# WRITING WITH READERS: WRITTEN COMMENTS AND THE TEACHING OF COMPOSITION

by

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This dissertation examines a widely practiced but often under-valued and under-examined component of teaching: the comments that teachers write on students' papers. I explore the intellectual and pedagogical work of written comments and the role of the teacher as the reader of student texts. In the first half, I focus on teachers as readers of student writing. I trace what I call a pedagogy of practical criticism—which operates primarily through close attention to student texts—through a group of teachers including I.A. Richards, Reuben Brower, Theodore Baird, William E. Coles, Jr., Mina Shaughnessy, and David Bartholomae. I also examine the common argument that teachers should restrain their authority when reading and responding to students' papers, and I argue that we should consider the positive, productive role of authority in teaching. I analyze scholarship on the issues of authority and appropriation, and I use student papers to look at how teachers negotiate their own authority in their response.

In the second half, I focus on students as readers of teachers' response, with emphasis on the difficulties students face in interpreting what their teachers have written. I examine teachers' response in the context of other texts that bear commentary, such as William Blake's marginalia and Jewish biblical commentaries, paying special attention to the ways in which these texts embody both stasis, in the form of the words fixed on the page, and change, which happens through the dynamic and unpredictable work of readers. I foreground the potential difficulty of

the more flexible kind of reading that comments often demand of students in asking them to change their own work or to think about it differently. I also examine the difficulty created by the differences between the knowledge and experience of, on one hand, the teachers who write the comments and, on the other hand, the students who must interpret them. I analyze a number of student texts with comments, and I consider the potential for learning that these comments offer—as well as reasons why that potential may not always be fulfilled when students revise.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**PREFACE**

I want to thank to all of the students who agreed to share their writing with me and the teachers who generously shared their comments and teaching materials. I would also like to thank the teachers and friends at the University of Pittsburgh from whom I have learned so much about reading, writing and teaching, including Jim Seitz, Nancy Glazener, Paul Kameen, Shalini Puri, Steve Carr, Jennifer Lee, and Stacey Waite. I am particularly grateful to Troy Boone, who has been a great friend and mentor from my first day on campus.

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# 1.0    INTRODUCTION

Comments can do strange things to a piece of writing. For the reader who comes to a comment-bearing text, the comments can change the text, sometimes subtly, sometimes dramatically. What might appear certain in the original text can suddenly seem tenuous, and many gaps become visible only when another reader points them out. Alternatively, what initially might seem to be a mass of jumbled thoughts can contain something more coherent, once another reader recognizes the connections. Comments remind us that we read and write not in a vacuum, but in the company of many other readers and writers. James Slevin offers this illustration from his own experience:

> I was taking English 1 from Rene Fortin, and the paper was a three-page, double-spaced close reading of *Moby-Dick*. The teacher's script was legible and gentle, sloping. The comment went like this: "Here [arrow to a sentence] you make Melville sound like Plato. Here [another arrow to another sentence] he sounds like Aristotle!  Which is he?  Which are you?" While not exactly Chapman's *Homer*, this comment was news to me.  What had been a straightforward, required paper with no one really in it was suddenly populated by a small crowd: Plato, Aristotle, Melville, Fortin, Slevin. We were all gathered there in that little one-inch margin, on erasable paper, my writing inexplicably transformed into an object of cultural attention and interrogation.  (Slevin 200)

Slevin dramatizes the way in which a teacher's written comments changed the way he thought of his own text and of himself as the writer, transforming an experience of fulfilling a course requirement into one of intellectual conversation. And even when the audience for commentary is not the writer himself, the comments change the experience of reading. People often write in books because they want to affect a subsequent reading, whether it is to remind themselves of something, as in personal reading notes students make in their school books, or to control (or attempt to control) the interpretations of large readerships, as in published biblical commentaries. Written comments interfere with interpretation and may influence the outcome of a reading; I first read Sir Joshua Reynolds's *Discourses on Art* in studying William Blake's annotations rather than Reynolds himself, and I now cannot think of Reynolds without also thinking of Blake's sharply critical commentary. One of the goals of this project is to think about how comments can teach by interfering with the way writers read their *own* work, introducing another perspective into the process of interpretation.

A large part of the motivation for this project comes from my sense that some of the most important work that gets done in the classes in which I have been both a teacher and a student happens when students revise their writing in response to another's reading—reading which is usually the teacher's and usually represented in the form of written comments. When I look back on my career as a student, from grade school to graduate school, and focus on the moments where some kind of meaningful change was taking place in my thinking, they all involved the interventions, usually but not always written, of a teacher. I have learned the most—more than from any book, seminar, or lecture—by revising in response to written comments. The most productive moments often involved fairly directive, heavy-handed interventions, in which a teacher would challenge, push, or question, sometimes giving quite

specific directions—for example, to make a section of a paper twice as long, or to write a certain number of sentences in response to a passage I had quoted. Sometimes a teacher would flat out disagree with me and suggest strongly that I argue from a different perspective to see how a change in approach could work. It has often been the case that only after completing a set of specific instructions, moving through the particular steps laid out for me by someone else, was I able to see what the teacher was getting at, why she had wanted me to do this work in this way. Even if I did not always agree with the result, I usually found that I had learned something about reading and writing that I did not know before.

In my experience, such successful revision in response to another's input—and by "successful" I mean revision in which the writer comes to understand something new, and in which the final draft is in some way better than the first—usually happens as the result of tremendous effort and full engagement. My own process almost always follows the same pattern. The first phase involves receiving and reading comments, and I tend initially to feel overwhelmed by the difficulty of understanding how someone else has interpreted my text, a difficulty I imagine my students often share. This difficulty has several sources. I, of course, understand what I was trying to say, and I may not see problems with my own text that will be apparent to other readers. Teachers often see where a text has not gone far enough or where connections need to be made more explicitly. If I, the writer, think I am finished (or close to it), it is often quite difficult for me to see that there is more work to be done—not difficult to believe it, necessarily, but difficult actually to recognize and understand the ways in which the text that I thought was complete is not. It takes great effort to understand this other reader's interpretation of my text because the teacher—with a different set of knowledge and experience—will most likely frame my text differently than I do, asking questions that I may not even have been

thinking of. Part of the work of reading comments is to process this different perspective, to try to understand it and see my own work through another's lens. I must try to understand what this reader sees, and why. I rarely understand a reader's comments fully before I have done substantial revision in response to them.

In the second phase, I move from reading and thinking about the comments to working on the text itself. As I said, reading comments is often an initially discouraging experience, not because the comments themselves are necessarily negative but because of the difficulty of taking them in, and I often linger in the first stage, working up the motivation to move on. But eventually, I must begin to revise; I must return to the words on the page. I usually start at the place in the text where I feel that I have the best understanding of what my reader has said to me. Often performing one set of changes helps me to understand other aspects of the comments, which shows me where to go next. Or perhaps I know what my reader is asking me to do but I do not understand why; performing the revision sometimes helps me to understand by forcing me to think through the particular changes that must be made on the page, which then allows me to evaluate the result. Sometimes I do not know where to start, and I decide instead to follow up on an idea of my own, which more often than not leads me into making revisions that are at least partly related to my reader's response, either because my own thinking takes me there or because the response has been percolating in the back of my mind, becoming clearer even as my attention is focused on other matters. There is no regularity to this process, but it consistently involves a weaving together of the reader's comments and my changes to the text as I move back and forth between them, both occupying my mind at once. As I come to understand my reader, I must also decide when to push back, when a reader's desires conflict with my own or threaten to eclipse my own project.

The last phase is one of reflection. At the end of a set of revisions that results in a new draft, I often find that I circle back to step one; if I sit back and re-read the comments, I usually understand them in a much more complete way than I did upon the first reading. In a teaching situation, this understanding, I would argue, is often as much the point of writing as the final text that is produced. I do not mean to say that the text itself is not valuable—it is, tremendously, and the revision process is more likely to produce knowledge if that text is taken seriously and kept present, an idea that I explore in Chapter 1. But in a pedagogical situation, the point of writing is often not only to produce a text that will be read by others, but to learn something from the experience of writing and revising that text; this feature is part of the peculiar sphere that is the composition course, or any course that takes writing seriously as a means of teaching and learning. If I take this study as an example, I can say that not only is the text valuable as a means of conveying the knowledge I have both acquired and produced, but that the process of writing and revising in response to other readers has itself been essential to the production of that knowledge. This experience has encouraged me to engage with other ways of thinking and knowing and to modify my own ways of thinking and knowing in response.

This description of learning through revision stands in contrast to the experiences of many students and teachers. It is important to note that I am at a stage as a writer where I can often choose my teachers and my readers, so it is likely that I will value what they say to me, even when I disagree. This, of course, is not the case for many student writers. The process of revising in response to teachers is often quite messy, plagued by misjudgments and misreadings. Students often do not understand the comments their teachers write, and sometimes they do not read them at all. Many teachers read paper after paper, wondering whether students have read or understood their comments. This study also grows out of a desire to explore this disconnect I

have noticed with respect to written comments. On the one hand, I know with certainty from my own experience as a writer that comments can be tremendously effective. On the other hand, though, I know from my experience as a teacher, and from talking with other teachers, that for all the time and energy we put into writing comments, they can also be frustratingly ineffective. My goal in this project has not necessarily been to present specific reasons for this difference in experience or to prescribe a technique for writing dazzlingly effective comments every time, but rather to think in an extended way about the role teachers play as active readers of their students' writing, the work that comments can do, and what it means to teach by writing them. I have also been concerned with exploring possible reasons that students might find comments difficult to engage with. Perhaps in this indirect way, this project can help teachers to improve their own commenting practices by offering a deeper way of thinking about what it is we are doing when we respond to our students' writing.

Several strains of thought in composition studies underpin this project. These ideas represent what I think is important and what I think teaching composition should be. There are other legitimate ways of thinking, of course, but these are the ideas that have been important for me. One of these is a particular version of writing as a process that occurs in time and across a number of drafts and involves looking back at what one has written in order to move forward. One example is the recursive approach used by Mariolina Salvatori, in which the teacher frequently asks students to reflect in writing on their reading and then to do more writing in response to their reflections.[1] Another example is the method described by Ann E. Berthoff in *Forming/Thinking/Writing,* in which writers are asked to write, look back at their writing, and then write more. Written comments fit into the interstices of this process, appearing in the

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[1] For a detailed account of this method, which is based on Salvatori's theorization of difficulty as an element of reading and learning, see *The Elements (and Pleasures) of Difficulty*.

margins in between the writer's active periods. Like Berthoff's "assisted invitations," written comments can direct writers to look back at what they have done and then continue to write, allowing the observations that both the reader and the writer have made to influence the writing they continue to do. Comments introduce the observations of another into the experience of writing and revising a series of drafts, and they bring in an important element to which the writer must respond in some way as she decides how to proceed. As Slevin's anecdote suggests, a teacher's comments can help a student to see his own text in a new way, which can change the course of subsequent revision and the learning that can result.

This study of written comments also intersects with another line of thinking, one which takes composition to be the work of developing ideas through the practice of manipulating words on a page rather than through some other mode of thinking—for example, through reading, listening to lectures, or talking with others. I am largely indebted to David Bartholomae for this way of understanding composition:

> Composition – or, those professionals willing to work on student writing – has a particularly valuable (or, perhaps "novel" or "unexploited") way of imagining criticism as something to be learned in practice, perhaps learned at the point of practice. This is different from studying the work of critics or theorists. Composition – or, the space within English studies where student writing is a central concern – is positioned to promote practical criticism because of its historic concern for the space on the page and what it might mean to do work there and not somewhere else. (Bartholomae 333)

This way of thinking about composition is important to my project because comments, set down on the physical page as they are, have the potential to direct attention toward the words

themselves and to keep the emphasis on the student's text (although many teachers' comments do not necessarily focus on the text itself). They call attention to the way in which a writer works out a position or an idea through a series of changes made on the page.

Written comments embody both of these strains of thought—writing as a recursive process that involves a great deal of reading and reflection over time and as a product composed of words written on a page. They do this by making another's reading visible alongside (or appended to, in the case of lengthier endnotes) a primary text that is, for the moment, still and unchanging but that will soon enter a period of active rewriting in response to that reading. Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier foreground this distinction between reading and writing in the introduction to *A History of Reading in the West*, which they begin with this passage by Michel de Certeau:

> Far from being writers—founders of their own place, heirs of the peasants of earlier ages now working on the soil of language, diggers of wells and builders of houses, readers are travelers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to enjoy it themselves. (Certeau, quoted in Cavallo and Chartier, 1)

Certeau is not referring to student writers and teacher readers—or, for that matter, any writers in the process of composing their yet-to-be-published texts and the readers of their works-in-progress—but the qualities of writing and reading that he describes hold true for the reading and writing of students and teachers. When student writers set words down on the page, those words take on a kind of permanence, even if the text is an early draft. Readers, in contrast, move through texts that are not their own, constructing meanings that the writer does not completely control. In response to Certeau, Cavallo and Chartier describe the difference between writing and

reading as "a fundamental distinction between a written mark—something fixed, lasting, preserving—and its readings, which are always of the order of the ephemeral, plurality and invention" (Chartier 1). Written comments exist at the intersection of the two. The come into being at a moment when the reader becomes at the same time a writer, responding to language with language by putting down words to reflect the reading she has done. Part of the work of this study is to foreground the way in which comments sit at this intersection in the hope that this way of understanding the situation of commenting will provide teachers with a fruitful perspective for rethinking their own commenting practices.

Another part of the work of this study is to call attention to the way in which comments exist in the context of the student text and not apart from it in some way. A review of the scholarship on teachers' written comments from the last three decades reveals that many of the essays on commenting focus on what the teacher has written but do not present those comments along with the student text to which they respond. Some of this work is interesting and raises important issues, such as Summer Smith's 1997 Bakhtinian study of endnotes as a genre. Smith looks at endnotes on over 300 papers and shows the ways in which teachers conform to, and sometimes depart from, certain conventions in writing comments. Her work is quite useful in making teachers more aware of the generic conventions that govern their responses, but even though she argues that teachers should adapt their endnotes to each student's particular paper, she does not present the comments with the papers to which they respond. In another example, for their 1993 study of the comments written on 3,000 student papers, Robert Connors and Andrea Lunsford did not read the student papers at all; they only read and classified the teachers' comments. In both studies, Smith and Connors and Lunsford were working with large numbers of papers, and it is likely that looking closely at student papers along with the comments would

not have suited their particular projects. Even so, the absence of the students' voices means that the reader does not get a sense of the conversation of which the comments were originally a part. Some scholars have included student texts in both their analysis of teachers' comments and in the articles that present that analysis, but a surprising amount of work does not take the student text into consideration. While it is possible to pursue some questions about comments without extensive study of the student papers on which they are written, I would argue that because comments are fundamentally responsive, the student texts that elicit them generally constitute an essential dimension of the situation of commenting, and I have designed my approach in this study in keeping with this position by considering the teachers' responses in conjunction with the student papers that motivated them.

As part of this study, I have also chosen to consider student texts with comments alongside texts that also bear comments but that are drawn from other genres and are, to varying degrees, considered to be more authoritative than student papers, such as Jewish and Christian versions of the Bible and Virgil's *Aeneid*. The difference in authoritative status between students' writing and such works as the Bible can make these texts appear so different that they may seem not to have much to say to one another. By asserting that in some ways these texts occupy the same genre and can be legitimately discussed together, I have attempted to learn something from their shared features, as well as to invite readers to think of student texts with teachers' comments as being intellectual work that merits serious study. In discussions of written response, student texts and the work of responding to them are frequently objects of contempt. For example, the Spring-Fall 2003 issue of the *ADE Bulletin* contains several short articles on responding to student writing. In one of these, Gordon Harvey compares the experience of reading and responding to student papers to the strain experienced by people who work on

computers all day, performing the same movements repeatedly until they develop injuries. This analogy implies that responding to student writing is not part of the intellectual work of teaching but is instead a burdensome process that results in injury to the teacher. In another piece in the same issue, Katherine Gottschalk cites a passage from a talk given by one of her colleagues in 1966:

> Uncharitable as this sounds, freshman themes can be inhumanly boring, especially when they come in large quantities. Our desks groan under the heavy weight of light literature. . . . People ask us, But isn't it exciting to find out what John thinks and writes? It isn't all that exciting. (Rosenberg, quoted in Gottschalk 49)

In this description, student writing again appears as an unpleasant burden and students themselves are characterized as dull. Gottschalk proceeds to offer an approach to teaching composition that she believes can position students to write more interesting papers, but she does not question the way in which her colleague describes students and their writing. Reading these descriptions, it is hard to imagine that the teachers who wrote them think of the comments that result from such an experience—comments given in response to dull, burdensome writing—as having much intellectual value. By locating student texts within a genre of more authoritative texts that have been objects of commentary that continues to be studied seriously, I have attempted to present these texts as much more than what these teachers describe and to reframe the experience of reading and responding to student texts in a way that allows for greater interpretive and pedagogical possibilities.

For this project, I gathered approximately 400 papers from 120 students in composition, literature, and creative writing courses in a single English Department during the 2006-07

academic year.[2] My aim in gathering and reading these papers was not to draw universal conclusions based on the evidence of all 400 papers but rather to select a few—10 or so—that I would read closely. To this end, I chose to work with papers that seemed to me to be interesting rather than representative, papers that would be valuable counterparts to the "authorized" or theoretical work that I also discuss. I selected papers in which the teachers seemed to be using their written response to do substantial teaching rather than simply to, for example, acknowledge the student's work or to justify a grade. I also selected papers in which the commentary is extensive enough that we see some of the work of reading that teachers do in writing their responses. I have approached these papers and their comments as primary texts to be interpreted carefully rather than as data to be counted. The papers have helped me to think about how the other texts and scholarship I examine can speak to actual classroom practice, and they put valuable pressure on various theories of reading, writing, and teaching. Because these papers are unpublished, I have chosen to reproduce them in full as appendixes to this study. In this way, the students and teachers whose writing I have used can to some extent speak for themselves rather than only through the passages I have chosen to excerpt for my own purposes, and my readers can decide for themselves if their interpretations of these texts agree with my own.

Reading papers with comments presents unique challenges. Because I wanted to focus primarily on the papers and comments themselves rather than on the various kinds of discussion and activity that happen off the page, I chose not to conduct interviews with the participants or to observe the classes for which these papers and comments were written. While this decision certainly did force me to read the papers carefully, it also put me in a position in which I had

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[2] In order to ensure the privacy of both students and teachers, I have removed names from all documents and have agreed to keep those documents secured. Both students and teachers were informed at the outset of the project of the purposes and risks of their participation, and each student and teacher whose work I use has signed a consent form.

very little access to the context of the documents, and context has great influence on how teachers and students interpret one another's writing. In working with these texts, I had to bear in mind constantly that what I was seeing was only a part of the pedagogical whole and that my interpretations might be quite different from those of the teachers and students themselves. I also had very limited access to the student writers; in some cases it is possible to guess at a writer's experience based on the course for which a paper was written (such as a first-year composition course or a seminar for senior English majors), but I had no knowledge of any student's particular background or of their experience of any particular course. Because of this limitation, I had to be very careful in my reading not to assume that I understood too much about what a writer knew or was thinking. In order to read texts with commentary, I also had to learn to maintain an awareness of the different interpreters and objects of interpretation involved in each text. For example, a student essay about a novel with a teacher's comments involves a number of acts of interpretation: the student and teacher each have their own interpretations of the novel, the student's essay, and the teacher's comments. In order to read these papers, it is important to be aware of all of these acts of reading and to consider the ways in which they affect one another. I had to learn to think about what the teacher was trying to accomplish in the written response— how she was interpreting the student's text in a particular way, how she was using her comments to focus on specific aspects of it, and what she seemed to hope the comments and revision would achieve—and also about why the student may have read the comments differently than the teacher intended. I explore these difficulties in the second half of this study.

In the first two chapters, I focus on teachers as readers of student writing. In Chapter 1, "Written Comments as Practical Criticism," I trace what I call a pedagogy of practical criticism—or pedagogy which operates primarily through close attention to texts, particularly

students' texts—through a group of teacher-scholars that includes I.A. Richards, Reuben Brower, Theodore Baird, William E. Coles, Jr., Mina Shaughnessy, and David Bartholomae. This chapter outlines a body of scholarship and thinking about teaching in which I want to locate this project because of the way these teachers value student writing and make it such a visible part of their work. In some ways it would be more obvious for me to locate this study within the scholarship of commenting that includes such figures as Nancy Sommers, C.H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon, Richard Straub, and many others who have more explicitly studied and written about the practice of writing comments. However, while I do consider the work of these scholars, one goal of this study is to examine written response within a broader context of teaching, so that comments can be better understood as a way of teaching students something of substance by working with their writing. Though none of the teachers whose work I consider in this chapter have written extensively about commenting, they have all been careful and committed readers of student texts, and it is their work as readers of student writing that I foreground here.

In Chapter 2, "The Problem of Authority in Responding to Student Texts," I examine the argument common in commenting scholarship that teachers should restrain their authority when responding to students' papers and resist the impulse to "appropriate" students' texts, and I argue that we should consider the positive, productive role of authority, even as we caution teachers against the dangers of its misuse. This chapter grows out of a desire to question a common tendency for scholars writing about commenting practices to urge teachers to restrain their authority in favor of honoring students' intentions. While I certainly do not want to question the importance of students' purposes and desires in their writing, in this chapter I complicate the assumption—sometimes tacit, sometimes explicit—that teachers' authority and students' intentions cannot co-exist, and I argue that authority can be a powerful part of the teacher's role.

I explore the work of various scholars on the issues of authority and appropriation, and I use student papers to look at how two different teachers negotiate their own authority in their written response.

In the second half of the study, I shift the focus to students as readers of teachers' response, with a particular emphasis on the difficulties that students may face in interpreting the comments their teachers have written. In Chapter 3, "Fixity, Fluidity, and the Effects of Marginal Writing," I examine teachers' response in the context of other kinds of texts that feature some sort of commentary, such as William Blake's marginalia and Jewish biblical commentaries. In these examples we see written record of the ways in which readers participate in constructing the meaning of texts through their interpretations, changing and using texts in ways that their authors may or may not have been able to anticipate. I consider the ways in which these texts embody the impulses of both stasis, in the form of the words on the page, and change, which happens through the unpredictable work of readers. I also work with student texts to explore the usefulness of these qualities for the practice of teaching through written response, where teachers have the opportunity to help students see how their texts can develop in new ways that students might not be able to imagine on their own, and I consider the potential difficulty of the more flexible, fluid kind of reading that comments often ask students to do.

In Chapter 4, "Written Response and the Perspectives of Reader and Writer," I turn my attention more fully to the difficulties that students face when they must read and respond to their teachers' writing. I examine a number of student texts from different courses along with the teachers' comments, and I consider the potential for learning that these comments offer—as well as possible reasons for why that potential may not have been entirely fulfilled. I also draw from several theories of reading—including those of Louise Rosenblatt and Wolfgang Iser—to

explore the differences between student and teacher as readers of one another's texts, readers who bring very different knowledge and experience to the interpretive work they do.

I began this study several years ago with the somewhat different question of whether or not student writing could be considered a genre, a question which was inspired by Mikhail Bakhtin's essay "The Problem of Speech Genres," in which Bakhtin claims that the "content, style, and compositional structure" of an utterance are "determined by the specific nature of the particular sphere of communication. Each separate utterance is individual, of course, but each sphere in which language is used develops its own *relatively stable types* of these utterances" (Bakhtin, "Speech Genres," 60, emphasis in original). I was intrigued by this theory of language, with its emphasis on the relationship between an utterance and its "sphere of communication," and in particular by the question of how this theory might apply to student writing. I concluded rather quickly that, in terms of form, it would be difficult (and, ultimately, of uncertain usefulness) to describe student writing, broadly understood, as a genre of its own in some way. However, I observed that a feature most student texts share is the written comments of teachers. If we think, as Bakhtin asks us to do, about the connection between a genre and the sphere in which it exists, the formal feature of written comments makes visible on the page an essential characteristic of the sphere of student writing: the fact that such writing is read and responded to by teachers, who become a part of the life of that text. This study represents an effort to understand what that shared feature might reveal about the practice of teaching and learning through writing, commenting, and revising in a sphere that is characterized in part by the presence of a reading, responding teacher. In all of these chapters, I attempt to make visible some of the richness of a practice which, though often burdensome and frustrating, is a defining

16

characteristic of its sphere of communication and which has the potential to be productive—and

sometimes even transformational—for those involved.

# 2.0    WRITTEN COMMENTS AS PRACTICAL CRITICISM

The moment when the teacher turns attention toward the student text to make comments that will somehow motivate revision is a moment when that text takes center stage. Even in courses that do not focus primarily on student writing, when the teacher reads and responds to a student text, that text has the potential to be an important site for working out the ideas of that course. Written comments, however, begin not with teachers' acts of writing on student texts but with their acts of reading. In this chapter I examine a number of teachers whose pedagogy has been based largely on the close, careful reading of student texts, pedagogies which I am gathering under the name of "practical criticism." This group includes a number of teacher-scholars—I.A. Richards, Theodore Baird, William E. Coles Jr., Mina Shaughnessy and David Bartholomae. These teachers are different in important ways; some primarily taught literature courses, while others were or are mainly teachers of writing, and their students differed greatly in terms of background and experience. However, they are as a group distinctive in that they have located the reading of student texts at the center of their pedagogy. The primary object of interpretation in these pedagogies is not a theory of rhetoric or a set of outside readings—it is the student text itself. This approach can help us to understand the work of writing comments as being closely related to the work of reading student texts. Some scholars have characterized the comment-writing teacher as a reader, but by "reader" they usually mean something like "audience," and they imagine the teacher's role in responding as being to help students develop awareness of that

audience.[3] By associating written response with practical criticism, I want to foreground reading in a different sense—the interpretive work that teachers do to make meaning of student texts.

One of the first teachers to make the reading of student texts a visible part of his research and teaching in English studies was I.A. Richards. In *Practical Criticism* (1929), Richards records the results of a well-known experiment he performed in literature classes he taught at Cambridge in the 1920s. In a number of sections over several years, Richards distributed poems to his students with titles and authors removed and asked the students to "comment freely in writing upon them" (Richards 4). After a week, these comments or "protocols" were collected, and Richards would then spend class time lecturing on the poems and the protocols. As Richards says, "Much astonishment for both the protocol-writers and for the Lecturer ensued from this procedure"—astonishment at what Richards thought to be the poor quality of his students' reading (Richards 4). Richards devotes much of the resulting book to reproducing selected protocols in order to illustrate various kinds of misreading. He also catalogues what he calls the ten "chief difficulties of criticism," the first of which is "the difficulty of making out the plain sense of poetry" (12). This "revelation" that highly educated Cambridge students were so often unable to make out the basic meaning of poems is one of the aspects for which the book is often remembered. Here is an example of the kind of work Richards does in order to make this case, which revolves around this opening stanza of "Piano" by D.H. Lawrence:

Softly, in the dusk, a woman is singing to me;

Taking me back down the vista of years, till I see

A child sitting under the piano, in the boom of the tingling strings

And pressing the small, poised feet of a mother who smiles as she sings.

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[3] For examples, see Chris Anson's 361 and Sommers "Responding," 148.

In a response designated as 8.13, one student writes the following:

Since I have formed my own opinion on the poem, I have experimented on one or two friends and each has started to grin when we have arrived at the phrase "a child sitting *under* a piano, in the *boom* of the *tinkling* strings." Allowing that it may possibly have been a grand and not an upright piano that the child was sitting under we have still to satisfy ourselves that "tinkling" strings can boom. Another rather unfortunate expression is that about the feet of the mother—poised. It is an uncommon word in poetry and naturally, as it doesn't fit in properly, it leads us away from the central idea of the poem. All these points, though small in themselves, do not allow us to get a good view of the poem as a whole. (100-01)

In response, Richards offers this commentary:

Always, in looking over these protocols, it is illuminating to compare the type of comment with the closeness of reading evinced. So particular attention here may be invited to the fact that 8.13 has not noticed any difference between "tingling" and "tinkling," he has not even observed which word is used when. It would be superfluous to expect him to have considered whether the closeness of the child's ear to the strings might have anything to do with the character of the sounds, or whether, when the children stand up to sing, a "tinkling" would not then replace "the boom of tingling strings." Such a thing too as a premeditated contrast between "the great black piano" of the present, obviously a grand piano, and the slighter notes of the instrument in the "parlour" would escape him. (101)

Richards was a teacher of literature rather than writing, and the examples of student texts that appear in *Practical Criticism* were not meant to stand on their own or to communicate to an

audience beyond Richards's class. Instead, they were meant to provide insight into the students' processes for making meaning, and Richards reads them as such. In interpreting this student's interpretation, Richards notices that the student has confused "tingling," a word which describes the physical sensation of sitting near the piano strings, with "tinkling," a word used later in the poem to describe the sound of the upright piano that the speaker remembers from his childhood and that he contrasts with the grand piano to which he is presently listening. Richards suggests that the student's basic misreading of the words on the page should lead us to expect that the student will also misread more subtle aspects of the poem's meaning.

Richards does not explicitly define the book's title, which he borrowed from Coleridge. The phrase has subsequently been interpreted in different ways—most often in the context of New Criticism, which draws on it, as "close-reading."  David West has remarked that "[i]f we think of I.A. Richards at all now, it is to think of him as the founder of an intrinsic technique of reading literature now known as 'practical criticism,' a technique which concentrates upon 'the words on the page' and which disregards the text's social and historical context" (West 207). He goes on to argue, however, that

> while is it undoubtedly true that such a technique of reading derived its name from Richards' book, what is not recognised is the fact that Richards' procedure of issuing anonymous poems and asking for comments was explicitly part of an experiment, and was certainly not how he thought that we should or could read a literary text. (West 207)

Robert Douglas-Fairhurst has criticized Geoffrey Hartman's dismissal of practical criticism, saying that Hartman fails to take into account Richards's original text and instead addresses what practical criticism later became. He argues that "Hartman's account of 'the failure of practical criticism' is shaped by a method of close reading that has very little in common with the book he

21

takes as its source; as is so often the case in these rapid sketches of twentieth-century literary criticism, the sins of the son are visited upon the father" (Douglas-Fairhurst 374). Richards himself states clearly in his introduction that the way of reading represented in his book is experimental rather than recommended:

> The precise conditions of this test are not duplicated in our everyday commerce with literature. Even the reviewers of new verse have as a rule a considerable body of the author's work to judge by. . . .Editors themselves will not be the slowest to agree with me upon the difficulty of judging verse without a hint as to its provenance. (*Practical Criticism* 5)

Although Richards certainly advocates careful, attentive reading, the equation of "practical criticism" with decontextualized close-reading is a narrow interpretation, given the work that Richards actually does. *Practical Criticism* is not an exposition of what Richards felt to be ideal examples of the close-reading of poetry; it is an engagement with the written responses of actual student readers, and it is an early example of a teacher-reader who takes student texts seriously as objects of interpretation.

One of Richards's greatest champions in composition studies has been Ann Berthoff, who has argued that despite Richards's focus on reading rather than writing, his thinking has much to offer teacher-scholars of composition (*Richards on Rhetoric*, xi). In her assessment of Richards's career, Berthoff redefines the term "practical" in relation to Richards as having to do with teaching rather than with literary close-reading. She says of his scholarship that

> [t]eaching was at first ancillary to theorizing; it provided the grist. And if later the roles of theory and practice were reversed, the important point is that Richards never lost sight of either one. The shift in the middle of his life from literary criticism to educational

22

design—"from criticism to creation," as he put it—is not so puzzling as it might appear if

it is remembered that Richards undertook no study without a *practical*—that is to say,

*pedagogical*—purpose in mind. ("I.A. Richards," 53, emphasis added)

This understanding of "practical" in Richards's work as "pedagogical" is certainly borne out by

*Practical Criticism*, in which Richards desires not only to improve his students' reading but to

improve the *teaching* of reading as well. He states in the opening sentences of the book that one

of his primary goals is "to prepare the way for educational methods more efficient than those we

use now in developing discrimination and the power to understand what we hear and read"

(Richards 3). Berthoff expands this understanding of what "practical" might mean when she calls

attention to an assertion near the end of Richards's book: "Sooner or later interpretation will

have to be recognized as a key-subject. *But only the actual effort to teach such a subject can*

*reveal how it may best be taught*" (Richards, quoted in Berthoff 57, emphasis in original). To this

Berthoff responds:

> Thus, pedagogy was seen as requiring the guidance of theory, which must, in turn, be
>
> examined in the light of what actually goes on as students read and write. Richards was
>
> the first teacher to treat student writing as a text deserving and repaying close attention;
>
> written responses and the careful study of those responses provide occasions for teacher
>
> and students alike to identify and evaluate ways and means of making meaning. ("I.A.
>
> Richards," 57)

For Richards, "practical criticism" is an approach to teaching in which specific, concrete

examples of student work are used to test more general pedagogical theories and principles;

theory and practice are always connected, always shape and speak back to one another. In

*Practical Criticism*, Richards reads students' writing as a window into students' processes of

23

literary interpretation, and into the ways in which this interpretation sometimes goes wrong, and he uses those observations to critique then-current principles of literary instruction. In working publicly with the written interpretations of actual students as he does in *Practical Criticism* and *Interpretation in Teaching*, Richards called into question the assumptions about students upon which much teaching of literature had been based. As Berthoff says, "*Practical Criticism*, with its demonstration of the actual work of seemingly competent readers, shocked everybody into the recognition that it was foolhardy to assume that the primary aim of English studies was to improve taste, the ability to read for sense and meaning being a foregone conclusion" ("I.A. Richards," 51). In naming Richards here as a practical critic, I want to recognize him not as a founder of literary close-reading but as an early proponent of a criticism that is concerned with teaching and with the reading and texts of actual students.

Another teacher and scholar who has acknowledged the influence of I.A. Richards is Reuben Brower. Brower worked with Richards as a graduate student at Cambridge and later when both were teachers at Harvard. Brower is known primarily as a literary critic and author of books about such figures as Robert Frost and Alexander Pope, but he also devoted great energy to teaching. From 1939 until 1953, Brower taught at Amherst College with Theodore Baird (whose work I will consider shortly). After leaving Amherst, he went to Harvard and founded the well-known course "Humanities 6: The Interpretation of Literature," which grew out of the work Brower had done at Amherst on a sophomore literature course. Hum 6, as it was known, ran until 1973 and involved a number of teachers who went on to become influential scholars, including Richard Poirier and Paul de Man.[4] Though Brower did not work with student texts in class as Richards had done, his writing about the course suggests that he took student writing seriously

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[4] More detailed accounts of this course have been offered by Richard Poirier and David Bartholomae.

24

and that he considered work with student writing to be extremely valuable to the teaching of reading.

Most of Brower's published work might be considered "practical criticism" in the New Critical sense of being based on close-readings of literary texts. His writing about teaching, however, shows that in some ways he was also a practical critic in Berthoff's sense of the phrase, a critic who is also deeply concerned with teaching and with the practices and texts of students. In the essay "Reading in Slow Motion," an account of the methods of Hum 6, Brower writes,

> Attentive criticism of written work is almost certainly of much more value for teaching good reading and writing than the usual discussions or section meetings. . . . The student who is to rise to the kind of reading and writing called for in our ideal course must feel that he has a responsible reader, one who addresses himself to this essay and to this mind. The most valuable discussion a teacher can give is a comment surely directed to an individual written performance. (16)

Brower's language here suggests that teachers' work with student texts—including teachers' comments on those texts—is valuable because through such work, the teacher is able to engage with the reading and writing of each particular student, directing attention to "individual performances" rather than "large-scale production methods." He argues that students in a large lecture section must have a venue in which their thinking is addressed individually by a "responsible reader" and that the exchange between the students' writing and the teacher's written comments can provide that venue. William H. Pritchard, Brower's student at Amherst and later a teacher of Hum 6 at Harvard, recalls Brower's reading of student papers:

> Brower was an acute reader of one's essays, and when in my second year at Harvard I finally signed up for a course with him . . . I found beneficial the detailed and incisive, if

barely legible, remarks he made about particular sentences, not just my paper as a whole. (Such remarks often took the form of check marks in the margin, signifying his assent to a sentence or idea, and giving me the feeling that somebody was actually reading what I had written.) Here was the "philological" concern [with the structure of language] De Man speaks of, and it was in sharp contrast to the casual, brief expressions of approval that passed for comments from many Harvard English professors. . . . (Pritchard 245)

Here Pritchard remembers vividly the way in which Brower read his writing closely as a meaningful part of his teaching, scrutinizing individual sentences and the details of the text. This account supports Brower's own contention that "attentive criticism of written work" can be a valuable and even essential component of the teaching of reading and writing. Pritchard also suggests, though, that in order for such work to be effective, it must not be "casual" but rather must grow out of the close, attentive reading of a teacher who takes student writing seriously.

The work of Richards and Brower intersects with another pedagogical example of practical criticism, English 1-2 at Amherst College. English 1-2 was the introductory course led by Theodore Baird from the 1930s until the mid 1960s.[5] Unlike Richards and Brower, Baird was a teacher of writing as well as literature, and English 1-2 was a composition course. The hallmark of this course was a syllabus composed of carefully sequenced assignments, written each year by a member of the writing staff and used in all sections of the course. The assignment sequences were designed to place students in a position to think about the complex relationship between language and experience. The assignments were recursive in nature and asked students in their writing to consider and reconsider a particular subject, often a concept or question, and to think about the problems involved in using language to address that subject. In a statement from

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[5] More extensive accounts of this course have been offered by Walker Gibson and Robin Varnum.

the 1946-47 academic year, Baird described English 1-2 as a "laboratory course," a metaphor that Richards also used and that calls attention to the hands-on nature of the work; student writing and the reading of that writing were the central activities of the course. Baird explained that

> [t]here are no lectures and the student does no required reading. Each student supplies his own subject matter for writing. That is, we ask the student to put into English what he has learned, both in and outside the classroom. In Term 1 we arbitrarily limit his material to physical activities, skills at the workbench, plays or strokes from games, many of them performed without any verbal accompaniment. We ask the student to become conscious of his particular ability, to sort out those actions which he knows he can do well, and to write about them. As teachers we encourage the student to believe that what he has learned to do he can put into words, and in the detailed criticism of particular papers we try to express the possible relations between the order of the wordless action and the structure of the English sentence. (quoted in Varnum 89)

This description highlights the position of student writing in English 1-2 as a means of bringing students to understand language in a particular way. Teachers read student papers not as windows into students' reading processes, as Richards and Brower did, but as examples of how language is closely interconnected with the experience it describes. English 1-2 often asked students to consider a subject they knew well but had probably never thought of in terms of language before, such as how to serve a tennis ball, and to think hard about how they might describe it in words, and about why that task might be difficult. Baird's table-clearing move of "no lectures and no required reading" resonates in a way with Richards's decision to remove the contextual information of literary works and to focus his course on a few poems and, more

importantly, on his students' written responses. Baird wanted students to focus on their own language rather than on a teacher's lectures or a set of outside readings. There is a desire in both gestures to eliminate the clutter, so to speak, so that students can more easily focus on the subject at hand and, through "the detailed criticism of particular papers," on their own written responses to that subject. The course was based on an idea, a particular way of thinking about language, but teaching was done primarily through the practice of writing and reading that writing rather than by explicitly discussing the ideas that underpinned the course.

A distinctive feature of English 1-2 was an understanding of language as creating different kinds of order out of the chaos of the world around us. One articulation of this idea that Baird often used comes from *The Education of Henry Adams*:

> From cradle to grave this problem of running orders through chaos, direction through space, discipline through freedom, unity through multiplicity, has always been, and must always be, the task of education. (Adams, quoted in Varnum 36)

Echoes of this language can be heard in passages from various course assignments, such as this one from the 1959 assignment sequence, written by Baird:

> When we write or talk and use words and symbols and signs, what we are doing is making sets, composing, organizing, ordering similarities. This act of ordering (a metaphor for all sorts of things that happen) is an extremely difficult one to express in general. Nevertheless it is at the heart, in the center, of our experience. (quoted in Varnum 37)

This idea of language creating order in part drives the course's emphasis on the close-reading of student texts; it was important for these students to pay attention to the particulars of language, because that language creates worlds and has an intimate, complicated relationship with the

experience it both describes and shapes. The assignment sequences were designed to lead students, using their own writing, to see the way in which their language and that of others has this effect. For example, consider the following excerpt from the 1946 assignment sequence:

Assignment 4

a) Write a paper on an action you have repeatedly performed with distinction.

b) Tell exactly how you performed this action on a particular occasion.

Assignment 5

a) How did you learn this action?

b) What did you do to learn?

c) Define "learn" in this context.

Assignment 6

a) Write a paper on an action you performed once and only once with distinction, an action you performed once but were unable to repeat.

b) Tell exactly how you did it.

Assignment 7

a) Rewrite assignment #4.

Assignment 8

Contrast papers written for Assignments 6 and 7 (technique and fluke) and make a list of differences between a Technique and a Fluke.

Assignment 9

Make a vocabulary (a list of keywords with definitions) for this course. Do not use [a] dictionary. (quoted in Varnum, 96-98)

This series of assignments leads students through a closely coordinated series of tasks designed to bring them to a very specific conclusion, and several of the assignments require students to re-read their earlier work. Although the students are asked to provide their own experience as subject matter, the ultimate goal of this work is not for the student writers to say something about that experience but rather to learn something about the problem of definition. Assignment 4 asks students to choose a subject, an action with which they are familiar and confident, and then invites them to talk about it more specifically by asking them to describe a particular instance of that subject. Assignment 5 asks students to break down that action by describing how they learned to do it, a task which requires them to think of the action in parts rather than as a whole. The assignment then shifts the focus from the action itself to the subject of language by focusing on the word "learn," asking students to re-read their own texts and to consider a familiar word as something whose meaning they have constructed rather than something whose meaning they can take for granted. This move calls to mind Richards, who was also very interested in the way words can take on different meanings in different contexts (see, for example, Richards's specialized quotation marks in *How to Read a Page* and subsequent works, which were meant to denote multiple ways of reading a particular word). Assignment 6 again shifts the direction slightly by asking students to describe a different sort of action, one they have done only once rather than repeatedly, and again to explain specifically how they did it. Students are then given the opportunity in Assignment 7 to apply the thinking they have done by returning to Assignment 4, a recursive move that positions students to take stock of what they have learned in writing Assignments 5 and 6. Assignment 8 gives names to the kinds of actions the students have been describing, "Technique" and "Fluke," and asks students to think about what these words mean by reviewing and comparing their own descriptions of each. Finally, Assignment 9 asks

them to expand the vocabulary list the assignments have begun—"learn," "technique," "fluke"—and to define them not in terms of external "dictionary" definitions, but in terms of the specific work of the course. In this way, students are encouraged to see in their own writing and reading how words derive their meaning from the ways in which they are used in particular situations, how those words can be used more or less adequately, and how language creates a kind of order in our thinking by distinguishing between types of actions such as a "technique" and a "fluke."

As these assignments demonstrate, students in English 1-2 were asked to work out problems of language primarily by writing, by reading that writing closely, and by returning to that writing to see how it could be rethought. Like the writing done by students for Richards's *Practical Criticism* experiments, the writing students did for English 1-2 was not necessarily done for the purpose of conveying a message to an audience. Students' texts were a means of teaching students a particular way of reading and interpreting language by thinking about the relationship between their experience and the words used to describe it. Baird and the teachers working under him read students' writing through this lens, and they asked students to do so as well.

William E. Coles, Jr. worked with Baird at Amherst from 1960 to 1965. Coles was deeply influenced by the experience of teaching with Baird, and his subsequent work exhibits much of the thinking and practices of Amherst composition, including the use of student writing as the primary text of the course and the emphasis on the way that language shapes experience. In the books *Composing*, its companion *Teaching Composing* (1974)*, The Plural I* (1978), *Composing II* (1981)*,* and *Seeing Through Writing* (1987), Coles presents assignment sequences that he wrote for courses he taught after leaving Amherst, and he frames these assignments with various kinds of context and commentary, including student papers, fictionalized discussions of

those papers, and his own observations. In the introduction to *The Plural I*, which was published in 1978 and describes a course Coles taught in the late 1960s, he explains that both writing and teaching are matters of what he calls "style" and that the only way to teach either activity is simply to perform one's practice of it:

> [W]hen it comes to someone's helping someone else to write or to teach writing, the most that would seem possible is for the someone to enact his notion of what is involved in the activity in such a way as to demand that others respond with an enactment of what for *them* is involved in it. Which is to say that when it comes to the teaching of art, what teaches finally is style. (1)

"Style" is a key term for Coles, and it seems to mean for him the particular choices each individual makes in his or her writing, reading and teaching. When the writer is confronted with the style of another—a teacher, another writer, a reader, another text—that writer can be invited in a number of ways to reconsider her own style, the choices she has made about what to put on the page, and to think of her texts as something she has made rather than something that just happened. She is made aware of language she may not have thought much about as she was composing and invited to affirm or revise her choices. It is a version of this process that Coles enacts in *The Plural I* and other books. The insistence that "style enacted as a demand for style" is the most powerful means of teaching shapes all of Coles's work, both with his students and in his own writing about teaching composition (*Plural I*, 1). In his portrayal of his teaching, Coles continually directs his students' attention to the close-reading of their own writing and the writing of others in order to put pressure on the choices they make as composers.

An important component of Coles's teaching as represented in his books is the complex way in which language does not simply refer to but actually constitutes what he calls "life" or

"experience"—what Baird, borrowing from Adams, might call "running orders through chaos." Echoing Baird, Coles writes in the introduction to *Teaching Composing* that in designing the course on which the book is based, he and his staff

> wanted a course in writing that would be a course in language as well, a course that would have as its subject the activity of *composing* in the largest possible sense of the term. We wanted a course that would enable us to suggest to students the ways in which their lives, no less than their papers, are composed, composed by language, designed and arranged by the symbol systems through which all of us see the world and by which we are in turn given the identities we have. (1)

As this passage suggests, Coles wanted to increase students' awareness that the relationship between language and life is not a straightforward one in which language describes life as it simply "is," but rather that language and life shape one another in complicated ways. For Coles, part of this work involved bringing students to write in the particular terms of their own lives instead of writing in clichés and readily available commonplaces—what Coles referred to as "Themewriting." This component of Coles's work has strong moral overtones, and in his writing there is at times an uncomfortable implication that that failure to grasp the message of the course might also mean that one's life itself would be diminished. This passage from *The Plural I* in which Coles considers the personal risks of Themewriting suggests what is at stake for him in this understanding of the relationship between language and life:[6]

> [T]o go through life Themewriting one's experience into bloodless abstractions—we had a swell time; it was a great trip; she was really cool—was to end up with how much of life having dribbled through one's fingers? Yes, the habit of Themewriting was a choice,

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[6] A version of this passage also appears in *Teaching Composing* on page 36.

I concluded class by saying. But maybe not always a free one, and maybe not one that

remained open forever. (*The Plural I*, 75-76)

In other words, if you write in clichés long enough, you may become one yourself. For Coles, a

course in composition is a course in how we compose both texts and experience, using language

as a way to make sense of the world. Student texts in such a course serve as a means of

interrogating not only the way we use language but the way in which that language determines

the features of our very lives.

*The Plural I*—which consists largely of actual student papers and fictionalized accounts

of class discussions of those papers—presents most dramatically Coles's methodology of

enacting the ideas behind his teaching by working closely with student texts. Similar to an

English 1-2 assignment sequence, the first part of Coles's assignment sequence deals with the

problem of definition. Coles begins the course by asking students to explain what they mean by

"amateur" and "professional" and then uses subsequent assignments to have students consider

these terms by providing specific examples of them and by thinking of how they would apply the

terms to themselves in different ways, asking along the way for students to define terms again

based on what they have written. The purpose of this work is to position students to consider the

complexity and nuance of words whose meaning they may have taken for granted. Coles also

wants the students, through this work, to learn that composing definitions has as much to do with

the writer as with the word being defined.

The next section of the course presents students with longer passages in which two

writers, J.D. Thomas and T. Clifford Allbutt, give advice to writers of technical or scientific

prose. These selections reflect the population (all male science students) of the institution where

Coles was teaching, Case Institute of Technology. The students are asked to read these passages

closely and to think about what they make of the speakers and who they think their ideal audiences would be. Coles also asks the students to evaluate the extent to which they would call these writers "amateurs" or "professionals" and why. These assignments shift students' attention to writing as a subject for discussion and raise the question of how the passages, the specific sentences on the page, construct both the writers and their readers. Coles concludes this section of the course by presenting a passage by Charles Darwin and asking students to think about how Darwin constructs himself—whether he is a scientist, an admirer of nature as an artistic creation, or both—as the speaker of these sentences.

The third section of the course shifts the direction to the topic of nonsense, and these assignments ask students to think about the relationship between language and experience from a somewhat different angle. Coles has students read two texts, the anonymous poem "I Saw a Peacock" and Edward Gorey's children's book *The Willowdale Handcar*, both of which offer no stable, easily available meaning. After asking students what they think these texts are about, Coles then asks them to reflect on what they had to do in order to answer that question. These assignments present students with the idea that writing and reading are both acts which involve making some kind of order out of disorderly experience, in this case the experience of reading. In his representation of class discussions during this unit, Coles leads the students to see that the writing of nonsense—writing which creates the illusion of meaning and order without ever fully delivering it—is not a matter of simple randomness but one that requires deliberate choices by the composer. The final assignments continue to focus on the idea of the writer as a composer of both texts and realities but take as a subject the relationship between the sciences and the humanities. These assignments ask the students, all science majors at a technical institute, to

address the question of what it means for them to be students and writers, composers of language and meaning, in both disciplines.

A closer look at one of the class discussions that Coles reconstructs provides some insight into how he might have used particular examples of student writing to get at the theory of the course (although Coles would most likely resist the term "theory" on the grounds that practice is everything in the teaching of composition). Assignment 5 builds on some of the early work students had done to define the terms "amateur" and "professional":

> Now describe a situation in which you acted as what you would call a professional. Again, where were you? Who else was there? What was said and done?    On the basis of what you have written, define professional. (51)

In the class discussion that took place after this assignment, Coles asks students to compare two student papers, the first of which describes a scene of playing pool:

> The game started slowly as each person in turn missed, but as it continued there was suddenly a radical change. Abruptly, I declared that I would clear the table and I did. They watched in amazement, wondering if I knew what I was doing or whether I was just lucky. They challenged me to do it again. I accepted the challenge and was successful. (52)

In talking with his students, Coles critiques this first paper primarily on the basis that it is more metadiscourse than specific description; the writer tells what happened, but he does not show it in language that would convince Coles that this event actually took place. Coles says that

> There isn't any situation here, of course, and that's what I mimeographed the paper to demonstrate. What *might* have been the situation is buried in two sentences: "Abruptly, I declared that I would clear the table and I did," and "I accepted the challenge and was

successful." The rest is Themetalk ("an immediate interest in participating," "they watched in amazement," and so on) *about* what happened. Nothing is rendered. We're told not shown that the writer was neither "boastful [nor] pretentious," and that he was "looked up to." For both the situation and what is made of it we have to accept the writer's solemn word. (52)

The breakthrough in the discussion comes when another student who plays pool claims that the language the writer uses, "clear the table," is unpersuasive because that's not how a real pool expert would talk; he argues that anyone who plays this well would instead use the phrase "run the rack" to describe what this writer says he did (52). In all of this commentary, we see the attention to students' language that is the basis of Coles's pedagogy. In his own analysis, Coles points to the sentences—"I declared that I would clear the table and I did"; "I accepted the challenge and was successful"—which glide over the details that, for him, are essential to creating a convincing impression in language that this is a real event that happened to a real person. The moment he chooses to foreground in his account of the class discussion—a student noticing the specific language the writer uses to describe the event—also illustrates this attention to the words on the page, and the weight Coles gives to the moment underlines this point: "It was the first direct connection anyone [in the course] had made between professionalism and the use of language, between professionalism and behavior" (53).

Coles then contrasts this paper with another in which the writer describes the experience of having to photograph two simultaneous high school football games in locations 40 miles apart. This paper contains much more specific detail that describes exactly what the writer had to do in order to accomplish this task:

Out of town, the San Diego freeway wasn't very crowded. On the long straight stretches I

managed around eighty-five miles per hour. I had to drop down to around sixty after the

Laguna turn-off. Laguna Canyon road is two-lane and twisting. When I arrived at Laguna

Beach High School, our team was doing fine. The score was forty-five to twenty-

something, with six minutes to play. In those six minutes I managed to get a good pass

interception and a beautiful shot of Cadreau (our quarterback) breaking away from the

crowd for a touchdown. (54)

After some discussion, Coles asks his students what "skillful" means in the context of the pool

paper and one replies,

"Only that he won the game. He said he'd clear the table and he did."

"Right. And that's about all. But does 'skillful' in the second paper mean only

that the guy got his pictures?"

"No. It's the way he did it, driving the car the way he did and all the rest." (56).

Coles agrees with this assessment and elaborates the point, saying to his students that the writer

of this paper has "found a way of talking about something that makes *me* say, 'I understand what

being skillful and economical and the rest means to this writer.' I praise him for creating a

meaning for such abstractions that I can't do justice to with a simple synonym" (57) Rather than

giving his students a lecture on the value of describing experience in specific rather than general

terms, Coles presents examples of each of these kinds of writing so that students, through

discussing the specific language, come to see and describe the differences. Because this is

Coles's fictionalized representation of the class, it is difficult to know the extent to which the

students actually got the point. However, in this representation, we do at least see what Coles

intended. This comparison of two particular responses to the same assignment engages Coles and

his students, who have all had to address the same writing task, in the work of observing the differences between these texts and drawing conclusions about what this all means for them as writers.

