Presenting and synthesizing several paradigms for the teaching of literature in American colleges, I investigate how definitions of reading, readers, texts, interpretations, and knowledge affect student acts of reading and writing. In addition, I draw upon specific examples of text-based, reader-based, and social-cultural based models for the teaching of reading to demonstrate how particular pedagogical theories and practices emerge from and reflect larger ideological concepts and paradigms.

Cognitive-oriented models of reading that rely upon schema theory to explain comprehension and interpretation, for example, have been used by theorists who advocated a text-based approach to literary analysis. Even though cognitive models are based on scientific studies that focus on the mental faculties of individual readers, I classify it as a text-based model because when translated into classroom practice, interpretive emphasis has been placed on the text rather than the reader. Therefore, the reader is subordinated to the text in various ways.

Expressive and social-cultural theories presented by Louise Rosenblatt, Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish, and Kathleen McCormick are used to demonstrate how the rhetorical
emphasis of interpretation can be shifted away from the text and toward the reader. As a reader-based theorist, for example, Rosenblatt advocates personal response as the most rewarding form of textual interaction students can experience. McCormick declares that personal response should be analyzed more extensively than the expressive model suggests, however. Hence, she proposes a social-based model that asserts both the cultures of reception and production should be studied as a means for better understanding individual responses to texts.

But reading is not my only focus in this project. In each chapter, I extrapolate as to how theories of reading, when translated into classroom practice, affect both student writing and student participation in the making of meaning. Therefore, to enrich my theoretical discussions of pedagogy and its affects on students, I draw upon my experiences as both a teacher and a student to provide practical classroom examples of student acts of reading, interpretation, and writing. Moreover, the application chapters of this project present two extensive examples of how theory can be translated into practice—the first is a discussion of a recent composition course I taught, and the second is an example student paper that performs a McCormickean analysis of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. From theory to practice, then, this project presents and challenges what it means to be a teacher and a student of literature and composition.
The Culture of Academia:
Authorizing Students to Read and Write

by

Danielle M. Mitchell

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Danielle M. Mitchell, Author
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I appreciate the insight and encouragement offered me by Professors Betty Campbell, Lisa Ede, and Cheryl Glenn--the committee members without whom this project would not have been completed. A special thanks goes to Dr. Glenn, who diligently read each draft, who endlessly helped me brainstorm, rethink, and revise my project, and who ardently encouraged me to go to Graduate School in the first place.
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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to the person who was afraid to speak and be smart--and to the teacher who taught her to be brave.
The Culture of Academia: Authorizing Students to Read and Write

Introduction: A Question of Pedagogy

A rhetoric[, whether it be of reading or writing,] is a social convention. It arises out of a time and place, a peculiar social convention, establishing for a period the conditions that make a peculiar kind of communication possible, and then it is altered or replaced by another scheme. . . . In other terms, it is grounded in a noetic field: a closed system defining what can, and cannot, be known; the nature of the knower, the known, and the audience; and the nature of language.

--James Berlin

[Even] conscientious teachers often . . . unwittingly defeat their long-term aims by classroom methods, day-to-day assignments, and devices for evaluation.

--Louise Rosenblatt

[While we might agree in principle about the socially ameliorating potential of a curriculum which empowers student writers across the cultural spectrum, we are by no means in agreement about what teaching practices might best be put to this end. . . .

--Patricia Sullivan and Donna J. Qualley

Problem

"What is literature?" Asking this question in Literary Theory in 1983, Terry Eagleton was not the first person to explore the definitions and functions of literature. His was, however, the first query to affect me in a profound way; it helped me to try to define literature for myself. "Why do I read?" "What do I enjoy and dislike to read?" "What does literature do for my life?" Asking myself these questions, I began to realize that I had read voraciously as a child and as a teen because it was "fun."
seduced by the pleasures of reading, by the personal enjoyment I experienced when interacting with stories and fictional characters. During my undergraduate studies at Oregon State, however, reading became less a pleasure and more a task.

