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FINAL MA PORTFOLIO

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A Final Portfolio

Submitted to the English Department of
Bowling Green State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in the field of English
with a specialization in English Teaching

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Professor Bill Albertini, First Reader
Professor Kimberly Spallinger, Second Reader

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Portfolio Narrative

Let me begin with describing my personal situation, including life and career goals, as these topics have driven the portfolio selections I've made. I am currently a career firefighter/EMT for the City of Charleston in South Carolina. The City of Charleston is generous enough to refund tuition expenses, and remunerate employees an additional 7% for each degree earned. Having always been a life-long learner, I jumped at the chance to further my education while increasing my salary. I decided upon BGSU and a Master's degree in English with a specialization in English Teaching for various reasons. Firstly, I am forty-three and a single parent. I needed a fully online program. Secondly, in my twenties I worked as a teacher of the English language in Poland, and I consider that time in front of a classroom the most fulfilling and enjoyable work I have ever done. Upon retirement from the fire service, I decided, I would like the option to teach English at the community college level. I therefore needed a fully online, fully accredited and challenging master's program in English teaching. That is how I discovered and decided upon BGSU.

The City of Charleston reimburses employees up to $3,000 per year for tuition expenses. This means I've been able to take two classes per year at BGSU without paying much out-of-pocket, which has created a five-year timetable for my program. As my studies progressed, my daughter entered elementary school and I became increasingly involved at her school (which enrolls grades 1-12). A third reason for my studies at BGSU emerged: I decided I wanted to create a program that I could offer as a supplemental afterschool workshop at her school. There are many options already there for students (such as Chess, Girls' Engineering, Soccer, etc.) but I was inspired to teach

adolescents how to have healthy political conversations and execute more effective rhetoric when making political arguments. That was the genesis for the Workshop Proposal in my portfolio, which is the project that remains directly applicable to my life in the near-term.

Recently, as my studies in the program have reached their conclusion, my specific interests in *why* I want to teach literature—what exactly I hope to teach students or lead them toward—have come into focus. The workshop, which I am passionate about, asks students to see genuinely from others' perspectives; it encourages them to humanize those that they disagree with, to view them as less of an existential threat and more as a fellow human being with just a slightly different moral makeup. My teaching philosophy focuses on literature's humanizing potential—the possibility that by reading literature, and by teaching it, students become empowered not only in who they believe themselves to be, but how they operate within society. This is achieved, again, by putting oneself in another's shoes, by seeing and feeling from another's perspective—an act that literature is uniquely positioned to offer. My two academic essay pieces follow this thread of interest in literature's humanizing effect, delving into what literature does or can do, psychologically, and how we as consumers of literature can appreciate it best.

Let me now take a step back and explain the projects that I've chosen for this portfolio in more detail, providing more reasoning about why they interest me academically and how that ties into my personal near- and long-term goals.

I've described the Workshop Proposal, and my desire to create and execute that workshop in the near future at my daughter's school, where I've already begun establishing relationships. The Teaching Philosophy goes along with that goal, as I may

need to submit a document as I petition the school to accept my workshop as an offering in their established afterschool program. I will elaborate on those two projects before discussing the remaining two, which are academic essays.

The Workshop Proposal was created in collaboration with another student here at BGSU. She and I discussed and exchanged ideas, then split the work in half—each writing our own distinct portion of the workshop. We then read each other's work and offered feedback. Before selecting this collaborative work for this workshop, I received permission from the other student to do so. As I began to revise the workshop, I originally intended to thoroughly revise the entire workshop. However, I soon realized that didn't feel right, or necessary. Because the work we contributed was so distinctly divided, I focused my revisions on the parts that I wrote, and made only limited clarifications to the portions written by my partner.

The Teaching Philosophy was entirely new to me when I composed it. As I mentioned, I was a teacher for only a short time a couple of decades ago. Even though I don't plan to teach full-time again until I retire, I knew it would be beneficial to have when I make the pitch to my daughter's school regarding the political workshop. But I didn't want to revisit it for purely for that practical reason. I had written it before I was inspired to create the workshop, so I wanted to revise it with my near-term goals in mind—so that I could become more intellectually oriented as a teacher and leader of a workshop. I also wanted to tie into the philosophy what had materialized as my overarching intellectual preoccupations, discovered as I progressed through various classes in the program. Mainly, these include questions of: what is literature, anyway— what does it do and what is its value? And also, along with that, further insight and

perspective into what has for decades been a passion of mine: the nature of the artistic process—its contours and possibilities.

That brings me to my two academic selections, chosen specifically because they wrestle with topics that are the most important to me, topics that, for me personally, will matter most when I find myself in front of a classroom. This desire to grapple with and understand these types of foundational ideas—such as (as I mentioned above), the purpose of literature; what it does and how we value it; its humanizing effect—is perfect for me at this stage, because of the personal story I detailed early, including my timeline of goals. I am not teaching now, and will not teach full-time for quite a few years. I can afford to focus now ideas that are foundational for me, ideas that I am most passionate about, ideas that will fuel me specifically as a teacher of literature. This is why I've chosen these pieces for this portfolio.

In the revision process of both these academic essays, I found greater and deeper appreciation for the topic, for others' thoughts on the topic, and for contemporary criticism. I also found new hope that my own insights might indeed prove useful, if developed more completely. In general, the capstone has help me learn to better traverse terrain that I've struggled with all my academic life: that space between listening and speaking, between always learning more and feeling that you know enough to strike out with an opinion of your own. I'm not quite there yet, regarding this particular academic material, but working through the revision process with Dr. Albertini has positioned me to wade into these academic waters with more confidence—and humility—than I've ever felt.

Brian Champlin

Dr. Erin Labbie

ENG 6070, Theory & Methods of Literary Criticism, Fall 2015

Final Project

Abstract

I.A. Richards and William Empson agreed that "certain conflicting psychological needs" existed within the human psyche, but they disagreed about the effect that literature had on those needs. For the purpose of this paper, let us consider those conflicts (and the psychological needs creating them) as those themes students of literature are quite familiar with: man vs. nature, the individual vs. society, etc. For Richards, literature had the capacity to reconcile those conflicts temporarily, allowing readers to achieve something similar to what Aristotle called catharsis. Empson, on the other hand, believed that literature was a reflection of the complex and irreconcilable needs within the author's psyche, but that it had no capacity to reconcile conflicting needs within the reader. In this paper, I present a summary of these scholars' ideas in this regard, identifying where and how they differ. I conclude that both viewpoints are equally valid, despite the fact that they appear to be diametrically opposed. By that I mean: what appears to be a contradiction is in fact not one, due to the different mode in which each scholar approached literature—Richards in reader-response mode, Empson with a focus on authorial intent. The mode, in this case, determined the truth of the idea.

