, “The task of cultural theory, broadly conceived, was to take apart the received wisdom of the traditional

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<sup>9</sup> Among other places that Derrida makes this assertion, his essay “White Mythology” makes this point using metaphor as its example. The meaning of “dead” metaphors – those that do not readily appear to be metaphors, like “table leg” or “Let me be blunt” – appears to come from no context, to transcend all contexts. The meaning and the metaphysics are based, then, in a “white” or effaced context, a non-context. Some forms of knowledge also appear to have no context, Derrida explains, as when “white” and “male” stand as the default categories of personhood in our culture. Thus, Derrida claims, to believe that something that is a product of human action or thought is without grounding in some discernible context is to mythologize it, to think of it the same way one might think of God or heaven or angels.

humanities,” to build knowledge about why and how culture matters based on careful research instead of mere tradition (207).

Despite arguments to the contrary, English studies today exists in this cultural studies context. Our English departments are generally staffed with specialists in one or more varieties of cultural theories such as feminist theory, post-colonial theory, and eco-criticism, as well as an area of textual emphasis such as a literary movement or period. English studies will not be post-cultural until specializations in these areas of culture theory are no longer in fashion. In fact, there’s no reason to lament cultural studies proper: even Michael Berubé, who has been critical of cultural studies, says he “still [has] hope that the history of cultural studies might matter to the university – and to the world beyond it,” despite what he finds to be its turn toward pop-culture critique (“What’s the Matter”). It is an improvement over the agnosticism of Yale-brand deconstructionism and the various shortcomings of decontextualized and decontextualizing structuralism since it takes all cultural phenomena – aesthetic and scientific, interpretive and empirical – as the means to understanding the larger phenomena of “culture” itself.

#### **1.2.4 Implications of Specialization and Autonomization for English Departments**

The academic genealogy of cultural studies is significant. As a critical-analytic approach to scholarship, it inherited the university’s structure and purpose – to draw from distinct bodies of knowledge that are only relatively autonomous from each other in order to refine a more general and generally-useful body of knowledge. But the lesson of our cultural studies moment has been that it would be a mistake to assume that a discipline’s intellectual and methodological framework – even in its ideal form –necessarily correlates harmoniously to its institutional embodiment. After all, despite the fact that English departments largely operate according to the premises and objectives of cultural studies, we often operate institutionally according to the



premises and objectives of the Romanticist roots of literary studies, anachronistically vying for autonomy from institutions that wield influence on the academic and cultural fields in which our discipline resides. Undoubtedly, some of the conclusions drawn in cultural studies research have impacted mass culture, but much of it remains esoteric to anyone uninitiated to the jargon of the given cultural theory. Specialization itself, however, isn't necessarily the problem ; after all, specialization is the way that knowledge is refined in the university. Specialization becomes problematic when it is equated with absolute autonomy.

This, unfortunately, has been the tendency of English studies scholars. Within the field of English studies, the dissonance between the intellectual disposition of any discipline and the discipline's institutional existence is evidenced in the inertia that pushes the subdisciplines of English – such as creative writing, rhetoric and composition, and literary studies – toward specialization. Whereas professors of literature in the first English departments had quite general degrees, today's PhD in literature usually carries some form official-institutional or discipline-recognized specialization in a time period, literary movement, area of literary theory, and area of cultural theory. One need but look at the jobs advertised with the Modern Language Association to find proof of this sort of official sanctioning of (what can sometimes seem like an infinite regress of) specialization.

Disciplinary specialization was, perhaps, inevitable given the history of English studies. It has been one of the means by which new and experienced scholars in the field could declare at least a relative degree of autonomy from other (sub)disciplines. For example, in English studies, literary scholars do not possess the specialized knowledge of composition theory that their colleagues in rhetoric and composition do, and their right to comment on composition theory and its implementation in curricula is limited by that relative lack of expertise; similarly, the right of

rhetoric and composition scholars to an opinion regarding the research and teaching of literature is limited. Disciplinary specialization also encourages scholars within the same subdiscipline to expand or deepen a specific body of knowledge: someone who studies nineteenth-century British literature might specialize in feminist theory while another scholar of nineteenth-century British literature specializes in psychoanalysis. Both scholars will have overlapping disciplinary knowledge and interests but may have quite different institutional value or use depending on the popularity of or need for those particular bodies of knowledge at any given moment in any given institution.

But the existence of subdisciplines and specializations presents problems for the institutional structure and functions of the field of English studies insofar as they become the positions in the field from which people struggle for control over the various forms of economic, cultural, and symbolic capital exchanged within English studies and from English studies to other fields. Take, for another example, the differences among a Bachelor of Arts, a Master of Arts, and a Master of Fine Arts. In the discipline of English studies, the most general degree is the BA. Though some undergraduate programs allow students to pursue certificates of specialization in one of English studies' subdisciplines, specialization becomes more important at the master's level. At that point, a distinction is made between creative writing and the other more research-oriented areas of the field, subdividing the field along the lines Bourdieu observed – the aesthetic/creative versus the academic/research. Of course, this is not because research or academic work is inherently less “creative.” It is because from the first instantiation of a specialized study of literature in higher education, during the height of Romanticist and Victorian notions of literature, “literary” implied “creative” or “imaginative.” The *study* of English literature was at first heretical but with time became more practical, systematic, and therefore

mundane; the literary *object* and the *creation* of literary objects was always so different in kind as to warrant special distinction in the field's institutional structure. When an English department that houses an MFA program as well as (at least) a more general BA and (probably) an MA in literature or (perhaps) rhetoric and composition or linguistics draws up its budget or decides how many graduate students in any of those subdisciplines to admit, it is forced to confront the fact that our sometimes quite oppositional disciplinary beliefs about our common subjects – language, discourse, literature – impact the choices we make about how to do business together within our institutional system.

Put in Bourdieu's terms, the field of English studies is structured in part by a division between literature and non-literature studies that is homologous not only to the tension between English and other academic disciplines but also to the tension between the allegedly autonomous literary field and those fields from which it has historically declared its autonomy, the fields of economics and power. The field of literature and literary studies has historically been seen and seen itself as struggling against more culturally and economically powerful fields and forces external to its own structure. This is the root of the field's estrangement from the sciences and trades, which were more highly-valued by the bourgeoisie. And yet, this proves to be a false autonomy as should be clear, given the presence of literary studies and creative writing in the institutions of higher education that trained new generations of the bourgeoisie for success in the economic marketplace. The (academic) literary field has struggled against the economically-motivated education system. English departments still privilege (the study of) literary uses of English above non-literary uses of English while simultaneously asserting their value in a system of higher education that is monetarily and intellectually invested in the refinement of a universal, useful body of knowledge.

The privilege of literary studies is, in some respects, ironic. The more culturally, economically, and symbolically powerful subdiscipline in English studies is literary studies, against which the non-literary subdisciplines vie for economic, cultural, and symbolic capital. Like the bohemians and the aesthetic and literary fields the bohemians reshaped, the non-literary subdisciplines see themselves as disempowered in a power structure that channels the inertia of power and other relationships in the field in literary studies' favor. When these subdisciplines seek out autonomy, as the bohemians and the French fields of aesthetics and literature did, the larger field of English studies fractures into a seemingly infinite regress of further-autonomizing subdisciplinary specializations, expanding the disciplinary and institutional space between scholars in different areas of the field. In such circumstances, traversing these divides requires large amounts of energy (consider how rare it is to see a conference at which linguists, rhetoric and compositionists, and literary scholars – let alone other hard and social sciences – are equally represented). In general, these sorts of intradisciplinary divisions and fractures have the potential to make English departments appear internally disorganized, disparate, devoid of a clear purpose and maybe even openly contentious, which may also discourage other disciplines and institutional bodies from extending overtures for partnership and cooperation to English studies right now, when we need them most.<sup>10</sup>

If literary studies recognizes and accepts this irony – if literature were no longer protected by an aura of history, myth, and other-worldliness, and if literary studies actually operated on premises of cultural studies by opening the field of *English* to a more general study of English language use in the service of understanding how and why human beings act in the world as we do – then the disciplines within English studies could work together more harmoniously to find a

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<sup>10</sup> By “partnership” I do not mean “servitude.” A fuller explanation of this sort of ideal relationship must be delayed until chapter four.

common and clearer purpose, object, and objective. Such intradisciplinarity could also set an example for an attitude of interdisciplinarity and institutional cooperation in the humanities and across other disciplines in higher education. To this end, I suggest a new transformation of the existing structure of power in English studies, a turn to a rhetoricized structure that can bridge the humanistic and scientific, the aesthetic and pragmatic, the institutional and disciplinary in ways that preserve their distinctions while promoting more productive collaborations both within and outside the university.

### ***1.3 Rhetoricity and the Rhetoricization of English Studies***

Given my calls for increased and improved intradisciplinarity, a call for a *rhetoricization* may strike some readers as blatantly and needlessly partisan. Why not call for a “linguicization” or a “literarization” of our field, or why use any seemingly partisan term at all? “Rhetoric,” admittedly, *is* a loaded word, and not just in an academic context. For most of its early life in the ancient Western world, rhetoric enjoyed the value and prestige that comes with its usefulness in matters of lawmaking, governance, litigation, and generating public influence. Aristotle described rhetoric as the art of knowing the available means of persuasion in any given situation. In this way, Aristotle differentiated rhetorical discourse from literary discourse. Wilbur S. Howell clarifies the nature of this differentiation: Aristotle formulates rhetoric as non-mimetic discourse used in persuasion and literature as mimetic discourse whose objective is to be pleasing and achieve some literary effect (e.g., catharsis). But as Howell argues, Aristotle did not intend to suggest that rhetoric and literature are mutually exclusive. Howell points out that for Aristotle the use of a “fable within an oration is of course a mimetic discourse within the context of nonmimetic verbal procedures, and it has to be considered, not as the independent

mimesis which it was designed to be, but as a mimesis controlled by nonmimetic influences” (60).

For hundreds of years after Aristotle, however, rhetoric remained quite separate from what we might now call “literary” discourse. In the 1<sup>st</sup> century BCE, Cicero issued treatises on the uses of rhetoric in law and the improvement of the individual and the state, and Quintilian taught that rhetoric is present in the effective use of speech by a moral and well-rounded man. One can see similarities between this rhetoric and the explicitly political strain of cultural studies of the 1960s and 1970s. But rhetoric did not always enjoy such high esteem in Western thought. One of its first devaluations came from St. Augustine, once a teacher of rhetoric, who distrusted language’s capacity to communicate truth and consequently considered rhetoric to be a corrupting influence on the transmission of meaning as God intended it. During the medieval ages, rhetoric was synonymous with the taxonomization of figures and devices. In the sixteenth century, Ramus continued in this trajectory, removing from rhetoric two of the five areas it governed over since the time of Aristotle – invention and arrangement – thus reducing rhetoric to matters of the style in which helpful details and evidence are delivered in a text. The primary purpose of rhetoric, this implied, was to catalogue the possibilities of linguistic ornamentation.

A brief revival of Classical rhetoric during the Renaissance returned some social, cultural, and intellectual value to rhetoric. S. Michael Halloran explains that “Renaissance figures such as Petrarch, Erasmus, and Francis Bacon virtually reincarnated the Classical ideal of a culture so publicly knowable that it could be embodied in a single man,” namely, the rhetor of Classical rhetorical fame (622). But in short order, the Enlightenment put “scientific reasoning” in the place of importance occupied by rhetoric in the Renaissance. During the Enlightenment, a new rationale for degrading rhetoric emerged. Whereas Augustine complained that rhetoric

distorted meaning as God intended for it to be communicated, Enlightenment theorists saw rhetoric as the unnecessary ornamentation or distortion of language through which reality would otherwise be directly and clearly transcribed. Philosopher and minister George Campbell, for example, wrote in the late eighteenth-century that rhetoric and science both rely on logic, but whereas science is argument by conviction of unimpeachable reality, rhetoric is argument by persuasion that need not and sometimes cannot sustain a clear connection to the realm of the empirical. The stylistic embellishments that are inevitable in rhetoric, Campbell forewarned, should be kept in check when discoursing on things empirical.

In the context of the modern university, rhetoric found itself caught in an unfortunate paradox. Rhetorical education was necessary for university curricula, both as a nod to the Classics and to train the newly-empowered bourgeoisie for the workforce. The decline of rhetoric in higher education, both disciplinarily and institutionally, came when the bourgeoisie recognized the appeal of the Romanticist notion of autonomy and turned to literature for spiritual and social homogenization during the Victorian age. Rhetoric's historical association with taxonomies, superficiality, constraining formalism, and pragmatism made it distasteful for literary scholars who subscribed to the aesthetics of Romanticism and who would come to positions of power within the field of English literary studies. As Bourdieu's history of the French literary field predicts, it was at the same time – the late nineteenth-century – that the study of English solidified into a distinct institutional body in the university that it began to express the intellectual traits of the aesthetic area of the literary field, namely, a concern with creative, imaginative, non-pragmatic texts and the esoteric, unteachable techniques that produce them. This is the disciplinary disposition that made it possible for the Boylston Chair of

Rhetoric to be occupied by a professor of literature who recused himself from any undergraduate composition teaching obligation.

One might wonder why or how rhetoric has managed to survive as long as it has within the institutional and disciplinary fold of a literature-centered English studies. Berlin reports that by 1920, the MLA had “decided that its main interest was in scholarship and in scholarship only” (*Rhetoric* 32). By renewing its own commitment to literature and literary research, the MLA saddled the rhetoricians in English departments with the stigma of cultural insignificance and the burden of educating those students who were deemed remedial by virtue of their performance on written entrance exams. In English departments, “rhetoric” and “composition” seemed to be synonymous despite the fact that rhetoric already also existed in other disciplines and departments such as Classics or philosophy. One reason that rhetoric survived in English departments in this diminished and disempowered capacity is that, compared to literary study and criticism, rhetoric seemed more appropriate to the task of training students in the quotidian, pragmatic communication skills that were necessary for success in the heteronomous world beyond the English department. But once rhetoric was yoked to composition pedagogy, rhetoric proved to be a helpful foil for literary studies as a demonstration of “the unique and privileged nature of poetic texts, it has been necessary to insist on a contrasting set of devalored texts” (Berlin, *Rhetoric* 28); specifically, Susan Miller observes, it meant that “literary authorship could be openly compared to the inadequacies of popular writing and especially to inadequate student authorship” (54-5). Paradoxically, the criteria by which students were evaluated in entrance exams and in their freshman writing courses – usually by students’ ability to adhere to grammar and style conventions – did not reflect the ostensibly more important criteria by which students



would be evaluated in the rest of their English coursework – insightfulness regarding literary criticism or research.

The discrepancy in entrance-qualifying criteria and the criteria by which student success was assessed in English undergraduate curricula should not be shocking considering the ongoing changes in disciplinary and professional interests. “With the narrowing of faculty interests that accompanied the adoption of the research ideal [in the modern university]” in the 1930s and 1940s, Crowley explains, “it became increasingly difficult to find full-time faculty who were willing to teach general or introductory courses” (118). It was, after all, that professors of English literature began to call for a disciplinary autonomy that reflected the autonomy of their subject, as maintained by New Criticism. Graff, quoting John Crowe Ransom, remarks that when “it was assumed that there were ‘aesthetic or characteristic values of literature’ that could be isolated from other values, it had to follow . . . that an autonomous literature department was naturally more desirable than one which would see literature as inseparable from history, philosophy, psychology, and social thought” (*Professing* 148). The English department, including rhetoric and composition, came to be this “literature department.” But the convenient contradiction for contemporary English departments is that despite the power and privilege of literature, the first-year writing course is the bread and butter of the “literature department.” Because first-year writing courses have been required in universities to help students who are trying to get ahead in the undeniably heteronomous “real” world<sup>11</sup> as well as to police access to

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<sup>11</sup> I think it is the difference between heteronomy and a false autonomy that our students (and even we) refer to when they speak of the non-academic “real world.” Admittedly, the university is not a representative microcosm or example of any specific non-academic social group, and so it will always be different from the “real world” that is its context. But to say that a field is not a metaphoric microcosm of its social context is not to say that the field itself isn’t heteronomous. The university *is* influenced by power differentials having to do with money, politics, history, religion, culture, etc. When students say that English or any other class won’t matter for them in the “real world,” perhaps they are doing nothing more than recognizing our self-imposed exclusivity.

economic and cultural capital, English departments have glutted themselves on the economic capital that a sizable captive audience of tuition-paying students guarantees.

During the 1940s through the 1960s, the most pragmatic areas of English, including non-literary composition and public speaking, demonstrated their power in the university by carving out space for distinct communications departments (Berlin, *Rhetoric* 92-119). But this sort of autonomization was not enough to distinguish composition and writing literacy from literature either disciplinarily or institutionally. “[B]y 1950,” Crowley notes, “American universities with graduate programs had begun to rely on graduate students to staff the required first-year composition course” (119). Tenure-track faculty in English departments had come to expect not only that the lower-level classes would be taught by lower-level instructors but that their graduate and undergraduate student population would be maintained based on the requirement that undergraduates take a course that new classes of graduate students would be allowed to teach. Universities then benefitted from cheap labor and, thanks to the inclusion of composition curricula within a literary department, the appearance of simultaneously improving both students’ writing literacy and their cultural literacy.

Given this inhospitable environment, it should come as no surprise that rhetoric and composition has sometimes sought its own disciplinary and institutional autonomy. The National Council of Teachers of English was established in 1911, but it wasn’t until 1947 and the establishment of the Conference on College Composition and Communication that scholars in the fields of composition and communication began to organize and professionalize. Despite the unfortunate shift in labor practices that Crowley summarizes, the end of the 1950s saw a renewed respect for rhetoric in the university. Berlin notes several of the causes of this renewal: the significance of the discipline’s roots in Aristotelian humanism, the expansion of writing and

communication studies across the disciplines, and interest in media and international communications (115-37). Since the 1960s, rhetoric and composition as a discipline – whether its scholars are found in English or Communication departments – have developed a nuanced and extensive body of knowledge about how and why people communicate in a variety of media but with a special focus on writing. For nearly three decades, the primary concern of scholarship in rhetoric and composition has been the social, cultural, and ideological implications of compositional and rhetorical choices; more recently, the field has led the way in studying and theorizing new and digital media communication and its socio-rhetorical implications.

Rhetoric and composition, then, is much more than the study and teaching of grammatical correctness or formulaic writing. But it has been difficult for scholars in this field to gain the respect due to this discipline because of the historical prominence and privilege of literary studies that rhetoric and composition must struggle as long as it is institutionally housed in English departments. Crowley clarifies this sentiment, remarking that

Many who choose composition instruction as their life's work also do so in part because they desire to serve the university community by helping students to write better. They find encouragement in the universal requirement in composition, which seems to imply that universities understand and support the importance of writing instruction. Once they are embarked on this career, however, they discover that teachers of the universally recognized course are underpaid, overworked, and treated with disdain. (119-20)

What's more, everyone involved in the system of higher education from education administration to students and taxpayers have been taught for over a century now that the objective of composition classes should be to teach students to perfect grammar and style rather than compositional and rhetorical flexibility. No one seems to want to hear what compositionists

have to say about their subject; they just want to know why Johnny can't write and whose fault that is.

This nineteenth-century model of composition also exists in our institutional structure to the extent that graduate students in literature and adjunct instructors who may or may not have any disciplinary interest in rhetoric composition are hired to teach courses for which rhetoric and composition scholars are better trained. It exists by virtue of the fact that English departments are still "literature departments," at least in terms of the ratio of literature to rhetoric and composition or linguistics or creative writing or technical writing scholars are concerned. It exists in curricular structures, as well, since composition classes are typically those through which students must pass before they can advance to upper-level literature classes, and since tenured and tenure-track faculty rarely teach introductory composition courses, even when their graduate classes don't fill and the burden goes to pools of adjunct employees with fewer or no benefits and no promise of long-term employment.

Because rhetoric and composition scholars often find English departments to be inhospitable, and because they also have inherited a tendency toward autonomy from the history and structure of the academic field in which they exist, some rhetoric and composition scholars have executed various moves toward autonomizing themselves from literary studies. In 1993, Gary Tate and Erika Lindemann debated in the pages of *College English* about whether literature has a place in the teaching of writing and rhetorical acuity. Partly in response to those debates, Crowley suggests another way to remove the discipline's yoke of indentured service to literature-heavy English departments: abolish the first-year composition requirement (19-29, 250-65). Many rhetoric and composition programs – including those at the University of Colorado-Boulder, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Washington State University, Syracuse

University, and the University of Texas-Austin, just to name a few – have separated from English into their own departments. With this sort of autonomy comes the opportunity to expand the discipline into subdisciplines, and depending on whether a rhetoric and composition scholar’s work lies more in the development of theory as opposed to the application of theory to teaching or to writing-in-context, individual scholars may declare themselves more rhetorically-oriented or more composition-oriented (Horner and Lu 293-308). Not surprisingly, as this move toward autonomy develops with time, research in rhetoric and composition scholarship within the past decade “addresses the possible fissuring of the relationship between rhetoric and composition explicitly” (Horner and Lu 295).

Of course, such moves toward autonomy recall the words of Ransom: “Strategy requires now, I should think, that criticism receive its own charter of rights and function independently” (qtd. in Graff, *Professing* 148). It seems that rhetoric and composition is doomed to repeat the disciplinary and institutional strategy of literary studies – of seeing opportunities to assert independence when cooperation may be more beneficial for clarifying and justifying the study of “English” in any form.

#### ***1.4 A Return to Rhetoric via Rhetoricity***

I diverge into the history of this contention between rhetoric, rhetoric and composition, and literary studies in English departments to highlight the disciplinary and institutional troubles wrought of the field’s bent toward a false autonomy that was appropriated from the aesthetics developed by Romanticists and sanctioned by the bourgeoisie via higher education curricula. But this history should also indicate that “rhetoric” belongs to a variety of historical moments, fields, disciplines, and institutions. A call for a return to “rhetoric” would be nearly nonsensical by itself; it would at least require a clarification about *which* “rhetoric.” And yet, that call for a

return to rhetoric in English studies long predates my present work, and it has come from all areas of the field of English studies. At the end of *Literary Theory*, Eagleton cites rhetoric as “probably the oldest form of ‘literary criticism’” (179) and argues that the best way to secure a spot for the study of literature in a system of higher education that is increasingly hostile to the humanities is to refashion literary departments into rhetorical literature departments that focus not on literature but on “education in the various theories and methods of cultural analysis” (186).

Similarly, the cognitive linguist Mark Turner asserts in his book *Reading Minds* that a modern cognitive rhetoric that isn’t concerned with taxonomies as much as with the study of human communicative activity can be helpful for explaining literary texts on three levels: of “local phrasing,” such as with isolated metaphors; of an entire literary work (or, one imagines, a set of works); and of our very concept of literature by demystifying literature and conceptualizing it not as a metaphysical or spiritual entity but as a “conversation” or some other sort of interpersonal communication. Eagleton echoes Turner’s appeal for a reconceptualization of the literary object: “The present crisis in the field of literary studies is at root a crisis in the definition of the subject itself” (186).

And from rhetoric and composition, Berlin argues for a redefinition of and return to rhetoric in the “postmodern” university. “The work of English studies” specifically, Berlin writes, “is to examine the discursive practices involved in generating both” literary and more seemingly pragmatic or practical discourse (*Rhetorics* 94). Following the interdisciplinary model of cultural studies, English classes should, Berlin asserts, “provide methods for revealing the semiotic codes enacted in the production and interpretation of texts, codes that cut across the aesthetic, the economic and the political, and the philosophical and scientific, enabling students

to engage critically in the variety of reading and writing practices required of them” in a heteronomous world (*Rhetorics* 94-5).

Against the false autonomy propagated by the fields of aesthetics and literature and against the mischaracterization of rhetoric, the call issued by John Bender and David E. Wellbery for “rhetoricity” resonates with the appeals issued by Eagleton, Turner, and Berlin for a more productive, rhetorical approach to the business of English departments. Rhetoricity can be thought of as “the fundamental category of every inquiry that seeks to describe the nature of discursive action and exchange” (26). The moment for the turn to rhetoricity is now, Bender and Wellbery claim, since

modernist cultural tendencies have created, then, the conditions for a renaissance of rhetoric, which today is asserting itself in all fields of intellectual endeavor and cultural production. But the new rhetoric is no longer that of the Classical tradition; it is attuned to the specific structures of modernist culture; its fundamental categories are markedly new. Rhetoric today is neither a unified doctrine nor a coherent set of discursive practices. Rather, it is a transdisciplinary field of practice and intellectual concern, a field that draws on conceptual resources of a radically heterogeneous nature and does not assume the stable shape of a system or method of education. The rhetoric that ... increasingly asserts itself, shares with its classical predecessor little more than a name.

(25)

This rhetorical inquiry rejects the Romanticist faith in the possibility of autonomous or decontextualized subjectivity and the connection to the decontextualized “literary” object that is typically associated with it. Rhetoricity also rejects the Enlightenment faith in the possibility of scientific objectivity. As a critical-analytic scholarly approach, rhetoricity also critiques the

liberal notion that people are capable of self-effacement in civic contexts, acknowledges the polyglottal nature of human communication, and recognizes the importance of print and non-print communication in the construction of reality and human activity (22-5).

Much of these dispositions toward knowledge, Bender and Wellbery claim, already exist in the disciplines of “modern knowledge itself” – the sciences, modern linguistics, psychoanalysis, mass communication, pragmatics, and philosophy<sup>12</sup> and literary criticism<sup>13</sup> (35-9). Even New Criticism “may be considered, for example, as a nostalgic attempt to fuse the organicist presumptions of Romantic aesthetics with the formal, figural analysis characteristic of classical rhetoric,” which was more amenable to the pragmatics of the early twentieth-century Anglo-American world (35). But rhetoricality differs from a “rhetorical” analysis that reduces rhetoric to a matter of figures and tropes. As a critical-analytic mode of rhetorical analysis, it is more accurately described as a *disposition* whose fundamental premise is that language and its various uses are significant for more than their own sake. From the position of rhetoricality, “the difference between the contained, localized irony of the new critic and the deep-structural irony of Derrida or de Man, irony is no longer a figure of speech of an educated habit of mind; it is the fundamental condition of language production” (36). Like irony, literature is no longer thought to be autonomous or mysterious:

Poetry is no longer a privileged kind of discourse but a specific case illustrating the general instance of language itself. In the structuralist – and now poststructuralist – frame of reference, every human endeavor, including fundamental social and cultural institutions, must be understood as discursively constituted and therefore subject to the foundational irony disclosed by analyses such as Derrida’s. (36)

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<sup>12</sup> See Bender and Wellbery 27-35.

<sup>13</sup> See Bender and Wellbery 35-9.



It follows that since “literature” is not fundamentally different from any other cultural phenomenon in this rhetoricality – due no more disciplinary power than any other humanistic discipline – it must be recognized as subordinate to and therefore heteronomously structured inside the study of language writ large.

A full rhetoricization of English studies would involve four steps. First, English studies must expand its *interdisciplinarity* by seeking scholarly partnership with the sciences, social sciences, and other humanities disciplines as well as among the subdisciplines within English studies. Interdisciplinarity does not require that the disciplines within and external to English studies abandon their specialized objects, areas, and methods of study<sup>14</sup>, but it does require that they see those specializations not as autonomous but as important only in a larger context of creating knowledge about human beings and their experiences of the world around them. A rhetoricization of the study of English requires that scholars of English see the structure of their studies as essentially *recursive*, “as a strategy of argument and inquiry” (37), which applies to a wider *variety of texts and occasions* than just what may be considered “literary” in the narrow sense of texts set apart from other texts or from their own contexts on the basis of aesthetic privilege. Finally, a rhetoricized English studies recognizes that humans *construct* and are themselves constructed using symbols that imperfectly and recursively reflect and influence “reality” as they experience it.

None of these four principles are new ideas in English studies. They are, however, more difficult to find in practice, particularly in terms of the institutional and disciplinary relationships between literary studies and linguistics and rhetoric and composition. It is true that not all

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<sup>14</sup> That is, interdisciplinarity doesn’t mean that all disciplines have equal right to direct another discipline’s priorities in teaching and research, though it does mean that all disciplines should have some interest in the knowledge created and refined in other disciplines. And it doesn’t mean that all disciplines are equally relevant for each other in every conceivable respect.

literary scholars see themselves as more important or valuable than their colleagues in other subdisciplines of English, and it is true that not every institution of higher education sees literature as more important or valuable than is warranted, but the following examples make clear that English studies has not yet lived up to its potential and that a rhetoricization of the field can liberate the field from the constraints of its own history.

## ***Part 2: Case Studies in Field Troubles***

### ***1.5 The Spellings Report and the MLA's Retort***

In September of 2006, the Commission on the Future of Higher Education released its report, formally titled “A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education” but more commonly known as the Spellings Report. The report infamously gave only passing attention to the humanities’ capacity to improve higher education in the areas of access, affordability, quality of instruction, and accountability to the sources of funding for higher education, particularly “students, tax payers, and donors” (xi). Improvements in these areas, the report stated, will prepare us for “tomorrow’s world [in which] a nation’s wealth will derive from its capacity to educate, attract, and retain citizens who are able to work smarter and learn faster – making educational achievement ever more important both for individuals and for society writ large” (xii).

Of the humanities scholars in American institutions of higher education who even read the Spellings Report, many no doubt bristled at the report’s characterization of the purpose of (improvements to) higher education in such pragmatic and capitalistic terms. But what was perhaps more disturbing, at least to scholars in the discipline of literary studies, was that the government had ignored them. This was a sort of *de facto* admission of the autonomy of literary studies, but one that appeared to be a Pyrrhic victory for literary studies. Even from the earliest

moments of the Renaissance, artists and their patrons (or perhaps *to* their patrons) plead the case for recognizing the importance of the arts for individuals and society: Sir Philip Sidney argued in his 1595 *Apology for Poetry* that the study of literature is valuable because literature combines aesthetic pleasure with history and ethics, which for Sidney proved that literature is the best source of all humanistic study and enlightenment. The MLA's rationale for the study of language and literature, as expressed in a 2008 white paper released with the Teagle Foundation, also argues that literary study is an invaluable way to equip students with historical, cross-cultural, information, and technology skills, including the ability "to apply moral reasoning to ethical problems" (3). The only difference between Sidney's justification and the justification expressed in the MLA's white paper is the pleasure one gets from reading literature, which is absent from the white paper.

But perhaps it is the MLA's 2006 reaction to the Spellings Report that indicates the struggle of English departments to clearly articulate our value in academia. "In principle," the MLA's official statement reads, "it is hard to disagree with the argument that colleges should be held publicly accountable for the quality of education they provide and that careful assessment of what our students learn is a reasonable means of demonstrating such accountability." But, as then-vice president of MLA Gerald Graff later remarked, many in both the MLA and English departments in general remarked that assessment of any sort would impinge on the rights of English departments to set their own standards and objectives (Jaschik). Neither the official reaction to the Spellings Report nor the later white paper articulate specific plans for assessing English studies degree programs, the quality of instruction, or program accountability to students and various other funding sources. In fact, the white paper never even uses the word "assessment," though it is one of the key terms of the Report's plan. Such attempts to dismiss

the requests and interests of the students, taxpayers, and policymakers regarding English studies are often presented by English studies scholars as genuine attempts to respond to or “enter into dialogue with” those parties. But clearly, no *détente* is possible when the conditions of talks – such as the need for assessment – aren’t recognized by both parties.

Furthermore, we cannot forget that the MLA does not speak for all of the subdisciplines within English studies. Literary studies, rhetoric and composition studies, linguistics, creative writing, technical writing, and various other disciplines that are sometimes housed in English departments vie for the same symbolic and cultural capital that can buy them the funding and prestige that guarantees their survival. This struggle often leads each respective subdiscipline to separate itself further and further from the others. This is part of the reason that the documents released by the MLA in response to the Spellings Report do not use the words “rhetoric,” “linguistics,” or “creative writing.” By omitting these subdisciplines from a plea for relevance, the MLA’s statements reflect English departments’ ongoing struggle for intradisciplinary and intradepartmental autonomy.

Furthermore, neither the Conference on College Communication and Composition, which represents rhetoric and composition studies, nor its parent organization, the National Council of Teachers of English, issued official reactions to the Spellings Report, though many of their official statements already addressed some of the report’s concerns. The Linguistic Society of America and the American Association for Applied Linguistics also either held their peace or ignored the Spellings report. Because the MLA enjoys considerably more symbolic capital than the professional organizations that represent other English studies disciplines, these are separate and unequal responses that perpetuate a struggle for an autonomy within and outside of English departments that is based on a privileging of literature that English studies scholars allegedly

rejected over forty years ago. And yet, since post-structuralism and cultural studies demystified the literary object and validated the expansion of what could be considered appropriate subjects of inquiry in the field of English, very little about the institutional, professional structure of the study of literature, rhetoric and composition, and English as a language has changed. Perhaps the most significant change is that English studies professes an awareness of the heteronomy of the cultural and aesthetic artifacts that it studies but fears admitting the extent of its own disciplinary and institutional heteronomy lest it cede any of the cultural, symbolic, or economic power that it now enjoys.