There were two distinct types of reading: "real" reading, which was for personal enjoyment, and "academic" reading, which enabled me to pass my courses but was not very enjoyable. And I often avoided my academic reading to read for pleasure. I neglected to read *The Violent Bear It Away* for class because I was reading *Anna Karenina* for "fun," for example. The freedom to choose for myself what scenes to focus on and what lens of analysis to apply to the text made the reading experience one I was not offered in my academic classes. The struggle with the two roles reading had assumed continued throughout much of my undergraduate career. I didn't quite understand why or how, in two different contexts, reading literature could yield such different experiences until I began taking rhetoric and composition courses as a junior. It was in courses such as *Reading Reception Theory* (Writing 420) and *Literature, Composition, and Literacy* (Writing 495) that I started to learn why reading English literature could be for me both a pleasure and a task.

The dualistic nature of reading had much to do with the shift of the rhetorical scene that occurred when I read for personal pleasure and for academic needs; the two contexts required me to read in different ways. And the tensions that resulted gave me discomfort. In class, "proper" analysis and critical distance were more important than my personal connections to the text. Attempting to mirror my teachers' interpretive moves to pass my courses, I felt distanced from texts, too uninvolved. Instead of being able to
analyze a text from various stances, it felt like I was limited to only one stance, one interpretive lens, one interpretive point of view. But once I began to realize that literature could be defined in a variety of ways and used for a variety of purposes, I appended Eagleton's question of "What is literature?" with "What is it that teachers teach when they teach literature?" I tried to answer these questions in each classroom context as I studied my teachers as well as my books. And, as a result, I learned how and why the ways that teachers teach can be just as important to student learning as the texts taught.

Although my undergraduate efforts to interrogate the myriad of definitions of and functions for literature were beneficial, until I entered my graduate program I did not have the opportunity to conduct a comprehensive investigation. Now, as both a graduate student and a second-year teaching assistant who teaches first- and second-year students about literature and composition, my extensive research project is driven by one critical question: "How do a teacher's definitions of literature and reading affect student acts of reading and writing?" My ultimate goal is to present a model of reading that creates space for students to read in both personally and academically rewarding ways.

Background

As both a student reader affected by my teachers' pedagogical models of reading and a teacher entering the profession, I not only want to be aware of different teaching strategies, but I also want to understand the assumptions and ideologies upon which they are constructed. By conducting this study, I enter a theoretical and pedagogical debate about how best to teach reading, writing, and critical thinking in English and composition
courses. Although there are a myriad of pedagogical, theoretical, and ideological stances upon which teachers of English and composition rely, there are three major categories into which these various perspectives can be taxonomized: text-based, reader-based, and social-based. As their names suggest, each strategy focuses on a different aspect of the rhetorical situation. Text-based theories of reading, for example, focus primarily on the text or the message. Theorists such as Charles Perfetti, Harry Singer, Marcel Just and Patricia Carpenter, and Isabel Beck and Nancy McKeown advocate this text-based model of reading. Figures such as Louise Rosenblatt, Wolfgang Iser, Norman Holland, Robert Probst, and David Bleich, however, present reader-based strategies that focus primarily on the reader or the receiver of the message. Social-based theories stress the role of social context on the production and reception of messages. Stanley Fish, Kathleen McCormick, Sylvia Scribner, and Shirley Brice Heath are among the many theorists who support the use of socially-based literary analysis. These three main categories or strategies are important not only because they have different foci, but because they define differently the roles of texts and readers in interpretive acts. Therefore, these different definitions, as I will show, significantly affect student reading, writing, and learning in the classroom.

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1 Presented in his article entitled "The Rhetorical Stance," Wayne Booth presents the rhetorical stance as a position taken by a communicator negotiating her use of available lines of argumentation, audience needs, and voice issues. Booth describes several stances, such as the pedant, advertiser, and entertainer, in order to demonstrate that assertions of belief can favor audience, message, or communicator. I adopt his term here because I, too, discuss how different theories emphasize different aspects of the rhetorical situation. But whereas Booth discusses the stance that balances the forces of reader, text, and message as the "truly" rhetorical stance, I refer to it as the balanced rhetorical stance.
Rationale and Methodology