*The Plural I* and other books in which Coles presents some of his assignment sequences (*Teaching Composing*, *Seeing Through Writing*) are valuable in that they give us extended examples of what it might mean to work out a particular approach to language by leading students through a tightly controlled sequence of writing tasks and by working with students' papers. Though Coles in this work is skeptical of theories about how to teach writing, his own practice as he represents it has a strong foundation in a philosophy of language that he learned under Baird and continued to develop after leaving Amherst, and in his pedagogical writing we see the way in which his teaching practices consistently reflect that philosophy. One danger of the books, though, is that they are narrated entirely by Coles from his perspective, so that it is difficult to gauge the effect of this approach on students. The conversations with students often create the sense that progress was being made—and at times progress most likely *was* being made—but because those conversations are fictionalized with the intent of portraying a certain kind of teaching, we as readers have no way of knowing what actually took place and how the students' experienced Coles's methodology. We see moments in the course that Coles found unsatisfactory, but we have no way of knowing what other mishaps or misunderstandings may have occurred. I would argue that another drawback of this pedagogy is that, while it is deliberate and thoughtful, it is in some ways too tightly controlled, and there appears to be little room for students' own interests and conclusions. In the comparison of the student papers on pool and photography, for example, Coles has a very specific conclusion he wants students to come to, and the students figure into the narrative more as props to help the teacher make his

39

point than as independent interlocutors. Although good teaching usually requires that the teacher have a sense of direction, there seems to be little room for students to come out anywhere else if they want to win Coles's approval. Nevertheless, this body of work provides a rare example of how student writing can be taken seriously as the foundation of a course and of how that writing can be used as a venue for working out some difficult theoretical concepts.

The teachers I have discussed up to this point worked in elite institutions (Cambridge, Amherst, Harvard, Case Institute of Technology) where the majority of students (and sometimes all students) were male, and many were from relatively privileged backgrounds. Richards, Brower, Baird, and Coles often seem to take for granted aspects of writing instruction that teachers in many other institutions cannot overlook in the same way (although their assumptions about students may not always have been justified, as Richards's experiments in *Practical Criticism* suggest). For example, in his syllabus for the course at Case which is the subject of *The Plural I*, Coles includes this statement: "Much of our conversation in class will be about ideas, techniques, meaning, but it should be emphatically said that conventional literacy will be taken for granted" (*The Plural I*, 13). In other institutional settings, however, with less privileged and experienced students, this literacy cannot be taken for granted, and teachers would be irresponsible to assume that "conventional literacy" falls outside of the scope of their courses. In many institutions, teachers consider it important to teach students what it means to write in a college environment—the forms and features, and the stakes, of academic writing—in a way that these teachers of privileged students did not feel the need to do.

What, then, might practical criticism look like in contexts where teachers and students have different knowledge, experiences, and needs? In order to answer this question, it is necessary to look for different models and for teachers working with a wider range of students.

In the teaching and scholarship of basic writing, mostly but not exclusively from the 1970s and early 1980s, composition teachers had to find new ways of reading the texts of students who were under-prepared to take part in the discourse of the academy. The pedagogical situation of basic writing and the needs of its student writers demanded that teachers pay particular attention to students' writing, and basic writing teaching and research are often marked by a sustained interest in the details of particular student texts.

As Mina Shaughnessy describes in *Errors and Expectations*, which grew out of her experience of teaching in the City University of New York in the wake of its open admissions policy, there were no existing models in the professional literature to help her and other teachers understand how to teach these new students. They learned by doing, and Shaughnessy's influential observations on the teaching of basic writing grew out of her work with students and their texts. In the preface to *Errors and Expectations*, Shaughnessy describes a set of student papers that she kept in her files, the first set of papers she ever received from what would come to be called basic writers, and she remembers the experience of reading those papers for the first time: "I could only sit there, reading and re-reading the alien papers, wondering what had gone wrong and trying to understand what I at this eleventh hour of my students' academic lives could do about it" (Shaughnessy vii). It is appropriate that *Errors and Expectations* begins this way, with the image of a teacher and a set of student papers, because the entire book is structured around her readings of examples of student writing. Though it is in many ways quite different from *The Plural I*, *Errors and Expectations* is similarly striking for the way that it does much of its work through close readings of student texts. In example after example, Shaughnessy interprets student texts, looking not for the sources of poetic misreading like Richards or for evidence of Themewriting like Coles, but rather for the logic and pattern behind her students'

idiosyncratic uses of language. In his assessment of Shaughnessy's career, David Bartholomae explains the value of Shaughnessy's approach to students and her work with student texts: "By studying errors in the context of students' actual performance, Shaughnessy allows us to see basic writers as writers rather than as a group lacking skills that are somehow acquired prior to writing" ("Released," 39). Her work is practical criticism in the sense that she closely examines the writing of real students and develops pedagogical theories and practices based on her observations of that writing. Significantly, this approach allowed her to develop an understanding of error not as an abstract list of mistakes a writer could make but in the actual contextualized practice of student writers.

The scholarship of basic writing—in which I would include both the teaching of basic writing students and the publications that came out of that work—is largely founded on the activity of reading of student texts. This reading is characterized by the effort to interpret students' texts as evidence of the thought processes that led students to put words together in a particular, often idiosyncratic, way. Bartholomae says of *Errors and Expectations* that

> [t]he value of the taxonomy in the book is the method it defines, where one looks long and closely at a student's writing to determine what patterns emerge. Through the perception of such patterns, one can discover that errors are not random, but products of systematic decision-making – that is, evidence that there is a grammar to students' ungrammaticality – and one can begin to speculate on the causes of the specific errors, rather than begin with the buckshot approach of teaching to all possible error. What makes this book so valuable, then, is the model of interpretation it provides. ("Released" 44)

In Bartholomae's estimation, the work that Shaughnessy does as a reader involves perceiving order and meaning that are not conventional but are nevertheless present in the student's text. The teachers of basic writing were working against a mode of interpretation in which students' errors rendered their texts chaotic and unreadable and the student writers unteachable. The teacher's mode of reading largely determines what she is able to say about a student text, and the reading of teachers like Shaughnessy enabled them to understand and explain the errors in student texts rather than dismissing those texts as meaningless and uninterpretable.

Shaughnessy's work provides an interesting point of comparison with that of Baird and Coles, because she uses a method—the close, careful reading of student texts—which is in some ways similar to theirs, but she deploys it in a very different setting with different emphases and goals. Unlike Coles, who locates "conventional literacy" outside the scope of his teaching, Shaughnessy focuses her considerable powers of observation on exactly those aspects of her students' writing that teachers in more privileged settings were comfortable excluding from their set of concerns. Shaughnessy does not aim to bring her students into a particular philosophical understanding of language; her more practical aim is to help them achieve greater fluency with academic discourse and, by extension, greater control over their academic lives. The writing of Baird and Coles's students served narrow purposes specific to their courses and was not necessarily meant to be readable to an audience outside of that setting, and their students at Amherst and Case had already attained access to privileged institutions. Shaughnessy, in contrast, aimed to help her students develop writing styles that would earn them access to the academy more broadly. Shaughnessy and other scholars of basic writing also show us how we might imagine *all* student texts as being worthy of close attention, not just those produced by students at colleges like Amherst and Harvard, if the teacher is able to attend to the particular

qualities of the student writing in question. Basic writing demonstrates that the close-reading of student texts can be a powerful methodology in a variety of contexts if the pedagogy is flexible enough to respond to the differences between students in different institutional settings.

Coles's statement on "conventional literacy" also suggests a kind of separation of concerns that basic writing rejects; in this context, "ideas, techniques, meaning" are worthy of discussion but "conventional literacy" is not. Teachers of basic writing call into question this separation of "ideas, techniques, meaning" and "conventional literacy" by insisting that the teaching of conventional literacy not be done in an environment that has been evacuated of ideas and meaning. Teachers such as Shaughnessy insist that basic writers have complex thoughts and ideas and that their sentences have meaning, even if the writer is not yet able to convey that meaning effectively. Consider, for example, the following passage from a basic writing student:

> Not too many people acheve their degree in these fields so therfor you can say that, in a way they are an abundance of jobs for them, though it they are the jobs least demanded by. As in contrast to the Jobs most demanding it is because as I mentioned before if the quality of knowledge obtained and so forth. In comparing the status the persons with degrees in the least job demand would be highly regarded then to that if a person with the form of a job which was most demanding. (Shaughnessy 46)

Shaughnessy assesses the writer's difficulties as follows:

> Note the difficulties the writer has with the forms for comparison and his consequent reluctance to depart from the wording of the essay question (*jobs in least demand*), which commits him to using these forms (*jobs least demanded by, as in contrast to, degrees in the least job demand, then to that*, etc.). Yet the idea he wants to articulate is both perceptive and complex:

Not many people get college degrees. Those who do get their degrees have a chance to get the best jobs. Therefore, even though there are relatively few openings for good jobs, the number who qualify for them is also small. You could say, then, that people with degrees have an abundance of jobs to choose from. Furthermore, because the jobs that are easy to get require less knowledge, they also give less status. (Shaughnessy 46)

In reading this passage, Shaughnessy posits a plausible theory for why the student makes these particular errors, speculates persuasively about what the student was trying to get across, and praises the meaning that the student was attempting to convey. Shaughnessy's reading enables her to understand this student as one who has great difficulties with the conventions of writing but who also has things to say and can be taught to say them differently. Her reading of student writing and her teaching are based on a conviction that writing and meaning must not be separated, as though the student needs to master the first in order to move on to the second. Meaning, for Shaughnessy, is not something to be addressed *instead* of conventional literacy; it is something which must always be kept present if conventional literacy is to be acquired in a meaningful way.

Reading this interpretation of a basic writer's sentence, I am reminded of Richards's description of his students' protocols and the kind of reading they demand:

These scraps of scribble are no more than faint and imperfect indications—distant and distorted rumors—of the fleeting processes of interpretation we are trying to study. They are never to be read *by the letter* (another of the tired pedagogue's besetting sins); they do not tell their own story; they are mere clues for us to place and interpret in our turn. . . . We have to remember, unless we are to forget all that we have to teach, that what the

45

writer meant is not to be simply equated with what he wrote. (*Interpretation in Teaching*, 29)

Shaughnessy's reading of this student's sentence seems similar to the kind of reading Richards describes. Rather than taking the student's sentences "by the letter" and dismissing them as unreadable, she interprets the passage by seeking out the meaning that it does not successfully convey on its own and imagines the thought processes that accompanied the placement of these particular words in this particular order—the way in which dependence on the language of the essay question creates problems for the writer. In reading this passage, Shaughnessy keeps in mind both the words on the page and the mental process that produced them. Read in this way, the basic writer's sentence becomes much more than the unreadable utterance of an unteachable student.

David Bartholomae also provides an interesting point of contrast to figures like Baird and Coles, who have influenced his work but with whom he differs in some significant ways. Bartholomae is another careful reader of student texts, and like Shaughnessy, he often works closely with examples of student writing. In the introduction to his essay collection, Bartholomae considers this sentence from one of Shaughnessy's students in *Errors and Expectations*:

In my opinion I believe that you there is no field that cannot be effected some sort of advancement that one maybe need a college degree to make it.

Bartholomae offers this interpretation:

The kernel sentence is simple and heartfelt: "One needs a college degree to make it." As the sentence diagrams itself, however, it enacts the drama of a student writer who knows that to "make it" in college one also needs to learn to write in forms that are more highly elaborated, where the writer is present not only as the locus of desire ("I want to make

46

it") but as someone who thinks, who commands that role in the classroom and in the academy, a context the student can only begin to imagine by beginning to write, and so the sentence opens with a variety of performative excursions:

> In my opinion
>
> I believe that you
>
> THERE IS NO FIELD THAT CANNOT BE EFFECTED
>
> *Some sort of advancement that?*
>
> One – maybe? – needs a college degree to make it. ("Living," 4)

In Bartholomae's reading of this sentence we see some of the same kind of careful work that Shaughnessy does, teasing out the meaning of the sentence and speculating about the thinking that led the writer to compose it in this way. Bartholomae's interpretation differs, however, in that it places more emphasis on imagining a version of the writer himself, what he knows and thinks and how he experiences his role as a student. The interpretation constructs a compelling version of the complex problems such a student would face in learning to write in the academy, but it performs a somewhat different function than Shaughnessy's reading. Where Shaughnessy's reading helps us to imagine how we might intervene in one particular student text, Bartholomae's reading proposes a more comprehensive version of who the basic writer is—both this specific basic writer and a more general "basic writer." It is a powerful reading, but one that might not account for the experiences of all basic writing students.

Bartholomae has argued in many places for the importance of the student text—for the importance of practice—in composition. In "The Argument for Reading," he describes the course Coles depicts in *The Plural I* as a course in close reading, and he calls for more of this kind of work in composition. I interpret "close reading" here as a way of claiming a primary

47

position for the words on the page, especially the student's page, and for the importance of reading and working with those words as the central activity of the course. The essay "The Study of Error" features an extensive case study of a text by a basic writing student named John, a case which Bartholomae says

> highlights the tremendous difficulty such a student has with editing, where a failure to correct a paper is not evidence of laziness or inattention or a failure to know correct forms, but evidence of the tremendous difficulty such a student has objectifying language and seeing it as black and white marks on a page, where things can be wrong even though the meaning seems right. ("The Study of Error," 28)

As in his reading of the basic writer's sentence above, here Bartholomae relates to a student's writing by constructing a version of the student writer himself. There are certainly risks involved in imagining aspects of the student to which we have no access, but the student that Bartholomae constructs enables teaching in a way that the alternative student—the student who is lazy and careless—does not. Both are the product of teachers' assumptions, but Bartholomae's version of the student writer is far more generous and provides much greater possibilities. Bartholomae also calls attention to the importance, and difficulty, of seeing words on a page *as* words on the page, and he argues that teaching students to read their writing in this way is essential to helping them reduce the occurrence of error in their texts. He resists accounts of the composing process in which the student text recedes into the background. In response to the cognitive process theory of composition outlined by Linda Flower and John R. Hayes ("A Cognitive Process Theory of Writing," 1981), he argues that the authors'

> references to invention and creativity seem to refer to something other than an act of writing – if writing is, finally, words on a page. Flower and Hayes locate the act of

writing solely within the mind of the writer. The act of writing, here, has a personal,

cognitive history but not a history *as a text*, as a text that is made possible by prior texts.

("Inventing the University," 66, emphasis added)

This passage is from "Inventing the University," which addresses the situation of basic writing

students who, according to Bartholomae, must learn to write in the academy before they are fully

part of it. Bartholomae argues that writing happens not only in the writer's mind but on the page,

and he asserts that "[i]f writing is a process, it is also a product; and it is the product, and not the

plan for writing, that locates a writer on the page, that locates him in a text and a style and the

codes or conventions that make both of them readable" ("Inventing the University," 67). Near

the end of "Inventing the University" he returns to this argument:

> The challenge to researchers, it seems to me, is to turn their attention again to products, to
>
> student writing, since the drama in a student's essay, as he or she struggles with and
>
> against the languages of our contemporary life, is as intense and telling as the drama of
>
> an essay's mental preparation or physical production. A written text, too, can be a
>
> compelling model of the "composing process" once we conceive of a writer as a work
>
> within a text and simultaneously, then within a society, a history, and a culture.
>
> ("Inventing," 83)

This passage again highlights the way in which Bartholomae reads student writing for how the

text constructs its writer. There are echoes here of Coles, who writes in the course description

used in *The Plural I* that "the self I am speaking of here, and the one with which we will be

concerned in the classroom, is a literary self, not a mock or false self, but a stylistic self, the self

construable from the way words fall on a page" ("*The Plural I*," 12). Both teachers focus their

attention on the words on the student's page and on the way those words construct the student

49

writer. What distinguishes Bartholomae from Coles is the way in which he foregrounds the social nature of language, the way language derives meaning from the social "codes or conventions" in which we participate; Bartholomae imagines the writer not only as an individual but as a participant in larger historical and cultural contexts. There is certainly an implicit awareness of the social nature of language in Coles's work, as in the argument that to be a professional means to use language like a professional (which implies a social group of professionals who use language in this way), but Bartholomae brings this aspect of language and writing forward to a much greater degree by focusing on what it means for students to have to come into academic discourse as they enter the social institution of the academy itself.

This interest in the way student writers and their texts are always socially situated leads Bartholomae to take quite a different position from Coles on the issue of reading in the first-year composition course. In the introduction to *Teaching Composing*, Coles says he and his staff did not

> want our course to have as its subject some focus to which the act of the student's composing his own experience in words, sentences, paragraphs was subsidiary. So we decided to get rid of everything that teachers and students alike are tempted to look at writing from behind or through or under. The anthology went; so did the standard plays, novels, and poems. . . . For all of us, like it or not, the subject was going to be writing as language, for that was all we had left: our assignments and class exercises, the students' papers, and each other. (2)

As Mariolina Salvatori has pointed out, this language suggests a fairly sweeping and potentially troubling rejection of the place of reading in a writing course (Salvatori 164). In a move similar to those made by both Richards and Baird, Coles rejects anything that could become a

convenient distraction, a reason for students and teachers not to look closely at the texts Coles considers most important. Salvatori also argues that Coles's rejection of reading as he articulates it in *Teaching Composition* overlooks the more subtle question of *what kind of reading* should be done in a composition course. Even though Coles says they "decided to get rid of everything," his published assignment sequences show that reading was often an important part of the assignments themselves. Students were frequently given a long passage from a text and asked to read carefully and to respond to a particular aspect of the excerpt. Coles says that he rejects the inclusion of outside materials that could become a distraction, but what he is actually rejecting is a particular way of reading those materials. By using only relatively small excerpts and by asking students to do very specific kinds of work with those passages, Coles is able to keep that reading tightly linked to the practice of writing and to control the degree to which the outside text becomes a presence in the course.

Where Coles makes the gesture of removing all outside reading material and constructs a course in which the student text is in some ways isolated from other kinds of academic work, Bartholomae argues that reading and writing in response to the texts which constitute the discursive space of the academy are essential components of the first-year course. In *Facts, Artifacts, and Counterfacts* (1986), a collaborative account of the Basic Reading and Writing course taught at the University of Pittsburgh in the 1980s, Bartholomae and Anthony Petrosky argue that basic writing students should not be prevented from doing the kind work that most college students are expected to do, even if they are unprepared to do it well, and part of that work is to engage in an extended intellectual inquiry involving the reading of a number of relatively difficult academic texts. Both the reading and writing assignments in the course were designed to help students learn to imagine the kinds of work people do in academic settings,

where scholars engage in extended inquiry-based projects. The course constructs student writing as real work rather than as practice for some kind of real work that students will do later on:

> Ours is not a course in study skills. We don't teach students how to find information in a textbook – to skim and scan and read topic sentences. We don't use workbooks; we use real books. Our assignments ask for something other than reports and summaries. Our students write drafts and revisions, not exercises; they work on semester-long projects, not the usual set pieces defined by discrete weekly themes. (*Facts*, 4)

This course was not designed with a focus on error but rather on a particular approach to academic writing and, importantly, reading, and it imagines writing and reading as being intimately connected activities. Bartholomae and Petrosky argue that a basic writing course should approach reading as a "conceptual act," based on the assessment that basic writers are often helpless when confronted with a moderately difficult text because they are unable to imagine the kinds of work that academic readers and writers do: "Their problems, we concluded, were not intrinsically reading problems but problems of composition, of the ability to 'compose' a reading" (*Facts*, 23). Though Pitt's Basic Reading and Writing involved a great deal of work with student writing both in and out of class, that writing was closely connected to reading in important ways, and writing was conceived as a way of accessing students' processes of making meaning as they read: "Our course offers reading as an activity and centers itself on a general inquiry into the possible relations between a reader and a text, something that can be represented by studying the specific written responses of specific readers" (*Facts*, 14).

Despite these different positions on the place of reading in the composition course, Coles's teaching certainly influenced the design of Basic Reading and Writing. The course followed a sequence of assignments that brought students to see the subject of the course,

"Growth and Change in Adolescence," as a subject constructed of language as much as of experience. There is an understanding of language in Bartholomae's work generally which echoes that of Baird and Coles in that thinking and language are not separated. The latter does not somehow neutrally represent or "clothe" the former; instead, "knowledge" always exists *in* discourse, never somehow apart from it, and the possibilities for knowledge or thinking are in many ways determined by the language in which the writer is working. Bartholomae resists the idea that thought or writing somehow exist in the mind of the writer, separate from the words on the page. What is different in Bartholomae, though, is the emphasis on the way in which that discourse exists outside of the individual writer; in language that echoes Bakhtin, he argues that the writer must struggle with discourse that "has a memory of its own, its own rich network of structures and connections beyond the deliberate control of any individual imagination" ("Inventing" 69). Coles addresses the problem of writing in clichés or borrowed language in the form of Themewriting, but he does not take on to the same degree the question of what it means to write in a context such as the academy, which is crowded with many other voices among which the individual writer must somehow situate herself. Bartholomae argues that "Students write in a space defined by all the writing that has preceded them, writing the academy insistently draws together: in the library, in the reading list, in the curriculum. This is busy, noisy, intertextual space" ("Writing With Teachers," 64). Because he insists that composition courses should have *this* space in mind, rather than an idealized space in which students write in freedom from the pressures of other texts and voices (an approach which Bartholomae associates with Peter Elbow), Bartholomae's teaching, as represented in *Facts, Artifacts, and Counterfacts* and *Ways of Reading*, involves a core of required readings. Bartholomae draws on Coles in many ways and shares his deep commitment to working with student writing as the central activity of

53

the composition course, but he—rightly, I would argue—puts reading back on the table. To construct student writing as existing in a context of other, more powerful texts more closely reflects the context in which all writers do their work.

Like pedagogies of practical criticism, written comments on students' texts emphasize "the space on the page and what it might mean to do work there and not somewhere else" (Bartholomae 333), and like practical criticism, written comments begin with teachers' reading. In many courses for which students write, the writing itself generally stays off-stage; it is read only by the teacher and the student writer, and perhaps a peer reviewer. Otherwise, the work that is represented by particular students' texts often remains somewhat hidden. However, when the teacher reads and responds to those texts, the students' writing—their practice of the ideas in the course—becomes the center of attention, and when students and teachers engage in the process of writing, reading and revising in response to written comments, they are, if in some cases only temporarily, engaging in a process of practical criticism. The teachers I consider here, in different ways and for different reasons, all put student texts at the center of their work, and when we comment on students' writing, we do something similar. Because of this shared emphasis on teachers' reading, the work of the teachers I have considered can offer other teachers valuable ways of thinking about written response—not specific practices, but rather an awareness of the place of teachers' reading in written response and in teaching composition more generally.

One idea that runs through many of the examples of practical criticism I have considered is that of language "running orders through chaos." Baird did not use this phrase in reference to the writing that teachers do on student texts, but I think it offers a possible way of understanding

what can happen when teachers read and write on students' papers. Comments written on a text, I would argue, can perform something like "running orders through chaos" by attempting to make visible a particular reading, in which the teacher emphasizes certain elements and de-emphasizes others. To recall from a discussion earlier in this chapter, in the Fall 1959 assignment sequence of English 1-2, Baird writes that

> When we write or talk and use words and symbols and signs, what we are doing is making sets, composing, organizing, ordering similarities. This act of ordering (a metaphor for all sorts of things that happen) is an extremely difficult one to express in general. Nevertheless it is at the heart, in the center, of our experience. (Baird, quoted in Varnum 37)

Robin Varnum notes that in Assignment 26 of this sequence, "Baird had pointed out that 'order' and 'chaos' were relative terms and that 'one man's chaos' could be another's order" (Varnum 38). This point that the character of a particular "order" depends on the individual is important, because it gets at the way in which the "order" Baird is talking about is not the kind that is imposed as a means of enforcing stability; rather, it is a way of organizing and making meaning out of experience, meaning which varies depending on who does the ordering and under what circumstances. The final assignment of this sequence asked students to "make an order out of the assignments you have done this semester, an order, that is, of thinking which you have made for yourself in doing these assignments" (Baird, quoted in Varnum 38). The language of this assignment—the use of *an* order, rather than *the* order; the emphasis on the student as maker of that order (an order which might be different from those of other students); and the fact that it asks students to do this work by returning to their own language and that of previous assignments—further suggests that the kind of order Baird refers to is the way in which language

shapes our ways of thinking and seeing the world, ways which can vary widely. This final assignment, which asks students to "make an order" by re-reading their own writing, also suggests that along with writing, reading too—the act of composing an interpretation of a text or set of texts—is also a means of "running orders through chaos."

Though he uses somewhat different terms, Coles also addresses this idea of "running orders through chaos" when he writes about the assignment sequence presented in *Teaching Composing*:

> We wanted a course that would enable us to suggest to students the ways in which their lives, no less than their papers, are composed, composed by language, designed and arranged by the symbol systems through which all of us see the world and by which we are in turn given the identities we have. (1)

Here again, language, as the means by which we engage with and make meaning of the world, creates different kinds of order by "composing," "designing," and "arranging" experience. This passage implies a way of reading in which students are brought to see their own use of language as a means of creating different kinds of order, both on paper and in the world beyond their texts. In the courses he describes, Coles aims to teach students to see their language as having this effect and to make more conscious choices about the orders they want to compose in both their writing and their lives.

The discourse of basic-writing pedagogy offers examples of how, in addition to writing, the act of reading can run orders through what might seem at times to be a chaotic text. I want to return for a moment to Bartholomae's assessment of *Errors and Expectations*:

> The value of the taxonomy in the book is the method it defines, where one looks long and closely at a student's writing to determine what patterns emerge. Through the perception

of such patterns, one can discover that errors are not random, but products of systematic

decision-making . . . and one can begin to speculate on the causes of the specific errors,

rather than begin with the buckshot approach of teaching to all possible error.

("Released" 44)

This characterization foregrounds the degree to which the work of reading student writing is a

matter of "running orders through chaos," discerning an order that will determine how one

chooses to respond. To teach these students effectively, the teacher must learn to read for the

order of the basic writing student's text, even though that order is most likely an unconventional

one. She must then teach students to see the differences between their own idiosyncratic orders

and the ones that academic readers would conventionally expect: "As teachers and students learn

to perceive patterns in the apparent confusion of student writing, that writing comes to represent

something other than confusion" ("Released," 40). This concept of reading as the act of creating

meaning or order out of the chaos of a text is also one of the foundational theories of the Pitt

basic writing course as portrayed in *Facts, Artifacts and Counterfacts*. Bartholomae and Petrosky

argue that "[w]hen reading is defined as something other than the activity of working one's way

through a long, complex text and imposing order and meaning on the information acquired from

the text, it is easy to see literacy as the sum of constituent skills" (*Facts*, 12). But, again, it is

important to note that "order" here is not a single order which exists outside of the individual

reader, who must wait for a teacher to confirm that her "order" is correct; order and meaning are

composed by the reader through the experience of wrestling with the text. One reader's order

may be different from another's and neither may be "incorrect," although some orders may be

more successful than others, depending on the context

I would argue that one thing teachers' written response does in outlining at least a partial representation of the teacher's reading is to construct an order, not necessarily in the sense of imposing order (although sometimes that is the desire) but rather one order out of many possible others. I do not want to push too hard on the metaphor of "order" or to say that written comments do or should make a student's text more "orderly." What they attempt to do, however, is to make visible for the student another's interpretation, a way of making sense of the text that is not necessarily the same as writer's own. We see a version of comments on a text, although not written by a teacher, as a means of ordering and interpreting when Bartholomae and Petrosky discuss the way their students typically read books, making no marks on the pages and finding themselves at the end with nothing to say. They argue that basic writing students need to learn the ways in which successful academic writers usually read, making the marks that enable them to compose an interpretation:

> They need to learn, in other words, to create the kind of index that a more experienced reader creates by putting checks in the margin or circling page numbers or in some way indicating sections or phrases that seem interesting or puzzling or significant, sections or phrases that they can turn to later when they need to work up an account of what they've read (*Facts*, 18).

Though Bartholomae and Petrosky are not writing about teachers' comments, this description of experienced readers' note-taking calls attention to the way in which the act of reading can itself be a kind of ordering. These marks indicate what seemed important or confusing to a particular reader at a particular moment in time, and they help to create a version of the text that is specific to that event of reading. Marks on a student's page can perform a similar function, providing the student reader with a reading or ordering of her text that she may use, incorporate, or push

58

against as she re-composes that text in revision. The reading of teachers and the written comments that emerge from that reading run orders through student texts in a number of ways. Comments can suggest, implicitly or explicitly, what aspects of the text are important and worthy of further attention. They can also indicate what the student has done well and what aspects of the text are less successful. They can suggest, implicitly or explicitly, a way of seeing a subject that is different from the one represented in the student's text. They can call attention to gaps in thinking. And the "order" suggested by one teacher's comments may be quite different from that of another teacher looking at the same text.

An example of a written response to a student text illustrates how even brief comments can create a kind of order according to a particular teacher's reading. This paper was written for a seminar for senior English majors on popular song lyrics as literature. Students in this course were required to write several one-page papers in a variety of genres, such as a review, a parody, or an annotated list of songs. This essay is a review of Charles Manson's 1968 album *Lie: The Love and Terror Cult*. The teacher's marginal comments are light, and the majority of them

*What makes them enjoyable?*

respond to this one paragraph:

While Manson's songs aren't exactly brilliant, they're pretty enjoyable overall. And he

does have some real gems on the album; his last song, "Eyes of a Dreamer" is

*Why?*    legitimately very good. "Cease to Exist" is also pretty smooth, and was actually covered

by The Beach Boys on their "20/20" album. (Interestingly, they chose to tweak the song a

bit: "Cease to *Resist*" became the new title.) And, I'd be remiss in excluding "Garbage

Dump," a hilarious song about garbage picking, which includes the unforgettable lines,

*We need more than this*

"There's a market basket an' a A&P. I don't care if de box boys are starin' at me. I don't even care who wins de war. I'll be in dem cans behind my favorite store."[7]

The teacher's notes on this paragraph ask the student to give more detailed criteria for her vague, general evaluations of the songs and point to places where she might do this work. In his endnote, the teacher continues this line of response:

You've chosen an interesting subject here, and you might speculate a bit more on the relationship between the ethics of an artist and the value of his/her art. But what this paper needs most are more detailed descriptions of the songs. A quick pair of adjectives doesn't do much to help us imagine them – I'd suggest you discuss fewer songs, so you can say more about them.

This teacher may or may not share some of the pedagogical interests or values of any of the teachers I have discussed, but in his response, he nevertheless performs a kind of practical criticism by explaining how this particular student's text relates to the kind of writing he wants to teach, and he constructs an order out of her text based on his own reading of it. In this essay, the student writes about Manson's music, but not in a way that conveys much of her experience to a reader. In his response, the teacher could have emphasized any number of issues at the expense of others. He could, for example, have focused instead on the tone of the student's paper and raised questions about what kind of writerly "voice" might be most effective for a review of popular music. Instead, though, he focuses on the absence of detailed descriptions of the songs. Though brief, his comments create a kind of order of concerns in which the most important issue for the student to attend to is her description, followed by the larger question of the relationship between ethics and art. The endnote also provides insight into the kind of reading that has led

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[7] The full text of this essay is included as Appendix A.

this teacher to create this particular order out of this student's text; at this moment in this course, he is primarily interested in why the student judges this music in the way that she does, and he wants to see more of the thinking that has caused this student to pronounce these songs "enjoyable" and "smooth."

Thinking of the work that we do when we write comments in terms of running orders through chaos suggests questions that can be useful to teachers in thinking about their own commenting practices. What kind of readers of student writing are we? What do we tend to notice in students' papers, and to what do we tend to call their attention? What elements do we emphasize, and what elements do we tend to overlook? Most importantly, are these the elements we *want* to be foregrounding when we give students our response, or are there other ways of ordering a text that could be more productive for particular students? Is the way we read student texts and the orders that we construct in our comments consistent with our goals for the course?

More broadly, thinking of written response as practical criticism can also help us to imagine the work of writing comments as an act of teaching rather than as the more limited work that some terms used for it suggest, terms such as "editing," "correcting," "marking" or "grading." As a framework, practical criticism can help us to conceptualize written response as a serious pedagogical activity that starts with the work of teachers as active readers. The purpose of gathering the work of these teachers together under one umbrella is not to say that student writing or written response should be one thing or another, but rather to highlight the strong, visible connection between how they conceptualize their work as teachers and how the practical work of student writing relates to that project. For the work Richards does in *Practical Criticism*, student writing was a means to an end that ultimately was not about writing; for Richards, student writing was a window into students' reading and a way of thinking about how

61

to teach them to read better. For Brower, who also used student writing in the context of literature instruction, writing was a means of interacting with individual students in the context of a large lecture course, a way of intervening into the practices of particular readers and writers with whom he might not otherwise have had much contact. Baird and Coles approached student writing quite differently; for them, student writing was a more central activity and was the primary site for work in their courses. In somewhat different ways, these teachers conceptualized student writing as a place where students were asked to engage with a philosophy in which language is an important constituent of experience and to think about how language shapes the way we understand and make meaning of the world around us. Teachers of basic writing brought very different goals to their teaching and read student texts for the causes and patterns of the errors they contained so that they might help students to understand these errors and learn to write in a more academically acceptable way.

In asking what place student writing occupies in our own teaching and how that place determines the way we read, we can bring various assumptions and objectives out into the open so that we may question and refine them and think about how we might further them through our written response. As Brower suggests, written response is one place where we confront the work of individual students, where we can see how they are or are not putting the ideas of a course into practice, and where we have the opportunity to involve ourselves in that practice through our own reading and writing. In the Manson paper above, for example, the teacher might very well give his students a lecture on the general importance of working closely with quoted passages in their writing, but in the moment when he responds to this student, he is teaching by means of his work as a reader of this particular text and by making his case to the student using her own words. This mode of teaching, which takes the student text as the primary venue for

communication, can potentially have a greater effect on the student writer by suggesting what various ideas about reading and writing might look like in terms of her own particular practice. Practical criticism offers a way of understanding the work we do when we respond to student texts that emphasizes the connection between, on one hand, the goals of a particular pedagogy and the thinking that underpins it, and on the other hand, the specific practices of teachers and students. As such, it can help us to think about how we want our written comments to connect with the more theoretical or intangible aspects of teaching and how that response can further our goals as part of a larger pedagogical project, whatever that project may be.

# 3.0    THE PROBLEM OF AUTHORITY IN RESPONDING TO STUDENT TEXTS

In May 1982, *College Composition and Communication* (*CCC*) featured two articles on teachers'

written comments, "Responding to Student Writing" by Nancy Sommers and "Students' Rights

to Their Own Texts" by C.H. Knoblauch and Lil Brannon. These were by no means the first

scholarly articles to address the topic of written comments, but a survey of the scholarship from

the past few decades suggests that these essays mark a critical moment that helped to define the

terms of much of the scholarship that followed. These pieces can be found at the center of a body

of scholarship on written response that urges teachers to restrain their own authority in the

classroom and to resist the impulse to appropriate their students' texts through their written

comments. Ideas introduced in these articles—such as "directive" versus "facilitative"

commenting, or "appropriating" students' texts—have become commonplace in discussions of

response in composition studies. This study explores the ways in which written comments serve

as a means of teaching, and the way we construct the role of the teacher is central both to how

we talk about commenting and how we engage in the practice of writing comments. In this

chapter, I examine the issues of teacher authority and the appropriation of students' texts that

these essays raise, and I explore the question of what kind of authoritative relationships teachers

can and should adopt toward student texts when they read and respond to them.

The argument to use comments to encourage revision rather than simply to correct errors

or justify a grade was an important shift in teachers' thinking about written response and was

part of a larger movement to think of student texts as part of an ongoing process of writing rather than as final, static products to be judged. In the scholarship on response to student texts, both before and after the articles by Sommers and Knoblauch and Brannon, many of the same points are emphasized again and again as scholar-teachers attempt to apply their understanding of the writing process to the practice of written response. Indeed, the admonition to comment on a text as though it were part of an ongoing process of revision rather than a fixed product may be the single most-repeated argument in the commenting literature (see Horvath, McDonald, Winterowd, among others). However, the push to move from what was assumed to be the traditional, product-oriented model to the new, process-oriented approach at times led teachers to construct response as falling into only one of two categories. On one hand was the traditional kind of response, which was understood to be authoritarian, directive, teacher-centered, focused on error, and not particularly interested in what students were thinking or saying. On the other hand was the newer process-oriented response, a kind of response that was intended to be facilitative and student-centered, with a teacher who thought of writing more as a process of making meaning and who was more interested in students' goals and purposes than in her own. These categories are also frequently described in terms of where to locate authority or ownership of the student text—often a dichotomized choice between teacher and student.

In "Responding to Student Writing," Nancy Sommers articulates what she imagines most teachers, including herself, are trying to do when they comment on students' texts. She likens teachers' comments to those of professional editors, comments which "show us when we have communicated our ideas and when not, raising questions from a reader's point of view that may not have occurred to us as writers" (Sommers 148). She also notes that comments help students learn to imagine a reader, and that they motivate revision. Based on her study of comments

written by teachers at two universities, however, Sommers argues that teachers often "appropriate" students' writing:

> [T]eachers' comments can take students' attention away from their own purposes in writing a particular text and focus that attention on the teachers' purpose in commenting. The teacher appropriates the text from the student by confusing the student's purpose in writing the text with her own purpose in commenting. (149)

In order to explain what she means by "appropriation," Sommers describes the way in which she sees teachers commenting on surface errors rather than on the meaning the student was trying to convey, thereby redirecting students' attention from their own rhetorical goals to the teacher's interest in sentence-level issues. She argues that this practice gives students the impression that surface errors are more important than the meaning of the text, that a first draft is relatively fixed in terms of both form and content, and that only superficial corrections are necessary. She also argues against the practice of commenting on both meaning and error with no "scale of concerns" to help students understand which aspects of writing are more important to focus on at a particular stage of the writing process. This position accords with Sommers's earlier essay, "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers," in which she finds that experienced writers are more willing than students to make significant changes to a draft and that they tend to turn their attention to sentence-level revising later in the revision process.

Although Sommers takes the position in "Responding to Student Writing" that teachers should resist the urge to take control of their students' texts, the issue of teacher authority in this piece is complicated. Explaining what she sees as the effects of teachers' appropriation of student texts, Sommers says that

[i]n the beginning of the process there was the writer, her words, and her desire to communicate her ideas. But after the comments of the teacher are imposed on the first or second draft, the student's attention dramatically shifts from "This is what I want to say," to "This is what you the teacher are asking me to do." (Sommers 150)

In this vision of the writing process, Sommers starts out with the writer, alone with her language and ideas, an image which locates authority fairly strongly with the student. When the teacher enters the picture, the focus shifts from student to teacher, and the choice Sommers seems to present is between a writing process that is either wholly student-centered or wholly teacher-centered. This dichotomy is particularly odd when we remember that because the student is writing for a class, there is more to the situation than "her words" and "her desire to communicate her ideas"; there is also the assignment to which she is responding and a reader who will assign a grade, and it is difficult to believe that the shift in focus from student to teacher is ever as clear as Sommers describes it here. Elsewhere in the essay, though, the question of authority does not seem so simple, as in this description of the role Sommers feels teachers *should* play in the student's writing process:

Instead of finding errors or showing students how to patch up parts of their texts, we need to sabotage our students' conviction that the drafts they have written are complete and coherent. Our comments need to offer students revision tasks of a different order of complexity and sophistication from the ones that they themselves identify, by forcing students back into the chaos, back to the point where they are shaping and restructuring their meaning. (154)[8]

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[8] Sommers cites Ann Berthoff's *The Making of Meaning* as the source of this thinking.

The language here is striking; the authoritarian vocabulary of "sabotage" and "forcing" contrasts sharply with Sommers's earlier urging of teachers not to appropriate their students' texts. At the same time that she urges teachers to relinquish control of students' texts, she urges them to assert considerable control over the processes by which these texts are produced. At this point, Sommers seems to be arguing for redirecting teachers' authority rather than completely restraining it.

In "On Students' Rights to Their Own Texts: A Model of Teacher Response," Knoblauch and Brannon offer their own assessment of teacher response, and they foreground issues of authority and textual ownership to a greater degree than Sommers. (The title of Knoblauch and Brannon's piece echoes that of the "Students' Rights to Their Own Language" resolution published by *CCC* in 1974.) They begin their article by considering the way in which readers approach texts written by authorized writers with an implicit faith in the writers' choices: "The sources of writers' authority may be quite various. But whatever the reason for our granting authority, what we are conceding is the author's right to make statements in exactly the way they are made in order to say exactly what the writer wishes to say" (Knoblauch and Brannon 157). The authors then go on to address the way in which, in a classroom situation, teachers often do not grant student writers the same authority they would grant other writers. They acknowledge that because of students' inexperience, teachers often have good reason not to grant this authority. Nevertheless, they argue that

[d]enying students control of what they want to say must surely reduce incentive and also, presumably, the likelihood of improvement. Regardless of what we may know about students' authority, therefore, we lose more than we gain by preempting their control and

68

allowing our own Ideal Texts to dictate choices that properly belong to the writers.

(Knoblauch and Brannon 159)

Knoblauch and Brannon argue that in a classroom situation, "the reader [the teacher] assumes primary control of the choices that writers make, feeling perfectly free to 'correct' those choices any time an apprentice deviates from the teacher-reader's conception of what the developing text 'ought' to look like or 'ought' to be doing" (Knoblauch and Brannon 158). They also introduce the concept of an "Ideal Text" to which teachers compare students' texts as they read, and they suggest that teachers' comments most often serve to illustrate the difference between the ideal text in the teacher's head and the actual student text on the page, a kind of commentary they oppose. They argue that this approach to commenting can lead students to abandon their own purposes in writing in favor of writing to satisfy the teacher, leading to "a diminishing of students' commitment to communicate ideas that they value and even a diminishing of the incentive to write" (159).

Knoblauch and Brannon revisit and extend this theme of competing student/teacher agendas in "Responding to Texts: Facilitating Revision in the Writing Workshop." This piece further develops the idea of an Ideal Text to which teachers compare students' texts when composing their responses. They argue that in traditional composition teaching, an emphasis on writing as a product "encourages a directive style of commentary, the function of which is either simply to label the errors in writing or to define restrictively what a student would (or will) have to do in order to perfect it in the teacher's eyes" (Brannon and Knoblauch 123). They argue that teachers should instead adopt a "facilitative" approach to commenting, in which comments "are designed to preserve the writer's control of the discourse, while also registering uncertainty about what the writer wishes to communicate" (Brannon and Knoblauch 126).

69

Knoblauch and Brannon advocate that teachers diminish their authority in response, arguing that teachers should

> alter their traditional emphasis on a relationship between student texts and their own Ideal Text in favor of the relationship between what the writer meant to say and what the discourse actually manifests of that intention. . . . We must replace our professional but still idiosyncratic models of how writing ought to appear, and put in their place a less authoritarian concern for how student texts make us respond as readers and whether those responses are congruent with the writers' intentions or not (Knoblauch and Brannon 161).

The authors identify teachers' own desires and goals for student texts as "authoritarian," and they explicitly write against the teacher's authority to determine what a text should look like in the context of the class. They go on to describe what they believe to be the ideal role of the teacher as reader/commenter:

> [T]he teacher's proper role is not to tell the student explicitly what to do but rather to serve as a sounding-board enabling the writer to see confusions in the text and encouraging the writer to explore alternatives that he or she may not have considered. The teacher's role is to attract a writer's attention to the relationship between intention and effect, enabling a recognition of discrepancies between them, even suggesting ways to eliminate the discrepancies, but finally leaving decisions about alternative choices to the writer, not the teacher. (Knoblauch and Brannon 162)

Knoblauch and Brannon explicitly identify the purpose of teacher commentary as helping the student writer improve the effectiveness of her communication, narrowing the gap between the effect the student wanted to achieve and the effect her text actually had. The teacher's role in this formulation is not to question or challenge the student's purposes or intentions, and the strongest

role they imagine for the teacher is to "encourag[e] the writer to explore alternatives that he or she may not have considered." The metaphor of a "sounding-board" represents the teacher as a relatively passive figure whose role is to reflect the student's thoughts and utterances in a way that allows the student to see gaps and missteps for herself rather than to engage with the student text in a more assertive way. This philosophy of commenting differs somewhat from Nancy Sommers's argument that teachers should interfere with students' belief that their drafts are complete by "forcing them back into the chaos," which is a stronger construction of the teacher's role. Knoblauch and Brannon urge teachers to locate agency and textual ownership with the student; they emphasize the importance of the "writers' real intentions" as the factor that determines the text's success, and they encourage teachers to leave final decisions about revision up to the student writer. This approach to response constructs the teacher as a facilitator and gives ultimate control over the text to the student writer.

Brannon and Knoblauch also limit the authority of teachers' response by de-emphasizing the importance of written commentary in favor of face-to-face discussions in conferences so that the student has the opportunity to respond to the teacher (163). They suggest that if this kind of discussion is not possible, students should compose their own accompanying commentary to explain to the teacher-reader what they intended. In this model of response, the student text itself remains untouched and response happens apart from it, through discussion or through the creation of other texts, rather than on the text itself.

There is a strong desire in this work to open up alternatives to the "traditional" pedagogies I describe above, which are assumed to have provided no space for the student writer as a thinking, acting, decision-making presence. One can see in this work a valuable desire to carve out a space where students could learn to engage in writing as an ongoing process and as

an act of invention and discovery, and in which students and their ideas mattered. What was then a relatively new emphasis on student-centered pedagogy helped to construct students as deserving greater respect than they were thought to have been granted in classrooms and in scholarship. Based largely on work like this, we often caution new teachers, rightly, not to overpower their students' texts with too many error corrections or with overly directive comments that do not allow students any room to make choices about how to revise.

Considering the kind of pedagogy that these authors were writing against, it seems reasonable to label the desires and goals they critique as "authoritarian"; when read today, though, without that immediate context, Knoblauch and Brannon's articles seem to suggest that we simply replace the teacher's intentions with the student's, a reading which has more problematic consequences for teaching composition. While students' intentions are certainly important, this insistence that the teacher not interfere with those intentions seems limiting and does not allow for the kind of learning that can occur when a teacher's interventions engage and challenge a student writer. This argument also assumes that students' intentions are stable, an idea which has been critiqued by a number of scholars (for example, see Crowley). Students often do not enter writing courses with enough experience to be able to start a piece of writing with clear, fully developed intentions, and to remove this aspect of writing from the scope of the teacher's intervention and engagement seems to limit the possibilities of teaching writing as a process of making meaning, even though this is the kind of composition these scholars advocate. Questioning students' arguments and assumptions, posing other possibilities, directing students' attention to other texts (or back to the text they are responding to), and even disagreeing with students, pushing against their arguments, can all lead in exciting and often surprising directions that students might not have taken on their own. This approach also does not allow for the fact

that teachers often have greater knowledge of and experience with ways of writing and thinking that will help students to be taken seriously in an academic setting.

The move to limit the teacher's authority as a reaction to overly authoritarian pedagogies appears in other scholarship on response as well. In 1984, Brooke Horvath published a "practical synthesis of current views" on response, which opens with the following statement:

> It is well to note at the outset that my concern here is with formative, not summative, evaluation. Determining a paper's grade and writing comments to explain or to justify that grade; deciding how well a paper measures up to one's expectations, fulfills the requirements of an assignment, meets certain criteria of good prose; in short, passing judgment, ranking: this is summative evaluation, which treats a text as a finished product and the student's writing ability as at least momentarily fixed. Formative evaluation, on the other hand, is intent on helping students improve their writing abilities; it approaches a paper "not in terms of what has been done . . . not to judge, but to identify problems and possibilities" [McDonald 1978]. (Horvath 137)

In dividing various kinds of response into two neat categories, summative and formative, Horvath makes clear the kind of commentary she is interested in, but she also contributes to the idea that response can in fact be easily divided into two types. In a later example, "Learning to Read Student Papers from a Feminine Perspective" (1989), Elizabeth Flynn describes her own shift away from reading student texts from a "masculine" approach, in which the responding teacher acts as an evaluator or judge. Instead, she adopted what she calls a "feminine" approach: "My comments on the drafts were meant to be helpful rather than judgmental, and I read the final products as documents in which I had an investment. . . . The important thing was that my relationship with my students changed. I was no longer merely an adversary. I was also on their

side, a friendly advisor" (Flynn 51).[9] Although Flynn's terminology is different, she also divides commentary into two fairly distinct types based on how the teacher chooses to apply her authority.

Even in scholarship that does not work in dichotomies to the same extent, the desire to limit the teacher's authority persists. In "Sideshadowing Teacher Response" (1997), Nancy Welch draws on the work of Mikhail Bakhtin to explore the usefulness of the idea of "sideshadowing" for teaching composition. Sideshadowing, as opposed to foreshadowing or predicting the future, is a way of thinking about texts that resists the idea of one inevitable path for revision and concentrates instead on bringing forward the multiple directions a text could take, and their consequences. Welch focuses on the tendency of teachers to read and respond with an eye towards some specific kind of revision, whether that revision is shaped by the teacher's projections for the paper or what the teacher perceives to be the student's intentions. Although Welch does not discuss her own use of "sideshadowing" as a pedagogical method extensively in this piece, her argument seems to be that we should invite students to write in the margins along with us as a way of challenging the inevitability of the teacher's response: "Through sideshadowing we can refuse to reserve the margins for the teacher's words, speaking loudest, carrying the most weight, alone" (Welch 377). Welch's anxiety about the authority of the teacher's comments leads her to attempt to diffuse that authority by making a space for students' voices in the margins of the texts alongside her own.

In response to this trend toward limiting teachers' authority, critiques have been mounted of the idea of a classroom in which the teacher relinquishes all authority to the students, or a classroom in which all members are assumed to be equal. For example, in "Reading Students,

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[9] For alternative considerations of authority and feminist pedagogy, see for example bell hooks or Frances A. Maher.

Reading Ourselves: Revising the Teacher's Role in the Writing Class" (1991), Lad Tobin raises questions about "teachers who describe themselves as 'facilitators' (as if they have no agenda of their own, or rather, as if their agenda is not important) or as 'just another member of the writing workshop'" (Tobin 338). He argues that in moving from a paradigm defined by product to one defined by process, teachers have mistakenly created a role for themselves in which they deny their own authority and their own inescapably central role in the class. He argues that we need to find a more complicated way of understanding teacher authority:

> I suspect that the notion of teacher-as-non-authority developed as a necessary stage or antithesis to the thesis offered by traditional classroom teachers. The synthesis is to move beyond either/or thinking—either we have authority or they do, either we own the text or they do, either the meaning is in the writer or the reader—towards a more dialectical definition. Rather than dichotomizing the teacher's and the student's roles, we need to see how they are inseparably related. (Tobin 338-39)

Because Sommers, Knoblauch and Brannon do not focus extensively on working out a positive understanding of the teacher's authority as it figures in response but instead emphasize the ways in which authority is often mis-applied, they appear to fall into this dichotomizing trajectory Tobin describes.

In "The Concept of Control in Teacher Response" (1996), Richard Straub attempts to complicate the terms of the discussion, noting that even fourteen years after the publication of Sommers's and Brannon and Knoblauch's essays,

> our professional talk about teacher response is still dominated by the concept of control.

. . . With a remarkable consistency, the recent scholarship of response has urged us to reject styles that take control over student texts and encouraged us instead to adopt styles that allow students to retain greater responsibility over their writing. (Straub 223)

Straub critiques the way in which terms related to authority tend to become dichotomized—"directive or facilitative, authoritative or collaborative, teacher-based or student-based"—and he questions the degree to which any comments can easily be classified as exclusively one type or another (225). He concludes that

[t]he main question of teacher response . . . is not a question of whether or not to impose our views on students and somehow control their writing choices. . . . The critical questions have to do with when and to what extent we as individual teachers exert control over student writing through our comments: How much should I make decisions for the writer? How much should I leave the student to figure out on his own? How much can I productively allow the student to explore his own writing choices? What is the best style for me, given my propensities as a teacher, given what I have to accomplish in this class, given what I think is going to help students learn to write better? What kind of comments will be best for this student, with this paper, at this time? (Straub 247)

Straub's conclusions are based on his observations of the commenting practices of respected composition scholars—Edward White, Jane Peterson, Anne Gere, and Peter Elbow. In his article, Straub reads comments written by these four teachers in response to a single student paper. He sees these teachers employing a variety of styles and approaches effectively, and he concludes that we need a more sophisticated, nuanced, and contextualized approach to thinking about how authority and control figure into the practice of writing good comments.

I agree with Straub, and I would argue that even as we consider the proper limits of teachers' authority, it is important to think about what kind of authority teachers *should* assert when responding to students' texts—what kind of suggestions we should make, what questions we should ask, when we should disagree with what a student has written. Sommers, Knoblauch and Brannon want students to make changes to their texts based on their own perceptions and purposes rather than on what they think the teacher wants, and to a certain degree, I cannot argue with this position—what teacher does not want her students to "take ownership" of their writing processes and texts, producing papers which do the work the writer wants to do, and do it effectively? At the same time, though, this position raises a number of important and difficult questions: To what extent is it possible to think of students' and teachers' purposes as being separate or different in the way that some scholars have implied? What exactly does it mean to "appropriate" a student's text? Is this appropriation necessarily bad or avoidable? Under what circumstances and in what ways might this appropriation be pedagogically permissible or productive? How might more nuanced ways of discussing teacher authority further our thinking about commenting practices?

The issues of authority and appropriation are closely related, and in exploring the questions of how much and in what ways teachers should intervene in students' texts, it is important to consider both. Although both of these terms have been used negatively in composition scholarship, they are actually multifaceted and quite complex. The common understanding of the verb "to appropriate" is to take possession of, often but not always without the right or authorization. It is interesting to note how many of our terms for learning and understanding also refer to a kind of taking possession: "grasp," "apprehend," or even "digest,"—to take into one's body for processing into a different form. William Sherman uses

this last term repeatedly to describe the work that Renaissance thinker John Dee does in reading and annotating his books (Sherman 81). None of these terms is necessarily negative, but for many composition scholars thinking about written response, "appropriation" has had a decidedly negative connotation. In order to understand this negative form of appropriation, we must also understand the issue of authority, because this kind of appropriation is one in which the teacher, an authoritative reader, takes too much control of the text away from the student writer. Like appropriation, though, authority is complex and can take different forms, some positive, some negative, some inevitable, some avoidable.