### ***1.6 Residual Autonomy in the Disciplinary Rejection of Cultural Studies***

Unfortunately, embracing the full extent of the disciplinary and institutional heteronomy of all the scholarship currently housed in English departments is precisely what English studies must do to retain those forms of capital. Or, rather, in order for the subdisciplines of English studies (and, indeed, all humanistic scholarship) to actually produce worthwhile knowledge about why and how human beings do what we do, they must recognize and work the full extent of their disciplinary and institutional heteronomy. The methods and premises of what Bender and Wellbery call “modernism” and that characterize the best parts of post-structuralism and cultural studies often required that academics reflexively examine their own positionality as creators and communicators of simultaneously universal (by virtue of its context and use in the university and the world external to the university) and specific (as in specialized) knowledge. Perhaps this is why the easy dismissal of cultural studies seems so unfortunate: what has been and could be our most productive epistemological framework in academia has of late fallen out of fashion even with some literary scholars.

One need not look long or hard to find some English studies scholar ringing cultural studies' death knell. In lieu of a larger study of publications in the past decade, I will here examine one such recent intonation of the departure of cultural studies from English departments that comes from the MLA's own scholarly journal about the work of English studies scholarship, *Profession*. William B. Warner and Clifford Siskin write in the 2008 issue that what English studies ought to be doing now is "Stopping Cultural Studies." Rather facetiously, they summarize cultural studies' purposes as "Theorize!," "Politicize Knowledge Work!," "Historicize!," and "Go Beyond the Literary!" (95-8). Among the criticisms levied by Warner and Siskin are the use of cultural studies in the new historicism (in the fashion of Frederic Jameson<sup>15</sup>) as a way to justify literary criticism as "political allegory" or as history itself (98). The authors also note that cultural studies has failed in its original mission, as dictated by its English progenitors, to instigate political activism and change since an explicitly political agenda would endanger the reliability of research conclusions. And cultural studies also fails in its political aspirations because it is often simply a fashionable way for English studies scholars, as historian Dena Goodman says, "to seize the political high ground and assert your [English studies scholars'] priority in defining ethical values" (qtd. in Warner and Siskin 101). The result, Warner and Siskin suggest, is a cultural studies that generates cultural theory for theory's sake rather than any actual "emancipatory politics" (101).

But ultimately, "culture is the problem with cultural studies" for Warner and Siskin (104). They note that the term "culture" is by turns quite general – denoting the organic process by which social action forms and changes society – and relatively more specific – denoting "in

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<sup>15</sup> Warner and Siskin claim that Jameson's use of history as "the ultimate ground and untranscendable limit of our understanding in general" made "textual interpretations in particular" (qtd. in Warner and Siskin 97) as well as literary criticism significant only insofar as it was simultaneously the practice of history.

[Raymond] Williams's words, 'the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity' (102). To Warner and Siskin, the first sense of "culture" is "indifferent" in that it "applies to all literatures and societies equally" (102). This sense orients English studies toward interdisciplinary contributions to a generalized body of knowledge. The second sense, however, encourages our conceptualization of cultures within cultures, and it pushes scholars toward increasingly specialized research in whatever increasingly specific culture they elect to study. "To do cultural studies," Warner and Siskin write, "you have to walk the line" between the general and the specialized (103).

While this should be the sort of balance that any discipline in a university or college system of knowledge creation and distribution cannot avoid and ought to embrace, it poses a problem for Warner and Siskin. In order "to do what cultural studies is supposed to do" for English studies scholars, which is "change literary studies" (104), English departments must, the authors write later, "stop cultural studies [and] reclaim what made our enterprise valuable in the first place" (106). English studies scholars are to be in "the business of mediating society's relation to the dominant technologies for reading and writing" (105). That is, we are to be specialists of the "relation" between "literature" (rather than "Literature," they explain) and "society," but we are to do this without the cultural theories or approaches that cultural studies makes available. And whereas in a cultural studies approach to knowledge about society as well as the institutionalized ways that such knowledge is created and used – an approach in which English departments would be one of many specialized subdisciplines or subinstitutions working *together* to form knowledge that is generally useful outside the narrowed "business" of any one discipline – a non-cultural-studies approach, for Warner and Siskin, implies disciplinary specialization *contra* generalization.

On many counts, this is a muddled (at best) rationale for English studies' departure from a cultural studies approach. It may be true that some scholarship at least appears to have no greater purpose than to generate theory for theory's sake, but jettisoning "theory" from literary studies specifically or English studies more generally is akin to throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Theory is present in academic work whether we want it or not. As Eagleton notes, "Hostility to theory usually means an opposition to other people's theories and an oblivion of one's own" (xii). Perhaps theory, like faith, is known by its actions, and action – specifically the "chang[ing of] literature" – is what Warner and Siskin ask for. But without some guiding principles by which one understands such phenomena as "literature," "change," and "theory," as well as *why* changes to "literature" are desirable objectives over changes to other social or cultural phenomena, how can Warner and Siskin claim to possess the understanding requisite for making any assertions *about* them?

Furthermore, it may also be true that an explicitly political agenda in cultural studies research complicates both the purposes and the results of academic research, but it is also true, as Warner and Siskin summarize, that cultural studies – in literary studies, no less – has provided many progressive, democratic changes to society, not just literature. These include the deconstruction of the canon and the inclusion of women and people of color and colonized nations into both the literary canon and the (academic) literary professions. And while we certainly can think of such revolutions as "social" rather than "cultural," to substitute one for the other, as the authors do in addressing what they find to be the calling of English studies, does not account for the differences between the two terms. Indeed, "culture" is a term made vague by common and imprecise use, but so is "society." The solution is not to play a shell game with the meaning implied by these terms, nor is it to construct universal, rigid definitions for them. The



solution is to be reasonable and clear when using these words, particularly when splitting hairs with them.

Most irksome to me as a rhetoric and composition scholar is the equation throughout the article of English studies and English departments with literary studies. The authors find the study of “culture” as insufficient for getting English studies to its goal of “mediating society’s relation to the dominant technologies for reading and writing”; they prefer that the study of “‘literature’ in its earlier comprehensive sense” be sufficient for itself in meeting these goals (105). But even the use of the word “literature,” no matter its “true scope” (105), recalls Goodman’s earlier rejoinder to scholars in English: whatever we study at any moment is rightfully in the purview of the “literary” according to one definition or another which we can invoke whenever necessary. This redefinition of literature is more akin to an act of (re)colonization than to an assessment of reality. “Literature” as the word is commonly used today is not synonymous with the “literature” denoted by the first uses of this word, especially not in the context of higher education and English departments, and to pretend that it can be so easily (re)invoked is to reestablish the domination of literary studies in English departments. Perhaps it goes without saying that, like the MLA’s “Comment” on the Spellings Report and white paper, Warner and Siskin’s article never mentions rhetoric and/or composition, and unlike the MLA’s documents, linguistics is also absent from this article. These omissions provide an object lesson regarding the importance of inter- and intradisciplinarity in literary studies.

### ***1.7 Rhetoricity, a New Resolution***

But intradisciplinarity, interdisciplinarity, and institutional cooperation are exactly what English studies needs to be relevant. Understanding the historical causes of a false autonomy and the structural proclivity in the fields of English literature and literary studies toward it is a

necessary first step. After that, we must develop ways to remedy the effects of that false autonomization of English studies. In the next chapter, I suggest a new conceptualization of literature as a metaphor as a way to rhetoricize English studies. This new understanding brings together the aesthetic, the rhetorical, and the scientific in English studies, and it requires that we do away with “the invidious valorization of the literary ... and the dismissal of the rhetorical” (Berlin, *Rhetorics* 94) and the institutional structures that perpetuate it, as difficult and painful as that will be.

## **Chapter 2 – The Metaphor of Literature (or Literature as a Metaphoric Process)**

*The distinction between proper and figurative meaning applied to individual words is an obsolete semantic notion that does not have to be tacked onto metaphysics to be taken to pieces. An improved semantics is sufficient to unseat it as a “determinative” conception of metaphor. As for its use in the analysis of poetry or of works of art, it [the understanding of metaphor as metaphysical] is less a matter of metaphorical expression itself than of a very particular style of interpretation, an allegorizing interpretation that does go hand in hand with the “metaphysical” distinction between the sensible and the non-sensible.*

Paul Ricoeur, *Rule of Metaphor*

*Heil dem Geist, der uns verbinden mag; denn wir leben wahrhaft in Figuren.  
Hail to the Spirit who joins us, for through him arise the symbols where we truly live.*

Ranier Maria Rilke, “Heil Dem Geist, Der Uns Verbinden Mag”

In my most recent sections of the Introduction to Poetry course I teach, I have assigned students to keep a reading journal in which they write reactions to and analyses of each poem we read for class. The analyses should be in terms of a particular rhetorical or aesthetic theory such as genre theory or implied authorship, but the reactions are the students’ space to consider other ideas without a focused analysis. Often, these reactions sound much like those of one of my students, Aubrey, who writes about one poem, “I really like this poem because I can relate to it. I personally haven’t experienced the death of a child, but I know what losing a loved one is like.

I was devastated when my grandfather died last year, and the speaker of the poem seems to be feeling what I was feeling.”

Aubrey provides me with an example of something about which I have heard many college-level teachers of literature either lament or laud, namely that the first and perhaps only reaction their students seem able to muster is whether the literary text before them is something they can relate to. For some teachers of literature, the relatability reaction indicates little more than laziness in their students’ study of the arts or their disaffection with more than “purely mercantile” objectives, to use Bourdieu’s phrase (*Rules* 114), for their education. For other teachers, the relatability reaction is a useful way to help students connect personally to the arts and, perhaps, to overcome students’ inadequate esteem for the arts. Other teachers may think of a relatability reaction as a natural part of the unique metaphysical experience of literature, at least for those who are somehow endowed with the capacity to appreciate literature. Teachers of literature whose ideological dispositions align with a cultural studies approach to the arts may be more likely to lament the relatability reaction on the basis that the objective of literary study should be to move beyond immediate personal reactions into a study of the text’s historical and socio-cultural significance. Teachers who, on the other hand, possess a Romanticist attitude toward literary study may find the relatability reaction to be inherently beneficial, an appropriate end in itself rather than a (possible) first step toward a more purposeful analysis.

It is also possible that such responses to students’ relatability reactions are based in dichotomized definitions of literature as either an object or a process. Those who define literature ontologically, separating the literary from the non-literary according to what they claim are the observable features common to all literature, have used those definitions of literature to

declare that literature exists regardless of the function(s) or use(s) of literature.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, those who define literature as a process claim that literature is not a thing or any combination of observable qualities such as the formal elements that are commonly associated with the “literary” like plot or elevated diction. Or, if those who define literature as a process would grant that literature is some ontologically-observable object, they would maintain that literature is nevertheless whatever the culture accepts as “literature” in any given moment and context. At first, these process definitions of literature may seem to be a sort of agnosticism, but ultimately they acknowledge that the definitions that distinguish literary objects from non-literary objects change from moment to moment and situation to situation, which ontological definitions leave only implied. This makes the more important question not “What is literature?” but “How and why is this particular thing literature?” Still, those who subscribe to these definitions cannot deny that there *are* objects that we call “literature,” and that the process by which even unstable standards for distinguishing “literary” texts from non-literary texts may have *created* or influenced discernible, observable textual patterns that are more common to literary texts than others.

In fact, my student Aubrey’s reaction indicates that literature is best defined as both a socio-cultural, individual, and *cognitive* process of identifying and comprehending literature as well as the objects that trigger that process of identification and comprehension. That is, Aubrey has learned that the appropriate reaction to what she perceives to be literature is to weigh whether and how she can relate to what the text suggests about the experience of life. This is necessarily a learned behavior since no one is born with an instinctual ability to identify literature, let alone a Westernized, Anglo-American version of “literature” that conditions us to

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<sup>16</sup> For more on the history of defining literature as an object or a process, see the brief genealogy of “literature” in the previous chapter, section 1.2.1.

expect that literature should have some personal effect on individual readers. More specifically, the process of identifying, interpreting, and identifying literature that Aubrey has learned is the cognitive, socio-cultural process of metaphor. That is, in our culture, we have learned to recognize and respond to literature as a metaphor because we have come to expect that “literature” consists of those texts that metaphorize our experiences with the experiences depicted in the text. These experiences amalgamate to a relatively stable concept: LIFE as it is and can be lived.

By “metaphor,” I do not mean a figure of speech or an ornamental literary device. Rather, “metaphor” here refers to the cognitive process of understanding one thing as another thing that it is not (Lakoff and Johnson 5). This new way of thinking about metaphor comes from the field of conceptual metaphor theory (CMT), which for three decades has been producing some of the most exciting and insightful research about the nature and uses of language and cognition that can be found across the disciplines of linguistics, psychology, cognitive science, and philosophy. My intention in this chapter is to prove that the process by which readers of literature in contemporary Western readers identify and interpret literature is a metaphoric process: we recognize that any given text is “literary” when we recognize that it is accepted and expected that we interpret the text as a representation of LIFE, though no text, literary or otherwise, could literally *be* our LIFE or our experiences of LIFE. The proof lies partly in two histories, the first of which is the Anglo-American concept of literature, which I outlined in the first chapter. The second is the history of the concept of metaphor, which I will summarize in the present chapter. Recounted side by side, these two histories highlight the similarities between metaphor and literature as cultural, intellectual, and conceptual phenomena. That is, if we recognize the metaphoric nature of literature by way of CMT’s definition of and

approach to metaphor, then it is possible to see that we process literature simultaneously as a cognitive, discursive, cultural, and individual-personal textual product *and* reading process.

In arguing for a rhetoricized definition of literature via CMT, I do not mean to suggest that the cognitive sciences are the only route through which English studies and other humanities may be saved. For a scholar in the humanities, any suggestion to this effect smacks of the humanities' subjugation to outside interests. Such fears of a loss of autonomy are misplaced because our autonomy from external interests was never possible to begin with, and what we ought to fear is the loss of opportunities to develop cross-disciplinary scholarship among the humanities and sciences. Conceptual metaphor theory, at its best, is already multi-disciplinary in that it uses the methods and premises of social and "hard" scientific research as well as humanistic research in developing a body of knowledge about a subject that is itself of cross-disciplinary interest – language. As such, CMT can be a source of insight across the sub-disciplines of English studies for describing not only *how* language works but *what* we create using language (historically, the purview of literary criticism and studies) and *why* or for what purposes we employ particular uses of language, including literature, to affect our world (the purview of rhetoric). But CMT can only present us with the opportunity to see the benefits of an interdisciplinary study of language; it cannot by itself answer every question about language-in-use. To do so, we need a wider breadth of interests in language than linguists, cognitive scientists, and metaphor theorists can provide, and we need a depth of specialized expertise from scholars in other disciplines, too, including literary studies and rhetoric and composition.

To see literature as a metaphor according to the premises of CMT necessitates that we adopt an understanding of literature that eschews a Romanticist faith in the possibility of textual or personal autonomy and that recognizes the influence that various heteronomous forces like

history, culture, power, and economics have on any definition and interpretation of literature. But it also requires that we reject any inclination inherited from the Enlightenment to make the study of literature into a purely scientific endeavor or, following an Enlightenment devaluation of literature, to discount the study of literature on the grounds that literature can make no scientifically-probative claims about reality. The reconceptualization of literature as a metaphorization of LIFE forefronts the rhetoricized nature of literature and reminds us of the necessity of rhetoricizing the intellectual and institutional habits of English studies. This is because such a reconceptualization expands the variety of texts we consider to be “literary,” reveals the importance of interdisciplinary approaches to literature, requires a recognition that our scholarly work and lived experiences reconstitute our literary experiences and vice versa, and acknowledges the constructed nature of meaning in literary language.

The benefits of this rhetoricization of literature extend beyond literary studies into the field of English studies and its relationship with other disciplines and with non-academics. A rhetoricization of English studies has no better starting point than such a reconceptualization of literature since literature is our field’s most well-known subject and literary studies is our most powerful and prestigious subdiscipline. By recognizing the cognitive, cultural, and personal-individual nature of literature, we acknowledge the necessity of the interdisciplinary study of literature. We admit that literary study autonomized from its context in English studies, the study of language and languages, humanistic study, and the university has no purpose other than its own existence. But if the purpose of the study of literature is to observe how literature, alongside other uses of language, influences and is used to influence its readers’ notions of what life is, was, or can and should be, then the study of literature takes on a valid, justifiable significance beyond itself. When literary studies and English studies operate with full

cognizance of the heteronomous nature of their field and object of study, other disciplines and non-academics will also see their value and necessity. In the fourth chapter, I will look at what a restructuring of the field of English studies that follows from a rhetoricized reconceptualization of literature as a metaphorization of LIFE would entail. But to arrive at that point, we must first stop to examine what it would mean to redefine literature in this way.

### ***2.1 A Brief History of Metaphor Theory***

It would not be an exaggeration to think of CMT as the Copernican shift in metaphor theory. CMT stands in a sort of complementary opposition to much of the assumed knowledge in Western thought about metaphor that has developed across nearly three millennia. To understand the significance of CMT, we must understand its point of departure: Aristotle's theory of metaphor and its attendant semantics. In explaining the implications of Aristotelian metaphor theory for CMT, I draw upon the account of Aristotelian metaphor theory that Paul Ricoeur articulated in *Rule of Metaphor* (1975, trans. 1977) as well as Ricoeur's analysis of its unrealized potential and problematic semantics. It wasn't until the twentieth century that metaphor theory began to shift away from the Aristotelian characterization of metaphor as an inconsequential, deviational use of language to a mode of thinking and acting. Conceptual metaphor theory, and Ricoeur's own tension theory of metaphor, are part of this latest development in theories about metaphor. Their claims, modes of analysis, and implications for reconsidering the nature of language and thought are so complex and far-reaching as to be capable of constructing a foundation for a rhetoricalized English studies.

#### **2.1.1 Aristotle's Theory of Metaphor and Its Problematic Semantics**

Arguably, there would be no metaphor theory were it not for Aristotle's treatment of it in his various works, most notably the *Rhetoric* and the *Poetics*. As Ricoeur finds, Aristotle



established metaphor as an important subject in Western philosophy, rhetoric, and aesthetics. Across these disciplines, Aristotle's theory of metaphor is consistent but flawed, partly because it operates on and reinforces a problematic semantics. The definition of metaphor Aristotle gives in the *Poetics* and refers to in the *Rhetoric* is that "*metaphor* is the application of a noun which properly applies to something else. The transfer may be from genus to species, from species to genus, from species to species, or by analogy" (*Poetics* 57b). This superficial transfer of meaning, or *epiphenomenon*, consists of substituting a word that is inappropriate to the meaning of the word that it replaces. One cannot teach the appropriate, aesthetically-effective use of metaphor; it "is a sign of natural talent [...] for the successful use of metaphor is a matter of perceiving similarities" (59a) where similarities would not otherwise be perceived. The perception of such similarities helps the author to produce the effects of "reasoning," which "include proof and refutation, the production of emotions (e.g., pity, fear, anger, etc.), and also establishing importance or unimportance" (56a-b).

Most importantly, metaphor is pertinent to a discussion of literary<sup>17</sup> discourse because it both facilitates and redoubles the overarching purpose of poetic discourse, *mimesis*. Howell explains that "Aristotle's concept of mimesis [is] a term for the process by which a poet projects some aspect of actual human living into an imagined action and then proceeds so to plot [*muthos*] what he has imagined as to make it identify itself with the reality behind it and to reveal by identification the deeper human significances of that reality" (31). Since "Imitation comes naturally to human beings," Aristotle writes, "so does the universal pleasure in imitations. ... The reason for this is that understanding is extremely pleasant, not just for philosophers but for

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<sup>17</sup> Since Aristotle's *Poetics* is concerned with what we would refer to as "literature" and literary techniques and issues rather poetry more strictly speaking, I will often use "literary" where an exact quotation of Aristotle would require "poetic."

others too in the same way, despite their limited capacity for it” (*Poetics* 48b). Here, Aristotle links the function of literary discourse – to imitate reality in a way that both pleases and reveals something not yet understood about that reality – with the function of philosophy – to provide explanations for (though not necessarily to reveal) reality.

Metaphor would seem to be the figure *par excellence* of literary discourse<sup>18</sup> and a bridge between the literary and the philosophical. As a stylistic device, it helps to achieve the mimetic effect of expressing a pleasing, insightful similarity and helps to guide an audience toward certain emotions and interpretations. Furthermore, for Aristotle, both *mimesis* and metaphor are “deviations from normal *lexis*” – the proper or fitting choice of words to represent what is meant or denoted – that present some new assertion about reality via a contradiction of that reality (Ricoeur 43). Insofar as literary discourse and metaphor have the capacity to make *speculative* assertions about reality,<sup>19</sup> they overlap with the function of philosophy rather than history, in which *factual* assertions about reality are made.

The characterization of metaphor contained in Aristotle’s *Poetics* is more or less consistent with that of his *Rhetoric*, wherein his most detailed discussion of metaphor can be found. In the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle maintains his four-fold typology of metaphor as a statement of similarity between a superordinate category in terms of a subordinate category, a subordinate category in terms of a superordinate category, one category in terms of an unrelated category on the same level of the categorical hierarchy, or a comparison via analogy (1411a7). Metaphor is also described in the *Rhetoric* as the epiphenomenological transfer of one word’s meaning to

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<sup>18</sup> See Ricoeur 42-3.

<sup>19</sup> Aristotle writes, for example, that literary discourse is concerned with the imitation of universal patterns of “what such or such a kind of man will probably or necessarily say or do” (*Poetics* 1451b9).

another word to which that meaning is improper.<sup>20</sup> Rhetors, Aristotle cautions, ought to consider the aesthetics of the metaphors they choose, being careful to select metaphors that are “beautiful either in sound or in meaning or in visualization or in some other sense perception” (1405b13). What makes rhetorical metaphor beautiful is whether the substituted word accurately reflects the meaning of the word that is substituted since “one word *is* more proper than another and *more like the object signified* and more adapted to making the thing ‘appear before the eyes’” (1405b13, emphasis added). Audiences may be persuaded, per the function of rhetorical discourse, by the beauty or surprise of a particularly apt metaphor (1412a6). But rhetorical metaphors need not necessarily be pleasing – that is, revealing of some understanding – in and of themselves or contribute to the pleasing quality of the text in which they are contained, as with literary metaphors. Above all else, rhetorical metaphors must aid in persuasion.

The *Rhetoric*, according to Ricoeur, “constitutes the most brilliant [attempt] to institutionalize rhetoric from the point of view of philosophy” by “developing this link between the rhetorical concept of persuasion and the logical concept of the probable” (11-12). The link occurs via metaphor because metaphor enables the transfer of meaning between “things that are related but not obviously so, as in philosophy, [since] it is characteristic of a well-directed mind to observe the likeness even in things very different” (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1412a5). Likenesses presented in rhetorical metaphors should, like literary metaphors, provide audiences with a perception of the world that “brings about learning [and]... creates understanding and knowledge” (*Rhetoric* 1410b2). But insofar as the purpose of rhetoric is persuasion rather than proof, metaphor can *only* re-present or re-describe aspects of reality, while it is the business of philosophy to formulate proofs about the nature or essence of that reality.

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<sup>20</sup> See *Rhetoric*, 1450b12 and 1412a 5.

The fact that simile is not mentioned in the *Poetics* is also revealing of the differences between the functions of literary/mimetic and rhetorical/non-mimetic discourse. It has been erroneously reported that Aristotle subordinated metaphor to a subtype of simile, but in fact “in six spots [in the *Rhetoric*], Aristotle subordinates simile to metaphor. The fact that later rhetorical tradition,” including the work of post-Aristotelian rhetoricians such as Cicero and Quintilian, “does not follow Aristotle here makes this point all the more remarkable” (Ricoeur 24-5). For example, Aristotle aligns simile with literary/mimetic discourse, noting that “simile is useful ... in speech, but only on a few occasions; for it is poetic. [Similes] should be brought in like metaphors; for they *are* metaphors” (*Rhetoric* 1406b2, original emphasis). On the other hand, metaphor is more appropriate to rhetorical/non-mimetic discourse since simile “is less pleasing because [it is] longer and because it does not say that this *is* that, nor does the listener’s mind seek to understand this” (1410b3, original emphasis). When a rhetor’s metaphors are not insightful, they not only may fail to keep an audience’s attention; they may not be effective in persuading or informing the audience. When a listener realizes “that he learned something different from what he believed ... his mind seems to say, ‘How true, and I was wrong’” (1412a6). Metaphor’s effectiveness in persuasion is dependent on a rhetor’s awareness of his audience’s shared knowledge and his ability to work within their common logic to construct metaphors that will help the audience to see the world in a particular way with minimal effort expended, both on behalf of the rhetor and the audience.

Certainly, metaphor as Aristotle defines it in the *Poetics* and the *Rhetoric* is of more than passing significance to the disciplines of literature and rhetoric. But the significance that Aristotle grants to metaphor is a limited and sometimes contradictory significance that shapes and is shaped by a similarly limited and confused semantics. First, Aristotle’s characterization of

metaphor as *epiphenomenon* suggests that metaphor can have no impact on the meaning of words or on how those words affect language users. Metaphor is a *surface*-level (*epi*-) transfer of the meaning of words, not an assertion about or a proof of the quality of reality. And yet, when Aristotle asserts that a word can be inappropriately used because the word *qua* word is not sufficiently “like the object [it] signifie[s]” (*Rhetoric* 1405b13), he commits himself to the notion that language instantiates reality in a literal, positivistic sense.<sup>21</sup> This would make metaphor of the utmost importance: What follows from it is that a new word meaning would necessitate the creation of a new object that is signified. But Aristotle never gives metaphor that power since metaphor can only present new understandings of the world, not create new meaning or a new reality. Ultimately, metaphor is for Aristotle the superficial, improper use of a word to “fill a semantic void,” (Ricoeur 17) not a void in the natural or abstract-conceptual world. And yet, metaphor for Aristotle does seem capable of providing audiences with new insights about the world as they’ve experienced it. Where does one draw the line between thinking about the world in a new way and knowing about the world in a new way? The power of metaphor to create knowledge and influence our experience of reality is at least confused in this logic, as is the semantics from which this theory of metaphor derives.

Second, if metaphor does not possess the power to affect word meaning or reality, it can be nothing more significant than a superficial ornamentation of discourse, a stylistic deviation

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<sup>21</sup> Interestingly, this is the same accusation that Max Black levies against Benjamin Whorf. In his critique of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, Black writes that Whorf is committed to the claim that human beings perceive reality by breaking it up into conceptual categories. Moreover, observes Black, Whorf asserts that it is a combination of perceiving and compartmentalizing reality is what *creates* reality or at least creates the basis for perceiving reality. When Aristotle bases his argument that words that are proper to the reality they redescribe since some words do not, in fact, properly fit the reality they describe, he “subscribes, consciously or not, to the ancient metaphysical lament that to describe is *necessarily* to falsify,” as Black writes of Whorf (248). Whorf, Black finds, “like many others, has succumbed to the muddled notion that the function of speech is to *reinstate* reality. Well, the best recipe for apple pie can’t be eaten – but it would be odd to regard that as an inadequacy” (248). Aristotle, too, seems to have confused propriety and impropriety in semantics with scientific, positivistic verifiability.

from what Ricoeur calls “rhetoric degree zero.”<sup>22</sup> The result of Aristotle’s “confining metaphor among *word-focused figures of speech* [was] an extreme refinement in taxonomy” at the expense of a more substantive, purposeful study of metaphor as it “operates at all the strategic levels of language – words, sentences, discourse, texts, styles” (Ricoeur 17). By reducing metaphor to a matter of style on the level of the “noun or word and not to discourse,” Ricoeur explains, “Aristotle establishes the orientation of the history of metaphor vis-à-vis poetics and rhetoric for several centuries” (16). And certainly, for centuries after Aristotle, the study of metaphor and, more generally, the study of language-in-use consisted primarily of identifying possible tropes, figures, and other deviational or ornamental patterns for the sake of identifying them, not for the sake of understanding their influence on our perceptions of reality.<sup>23</sup> The study of metaphor only reinforced a semantics that assumes that the only import of language is stylistic and superficial.

We can see the consequences of this problematic theory of metaphor and semantics in the division of rhetorical and literary studies. According to the logic of Aristotle’s semantics, if words can have one and only one proper meaning, then any improper meaning necessarily obfuscates reality. Ramus, for example, reacts to this logic by reducing rhetoric to matters of stylistic embellishments that has no significant bearing on reality. Enlightenment thinkers also maintained that rhetoric was nothing more than stylistic embellishment that distorts rhetoric degree zero language, and this backlash against connecting language to reality in the way that Aristotle suggests is also at the heart of the common contemporary definition of rhetoric as

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<sup>22</sup> Ricoeur writes: “Everyone agrees in saying that figurative language exists only if one can contrast it with another language that is not figurative” (138). This would be an arhetorical language in which context has no bearing on the meaning of the discourse and in which all intended meanings can be certainly and wholly communicated. If metaphor is defined as deviation from language that certainly and wholly communicates its meaning, “What, then, is this other language, unmarked from the rhetorical point of view?” Ricoeur asks. “One must ... admit that it cannot be found” (138).

<sup>23</sup> On the matter of the decline of rhetoric from the Greeks to nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Ricoeur 44-64; Lakoff and Turner 1-15; and Turner 25-9.

evasion or misdirection. Probably, Aristotle did not intend for his semantics to produce any unwarranted fear that changes in language use or the misuse of language would result in changes to positive reality, as if to start calling dogs “cat” would turn them into such. But what must be acknowledged is that language can affect reality insofar as it influences how language users think and act in the world. Language does not operate on the same principles as magic; it cannot alter empirical reality or determine our thoughts and actions, though it does certainly *influence* our perceptions, thoughts, and actions.

One can also see the consequences of Aristotle’s problematic semantics in the realm of aesthetics and literature in the premises and effects of the pure aesthetic. Since language does not alter empirical reality – since calling a dog a cat does not turn it from canine to feline – there can be no proof that language has any effect on the real, extra-textual world. Metaphor and other figures of speech, as purely stylistic devices that are defined by their deviation from purely descriptive language, are taken to be matters of literary or artistic discourse. Their autonomous, decontextualized nature makes them perfectly suited for an autonomous, decontextualized discourse, and it also makes them perfectly unsuitable for any discourse that is supposed to describe or represent the real world. Eventually, the impulse in aesthetic and literary analysis and criticism to taxonomize figures and tropes gave way to a disavowal on behalf of the members of the field of literature of taxonomies and other forms of language-focused analysis. Such analysis would have contradicted the assumption that there can be an autonomous literary language, since it would suggest that the very medium of the literary communication – language – could be understood according to schemas and categories that not only come from an extra-textual context but also acknowledge the fact that the text does have connections to an extra-textual context. Thus, Aristotle’s metaphor theory and semantics not only condemned metaphor

to insignificance for centuries, it also contributed to the millennia-long decline of rhetoric and the autonomization of literature and literary studies.

Of course, Aristotle's understanding of metaphor is not wholly flawed, and some of it echoes in CMT. Arguably, his most productive discussions of metaphor are not in either the *Poetics* or the *Rhetoric* but in the *Eudemian Ethics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*. In the *Poetics* and the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle's attention to metaphor focused mainly on an ontology of metaphor, taking as its central question, "What is metaphor?" But his philosophic treatments of metaphor go beyond classifying types of metaphor to examining the ways that metaphor happens, even outside language and the significance of the metaphoric event. Ricoeur notes this important contrast in Aristotle's multi-disciplinary metaphor theory: In the *Eudemian Ethics* and the *Nicomachean Ethics*, the terms *metaphora* and *metapherein* are used to discuss "the transpositional movement as such, in processes more than in classes. We can formulate this interest as follows: what does it mean to transpose the meaning of words?" (17). These philosophical approaches to metaphor posit that metaphor is any transposition, including "transfers of a quality of one part of the soul to the entire soul" (325). Following to this definition of metaphor, the central question becomes more phenomenological than ontological, concerned with *how* and *why* metaphor and meaning in language happen than *what* metaphor is.

Unfortunately, this philosophic treatment of metaphor did not endure in rhetorical and literary studies. The Aristotelian metaphor theory and its attendant problematic semantics that influenced the fields of rhetoric and literature derived from his *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*, naturally enough. While we have Aristotle to thank in part for the breadth and depth of modern metaphor theory, we can still lament the stunted study, characterizations, and theories of metaphor that developed from Aristotle's rhetorical and poetic branches of metaphor theory. Rather than dwell



on the metaphor theories developed between the time of Aristotle and the present, I will now turn to an account of modern metaphor theories that express (and are arguably rooted in) Aristotle's philosophic treatment of metaphor. This important shift away from reductive and confused Aristotelian metaphor theory toward a more substantive and purposeful account of metaphor begins in the twentieth century with philosopher and, later, literary critic I.A. Richards and continues through contemporary CMT.