I cannot present an exhaustive discussion of the many effective and ineffective ways literature can be taught to college students in the limited space that this thesis project allows. Therefore, I simplify my taxonomy in order to present a more coherent, yet admittedly limited, discussion of pedagogical models and their ramifications on students. It is important to note that my discussion of each paradigm asserts conclusions based upon the purity of the pedagogy being discussed. In other words, the pedagogical situations I offer are dependent upon strict translations of theory into practice. The "pure" translations I offer, so to speak, are not meant to deny or dismiss the complexities of teaching--translating theory into workable practice and performing in ways that we hope to are difficult--but rather to present the foundational paradigms from which innumerable theories emerged. Within each of the larger categories of text-, reader-, and social-based strategies, there are specific theories upon which I will focus. Cognitive theorists compare human readers to computers that process textual information. Thus, I present cognitivists as representatives of text-based theories of reading. Reader-response advocates such as Rosenblatt, the first person of note to emphasize the reader's importance to interpretive acts, and Iser, a theorist who explains how readers interact with texts to achieve interpretations, assert that personal response is the best way to teach students about literature; thus they represent the reader-based perspective. And social-based theories will be discussed in relation to two cultural theorists, Fish and McCormick, who re-define reading as a social rather than as a cognitive or individual act by emphasizing the context in which interpretations are constructed. By juxtaposing these three theoretical
perspectives, I will demonstrate their strengths and weaknesses when applied to classroom practice in order to demonstrate why I feel the social-cultural model is the most comprehensive and beneficial paradigm for the teaching of reading and writing.

The purpose of my inquiry is not only to understand better my experiences as a student of literature, but also to analyze paradigms that influence (both consciously and unconsciously) my pedagogy as a teacher of literature and composition. I must, therefore, acquire an understanding of prominent theories: their ideological roots, theoretical explanations, and practical implications. Hence, I will analyze several paradigms for the teaching of reading that define education, reading, writing, texts, readers, and interpretations differently in order to examine the ideological stances upon which each pedagogical model is built. In addition, I will extrapolate as to how cognitive, expressive, and social-cultural models of reading affect student acts of reading, interpretation, and writing.

Although this thesis covers various perspectives and theories and draws upon many reference texts, there is one primary text that will serve as a reference in every section: the award-winning *The Culture of Reading and the Teaching of English* by Kathleen McCormick. Much as Eagleton inspired my initial research into teaching literature, McCormick has inspired this extensive study by demonstrating to me how paradigms, theories, and classroom practices are not created in a vacuum—they have histories, assumptions, and agendas. Moreover, the social-cultural model that McCormick presents is one that establishes a balanced rhetorical stance that equally emphasizes texts,
readers, and contexts of production and reception to teach readers not what but how a text means something.

Overview of Chapters

This thesis is roughly divided into two sections. The first section, chapters one through three, present the three major paradigmatic perspectives that have dominated the teaching of reading in twentieth-century American institutions. The second section comprises two application chapters whereby I reflect further on McCormick's social-cultural theory that defines knowledge, interpretations, texts, and readers as social constructs. In each section, I will discuss not only the theoretical perspectives, but also the ramifications on students when theory is translated into classroom practice.

Chapter One, "The Cognitive Model--Dominant Texts and Subordinate Readers Who Compute Comprehension," focuses on the text-based theories presented by cognitive theorists. More specifically, the first chapter is devoted primarily to discussing the concept of schema theory in both theoretical and practical terms. Chapter Two, "The Expressive Model--Dominant Readers and Subordinate Texts," discusses the reader-based reader-response movement as it was presented to displace cognitive models of reading. Favoring intimate personal interaction between text and reader, reader-based theories have significantly affected the teaching of literature. Focusing on social-based theories, Chapter Three, "The Social-Cultural Model--A Balanced Rhetorical Stance," presents two significant theories of reading and acts as a transition into a discussion of my experience as a teacher attempting to implement McCormick's social-cultural model of reading in my composition classroom. The first of the application chapters, Chapter Four, "Theory to
Practice--Translating and Performing Social-Cultural in the Classroom," presents my experiences as a teacher of English Composition. The fifth and final chapter, "A Student's Perspective--Taking a Stance," is an example of a student paper ("Their Eyes Were Watching God: A Diachronic Analysis of Reception") that demonstrates how a student could effectively conduct a McCormickean analysis of a literary text as a social construction.