Paulo Freire has addressed questions of authority extensively, and his thinking exhibits many of the same values as the teachers who worked to make commenting practices more process-oriented and student-centered. He is well known for the pedagogical philosophy he elaborated over a lifetime of teaching and scholarship, a philosophy which often deals quite directly with questions of different kinds of authority and power as they relate to education. Because of these shared values and interest in the problems of teacher authority, Freire's work is useful in thinking through the issues I have outlined thus far. In his celebrated chapter on the "banking concept of education" in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970), Freire critiques a method of education in which the oppressor-teacher teaches by "making deposits," or filling students with knowledge which the teacher owns exclusively. Freire argues that under the banking system of education, "the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students" (Freire 73). This confusion leads the teacher to treat the students as passive, empty vessels to be filled with knowledge which the teacher possesses and they do not. As the metaphor of "banking" suggests,

in this system of education, the knowledge that the teacher "deposits" or "transfers" is treated as stable, complete, and impervious to the questions and contributions of the students.

Freire champions a kind of revolution in which the banking concept of education would be replaced with liberating, problem-posing education, a paradigm shift that would demand the revision of essential concepts like "teacher," "student," and "knowledge," as well as the relationships among them:

> Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-student and the students-of-the-teacher cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. (Freire 79-80)

The "teacher-student contradiction" that Freire refers to is the way in which, in banking education, the teacher is the Subject, the narrating figure who is able to think, act, and make choices. The students in this mode are Objects, passively receiving the knowledge the teacher narrates and making no meaningful contributions; these roles "contradict" the reality that all participants in education are, in fact, cognizing Subjects. Where in banking education knowledge is the teacher's stable, unchanging possession, in liberating or problem-posing education, knowledge belongs to no one but instead intermediates dialogue between teacher and students, a dialogue in which both teacher and students may participate, question, and learn.

What happens to authority in this redefining of education and its participants? Freire insists that

> [i]n this process, arguments based on "authority" are no longer valid; in order to function, authority must be *on the side of* freedom, not *against* it. Here, no one teaches another, nor

is anyone self-taught. People teach each other, mediated by the world, by the cognizable objects which in banking education are "owned" by the teacher. (Freire 80, emphasis in original)

Freire seeks to overturn the teacher/student dichotomy which locates thinking, knowing and acting exclusively with the teacher, but he does not suggest that we replace this dichotomy with an entirely egalitarian concept of education in which authority does not exist. "Arguments based on 'authority'"—arguments that are enforced simply through the power of the teacher's institutional position—are no longer valid, but authority does not disappear. Rather, it is replaced with "authority of knowledge," "authority on the side of freedom."

*Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is full of binary sets of terms: oppressor and oppressed, authority and freedom, banking and problem-posing, teacher and student. Perhaps because of this tendency, the book has given rise to many of what Freire might call misinterpretations of his philosophy as being anti-authority, despite the fact that he often sets up these binaries in order to trouble rather than to reinforce them. When I have taught Freire's chapter on the banking concept of education to undergraduate students, their most pronounced point of critique has consistently been the way in which they perceive Freire to be advocating a classroom without authority. My students have been intrigued by many of Freire's ideas, but they have had considerable difficulty imagining what a problem-posing class would look like, and they often have fairly strenuous objections to the idea of a class in which the teacher does not exert a strong presence. They tend to read Freire as presenting a choice between authoritarian education or authority-free education, and much of our discussions focus on questioning this binary and trying to understand what kind of authority Freire does and does not advocate.

In a review of Freire's later work, Peter Mayo considers several examples of readers who interpret Freire as being against authority, including Paul V. Taylor's critique that Freire's pedagogy is too "overtly directive" to be considered a "dialogue among equals" (Mayo 378). Mayo responds to critiques like Taylor's by arguing that Freire in fact never did advocate *equality* in the classroom (Mayo 378). Freire does not argue that teacher and student should be "equals," but rather that they should be cognizing subjects in dialogue with one another— "together, but not equal" (Freire and Shor 92). In his later work—including *A Pedagogy for Liberation*, which is presented as a dialogue with Ira Shor—Freire discusses authority at length and responds in instructive ways to this tendency to interpret his work as being generally opposed to authority in education. A key distinction for Freire is not that between *authority* and *non-authority*, but between *authority* and *authoritarianism*. In response to Shor's argument that a teacher must decide in each class when and how quickly to relinquish authority, based on the readiness of the students, Freire offers this response:

> [F]or me the question is not for the teacher to have less and less authority. The issue is that the democratic teacher never, never transforms authority into authoritarianism. He or she can never stop being an authority or having authority. Without authority it is very difficult for the liberties of the students to be shaped. Freedom needs authority to be free. It is a paradox but true. . . . The question nevertheless is for authority to know that it has its foundation in the freedom of others, and if the authority denies this freedom and cuts off this relationship, this *founding* relationship with freedom, I think that it is no longer authority but has become *authoritarianism*. (Freire and Shor 91, emphasis in original)

Freire acknowledges the necessity and even the value of the teacher's authority; what he rejects is an authoritarian stance in which the teacher does not recognize the freedom of the students.

"Freedom" in this context might best be understood by looking at Freire's concept of "dialogue," which suggests that freedom for the student means not the right to do whatever she wants, but the right to participate in dialogue with the teacher as a thinking, feeling, acting—but not unlimited—subject. Freire argues that "Dialogue *seals* the relationship between cognitive subjects, the subjects who know, and who try to know" (Freire and Shor 99, emphasis in original). This understanding of true "dialogue" as something that can only occur between "cognitive subjects who know and try to know" is, I think, essential to understanding the limited or bounded freedom that Freire imagines for students in liberatory education. For dialogue to maintain the appropriate tension between authority and freedom, the participants must always acknowledge each others' status as cognitive subjects, even if authority is not evenly distributed. Participating subjects must answer to one another but are nevertheless free, as cognitive subjects, to make choices that shape their own contributions to the dialogue in negotiation with the other participants. When the teacher begins to act in a way that does not recognize the students' status as cognitive subjects, authority becomes authoritarian. Freire explains this tension further:

> Dialogue does not exist in a political vacuum. It is not a 'free space' where you may do what you want. Dialogue takes place inside some kind of program and context. These conditioning factors create tension in achieving goals that we set for dialogic education. To achieve the goals of transformation, dialogue implies responsibility, directiveness, determination, discipline, objectives.
>
> Nevertheless, a dialogical situation implies the *absence* of authoritarianism. Dialogue means a permanent tension in the relation between authority and liberty. But, in this tension, authority continues to be because it has authority vis-à-vis permitting student

freedoms which emerge, which grow and mature precisely because authority and freedom

learn self-discipline. (Freire and Shor 102)

Freedom, then, includes the ability to act, to make choices, within parameters set by the authoritative but *not* authoritarian teacher and by the social space of the classroom. The student also acquires greater freedom—and, most likely, greater authority as well—as she learns, in dialogue, how to exercise that freedom responsibly.

What I admire about Freire, and what I think he shares with Sommers, Knoblauch and Brannon, and many other composition teachers, is his insistence on a pedagogy that recognizes students as people with knowledge, desires, and lives all their own. Although most of the teacher-scholars writing on response in the early 1980s do not refer to Freire in their work on commenting, his arguments align with theirs in some striking ways. Sommers, Knoblauch and Brannon position themselves as working against commenting practices they associate with a more traditional, authoritarian pedagogy not unlike the banking pedagogy that Freire rejects so strongly. There are even moments when the specific language of commentary scholarship intersects with Freire's language in illuminating ways. For example, Freire tells Shor that

when I am against the authoritarian position, I am not trying to fall into . . . a *laissez-faire* position. When I criticize manipulation, I do not want to fall into a false and nonexistent nondirectivity of education. For me, education is always directive, always. The question is to know towards what and with whom it is directive. (Freire and Shor 109)

Freire's use of the term "directive" here is interesting for the way in which it echoes the language originally adopted by Knoblauch and Brannon to describe different kinds of response, "directive" versus "facilitative." "Directive," especially in discussion of written response, is often interpreted as meaning to give orders in a manner that disregards the student's purposes

and desires, which Freire might think of as issuing non-dialogic "communiqués." The term, however, can also be interpreted as Freire does above to mean simply to give "direction" and purpose to an educational encounter. "Facilitative" commentary could also give direction, but the term de-emphasizes the teacher's purposes and is often interpreted to mean a pedagogy that is more permissive, less focused—what Freire might call *laissez-faire*. Peter Mayo, in his review of Freire's later work, notes that

> [o]ne term which is dropped from the Freirean lexicon—it was probably never used by Freire but only by commentators, including yours truly—is that of "facilitator." Freire categorically refutes this term, in an illuminating exchange with Macedo [1995], because of its connotation of *laissez faire* pedagogy. "Teacher" is the term used. (Mayo 378)

The dichotomy of directive-versus-facilitative teaching has had a significant influence on thinking about written response. In Knoblauch and Brannon's original use, the terms stand for two different kinds of pedagogy the authors want to compare, but outside of that original context, the terms become increasingly simplified and come to stand for pedagogies which, too, become oversimplified. "Directive" and "facilitative" also frequently come to be understood as falsely mutually exclusive, as in the common advice to "be facilitative, not directive" when writing comments or engaging in other pedagogical practices. For example, I once attended a panel discussion in my department on the topic of writing assignments. The panel was organized for the benefit of new teaching assistants in the process of developing their own courses for the first time, and the four panelists presented assignments they had written and discussed the context and rationale for those assignments. The assignments were all smart and interesting, and the thinking that had gone into their writing was evident. What struck me about the discussion was the way in which each panelist pointed out *apologetically*, using the language of "directiveness," the ways

in which the assignments exercised authority over students by setting various kinds of tasks and boundaries. There was a clear uneasiness about these admissions, as though the teachers believed in the choices they had made in writing the assignments but were uncertain about how their assertions of authority would be received by the audience or other panelists. Authority took on the ambiguous character of something we all possess and exercise but do not like to acknowledge or discuss, and something we must be prepared to defend if we decide to use it.

What Freire offers here is a way to imagine how a teacher might write good comments that are both directive *and* facilitative by giving a student direction for reading and revision, while at the same time allowing the student a certain freedom to think and make choices, and while being genuinely open to that student's own response. The trick is to find a balance between, on one hand, the teacher's direction-giving scaffolding through interventions such as written comments and assignments, and on the other hand the students' ability to make real, meaningful choices within that scaffolding. Freire thus offers fresh ways of seeing familiar language, and he helps us to see how certain usage and associations may have rendered this language problematic.

Freire also offers teachers an intriguing model for thinking about the exchange that happens on the pages of students' texts through his understanding of "dialogue." Through this concept Freire urges us to understand our teacherly authority as being always in tension with the freedom of the students—but what does it mean to respect students' freedom in the context of responding to their papers? Freire helps us to see that the key to this question lies not only in what the teacher says in the margins, but in the orientation toward the student and the text that is the foundation of those comments. In *Pedagogy of Freedom*, Freire offers this definition of "listening":

Listening is an activity that obviously goes beyond mere hearing. To listen, in the context of our discussion here, is a permanent attitude on the part of the subject who is listening, of being open to the word of the other, to the gesture of the other, to the differences of the other. This does not mean, of course, that listening demands that the listener be "reduced" to the other, the speaker. This would not be listening. It would be self-annihilation. (Freire, quoted in Mayo, 375)

Although Freire is not specifically discussing the act of reading here, this definition has important implications for reading and responding to student texts. I am drawn to "listening" as a metaphor for reading because it suggests a kind of generosity, a way of making space for the text one is reading. For teachers reading and commenting on student texts, the metaphor of listening, particularly as Freire articulates it here, can offer a way of understanding their own authority in relation to the students' "freedom." As teachers read, they listen for "the word of the other, to the gesture of the other, to the differences of the other" so that their responses, while accented by authority, are always in dialogue with the text and shaped by the dynamics of that dialogue. Even when a teacher is giving specific directions, being "directive" and authoritative, she can at the same time be attentive to what the student may want to say and do and to the fact that the student may have different knowledge and experience. In this way, the attitude of listening can act as a balancing force to prevent that authority from sliding into authoritarianism. However, as Freire suggests, to adopt an attitude of listening is not to suppress entirely one's own purposes in favor of those represented in the text. Nor is it to suppress one's own authority, for to do so would be to deny the circumstances of the teacher-student relationship and the legitimate differences between teacher and student, including knowledge, experience, and institutional position.

It is also useful to consider what constitutes the teacher's authority in the Freirean model. As I noted earlier, intellectually valid authority for Freire is not merely professional authority, but rather what he calls "authority of knowledge." Many teachers certainly derive professional authority from their position in the institution, but authority of knowledge—authority based on experience and knowledge of the subject at hand—is (ideally, at least) also part of what makes it appropriate for teachers to make demands of their students and choices about their educational experience. Freire posits that we should think of knowledge as the mediating object of educational dialogue rather than the teacher's sole possession, but he also acknowledges that "the educator has had a certain 'gnosiological' or intellectual experience in picking this object for study before the students meet it in the classroom, and in painting it or presenting it for discussion" (Freire and Shor 100). He goes on to say that "[a]t the moment the teacher begins the dialogue, he or she knows a great deal, first in terms of knowledge and second in terms of the horizon that she or he wants to get to. The starting point is what the teacher knows about the object and where the teacher wants to go with it" (Freire and Shor 103). For Freire, legitimate authority derives from the teacher's greater knowledge and experience, not from the institutional power she holds as a grade-assigning gatekeeper. Hans-Georg Gadamer makes a similar argument in *Truth and Method*:

> [A]uthority cannot actually be bestowed but is earned, and must be earned if someone is to lay claim to it. It rests on acknowledgment and hence on an act of reason itself which, aware of its own limitation, trusts to the better insight of others. Authority in this sense, properly understood, has nothing to do with blind obedience to commands. (Gadamer 281)

Like Freire's idea of "dialogue," a relationship in which all participants think and contribute, authority in Gadamer's formulation lies in a kind of agreement between participants in a situation. Authority is not forced on another against his will but is granted by one person to another. Gadamer goes on to explain that

> [i]ndeed, authority has to do not with obedience but rather with knowledge. . . . Here also its true basis is an act of freedom and reason that grants the authority of a superior fundamentally because he has a wider view of things or is better informed—i.e., once again, because he knows more. . . . This is the essence of the authority claimed by the teacher, the superior, the expert. (Gadamer 281)

Similar to Freire's authority of knowledge, authority for Gadamer is based on the authority figure's greater ability and experience; it does not derive from an ability to make others do what you want, which would be not authority but something more like dictatorship (Gadamer 281). Based on this authority of knowledge, the teacher makes decisions that will provide the guidelines for students' experience—including her choice of goals, materials, and activities—and students usually enter into this relationship of authority by choice because they believe they stand to benefit from the relationship in some way.

In his later essay "The Subject and Power," Michel Foucault elaborates a similar idea that power, which is closely related to authority, exists in a relationship of free choice rather than in one of force. Foucault argues that power does not exist apart from and outside of social situations, but rather that it exists *in* the relationships between people or groups of people. He explains further that "the exercise of power is not simply a relationship between partners, individual or collective; it is a way in which certain actions modify others" (Foucault 219). "A way in which certain actions modify others" is a neutral formulation, one which leaves open the

possibility for power to be exerted to modify others' actions in ways that are either positive *or* negative, or simultaneously both. Foucault contrasts relationships of power with relationships of violence, and in this contrast we begin to see how, in his formulation, power can prohibit actions but at the same time can make other actions possible:

> A relationship of violence acts upon a body or upon things; it forces, it bends, it breaks on the wheel, it destroys, or it closes the door on all possibilities. Its opposite pole can only be passivity, and if it comes up against any resistance it has no other option but to try to minimize it. On the other hand a power relationship can only be articulated on the basis of two elements which are each indispensable if it is really to be a power relationship: that "the other" (the one over whom power is exercised) be thoroughly recognized and maintained to the very end as a person who acts; and that, faced with a relationship of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions may open up. (Foucault 220)

Foucault acknowledges that relations of violence and relations of power often exist simultaneously, seeming at times to be part of the same continuum. Nevertheless, he argues that

> [i]n itself the exercise of power is not violence; nor is it a consent which, implicitly, is renewable. It is a total structure of actions brought to bear upon possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult; in the extreme it constrains or forbids absolutely; it is nevertheless always a way of acting upon an acting subject or acting subjects by virtue of their acting or being capable of action. A set of actions upon other actions. . . . The exercise of power consists in guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome. (Foucault 220-21)

This conception of power as a set of actions that modify other actions offers a way of describing the complex and constantly shifting balance of freedom and constraint that characterizes the negotiations of student-writer and teacher-reader that take place through the mediating object of the student text. As teachers, our actions, such as written comments, shape the field of possibility for our students' actions; students always have available to them a variety of responses, but our actions modify that range. The important thing to be aware of is how much and in what ways our actions should determine that field of possibility, for the possibility of over- or under-determining the field always exists. If I look back at my own teachers' interventions in my writing, Foucault offers me a way to think about what was happening in some of those exchanges. Take, for example, an injunction I once received to double the length of my response to a quotation, an action which quite clearly modified my own responsive actions by limiting the field of possibilities. There was more behind this demand than a desire to increase the length of my draft; as the writer of the paper, I was unable to see what assumptions I was making and what acts of reading I was performing that I was not making visible in my writing. The teacher's response caused me to write more, and in that writing I realized what I had not yet said that needed to be brought into the open. In acting to modify my actions in this way, the teacher asserted a certain degree of control over decisions affecting my text, but at the same time allowed me a considerable range of choice regarding what to say, which enabled me to see possibilities that I had not been able to see for myself. This theory of power offers an alternative way of imagining the student-teacher relationship as existing between acting subjects even if those subjects do not share equal power, as well as a way of imagining teachers' interventions as being potentially productive.

There are interesting similarities between Foucault and Freire on the issues of authority and power—not exactly parallels, but resonances nonetheless. I do not want to argue that Foucault's relationship of violence is equal to Freire's concept of authoritarianism, or that Foucault's relationship of power is equal to Freire's authority of knowledge, for to do so would be to oversimplify all of these concepts; Freire's work is grounded more specifically in the context of education, where Foucault considers the workings of power on a much broader scale. Nevertheless, there are similarities in how these two thinkers articulate their ideas. Looking back at Foucault's explanation of relationships of power and violence, we see that a relationship of violence allows for little or no choice. By contrast, a relationship of power can only exist under the condition that a range of actions remain possible. Foucault also argues that

> [w]hen one defines the exercise of power as a mode of action upon the actions of others, when one characterizes these actions by the government of men by other men—in the broadest sense of the term—one includes an important element: freedom. Power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free. By this we mean individual or collective subjects who are faced with a field of possibilities in which several ways of behaving, several reactions and diverse comportments may be realized. (Foucault 221)

This insistence that the one over whom power is exercised must always be understood as a "person who acts" resonates with Freire's insistence that one's authority depends on the freedom of others and that if this freedom ceases to exist, then authority has become authoritarianism. In terms of responding to students, a relationship of power or authority would exist in comments that suggest direction to a student, perhaps quite strongly, but that still allow the student a range of meaningful choices; comments that allow the student no choice would create a relationship of

violence or authoritarianism. In describing authority of knowledge and relationships of power, Freire and Foucault both insist on the importance of the tension between authority/power and freedom and on the presence of both in order for the relationship to exist as something other than one of violence or authoritarianism. For both figures, this tension seems to lie at the foundation of the productive potential of unequal relationships.

Many of the scholars who consider the exercise of authority in relation to student texts worry about the potential of that authority to limit the student writer's options (such as Nancy Welch's "Sideshadowing Teacher Response,"), and that concern is well founded. However, as Freire and Foucault both suggest, there are ways in which authority and power can open up possibilities as well as shutting them down. While the teacher's interventions certainly can limit a student's options for revision, they can also create or make visible alternatives that the student may not have the experience to be able to imagine on his own. Foucault argues elsewhere that power is productive, that it "doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no . . . it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse" (*Power/Knowledge* 119). As teachers, it is important that we consider the destructive potential of our interventions, the ways in which we might cut off legitimate options for our students in a particular situation or over-determine their fields of possibility. I would argue, however, that it is also important to keep in mind the productive potential of those interventions and the ways in which we can enable other possibilities for our students' thinking and writing, especially possibilities that they might not be able to access on their own. The arguments I examine here suggest that the productive potential of the pedagogical encounter lies not in approaches which are either teacher-centered or student-centered, but in the dialectical tension that can exist between participants who may not have equal authority but who nevertheless bring their own knowledge, experience and goals to

the relationship. Based on this thinking, the teacher's task in commenting should not be either to seize or to relinquish control of the process, but rather to advance and shape the dialogue between teacher and student, dialogue which is centered around the student's text.

How does appropriation, the act of which "authoritarian" teachers are often accused, figure into this dialogue? As I discuss above, composition teachers have been most concerned with forms of appropriation that dispossess or take ownership of the text away from the writer in some way. This kind of appropriation is what Joy Reid refers to when she talks about "appropriation" as the great sin of composition studies in the 1980s:

> During the 1980s, appropriation became a buzzword for everything that was wrong with the old approaches to teaching writing; I could hardly go to a conference presentation without hearing about the evils of commenting (i.e., intruding on) student papers; about the "tyranny" of teachers' responses; and about the student confusion that surrounded teacher response. These presentations ended by warning teachers not to get in their students' way, not to interfere with their writing, not to impose control or authority over their students' writing. (Reid 275-76)

But while appropriation certainly can at times take the form of the dispossession that many composition teachers have cautioned against, there is also an inevitable kind of appropriation that happens in the course of reading and interpreting any text. Many theorists—including Hans-Georg Gadamer and Louise Rosenblatt—have asserted in different ways that the act of reading involves the work of reconstructing the text, and one could argue that such acts of reconstruction constitute a kind of appropriation. Gadamer, for example, points out the way in which, in reading, "one partner in the hermeneutical conversation, the text, speaks only through the other partner, the interpreter. Only through him are the written marks changed back into meaning"

(Gadamer 389). Similarly, Rosenblatt says that "a text, once it leaves the author's hands, is simply paper and ink until a reader evokes from it a literary work" (Rosenblatt ix). Such theories of reading help us to understand the active role that readers play in interpretation. They also help us to understand the great responsibility that is part of that role, which suggests the question of appropriation: Do readers, including teachers, necessarily appropriate the texts they interpret? What makes this appropriation unavoidable, productive, or desirable?

Materialist scholars of print culture approach the subject of reading by studying actual readers in their historical contexts, and this approach gives them a different understanding of appropriation. From this perspective, appropriation is also neither good nor bad but inevitable, and it is understood in terms of the concrete practices of actual people. Roger Chartier studies reading as an action that is engaged in by particular readers in particular material and social situations, and his understanding of appropriation is grounded in this approach:

> [W]e can reformulate the notion of appropriation and place it at the centre of a cultural historical approach that focuses on differentiated practices and contrasted uses. . . . In my own perspective, appropriation really concerns a social history of the various interpretations, brought back to their fundamental determinants (which are social, institutional and cultural), and lodged in the specific practices that produce them. (Chartier 13)

In thinking about appropriation, Chartier is concerned with how and why actual readers have interpreted and used texts. These concerns certainly can involve struggle for control of a text, but that struggle is not his primary understanding of textual appropriation. Chartier distinguishes his understanding of appropriation from that of Foucault, who he says "held 'the social appropriation of discourse' to be one of the primary procedures for gaining control of discourse, subjecting it,

and putting it beyond the reach of those who through limited competence or inferior position were denied access to it" (Chartier 13). For Chartier, "appropriation" means something more along the lines of adapting a text for one's own uses or purposes through interpretation. This adaptation does not necessarily carry a negative connotation rather a more neutral one. William Sherman, who has studied the Renaissance polymath John Dee's library and marginalia extensively, argues that the acts of reading texts and writing in them involve active appropriation on the reader's part but that these acts are not necessarily (although they can be) meant to somehow wrest the text away from the author:

> Reading, I have suggested, is adversarial: the text is the site of an active and biased appropriation of the author's material. This idea is conveyed in the very name that is formally given to volumes whose margins contain traces of active reading—*adversaria*. This term need not set reader and writer against each other in enmity: indeed, the Humanists often referred to texts as their friends—even as the disembodied voices of absent friends. But adversaria certainly mark an engagement, and sometimes a struggle; the marginal notes are (as the term's literal translation suggests) "opposite" the text, and sometimes in opposition to it. (Sherman 65-66)

In this formulation, reading involves engagement and sometimes struggle, but it does not inherently involve dispossessing the author or other readers of authority over a text. Dispossession or control certainly can at times be the reader or commentator's intent, but even when this is the case, the writer or other readers of the text may not share that experience. Whenever they read, people adapt texts to their own understandings and purposes. We can debate the validity of those uses and interpretations, but the act of appropriation itself is not inherently negative. Reading may in many ways be a power struggle, but it is not necessarily a

zero-sum game with clear winners and losers, and there are different kinds of appropriation that can happen depending on the particular set of circumstances that attend an event of reading.

Teachers read students' texts in the context of college courses, in which they are expected to offer instruction and ultimately to give grades, and that situation will shape their interpretations of and responses to those texts. Keeping in mind the context of teachers' reading helps us to see how difficult it is to think of appropriation as simply an authoritative reader taking control away from a disempowered writer. In most cases, students writing in classes are responding to an assignment with specific instructions or parameters, and their choices will be limited by the particular teacher, the nature of the course (e.g., "creative" versus "expository" writing), the discipline, and the institution. Teachers read what students write and respond by writing comments; students may interpret these comments in ways that the teacher did not intend and could not have predicted, and the revised text that results may not clearly "belong" to either the teacher or the student. In such a setting, it is difficult to speak of students having exclusive "ownership" of these texts, texts whose shape is in many ways determined by factors outside of the students' control. The teacher may in some sense "appropriate" the student's text by setting the terms of writing and revising and by interpreting that writing through the lens of her own experience and the goals she has set for the course, but this appropriation is part of the work of teaching, and the teacher's intervention is one way in which the experience of writing and revising can expand the student's horizon. At its best, this kind of appropriation can allow the teacher to offer the student writer a knowledgeable, experienced interpretation to respond to in re-reading and re-thinking the text.

Mina Shaughnessy's work provides an example of the complexities of teacherly appropriation. Shaughnessy helped to establish the field of basic writing by demonstrating how

student texts that many teachers thought to be "alien" and uninterpretable could be read in terms teachers could understand, a process that also changed the way teachers understood the students themselves. She did this by showing how students' errors, which many had previously thought to be arbitrary and beyond readers' understanding, were based on students' inexpert grasp of aspects of writing—such as grammar, usage, sentence structure, and academic conventions—that were quite familiar to most teachers of composition. This reading of student texts from her own perspective as a teacher of writing—a way of reading that the students themselves could not at the time have performed—is a potentially positive form of appropriation in that it allowed Shaughnessy to develop methods for teaching these students, who learned in the process to write in ways that would give them greater access to the academy.

Did Shaughnessy in this process also "appropriate" students' texts in the sense of dispossession? Some might say that she did. Though Min-zhan Lu does not use the term "appropriation," she argues that Shaughnessy, in teaching her students to master the conventions of academic discourse, does not pay adequate attention to the changes in thinking and point of view that accompany changes in the way one uses language and thereby blunts the political impact of her students' texts. Joy Reid, a teacher of students who have learned English as a second language, critiques the charge that teachers "appropriate" their students' texts and discourses when they attempt to bring that writing nearer to what we would recognize as our own academic discourse. Often, as in the ESL courses that Reid describes, this process is a matter of giving students access to ways of using language that will allow them to be heard by other members of the academy. This process can also give students access not only to ways of using language but to powerful ways of thinking as well. This kind of appropriation, in which students are asked to adapt their ways of thinking and writing to the conventions and expectations of the

97

academic institution, happens at all levels of teaching; it does not only apply to students often assumed to have less power, such as freshman, ESL students, or basic writing students, but to advanced graduate students as well. Though in some ways their positions are oppositional, I would argue that Lu and Reid are both right in the sense that learning often entails both losses and gains, and their conflicting positions reveal the way in which language use, and learning in general, are complicated endeavors. Students, we assume, choose to participate in higher education because they expect to be changed by it in ways that will be to their advantage, and this is often the case, but they may also be changed in ways that they could not have imagined and may not necessarily have wanted. Richard Rodriguez has written in *Hunger of Memory* about the loss experienced by students who, in mastering academic discourses, become distanced from their other ways of using language and the social spaces associated with them, and this experience may be another disadvantage of being appropriated by one discourse at the expense of another. Appropriation may have the potential to be productive, but it is never free of risk.

Thus far, my discussion of teacher's authority has been largely theoretical, but it is important to recognize that authority in the classroom exists in the particular relationships that teachers develop with their students and that it will have a different character depending on the specific situation. While theory is useful in helping us to think about the both the potential and the risks of authority, an examination of teachers' classroom practices—including the kinds of comments that they write to their students—can bring insights to a consideration of authority that theory alone cannot provide. In the two classroom examples I consider below, two experienced teachers manage the authority inherent in their positions quite differently. Both of these teachers, I would argue, maintain a posture toward their students of authority rather than authoritarianism, but they

98

have different goals for their students and they carry their authority in different ways. The first example I consider is from a first-year composition course based on the staff syllabus used by all new graduate student instructors (although this particular teacher is a professor with many years of experience who uses the staff syllabus by choice). This teacher told me in an interview that he does not see his own authority as something he can retain or give up as he chooses but rather as an inherent part of his role in the classroom. He does, however, attempt to minimize the effect of that authority on his students in order to encourage them to take responsibility for choices related to their own writing. His decision to use the staff syllabus, which is written by another teacher unknown to the students rather than by this teacher himself, is part of this effort to diffuse his own authority. Like Nancy Welch, this teacher invites students to participate in the extra-textual writing about their texts—writing which includes marginal commentary, peer responses, and revision plans—and he asks students to begin the process of written response themselves rather than waiting for his comments. On the day that an essay is due, the teacher gives students time in class to read over their work and make corrections or notes for revision before handing in their drafts. In this way, when the teacher writes his response, his comments do not appear alone, although they still carry the authority of their writer. This approach also places students in the position of making the first statement in the conversation about the text. The teacher then asks students to write a revision plan in which they consider specific topics he has given them, such as their use of others' ideas and the position they have established in their texts. Through this strategy, the teacher uses his authority to guide the students' thinking about revision but allows students to articulate for themselves what changes they might want to make. He also has each student read and respond to another's paper, using questions on a worksheet which he hands out. When the teacher reads and comments on the students' essays, he also reads and responds to

99

their revision plans and to the peer responses so that a kind of conversation among several readers develops on the page. These strategies, which ask students to think about revision before they learn the teacher's response, are intended to help students think of themselves as bearing the responsibility for decisions about how to revise. They also position students as critical readers of their own texts, which is a key element of teaching students to take responsibility for what they have written. One of the most striking qualities of the responsive texts in this course is the way in which they are focused around the student writer rather than the teacher. Rather than writing a lengthy endnote, as many teachers do, this teacher primarily writes his responses in the margins of the students' drafts and revision plans, so that he is responding to the student's assessment of the draft rather than writing his own assessment from scratch on a separate sheet of paper. Because of this approach, the dominant text at the center of the page is usually written by the student, not the teacher. The teacher and his comments still convey significant authority because of his knowledge and position, but his approach gives students the opportunity to articulate their own ideas for comparison, which theoretically puts them in a better position to read the teacher's comments critically rather than passively accepting what the teacher has to say.

For the first long essay of this course, students read James Baldwin's "Notes of a Native Son" and were asked to write their own "Notes of a Native Son/Daughter." The first-year student whose paper I consider here wrote about her twin brother, from whom she was separated for the first time because they had chosen to attend different colleges.[10] The student begins her 5-page essay with several paragraphs introducing her relationship with her brother, Mark. About one-third of the way through the essay, she shifts to a discussion of her older sister's relationship with her own best friend, a relationship the writer greatly admires and envies. A few pages later, the

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[10] For the full text of this essay with accompanying materials, see Appendix B.

writer switches back to her brother Mark and concludes the essay by describing the painful but also exciting choice of deciding to attend different colleges. In his response, the teacher focuses on the student's text and uses what she has done to make recommendations for revision rather than encouraging her to pursue other directions. At the end of her introductory paragraph, the student writes that having a twin brother "has given me a false sense of security because before now I never had to enter anything alone." The teacher has circled the phrase "a false sense" and drawn a line connecting it to this marginal note: "Here is a key term for exploring the complexities of your relationship with Mark—why is the sense of security now perceived as 'false'? Look at both sides of it." The teacher returns to this reference to "false security" in his brief endnote, which is handwritten at the end of the student's paper:

> The story of your relationship with your brother is the central element here. You can use this relationship as a framework to connect up with the story about Joyce and her friend, as well as the transition to college. The reference early on to a "false" sense of security is quite powerful in getting at the strength of your connection to Mark, the difficulty of making a transition now, and the excitement of getting a new life of your own.

In both the marginal note and the endnote, the teacher uses features of the student's own text—the central theme of her relationship with her brother and the idea of a false sense of security—to suggest a direction for revision. His notes in response to the student's revision plan reinforce this message. In this plan, the student suggests three areas she would like to pursue, and the teacher responds briefly to each one:

1) I want to focus on the ending and make sure my <u>main point</u> is getting across.

The special bond I have w/ Mark and how it is changing [The student uses an

*Yes, exactly!*
*Focus on this!*

arrow to indicate that this last phrase is her "main point."]

2) I also would like to find some outside text to enhance by personal stories.

3) On page 3 I want to fix the story about my freshman year at high school.

*Connect up with your*
*story about Mark*

In this revision plan and response, the teacher's comments continue to work by interacting with what the student herself has written rather than by introducing a new direction himself. The final commentary that the teacher offers in response to this paper appears in the margins of the peer response written by another student in the class. The first question of the peer review worksheet is "What do you think is the strongest feature of the essay, the one thing that the writer should be careful not to lose when s/he revises the essay?" In response, the peer reader writes, "The relationship she has w/ her brother. It's more about going to college and gaining new experiences rather than just the topic of a "best friend." The teacher has circled the first sentence fragment, "The relationship she has w/ her brother," and has written "Yes!" in the margin. This brief note reinforces the teacher's own response and indicates to the peer reviewer that she has read well. In this example, the teacher's response is strongly student-centered, but it is also authoritative. He uses his authority to point clearly toward an avenue for revision—using the student's relationship with her brother as the central organizing element. However, he deflects attention from that authority by framing his comments in terms of features of the student's own text rather than by

referring to an abstract principle of writing, such as "Good essays need to be organized around a central theme." He also attempts to make his authority less visible by orchestrating the extra-textual writing so that his voice appears on the page among those of the student writer and her peer reader rather than alone. One might argue that he appropriates the student's text in a way when he interprets it from his own perspective, recognizing that it could benefit from stronger organization. However, he takes great pains to include the student in the commentary on her essay, so that even though can certainly influence the student's subsequent choices, he never appears to have taken control of the text and its revision.

The teacher in the next example I consider is much more overtly authoritative. This "

sophomore-level course, taken primarily by education majors, focused on the critical reading of children's literature. In this paper, the student argues that Cinderella may not be as morally superior to her stepsisters as many readers might assume. Even before reading the essay and the teacher's response, the look of these pages is strikingly different from those of the previous student (see Appendix C). The comments intervene in the student's text to a much greater degree, and the teacher does a significant amount of editing, which the previous teacher does not do at all. I discuss the kind of teaching that can happen through this editing further in Chapter 4, but for the purposes of the present discussion, I want to point out the way in which this response, in which the teacher rewrites many of the student's sentences, asserts a much stronger presence in the student's text than that of the previous teacher. A closer look shows that this teacher provides a much more detailed, sentence-level critique of this student's text. For example, in the following single sentence, he makes a number of comments and corrections:

*Which one?* " "

The modern retelling of Cinderella shows the stepsisters as ugly on the outside as well as

within, but if we look back to the Grimm Brothers' version, we see that this was not an
<sup>LC</sup>

issue when considering where to place your sympathy in the story.
<sup>AVOID</sup>

*Vague and wdy*

This commentary does indeed assert a degree of control over the student's text, urging her to

revise her sentence in quite specific ways. The comments, though, are directed at *how* the student

has written the sentence rather than at what she has said, and this is true of much of this teacher's

editing. In contrast, where the teacher praises particular sentences, he praises their meaning, as

he does by writing "good point" in the margin beside the student's observation that "Cinderella's

assertiveness only appears when she is alone and when she is in close vicinity to the hazel tree"

(3). The endnote is formatted as a semi-formal letter and is typed on a separate sheet of paper

with the English department heading photocopied at the top, underscoring the teacher's

institutional position. This endnote, reproduced here in full, continues the approach of focusing

on how the student has written her essay rather than on what she has said:

This paper on jealousy in the Grimms's "Cinderella" makes a number of very

convincing points—such as when you remark that Cinderella's "assertiveness only

appears when she is alone and when she is in close vicinity to the hazel tree" (3).

However, the paper needs to proceed by means of close reading, which is the heart of any

good essay in an English literature class such as [this one]. You must prove each claim in

your essay by examining in detail passages from the text. Each of these examinations

should offer the components of a **close reading**, as follows: **quotations** from the text in

support of your claim; and an **analysis** of each quotation that demonstrates the validity of

your claim. Your analyses of the quotations should demonstrate the validity of your claim

by scrutinizing in detail the **language** of the text—the individual words, images,

metaphors, etc. that the text uses and how they operate in the quotations. There is far too

much vague generalization in the paper and not enough close reading of texts.

The paper is also undermined by problems involving paper format,

documentation, and prose style. You need to review Joseph Gibaldi's *MLA Handbook*

before turning in each submission to make certain that it follows MLA paper format and

documentation practices exactly. Your writing in the paper is often solid, though wordy

at the beginning and cluttered with the occasional awkwardness thereafter; you should

also attend closely to all of my comments on the paper so as to produce really high-

quality prose in your future writings.

Finally, there are far too many simple errors in order for this paper to be an

acceptable submission: you need to proofread your work much more carefully in future

[sic] (review course requirements and policies).

The teacher begins the endnote by praising the content of the student's essay but then moves

quickly into an outline of his expectations regarding the methods of critical reading and

writing—supporting claims with close reading of passages from the text. This lesson is delivered

in very authoritative manner with little room for disagreement, and much of it is taken from the

syllabus, itself an authoritative document that outlines the goals, expectations and requirements

of the course. The endnote also calls attention to the requirement that students follow MLA

formatting correctly and that they proofread carefully. Where the previous teacher's comments

might be seen as student-centered, this teacher's are what I would call discipline-centered; he

frames much of his response not in terms of the student's text but rather in terms of the standards of upper-division literature courses and of MLA style.

While this response is quite authoritative, though, I would argue that it is not authoritarian. The teacher's negative comments all respond to problems with close reading, style, correctness, and documentation—never to the student's actual argument. In a sense, the teacher does appropriate or take control of the student's text by dictating specific sentence-level revisions and insisting on greater close reading. However, these issues are governed largely by disciplinary convention rather than by this teacher's own preferences, and "ownership" of them does not really lie with the teacher or the student. The specific aspects of the essay that are the object of the teacher's more directive comments would not be negotiable in most English literature courses (although the degree to which teachers emphasize their importance certainly varies). The teacher indicates to the student that his requirements for successful writing are not particular to him but rather are typical of this kind of course when he tells the student that close reading is "the heart of any good essay in an English literature class." His response to the student's writing may be authoritative, but the student will need to improve her control of these elements if she is to write successfully in this type of course. In contrast, the positive comments in both the margins and the endnote respond to points the student has made about the text. In his response to the content of the student's essay, the teacher is much more positive and encouraging, so that while his response to her writing is quite authoritative, his response to her thinking is much less so, and control of *what* to say remains, to a greater degree, with the student. While the teacher does devote a much greater percentage of his written response to this draft to matters of correctness and the methods of critical writing, he explained in an interview that in his

106

comments on this first essay of the course, he wanted to convey to students that he expected them to pay considerable attention to these issues throughout the semester.

The differences in the way these two teachers assert their authority are certainly related to differences in their personalities, but they are also related to differences in their goals for these courses.[11] The first example is taken from a first-year composition course, and one of this teacher's stated pedagogical goals was to help students develop their ability to direct their own revision process. He articulates this goal for students in his course description:

> One of my primary goals in this course is to get you as quickly as possible to a point where you can do your own revision planning for your writing. In other words, I want you to become less and less dependent on me as a reader and more and more confident in your own skills.

The style of this teacher's response supports that goal in several ways. It helps the student to see where her own ideas for revision, which she wrote down before the teacher ever saw the essay, overlap with those of the teacher, and it places the student in a position to think somewhat independently from the teacher about the decisions involved in revising her text. The response also supports the goal of helping students to take control of their choices by making students' voices a central part of the commenting process. In the second example, taken from an upper-level literature course, the goals the teacher articulates in the syllabus do not include improving students' confidence and ability to direct their own writing processes. Instead, the teacher says that he aims to improve students' reading of literary and critical texts and their writing in the

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[11] The effect of these teachers' authority on their students is the result of many factors, including both their written response and their performance in the actual classroom. In the case of the second teacher especially, it is likely that the authoritative quality of his comments is offset somewhat by his manner, which, while confident and authoritative, is also extremely personable. He also focuses to a much greater degree in class discussions on students' ideas and interpretations of the literary texts than he does in the written response I consider here. The effect of teachers' classroom performance on students' interpretation of written comments is beyond the scope of this study but would be a productive area for further inquiry.

context of a course in literary criticism. He states in the course description that "The emphasis throughout the semester will be on close reading of the critical as well as the fictional works, and we will consider the importance of critical debate and revision to the literary and cultural analysis of works for young people." For this teacher, writing successfully in this environment involves a certain degree of correctness and polish; the syllabus states that all work "must adhere to the *MLA Handbook* in all matters of paper format, quotation, citation, documentation, and style" and must "be free of spelling and typographical errors, including misquotations of other texts." To these ends, he comments directively on students' writing at the sentence level. Because most upper-level English courses require close reading, careful proofreading, and correct MLA documentation to some degree, a more indirect approach to these issues runs the risk of misleading students about the expectations of the discipline.

In his studies of written response, Richard Straub argues that "The main question of teacher response . . . is not a question of whether or not to impose our views on students and somehow control their writing choices. . . . The critical questions have to do with when and to what extent we as individual teachers exert control over student writing through our comments (Straub 247). These two papers help us to understand that the questions of when, how, and how much to exert control do not have simple, single answers. Rather, the answers depend on the goals of the teacher and the course, and each way of responding is a choice with advantages and disadvantages. By exerting less control over the student's writing in his response, the first teacher encourages the student to take more responsibility, but he may not have as great an influence on the development of the draft through the revision process. In taking greater control of particular aspects of the student's text, the second teacher is able to guide the student toward the kind of writing that he wants to see in a more direct and efficient manner, but he does not

engage the student extensively in an exchange about the aspect of her writing over which he asserts less control, the substance of her essay—at least not at this point in the course or in this particular draft. Neither of these teachers attempts to divest himself of authority, and each uses it to show the student writer what he thinks will be a productive approach to revision. The appropriate or inappropriate use of authority, then, is not necessarily determined by the teacher's decision to comment on certain aspects of a paper, or by a teacher's decision to communicate directly to a student that some choices are better than others. Instead, it lies in the relationship that teachers establish with students and their texts and in how they read and respond to those texts in a larger context of pedagogical goals and practices.

# 4.0    FIXITY, FLUIDITY, AND THE EFFECTS OF MARGINAL WRITING

Comments ask readers to read differently. Comments, the written record of another's reading, can help a subsequent reader see a text in a more critical, less accepting way and can encourage that reader to imagine the text as being other than what it is. In this chapter, I situate teachers' written response within a wider context of commentary, considering such examples as William Blake's annotations in his books, Jewish commentaries, and early modern Biblical glosses. Although these texts seem (and in many ways *are*) quite different from student texts, considering them together makes visible the simple but powerful fact that readers create new meaning when they read. Through written comments, that new meaning can affect the future life of a text. Part of the value of written response, the product of teachers' reading, lies in its potential to help students to read their texts differently, to think of those texts as temporarily fluid, and to imagine ways in which those texts might change and grow.

As Nancy Sommers and many other teachers have noted, inexperienced student writers often think of their first drafts as finished or complete, and they often benefit from interventions that position them to see their texts differently. In "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers," Sommers compares the revising practices of a group of University of Oklahoma undergraduates to those of a group of journalists, editors and academics. Sommers's primary findings are that experienced writers tend to see their writing process as recursive rather than linear and that, in terms of ideas and global structure, students tend to view

their early drafts as completed or "fixed," where experienced writers are more likely to see these aspects of their texts as being more fluid and subject to dramatic change through the revision process. Sommers describes the students' concern with individual words in their writing and their tendency to think of revision as the need to replace individual words with better ones. She says that "What is revealed in the students' use of the thesaurus is a governing attitude toward their writing: that the meaning to be communicated is already there, already finished, already produced, ready to be communicated, and all that is necessary is a better word 'rightly worded'" (Sommers 381-82). In contrast, the experienced writers in Sommers's study tend to see revision as a process that involves more substantial changes as the writer continues to search for the form and substance of an argument:

> The writers ask: what does my essay as a *whole* need for form, balance, rhythm, or communication. Details are added, dropped, substituted, or reordered according to their sense of what the essay needs for emphasis and proportion. This sense, however, is constantly in flux as ideas are developed and modified; it is constantly "re-viewed" in relation to the parts. As their ideas change, revision becomes an attempt to make their writing consonant with that changing vision. (Sommers 386)

These two views of revision—one which emphasizes stasis and fixity, the other which emphasizes change and flux—imply two different ways of reading a text. The students read the text as being essentially complete, needing only small, local adjustments. The experienced writers, in contrast, read the text as being more fluid and open to change. In the previous chapter I critique Sommers's "Responding to Student Writing" for what I see as its failure to allow teachers the authority to assert a strong enough presence through their written response, but Sommers does argue in that piece that teachers' comments should "provide an inherent reason

for students to revise" and to perform the kind of revision that she attributes to more experienced writers (Sommers, "Responding," 156). Taken together, these two pieces suggest an approach in which teachers' comments have the potential to push students to take a more fluid view of their own texts and to show them what kinds of changes might be possible.

As the contrast between experienced and inexperienced writers suggests, though, this more fluid way of reading a text is not easy, and it is an ability that the more experienced writers have developed over time. In order to think of a text as being subject to change, the reader needs to be able to question the words on the page and imagine alternatives rather than accepting those words as inevitable. This way of reading requires that the reader entertain multiple possibilities at once, possibilities which can be suggested by the comments written in the margins. This way of reading is more difficult and disrupted than an approach in which the reader simply accepts what is written and moves on, or in which the reader need only trace a single line of thought. In a recent review of newly published annotated versions of the U.S. Constitution, Adam Liptak makes these observations: "The annotation is a curious genre. The reading experience is by nature unpleasant, with the eye forced to shuttle back and forth between text and commentary. The document under scrutiny is constantly interrupted, its unities dismembered" (Liptak, "More Perfect"). Commentary can interfere with readers by making them more conscious of the *work* of reading, discouraging the reader from accepting the words on the page without question or from becoming "lost" in the text and the reading experience. This way of reading, though difficult, can heighten the reader's awareness of the text, and Liptak goes on to acknowledge that despite the unpleasantness, "there is a great deal to be said for reading every word of the Constitution, and being made to pause and consider each one."

Mariolina Salvatori has written extensively on the subject of difficulty, particularly the interpretive difficulties that students often face. She describes the work she does with students, asking them to identify the difficulties they experience in reading various literary texts and to think in a careful and extended way about the nature of those difficulties and the strategies they might use to engage with them. Salvatori also writes that the difficulties her students point to "consistently identify actual and venerable interpretive cruxes" (Salvatori, "Toward a Hermeneutics of Difficulty," 82). In other words, the difficulties that a text presents for readers are frequently related to features that are important to the meaning of that text. Although Salvatori is writing primarily about the difficulties of reading literary texts, this thinking applies to the difficulties presented by teacher's comments as well. Written comments can pose a number of challenges for students (or any readers, for that matter), but those difficulties are part of the very nature of comments, and the work of engaging with those difficulties can lead to a deeper understanding of what the comments have to offer for the student and can help the student to develop the ability to read her own text with an eye toward possible change.[12]

A student paper with comments can help us think about how comments can encourage different ways of reading and the work that they present for their student readers in more specific terms. This midterm essay, a first draft, was written about Jean Rhys's novel *Wide Sargasso Sea* for a seminar on Caribbean literature for senior English majors. In her marginal comments and especially in her endnote, the teacher does substantial work to show the student what kind of changes she would like to see in revision. For example, on page 3, the student discusses a

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[12] For more on difficulty, see Salvatori, "Toward a Hermeneutics of Difficulty" and Salvatori and Donahue, *The Elements (and Pleasures) of Difficulty.*

moment in the text in which the main character Antoinette, a white Creole living in Jamaica, describes her own face as being mirrored by that of the black girl Tia:[13]

> Goaded by the white Creole obsession with power and a vengeance stemming from years of mistreatment, the black Creoles despise Antoinette and her family and take every opportunity to wring as much misery and fear out of them as possible. Tia, a black girl from her childhood whom she wished to befriend, clarifies their relationship by proclaiming, "Old time white people nothing but white nigger now, and black nigger better than white nigger" (Rhys 14). The image of Antoinette's bloody face mirroring that of Tia's tear-streaked one after the latter threw a rock is very apt (Rhys 27); it underscores the fact that there is no bond of blood or anything else between the two.

In the margin next to this passage, the teacher has written

> yes—good, develop this—but the "mirroring" implies some likeness—that cannot, however, be turned into friendship.

This comment praises the student's use of a specific example from the novel but encourages him to make more out of it by discussing it at greater length. The teacher also proposes a somewhat different interpretation of the image of the two girls' faces, one streaked with tears and the other with blood. Where the student reads this image as a sign that these two have nothing in common, the teacher reads it as indicating that there are similarities between the two but that they are not enough to overcome the differences. In order to do the work of expanding his discussion of this passage, the student will need to alter both his text and his reading by returning to Rhys's novel to think further about the details of the passage and what those details might allow him to say

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[13] The full text of this essay is included as Appendix D.

about the text. An avenue for developing this example appears later in the essay when the student again refers to an example of "mirroring" in the novel:

> At the end of the story, after years of living locked away in his English mansion, Antoinette is finally depicted as having lost the last thread of her identity: "It was then that I saw her – the ghost. The woman with streaming hair. She was surrounded by a gilt frame but I knew her" (Rhys 111-12). In a dream, Antoinette sees herself in a mirror, but she cannot recognize her own self. Her identity has utterly disappeared, and it was possible for this to happen because she never managed to form a strong identity from the beginning.

The student makes no connection between this example of "mirroring" and the one described above, which occurs almost three pages earlier in the student's text. In the margin next to this passage, the teacher indicates this parallel, writing "compare formally to Tia moment." The teacher does not do any interpretive work beyond this short note, leaving that work for the student. She does, however, gesture toward a possible connection between these passages and suggests that the student alter his text in order to acknowledge and examine that connection.

In her endnote, the teacher continues this work of outlining possibilities for revision, primarily by suggesting that the student recast his argument in a literary rather than a psychological/sociological framework:

> Your paper is currently set up to "prove" that whites suffered in the Caribbean, too. And you produce a psychological portrait of Antoinette as proof. But note that the way you pose the problem currently, it is not a <u>literary</u> question, but a sociological one. <u>Literary</u> analysis requires you to reframe the question – perhaps thus (though you may certainly offer different approaches):

-how does <u>WSS</u> assert and validate the "Caribbeanness" of Antoinette (thereby struggling to rescue her from the rejection of the English and the emancipated slaves alike)?

-how does it develop a white Creole <u>aesthetic</u>? (here questions of the novel's <u>form</u> and indeed the novel's vision – which aren't necessarily the <u>same</u> as any individual characters', even though it may be symptomatic to the characters)

Here you could look at aspects of form such as point of view, fragmentation, understatement, [something not legible] -- a) all ways of addressing a <u>literary</u> response to a historical problem of b) thinking of the literary in terms not confined to plot and character.

(So, for instance, rather than spending so much time summarizing and recounting the plot – perhaps focus on a few moments in the plot – eg. Tia/Ant or conflicts over naming – and then <u>analyze</u> those moments)

In this endnote, the teacher challenges the way the student has framed his topic and asserts that his approach needs to be more literary, taking into greater account the features of the literary text *as* a text, rather than taking a sociological approach based on a psychological portrait of a single character. She also offers a kind of plan for rewriting this essay in which the student would narrow his focus to a particular set of moments in the novel, such as examples of mirroring or conflicts over naming. These are not revisions the student would necessarily make on his own. They are ways of approaching the text, however, that could potentially further his development as a reader and writer of literature and literary criticism. The work this teacher has asked the student to do demands that he change both his essay and his reading. The teacher asks him to read Antoinette not as a real person but as a character constructed out of words on a page. She asks him to think about how the novel uses this character and other literary elements to do

various kinds of work, such as taking a position on what it means to be "Caribbean" or developing an aesthetic particular to this time and place, rather than as reflecting some kind of historical reality. The kind of reading the student will need to do is in some ways like the reading Liptak associates with annotated texts, a reading in which the reader "dismembers" the text, pausing to consider the details in order to understand how they create particular effects. In laying out this work for the student, the teacher's comments urge him to think of his essay and his interpretation as being unfinished and open to change. It is this aspect of commentary—the way that it can "unfinish" a piece of writing and affect subsequent readers in different ways—that I will be exploring in the rest of this chapter by considering various types of commentary in different genres.