Close Reading with I.A. Richards and William Empson:

Perspectives on Human Psychological Interaction with Literature

1. Introduction

In this paper, I revisit a particular debate between I.A. Richards and William Empson—literary criticism's two scientifically-trained pioneers of "close reading." The debate is steeped in ideas about human psychology and human psychological interaction with literature—nebulous material, to be sure. Still, the criticism presented by Richards and Empson in this field is compelling and worthy of study. Their interests involved the scrutiny of certain human psychological "needs," conflicting with each other, and literature's effect on or interaction with those conflicts. Both scholars agreed that there were indeed certain conflicting psychological needs imbued within the human psyche. But does literature, as Richards suggested, reconcile the tension between those needs, or does it, as Empson advocated, simply lay them bare in all of their complexity, exposing without reconciling? In this paper, I trace the work done by literature with respect to human psychological needs through the lens of Richards' and Empson's work. The conclusion I reach allows space for both Richards and Empson. This is possible because truth in this particular instance is perspective-based: while Richards approached the question in a reader-response mode, Empson was focused upon authorial intent. If we refrain from passing judgment on which mode is more valid—if we, in other words, remain agnostic on a topic for which there is no clear academic consensus—then it becomes evident that both scholars' views are valid within the mode in which they operate.

2. I.A. Richards

Before Richards became a professor of literature at Cambridge, before he became an influential literary theorist and shaped modern literary studies discourse towards what would come to be called "New Criticism," he was a Pavlovian-trained psychologist. As a

result, the thrust of his work in literary criticism is concerned with literature's effect on human psychology. As Paul Fry puts it in his lecture, "The New Criticism and Other Western Formalisms": "For Richards, reading is all about experience—that is to say, *the way* in which the mind is affected by what it reads. And so even though his subject matter is literature, he's nevertheless constantly talking about human psychology—that is to say, what *need* is answered by literature, how the psyche *responds* to literature." Response, of course, is very much a concern in Pavlovian psychology—as is the idea of needs. Also, one can note in the Fry quotation the presence of a partial opposition: psychology and literature intersect and interact, but there is also a tension between them. One can witness this kind of partial opposition in other more commonly regarded modes as well: science vs. religion, fact vs. fiction, empirical vs. emotive, etc. In Richards' writing about psychology and literature, he is very much focused on duality – and the tension inherent in it. In the chapter entitled "The Two Uses of Language," Richards presents the duality in psychological terms, and this creates the framework for much of the literature-related assertions that follow:

> Among the causes of most mental events . . . two sets may be distinguished. On the one hand there are the present stimuli reaching the mind through sensory nerves, and, in co-operation with these, the effects of past stimuli associated with them. On the other hand is a set of quite different factors, the state of the organism, its needs, its readiness to respond to this or that kind of stimulus. The impulses which arise take their character and their course from the interaction of these two sets. (262)

Richards is saying that there is information filtering into our minds from the outside world—what Richards later the chapter links to truth, objectivity, and science. For now, let us call that "objective information" *A*. Well, *A* is not the only player in the game. There is also *B*, the mass of personal psychological complexity that comprises an individual's baseline for interpreting, accepting (or rejecting), and reacting to *A*. Perhaps knowing that he was addressing an audience from the humanities rather than scientists and psychologists, Richards suggests that his readers imagine a sphere (our *B*—an individual's baseline for thought and interpretation) "constantly bombarded by minute particles (stimuli)" (our *A*—observable data), "while within the sphere complex mechanisms (are) continually changing for reasons that have nothing to do with the external stimuli" (263). Put simply: Richards is arguing that mental activity is the *result of the interaction* between an individual mind and observable information. Only in understanding how Richards' considered the nature of that interaction can we understand his basis for claiming that literature reconciles the conflicting needs within us.

At this point, let us recognize this idea: while it provides all "useable" material, *A* (external stimuli or "objective truth", etc.) is not actually controlling thought. It is *B* (an individual's psychological baseline, or the sphere) that selects what it wishes and interprets as it pleases, with zero regard for *A*. *B* has its own impetus, its own *needs*, and it will, based upon those needs, either distort *A*'s stimuli or leave it undistorted. As Richards says: "Even the most ordinary and familiar objects are perceived as it pleases us to perceive them rather than as they are, whenever error does not directly deprive us of advantages" (264).

It is important to note that in the previous quotation Richards uses the phrase "as they are." This is because, for Richards, science (i.e. objective truth) *does* exist independently of our interpretation of it. It is, as he phrases it, autonomous. Fry paraphrases this idea from Richards' in this way: "Scientific facts can be described in statements without the need for any kind of psychological context or any dependency on the varieties of human need. It is autonomous in the sense that it is a pure, uncluttered and uninfluenced declaration of fact or falsehood" (Richards 276, qtd. in Fry, ENGL 300: The New Criticism). Fry then reads to his students the following passage from Richards, which nicely demonstrates how and when literature enters the psychological framework that Richards has constructed thus far. Fry's verbal asides are in brackets:

> To declare Science autonomous is very different from subordinating all our activities to it. [Here's where poetry comes in.] It is merely to assert that so far as any body of references is undistorted it belongs to Science. It is not in the least to assert that no references may be distorted if advantage can thereby gained. And just as there are innumerable human activities which require undistorted references [scientific activities] if they are to be satisfied, so there are innumerable other human activities not less important which equally require distorted references or, more plainly, fictions. (Richards 276, qtd. in Fry, ENGL 300: The New Criticism)

Well, if that does not make the lover of literature jump up and down with excitement, nothing will. We *will* fictions (or falsities—or what Richards later calls emotive statements/pseudo-statements) into existence because we need them. That is, some mechanism within the sphere of our psyche needs *something*, and for whatever reason it

has determined that that something is a distorted reference, not an undistorted one. For Richards, human psychology requires both undistorted references (science) and distorted references (religion, and now, poetry)—and neither of those needs is inherently more important than the other. They are, however, in conflict. Reconciliation is possible only when both needs can be readily satisfied. Literature (like religion) is a uniquely capable distorted reference, one up to the task of reconciling the complex web of needs within our psyche. Or, as Fry eloquently summarizes Richards' thoughts: "That's the role of poetry and that's what it does, simply by evoking our wishes, our desires—irrespective of truth—in their complicated, chaotic form and synthesizing them organically into something that amounts to psychological peace." That idea of psychological peace, Fry points out, is similar to Aristotle's idea of catharsis—and similar, as well, to Milton's idea "at the end of *Samson Agonistes* . . . when he says, now we have as a result of this tragedy 'calm of mind, all passion spent.' That could be the motto for Richards' work. The experience of art, the experience of poetry, and the reconciliation of conflicting needs results in a kind of catharsis, a 'calm of mind, all passion spent'" (Fry, ENGL 300: The New Criticism).