Conclusion

Each of the many ways to teach reading, writing, and critical thinking; and each method has far-reaching implications for students, teachers, and education in general. Although teaching and enacting paradigms are complex, in order to discuss such activities in a coherent manner, I simplify them by establishing a taxonomy that allows me to investigate the foundational principles that inform a wide variety pedagogical stances. Such generalization and apparent rigidity were necessary in order to demonstrate how different paradigmatic stances on and answers to the questions of "What is literature?" "What is it that teachers do when they teach literature?" and "What is the purpose of reading literature?" significantly affect student reading, writing, and learning. I am not arguing for a complete dismissal of any paradigm or theory. I am suggesting, however, that each paradigm defines the rhetorical situation differently; and only when pedagogies are based upon a balanced rhetorical stance that gives equal credence to texts, readers, and contexts, can reading and writing be both academically and personally relevant to the lives of students.
Interpretation is not the art of construing but the art of constructing. Interpreters do not decode [meanings]; they make them.

--Stanley Fish

How can we respect student responses, which are often intrusively naive and even based on misreading, and still value a literary perception of the text?

--Ruie Jane Pritchard

Introduction

Teachers and students rely upon a variety of theories and practices of reading and writing--both consciously and, of course, unconsciously. As do the institutions in which they are studied, adopted, challenged, and developed, these literary theories, studies, and practices continually evolve. Although they have come to inhabit multiple spaces in academia, literary studies and practices in American institutions are often linked to the 1864 assertions made by Matthew Arnold in The Function of Criticism at the Present Time. Arnold suggests that books and reading are valuable insofar as they expose readers to "a current of ideas" that "nourish" one's thinking (219). More specifically, Arnold believes that this nourishment takes place when knowledgeable readers can accurately comprehend literature.

But as both Eagleton and McCormick ask, "What is literature?" According to Arnold, literature--at least good literature--is a cornerstone of culture because culture is an amalgam of the best that has been thought and said in literature and the arts. Arnold also
asserts that it is the role of literary critics—the knowledgeable, not the average, readers—to define culture by using literature to "propagate the best that is known and thought in the world" (232). Thus, Arnold makes both the study of and the ability to properly interpret literature essential to culture and education by associating literature and reading with the transmission of important cultural knowledge. Arnold's assertion is particularly significant because it foregrounds the importance of literature and literary studies in an increasingly scientific age of "provable" theories, of scientific methodologies of experimentation and analysis used to establish a stable body of knowledge called truth.

Although science and its methods were neither universally nor wholeheartedly accepted by all institutions and people, empiricism did present an alternative epistemology to challenge the dominance of the liberal arts curriculum. In fact, as James Berlin discusses in Writing Instruction in Nineteenth-Century American Colleges, when science's empiricism gained greater prominence as a legitimate discipline important to both the academy and the larger culture, universities were restructured: the once homogeneous liberal arts curriculum was replaced with the more fragmented Germanic system of electives. Consequently, new departments had to be created, facilities had to be built, and faculty members had to be hired. Such extensive restructuring required great amounts of capital. Therefore, the hard sciences not only commanded their own space within the university, but also required significant funding—funding once reserved for literary studies. In order to compete in the marketplace of government subsidies, literary theorists felt great pressure to "scientize" their practice, to re-define literary studies as an objective
discipline with a distinguished body of knowledge by making acts of reading and interpretation less subjective and more scientific.

In *Writing in the Academic Disciplines, 1870-1990: A Curricular History*, David Russell explains that with the late nineteenth-century advances in print technology "writing became central to organizing . . . and creating new knowledge" within the academy (4). Ironically, however, writing was denied disciplinary status. Compartmentalized into freshman composition courses and housed in English departments concerned more with literary criticism than writing, the teaching of writing was marginalized. So it seems was the learning of writing insofar as students were expected to acquire the skill after taking only one course.\(^1\) Both theoretically and practically, then, writing was, as Russell shows, treated as "a single, generalizable [and transparent] skill, learned once and forever" (15). Furthermore, as a result of this "myth of transience," writing was often considered an easily learned body of knowledge to be taught via lectures rather than individualized instruction. A greater degree of marginalization afflicted writing and writing instruction while they were immersed in a basic desire to treat writing as a science rather than an art. This skills approach was challenged, however, by educational reformers, such as Fred Newton Scott and Gertrude Buck, who not only asserted that writing was a complex social act dependent upon rhetorical context, but who also re-conceived in significant ways the teaching of writing; but they were largely ignored until the 1960s. As Russell points out, the usual tendency (it could be argued that this is still the case today) was "to complain about poor student writing" while expecting other instructors to deal with it

\(^1\) The notion of students learning to write in one course has persisted well into the twentieth century. But, as both Russell and Berlin assert, composition courses were initially thirty weeks in length; whereas today, the one intensive composition course is often only ten to fifteen weeks in length.
By ignoring the need to restructure the system, to re-define the acts of writing and learning to write, institutions reinforced the myth of transience that enabled them to treat writing as a science to be mastered rather than a craft to be honed over time, as a general skill rather than a complex act expected to conform to tacit academic and social assumptions and traditions.