In the process of writing, writers move through different stages—composing a draft, submitting that completed draft to others for reading and response, taking that draft apart and revising it toward a final form. During this process, they sometimes work to consolidate a text into a coherent form and sometimes take that text apart, fragmenting in order to reassemble it. Scholars have referred to different versions of these impulses by various names. Wolfgang Iser uses the term "wandering viewpoint" to describe the way in which the reader's experience of a text is always in some sense fragmented because the reader cannot perceive the text all at once; instead, the reader must move around in the text, grasping only sections at a time (Iser 109). "Consistency building," in contrast, refers to the work that readers do to synthesize these fragments into an interpretation of the work as a whole (Iser 118-119). Jason Snart, a Blake scholar whose work I discuss in more detail below, uses the term "fixity" to refer to the finality of the printed page or engraved plate and "fluidity" to refer to the infinite imagination which creates that page (Snart 35). In "Discourse in the Novel," Mikhail Bakhtin describes language as

being both centripetal and centrifugal to varying degrees. "Centripetal" or "unitary" language is a conservative, consolidating force: "Unitary language constitutes the theoretical expression of the historical processes of linguistic unification and centralization, an expression of the centripetal forces of language" (Bakhtin 270). Unitary language, he argues, exists in the context of heteroglossia, the tendency of language to fragment and differentiate into numerous variations as it is used. He says that "at every moment of its linguistic life [unitary language] is opposed to the realities of heteroglossia," but he acknowledges that unitary language performs a function in society by "guaranteeing a certain maximum of mutual understanding and crystallizing into a real, although still relative, unity—the unity of the reigning conversational (everyday) and literary language, 'correct language'" (Bakhtin 270). He contrasts the centripetal quality of unitary language with the "centrifugal," decentralizing force of heteroglossia (Bakhtin 271). Centripetal and centrifugal forces, Bakhtin argues, always coexist: "Alongside the centripetal forces, the centrifugal forces of language carry on their uninterrupted work; alongside verbal-ideological centralization and unification, the uninterrupted processes of decentralization and disunification go forward" (Bakhtin 272).

Commentarial or marginal writing—whether it appears on a student's paper or on some other kind of text—can have widely disparate aims, sometimes attempting to strengthen a primary text and sometimes attempting to weaken or fragment it. As I suggest above, teachers' comments often attempt to unsettle students' centripetal tendencies in their writing. Many commentators in other settings endeavor to re-purpose a text for aims that its author may not have intended or even been able to imagine, and often a commentary that aims to limit and control the interpretive possibilities of a text succeeds instead in multiplying them as readers respond to the commentary in numerous ways. But in different ways depending on the discursive

context, centripetal and centrifugal forces and the tension between them shape the way that marginal writing functions in relation to a primary text or set of texts.

One example of scholarship that attempts to describe these forces in marginal writing is Lawrence Lipking's "The Marginal Gloss." Well known and often cited by scholars of marginalia and commentary, Lipking's essay considers several examples of marginal gloss, including Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner," Eliot's "The Waste Land," *Ulysses* as implicit commentary on Homer, and the fragment from *Finnegan's Wake* that was published as the short story "Storiella as She Is Syung." Lipking begins his meditation on margins with Paul Valery's 1927 publication of Poe's marginalia, which Valery accompanies with marginal notes of his own in which he attempts to work out a systematic theory of notes, an effort which Lipking finds to be at odds with Poe's "whimsical and scattered thoughts on his pleasure in marking up margins" (Lipking 609). Lipking disagrees to some extent with Valery's systematizing impulse, asserting that "[t]he attraction of marginalia, for [Poe], consists of the opportunity for defiance of rigorous discussion, for the total originality and unexpectedness he so prized—in short, for complete independence from the text" (609-10). He argues that "the difference between Poe's and Valery's theory of notes—between a theory that emphasizes the nonsensical unpredictability of notes and a theory that discovers in notes the essential logic not only of all reading but of the mind itself—cannot be resolved" (Lipking 611).

Although Lipking argues that Valery misrepresents Poe by attempting to systematize Poe's unsystematic marginalia, he does not seem to take either side; rather, he lays out both ways of thinking for the reader's consideration as an introduction to his examination of other examples, and he is as interested in Valery's position as he is in Poe's. Lipking notes the way in which Valery's own commentary continues on after Poe's text has ended, and he reads in

Valery's responses to Poe's marginalia the suggestion that marginal writing indicates the essential "unfinishedness" of all texts, even those which seem complete: "Thus the apparatus of the margin, with its constant suggestion that revisions are possible, explanations are needed, delivers a vivifying truth: however much the text pretends to finality, it is always open to change" (611). I would argue that it is not the margin itself that delivers this truth, as Lipking seems to suggest, but rather a way of reading in which margins are constructed as a place for the reader to change the text through interpretation and commentary. This idea—that readers' marginal writing makes visible the ways in which a text is never finished but is in some way always fluid—is important to my own reading of the marginalia of teachers and others.

Lipking suggests that the differences between Valery and Poe's positions can be attributed in part to differences between the two genres of marginalia and marginal gloss. His description of marginalia, or the marginal notes of readers, aligns that form of marginal writing with centrifugal language:

> Marginalia—traces left in a book—are wayward in their very nature; they spring up spontaneously around a text unaware of their presence. . . .The charm of such notes depends on their being on the edge: the borders of intelligibility (Poe) or consciousness (Valery). The reader catches an author off his guard, intercepting a thought that may scarcely have risen to formulation. At their best, marginalia can haunt us like a few passing words overheard in the street; all the more precious because the context remains unknown. (612)

In contrast, Lipking's assessment of the marginal gloss, or a printed text located on the page alongside a primary text, aligns this genre more with the stabilizing tendencies of centripetal language: "The marginal gloss, however, responds to another frame of mind: the need to spell

120

everything out. . . . However dense the text, the gloss holds out the hope that all perplexities can be explained and all obliquities reduced to order" (611-613). Lipking's characterizations of marginalia and the marginal gloss describe the work of two different kinds of readers, one who writes in the margins spontaneously as the impulse strikes and one with a more systematic and unifying purpose.

Lipking's assertion that margins point to the way in which a text "is always open to change" describes well the notes that William Blake made in the books he owned. Blake's marginalia provide one of the best examples of commentary that "unfinishes" a primary text, using that text to create new meanings in different ways. I will be considering here two examples of Blake's marginalia, his annotations on Sir Joshua Reynolds's *Discourses on Art* and Lavater's *Aphorisms on Man*. Blake reads these two works very differently, and this reading shapes the comments he writes in response and the composite texts that result.

Blake attended the Royal Academy of Arts between 1779 and 1785 during Reynolds's term as president there. His annotations to Reynolds's *Discourses on Art*, a collection of addresses delivered at the Royal Academy, exhibit his hostility toward Reynolds's aesthetic philosophy. His notes begin on the title page with the declaration that "This Man was Hired to Depress Art    This is the opinion of Will Blake my Proofs of this Opinion are given in the following Notes" (Blake 635). The marginalia, though, do more than convey Blake's disagreement with Reynolds; in his marginal notes, Blake also asserts his own philosophy of beauty and art. For example, Reynolds argues in Discourse III that in order to perceive beauty, the artist must learn to see past the particularities of objects and to concentrate on their general, abstract forms (Reynolds 44). He says that

instead of endeavouring to amuse mankind with the minute neatness of his imitations, [the genuine painter] must endeavor to improve them by the grandeur of his ideas (Reynolds 42).

Blake responds to this statement in the margin:

Without Minute Neatness of Execution. The. Sublime cannot Exist! Grandeur of Ideas is founded on Precision of Ideas (Blake 646).

Continuing this line of thinking, Reynolds argues that

the whole beauty and grandeur of the art consists, in my opinion, in being able to get above all singular forms, local customs, particularities, and details of every kind. (Reynolds 44)

Blake responds

A Folly

Singular & Particular Detail is the Foundation of the Sublime. (Blake 647)

And again when Reynolds argues that

it is from a reiterated experience, and a close comparison of the objects in nature, that an artist becomes possessed of the idea of that central form, if I may so express it, from which every deviation is deformity, (Reynolds 45)

Blake writes,

One Central Form Composed of all other Forms being Granted it does not therefore follow that all other Forms are Deformity. (Blake 648)

In this way, through brief but numerous responses, Blake argues with Reynolds's text and employs it for his own purposes, using it as a venue in which to articulate his own aesthetic philosophy. Unlike commentaries that attempt to clarify a primary text or to reinforce its

message, Blake's marginal responses work against Reynolds's arguments. We see Blake refuting Reynolds vigorously on the pages of Reynolds's own text to create something new. Rather than writing a separate, unified treatise in response to Reynolds, Blake creates a composite text of Reynolds's writing and his own; in choosing to make his argument in the margins, Blake keeps Reynolds present but uses him as something to push against, giving momentum to his own argument.

Written in 1788, ten years before the marginalia on Reynolds, Blake's notes in John Caspar Lavater's *Aphorisms on Man* are remarkably different in tone. The first note appears on the title page: the name "Will Blake" is signed in small letters beneath the author's printed name, and Blake has enclosed both names in a heart. This marking immediately signals a different relationship between primary author and annotator than what appears in the margins of Reynolds. The next note is written above the first printed aphorism: "for the reason of these remarks see the last aphorism" (Lavater 1). [14] Turning to the last aphorism, the reader finds this comment: "If you mean to know yourself, interline such of these aphorisms as affected you agreeably in reading, and set a mark to such a sense of uneasiness with you; and then shew your copy to whom you please" (Lavater, page 224 in facsimile text). Although the numbering of Lavater's aphorisms might suggest that the reader progress through them in order, Blake's notes re-order the text for his readers in a way that calls attention to his own interpretation as much as to Lavater's primary text. Lavater's first two aphorisms read as follows:

1. Know, in the first place, that mankind agree in essence, as they do in their limbs and senses.

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[14] Page numbers in citations for the notes on Lavater are taken from the page numbers of the facsimile text. For the notes which are difficult to read in facsimile, I have used Erdman's text as an aid.

2. Mankind differ as much in essence as they do in form, limbs, and senses—and only so, and not more. (Lavater 1)

Blake has underlined both of these aphorisms and written in the margin beside them, "This is true Christian philosophy far above all abstraction" (Lavater 1). Blake's affirmation of these opening aphorisms conveys some of the philosophy of the general and the particular that we see in the later notes on Reynolds.

Blake's notes become more complex with Lavater's third aphorism; the aphorism itself reads "As in looking upward each beholder thinks himself the centre of the sky; so Nature formed her individuals, that each must see himself the centre of being" (Lavater 2). To the left of this text Blake has written "let me refer here, to a remark on aphorism 533 & another on. 630" (Lavater 2). As Jason Snart has noted, Blake uses his marginal notes as a way of marking a new path for the reader through Lavater's text. Blake's notes also reflect the nature of his reading, which was not necessarily ordered and progressive but which instead followed some kind of path from aphorism 3 to 533 and back again. Turning from entry 3 to 533, the reader finds this aphorism:

> I have often, too often, been tempted, at the daily relation of new knaveries, to despise human nature in every individual, till, on minute anatomy of each trick, I found that the knave was only an *enthusiast* or *momentary fool*. This discovery of momentary folly, symptoms of which assail the wisest and the best, has thrown a great consolatory light on my inquiries into man's moral nature: by this the theorist is enabled to assign to each class and each individual its own peculiar fit of vice or folly; and, by the same, he has it in his power to contrast the ludicrous or dismal catalogue with the more pleasing one of sentiment and virtue, more properly their own. (Lavater 181-82)

124

Blake's response to this aphorism leads the reader out of Lavater's text to the second book of Samuel, Chapter 6:

> man is the ark of God the mercy seat is above upon the ark cherubims guard it on either side & in the midst is the holy law. man is either the ark of God or a phantom of the earth & of water    if thou seekest by human policy to guide this ark. remember Uzzah II Sam. IV Ch:
>
> knaveries are not human nature    knaveries are knaveries    See N 554
>
> this aphorism seems to me to want discrimination
>
> (Lavater 181 and Blake 596)

In the Biblical passage to which Blake refers, the Ark, which is being carried by oxen, becomes unstable and Uzzah reaches out his hand to steady it; however, touching the Ark is a forbidden act and Uzzah is struck dead on the spot, despite his good intentions. Aphorism 554, to which Blake now directs us, reads

> The enemy of art is the enemy of nature; art is nothing but the highest sagacity and exertion of human nature; and what nature will he honour who honours not the human?

Blake has underlined the text appearing after the semicolon and written to the side, "human nature is the image of God" (Lavater 190 and Erdman 597). Blake's message in these notes is not easy to discern, but he might be suggesting that in positing that knaveries are part of human nature, Lavater, in this instance at least, does not honor man as the image or "ark" of God. He may also be suggesting that to systematically theorize human nature, to "seek by human policy to guide this ark," is to misunderstand human nature itself. Snart also seems to be somewhat uncertain of Blake's meaning, but he speculates that

Blake's response to Lavater's attempts to systematize human nature (and further to justify

"knaveries," for example, as part of certain human nature), is to warn that human nature

is the image of God, and thus to tamper with human nature is to tamper with the ark of

God, as Uzzah does with fatal results in 2 Samuel 6. (Snart 164-65)

Returning to Aphorism 3, we see that Blake has also referred us to his note on Aphorism 630. I

will not trace this new path here, but I do want to point out the way in which all of these

interlinked texts—aphorisms, annotations, and scriptural reference—form a complex,

fragmentary and intertextual response to Lavater. Though these notes demonstrate much greater

sympathy with the primary text than do the notes on Reynolds, Blake does not annotate simply to

show his support of Lavater; he disagrees when moved to do so and uses his commentary to

assert his own philosophy of religion and human nature, creating a new work of his own through

reading. In this way, Blake's marginalia on both Reynolds and Lavater make visible the

centrifugal effects of reading and interpretation.

Snart's *The Torn Book* is one of the most extensive studies of Blake's marginalia. Snart

argues that Blake's annotations in the books he owned can be understood as part of his larger

project—worked out through his poetry, art, printing and annotating—of challenging the

practices of authoritative, systematic reading encouraged by the conventionally printed page. The

most interesting aspect of Snart's project for a study of teachers' comments lies in the way he

interprets Blake's marginalia as "opening" or "unfinishing" the primary texts Blake was reading.

One of Snart's central questions is "what it would mean to imagine the act of annotation as a

kind of 'tearing the book,' an act that is textually and materially intrusive and disruptive, and

thus an act deeply tied to what 'the book' meant to Blake and to his work" (Snart 20). He argues

that

Blake annotated in such a way as to challenge the formal configuration of the books he

was reading, thereby challenging the way in which such configurations controlled the

experience of reading itself. . . . Blake's annotating was a metaphoric "tearing" of the

book, opening up its representational space and its textual authority for consideration.

(Snart 21-22)

Here Snart suggests that Blake's notes create a kind of "openness" and challenge the authority of

the book, with its orderly printed pages, to determine his experience as a reader. One way in

which marginalia can unsettle a text is to suggest another order of reading, and Snart notes the

way in which Blake's annotations "unfinish" a text by interrupting its linearity. He surmises that

[t]he books Blake experienced as an annotator all evince, to greater or lesser degree,

sequential logic and linear development, and Blake must have recognized the degree to

which annotation itself disrupted ideas of sequence and certainly of linearity. Consider as

an obvious example the annotations that direct the reader's attention to parts of the text,

or to other annotations, that are materially distant. (Snart 180)[15]

Blake cannot rearrange the printed page, but by changing the order in which a reader proceeds

through the book, he shifts the emphasis of the meaning from the primary text to his own

commentary. Blake disrupts the linear quality, for example, of Lavater's orderly, numbered

aphorisms by directing the reader to many disparate places in the text, creating a path through the

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[15] It is not certain who this intended reader might have been, although it was common practice in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries for readers to circulate books which they had annotated among friends. H.L. Jackson discusses these texts and practices at length in *Romantic Readers: The Evidence of Marginalia* and *Marginalia: Readers Writing in Books*. Given this cultural practice, it seems reasonable that Blake would expect that his notes would find a reader at some point. Snart himself is unclear as to the audience Blake may have had in mind for his marginal notes, but he argues that "*all* annotations, to a greater or lesser degree, are part of a performance that implies an audience who will experience not just the content of an annotation but also its material intrusion into the host text" (Snart 191, n37).

text which is based on Blake's reading rather than Lavater's writing. Snart also considers the way in which annotation decenters a primary text by adding voices to the page:

> The marginalia disrupt the finishedness of the printed page by introducing an alternate perspective. This challenges the single perspective (what Blake elsewhere called "Single vision") and the suppression of individuality Blake saw at work in the Newtonian text. The act of creating marginalia represents the material marking of multiple, often self-interfering perspectives onto what seems, in certain instances, the otherwise univocal page. (Snart 111)

This description applies well to an example such as the annotations on Reynolds, in which Blake asserts his own antagonistic presence into the margins of Reynolds's otherwise orderly, univocal text. At least in Blake's copy of the book, Reynolds's arguments no longer stand alone, but are accompanied on the page by an oppositional voice. In several ways, then, Blake's notes work to undermine the fixity of the primary, printed text by altering, extending, revising, and responding to what the original author has said. Blake does not allow the printed text to stand alone on the page as "finished," but uses the margins of the page to continue the work of reading, interpreting, and rewriting.

"Fixity" and "fluidity" are two important terms for Snart in his thinking about Blake's texts and composing processes:

> Blake seemed deeply concerned with the tension between fixity (the finality or completeness of the engraved plate or the printed page, for example) and the fluidity of poetic vision (the imagination which was, to Blake, infinite until materialized on plate or paper). (Snart 35)

I would argue that Blake's marginal notes represent the fluidity of not only poetic vision but of the act of reading itself. Snart sees Blake as opposing the tendency of the book form to impose or "fix" a particular way of reading, but this fixed reading in which the reader progresses through a book from beginning to end and does not insert herself into the text by writing on it is itself a practice that readers learn. For example, we may tend to read novels by progressing in an orderly fashion from the first page to the last, but we read cookbooks, phone books, and collections of poetry quite differently. Because these ways of reading are often taken for granted, though, it is easy to fall into thinking that the book itself has this power over us. Certainly the material form of a book gives us signals as to how to read, but Blake's marginalia remind us that the reading experience has as much to do with the choices of the reader as with the features of the printed page. We can read in the way that the book seems to ask of us, or we can speak back, argue, or choose our own path through the numbered pages.

I turn now to a very different set of commentaries in which the relationship between fixity and fluidity is also visible and complex, those written as part of a long tradition of rabbinic Judaism.[16] The first and foremost text of Jewish study and interpretation is the Torah, or the first five books of the Bible. For the purposes of discussion here, it should be understood that I am dealing with texts and reading practices that have existed primarily in a context of the traditional Jewish belief that the Torah was given by God to Moses at Mount Sinai. Its centrality to traditional Jewish belief and practice thus cannot be overestimated. Scholars often describe Jewish literature collectively as an inverted triangle or pyramid, with the vast bulk of texts resting on the small but essential base of the Torah (see, for example, Holtz "Introduction" 13). Because of the status of the Torah, it is widely thought of among adherents to this tradition as

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[16] Rabbinic Judaism refers to the dominant form of Judaism that includes the concept of an oral law, discussed below, even if it does not insist on strict adherence to this law, and that takes the Talmud as a central text of study.

being extremely fixed and stable. Many Orthodox Jews believe that the Torah was given to Moses at Sinai letter for letter, and there is great emphasis on preserving the text as it is thought to have been transmitted by God. For a Torah scroll, which is always written by hand, to be considered kosher (usable for ritual purposes), it must be deemed perfect; one imperfect letter (out of over 300,000) can render a scroll unusable. Such concern with "fixing" a text is almost unparalleled.

However, the large body of commentaries, supplements, and other interpretive texts in many ways both reinforce and undercut this fixity. The term "Midrash" refers to a body of Jewish texts that interpret the Torah and other books of the Jewish Bible. Originally midrash was composed orally; most midrashim were written down and edited between 400 and 1200 C.E., but their oral composition often began much earlier (Holtz 178). There are different genres of midrash, but all midrash functions in some way as interpretation of Biblical texts. Midrashim were often composed in response to questions or problems raised by gaps in the text of the Jewish Bible. As Erich Auerbach notes in the opening chapter of *Mimesis*, the style of the Torah is spare and terse, providing only such detail as is absolutely necessary. It is a style that leaves many gaps to be filled through the interpretive work of readers.  For example, the Torah usually does not describe the thoughts and feelings of characters; midrash attempts to fill in some of the missing details. Midrash also typically deviates, sometimes substantially, from the text itself. Take, for example, a response to Genesis 1.26, "And God said: Let us make man." A midrash from the collection *Genesis Rabbah* tells of how the angels Mercy, Truth, Righteousness, and Peace each argued for or against God's decision to create man (Holtz 191-92). In this case the midrash responds to a feature of the text, the use of the plural first-person pronoun in "Let *us* make man," to raise the problem of to whom God would have been speaking if nothing else had

been created, and it solves the problem by imagining the angels who might have been present. The midrash then departs from the text in imagining the conversation that must have taken place among these angels, for which there is no support in the original text of Genesis. Though it was not written as a marginal commentary in the way that Blake's notes were, midrash serves as a kind of commentary, elucidation, expansion, and/or interpretation of the scriptures, and it is usually linked to a specific moment in the primary text. As such, it suggests a kind of fluidity in Jewish religious texts and reading that will become much more prominent in the following examples. Midrash extends the boundaries of the text, and by doing so calls into question the notion that the primary text itself is "fixed."

Jewish commentaries did not take the form of running commentary written in the margins of a primary text until the Middle Ages (Greenstein 213). The most famous medieval commentator was Rabbi Shlomo Yitchaki, commonly known by the Hebrew acronym Rashi. Written in the eleventh century in France, Rashi's commentaries are still a standard component of printed editions of the Torah and Talmud. In terms of the style of his commentary, Rashi was something of a transitional figure. His commentary on the Bible in particular often draws on the techniques of midrash or simply "drash," which "endeavors to decipher and spell out the latent meanings of the text," described above (Greenstein 216). He also, however, at times takes the approach of *pshat*, which is usually understood to mean the "plain sense" of the text (Gelles 9). Take, for example, Rashi's commentary on Genesis 3.8. The biblical verse reads "They heard the sound of [God] walking in the garden toward the direction of the sun; and the man and his wife hid from [God] among the trees of the garden" (Herczeg 33-34). Rashi responds to the opening words "They heard" as follows:

> There are many aggadic [non-legal] midrashim on this verse, and our Rabbis have already arranged them. . . . I have come for nothing but the simple meaning of Scripture and for aggadah [non-legal interpretation] which resolves the words of Scripture with each word stated in its proper framework and with its correct meaning. (Herczeg 33)

He then goes on to interpret the verse simply: "they heard the sound of the Holy One, Blessed is He, Who was 'walking in the garden' (Herczeg 33).[17] Subsequent generations of commentators, including Rashi's grandson Rabbi Samuel ben Meir or "Rashbam," embraced the mode of *pshat* to a much greater degree and developed it further as an interpretive approach, seeking to "understand the biblical text within the parameters of its historical, literary, and linguistic context" (Greenstein 217). The mode of *pshat* was new in the Middle Ages, and it represents the desire to clarify the meaning of the text, rather than to expand meanings. Though few commentators practiced *pshat* exclusively and instead combined different approaches, *pshat* represents a more centripetal tendency in commentary than what had previously been practiced.

Another important body of Jewish literature is the Mishnah and its commentary the Gemara, which collectively form the Talmud.[18] The Jewish tradition posits that when God gave the written Torah to Moses at Mount Sinai, he also gave an "Oral Torah" that was not meant to be written down but rather passed on orally from generation to generation and that would carry the same authority as the written Torah; many Orthodox Jews adhere to this belief today.[19] This Oral Torah was a complement to the written Torah in that it explained how to carry out many of the written laws and clarified points of the written text that were vague and difficult to

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[17] For more examples, see Gelles 10-12.

[18] Somewhat confusingly, the word "Talmud" is commonly used to refer both to the commentary on the Mishnah, also known as Gemara, and to the combination of Mishnah and Gemara. For clarity's sake, I use the term "Gemara" to refer to the commentary itself and "Talmud" to refer to the text as a whole.

[19] Lawrence Schiffman dates the idea of an oral law that was given with the written to the first century B.C.E. – first century C.E. (Schiffman 5).

understand. However, because of persecution and the passage of time, it became desirable for this oral text to be preserved in writing, and so between the first and third centuries, these teachings were compiled and edited by numerous rabbis and scholars; the resulting text is called the Mishnah. Though it is ostensibly a code of law, the Mishnah does not read like a collection of legal injunctions. Instead it is written as a series of discussions or arguments. Moshe Halbertal raises the question of why the Mishnah was written in the form of debates that include minority or dissenting opinions. He notes the rarity of a canonical text that "transmits the tradition in the form of controversy" and does not seek "to censor minority opinions nor to harmonize them within the rest of the material" (Halbertal 45). The effect of this format is to open up the text to an array of interpretations and controversy over what the text means and how it is to be read. For example, here is an excerpt from the chapter of the Mishnah dealing with the lighting of Sabbath candles, which is read weekly as part of the Friday night Sabbath service:

> [1] With what may we light [the Sabbath lamp] and with what may we not light? We may
> not light with cedar bast, uncombed flax, floss-silk, willow bast, desert silk, nor seaweed.
> Nor [may we light] with pitch, wax, cottonseed oil, oil that must be destroyed by burning,
> fat from sheeps' tails, nor with tallow. Nachum the Mede says: We may light with boiled
> tallow. But the Sages say: Whether it is boiled or it is not boiled, we may not light with it.
>
> [2] We may not light on Yom Tov [a holiday] with oil that must be destroyed by burning.
> Rabbi Yishmael says: We may not light with tar, out of respect for the honor due the
> Sabbath. But the Sages permit [lighting] with all [these] oils: with sesame oil, nut oil,
> radish oil, fish oil, gourd oil, tar, or naphtha. Rabbi Tarfon says: We may light only with
> olive oil. (Scherman 323-25)

As we see in these paragraphs, the format of the Mishnah, with its multiple voices and dissenting opinions, reflects its origins as an oral text. Like the gaps Auerbach identifies in the Bible that open it up to the interpretive commentary of midrash, the unresolved nature of the legal disputes in the Mishnah, where multiple opinions are given but one is not necessarily indicated as "correct," open that text up as well to volumes and volumes of interpretive response. The Mishnah itself is not a commentary on the Torah—it is more of a companion text to aid in religious practice—but it is part of a tradition of reading in which fixed, written texts are surrounded by a more fluid and dynamic body of oral commentary.

Between the third and fifth centuries, the rabbis of Israel and Babylonia spent much time discussing and debating the Mishnah; these discussions would eventually become the Gemara, a vast collection of responses that are presented as commentary on the Mishnah but that often wander far from the Mishnaic text with which they begin (Schiffman 11-12).[20] The texts of the Mishnah and Gemara are printed together as the Talmud, which fills from 20 to 70 large volumes, depending on the publisher and translation. Like the Mishnah, the Gemara is written as a series of discussions, with different speakers voicing different opinions and raising questions. The Gemara, however, is far more complex. A typical Mishnah entry might be the length of a short paragraph, 10-15 lines or so. This entry is followed, however by many pages of Gemara commentary which winds its way through many topics and subtopics. The texts of Mishnah and Gemara appear as a single column in the center of each page. In printed Talmuds since the sixteenth century, this text is surrounded on the page by the commentaries of Rashi, the Tosafot (French commentators who succeeded Rashi) and others. Though it is organized to a degree and follows the structure of the Mishnah, the text of the Talmud suggests much of the fluidity of an

[20] There are actually two Gemaras or Talmuds, one composed in Babylonia and one composed in Israel. The Babylonian Talmud is by far the one most widely studied and is the one I refer to throughout this section.

oral discussion, with the rabbis moving from topic to topic and from question to question in a way that is often very difficult for an inexperienced reader to follow.

The primary text of the Talmud was finished in the sixth century, but various commentaries, corrections, and other media for interpretation have continued to be written into the present. Thus, "although the Talmud is usually spoken of as having been completed (or 'sealed') in the sixth century, it in fact remained the site of a continuing conversation among Jewish scholars lasting to our very times, most recently aided and abetted by new computer technologies that were inconceivable even a decade ago" (Stanislawski 97). Little is known about how the text of the Talmud came to be written down, but written manuscripts are first mentioned in the year 634 C.E. (Schiffman 13). The earliest printed editions of the Talmud were published in Italy and Spain in the late 15$^{th}$ century. Before the first printed editions appeared, the text of the Talmud appeared alone on the page, without such commentaries as those by Rashi and the Tosafists, which are now standard components printed alongside the main text. The commentaries were considered to be separate books (Heller 61). Once the Talmud entered print, though, Rashi and Tosafot became standard components of the Talmudic page, both because they proved to be valuable aids to interpretation and because printers tended to copy what their predecessors had done; both of these commentaries appeared in the first printed edition of the Talmud, which was published by Soncino in 1483 (Fram 91). Haym Soloveitchik explains the value of Rashi for reading and understanding the Talmud:

> [T]he Talmud is, as it were, a "telegramatic" text, the main points are stated, but the flow, the linkage of the various points, is left up to the reader to reconstruct. It is this flow and linkage that Rashi supplies, and with remarkably few words. Rashi was gifted with an inordinate ability to detect both minor gaps in a presentation and the slightest ambiguity

of language and correct them succinctly. Realizing the cumulative effect of trivial errors, he deftly guides the student through the text with a mere word or two, preventing a host of possible misunderstandings. (Soloveitchik 37)

Like the *pshat* mode of biblical commentary, Rashi's commentary on the Talmud has the more centripetal aim of clarifying the meaning of a difficult and often vague text as far as possible.

Despite this desire to fix a meaning, however, both the form of the Talmud and the ongoing tradition of adding commentaries lend a fascinating element of fluidity to what is often a deeply conservative tradition. In their essay on the yeshiva as a particular type of education, Moshe Halbertal and Tova Hartman Halbertal consider the ways in which the form of the Talmud relates to the flowing, dynamic style of yeshiva education, in which most study takes place through discussion in pairs or larger groups and focuses on texts that the students have read beforehand. In order to explain the energy of this environment, the authors compare the Beit Midrash (or main study hall) to a conventional library:

Libraries are areas where silent reading and isolated reflections on a text take place. Movement and noise are minimized as much as possible as they are considered a desecration of the silence of the sacred space. The Beit Midrash is noisy and full of body language, where study is experienced as a communal activity. (Halbertal and Hartman Halbertal 458)

Students do not take written exams or write papers, and conversation is the dominant mode of learning. The Halbertals explain that this oral mode of teaching, learning, and evaluation yields a type of education that is more fluid than many more conventional learning environments:

The lack of writing highlights another feature of the Yeshiva. In the Beit Midrash ideas come and go, questions and answers are raised and forgotten. When the same tractate [a

136

section of Talmud] is to be studied again in the next cycle of learning, teachers are expected not to repeat their old readings but to innovate. (Halbertal and Hartman Halbertal 459)

They argue that these qualities are connected to the form of the primary text of study, the Talmud:

> The conversational mode of study interestingly reflects the structure and content of the Talmud. . . . [T]here is a central and relatively constant feature at the root of the conversational mode of study, which is deeply related to the nature of the Talmud as a particular type of text. (Halbertal and Hartman Halbertal 460)

Because of the nature of the Talmudic page—which is presented in the form of a discussion and is surrounded by commentary that continues the discussion into subsequent generations—students of the Talmud today have some sense that they are entering into a conversation that has been ongoing for many centuries:

> The structure of learning in the Yeshiva is in its basic conversational mode a re-enactment of the imagined talmudic discussion. There is a deep affinity between the peculiar conversation of the talmudic page and the way its learning is organized at the Beit Midrash. The students become attached to the tradition through their active participation in the ongoing argument. The text is the initial conversation which expands and develops by dialogue with it. Re-enactment is not a repetition: the student introduces a new interpretation, a novella or chidush (a new way of approaching a problem). . . .
>
> The talmudic page provides a skeleton which is continuously enlarged through the incorporation of subsequent commentaries to the discussion, and through the improvisation of the students themselves. (Halbertal and Hartman Halbertal 460-61)

In this way, we see how a religion and a tradition of scholarship that are centered around a limited number of fixed and revered texts and in many ways resist change have developed surprisingly fluid modes of reading and response.

Because of this complex interaction between fixity and fluidity, the advent of print had great impact on Jewish reading, writing and learning. In his essay "The Ashkenazi Elite at the Beginning of the Modern Era: Manuscript Versus Printed Book," Elchanan Reiner considers the effects of print on Jewish learning and relationships with texts. Because oral learning, composition, and transmission were valued so highly in the medieval period, Jewish intellectual authorities were anxious about the effects of printing on the circulation and availability of religious texts (Reiner 87). Reiner examines a debate between rabbis in sixteenth century Poland regarding the writing and use of printed books. He begins with the position of Hayyim ben Bezalel of Freidberg, who wrote a polemical tractate in response to the printing of a legal manual:

> There is no room, R. Hayyim writes, for the printed manual, as it freezes and rigidifies halakhah [Jewish law], which must remain fluid; further, he seems to be saying that there is no such thing as an authoritative text. Authority is personal, it depends absolutely on the halakhic scholar, the *posek*, who cannot—and may not—rely on precedents. (Reiner 87)

Prior to the introduction of print, the emphasis among Ashkenazi Jews—Jews who settled in Eastern Europe—was not on the text itself but rather on the scholar who would draw on his own legal knowledge to make a ruling specific to each individual situation. Hayyim feared that with print, this fluidity would be lost and authority would be transferred from the scholar to the text, which would rigidify the meaning. Books held a somewhat peculiar place in this context:

138

The handwritten or printed book was not an authoritative text, although there was a danger that it might be considered in that light. Meant merely as an aid to its author, without whom the book was meaningless, its authority derived from him and he was also the sole legitimate reader. . . . Thus the text is a reflection of another, oral text; that oral text is the authoritative one, its source of authority being the fact that it is transmitted from teacher to pupil. . . . Thus the Ashkenazi halakhic tradition is understood—at least, in the mid-sixteenth century—as inherently oral. (Reiner 88)

Midrash, Mishnah and Talmud all began as oral texts that were written down only when it seemed necessary for preservation of the tradition. Reiner's assessment of the book in sixteenth century Ashkenazi scholarly culture demonstrates this same valuing of the more fluid oral text over the more fixed written one.

Reiner also considers the place of the written text in the medieval yeshiva, before the advent of printing. In this setting, students would study a canonical legal text, which would be expanded through the oral interpretation of the teacher. Reiner points out that the kind of text that was used in this period as the basis of legal rulings was "the text as studied in the yeshiva [religious school], not as written by its author" (Reiner 91). This text often included the comments of the head of a religious school as they had been copied down by his students in the margins of the manuscript page. He explains that

[w]hen the text was copied later, these comments intruded into the body of the main text, where they were absorbed as an integral part. . . . It was the new, complex text that they produced, which included parts of the original codex together with the teachings of the later authorities, that became authoritative, rather than the original text itself. Despite the marked difference between it and the canonical text, it enjoyed canonical status, albeit

limited to a particular locality. It functioned in a well-defined geographical region and

was effective only for a limited period. (91-92)

The advent of print effectively ended such textual fluidity by producing "a final binding and

authoritative text" (Reiner 92). In this way, print ultimately increased the status of the written

text and made standard editions of texts available to a much wider range of readers, a shift

which, as Reiner discusses, provoked dramatic changes in Ashkenazi intellectual society.[21]

Although print now saturates the world in which we read and write, texts that are in the

process of being composed bear some similarities to these medieval manuscripts. For example,

the process Reiner describes in some ways mirrors the texts students write for courses, where the

teacher's marginal notes often influence the development of the text—and are sometimes

incorporated verbatim. These comments become an integral part of the text in such a way that an

outside reader coming to the finished product would likely be unable to distinguish them from

the student's "own" writing. Similarly, most readers cannot detect an editor's suggestions when

reading the final version of a text unless they can compare it with an earlier draft. As I have

suggested, increasing students' awareness of the possibilities of change that exist for unfinished

texts can be an important part of the work of writing comments and of teaching writing in

general.

Many of the traditional Jewish texts that I have considered here—including Midrash, the

commentaries of Rashi and others, and the Gemara—respond, at least in part, to problems

presented by the texts to which they respond. The Torah, Mishnah, and Gemara are all difficult

works that leave out much information that is important in order for readers to understand what

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[21] Elizabeth Eisenstein has discussed the ways in which the advent of printing both fixed texts by making it easier to produce standard editions but also helped to proliferate meaning by making texts available to much larger numbers of readers, exposing them to a much greater variety of interpretation.

these texts are saying or are asking them to do, and much of the commentary seeks to clarify

meaning in different ways. In contrast to this centripetal aim, however, these texts often have the

effect of expanding or multiplying meanings, and they have led to the writing of many volumes

of interpretation. This tendency also characterizes the next set of texts I examine, marginal

glosses in medieval and early modern England, although these glosses at times exhibit a much

more overt desire to wrest control of the text from other groups of readers.

Virgil scholar Christopher Baswell has used a number of manuscripts to trace three

different kinds of commentary on Virgil's *Aeneid* that appeared in medieval England. The first

category he calls "pedagogical," and it includes commentaries that appear on manuscripts for use

in schools, primarily although not exclusively for instruction in grammar and rhetoric. The aim

of this kind of commentary was to clarify the text at the literal (as opposed to allegorical) level

and often to resituate the text to some degree in its original historic and geographic context, all in

an attempt to make the text more accessible to students less experienced with Latin or classical

history, geography and mythology. Baswell says that "[t]he major impulses behind these notes

were lexical and syntactic: they aimed to make the text linguistically comprehensible to readers

of unsophisticated Latinity" (68). Like some Jewish commentaries, these pedagogical

commentaries on Virgil often clarified points of difficult vocabulary or, less often, unfamiliar

points of history or mythology. Baswell argues that this kind of commentary can often have the

inadvertent effect of narrowing the interpretive choices available to a reader. He provides an

example of such commentary in his reading of the earliest of three glosses that appear on a

medieval manuscript of Virgil's *Aeneid*:

> At 1.107, in the midst of the tempest scene, Virgil writes "furit aestus harenis" ("surge
>
> that seethes with sand"). Now the gloss of "aestus" ("fever, seething, tide, anxiety") is

"periculum" ("danger"), which fixes the word in a metaphorical rather than a literal

sense. Again, at 2.310-11 ("The spacious palace of Deiphobus / has fallen, victim of the

towering Vulcan"), "Volcano" is glossed not in the mythological but in the metonymic

sense, with "igne" ("fire"). A double reference is avoided or, at the least, its impact is

reduced. . . .Such glosses never twist the sense of the text, but they do make choices for

the reader, providing a single sense where a double reference is possible. (54-55)

Baswell argues that this particular commentary, which aims to simplify the text for a less learned

reader, results in a "flattening" of Virgil's text through its reduction of possible meanings.

Baswell considers another manuscript of the *Aeneid* containing several commentaries, of

which two in particular have a more allegorizing focus than the pedagogical commentaries. He

looks at interpretations of the text in which Aeneas figures as a kind of Everyman and which

assert that Aeneas's experiences can be understood as representing something other than the

literal meaning of the text—for example, the different ages of man, from birth to death, or from

immaturity to wisdom. An example of allegorical commentary appears in a well-known

commentary of uncertain origin but generally associated with the Latin poet Bernard Silvestris.

The following note appears in response to Aeneid 6.3-4, "tum dente tenaci / ancora fundabat

navis," "then the anchors began to secure the ships with their sharp teeth":

*Tum dente tenaci*: since Virgil said that Aeneas and his companions, that is, the spirit and

the spiritual desires, are opposed to the passion of the flesh and excitement of temporal

things. And it is most difficult to show how they are able to do this with their ships, but

Virgil narrates thus: they are able to turn the prows to the beach since "the anchor

(*anchora*) holds the ship fast." We interpret the anchor here to be the same thing as in

Boethius: "The anchors hold fast" (*Consolation*, bk. 2, prose 4.9). Indeed, in both works

we interpret the anchor as hope. Hope is the expectation of future good and is properly

designated by the anchor, because, just as that instrument does not allow the ship to drift,

so hope does not permit desire to vacillate. (Baswell 128-29).

This mode of reading, in which the commentator seeks metaphorical meanings in the text rather

than literal ones, is quite different from the pedagogical mode Baswell describes earlier. Baswell

associates this kind of commentary, to some degree, with a more powerful role for the

commentator; whereas in pedagogical commentary the commentator's role was to clarify or

simplify the literal meaning of Virgil's text, in allegorical commentary the commentator now has

access to "hidden" meanings in the text which are not necessarily accessible to the common

reader and must make those meanings visible, a more co-creative role than that of simple

"transmission."

Baswell then turns to another manuscript whose commentary, identified as the "Norwich

commentary," is also allegorical but with Christian social and moral values. For example, this

note appears in response to Aeneas's abandonment of Dido: "Note, Aeneas flees Dido at the

order of Mercury and Jupiter. And mankind does not flee sin at the order of God and the

preacher" (quoted in Baswell 153). The commentator uses Virgil's text to make specifically

Christian points. Baswell explains this process further:

Juno, nursing her own wounds, mentions Athena's vengeance on the entire Greek fleet

for Ajax's rape of Cassandra (1.41). The commentator explains: "Note that many dies on

account of one. Note, this is about our first parent and the originators of evil." Ajax will

be used for an *exemplum* describing Adam. More interesting is the allegorization of

Jupiter's great prophecy of the Augustan peace and the binding of Furor: "on the binding

of Satan." Jupiter himself is Christianized as God the Father and Augustus cast as a

143

Christ figure, bringer of the new dispensation. When Dido prays to Jupiter at her banquet to make this a "joyful day" (1.732), the note adds: "In our own language, 'may God make us joyful,' because all joy is from him." (155)

In responses like this one, the Norwich commentator re-purposes the *Aeneid* to suit his own historical and social situation and does not take into account the differences between Virgil's time and his own. Baswell observes that many of this commentator's notes are pedagogical in nature and intend to clarify points made difficult by the historical gap, but that his allegorical notes do a very different kind of work: "The Norwich commentator acknowledges Virgilian difference in his pedagogical notes, but he also overcomes (or suppresses) it in the interest of using Virgilian *auctoritas* to describe and advance a contemporary social, ethical, and religious order" (Baswell 163).

Similarly, Renaissance Biblical commentators often re-interpreted texts through commentary to serve their own ends in an effort to control the meaning. Renaissance scholar Evelyn Tribble has studied the ways in which marginal glosses were used in different English translations of the Bible, noting the struggles for control of interpretation that were enacted in the margins of the printed page. Tribble begins by considering the *Glossa ordinaria*, which was the standard Christian Biblical commentary of the twelfth century. With its almost overpowering marginal frame (the commentary fills more space on the page than the primary text), the printed page of the *Glossa ordinaria* bears some physical similarities to a page of the Talmud, and Tribble's description of that page could apply to both texts:

The text is swallowed up in a sea of commentary both marginal and interlinear. In addition, both the text itself and the gloss bristle with abbreviations and symbols. The

144

apparatus is nowhere explained, since the Gloss was standardized; anyone reading it

would already be trained in its use. This is a page for experts only. (Tribble 12)

The sixteenth century saw a proliferation of commentaries on the Scriptures, many of them

written in reaction to commentaries like the *Glossa ordinaria*. Unlike commentators on the

Talmud, however, who attempted to clarify their difficult primary text, many Renaissance

commentators responded to the *Glossa ordinaria* by rejecting it entirely and writing their own

commentaries that were meant to take its place. Protestant Reformers such as William Tyndale

objected to glosses on the grounds that they obfuscate the text and primarily serve the purposes

of the church authorities who, Reformers argued, wanted to maintain power by convincing

laypeople that they were not able to read the Bible on their own (Tribble 12-14). In the notes to

his own translation of the Bible, Tyndale does not allegorize the text as church commentaries

often do. Instead, he

draws parallels (or, more often, contrasts) between the biblical text and the present state

of the church. . . . In his view the scholastics employ "sotle allegories" to obscure the

Scriptures, while he uses simple language to point out those places where the text cleaves

to him. (Tribble 17)

Tyndale objects to allegorical interpretations advanced by the church which bear little

resemblance to the plain meaning of the text on the grounds that they inappropriately intervene

between the reader and the meaning of the Scriptures.

Tyndale advocated a presentation of the Scriptures which would allow readers to produce

their own interpretations, but this mode of reading made many authorities nervous. As an

example, the Great Bible of 1539, authorized by Henry VIII, features printer's hands in the

margins of the text to indicate passages for which there is an annotation at the back of the volume:

> At those places where a hand appears (and indeed "any other where" in the Bible), the reader is enjoined to make no "private interpretacyon thereof." In essence, a pointing hand warns the reader that the passage at hand is church property; that there are "godly" or officially sanctioned readings of these texts. Just as the translator can be accused of producing his version of the Bible, so is it possible for the reader to produce his own solipsistic internal version of the text. The pointing hands, then, signify hands off to the reader; interpretation is a privileged enterprise to be conducted by the church. (Tribble 25)

Of course, such annotations in no way guaranteed that dissenting readers would not still interpret as they wished, but the notes demonstrate the anxiety felt by many at the increased circulation of the Bible among readers who previously had not had access to the text itself. Both church and political authorities worried about what would happen if individual readers began to disregard established interpretations in favor of their own.

The 1549 revision of the Reformist Matthew's Bible, which included notes by Edmund Becke, illustrates the struggle between Catholic and Protestant readings of the text. For example, in response to a verse from Matthew 23 ("And call no man your.b.father upon the earth, for there is but one your father, & he is in heaue{n}" [quoted in Tribble 29]), this footnote, which is signaled by the "b" in "your father," appears at the end of the chapter:

> b. Here is the bishoppe of Rome declared a playne Antichriste in that he woulde be called the most holye father, and that all Christen me{n} should acknowledge hym for no lesse

then their spyrituall father notwithstandinge these playne wordes of Christe call no man

youre father." (quoted in Tribble 29-30)

In this note, we see how the margins of the page became a space in which Catholic and Protestant interpreters played out their struggle for control of meaning and of readers. Where the Great Bible demonstrates anxiety about the private interpretations of individual readers, this annotation illustrates the annotator's similar anxiety about competing religious institutions. The Rheims New Testament, first published in 1582, represented an effort by the Catholic church to resist Protestant reforms by issuing their own English translation:

We haue also set forth reasonable large ANNOTATIONS, thereby to shew the studious

reader in most places perteining to the controuersies of this time, both the heretical

corruptions and false deductions, & also the Apostolike traditions, the expositions of the

holy fathers, the decrees of the Catholike Church and most auncient Cou{n}cels: which

meanes whosoeuer trusteth not, for the sense of the holy Scriptures, but had rather folow

his priuate iudgeme{n}t or the arroga{n}t spirit of these Sectaries, he shal worthily

through his owne wilfulnes be deciued. (quoted in Tribble 45)

In the preface and annotations, the editors make clear their intentions of, as Tribble says, "reappropriating the text" (Tribble 44).

The proliferation of Biblical commentaries in this period suggests that despite attempts to fix the meaning of the text and protect it from the "wrong" readers, the meaning remains fluid because another reader can always propose a new interpretation, especially if that reader feels as strongly as these did. Here again we see the presence of both centripetal and centrifugal impulses in marginal writing. Where one reader may desire to finish or "fix" a text once and for all, another reader/annotator can always intervene and insist on further change. Of course *every* time

147

a new reader comes to a text, that reader to some extent will compose a new meaning or interpretation, but the striking thing about written commentary is the way in which it makes that new reading visible and can act as a catalyst for other new interpretations.

In each of the examples I have discussed in this chapter, we see the way in which part of the effect of written commentary is to make the work of readers—work which is often ephemeral and intangible—part of the physical page of the text. Whether those readers intend to disagree, as with Blake's commentary on Reynolds; to clarify, as with Rashi's commentary on Jewish texts; or to reposition a text, as with Renaissance Biblical commentators, their responses become part of the subsequent life of the text as it repeatedly comes into contact with active, living readers who will encounter both the text and the commentary. In becoming part of the text, commentary can then influence subsequent readers in numerous ways.

Like other kinds of commentary, teachers' written comments also make the work of a reader part of a text, and they intervene in the reading of the student writers who must interpret them. Elchanan Reiner's discussion of manuscripts in the late medieval yeshiva provides an example of readers affecting a primary text by expanding its meaning as comments are folded into the primary text itself, and students' papers often undergo a somewhat similar transformation as student revise in response to their teacher's comments. Jason Snart asks what it would mean to imagine Blake's annotations as "a kind of 'tearing the book,' an act that is textually and materially intrusive and disruptive"; what if we imagine teacher's comments in a similar way? Students, no doubt, often experience teachers' comments as intrusive and disruptive, and part of the work of those comments lies in their ability to unsettle a text that needs to go further in some way. Sometimes teachers are quite specific in their intrusions—for example, by asking students to cut half of a text and rewrite it based on what is left. Some

teachers instead ask students to rethink a central idea or to rewrite a text from a different perspective. Both of these types of request ask students to "unfinish" their work and recompose it as something new, and a great part of the value of writing *with* teachers lies in the teacher's role as reader, which helps the text enter a more fluid state in which all kinds of changes in response to a number of influences are possible.

These kinds of pedagogical interventions raise some of the questions of authority that I addressed in the previous chapter. Unlike student texts, the non-pedagogical texts that I examine here tend to carry great authority in relation to their commentators. Biblical commentators, for example, whether Jewish or Christian, approach the object of their commentary as a text that cannot be changed, in part because of the tremendous authority of that text. Their commentaries may seek to clarify the text or to challenge others' interpretations of the text, but they do not seek to change the text itself. As another example, Blake's commentary on Reynolds is somewhat different in that Blake does not revere Reynolds's text in the way that Biblical commentators revere the Bible. However, Reynolds was president of the Royal Academy of Arts at the time that Blake was a student there, and Reynolds's *Discourses on Art* were the work of an authoritative figure, even if Blake did not accept that authority upon himself. Reynolds's authority may have partially led Blake to take the stance that he did in writing his annotations, challenging Reynolds's ideas in a direct and hostile manner.

When a teacher reads a student text, however, the distribution of authority in the relationship is very different. Because the teacher has greater knowledge and experience and the ability to assign grades, she can affect both the text and its author in ways that the other commentators I consider in this chapter could not. In the examples I consider in this chapter the text generally has greater authority, but in the situation of a teacher reading a student's writing,

authority tends to lie with the reader. In the previous chapter I argue that a certain kind of appropriation is unavoidable in the experience of reading, in which readers "appropriate" texts by forming their own interpretations. In a pedagogical situation, the effects of this appropriation can be either positive or negative, or even both, depending on the teacher and the situation. I also argue that teachers' authority can be a productive element of teaching because it allows teachers to encourage students to try out new ways of writing, reading and thinking. When we view student texts in relation to more authoritative texts, however, we see how student writing is more vulnerable and open to the influence of the reader. Because of the greater vulnerability of the student text, the teacher-reader is in a much more delicate position than the other commentators I discuss in this chapter. Her response can push students toward productive changes in both their writing and their thinking, but it can also easily overwhelm the text, as many others have cautioned. The question the teacher must ask is not a simple one of whether to assert authority or restrain it but rather the more nuanced questions of what aspects of a text to focus on, what kind of pressure to exert, and how to develop a relationship in which the student has meaningful choices available to him.

When the teacher whose comments I consider above responds to her students' writing, she is asking students to imagine their texts as being different from what they are in some way, and this is part of the potential value of response. In another midterm essay from this same course, we see the teacher again using her written response as a way to show the student how she has read the text and to encourage the student to keep her text and her reading fluid and open to change. This essay addresses the topic of the Caribbean landscape in three texts—*Wide Sargasso Sea*, Derek Walcott's essay "The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory," and Jamaica Kincaid's

*A Small Place*. Drawing on a passage from *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the student writes the following:[22]

> During a rum-fueled tête-à-tête, Rochester tells Antoinette, "I feel very much a stranger here. I feel that this place is my enemy and on your side," to which Antoinette responds, "You are quite mistaken. It is not for you and not for me. It has nothing to do with either of us. That is why you are afraid of it, because it is something else" (Rhys 78). As a reader, this conversation reinforces the idea <u>that the landscape is its own character in the story</u>. Always looming in the background, foreshadowing, mirroring, symbolizing. There is rarely a page that some form of Caribbean botany, scenery, or wildlife is not present. [Underlined passage reflects the teacher's marking.]

In the margin beside this passage, the teacher has written in response to the underlined section of text

> Well put (You might acknowledge that Braithwaite has made this point about Caribbean literature more generally—although he denies that WSS/Rhys are Caribbean. Quite ironic, eh?)

This comment does several things. It directs the student reader's attention outside of her own essay to a text that she has not addressed here, showing her another connection that she could make to open up her own inquiry into the Caribbean landscape in literature. The comment also engages the student in conversation and includes the teacher's own opinion of Braithwaite's rejection of *Wide Sargasso Sea* as Caribbean literature. This remark also seems to pick up on a prior discussion; the teacher's suggestion that the student acknowledge Braithwaite's position

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[22] The full text of this essay is included as Appendix E.

implies that the student is already aware of it. The student does refer to Braithwaite in the conclusion of her essay:

> Braithwaite's explanation of how the Caribbean islands were formed (the space between the Andes and the Rockies descended into the ocean at right angles, leaving only mountain tops emerged, which then became the Caribbean islands) makes me believe there is hope of the Caribbean people looking to a different history. One of the natural persuasion, where monumental movements in the earth created a small, unique corner of the world. A place where one might have arrived in unspeakable ways, but can now let go to live on the pinnacles of these undersea mountains, in unity, claiming this unparalleled beauty as their own, and not that of the tourists of the Western world.

In response, the teacher writes

> This is a very <u>loving</u> and moving conclusion, Cherie. Stay with it; keep working the swim-on sentences! There are many insights – too condensed – here.

The teacher encourages the student to keep working in this direction, opening up her ideas and extending the boundaries of her essay as she does so. The teacher's endnote offers more specific suggestions for the student to consider as she does this revising:

> The sensitivity of your argument here is wonderful to see. These texts' use of landscape has clearly caught your imagination.

> Compositionally, though, you need to rework the paper so that you're not setting it up to talk about 3 texts sequentially and just say "each one's doing something different" (though the differences you identify <u>are</u> interesting in themselves.)

> Part of the difficulty is that you're comparing 2 essays with a novel – and each genre makes its "argument" differently. Think about how to deal with that in a revision. [and

btw, would reference to Carpentier, and landscape in marvelous realism help – or would it be too much to handle?]

But the main question that you need to get at to deepen your argument is this: <u>Why</u> does each text approach landscape so differently? What problems does each thereby formally resolve? What problems can it <u>not</u> resolve? What might DW and JK say to each other? What <u>aspects</u> of Caribbean landscape does each claim and why?