### **2.1.2 Interanimation and Interaction Theories of Metaphor**

Indeed, the title of the book in which Richards explicates his reconceptualization of metaphor, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (1936), should suggest its similarity to Aristotle's philosophical treatments of metaphor in its focus on the metaphoric *process* rather than on a catalogue of metaphoric *forms*. But Richards' theory of metaphor and the semantics on which it is predicated contrasts in important ways with Aristotle's. First, Richards takes as a given that there is no rhetoric degree zero in language. Words do not correspond in any real or positivistic sense with reality; they mean only what we conventionally use them to mean. "The belief that words possess a meaning that would be proper to them," Richards warns, "is a leftover from sorcery, the residue of 'the magical theory of names'" (71). Consequently, language can only approximate the meaning for which it is a medium and rhetoric must be "a study of misunderstanding and its remedies" (3). Here, Richards recasts rhetoric as the study of *how* and *why* (imperfect) meaning is made in language, moving it away from a taxonomy of *what* forms language takes since such a catalogue wouldn't be capable of describing the necessarily context-dependent slippages in meaning that occur in all language use.

Richards' treatment of metaphor is similarly focused on the purpose and function of metaphor. He rejected theories that "made metaphor seem to be a verbal matter, a shifting and

displacement of words,” claiming instead that “fundamentally it is a borrowing between and intercourse of *thoughts*, a transaction between contexts. *Thought* is metaphoric, and proceeds by comparison, and the metaphors of language derive therefrom” (93). Richards defines as metaphor the process of understanding a “tenor” concept via a “vehicle” concept. In the process of thinking metaphorically, the human mind searches for the common “ground” on which the tenor and vehicle are compared. The capacity to understand and create metaphor does not, by this understanding, indicate any sort of genius. Rather, it is an everyday process since the human “mind is a connecting organ [that] works only by connecting and it can connect any two things in an indefinitely large number of different ways” (82). Metaphors are necessary because, through them, we “interanimate” or mutually inform structure ideas in ordinary and extraordinary ways that enable us to have “control of the world that we make for ourselves to live in” (135).<sup>24</sup>

The Aristotelian notion that metaphor “brings about learning . . . and understanding” (*Rhetoric* 1410b2) is evident here. However, Richards’ interanimation theory considers metaphor to be more than a figure by which insightful comparisons are made, which was the fate metaphor suffered in Aristotelian metaphor theory. As Ricoeur explains, Richards succeeds in reorienting metaphor theory toward a new query: “if metaphor consists in talking about one thing in terms of another, does it not consist also in perceiving, thinking, or sensing one thing in terms of another?” (83). Richards sees this as a fundamentally rhetorical inquiry, one that Ricoeur aligns with a sort of “improved semantics” on which new theories metaphor, of meaning in language, and of rhetoric can be formulated. An interanimation theory of metaphor assumes that meaning isn’t in words but in discourse, since the meaning of words is contingent on our using

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<sup>24</sup> As an example, Richards points to psychoanalysis, which he takes to be a structured metaphoric structure, to borrow from Bourdieu’s vocabulary, of concepts about “modes of regarding, of loving, of acting” that reflect and interanimate our thoughts and experiences of those things and the other lived human experiences that psychoanalysis describes. See *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* 135-6.

them according to socially-constructed conventions that are both linguistic and extra-linguistic. Rather, it assumes that words will animate and be animated by the discourse in which they are used and our perceptions, thoughts, and experiences of reality. This makes metaphor something much more than stylistic embellishments of language that would otherwise be a direct representation of that to which it refers. Metaphor in interanimation theory is not just in language but in thought and action, which means no taxonomy of linguistic figures can fully account for what metaphor is. Consequently, Richards' interanimation theory of metaphor is part of his call for a new rhetoric that is fundamentally concerned with analyzing the ways that language – literary and non-literary – is used effectively and ineffectively to create and exchange meaning.

Ricoeur also finds interaction theories of metaphor that emerged thirty years after Richards' interanimation theory to be consonant with an improved semantics. The first theorist to delineate an interaction theory was Max Black, in *Models and Metaphors* (1962). Black proposes a more linguistic rather than philosophic approach to metaphor than Richards', one that accounts for *how* meaning is made when two thoughts interanimate one another (Black 1-24). Black acknowledges Richards' assertion that thoughts "interact" or "act together" to create new meaning when they interanimate one another but argues that the mechanisms of that interaction remain unclear in Richards' explication of interanimation. Black proposes that the *what* of metaphor be taken as a given: metaphoric statements have at least one metaphoric word – a focus, or what interanimation theory would call a tenor – and at least one literal word – the frame, which is akin to a vehicle (28-9). The mechanism that allows us to comprehend metaphors, according to Black, is an interaction between conceptual "systems of associated commonplaces," which are "things ... held to be true" by some socio-cultural group (40).

For example, when the average American hears the metaphor *Love is a houseplant*, the various associated beliefs<sup>25</sup> that she holds about houseplants interact with her systems of associated commonplaces related to love. If the audience of the metaphor is a botanist or an interior designer, then his system of commonplaces associated with the word “houseplant” will be substantially different from an audience whose experiences with houseplants may be limited to owning and caring for houseplants or having witnessed or heard of someone else’s owning and caring for them. Similarly, each individual person’s experience with love will have some bearing on their beliefs about love. In other words, Black would assert, commonplaces are always only relatively common.<sup>26</sup> The trigger that tells the listener not to take literally the claim that love is a houseplant is the contradiction of the common knowledge about love, which is not usually or literally, using Black’s terminology,<sup>27</sup> something that requires adequate shade or sunlight and water. The metaphor effectively “suppresses some details, emphasizes others – in short, *organizes* our view” of the focus, which in this example would be love, in such a way that the “principle subject is ‘seen through’ the metaphorical expression – or, if we prefer, that the principal subject is ‘projected upon’ the field of the subsidiary subject” of the houseplant (41, original emphasis). The interaction of the two systems can cause the frame to be structured by

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<sup>25</sup> Black writes that “literal uses of the [focus] word normally commit the speaker to acceptance of a set of standard *beliefs* about” the referent of the focus word (40, emphasis added). The use of this term is, perhaps, problematic, since “belief” carries with it its own set of associated commonplaces that evoke the same metaphysical explanations of meaning in language to which Black objects in his introductory apology for a semantics that eschews the philosophical. How, after all, are beliefs created? What is the mechanism of belief? Belief and knowledge cannot be synonymous, so to what extent does this semantics pertain to the creation of knowledge about a real world in which those tangible and intangible phenomena can be experienced rather than “belief” that that which is unseen or unexperienced can be true or valid? *Contra* this semantics, conceptual metaphor theory situates semantics in the realm of knowledge that does not make meaning a matter of disprovable truth but of simultaneously individual, socio-cultural, and experiential knowledge.

<sup>26</sup> See Black 44.

<sup>27</sup> Black often uses “literal” to mean “empirically real” or “intended referent” such as with a metaphoric tenor or focus. Raymond Gibbs lists five types of “literal” that are often used in comparisons of literal and figurative meaning. Black seems to take “literal” to mean what Gibbs calls nonmetaphorical literality and context-free literality; other types of literality include conventional literality, subject-matter literality, and truth conditional literality (75).

the focus, too, in some cases. If in our culture we experience the metaphor *Love is a houseplant* often enough, we may begin to think automatically of houseplants when we encounter the concept of love or vice versa, even outside the context of the metaphor.

In keeping with an improved semantics, Black finds that the locus of meaning is in context and use, not in the words themselves. This is because it is not always clear that any given statement is metaphorical or literal, or which term in a metaphoric statement is the focus and which is the frame. The statement *Marsha was uplifted* could be a literal statement of events if Marsha was lifted by her husband from a lower chair to a higher one, but it is metaphoric if it is used to report that her mood improved. Context and situation will also determine whether we read allegories, proverbs, and riddles literally or as “attempt[s] to construct an entire sentence [or text] of words that are used metaphorically” (27). Black’s use of the terms focus and frame emphasize the importance of considering extra-textual context or the text’s interaction with the constellation of fields that comprise the context of its creation and use, as Bourdieu might describe it, for determining whether the whole text should be read as a metaphor. Such a consideration is necessary for recognizing that the assertions about reality implied in an allegorical or proverbial text (e.g., that animals can speak or that there ever was a Faerie Queene) create new conceptual interactions among systems of thought, ones that are not to be taken as proofs about the extra-textual world but that ask the reader to reconsider what she takes to be “literal” or conventional.

One can see some of the earliest moves to situate metaphor theory in the study of language and linguistics as opposed to philosophy, rhetoric, or aesthetics in Black’s attempt to avoid philosophical explanations of *how* metaphoric meaning happens. But while his interaction theory of metaphor helpfully defines metaphor as a process that relies on conceptual, socio-

cultural, and individual experiences, it does not explain the mechanism by which thoughts in the brain literally interact. The mind does not literally “frame” or “focus” ideas; like “tenor” and “vehicle,” these terms only offer another metaphor to describe the phenomenon of comprehending metaphor. Nevertheless, it helpfully supplements the theory of interanimation by making metaphor more than a process of comparison. The functions of metaphor that Black lists include *comparisons* of systems of concepts, *substitutions* of one system of concepts for another (as with Aristotelian theories of metaphor), and *interactions* of systems of concepts. In all these metaphoric relationships, conceptual systems shape and change one another. When metaphors change our concepts, they also influence how we react to those concepts as we experience them in our lives. Metaphors, defined this way, may not change reality in an objective, positivistic sense but they can and do affect our perceptions of and reactions to it. Here, the study of language becomes the study of interactions among people, their ways of thinking and knowing, and the reality that they experience.

Later interaction theories maintained Black’s fundamental assertions about metaphor, but over the next twenty years, during which time interaction theory was the eminent theory of metaphor, these variations on Black’s theory moved the study of metaphor more squarely into the fields of language studies and linguistics. These interaction theories tended to see metaphor, problematically, as the creation of a *unity* of language, meaning, or thought. Among the most notable contributions of interaction theorists is the claim made by philosopher Marcus Hester, in *The Meaning of Poetic Metaphor* (1967), that the nature of metaphoric interaction is one of a unification of ideas that results in a seeing the tenor as the vehicle (119-92). Hester’s theory, however, is explicitly specific to *poetic* metaphor, which suggests a historically literary or rhetorical preoccupation with determining *what* types of metaphors exist. In 1968, Philip

Wheelwright's *The Burning Fountain of Symbolism* brought interaction theory to psychoanalysis. Like Hester, Wheelwright claimed that metaphor "fuses heterogeneous elements into some kind of unity" (45). Wheelwright uses metaphor to explain that expressive (i.e., aesthetic statements or statements used to explain emotions) carry an "assertorial weight" or a power of assertion pertaining to figures of speech (e.g., what puns reveal about the psyche), archetypes, and religion/mythology.<sup>28</sup> Ten years later, Robert Rogers' *Metaphor: A Psychoanalytic View* (1978) made poetic metaphor a matter of primary and secondary mentation: in primary mentation, we comprehend the literal meanings of the poetic statements, and a secondary mentation process reveals the ambiguous or concealed meanings of the statements. The result of metaphor for Rogers is a gestalt (121) or an "organic unity" of mentation processes (45).

Another notable contribution to interaction theory was the "perspectival" theory of metaphor presented by philosopher Eva Kittay in *Metaphor: Its Cognitive Force and Linguistic Structure* (1987). This theory marks the final stages of interaction theory's transition to linguistics, where metaphor theory mainly resides today. Kittay offers perspectival theory as a complementary revision to interaction theory. According to Kittay, metaphor "is the linguistic means by which we bring together and fuse into a unity diverse thoughts and thereby re-form our perceptions of the world" (6). Metaphoric meaning occurs when a second-order interpretation is necessary to make sense of a statement that does not make sense, given the context, with a first-order interpretation. The meaning of the metaphor, Kittay writes, "depends on systematic semantic features of language" (46) that are recalled by the topic (rather than tenor) and vehicle terms used in a metaphor. When we encounter any term, we already have other concepts and,

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<sup>28</sup> See Wheelwright, chapter 10.

therefore, terms associated with it, and metaphor is the process of using one semantic field of associated word-meanings as “a perspective from which to gain an understanding of that which is metaphorically portrayed” (13-4).

### 2.1.3 Ricoeur’s Tension Theory

In *Rule of Metaphor*, Ricoeur proposes his own tension theory of metaphor as an alternative to interanimation and interaction theories of metaphor as well as other metaphor theories that are not based on what Ricoeur calls an improved semantics. The tension theory of metaphor postulates that “the ‘place’ of metaphor, its most intimate and ultimate abode, is neither the [noun], nor the sentence, nor even discourse, but the copula of the verb *to be*” (7). Ricoeur nods to Wheelwright’s prior treatment of metaphoric tension, but whereas Wheelwright claimed that the tension of metaphor is produced by the emphasized unity suggested by the metaphor – that one thing *is* another – Ricoeur proposes that metaphoric tension is equally unity and disunity. This tension exists – no matter what the mode of discourse<sup>29</sup> – in the copula, which “is not only relational. It implies besides, by means of the predicative relationship, that *what is* is redescribed; it says *that* things really are this way” (Ricoeur 247-8, original emphasis). In this way, metaphor expresses what Ricoeur refers to as an “ontological vehemence” that one thing *is* something that it *is not*.

The objective of this tension theory of metaphor is to describe the metaphoric relationship between the concepts suggested by the words or other symbols, as with paintings or with images suggested in poetry, rather than a demarcation of which concept in a metaphor metaphorizes and which one is metaphorized. For this reason, Ricoeur does not use a dichotomy like tenor-vehicle, focus-frame, or topic-vehicle. He does, however, emphasize the importance

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<sup>29</sup> See Ricoeur 229-39 and 302 for a discussion of metaphor in verbal and non-verbal expression.



of making a distinction between a literal and a metaphoric *interpretation* of any given metaphor, one part of the tension of metaphor is that it is not always clear when a statement is intended to be metaphoric or not (246). But what matters is not distinguishing which term or even whole statement is used metaphorically against a backdrop of otherwise literal or representational terms; what matters with metaphor is that human beings can understand that one thing *is* what they otherwise expect it *not to be*. The relationship of words, texts, and concepts to reality is of much greater importance than determining a taxonomy of metaphor that enables us to demarcate where vehicles or frames stop and tenors or focuses begin since, in keeping with the spirit of interaction theories, the relationship between the two concepts is much more complex than merely Focus A is Frame B rather than Focus B and Frame A. The objective of a tension theory of metaphor is the study of why and to what effect human beings use metaphors to create, negotiate, and recreate reality by asserting the contradiction that *A is B* when they know that *A is not B*.

Ricoeur states that “the most important theme” of *Rule of Metaphor* is a reformulation of rhetoric via metaphor theory and a concomitant improved semantics. But, he clarifies, his objective “is not to restore the original domain of rhetoric – in any case, this may be beyond doing, for ineluctable cultural reasons – rather, it is to understand in a new way the very workings of tropes, and, based on this, eventually to restate in new terms the question of the aim and purpose of rhetoric” (45). The study of metaphor provides a way to restate rhetoric since “metaphor is the rhetorical process by which discourse unleashes the power that certain fictions have to redescribe reality” (7). This reformulation of rhetoric is tied to poetics because “The poetic function and the rhetorical function cannot be fully distinguished until the conjunction between fiction and redescription is brought to light” (247). In metaphor, the *is not* pertains to

the literary-poetic and the fictive, while the *is* pertains to the rhetorical and the redescriptive. “By linking fiction and redescription in this way” to the literary-poetic and the rhetorical, respectively, Ricoeur writes, “we restore the full depth of meaning to Aristotle’s discovery in the *Poetics*, which was that the *poesis* of language arises out of the connection between *muthos* [plot] and *mimesis* [imitation]” (7). Literature here is defined as a mode of discourse in which what is presented as a redescription of people, objects, events, and relationships is understood both as being real and as not being real *simultaneously*. The study of literature requires not only that we ask what about the text *imitates* reality and therefore is not truly real (the realm of the *Poetics*) but also what about the text *is* real (the realm of the *Rhetoric*).

Ricoeur’s notion of ontological vehemence is particularly helpful for understanding the problems with philosopher Donald Davidson’s critique of the metaphor theories that are based on such an improved semantics. In “What Metaphor Means” (1978), Davidson objects to these metaphor theories on the grounds that no metaphor can “say anything beyond its literal meaning (nor does its maker say anything, in using the metaphor, beyond the literal)” (32). Metaphor to Davidson is an ornamental or superficial linguistic device defined by use rather than meaning (33). It “makes us attend to some likeness” and is therefore literal, requiring no secondary understanding of what is compared (33). To say that *Love is a houseplant*, for Davidson, would be to use a sense of *houseplant* that can apply literally to *love*; the sense of *houseplant* that does not apply to *love* cannot be the sense of *houseplant* that is used in this particular metaphoric expression if the expression makes sense. Thus, the metaphor makes no new implied assertion about reality, nothing that was not already taken for granted and required no further ontologically vehement assertion to reinforce its validity. This makes Aristotle’s

seemingly benign claim that metaphor helps its audience to learn and understand an object of Davidson's critique.

To claim that metaphor has no bearing on or claim to make about reality is to succumb to what Ricoeur calls "ontological naïveté." There are two forms of ontological naïveté: to claim that metaphor asserts nothing about reality, as Davidson avers, and to claim that metaphors create reality, which ignores the fact that metaphoric assertions about reality contradict at least some aspect of received knowledge about reality.<sup>30</sup> Even "dead" (conventional) metaphors, like *the foot of the mountain*, contradict empirical reality, though they may not contradict our conventional ways of talking about it. Ultimately, Davidson offers the same understanding of the function, mechanism, and significance of metaphor that an impoverished, post-Aristotelian metaphor theory and semantics offered. What Ricoeur's tension theory offers is a more sophisticated understanding of the relationship of metaphor and symbolic meaning have to reality. Metaphors do ask us to think in ways that "no plain prose can possibly do" (Davidson 45) and in doing so they can alter how we perceive and act in the world, but they do not do so without the tensive complication that what is asserted *is not* necessarily what *is*. In other words, metaphor is never comprehended as naively as Davidson suggests.<sup>31</sup>

## ***2.2 The Contemporary Moment: Conceptual Metaphor Theory***

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<sup>30</sup> See Ricoeur 249-54. Ricoeur notes that the claim that metaphor creates reality is tied to some theories of metaphor that define metaphor as the unification of word-meaning and reality, even if that unity is only perceived and not literal. This, he says, is an ontological naïveté since the recognition of a metaphor requires that we recognize its contradictory assertions at the same time that we recognize the literalness or truth of those assertions.

<sup>31</sup> Admittedly, dead metaphors are so conventionalized that they do not require any extra cognitive or conceptual processing and may be taken as literally true. But they are not taken to be literally true in the same sense that Davidson implies. To talk about the foot of a mountain is not necessarily to have a separate sense of "foot" that means "base of mountain." Those for whom this is a dead metaphor may have to do extra cognitive work to determine why "foot" makes sense in that context, but they would likely not say, "Because there are human feet, animal feet, and mountain feet, and this is a mountain's foot." More likely, they would rationalize it as, "Feet are found at the bottom of something," and even this is a form of personification since not all feet-like objects are called "feet." Horses have hooves; human beings have feet. The concept is still metaphoric, not literal, and the only naïve aspect of this process comes when the metaphor is conventionalized.

Conceptual metaphor theory, the most recent development in theories of metaphor, stands in almost diametrical opposition to Davidson's estimation of metaphor. The seminal work in CMT is George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's *Metaphors We Live By* (1981; rev. ed. 2003). In it, Lakoff and Johnson articulate a theory of metaphor that builds from interanimation, interaction, and tension theories. To Lakoff and Johnson, "metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature" (3). Conceptual metaphor theorists define metaphor as "understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another" (5). In metaphoric thinking, we use the words, thoughts, emotions, and other experiences that we associate with a "source" domain of thought or concept to understand a "target" domain or concept. Targets are often the more abstract of the two concepts, and concrete phenomena give us a way to describe abstractions that we have no other means of describing.

When we understand a target in terms of a source, we "map" the structure or contents of the source domain onto the target, reshaping the target in our minds if even for just a moment. The process of mapping has the potential to permanently restructure the way we think about the target if the given metaphor is experienced often enough in a culture. Take, for example, the common metaphor that Americans live by, *LIFE IS A JOURNEY*.<sup>32</sup> We encounter this metaphor in everyday speech whenever we hear someone say, "He's on the wrong path," and we also experience it when we read Robert Frost's "The Road Not Taken." It would also be the metaphor by which we would make sense of a pictorial rendering of "The Road Not Taken," for the metaphor lies not in the symbol but in the cognitive process of understanding *LIFE* in terms of a *JOURNEY*. This is a common conceptual metaphor for Americans, so it takes no special

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<sup>32</sup>Henceforth, all conceptual domains will be denoted typographically using all capital letters. Specific examples of language that uses these concepts will be represented in italics.

effort from the average American to make sense of statements or other symbols that assert that LIFE IS A JOURNEY.

The cognitive process of mapping this metaphor involves restructuring the more abstract concept LIFE in terms of the concept JOURNEY. LIFE here refers to our concept of what we generally expect out of life as it is lived, it includes our notions of events like birth, death, rites of passage, and other culturally-specific events like falling in love for the first time or learning to ride a bicycle or leaving home for the first time as an adult. LIFE also includes a sense of what we should expect of certain categories and types of people (e.g., parents, lovers, friends, kind people, cruel people, insecure people, etc.) that we expect the average person will have some experience of in his or her life. It also includes our culturally-informed expectations of what lived life entails (e.g., choice is both a burden and a blessing, bad things sometimes happen to good people, the good die young, we get what we deserve, etc.).

These concepts that constitute the concept of LIFE are developed and reinstated by neuro-cognitive processes that make thought possible on an individual level as well as by cultural practices and institutions.. In our culture, the prototypical LIFE consists of a chronological structure in which birth precedes death, the struggle of living precedes death, and death precedes entrance into an afterlife; some of these aspects of that prototypical LIFE may not be universally subscribed to by all contemporary Americans, but it is probably what we assume most Americans consider to be some of the typical events of LIFE.<sup>33</sup> Yet even these LIFE events are colored by larger cultural notions of what is normal or to be expected; they do not include all possible variations on the actual experience of life or actual beliefs about life, which could

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<sup>33</sup> As I will explain in chapter 3, whether this is actually how even the majority of contemporary Americans structure the concept LIFE isn't the point. It is at least part of the "folk theory" of what LIFE entails: the typical American, I submit, will probably assume that another American's notion of LIFE includes a sense that an afterlife follows death.

include stillbirth or the absence of an afterlife. Likewise, the structure of the relationships among other people, objects, events, and relationships (e.g., misfortunes are preceded by misdeeds, successes should follow from age and experience, etc.) are based on culturally-shared experiences, some of which may not or cannot accurately represent the experience of every individual in the culture.

JOURNEY, as a concept, has its own structures: We may begin a journey, then turn around and come back or complete the journey by arriving at our destination. JOURNEYS are usually processes of discovery whereas TRIPS are more brief and have some immediate purpose. When we map JOURNEY onto LIFE, we select certain aspects from the source domain, JOURNEY, and allow them to change the structure of our concept of LIFE. Our larger categories of life experiences can be understood as events that happen while we are on the journey. DECISIONS might be metaphorized as FORKS IN THE ROAD, and the MENTORS we have in life might be metaphorized as GUIDES on our journey. The chronological schema of a JOURNEY maps onto the chronological sequence of events of LIFE, where BIRTH or some other earliest point on a chronological spectrum is THE BEGINNING OF THE JOURNEY. According to CMT, only the structure of the target changes in a metaphor. Our thinking of LIFE as a JOURNEY will never influence how we think about JOURNEYS in such a way that we begin to think of JOURNEYS in terms of LIFE. Furthermore, sources will never restructure the target so much that it becomes unrecognizable; LIFE will still be LIFE if it is metaphorized as a JOURNEY or as a GAME or as anything else. The principle on which these claims are based is called the invariance principle, and it is premised on the unidirectionality of the mapping from a source to a target.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> See Kövecses 103-4.

While one can see the fingerprint of interanimation and interaction theories of metaphor in the source-target dichotomy of metaphor in CMT, the explicit lack of bidirectional interaction clearly departs from those earlier theories' characterization of metaphor. In *More than Cool Reason* (1989), Lakoff and Mark Turner explain the basis of their divergence: interaction theories of metaphor assert that "there is no source or target. There is only a connection across domains, with one concept seen as the filter of the other" (131). This is a characterization more befitting Ricoeur's tension theory than interaction theories, which maintain a formal distinction between the metaphoric and the literal terms of any given metaphor. But Lakoff and Turner do accurately note that these theories of metaphor often seek to explain metaphor as a *unity* created by "merely comparing the two domains in both directions and picking out the similarities," (132) though one notable exception was Black's break with Richards in denying that comparison is the fundamental function of metaphor.

Furthermore, Lakoff and Turner write that to invert a metaphor is to produce "two different metaphors, because the mappings go in opposite directions, *and different things get mapped*" (132, original emphasis). For example, the metaphor A JOURNEY IS A LIFE could be mapped out and we could "perhaps [call] embarkations 'births' and departures 'deaths'" (Lakoff and Turner 132), though since the target is concrete and the source relatively more abstract, such an inverted metaphor is unlikely to be of much everyday use to us, though we might encounter it in less-common contexts like a poem. But this assertion about the unidirectionality of metaphoric mapping does not fully account for interaction between concepts in the way Black theorized it. In fact, Black's interaction theory is probably consonant with the invariance principle. This is because interaction theory claims, fundamentally, that it is simply more likely to think of either the source or the target when only its counterpart in the metaphor is

encountered *outside the context of the metaphoric concept*. That is, if people in a certain socio-cultural context think of PEOPLE often enough in terms of MACHINES, as may be the metaphoric concept underlying such linguistic expressions as *Who flipped your switch?* and *I've run out of gas*, then it is likely that they will be more likely to think about MACHINES as connected to PEOPLE since their minds have formed a strong neuro-cognitive connection between the two concepts. Thus, they will be more likely to think, act, and talk about MACHINES as PEOPLE than they would be to connect MACHINES to another concept that they have never experienced as connected to MACHINES before. They will be more likely to anthropomorphize a machine – to talk to it, to cajole it into working, to think it has a will to function – than they will be to talk about it as if it were some other living creature with sentience like a DOG or an ELEPHANT, let alone something without those salient features, like a BUILDING or a JOURNEY.

Later interaction theory undoubtedly overemphasized the unity of thought that metaphoric cognitive interaction between conceptual domains produces. This led to some muddled thinking about the nature of metaphoric thought and the nature of the transfer of structured ways of thinking from one area of the brain to another. But a tension theory of metaphor can preserve both the invariance principle and a principle of contextually-dependent likely association since it understands metaphor to be a matter of simultaneously comprehending disunity and unity in a pair of concepts. That is because it recognizes that in metaphoric thinking, we do not *only* consider that one thing *is* another thing; that way of thinking would result in a tautological unity, whereby we map all aspects of a source onto a target and the target onto the source, thereby violating the invariance principle. Tension theory recognizes that human beings can “know” that a source *is not* a target nor the target the source, even while they



“know that it *is*. The mechanism by which we recognize this contradiction, as CMT points out, is that some aspects of both concepts will not map as easily onto the other concept, or they will only restructure the concept for a moment in a specific situation (as with the poetic application of A JOURNEY IS A LIFE). But the ontologically vehement assertion that the target *is* the source nevertheless makes it more likely that the two concepts will interact together cognitively and conceptually than other concepts that have not previously interacted in a metaphoric tension in our minds.

### ***2.3 Literature as a Metaphor for LIFE***

#### **2.3.1 A Theory of the Literary Metaphor Process**

Literature provides us with a particularly helpful example of the bidirectional interaction that can happen in metaphor. This is because literature is itself metaphoric in nature, or to be more specific, because we process literature as we do metaphors. Consider the parallel that Ricoeur observes between the functions of metaphor and the overlapping functions of literature and rhetoric that becomes clear when we think of metaphor as a tensive relationship of *is/is not*. Per Aristotle’s theories, rhetoric aligns with the *is* function of metaphor because it seeks to redescribe reality or probable experiences in and interpretations of reality. Literary discourse aligns with the *is not* function of metaphor insofar as it imitates (and therefore suggests a difference from) reality. At the same time, in imitating reality, literary works *reveal* reality by redescribing via imitation the experience of reality. Howell explains that Aristotle acknowledged just this sort of overlap between literature and rhetoric. For instance, rhetors may use imaginative, fictional examples<sup>35</sup> such as fables in order to produce

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<sup>35</sup> The very fact that literature can be talked about as an example of the reality that is redescribed in a rhetorical text is significant. Aristotle considers example, also sometimes translated as “paradigm,” to be a form of rhetorical induction that appears to be metaphoric in nature. Aristotle writes, “It has been explained that a paradigm is an

a mimetic discourse within the context of nonmimetic verbal procedures. ... The important problem about a given fable when it is judged in its own terms is that of ascertaining how accurately it reflects *human truth*, and how significant that truth is. But the fable used in the context of an oration is to be judged in connection with its capacity to prove the orator's case – to offer logical, emotional, and ethical support to what he is recommending. (60, emphasis added)

In this formulation, literature uses *mimesis* not to prove that the real world is this way or that, but to assert something about the *human condition*. Imitation, by definition, suggests that the imitator *is not* the imitated. But literature is always only a half fiction or half *is not*. It is always simultaneously *not* historically-probative and also a *real* example of “human truth.” On the one hand, in its rhetorical capacity, literature redescribes what Lakoff has called “experiential reality,”<sup>36</sup> which defines reality in terms of experience “in the broad sense: the totality of human experience and everything that plays a role in it – the nature of our bodies, our genetically inherited capacities, our modes of physical functioning in the world, our social organization, etc.” (*Women* 266). On the other hand, in its literary capacity, literature imitates that real human experience. The mechanism by which literature both *is* and *is not* the reality that it simultaneously reveals and redescribes is the same social, cognitive, conceptual process of metaphor.

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induction... It is reasoning neither from part to whole nor from whole to part but from part to part, like to like, when two things fall under the same genus but one is better known than the other” (*Rhetoric* 1357b19). Examples in rhetoric are either historical examples (based on a principle of comparison) or fictional examples from fables (which operate on the principle of *logoi*, or reasoning) (*Rhetoric* 1393a2). Rhetorical induction via fable, then, is another instance of the overlap between rhetoric and literature: not only can the imaginative, fictional mode of fable be used within a rhetorical text, it has a rhetorical nature, being useful for reasoning about the real world of which it is not a direct transcription.

<sup>36</sup> Experiential realism or experientialism is more accurately attributed to Lakoff and Johnson, but it is explained in detail in Lakoff's monograph, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*. See *Women* 265-8.

More specifically, the conceptual domain associated with “human truth” or the “human condition” is LIFE, the same target in the metaphor LIFE IS A JOURNEY. In any given literary text, our experiences, in the Lakoffian sense of “experience,” with the people, objects, events, and relationships among them that we take as conventional aspects of the conventional human life interact with the experiences of the participants, objects, events, and relationships among them that are depicted in the literary text. Take, for example, a science fiction text that does not depict any human person whatsoever. The participants in the plot – the *muthos* or depiction of life, in Aristotelian terms – will nevertheless correspond to types or categories of people or human dispositions. An autobiographical depiction of Benjamin Franklin’s life may be a more or less historically accurate redescription of his life, and we can read it *as* a historical document. We read it as literature, however, when our process of reading is metaphoric, when we recognize that Franklin’s experiences of LIFE *are not* our own direct, redescribed experiences of LIFE (just as the LIFE depicted in the science fiction novel *is not* literally a redescription of our experiences with LIFE) at the same time that we recognize that his autobiography does reflect the same *types* of experiences we have with the same constituent categories of the concept LIFE.

When we recognize the metaphoric nature of literature, we begin to see the connections among cultural studies approaches to literature and to more personal-individual responses to literature like the relatability reaction. That is because literature not only depicts or imitates reality, it has the potential to inform or change it. The validity of this contention is tethered to the validity of interaction theories of metaphor since the metaphoric process must then be bidirectional: LIFE in the reality of our experiences is LIFE as depicted in the work of literature, and LIFE as depicted in literature is LIFE as we experience it outside the text. Without this sort of recognition that works of literature have the potential to affect how we experience reality and,

thus, how we act and think based on our conceptualized reality, what purpose is there for studying literature? In fact, the metaphoric nature of the literary experience has become so automatic that we cannot but admit that literature affects how we think and act, and our extra-textual experiences will affect how we interpret literature. This bidirectionality is the basis for our relatability reaction to works of literature: we automatically weigh our experiences against those depicted in the text, and if we read often enough that sisters are more nurturing than brothers or that suburbia is a breeding ground for spiritual malaise, we may begin to think of and act as if those depicted experiences are real.