3. William Empson

For Empson, a student of Richards and himself scientifically-minded, psychological reconciliation via literature is a romantic idea that probably does not, in fact, take place. This is not to say that the effort is not there, however. Says Empson: "Literature is a social process and also an attempt to reconcile the conflicts of an individual in whom [the conflicts] of society will be mirrored" (*Some Version* 19). But although Empson recognizes the attempt, he also recognizes the temporary nature of the

reconciliation. The literary onion, thought Empson, can always be peeled more (even for the same reader), and more scrutiny will yield different results. This is why, for Empson, actual reconciliation remains just beyond reach and anything that appears to be so will in fact be proved to be illusionary and skin-deep. It is this *attempt*, argues Empson, that is itself remarkable, that itself honors the complexity of the human psyche, mirroring it, representing it. As Fry points out, Empson understands poetry as "attempting to do something which in the immediate psychological circumstances [it] can't do, but in the process evoking an extraordinary complexity of effort on the part of the mind to be reconciled through the medium of language"—and therein lies its greatness (Fry, ENGL 300: Introduction).

But what actually transpires during this valiant attempt? What does literature do, exactly, according to Empson? In fact, it accomplishes nothing on its own. Literature simply *lays bare* our psychological needs, to use Fry's terminology, exposing them in all of their complexity but leaving them exactly as they were. In this sense, for Empson, literature reports. It plays the role of journalist, not diplomat. Or, as Fry says of Empson's view: "Maybe poetry *doesn't* reconcile conflicting needs. Maybe, after all, poetry is *an expression* of the *irreducible conflict* of our needs" (Introduction). This idea of poetry as an expression, or reflection, of psychological mechanisms within the author corresponds (tangentially, at least) with a sentiment that dates as far back as Plato. In the following passage from "The Phaedrus," Phaedrus concludes the following with Socrates: "You're talking about the living ensouled speech of a man of knowledge. We'd be right to describe the written word as a mere image of this" (79). For Empson, however, that image (the written word, or literature) is not "mere;" it is wondrous in its complexity and

stands as a true reflection of a deep-seated human psychology that would otherwise remain unavailable for consideration.

Both scholars recognize that conflicting needs exist within the human psyche and that literature attempts to reconcile them. They disagree about whether, in the end, literature is successful in doing so. For Richards, literature actually *does* something, emotionally and psychologically. For Empson, literature simply reports data—and in so doing helps us towards a better understanding of ourselves and of the society that shaped us.

Finally, two general distinctions between Richards and Empson will help contextualize their views and give us a better understanding of psychological reconciliation in literature. The first is the fact that Richards' theory was very much centered on human psychology, while Empson was not quite as interested in offering a theory based strictly along psychological lines. Empson was more focused on obliterating ambiguity as much as possible through scientifically-inspired literary analysis via close reading. This focus is what led him to publish one the classics of modern literary theory, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. The second and even more important difference is Richards' predilection for reader-response. As Fry points out, "Richards is actually an avatar of figures like Iser, like Hans Robert Jauss and Stanley Fish . . . who are interested in reader response: that is to say, in the way in which we can talk about the structure of reader experience" (New Criticism). In Richards' view, it seems, real value in literature was not imbued into the work by the author at the time of its creation, but in each reader's personal experience with the text. In that sense, Richards' views were very much like that of Barthes, who suggested: "To give a text an author, is to impose a limit on that text, to

furnish it with a final signified, to close the writing" (qtd. in Fry "Introduction"), and also: "a text's unity lies not in its origin but in its destination" (Barthes 1325). Empson, on the other hand, was interested primarily in authorial intent. He wanted to discern with as little ambiguity as possible what was imbued into the work *by the author*. Those are the modes within which the two scholars operated and the distinctions are important to consider as readers attempt to discern their own psychological response to literature.

4. Room for both Richards and Empson

As I mentioned in my introduction and alluded to elsewhere in this paper, I believe the truth of the subject lies with perspective. For Empson, a close reader concerned mainly with authorial intent, this idea of reconciliation fell into the realm of reader-response and became therefore besides-the-point—because with regard to conflicting psychological needs and potential reconciliation, ultimately for Empson, the onion can indeed always be peeled again; the text can indeed always be interpreted differently—ad infinitum. In one of his essays in *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, he argues for a less ambiguous approach to what other scholars call "atmosphere." Here is Paul Fry paraphrasing Empson on that topic, "Look, this is what people mean when they talk about atmosphere. It's not just something you feel on your pulse. It's something that can be described, something that can be analyzed" (Introduction). From the perspective of authorial intent, this is true. But a reader can only respond to a text (at a specific time and place in their life) in a certain way. A reader's personal emotional engagement with a piece of literature exists as a unique moment itself. It is different than it would have been years earlier, and it is different than it will be years later. It is certainly different than another reader's response to the work. If there is to be reconciliation, it falls within the

realm of reader-response and lies squarely outside of that of authorial intent. *And actually*, I believe Empson strikes this exact point in the following statement: "It may be said that the contradiction must somehow form a larger unity if their final effect is to be satisfying. But the onus of reconciliation can be laid very heavily on the receiving end" (*Seven Types* 193). The reader, he is saying, dictates the reconciliatory response—and I.A. Richards, I believe, would agree.

Call for Paper

International Conference on Psychology and the Arts, Denmark, Roskilde University near Copenhagen, June 22-26, 2011

PsyArt Foundation
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We are pleased to announce that the International Conference on Psychology and the Arts will be held at Roskilde University, Denmark, close to Copenhagen, June 22-26, 2011. Our hosts will be Professor Camelia Elias of Roskilde University and Professor Bent Sørensen of Aalborg University. The conference sponsors are the PsyArt Foundation and Roskilde and Aalborg Universities.

Papers may be in English, French, or German, and they may deal with any application of psychology or psychoanalysis to the study of literature, film, or the other arts. Our conference is very convivial and draws scholars from around the world. The registration fee of $295 includes admission to all sessions, reception, coffee breaks, and Sunday banquet, and two tours: a Roskilde walking tour and a bus tour to to the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art and to Kronborg Castle (supposed to be Hamlet's castle).