(By the way – you don't comment on the "Sargasso" Sea . . .)

This paper is good as it stands, but has many untapped riches, as Carpentier might say.

PS FYI: You might be interested in some paintings I have that set up Che Guevara as landscape. As I write, I'm listening to "Verde Luz" – a kind of anthem of Puerto Rican independentistas. It talks about "free, your skies; your star, solitary . . . / the green light of the mountains and sea"

The teacher here is clearly supportive of the project the student has defined for herself and of her initial efforts to pursue her inquiry. She points out, though, the ways in which the paper is not working, and one way that she addresses these problems is by directing attention to the form of the paper, which is basically an extended version of a five-paragraph essay in which few connections are made between the three "body" sections. She provides the student with questions to consider as she tries to relate those paragraphs to one another in revising, offering the student ways of seeing connections between different parts of her essay that she is not yet making for herself. In the main section of the endnote and in the postscript, the teacher also suggests other texts that the student could bring in as she explores her topic, although she also acknowledges that some of these references might be beyond the scope of this paper. The teacher indicates the flexibility of boundaries when she asks the student if bringing in marvelous realism would be too

much for the writer to handle at this stage of the writing process, a question which calls attention to the ways in which this text is not "fixed" but can be changed from draft to draft depending on what seems necessary and feasible to the writer. One of the most interesting features of this endnote is the postscript, in which the teacher describes the music that she is listening to as she writes, music which coincidentally intersects with the student's topic. This gesture illustrates another way in which a reader can extend a text beyond the boundaries of the printed page by making new connections with the extra-textual world. In this endnote, the teacher-reader makes her own response as an active reader visible in her commentary. Taken together, the commentaries I examine in this chapter make visible the fact that while a text itself may in some sense be static words on the page, it exists in the context of a shifting, dynamic world of interpretation and response, in which readers make their own meaning from texts and use them in varied and unpredictable ways. I would argue that in her commentary, this teacher attempts to show her students how they can take advantage of that context as they revise, and she does this by pointing to factors—disciplinary conventions and expectations, other texts, her own reading of the primary texts and the students' writing—that can influence the students as they rewrite their essays.

Composition scholarship tends to characterize student writing as either a product or a process, but I would argue that the somewhat unlikely confluence of texts that I assemble in this chapter suggests a particular way of imagining the writing process that includes periods of both stasis *and* change, each of which imply different ways of reading for both students and teachers. In each example, we see a text that a writer, student or otherwise, has finished and made available to the world in some way. (In the case of Biblical commentaries the question of authorship is more complicated, but even so, the text has assumed a final form and been widely

154

published.) Commentators respond to these finished texts, opening them up to re-interpretation and, in such cases as the composition classroom and the medieval yeshiva, to actually being changed. In more centripetal periods, an individual writer moves toward assembling a stable text that is "finished," at least for a time, and may need to shut out or ignore the influence of other readers and their interpretations. These moments of stasis are broken up by more centrifugal periods of change, in which the writer opens the text to the possibilities of revision, which can be motivated by a number of influences, including the response of a teacher-reader. This way of thinking about and describing the writing process may help students to take greater advantage of the possibilities available to them when they revise in response to a teacher's comments. Change is certainly more difficult and demanding for the writer, but it is also when learning is most likely to happen.

# 5.0    WRITTEN RESPONSE AND THE PERSPECTIVES OF READER AND WRITER

In the previous chapter, I consider the difficulty that a text with comments presents for a student reader by challenging her to think of her text in a more fluid way and to imagine it as being different from what she has already written. In this chapter, I take up another difficulty, that which arises from the differences between the perspectives of teacher and student. To explore this difficulty, I begin with a student text with its accompanying written response. This essay, which addresses the issue of race in *Moby-Dick*, was the final paper written in an upper-level period course on American Literature up to the Civil War. This particular section of the course focused on the idea that during this period, American writers were trying to establish a literature that dealt with distinctly American subjects and themes and that could be taken seriously as a "national" literature, on equal footing with more established European literary traditions. The course featured a demanding list of required readings, including selections from the *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, all of the novel *Wieland*, selections of poetry, and all of *Moby-Dick*. By the time students read *Moby-Dick*, they would also have read *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, and race would have been readily at hand as a topic of discussion. Although I do not know the history of this particular student, it seems likely that she was an English major, given the nature of this course and the fact that she took another period course from this teacher the following semester. Because she wrote this paper at the end of the

semester, she would have been involved for the previous two months in discussions of critical reading and writing in this course.

The major assignments of the course were two exams (a mid-term worth 20% of the final grade and a final exam worth 25%) and this final essay, worth 20%. This essay, written in the final weeks of the course, was the only piece of writing of substantial length, although students were required to write five or so one-page pieces in response to the readings. While this course was not designated as writing-intensive, the teacher placed great emphasis on writing, and writing was addressed regularly in class, including discussions of students' short papers, sentence-level issues, and the writing strategies employed in the assigned critical readings. Despite this attention to writing, though, the writing and revising of longer essays would not have been a central activity of the course.

For this final essay, there was no formal written assignment; the requirements for the essay were given in the syllabus. The teacher offered minimal direction, instead allowing students great freedom in designing their own projects:

This assignment is designed to give you an opportunity to make a substantial argument based on your own thinking about one or more course readings. Please let me know your general direction, either by email or by having a brief conference with me, before you get started, and be sure to get explicit approval with me, just to make sure you're not off on the wrong foot. I can also help you formulate a topic if you're having trouble. You do not have to consult secondary (critical) works for this essay, but be sure to cite any works you consult that influence your work, including websites.

Students were required to submit a draft version of the essay for feedback from the teacher prior to turning in the final version. The teacher did not offer any other requirements or criteria, which

157

suggests that students were to assume quite a bit of responsibility for the direction of their essays.

This paper is a first draft of the final essay—in her title, the student calls it a "very rough draft"—and throughout the text there is evidence of the student's writing process in the form of abrupt breaks in the text, notes, and questions for the teacher.[23] The student attempts to argue that in *Moby-Dick*, Melville takes a stand against racism. One way in which she does this is by arguing that that there is no racial tension among the characters in the novel and that characters are valued for their abilities rather than judged according to their skin color, as in this paragraph on the crew of the Pequod, which appears near the end of the student's essay:

> By judging someone based on ability instead of race, Melville is creating a new way of judging people in society. Melville's new way of judging society creates a "raceless" environment on the ship. Analyzing Moby Dick, the reader cannot find any problems among crewmembers due to race. The lack of problems and in fighting suggests that Melville's "raceless" society removes all of the problems associated with race differences. By showing how ignoring differences in race eliminates problems in his "perfect racial microcosm" of the Pequod, Melville even wrote that "sailors belong to no nation in particular" in his work *Omoo* (Marr 9). Melville is subtly suggesting to the reader that all of the racial problems in the world could be gotten rid of by accepting all races and judging people based on their ability to contribute to the human community rather than their race. (5)

The student writer also argues that the whale itself, because it is white, symbolizes racism, which must be killed. To support her position, she describes the scene in which the harpoon to be used

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[23] See Appendix F for the full text of the essay with the teacher's comments.

158

to kill the whale is cooled in the blood of the harpooners aboard the Pequod, none of whom are white, and then interprets the killing of the whale as the "killing" of racism:

> When Ahab and his men finally do encounter Moby Dick, each of the harpooners is able to get a harpoon into the whale. Symbolically, each of the minority races is taking part in the attempt to destroy racism once and for all. Yet ultimately Ahab must be the one to kill the whale using his harpoon because he is white, and a white man must be the one to administer the fatal blow ending racism. Since racism and race differences center on the superiority of the white man, a member of the "superior" race must ultimately put an end to racism. However, Ahab is able to use the strength and traditions – the blood – of the minorities to help him (the blood on his harpoon). (6)

She concludes, however, by arguing "[t]he fact that Moby Dick ultimately succeeds in sinking the ship and destroying everyone but Ishmael indicates that a world without racism is not possible" (7).

The student texts I examine in this study present certain challenges for a reader. Because of the constraints of my particular study, I was unable to speak with the student writers about their work or their interpretation of their teachers' comments. Further, like many archives of student papers, mine is somewhat fragmented, and I do not have a full sequence of papers for most of the students who participated in this study. These gaps exist for a number of reasons; the teachers who participated were often busy and were sometimes unable to save copies of the texts for me, and some students may not have completed assignments or may have withdrawn from the courses for which they were writing. For all of these reasons, I do not always know what happened after students wrote these particular papers, and I do not know what the teachers intended or how the students responded to the comments. As the reader, I must try to imagine

159

how students and teachers might have interpreted one another. To do this I have drawn on my experience as both a student and teacher of composition and literature courses and on my interpretation of the materials that are available to me. My interpretations almost certainly do not reflect the exact experience of the students and teachers involved, but they help me to imagine how these comments present both opportunities and challenges for students.

The teacher responds to this essay on *Moby-Dick* with short notes in the margins, but the bulk of her response consists of a 3 ½-page, single-spaced, endnote (for the full text of both the essay and the comments, see Appendix F). Rather than revising in response to these comments, however, for reasons unknown to me the student chose to write an entirely different essay on a different topic. An easy critique of the teacher's response might be that it is too much, too overwhelming, and that it offers the student no way to retain control of her own project, making it difficult for the student to imagine a way of revising her text. Such a critique would be in keeping with much of the existing scholarship on commenting, but it would overlook much that is valuable about the response that the teacher offers the student. I want to read this response differently. Though lengthy, the teacher's response is rich and thoughtful, and I want to think about possible reasons for why it did not achieve what the teacher might have hoped, at least not in a way that is visible on the page. This commentary is the written representation of the teacher's reading, but like any text, its meaning is not necessarily transparent, and it requires interpretation on the part of the reader, who in this case is the student writer. In my reading of this paper with its commentary, I draw on the work of Mariolina Salvatori, who has elaborated a particular version of "difficulty" in which difficulty is understood not as something negative to be avoided, but rather as a necessary part of the experience of learning that any student must

confront and work through.[24] Based on the available evidence, I do not know how this student read this comment or why she chose not to revise this paper. I want to imagine for a moment, however, that part of her choice was determined by a particular kind of difficulty involved in reading this comment—difficulty that is an inherent part of written comments that present great possibilities for learning by challenging students to think in a different way.

The first problem the teacher calls attention to in the student's essay relates to the logic of the argument. The teacher points to the way in which, for most of the paper, the student argues that Melville presents the Pequod as a space that is free from racial prejudice. She then points to the way the student's interpretation of the Pequod's destruction undercuts that reading:

> One problem is that the paper seems to work hard to establish that the Pequod is a society in which there is no racial prejudice. . . .However, on the last page, the fact that ship [sic] sinks is interpreted to mean that there can't be a "raceless" world—by which I assume you mean mainly a world without racial inequality and race-based prejudice. This path that the paper takes seems to be self-undermining.

The problem the teacher identifies is that the end of the essay contradicts its more optimistic thesis and the work that most of the essay tries to do.  As an experienced reader who has taken many classes in composition and literature over the years and who has taught in both of these areas, I can imagine several tasks that this student might undertake in response to this comment. I read this endnote as an invitation for the student to think about an aspect of her paper that is problematic but that could also lead to richer insights about the novel and to a stronger argument. The comment points to two interpretive choices the student has made that seem to conflict. On the one hand, that the Pequod is "raceless" and that this quality represents Melville's opposition

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[24] For more on difficulty, see Salvatori, "Toward a Hermeneutics of Difficulty," and Salvatori and Donahue, *The Elements (and Pleasures) of Difficulty*. I also discuss Salvatori's concept of difficulty in Chapter 3.

to racism, and on the other hand that the sinking of the ship means that this racelessness cannot exist; the student does not reconcile her pessimistic interpretation of the novel's ending with the optimism of her thesis. One course of action the student might take would be to return to the novel and rethink her interpretation. This rereading would likely involve questions of what textual evidence exists to support the interpretation and how persuasive that evidence is. Based on this rereading, the student might decide to revise her interpretation. If she decides, however, that her interpretation is sound and that she still stands behind it, she must address the problem that the contradiction in the paper presents by asking what it means that the novel spends many, many pages establishing a world that ultimately is not viable. She might then rewrite sections of the essay to bring this observation forward, toning down the optimism of much of the paper.

The path I have outlined here is only one of many possibilities, but any path the student took that would lead to a successful revision would likely involve some demanding rereading and rewriting. Many literary texts present contradictions, and much interesting interpretation results when the reader faces those contradictions squarely and asks questions about what they might mean. This kind of reading, however, is not easy. The instruction in literature that students receive prior to entering college is likely to be much simpler, such as encouraging them to equate a textual feature with a single idea—the white whale equals white racism, for example—and students often are not asked to attempt more complicated interpretation until they reach college courses like this one. It is possible that the teacher had done some work in this course to teach students to interpret such perceived contradictions, but even so, such reading would most likely have been relatively new to them. The kind of reading and revision that this comment implies could be potentially difficult and unfamiliar to the student.

Another difficulty presented by this endnote is that this is not the only problem the teacher points out; in fact, the comment turns out to be relatively minor in the larger context of the teacher's response. After making this observation, the teacher goes on to discuss at length the historical problems with how the student treats race in her essay, and this discussion fills much of the endnote:

> However, the more significant problem is really the way the paper treats race (and it's symptomatic of ways that race often gets discussed in the media—so it's an understandable by-product of living in the world today, even though it's analytically problematic, especially when writing about the 1850s). In the paper as it stands, it seems as though race is important only because it's a factor that causes prejudice and unfairness on the part of some people. The main ways that such prejudice and unfairness would be expressed, the logic goes, would be white people's being unwilling to hire or socialize with people of other races. This racism is treated in the paper as if it is older—more traditional, more long-standing—than attitudes that assume human equality regardless of race or other factors.

> What I've just described is an understanding of race and racism that would work much better for the 1950s (or 1960s) than for the 1850s. (And the racism of the 1950s has not gone away for us yet—so I can understand why it's still on your radar screen.) In the 1950s, the main public forms of racism that were targeted by the Civil Rights movement and similar reforms involved discrimination in employment, public segregation, and forms of social segregation that were related to public segregation. In other words, the marks of white racism mainly involved white people's wanting black people out of "their" spaces except in certain well-defined servant capacities. The laws supporting

racial segregation that the Civil Rights movement tackled were mainly passed in the 1890s. (This is often a surprise to people: several decades AFTER slavery ended, as part of a backlash resulting from the end to Reconstruction in the South, states passed Jim Crow laws and segregation became much more pronounced than ever before.) . . . .

SO: your paper as it stands suggests that white people on the Pequod do not practice the forms of segregation and discrimination that became the hallmark of the first half of the 20$^{th}$ century. As you can imagine, though, that's a curious way to investigate this text of the 1850s. . . .

The task for your essay, then, is to figure out a way to frame an inquiry about race that is appropriate to the 1850s and—even more importantly—appropriate to the world of this text.

In explaining her reading of the student's paper, the teacher outlines two frameworks that are based on different understandings of racial relations, the one that the student has used and one that is more historically appropriate for the novel. In the student's reading of the novel, racial prejudice is signaled by a desire for separation between people of different skin color and a tendency for people to judge one another based on skin color rather than on other intangible qualities. The framework the teacher proposes instead involves more complex understandings of what race might mean for Melville and for the novel, and she encourages the student to consider other distinctions besides "black" and "white." She explains this framework further on in the endnote:

The interracial links you posit, especially Queequeg's with Ishmael, do seem important to explore, but not because the Pequod is completely race-blind; as I noted in a margin, chapter 40 (around p. 150) involves racial slurs and violence. But if the big gulf between

Ishmael and Queequeg is not between white and black or dark but between civilized and

barbaric, Western and nonwestern, Christian and non-Christian, then the interracial

dimension of their friendship might not be the most important way to name it.

"Whiteness" may be associated with Anglo-American or Euro-American beliefs in the

cultural superiority of Western Christian cultures, and internal "minorities" (again, a 20th-

century cultural term) may not be as important as the "Others" represented by Africa,

Asia, and other lands that Westerners tended to write off as uncivilized.  (I'm invoking

the "Other" here, but let me suggest that if you use the term, you need to be careful to

explain what you mean by it—it is often used but can take on different forms of

significance.)

The teacher's way of reading, which is sensitive to historical difference, allows her to identify

and foreground a key problem with the student's interpretation. The teacher offers the student a

way of understanding the source of the problem by suggesting that the student is basing the

concept of race that she uses to interpret the novel on familiar notions that are part of her own

historical moment rather than that of *Moby-Dick*. In doing so, the teacher explicitly calls the

student's attention to the differences between her moment and that of the novel. The ability to

make this kind of distinction between historical and social contexts is essential if the student is to

write a successful essay about a historically distant novel and the social issues with which it is

enmeshed. The teacher's interpretation of the source of the problem—that the student is applying

a notion of race more appropriate to her own time—is quite plausible, but even if the teacher is

incorrect in her assessment of what has caused the student to read and write in this way, the

student's text itself does exhibit the problems that the teacher describes, and the student would

need to address them in order to produce an essay that would be persuasive in the context of many upper-level literature courses.

One reason I am drawn to this paper is that the endnote, for all the difficulties it presents, is in many ways an example of experienced, committed teaching, and it offers great insight into how this teacher reads this student's writing. Again, as both a teacher and long-time student of reading and writing, I read this comment as an invitation for the student to learn something about the differences between perceptions of race at different historical moments and to use what she has learned to write an essay that takes a more sophisticated account of these differences. We can see how the teacher's perspective—her knowledge, experience, and the ways of reading and writing that she wants to teach in this course—shapes her reading of the student's text. Her familiarity with the novel and its historical moment allow her to recognize the ways in which the student is applying a historically inappropriate notion of race and to describe the paper in those terms. This response makes sense for a course that addresses the relationship between literature and its historical context, and if the ways of thinking that the teacher presents for the student are difficult and complicated, they are also important and potentially extremely valuable if the student can find a way to incorporate them into her own reading and writing.

However, as I have suggested, the teacher's interpretation of the student's essay is not the only act of reading in this situation; the student must read and interpret the teacher's response. Although reader-response theory focuses primarily on literary texts rather than the texts of teacher and students, this approach to reading can provide insights into the texts I am examining—and the difficulties they might present to students—because of the way in which these theorists consider meaning to be the product of the interaction of reader and text. As part of her transactional theory of reading, Louise Rosenblatt conceives of the reader as an active

participant in the process of making meaning from texts. Readers, she argues, do not simply absorb information; nor do they wholly impose themselves on the text. Rather, they participate in a complex transaction that includes the reader, the text, the author, and many other aspects of the particular reading event. Reading, for Rosenblatt, is the product of a specific reader in a specific situation:

> The reading of a text is an event occurring at a particular time in a particular environment at a particular moment in the life history of the reader. The transaction will involve not only the past experience but also the present state and present interests or preoccupations of the reader. This suggests the possibility that printed marks on a page may even become different linguistic symbols by virtue of transactions with different readers. (Rosenblatt 20)

Based on this understanding of reading, the meaning that arises from the encounter between text and reader differs depending on who the reader is, what she knows, and what she expects from the experience. While I do not know how the student interpreted this endnote, her interpretation was very likely different from the teacher's or my own. The elements that Rosenblatt names as factors in determining the outcome of a reading event would most likely be quite different for an experienced, tenured professor and an undergraduate student in her course.[25]

The teacher's articulation of the work that lies before the student provides an example of a possible point of difference. Looking back at the endnote, the teacher describes the student's task as being "to figure out a way to frame an inquiry about race that is appropriate to the 1850s and . . . to the world of this text." "To frame an inquiry" is language that would be relatively

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[25] For further discussion of the reader's role in interpretation, see Iser, Rosenblatt (1938; 1978; 2005), and Salvatori (1983; 1986; 1996), among others.

common in the sphere of literary criticism and study, but an undergraduate student, as a relatively new participant in this sphere, may not understand what that language signifies and what kind of work it implies. The teacher's request that the student reframe her argument suggests a course of action something like the following: The student would need to somehow, either through talking with the teacher or doing her own research, become more familiar with the ways in which race was thought about and talked about during the period when the novel was written, and to think about how those ways of thinking and talking are different from her own. She would then need to return to the novel and re-evaluate the evidence there, deciding what she thinks the novel has to say about race now that "race" means something different than what she had previously thought. She would then need to revise both her argument and her essay substantially in order to reflect this new understanding. This work would require the student to put forth a great deal of effort, both in terms of shifting her own interpretation to accommodate a new way of thinking and in terms of the time it could potentially take to apply this new way of thinking to a novel of this length and to produce what would in some ways be a new essay. While it is possible that the student might have enough experience with literature courses that the invitation to re-frame her inquiry would signal to her the kind of work that I have described, it is likely that she would be uncertain about what she was being asked to do and daunted by the work of making such sweeping changes.

Another paper by this student from earlier in the course provides further insight into why this kind of response might be difficult for students to interpret or respond to. In this one-page essay, the student compares moments from *Moby-Dick* and Hawthorne's short story "Young Goodman Brown" in which a character is invited to participate in non-Christian religious practices and must decide what to do. The student points out similarities and differences between

the scenes, but she ultimately refrains from drawing conclusions about their significance, suggesting simply that the scenes "represent the changes taking place in the religious arena during the early 1800s and illustrate the spiritual difficulty of deciding which worship practices were acceptable for Christians and which ones were not."[26] The teacher is somewhat unsatisfied with the student's reading of these passages and responds as follows (this is the full text of the endnote):

> It's really important to discuss whether works of literature securely presume that Christianity is their truth <u>or</u> whether they engage Christianity (as the dominant religion in the US at the time) without being totally 'inside' it. Are there ways in which *Moby-Dick* stages questions <u>about</u> Christianity as well as <u>within</u> Christianity? What questions could you bring to a text's treatment of Christianity to establish what place Christianity has in its world?

In this endnote, the teacher encourages the student to think further about the scenes she has chosen in relation to the larger idea she uses to frame them, religion. While the student notes that religion is an important element of both scenes, she does not ask the more subtle question that the teacher presents, the question of how these texts might have different relationships to this theme. The teacher is asking the student to do a more critical kind of reading by not assuming that both of these literary texts accept the truth of Christianity and are simply engaged in a process of deciding what practices are in agreement with that position. Instead, the teacher wants the student to take a step back and question the position the texts take in relation to Christianity in the first place. This way of reading can potentially help the student to see aspects of these texts that she may initially have overlooked or misunderstood. However, the endnote asks the student

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[26] See Appendix G for the full text of the essay.

to rethink assumptions she has made about these texts, and this kind of rethinking challenges the student to do the difficult work of returning to the texts to look for details she may have previously overlooked that might help her to decide how the texts are positioned in relation to Christianity. This way of reading would be quite familiar to the teacher, but it would likely be both less comfortable and less obvious for the student, which could cause her to interpret the teacher's response differently from the teacher herself.

I would argue that the differences between the perspectives of student and teacher constitute one of the central difficulties students face when they confront their teachers' written responses. Wolfgang Iser offers a way to explore those differences further by calling attention to the way in which all relationships between individuals involve a gap that arises from the fact that no one can ever experience another's experience. As I read Iser, his theory of reading extends Rosenblatt's by taking into account not only the situation of the interpreter but also the relationships between participants in an interpretive encounter, such as a reader and a text. "Contact" in interpersonal relations, he argues, "depends on our continually filling in a central gap in our experience" (Iser 165). Because pure, unmediated perception of another is impossible, this process of filling in the gap (Iser also calls it a "blank") between participants requires interpretation, the act of processing our perceptions of the other so that they make sense to us.[27] Iser refers to the "fundamental asymmetry" of interaction—a situation in which the two participants are inherently different—that exists both between speakers in a conversation and between a reader and a text. This asymmetry creates a gap in understanding between the participants in the transaction, which motivates the active participants—the speakers in the case

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[27] To clarify, Iser also at times uses the term "gap" to refer to an aspect of the text itself that the reader must somehow fill in rather than to a gap in understanding between text and reader. The latter meaning is the one that I am using here. (For a discussion of the function of gaps in texts, see Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach.")

of conversation and the reader in the case of a reader and a text—to try to fill it. In either situation, the gap cannot truly be "filled" because we cannot completely share the experience of the other speaker or of the author of the text; instead, we engage in interpretation and, in the process, produce new meaning that is influenced by both participants but is identical to neither. Despite the fact that perfect, unmediated communication is impossible, however, Iser argues that interactions can be more or less successful, depending on the participants:

> The interaction fails if the mutual projections of the social partners do not change, or if the reader's projections superimpose themselves unimpeded upon the text. Failure, then means filling the blank [or gap] exclusively with one's own projections. Now as the blank gives rise to the reader's projections, but the text itself cannot change, it follows that a successful relationship between text and reader can only come about through changes in the reader's projections. (Iser 167)

I would argue that the activities that students and teachers engage in—namely reading, commenting and revising—function as a means of "filling in the gap" between the text and the reader and between the teacher and the student. However, the interaction may be a failure if the participants are not able to adjust their perceptions in response to one another. The changes or adjustments Iser refers to are one way to describe what we might call "learning." Readers' comments on a writer's text often require that the writer learn something new or entertain a new way of thinking in order to understand them, either about the text itself, the subject matter that the text takes up, or both. (This is true, I would argue, for many kinds of readers and writers, even those whose perspectives are not as different as those of a tenured professor and an undergraduate student.) In order to understand her teacher's endnote, the writer of the *Moby-Dick* paper must grasp the differences between her own framework and the one the teacher has

outlined, which is most likely new information for her. This change in itself carries with it a certain degree of difficulty. The student would also have to learn a new way of looking at her own essay, one in which she does not take her own ideas about race for granted but understands them as being embedded in a particular historical and social context.[28]

The situation of student writing is interesting because it involves qualities of both kinds of interactions that Iser describes; it involves readers and texts, but like two people conversing, the teacher and the student writer can both change as a result of their interactions. Although students usually have the option of speaking to teachers in person once they receive comments, the commenting process is not exactly a conversation. It is an exchange of sorts—a series of interpretive acts in which the student writes a paper, the teacher reads the paper and writes comments, the student reads those comments and revises in response—but at the moment that the student confronts the written comments, the teacher is often not immediately available for discussion and questioning. For numerous reasons, many students choose not to seek further explanation from their teachers and attempt to interpret the written comments on their own. The ways in which the process of commenting and revising are *not* a conversation constitute another element of difficulty in the process; written comments are a necessarily limited representation of the teacher's reading, and the inability to speak back to those comments means that the student may fill in areas of confusion and uncertainty by guessing rather than by pursuing further explanation.

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[28] Although I rely on Rosenblatt, Iser, and later Mary Louise Pratt in this chapter for possible explanations of how individual readers' different perspectives can lead them to respond to texts in different ways, I am also indebted to the theory of understanding that Hans-Georg Gadamer presents in *Truth and Method.* Although Gadamer's theory does not address the issues of difference and miscommunication that I take up in this chapter, his metaphor of "horizons" as a way of conceptualizing differences among readers initially helped me to imagine the way in which readers bring different experiences and frameworks to the interpretive work that they do with texts.

In my next set of examples, a series of papers written for a first-year composition course, we see another instance of thoughtful commentary that was written by a committed teacher but that seems to have presented difficulties for its student reader. I will be considering five student texts written by a single student from the first half of the course: a two-page reading-response and two longer essays with their subsequent revisions. These papers show the way in which, over the course of half a semester, the student responds to the teacher in sometimes unpredictable ways that do not necessarily seem to be the product of having read and understood the teacher's comments. The first piece is a short response written on James Baldwin's essay "Notes of a Native Son." The assignment asked the student to "underline or highlight passages in which you sense a tension within Baldwin's writing" and then to choose one of those passages to discuss in a response paper. The teacher provides these questions in the prompt: "What are the opposing ideas in the passage you have selected? Why, to paraphrase Baldwin, hold in mind these two ideas? Why might it be useful or valuable to do so? That is, why not resolve the contradiction by choosing one side or the other?"

The language of this assignment reflects an interest in tension, contradiction and complexity that is one of the hallmarks of this course, which leads students through an exploration of the literary essay. Variations of this staff syllabus were used in this department by approximately 25 instructors per semester for several years, and other documents help to provide a sense of the values of this course. The course description of another version of this syllabus also foregrounds contradiction and complexity: "If, as F. Scott Fitzgerald wrote, 'the test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time,' then the essay is also a place where complex, rather than closed or systematic thinking is encouraged." This passage from Fitzgerald echoes the language of "opposing ideas" that we see

173

in the assignment on Baldwin. In the following section from an assignment later in the course, we again see this interest in tension and contradiction:

> As you prepare to write, think of a story or series of related stories that provide rich occasions for reading. You may find that you do not yet know how these individual moments come together, precisely what they *mean*. But rather than providing easy answers, think about how you can surround your subject, come at it from a number of angles, zero in. Consider the tensions and contradictions in your own experiences and in the culture or community in which you live, the sphinx to which you, as a writer, feel compelled to respond.

In a way, this excerpt acknowledges the difficulty of what students are being asked to do when it cautions them against "providing easy answers." The work of focusing on contradictions without necessarily resolving them is difficult because it requires the reader/writer to live with some uncertainty and potentially some confusion, a position that can be more uncomfortable than settling on a single, certain answer or meaning. Students in this course would have had to come to terms with this way of thinking in order to write in the way that the assignments demand.

In her short piece, the student chooses for her discussion a passage on injustice that appears near the end of Baldwin's essay:

> The first idea was acceptance, the acceptance, totally without rancor, of life as it is, and men as they are: in the light of this idea, it goes without saying that injustice is a commonplace. But this did not mean that one could be complacent, for the second idea was of equal power: that one must never, in one's own life, accept these injustices as commonplace but must fight them with all one's strength. (Baldwin 238)

The student addresses Baldwin's passage most directly in these paragraphs from her response:[29]

> In the contradiction, Baldwin talks about how one can accept life as it is without resentment, or fight for equality with all of ones strength. He did not seem to want to pick either way of life. If he accepts all the injustices he had, just because he was black, his life would be nothing but regret. On the other hand, if he fought for his equality, he would probably end up dead. He did not feel that there was a solution for his problems. Either way he looked at it, they seemed to have both pros and cons.
>
> If I were Baldwin, I feel it would be most beneficial to pick the first part of the contradiction. If Baldwin would live by the rules that were given to him, he would rarely encounter problems. I know avoiding the problem is not always the solution, but life is a precious thing. After all, life is not always fair.

In her reading of the student's text as we see it represented by her comments, the teacher pays particular attention to the student's decision to choose one side of the contradiction Baldwin presents. When the student writes, "In the contradiction, Baldwin talks about how one can accept life as it is without resentment, or fight for equality with all of ones strength," the teacher responds in the margin, "does Baldwin set up an either/or?" Although the student acknowledges that Baldwin does not "seem to want to pick either way of life," the teacher understands the student to be interpreting Baldwin as offering a choice between two positions. I read the teacher as wanting the student to notice how Baldwin's text presents two contradictory ideas that must nevertheless be held in tension at the same time, and she wants the student to resist the urge to choose one. Here we see the teacher pointing to a difference between her own thinking and the student's. From the perspective of the student's text, tension is something to be resolved; for the

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[29] See Appendix H for the full text of the essay with the teacher's comments.

teacher and for Baldwin, tension must be maintained. The student then goes on to state which of Baldwin's options she would choose, saying that she would "pick the first part of the contradiction." In her marginal note, the teacher pushes against this assertion, saying "you would accept racism? accept second-class citizenship?" In her endnote, the teacher offers a more full articulation of the question she asked in her marginal notes:

> At the end here, you try to resolve Baldwin's conflict – but I think you need to ask, more carefully, why <u>not</u> resolve – why does he make this choice? Are you honestly suggesting people accept injustice and "live by the rules"? How does the truism "Life is not always fair" serve to close down questioning, inquiry; how does it offer an easy answer?

I would argue that the teacher's mode of reading, which emphasizes questioning, contradiction and tension, allows her to foreground the way in which the student seems to be overlooking a key element of Baldwin's passage: his growing belief that these ideas are equally important and that one must not be chosen at the expense of the other. This response reveals the way in which the teacher reads the student's text from the perspective suggested in the course materials discussed above, a perspective in which complexity and contradiction are to be valued and explored rather than erased. Viewing the student's text through this lens, the teacher focuses on the way in which the student has responded to a moment of great tension and complexity, a key moment in Baldwin's text, by trying to resolve the contradiction she sees. Rather than taking up Baldwin's challenge to hold two opposing positions in tension, the student responds by choosing one side; the teacher observes this choice and presses the student in her questions to resist the urge to eliminate tension and to think about what might be gained through this resistance, a mode of reading that would be more in keeping with Baldwin's text.

176

In looking at the teacher's comments alongside the student's essay, we see a version of Iser's fundamental asymmetry in the difference between how these two participants each relate to contradiction, and this asymmetry could potentially be a source of difficulty for the student as she reads what her teacher has written. Because this text was not revised, I do not know how the student responded to the comments, but I would imagine that for many reasons, it might not be immediately clear to many first-year students why questioning and inquiry are valuable, or why one might *not* want to accept an easy answer. For example, if a student has been taught to write in a style that requires her to choose and defend a single position, she may not understand why it can also be valuable to explore a number of positions in a piece of writing and to acknowledge that more than one position can have legitimate merit, or that seemingly oppositional positions can be equally valid. Because this essay was the first assignment in the syllabus, the student would not yet have been exposed in this particular course to the mode of thinking and questioning that confronts her in the assignment and in teacher's response, and the newness of the approach could also have contributed to the potential difficulty of understanding these comments.

It is interesting to note that when the student reproduces Baldwin's passage at the top of her short essay, she omits the sentence that precedes the passage in Baldwin's original text: "It began to seem that one would have to hold in the mind forever two ideas which seemed to be in opposition." In omitting this sentence from both her quotation and her reading, the student omits the evidence in Baldwin's text that it may not be possible or desirable to choose between the positions that he outlines. One possible response to the student's essay would be to direct her attention to this sentence and to ask her what she makes of Baldwin's suggestion that these ideas might have to be forever held in tension with one another, as well as what she makes of

177

Baldwin's implication that the two positions might not be as contradictory as they initially appear ("two ideas which *seemed* to be in opposition"). Such an approach might offer the student a concrete, text-based entrance into the complex way of thinking and reading that the teacher seems to desire.

The next piece in this portfolio was the second assignment for the course, a longer essay in which students were asked to write their own "Notes of a Native Son/Daughter." In this essay, the student writes about her experience of being a diagnosed claustrophobic and her efforts to overcome the disorder. The essay is composed largely as a series of sketches from childhood which illustrate her experience, such as this one:[30]

> It was pretty early in the morning, and my mother was taking me to look for seashells on the shoreline. I was so excited to go out on the beach. We ran to the elevator and jumped in. On our way down a siren and voice started to go off in the elevator stating, "The elevator is currently stuck, please remain calm and we will get you out as soon as possible." I was terrified. I started screaming and yelling. It was only fifteen minutes before we got out, but I knew I would never get over this distressing experience. I told my mother I never wanted to be in an enclosed space ever again. She told me everything would be alright, but I knew differently.

After moving through a number of these stories, the student concludes by saying that she has overcome her disorder, although she does not say how, and she says that she would not change her experience because it has made her the person she has become. The teacher's response is similar to that in the previous example in that she foregrounds issues of conflict and

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[30] See Appendix I for the full text of the essay with the teacher's comments.

contradiction and asks the student to focus on these aspects of her text rather than moving away from them. This is the full text of the endnote:

In your reflection, you point to such an interesting conflict in your essay: the stories you tell about your claustrophobia convey difficulty, embarrassment, and yet you "would not change your disorder." As a reader, I notice how at the close of each small story, either you or your family hopes that this will be the last time, that you will be "cured." You do really nice work telling individual stories, crafting moments in which you were caught, trapped. I am struck by the line that opens paragraph 2, in which you tell us you began to use your imagination. As the essay continues, it seems a story of mind over matter, as if you must simply imagine your way out of ("conquer") having claustrophobia.

As a reader, I wonder about your own and your family's attitude toward claustrophobia. You call it a "disorder" throughout the essay and at several points talk about "getting over it." What does it mean to have a disorder? At times, you seem to see it as a medical condition, while at others as something you can just will away. Your family, on the other hand, seems to take the latter view. I wonder how you think about this. These are interesting tensions worth exploring more fully. I'd also encourage you to explore the contradiction you noticed in your own work by writing more about how claustrophobia has shaped you—how does it make you see the world differently than others?

As I said above, you write richly detailed stories—the writing is specific and I as a reader I am able to experience these moments with you. Notice how your introduction and conclusion [sic]: the introduction seems a kind of pre-writing to get you into the

essay; the conclusion makes quick work of some very interesting ideas, hence the contradiction you notice. How can you write with as much detail and specificity here, when talking about your ideas, as you do when telling stories?

I would argue that, as with the previous essay, the teacher's valuing of contradiction allows her to make observations about this text that could lead the student to develop a more interesting piece of writing. For example, as the teacher indicates, the student glides over the question of whether claustrophobia is a medical condition (and what that would mean) or something that the student can choose to overcome if she is strong enough (her essay seems to suggest the latter). By exploring this conflict more explicitly in her writing, the student could convey some of the complexity of claustrophobia to readers who do not share this experience. The teacher's question of how claustrophobia has shaped the way the student sees the world also points to such a revision. The student herself gestures toward this contradiction to some degree in the final paragraph of her draft:

This disorder is not an easy obstacle to overcome. It is, without a doubt, a life changing experience. Although it was tough to get through, I would not change my disorder. It has definitely made me a stronger person. It is something that affected my life everyday for a long time. I am proud to say that I am one of the few that have conquered my fear.

Again, the teacher's tendency to value contradiction and to gravitate toward moments where she feels that a complex situation has been oversimplified allows her to point to a place in the text that could be revised into something much more interesting. The teacher notes the lack of detail in this ending, in which the student asserts that she has conquered her fear of enclosed spaces and that the victory has made her stronger without explaining what was involved with either of those

changes. Such explanation could open this ending up into a piece of writing that would provide readers with much greater insight into the experience of someone with this condition.

However, as with the previous example, this commentary also presents the student with a potentially difficult task. The narrative of an individual overcoming troubles through will and determination is commonplace—we see it everywhere in movies, television, print media, etc—and it may be difficult for the student to imagine other ways of telling her story. In some ways, the teacher is asking the student to write an essay that is similar to Baldwin's, and the student's response to Baldwin suggests that she is not entirely comfortable with a narrative that explores conflict rather than resolving it. This perspective, quite different from that of the teacher, may have made it difficult for the student to do what the teacher asked. This was the second assignment for the course—it would have been written two weeks into the term—and while the teacher's response shares the same values as her response to the student's paper on Baldwin, the student would still not have had much time to be exposed to this way of writing and thinking. In addition, there is the difficulty involved with writing about experiences that have at times been quite painful for the writer. The student may have a great personal stake in believing the story that she has told—that she has conquered her fear—and she may be very reluctant to trouble that narrative of success.

In the revised version of this essay, the primary changes appear in the first and last paragraphs. After writing the first draft, students had read T.S. Eliot's "Tradition and the Individual Talent," and for this revision they were asked to consider what traditions had shaped their own lives, along with the teacher's comments on the first draft. In response to the first draft, the teacher had suggested that the student cut the first paragraph and begin with the second (see Appendix I). Rather than cut this paragraph, however, in her second draft the student chooses to

rewrite it, replacing a brief description of her hometown and the activities she enjoys with a reference to Halloween, which she says brings back terrible memories. What these memories are and how they relate to Halloween, though, is not yet clear. The connection becomes somewhat more obvious in the revision of a paragraph near the end of the essay:[31]

> Most claustrophobics never fully recover from their experiences. At some point in their life, they are likely to have a panic attack or become scared in a crowded or closed space. I can say that I truly feel good about attempting new situations. For example, Halloween is on its way. As I was growing up, this was never a good time for me. I was never really able to experience the traditions of going in haunted houses and costume parties. Watching my friends do these things really hurt me; I wanted to do the things they were able to do. It looked like so much fun. The haunted houses were just too small and dark for me to even step foot in. My family always told me never to give up, and I didn't. About three years ago, I went with my friends to my first haunted house. I held my boyfriend's hand the entire way through. It was a very big step for me. I couldn't believe I actually did it.

The student has made only minor changes to her essay, and her understanding of "tradition" is not the same as Eliot's. Instead of examining the contradictions of her first draft, she has written another version of a triumph narrative, a story of conquering fear. The teacher's response is short:

> Except for the brief references to Halloween at the start and of your essay [sic], the essay remains much the same. You seem to have disregarded the assignment and the task of examining the traditions that have shaped your life, and in particular, your experience of

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[31] See Appendix J for the full text of the essay with the teacher's comments.

claustrophobia. Thus, while you tell the story of your experience, there is very little reflection or thinking about that experience. If you like, you may attempt the revision again. Let's talk about this in conference.

This endnote, written at the midpoint of the course, reflects the gap between teacher and student that remains after this initial sequence of assignments. The student's revisions are minimal and do not suggest that she has attempted to change her approach in the way that the teacher has asked for. As I have suggested, the strategy of drawing contradictions out into the open rather than glossing over them or resolving them quickly can be difficult to understand and enact, and even if this idea had been part of the class readings and discussions (which it most likely was), the student may have needed more support in working out what this means for her own writing. It is possible that the student, failing to understand both the teacher and the assignment, genuinely thought she had done what she was asked to do. The student may have "disregarded the assignment," but I can also imagine her being unpleasantly surprised and frustrated to find out that the teacher saw "very little reflection or thinking" in this revision, as the teacher says in her comments.

This course was composed of carefully sequenced assignments organized around readings from Joyce Carol Oates's volume *The Best American Essays of the Century*, and in a later assignment written at the mid-point of the course which asked students to compile their own mini-anthology of best essays and write an introduction explaining their choices, the student had the opportunity to reflect back on her "Notes of a Native Daughter." Her primary criterion for the essays she includes in her mini-anthology is that they have to provoke some kind of emotional reaction or discomfort, and she feels that her own essay does not do this. The student contrasts her work with two essays in Oates's anthology that she found especially powerful, Adrienne

Rich's "Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying" and Gerald Early's "Life with Daughters: Watching the Miss America Pageant." This passage is from the introduction the student wrote to her own "mini-anthology":[32]

> The last essay I picked to put in my mini-anthology is *Notes of a Native Daughter*. Oates would never pick my essay to be put into *The Best American Essays of the Century*. This is because it does not fit into her criteria. My essay is dull. It does not make one feel uncomfortable. I needed to include interesting facts and twists, not just experiences or stories. My essay has a lot of personal information, but no emotion. Unlike Rich, I am not provocative nor am I informative with my writing. My passage is just a story, and nothing more than that. It does not give any opinions or facts.

> In my essay, I state, "Today, I still get nervous to get in an elevator alone or go in a place with too many people." I realize not many people know how claustrophobes feel, and why this quote would not make other readers feel uncomfortable. Realizing my mistakes in my essay, I now want to include something that would make a reader reposition in their seat, or have to reread a statement. I want my essay to be entertaining.

> I chose this essay instead of all the others because I noticed my mistakes in this particular passage the most, as I explained above. It was not that I thought my essay would fit Oates criteria, but that it did not fit at all. In fact, comparing my essay to the others showed me my mistakes and how I can fix them. It was more of a learning experience than anything else. For example, instead of talking about my Halloween traditions in my essay *Notes of a Native Daughter*, I could talk about how my disorder was not discussed with my family. I would state, "When I got diagnosed with

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[32] See Appendix K for the full text of the essay with the teacher's comments.

claustrophobia, my family never seemed to bring up the fact that I was special, that I needed help. As an alternative, they would just anticipate I would get over it. They did not want my disorder to be an issue any longer.

In this retrospective reflection, the student now critiques her own essay, but it is interesting to note that the terms she uses for her critique are different than what the teacher's have been. In her initial endnote to the student's original "Notes of a Native Daughter," the teacher asked the student to focus more on the "contradictions" in her essay, and this was the key term for what the teacher was asking the student to do. The student uses different language here, describing her essay instead as failing to be interesting or provocative: "My essay is dull. It does not make one feel uncomfortable." From the student's perspective, the problem with her essay is that it does not adequately convey the discomfort of having claustrophobia, which makes it "dull." The critique of dullness does not appear in the teacher's response at all; in fact, the teacher had previously praised the student's use of detailed examples in her original essay on claustrophobia. The student, however, has decided that, based on her reading of others' essays, she wants to work on making her writing more "entertaining." In turning against her own essay in this way, the student fails to recognize what she has done well—for example, the vivid anecdotes that the teacher praised.

The concerns of teacher and student are still different, but they do begin to overlap in certain ways. The moments the teacher asks the student to examine in revising her earlier essay are moments of difficulty and discomfort, and even if the teacher does not seem concerned that the essay be more "entertaining" or "provocative," as the student herself says she wants it to be, the two readers are now gravitating toward more similar aspects of the text. This interest leads the student to wonder how she might write differently about her family and how they handled her

claustrophobia rather than adding examples which illustrate the disorder. Focusing on the tension between her family wanting the problem to go away and the student needing help is one way in which the writer might begin to make her essay more provocative by exploring the difficulty of her experience. Where previously the student could only imagine different ways of telling the same story—with references to Halloween—she can now also begin to imagine a different way of approaching revision by focusing on moments of tension or discomfort.

Interestingly, however, this shift does not seem to have been the product of any kind of response from the teacher. In her revision of the mini-anthology essay, the student foregrounds this re-assessment of her own writing further by rewriting the beginning of her essay to dramatize the realization:[33]

'Tick, Tick, Tick' goes the clock. This was the irritating sound I was trying to fall asleep to. It was about 12:30 am and I just could not force myself to fall asleep. I put my pretty in pink earplugs in, but it still didn't help one bit. I could not stop replaying the words of my instructor over and over in my head. It was like a tape player that had gotten stuck. "What was I doing wrong?" I kept asking myself. I was searching aimlessly to find an answer; I wanted to improve my essay and grade, but how could I possibly do this if I could not figure out my writing problem? Eventually, I got tired of thinking and drifted off to sleep in a state of confusion.

The next morning, I woke up not only to my alarm clock, but also to my roommate freaking out. Her essay was due in two hours, and she had not even started to revise it. I told her I would help her proofread it. As I started to read, I felt my eyes get heavier and heavier until they finally closed; that's when it hit me. I realized that my

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[33] See Appendix L for the full text of the essay with the teacher's comments.

writing was doing the same thing to other readers. My essays were nothing but stories. They had no interesting facts or advice. I quickly finished helping my roommate, and started to work on my own essay. This is how it all started.

In the narration of the student's moment of discovery, we still see the gap in understanding between the teacher and the student. The student writes that after her conference, she was still "searching aimlessly" and that she "could not figure out my writing problem"; she still does not understand what her teacher wants. The student never says that she went back to reread her teacher's comments in search of answers. Instead, the experience which seems to be the most important catalyst is that of reading essays by Rich and Early and articulating why she found them so powerful. Both of these essays evoke complex responses in the student—at times angering her, at times comforting her—and they have led her to decide that she wants her own writing to evoke similarly powerful responses in readers. This experience seems to have been reinforced when the student fell asleep reading her roommate's essay and decided that she did not want her own writing to have the same effect on her readers. While the teacher's comments and the teacher-student conference do seem to have caused the student some potentially motivating anxiety, the actual content of the teacher's response does not seem to have made much of an impression.

The teacher responds to this shift in thinking in an endnote which is much more enthusiastic than her assessment of the earlier revision of "Notes of a Native Daughter":

You've done such nice work revising your anthology introduction—first, by rewriting the introduction, and so framing the essay with your discovery, that the writing you admire is rich with insight. From here, you have included autobiographical story as a way to reflect on Early's essay, as you did with Rich. And, if I remember the original correctly, you

have expanded the discussion of your own essay and how you might revise. What really strikes me this time around is the way you have shifted, ever so slightly, your response to Rich's charge that married women, along with lesbians and prostitutes, have been forced to lie (you give her a little more credit) and the way your own story about black and white dolls say, in fact that these kinds of choices *do* matter. You and your friend both had dolls both black and white—how has this shaped you? Do you think most little girls, especially white, have the same experience? I tend to doubt it. I'd like to see you continue thinking about these two particularly difficult moments, these places of discomfort. You have gotten the hang of it Laura[34]—in this essay, I see your care, your energy and thoughtfulness, and this makes your writing both interesting and a pleasure to read. You use examples—both from the text and from your own life—to help the reader *understand*. Not dull in the least. You've done terrific work here.

One quality of this endnote that I want to point out is the way in which the teacher's perspective has shifted; she has taken on aspects of the student's perspective by adopting her language and interests in places: "I see your care, your energy and thoughtfulness, and this makes your writing both *interesting* and a pleasure to read" (emphasis added), or "Not dull in the least." Also worth noting is the way in which the student's "discovery" and the foregrounding of that discovery in the revised draft seem to have caused the teacher to read differently sections of the essay that the student has not changed at all, such as the discussion of married women and lying. The teacher seems to be responding in some ways to the student's declaration that she has learned something, rather than to actual changes in the student's text. Although the student's thinking about writing

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[34] Name has been changed.

has begun to change, that change has not yet been fully integrated into her writing itself, and it does not seem to be the change that the teacher had initially asked for.

I have considered Rosenblatt and Iser's theories of reading as ways of understanding what happens in the interpretive transactions surrounding teachers' written response, and at this point I would like to bring in another approach that may offer a way of describing what happens in these papers. In "The Arts of the Contact Zone," Mary Louise Pratt describes contact zones as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other" (Pratt 519). The concept of a contact zone as Pratt defines it recognizes the ways in which interpretive encounters are usually not matters of easy communication between parties who share the same language, assumptions, and values but rather are often fraught with misunderstanding and missed connections: "Miscomprehension, incomprehension, dead letters, unread masterpieces, absolute heterogeneity of meaning—these are some of the perils of writing in the contact zone" (Pratt 524). She draws on several examples from both inside and outside the classroom to demonstrate how texts often fail to reach their audiences because of important and often unacknowledged or poorly understood differences between participants.

In this series of student papers, we see the student's thinking develop in a kind of contact zone in which the student and teacher have different ways of interpreting and writing about both texts and experiences. The student revised her anthology introduction at the midpoint of the course, and we do not see here what happens over the rest of the term. At this point, however, she seems to have developed an approach to reading and writing that combines her teacher's interest in tension and discomfort with an interest in being more provocative for her readers, an interest that she has identified based on her own reading of others' essays. The student, however, does not seem to have understood what her teacher has said about contradiction. The teacher

189

seems pleased with the direction the student is taking, but the student's texts do not yet suggest that she has improved her ability to use her writing to recognize and examine contradicting positions, as the teacher had been pressing her to do. The student, for example, wants to convey more of the difficulty and discomfort of claustrophobia, and she sees the value of exploring her family's reactions, but she does not take up the question of what it means to have a medical disorder versus a condition that can be overcome with will power. The fact that the student's thinking does not exactly correspond to her teacher's earlier written responses is not necessarily a problem, and it is entirely possible that her writing continued to develop in productive ways after this midpoint of the course. Nevertheless, it is hard not to suspect, based on these documents, that at least part of the lesson the teacher was attempting to teach went unlearned and that at this point in the course, there remained a degree of miscomprehension in the contact zone of this particular student-teacher relationship.

In all of these examples, we see the written response of perceptive teachers, response that offers students interesting and potentially fruitful paths for revision. In each case, however, the commentary does not appear to have yielded the desired results to the degree that these teachers might have hoped. This disjunction suggests the importance of thinking about how we as teachers might help students to engage with the comments we write. Rosenblatt gives us a theory of reading that foregrounds the active role that the reader plays in transactions with texts and the importance of that reader's perspective; in order to understand the perspective of the student reading a teacher's comments, we must think about what that student may or may not know. Students know a great deal, but, especially in the case of first-year students, they have not necessarily been inducted into the ways of reading, writing and thinking that are commonly

valued in the academy—such as approaching a subject by complicating rather than simplifying it. In addition, comments that have the greatest potential to teach students something are often not written as a set of clear instructions. The comments I examine here present students with difficult intellectual challenges, and part of the students' job in revising is to figure out what to do in response to those challenges. I am not suggesting that teachers should do that job for them; a great deal of learning happens in the struggle to figure out how to respond to difficulties. At the same time, though, there may be ways in which we can make it easier for students to understand and engage with what we write to them. Specific teaching practices are particular to individual teachers and their unique contexts and not something that can easily be prescribed by an outsider, but I would argue that a fundamental element of developing such practices might be for teachers to keep in mind the question of what differences between themselves and their students might make their comments difficult for students to read. Heightened awareness of this difficulty as an element of written response can in turn help us to become more aware of how we might offer students the support to engage with that difficulty more productively.

In the next set of papers I consider, the teacher's comments present students with difficulties with which they must engage, but we also see in the other course materials some ways in which the teacher provides various kinds of support that may help to make the comments more accessible to the student writers than they might be otherwise. These papers were written for a course on critical approaches to children's literature. This was an upper-level course, but many of the students were majoring in Education rather than English and were taking it to fulfill School of Education requirements. They would have taken an introductory literature course as a prerequisite, but many of them may not have had extensive experience with the ways of reading and writing that are typical in English literature courses—particularly close reading, in which the

writer quotes passages from a literary text and states explicitly what she sees in them that leads her to draw certain conclusions. This kind of reading and writing can be tricky for students new to the discipline of English to master. It requires an approach to reading that can feel slow and unnatural, and it requires the writer to consider what details she may need to point to in a passage in order for her interpretation to be clear and persuasive to someone else. For someone with experience in the discipline of literary studies, the phrase "close reading" would quickly signal this kind of reading and writing, but a student with less experience might not know what kind of work "close reading" calls for. In the comments and papers below, however, we see the teacher employ several practices to help students to engage with the work that he outlines for them in his written response.