The metaphorization of LIFE may in fact be that which signals to readers of literature that they are in the presence of the literary. Cultural studies in conjunction with post-structuralism has taught us that “literature” is a constructed concept, not something we apprehend because of our connection to some supernal realm or spiritual truth or otherworldly metaphysical dominion. Conceptual metaphor theory and cognitive linguistics have also set about debunking the myth that the literary exists outside of our concepts of it. As cognitive scientist and psycholinguist Raymond Gibbs reports in *The Poetics of Mind* (1994), “recent experimental evidence demonstrating that people understand written language not through the mere application of logical and linguistic rules but via certain presuppositions about texts’ being composed by intentional agents (i.e., people)” (74). In the set of studies to which Gibbs refers, participants were asked to read metaphors that they were told were either written by famous twentieth-century poets or generated by computers. “Readers found metaphorical expressions, such as *Cigarettes are time bombs*, more meaningful when these statements were supposedly written by twentieth-century poets, who are intentional agents, than when these same metaphors were seen as random constructions of a computer program,” Gibbs writes (74). Furthermore,

participants took more time to process cognitively and consider the meaningfulness of the metaphors that they thought were composed by poets, but they “quickly rejected as ‘meaningless’ these same anomalous expressions when told that they were written by an unintelligent computer program, because computers are assumed to lack communicative intentions” (74-5). In other words, there is no inherent property of literariness; it is instead a set of acquired expectations and reading strategies.

The research that Gibbs summarizes indicates that there are many cues that tell a reader to read a text as literature. One such cue is knowing that the text is written by someone who writes literature – a poet or a novelist or a playwright. Another is reading the text in a situation in which literature is commonly read, such as for a literature class or in the “Literature” or “Fiction” section of a bookstore. It is my claim that readers also know that they should be reading the text as literary – that is, looking for how it metaphorizes their experiences of LIFE – if they think the text is intended to or can be interpreted as having some message about the experience of LIFE. This may seem to be a circular logic, and it is, but not one that has appeared arbitrarily. It is quite natural, as Gibbs reminds us and as cultural and literary studies scholars including Eagleton and Williams maintain, we read as literary that which we expect to be literary. Any understanding of literature that locates the literariness of the texts we read in an inherent property of literature that transcends our socio-cognitive construction of LITERATURE implies an arbitrariness that contradicts what we know and can prove about the fact that “literature” is in our concepts, expectations, and actions rather than in literature itself.

What makes the relationship between metaphor and literature special is not only what is metaphorized – the concept of LIFE – but the fact that the metaphoric nature of literature may be what distinguishes the literary from the non-literary. Metaphor appears in all areas of thought

and communication, for there is no rhetoric degree zero and we need concrete ways of talking and thinking about abstractions and unseen things. But literature functions cognitively as a metaphor, and this fundamentally metaphoric quality of literature as well as the particular metaphor literature operates on demands a set of expectations and reading strategies that sets it apart from other forms of communication. When we read a menu or a class syllabus, or when we hear an evening news broadcast, we do not expect that these texts are composed by agents, to use Gibbs' term, whose intentions are to ask us to consider what we know and expect about LIFE in terms of the LIFE they present to us in the text. We do not expect, even on a subconscious or automatic level as we may with literature, that an intentional agent has put any depiction of LIFE in those texts, let alone that our reading strategy should be to understand our experiences in terms of those that the texts may depict.

However, when we encounter literary texts such as Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech or the testimonios of Rigoberta Menchu, we recognize that these are literary texts because there is some larger assertion about the nature of LIFE that we assume the authors, as intentional agents, wanted us to consider. Perhaps non-literary texts metonymize the human experience, and perhaps non-literary discourses including the sciences and the graphic arts also metaphorize LIFE in different modes than does literature. And our concept of what constitutes literature can also be included to include genres not currently considered literary, such as cookbooks, sitcoms, and graphic novels. Ultimately, my focus on literature should not be taken as an indication that "literature" is the only genre that can metaphorize LIFE; it should, in the spirit of rhetoricality, suggest that we must reconsider what it takes to be literary, how "literary" happens cognitively and culturally, and why literature matters. Reconceptualizing literature as a metaphorization of LIFE helps us rhetoricize LITERATURE as a concept.

### 2.3.2 Variations on a Theory of Literature as a Metaphoric Process

Versions of this understanding of literature appear in a number of important cultural and literary theories. Nietzsche suggests a similar theory in “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense” (1873). Language is at least doubly metaphorical, Nietzsche writes: the first metaphor consists of “the stimulation of a nerve ... into an image,” which is “then imitated by a sound,” which results in the second metaphor (767). Humankind comes to recognize reality only in terms of metaphor, both insofar as we experience reality in terms of language and as we understand all phenomena as categorically related to similar phenomena (one of Nietzsche’s examples is that all leaves are both unique and similar). Our metaphors are lies that we’re willing to accept because they make life easier and more tolerable, Nietzsche writes. To apprehend truth, the “thing-in-itself” rather than the thing as understood via language or via other preconceived notions, requires “an *aesthetic* way of relating” to phenomena (770, original emphasis). Aesthetic thinking allows us to exert some control over our worlds by creating new metaphors instead of being enslaved to the familiar metaphors (772-3).

The modern cognitive linguist and conceptual metaphor theorist would no doubt agree that people construct their worlds metaphorically on a number of levels (linguistically, conceptually, etc.) and that these levels are intertwined and can have a powerful impact on how we live and act in the world. Specifically, Nietzsche’s theories underwrite the notion that metaphor is of greater importance than as merely a figure or trope, and that to look at various (conceptual and cultural) phenomena *as* metaphoric is not only fruitful but accurate. But to think of literature as a cognitive-conceptual metaphor is not to make the literary-aesthetic the panacea of that which ails the modern soul in a (post-)Industrial world, as Nietzsche implies. Nor is it to

seek “truth.” Rather, it is to observe patterns of how people construct and reconstruct their reality via literary modes in ways that can be observed both in science and in humanistic study.

As an argument against early historical-materialists who contended that literature merely reflects reality, Raymond Williams cites Volosinov’s explanation that literature does not constitute reality but is a socio-cultural-historical activity that changes and contests or “refracts” reality (37-8). Similarly, Frederic Jameson writes in *The Political Unconscious* (1981) that works of literature do more than reflect the unconscious ideology; literature operates allegorically, expressing an “imperceptible” homology between the ideology presented in the text and the ideological context from which the text is produced and interpreted (58). To refer to literature as allegorical, however, suggests a precise unity of mappings – that all aspects of the ideology presented in the text will align with those of the extra-textual world. Using Black’s notion of allegory as metaphoric vis-à-vis its extra-textual context can help us understand the essentially metaphoric function of the literary text. A “refraction” suggests a tension – the refraction *is* the original light and *is not* the original light – that “allegory” might not unless understood in terms of its socio-historical context.

Jacques Lacan brought psychoanalytic theory, language, and metaphor onto common ground, as Eagleton explains (142-8). When a child recognizes difference and absence, he desires some unity of meaning. Language offers that unity by uniting a signifier with that which it signifies, but it can only do so metaphorically since the signified is not the signifier. Literature is like the ego in that it represses the chaos of its own production, making a unified narrative out of disorganized events. Psychoanalysis does not, however, have the capacity to explain the mechanism behind this metaphoric process. Lacan uses metaphors (e.g., metaphors work like mirrors, individuation is metaphorization, etc.) to describe a psychoanalytic process of a



recognition of selfhood and otherness. But those metaphors do not describe in a literal sense either the psychoanalytic processes that they describe or the process by which we make meaning in language. They are metaphors that describe metaphors.<sup>37</sup> I argue that literature is *literally* a metaphoric process. It is not *like* a metaphor; it actually operates on the same metaphoric process of understanding one thing in terms of another that LIFE IS A JOURNEY operates on. Understanding metaphor this way allows us to explain *what* literature is and *how* it functions in our minds.

Kenneth Burke suggests a similar reconsideration of literature as “equipment for living” in *The Philosophy of Literary Form* (1941). His argument extends from his understanding of proverbs: “Proverbs are *strategies* for dealing with *situations*. In so far as situations are typical and recurrent in a given social structure, people develop names for them and strategies for handling them” (296-7). If this is true, “Why not extend such analysis of proverbs to encompass the whole field of literature? Could the most complex and sophisticated works of art legitimately be considered somewhat as ‘proverbs writ large’?” Burke asks (296). Just as there are different and sometimes contradictory proverbs (e.g., *Out of sight, out of mind* compared to *Absence makes the heart grow fonder*), there are apparent contradictions in literary depictions of the world (297). When we metaphorize literature as a proverb, we can see literature more clearly as a sociological phenomenon, a change in perspective that “automatically breaks down the barriers erected about literature as a specialized pursuit” (303). This would make the study of literature a study of types of recurring sociological phenomena and “would derive its relevance from the fact that it should apply both to works of art and to social situations outside art” (303).

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<sup>37</sup> Ricoeur’s discusses the inadequacy of such metaphorical descriptions of metaphors as well as the limitations of speculative philosophies that are based on metaphors in the final study of *Rule of Metaphor* (257-313).

Burke's formulation of literature as a proverb and his suggestion that literature operates metaphorically in the same ways that proverbs do is fruitful, particularly insofar as it highlights the socio-cultural nature of the construction of knowledge and experience. But in doing so, it suggests that literature is *like* a proverb and, thus, *like* a metaphor in its capacity to reflect and recreate human thought and activity. I would go one step further to assert that literature is not *like* a metaphor but that it *is* metaphoric insofar as we process it in the same way that we process metaphor. To see literature as actually being metaphoric in nature inscribes literature with the power of metaphor to determine the reality of any given phenomenon or aspect of a phenomenon "through a variety of perspectives" or metaphoric perceptions (Burke, "Master" 504).

Metaphor theorists have also speculated that literature's interaction with reality is of a fundamentally metaphorical nature. Samuel Levin's *Metaphoric Worlds* (1988) argues that a literary text's use of specific metaphors that "are expressed in language that is semantically deviant ... like 'The trees were weeping'" (xi) will demand that readers create a metaphoric world in which the metaphoric reality described is possible. Readers must then project themselves into this fictional world that violates their understanding of reality in order to comprehend the false reality. But a theory of metaphor based in CMT and a tension theory would reject the implicit assertion that we must negate our own experiential knowledge of reality in order to understand metaphors. Furthermore, understanding literature as a metaphoric process requires that we consider LITERATURE as a concept and a mode of discourse rather than the individual metaphors that are used in any given work of literature. Levin's theory seeks to explain how we interpret and comprehend individual works of literature, but it does not explain, as this dissertation aims to, how LITERATURE *as a mode of discourse* has the capacity to create

a (metaphoric) reality that readers can see as being their own reality at the same time that they realize it is not their reality.

Mark Turner explains in *Reading Minds* (1991) that metaphoric concepts appear in literature on at least three distinct levels (240-7). First, metaphors appear on the level of “local phrasing” just as they do with all other modes of discourse. By local phrasing, Turner means individual linguistic expressions of conceptual metaphors, some of which may or may not be more culturally prevalent than others. Levin’s example of Wordsworth’s “The trees were weeping,” for example, is a linguistic expression of the conceptual metaphor TREES ARE HUMAN BEINGS, a common use of personification, and also perhaps a less-common metonymy like THE WEEPING OF TREES IS THE SADNESS OF NATURE, which would still rely on the metaphor of personification. Second, metaphor operates on the level of an entire literary work in the form of controlling metaphors and metaphor systems. In Tolstoy’s *War and Peace*, one possible controlling metaphor that governs the meaning of the text is LOVE IS WAR. This metaphor might be developed across the text using a system of local-level metaphors (both as linguistic expressions and as events depicted, such as when two lovers are depicted as being “at war” with one another) to form a coherent concept across the entire text. Third, Turner writes, we might metaphorize our concept of LITERATURE as A CONVERSATION BETWEEN AUTHORS AND READERS or as A READER’S JOURNEY THAT IS LED BY THE AUTHOR (245). But to recognize LITERATURE as A METAPHOR is not to metaphorize LITERATURE. Literature actually operates on the basis of metaphor; the literary experience is itself the experience of metaphor. In this formulation, literature metaphorizes LIFE.

### **2.3.3 Interdisciplinarity, Rhetoricity, and an Improved Theory of Literature**

These variations on a theory of literature as a metaphoric process have taken as their primary concern an explanation of *what* literature is by explaining *how* (various aspects of) literature operates. This concern with a description of *what* and *how* was also the primary concern of the metaphor theories that proceeded from interanimation and interaction theories, including tension theory and CMT. As yet, however, metaphor theory largely has not taken up the central, rhetorical question of *why* or to what effect we use metaphors in the ways that we do.

In the field of literary studies, as I indicated above, the homologous shift to a rhetorical inquiry can be seen in cultural studies. Literary analysis and criticism in such cultural studies subfields as feminist studies, post-colonial studies, and queer studies take for granted that literature provides distorted redescrptions of the reality that various subaltern and minority populations experience. The leitmotiv sustained across this sort of cultural studies analysis is that readers are asked to recognize *both* the commonality and impossibility of commonality of their experiences of LIFE as they read these texts. In fact, that tension explains why we as human beings use literature to communicate: we do so to redescribe our own experiences of LIFE in terms of the more abstract experience of LIFE that all human beings share to some extent or another, and we do so to experience and reconceptualize LIFE according to someone else's experiences.

Metaphor theory today is in need of such a move toward the rhetorical, for it has made too little of the question *why* and for what specific purposes both individuals and socio-cultural groups of people use metaphor in literary and non-literary texts. In CMT, literature is usually fodder for proofs about how metaphor functions; this is particularly the case as the field of

neurolinguistics takes up the question of the physical brain mechanisms of metaphor.<sup>38</sup> This contributes to other legitimate reasons as to why CMT has kept its distance from English departments and literary studies.<sup>39</sup> Conceptual metaphor theory is primarily located not in English studies departments but in linguistics departments or departments that house the cognitive sciences. Consequently, as a “scientific” discipline, it enjoys both better funding and more respect both within and outside the academy than either literary or rhetoric and composition studies. Furthermore, literary scholars have no reason to consider the findings of CMT if those findings treat literature as a filler of corpora to be dissected by cognitive scientists rather than studied for its purely linguistic significance.

Without a consideration of the rhetorical, a consideration of the effects of language use – literary and otherwise – will be absent from both metaphor theory and literary studies. But there are also good historical reasons for why rhetoricians and rhetoric and compositionists have been comfortable with ignoring CMT. Rhetoric is still often seen as the study of taxonomies for taxonomies’ sake, and a return to the study of a particular trope or figure, as metaphor is still often defined, may seem to any given rhetorician to reduce the full capacity of rhetorical analysis. Furthermore, rhetoric and composition has fought a long battle for disciplinary and institutional autonomy against literary studies, and as metaphor is sometimes also seen as a literary or purely stylistic device, rhetoric and compositionists who want to wholly autonomize

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<sup>38</sup> Lakoff reported during a plenary session at the Fillmore Fest (2009) at the University of California at Berkeley that the latest research in neurolinguistics and neuronal grammar indicates that metaphoric thought happens when otherwise-separate neuronal nodes (there are, Lakoff reported, roughly 1,000 neurons per node) respond to the same stimulus simultaneously. This, Lakoff reported, makes metaphor not abstract but “doubly concrete.” It does not, however, explain why people would need to formulate doubly-concrete thoughts to negotiate their social contexts and rhetorical situations.

<sup>39</sup> This is with the exception of a period from the early 1980s and the beginning of a formal conceptual metaphor theory through Turner’s *Reading Minds*, which was published in 1990. During this time, some prominent CMT theorists such as Lakoff, Johnson, and Turner used CMT to make observations about the meaning and interpretation of literature. Since that time, however, CMT theorists have largely used literature to make observations about conceptual metaphors.

their discipline may also eschew the findings of CMT since it presents the risk of proximity to the literary. Finally, rhetoric and composition has already had what scholars in that field refer as a “cognitive” moment. During this period, from the 1970s through the 1980s, compositionists attempted to identify universal cognitive compositional processes. When it became clear that composition is too complex a cognitive task to identify any such universal process without also universalizing other factors (e.g., socio-economic status of the writer, the differences among particular compositional tasks, the competencies of different writers, etc.), this cognitive movement fell out of fashion.<sup>40</sup> In short, rhetoric and composition scholars have avoided a cognitive theory of metaphor out of a fear of reductive, universalizing explanations of linguistic competency and use.

But many opportunities are missed by the institutional and disciplinary separation and autonomization that keeps CMT from being a truly interdisciplinary, not just multi-disciplinary, area of academic research. CMT operates on the sort of improved semantics that locates meaning not in words but in the contexts and situations in which those words are used. It proves, even in empirical ways in the age of neurolinguistics, that language not just a matter of ornamentation or deviation but constituent of human thought and, therefore, action in ways that have effects on the real world. And it locates the significance of the study of language not in the study of aesthetics, linguistics, or stylistics exclusively but, as Ricoeur remarks, in the realm of the rhetorical, where the central concern is of how particular uses of language to redescribe reality can affect the real world by affecting language users.

The improved semantics on which CMT is based is compatible with the disciplinary and institutional disposition of rhetoricality. CMT supports the assertion that reality is *constructed*

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<sup>40</sup> For more detail about the cognitive moment in rhetoric and composition, see Flower and Hayes, Lunsford, and Rose.

since it locates the meaning of metaphors and of language generally not in words themselves but in the use of those words to create concepts and, thus, predispositions to conceptualize the world in particular ways that can change from context to context and situation to situation. In locating the creation and comprehension of metaphor and meaning in language in the brain, CMT argues that metaphor in particular is a process of thought that occurs in all variety of human discourse, thinking, and action. This means that metaphor and other types of human communicative and cognitive activity aren't necessarily a matter of interest for one area of research or another. It requires that we open up the study of metaphor to a *variety of texts* and that we work *interdisciplinarily* to refine our knowledge about how those discursive strategies affect how we operate in any given context or situation. Because the nature of CMT's improved semantics promotes interdisciplinary research, it also promotes disciplinary and institutional *recursivity*. Disciplinarily, scholars of the various uses of language must acknowledge that our language choices create, reflect, and recreate our realities, and those realities may not always invite outsiders to share our knowledge. The structure of the field of academia necessitates a tension among the disciplines, for we can never have a unity of thought and purpose since we must have a diversity of specializations. What may appear to be the paradox of the structure of the university should instead be seen as a tension, one in which we acknowledge our unified and our discipline-specific objectives as being the same and different simultaneously, working in and through the tension toward both sets of objectives. Productive tension, rather than autonomization, must be the nature of interdisciplinary study.

English studies is particularly well-situated to be an example of how rhetoricality can curb the impulse toward disciplinary and institutional autonomization in the academy and promote more purposeful and profitable knowledge. In the next chapter, I will examine the

literary (and sometimes non-literary) genre of the autobiography as an example of what the rhetoricized study of literature as a metaphoric process would entail and what its implications are for the field of English studies. To research and teach literature as a metaphorization of LIFE would entail explicit treatment of the tensions between representations of reality and extra-textual experiences; both the literary and the extra-textual must be seen as “real” experiences, but the tension – the *is* and the *is not* – between what is redescription-imitation and what is directly experienced by people outside the literary work must be explored to understand the impact of literature for the extra-textual world. Consequently, in keeping with the objectives of cultural studies, it must acknowledge *why* the representation of reality depicted in a given literary work differs from another literary work and why those representations differ from the reality experienced by readers of different perspectives. It must also consider how language creates, reflects, and reinstantiates those tensive realities. Thus, it requires that English studies recognize that linguistics and rhetoric and composition have as much to offer for the study of the linguistic phenomenon of “literature” as literary studies itself since metaphor is not exclusively or even properly an aesthetic or literary phenomenon. Ultimately, to reconceptualize literature in this way will require English studies as a field to fundamentally reshape its structure and function since to conceptualize literature as a metaphoric process is to acknowledge that the study of literature is fundamentally a matter of the study of language and rhetoric.

### **Chapter 3 – Truth, Concepts, and Autobiography**

*When a critic insists that only certain subjects are fit subjects for poetry, the statement argues from the reality spectrum. ... You can read anything, from a Shakespeare sonnet to a cereal box, “literarily.” From this premise departs the current discipline of Cultural Studies, which chooses to read the whole of society as a series of “texts.” ... You don’t posit an external reality against which to measure the reality presented in the literary work. You accept that literary reality as reality itself.*

Richard Lanham, *Analyzing Prose*



*Everything is a metaphor for human life. If we build machines, it's all metaphoric for our own bodies. These race cars are like gladiators out there. They are performing with full power and full impact.*

Jeff Koons, on his design for the BMW Art Car

### **3.1 Lyndon B. Johnson and the Fallacy of Literary Non-Reality**

A special feature on Lyndon B. Johnson in the 23 January 1973 edition of *The New York Times* reports that as soon a young Lyndon could read, he decided that he disliked fiction. Of the stories his mother read to him, Lyndon reportedly asked, “But Ma, is it real? Did it really happen?” According to the article, President Johnson grew to take pride in his preference for fact over the non-reality of fiction since facts, by President Johnson’s understanding, are real, true, or historically verifiable and fiction is non-real, at best a distortion of reality, and therefore incapable of being true or historically verifiable.

But the logic of this understanding confuses the relationships among fact, fiction, and reality. Despite President Johnson’s categorizations, fact and fiction often coincide, as Aristotle noted in treating the use of fictional examples in works of rhetoric as a means of rhetorical induction.<sup>41</sup> In such cases, rhetors depict the given facts of a “real” or historically-verifiable situation in terms of a fictional situation in an attempt to persuade audiences of the “reality” (i.e., correct way of seeing) of that “real” (i.e., historically-verifiable) situation. Such overlaps between rhetorical and literary discourse align with Aristotle’s distinctions between the aims of rhetorical and literary discourse and historiography and philosophy: it is the purpose of neither rhetorical nor literary discourse to act as disinterested reports of “real” or factual (historically-verifiable) events or as logical proofs about the “reality” (objective world) they represent.

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<sup>41</sup> For further information regarding Aristotle’s explanation of rhetorical induction or “example,” see section 2.3.1, above.

Furthermore, by Johnson's logic, fictional literature or any literature other than historical reports (e.g., biographies, historical narratives) cannot, by definition, be "real." In fact, in preferring fact to fiction because fact accurately represents reality while fiction distorts that accurate representation, Johnson is committed to the notion that it is possible to accurately (objectively) refer to the reality described. This assumes that historians and biographers, and other language users, have access to the objective language and interpretation that Ricoeur called rhetoric degree zero. It also means that, like Aristotle, Johnson assumes that language does not have the capacity to change positive reality – which also suggests that reality can be purely perceived because it can be purely represented by a rhetoric degree zero – and any attempt to affect the pure perception of reality via language will result in a distorted depiction of reality. Consequently, any depiction of non-reality is essentially a misuse of both language *and* reality.

Johnson was neither the first nor will he be the last person to dismiss fictional literature as irrelevant to or as a distraction from "reality." In fact, Johnson's rejection of literature is based on a confusion about the nature of fiction, language, and reality that also distorts a sense of the capacity of literature to not just entertain and instruct, as Sir Philip Sidney put it, but to affect the realities of those who experience it. And it is probably a rationale for rejecting the significance of literature that is more prevalent today than contemporary English studies scholars may think.

On the other hand, many contemporary scholars in English studies think that the purpose for studying literature is so self-evident or well-covered that it requires little or no explanation. But if one were to take a survey of English studies scholars and teachers about what those purposes are, surely the range of responses would indicate that some explanation is indeed necessary since there isn't (and, I aver, should not be) a universal sense of purpose. Since the

necessity of English studies, particularly that of literary studies, has been predicated on a mystification of the literary object, we now require a demystification.

Conceptual metaphor theory, cognitive linguistics, and rhetoric each give us ways to demystify the literary object by explaining the mechanisms and principles by which language, meaning, and reality interrelate. Conceptual metaphor theory has demonstrated in ways that are culturally-, contextually-, and empirically-aware that language and, consequently, literature create and reflect reality. In this chapter, I will explain how literature becomes real in the minds of those who experience it. This literary reality has the potential to affect extra-textual reality by influencing both our cultural knowledge and the ways that we perceive and comprehend natural, positive reality. The interactional process of understanding our experiences of reality in terms of the experiences of reality depicted *in* literature and vice versa is fundamentally metaphorical. To explain the mechanisms of this process, I will draw upon the work of conceptual metaphor theorists, including Lakoff and Johnson, to explain how the processes associated with metaphorization – including categorization, interactivity, prototype effects, and highlighting – are at work when we metaphorize literature. Finally, I will conclude with a series of case studies of autobiographical texts that demonstrates the need to rhetoricize the field of literary studies by recognizing literature as a metaphor for the cognitively- and culturally-constructed concept LIFE. By approaching literature in this way, English studies scholars and teachers can promote a more accurate, demystified understanding of the relationships among language, literature, and reality.

### ***3.2 Categories and/of Experiential Reality***

#### **3.2.1 The Insufficiencies of Objectivist Accounts of Truth**

In *Metaphors We Live By*, Lakoff and Johnson explain the implications of our cognitive capacity to create and comprehend metaphors for a theory of truth and reality. Philosophical approaches to metaphor, Lakoff and Johnson write, have tended to treat metaphor in opposition to truth, defined as “*objective* (absolute and unconditional),” thereby relegating metaphor to the realm of the poetic or literary, wherein questions of metaphor’s truth or objective connection to reality had been banished (*Metaphors* 159, original emphasis). This notion of truth comes from what Lakoff calls in his later work *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things* (1987) the classical theory of category construction. According to this classical theory, human beings perceive phenomena as being part of certain categories based on the shared natural properties of those phenomena. Furthermore, it assumes that there is one and only one way of correctly categorizing those phenomena into concepts since there is only one valid way to perceive and interpret reality. The confusion may arise, Lakoff suggests, because

Most categorization is automatic and unconscious . . . In moving about the world, we automatically categorize people, animals, and physical objects, both natural and man-made. This sometimes leads to the impression that we just categorize things as they are, that things come in natural kinds, and that our categories of mind naturally fit the kinds of things there are in the world. But a large proportion of our categories are not categories of *things*; they are categories of abstract entities. . . . Any adequate account of human thought must provide an accurate theory for *all* our categories, both concrete and abstract. (*Women* 6, original emphasis)

The assumptions of the classical theory of truth were based more on philosophical speculation than on empirical study of the perception and interpretation of reality, Lakoff asserts. But they do not account for the discoveries made by linguists in at least the past sixty years about what

language use can tell us empirically about the relationship of categorization and concepts to reality.

Conceptual metaphor theory is based in a different theory of truth than is the classical theory of category construction. On one hand, conceptual metaphor theorists disagree that there exists an objective, natural truth that our concepts and language can and do accurately reflect. On the other hand, conceptual metaphor theorists do not claim that all connections among language, semantics, and reality are relative. Rather, the theory of truth undergirding CMT asserts that we perceive something to be true when it fits our existing systems of concepts or, more rarely, fits as a result of having caused us to cognitively adjust our conceptual system (*Women* 267). Adjustments to our conceptual system occur as a result of our cultural context, individual embodiment, and experience of the natural world. Consider the findings of Eleanor Rosch's groundbreaking work with language and categorization, to which Lakoff refers in *Women*. Rosch's study of the category BIRD<sup>42</sup> indicates that categories are not the result of direct and objective perception of the categories that are natural and self-evident. Rosch discovered that people think of some birds as better and worse examples of the category BIRD. Specifically, robins and sparrows were considered by the subjects of Rosch's study to be better examples of BIRD than owls and eagles, Lakoff reports (*Women* 45).

At first, Rosch's results seemed to suggest, according to Lakoff, "that membership in the category *bird* is graded and that owls and penguins are less members of the *bird* category than robins" (*Women* 45). But this isn't the case. Each of the birds listed as examples were recognized by respondents as being fully birds, not more or less birds, as they would be if

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<sup>42</sup> Typographically, words that are capitalized indicate that the word refers to a concept, something that is entirely in the minds of language users; categories, insofar as they refer to the conceptual categories that we construct to understand reality, will also be capitalized. Italics, as with the previous chapter, indicate the use of an example. For example, the conceptual category FONT is activated in the minds of readers of the example sentence *I had to select a font*.

membership in the category BIRD were graded. Lakoff explains that the fact that some birds are recognized as better examples of BIRD than others proves that there are other ways to structure categories than natural or “true” correspondence to an objective reality. Instead, we cognitively organize the phenomena we encounter into *conceptual* categories. That is, our perception not only of things but “of abstract entities ... [including] events, actions, emotions, spatial relationships, social relationships, and abstract entities” is fundamentally “a matter of both human experience and imagination – of perception, motor activity, and culture on the one hand, and of metaphor, metonymy, and mental imagery on the other (*Women* 6-8). Rosch’s work proves that we are capable of perceiving in our world in terms of prototypicality – recognizing that there are better and worse examples of things that are equally members in a category – because our categories are conceptual rather than natural or positive.

### **3.2.2 Truth, Reality, and Experience**

Thus, we perceive truth not when something fits with objective, natural reality but when it fits with the conceptual categories of reality that we have constructed as a result of our direct and indirect experiences of that reality. This is the fundamental premise of experiential realism, which Lakoff and Johnson offer to as an alternative to the classical theory of truth. Consider the example, cited by Lakoff in *Women*, of Charles Fillmore’s study of the conceptual category BACHELOR (70-1). We are not born knowing what or who is properly called a “bachelor,” and not all cultures and languages have a term for the concept BACHELOR. We come to “know” or, more accurately, to construct a conceptual category of BACHELOR by first encountering the concept in our culture, adopting it into our own conceptual systems of thought, and by meeting or hearing about people who fit the category BACHELOR. Because categories are constructed rather than natural, according to experiential realism, our conceptual systems can absorb

anomalies. For example, we can simultaneously know that the word “bachelor” denotes an unmarried adult man and that there are men who meet those criteria but are not members of the conceptual category BACHELOR. The Pope is one such example. The Pope is not an uncommon member of the category BACHELOR nor is he a bad example of the category. To be either a prototypical or atypical member of the category would imply that the Pope belongs to the category at all. If BACHELOR were a natural category, then the Pope would have to belong to it since it would be against nature to omit him from a category whose criteria he meets. But, of course, like all conceptual categories, BACHELOR is not natural and objective but constructed from personal and cultural experience with and knowledge of that category, as are exceptions to the rules that structure our knowledge of the concept.

How is it possible that we can know that BACHELOR should include the Pope and that BACHELOR should not include the Pope? Fillmore’s study, Lakoff remarks, suggests that we can explain the discontinuity by understanding that not all categories consist of prototypical or graded membership (whereby, for example, some bachelors are better examples of BACHELOR than others) but by recognizing that what is graded is “the degree to which the [category] fits our knowledge or assumptions about the world” and vice versa (*Women* 71). Lakoff offers another equally plausible explanation of the contradiction between categorization and knowledge as being a matter of thinking of BACHELOR as an idealized cognitive model (ICM). An ICM is a complex of multiple concepts with its own internal structure. Idealized cognitive models are “idealized” in that they represent how we think about things more than they represent actual things. They are “models” in that their idealized structure reflects (what we perceive to be) reality more than an accurate reflection of reality. The ICM for BACHELOR would include not only a structured concept of the criteria by which we consider something as a member of the

category BACHELOR; it would also include a structured concept of our knowledge about the *background conditions* that are necessary for membership in the category. In this example, we would “take two cognitive models – one for *bachelor* and one for characterizing one’s knowledge about an individual, say the pope – and compare them, noting the ways in which they overlap and the ways in which they differ” (*Women* 71). Since our knowledge of the Pope does not fit our knowledge of BACHELORS, we do not perceive this discontinuity as a misrepresentation of nature.

These studies of language, cognition, and categorization reveal that reality consists of our constructed knowledge both of objectively-observable phenomena and of abstract entities. “Since we understand the world not only in terms of individual things but also in terms of *categories* of things,” Lakoff writes, “we tend to attribute a real existence to those categories” (*Women* 9). That is, we take our categories as appropriate to reality, and we reason about the world based on the ways we have constructed reality in categories. The fact that we recognize better and worse examples of the members of categories and that there are multiple ways of explaining the contradictions and unpredictability of those categories supports the notion that reality is in many ways more *experiential* than objective.

To some, it may seem that experiential realism is essentially a theory of relativism, but experientialism contends that our concepts are grounded in our experiences of certain objective phenomena, including our physical environment and embodiment (*Metaphors* 180; *Women* 210, 344). For example, the color green exists in the world objectively to the extent that most human beings possess the same color receptors that allow us to see the same hues, and any given object that we may perceive as being green will be green (i.e., reflect light in ways that would create the effect of being green) regardless of human perception. GREEN, as a conceptual category, is



different from the phenomena that produces what we perceive as the color green, and it is different in objective ways from both the cognitive and physical perception of other colors. The difference is not a question of mere language peculiarities but one of both objective and constructed reality: if I am told that a traffic light is blue when I perceive it, as a result of my physical capacities, to be green, I will think that the speaker has mistaken or purposefully misrepresented reality, though the speaker could be using the construction of “blue” available to her through her particular background knowledge (e.g., her culture, her native language), which may be quite different from my own.