The deadline for sending us your title and abstract and registration fee is April 1, 2011 or the date by which we receive 65 abstracts, titles, and registration fees, whichever comes sooner.

Conference information, hotel information, and online registration can be found at:
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We look forward to seeing you in Denmark in June!
All the best,
Andrew Gordon
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Brian Champlin

Dr. Bill Albertini

ENG 6090, Teaching Literature, Spring 2015

Critical Essay

A Reconsidered Aesthetic: Climbing Back Up the Yawning Crevasse

In the introduction to his collection of contempary criticism, *Falling into Theory*, David Richter writes: "some of the traditional rationales for the discipline of literary study as it has been practiced over the last half century have vanished into the yawning crevasse"—created, of course, by the vast theoretical and critical changes of the latter half of the twentieth century (11). The imagery of shifting landscapes is intended and appropriate. Literary criticism, Richter suggests, could possibly be in a state of what philosopher Thomas Kuhn famously labeled a scientific revolution—the chaotic, transformative period within which one theoretical paradigm replaces another. Counted among the vanishing rationales for literary study is the aesthetic experience it proffers—a fact noted by George Levine in the introduction to his own collection of criticism, *Aesthetics and Ideology*: "In the current critical scene, literature is all too often demeaned, the aesthetic experience denigrated or reduced to mystified ideology" (379). Supplanting appreciation for literature's aesthetic—rising, in fact, out of the rocky earth like a mountain even as the aesthetic tumbles downward—is the convincing ideological-centric criticism labeled "anti-foundational." These critics seek to degrade and destroy certain power structures that have driven society—and with it, literature. Like Levine, I am eager to count myself among the devotees of that criticism, which is now central to criticism. But before I can give myself over to it completely, I need it to make more room

in its ethos for literature's "greatness" than it currently affords. It can do this in part, I propose, by considering literature's aesthetic not in the traditional sense of absolute "Beauty" and "Truth," but in a more concrete and generative sense: as the unique and real result of a unique and real human endeavor that is called the artistic process. Just as there are exceptional pole vaulters and exceptional philosophers, there are exceptional literary artists—humans of all genders, races, socio-economic positions and sexual orientation, etc.—laboring to create literature. Reconsidering literature in this way—that is, with a keen awareness of its unique artistic process and an admiration for the writers working successfully within those confines—will help literature retain its value even as critics expose certain ideological mechanisms that drive it through our culture.

It is commonly accepted that in Western intellectual history there has been a steady trend *away* from the "absolute" or "objective." This trajectory towards ever-greater appreciate for the subjective perhaps began with the Age of Enlightenment and has continued into contemporary times. The idea that literature can embody "absolute truth" has also been steadily falling out of favor: although "the canon" persists to this day, it does so in weakened form. None other than Jorge Luis Borges, the 20th century's consummate bibliophile and author of precisely crafted fictions, has debunked the idea of literary perfection: "Our indolence speaks of classical books, eternal books. If only some eternal book existed, primed for our enjoyment and whims, no less inventive in the populous morning as in the secluded night, oriented toward all hours of the world" (Borges 29). Influential anti-foundationalist critic Barbara Herrnstein Smith would certainly agree. In her 1983 essay "Contingencies of Value," she argues that the literature considered "classic"—those works supposedly the closest to perfection—rose to

prominence through "happenstance rather than the work's possession of any absolute quality" (Smith 124-5). She then goes further, arguing that these works maintained preeminence not through "the continuous appreciation of the timeless virtues of a fixed object by succeeding generations of isolated readers" (as critics have historically believed), but through "a series of continuous interactions among . . . mechanisms of cultural selection and transmission" (Smith 147-8). Of course, Smith is by no means alone in this opinion. The majority of contemporary critics now openly reject the "foundationalist" theories of the past, which "see literary quality as universal, and... makes strong, essentially unprovable assumptions about the nature of reality or society or human psychological that, if contested, leave their theories without explanatory power" (Smith 124).

All of these are good and just developments, in my opinion. But as claims of *absolute* literary value are debunked, literature's value in general risks degradation. This disconcerting strand in the contemporary ethos was identified by George Levine as "a resistance to (or demystification of) the idea of literary value" (378). As a graduate student in literary studies, I have felt apprehension toward anti-foundational critics in this regard, despite the fact that I appreciate the truths they bring to bear. So, for example, while reading from Smith I find myself embracing the idea that classical status is arbitrary and that the tail has indeed been wagging the dog in regards to canon preservation—but I also find myself repulsed by her repeated use of quotation marks around the phrase "works of literature." That action is indicative of a widespread contemporary presupposition that literary value is to be either ignored as irrelevant or debunked altogether. As Levine frames it: "Questions of literary value are for the most

part beside the point of criticism, as are arguments for literature's distinctiveness, and when they occur they can be felt to be an embarrassment" (381). Marxist literary critic Terry Eagleton, Levine contends, goes further and explicitly argues against "the idea of specialness of literature" by "transforming the aesthetic into a category of political dominance" that "many [critics] have relatively comfortably accepted" (381). So, for example, when contemporary critic Jane Tompkins illustrates the social mechanisms that have kept *The Scarlet Letter* in the canon, she is doing important work. But when she extends that content and states, "the idea of the classic is virtually inseparable from the idea of literature itself," her focus shifts ever-so-slightly from the specific to the general—and that is where literature itself is at risk for devaluation (138).

We arrive again at the reconsideration of the aesthetic I mentioned at the start of this essay. Some elaboration on that idea is now appropriate. The process of literature's artistic creation is complex and approached differently by different artists. I don't think it is a stretch, however, to assert that literary works are reflective of their creator's internalized experience. As such, they assume their own importance—their own truth. By no means is that truth eternal or absolute in the largest sense to which those terms can be applied. But it is *a* truth. It does not have to be *our* truth, but it is the outward manifestation of an individual's experience—experience that is from and within a certain culture at a certain time. Literary works, because they simply assume their own importance and are reflective of society, are unique and valuable. But are they all of equal value? Arguing that all works are automatically equal would be difficult, to say the least. The logical truth, it seems to me, is that artists are *not* equally adept at crafting literature.