As I will show in this chapter, attempts to define reading and writing as objective acts has continued well into the twentieth century with the cognitive movement's attempts to further "scientize" literary studies. In addition, I will extrapolate as to how cognitive pedagogies affect student writing in literature classrooms.2

The Science of Reading: Cognition and Literary Studies

The cognitive model of reading emerged in the 1960s, reflecting the advances made in the field of cognitive psychology. Studying processes of human analysis and comprehension, eye movements and linguistic development related to reading, psychologists explained reading and interpretation as the products of cognitive functioning. Perhaps McCormick says it best when she asserts that cognitivists want to demystify processes of reading and interpretation by defining them as scientifically explainable objective acts, by describing them as a "hierarchy of skills" that can be explained in empirical terms (16). Doug Brent further elaborates on the cognitive

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2 Given my specific focus on the employment of cognitive reading strategies in literature classrooms, I have chosen not to address the wealth of information presented by composition specialists who specifically research writing as a cognitive act; in The Making of Knowledge in Composition (Boynton/Cook, 1987), Stephen North refers to these researchers as clinicians rather than as cognitivists. Although I find the work of clinicians such as Lev Vygotsky, Jean Piaget, Janet Emig, Andrea Lunsford, and their many colleagues both informative and worthwhile, it is simply beyond the scope of my thesis—which focuses on how reading strategies affect student writing and the teaching of writing—to discuss them in detail.
paradigm in *Reading as Rhetorical Invention*. By likening human readers to computers, he says that cognitivists refer to and rely upon "mental processes" to quantify the reading process as a set of skills that must be mastered before students can proceed to higher cognitive functioning (21). Defining reading as a set of mental processes employed to decode language, McCormick says that cognitivists such as Peter Winograd and Peter Johnson identify reading as a "purely mental capacit[y]" (17). Therefore, both reading and comprehension are about successfully matching symbols with the symbolized, signifiers with the signified. This "discourse-processing theory of comprehension," as Brent refers to it, is dependent upon this one-to-one correlation between word and intended meaning (21). Thus, by presenting reading and comprehension as scientifically quantifiable acts, cognitive theory dismisses the legitimacy of multiple interpretive outcomes for a single text. In fact, I would argue that there is no interpretation at all; there's only comprehension, or the accurate decoding of written language.

Cognitive identifications of the nature of reading as scientific and objective are further supported, says McCormick, by the cognitive model's rigid definition of texts as objective, independent bodies--containers of meaning. Located entirely within the text, meaning--that is, what the reader learns from reading--is untouched by considerations of the contexts of production and reception. Therefore, the contextual forces asserted on author, reader, and text are irrelevant to the writing, reading, and understanding of texts, according to initial cognitive theories of reading.

Although it may have seemed like a good idea to institute a model of reading that stabilized interpretation (thereby assuring the transmission of proper cultural knowledge)
by focusing solely on the text, such stabilization was never realized; reading, teaching, and learning are simply too complex for such interpretive rigidity. Cognitive researchers and theorists were plagued by studies and experiments that repeatedly demonstrated how unlikely it would be to establish universal interpretations of texts. As a result, they were unsuccessful in explaining reading as an objective act of decoding uninformed by rhetorical concerns. Cognitivists developed "schema theory," then, a theory that explains reading as both subjective and objective, in order to account for the disconcerting variations in meaning that inevitably arise during the reading process.

Even though schema theory maintains the cognitive-based definition of reading as a scientific process of linguistic decoding, it also suggests that reading is somewhat subjective because the one-to-one correlation between the text's signifier and the reader's creation of the signified is dependent upon the reader's cultural knowledge and expertise with textual conventions. So in articles such as "Schema Activation and Schema Acquisition," "The Reader's Construction of Meaning: Cognitive Research on Gender and Comprehension," and "Application of Theories of Reading to Instruction," proponents of cognitive theory like John Bransford, Mary Crawford and Roger Chaffin, and Isabel Beck and Margaret McKeown asserted that their new and improved cognitive theory could explain multiple (even dissenting) textual interpretations based on a reader's possession of the schema necessary to achieve accurate comprehension, i.e. the correct interpretation.