This theory regarding the ties of the positive, physical world to perception and knowledge opposes scientific objectivism and improves upon scientific realism. “Scientific objectivism,” Lakoff explains,

claims that there is only one fully correct way in which reality can be correctly divided up into objects, properties, and relations. Accordingly, the correct choice of objects is not a matter of a choice of conceptual schemes: there is only one correct way to understand reality in terms of objects and categories of objects. Scientific realism, on the other hand, assumes that “the world is the way it is,” while acknowledging that there can be more than one scientifically correct way of understanding reality in terms of conceptual schemes with different objects and categories of objects. ... Since no God’s eye view standard is possible, that is the best we can do – and it’s pretty good. Good enough to provide us with reasonable standards for stable scientific knowledge. (*Women* 265)

The downfall of scientific realism, Lakoff finds, is that it still offers insufficient explanations of why categories don’t universally correspond to the natural world and why it is possible for the human mind to reason around overlaps and contradictions in categories. Experientialism,

however, helps us explain that categories are “real” when they fit our experiences of the natural, positive world *and* our constructed knowledge about it.

Arguably, “reality” isn’t as important a concern to experiential realism as *meaning*. Experiential realism sees “reality” in the sense of “objectively observable phenomena” as raw data that people experience and interpret. We make use of our existing conceptual categories in experiencing and interpreting (phenomena as being part of) these conceptual categories, sorting the data into applicable categories, perhaps restructuring the categories if necessary, and recognizing some experiences as better or worse fits for these existing categories. If it is true that our concepts and categories are not objective but are a matter of the interpretation of the raw data of experience through the various (biological, physical, and social) lenses of our embodied nature as human beings, then it becomes clear that our very interpretations of the “real” material world and our constructions of “real” abstractions like time, truth, and honesty are not objective in a positive sense but experientially and cognitively real in an objective sense. Put simply, any experience is real and has the capacity to affect reality by affecting how we think and act in the real world.

### **3.2.3 Metaphor and Experiential Reality**

In experientialism, metaphor can be treated as true or false since truth and falsity are determined by fit with concepts rather than natural categories. This contradicts the traditional notion that metaphor is a poetic aberration from “literal” language that is incapable of being or communicating “truth.” It also means, Lakoff and Johnson aver, that we can study metaphor using empirical and social-scientific methods that give us a more precise understanding metaphors’ “conceptual nature, their contribution to understanding, [and] their function in cultural reality” (*Metaphors* 159). Once we assume that reality is both objective and constructed

and that our conceptual systems give structure and meaning to our experience of reality, we can make the study of metaphor a matter of studying the mind and its cognitive mechanisms, capacities, and habits, and of understanding how and why we use cognition to link our conceptual systems and reality. We can use methods from literary analysis to discourse analysis and neuroimaging to show those who think that language has no bearing on reality that to link source and target linguistically or culturally is to link them physically in our brains and cognitively in our minds; we can explain that hearing a repeated metaphor produces observable effects in the minds of individuals and in whole cultures. By extension, we can also explain that the experience of (particularly recurrent patterns of) literary plots and tropes also affects our minds and our perception of and participation in reality in empirically-verifiable ways.

To prove that metaphors are true – that is, that they fit with our conceptual systems – one must first observe what the conventional knowledge is of the source and target concepts involved in the metaphor. This is particularly easy for conventional metaphors such as ANGER IS HEAT and SAD IS DOWN that are already part of our culture’s way of conceptualizing, experiencing, and communicating about reality. These conventional metaphors may seem to be “transcendent” because they are nearly universal, and in those cultures where these metaphors are commonly encountered, they may seem too automatic to be constructed. However, their universality and commonality derive not from some property inherent in the concept (*qua* concept) or linguistic expression (*qua* language) but from the fact that all people experience ANGER IS HEAT and SAD IS DOWN as the result of our physical embodiment: Anger leads to increased heart rate and to increased body temperature; similarly, those who are sad or depressed are often lack the energy it takes to sit or stand up straight (*Metaphors* 15). Statements such as *She was steamed* and *He seems really down* are linguistic expressions of metaphors that are structured by our

conceptual categories of ANGER, HEAT, SAD, and DOWN, and the metaphors they express – ANGER IS HEAT, and SAD IS DOWN – are themselves concepts that are conventional for most cultures. Each culture has its own sets of conventional metaphors, and when we adopt concepts like ANGER IS HEAT into our conceptual systems, we measure truth against it.

Lakoff and Johnson find that unconventional metaphors can be understood as true in the same way as conventional metaphors. To prove this assertion, they examine the truth of two linguistic expressions of the same conceptual metaphor, LIFE IS A STORY. The first – *Tell me the story of your life* – is a conventional expression in our culture. The second – *Life's ... a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing* – is an unconventional expression of the same metaphor. To understand whether the unconventional expression is true – that is, whether LIFE can *be* A STORY – we must understand what it means to think that LIFE IS A STORY. “It is assumed” in our culture, Lakoff and Johnson write, “that everyone’s life is structured like a story, and the entire biographical and autobiographical tradition is based on this assumption. Suppose someone asks you to tell your life story. What do you do? You construct a coherent narrative that starts early in your life and continues up to the present” (*Metaphors* 172). LIFE, when conceptualized in terms of a STORY, will be structured in terms of categories of common LIFE experiences, including experiences with/of people, parts of life (“significant facts, episodes, and significant states”), stages of life (including preconditions, beginning, middle, and end), a linear sequence of events and an indication of the causes for the linear progression of the sequence, and purposes (goals, plans, or other catalysts) (*Metaphors* 173). In telling our life stories, we highlight some participants and events over others and “perceive them as fitting together coherently in the way specified by the structure of the narrative” (*Metaphors* 173-4). The unconventional expression of this conventional metaphor can also be true if it

fit[s] the lives of people whose life circumstances change so radically, rapidly, and unexpectedly that no coherent life story ever seems possible for them. ... [W]e should stress ... that issues of truth are among the least relevant and interesting issues that arise in the study of metaphor. The real significance of the metaphor LIFE'S ... A TALE TOLD BY AN IDIOT is that, in getting us to try to understand how it could be true, it makes possible a new understanding of our lives. It highlights the fact that we are constantly functioning under the expectation of being able to fit our lives into some coherent life story but that this expectation may be constantly frustrated when the most salient experiences in our lives, those full of sound and fury, do not fit any coherent whole and, therefore, signify nothing. (*Metaphors* 174)

For those cultures in which LIFE IS A STORY is not a conventional metaphor, it will not be automatically true that LIFE is any sort of STORY, though the metaphor can still be true insofar as it fits its audience's knowledge of the source and target concepts.

### ***3.3 Literary Reality***

#### **3.3.1 Interaction between LIFE and STORY**

Lakoff and Johnson's choice of the conventional metaphor LIFE IS A STORY proves particularly felicitous for considering ways in which the study of language, including literature, can be enriched by the principles, methods, and discoveries of CMT. In this metaphor, we consider LIFE<sup>43</sup> in terms of A STORY, highlighting salient entailments or aspects of both

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<sup>43</sup> By LIFE, I do not mean "those things which are alive" or "the state of being alive. The distinction is important since the sense of "life" I have in mind has more to do with the constructed notion of daily lived *experience* than any state of *being*. Furthermore, as regards the category structure of the concept LIFE, I have refrained from any description of LIFE by some existing distinctions (e.g., Lakoff's distinctions among subcategories in *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*). I affirm that LIFE is a concept and that it and its constituent conceptual categories exhibit prototype effects because of their various types of category structures (e.g., radial categories, ICMs, metonymic models, etc.). But since multiple explanations of the structures of categories are possible, and since making this sort of distinction would only be of minimal importance for my observations about the nature of literature (i.e., that the

concepts and hiding others, then mapping the salient entailments from the relatively more concrete phenomenon STORY to the relatively more abstract phenomenon of LIFE or lived human experience. The aspects of STORY that Lakoff and Johnson find most pertinent to understanding LIFE include participants/characters, plot, stages of the story, the linearity of the sequence of events or plot, and the purpose or the moral communicated in the story. Less salient aspects of the concept STORY include where and how STORIES are told, though these are also part of our concept of STORY and we might not recognize something as being a story if we encountered it in a nutrition label or if it were shouted at us. The aspects of STORY that are highlighted are those that help us to see a resemblance<sup>44</sup> between LIFE and STORY. The structure of this conceptual metaphor can be as illuminating as it is oppressive, as Lakoff and Johnson point out: stories narrate and organize the experiences they depict, guiding us to see some examples of LIFE – the lived human experience of certain (categories of ) people, events, causes, and purposes – as being better or worse examples of the experience and/or story of LIFE.

The metaphor LIFE IS A STORY also exemplifies the validity of the interanimation and interaction theories of metaphor that were first offered by I.A. Richards and Max Black. Lakoff and Johnson and many conceptual metaphor theorists after them rejected interaction theories on the grounds that they imply a conceptual unity rather than a tension exists between metaphorized

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prototype effects of the categories of LIFE presented in works of literature are evident when we consider what experiences *are* and *are not* what we take to be “typical” in both culture and literature), I leave the work of defining the types of categories of LIFE to others who may find such an investigation to be necessary and fruitful.

<sup>44</sup> Ricoeur comments at length in *Rule of Metaphor* about the relationship of metaphor to resemblance. While he rejects the notion that metaphor is a matter of superficial substitution or comparison (the purview of simile), he remarks that comparison is not synonymous with resemblance; metaphor requires the ability to see resemblances in phenomena, but it does not necessarily require that we compare the phenomena or their similar or dissimilar features. Ricoeur endorses Hester’s theory that metaphor is a matter of seeing one thing *as* another: “‘Seeing X as Y’ encompasses ‘X is *not* Y’” (214). To see a resemblance implies that we recognize both the similarities and the dissimilarities simultaneously in a metaphor, and that in recognizing them, “The borders of meaning are transgressed but not abolished” (214). Seeing-as also indicates that we do more than use a trick of language to effect a comparison when we formulate metaphors; it “designates the *non-verbal* mediation of the metaphorical statement” (214, original emphasis). Ultimately, the mimetic work of metaphor is not in imitation or comparison but in highlighting salient resemblances between two distinct phenomena.

domains. This unity implies that metaphors can be inverted and retain their meaning, but Lakoff and Johnson note that the entailments that follow from LIFE IS A STORY are different from A STORY IS LIFE. That is, the second metaphor would produce such expressions as *This story is born* rather than *My story began with my birth*. These qualms with interaction theories, however, do not take into account that Black's interaction theory rejects the notion that metaphor is only a matter of comparing or finding likenesses between concepts. It also ignores the fact that interaction theories of metaphor are more concerned with the likelihood that when we encounter one concept from a common metaphor we are more likely to think about the other concept from the common metaphor than we are another concept that we have never or only rarely associated with the concept.

In fact, the history of how we have conceptualized literature in the West indicates that the concepts LIFE and STORY have come to interact with one another beyond the scope of the metaphor LIFE IS A STORY.<sup>45</sup> Since at least Aristotle, we have come to understand stories as being significant for their ability to hypostatize abstract notions about LIFE into the concrete representation of experiencing/experienced LIFE. As Eagleton demonstrates,<sup>46</sup> we judge STORIES to be good in terms of style – their aesthetic execution – or in terms of their meaning – how interesting the stories are or whether they provide the best reflection of our experiences or the reflection of our best experiences.<sup>47</sup> We have taken some stories as being more important or,

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<sup>45</sup> Whether this interaction caused the metaphor LIFE IS A STORY or is the result of that metaphor is perhaps something that can be ascertained with a relative degree of certainty, but it would require us to investigate the metaphor systems and uses of literature across history, cultures, geographic locations, and modes of discourse. I am inclined to say that it is as likely that the concept LIFE IS A STORY led to our thinking of LIFE and STORY in terms of one another beyond this metaphor as it is that the interaction of STORY and LIFE in the minds of people in various Western cultures has led Americans to metaphorize LIFE as a STORY. Regardless of which came first, the metaphoric and conceptual interactions recursively construct and reshape each other each time we use them.

<sup>46</sup> For a summary of Eagleton's overview of definitions of literature, see chapter 1, above.

<sup>47</sup> I have not included "significant" alongside "style" and "meaning" because "significant" works may not necessarily be "good," either stylistically or in terms of meaning. They may be significant because they are bad, and so they are not necessarily appropriate to the category of GOOD STORIES to which I refer here.

like robins in the category BIRD, as better examples than others both of good writing and of the LIFE depicted in the (fictional and non-fictional) texts. We have created a conceptual category for these stories and an accompanying linguistic term, “literature.” Put another way, we have, as Eagleton notes, come to equate the stylistic excellence and engaging content of a work of literature with its importance or significance for our own life experiences.

### **3.3.2 The Metaphoric Nature of Literary Comprehension**

The equation of our concept of GOOD or LITERARY WRITING with our concept of what constitutes a GOOD LIFE isn't the consequence of the natural characteristics of any of these categories. It is the result of our processing literature as a metaphor. In reading a work of literature, readers draw upon their conceptual category of LIFE – both what is considered prototypical or normal according to the multiple cultures to which they belong as well as to their own direct, personal experiences – in order to discern what the text before them suggests is or should be involved in the experience of LIFE. This is a metaphoric process, one in which readers understand the text in terms of their knowledge about the participants, parts, stages, linearity, causality, and purpose of lived human experience. This literary comprehension is interactional, though, insofar as readers' concepts about LIFE can be changed by experiencing LIFE (as it is depicted) in works of literature. Ultimately, this sort of indirect experience is the same as hearing only second-hand information about bachelors and constructing a conceptual category of BACHELOR based on purely these sorts of indirect experiences. Without having had the direct experience of meeting a bachelor, it is still possible for me to draw upon others' experiences to gain my own knowledge of the category. It may be that literature is even more powerful than other indirect experiences of LIFE (such as listening to our friends' stories of their



experiences with bachelors) because we have been conditioned to recognize LITERATURE as having something significant to say about LIFE.

It is important to emphasize that this experience of literature as a metaphorization of LIFE is fundamentally tensive in the way that Ricoeur theorized metaphor to be tensive. We may find many opportunities to metaphorize the experience of LIFE depicted in a literary text and in terms of our particular lives and our concept of LIFE. But we will also inevitably find that the correspondences and resemblances between the literary depiction of LIFE and our own knowledge of it will never form a unity or tautology, both because it is not an individual reader's life story being told in every work of literature and because the reader's particular experiences and concept of LIFE are not always those that are suggested to the reader in the work of literature as being possible, typical, or ideal.

The metaphoric nature of literature and the fact that what literature metaphorizes are concepts of LIFE makes literature of the utmost importance. This metaphoric theory of literature is predicated on the notion that we construct our experiences into conceptual categories and that, in turn, our concepts affect how we perceive, react to, and comprehend reality. This means that literature has the potential to influence reality by influencing its readers' notions of what people, events, stages, sequence and causes for changes and developments, and purposes are typical of LIFE, categorically speaking. It bears repeating that this is a matter of influence, not determination. The fear of cognitive determination is at work whenever any authority – from the federal government to parents – threatens to ban a book because of its capacity to influence the masses (not just scandalize them). But this folk theory<sup>48</sup> of literary determination often

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<sup>48</sup> Lakoff defines folk theories or folk models as the theorization by “Ordinary people without any technical expertise” (*Women* 118). Folk theories are not to be entirely discounted, but it is important that we recognize that folk theories can oversimplify or misrepresent both the natural world and the nature of human activity in it.

reinforces an unfounded fear that to influence concepts and thinking, even temporarily, is to permanently and irreversibly change that concept. Thankfully, experientialism demonstrates that such a theory of determination oversimplifies the relationship among language, cognition, and reality. Concepts are neither made or fundamentally reshaped suddenly, nor are any such changes necessarily permanent, certainly not from a cognitive point of view. If, for example, if we read often enough about female characters who are either sweet and helpless or cruel and domineering, or if those are the primary type of culturally-significant or well-known female characters, then those literary experiences of women can affect our concept of WOMEN at least temporarily and perhaps permanently. Concepts like WOMAN may not change overnight, but they can change over time if repeated experiences, such as literary experiences, influence our structure of the concept.

As an example of the ways that literature can metaphorize and influence our concepts of entailed aspects of LIFE, consider the conceptual category DETECTIVE as it is typically represented in literature. The typical detective is a man who eschews emotion in favor of a cool, logical approach to most things in life, including his detective work, but who is also a loner and operates on his own authority. Prototypical examples of the DETECTIVE include Sherlock Holmes and Philip Marlowe. Atypical examples of DETECTIVES are women, but female detectives often exhibit many of the personality traits of the prototypical male detectives. One example of such a female detective is V.I. Warshawski, the protagonist of Sara Paretsky's novels including *Killing Orders* (1985) and *Hardball* (2009). V.I. also goes by the androgynous truncation "Vic," though her full name is Victoria. Nancy Drew is an even less "good" example of DETECTIVE than V.I. Warshawski because of her age and friendly temperament. As we read works of literature that feature detectives, we weigh whether the depiction of DETECTIVE

– as a conceptual category of people and therefore part of our concept of what the experience of LIFE can or should entail – *is* or *is not* a good fit with our existing knowledge about LIFE and the world as we’ve experienced it. It would take many more stories with female detectives to make gender a moot point for defining goodness-of-example of the category DETECTIVE in works of literature and for those literary examples to permanently affect the structure of DETECTIVE as a conceptual category in our minds.

Furthermore, our non-literary experiences of DETECTIVE as a category influence the structure of the category for us as individuals and, if the experiences are widely-shared, for an entire culture. As we read a work of literature that has a character who is a detective, we balance the depiction of the character presented in the text against our expectations of the typical detective. We may find Nancy Drew’s atypicality as a member of the category DETECTIVE to be interpreted as new and creative or as a purposeless deviation from the norm.<sup>49</sup> We may find both Nancy Drew and Sherlock Holmes to be atypical of our direct, personal, extra-literary experience of detectives, even if Holmes remains typical for our concept of LITERARY DETECTIVES. The process of identifying when and how any given work of literature presents us with an accurate depiction of “real” LIFE always involves a process of recognizing both fit and incongruity between our concept of what the literary work suggests about LIFE and the concept of LIFE that we bring to the text.

Thus, the metaphoric nature of literature is what makes it worthy of study and research. The ways that the world is presented in literature matters, particularly if the representation is one that recurs in a culture. If DETECTIVES are thought by a culture to be one way or another, then

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<sup>49</sup> For more on the implications of genre-based categorical normativity regarding the concept DETECTIVE, see Anne Cranny-Francis’s chapter in *The Power of Literacy*, “Gender and Genre: Feminist Subversion of Genre Fiction and its Implications for Critical Literacy.”

atypical detectives – whether “literary,” fictitious (as with characters like Monk or Cal Lightman), or flesh-and-blood – may not be recognized as detectives. The stakes can be quite high for people from marginalized or underrepresented groups. Often, their experiences do not align with what the mainstream anticipates should be the norm, and literature has the potential to reinforce or adjust how readers think about both the norm and those whose experiences do not always fit well with it.

In the remainder of this chapter, I offer a brief study of the metaphoric nature of autobiography and four case studies of autobiographies as a more detailed example of what the study of literature as a metaphorization of LIFE can reveal about the relationships among language, literature, cultural, individual readers and writers, and cognition. Autobiography is a fruitful example of this approach to literature for several reasons. First, autobiography as a genre is not always considered “literary,” and even when it is, not all autobiographies are equally esteemed as “literary,” sometimes because they are not considered aesthetically-pleasing or aesthetically- or culturally-significant. Analyzing several autobiographies, including those that may not generally be considered to be literary, will help prove that it is the reading and comprehension process that is fundamentally “literary” and that we can and do read a variety of texts as literature.

Second, autobiography presents us with opportunities to observe the tensive but complementary interaction of history, rhetoric, and aesthetics that has been the source of profound confusion about the relationship between language and truth or reality and between rhetoric and literature. Third, autobiographies give us an opportunity to explore the ways that our concepts, perceptions, and actions structure and are structured by our individual and socio-cultural experiences. For this reason, I focus my study on autobiographies written by Americans

after 1970 since it was after 1970 that autobiographies that were atypical in terms of style and that represented an atypical (concept of) LIFE began to receive serious critical and cultural attention. These autobiographies represent the tensions between LIFE as depicted in the work of literature and the concept of LIFE as it is constructed by the individual and cultural experiences of the autobiographer and readers.

### ***3.4 Autobiographical Experiences of LIFE***

#### **3.4.1 Autobiographical Prototype Effects**

Are genre-based classifications made in the same way that all other types of categories are developed? As rhetorical genre theorist Amy J. Devitt remarks in *Writing Genres* (2004), this “is a question deserving examination by neurologists, cognitive psychologists, and psycholinguists. What we know,” she continues,

is that language users perceive genres without being taught them apart from learning language (once they know the words, they describe themselves as telling “jokes” or “stories,” for example), and different groups develop new words to describe the different genres they use. People classify unique actions under common labels, and we scholars call those labels “genres.” (8-9)

Devitt goes on to warn that genres are not synonymous with categories if by categories we mean arbitrary divisions or seemingly inherent qualities (6-9). Devitt endorses the view of genre that has dominated rhetorical genre theory for nearly three decades: that genre is a typified rhetorical action that becomes typified as a result of its use in “recurring conditions [that] involve a social context” (13).

These views of genre align with what cognitive linguistics and an experientialist theory of knowledge and reality tell us about the interaction of language and the cognitive process of

categorization. For both rhetorical genre theorists and cognitive linguists who accept the basic premises of experientialism, genres can be considered categories without ignoring that genres are conceptual categories, constructed by language users, that both shape and are shaped by how their users perceive and act in the world. To think of genres as categories in this way is not to think of them as arbitrary or false labels that derive more from scholars' and critics' arbitrary pronouncements about what a given genre's essential traits are or should be. Instead, it defines genre as a strategy employed by language users to construct their worlds and establish expectations for reacting to recurring situations.

As conceptual categories, genres are one way that reader cognitively structure their individual and cultural experiences and of the (experiences depicted in the) texts they read. Because conceptual categories are constructed from experiential knowledge, they are, as Devitt notes about genres, constantly balancing between stability and instability (135). However, the fact that genre labels and categories exist indicates a shared experiential knowledge of patterns of text form, function, and effects. That is, the fact that the genre label "joke" is commonly used and recognized in our culture indicates that we share the conceptual category JOKE like we do BIRD and BACHELOR. We expect that jokes will fit our experiential knowledge of what JOKE entails; texts that are not funny or that are serious may not be recognized as JOKES. We may find atypical jokes to be innovative or bad examples of the category JOKE. Regardless, rhetorical genre theory, cognitive psychology, and cognitive linguistics all indicate that the conceptual structure of JOKE isn't something we're born with; we construct our knowledge of the genre category by hearing others talk about and tell jokes and by seeing others' reactions to the jokes we tell or hear.

Because our knowledge of genre categories depends on our individual and social experiences of the genre in cultural contexts, the conceptual structures of genre categories reveal just as much about culture and history as the textual patterns to which they refer. For example, whether we define AUTOBIOGRAPHY as a subcategory of LITERATURE has to do with our expectations of what is prototypical for the conceptual genre categories of both LITERATURE and AUTOBIOGRAPHY. It is often problematically assumed that autobiography is more a matter of historical reportage than the craft of composing texts – literary or otherwise – that may or may not be worthy of special esteem. Our cultural knowledge of HISTORY makes history seem more objective than it ever actually is; the narrative<sup>50</sup> nature of historiography requires that the historiographer highlight and hide elements of her report. But narrating one’s life necessarily requires highlighting and hiding certain parts of one’s life since autobiographies are not direct transcriptions of one’s minute-to-minute activities and thoughts. Autobiographies are generally assumed to be at least relatively less reliable than histories or biographies since their authors are also the subjects and we expect that their assessment of their histories will be colored by subjectivity. Since the prototypical autobiography or memoir deviates substantially from HISTORY by not offering a direct, objective report of the events of the autobiographer’s life, the typical autobiography probably belongs just as much if not more to the category of LITERATURE than HISTORY.

Another reason that AUTOBIOGRAPHY as a genre is typically separated from HISTORY is that personal anecdote is prototypically more appropriate to autobiographical writing than historical writing. Because the personal and anecdotal are not typically valued as

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<sup>50</sup> As Jameson observes in *The Political Unconscious*, narrative in historical and literary texts has the normalizing effect of “narrativizing” (suggesting a falsely linear, causal structure to) the events they depict, which tacitly proposes a sense of what experiences are normal, expected, and ideal.

“historically accurate,” this conceptualization of autobiography undermines its use-value<sup>51</sup> as a means of saying something of cultural and historical importance. Furthermore, the personal anecdotes of some people are valued more than others, usually because their lives are seen as being more culturally-significant and their personal anecdotes as worthy of recording either for the sake of history or for the sake of using their lives as an example of an ideal life in one respect or another. Thus, our concept AUTOBIOGRAPHY has privileged or made typical the propriety of telling only the stories of lives that our culture already considers prototypical or ideal. One of the consequences of this conceptual structure of the category has been the devaluation of the life stories of marginalized people, whose life stories and styles of autobiographical writing are often quite different from those of the typical autobiography.

The generic expectation that autobiography will tell the historically accurate story of a historically or culturally important life derives in large part from the relationship of our concept AUTOBIOGRAPHY to the genre of Greek epic. As Ronald L. Williams, Jr. remarks in *African American Autobiography and the Quest for Freedom* (2000), our cultural knowledge of AUTOBIOGRAPHY inherited from Greek epic the expectation that any story worth telling about an individual person must be about a great man who overcomes adversity through his own ingenuity and the help of good fortune and friends (1-6). Even autobiographies by members of marginalized groups can reinforce this genre expectation by highlighting certain events or choices that present the autobiographer as a hero(ine) or as someone from that marginalized group who has endured or overcome adversity. But quite often, autobiographies by members of marginalized groups do not meet this expectation. These autobiographies may focus more on the communities of which an autobiographer sees herself as a representative example rather than

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<sup>51</sup> For more on the use-value of genre, see Thomas O. Beebee's *Ideology of Genre: A Comparative Study of Generic Instability* (1994) 1-29.



on the autobiographer as an individual. They may focus more on the events of the LIFE depicted than on the person(ality) of the autobiographer. And they may focus more on the fact that the autobiographer's life is not to be taken as an ideal but perhaps just as a salient example<sup>52</sup> of LIFE that does not fit well with the mainstream conceptualization of LIFE.

### **3.4.2 Reading Autobiography as a Metaphorization of LIFE**

There are certain cues that suggest to readers that they should read an autobiographical text as literature and, therefore, as a metaphorization of LIFE. Readers may recognize a resemblance or correspondence between the depiction of LIFE in autobiographical texts and their own concept of LIFE, which could trigger a metaphoric process of understanding some aspects of one concept in terms of corresponding aspects from a different concept. From this approach, readers would come to read an autobiographical text as literature because they're reading it as a metaphorization of LIFE. Other cues may also trigger the recognition that a reader should be reading an autobiography literarily and thus as a metaphor, such as whether the reader knows that the autobiography is culturally significant or whether she has encountered the autobiography in a literature course or in the literature section of a bookstore or library.

We read autobiography as a metaphorization of LIFE in the same way that we read other works of literature as metaphorizations of LIFE. This reading process begins with a reader's experiential knowledge of the concept LIFE. An American conceptualization of LIFE might entail that in terms of PEOPLE, the typical LIFE will involve a nurturing MOTHER, breadwinning FATHER, a loving SPOUSE, and competent if not enjoyable COWORKERS, among other subcategories of PEOPLE. We might also think of the typical LIFE as being structured by certain parts such as rites of passage or states like BEING IN LOVE or

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<sup>52</sup> In *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*, Lakoff differentiates among types of prototypes (86-90). These include typical examples, ideals, paragons, generators, submodels, and salient examples.

GRIEVING. LIFE seems to have clearly defined stages (i.e., birth, childhood, adolescence, young adulthood, middle age, late adulthood, old age) with increasingly less well-defined sub-stages (e.g., awkward teenage years, mid-life crisis). And we think of the purpose of LIFE as being something we will never completely understand, something we must always be searching for. Of course, our “knowledge” about LIFE will probably not exactly match our direct, personal experiences of these constituent parts of the conceptual category of LIFE since the concept is so complex and complicated or destabilized as a result of its being based on knowledge shared in our culture. It is an idealization of what LIFE typically entails or should entail.<sup>53</sup>

In reading an autobiography, readers draw upon their concepts of LIFE in order to understand whether and how LIFE as it is depicted in the autobiography aligns with what they “know” through their cultural and individual experiences to be typical of LIFE. They weigh whether LIFE in the work of literature *is* LIFE as they are familiar with it or if it *is not* a good fit with their concept of LIFE. Readers may correlate the goodness of the (concept of) LIFE depicted in the autobiography with the goodness of the depiction of the life, per Eagleton’s comments about the history of the concept LITERATURE. The possibility exists for readers’ concepts of LIFE to cognitively and conceptually interact with those of the autobiographical depiction of LIFE. They may reevaluate or restructure – perhaps even automatically and unconsciously, as Lakoff says (*Women* 6) – their concept of LIFE based on their new experience of LIFE through the autobiography.

With autobiography in particular, readers may emphasize the *is* in the metaphor processing rather than the *is not*. This may be due in part to autobiography’s roots in Greek epic

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<sup>53</sup>Whether readers do make a clear differentiation between this sort of cultural-ideal LIFE and actual-personal concept of LIFE should and can be investigated further, and I hope that the process of literary analysis via CMT that I outline here can provide a helpful basis for such an investigation.

and “great man” stories,” which encourage us to aspire to be like the autobiographical subject, who has overcome tragedies and has not only lived to tell the tale but has lived so well as to be worthy of an audience. But the *is not* is just as important as the *is* in metaphor; we will never *be* the autobiographers about whom we are reading, and even if our experiences of LIFE resemble theirs or *are* theirs in that we also have experiences with the (types of) participants, parts, stages, linear-causal events, and purposes that they have, their experiences will never exactly be ours. Because of the metaphoric nature of literature, when we detect resemblances between our experience of LIFE and the experience of LIFE that we read about in autobiographies, we understand those experiences of LIFE as being our own experiences of the same categories of LIFE at the same time that we understand that they are not our own direct, personal experiences.

For all its typical characteristics, there is much variation in actual autobiographies. Paragons of autobiographies like Benjamin Franklin’s *Autobiography* and, more recently, Bill Clinton’s *My Life* are only the norm in that they *are* paragons, not because they are the statistically most common or best type of autobiography. There are many other examples and even independent subgenres of autobiographies, such as fictional autobiographies and children’s or young adult autobiographies. Each of these different types of autobiographies present different strategies of metaphorizing LIFE for both their writers and readers. In the case studies below, I will observe some of these strategies as they are used in prototypical and atypical autobiographies.

### **3.4.3 A Brief Genealogy of Post-1970 American Autobiography**

The *OED* indicates that the word “autobiography” was first used in 1797, and its first titular use, according to literary critic and autobiography scholar James Olney, was in 1834 in W.P. Scargill’s *The Autobiography of a Dissenting Minister* (5). Olney writes that “three Greek

elements meaning ‘self-life-writing’ were combined to describe a literature already existing” (6). In addition to the Greek epic, autobiography scholars including Olney, Sidonie Smith, and Leigh Gilmore find the Christian confessional tradition to be the next significant antecedent of autobiography. Christianity made the individual person significant not only in terms of the opportunity for a personal relationship with God but also in terms of the personal responsibility for self-examination required for repentance and salvation. In this way, “the truth of an individual’s inner struggle” became the basis for determining the value and worth of confession (Smith 22; see also Gilmore 108-29). In addition to Christianity’s attention to the individual, Smith writes that “The disintegration of the feudal system” also increased the sense of how important individuals are within a social system (22). The Copernican revolution had a similar effect of centering human beings as agents in their own universe and as creators of knowledge about that universe (Olney 31; Smith 23).

Later cultural changes and historical events also shaped and partially demystified the notion of individual “identity.” During the medieval age, “mediocre metal plates that were used in antiquity gave way [...] to silver-backed mirrors produced by Venetian technique” (Olney 32), which were further refined during the Renaissance (Smith 24). This technological improvement made a familiarity with the “true” self seem possible. The proliferation of the written word via the printing press during the Renaissance led to increased literacy and readership, and much of the philosophy, literature, and political writing available to this extended readership theorized about the relationship of the individual to society (Smith 24-5). For U.S. autobiography in particular, Smith and Williams, Jr. both remark that the spirit of independence related to the Revolution, the Protestant work ethic, and the industrial revolution shaped our interest in the self-made man (Smith 4; Williams, Jr. 9-39). Interest in psychology from the nineteenth and

twentieth centuries reinforced this interest in the individual mind. Freudian psychology validated the notion that the key to personal happiness lies within one's own mind, but it also checked this focus on the individual by requiring supervision by an authority, much like a priest oversees confession (Gilmore 56).