In this regard, as I have read the powerful criticism from Smith, Tompkins, and others, I have sensed something similar to what critic Wilson Harris noted in Achebe's perception of *Heart of Darkness*: "a certain incomprehension . . . of the pressures of form . . . that has its deepest roots in an intuitive and much, much older self than [that] . . . which binds us to a particular decade or generation or century" (334). Sensing that lack of attention to "the pressures of form" in contemporary criticism, I have resisted the urge to give myself over more completely to ideological criticism that dismisses literary value. They are doing important work of challenging power structures that continue to adversely affect society, but as they do that work, they are not paying enough respect to process (what Harris labels "the pressures of form") and therefore the product (literature). As contemporary critics have rightly pushed back against the prevalence of white male voices on the canon, and as they have exposed the complex mechanisms that have been driving that phenomenon, literature's value and purpose become open to question. We do literature, and ourselves, a disservice if we do not make room in contemporary criticism for literature's special ability to (as contemporary Irish poet Seamus Heaney has said) "open unexpected and unedited communications between our nature and the nature of the reality we inhabit" (Heaney 93). This feat is not achieved in every work and by every artist.

John Berger (novelist, poet, painter, and art critic) begins his essay on aesthetics, "The White Bird," with an anecdote: "From time to time I have been invited by institutions—mostly American—to speak about aesthetics . . . But I didn't go. The problem is that you can't talk about aesthetics without talking about the principle of hope and the existence of evil" (5). He was, no doubt, being facetious and employing some

wonderful British humor, but his point is well-taken: aesthetics is a notoriously nebulous topic. Perhaps that quality of the literature's aesthetic—its nebulousness—along with its historic linkage to ideas of the "Eternal" and "Absolute"—is partly what has led to its decreasing celebration and its increasing dismissal (a la ideological suspicion).

If we are indeed in the midst of one of Kuhn's scientific revolutions, perhaps the shifting landscape is starting to settle. For here I am, by no means refuting contemporary criticism, by no means defining theories *in spite of.* As one contemporary scholar paraphrases Kuhn, "Once the majority of an intellectual community accepts a new paradigm, the community's members work on expanding this paradigm, but not on changing it" (Zemliansky). Perhaps "expansion" can be considered my aim here, as I ask contemporary criticism to accommodate a reconsidered aesthetic into its ethos, to retrieve literature's artistic power and value from the "yawning crevasse."

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Brian Champlin and Laura Risaliti[1]

Dr. Heather Jordan

ENG 6200, Teaching of Writing, Spring 2018

Final Project

PROJECT TITLE

Deeply Divided: Working Toward Healthier Public Discourse in America

PROJECT AUDIENCE

The content in this workshop proposal has been developed for students at the high school level. It can easily be adapted to the junior high school level by employing content appropriate for the grade level.

TERMINOLOGY & ASSUMPTIONS WITHIN THIS PROPOSAL

- "National political discourse" appears frequently in this proposal, sometimes shortened to "political discourse" or simply "discourse." We are not referring to this subject in all its multifaceted totality. We are referring to a specific strand of national political discourse that is often undertaken in social media and website chat rooms, is employed by trade by so-called pundits and prognosticators, and surfaces randomly in society via impromptu in-person interactions amongst citizens.

- We assert that this strand of national political discourse is "diseased." By that we

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[1] This was a collaborative work completed by myself and Laura Risaliti. I have obtained Laura Risaliti's permission to use this project in my capstone portfolio. The collaborative nature was such that I wrote the introductory material as well as Phase 1, while Laura Risaliti composed Phases 2 and 3. For this capstone portfolio, I have focused my revisions on the portions of the work that I wrote, and made only certain clarifications and edits on the work completed by my partner.

mean that, in its current incarnation, national political discourse is by and large failing to function as a public-sphere marketplace of ideas in which perspectives are shared, examined, and evaluated by citizens seeking to make informed decisions in a representative democracy. We believe that the "interchange" is at a qualitative all-time low, and that in the specific strand of national discourse that we are addressing (perhaps appropriately labeled "popular" national political discourse), people are not attempting to exchange ideas, but to reinforce for themselves ideas that they already hold. In this proposal, we make the assumption that our readers share this belief about the state of popular discourse.

- In this proposal, we point out that opinions are shaped by the moral frameworks that people carry with them. That is, rather than being generated through pure reason, opinions are products of individual moral belief systems. We do not argue that those systems themselves are diseased. Rather, we posit that the discourse that people are currently using to advocate for their opinions is diseased. Again, we do not make an academic argument in defense of this position; we simply assume that our readers share it.

PROJECT PROPOSAL

At the outset of this program, we ask students to assess the current state of public discourse in our country, illustrating to them just how badly divided we are and why that division is untenable. We then teach students that morality, not pure reason, creates opinions. Recognizing these facts will create a multifaceted effect:

- Students will gain insight into their own opinions and moral makeup—that is, the moral belief system that they carry with them and that informs their opinions.

- Students will gain insight into the subjectivity of "truth."

- Students will understand that opinions that conflict with their own are founded in the same manner as their own—through moral belief systems rather than through "ignorance" or "lack of enlightenment." This understanding will introduce a new and more challenging type of empathy as students are asked to recognize the validity/reality of others' moral belief systems, and therefore opinions.

Students will then be asked to formulate arguments *through* the lens of others' moral belief systems. Obviously, understanding those belief systems is integral to the process; genuine listening and understanding therefore are prerequisites to a successful argument. As students employ this new style of rhetoric, they will begin to understand that effective rhetoric—and therefore healthy discourse—are indeed possible in today's deeply divided America.

In summary, this project will:

- Help students recognize the diseased nature of popular national political discourse;

- Inspire them to *want* to employ more effective political rhetoric;

- Increase awareness that one's worldview and "truth" are not identical;

- Encourage a new empathy (the hard kind of empathy – when exercising it actually challenges one's deeply held beliefs);

- Teach students specific techniques for more effective rhetoric;

- Show students a path towards healthier national discourse;

- Create space for them to begin practicing that discourse.

NEED FOR PROJECT

Often nowadays, we read or hear the assertion that our country has become profoundly divided, that people have hunkered down into their worldviews like never before, that everyone is talking and no one is listening. Often, too, it is assumed that engaging in discourse with "opponents" means engaging with intolerance and anger— even hatred and violence. The reasons for this are complex, but there is seemingly no end in sight. It appears to us that rhetors are increasingly directing their message to themselves, simply affirming their own positions as opposed to genuinely attempting to connect with others. This idea is only exacerbated by the news bubbles and echo chambers that have become more and more prevalent. The ability to cherry-pick news sources to fit the bias of one's choice deepens the problem—but compounding that are the social media algorithms and structures that generate and amplify echo chambers. If someone does not like an ideology or belief system, that person is able to completely avoid information from sources that would support those ideals. If individuals are exposed to contradictory facts and opinions, they are able to decry them as "fake news" and therefore avoid contemplating how those facts and/or opinions may problematize their own personal ideology. In a society that (in our view) is becoming increasingly

focused on winning arguments and debates rather than working towards a consensus, we want to create a program that combats this kind of divisive rhetoric and diseased discourse. We want to contribute to the effort of helping save America from itself—because it is quite possible that we have arrived at a point in which it needs saving.