Because this teacher's written comments bear a close relationship to the other organizing documents of the course, I will look at the course description and assignments along with papers from two students with the teacher's comments. The course description clearly sets out the teacher's goals, which involve introducing students to the practices of close reading and the kind of critical debate characteristic of this academic discipline:

> The emphasis throughout the semester will be on close reading of the critical as well as the fictional works, and we will consider the importance of critical debate and revision to the literary and cultural analysis of works for young people. The writing assignments for the course will enable students to understand the interpretive stakes of such critical scrutiny and revision in the context of both their own work and the assigned readings.

The first assignment for the course asks students to "analyze a particular thematic issue involved in the Grimm brothers' 'Cinderella.'" The teacher tells the students to write a "carefully organized and elegantly written paper" on "a single topic that interests you intensely," language

which conveys high expectations for both the students' writing and their engagement with the subject. The assignment also advises students that "specific, unpredictable topics will make your arguments more focused, well-organized, and exciting to write and read." Students are invited to think of this work in a way that might be unfamiliar to them—as being potentially exciting for both themselves and the teacher and peers who will eventually read the resulting papers. This assignment also does a considerable amount of instructing. Students are given the following quite specific advice:

> Begin with a well-focused introductory paragraph that lays out the topic of the paper: in the first sentence, state the argument you will prove about the particular thematic issue on which you have chosen to focus (i.e., state your thesis); in the remaining sentences of this paragraph, state the claims you will address in order to prove your thesis. Then offer tightly organized paragraphs in which you prove each claim in turn by examining in detail passages from the text of "Cinderella." Each of these examinations should offer the components of a **close reading**, as follows: **quotations** from the text of "Cinderella" in support of your claim; and an **analysis** of each quotation that demonstrates the validity of your claim. Your analyses of the quotations should demonstrate the validity of your claim by scrutinizing in detail the **language** of the text—the individual words, images, metaphors, etc. that appear in the quotations from the text and how they operate. (emphasis in original)

This assignment attempts to help student engage with the work of "close reading" by defining the phrase: quote the text and analyze the specific language of the passage you quote. Consistent with the assignment, the in-text comments on these papers are very focused in intent and tend to do one of three things: correct sentence-level errors, indicate where the student needs to do more

or better close reading, or point out problems with the conventions of writing literary criticism. The teacher does a great deal of sentence-level editing, some of it quite directive. For example, on the opening paragraph from one student's essay, he has made the following corrections/suggestions:[35]

*Awk— break into 2 shorter clearer sentences*

*Which one? You need the plural possessive*

IN

~~Within~~ the Grimm brother's version of the fairytale "Cinderella," birds are used as a representation of freedom, justice, and solace <u>that is sought by Cinderella and an extension of her mother from the grave</u>. The birds seem almost omniscient, giving the reader the impression that they are an extension of a higher power, <u>which is introduced as</u>

IN

a possibility ~~within~~ the first paragraph of the tale. The ~~primary interactions of~~ birds ~~within the story involves them~~ grant~~ing~~ Cinderella's every wish; they appear to be the only source of happiness in her life.

*You don't need all that verbal clutter. "The birds grant C's every wish" is all your sentence says.*

Only one of these marks corrects an actual error, the note on the first sentence pointing out the need for the plural possessive form, "brothers'." The other marks aim to improve the writer's style, the choices she has made that are not necessarily incorrect but that the instructor thinks are inelegant or, as we so often write, awkward. The conventional wisdom in composition often says that this kind of attention to sentence-level issues is better left for later drafts. Nancy Sommers's "Responding to Student Writing" takes the influential position that focusing on sentence-level errors in a text like this one, which is the first draft of the first essay of the course, sends a

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[35] This essay appears in full as Appendix M.

confusing message regarding the hierarchy of concerns in revising. We often think of texts in terms of spatial metaphors such as "surface" versus "depth" or "local" changes versus "global" ones and argue that comments on early drafts should focus students' attention on "deeper" or "more global" matters of ideas and save the details for later. Viewed within this framework, these might very likely be judged poor comments which direct the student's attention to the wrong issues.

I want to consider a different way of framing this kind of commentary, however, one that allows us to see what kind of work it is doing and what it has to offer for the student. I want to distinguish between editing that simply attempts to "clean up" a text and comments that attempt to teach writing by showing the student, using her own text, what other options might be available at the sentence level. One could argue that these comments convey several messages to students. One of these is that matters of correctness and prose style are to be taken very seriously in this course. Another possible message, however, is that writing is often a matter of attending to a number of issues, all of which demand awareness at one point or another and sometimes simultaneously. Such comments as these might be read as indicating that the text is conceptually final, as previous scholarship has argued, but they might also be read as suggesting that work on this level will be an ongoing matter of concern, something to practice in every draft. These comments, if framed in the right way by the teacher, could be interpreted as teaching the student to read her own writing more carefully by enacting the kind of reading the teacher would like to see.

However, in addition to the difficulty related to being potentially unfamiliar with the methods of close reading, students could be quite intimidated by such intense scrutiny of their writing and by the feeling that the teacher is going to read every word so closely. Because this

passage was taken from the first assignment that students completed for this course, the teacher's heavy, sentence-level commentary may have come as something of a shock. Many of these students may not have felt that they had the ability to meet the teacher's expectations of their writing style and grammatical correctness. I would argue, however, that this teacher does the kind of framing that would help students read these comments as more than slash-and-burn editing in several ways. First, he includes brief marginal notes which explain the suggestions he has made. When crossing out language from the third sentence of the passage above, he explains this choice, saying "You don't need all that verbal clutter. 'The birds grant C's every wish' is all your sentence says." He also refers to these sentence-level issues in this passage in his typed endnote:

> Your writing in the paper is often solid, though wordy at the beginning and cluttered with the occasional awkwardness thereafter; you should also attend closely to all of my comments on the paper so as to produce really high-quality prose in your future writings.

The teacher uses his endnote to underline the comments that he has written in the student's text and to call direct attention to the particular details of the student's own language as an area to which she should devote time and energy throughout the course. This commentary turns the teacher's textual corrections into a kind of writing lesson. Bringing attention to this aspect of writing in multiple places encourages the student to think about her sentences rather than simply making corrections and moving on.

The other subject of most of the comments on these papers is close reading of the literary text the paper addresses. For example, in the margin beside this paragraph, the teacher makes the following notes:

After Cinderella had completed her task, she is then able to attend the festival. As her stepmother mentioned, Cinderella could not attend in such a disheveled appearance so she goes to her mother's grave to wish for gold and silver, assumingly with which to buy an appropriate dress and to clean up. However, what she is presented with is an elaborate dress of gold and silver. Here, the birds have given her a dress that elevates her above the rest of the young women in attendance and, accordingly, has given her an advantage in meeting the prince. In fact, the second and third dresses were far more magnificent than the first and it was these dresses that captivated both the prince and the other people at the festival. Here, as following with the culture of that time, we see that the birds (or Cinderella's mother) are concerned with the suitable marriage for her daughter.

*NO quotes or close reading = no analysis here*

In this paragraph the student describes the events of the text but does not work with the specific language, and the teacher's comment points out that she is not doing the kind of work that he expects. As with the papers I examine earlier, it is quite possible that the student is to some degree unfamiliar with the practices of this course and may not yet have developed the ability to write explicitly about the details of a literary passage as consistently as this teacher would like. This lack of familiarity could present some difficulty for the student in responding to this comment. In the subsequent paragraph, however, the student does focus her analysis on particular words, and the teacher calls attention to this moment enthusiastically:

After the third time Cinderella evades the prince, and he decides to use the shoe she had left behind to find his "true love," the birds reveal the true owner of the golden slipper. After the prince is almost fooled by each of the stepsisters, and begins to drive away with them, the birds cry out "Looky, look, look at the shoe that she took. There's blood all over, and the shoe's too small. She's not the bride you met at the ball," (Grimm 91). Other than their most obvious act of pointing out that the stepsisters are, indeed, not the correct girl, the birds allude to another point. By referring to the woman he was seeking as "bride," the birds are given an omniscient quality are [sic] responsible for his correct choice of bride. Not only did they know that he was taking a wife, they made certain that he knew Cinderella was the one. The fact that the birds are the main cause of the prince and Cinderella's union ties into the fact that, as mentioned before, the Grimm brothers established a connection between the birds and Cinderella's mother.

*Good: This is a close reading of the text. Do that kind of work in every sentence and you'll write very successful papers.*

In this paragraph the student shifts her mode of working with the text from the more general description of narrative that we saw before to a more focused mode of developing a point based on the particular choice of the word "bride." The marginal comment praises her work and tells the student clearly that *here* she has done what is required—a particular kind of close reading— and that *this* way of talking about the text is what she needs to do more often. Working with the student's own text, the instructor uses the marginal notes as part of a lesson in close reading, showing her where she's working well and where she needs to work differently; he points out where the student's writing is lacking, but he also provides her with a specific example of what she can do to improve. In his endnote, the instructor reinforces the message that this instruction is to be applied to other situations by again calling attention to this paragraph:

This paper on the role of birds in the Grimms's "Cinderella" offers an outstanding close reading on page 4, where you note that the use of the word "bride" suggests that the birds have omniscience and are responsible for the prince's correct choice of bride. Excellent. Now, provide just such a close reading in support of every point you make in the entire rest of the paper, such that each of your claims is followed by a similarly detailed examination of the text. There are too many vague generalizations and not enough close readings throughout the paper.

The instructor underlines his marginal notes by pointing again very clearly and specifically to the place in the text where the student has succeeded.

There is a very specific kind of teaching that happens in the set of drafts which I am using this paper to represent, teaching which focuses on what it means to write in the discipline of English, and there is a recursive quality to the teacher's comments and the other course materials. The writing problems this instructor puts before the student in responding to this early draft are not about the student's larger argument; they are more about the specific practices of reading and writing as a literary critic. The papers reveal a multifaceted lesson in close reading; the instructor asks for close reading of literary texts, and he also insists that the students read their own writing equally closely, showing them what that means by reading and editing closely himself. The specificity of the endnote above, in which the instructor cites particular passages of the student's text, emphasizes this quality. The technique of using the student's own sentences to illustrate the kind of close work with quotations the instructor wants to see keeps the student present in this written exchange in a way that might not happen if he had directed her to some outside example of "good close reading" for her to imitate. The comments on this paper are closely linked to the goals that the teacher outlines in the course description, which include

199

improving the students' close, critical reading skills and honing their prose style, and this consistent focus throughout the teacher's communications with students may provide a kind of support for students as they work to meet the standards the teacher has set for them. The focused nature of the comments and the other course materials—the way that all of these texts address the same few issues—presents students with a well-defined set of problems to address and gives them multiple opportunities to understand these issues and to change their reading and writing in response.

The assignment for the second paper continues the focused emphasis on close, critical reading. Students are asked to compare passages from two different versions of Frances Hodgson Burnett's *A Little Princess*:

First, review the assignment for Paper 1 and, following scrupulously its instructions regarding argumentation, close reading, and style, produce an analysis of the passage or passages from *Sara Crewe* by examining the themes that dominate the text and the formal techniques with which these themes are rendered—including word choices, metaphors, details of characterization, etc. Then, account for how Burnett revises the passage or passages in *A Little Princess*. Identify the passage (or passages) from the later text that are complementary to—that parallel or approximate—the passage (or passages) from the earlier one and explain the changes, however subtle, that Burnett made in her revision. Although it is important to be aware of what is absent from *Sara Crewe* and is then added in *A Little Princess*, what you should **not** do in this paper is provide a mere catalog of the additions. Rather, analyze the **textual differences** between what **does** appear in the earlier text and how that material is presented differently in the later one. If an addition is made to the passage in the later text, feel free to discuss it—

but keep the focus on how this addition changes the **textual** nature of the work (rather than how it merely complicates the plot, adds a character, etc.). You should scrutinize the complementary passages sentence-by-sentence, image-by-image, word-by-word, punctuation mark-by-punctuation mark and explain the way in which each of the alterations transforms the presentation of the material in the passages.

The task of comparing specific passages continues the focus on close reading by putting students in a position where they must identify and account for specific differences in order to do the work of the assignment. The final sentence of this paragraph in particular instructs students in the closeness of the reading they are being asked to perform. As in the first assignment, the format here is quite directive and students are told explicitly what to do, which may help them to do the kind of specialized, disciplinary reading and writing that the teacher is asking for.[36]

In her response to the assignment for Paper 1, the writer of the next essay failed to provide any example of close reading that the teacher could praise. The endnote the teacher writes in response to that earlier paper focuses on this absence, repeating the instructions from the assignment:

This paper on deception in the Grimms's "Cinderella" offers, on page 4, the very insightful comment that "Cinderella is just as guilty as her stepsisters and stepmother" and that "the only difference seems to be that Cinderella did [sic] not cause physical harm

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[36] It is possible to argue that the direction to attend to each change at the level of individual words and punctuation marks could lead students astray if they have not been instructed in the complexities of textual transmission and the ways in which texts can change for a variety of reasons other than the author's deliberate choices. However, the teacher is attempting to introduce a particular way of reading to students who are likely to be largely inexperienced with this kind of work; he may be exaggerating his description of the methods of close reading because he knows that most of the students will not complete the assignment exactly according to the instructions on their first try. He also may not want to distract them by introducing elements of complexity and uncertainty, such as the various reasons that changes can be made to a text, at this point in the course. The students would, however, eventually need some sense of how texts can change over time in order to understand the implications of this mode of reading more fully.

to others or herself in order to obtain her goal." However, all such points must be proven by means of close reading, which is the heart of any good essay in an English literature class such as [this one]. You must prove each claim in your essay by examining in detail passages from the text. Each of these examinations should offer the components of a **close reading**, as follows: **quotations** from the text in support of your claim; and an **analysis** of each quotation that demonstrates the validity of your claim. Your analyses of the quotations should demonstrate the validity of your claim by scrutinizing in detail the **language** of the text—the individual words, images, metaphors, etc. that the text uses and how they operate in the quotations. You offer the quotations, but they are usually preceded and followed by plot summary, not by strong claims and close readings.

By repeating the language of the assignment in the endnote, the teacher does two things. First, he continues his focus on specific aspects of students' reading and writing. The student may have found this repetition frustrating, but the endnote also gives her a repeated opportunity to gain experience with the methods of reading and writing that are essential for success in this course. Second, the teacher again explains what he means by "close reading" rather than assuming that the student will understand the language he is using.

Within the framework of this course, the student's second paper shows marked improvement over her previous effort, especially in terms of close reading, and the teacher acknowledges this improvement in his marginal notes. The first paragraph contains some editing, but the notes on the rest of the paper consist mainly of affirmative check marks beside lines where the writer is doing the kind of close reading the teacher wants to see. For example, in her

analysis of two corresponding sentences from *Sara Crewe* and *A Little Princess*, respectively, the student writes,[37]

> When Sara's outfit is described in Sara Crewe it is called a dress: "She had
> picked out a black velvet dress she had outgrown" (Burnett 192). When
> Burnett revises this passage, however, she changes the word *dress* to
> *frock*" (66). While the high-quality velvet fabric remains the same, the
> term *frock* implies a much less attractive ensemble than *dress* does. A ✓
> frock is defined as being an "unfitted, comfortable garment for wear in the
> house" (Wikipedia), and in no way signifies Sara's once high fashion ✓
> wardrobe. By making this change, Burnett more clearly demonstrates just
> how far down the social ladder Sara is being made to fall – she is no
> longer able to wear dresses but must only wear frocks. ✓

The student demonstrates the attention to specific language that was lacking in her previous paper, and the teacher notes this with three check marks in the margin beside the passage. The endnote reinforces the marginal notes:

> This paper comparing *Sara Crewe* to *A Little Princess* makes a number of very
> good points about the depiction of Sara and how it depends in large part on the
> interpretation of her clothing, in particular the black dress that signifies her mourning and
> then her poverty. Your central observations about the depiction of the dress are very
> convincing; in a few places (3 top in particular), but the paper needs expansion in terms
> of its close reading. For the most part, however, this is a very strong start, and you will

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[37] This essay appears in full as Appendix N.

find numerous points of contact between your argument and the critical works by Connell and Reimer to which we will turn our attention next.

Your paper is generally well-written, though you should attend closely to all of my comments on the paper so as to produce the best possible second edition of Paper 2. I look forward to reading that revision.

Again, the instructor begins with a general, positive comment in which he summarizes the student's argument, and then calls for more close reading. The first paragraph concludes with praise for what the student has done well and a gesture toward connections between this paper and the next section of the course. There is no explicit reference to the student's earlier paper, but when read in relation to the instructor's comments on the student's previous essay, this endnote clearly points out the improvements the student has made, a move which can help the student see the relationship between her two texts and the direction in which her work needs to continue. The concluding paragraph addressing writing issues is also more positive than that of the previous endnote. The instructor explicitly marks his written comments as an important part of instruction by encouraging students to read them carefully and take them seriously. Responding to marginal comments on the first draft of Paper 2, the student continues to improve her close reading and her control of her prose when she revises it. This paragraph is from the first version:

*well, "black" is an adj. here*

The additions that Burnett makes to the text also help to better characterize Sara and give her a lowly appearance. When Sara's dress is mentioned in *Sara Crewe* there is no adjective describing it: "she had decided to find a black dress for herself, and had

picked out a black velvet she had outgrown" (Burnett 192). When this same dress is

mentioned in *A Little Princess* ~~an~~ *several* adjective appear~~s~~: "She had put on … the cast-aside

black-velvet frock" (66). By using the adjective *cast-aside*, Burnett <u>indicates</u> that Sara,

too, has now become cast-aside. She is being made to wear an outfit that has been

discarded and rejected, which will turn out to be the exact way that Sara is treated from

this point forward in the novel.

*How does B. "indicate" this? Need fuller close reading*

The teacher's comments instruct the student in close reading in two ways. First, they push her to

explain her reading of the quoted sentence in greater detail by marking the word "indicate" as the

moment where something important is glossed over in this account of reading. The comment

asks the student to think further about what she sees that she's not yet describing—what exactly

is it about Burnett's sentences which indicates this relationship between Sara and her dress?

Second, the comments on this passage press the student to be more careful in her own reading

and writing: do not say there is "no adjective" when there is one, and revise subsequent

sentences to reflect this change. Here is the relevant portion of the student's revised paragraph:[38]

> The additions that Burnett makes to the text also help to better
>
> characterize Sara and give her a lowly appearance. When Sara's dress is
>
> mentioned in *Sara Crewe* it is only described as being black and velvet:   ✓
>
> "she had decided to find a black dress for herself, and had picked out a
>
> black velvet she had outgrown" (Burnett 192). When this same dress is
>
> mentioned in *A Little Princess* another adjective appears: "She had put on,
>
> without Mariette's help, the cast-aside black-velvet frock" (66). By using

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[38] This essay appears in full as Appendix O.

the adjective *cast-aside*, Burnett indicates that Sara, too, has now become ✓✓

cast-aside. She does this by pointing out that Sara does not have the help

of her French maid, Mariette, any longer, because if she did she would

never have had to put on a dress by herself. Sara is also being made to *yes—good close readings in this ¶*

wear an outfit that not only does not fit, but has been discarded and

rejected – something that would not have occurred when Sara's father was

alive. By wearing a cast-aside dress, Sara takes her first steps toward

losing her princess title.

In responding to her teacher's urging that she expand her account of her reading, the student has

written a fuller, better supported, and more persuasive representation of her engagement with this

passage. The minor changes in the way she refers to the language of Burnett's passage also

reflect the work of a writer who is in the process of becoming a closer reader of her own

language. The teacher's endnote reinforces this work:

This revised, second edition of your Paper 2 does a very good job of improving and

expanding on your previous comparison of *Sara Crewe* to *A Little Princess.* Your claims

throughout about the depictions of Sara's clothing—which were convincing to begin

with—are strengthened analytically and tightened stylistically: well done.

The techniques this teacher uses to help students engage with his comments are similar to those

recommended by other teachers who have written about commenting practices. Nancy Sommers,

for example, has argued that "[t]he key to successful commenting is to have what is said in the

comments and what is done in the classroom mutually reinforce and enrich each other" and that

"classroom activities and the comments we write to our students need to be connected"

(Sommers 155). I read Sommers's references to "what is done in the classroom" and "classroom

activities" as gestures toward the larger context of the course, which includes course descriptions and assignments, and I would argue that this teacher provides the connection between written comments and their pedagogical context that Sommers describes.

As I have suggested, readers come to texts with perspectives shaped by different experiences and social and institutional situations, and their interpretations can be quite different from what a writer or other readers might expect. Take for example, the miller in Carlo Ginzburg's *The Cheese and the Worms*, who adapted material from his reading in often surprising and unpredictable ways to develop religious theories that were his own combination of both high and popular culture, and who was consequently accused of blasphemy. Although the classroom does not carry such severe penalties, it does carry its own risks and punishments, and there are consequences for misreading between teachers and students. Teachers may be frustrated in their efforts to communicate what they believe they have to offer their students, and students may suffer in terms of both missed learning opportunities and unsatisfactory grades. Although some of the most interesting moments of teaching can happen when students do not do what we think we want them to do, difficulty in making meaningful connections with students in our written responses is worth teachers' time and attention. Teachers do not necessarily know what their students know or how they think, and incorrect assumption about students can cause a great deal of misunderstanding.

Specific teaching practices must be tailored to particular teachers and their goals and methods, as well as to particular students, and what works in one situation may not work in a different context with a different conjunction of student, teacher, and course. The teacher of children's literature asks his students to do a kind of work—supporting an argument with evidence gathered through close reading—that may be easier to address through written

comments, in which he can show students specifically where they might have made different choices. For the complex, sophisticated thinking that the first two teachers ask of their students, other kinds of support may be required. The writer of the *Moby-Dick* paper, for example, may have needed to speak to the teacher in person and to study examples of the kind of critical writing the teacher describes in her endnote in order to develop the understanding that could lead to a satisfactory revision. For the student who wrote about her claustrophobia, a closer examination of Baldwin's essay in relation to her own might have yielded a better understanding of the complexity the teacher was pushing her toward. There are many other possible interventions that could help students to work with comments that call for meaningful but difficult work, but in working out particular practices for writing to their students and for situating those written responses in a larger pedagogical context, teachers can start by asking in what ways we might be speaking to students in language that they are not prepared to understand and presenting them with tasks that they might not be prepared to undertake. In doing so, we can begin to think about how we might help our students to engage with comments that present considerable difficulties but also opportunities for significant learning.

# 6.0    AFTERWORD

I began this study with an image in my mind of the papers with comments that frequently sit in boxes outside teachers' offices gathering dust, papers that teachers have placed there to be collected by students who did not think them important enough to make the trip. I undertook this project with a vague sense that the papers in those boxes represented intellectual work that I wanted to understand better and to make more visible to other teachers. Through this study, I have come to understand the process of revising with teachers' comments—when it goes well— in a particular way. The comments force the writer to encounter another's perspective, and they provide a concrete place—the written page—where this can happen. By themselves, comments do not do the work of integrating the reader's response into the writer's perspective, but they serve as a kind of opening move in the process. The integration happens through the work of revision, during which the writer attempts in some way to reconcile the two perspectives, her own and her reader's. This work requires the writer to return to her own text and to consider where the reader's comments have changed her thinking and where she disagrees with the reader and wants to stand her ground, or to do something different entirely. In examining texts with comments, I have also come to think of the work of responding to them as something that cannot be taken for granted. As teachers, we do not always think about how our comments will be read by students, and we frequently do not make the work of interpreting those comments visible in our classroom instruction.

When I think back on my commenting experiences as a teacher, I am most aware of moments—many of them, over the years—when I received revised papers from students and was surprised that they had done so little in response to what I had written. I was a bit puzzled by this phenomenon. Whether I was teaching composition or literature, I always discussed revision with my students, explaining that I saw revision as a process of re-thinking and re-seeing rather than changing a word here or there. In several courses I assigned Nancy Sommers's "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers" and was gratified by the resulting conversations I had with students, who were often surprised and interested to read about an approach to revision that was unfamiliar to them and to see that real writers actually revise in this way. But I was frequently disappointed to see that students had done far less with my comments than I imagined or hoped. I was then left wondering, was I unclear? Did I ask too much? Was this student just pressed for time or uninterested in the work? How should I evaluate this effort, based on the quality of the draft itself or the quality of the revision, or both?

One lesson I have learned from this study that I would apply to these situations in the future is a heightened awareness that interpreting and responding to comments involves particular kinds of reading and writing—sometimes awkward and difficult—that we should not necessarily expect students to do well without instruction and assistance. I have considered these difficulties throughout this study, but I want to recall them here. On one level there is the difficulty of simultaneously reading one's own writing and the writing of another, shuttling back and forth between the texts. On another level, there is the difficulty of making sense of how someone else sees your writing from their own perspective. Had I given these difficulties more thought, I might have spent even more time in class discussing revision, and I might have discussed it in different ways. I might have asked students to think of the task of responding to

another's comments—not just revising, but revising specifically *in response to others*—as a specific kind of work and engaged them in more conversation about why this kind of revision is hard, what problems it presents, and what value it might have for the writer. Foregrounding these difficulties with students might have created a better forum for discussing revision strategies that would better equip students to respond to the challenges of revising for an audience of teachers.

In the more recent work I have done in a professional setting, I have been extremely interested to observe writers—writers who are not students but are not necessarily experienced or skilled writers—struggling with these same difficulties. The government agency where I currently work as an editor and writing coach functions in some ways as a large publishing house. Small groups of auditors, many of whom are in their mid to late twenties and have recently completed two- or three-year graduate programs, perform original research and write a large number of reports every year. These auditors are primarily trained in public policy or law, and their writing experience and ability varies widely. The production process involves a number of reviewers who read the reports and give comments to which the writing teams must respond. These reviewers tend to be upper-level managers; they enjoy a great deal of authority, and the writers must respond to their comments by making the changes that are requested in order for the report to continue to the next stage in the process that leads to final publication. Sometimes these changes are very specific, such as changing particular words or phrases, and sometimes they are less so, such as changing the overall tone or approach of a piece of writing.

My role in this process is to help the writers in whatever ways they need, similar in some ways to a tutor or consultant at a university writing center, and I often help them respond to these comments. I have been quite interested to observe the interactions between the writers and their readers and to notice that the difficulties they face are similar to those faced by students who

211

must respond to the comments of teachers. Sometimes the difficulty is with handwriting, and it is amazing how years as both a teacher and student of composition have prepared me to decipher others' scribbling. Often, though, the difficulty lies in understanding the reader's perspective and what motivated him to ask for certain kinds of changes. I often function as a mediator between the writers and the readers, and this process is one of negotiating between different perspectives. A team of auditor/writers spends up to a year working on a single report, and by the time the report enters the final review process, they have spent so much time thinking about the data, the argument, and the draft that they often cannot imagine saying anything in a different way and have great trouble shifting into a mode of thinking in which the draft is again fluid and open to change. The reviewers tend to have less knowledge of specific data but greater experience with the field of knowledge in general, as well as more experience with those in Congress who have requested that the research be done and the report be written. Both groups are often unaware of the differences that motivate each other to think, write, and read in particular ways; they are able to convey their own perspectives but have more trouble understanding the perspectives of others (or, at times, insufficient interest in doing so). The review process involves receiving comments from at least three and sometimes as many as seven or eight reviewers within the agency, as well as from any external government agencies that were discussed in the report. The team must respond to all of these comments in some way, either by making changes or by explaining why they chose *not* to make the changes, and the process of responding to so many readers, often simultaneously, can be extremely stressful for even the most experienced writers.

Another observation I have made is that the people who learn from this process—both how to navigate a number of competing readers and how to anticipate what particular readers will want—do well and generally have an easier time than the ones who have more trouble with

it and are not as easily able to learn with each new reviewing experience. Some writers resist every request for a change because they have difficulty understanding the thinking behind the request, but the ones who tend to be more successful and less frustrated are those who are able to stay flexible in their posture toward the text and who have learned to judge when to cooperate with a reader and when to stand their ground. The more successful writers are also more aware of the perspectives of their readers—perspectives which are shaped by both experience and personality—and this awareness enables them to make changes more quickly and smoothly. For most writers, though, learning to negotiate this process is not automatic, and I believe that explicit instruction in the work of responding to readers would help writers not only in academic settings but in professional ones as well. Writers would be better able to learn from their readers, and they would be more consistently successful at navigating the process of receiving and responding to comments.

I have also noticed that many experienced professionals who have done well as writers in this setting—many of them managers with considerable authority and responsibility—are often puzzled at the difficulty that some have with the writing process and frustrated with some writers' inability to improve their writing and revising over time. This agency does offer extensive writing instruction, but that instruction tends to focus primarily on such issues as the features of this particular genre of report or the expected writing style. There is little discussion of the process of producing a draft over time, and no discussion of what is involved in responding to the comments of readers. Revision is usually viewed as punishment for an inadequate first draft rather than an inherent part of the writing process (this despite the fact that some kind of revision inevitably takes place), and it is not valued as an opportunity to improve a draft in response to other readers. In addition, writing that is considered to be inadequate is often

simply rewritten by others in order to save time, especially when the writer is relatively inexperienced, so that the original writer has little opportunity to learn anything that she can bring to her next writing task. Many in the agency express what I believe is genuine interest in finding ways to teach people to write better, but (perhaps not surprisingly) there appears to be little or no understanding of the value of revision for the writers themselves.

The work that I have done in this study could potentially continue in many directions. In some ways, however, the work of developing connections between composition instruction in the academy and the writing students will do when they leave the academy and enter professional spheres seems to me to be of particular urgency and interest. Thinking and learning do not end when students leave college, and I think that by incorporating some of the ideas that I explore in this study into, for example, professional writing courses, we can better prepare students to continue using writing and revising as part of that thinking and learning. By paying more explicit attention to the intellectual work of responding to comments in professional contexts, we may be able to better prepare students for the writing they will do in a variety of settings in which they will likely be expected to write and revise in response to the demands of readers. Many writers might be better able to respond to readers if they had a better understanding of the clash of perspectives that is inherent in the commenting/revising process. If writers were more aware of the differences between their own perspectives and those of their readers, they might be better able to respond to those readers, and they might experience less distress in the process. I also believe that it could be productive to find ways of making the work I have begun in this study available to those working in professional settings who are interested in writing instruction (or "training," as it is more likely called). By taking my work in this direction, I hope to develop

connections between the writing and learning our students do in the academy and the writing and

learning they will continue to do once they leave college and enter the workplace.

# APPENDIX A

# Live and Let Lie

"Anywhere you might wander. You could make that your home. And as long as you got love in your heart. You'll never be alone. Just as long as you got love in your heart. You'll never be alone (no no no). You'll never be alone (no no no no)"

*this?*

Charming lyrics, eh? Just a tad on the clichéd side, these warm and fuzzy, all-you-need-is-love lyric style has shown up in numerous 60's and 70's folk songs. But, what if I told you that these particular lyrics were penned by one infamous man who could be described as anything *but* "warm and fuzzy"? This is a man whose dirty deeds have made him a household name...whose wild eyes and swastika tattoo have created an American symbol of evil.

That's right; we're talking about old Charlie Manson. The aforementioned lyrics are from a song called "Home is where you're Happy," which is on Manson's album, "Lie: The Love and Terror Cult." The album, recorded in 1968, was released and distributed during Manson's 1970 murder trial in an effort to finance his weak defense. As for the album itself, it really isn't half bad. One of the most pleasantly surprising aspects of "Lie" might be Manson's voice, which is deep, smooth, and fairly versatile. Various other members of Manson's notorious "Family" contribute background vocals. Of course, while Charlie's voice is surprisingly good, the rest of his Family simply sounds (not-so-surprisingly) creepy.

"Home is where you're Happy" is definitely one of Manson's tamer moments—the majority of his songs are a bit more unsettling. For instance, "Clang Bang Clang" (aka "Big Iron Door") is a short but catchy tune about one man's experiences behind bars: "They put me in a cell. With a concrete floor. Nine other men in that cell with me. Moanin' their fate, with destiny." Another song, aptly titled "Don't Do Anything Illegal," grumbles about the pesky constraints of "the eagle," which symbolizes old Johnny Law.

Some of Manson's songs mock the dull conventions that dictate the 1960's social order. For example, "Sick City" scorns city-dwellers apathetic to the deterioration of their environment: "Things get worse. And you just sit. And watch TV and drink your beer." "Mechanical Man" is similarly critical: "I am a mechanical man. And I do the best I can. Because I have my family. I am a mechanical boy. I am my mother's toy. And I play in the backyard sometime. I am a mechanical boy." A reoccurring theme in Manson's lyrics (and interviews, for that matter) is the idea of a widespread societal monotony—men and women plodding their way through lackluster lives.

*what make these enjoyable*

While Manson's songs aren't exactly brilliant, they're pretty enjoyable overall. And he does have some real gems on the album; his last song, "Eyes of a Dreamer" is legitimately very good. "Cease to Exist" is also pretty smooth, and was actually covered by The Beach Boys on their "20/20" album. (Interestingly, they chose to tweak the song a bit: "Cease to *Resist*" became the new title.) And, I'd be remiss in excluding "Garbage Dump," a hilarious song about garbage-picking, which includes the unforgettable lines, "There's a market basket an' a A&P. I don't care if de box boys are starin' at me. I don't even care who wins de war. I'll be in dem cans behind my favorite store."

*why?*

*we need more than this*

Due to Manson's "checkered past," many people have automatically criticized his music. And, fair enough, most people aren't into murderous musicians. An Allmusic.com reviewer once wrote, "Manson was as good a musician as he was a person." I really have to disagree. Sure, Manson was a terrible person...but I just can't say the same about "Lie: The Love and Terror Cult."

'Is this an album review?
(Please identify the genre
beneath your name.)

You've chosen an interesting subject
here, and you might speculate a bit
more on the relationship between the ethics
of an artist and the values of his/her art.
But what this paper needs most are more
detailed descriptions of the songs. A quick
pair of adjectives doesn't do much to help us
imagine them — I'd suggest you discuss fewer
songs, so you can say more about them

**APPENDIX B**

9 September, 2006

Change can be an exciting word or a terrifying word. The change from living at home to living on my own at college is proving to be both. My family has always played an important role in my life, but here at college I am five hours away from a familiar face. Being the seventh of eight children, I received plenty of advice on what to expect at college from my older and wiser siblings. Everyone assured me that I was ready for college. They knew I could handle the school work and would be fine adjusting to the freedom college offers. Unfortunately none of them could reassure me on one very important issue. What I am going to do without my twin brother Mark? Having him has given me a false sense of security because before now I have never had to enter anything alone.

From the time we were toddlers my brother and I have always had an exclusive language. Even before we learned how to speak we had our own special way of communicating. Our separate personalities became clear as we grew older. Mark was shy and soft spoken, the total opposite of me. I was known to start conversations with strangers and to talk rapidly to anyone who would listen. On our first day of preschool the teacher told us to introduce ourselves and I knew Mark would hate speaking in front of a room filled with new faces. Since I was his older sister, by three minutes, I spoke for him and told everyone that he was shy. Mark has since gotten over his shyness and gone on to star in all of our high school shows. I take some credit in helping get over his

*[handwritten annotations: "here is a key term for exploring the complexity of your relationship with Mark —" ; "why is the same now person?" ; "look at both sides of it" ; "why is it now false? has it always been?" ; "Explain" ; "STRONGER"]*

220

insecurities because I know he has done the same for me. Somehow even with our different personalities we managed to stay best friends throughout our whole lives.

For every major event in my life, Mark has been going through it, too. Events such as starting kindergarten or getting our drivers license were always done together. *Conclusion.* We have always shared these monumental events and grew accustomed to sharing the spotlight. Someone once asked me if I got sick of sharing birthdays with Mark. This question was so bizarre to me because our sharing our birthday is the reason we have such a special relationship. When I would branch off and try something on my own, I could take comfort in knowing Mark would be waiting to hear about my adventure at home. He provided me with an enough confidence so that I could become my own person. Luckily when it came time to start high school, I had Mark to help me survive being the new kid. *last 3rd of essay*

My older sister Joyce came home a few weeks into her freshmen year of high school with a best friend. Her name was Layne and over the next four years she developed into a member of the family. She came on family vacations and was a frequent guest for dinner. Joyce and Layne did everything together from the classes they took to their after school jobs. When they were not with each other they would be on the phone *talking* for hours at a time. To me it seemed like the perfect friendship and I longed to have my own girl best friend. Ironically while Joyce was making friends, I was losing them. I choose to be home schooled for middle school so I could raise a puppy for the blind. Within a year I had lost most of my school friends and relied on my siblings to keep me busy. I idolized what Joyce had with Layne and I could not wait to go to high school and make my own best friend.

*Brother*

Making a best friend proved to be much harder than I had anticipated. Without

Mark I do not think I would have made it through freshmen year. I relied on him for

everything from Friday night movies to a table to sit at in the lunchroom. Thanks to him,

I always had a friend to sit with on the bus and to bring home any homework I missed

while out sick. By the time summer came I still did not have a true best friend. I had a

few kids who would invite me to birthday parties and such, but no one was even close to

being my own version of Layne. One day while I vented my frustration to Joyce she told

"Instead of finding a 'Layne', try to be someone's 'Layne'." I should have spent less time

looking for someone ~~to be my best~~ friend and more time trying to be ~~someone's~~ one's best

~~friend.~~

*revise or explain. none of explaining*

*Conclusion?* ⟶ realized I had a best friend

*or maybe you already had one in your brother, Mark*

Instead of looking for someone to take an interest in me I needed to find friends

who I could relate to. Friendship is something I have come to treasure since struggling

throughout my freshmen year. Another lesson I learned is to be patient when it comes to

making friends. When I was so desperate for a best friend I would want to form a

relationship overnight when in reality it takes much longer to get to know someone the

way a true friend does. I realized than that no one could ever get to know me the way

Mark ~~has~~ *does*. Of course there are times when he does not understand a girlie issue, but he is

always willing to listen and offer his sarcastic opinion. I would get nervous before every

school dance over the fear of not being asked. Mark would call around to all his guy

friends until one of them agreed to ask me to the dance. He understands my moods and

puts up with all my bad qualities too. Living under the same roof all our lives has forced

us to resolve any fights quickly. I had always planned on attending the same (University)

as Mark, but ~~when the time~~ we realized our goals for the future are not the same. *Conclusion?*

*when the time came
to decide on a
school*

{ extra space? }

The decision to go to college was not really a decision at all but more so fulfilling an obligation to myself. There are certain goals I have set for my life, and college was the next step in achieving those goals. My parents both attended the University of Pittsburgh when they were my age so I grew up listening to stories about the city. My parents did

*change*

not push the school on me and my brother, but they were thrilled when we both showed interest in attending it The spring of my junior year my dad brought us out to visit

*change*

Pittsburgh. The school seemed like a perfect fit for me and my ambitions. By fall of the same year I was already accepted and enrolled. It was not until several months later that I realized Mark would not be making the journey with me. He chose a school in Philadelphia that is well known for journalism, his intended major. At first I was deeply hurt by his choice, but now I can see he needed to branch off on his own.

Over the summer I returned to Pittsburgh for orientation and as I learned more and more about the University, I was sure I had made the right choice. The school offered everything I wanted. Once the orientation meetings were over, I went to a dinner hosted for all the soon to be freshmen. When it came time to find a place to sit my mind went instantly to Mark. For the first time in my life I was completely alone. He was not there to make the situation less intimidating, or to help me make friends. I have always had someone to sit with or to make joining a table seem less awkward. All throughout orientation my thoughts drifted to Mark or more so his absences. I realized how much of

*pictured*
*our*
*there will*

an impact he had on my daily life. I ~~thought of my~~ next birthday and I realized ~~there will~~ be no one to share it with. This was my first glimpse at how my life would change.

Having only spent two and a half weeks here at the University, I still am unsure of what college will do for me. The classes are what I expected them to be and overall I have enjoyed the learning environment. After hearing so much about the social aspect of college from my family my expectations were high to begin with. Making friends has been easy, but these new friends do not replace my friends at home. For the first time in my life the future seems unclear. Up until now the focus has been on getting into a good college, but now that ~~I have completed that goal~~ I am here I wonder what to do next. Every choice I make from here on will have a direct impact on my future. — cut or fix too broad & openended.

Over the next four years I hope to not only earn a degree, but also make lasting friends. I want to be able to have all the crazy memories that my sisters and brothers formed years ago. A major part of those memories are the people they met while away a school. A true friend loves you for who you are and that is simply enough. No one could ever be more of a true friend than my brother Mark. Being apart at school is just another example of us branching off and I will always take comfort in knowing Mark is just a phone call away waiting to hear about my adventure.

*[Handwritten margin annotations:]* invite one Paragraphs • move • INTRO • I am here • ① ②

*[Handwritten note at bottom:]* The story of your relationship with your brother is the central element here. You can use this relationship as a framework to connect up with the story about Joyce + her friend, as well as the transition to college. The reference earlier

to a "false" reassurance
is quite powerful in getting
at the strengths you can use
to Mark the difficulty of
making a transition now, +
the excitement of getting a
new life of your own.

Notes of a Native Daughter Revision Plan

① I want to focus on the ending & make sure my main point is getting across.

⟶ & The special bond I have w/ Mark & how it is changing.

*yes!*

*focus on this!*

② I also would like to find some outside text to enhance my personal stories.

③ On page 3 I want to fix the ~~story~~ about my freshmen year at high school.

connect yourself

your story about Mark.

**Reading Partner Worksheet**

Read the whole essay first. Mark places along the way that seem to you to be especially good, or that make you stop and want to respond, or where you just want to hear more. Ask questions of the text and say things back to it, in your own words, in the margins or at the end. Then answer the following question, on this sheet. Use the back if necessary.

1) What do you think is the strongest feature of the essay, the one thing that the writer should be careful not to lose when s/he revises the essay? *The relationship she has w/her brother. It's more about going to college and gaining new experiences rather than just the topic of a "best friend"*

2) Do you have a clear sense early in the essay of what the writer has to offer in the essay? Do you want to know more about that? Say something about where and how the writer can do this. *It makes me want to learn more. She really does explain at the end. She tells about he. latest experiences.*

3) As you read through the essay, what do you want to hear more about? Point out specific places in the essay where such additions would be helpful. Where/how can the writer make more/better use of the text? Point out specific places in the essay where such additions would be helpful. *Maybe branch out more on the 'best friend' aspect. More in the middle and even the beginning. It's only mentioned in about 2 paragraphs.*

4) What sort of problems do you see, things that need to be re-thought or re-organized or re-written or simply corrected? Point out specific places in the essay where such work is necessary. *Towards the end it comes to an abrupt halt. Just add a little more description at the end.*

**APPENDIX C**

*spacing errors*

Cinderella. Not the Princess you think she is.

Elisabeth Panttaja In her essay "Going Up In The World: Class In Cinderella," states that

when "considering the similarities in their goals and strategies, the idea that Cinderella and

her mother are morally superior to the stepsisters and their mother is shot through with

contradictions" (Panttaja 90). Cinderella is generally seen as the downtrodden, brave young

girl who overcomes adversity to snare her prince, whereas the stepsisters are seen as taking

their jealousy and hatred of Cinderella to a new level through their struggles to try and take

the prince for themselves. The modern retelling of "Cinderella shows the stepsisters as ugly

on the outside as well as within, but if we look back to the Grimm Brothers' version, we see

that this was not an issue when considering where to place your sympathy in the story. It was

not a battle of the beautiful and downtrodden girl versus the ugly and vindictive sisters; it

was a battle of the beauties, each of which was willing to go to extremes to ensure a marriage.

But Cinderella's jealousy does not seem to stem directly from her, but merely uses her as a

tool to do the bidding of another character, Cinderella's dead mother. Therefore I would like

to discuss the ways in which Cinderella and more aptly, Cinderella's mother are just as

ruthless and cunning as the stepsisters through their jealousy of a certain social status.

Jealousy is a big issue within any type of fairy tale; it usually stems from the 'bad' or

'evil' character when they long or aspire to covet something that belongs to our heroine or

hero. This is also the case within 'Cinderella'; Cinderella's place as the daughter of a rich

229

man is instantly taken away from her after the death of her mother; "They took away her

beautiful clothes, dressed her in an old gray smock, and gave her wooden shoes". The they in

this sentence refers to her stepmother and her stepsisters, who within this telling of the tale are

described as "beautiful and fair" of face but with "nasty and wicked hearts" (Grimm Brothers

87). This demotion of class that is performed to Cinderella seems to be all the justification

that is needed to damn these women to a dreadful fate at the end of the short story. It is

generally assumed that the stepsisters deserve what become of them; in this case, hobbling

cripples who no longer have the use of their eyes but to me there does not seem to be enough

justification for the way in which the stepsisters are treated, particularly for their blinding

within the last paragraph.

If you look at the short story as a whole and analyse the basic plot of the tale, it

becomes even clearer as to why Cinderella is the one who cannot be trusted and is jealous of

her stepsisters. If we look at the most spiteful of Cinderella's actions, we must look to the

very end of the tale in which Cinderella is about to be married to the prince.

On the day that the wedding with the prince was to take place, the two false sisters

came to ingratiate themselves and to share in Cinderella's good fortune… Suddenly

the pigeons pecked out one eye from each of them. And as they came back from the

church later…the pigeons pecked out the other eye from each sister. Thus they were

punished with blindness for the rest of their lives due to their wickedness and malice

(Grimm Brothers 92)

This last line is particularly important in this tale as it brings about the moral message that

these tales would have wanted to bestow upon its reader; if you are bad and wicked you will

get your eyes pecked out. But it also seems an odd way to end the supposedly happy tale of

two people falling in love. Of course there is much debate surrounding the fact of any love at

all existing within the tale, but ending with a punishment inflicted upon two women who it would already appear had lost the battle) leaves the reader with a bad taste in their mouth. If the story revolves around the three girls searching for a husband, then surely Cinderella has won that battle; it seems absurd that as well as losing the battle, that the stepsisters should also be blinded. Cinderella does not seem to have any direct involvement in the blinding, but she does not stop it either. If you look closely at the paragraph, which is focused upon the wedding between Cinderella and her prince, there is no mention of happiness or nuptials; the wedding seems to be more concerned with the brutality happening to the stepsisters.

This is where the problem comes in when discussing Cinderella's jealousy towards her stepsisters. Cinderella although it appears that she is extremely jealous of her siblings does play a passive role in the way events pan out. If Cinderella is not in charge of her own destiny, then the jealousy could stem from Cinderella's mother in revolt to the way in which these women have treated her daughter. Cinderella's assertiveness only appears when she is alone and when she is in close vicinity to the hazel tree:

"When they had all departed, Cinderella's wept to her mother's grave beneath the hazel tree and cried out: "Shake and wobble, little tree! Let Gold and Silver fall over me." (Grimm Brothers 89)

Although here Cinderella is committing a speech act and in fact gold and silver do fall down onto her, she is under no allusion that she should actually receive any help in this matter; she is always at the mercy of her mothers decisions and does not have the ability to make them for herself.

If you take the idea that in this time period mothers and their daughters would be under a great amount of pressure to marry their children off to the most appropriate man, then the concerns of the stepmother revolving around her own children do not seem all that

231

unusual. The two things that the stepsisters and stepmother do to her, namely take away her pretty clothes and make her pick lentils up from within some ashes, doesn't seem to go to the same extreme as Cinderella does by plucking out of the eyes of the stepsisters. The stepfamily does not believe that what they are doing is Cinderella is unjust, as they do not believe that she would even have a chance at wooing the prince; she is referred to as being "deformed" (Grimm Brothers 89). Therefore Cinderella's actions become more and more understandable, although not justifiable. Her ruthlessness appears to only come from one place; the hazel tree. Her mother's grave is, within this short story, the catalyst for all of Cinderella's remarkable changes.

Unbeknown to Cinderella, her mother could be doing the same as the stepmother and trying to make sure her daughter has the most advantageous marriage possible. Although Cinderella's actual involvement in her fortune is certainly debatable, the stepsisters' involvement in their own future cannot be misinterpreted as an intervention from other powers. They take their involvement in their destinies to an extreme. "The maiden cut her toe off, forced her foot into the shoe, swallowed the pain, and went out to the prince" (Grimm Brothers 91). Cinderella's character may be too passive to assert her wishes upon her own destiny and that is why another force is needed to set her on the right track. Whether you look upon the story as Cinderella gaining her rightful place in the bourgeoisie and gaining a place among royalty, or Cinderella winning the equal battle between sisters, the action is always spurned on by someone's jealousy of the other. Everyone it would appear is jealous of everyone else.

Jealousy in 'Cinderella' comes from all members of the family, not merely the stepsisters and stepmothers; Cinderella and her mother have their own share of jealousy. Cinderella is not only the timid and sympathetic figure with which we are normally presented,

she has many ploys up her sleeve to help her overcome her stepsisters' superior beauty and gall in relation to her mothers marriage plans for her. In terms of Cinderella and her mother being overly ruthless in trying to organise their jealousy there does seem to be an essence of the powerful and well married wield the power over those who do not. The short story seems to hold these ideals up on a pedestal and creates for the reader a world in which anything you do can be justified merely because you are a member of the nobility, or in Cinderella's case royalty.

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(1993) 85-103.

234

This paper on jealousy in the Grimms's "Cinderella" makes a number of very convincing points—such as when you remark that Cinderella's "assertiveness only appears when she is alone and when she is in close vicinity to the hazel tree" (3). However, the paper needs to proceed by means of close reading, which is the heart of any good essay in an English literature class such as EngLit 1645. You must prove each claim in your essay by examining in detail passages from the text. Each of these examinations should offer the components of a **close reading**, as follows: **quotations** from the text in support of your claim; and an **analysis** of each quotation that demonstrates the validity of your claim. Your analyses of the quotations should demonstrate the validity of your claim by scrutinizing in detail the **language** of the text—the individual words, images, metaphors, etc. that the text uses and how they operate in the quotations. There is far too much vague generalization in the paper and not enough close reading of texts.

The paper is also undermined by problems involving paper format, documentation, and prose style. You need to review Joseph Gibaldi's *MLA Handbook* before turning in each submission to make certain that it follows MLA paper format and documentation practices exactly. Your writing in the paper is often solid, though wordy at the beginning and cluttered with the occasional awkwardness thereafter; you should also attend closely to all of my comments on the paper so as to produce really high-quality prose in your future writings.

Finally, there are far too many simple errors in order for this paper to be an acceptable submission: you need to proofread your work much more carefully in future (review course requirements and policies).

Grade for Paper 1: D

# APPENDIX D

*a nice ~~subtle~~ allusion to the novel.*

## The <u>Other Side</u> of Deculturalization

The colonizing of the Caribbean wrought great ethnic damage to many people, as *odd phrase*
is often understood nowadays. Africans <u>brought</u> to the West Indies underwent a gross

transformation of their cultural heritage and became subservient to the behaviors and

values of their persecutors, the colonists. However, although they <u>suffer</u> the greatest

burden of change, the people who became black Creoles were not the only ones to

undergo (such a) transformation. In order for colonists to make a living in the land they

occupy, they <u>must</u> adapt to the resources and rhythm of that land. Because of this,

colonists eventually develop a distance from their homeland, developing a local style and

even pride. Unfortunately, this distance <u>can result</u> in a lack of healthy relationships with

those who remained in the homeland. The white Creoles <u>faced</u> strained relations with

both their previous compatriots and the other races with whom they shared the new land.

In becoming part of a distinct kind of culture, white Creoles had to adapt to a identity

different to their old selves. This <u>could</u> lead to a sense of frightening isolation, which is

depicted in Jean Rhys's <u>Wide Sargasso Sea</u>. The character of Antoinette Cosway recalls a

life in which her family, and eventually she herself, was shunned by all of the societies

around her. Counting on the support of a culture that can give her identity and belonging,

she ends up rejected by each group over time, which causes the disintegration of her

identity. Antoinette reveals how the attitudes of the people surrounding her brought about

*odd tension between past & present tenses.*

*yes, good point (though no "such a" transformation since you go on to claim not subservient but subordinate for the white Creoles).*

237

her downfall as she loses her grounding in elements that will define her.

The English who inhabit Jamaica consider themselves above the ruined Cosway women who have lost their livelihood. Antoinette pointedly opens her tale with the statement, "They say when trouble comes close ranks, and so the white people did. But we were not in their ranks" (Rhys 9). Only English people of status receive aid from others of their kind; the recently poor plantation owners are treated like the dirt in which they live. Antoinette tries to make her new stepfather, Mr. Mason, understand this, but he brushes her story of English prejudice off as a lie created by Creoles (Rhys 18). Mr. Mason turns out to be an imbecile who thinks of the black Creoles as no more than simpering animals (Rhys 23). After Coulibri is burned down and Annette flies into a violent rage at her husband for not heeding her warnings, he reacts in the proper English manner and abandons her in an asylum and spends most of his time traveling (Rhys 80). Antoinette's husband later in her life, shortly after their marriage, states the overall impression of white Creoles very bluntly: "Creole of pure English descent she may be, but they are not English or European either" (Rhys 39). As he begins his departure from Jamaica with her, he invokes the stereotype of these people that he has come to believe: "Pity. Is there none for me? Tied to a lunatic for life - a drunken lying lunatic - gone her mother's way" (Rhys 99). Despite all of this, Antoinette refuses to fight or turn against the English custom imprisoning her, as she bemoans the loss of her remaining money to her husband under the law (Rhys 66). Although she comes from English stock, Antoinette is degraded and exploited by the culture that is supposed to be her heritage.

Worse yet is the fact that Antoinette is unable to connect with the race that makes up so much of the island - the black Creoles. Goaded by the white Creole obsession with

power and a vengeance stemming from years of mistreatment, the black Creoles despise

Antoinette and her family and take every opportunity to wring as much misery and fear

out of them as possible.  Tia, a black girl from her childhood whom she wished to

befriend, clarifies their relationship by proclaiming, "Old time white people nothing but

white nigger now, and black nigger better than white nigger" (Rhys 14).  The image of

Antoinette's bloody face mirroring that of Tia's tear-streaked one after the latter threw a

rock is very apt (Rhys 27); it underscores the fact that there is no bond of blood or

anything else between the two.  Much later on, not even acquiring status again through

her inheritance by Mr. Mason improves the relationship, as Amélie calls her "white

cockroach" and attacks her as others had done in the past (Rhys 60).  Amélie and the

other black Creoles that hate her must know that the marriage has left her penniless, and

are quick to deride her in her dependency as well as spread nasty rumors to her new

husband.  Christophine is one of the few black Creoles who supports her, but even she

acknowledges that there are substantial differences between the two of them: "She is not

béké like you, but she is béké, and not like us either" (Rhys 93).  Even though

Christophine does all she can to help Antoinette, she acknowledges that Antoinette

belongs with neither the English nor the black Creoles and is in a unique category all her

own.