These cultural and historical shifts influenced our conceptualization of autobiography as a form of historically and emotionally accurate disclosure of all pertinent facts, feelings, and events by a person who is capable of truthful self-revelation and whose life stands as a "supreme example" of morality, life experiences, or the essence of a given historical moment (Smith 8). As both a cause and an effect of this development of autobiography, autobiographical criticism and theory until the 1970s privileged these features. But certain autobiographies consistently failed to meet these criteria, both in terms of content and form. Women, for example, were thought by social and literary critics to be incapable of understanding themselves or their worlds in any significant and/or truthful way (Smith, Gilmore); even if their texts were not dismissed outright on those grounds, they might be condemned as morally or experientially irrelevant to mainstream, androcentric culture, or they might be dismissed as formally unacceptable since many women's autobiographies reflect and restate the dissonance of women's lives with the androcentric mainstream. Similar things can be said of the autobiographies of other marginalized and underrepresented groups, including homosexuals, genderqueers, ethnic minorities, and the economically disadvantaged, whose autobiographical works have been neglected or dismissed for not being authoritative representations of mainstream (conceptualizations of) LIFE.

Around 1970, however, autobiography criticism began to take up a greater variety of autobiographies, including those by marginalized or underrepresented groups and literary or

artistic autobiographies that didn't adhere to readers' stylistic expectations of AUTOBIOGRAPHY. Olney and Smith remark that part of the reason for this change was the fact that scholars, primarily in the humanities, began to reconceptualize HISTORY. Instead of thinking of HISTORY as a disinterested, truthful report of objective reality, scholars began to think about and treat HISTORY as a normalizing, necessarily subjective narrative that shapes how we think about our past (and present) as much as it reports on it. In autobiography studies, this validated inquiries into the individual (*auto*) experience as constitutive of rather than defined by history (*bio*). For the academy, Olney writes, autobiography "offers privileged access to an experience (the American experience, the black experience, the female experience, the African experience)," which made the study of autobiography "a popular, even fashionable, study [since] traditional ways of organizing literature by period or school have tended to give way to a different sort of organization (or disorganization)" (13). As critics and scholars of autobiography became dissatisfied with the norms and characteristics associated with autobiography, they took up a new label – "life writing" – to create critical distance between the traditional genre of autobiography and "the protean forms of contemporary personal narrative, including interviews, profiles, ethnographies, case studies, diaries, Web pages, and so on" (Eakin 1) that do not readily conform to the genre conventions or common conceptualization of AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

#### **3.4.4 Case Study One: Bill Clinton's Contemporary Paragon of Autobiography**

Bill Clinton's *My Life* is a prototypical autobiography, a historical but personal and friendly account of a historically- and culturally-significant life. In the Prologue to his voluminous autobiography, Clinton writes that when he was a young man, he made a list of life goals: "I wanted to be a good man, have a good marriage and children, have good friends, make a successful political life, and write a good book" (3). The autobiography is an account of how

Clinton set about achieving all but the last of these goals. “As for the great book, who knows?” Clinton asks, hinting at his autobiography. “It sure is a good story” (3).

In his autobiography, Clinton is a paragon of an American conceptual category of LIFE. That is, as an autobiographical subject, he is (mostly) admirable, has a happy family, makes good and beneficial friendships, and is successful in terms of the goals he sets for himself and in terms of cultural metrics of success (e.g., fame, wealth, charitableness, etc.). Clinton’s life is the kind of LIFE that many in his intended and potential audience may want to identify with. In this way, *My Life* is also a good example of literature – a text that asks readers to see LIFE as it is depicted in the text in terms of their experiential knowledge of LIFE and to consider whether that LIFE is one that *should be* their own though it *is not*. Although Clinton refrains from outright moralizing – a feature common in older prototypes of American autobiography like Benjamin Franklin’s autobiography – to emphasize the “should be” of his life story, he adheres to the expectation that autobiographies that are worthy of our attention will skew more toward historical accuracy and frank confession than artistic retelling of a life story. This suggests that readers are free to interpret the relevant life lessons for themselves rather than have Clinton himself pronounce the significance of his life experiences for the rest of us, as Franklin often did in his autobiography.

In recounting the events that led him from infancy to presidency, Clinton employs a type of storytelling that blends mostly history with confessional writing and psychological self-examination that is prototypical to autobiography. One example of this historical but personal style comes with Clinton’s recollection of his return to the U.S. from a series of visits to the U.K., Ireland, and Germany in the winter of 2001. “When I came home to the budget war,” Clinton writes,

the Republicans shut down the government again and it sure didn't feel like Christmas was on the way, though seeing Chelsea dance in *The Nutcracker* brightened my mood considerably. This time the shutdown was somewhat less severe because about 500,000 federal employees deemed "essential" were allowed to work without pay until the government reopened. But benefits to veterans and poor kids still weren't being paid. It wasn't much of a Christmas present to the American people. (689-90)

These observations about issues that he, as a prototypical great man, must face are tinged by the subjectivity of his opinions about them as well as by his thoughts regarding his emotional life. By disclosing his thoughts on this range of historical and personal issues, he invites reader to recognize the resemblance of their experiences with such categories of LIFE experience as JOB DIFFICULTIES, FAMILY EVENTS, MILITARY DRAFTS, FATHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIPS, and ECONOMIC TROUBLES. Readers may find the joy that Clinton takes in his family in the face of worries at work fits their understanding of how these elements of LIFE operate in relationship to one another, at least in terms of the structure of our cultural expectations of LIFE if not also in terms of our individual experiences. At the same time, readers know that Clinton's experiences are not literally their own, and some readers may not find his handling of this situation to fit their knowledge of the typical LIFE. Some readers, for example, may think that it is difficult to bracket off one's work woes from one's familial life and that Clinton has either not dealt with the situation well or that he has misrepresented it in his autobiography.

Readers of Clinton's autobiography can identify with Clinton's general experiences with LIFE in terms of concepts such as EDUCATION, SUCCESS, and MISTAKES. But events particular to Clinton's life make Clinton's experiences exceptionally good examples of LIFE,



perhaps even an EXCEPTIONAL LIFE. Their exceptionality can make it difficult for readers to map salient features from Clinton's specific LIFE experiences to their own because it may be difficult to see relevant correspondences beyond the level of general categorization (i.e., beyond a general concept like SUCCESS to the more specific concept POLITICAL SUCCESS or even more specific concept NATIONAL (U.S.) POLITICAL CAMPAIGN SUCCESS).

Of course, these exceptional experiences are probably what make Clinton an ideal according to mainstream American notions of what LIFE entails or should entail. For example, Clinton was a Rhodes scholar, achieved the greatest success possible in his chosen career (as a two-term President), and committed and overcame the personal mistake of having an affair, all of which are extraordinary events and achievements that the average person will not experience. Rhetorically, however, Clinton's style helps readers to see or make correspondences between his extraordinary experiences and their own experiences or notions of LIFE. Of the extraordinary event of having a Senator write a letter of recommendation for his Rhodes scholarship application, Clinton writes,

I hadn't wanted to bother the senator because of his preoccupation with and deepening gloom over the war [in Vietnam], but Lee [Williams] said he wanted to do it, and he gave me a generous letter. ... Applying in Arkansas was a big advantage. Because of the size of our state and its college population, there were fewer competitors; I probably wouldn't have made it to the regional level if I'd been from New York, California, or some other big state, competing against students from Ivy League schools. (114-5)

The conversational style ("hadn't wanted to bother," "some other big state") in which Clinton writes reinforces his status as an everyman and an underdog who managed to pursue the American dream despite not being from a well-known state or having an Ivy League education.

The personal style with which Clinton writes about these events may be cues that suggest to readers that they should be reading Clinton's autobiography metaphorically, looking for resemblances between Clinton's life and their own lives.

Thus, Clinton's autobiography recreates the irony of all autobiographies: that the LIFE depicted in an autobiography reflects culturally-shared concepts about LIFE and yet is supposed to be exceptional in some way. As Williams, Jr. suggests, the most culturally-significant autobiographies are usually by people whose lives fit our culturally- and cognitively-constructed concept of the kind of LIFE we should (want to) aspire to, even though these autobiographies are also written by people who are *exceptional*, whose lives the *average* reader will not be able to mirror.

The same metaphoric tension exists in the photographs that are included in *My Life*. Writing in 1865 about the legal probity of photography, John Ruskin remarks that photographs "are popularly supposed to be 'true,' and, at their worst, they are so, in the sense in which an echo is true to a conversation of which it omits the most important syllables and reduplicates the rest" (qtd. in Adams 4). Public faith in the ability of photography to validate the assertions of the autobiographer is only part of the reason as to why photography has become appropriate to the genre of autobiography, particularly to prototypical autobiographies. Photographs also facilitate the telling of a historical narrative. In Clinton's autobiography, for example, the photographs are roughly in chronological order; the first set of photographs document the history of his personal life, and the second set of photographs document his life as a public servant and politician.

The photographs in Clinton's book also affect the mapping of experiences of LIFE as it is depicted in *My Life* with the reader's own experiences and knowledge of LIFE. Many of the photographs, particularly from his childhood and young adulthood, are of Clinton participating in

things we think to be typical of LIFE at that stage – celebrating Christmas with family members, eating with friends at a picnic, and standing in a preschool class photo. Other photographs – such as one his wedding day and another of himself lying down on the floor next to his dog while holding his infant daughter on his chest – also remind the reader of the prototypicality of Clinton’s LIFE. These photographs are interspersed with photographs of Clinton campaigning for governor and President; appearing on *The Arsenio Hall Show*; and meeting with heads of state including Jiang Zemin, Ehud Barak, and Yasser Arafat. Cognitively, this suggests to readers that such an exceptional LIFE is possible, and it reinforces the cultural knowledge that Clinton’s is the kind of life that we should want to be living. But in doing so, it also reinforces the tension that this prototypical LIFE *is not* one that is lived by those who aren’t heterosexual, male, politically powerful, white, and Christian. In the metaphoric tension of literary reading, those who cannot see themselves in Clinton’s place in these photos may understand their life in terms of how it *is not* Clinton’s life.

Readers of Clinton’s autobiography process the depiction of Clinton’s life and the tacit arguments about LIFE, at least for the prototypical man, that are presented in his autobiography by metaphorizing them against their own experiences, processing what they read in terms of whether it *is* or *is not* their own experience. In reading Clinton’s autobiography, readers may be persuaded to see LIFE as he sees it (or represents it, or as readers think he represents it) and to act accordingly, but it does not determine that readers will think as Clinton thinks, act as Clinton acts, or have the kind of life that Clinton has. Some may be comforted by that; others may lament that the autobiographies of “great” or “important” men do not have the power to determine anything about their readers. Regardless, understanding literature this way proves that there is no magic in literature, only a complex web of individual cognition, concepts, and culture.

### 3.4.5 Case Study Two: The Opposing Paragon: James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces*

Anyone who has paid even passing attention to pop culture or literature in the past five years has heard about the scandal of Oprah's endorsement of James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces* (2005). The book was the September 2005 selection for Oprah's Book Club, and like many of the books chosen for the book club, *A Million Little Pieces* told a harrowing and sometimes salacious tale of personal hardship and personal redemption. The tale marketed – both for Oprah's Book Club and beforehand – as a memoir. Generally, it was received as such without question despite the fact that many of its formal features – its lack of punctuation, unconventional capitalization, and fact that it is written in present tense – are unconventional for autobiographical writing.<sup>54</sup> In January 2006, when the website *The Smoking Gun* revealed that the accounts Frey gave of his life did not, as President Johnson might say, really happen, Oprah's first reaction was to support of Frey, saying in an interview on *Larry King Live* that his memoir was his real “memory” of the events. Within weeks, Oprah changed her position and conducted her own interview with Frey and his editors and publishers in which she condemned Frey for lying and his publishers for their complicity.

To think that the to-do was a matter of kabuki theatre misses the point of why the experience of literature and of literary reality matter to us cognitively, conceptually, and culturally. In many ways, Frey's fictional memoir recalls Nietzsche's observations about “truth” and literature in “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense”: “the liar uses the valid tokens of designation – words – to make the unreal appear to be real. ... If he does this in a manner that is selfish and otherwise harmful, society will no longer trust him and therefore exclude him from its

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<sup>54</sup> One might add to this list the formal feature of photography, though it is arguably less common for a memoir, which Frey's book seems closer to, generically speaking. For more on the uses of photography in various types of autobiographical writing, see Adams 1-79.

ranks. Human beings do not so much flee from being tricked as from being harmed by being tricked” (876). In representing his work as memoir, Frey and his publishers violated no law of nature, but they did attempt to trick those who share experiential knowledge about MEMOIR as a genre into thinking that his memoir met the fundamental criterion of truthfulness (i.e., that none of the memories summarized in it were intentionally fictionalized – things not remembered but fabricated). But, as Lakoff notes, because it takes no special cognitive effort to construct or use conceptual categories, they have a way of seeming real or proper to natural reality. Genre categories, insofar as they are also conceptual categories that we construct cognitively from experiential knowledge, can also seem real or true to reality. When a given text fails to meet our expectations of a genre,<sup>55</sup> we might think and act as if our experience of reality in reading the text and the LIFE it depicts has been made into a non-reality, a lie. Violating reality, not to mention having one’s trust as a reader and consumer violated, may be enough to constitute “harm,” which Nietzsche suggests will trigger ostracization.

If Clinton’s *My Life* is a paragon of autobiographical writing, Frey’s *A Million Little Pieces* is a sort of opposing model. Both books are paragons in the sense that paragons are, according to Lakoff, “individual members [of categories] who represent either an ideal or its opposite” (*Women* 87). Frey not only fails to adhere to the expectation that he will report facts and that his story is worth considering since it tells an extraordinary tale that reinforces certain cultural values regarding the prototypical LIFE – self-reliance, perseverance in the face of adversity, improving family difficulties. His autobiography is also an inverse paragon in its

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<sup>55</sup> Of course, some violation of genre expectations isn’t seen as a lie at all. It can instead be seen as innovative. Some questions of intentionality and the clarity of intention for readers seems pertinent to these matters. The difference between Frey’s violation of genre expectations and, say, what some readers of POETRY may see as violations of that genre in prose poems or poems by the LANGUAGE poets, is that Frey insisted that his text adhered to very strict genre guidelines whereas unconventional poetry might be seen as trying to break genre boundaries rather than adhere to them. Frey claimed that his text adhered to genre conventions that he knew it didn’t, and this seems to be the difference between a lie and an innovation.

depiction of the kind of LIFE that we do not expect to want. When we first encounter James in *A Million Little Pieces*, he is on a plane, unaware of how he sustained the injuries that have left him bloodied and missing some of his teeth. His parents pick him up and take him to a rehabilitation center that has “the highest success rate of any Facility in the World” (7). The facility has its work cut out for it since, James reports, “At fifteen I was drinking every day, at eighteen I was drinking and doing drugs every day. It has gotten much heavier since then,” and his arrest record includes charges for “Possession, Possession with Intent to Distribute, three DUI’s, a bunch of Vandalism and Destruction of Property charges, Assault, Assault with a Deadly Weapon, Assaulting an Officer of the Law, Public Drunkenness, Disturbing the Peace. I’m sure there’s some other shit,” James adds, “but I don’t remember exactly what” (28). Frey’s memoir inverts the model of the Clintonian Rhodes scholar. Drug abuse, adolescent addiction and delinquency, and lawlessness are not included alongside self-reliance and individualism in our American concept of what the typical LIFE does or should involve. LIFE as James experiences it is not what we “know” the typical transition from adolescence into adulthood *is or should be*.<sup>56</sup>

James’s experiences with other general categories of LIFE similarly invert our expectations of the typical LIFE. We expect that in LIFE we will have FRIENDS, a subcategory of the types of PEOPLE we encounter in LIFE. FRIENDS should be loyal, supportive, dependable, and positive influences, among other qualities. The friends that James makes in the facility are perhaps good FRIENDS though they are not *who* we might expect would make good

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<sup>56</sup> Though, as David Parker notes, life writing can be an ideal space for weighing the individual’s notions of the GOOD or a GOOD LIFE against others’. Parker ponders “the question of why the claims of others should virtually constitute the moral domain instead of being simply one sort of claim among others. What of the claims of the self? ... [W]here the procedure of universalization dominates practical reason, it is not so easy to see how what Bernard Williams calls ‘the *I* of my desire’ ever gets much mass in the moral scale against the omnipresent and arguably more weighty obligations I have to others. The heuristic of impartiality does not simply insist on the moral equivalence of selves; it gives no weight to my *particularity* as a self. In a word, it can find no place in the equation for the moral significance of my *difference*” (66). As Parker notes, there must always a tension always exists between these two sides of the scale in life writing.

FRIENDS. James's friend Leonard fulfills the role of the BEST FRIEND or MENTOR-FRIEND, the older and wiser man who proves to be loyal and who is the only person that James thinks understands him; and Lilly fulfills the role of the emotional fragility that typically accompanies the categories FEMALE or WOMAN, and she eventually becomes a GIRLFRIEND to James. But the particular people whom James befriends are not like Clinton's well-placed or morally-upright friends; they have been, like James, living an atypical LIFE. Leonard and Lilly, like James, are in the facility for their vices, and Lilly eventually takes her own life. But life as we live it is never an exact match with our concept LIFE, and many of us probably have friends in our lives who seem unlikely to be good influences or dependable. These characters are perhaps all the more interesting to us because they do not meet our expectations of FRIENDS though they are presented as such. As we read, we weigh our knowledge of FRIENDS, including our own experiences with FRIENDS, against what the text suggests to us is real or possible regarding friends. Perhaps we will find Frey's representation of unconventional FRIENDS to be unrealistic – whether that be in terms of our individual experiences with FRIENDS or our experience of cultural knowledge about FRIENDS. We may conversely find that this different conceptualization of FRIENDS opens us new ways of thinking about the category by challenging our existing expectations about who can be a good FRIEND. It is this sort of play with conceptual categories of LIFE that might make *A Million Little Pieces* of interest to readers.

As with his experiences with FRIENDS, James's experience of the category PARENTS is fraught. His parents love him enough to get him into rehabilitation, but they are emotionally and often physically distant. It is not until they pick him up at the airport that, James recalls, "I learn that my Parents, who live in Tokyo, have been in the States for the last two weeks on

business. ... They had driven to Chicago during the night” to collect James from the airport (4). His parents participate in the Family Program at the facility in an effort to demonstrate qualities we usually associate with PARENTS, like LOVE and PATIENCE. But they are also examples of what we think PARENTS should not be. The story that James tells his parents of his early drug and alcohol abuse casts them as absent parents. Of his habits at eighteen, for example, James recalls, “Went away to school in the Fall. No Rules, you weren’t around, I got a monthly allowance. I was in Heaven. I blacked out every night” (219). In a moment of kindness, he remarks, “I know you’re sitting there thinking you should have known more and you should have stopped me, but I hid things well and you tried, you tried hard,” James says (219). But this seems to contradict the story of how well his parents raised him that James tells throughout the memoir, and readers can easily connect the qualities that make these parents an example of BAD PARENTS who are complicit with James’s own self-destructive experiences.

Such inversions of our expectations of LIFE as well as of AUTOBIOGRAPHY that Frey’s memoir presents are perhaps the more interesting as commentaries on LIFE than those that we think are prototypical. But ultimately, Frey’s memoir does adhere to what we may expect in autobiographical writing: a depiction of the autobiographical subject as a man whose individual choices have made him successful and worthy of having a tale to tell about himself. At the beginning of the book, James rejects the approach of the rehabilitation facility, answering, “I don’t know,” when he is asked if he is “willing to do whatever it takes” to get better (29). James’s approach to self-help becomes a vehicle for Frey to restate our cultural value of individualism: “If you’re not willing to do whatever it takes,” the doctor tells James, “you might as well leave. I would rather you not, but we can’t help you until you’re ready to help yourself. Think about it and we can talk more” (29). James replies, “I will,” and his ordering and sending



back a glass of bourbon after leaving the facility is supposed to be proof that anyone who is strong enough can overcome his own demons on his own.

Of course, this LIFE did not really happen, and perhaps that suggests that despite the fact that the conventions of autobiography indicate that we at least think a good example of LIFE can (or maybe even should) involve a self-made or self-helped man. The story that Frey tells in *A Million Little Pieces* was real to its audience – actually and ideally – and when it wasn't, and the audience felt tricked about what is real, true, and possible about LIFE according to their experiential knowledge of it. The audience's reactions to this trickery indicate that, despite what President Johnson thought, what matters when it comes to literature isn't what is real and what is fiction but what we expect to be real and possible.

### **3.4.6 Case Study Three: Disidentification in Audre Lorde's *Zami***

Audre Lorde's autobiographical *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (1982) negotiates the genre conventions of autobiography in markedly different ways than do Clinton's and Frey's autobiographies. Some of these differences are suggested by the genre description Lorde has given *Zami*: "biomythography." Like autobiography, biomythography is writing about the experience of lived life ("bio-"). But in removing the "auto," it is also suggested that this life is not, as is the case with prototypical autobiographies, the life of an *autonomous* self; rather, this is the story of a life as it is interconnected with others' lives. And by situating *Zami* within traditions of "myth"-making and -telling, Lorde flouts the notion that an autobiographical text's validity derives from its historical accuracy or disinterested reportage. Referring to her autobiographical work as a myth, Lorde suggests, among other things, that it is written ("graphy") from stories shared by a people who also share culture and history, and that the work is itself a new telling of the stories, culture, and history.

The extent to which *Zami* is an autobiography is debatable on at least two grounds, then: whether Lorde wants her readers and critics to think of *Zami* in terms of their concept of the genre of AUTOBIOGRAPHY, and whether any such correlation between *Zami* and AUTOBIOGRAPHY is possible for readers. The former issue is not necessarily central to the issue of whether readers will read this text as a metaphorization of LIFE and which cues in and surrounding the text encourage them to do so. The latter issue has to do with what textual and contextual cues about *Zami* encourage the reader to see connections between the genre and this particular text. And there are many such opportunities for readers to recognize the autobiographical nature of *Zami*: its chronological retelling of Lorde's life as a girl and young woman (with a focus in this case on friendly, romantic, and mentor relationships with females in those years); it is written by and about the same person; and the exploration of the autobiographer's selfhood and the significance of her experience, which she shares with the reader.

But in many ways, *Zami* does not fit the typical notion of AUTOBIOGRAPHY, which has been defined by the standards that those whom society has historically sanctioned to write autobiographies, namely, men who are notable because of their success or virtuousness. For example, both Clinton and Frey negotiate the genre of autobiography by adhering to (and at the same time challenging) the notion that the autobiographer's life story is worth telling because it is exemplary or more important than the average person's life story in some way. This is not necessarily the case with Lorde's autobiography. As Johnnie M. Stover asserts in *Rhetoric and Resistance in Black Women's Autobiography* (2003), to affirm the notion that autobiography must report the experiences of a paragon of whatever demographics – gender, race, class, religion, etc. – that the autobiographer represents “effectively denies the importance of ancestral

connections, another aspect of community rootedness that characterizes African American women's autobiography" (32). In writing a biomythography titled *Zami*, which is the "Carriacou name for women who work together as friends and lovers" (Lorde 255, original emphasis), Lorde operates in a tension between the biomythography's emphasis on the group and autobiography's emphasis on the individual. That is, Lorde affirms her place in and connections to Carriacou women as well as the importance of her own story and experiences for those who are both inside and outside that group.

This genre tension thus becomes a mechanism for negotiating new knowledge or ways of thinking within a reader's existing concepts about autobiography. Despite the fact that *Zami* is not the typical autobiography, it has many of the hallmarks of the genre, and its divergences do not utterly disorient the reader so much as they require readers to reconsider what they know to be real about the genre of autobiography and the conceptualization of LIFE that they encounter in the text. Francoise Lionnet asserts in *Autobiographical Voices* (1989) that this sort of generic tension allows autobiographers to challenge

the conceptual apparatuses that have governed our labeling of ourselves and others, [and] space is thus opened where multiplicity and diversity are affirmed. This space is not a territory staked out by exclusionary practices. Rather, it functions as a sheltering site, one that can nurture our differences without encouraging us to withdraw into new dead ends ... For it is only by imagining nonhierarchical modes of relations among cultures that we can address the crucial interdeterminacy and solidarity. (5)

Unlike Frey, in naming *Zami* a biomythography, making it a story of shared LIFE, and situating it at the periphery of autobiography, Lorde has been up front with her readers about the fact that her autobiographical book will not satisfy many of their category expectations for

AUTOBIOGRAPHY. Rather, it will capitalize on those expectations by using them to encourage readers to reconsider what they expect of the typical autobiography and the (typicality of the) LIFE it depicts.

In addition to her unusual use of genre, another strategy that Lorde uses to simultaneously invite and disinvite readers to identify with her is the second-person. While not exclusive to life writing by people who are part of disempowered or marginalized groups, it is certainly more commonly- and significantly-used in those texts than in more traditional autobiographies wherein the autobiographical subject is the central focus. When readers encounter the second-person in autobiographical writing, they are required to negotiate multiple metaphoric tensions. “If you asked the wrong woman to dance” at a lesbian bar called the Bagatelle, Lorde writes, “you could get your nose broken in the alley down the street by her butch, who had followed you out of the Bag for exactly that purpose” (221). Of course, the average reader has not had this exact experience, and so the “you” does not apply in a literal sense. Lorde invites her readers to see themselves as being her or as having the same knowledge and feelings that she has about the “important part of lesbian relationships in the Bagatelle” (221). The fact that she has to explain this experience, however, suggests that she knows that her readers will not be able to see themselves as having had the same experiences she has had, both as Audre Lorde and as a black lesbian living in New York City in the 1950s. The “you” suggests the tension that is always at work in autobiography and literature: You, the reader, will be able to understand the LIFE depicted in this text as being your own experience of LIFE in terms of some general categories of experience like COURTSHIP, DATING, VIOLENCE, and REACTIONS TO THREATS, though the literary depiction will not be an exact duplication of your experience of LIFE.

Lorde often uses the plural first-person to remind readers that they will always only be able to share in her experiences in terms of some broad categories of experience, such as FALLING IN LOVE or BEING YOUNG or of DATING or SEX. In her use of the plural first-person, Lorde indicates to readers that they cannot be the “us” about whom she tells her biomythographic story. For example, in explaining what the scene is like at the Bagatelle, Lorde writes, “For some of us ... the role-playing reflected all the deprecating attitudes toward women which we loathed in straight society. It was a rejection of these roles that had drawn us to ‘the life’ in the first place” (221). This selection appears in the paragraph directly after her use of the second-person to describe asking a woman to dance at the Bagatelle. This “we,” specifically, is the group of women whom Lorde knew at the Bagatelle, but more indirectly it includes women who can share the same experiences of loathing deprecating mainstream attitudes toward women. These are groups that, in using the more exclusive plural first-person, Lorde separates from the readers she had invited to identify with her experiences just sentences beforehand by using the more inclusive second-person. This is one way that Lorde disinvites her readers from seeing their experience of LIFE as *being* the LIFE they read about in *Zami*. Readers may not feel as if they are part of the mainstream, on the outside looking in because they have been allowed to look in by a narrator, which inverts (or subverts) the usual positions of power and perspective. This also situates readers in a multiplicity of metaphoric tensions, each of which creates a new conceptual “space”<sup>57</sup> wherein they might renegotiate their knowledge of actual and ideal LIFE in terms of the conceptual category of LIFE that Lorde asks them to consider as real and really possible as they read her mythic life writing.

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<sup>57</sup> The notion of space that Lionnet refers to is of particular significance for metaphor theory and cognitive linguistics. It suggests a theory of mental spaces and conceptual blends, which are different from metaphor in that they combine several, not just two, distinct concepts. Further extrapolations on the uses of blends and mental spaces in this theory of literature as a metaphor can be found in the Afterward.

### 3.4.7 Case Study Four: Fictionalized and Marginalized, for Children: Walter Dean Myers' *Autobiography of My Dead Brother*

Walter Dean Myers' *Autobiography of My Dead Brother* (2005) blends some of the same fictional elements of *A Million Little Pieces* with the heightened tension of shared experiences that cannot be shared that comes, for most readers, with reading an autobiography, such as *Zami*, written by someone from a marginalized or minority community. Myers' book also departs from the expectations of the conceptual category AUTOBIOGRAPHY in that its intended audience is adolescents and young adults. Unlike *A Million Little Pieces*, *Autobiography of My Dead Brother* declares itself to be fictional from the very start. It is narrated not by "Walter Dean Myers" but by the fictional character Jesse, who is fifteen and growing up in Harlem, facing some of the problems that our culture takes to be prototypical of a young black man's experience growing up in an urban setting, including the violent deaths of friends, gang wars, drug abuse, and unhappy families.

The autobiographical aspect of *Autobiography of My Dead Brother* is like *Zami* in that it is not an individual-oriented autobiography but life/story about a life shared by a group told by one member's point of view. Unlike Lorde's autobiography, this story is told from a character's point of view rather than the author's/autobiographer's. In this autobiography, Jesse, rather than Myers, tells the audience the story of how he grew apart from his childhood friend and "blood brother" Rise because of Rise's involvement with gangs and drugs. "Jesse here is writing my life up," Rise tells his girlfriend. Rise continues:

I've been telling him there's three important times in a man's life. The first was when he's born. That's about the circumstances he got going for him. Then when he dies.

That's about what he'd done with his days. But then there's one minute in his life where

he makes the big D to take over his life. That's what most people don't do, take charge of their lives. (172)

Rise's meta-generic commentary reflects the significance of the generic conventions of BIOGRAPHY and AUTOBIOGRAPHY. Rise seems to expect, like many readers of *Autobiography*, that biographies are written about great men by other people who admire them. As with Clinton and Frey, Rise wants to be known for his exceptional qualities ("That's what most people don't do") and his self-reliance ("take charge of their lives"), and his concept of BIOGRAPHY suggests that the "story" part of his life story should be more historical reportage than subjective or fictionalized storytelling. But Jesse does not compose a biography about Rise; he calls his story an autobiography in contradiction to the expectation that AUTOBIOGRAPHY is written by the same individual whose life is its focus because he sees Rise's life and his own life as the same life and experience of LIFE. But this shared life, which is what makes it possible for Jesse to call this story an autobiography, is what makes the story of their friendship heartbreaking: Rise, as the title indicates, dies as a result of gang violence, the victim of his own attempts to be a "great" or important person in his sphere – attempting to have the kind of LIFE that is portrayed in Clinton's autobiography, or to be great because of his own will and efforts in spite of adversity as Frey's memoir suggests he should be – worthy of having biographies written about him, leaving his brother to write an autobiography about a shared life that has passed away.

This fictional, dual-life autobiography about two culturally-marginalized teenage boys whom history might deem insignificant also disrupts our constructed knowledge of AUTOBIOGRAPHY and the type of LIFE that is usually considered appropriate to the genre because it is a children's or young adult autobiography. Because prototypically valid authors of

autobiographies are historically- or culturally-significant people, young adults rarely have sanction to write or be the subject of autobiographies, and it is assumed that few audiences would be interested in reading such autobiographies by or about young people. But Myers' "autobiography" is not actually both by *and* about a young adult; it is a work of fiction that uses the conceptual category of AUTOBIOGRAPHY to create a "space," as Lionnet says, in which we can reconsider both the importance of young people's struggles in the world and, in the case of Myers' book, those of black, urban youth.

In reading *Autobiography of My Dead Brother*, readers understand their own LIFE in terms of Jesse and Rise's experiences of LIFE, and they also have the opportunity to empathize with the decisions that Jesse and Rise make in response to their circumstances. Older readers may think back to the experiences they had as young people and try to understand why these teenagers might make certain choices or have the reactions they do to certain situations. For example, a reader might have the opportunity in this book to consider why Jesse writes an autobiography rather than a biography, particularly if that reader comes from a cultural background that privileges individual ideas and achievements, which are some of the fundamental principles of traditional autobiographical writing. In Rise and Jesse's context, collective experience is just as if not more important than individual experience, as evidenced by Jesse's reflections on the gang shootings that tear apart his community:

The shootings made the paper the next day, and everybody on the block already knew I had been picked up. People I didn't even know were asking me questions. It made me mad to think that my friends, kids and grownups who thought I was a nice guy one day, could think the next day I was shooting people in the streets. And in a way they wanted



me to be involved in the shooting simply because it made it all more exciting for them.

(194)

The opportunity is there – cognitively and culturally – for readers to consider the importance of having close friends for one’s survival in tough neighborhoods or in adolescence. Such interpretive work can go a long way toward building empathy for all people who have any shared LIFE experience with these very basic categories of FRIENDS, NEIGHBORHOODS, and ADOLESCENCE as well as others depicted in the story.