GENERAL TIMELINE AND STRUCTURE

This program will be completed as a workshop that takes place after school hours—once per week, for two hours each week. It will last approximately four months and be divided into three phases. The first two phases will be instruction-based and shorter in length (approximately four weeks each). The third phase will last eight weeks and involve writing and collaborative work.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following is a sampling of questions with which we will poll the high school students at your school prior to beginning the workshop. The questions would serve as data to be shared with workshop participants. Prior to that, though, the school-wide poll itself will create interest in and awareness of the workshop—helping to increase enrollment.

- Do you feel that you understand the following terms: discourse, rhetoric, ethos, pathos, logos?

- Think for a moment of a social/political topic you care deeply about (gun control, abortion, the environment, kneeling during the national anthem, etc.). Now imagine someone in front of you who seems to be the perfect representation of the group you consider your opponents. That person is telling you why their

belief is correct, and yours is wrong. Which of the following BEST describes how you feel: (1) intellectually challenged, (2) frustrated, (3) disgusted, (4) no strong feeling.

- Think about how "divided" America is today. Which word BEST describes how that makes you feel: (1) normal/no feeling, (2) sad, (3) hopeless

- Think again of that person who believes the complete opposite of what you believe. Do you think they exist in a so-called "echo chamber" (consuming and hearing only one viewpoint)?

- Do you feel comfortable talking about politics most of the time, or are you fearful that the conversation will quickly devolve into anger and argument?

- Where do people your age engage in political conversations (what platforms, where in person, etc.)?

- Do you believe in facts? What are they?

- Has the internet helped create more conversations, better conversations, or what?

WORK SCHEDULE: SUMMARY

This workshop will be broken up into three different phases. The first two phases will consist of four one-hour lessons each; the third phase will consist of eight one-hour lessons. There will then be a one lesson conclusion. In general, Phase 1 creates the need/demand for the workshop; Phase 2 creates the intellectual framework; Phase 3 creates the action/implementation.

- Phase 1: Who's talking, and who's listening?

The Current State of National Discourse—And Why We Need To Do Better

- Phase 2: I'm right; you're wrong—and I'll never believe otherwise.

    Understanding How Opinions Are Products of Moral Belief Systems

- Phase 3: Speak so that others will hear.

    Using Moral Jujutsu to Make Effective Arguments

WORK SCHEDULE: DETAILED

PHASE 1:

The Current State of National Discourse—And Why We Need To Do Better

Phase 1, Part 1—Terminology: Rhetoric and Discourse

At the start of Phase 1, students will learn the meanings of the terms "rhetoric" and "discourse," as well as the rhetorical devices "logos," "pathos," and "ethos." We will not simply introduce the terms and move on. We will use this small workshop environment as an opportunity to instill a strong, foundational understanding of the ideas behind the terms. Throughout the course, there will be a terminology poster visible to all, displaying concise definitions of each term. Students will be made aware of a game: throughout the course, if they notice that one or more of the three terms applies to content currently being discussed, they can volunteer that information and receive a point. Points are redeemed for prizes at the end of the workshop. The "terminology" section will include the following:

- Contemporary definitions and examples (from term papers to tweets);

- Basic history, antiquity to present;

- Worksheets: matching, identification;

- Open class discussion;

- Video resources.

Phase 1, Part 2—The History of American National Discourse, Pre-Internet

This portion of the workshop will involve collaboration with an American History/Cultural Studies teacher.

The class will be introduced to the idea of "national discourse," tracing discourse and its mediums from the Declaration of Independence to the Civil War, through the tumultuous 1960s and then the Cold War. Newspapers, radio, and television will be considered, as will socio-economic, racial, and gender factors. Students will gain an introductory and general understanding of the manner in which national history, current events, and technology—along with the preoccupations of groups in power (affluent white males)—has shaped the direction and contours of what is known as "national discourse." The section will conclude with consideration of televised negative "attack ads"—which (though negative attacks are as old as the country itself) have become the rule of political discourse rather than the exception.

This section will include lecture, open discussion, and video resources.

Phase 1, Part 3—Deeply Divided: The Current State of National Discourse

The class will then examine public discourse in the age of Internet. We will examine Internet-enabled media such as Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, and blogs, as well as the "comments" section available on almost all online news/media posts for examples of political discourse. The class will also consider the sources of information that contemporary rhetors are consuming, including: television media, Internet sites,

chat rooms, contemporary "pundits" and the personae they affect, and the rise of the "soundbite." Also considered will be: the manner in which "big data" curates the media that one sees on their screen, and the manner in which individuals can control the variety of thought they are exposed to (creating or challenging so-called "echo chambers"). Activities/lessons will include:

- The class will perform close reading and viewing of rhetoric from various political media. Students will attempt to identify levels of bias, from objective to subjective. Obviously, an "objective" viewpoint is impossible, but a "scale" will be introduced nonetheless, with media that seeks to understand rather than to reinforce an already realized viewpoint situated on the "objective" side. Class discussion will focus on the nature of that attempt to understand, how much "objectivity" is actually possible, etc.

- The class will be introduced to Gottman's research on divorce, and how feelings of "disgust" and "contempt" are proven predictors of divorce, while "anger" does not necessarily predict anything. This information can be found at www.gottman.com. The class will then identify rhetoric that paints the opposition as disgusting and/or subhuman. For this, they will examine the rhetoric of nationally-televised pundits, writers with national exposure, politicians, and political ads. They will also search public discourse for sentiments of disgust, and contemplate the relationship between professional and public discourse.

- The class will perform close reading of reasonable (level-headed) argumentative rhetoric, identifying devices and contemplating why it fails to convince its supposed audience (those that disagree).

- The class will be asked to contemplate the source of feelings of contempt for their opponents. The class will discuss the line between contempt and respectful disagreement.