Perhaps the worst blow of all is when the other white Creoles, including

Antoinette's own family, turn away from her.  From very early on, her mother pays little

attention to her because of her misery at their position.  Antoinette says, "But she pushed

me away, not roughly but calmly, coldly, without a word, as if she had decided once and

for all that I was useless to her" (Rhys 11).  In her marriage, she goes deeper in explaining

239

this neglect to her husband: "Then there was that day she saw I was growing up like a white nigger and she was ashamed of me, it was after that day that everything changed" (Rhys 79). Annette's lack of status is all too apparent in her daughter, and so Antoinette becomes no more than a source of misery for her. Antoinette represents, to her family as well as others, the white Creole, the colonist without any cultural ties or standing. When Antoinette brings her mother the bad news that Pierre, the son, has died, her mother rejects her (Rhys 28-29). Antoinette cannot seek the comfort of her mother, who only sees her as a burden. Her Aunt Cora looks after her for some time, but then puts her in a convent and afterwards leaves for England to improve her health (Rhys 33). It may be that Cora expects to improve her health by escaping the oppressive atmosphere that Jamaica has for her kind. When Aunt Cora hears of Antoinette's wedding plans, she loses all hope for the well-being of their family and goes away for good (Rhys 69). Antoinette's family cannot help her; they cannot even help themselves, and Antoinette is a reminder of this. When one is ashamed of their own kind, there is no mutual compassion.

All of this has a profound effect on Antoinette's perceptions of herself and her surroundings. Near the beginning of her marriage, she recounts to her husband, "Once ... I used to sleep with a piece of wood by my side so that I could defend myself if I were attacked. That's how afraid I was" (Rhys 44). Some illumination on this behavior can be found in her reflection on the convent people: "They are safe. How can they know what it can be like *outside*?" (Rhys 35). Antoinette's powerful fear stems from her feelings of alienation, which is imposed on her by all of the groups refusing to claim her as their own. Without something to which to belong, her life has no stability and her basic survival becomes a trial. When she finally gets married, it seems as if she has found her solution.

Her new husband can see what effect he has on her. "'You are safe,' I'd say. She'd liked that - to be told 'you are safe'" (Rhys 55). Antoinette married the man so that she could feel that she belonged to someone or something. But they do not get along, the division between their lives and cultures is still too deep. Antoinette herself finally acknowledges her isolation at one point, almost in passing: "So between [the black Creoles and English] I often wonder who I am and where is my country and where do I belong and why was I ever born at all" (Rhys 61). Antoinette cannot even be certain of her identity while cut off from the heritage or traditions that do not belong to her. At one point, she even comes close to realizing why she has been denied culture and identity. When her husband expresses his fear of the Jamaican countryside, she claims, "It has nothing to do with either of us. That is why you are afraid of it, because it is something else" (Rhys 78). Just like the country she lives in, Antoinette, too, is "something else," possessing a culture all her own. But it is not recognized as culture by anyone else. She steadily loses her identity from this point onward at the hands of her vindictive husband. He arbitrarily takes away part of her identity by refusing to use her name. "Bertha is not my name. You are trying to make me into someone else, calling me by another name" (Rhys 88). He succeeds in subjugating her will before they leave (Rhys 102). At the end of the story, after years of living locked away in his English mansion, Antoinette is finally depicted as having lost the last thread of her identity: "It was then that I saw her - the ghost. The woman with streaming hair. She was surrounded by a gilt frame but I knew her" (Rhys 111-12). In a dream, Antoinette sees herself in a mirror, but she cannot recognize her own self. Her identity has utterly disappeared, and it was possible for this to happen because she never managed to form a strong identity from the beginning.

Although it cannot be disputed that black Creoles have suffered greatly at the hands of the colonists who bought or abducted them into a new country and life, and no comparison between them or other races can be made, it is still true that the other residents of those islands experienced alienation, too. It was the strange existence of the colonist, separated from the culture of his or her country by circumstance, but as yet having no culture of his or her own. And one cannot belong to another culture simply by imitating it, so the black Creoles could not accept their neighbors. The white Creoles of the colonial period in the Caribbean underwent their own identity crisis, and Antoinette Cosway in Jamaica shows how and why it happened. While holding onto divided loyalties, and without the support of other white Creoles living around her, she was unable to form a unique identity that she could be proud of, and so she simply ceased to exist as a person. Her story in <u>Wide Sargasso Sea</u> warns that one cannot focus too strongly on the cultures of communities other than the one that a person lives in if a sense of belonging is to be found.

242

Your paper is currently set up to 'prove' that whites suffered in the Caribbean, too. And you produce a psychological portrait of Antoinette as proof. But note that the way you pose the problem currently, it is not a literary ~~question~~, but a sociological one. Literary analysis ~~—~~ requires you to reframe the question — perhaps thus (though you may certainly offer different approaches):

- how does <u>WSS</u> assert & validate the "Caribbeanness" of antoinette (thereby ~~— ~~ struggling to rescue her from the rejection of the english & the emancipated slaves alike)?

- how does it develop a white Creole aesthetic?

(here questions of the novel's <u>form</u> & indeed the novel's vision — which aren't necessarily the <u>same</u> as any individual characters', even though it may be sympathetic to the characters)

Here you could look at aspects of form such as point of view, fragmentation, understatement, obeah & Indas — all ways of (a) addressing ~~the~~ ~~——————~~ a <u>literary</u> response to a historical problem & (b) thinking of the literary in terms not confined to plot & character.

(So, for instance, rather than spending so much time summarizing & recounting the plot — ~~—~~ perhaps focus on a few moments in the plot — eg Tia/Ant or conflicts over saming — & then analyze those moments)

Paper grade at this point: C—    CP grade at midterm: C— (but the few times you've spoken, your Q's/comments have been so insightful — I'd like so much to hear more from you.) Best,

**APPENDIX E**

## The Caribbean Landscape: Beauty, Menace, and History in the Works of Walcott, Rhys, and Kincaid

Upon hearing the word "Caribbean," it is common for one to conjure up pictures of tropical beaches with clear water, lush jungle-like surroundings dotted with exotic flowers, plants, and fruits, and wildlife that most of us have only seen in pet shops freely roaming the landscape. It is common to think of a native people, brightly dressed in fabrics with loud prints, talking in melodic accents, smiling, laughing, and singing. This is the common North American perception of the Caribbean, one that Carnival Cruise Lines has depicted in their promotions. It is this idea of the Caribbean that prompts the Jamaican Tourist Board-sponsored ads to show beautiful, dread-locked people jumping through waterfalls, and couples frolicking down palm-lined paths, while in the background a bland, vanilla version of Bob Marley's "One Love" is played. This is the common American perception of the Caribbean for most because our (individual) relationship with the Caribbean has been strictly with the physical land. The people of the Caribbean are included into this physical landscape; they are part of the spectacle. It is easy for us (North Americans) to imagine that this incredible physical beauty creates ideal settings for the native people to carryout their everyday lives in. The Caribbean writers we have read this semester tell us differently. The Caribbean is simply not a paradise that makes everything alright, it is a complex system of different cultures and heritages. It is a unique physical landscape inextricably linked with a unique history. The

landscape is a source of love *and* resentment for the people who live there. All the writers we have read thus far in class have employed or described the landscape in different ways. Through close readings of some of the passages from some of the writers, we can try to understand this link between the landscape and history.

Derek Walcott's essay, "The Antilles: Fragments of Epic Memory," begins by describing a theatrical presentation of *Ramleela*, a Hindu religious celebration. Walcott's language is rich and masterful in describing the scene; it is the language of a poet. Walcott, however, does not subscribe to the idea that the landscape is a reminder or representative of the history. As he eloquently puts it, "[v]isual surprise is natural in the Caribbean; it comes with the landscape, and faced with its beauty, the sigh of History dissolves (Walcott 68). Walcott takes the view that despite the painful past of the Caribbean, the beauty of the islands is something that belongs to everyone whose destiny has led them here. For Caribbean people, the precise emulation of the rituals and beliefs of the homelands of their forefathers should not be the focus, but rather the new and unique rituals that have evolved from the old ways; the *Caribbean* ways. The Caribbean landscape then becomes part of the new celebration. The "cabbage palms moving their fronds at sunrise" belong to the Indian boys as much as they do to Perse (Walcott 78). When the Indian boys are preparing for *Ramleela*, they shoot bows into golden skies with blue mountain backgrounds. Walcott reminisces how the red hue of the boys' skin is like the beauty of watching the scarlet ibises take flight. It does not matter to Walcott how these boys came to be in the Caribbean, but that it is place of tremendous beauty ready to be claimed as part of their identity. Walcott's view accepts the past, but does not wallow

Z

246

in it. Instead he feels grateful that his own destiny was to be part of this wondrous and special place.

In Jean Rhys novel, *Wide Sargasso Sea*, the landscape plays an integral role in the narrative, character development, and in creating a sense of the islands for the readers. The beginning of the story is narrated by Antoinette, a young white Creole. Through her subjective voice, Antoinette describes the eventual demise of her family's Jamaican estate, Coulibri, after the slave emancipation in the early 19th century. When describing the gradual decay of Coulibri, the most stunning and powerful images are of the back garden that becomes overgrown with wild flowers and plants. Antoinette reminisces how the garden used to be before by comparing it to the Garden of Eden, she states that "the tree of life grew there," but dramatically shifts her tone when she laments that "it had gone wild" (Rhys 10,11). Antoinette describes how "[u]nderneath the tree ferns, tall as forest tree ferns, the light was green. Orchids flourished out of reach or for some reason not to be touched. One was snaky looking, another like an octopus with long thin brown tentacles bare of leaves hanging from a twisted root. Twice a year the octopus orchid flowered... [i]t was a bell shaped mass of white, mauve, deep purples, wonderful to see. The scent was sweet and strong. I never went near it (Rhys 11). This particular passage exemplifies how landscape is employed in this story as a device to mirror what is happening to the characters internally. Antoinette later reveals that this "wild" garden does not bother her because she barely remembers the proper garden, just as she is becoming "wild," free from the restrictions of white, proper, plantation life. Left to her own devices after her mother's descent into depression, Antoinette explores the

surroundings of her home, something she would not have the chance to do if the prior rules of "white" propriety still applied to her. She is forging a bond with the landscape; it fills the emptiness her mother and the upheaval of stability has created in her life. Not accepted by whites or blacks, Antoinette feels a belonging among the wild plants, exotic flowers, and crystal pools. Her bond with her surroundings is her claim to being a Caribbean person; her identity. Later, when Antoinette grows into a woman and marries the Rochester-figure from England, the landscape again becomes an agent through which their true feelings are exposed or mirrored. After the marriage, Antoinette and the Rochester-figure honeymoon in Dominica, at a small estate that belonged to Antoinette's mother. The journey to reach the estate provides an opportunity for Antoinette to show off her beloved homeland (herself) to her new husband, but he finds the surroundings menacing and foreign. The Rochester-figure remarks to himself of how overwhelming the landscape is, and thinks to himself "[t]oo much blue, too much purple, too much green. The Flowers too red, the mountains too high, the hills too near. And the woman is a stranger" (Rhys 41). Here, the landscape and Antoinette are equated in the Rochester-figure's eyes. Both her, and the surroundings, make him feel like a outsider. During their honeymoon, the Rochester-figure's growing distaste for his new wife starts coming through during conversations and in his observations of the environment. During a rum-fueled títe-‡-títe, Rochester tells Antoinette, " I feel very much a stranger here. I feel that this place is my enemy and on your side," to which Antoinette responds, "[y]ou are quite mistaken. It is not for you and not for me. It has nothing to do with either of us. That is why you are afraid of it, because it is something else" (Rhys 78). As a reader, this

4

conversation reinforces the idea that the landscape is its own character in the story. Always looming in the background, foreshadowing, mirroring, symbolizing. There is rarely a page that some form of Caribbean botany, scenery, or wildlife is not present. Landscape is integral in developing Antoinette's character, and alienating the Rochester-figure. The landscape tells the story of the Caribbean, the history of the islands. The feelings of menace that this wilderness can evoke can be representative of the crimes of humanity that took place here. *Wide Sargasso Sea* does not just simply recreate the Caribbean environment around the characters, but immerses the characters, allowing the landscape power (characterization) not seen in many other fictional works.

In the non-fiction work, *A Small Place*, author Jamaica Kincaid writes a sharp, poignant essay on Antigua, her native land. In the essay, Kincaid bashes the Antiguan government for its corrupt ways, sends a prickly missive to would-be tourists of her native island, and denounces the hegemonic, capitalistic north for making her country dependant on them. She also strikingly and masterfully juxtaposes the beauty of the Caribbean landscape with these travails, and with the abominable history of generations before.

When Kincaid details what the average tourist might take in upon seeing the ocean from the hotel room for the first time, she states, "the colour of the water is navy-blue; nearer the water is the colour of the North American sky. From there to the shore, the water is pale, silvery, clear, so clear that you can see its pinkish-white sand bottom (Kincaid 12,13). She then goes on to confess that unbeknownst to the tourist, the bathtub he just drained, the toilet he just flushed, and the sink in which he just spat emptied into

5

249

that very same ocean since Antigua lacks a proper sewage treatment facility. Here the

façade of paradise is shattered by the reality that Antiguans ( and many Caribbean

people) face everyday. Exponentially worse than a sewage problem, Kincaid then

reminds the reader of how many slaves met their end in that perfect, sublime sea, forcing

the reader to look beyond the benevolent Caribbean exterior into the dark annals of

Caribbean history, of which the landscape is a reminder. Further in in the essay, Kincaid

explains how it is actually three islands that make up the nation of Antigua. This is rather

humorous because Kincaid points out the irony of calling a 9 x12 mile island, an even

smaller island named Barbuda, and a barren rock that is only inhabited by birds called

Redonda a "nation." She then matter-of-factly points out that Barbuda was actually

settled by a family named Codrington, "who specialized in breeding special groups of

black people, whom they then sold into slavery" (Kincaid 51). It is painfully drawn to

the reader's attention that the author of this book, like the majority in the Caribbean, is

reminded of the cruel past everyday. The history is inescapable; it is part of the land, part

of the sea, part of the people. By contrasting what the Caribbean has come to represent to

the North Americans and the Europeans (a glorious vacation destination) with what the

actual inhabitants cannot forget (reminders of a slavery constantly around them), Kincaid

delivers a wake-up call to the blissfully ignorant, the outright deniers, and the plain

apathetic of the Caribbean plight.

Not all the authors we have read have taken the same view, or employed the

Caribbean landscape the same way in their work. While some like Walcott are in awe

and feel blessed to be part of this unique part of the world, other's like Kincaid are still

250

dealing with the remnants of a colonial existence. In some, the landscape is used to create a literary effect, as in Rhys' work, wherein the plants and the flowers and the wildlife create a world the reader can sense. The genre "Caribbean literature" implies an intimacy with the landscape within the text. As Braithwaite says in "History, the Caribbean, and the Imagination," without the sense of the wind on the skin, the sound of the waves, or the glitter of the water, "[he] could not even appropriate the history of [his] region." Braithwaite's explanation of how the Caribbean islands were formed ( the space between the Andes and the Rockies descended into the ocean at right angles, leaving only mountain tops emerged, which then became the Caribbean islands) makes me believe there is hope of the Caribbean people looking to a different history. One of the natural persuasion, where monumental movements in the earth created a small, unique corner of the world. A place where one might have arrived in unspeakable ways, but can now let go to live on the pinnacles of these undersea mountains, in unity, claiming this unparalleled beauty as their own, and not that of the tourists of the Western world.

The sensitivity of your argument here is wonderful to see. These texts' use of landscape has clearly caught your imagination.

Compositionally, though, you need to rework the paper so that you're not setting it up to talk about 3 texts sequentially & just say "each one's doing something different" (though the differences you identify _are_ interesting in themselves.)

Part of the difficulty is that you're comparing 2 essays with a novel — & each genre makes its "argument" differently. Think about how to deal with that in a revision. [& btw, would reference to Carpentier, & ——— landscape in marvelous realism help — or would it be too much to handle]

But the main question & that you need to get at to deepen your argument is this: Why does each text approach landscape so differently? What problems does each thereby formally resolve? What problems can it _not_ resolve? What might DW & JK say to each other? What _aspects_ of Caribbean landscape does each claim & why?

(By the way — you don't comment on the "sargasso" sea ...)

This paper is good as it stands, but has many untapped riches, as Carpentier might say.

Paper grade: B
Midterm GP: A

P.S. FYI: You might be interested in some painting I have that set up Che Guevara as landscape.
As I write, I'm listening to "Verde luz" — a kind of anthem of Puerto Rican independentistas. It talks about "free, your skies; your star, solitary ...
the green light of the mountains & the sea."

**APPENDIX F**

**Very Rough Draft of Long Essay – Race and Racism in *Moby Dick***

In 1851, Herman Melville wrote *Moby Dick*, a story about an old sea captain hunting a white whale that had taken off his leg. Yet *Moby Dick* is much more than a story of revenge. It has subtle undertones and symbolism relating to issues interesting Melville, and it is a subtle commentary on the human race. Race and racism is one area on which the commentary in *Moby Dick* focuses. Moby Dick is the story of a whaling crew fighting against racism and the believed superiority of the white race as embodied by the white whale, Moby Dick.

The main interracial relationships existing on the whaling ship the Pequod are the relationships between Ishmael and Queequeg, Ahab and Fedallah, and Ahab and Pip. A relationship exists between the rest of the crew and the harpooners, but it is not as apparent as the 3 relationships previously mentioned. Ishmael, Ahab, and most of the crew are white, while Queequeg is a Pacific Islander, Fedallah is a Parsee, Tashtego is a Gay-Header Indian, Dagoo is an African slave, and Pip is a young African boy. Additionally, in spite of the fact that Queequeg, Tashtego, Dagoo, and Fedallah are minorities, the four of them hold the most important positions on the ship, those of the harpooners. The harpooner dictates whether or not the voyage is successful because the duty of catching whales falls to him.

The relationship between Ishmael and Queequeg is perhaps the most poignant interracial relationship aboard the Pequod. Ishmael and Queequeg meet in an inn and from then on become bosom friends. They behave like an old married couple by "snuggling" in bed and talking late into the night. They have a close bond that not even racial stereotypes can shake. As Ishmael walks around town with his bosom friend, his

254

racial unconsciousness is "evident in [his] retort in response to the 'jeering glances' he attracts as he circulates through the streets of New Bedford with Queequeg: 'as though a white man were anything more dignified than a whitewashed negro' (MD 60)" (Marr 10).

Another example of the non-existent racial tensions in Moby Dick is the relationship between Ahab and Fedallah. {find out where Fedallah is from – Parsee = Persian?} Since Ahab brings Fedallah onto the ship without anyone knowing and hides him until the first whale is sighted, he is responsible for taking care of the Parsee and his men. If Ahab was racist and didn't like non-white people, he wouldn't have done that. Additionally, since Ahab hides Fedallah on the ship, he has some sort of past relationship with him – "they go way back" -> rework. Ahab also trusts Fedallah. He listens to and believes the Parsee's prophecy. [Fedallah is like Ahab's right hand man.]

Ahab's other interracial relationship involves the young African boy Pip. After Pip falls from the whaling boat into the sea, he becomes "dumb" or "mad". One day, Ahab sees Pip wandering the deck and babbling. Feeling bad for the poor boy, Ahab decides that Pip will spend the rest of the voyage in his cabin with him. Ahab becomes a sort of father figure or caretaker for Pip since he's no longer "right in the head". Strangely, after spending some time with Pip, Ahab feels as though the boy is curing his malady and says that "like cures like" (MD ??). Pip almost makes Ahab admit that his chase for Moby Dick is "mad" and turn back for home. However, when Ahab realizes the effect that Pip's company is having on him, he tells the boy to stay in the cabin while they are chasing Moby Dick. Ahab doesn't want to take any chances that Pip's presence might make him give up the chase for Moby Dick – his only goal since losing his leg to Moby Dick.

255

***expand more on Ahab's relationship with Pip, Pip's role as the fool, or Pip's sane ramblings?***

Since the rest of the crew is white and the harpooners are minorities, there is an interracial relationship between these men as well.  All of the crewmembers get along regardless of race. They respect each other and help each other because their common goal is to catch whales, especially Moby Dick. When Queequeg gets sick, all of the men are worried that he will die, and none of them want him to die. Since he is dying, they all do whatever they can for him even though he's a Pacific Islander and not white. -> integrate this -> While Queequeg and Ishmael are on the boat that will take them to Nantucket, Queequeg saves a man who falls overboard even though he called him a savage. Queequeg is concerned about his fellow man regardless of race. After Queequeg saves the drowning man he is viewed as a human being, not as a Pacific Islander. By saving a stranger, the other men on the ship see that Queequeg is just like them except for the color of his skin.

***get page #'s in MD to support info above – possibly incorporate direct quotes***

***something about the racial "Other"?***

***I'm planning on expanding more on each individual relationship and finding sources to back up my claims.***

The interracial relationships aboard the Pequod are really no different than the "same race" relationships. No master/slave motif governs the people's interactions, and the non-white men are addressed no differently than the white men. The conversations taking place between the captain and crew and among the crewmembers are equal – no

one is above anyone else because of race. The only time that someone does behave as a master would to a slave is when Stubb orders Fleece, the old African cook, to give a sermon to the sharks. Here, when Stubb treats Fleece differently because he is black, is it brutally obvious that something is wrong. The reader immediately gets a sense that Stubb's request is ridiculous and that he is treating Fleece unfairly. Fleece even comments that Stubb's request is absurd (MD 238). The fact that Stubb eats whale steak — something not normally done after capturing a whale anymore — could indicate that he is more traditional in his thinking because eating whale steak was an older custom. If Stubb is more traditional, he could be following the more traditional treatment of African-Americans. By pointing out how unacceptable Stubb's treatment of Fleece is, Melville could be pointing out how out-dated the traditional treatment of minorities is (Sparknotes).   -> I'll elaborate here…

On the Pequod, a person's value seems to depend on his skills, abilities, and usefulness rather than on his race. For example, Ishmael is white, but he is rarely chosen to do any important job on the ship because he is weak and unfit for the job of a whaler. Queequeg, Tashtego, Dagoo, and Fedallah are all non-white, but they are given the most critical jobs on the ship because they are strong, accurate, and the most physically qualified. It's interesting that all of the mates choose sailors from minority groups as their harpooners rather than white crewmembers. Choosing all minority harpooners suggests that the mates overlook race and focus on ability – something that would have been difficult to do in a time when race issues were becoming a hot topic due to slavery (and the fact that the Civil War was brewing). Significantly, the owners of the Pequod are only concerned with Queequeg's religion when he goes to sign up for the voyage. His religion,

not his race, is the only obstacle between Queequeg and the whaling voyage since they know that he is a skilled harpooner. Queequeg is also offered a higher cut of the Pequod's profit than Ishmael because his skills will play a much larger role in the success of the voyage. A man's worth upon the Pequod is measured by what he can contribute to the voyage instead of his race.

By judging someone based on ability instead of race, Melville is creating a new way of judging people in society. Melville's new way of judging society creates a "raceless" environment on the ship. Analyzing Moby Dick, the reader cannot find any problems among crewmembers due to race. The lack of problems and in fighting suggests that Melville's "raceless" society removes all of the problems associated with race differences. By showing how ignoring differences in race eliminates problems in his "perfect racial microcosm" of the Pequod, Melville even wrote that "'sailors belong to no nation in particular'" in his work *Ornoo* (Marr 9). Melville is subtly suggesting to the reader that all of the racial problems in the world could be gotten rid of by accepting all races and judging people based on their ability to contribute to the human community rather than their race.

It's interesting that Ahab the crotchety, old captain, who would seem to be the most set in his ways, has the most interracial relationships. Being set in his ways around the time of the Civil War would make me think that he was racist, but the fact that he has so many interracial relationships suggests otherwise. Ahab's relationships with Fedallah and Pip, an African boy and a Persian man, show that he does not form relationships based on race – these two relationships also appear to be the two closest relationships that he has. Ahab values Fedallah and his crew's skills enough to sneak the Parsee and his

258

men onto the Pequod and hide them from the rest of the crew. In doing so, Ahab becomes the sole provider for Fedallah and his crew.

Towards the end of the novel as the Pequod draws nearer to the area where Moby Dick is expected to be feeding, Ahab asks the Blacksmith to forge the harpoon that will kill Moby Dick using old horse shoe nails – the toughest metal Blacksmiths work. As the Blacksmith is about to cool the end of the harpoon in his bucket of water, Ahab stops him and insists that the harpoon is cooled with the blood of the three minority harpooners – Queequeg, Tashtego, and Dagoo (MD 371). The blood of the different minority races is now part of the harpoon that will kill the great white whale – the white whale that represents the superiority of the white race and racism. Ahab is using the blood of the minorities to help "kill" racism.

When Ahab and his men finally do encounter Moby Dick, each of the harpooners is able to get a harpoon into the whale. Symbolically, each of the minority races is taking part in the attempt to destroy racism once and for all. Yet ultimately Ahab must be the one to kill the whale using his harpoon because he is white, and a white man must be the one to administer the fatal blow ending racism. Since racism and race differences center on the superiority of the white man, a member of the "superior" race must ultimately put an end to racism. However, Ahab is able to use the strength and traditions – the blood – of the minorities to help him (the blood on his harpoon).

\*\*\* I want to find sources that interpret Moby Dick, the whale, as symbolizing racism and white superiority. I haven't found those sources yet, but I think that my hypothesis makes sense because Moby Dick is a giant white whale, and racial tensions were running high due to slavery and the possibility of the Civil War.\*\*\*

*It maybe less important to find sources than to figure out why you believe this is a good way to interpret – les role*

*Moby Dick* is also a testament to the fact that you can't ignore race. Even though the Pequod is an oasis free from racism, as soon as the white whale, symbolizing white power, enters the picture, everyone is destroyed. Moby Dick's ferocity and the fact that he attacks the ship is another indication that race can't be ignored. Moby Dick is attacking Melville's ideal world that exists without racism. The fact that Moby Dick ultimately succeeds in sinking the ship and destroying everyone but Ishmael indicates that a world without racism is not possible.

*Wouldn't this idea profoundly undermine the idea is working to tell people imagine a raceless world?*

Additionally, Ahab intuitively knows that this voyage will be the Pequod's last (MD ??). Ahab's uneasy feeling about the fate of the voyage echoes the fact that racism will be the end of Melville's ideal "raceless" world and all of the people in it. All of the negative events occurring over the three-day chase scene are linked with the ship's closes proximity to the white whale, or their close proximity to racism. These negative events emphasize racism's poisonous quality. Everything that comes into contact with racism is affected because racism is like a poison that ultimately destroys everything in its path. Just as Moby Dick escapes from Ahab and his crew, racism escapes from those who wish to end it.

***include other ideas/info from sources***

Conclusion

* different interracial relationships

* ship as a "world" free from racism

* Moby Dick as representing racism

* harpoon w/ "racial" blood is supposed to be used by the white man to end racism – everyone/every race working to end racism

8

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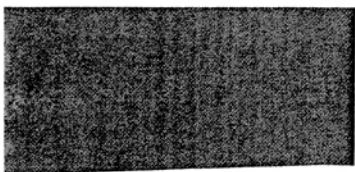
"Race and Racism in <u>Moby Dick</u>"

**Significance, coherence, and persuasiveness of argument:**

The topic of race can be a very productive one in relation to <u>Moby-Dick</u>, but I think this essay needs to be reworked significantly. It is possible that much of your thinking could be very productive if put to slightly different uses.

One problem is that the paper seems to work hard to establish that the Pequod is a society in which there is no racial prejudice, except maybe for Stubb's treatment of Fleece. However, on the last page, the fact that ship sinks is interpreted to mean that there can't be a "raceless" world—by which I assume you mean mainly a world without racial inequality and race-based prejudice. This path that the paper takes seems to be self-undermining.

However, the more significant problem is really the way the paper treats race (and it's symptomatic of ways that race often gets discussed in the media—so it's an understandable by-product of living in the world today, even though it's analytically problematic, especially when writing about the 1850s). In the paper as it stands, it seems as though race is important only because it's a factor that causes prejudice and unfairness on the part of some people. The main ways that such prejudice and unfairness would be expressed, the logic goes, would be white people's being unwilling to hire or socialize with people of other races. This racism is treated in the paper as if it is older—more traditional, more long-standing—than attitudes that assume human equality regardless of race or other factors.

What I've just described is an understanding of race and racism that would work much better for the 1950s (or 1960s) than for the 1850s. (And the racism of the 1950s has not gone away for us yet—so I can understand why it's still on your radar screen.) In the 1950s, the main public forms of racism that were targeted by the Civil Rights movement and similar reforms involved discrimination in employment, public segregation, and forms of social segregation that were related to public segregation. In other words, the marks of white racism mainly involved white people's wanting black people out of 'their' spaces except in certain well-defined servant capacities. The laws supporting racial segregation that the Civil Rights movement tackled were mainly passed in the 1890s. (This is often a surprise to people: several decades AFTER slavery ended, as part of a backlash resulting from the end to Reconstruction in the South, states passed Jim Crow laws and segregation became much more pronounced than ever before.) There are loads of stories about the kinds of racist behavior that many people, black and white, didn't want to tolerate any more: stories about white people acting as if black people contaminated their swimming pools, stories about white parents trying to keep their kids from having black friends, stories about white people keeping black people out of clubs and workplaces and restaurants and a host of other settings. These forms of racism were (bad) 'traditions' in the 1850s: they had grown familiar to older generations of people who had grown up in the Jim Crow era.

SO: your paper as it stands suggests that white people on the Pequod do not practice the forms of segregation and discrimination that became the hallmark of the first half of the 20th century. As you can imagine, though, that's a curious way to investigate this text of the 1850s.

262

(Just to pin down what's so different in <u>Moby-Dick</u>: before Ishmael gets to know Queequeg, he has qualms about the fact that he'll be bunking with a non-Christian involved in 'barbaric' practices such as head-shrinking and cannibalism; he doesn't voice any qualms that are specifically about sharing a bed with someone with dark skin, which is the kind of racist queasiness much more typical of the later form of racism.)

There could certainly be race-related prejudice in workplaces (Frederick Douglass refers to this) in the years before the Civil War—and it's hard to imagine Queequeg ever becoming a captain in the social world of the Pequod—and there were rampant theories of white superiority and the inferiority of every other race (some of them religiously based, some scientifically based) as well as taboos against interracial marriage and reproduction, but the signs of racism were not necessarily the avoidance of people of other races. (Indeed, slaveholders often taunted abolitionists, pointing out that slaveholders were much more comfortable living in close proximity with 'Africans' than were northerners in inland areas who had encountered few black people. The slaveholders' oppression of slaves did not depend on avoiding physical contact or avoiding sharing spaces, for instance.) Historical evidence suggests that the whaling industry was international (and in that way interracial) and that although race affected the economic and social treatment of nonwhite people, the whaling industry was eager to hire them—especially if they had specialized skills like harpooning. (And think about harpooning as the aspect of whaling most closely akin to hunting with a spear, vs. the factory labor involved in processing the whale's carcass.)

The task for your essay, then, is to figure out a way to frame an inquiry about race that is appropriate to the 1850s and—<u>even more importantly</u>—appropriate to the world of this text. And here I want to mention another difficulty with the paper as it stands: Why, if Ahab is meant to be some kind of exemplary fighter against racism, is he also depicted as a revenge-obsessed madman who takes almost the whole crew down with him? Whatever your investigation of race is, it has to have some way of connecting with the most obvious features of the book.

I can think of one text that you might find helpful if you have time to read it: Toni Morrison's <u>Playing the Dark</u> (and I can't find my copy, so I'm writing about it from memory). Morrison looks at a number of works by white writers and talks about ways in which they are preoccupied with what she calls, I think, "the Africanist presence." Her argument in a way is that the very notion of whiteness depended crucially on a notion of blackness: that is, being white meant not being black; being white meant being 'more human' than black people—so being white was tied up in ideas of what was most valuable about being human. She writes about <u>Moby-Dick</u> as well as <u>The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym</u> (an odd work by Poe in which the narrator writes at length about the horrors of whiteness near the poles).

However, whether or not you get a chance to look at Morrison's approach, think about why the text gives you reasons to associate the whale Moby Dick with white racism. (Bear in mind, by the way, that the word 'racism' didn't exist then—probably you should explain what you mean by it.) Remember that we discussed a possibility very much like this in class; Maura talked about ways in which the white whale might embody

the awful aspects of 'whiteness'; the ship was itself implicated in this whiteness. There would be much to work out about this argument, but it seemed like a good start not to assume that a ship with this problematic captain was on the side of 'good' rather than struggling with something that was a problem within rather than without. Whether or not this line of thought appeals, perhaps you could look at passages in which whiteness is discussed as frightening in ways that have some relationship to white racial identities.

The interracial links you posit, especially Queequeg's with Ishmael, do seem important to explore, but not because the Pequod is completely race-blind; as I noted in a margin, chapter 40 (around p. 150) involves racial slurs and violence. But if the big gulf between Ishmael and Queequeg is not between white and black or dark but between civilized and barbaric, Western and nonwestern, Christian and non-Christian, then the interracial dimension of their friendship might not be the most important way to name it. "Whiteness" may be associated with Anglo-American or Euro-American beliefs in the cultural superiority of Western Christian cultures, and internal "minorities" (again, a 20th-century term) may not be as important as the "Others" represented by Africa, Asia, and other lands that Westerners tended to write off as uncivilized.   (I'm invoking the "Other" here, but let me suggest that if you use the term, you need to be careful to explain what you mean by it—it is often used but can take on different forms of significance.)

Remember also that there are forms of race-based thinking that do not overtly involve negative emotions. For instance, the kind of exoticism attributed to Fedallah (strange dark prophet) and the reduction of Pip to a kind of psychological mirror or prop for Ahab might count as ways in which these characters are diminished, not treated as quite the same kinds of centers of thought and decision-making as Ahab, Starbuck, etc. (It's a question to consider even with Queequeg, although there are certainly striking forms of equality at work.) There might be ways in which cultural stereotyping (or religious stereotyping or exoticist stereotyping) are at work even in passages that show white/western/Christian characters' affection or admiration for characters who are 'other.'

Maybe you could turn your question around again and ask how race appears in Moby-Dick—how it even shows up as a category. What is connected to it? (One answer might be the distinction between civilization and barbarism, since that's an explicit stake of Ishmael's attempts to make sense of Queequeg.) What fears and hopes or other affects or ideas does the text link to it? In other words, try to offer an account of what race is in the world of this text and what problems it poses or solves.

**Organization (opening and closing, paragraphing, and use of transitions):**
Mainlygood. The undermining at the end throws the reader a bit of a curve, but you use paragraphs well to separate and develop your claims.

**Style and sentence-level correctness and clarity:** I marked a few small errors you should be sure you understand, but mainly your sentences are grammatically correct and syntactically easy to follow. Work on making your claims more precise by pinning down

key terms (race, racism, other, raceless) and working to capture nuances and complexities.

**Use of evidence:** You need to use much more evidence to characterize the kind of attention the text pays to race as well as to support allegorical interpretations (the whale as racism, the Pequod as anti-racist activist, etc.). Remember to work with the language of key passages to explain where you see certain emphases or connections made.

**Conventions:** Notice that the title of the book hyphenates <u>Moby-Dick</u> even though the whale's name in the book isn't hyphenated. Be sure to number your pages, and remember that your title can do a lot to set readerly expectations. Be sure to use MLA format for entries in your Works Cited list.

**Suggested priorities for revision:** 1) Work on framing a line of thought or inquiry into race that emphasizes how this issue arises in the text and that works with language from key passages; 2) Be careful not to import assumptions from later time periods.

**APPENDIX G**

## A Shared Religious Crisis

Since Herman Melville greatly admired Nathaniel Hawthorne as an author and even dedicated Moby Dick to him, it's not surprising that one can find similarities between Moby Dick and Nathaniel Hawthorne's works. One obvious similarity exists in the religious experiences of Ishmael in Moby Dick and Goodman Brown in Young Goodman Brown. Both men are faced with a decision between Christianity and devil-worship, a decision also reflecting the religious atmosphere of the early 1800's. The religious beliefs of the main characters of Moby Dick and Young Goodman Brown are tested by the temptation to convert to paganism and devil-worship (Moby Dick bottom p. 56 – top p. 57 & Young Goodman Brown middle p. 2266), and both characters must decide what their real spiritual beliefs are and whether or not they coincide with accepted Christian practices.

Tempted by pagan figures to renounce their Christian beliefs, both Ishmael and Goodman Brown question whether or not they should stray. Ishmael is tempted to worship Yojo, Queequeg's god, and "deliberate[s] a moment, whether, in case [Queequeg] invite[s] [him], [he] [will] comply" (Moby Dick 56). Ishmael, who was raised "a good Christian," questions how he could "unite with this wild idolator in worshipping his piece of wood" (Moby Dick 57). Similarly Goodman Brown is tempted by the Devil to join the rest of his community in worshipping the Devil instead of God. Goodman Brown is not sure if he should convert to devil-worship because he sees most of the townspeople he looked to for religious advice standing in the crowd behind him. Just as Goodman Brown and his wife, "the only pair, as it seem[s], who [are] yet hesitating on the verge of wickedness" are about to be baptized in the ways of the Devil, Goodman Brown realizes that he doesn't want to give up his religious beliefs so that he can "be [a partaker] in the mystery of sin" (Young Goodman Brown 2266).

Even though both Ishmael and Goodman Brown are similar in the fact that they don't give up their Christian beliefs, they are different in what they do and how they view religion after being faced with converting to Paganism. After being invited by Queequeg to worship Yojo, Ishmael asks himself what worship is. Deciding that it is "to do the will of God" and that the will of God is "to do to [his] fellow man what [he] would have [his] fellow man do to [him]," Ishmael kneels down and worships Yojo with Queequeg (Moby Dick 57). After participating in this Pagan ceremony, Ishmael begins to think in terms of spirituality rather than religion because he no longer associates being a Christian with specific Christian practices (hence the reason that Ishmael thinks it's acceptable for a Christian to worship an idol when it's against the 10 commandments). Goodman Brown differs from Ishmael in that when he is faced with being baptized in the ways of wickedness, he looks to God for guidance and refuses. He does not interpret God's will as wanting him to participate in devil-worship. Additionally, after seeing all of his townspeople at the ceremony, Goodman Brown no longer attends church because he hears the holy psalms as "anthem[s] of sin" since they are coming from one of them men present at the Devil's ceremony (Young Goodman Brown 2267).

Although both men are faced with similar religious crises, they react in different ways. Ishmael debates whether or not Queequeg's religious practices are really un-Christian and, deciding that they're not, participates in idol-worship believing that it's the will of God. Goodman Brown, in contrast, is firm in his decision once he has evaluated what is at stake – his soul. Goodman Brown decides that he will in no way participate in devil-worship because it is unquestionably against God's will. Both these moral crises represent the changes taking place in the religious arena during the early 1800's and illustrate the spiritual difficulty of deciding which worship practices were acceptable for Christians and which ones were not.

*But remember that this choice is not the story's culmination. The question of whether the forest scene was true is what haunts the rest of his life.

How does Ishmael signify weighing what go on to as he knows? Queequeg.

or to see if better?

Why lump a god in another religion with the Christian specific devil?

at issue is that Ishmael never

modest wishion?

) over ↗

267

It's really important to discuss whether works of literature securely presume that Christianity is their truth OR whether they engage Christianity (as the dominant religion in The U.S. at the time) without being totally 'inside' it. Are There ways in which MOby-Dick stages questions about Christianity as well as within Christianity? What questions could you bring to a text's treatment of Christianity to ~~understand it better~~ establish what place Christianity has in its world?

B+

268

**APPENDIX H**

*"The first idea was acceptance, the acceptance, totally without rancor, of life as it is, and men as they are: in the light of this idea, it goes without saying that injustice is a commonplace. But this did not mean that one could be complacent, for the second idea was of equal power: that one must never, in one's own life, accept these injustices as commonplace but must fight them with all one's strength."*

In <u>Notes of a Native Son,</u> I feel James Baldwin struggles with many issues such as love and racism. In the beginning of the passage, Baldwin discusses his hatred for his father. He goes into much detail throughout the story of how others felt the same way, but at the end contradicts himself at the funeral. He begins to think about the many things his father had done throughout his life to benefit their family. He began to realize his father was not a bad person after all. He also goes through many unpleasant experiences that lead up to the quote written above.

Racism at this time period appeared to be horrendous. In the passage, it clarifies the fact that black people could not even get served in a restaurant. For example, when Baldwin walked into "American Diner" the waiter states, "We don't serve Negroes here." This made him very upset and set him off into a rage, much like his father used to act. As Baldwin realizes that his father was right about the way black people are treated, he begins to get angrier. He goes through a series of events that are much like the one at the restaurant. At the end of this passage he comes to the contradiction stated above.

In the contradiction, Baldwin talks about how one can accept life as it is without resentment or fight for equality with all of ones strength. He did not seem to want to pick either way of life. If he accepts all the injustices he had, just because he was black, his

*[handwritten margin notes:]*
this isn't actually in the passage in here elected — not ix where.

does Baldwin set up an criterior?

→ while in the passage you have selected, Baldwin talks explicitly about contradiction, you seem more interested in what comes before — the scene in the diner. Why not quote

*[handwritten right margin:]* that section and then talk about it?

270

life would be nothing but regret. On the other hand, if he fought for his equality, he would probably end up dead. He did not feel that there was a solution for his problems. Either way he looked at it, they seemed to have both pros and cons.

If I were Baldwin, I feel it would be most beneficial to pick the first part of the contradiction. If Baldwin would live by the rules that were given to him, he would rarely encounter problems. I know avoiding the problem is not always the solution, but life is a precious thing. After all, life is not always fair.

At the end of the passage, Baldwin states, "I wished that he had been beside me so that I could have searched for the answers which only the future would give me now." By saying this, I feel he is revealing the true love he had for his father. I think throughout

*Nice*

Baldwin's life, his father always gave him messages that were hidden in his actions; much like the hidden messages in Mark Twain's passage. His father was always trying to show him the injustices he would soon encounter in life, and how to deal with them. Once Baldwin realizes this, he is too late and is left to find out the answers on his own.

I really like the connection to Twain, and the idea that Baldwin's father "taught" him by way of "hidden messages" — a life he had to decipher. At the end here, you try to resolve Baldwin's conflict — but I think you need to ask, more carefully, why not resolve — why does he make this choice? Are you honestly suggesting people accept injustice and "live by the rules"? How does the truism "life is not always fair" serve to close down questioning, inquiry; how does it offer an easy answer?

# APPENDIX I

# Notes of a Native Daughter

As I was reminiscing through my adolescent years, I realized the many events that truly impacted my life. I remembered the good times and the bad. I grew up in a little town about two hours away from here called DuBois. DuBois is not the most exciting place to live. I love to shop, go out, and just have a good time. Unlike me, most of the people here farm and hunt. Going through my memories and experiences, I recognized one of the many things that impacted my life. The topic I chose to write about, until this very day, still has a major influence on my life. Here is how it all began.

I was about three years old when I really started to use my imagination. Everyday I liked to imagine I was doing something new. Like every other toddler, I had a favorite game; I loved to play house. I would ask my mother everyday to play house with me, and being the good mother that she was, said yes. I'm sure it was not always fun for her, but I loved it. Eventually, I got bored of only having one friend, so I started to invite my other friends from across the street over to play with me.

It was a scorching day in DuBois, Pennsylvania, and I was up in my room with my good friend Kaylee playing house. We were having such a splendid time that the hours just seemed to pass us by. After playing house, Kaylee and I both were starving. We ran over to the door, but for some reason it would not open. We both began to panic and scream for my mother. Of course my mother was used to all the screaming, and just thought we were playing a game. When she finally realized we were not playing

273

anymore, she ran upstairs to my door. She tried to open it, but it just would not budge. In time, she got impatient and told us to stand back. Kaylee and I ran over to my bed, and the door flew off the hinges. My mother kicked the door down! Apparently, it was so hot outside that the paint melted in the cracks of my door. After this, I never wanted to be in an enclosed area ever again. Needless to say, this traumatic experience caused me many unpleasant experiences throughout my life.

So you see this as the origin of your claustrophobia (or was it the first symptom — the first occurrence?

About a year after this event happened, my family decided to take a family vacation to Florida. As soon as we arrived at our condominium, I was old enough to realize that I had to go in an elevator to get up into our room. I made my father come up the steps to the fourth floor every day until he was too tired to possibly do it anymore. After five days of climbing steps constantly, he looked at me and said, "████ you are getting on this elevator whether you like it or not." I cried and cried, but after the two second ride, I noticed that nothing went wrong. I continued to use the elevator for the rest of our stay. My family thought that maybe my phobia was finally over, until the last day of vacation.

It was pretty early in the morning, and my mother was taking me to look for seashells on the shoreline. I was so excited to go out on the beach. We ran to the elevator and jumped in. On our way down a siren and voice started to go off in the elevator stating, "The elevator is currently stuck, please remain calm and we will get you out as soon as possible." I was terrified. I started screaming and yelling. It was only fifteen minutes before we got out, but I knew I would never get over this distressing experience. I told my mother I never wanted to be in an enclosed space ever again. She told me everything would be alright, but I knew differently.

I notice, the way, with each occurrence, everyone just hopes you are "over it!"

274

In the course of the next year, I never wanted the door to be closed anywhere I went. If we went to the mall, my mother had to hold the stall door open for me. Or if we went in a car, I always had to have someone sit right beside me. My mother knew that we had to do something about this problem. She decided to start taking me into big rooms that had doors, and began closing them while I was coloring or playing. Eventually, I got used to being in big places that were enclosed. She continued to do this until my phobia was almost over or at least she had hoped.

Within the next couple of weeks, my mom and I went to the public library. We went to the reading corner and she began to read me my favorite story which at the time was Green Eggs and Ham by Dr. Sues. She would always read a story to me first, and then we would go look for her books. As we were looking for her books, I decided I had to go to the bathroom. We went to get the keys to the restroom and started to go in. I noticed the room was quite small, and decided that I didn't want to go in anymore. As always, my mother told me she would keep the door open for me, but I still would not cooperate and just would not go in. After about five minutes of trying, she finally gave —up. We continued on our search for her books. I went down another isle to be away from my mother. I remember perfectly watching her walk away and I just stayed behind. I had to go to the bathroom so bad that I peed myself. I looked down and noticed that the carpet that surrounded me was covered in pee. It was extremely obvious that I was the one that had done this, but when my mother returned I tried to lie. She said, ░░░░ what happened?" I answered, "I don't know it was like this already." I noticed her staring straight at my pants. I was young, and didn't realize that it was all over them! My mother was so embarrassed. We had to tell the librarian what had happened, and my mother

275

helped her clean it up. All of these experiences were mortifying to my mother, but she continued to work with me to fix things. I ended up going to a doctor to help me with my problem. He diagnosed me with Claustrophobia, which everyone already knew I had. Claustrophobia is an anxiety disorder that involves the fear of enclosed or confined spaces. After a few sessions, my parents didn't feel that it was necessary for me to continue going. They knew I could get over this own my own.

As I grew up, I knew I had to work hard to get over being claustrophobic. This really started to interfere with my life. I started getting panic attacks just because I was in a place with too many people, or the room was just too small. In order to get better, I started my own treatments. I began to close my door when I went in my bedroom or bathroom, just little things that would help me to get over my fear. As I started to progress, I realized how ridiculous I was being. Eventually, I was pretty much over my fear of being in enclosed spaces.

Currently, I still get scared to get in an elevator alone or go in a place with too many people. Every so often, I feel like a may have a panic attack. For example, a few weeks ago I went to a dance club with a few of my friends. We were all having so much fun, but it was getting hot. As time passed, more people came, and I was starting to feel a little uncomfortable. In time, I could feel myself start to sweat, and before I knew it I was seeing stars. One of my friends named Megan caught me before I fell. She carried me outside for some fresh air. She brought me some water, and began to feel better. I was so embarrassed.

Most claustrophobics never fully recover from their experiences, but I can say that I truly feel good about attempting new situations. Being in college, I am used to

276

being around a lot of people. Before, I never wanted to be left alone in a room, and now I can't wait to have some privacy. I am happy with the way I live my life, and I hope it continues like this.

This disorder is not an easy obstacle to overcome. It is, without doubt, a life changing experience. Although it was tough to get through, I would not change my disorder. It has definitely made me a stronger person. It is something that affected my life everyday for a long time. I am proud to say that I am one of the few that have conquered my fear.

aqui, these words stand out.

In your reflection, you point to such an interesting conflict in your essay: the stories you tell about your claustrophobia convey difficulty, embarrassment, and yet you "would not change your disorder." As a reader, I notice how at the close of each small story, either you or your family hopes that this will be the last time, that you will be "cured." You do really nice work telling individual stories, crafting moments in which you were caught, trapped. I am struck by the line that opens paragraph 2, in which you tell us you began to use your imagination. As the essay continues, it seems a story of mind over matter, as if you must simply imagine your way out of ('conquer") having claustrophobia.

As a reader, I wonder about your own and your family's attitude toward claustrophobia. You call it a "disorder" throughout the essay and at several points talk about "getting over it." What does it mean to have a disorder? At times, you seem to see it as a medical condition, while at others as something you can just will away. Your family, on the other hand, seems to take the latter view. I wonder how you think about this. These are interesting tensions worth exploring more fully. I'd also encourage you to explore the contradiction you noticed in your own work by writing more about how claustrophobia has shaped you—how does it make you see the world differently than others?

As I said above, you write richly detailed stories—the writing is specific and I as a reader I am able to experience these moments with you. Notice how your introduction and conclusion: the introduction seems a kind of pre-writing to get you into the essay; the conclusion makes quick work of some very interesting ideas, hence the contradiction you notice. How can you write with as much detail and specificity here, when talking about your ideas, as you do when telling stories?

**APPENDIX J**
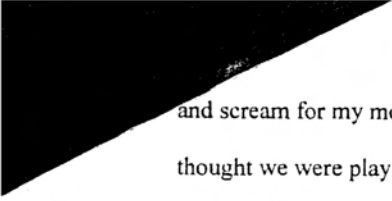
## Notes of a Native Daughter

As I was reminiscing through my adolescent years, I realized the many events that truly impacted my life. I remembered the good times and the bad. Now that it is October, I realize that Halloween is on its way. Halloween, for me, has always brought back terrible memories from my childhood. Going through my experiences at this time, I realize the one event that has changed and shaped my life the most. The topic I chose to write about, until this very day, still has a significant influence on my life. Here is how it all began.

I was about three years old when I really started to use my imagination. My imagination at this point was a fun learning tool. I could imagine a box was a car, or my doll being a true best friend. Everyday I liked to imagine I was doing something new. Like every other toddler, I had a favorite game; I loved to play house. I would ask my mother everyday to play house with me, and being the good mother that she was, said yes. I'm sure it was not always fun for her, but I know I was crazy about it. Eventually, I got bored of only having one friend, so I started to invite my other friends from across the street over to play with me.
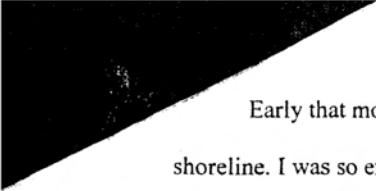
It was a scorching day in DuBois, Pennsylvania, and I was up in my room with my good friend Kaylee playing house. We were having such an amazing time that the hours just seemed to pass us by. After playing house, Kaylee and I both were starving. We ran over to the door, but for some reason it would not open. We both began to panic

and scream for my mother. Of course my mother was used to all the screaming, and just thought we were playing a game. When she finally realized we were not playing anymore, she ran upstairs to my door. She tried to open it, but it just would not budge. In time, she got impatient and told us to stand back. Kaylee and I ran over to my bed, we were in state of hysteria and total confusion. Before I could even scream, "CRACK!" the door flew off the hinges. My mother kicked the door down! Apparently, it was so hot outside that the paint melted in the cracks of my door. After this, I never wanted to be in an enclosed area ever again. Needless to say, this traumatic experience caused me many more unpleasant incidents throughout my life. I think this was the initial experience that triggered my claustrophobia.
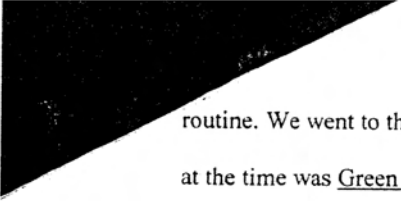
About a year after this event happened, my family decided to take a family vacation to Florida. As soon as we arrived at our condominium, I was old enough to realize that I had to go in an elevator to get up into our room. My imagination started to go wild. "What happens if I get stuck in there forever?" My heart started to race. My father knew that I was deathly afraid of enclosed areas and agreed to walk with me. He would walk up the steps to the fourth floor every day until he was too tired to possibly do it anymore. After five days of climbing steps constantly, he looked at me and said, you are getting on this elevator whether you like it or not." I cried and cried, but after the two second ride, I noticed that nothing went wrong. My head filled with pleasant thoughts. I actually kind of enjoyed the ride. I continued to use the elevator for the rest of our stay. This was an exciting event for my family. They weren't climbing steps all the time, and I appeared to be 'normal' again. My family thought that maybe my phobia was finally over, until the last day of vacation.

Early that morning, my mother took me for a walk to look for seashells on the shoreline. I was so excited to go out on the beach. We ran to the elevator and hopped in. On our way down a siren and voice started to go off in the elevator stating, "The elevator is currently stuck, please remain calm and we will get you out as soon as possible." I was terrified. I started screaming and yelling. Everything around me started to blur. My imagination started to act up again, it always seemed to make my situations worse. I remember thinking I was going to be stuck in there forever, and possibly die because the elevator would fall to the ground. It was only about fifteen minutes before we got out, but I knew I would never get over this distressing experience. I told my mother I never wanted to be in an enclosed space ever again. She told me everything would be alright, but I knew differently.