Myers, like Clinton, includes images in his text, but the images are not photographic. They are drawings made by Myers’ son Christopher of some of the people and plot points of the book. The photographs Clinton used complemented the generic expectation that autobiographers will provide historically-accurate accounts of their historically-significant lives because, as Timothy Dow Adams writes in *Light Writing and Life Writing* (2000), “autobiography and photography are commonly read as though operating in some stronger ontological world than their counterparts, fiction and painting, despite both logic and a history of scholarly attempts that seem to have proven otherwise” (17). Just as *Zami* challenged the notion that the veracity of an autobiography is in proportion to its distance from shared experiences and cultural “myths,” Myers’ inclusion of drawings provides alternative ways of knowing and sharing a LIFE experience. The drawings recall the formal features of children’s literature, which often includes illustrations, and thereby suggest that the LIFE story worth knowing is not that of an important, self-made adult man. Unlike Clinton’s photographs, these drawings do not promise that the story is historically-verifiable. In fact, they draw attention to the fictionality of the story, being themselves interpretations of what Jesse and Rise’s experiences would be if they had actually happened. But the drawings also concretize these fictional events, pulling them out of the realm

of the abstract and making them more cognitively accessible to readers, just as a detailed written description might, and helping readers to understand Jesse's thoughts through the metaphoric process of understanding one more abstract concept in terms of a more concrete one. This realism is compounded by the fact that the drawings were made by Myers' son, who was raised in New York City; this connection also gives the drawings and the story they complement a sense of autobiographical authenticity.

Some of the drawings might be considered typical to autobiographies, such as portraits of main characters. Other drawings – like those of Jesse with a black eye and his father side by side with the words “Punching bag” below Jesse and a metal plate over his father's mouth – tell the reader what Jesse might be thinking – that he is angry at his father less for hitting him than for not apologizing to him about it and “hold[ing] up his end” of the responsibility not to be a violent family (156). These drawings give readers an opportunity to see the reality that Jesse experiences, which goes beyond that which he can document as historical fact. It reminds readers of the reality of the emotional side of the experience of LIFE. It also gives readers another opportunity to see their own similar LIFE experiences, such as with PARENTS and DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, as being and not being those that Jesse experiences. Some readers may have had their own encounters with domestic violence and some may not. Those who have will interpret the drawing and the situation in terms of whether Jesse's reaction is reasonable or fits their personal experiential knowledge of such situations. Others who have not directly experienced domestic violence will still weigh Jesse's reaction according experiential knowledge, but their experiential knowledge will be primarily cultural rather than personal. Readers may highlight certain factors of Jesse's LIFE such as his age or class or location in an urban environment over others in reasoning about whether his choices make him a character

whose LIFE experiences seem realistic and/or better or worse examples of the type of person we want to be. The drawings included in the autobiography give readers a more concrete and complex understanding of the reality depicted in this fictional character's life story.

As with *Autobiography of My Dead Brother*, young people's literature as a genre often tells poignantly tragic or sad stories. Perhaps, as Plato said, this is a way of acculturating children to the knowledge that LIFE brings with it both joys and tragedies. If children encounter this bittersweet depiction of LIFE again and again in the stories that they hear and read, then young adult literature will have fulfilled its task of informing its audience of the unhappy realities of life. Conceptual metaphor theory shows us that this happens cognitively and culturally as much as individually any time we have a text that we (even as children) read as having some larger indication of what LIFE entails. In *Autobiography of My Dead Brother*, Jesse and Rise's story indicates to children that their tragedies may come from people close to them, people who are good and worthy of love but who make bad decisions. The depiction of Jesse's relationship with his father and with Rise does not oversimplify the complexities of that relationship; it asks its readers, young and old alike, to consider whether that sort of relationship is something worth enduring as Jesse did or if they have or would have dealt differently with those situations. Regardless of whether we find Jesse's experiences with that type of person *to be* ours or *not*, it is the metaphoric nature of literary reality that asks us to consider those issues and think about the complications that LIFE seems to hold for us.

### ***3.5 The Rhetoricity of Literary Metaphorization of LIFE***

To recognize the fundamentally metaphoric nature of the literary comprehension process is to recognize the rhetoricity of literature. It is premised on the notion that our perceptions of, concepts of, and actions in the "real" world are *constructed*. We construct our knowledge via a

*recursive* process of understanding the world through our experiences and understanding our experiences through our interactions with the world. One way of constructing our concepts of the world recursively is via the literary experience, whereby we recursively construct our understanding of LIFE through the examples of LIFE that we encounter in works of literature. Furthermore, this approach to the experience of literature via CMT makes clear that literary meaning is located in cognition, recurring rhetorical situations, and experiential reality, not in any intangible, magic quality inherent in the literary object.

This suggests that literature requires an *interdisciplinary* approach. An approach to literary study that recognizes literature's metaphoric nature requires that we use the methods and insights of cognitive linguists, rhetoric and compositionists, literary scholars, aesthetes, and everyday readers of literature if we wish to have a more complete understanding of how literature affects the concepts and realities of its readers. It will also require that we look at a *wider variety of texts* as "literary" or as being open to "literary" comprehension by readers. If, for example, we are able to use the methods of conceptual metaphor theorists to determine empirically that readers of literature metaphorize their own conceptual domains of LIFE with those depicted in the texts they read, then we will have to also determine when and for which texts readers do not employ that comprehension strategy. Ideally, this interdisciplinarity should recursively influence the institutional structure of English studies, making each field within English studies a truly equal partner and cooperating effectively with those scholars such as linguists, communications scholars, and, increasingly, rhetoric and compositionists whose interests overlap with English studies but who are institutionally separated from English as a discipline.

In the final chapter, I will outline some of the implications of how English studies as a field would have to change were it to accept this rhetoricized characterization of literature as a metaphorization of LIFE, some of which I have mentioned here briefly. In particular, I look at the ramifications of a more unified English studies. This unification is at least two-fold: within the discipline, English studies would recognize literature not just as a fundamentally cultural phenomenon, as we already do, but as a linguistic and rhetorical phenomenon as well; and our institutional structures and practices would be more clearly unified with our disciplinary knowledge. English studies in the U.S. has for more than fifty years led the way in cultural studies and making the study of literature meaningful beyond itself. Now, in the face of tectonic shifts in higher education, we have a new set of challenges to confront. A rhetoricized English studies, I will argue, will best equip us to meet that challenge.

#### **Chapter 4 – Rhetoricity in Today’s Literary and English Studies**

*I got the idea that what I was telling was really a story about conflict that had been evaded. And I began to feel that this failure of our profession to confront our conflicts was connected with the murkiness about what it is we do. We adopt a pluralistic model that lets us study literature in any number of ways, but by not coming to terms with or asking students to come to terms with the conflicting approaches or conflicting readings, we evade questions about what it is we are doing.*

Gerald Graff, “Only Connect”

*I’m a uniter, not a divider.*

President George W. Bush

##### **4.1 A Rhetorician’s Perspective**

English studies in contemporary American higher education is, to venture a metaphor, a loose federation of allies. Most of these are willing allies: they see themselves as partners who want to perfect their union and mutually benefit from sharing their burdens, work, and privileges. This is a fine union in theory but it is difficult to effect. Its structure and functions are much debated, and theories about and instantiations of the institutionalization of its practices and

mission differ from locale to locale (of necessity, since no two locales are the same and have the same specific history or needs). Furthermore, the institutional structures through which power is negotiated are divided along party lines, such that one's allegiances are declared according to disciplinary boundaries that cannot often be traversed easily without risk to one's professional reputation.

Like President Bush, I want to be seen as a uniter rather than a divider. And, like President Bush, I say that from the perspective of a partisan. My ultimate goal is not to do away with disciplinary boundaries or to pretend as if they don't matter or don't exist. Moreover, my argument for rhetoricizing English studies should not be seen as a way for me to gain political points for my chosen party, rhetoric and composition. Instead, it is an argument for rhetoricality, which, as I will explain in this chapter, proceeds from modernist rhetoric but is not itself a rhetoric or system of understanding the creation of communicative meaning-making. Rhetoricality gives American higher education a way to bridge intellectual-disciplinary dispositions and form a more perfect union with the institutional structures that give knowledge form and function. But it does not pretend that disciplinary boundaries don't matter or aren't useful.

Any effective uniter must acknowledge her subjective position and consider how that position might affect how she proposes to confront the conflicts, as Graff says, inherent in the division. This is particularly important and delicate when it comes to the claims that a specialist in the field of rhetoric and composition makes about the field of English literary studies. The history between these two fields, as I explained in the first chapter, is nearly a century long and has often been acrimonious. As Maxine Hairston explained in her 1985 address as president of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, titled "Breaking our Bonds and

Reaffirming our Connections,” for compositionists in English departments, “Fighting that literature faction often makes you feel like you have invaded China. You can mount an all-out assault and think that you’re making an impression, but when the smoke clears, nothing has changed. The mandarins are untouched” (273). Less a decade later, the issue still loomed large over rhetoric and composition, as evidenced by the Tate-Lindemann debates, in which rhetoric and composition scholars held forth in the pages of *College English* about whether literature had any place in first-year writing courses and whether the inclusion of literature in first-year writing courses posed a substantial risk to the disciplinary capital of rhetoric and composition. More recently, rhetoric and compositionists have also been confronting labor issues related to the secondary status of rhetoric and composition in English studies because across the nation, composition is quite often taught by a corps of graduate students or adjunct faculty whose primary interest or training is not in composition studies and who are not highly valued enough to receive the kinds of intellectual or employment benefits that full time and tenure-track faculty receive.<sup>58</sup>

The issues to which Hairston pointed are no less issues today, though rhetoric and composition has gained disciplinary capital in the intervening twenty-five years, as the secession of numerous rhetoric and composition factions from English departments at many notable universities<sup>59</sup> indicates. And yet, many rhetoric and composition programs remain within English departments, whether because they feel a symbiosis with their literary and English language studies counterparts or because of inertia, or because they lack the clear sense of purpose necessary to dislodge themselves from their English departments. Regardless, the lack

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<sup>58</sup> For more on the labor debates, particularly as they are summarized in the work of Berlin and Crowley, see section 1.3, above.

<sup>59</sup> As I noted in section 1.3, above, these include the University of Colorado-Boulder, the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Washington State University, Syracuse University, and the University of Texas-Austin.

of uniformity in rhetoric and composition's approach to its relationship to the other subdisciplines in English studies, particularly literary studies, indicates that the debates are ongoing,<sup>60</sup> and the fact that many rhetoric and composition factions have departed English departments should indicate that the conflicts between rhetoric and composition and literary studies continue to encourage those who work in rhetoric and composition to pursue autonomization, and that this autonomization is often borne of the kinds of acrimony that Hairston, Tate, and Lindemann addressed.

Ultimately, as I argued earlier, the contemporary conflicts between rhetoric and composition and literary studies – as and when the two disciplines are united within the context of English studies – are very much like the intellectual and institutional conflicts that caused literary studies to see itself as autonomous from other academic disciplines. Both disciplines sought disciplinary autonomy (from disciplines outside English departments, in the case of literary studies, and from literary studies, in the case of rhetoric and composition) as a way of establishing themselves as disciplines, asserting that their validity derives not from what they have to gain from and contribute to academia but from their exclusivity within that academic context. This sort of autonomy is a false autonomy, one in which these disciplines assert a decontextualization from– and concomitant privilege or power over – other disciplines that doesn't really exist. As a uniter, I present rhetoricality as the intellectual-disciplinary and institutional basis for pursuing heteronomy rather than autonomy. In a rhetoricized, heteronomous model, both disciplines would see themselves as part of a larger matrix of disciplines that maintain their disciplinary identities while also sharing the charge of contributing to and making the most of others' contributions to academic pursuits.

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<sup>60</sup> At least within rhetoric and composition though perhaps not in literary studies. I am presently unaware of any serious discussion in literary studies about the relationship of rhetoric and composition to literary studies.



Today's English studies scholar, no matter her disciplinary specialization and perspective, cannot deny that English studies has come far from the days of the early and mid-twentieth century when those who worked in literary studies argued for its validity and value as an academic discipline in terms of its autonomy from other disciplines.<sup>61</sup> The situation has also changed in terms of some of the particular problems rhetoric and composition has had to confront because of its complex and strained relationship to literary studies. As I noted in the first chapter, the shift toward cultural studies has also helped make the field of English studies more hospitable to rhetoric and composition by making the study of literature much more rhetorical (and perhaps also rhetoricized) insofar as it shifted the discipline away from the study of literature-as-high-art toward the study of literature as it (in)forms and is (in)formed by cultural practices and institutions.

This sort of progress in English studies has been necessary and helpful, but it has also resulted in new expressions of some residual problems for English studies. In particular, there remains a problem of definitions: what is literature, if not the study of high art? What is English studies, if not primarily the study of literature? In light of recent changes in higher education policies and priorities that affect not only our budgetary and institutional concerns but also the demands put on the intellectual labor of those of us who work in English studies, we must also ask ourselves, how do we justify the place of English studies if we can't define it? How (and why, and for whom) might we go about defining English studies in this changed environment?<sup>62</sup> One way to answer these questions, I propose, is by adopting the disciplinary disposition of rhetoricality, which provides English studies and its subdisciplines with a set of premises and

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<sup>61</sup> For more on the history of rationales for literary studies as a discipline, see section 1.3, above.

<sup>62</sup> For more on the "crisis" (or lack thereof) of defining literary and English studies, see section 1.1, above.

principles to follow as we begin to redefine our discipline and confront the institutional challenges concomitant to these disciplinary shifts.

In the present chapter, I present a schematic overview of what a rhetoricization of English studies in American higher education might involve. Unfortunately, anything more precise than a sketch is outside the scope of the present project, as it would require the acquisition of a set of empirical data about disciplinary and institutional practices in “English studies,” variously defined, and its subdisciplines that does not already exist and perhaps could not exist because of the permeable and ever-changing boundaries of the fields of English studies and its subdisciplines. Nevertheless, it is possible to outline some of the most significant or obvious opportunities for English studies to use rhetoricality as the basis for its continued progress as a field. Because literature and literary studies have historically been privileged above other subjects and subdisciplines within English studies as a field, I will begin with an overview of the benefits of rhetoricization for literature in its institutionalization as an academic discipline, both in terms of a rhetoricization that proceeds from defining literature as a metaphorization of LIFE and in terms of other forms of disciplinary and institutional rhetoricization. Afterward, I will observe what rhetoricization can do to align the intellectual pursuits with the institutional structures of English studies as a whole, both as a result of the telegraphed reverberations of rhetoricizing literature and literary studies and of a more general rhetoricization of other areas of English studies.

## ***4.2 Rhetoricizing Literature and Literary Studies***

### **4.2.1 Residual Conceptualizations of Literature**

In order to understand the importance of rhetoricizing literature for the rhetoricization of English studies, I will begin with a summary of the problematic definitions of literature.<sup>63</sup> These definitions are not explicit in today's leading research in literary studies and literary theory, but to confront our contemporary problems and continue to progress as a field toward more accurate and helpful conceptualizations requires that we also confront our intellectual and institutional history. We might put unhelpful conceptualizations of literature into four general categories. Literature has been conceptualized as spiritual in nature. In this conceptualization, literature might be ontologically spiritual, with its own sort of spiritual essence, or experientially spiritual, in that it causes the reader and/or writer to have some sort of spiritual experience. This was the concept at the heart of Romanticist notions of literature as spiritual escape from the drudgery and tragedy of material existence. It carried over into the Victorian idea that literature could replace religion as an ordering principle of society that touched people spiritually rather than just communicated information and ideas to them. This conceptualization of literature is sometimes associated with the conceptualization of literature as falsely autonomous, acontextualized, or universal and timeless in its appeal because its transcendence could be seen as the product of its spiritual essence. But transcendence need not be spiritual in nature; it could be a matter of the work's transcending the context of its creation by virtue of the eternal nature of its themes, characters, or plot.

Another conceptualization of literature that often overlaps with these conceptualizations of literature as spiritual is of literature as creative or imaginative texts composed by an individual writer, one who is often endowed with special spiritual gifts or inspiration. And literature has been conceptualized as texts that are culturally significant (because they are esteemed by artists,

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<sup>63</sup> For more on definitions of literature and the problems such definitions have posed for English studies, see section 1.2.1, above.

critics, or the public) or about culturally-significant people or topics. If the texts, people, or topics are also universal in their appeal (e.g., as with famous texts or archetypal characters and situations), or if their authors are uniquely inspired in their imaginative or creative efforts, this conceptualization will overlap with conceptualizations of literature as spiritual, acontextual, or uniquely creative.

These are unhelpful conceptualizations of literature insofar as they are throwbacks to outmoded ways of thinking about literature that produced problematic approaches to and valuations of literature and the discipline of literary studies and, over time, the field of English studies. Though recent work in literary criticism and theory has demanded that literary scholars work from a much more productive set of notions about literature than those that guided the earliest forms of English study in Anglo-American higher education, these problematic conceptualizations cannot yet be put away as non-issues. Lest we think the work of this forward progress is done, we must continue to be aware of how these conceptualizations of literature have affected our mainstream American culture's belief that literature is the most important use of language, worthy of investments of time, energy, intellectual labor, and economic resources. Correspondingly, these conceptualizations have encouraged our culture to value literary studies as the most important of all subdisciplines within English studies. Even if those who lead the way in influencing literary studies realize that literature is but one form of human communication and that other areas of equal importance in English studies and other disciplines have equal contributions to make, there is still much work to be done to ensure more equal, productive intellectual and institutional valuation and cooperation among the subdisciplines of English studies. That is why rhetoricality matters today.

#### **4.2.2 Rhetoricized Conceptualizations of Literature**

As Bender and Wellbery claim, literary criticism, as a discipline of “modern knowledge itself,” is arguably already inclined toward rhetoricality (35-9). The five assertions on which rhetoricality is premised are: (1) *Contra* the Romantics, there is no possibility of an autonomous or decontextualized human subject or literary-aesthetic object. All human beings and human phenomena take place in observable, describable contexts. (2) *Contra* Enlightenment theorists, there is no possibility of decontextualized scientific objectivity. When human beings create or have knowledge, that knowledge will be affected by the context of its creation or use. (3) *Contra* liberal humanism, human beings cannot bracket their subjectivity completely, and so public discourse can only be *relatively* disinterested. (4) All human communication is polyglottal, and (5) human beings use many different modes of communication to construct the realities in which they act. Academic disciplines that have adopted this disciplinary attitude of rhetoricality will operate according to four principles: they will (1) acknowledge their own inherent *interdisciplinarity* and actively seek to build and improve interdisciplinary cooperation, (2) expand the *variety of texts and occasions* that they address, (3) acknowledge that reality and our knowledge of it is *constructed*, and (4) operate *recursively* by allowing the transdisciplinary body of knowledge that they contribute to and draw from to influence their institutional structures and practices and future intellectual work.

None of these assertions or principles are anathema to contemporary literary studies. But they are anathema to problematic residual conceptualizations of literature as spiritual, acontextual, uniquely creative, or of special significance and a falsely autonomous discipline of literary or English studies. To rhetoricize literary studies requires a clearly articulated conceptualization of literature that is consonant with the assertions and principles of rhetoricality. The conceptualization of literature as a metaphorization of LIFE provides that sort

of platform. It denies that literature is somehow endowed with special inherent qualities – spiritual, cultural, textual, or otherwise – that make it wholly distinct from and more significant than other uses of language. It does this not by a purely empirical appeal wherein what we know about language, text, and culture matter only insofar as we can use cognitive science to put in quantitative terms what properly belongs to qualitative assessments; rather, it affirms the claims of cognitive linguistics that meaning-making in language is a complex function of human cognition that is affected by individual and socio-cultural experiences. This promotes an interdisciplinary approach to the study of literature because it values and perhaps even requires simultaneous attention to linguistic, rhetorical, aesthetic, and socio-cultural concerns.

In promoting interdisciplinarity along these lines, a reconceptualization of literature as a conceptual metaphor highlights the fact that literary texts and our concept LITERATURE are constructed and made meaningful by our experiences as embodied individuals participating in socio-cultural contexts. That is, we could not understand that literature metaphorizes LIFE unless we understand that language in *all* its uses is created, used, and made meaningful by people, not because it possesses some (spiritual) connection to a realm of acontextual, universal meaning. A reconceptualization of LITERATURE according to the premises of cognitive metaphor theory means that in our accounts of what literature is, how it functions, and why we use it, we must address qualitative as well as quantitative data. Our notion of what literature is must take into account the influence of culture, history, and individual perception and interpretation and the empirical proof that the brain processes language and helps us create meaning within those cultural, historical, and personal contexts.

This understanding of literature, then, is itself recursive in that its primary assertion – that literature metaphorizes LIFE – is based on empirical data as well as theory and interpretations of

those data based on that theory. It also encourages intellectual and institutional recursivity within academia by characterizing literature itself as a phenomenon of interest to the hard sciences, social sciences, and humanities. It thereby promotes research that brings (disciplinary fields that are primarily concerned with) the empirical and objective into conversation with (disciplines that are primarily concerned with) the interpretive, cultural, and contingent. This sort of interdisciplinarity can only be supported through an institutional structure in academia whereby heteronomy and interdisciplinary work – whether in teaching, research, or administration – are valued over autonomy and protectionism. In other words, it is best supported by the same foundation upon which a liberal education is constructed.

Inevitably, whenever literary studies opens itself to the methods and knowledge of other disciplines, particularly the sciences,<sup>64</sup> it also opens itself up to considering a variety of texts. This sort of consideration involves developing a functional literacy in the outside body of scholarship, ideally in consultation with a colleague in that field; it also involves expanding the range of what counts as valid fodder for teaching and research in literary studies. As Bender and Wellbery suggest, contemporary literary studies already opens itself to a variety of texts and ideas found in other disciplines. The literary studies and any discipline that regularly traverses disciplinary boundaries must be vigilant to avoid unthinking appropriation of other disciplines' knowledge and methods.

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<sup>64</sup> I by no means wish to impugn literary studies for failing to consider other disciplines' methods and knowledge. The cultural studies turn in literary studies has been one indication of the flexibility of literary studies in this regard. I do wish to suggest that literary studies has much work ahead if it wants to continue doing so, as I say, particularly with the sciences, and it must be careful to enter into cooperative partnerships with scholars in other fields as opposed to appropriating their methods and knowledge. Consider the case of ecocriticism in literary studies today: In that approach to literature, a danger lies in merely nodding to the theories and methods of research used in the (social) scientific disciplines related to ecocriticism, including geology, geography, biology, sociology, and anthropology. To make valuable contributions to a worthwhile body of knowledge about literature according to an ecocritical approach (and to clearly articulate to other fields why a consideration of literature, aesthetics, and/or the humanities is valuable), literary scholars must pursue honest interdisciplinarity and recursivity in their teaching, research, and administrative work.

Literary studies is also to be commended for expanding its treatment of texts and questioning the boundary of what “literature” means and “literary study” entails. A reconceptualization of literature as a metaphor can further this expansion in that it defines new boundaries for determining what is “literature” and what is not. Rather than determine the proper purview of literary studies based on whether a text is “important,” creative, or inspired in some apparently inherent literary way, we would define as literary whatever is read as a metaphorization of LIFE, and we could potentially read any text as literature in that way. This could give literary scholars another opportunity to work with other scholars outside their field in productive ways and prove that the proper purview of a “literature” class isn’t just to teach a course in art history or art appreciation or that teaching literature entails teaching students how to see the intersections of methods and knowledge from a variety of areas of study. It gives literary studies another opportunity to continue in its progression away from justifying its existence in academia through claims to a false autonomy, spirituality, or unique creativity. Interdisciplinarity that leads to heteronomy and an improved understanding of how human beings construct their worlds would be justification enough.<sup>65</sup>

A reconceptualization of literature via conceptual metaphor theory is but one possible way of rhetoricizing literary studies and beginning the process of rhetoricizing English studies. But a full and explicit rhetoricization of English studies (as opposed to the latent rhetoricality that Bender and Wellbery assert is probably already part of the discipline) does not have to begin with a reconceptualization and rhetoricization of literature and literary studies. However, I contend that if those who work in literary and English studies want their discipline(s) to operate

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<sup>65</sup> At least, in a world or context where liberal education is a fundamental value. Even so, for those who value higher education as a means to economic success, interdisciplinarity and heteronomy can be appealing for its efficiency (it is possible to cover many subjects simultaneously in such an approach) and, more importantly, because it produces the most accurate and comprehensive understanding possible of human activity.



by the premises and principles of rhetoricality, they would be well-served to begin with a consideration of the rhetoricality of literary studies, given the power and prestige of literature<sup>66</sup> within our culture and literary studies within English studies.

### 4.2.3 Locating Rhetoricization in Literary Studies

#### 4.2.3.1 Literature Classrooms

A rhetoricized approach to teaching literature – particularly one that reconceptualizes literature as a metaphorization of LIFE – would<sup>67</sup> answer the question “Why read and teach literature?” proleptically. Students in such courses would read more than just “great” or “important” works and, when they read texts that appear on lists of “great” books or poems or dramas, they would read them for their inherent worth *qua* “great” literature or for the sake of reading “great” literature. The point of reading literature would not be for students to have ingested the works that will give them the maximum cultural or symbolic capital, to put it in Bourdieu’s terms.<sup>68</sup> The new objectives would hinge on developing students’ awareness of the constructed, recursive, heteronomous nature of discourse, thought, and action, with an emphasis on aesthetic discourse. Students would learn a variety of methods – from discourse analysis to

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<sup>66</sup> At least, in comparison to non-literary texts.

<sup>67</sup> Although I have acknowledged the fact that rhetoricization is already happening in implicit and explicit ways in both literary and English studies, I will from here on write about rhetoricization in these disciplines as if it is hypothetical. This is not to deny that literary or English studies do not, in some form or another, work according to the model of rhetoricality; it is to acknowledge that my intention here is to present general models that I hope will be applicable to as many of the myriad types of situations and contexts (e.g., from small schools to large schools, and from technical and community colleges to research universities) in which we find literary and English studies, even though it may be the case that the forms of rhetoricization that I suggest are already part of the practices, structures, and institutions of any given location in which we might find literary or English studies in any given institution of higher education in America today.

<sup>68</sup> Of course, there is something to be said for ensuring that our students have among them an equal amount of these forms of capital. Not having them can be nearly as disempowering in our society as not having access to the means of economic capital and power. We do our students no service to deny that having the cultural capital of knowing the “great” books, culturally-significant works of art, the history of these great works, how to paint, or how to play a musical instrument matters for how socially and economically successful our students are. When government cuts funding for arts education, it is the marginalized who should be most angry that their access to these sorts of capital is being taken away from them. More importantly, though, students ought to have a rhetoricized education in this respect, understanding that art and our valuation of it is constructed, recursive, and contextual.

interpretive or aesthetic methods – for determining what are “literary” texts and then for analyzing and critiquing them.

Rhetoricized literature classes would also encourage interdisciplinary thinking and study. For example, a course in literature and ecocriticism would unite the study of literature with a field that is already interdisciplinary; such a course *could* be co-taught<sup>69</sup> by a specialist from literary studies and another from history, geography, or environmental sciences.<sup>70</sup> This sort of interdisciplinarity in the classroom has the potential to draw in students who might otherwise have thought of literature as irrelevant to their education and/or everyday lives since they had not yet thought about connections between literature and the sciences or the environment. It would also put into conversation the different disciplinary ways of knowing and methodologies from the disciplines that are brought together in the course.

Courses specifically focused on literature as a metaphorization of LIFE could take any number of forms. Students would have to understand the empirical evidence that metaphors shape how we think and act on individual and social levels, and they should also be encouraged to see anecdotal evidence for the significance of metaphor from their own lives. If the course focused on some a particular genre, time period, or literary movement, students could read and analyze literature according to the unique or significant ways that LIFE or various entailments of LIFE (e.g., RITES OF PASSAGE, PARENTS, RELATIONSHIPS, etc.) are constructed or metaphorized in the given genre, historical moment, or literary movement. This is predicated on students’ understanding of how metaphor functions as a concept and their careful consideration

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<sup>69</sup> Indeed, such a course could be co-taught, albeit probably to a larger class. Co-teaching has its own administrative and economic complications, though in some circumstances its benefits would outweigh the costs.

<sup>70</sup> I am indebted to Dustin Crowley of the University of Kansas for this conceptualization of a rhetoricized course focused on ecocriticism and for informing my earlier comments regarding ecocritical approaches to literature.

of the structure and entailments of the concept LIFE.<sup>71</sup> Such an approach particularly lends itself to ethnographic investigations of the ways that people construct their worldviews, concepts of what life is or should be, and sense of reality. The move toward criticism could follow from these analyses: in observing constructions of LIFE in literature and the reception of those constructions within certain groups, students would be able to see that not all conceptualizations of LIFE are created equal, and that narratives of what LIFE entails often exclude some individuals and life experiences. If students know that metaphor affects how people think and act in empirically-verifiable ways, and if they come to understand the metaphoric operation of literature, then they will be able to see that literature has empirically-verifiable<sup>72</sup> effects on readers and their worlds. This makes critical literary literacy vitally important for a well-rounded education about how and why human beings construct their worlds as they do.

Regardless of the focus of the literature class, students would be encouraged to begin making recursive connections between literature and other areas of their studies and lives. In a course on contemporary poetry, for example, this sort of recursivity could be fostered by assigning papers that ask students to analyze how a poem and a text from one of their other classes use discourse in similar and different ways in constructing reality. Students might be asked to collaborate with or interview scholars or students in other non-literature courses to find alternative ways of interpreting a poem and then explain the causes for or significance of the

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<sup>71</sup> As I hope I have made clear so far, to say there is but one conceptualization of LIFE is akin to saying that there is one life. Each person has an operating concept of LIFE that is influenced by a culturally-prevalent concept LIFE. It is to that general, complex, schematic concept LIFE that I refer here.

<sup>72</sup> This is not to say that the only significant claims that literary studies can make must be empirically-verifiable. Indubitably, literary studies has made important contributions to cultural studies, critical studies, and aesthetics; most of these have been qualitative in nature or contributions to intellectual labor in theory or interpretation. My point here is to note that today there are ways to prove empirically that literature operates and affects us in the ways that we claim it does. Conceptual metaphor theory and cognitive linguistics give us one such (at least relatively) empirical way of doing this, but they cannot be the sole method of literary analysis since they are not in and of themselves adequate for considering some cultural issues like, for example, the importance of a given text for its literary or historical moment.

differences in interpretation. Some teachers foster this recursivity by assigning journals or commonplace books, wherein students make connections between the content of the course and their daily lives. Each of these approaches help students see that they are constructing knowledge, just as their assigned literary readings also create, organize, and structure the context and reality in which they are read. It foregrounds the fact that “literature” is not an objective quality or phenomenon so much as it is a reading strategy. Since so many of them have been told that “literature” is an ethereal, mysterious thing beyond their grasp, we owe it to our students to demystify literature by emphasizing its constructed, recursive nature. Once our students understand that literature is something they process as easily as metaphors but that also affects their ways of thinking and acting as profoundly as some metaphors do, they will at least be able to understand why the study of literature is important to their lives.

Other subdisciplines within English studies would also likely be part of the interdisciplinarity (or, in this case, intradisciplinarity) and expansion of subjects in the rhetoricized literature class. Insofar as rhetoricality emphasizes the significance of multi-modal, polyglottal human communication in considering how we use communication to act in and to construct reality, a rhetoricized literature classroom ought to ask students to consider the rhetorical nature of literature (e.g., the audience, author, purpose in a given social sphere, or communicative effects of any given text). It might also ask students to use their own writing to understand the differences and similarities in compositional choices (e.g., rhetorical strategies, formatting choices, contexts, purposes) and those of what we have come to call “creative” or “imaginative” writing. If the disposition of the course is truly rhetoricized, students would be encouraged to see that there is no inherent difference between the creativity they use in their compositional process and that which writers of literature use, no reason that one form of

composition should be any more or less important than the other. In this way, a rhetoricized literature course could also be a composition course so long as the instructor(s) would be appropriately trained in the disciplines of literary studies, composition studies, and creative writing studies.

None of these approaches to the literature class demand a loss of specialization. In fact, they assume that the only way to produce knowledge worthy of sharing with students is to *create* knowledge worth sharing. This requires that we have specialists in the study of literature who have a comprehensive knowledge about particular genres, periods, and theories of literature. Without specialization, the body of knowledge that we create about literature and, in turn, about the English language, will undoubtedly be underdeveloped. If literary studies is to make worthwhile contributions to the project of the modern university – if our interdisciplinary enterprises are to be worthwhile and the knowledge we share with students and the public to be useful – it must be granted the human and economic resources it needs to engage in specialized research. Note that this justification for resources (and respect) is not predicated on the inherent value of literature itself or the necessity of maintaining a sort of priesthood that protects access to literature. It is based in heteronomy rather than autonomy. For such a justification to be taken seriously, a reckoning must come to the field of literary studies: the importance of literature and the study of literature must come to be seen in terms of their *connections* to other disciplines, to other bodies of knowledge, to other non-academic experiences rather than their autonomy from them.