To further explore this cognitive explanation of reading, it's important to understand the definition and functions of schema. Schema, simply put, are structures of
prior knowledge that inform processes of reading and comprehending texts. Acting as building blocks that enable readers to compute new information by relying on the knowledge base established by previously learned information, schema situate the reader within a personal and subjective context. There is potential, then, for schema theory to redefine reading as the creation rather than the transmission of meaning, and as an individualistic, subjective activity rather than an objective and scientific encounter between text and reader. Sometimes that is just what happens, especially given the complexities of effectively translating and performing theory. But according to the implicit tenets of schema theory, such an extensive re-definition should not be realized. For although interpretation cannot strictly be considered universal because all readers have individualized pools of schemata, the cognitive tradition staunchly asserts the existence of a "universal foundation [of information]... which guarantees the truth or accuracy" of knowledge; and thus, by implication, interpretation--since it is upon common knowledge that interpretation is built (McCormick 18). So even though cognitivists use schema theory to explain the existence of multiple interpretations, they dismiss the legitimacy of interpretive multiplicity by asserting the possibility of one correct reading, one accurate interpretation. Thus, it's possible to conclude that the ultimate goal of reading is still comprehension rather than textually supported interpretation.

In overview, then, according to schema theory, readers are subjective bodies who encounter objective texts in search of truth and knowledge--the accurate, proper interpretation. As Rand J. Spiro says in "Constructive Processes in Prose Comprehension

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3 McCormick says that contemporary definitions of schema can be traced to the work of Sir Frederic Bartlett, particularly his Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1932).
and Recall," the cognitive model's "goal of reading is to update [one's] knowledge" rather than to investigate the implications of interpretive acts (270). So even though in practice schema theory could be used to investigate how readers can construct multiple yet equally valid interpretations, the theory itself doesn't propose such an activity. If, as Spiro suggests, reading is the act of updating rather than making knowledge, how does this happen?

Translating Schema Theory into Classroom Practice

If we rely on schema as an explanation for achieving the correct comprehension of objective texts, readers must access and retrieve only the schema that will allow them accurately and coherently to interpret the literature. Consequently, cognitive pedagogies such as those presented by Beck and McKeown necessitate that teachers control the retrieval process via schema implantation. What I mean by this is that, much like Paulo Freire's "banking concept"\(^4\) of education and knowledge whereby teachers deposit information into students, schema theory requires teachers to deposit the schema necessary for students (at least those students who do not already possess the appropriate schema) to comprehend texts. Interpretation and comprehension, then, are not achieved by the reader entering the world of the text, or by the reader applying the text to her personal experiences, but by more objective means of linguistic decoding. By asking leading questions and decoding textual symbols and allusions just before students read texts, teachers direct and control interpretation. In other words, by providing them the

\(^4\) Published in Pedagogy of the Oppressed, "The 'Banking' Concept of Education" offers Freire's explanation of how learning can be a passive process when teachers consider their students empty vaults into which knowledge should be deposited as if it were currency.
proper schema, teachers often attempt to prevent student readers from accessing their
(unrelated) personal banks of schemata that may lead to multiple (and incorrect)
interpretations. Although teaching often requires instructors to help student readers by
providing information about texts—its words, references, and allusions, for example—
schema theory suggests teachers do so in order to establish one interpretive outcome.

Perhaps controlling schema retrieval is an effective strategy when dealing with
difficult texts because it leads readers to conclusions they might not be able to achieve on
their own accord. But there is the risk of creating passive readers, readers who rely on
teachers to tell them what the text means, readers who rely on shallow levels of
understanding because they don't analyze the text in a broad sense—they fail to consider
how it relates to social and literary histories as well as to their personal experiences. As
McCormick so directly states,

> the objectivist convictions that language is a transparent
> means of communicating facts about the world and that
> knowledge is directly embodied in texts[,] repeatedly
> redirect the focus of schema theory away from . . . broad
> cultural analysis and toward the study of "appropriate"
> schemata necessary for readers to possess in order to
> "comprehend" a text "correctly." (25)