In the course of the next year, I never wanted the door to be closed anywhere I went. It was a burden. My mother noticed my problem, and really started to watch my actions. She knew I was claustrophobic, but like every other mother, she tried to ignore the signs. If we went to the mall, my mother had to hold the stall door open for me. Or if we went in a car, I always had to have someone sit right beside me. She took my problems into her own hands and started to slowly help me. She decided to start taking me into big rooms that had doors, and began closing them while I was coloring or playing. Eventually, I got used to being in big places that were enclosed. It felt like my phobia was getting better. She continued to do this until my phobia appeared to be over, at least she had hoped.

Within the next couple of weeks, my mom and I went to the public library. I can remember it perfectly. It was a tradition for us to go there every week. We had the same
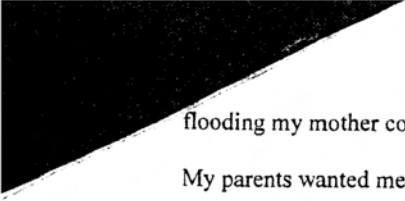
routine. We went to the reading corner and she began to read me my favorite story, which at the time was <u>Green Eggs and Ham</u> by Dr. Seuss. She would always read a story to me first, then we would go look for her books. As we were looking for her books, I decided I had to go to the bathroom. We went to get the keys to the restroom and started to go in. As I opened the door, I noticed that the bathroom was painted all white. It reminded me of a horror scene in a movie. I also saw that the room was quite small, and decided that I did not want to go in anymore. As always, my mother promised me she would keep the door open for me, but I still would not cooperate. After about five minutes of trying, she finally gave up.

We continued on our search for her books. I went down another aisle to be away from my mother. I remember watching her walk away while I just stayed behind. I had to go to the bathroom so bad! When I looked down, I noticed that the carpet that surrounded me was covered in pee. It was extremely obvious that I was the one that had peed, but when my mother returned I tried to lie. She said, "████████ what happened?"

I answered, "I don't know it was like this already." I noticed her staring straight at my pants. It finally hit me, she knew I was lying. It was all over me. My mother was so embarrassed. We had to tell the librarian what had happened, and my mother helped her clean it up. All of these experiences were mortifying to my mother, but she continued to work with me to fix things. She would never give up.

Eventually, I ended up seeking professional assistance to help me with my problem. He diagnosed me with Claustrophobia. Claustrophobia is an anxiety disorder that involves the fear of enclosed or confined spaces. After learning a few methods to cure claustrophobia such as cognitive behavior therapy, anti-anxiety medication, and
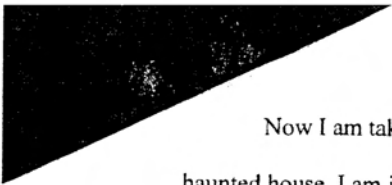
flooding my mother concluded that it was not necessary for me to continue treatments. My parents wanted me to try to get over my disorder on my own. My mother helped me by doing flooding treatments, which is a form of exposure treatment. She exposed me to confined spaces, and I began to realize that nothing bad was going to happen anymore. I was not going to die just because the doors were closed.

Today, I still get nervous to get in an elevator alone or go in a place with too many people. Every so often, I feel like a may have a panic attack. For example, the other day I was riding in an elevator alone and I thought the door was not going to open. I started to feel light headed. My imagination took off. I began thinking the door was never going to open and I would not have enough air to breathe. After the it opened, I felt ashamed that I got so anxious. Being Claustrophobic is much like having an anxiety disorder. It is not an easy thing to overcome.

Most claustrophobics never fully recover from their experiences. At some point in their life, they are likely to have a panic attack or become scared in a crowded or closed space. I can say that I truly feel good about attempting new situations. For example, Halloween is on its way. As I was growing up, this was never a good time for me. I was never really able to experience the traditions of going in haunted houses and costume parties. Watching my friends do these things really hurt me; I wanted to do the things they were able to do. It looked like so much fun. The haunted houses were just too small and dark for me to even step foot in. My family always told me never to give up, and I didn't. About three years ago, I went with my friends to my first haunted house. I held my boyfriends hand the entire way through. It was a very big step for me. I couldn't believe I actually did it.

Now I am taking an even bigger step, much bigger than walking through a haunted house. I am in college. I have to live in a small room with three people. It does not bother me at all. Now I am used to being around a lot of people. I cannot wait to have some privacy! I am happy with the way I live my life, and I hope it continues like this.

This disorder is not an easy obstacle to overcome. It is, without doubt, a life changing experience. Although it was tough to get through, I would not change my disorder. It has definitely made me a stronger person. It has shown me what life is really about. The easiest way to explain life for me is, "Live everyday as if it was your last." I realize now that holding back because I was afraid is not an excuse. One should live everyday to the fullest. When I was deep into claustrophobia, I was not doing this. Now I am trying to catch up on all the things I have missed out on. It is something that affected my life everyday for a long time. I am proud to say that I am one of the few people that have conquered my fear.

*Essay #3*

Dear ██████,

Except for the brief references to Halloween at the start and of your essay, the essay remains much the same. You seem to have disregarded the assignment and the task of examining the traditions that have shaped your life, and in particular, your experience of claustrophobia. Thus, while you tell the story of your experience, there is very little reflection or thinking about that experience. If you like, you may attempt the revision again. Let's talk about this in conference.

Mid-term grade: C-/C

# APPENDIX K

<u>Mini- Anthology</u>

As I was reading around in *The Best American Essays of the Century*, two essays really caught my attention. For my mini-anthology, I am choosing to talk about *Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying*, *Life with Daughters: Watching the Miss America Pageant*, and *Notes of a Native Daughter*. These essays I felt exemplified the qualities Joyce Carol Oates wants in an essay. They made me feel uncomfortable at times, informed, and aroused about certain issues. At one point, I even felt confused about my own personal beliefs. Two of these essays made me feel intense emotion, while the other made me feel no emotion at all. Many of the emotions I did feel, I hope to convey in my writings someday. In preparation for this assignment, I read the following essays; *Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying*, *Life with Daughters: Watching the Miss America Pageant*, *The Disposable Rocket*, *Total Eclipse*, *The Future is Now*, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, *The Solace of Open Spaces*, *Heaven and Nature*, *Perfect Past*, and *Graven Images*.

To start, Adrienne Rich wrote *Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying*. I believe this was the best essay in the entire book. I feel that every woman can relate to at least one statement in this passage; that is essentially what makes it so unique. I loved this essay. Rich gives the reader personal information, which in my individual opinion, makes the essay easier to understand. This passage was informative and interesting at the same time.

In the essay, Rich portrays her viewpoints on liars. She states, "And she may also tell herself a lie: that she is concerned with the other's feelings, not with her own. But the liar is concerned with her own feelings." This quote makes me feel uneasy because I know it is the truth. When lying occurs, it is simply because it is the easier way out; it is not to save the other person from pain. I feel this quote is entertaining in the sense that it occurs in everyday life. Rich also says, "In lying to others, we end up lying to ourselves." This is very discomforting. It makes me feel as if I really do not know my true thoughts or beliefs. For example, a few years ago I lied to my boyfriend. We had been dating for a few months, and I hung out with another guy. He found out about it, and I deliberately lied to him. I tried to force myself into believing I lied to him because I did not want to see him hurt; but deep down, I knew the real reason. I wanted to take the easy way out; I still wanted to be with him and thought lying was the only way he would stay with me. Lying to him only made the situation worse. Lying is, in fact, a way of life.
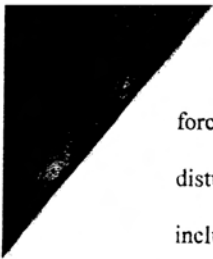
In *Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying,* Rich discusses how some women are forced to live their lives. She states, "In the struggle for survival, we tell lies." This perturbs me because it could technically mean that the world is based on a lie. It provokes me to think that I may be living a lie. Advertisements are a perfect examples of simple the lies in the world. I see advertisements on television for lipstick that supposedly stays on for eight hours, when really it peels off within two. How can people differentiate lies from the truth? Rich converses valuable information in her essay.

The final quote in this essay made me feel exceptionally tense. It was not that I didn't believe Rich, because I feel that she is an extremely intelligent woman, but that I simply could not agree with her on this quote. It reads, "The lesbian, then, has often been

forced to lie, like the prostitute or the married woman." As I read these few words, I felt a disturbing sensation run through my body. I do not think that a married woman should be included in this quote. Prostitute and Lesbians lie because of the prejudices in society. They want to be accepted. A married woman may lie about money, or being happy taking care of her children instead of using her college degree. Though in some instances, such as her own, I feel she is right. I do not believe this quote is wholly true. For example, my grandparents lived a faithful and loyal marriage for over 50 years.

Joyce Carol Oates was wise in putting Rich's passage in her book. I believe she did this for a number of reasons, such as, the emotions it makes the reader feel. I also learned to examine the world in multiple ways. At some points in the story one feels that a statement can be totally agreed upon and feel comfortable with Rich's statements, while in other parts, one feels a total state of discomfort. For most readers, Rich's homosexuality may be the reason they feel uncomfortable with this essay. For me, that is not the case. I have many people in my family that are gay and I do not look at them any differently than myself. I am very comfortable with this aspect of the essay. Rich's work is provocative in the sense that it sparked my arousing interest and controversy at the same time. Her viewpoints and facts were very intense. I think this is exactly what Oates was looking for in a passage.

I picked *Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying* because in the first few paragraphs, I saw this quote. It states, "Our Land Free, Our Men Honest, Our Women Fruitful." After reading this, the passage kept my full attention. I thought that this essay may be sexist to begin with, but it turned out I obtained very useful information. It really made me think about why people lie, and the different positions and circumstances

people go through. The title also caught my eye. It seemed to have a unique quality about it that I cannot explain.

The next essay I chose to write about was *Life with Daughters: Watching the Miss America Pageant* by Gerald Early. I picked this essay because the issue presented within the passage still occurs today. The issue I am talking about is racism. I, myself, am not racist, but this essay disturbed me in many ways. It made my emotions rise, and made me feel very tense. Although it was not a comfortable essay for me to read, I thought it was very interesting to examine a passage wrote by a black man about the Miss America Pageant, dolls, and his daughters.

In the essay, Early played with my emotions. He states, " In some ways my wife learned her lessons well in her youth: she never buys our daughters white dolls." This to me sounds racist. It bothered me to think that children at a young age are taught that there is a 'difference' between white and black people. I was taught that we are all created equal regardless of the color of skin. He also talks about his daughters having black dolls. This agitated me. It made me think that he was teaching his daughters that white was not good enough. That there is a significant difference between blacks and whites. Instead of making them have only black dolls, I feel he should make them have both black and white dolls. It would influence her to be friends with people of all different races.

At the end of the passage, I felt at ease. I read, "We're not racial. That's old-fashioned. Don't you think so, Daddy? Aren't you tired of all that racial stuff?" This comforted me in a way to think that his children were not bitter like his wife. She makes me angry. It appears that she feels organizations, such as the Miss America Pageant, are

have a dream that my four little children will one Day live in a nation
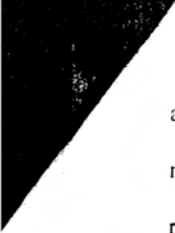
291

in a sense outrageous. The Miss America Pageant has a diverse group of ladies competing against each other for a scholarship but in most black organizations, whites cannot join. This quote gave me hope that the future will not have racism at all; it will be diminished.

Oates states, "My belief is that art should not be comforting; for comfort, we have mass entertainment, and one another. Art should provoke, disturb, arouse our emotions, expand our sympathies in directions we may not anticipate or even wish." This essay does exactly this. It is uncomfortable, and stirs feelings. Oates picked this essay because it deals with delicate issues that still occur in today's society. It gives valid opinions and viewpoints while arousing the reader's emotions in different ways. In general, *Life with Daughters: Watching the Miss America Pageant* is a scintillating essay. It discusses the discomfited issues of race. One reader may agree strongly with Early's points, while others could possibly rage about. I think this is why Oates chose to put a confrontational essay, such as this one, in her book.

The last essay I picked to put in my mini-anthology is *Notes of a Native Daughter*. Oates would never pick my essay to be put into *The Best American Essays of the Century*. This is because it does not fit into her criteria. My essay is dull. It does not make one feel uncomfortable. I needed to include interesting facts and twists, not just experiences or stories. My essay has a lot of personal information, but no emotion. Unlike Rich, I am not provocative nor am I informative with my writing. My passage is just a story, and nothing more than that. It does not give any opinions or facts.

In my essay, I state, "Today, I still get nervous to get in an elevator alone or go in a place with too many people." I realize not many people know how claustrophobes feel,

*[handwritten margin note: This sentence has tremendous impact.]*

and why this quote would not make other readers feel uncomfortable. Realizing my mistakes in my essay, I now want to include something that would make a reader reposition in their seat, or have to reread a statement. I want my essay to be entertaining.

I chose this essay instead of all the others because I noticed my mistakes in this particular passage the most, as I explained above. It was not that I thought my essay would fit Oates criteria, but that it did not fit at all. In fact, comparing my essay to the others showed me my mistakes and how I can fix them. It was more of a learning experience than anything else. For example, instead of talking about my Halloween traditions in my essay *Notes of a Native Daughter*, I could talk about how my disorder was not discussed with my family. I would state, "When I got diagnosed with claustrophobia, my family never seemed to bring up the fact that I was special, that I needed help. As an alternative, they would just anticipate I would get over it. They did not want my disorder to be an issue any longer."

Oates once said, "What I aspired to be and was not, comforts me." After doing this assignment, and having our conference, I feel much better about this class. Before I was lost and confused, whereas now I feel like I know exactly what is going on. I was frustrated with the grade I was given, but it made me want to work harder. By the end of this class, I hope to have at least one essay that fits Oates criteria. That is my goal.
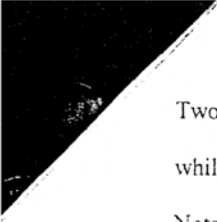
**APPENDIX L**

Illuminating Revision

'Tick, Tick, Tick' goes the clock. This was the irritating sound I was trying to fall asleep to. It was about 12:30 am and I just could not force myself to fall asleep. I put my pretty in pink earplugs in, but it still didn't help one bit. I could not stop replaying the words of my instructor over and over in my head. It was like a tape player that had gotten stuck. "What was I doing wrong?" I kept asking my self. I was searching aimlessly to find an answer; I wanted to improve my essay and grade, but how could I possibly do this if I could not figure out my writing problem? Eventually, I got tired of thinking and drifted off to sleep in a state of confusion.

The next morning, I woke up not only to my alarm clock, but also to my roommate freaking out. Her essay was due in two hours, and she had not even started to revise it. I told her I would help her proofread it. As I started to read, I felt my eyes get heavier and heavier until they finally closed; that's when it hit me. I realized that my writing was doing this same thing to other readers. My essays were nothing but stories. They had no interesting facts or advice. I quickly finished helping my roommate, and started to work on my own essay. This is how it all started.

I began reading around in *The Best American Essays of the Century*, and two essays really caught my attention. For my essay, also known as my mini-anthology, I am choosing to talk about "Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying", "Life with Daughters: Watching the Miss America Pageant", and "Notes of a Native Daughter".

- 5

Two of these essays I felt exemplified the qualities Joyce Carol Oates wants in an essay, while the other was an overall learning experience for me. "Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying" and "Life with Daughters: Watching the Miss America Pageant" made me feel uncomfortable at times, informed, and aroused about certain issues. At one point, I even felt confused about my own personal beliefs. These two essays made me feel intense emotion, while the other made me feel no emotion at all. Many of the emotions I did feel, I hope to convey in my writings someday. In preparation for this assignment, I read the following essays; "Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying", "Life with Daughters: Watching the Miss America Pageant", "The Disposable Rocket", "Total Eclipse", "The Future is Now", "The Way to Rainy Mountain", "The Solace of Open Spaces", "Heaven and Nature", "Perfect Past", and "Graven Images".

To start, Adrienne Rich wrote "Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying". I believe this was the best essay in the entire book. I feel that every woman can relate to at least one statement in this passage; that is essentially what makes it so unique. I loved this essay. Rich gives the reader personal information, which in my individual opinion, makes the essay easier to understand. I admire the way her passages flow with intelligence and emotion. This particular passage was informative and interesting at the same time.
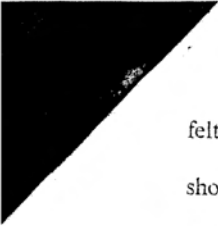
In the essay, Rich portrays her viewpoints on liars. She states, "And she may also tell herself a lie: that she is concerned with the other's feelings, not with her own. But the liar is concerned with her own feelings." (413) This quote makes me feel uneasy because I know it is the truth. When lying occurs, it is simply because it is the easier way out; it is

not to save the other person from pain. I feel this quote is entertaining in the sense that it occurs in everyday life.

Rich also says, "In lying to others, we end up lying to ourselves."(414) This is very discomforting. It makes me feel as if I really do not know my true thoughts or beliefs. For example, a few years ago I lied to my boyfriend. We had been dating for a few months, and I hung out with another guy. He found out about it, and I deliberately lied to him. I tried to force myself into believing I lied to him because I did not want to see him hurt; but deep down, I knew the real reason. I wanted to take the easy way out; I still wanted to be with him and thought lying was the only way he would stay with me. Lying to him only made the situation worse. Lying is, in fact, a way of life.

In "Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying", Rich discusses how some women are forced to live their lives. I like that she gives examples that do not pertain to her life; with a mix of some that greatly affect it. She states, "In the struggle for survival, we tell lies."(416) This perturbs me because it could technically mean that the world is based on a lie. Basically, it provokes me to believe I am living one big lie, and to support my theory, I think of advertisements. Advertisements are everywhere and anywhere you look. I see advertisements on television everyday for lipstick that supposedly stays on for eight hours, when really it peels off within two. How can people differentiate lies from the truth? Rich converses this valuable information in her essay.

The final quote in this essay made me feel exceptionally tense. It was not that I didn't believe Rich, because I feel that she is an extremely intelligent woman, but that I simply could not agree with her on this quote. It reads, "The lesbian, then, has often been forced to lie, like the prostitute or the married woman."(416) As I read these few words, I

felt a disturbing sensation run through my body. I do not think that a married woman should be included in this quote. Prostitute and Lesbians lie because of the prejudices in society. They want to be accepted. A married woman may lie about money, or being happy taking care of her children instead of using her college degree. Though in some instances, such as her own, I feel she is right. I do not believe this quote is wholly true. For example, my grandparents lived a faithful and loyal marriage for over 50 years.

The quotes in Rich's essay were one of the main reasons I chose her passage to be in my mini-anthology. I picked "Women and Honor: Some Notes on Lying" because in the first few paragraphs, I saw this quote. It states, "Our Land Free, Our Men Honest, Our Women Fruitful." After reading this, the passage kept my full attention. I thought that this essay may be sexist to begin with, but it turned out I obtained very useful information. It really made me think about why people lie, and the different positions and circumstances people go through.

Rich is an outstanding writer and person. Joyce Carol Oates was wise in putting Rich's passage in her book. I believe she did this for a number of reasons, such as, the emotions it makes the reader feel. I also learned to examine the world in multiple ways. At some points in the story one feels that a statement can be totally agreed upon and feel comfortable with Rich's statements, while in other parts, one feels a total state of discomfort. For most readers, Rich's homosexuality may be the reason they feel uncomfortable with this essay. For me, that is not the case. I have many people in my family who are gay and I do not look at them any differently than myself. I am very comfortable with this aspect of the essay. Rich's work is provocative in the sense that it

sparked my arousing interest and controversy at the same time. Her viewpoints and facts were very intense. I think this is exactly what Oates was looking for in a passage.

The next essay I chose to write about was "Life with Daughters: Watching the Miss America Pageant" by Gerald Early. I picked this essay because the issue presented within the passage still occurs today. The issue I am talking about is racism. I, myself, am not racist, but this essay disturbed me in many ways. It was hard to read about the opinions that some blacks have about white society. It made my emotions rise, and made me feel very tense. Although this was not a comfortable essay for me to read, I thought it was very interesting to examine a passage wrote by a black man about the Miss America Pageant, dolls, and his daughters.

In the essay, Early played with my emotions. He states, " In some ways my wife learned her lessons well in her youth: she never buys our daughters white dolls."(536) This to me sounds racist. It bothered me to think that children at a young age are taught that there is a 'difference' between white and black people. I was taught that we are all created equal regardless of the color of skin. For example, for my sixth birthday I finished blowing out my candles and reached for the huge pile of presents. I ripped through them all. I received clothes, trolls, and dolls. The last present I opened was special; it was wrapped in pink wrapping paper. It was my favorite present. My mother bought me Christie (the black Barbie) and Kelly (the white Barbie.) I was so excited to show all of my friends that I had two different Barbie's to play with. I think by doing this, my mother was teaching me to accept others regardless of color; she succeeded.
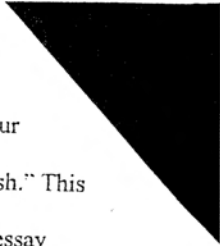
On the other hand, Early goes on to talk about his daughters having black dolls. This agitated me. It made me think that he was teaching his daughters that white was not

good enough. He states, "And in this context, the issue of white dolls, the fetishization of young white feminine beauty, and the complexity of black girlhood becomes an unresolved theme stated in strident key. Blacks have preached a long time about how to heal their daughters of whiteness."(534) This year, I met a girl named Jatolloa. She is black. I wanted to talk to her about this essay. I was interested in seeing what color dolls she played with as a child. She explained to me that she had more black dolls than white, but this did not mean anything. She said having both types of dolls influenced her to be friends with everyone.

At the end of the passage, I felt at ease. I read, "We're not racial. That's old-fashioned. Don't you think so, Daddy? Aren't you tired of all that racial stuff?"(547) This quote gave me hope that racism will not exist in the future; it will be diminished. It comforted me in a way to think that his children were not bitter like his wife. She makes me angry. It appears that she feels organizations, such as the Miss America Pageant, are in a sense outrageous. She should feel ashamed. The wife should not feel unjustified or left out in today's society. In the present, most blacks have organizations that whites cannot join, such as Miss Black USA. This to me seems unfair because whites do not have organizations such as these. Instead creating tension, other associations were created to represent equality. For example, the Miss America Pageant has a diverse group of ladies competing against each other for a scholarship. The thought of separation between black and white is grotesque. Black and white should go together. like a newspaper, or a zebra. They should come together as one.

Oates looks for specific criteria and qualities when picking essays to be read in her book. She states. "My belief is that art should not be comforting; for comfort, we

have mass entertainment, and one another. Art should provoke, disturb, arouse our emotions, expand our sympathies in directions we may not anticipate or even wish." This essay does exactly this. It is uncomfortable, and stirs feelings. Oates picked this essay because it deals with delicate issues that still occur in today's society. It gives valid opinions and viewpoints while arousing the reader's emotions in different ways. In general, "Life with Daughters: Watching the Miss America Pageant" is a scintillating essay. It discusses the discomfited issues of race. One reader may agree strongly with Early's points, while others could possibly rage about. I think this is why Oates chose to put a confrontational essay, such as this one, in her book.

The last essay I picked to put in my mini-anthology is "Notes of a Native Daughter". However, Oates would never pick my essay to be put into *The Best American Essays of the Century*. This is because it does not fit into her criteria. My essay is dull. It does not make one feel uncomfortable. I needed to include interesting facts and twists, not just experiences or stories. My essay has a lot of personal information, but no emotion. Unlike Rich, I am not provocative nor am I informative with my writing. I am not a professional writer, but an inexperienced writer learning from my mistakes. My passage is just a story, and nothing more than that. It does not give any opinions or facts. At first, I was embarrassed to think that I was making so many mistakes in my writing; whereas now I am able to realize my mistakes, and critique them in a positive manner.

In my essay, I talk about my childhood incidents that have encouraged my claustrophobia. For example, I got stuck in an elevator at a very young age. This was a very traumatizing event. I state, "Today, I still get nervous to get in an elevator alone or go in a place with too many people." I realize not many people know how claustrophobes

feel, and why this quote would not make other readers feel uncomfortable. Realizing my mistakes in my essay, I now want to include something that would make a reader reposition in their seat, or have to reread a statement. For instance I could say, "Today, I still get nervous to get on an elevator. As I watch the doors close, the same series of events happen to me. I feel the tension in my head build, and the droplets of sweat run off my face. When I realize I want to get off the elevator, it is too late, and I am along for the ride. It could be seconds or hours before I get out of this little box that only holds so much oxygen." I want my essay to be entertaining.

I chose this essay instead of all the others I wrote because I noticed my mistakes in this particular passage the most, as I explained above. It was not that I thought my essay would fit Oates criteria, but that it did not fit at all. In fact, comparing my essay to the others showed me my mistakes and how I can fix them. It was more of a learning experience than anything else. For example, instead of talking about my Halloween traditions in my essay "Notes of a Native Daughter", I could talk about how my disorder was not discussed with my family. Instead of saying, "Halloween appeared to be so much fun for all of my friends. The haunted houses were just too small and dark for me to even step foot in." I would state, "When I got diagnosed with claustrophobia, my family never seemed to bring up the fact that I was special, that I needed help. As an alternative. they would just anticipate I would get over it. They did not want my disorder to be an issue any longer." It is not that I am a bad writer, but that I misinterpreted the meaning of 'tradition' in the last essay. I realize this now, and can fix my essay. I can finally write to the standards I am capable of writing.

Oates once said, "What I aspired to be and was not, comforts me." Doing this assignment helped me advance my writings in significant ways. I am now using examples to explain my work, much like Rich. After feeling discouraged and ready to give up, I finally feel back on track. Before I was lost and confused, whereas now I feel like I know exactly what is going on. I want to work as hard as I possibly can to have at least one essay that fits Oates criteria. That is my goal.

As this essay comes to an end, so does my state of confusion. Tonight I will crawl into bed feeling confident. I will be able to fall asleep to the annoying 'ticks' of my clock. Finally, I will be able to sleep in peace.

②

Dear ██████,

You've done such nice work revising your anthology introduction—first, by re-writing the introduction, and so framing the essay with your discovery, that the writing you admire is rich with insight. From here, you have included autobiographical story as a way to reflect on Early's essay, as you did with Rich. And, if I remember the original correctly, you have expanded the discussion of your own essay and how you might revise. What really strikes me this time around is the way you have shifted, ever so slightly, your response to Rich's charge that married women, along with lesbians and prostitutes, have been forced to lie (you give her a little more credit) and the way your own story about black and white dolls says, in fact, that these kinds of choices *do* matter. You and your friend both had dolls both black and white—how has this shaped you? Do you think most little girls, especially white, have the same experience? I tend to doubt it. I'd like to see you continue thinking about these two particularly difficult moments, these places of discomfort. You have gotten the hang of it ██████—in this essay, I see your care, your energy and thoughtfulness, and this makes your writing both interesting and a pleasure to read. You use examples—both from the text and from your own life—to help the reader *understand*. Not dull in the least. You've done terrific work here.

**APPENDIX M**

*(handwritten annotations: "spacing error", "which one? (you need the plural possessive)", "Fn")*

Seeking Succor

Within the Grimm brother's version of the fairytale "Cinderella," birds are used as a representation of freedom, justice, and solace that is sought by Cinderella and an extension of her *(handwritten: awk – break into 2 shorter, cleaner sentences.)* mother from the grave. The birds seem almost omniscient, giving the reader the impression that they are an extension of a higher power, which is introduced as a possibility within the first paragraph of the tale. The primary interaction of birds within the story involves them granting *(handwritten: You don't need all that verbal clutter. "The birds grant Cin every wish" is all your sentence says.)* Cinderella's every wish; they appear to be the only source of happiness in her life. Not only do the birds aid Cinderella in the arduous tasks bestowed upon her by her stepmother and stepsisters, they also serve as a means to push the "true love" aspect of the story. Furthermore, the sense of justice that ends the fairytale can be solely attributed to the birds and their actions. In fact, those actions are the final scene, and resolution, of the story.

The opening scene of the fairytale is one that includes the death of Cinderella's mother's Her dying words to her daughter are "Dear child, be good and pious. Then the dear Lord shall always assist you, and I shall look down from heaven and take care of you" (Grimm 86). This provides a foundation for the image of both the birds and the hazelnut tree in which they reside. within the story. Cinderella asks only for a twig whenever her father offers to bring them something from the fair and this twig happens to magically grow into a hazelnut tree from the nourishment of her tears. It is this tree that 'assists' the birds and gives them a place to 'watch over' Cinderella as she weeps and prays over her mother's grave three times a day. The Grimm

~~brothers write~~ "Whenever Cinderella expressed a wish, the bird would throw her whatever she had requested" (~~Grimm~~ 87). By using the verb "throw" the author is personifying the bird as human in its actions as well as creating the impression that whoever is giving these gifts to Cinderella must be far enough away as to need to 'throw' them to her, rather than hand them to her or simply give them to her. — *ok, and is? does this imply the mother is doing the throwing?*

The religious aspect of the entire scene is echoed throughout the plot as well. Cinderella goes to her mother's grave and prays *three* times a day, stressing the presence of the Holy Trinity. Furthermore, Grimm writes "Two white pigeons…followed by the turtledoves…" (Grimm 88). Rather than simply writing that a flock of birds attended to Cinderella, the brothers chose to represent the birds in three parts. When all of the birds have arrived, it is said that they are "all of the birds under heaven" and by literally mentioning heaven, rather than something *actually, this is a figurative "mention" of heaven.* mundane such as the sky or the earth, the religious tone is strengthened.

Also, the pigeons are described as "white" rather than gray or brown, ~~blatantly~~ alluding to the purity and Holiness of these birds. It is in the order mentioned above that this flock of birds *very wdy + awk makes no sense.* enter to story upon every occasion, just as the "Father, Son, and Holy Spirit" are always mentioned in that specific order. Finally, after the birds have seen to it that Cinderella is married to the prince, they "₀ landed on Cinderella's shoulders…and there they stayed" (Grimm 92). Their act of remaining on her shoulders is significant not only because you touch both of your shoulders when making the sign of the Trinity, but also because it enables them to act as her *under.* conscience in a way.

Later in the story, in order to go to the King's festival, Cinderella must pick out all of the lentil beans that her stepmother had scattered within the soot and ashes of the fireplace. This scene elicits two ideas, one being that her step-family consistently tries to keep her as a kitchen *I — always write about texts in the present tense.*

307

maid by whatever means possible and that the birds, who help her find the beans, are also a source of solace for Cinderella. At this point in the story, not only have the stepsisters stripped Cinderella of her appropriate clothes and shoes, they have now caused her to appear dirty and disheveled as well as keep her within the kitchen throughout most of her day. As Cinderella is picking throughout the ash, she calls out "the good ones for the little pot, the bad ones for your little crop." (Grimm 88). Here, the birds are separating the good and bad beans so that she can go to the festival, and by instructing the birds to take the bad ones for their crop, the author(s) creates a parallel of the birds extricating the bad out of her life so that she may, in the end, be happy.

*awk.*

*Cinderella instructs the birds to do this. not the authors.*

After Cinderella had completed her task, she is then able to attend the festival. As her stepmother mentioned, Cinderella could not attend in such a disheveled appearance so she goes to her mother's grave to wish for gold and silver, assumingly with which to buy an appropriate dress and to clean up. However, what she is presented with is an elaborate dress of gold and silver. Here, the birds have given her a dress that elevates her above the rest of the young women in attendance and, accordingly, has given her an advantage in meeting the prince. In fact, the second and third dresses were far more magnificent than the first and it was these dresses that captivated both the prince and the other people at the festival. Here, as following with the culture of that time, we see that the birds (or Cinderella's mother) are concerned with the suitable marriage for her daughter.

*plot summary*

*under*

*no*

*Give a close reading - no analysis here.*

After the third time Cinderella evades the prince, and he decides to use the shoe she had left behind to find his "true love," the birds reveal the true owner of the golden slipper. After the prince is almost fooled by each of the stepsisters, and begins to drive away with them, the birds cry out "Looky, look, look at the shoe that she took. There's blood all over, and the shoe's too

308

small. She's not the bride you met at the ball," (Grimm 91). Other than their most obvious act of

pointing out that the stepsisters are, indeed, not the correct girl, the birds allude to another point.

By referring to the woman he was seeking as "bride," the birds are given an omniscient quality

are responsible for his correct choice of bride. Not only did they know that he was taking a wife,

they made certain that he knew Cinderella was the one. The fact that the birds are the main cause

of the prince and Cinderella's union ties into the fact that, as mentioned before, the Grimm

brothers established a connection between the birds and Cinderella's mother.

The readers, birds, and Cinderella's mother can all rest assured that Cinderella will

receive justice. As the Grimms wrote "…[the prince] took her foot out of the heavy wooden

shoe, and put it into the slipper that fit her perfectly" their word choice assures that she will be

happy (Grimm 92). By creating the image of the prince literally removing the shoe from her foot

and putting it into the slipper, the Grimm brothers establish the sense that he is saving her from

continuing down the path of life that she was forced to follow.

Finally, on the day of their marriage, in the final scene, the pigeons pluck the eyes out of

both of her stepsisters. This is the ultimate justice that has been bestowed upon Cinderella, yet

again, by the birds or, ultimately, her mother. Some readers may feel that this is undeserved of

the sisters, that it is too harsh; however, there are those that believe that it is justified. Elisabeth

Panttaja, in her essay "Going Up in the World: Class in 'Cinderella'" says that because they

mutilate themselves, cutting off portions of their feet, that they deserve any further punishment.

Panttaja also writes "The return of a stunning Cinderella sends the political message that what

society would take away, God and magic will always again provide" (Panttaja 98). In following

with this idea, if the stepsister's eyes were taken away by society, the pigeons (or Cinderella's

mother), then one may assume God will restore their vision.

Consequently (this) could in turn imply that not only do the pigeons bestow mercy on

Cinderella, but they have also saved her wicked stepsisters; eventually, at least. Should their eyes

be restored, as Panttaja illustrates, then it is a possibility that they will have learned their lesson

and been considered beautiful both inside and out. This would enable the reader to feel confident

that both Cinderella, and her stepsisters, achieved a "happily ever after." Even more so, by the

extended beauty of the stepdaughters, her stepmother may even be happy as well. This all can be

traced back to her mother's dying request, "to remain good and pious." Cinderella's birth

mother, through the use of the pigeons, has not only remained true to her advice, but has proven

that it is the righteous choice.

In the Grimm brother's version of Cinderella, birds can be seen to represent freedom,

justice, and solace both for Cinderella and her stepfamily. The birds are not only an extension of

the Holy Spirit, but also offer Cinderella the objects she needs to achieve the perfect marriage.

They assist her in her daily chores, help the prince realize she is his true bride, and become

connected with the mother she had lost. In the end, both Cinderella and her mother remain good

and pious and we are satisfied with the "fairytale" ending.

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  "Cinderella" *[handwritten: ('']*

Panttaja, Elisabeth. <u>Going up in the World: Class in 'Cinderella'</u> 1993. *[handwritten: → incomplete citation.]*

*[handwritten: periods go inside all quote marks]*

311

*Paper 1*

**Department of English**

28 January ████

████████

Dear ████,

This paper on the role of birds in the Grimms's "Cinderella" offers an outstanding close reading on page 4, where you note that the use of the word "bride" suggests that the birds have omniscience and are responsible for the prince's correct choice of bride. Excellent. Now, provide just such a close reading in support of every point you make in the entire rest of the paper, such that each of your claims is followed by a similarly detailed examination of the text. There are too many vague generalizations and not enough close readings throughout the paper.

The paper is also undermined by problems involving paper format, documentation, and prose style. You need to review Joseph Gibaldi's *MLA Handbook* before turning in each submission to make certain that it follows MLA paper format and documentation practices exactly. Your writing in the paper is often solid, though wordy at the beginning and cluttered with the occasional awkwardness thereafter; you should also attend closely to all of my comments on the paper so as to produce really high-quality prose in your future writings.

Grade for Paper 1: C+

**APPENDIX N**

Revisions Make Sara More Unapppealing

*spelling authors' names correctly is the minimum requirement for success in an English Lit. Class, Jordon.*

When Francis Hodgson Burnett revised her novella *Sara Crewe: Or, What*

*Happened at Miss Minchin's* and turned it into *A Little Princess*, she added as well as

changed phrases that caused Sara to seem like even more of a desolate girl by the time

? the novel was finished. When a passage from *Sara Crewe* is compared with a paralleling *Very awk.*

passage from *A Little Princess*, these changes shine through. A section that highlights

Sara's fall from society particularly well is the one in which the narrator is describing

Sara's appearance as well as the dress that she wears while first mourning for her father.

Many of Burnett's changes and additions in this passage help to clarify just how bereft

Sara has become. They also cause the reader to no longer view Sara as a little princess, *no split in finitives, please*

but to instead see her as a little beggar girl.

Burnett's subtle changes to the way she describes Sara's black dress make Sara

become more unappealing to the eye. When Sara's outfit is described in *Sara Crewe* it is

called a dress: "[She] had picked out a black velvet dress she had outgrown" (Burnett

192). When Burnett revises this passage, however, she changes the word *dress* to *frock*:

"She had put on … the cast-aside black-velvet frock" (66). While the high-quality velvet

fabric remains the same, the term *frock* implies a much less attractive ensemble than ✓

*dress* does. A frock is defined as being an "unfitted, comfortable garment for wear in

the house" (Wikipedia), and in no way signifies Sara's once high-fashion wardrobe. ✓

314

By making this change, Burnett more clearly demonstrates just how far down the social ladder Sara is being made to fall – she is no longer able to wear dresses but must only wear frocks.

Sara's facial description also changes after the revision. In *Sara Crewe*, Burnett characterizes Sara as having "very large green-gray eyes fringed all around with heavy black lashes" (Burnett 193). This description is completely removed and no mention of her eyes reappears in this section of *A Little Princess*. The detailed description that appears in *Sara Crewe* gives Sara an alluring look, and seems to contradict the other, non-flattering, descriptions about her features given previously in the passage. Because this picture makes Sara seem pretty, it takes away from how the reader is supposed to now view Sara – it makes her too pleasing to look at and less like the beggar she has become. Sara is also now described as being "a strange, desolate, almost grotesque little figure" (66), whereas in *Sara Crewe* she is simply "the queerest little figure in the world, and a sad little figure, too" (192). By switching her first choice of adjectives to the new ones, Burnett changes Sara's entire identity. Sara is not only strange, but she is disgusting as well: "In fiction, a character is usually considered … grotesque if he induces both empathy and disgust" (Wikipedia). Instead of being viewed as merely a sad little girl, she is seen as miserable and almost repulsively ugly. All of these changes to Sara's appearance make it extremely clear that Sara is no longer looking like a princess from the outside. This new Sara is to be seen as more of a sickening creature than a little girl, let alone a princess.

The additions that Burnett makes to the text also help to better characterize Sara and give her a lowly appearance. When Sara's dress is mentioned in *Sara Crewe*

there is no adjective describing it: "she had decided to find a black dress for herself,

and had picked out a black velvet she had outgrown" (Burnett 192). When this same

dress is mentioned in *A Little Princess* ~~an~~ several adjectives appears: "She had put on … the

cast-aside black-velvet frock" (66). By using the adjective *cast-aside*, Burnett

indicates that Sara, too, has now become cast-aside. She is being made to wear an

outfit that has been discarded and rejected, which will turn out to be the exact way

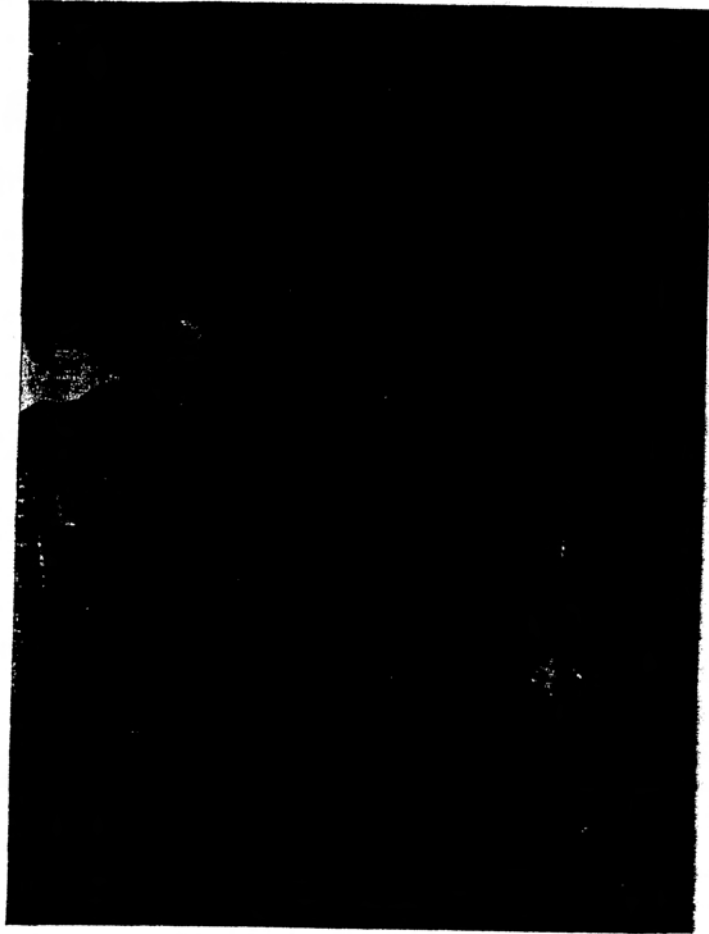that Sara is treated from this point forward in the novel.

how does B." indicate this — need fuller close reading.

The framing in which Sara is to put on the dress also changes after the revision

in order to take away Sara's power in the novel. When Sara first mourns her father in

*Sara Crewe*, she decides for herself to put on the black dress: "No one had said

anything to the child about mourning, so, in her old-fashioned way, she had decided

to find a black dress for herself" (192). By having Sara make the decision to put on

the black dress, Burnett is still leaving Sara with a touch of control. All of that power

is taken away in *A Little Princess*, however, when it is Miss Minchin that forces Sara

to wear the black dress: "Go and tell her to take off that preposterous pink silk gauze,

and put the black one on, whether it is too short or not!" (62) After this point, Sara is

no longer allowed to make choices for herself and instead is under the complete rule

of Miss Minchin. Although eventually she is also under Miss Minchin's rule in *Sara*

*Crewe*, she is still left with more power because she was able to make a decision for

herself instead of having it made for her.

The illustrations in *A Little Princess*, produced by Ethel Franklin Betts, are

also signs of how Burnett makes Sara become more destitute. In Figure 1, Sara is seen

sitting in her new attic bedroom with a downcast look on her face: Sara is the main

focus in the drawing and sitting on a bed covered in a patchwork quilt. The quilt could symbolize Sara, with all of the patterns making up the various aspects of her life. In this drawing, however, the quilt is patched over in two spots, representing Sara's loss of both her father and her wealth. The patch where her father used to be could symbolize Miss Minchin, as she is now Sara's, non-desirable, caregiver. The patch covering the hole of her lost wealth could symbolize her new position as scullery-maid, which is also less appealing than what was previously there. The quilt is also ripping in a few other places, representing other things that Sara is about to lose, such as her friendship with Ermengarde. Sara's bed in this illustration is placed in a corner with an angled ceiling that comes very close to the bed. This symbolizes how Sara's world is seemingly falling down on her and is beginning to trap her, but never actually reaches the point of falling. Her life is a complete wreck, but just as the wall will never literally fall and trap her, neither will her current situation. This illustration helps to get across Burnett's idea that Sara is at the lowest she could ever have imagined, and that nothing about her situation is princess-like.

Sara is, overall, seen in a much harsher light in *A Little Princess* than she is in *Sara Crewe*. Burnett's changes to her novella emphasize just how far Sara falls after the death of her father, not only in a monetary sense but also in her character and outward appearance. Even if Sara stays strong on the inside throughout her time as a maid for Miss Minchin, Burnett makes sure that the reader knows just how horrible she seems from an outsider's perspective.

She seldom cried.   She did not cry now.

Fig1.  Betts, Ethel Franklin. <u>A Little Princess: Being the Whole Story of Sara Crewe Now Told for the First Time</u>. 1905. New York: Scribner's 1938.

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*Use Oxford English Dictionary, not Wikipedia.* [handwritten annotation]

*Paper 2*

**Department of English**

24 February

Dear ▮,

This paper comparing *Sara Crewe* to *A Little Princess* makes a number of very good points about the depiction of Sara and how it depends in large part on the interpretation of her clothing, in particular the black dress that signifies her mourning and then her poverty. Your central observations about the depiction of the dress are very convincing; in a few places (3 top in particular), but the paper needs expansion in terms of its close reading. For the most part, however, this is a very strong start, and you will find numerous points of contact between your argument and the critical works by Connell and Reimer to which we will turn our attention next.

Your paper is generally well-written, though you should attend closely to all of my comments on the paper so as to produce the best possible second edition of Paper 2. I look forward to reading that revision.

Grade for Paper 2: B

**APPENDIX O**

Revisions Make Sara More Unapppealing

When Frances Hodgson Burnett revised her novella *Sara Crewe: Or, What Happened at Miss Minchin's* and turned it into *A Little Princess*, she added passages as well as changed phrases that made Sara seem more like a forlorn girl and less like a little princess. When a passage from *Sara Crewe* is compared with one from *A Little Princess*, these changes shine through. A section that highlights Sara's fall from society particularly well is the one in which the narrator is describing Sara's appearance as well as the dress that she wears while first mourning her father. The words Burnett uses to describe Sara change as well, which only further depredate her princess status. Many of Burnett's changes and additions in this passage help to clarify just how bereft Sara has become. They also cause the reader to view Sara as a little beggar girl instead of a little princess.

Not only do the changes in Sara's appearance and wardrobe make her more unappealing to look at, they also take away the princess-like qualities that she possesses at the beginning of the story. Sara's physical appearance, perhaps more than her inner self, denotes Sara as the princess that she claims to be. Although Sara herself may still believe she is a princess after she is stripped of her possessions, no one in the outside world would view her as such. Mavis Reimer comments that this is because "it is Sara's outer worth – her expensive clothes and her deportment – that denominate her as

322

princess" (Reimer 113). Reimer is suggesting that if Sara's exterior self does not show that she is a princess, she loses the characteristic of being one. It is easy to think that it is Sara's inner qualities that qualify her to be a princess because she remarks that even if she is "a princess in rags and tatters, [she] can be a princess inside" (Burnett 105). But Reimer notes that Sara is "mandated to cultivate inner worth, self-definition, and self-control by her status in the imperial system" (Reimer 115). It is not these qualities that turn Sara into a princess or that prolong her princess status, but rather her previous class in society, with all that it entails, that forced her to develop them. They linger in her because she once was a princess, but they alone do not qualify her to remain a princess.

Burnett's subtle changes to the way she describes Sara's black dress make Sara become more unappealing to the eye, and consequently cause her lose her princess status. When Sara's outfit is described in *Sara Crewe* it is called a dress: She "had picked out a black velvet dress she had outgrown" (Burnett 192). When Burnett revises this passage, however, she changes the word *dress* to *frock*: "She had put on … the cast-aside black-velvet frock" (66). While the high-quality velvet fabric remains the same, the term *frock* implies a much less attractive ensemble than *dress* does. A frock is defined as being a "loose outer garment" (Compact Oxford English Dictionary), and in no way signifies Sara's once high-fashion wardrobe. By making this change, Burnett more clearly demonstrates just how far down the social ladder Sara falls – she is no longer able to wear dresses but must only wear frocks.

Sara's facial description also changes after the revision. In *Sara Crewe,* Burnett characterizes Sara as having "very large green-gray eyes fringed all around with heavy black lashes" (Burnett 193). This description is completely removed and

no mention of her eyes reappears in this section of *A Little Princess*. The detailed

description that appears in *Sara Crewe* gives Sara an alluring look, and seems to

contradict the other, non-flattering, descriptions about her features given previously in

the passage. Because this picture makes Sara seem pretty, it takes away from how the

reader is supposed to now view Sara – it makes her too pleasing to look at and less

like the beggar she has become.

Sara is also described in *A Little Princess* as being "a strange, desolate, almost

grotesque little figure" (66), whereas in *Sara Crewe* she is simply "the queerest little

figure in the world, and a sad little figure, too" (192). By switching from her first

choice of adjectives to the new ones, Burnett changes Sara's entire identity.

Grotesque is defined as "comically or repulsively ugly or distorted", so instead of being

viewed as merely a sad little girl, she is seen as miserable and repulsively ugly

(Compact Oxford English Dictionary). All of these changes to Sara's appearance make

it extremely clear that Sara is no longer looking like a princess from the outside: "The

crux of Sara's problem is that, without the markers of outer worth, she can no longer

attract the right kind of looks" (Reimer 121). This new Sara is seen as more of a

sickening creature than a little girl, let alone a princess, and she no longer attracts the

looks of people on the street like she did when she was the Princess Sara. This is

because "shabby, poorly dressed children are not rare enough and pretty enough to

make people turn around to look at them and smile" (Burnett 90). If outer

appearances are what define Sara as being a princess, she has completely lost any

signifier that she is one.

The additions that Burnett makes to the text also help to better characterize Sara and give her a lowly appearance. When Sara's dress is mentioned in *Sara Crewe* it is only described as being black and velvet: "she had decided to find a black dress for herself, and had picked out a black velvet she had outgrown" (Burnett 192). When this same dress is mentioned in *A Little Princess* another adjective appears: "She had put on, without Mariette's help, the cast-aside black-velvet frock" (66). By using the adjective *cast-aside*, Burnett indicates that Sara, too, has now become cast-aside. She does this by pointing out that Sara does not have the help of her French maid, Mariette, any longer, because if she did she would never have had to put on a dress by herself. Sara is also being made to wear an outfit that not only does not fit, but has been discarded and rejected – something that would not have occurred when Sara's father was alive. By wearing a cast-aside dress, Sara takes her first steps toward losing her princess title. She no longer is visibly a princess because of the garments she is being made to wear. This is because "Sara's right to take the title of 'little princess', [is not] a sign of inner, personal worth but ... her visible entitlement as a daughter of the Empire" (Reimer 115). In order for Sara to keep her rights as a princess, outsiders must see her as a princess. From this point on in the novel, Sara becomes just as much of a discarded object as the cast-aside dress that she is being made to wear. She is no longer a princess, or even a prized pupil to Miss Minchin or the school, instead, she is at the lowest position she could be: a beggar.

The framing in which Sara is to put on the dress also changes after the revision in order to take away Sara's power in the novel. When Sara first mourns her father in *Sara Crewe*, she decides for herself to put on the black dress: "No one had said

325

anything to the child about mourning, so, in her old-fashioned way, she had decided to find a black dress for herself" (192). By having Sara make the decision to put on the black dress, Burnett is still leaving Sara with a touch of control. All of that power is taken away in *A Little Princess*, however, when ~~it is~~ Miss Minchin ~~that~~ forces Sara to wear the black dress: "Go and tell her to take off that preposterous pink silk gauze, and put the black one on, whether it is too short or not!" (62) After this point, Sara is no longer allowed to make choices for herself and instead is under the complete rule of Miss Minchin. Whereas before, Miss Minchin would do anything to accommodate Sara's needs, now Sara loses all of her authority and is at the mercy of Miss Minchin. Although eventually she is also under Miss Minchin's rule in *Sara Crewe*, she is still left with more power because she was able to make the decision for herself.

The illustrations in *A Little Princess*, produced by Ethel Franklin Betts, are also signs of how Burnett makes Sara become more destitute. In Figure 1, Sara is seen sitting in her new attic bedroom with a downcast look on her face; Sara is the main focus in the drawing, and she is sitting on a bed covered in a patchwork quilt. The quilt could symbolize Sara, with all of the patterns making up the various aspects of her life. In this drawing, however, the quilt is patched over in two spots, representing Sara's loss of both her father and her wealth. The patch where her father used to be could symbolize Miss Minchin, as she is now Sara's ~~non-~~desirable caregiver. The patch covering the hole of her lost wealth could symbolize her new position as scullery-maid, which is also less appealing than what was previously there. The quilt is also ripping in a few other places, representing other things that Sara is about to lose, such as her friendship with Ermengarde. Sara's bed in this illustration is placed

326

in a corner with an angled ceiling that comes very close to the bed. This symbolizes *ok ·*

how Sara's world is seemingly falling down on her and is beginning to trap her, but

never actually reaches the point of falling. Her life is a complete wreck, but just as the

wall will never literally fall and trap her, neither will her current situation. This

illustration helps to get across Burnett's idea that Sara is at the lowest she could ever

have imagined, and that nothing about her situation is princess-like.

Sara is, overall, seen in a much harsher light in *A Little Princess* than she is in

*Sara Crewe*. Burnett's changes to her novella emphasize just how far Sara falls after

the death of her father, not only in a monetary sense but also in her character and

outward appearance. Even if Sara stays strong on the inside throughout her time as a

maid for Miss Minchin, Burnett makes sure that the reader knows just how horrible

she seems from an outsider's perspective. The way she is seen from the outside

indicates that Sara has temporarily lost her princess status, because so much of it

relies on her looks and exterior appearance. During the time that Sara is a beggar, she

is not a princess, even if she possesses the inner qualities of one, because of the way

she looks.

Fig 1. Ethel Franklin Betts, illustration from Frances Hodgson Burnett, *A Little Princess*, (New York: Scriber's, 1905) Facing 94.

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*Paper 2 revised*

**Department of English**
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24 March ███

███████████

Dear ███

    This revised, second edition of your Paper 2 does a very good job of improving and expanding on your previous comparison of *Sara Crewe* to *A Little Princess*. Your claims throughout about the depictions of Sara's clothing—which were convincing to begin with—are strengthened analytically and tightened stylistically: well done. Most impressive, though, is your use of the critical work by Mavis Reimer—not, by any means, an easy essay—which is extremely capable.

    The paper isn't perfect: there are occasional awkward moments and punctuation problems, some of which we've been over in class, and a couple of errors on the works cited page. Still, this is work of a high order, and promises much for your Paper 3—to which I look forward eagerly.

**Grade for Revised, Second Edition of Paper 2: A-**

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333

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