#### **4.2.3.2 Conferences and Conventions**

Literary conferences and conventions are one site at which the need for a balance of specialization and interdisciplinarity is particularly pronounced. A look at recent programs from

some of the more popular literary conferences<sup>73</sup> indicate that literary scholarship is still cultural in its focus and that the study of literature continues to value the expansion of types of texts and occasions that accompanied the shift toward cultural studies.<sup>74</sup> Arguably, literary studies may not belong properly to an “English” department since the study of English literature today has increasingly to do with global Englishes. All of this is in keeping with the interests of rhetoricality. Particularly, the cultural studies approaches that still prevail at many large literary studies conferences help keep the pure aesthetic and autonomization at bay by emphasizing the value of research and knowledge from other fields (particularly the social sciences). But more can yet be done to promote substantive, interdisciplinary research and dialogue at such literature studies conferences, and, consequently, to enact recursively the fundamental premise of our acceptance of cultural studies approaches to literature – an acknowledgement of our heteronomous context in an academic sphere in which that knowledge is created as well as in the socio-cultural context of that knowledge’s creation and use.

Take as an example the fact that the 2011 Modern Language Association convention was held at the same time as the Linguistic Society of America’s annual meeting in January 2011. The date of the Modern Language Association’s convention was moved for many reasons, not least of which was to avoid overlapping with Christmas celebrations (Redden), but it nevertheless meant that linguists or language studies scholars who might have considered proposing papers to both the MLA and the LSA or even attending one and proposing a paper for the other instead had to make an important (professional and disciplinary) choice about doing

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<sup>73</sup> Specifically, I looked at the most recent conference proceedings from the Louisville Conference on Literature and Culture Since 1900, the American Comparative Literature Association’s annual meeting, and the Modern Language Association’s annual convention.

<sup>74</sup> Of course, there lies a danger in assuming that the content or patterns of professional or disciplinary conferences identically reflect the intellectual and/or institutional disposition of a field. Yet there is also a danger in asserting that such conferences are not relevant indications of the interests and practices of their respective fields.

one or the other. In fact, given the bulk of the panels at the latest MLA convention and the relative imbalance of papers in literature versus rhetoric and composition, technical and professional writing, creative writing, and language or linguistics, one might think that the “L” in the group’s name stands for “Literature” rather than “Language.” Many opportunities for interdisciplinary research and knowledge-making are lost because of problematic institutional practices like that of the conflict between the MLA and the LSA’s conferences.

But if we accepted a rhetoricized definition of literature, then the approaches to literary research would be much more varied than they currently are, and our sites of sharing and shared literary study could not afford to exclude closely-related disciplines like language studies, linguistics, rhetoric and composition, and creative writing. Scholars from these disciplines or from those that are farther removed from literature studies – sociologists, psychologists, engineers, biologists, physicists, etc. – might appear at these conferences as contributors to panels or papers. Some might attend just to hear more about how (the study of) literature reveals something significant for their own interests and research regarding the ways that human beings perceive, interpret, and act in the world as they do. One could imagine how a professor of physics might think of new ways to engage students in large introduction sections of physics courses by leading with a discussion of expressions of laws of physics in literature after hearing a talk about the physical world as represented in the works of Thomas Pynchon. Of course, right now, the institutional or intellectual structural apparatus that makes such interdisciplinary connections possible is weak at best and purely hypothetical at worst. Rhetoricizing literature would make it easier to see the value of heteronomy and to realize that specialized knowledge emerges from a shared body of knowledge. Such a realization incentivizes scholars from all disciplines to *create* opportunities to work together and share the knowledge they create. As it

is, literary studies largely seems content with knowing what it knows about culture, society, history, and literature, but so much more could be known and shared if we worked more often and more directly with scholars from other disciplines and invited them to be critical, engaged audiences of our own research.

A new definition of literature can help us construct such bridges among literary scholarship and scholarship from other disciplines. To redefine literature as a metaphorization of LIFE would ensure that new paths in literary scholarship are in line with the principles of rhetoricality because it encourages literary scholars to consider the findings, assertions, and methods of disciplines ranging from the hard sciences to other humanities disciplines such as rhetoric and composition. This, in turn, would necessitate that literary scholars keep in mind the heteronomous, interdisciplinary context in which their knowledge is situated, and it would remind literary studies scholars of the heteronomous (e.g., material, cultural, physical, emotional, individual, social, historical) forces that influence their object of study. The more autonomized the view of literature or the more autonomized the approach to literature (e.g., New-Critical style close reading for close reading's sake) the less welcome it would be at the conferences where rhetoricized scholarship and research are shared.

Research that proceeds from the notion that literature metaphorizes LIFE need not be a direct analysis of the ways that literature behaves metaphorically. A paper on Pynchon's literary representations of the physical world *could* examine how Pynchon or his readers use those representations to understand or reinterpret extra-textual reality through more or less empirical methods, including the use of neural imaging to see, in a literal sense, the connections that readers make between Pynchon's text and their extra-textual experiences of physical phenomena. Or perhaps the paper used discourse analysis or more traditional literary analysis to compare



Pynchon's representations of physical phenomena with descriptions of the same or similar phenomena by a given cultural or social group. Regardless, the ultimate objectives would be the same: to contribute to a body of knowledge wherein what we know about literature, human beings, and the world as we perceive and interpret it influences how we study them, thereby making the study of literature significant beyond itself.

#### **4.2.3.3 Around and Beyond Campus**

Literary scholars would increasingly seek out direct partnerships with scholars in other disciplines, including the subdisciplines of English studies. In particular, they might cooperate with these scholars in a range of activities like discussing ideas for their own research or on developing co-authored research, attending or presenting at conferences or symposia in other disciplines (perhaps as the result of cooperative research), or planning co-taught courses with these colleagues. All this would go a long way to improving not just literary studies research but also that of our collaborators, whose own research might benefit from the insights and input of literary scholars. In so doing, it would also help promote the value of and need for literary studies in the academy to our colleagues, administrators, and students.

One reason for literary scholars to leave the enclaves of their offices and to create opportunities to work with colleagues and administrators outside literary studies is to lead the way in petitioning administrators for support in developing resources and infrastructure to support interdisciplinary research. These include support for faculty colloquia, interdisciplinary seminars, common research space, and other human and technological resources. At the University of Kansas, for example, the KU Libraries houses a Center for Digital Scholarship with a large, well-appointed lab where scholars can work with Center staff on various projects, such as digitizing and creating multimedia and primary source materials and consulting about

copyright in the digital age (“KU to Launch”). This Center also houses an Institute for Digital Research in the Humanities, which was itself developed through the work of the KU Libraries and the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. Such opportunities to create digital humanities projects are going to arise much more often in the future and humanities scholars need to be engaged in creating these opportunities and steering their development. If literary scholars want to ensure that such opportunities for creative partnerships or innovative research will be beneficial for literary research, they will have to eschew autonomization and take the initiative to mold these opportunities by working with others outside their field.

Consider Google’s digitalization of books and its creation of a searchable, albeit flawed, open-access corpus. Many in the academic and non-academic community hailed the searchable corpus as “a new landscape of possibilities for research and education in the humanities, (Cohen, “In 500 Billion”). But some prominent linguists, including Mark Liberman and Geoffrey Nunberg, criticized the quality and usefulness of the corpus. These criticisms, however, only came after<sup>75</sup> scholars in the humanities had already undertaken projects and declared as fact the seemingly empirical findings of their Google-based research (Nunberg; see also Wootton). Undoubtedly, this ought not to have been the case: why didn’t Google consult (more) linguists before launching this tool? Why weren’t linguists more vocal about their concerns with the system earlier? Perhaps because it didn’t matter. Those outside the academy are perhaps accustomed to being separated from those within, and those within forget that others outside their disciplines may be interested in or may have a need to know what the academicians know and how they know it.

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<sup>75</sup>Nearly a year and a half pass between Wootton’s article in *The London Times* and Nunberg’s article in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

A similar problem faces literary scholars: if we can use the Google Books corpus to prove empirically that, for example, Victorian literature used certain words more often than others, then can't we say that we've empirically proved that they value the things associated with those words more than other words?<sup>76</sup> Of course not; the only thing proved in this scenario is that certain words are used more often than others. It is beyond Google's reach to create a tool that allows us to gauge what literary scholars gauge, though one could imagine such a Value Detector or a Interpretive Analysis gadget. It would still be up to experts in Victorian literature and culture to do the work of interpreting the data yielded by the corpus. As Patricia Cohen of *The New York Times* writes, quoting literary scholar Professor Alice Jenkins of the University of Glasgow, many professionals in the field of literary studies think that "large-scale, quantitative research is likely to highlight 'the importance and the value of close reading; the detailed, imaginative, heightened engagement with words, paragraphs and lines of verse'" ("Analyzing"). True as this may be, it is still the burden of literary scholars to be leaders in the development of new opportunities for research in the humanities, across academia, and between academia and the non-academic world. Then, when it comes to issues such as whether (and which) claims about literature can be proven empirically, literary scholars may not have to sprint to catch up with this data zeitgeist in both academic and non-academic culture and that has begun to influence research in and thinking about literature. They could help steer the course of such research and knowledge because they would have been locating themselves outside their own offices and inside the offices of administrators and fellow scholars more often.

Connections with the non-academic world would also be important for a rhetoricized study of literature because literature is not created or used exclusively in academic contexts.

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<sup>76</sup> For more information on an ongoing research project along these lines, see Cohen, "Victorian."

Literary scholars are already educating the public by teaching and by holding lectures, symposia, and colloquia that are open to the public.<sup>77</sup> But if the study of literature is to be recursive and if it acknowledges that all knowledge is constructed, then research about literature ought to involve more direct engagement with the people whose use of literature is under investigation. In order to fully understand the ways that people create and use literature and its significance for the socio-cultural contexts in which it is found, literary scholars must create opportunities both on and off campus to interact with the public by educating *and* learning from them.

Another way to foster these connections is by conducting more group-specific or ethnographic research into the ways that groups of people construct their worlds and/or their understanding(s) of literature. The previous chapter, on the metaphorization of LIFE in autobiographical writing, was largely a matter of literary analysis and cultural speculation. These are the tools most often used in literary studies today, and they have sufficed for our purposes. But I could also have consulted experts from Sociology or American studies to discuss what research has already been done regarding the values of the cultures about which I was making claims. Or, if insufficient data were available, we could conduct our own ethnographic research of these groups. In so doing, I would be taking my literary knowledge and intellectual labors<sup>78</sup> far beyond my office to other scholars, and I would be constructing knowledge about the ways that people use and think about literature that is recursively based on their actual practices.

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<sup>77</sup> Ostensibly, these forums offer opportunities for the public to do more than passively take in the knowledge of scholars. Ideally, for a rhetoricized literary studies, the public has the chance to weigh in on the ideas presented at these forums and thus to influence the research and analyses of literary scholars. This is one way to recognize and capitalize on the recursive nature of the literary object and the study of literature.

<sup>78</sup> See Shapiro for more on the value of intellectual labor in academia. Intellectual labors should not necessarily be considered more valuable because they involve empirical or lab-based research. The intellectual labor of working in theory and abstraction is no lighter or less necessary a labor than whatever research goes on before that theory work. The intellectual products of the labor of a literary studies scholar are no less valuable if they are not predicated on scientific data; they will be less valuable if they reveal nothing new or insightful about the world or their subject(s).

Ultimately, the way for literary studies to justify its existence on college and university campuses is to prove to students, taxpayers, administrators, and higher education policymakers that literary studies contributes something unique to a well-rounded education and to the body of knowledge created in the university. The way that literary studies scholars can show that they have worthwhile contributions to make to academia and to the public is by stepping outside of their departments and beginning dialogues with those interested parties. Instead of being weakened by heteronomy, the recursive and constructed nature of literature and literary study, and interdisciplinary work, rhetoricization makes it easier for the discipline of literary studies to argue for the resources and respect it deserves in academia.

### ***4.3 Rhetoricizing English Studies***

#### **4.3.1 Locating Rhetoricization in English Studies**

In many ways, the sketch of a rhetoricized literary studies will resemble the sketch of a rhetoricized English studies that follows here. But the two rhetoricizations must be considered in slightly different ways in part because English studies is perhaps more fundamentally an institutional/administrative unit and secondarily an intellectual/disciplinary field, while literary studies is perhaps more fundamentally an intellectual/disciplinary field and secondarily the institutional structure of that field. If it is fair to say that defining “literature” and its corresponding discipline of “literary studies” is challenging, then it would be fair to say that it is even more challenging to define “English” and what appropriately belongs to “English studies” as a discipline since these often include “literature” and “literary studies.” In the following section, I outline what rhetoricizing English studies might involve with the qualification that, as there is no monolithic literature or literary studies about which I could make universal claims and offer universal suggestions, there is no monolithic discipline of English studies or English studies

department on which I can base my suggestions for rhetoricization. My suggestions will not fit every single situation and context in which we find English studies, though they may be taken as an indication of the guiding principles of rhetoricizing English studies, both as a development of a rhetoricized reconceptualization of literature and from a more general rhetoricization of the field of English studies.

#### **4.3.1.1 The English Department**

By “English departments,” I mean any institutional structure within a larger college or university that houses mostly English studies scholars and instructors. I do not wish to make any commentary on departments wherein there are a handful of English studies scholars and instructors among faculty from other disciplines as well, such as with English and Philosophy departments or Humanities departments that exist in some smaller colleges and universities. English departments are often given other names that acknowledge the diversity of subjects pertinent to English studies (such as a Literature and Writing department) and of the subject areas covered by its faculty. For the sake of ease, however, I will simply use the term “English department” to refer to a schematized institutional body under the aegis of which English studies scholars are sanctioned to work within a college or university.

The potential objects available for research in English studies are found throughout the university, and so not all research and teaching related to English studies will be found in English departments. Examples of such related work include Writing Centers and writing courses in degree programs where English is still the primary language (e.g., business degree programs). Right now, there is little clarity about what the proper purview of English departments *ought* to include, but that becomes less problematic in a rhetoricized English studies. A rhetoricized English department would house scholars and scholarship that

investigates how and why people use the varieties of (Anglophone) communication that they do to construct their realities. “Anglophone communication” studies today includes world Englishes, works translated into English, and non-linguistic communication used by English speakers; sometimes, there need be no “English” element of the texts and occasions English studies scholars investigate. A rhetoricized English department would welcome this sort of diversity in the texts and occasions its faculty research. It would be able to articulate a need, even, for this diversity since its charge would be to develop a refined and extensive body of knowledge about English-based communication in all its forms.

The number of faculty per subdiscipline within an English department would be an important matter for a given English department to contend with. If we take seriously the assertion that the business of English departments ought to be the study of the English language in use, then we cannot condone any special emphasis on one area by stacking the faculty deck in the favor of literature, rhetoric and composition, creative writing, or any other subdiscipline. For many English departments today, this would require a reduction in the number of literary studies faculty and an increase in English language, rhetoric and composition, technical writing, and creative writing faculty. This would not be an uncomplicated change: one potential contention with a reduction in literary faculty might be that the breadth of all that literary studies encompasses warrants a disproportionate number of faculty to cover all relevant areas. If that were truly the case, however, no small college or university could have any sort of literary studies program since they can only accommodate a small number of literary studies faculty. In a rhetoricized model, it could be that fewer departments are able to offer degrees in as many areas of literary scholarship as they currently do. That seems fitting, given the current crisis in

the job market for professors of literature.<sup>79</sup> Moreover, each of the other subdisciplines could make the same argument about the breadth of their field and need for more faculty within the department to cover those areas in teaching and research. In other words, English departments might be smaller with equal representation among the subdisciplines and deeper specialization within those represented subdisciplines.

Another contention might be that if the number of literary studies faculty in an English department decline, so too will either specialization or interdisciplinarity in all of English studies. That is, English departments that offer only, say, MA or PhD degrees in Shakespearean literature or contemporary American literature may produce graduate students who *only* know those areas of literary studies; we will have produced scholars of very limited scope who cannot easily work outside the confines of that specialization. Or, if an English department had fewer literature faculty, they might be able only to offer a very generalized MA or PhD but with no depth since perhaps there would only be one or two scholars from a given area of specialization to teach graduate students. These are contentions that should be taken seriously, and perhaps it is that the balance between specialization and interdisciplinarity is one that all English departments, by their very nature, will struggle with regardless of whether or not they operate with a disposition of rhetoricality.

What is more important, perhaps, is that in a rhetoricized English studies, the lines between “literary studies” and “writing studies” and “rhetoric studies” and other areas of scholarship in English studies would not be so clearly cut as they are now. Someone who graduates from a rhetoricized English department could have a specialization in a certain area of

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<sup>79</sup> According to research by the MLA, there are substantially fewer tenure-track positions for English faculty than there were in 1995 while part-time and non-tenure track positions have increased (Laurence). The only area of specialization to have an increase in the number of jobs advertised with the MLA in the 2009-2010 hiring season was rhetoric and composition (MLA Office of Research).



literature but could also teach introductory composition and language courses. Another graduate might have a specialization in composition studies but also publishes research in rhetorical approaches to (teaching) literature or technical writing. Many current graduate students in English studies are already taking this rhetoricized, multidisciplinary approach, and the already-multidisciplinary field of English studies will benefit from having scholars who have such expansive talents and interests.

It could be that a rhetoricized English department would no longer exist as an “English department.” Perhaps if communication more broadly is its focus, English studies would be more appropriately located in a communication department. Or, English studies might be included with communication, art, and music in something more akin to a Text Studies department that houses all intellectual issues related to understanding the creation and use of texts composed in various modes. Rhetoricized English departments could undergo any number of similar permutations, and these are but some of the possibilities.

#### **4.3.1.2 Around Campus**

If “English studies” refers to the study of more than English literary communication – to the study of English language, composition, and literature – then English studies has a vested interest in English texts written within other disciplines and situations outside of the English department. Consider writing centers as examples of institutional and intellectual bodies that are often separate from English departments and where important scholarly and instructional work related (in at least some respects) to English studies takes place: there is no reason that a rhetoricized English department should insist that a writing center come under its jurisdiction, but scholars from all areas of the English department should find ways to foster working relationships with the writing center. English department faculty should be aware of the services

and philosophy of their college's or university's writing center so that they can lend their input about those services and philosophies, where they intersect with the faculty's work, to help make our students the best writers they can be, no matter what the situation. Similar sorts of outreach and cooperation could happen with writing courses and writing programs in other areas of the college or university. For example, when faculty from the business school need to teach classes on business writing, they could consult with certain English faculty regarding things related to English language, style, and rhetoric.

Such cross-disciplinary classes underscore how much English studies has to contribute to the quality of students' education and to the work of academia. Our colleagues in other departments who might otherwise think that English departments only concern themselves with the study of "good" or "important" writing and (somewhat paradoxically) basic composition and grammar would begin to reconfigure their concept of what an English department is interested in. Students would come to see the English department as an important part of their academic careers, since they would be exposed to the input, expertise, and service of the English department about the various texts that they have written and read in each of their disciplines. Administrators would also be hard-pressed to ignore the value of English departments that eagerly seek out opportunities to make contributions to the work that students and other scholars do with English communication across the university. By highlighting the value of their input throughout the academy – not just as a service to the university but as a source of expertise and assistance in things related to English communication – English departments can clarify the significance of our contributions to academia for anyone with an interest in higher education.

Of course, when English studies scholars find themselves in the offices of administrators or in college- or university-level meetings about budgets, hiring priorities, program outcomes,

strategic planning, and student life programming, they must keep in mind the heteronomous nature of their relationship to various bodies within this academic context. That is, we must work with administrators and scholars in other disciplines rather than issue demands about the needs of the English department without considering the questions, interests, and input of those who have some interest in our practices. If, for example, college or university administration calls for an assessment of each academic program, English studies scholars should welcome the opportunity to work with administrators in developing an assessment that is appropriate and fair and that discovers information that is relevant and of interest to all parties concerned. We should not ignore such calls for assessment or accountability; these are opportunities to demonstrate the benefits, scope, range, and importance of the study of English in the university, so long as we do not have to concede *direction* of the assessment to those who are unfamiliar with our subjects and pedagogical practices. Ignoring or rebuffing calls for assessment is an autonomizing move, one that suggests to administrators, colleagues in other disciplines, students, and the public that we think of our discipline as the whole puzzle rather than as one piece of the whole.

#### **4.3.1.3 English Classrooms**

As I suggested above, the rhetoricization of English studies may have some implications for *who* teaches *what* in English departments. If scholars in English departments specialize in one area but have sufficient experience with or training in other areas of specialization, then English courses may themselves be more intradisciplinary if not interdisciplinary than they currently are. English departments would offer more courses that blend areas of linguistic or communications-focused inquiry with areas of rhetorical or literary inquiry. A course in digital or new media communication in English might examine the ways that fan fiction or hyperlinked versions of canonical literature influence reading habits, cultural shifts, or intended and actual

audiences. More courses in English departments would be cross-listed or co-taught with instructors from other disciplines. We might see more Writing Across the Curriculum programs, too, because of the opportunities for expanding critical literacy skills across and within the disciplines.

Ultimately, full-time and tenure-track faculty may find themselves teaching undergraduate courses if the number of graduate students admitted into a rhetoricized English department decreases. Faculty could use those lower-level courses as opportunities to work with colleagues from other disciplines in courses that focus on the foundations of those fields. First-year composition, introductory English language, and introductory literature courses would not be seen as drudgery either to teach; they would be seen as opportunities to guide the first steps of our students' education in English, not hurdles to clear before being allowed to teach a(n advanced) literature course. Students would come to understand literature as but one way that human beings use communication to negotiate their worlds, but they wouldn't see it as *inherently* superior to other forms of communication. Rather, English studies classes would help students to develop a rhetorical, cultural, and linguistic awareness of *all* the (Anglophone, at least for an *English* department) texts they encounter in their studies and in their everyday lives, not just the literary texts they encounter.

#### ***4.4 Rhetoricity as an Answer to Present and Future Questions***

The benefits of rhetoricizing literary and English studies are numerous. Within English departments, they help scholars to articulate a valid, coherent theory about the nature of literature and language-in-use. They also give us a basis for accepting the heteronomous nature of our object of study and the institutional context in which we study it. In turn, they encourage us to understand the constructed nature of our world, pursue an expansive understanding of human

activity that spans disciplinary boundaries, recognize the recursive relationships between how we act and what we know, and sanction us to apply that knowledge to a wide variety of texts. This, in turn, helps us face some unwelcome truths about the untenable practices of privileging literary studies and predicating the necessity of English studies in academia on tenuous or at least unproven claims that our value is connected to something as nebulous as “critical thinking”<sup>80</sup> or that our value is self-evident and in need of no justification.

Outside English departments, they give us opportunities to seek new cooperative partnerships with scholars in other fields for constructing and refining knowledge about the world. Our research in that respect would reinforce and explore the fact that our world is constructed from our objective, cultural, and individual experiences and interpretations of those experiences. This disciplinary disposition would make clear for those outside the English department that we wish to work with others and consider their interests and questions in formulating what we know about the English language in its various uses. English departments need to cultivate this sort of heteronomy, transparency, and a more accurate and worthwhile understanding of our object of study – the English language – if they wish to be taken seriously in contemporary higher education.

This is a timely issue for English studies in the wake of the Spellings report and subsequent attempts by those in academia to justify their current practices. Consider the case of the Texas A&M University system, where in 2010 a list of the profitability of each professor at the university was published in an attempt to increase transparency in higher education spending (a key element of the Spellings report’s recommendations). As it turns out, the English

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<sup>80</sup> See Fish and Berubé for further discussion of whether teaching critical thinking is a valid justification for English studies. Critical thinking can be a way for English studies scholars to have their cake and eat it, too, by satisfying the demands of those who see college as a place for acquiring job skills and of those who see college as a place to be exposed to new ideas and to learn to articulate one’s own insights.

department was in the black, while such departments in the hard sciences such as oceanography, physics and astronomy, and aerospace engineering were in the red (Simon and Banchero). While the profitability of English is no doubt due in part to intradepartmental labor issues since the burden of teaching many undergraduate students is largely put upon under-paid graduate teaching assistants rather than full-time or tenure-track faculty, it ultimately doesn't matter that the Texas A&M English department, like many other English departments across the nation, has managed to avoid dealing with that labor issue. What matters more is that much of the work that goes on in English is *perceived* as being non-essential. For example, in a *Wall Street Journal* article about the profitability list, Bill Peacock, vice-president of the Texas Public Policy Foundation, is quoted as saying that taxpayers should determine whether “they should be spending two years paying the salary of an English professor so he can write a book of poetry simply to add to the prestige of the university or the body of literature out there” (Simon and Banchero). When asked about his response to criticisms along these lines, Chester Dunning, history professor at Texas A&M, said that “if you want me to explain why a grocery clerk in Texas should pay taxes for me to write those books, I can't give you an answer. . . . We've only got 5,000 years of recorded human history, and I think we need every precious bit of it” (Simon and Banchero).

English studies must come to terms with the fact that its current intellectual and institutional practices may only be reinstating a history that the discipline may have thought it abandoned long ago. We must be committed to an honest appraisal of our current practices in the hopes of improving on shortcomings and creating an honest, coherent picture of what English studies can and does contribute to its academic and social context. We have much to offer those who would reduce higher education to the transmission of skill sets for jobs, not on their terms

but in terms of what is necessary in order to say that the body of knowledge created and refined in the university is comprehensive, accurate, and worthwhile.

### **Afterword – Literature as a Conceptual Blend?**

This project emerged from two courses I took during the fall of 2006 as a graduate student at the University of Kansas. These were a topics course about rhetorical approaches to literature and a metaphor theory seminar. In the first weeks of the topics course, we students read and discussed some well-known works by Terry Eagleton, S. Michael Halloran, and others about the nature of literature. As the semester wore on, it was clear that this debate hadn't yet been settled and that perhaps it never could (or should) be. At the same time, in the metaphor theory seminar, I began to read Paul Ricoeur's *Rule of Metaphor*. Ricoeur's claim that metaphor is the assertion – however conscious or unconscious – that some phenomenon *is* that which the speaker and audience knows it *is not* was particularly convincing to me as an elegant expression of the fundamentals of conceptual metaphor theory, which had been validated by nearly twenty years of qualitative and quantitative data.

I began to see overlaps between the description of (conceptual) metaphor that Ricoeur's tension theory made possible and the description of literature espoused by many Western literary scholars, philosophers, linguists, and rhetoricians for centuries (I summarize some of these overlaps in chapter two). In other words, it proved helpful to think of literature as a metaphor for the following reasons:

- It provides a way to talk about how fictive reality can so automatically and consciously or unconsciously make sense to readers.
- It situates meaning in language, cognition, rhetoric (or the use of words to address interpersonal and inter-situational exigencies), experience, and culture rather than in an

unknown or inexplicable realm (or ignoring the question of meaning-making altogether).

This makes the study of literature something that is more fully in line with current interdisciplinary trends in the (post-)cultural-studies field of literary studies. In short, it is already rhetoricized.

- It highlights the tension between a reader's individual experience of or cultural knowledge about LIFE and the concept of LIFE that is expressed in an artistic work. It is comfortable with the inherent and inevitable conflict, as well as the ambiguity that will obtain between the reader, the text, and the socio-cultural context in which both are situated.
- It gives us a way to explain the significance of literature – that it affects people as individuals and as members of a culture – on an interpretive, analytic basis as well as on a scientific, empirical basis. This makes it easier to explain to anyone from the layperson to scholars in the hard sciences what literature is, how it functions, why we use it, and why it's a valuable area of study in higher education.

Conceptual metaphor theory is not the only possible way to explain the nature of literature, though. It is one possible way to understand literature as a phenomenon that elegantly summarizes and entails most of what literary scholars assert literature is and does.

Another possible explanation of the nature of literature that operates on the same premises as conceptual metaphor theory and that offers many of the same benefits is that literature operates as a conceptual blend rather than a conceptual metaphor. Conceptual blends, also called conceptual integration (Fauconnier and Turner 18), are similar to metaphors in that they involve mapping similar or salient properties between at least two distinct conceptual domains. With metaphor, there are only two domains, though this complexity may be multiplied



by entailed or associated metaphors. Conceptual blends, on the other hand, can involve more than two conceptual domains. They aid us in understanding or imagining that which we haven't yet experienced or conceived of, such as counterfactual assertions like *If I were you, I would have done it* (Kövecses 228). To understand this example phrase would require imagining the speaker as being someone whom she is not and then acting as if she were that person. In conceiving of such a counterfactual, we use a network of many domains that are blended in a cognitive *blended space*. That is, in mapping elements of I [THE SPEAKER] onto the conceptual domain YOU [THE INTERLOCUTOR], we create a new domain, I/YOU, in which the speaker and her interlocutor are one and the same person; in this blended space, we can imagine the speaker behaving as and actually *being* her interlocutor. "We can say, then," metaphor theorist Zoltan Kövecses explains, "that there are two *input domains* that yield a third one, [the] *blended space*" (228-9, italics in original). This *emergent structure* – the output of the conceptual blend – isn't part of the cognitive function of metaphor. In that formulation, we understand one domain in terms of another, drawing from the source (FIRE, for example) to understand the target (ANGER, in the case of ANGER IS FIRE) but not to produce a new concept, ANGER/FIRE.<sup>81</sup> Because blends can be multi-directional, they can produce blended concepts, like I/YOU.

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<sup>81</sup> I affirm that conceptual blends have this capacity while metaphor lacks it. But I think that metaphor *can* be seen as having emergent functions. In thinking and talking using metaphor, for example, speakers develop "entailed" metaphors – metaphors that derive from a superordinate metaphor. For example, the conceptual metaphor COMPLEX ABSTRACT SYSTEMS ARE PLANTS (as in *Please turn to the local branch of the organization*) produces the entailed metaphor REDUCING COMPLEX SYSTEMS IS MAKING PLANTS SMALLER (PRUNING, CUTTING), as in *They selectively pruned the workforce* (Kövecses 98-9). Perhaps metaphor is seen in this reductive manner because conceptual metaphor theorists deny the bidirectionality of metaphorical mapping. If metaphor is seen as only a matter of drawing from a source to elaborate on a target, then only the target and source matter, to the exclusion of possible entailments and elaborations on that metaphor that may not be fully contained within the source and target concepts.

It could be the case that we process literature as a conceptual blend rather than a conceptual metaphor, that literature *blends* our experiences of LIFE with those presented in the literary texts we read rather than *metaphorizes* them in terms of the depiction of LIFE in the literary text. To talk about literature as a metaphor as I have is to assert that our concept LITERATURE is structured by the knowledge that a work of literature will depict the experience of LIFE, where LIFE is our concept of what the prototypical lived human experience entails. In reading literature, we use our concept of LIFE, which we've cultivated from our cultural knowledge and personal experiences, as a source domain to help us understand the target concept(s) of LIFE depicted in the literary text; we also use the concept(s) of LIFE depicted in the literary text as sources for understanding the target domain of our own concept(s) of LIFE. Conceptual blend theory would treat each of these domains as input domains; that is, each domain adds something unique and necessary for the blended space of LITERATURE (as a blend of the reader's experiences of LIFE with the literary depictions of LIFE).

The benefits of conceptualizing of literature as a blend in this way include the ease with which it would be possible to talk about the multi-directionality of the influence of one concept on another and, thus, of literature on its readers and the socio-cultural context on literature. If metaphor theory holds that metaphoric mapping is unidirectional,<sup>82</sup> then we must address each of the cognitive moves – from the reader's individual experience to a character's experience and vice versa, and from the reader's cultural experience to a character's experience and vice versa, and from the reader's individual experience to the overall characterization of LIFE in the text and vice versa, from the reader's cultural experience to the overall characterization of LIFE in

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<sup>82</sup> For more about the directionality of metaphor, see section 2.2, above.

the text and vice versa – individually. Blend theory can streamline this process without reducing the complexity of the process.

But there are complications with a blend theory approach. A blend suggests that two things that were not unified are now unified. Metaphor, following Ricoeur's formulation, preserves the *tensive* nature of the unification being asserted. For literature, this is of the utmost importance, because our experiences of LIFE do not and often are not supposed to precisely mirror those depicted in the literary text. To suggest otherwise is to ignore the very real contexts that our concepts of LIFE and LITERATURE emerge from. Furthermore, to conceptualize of literature as a metaphorization of LIFE gives us a way to reassess what we thought we knew about the unidirectionality of metaphor. Blend theory only provides a different way of thinking and talking about the same issues that a metaphor theory approach brings to light, but I think that we will find that it doesn't provide conceptual metaphor theorists with a way around the issue of unidirectionality.

Both conceptual metaphor theory or conceptual blend theory give us new and much needed insights into the linguistic, aesthetic, and rhetorical aspects of literature and the literary experience. Either could be profitably pursued and should be.

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