- Video resources:

https://www.ted.com/talks/robb_willer_how_to_have_better_political_conversations

https://www.ted.com/talks/jonathan_haidt_can_a_divided_america_heal

End of my work; beginning of Laura Risaliti's work:

PHASE 2:

Understanding How Opinions Are Morally-Based

Phase 2, Part 1 -- Understanding Our Own (and others') Morality

Phase 2 will start with students participating in an activity called "The Lifeboat." In this activity, students have to choose which people should be saved a space on a lifeboat in a sea disaster situation. There are 15 people and only 10 can fit on the lifeboat. Each person is given a short description like "A doctor. A general practitioner, he is addicted to drugs and very nervous. Age 60." Students will first create their own list of who should or should not be on the lifeboat. After completing the activity for themselves, they will get in small groups and try to come to consensus on who should

and should not make it onto the lifeboat. After reaching consensus, we will discuss what this activity illuminated for students (what made each person decide on who to take, which characters were not negotiable in their eyes, etc.). This will let students begin to see how others morality may differ from their own, but that does not make them wrong.

- Example resource: http://www.takingtheescalator.com/zzzLifeboat.pdf

Phase 2, Part 2 -- "The Cave" in the Modern World

We will begin by having students read Plato's "The Allegory of the Cave." In reading this, students will see how the prisoners still in the cave could not accept the escaped prisoner's description of the world outside of the cave because it challenged their perceived "truth." Students will work in small groups to read and comprehend the text, and then we will come together as a group to discuss the significance of the story (and what the allegory is). We will brainstorm examples of where we see "the cave" today to help students begin to identify with the story (believing in Santa as a child; "the cave" in pop culture, as in *Toy Story*, etc.).

Phase 2, Part 3 -- Identifying and analyzing our own caves

After reading and discussing the meaning and significance of the allegory, during the next two weeks, students will begin examining their own "cave" and their beliefs. This will require students identify an ideological belief of their own that they believe is "right." After identifying this belief, students will spend some time looking at how this

belief has been formed. Students will create a visual representation of their echo chamber (their "cave") to show this--echo chambers can include parents/guardians, religious beliefs, news outlets they engage in, who (either individuals, organizations, or other sources) they follow on social media, friends, and anything else that they believe has help them to form this opinion. After completing this, students will share with one another and we will discuss again how beliefs are formed and how, while others may have different beliefs, each person sees their own as "correct".

Students will then take their visual representation of their belief and turn it into a piece of writing. In this piece, they will begin to articulate their own perspective and belief and aim to explain WHY they believe what they do. We will reiterate that instead of trying to convince the audience to change their belief (which will not likely happen since these beliefs are often so rooted in one's morals), it is more effective to explain why they believe what they do so that their audience can understand the morals and motivating factors behind their belief and hopefully at least gain understanding from reading their writing.

PHASE 3:

Speak So That Others Will Hear

Phase 3, Part 1 -- Hearing (really hearing) the other side

In the first week of the final phase, students will partner with someone who has a belief opposing/differing from theirs (the one that they established in the second phase). The beliefs do not necessarily have to be exact opposites, but the two students

should not completely agree on the belief. They will sit down together and have a 15-20 minute discussion in which they seek clarity from the other perspective. Again, the goal of this conversation is not to persuade but to gain a better understanding of why the other person believes what he or she does. Partners should also work to explore "the gray" with each other: Where is there complexity regarding this belief? Where can they concede to the other side's points? Where can the two partners agree? Before students partner up, we will spend time going over how to have these kinds of interactions and discussions so that they are effective and respectful. We will go over how to ask questions that seek clarity (ones that are not biased or leading) and how to avoid belittling the opposition, both explicitly or implicitly. We will also show our students the Oatmeal graphic about the backfire effect. We will use this to talk about how we may naturally want to react in anger or shut down when opinions, beliefs, and facts contradict our own. We will stress that we need to be aware of this natural reaction; we have to fight to remain open-minded and really listen to our partners to gain a new understanding and perspective on the topic.

- Online resource: http://theoatmeal.com/comics/believe_clean

Phase 3, Part 2 -- A Walk in Their Shoes: Understanding the other side

In the following lesson, students take what they learned from their conversation with their partner and use that information to write another piece about a belief, except this time, students will be required to embody their partner's belief and write as if they are their partner. Students should practice stepping inside their partner's shoes and

thinking about how their partner views this belief. These pieces of writing should feel authentic to the partner's belief. Again, we will go over how to avoid being biased or belittling in students' writing, since the students who are writing these pieces do not agree with the position they are taking. By completing this activity, students will get experience in really examining the morality and reasoning that informs opinions against their own, which will hopefully help to build empathy, understanding, and insight for all students.

After writing from their partner's perspective, in the next lesson, students will again collaborate with their partner, this time to go through their writing to make sure they are authentically embodying their partner's views. Partners will be responsible for giving feedback as to how they can adapt and change their writing to reflect the views of "the other" without adding any condescending side remarks or other explicit or implicit ideas that would not represent their views in a realistic way. By working on this together, not only will students gain a better understanding of their partner's views and learn how to accurately represent those views, but students will be collaborating with someone else who has a different view. This collaboration in itself is beneficial because it requires students to have a discourse that is respectful and effective while still navigating topics that participants my disagree on.

Phase 3, Part 3 -- Bringing it all together: Collaborating to use effective rhetoric

The next two lessons of phase three will require more collaboration between partners to create an end product. This product is a nuanced speech: both partners

need to work together to take their topic (their belief) and what they have written about it so far and create a speech that they will present to their peers that employs effective rhetorical appeals while addressing their topic in a way that will engage as many peers as possible. This means that they will have to think about what they learned and what challenges they faced through the early stages of phase three when they had to listen to their partner's perspective and reasoning as to why he or she held that belief. What was effective? What was ineffective? What reasons or explanations did or did not resonate with both parties? Why? What appeals would be most or least effective for their diverse audience? Partners will use all of this information to create their speeches. Students will have a little bit of freedom in terms of exactly how they want to set up their speech. They can choose to each do one on their "side" of the belief. These speeches will be performed back to back. Students may also choose to do one longer speech together in which they take a nuanced stance on the topic that is more of a middle ground between the two sides. Depending on how strongly the students feel about their belief, the topic, and the "gray" area that students were able to find, one style of speech may work better for specific sets of partners.

Phase 3, Part 4 -- Listening and Reflecting: What did you hear?

The final three lessons will be the presentations of the speeches. All students will become audience members for their peers' speeches. After every pair has presented their speeches, students will write a final reflection about what they learned through this process. Things we will want students to reflect on and address in these written

reflections would be: What was the easiest part of this project? What was the hardest part? Why? What challenges, if any, did you face that were hard to overcome? What did you learn about your partner? What did you learn about "the other side"? Did you opinions or views change at all? Do you have a better understanding of "the other side"? How did you approach collaborating with your partner? How did you decide what rhetorical strategies would be most effective for your speech? What have you learned about yourself through this project? What do you want to take away from this project? What did you learn? How will you apply what you learned to your life outside of this workshop?

Phase 3, Part 5 -- Big Takeaways: Where do we go from here?

The final lesson of the workshop, students will bring their reflections and we will have a round table discussion/Socratic seminar to facilitate a conversation about what we should all take away from the workshop and how we can improve discourse in the world today. Students' reflections will serve as notes for talking points, but the conversation will be fairly open and fluid to discuss what they want to in terms of take-aways. Before we finish the discussion, we will have students collaboratively create five action points they believe they can implement now to make improvements to discourse in their lives.

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Understanding How Opinions Are Morally-Based

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After writing from their partner's perspective, in the next lesson, students will again collaborate with their partner, this time to go through their writing to make sure they are authentically embodying their partner's views. Partners will be responsible for giving feedback as to how they can adapt and change their writing to reflect the views of "the other" without adding any condescending side remarks or other explicit or implicit ideas that would not represent their views in a realistic way. By working on this

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Phase 3, Part 3 -- Bringing it all together: Collaborating to use effective rhetoric

The next two lessons of phase three will require more collaboration between partners to create an end product. This product is a nuanced speech: both partners need to work together to take their topic (their belief) and what they have written about it so far and create a speech that they will present to their peers that employs effective rhetorical appeals while addressing their topic in a way that will engage as many peers as possible. This means that they will have to think about what they learned and what challenges they faced through the early stages of phase three when they had to listen to their partner's perspective and reasoning as to why he or she held that belief. What was effective? What was ineffective? What reasons or explanations did or did not resonate with both parties? Why? What appeals would be most or least effective for their diverse audience? Partners will use all of this information to create their speeches. Students will have a little bit of freedom in terms of exactly how they want to set up their speech. They can choose to each do one on their "side" of the belief. These speeches will be performed back to back. Students may also choose to do one longer speech together in which they take a nuanced stance on the topic that is

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this process. Things we will want students to reflect on and address in these written

reflections would be: What was the easiest part of this project? What was the hardest

part? Why? What challenges, if any, did you face that were hard to overcome? What did

you learn about your partner? What did you learn about "the other side"? Did you

opinions or views change at all? Do you have a better understanding of "the other

side"? How did you approach collaborating with your partner? How did you decide what

rhetorical strategies would be most effective for your speech? What have you learned

about yourself through this project? What do you want to take away from this project?

What did you learn? How will you apply what you learned to your life outside of this

workshop?...and any other things students find meaningful to address in relation to

their work and growth through this workshop.

Phase 3, Part 5 -- Big Takeaways: Where do we go from here?

In the final lesson of the workshop, students will bring their reflections and we will have a round table discussion/Socratic seminar to facilitate a conversation about what we should all take away from the workshop and how we can improve discourse in the world today. Students' reflections will serve as notes for talking points, but the conversation will be fairly open and fluid to discuss what they want to in terms of take-aways. Before we finish the discussion, we will have students collaboratively create five action points they believe they can implement now to make improvements to discourse in their lives.

Brian Champlin

Dr. Bill Albertini

ENG 6090, Teaching Literature, Spring 2015

Teaching Philosophy & Methodology

Literary Theory & Philosophy

Through the ages, humans have considered literature (and more broadly, art) from different perspectives. According to contemporary literary theorist Terry Eagleton, the followers of F. R. Leavis (literary critics known as "the Leavisites") believed that "English was not only a subject worth studying, but the supremely civilizing pursuit, the spiritual essence of the social formation" (Richter 55). I do not view literature in such grandiose terms. I do believe, however, that the teaching of literature, and the studying of it, is indeed humanizing—that is to say, teaching and studying literature leads individuals to feel more empowered both in who they believe themselves to be, and in how they operate within society.

Pedagogical Goals

My pedagogy is imbued with a deep appreciation for literature's humanizing potential. Along with that appreciation, though, is a simple love for its aesthetic and for its craft— the artistic process that leads to its production. It is also informed by the idea that the study of literature (through reading, writing, and discussion) encourages the development of cognitive skills that will help students achieve success in other disciplines as well as in their future professions. My aim is that students leave class with increased:

- Respect for learning in general

- Respect for their peers

- Cognition

- Literacy

- Analytical skills

- Rhetorical skills

- Listening capacity

- Experience (vicarious, through texts)

- Perspective (human, historical, philosophical, etc.)

- Imaginative abilities

- Respect for human artistic achievement

Pedagogical Philosophy

Parker J. Palmer's theories of teaching fundamentally inform my pedagogy. In an effort

to achieve genuine, lifelong learning, I attempt to imbue lesson plans with Palmer's

wisdom. As he says, "education is not a cognitive process . . . it is a process that involves

the whole person, and so involves deep feelings as well." In the classroom, I seek to

establish "a learning space characterized by openness, boundaries, and an air of

hospitality" through "an ethos of trust and acceptance" (qtd. In Showalter 34-5). Or, to

rephrase Parker's words: I believe we learn best when we are emotionally confident,

comfortable, and engaged in a positive manner.

Methodologies & Practices

- Short lectures of approx. 10 minutes, preferably at the beginning of class. Bulk of learning utilizes other modes: small group & individual work; whole class discussion.

- Small group work is emphasized, with self-guided peer-to-peer discussion & evaluation. This fosters an environment of independence and self-responsibility, creating the feelings of confidence and engagement aligned with my philosophy.

- Personalized content: current & local events, controversial topics, personal stories, opinions, etc. tied into literary content. The personal is what feels most important and creates the most genuine engagement.

- Palmer-like environment created through explicit definition of our classroom space as an open environment; mutual respect and genuine listening is encouraged. Students apply this during daily small group work. "Explicit" is the key word here. Students learn about, agree to, and sign off on creating this type of environment before beginning.

Tying It All Together

As I mentioned, I believe that teaching and studying literature has humanizing potential, leading individuals towards more empowered versions of themselves. As such, those activities empower humans to engage with one another more completely, both personally and publically. In other words, studying and teaching literature creates deeper people and more empowered citizens. In my classroom, a warm, respectful and positive environment acts in tandem with the humanizing potential of the content.

Works Cited

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Showalter, Elaine. *Teaching Literature*. Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2003. Print.