Neglecting to address the ambiguities inherent in linguistic acts, to account for the
transactional nature of interpretation, and to study the contexts of production and
reception, the cognitive model of reading-as-decoding language often relies on attempts to
determine authorial intention. And as a result, the reader is doubly silenced. First, only
the text's knowledge—the author's "talking" and questioning—is valued. So rather than
being a metaphorical conversation between text and reader, reading is more like a lecture
insofar as it has one active agent and one passive receiver. Second, the ultimate authority on authorial intentions and correct interpretations is the teacher rather than the student of literature. Academically authorized to act the expert, the teacher not only supplies the correct schemata necessary to achieve comprehension, but also defines comprehension as well. And all too often, this results in the dismissal of student readers and their ideas in favor of a teacher's or literary critic's ideas. 

To illustrate this point, consider a class session devoted to John Milton's ambiguous "Sonnet 16" ("When I consider how my light is spent . . ."). A teacher attempting to control the interpretive outcome might begin by giving a summary of what the text is about: an aging poet considering his blindness, for example. Next, she might explain the imagery that emphasizes and supports her assertion of textual meaning. Were I, as a student in a schema-oriented classroom, to suggest a different interpretation (that the text is Milton's meditation on his career), my suggestion would be dismissed either as mere speculation or as wrong. Although all interpretations are speculative in that they attempt to make coherent Milton's ambiguous references, rather than permitting me to assert and defend my reading of the poem, the teacher would dismiss my interpretation by asserting the one correct interpretation that she values—the one that has the support of a long line of critics, hers.

Generally speaking, by applying scientific ideology to literary studies, cognitive theorists supported the location of interpretive authority in elite literary scholars by

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5 Regardless of the paradigm a teacher endorses, she will encounter interpretations that seem to lack textual support. How a paradigm deals with various interpretations is the issue here, because, depending on the paradigm's rhetorical stance, multiple interpretive outcomes can either be respected and utilized or disrespected and dismissed.
presenting reading as an objective act and by identifying the discipline as a stable one with
a discrete body of knowledge. Expected to read objectively, students were often stripped
of their interpretive agency in order to protect the sanctity of both literary texts and the
discipline. The notion of disciplinary and interpretive stability, however, is assaulted by
people such as Eagleton who asserts that "[a]ny belief that the study of literature is the
study of a stable, well-defined entity, as entomology is the study of insects, can be
abandoned as a chimera" (11). But I will get to those arguments later.

The Role of Writing in Pedagogies of Cognitive Reading: Proving the Plot

As many different strategies exist for writing about literature as for reading it. But
when teachers translate theories that identify reading as a cognitive act into classroom
practice, there are far ranging implications and ramifications. Of concern, here, is one
question: What happens to student writing if students are supposed to read texts as
objective bearers of meaning?

In my experience, the writing produced in response to cognitive models of
instruction, just like the reading, is more about the text than the reader's reading of the
text, more about summarizing the text and its ideas--reiterating the plot--to prove
comprehension has been achieved than forming, articulating, and asserting one's own
opinions. Although, as Wayne Booth asserts in The Rhetoric of Fiction, "the creation and
enjoyment of art [or any communication] can never be a completely neutral activity,"
writing in the cognitive classroom pretends otherwise because it fails to present and
analyze the interested nature of reading and writing acts (329). So rather than questioning
the limitations and constraints on the text's production and reception, students learn that the role of the student is to receive, not to create meaning.

Rather than being challenged by the teacher to take risks by linking the text to personal experience, by writing a paper that views a text through a specific social, cultural, or historic lens, or by writing papers that interrogate a text's inconsistencies to "look for the symptoms or signs of the power and contradictions involved . . . [in the text's representation of reality and] ideology," students are more often expected passively to paraphrase the text as if it were an objective body (McCormick 77). In other words, students are to explain what happens in the text and why it is significant to the overall interpretation presented by the instructor. But there is so much more to reading and interpretation than the presentation of what a text means and how scenes relate to one another; there is also the study of how and why it means something. In other words, getting a handle on the plot and textual structure should be the basis for further and more in depth inquiry, not the end of the interpretive process.

At this point, I'd like to shift gears and speak to a couple specific examples of how cognitive pedagogy may affect students writing. One risk of translating cognitive theory into classroom practice, as I mentioned earlier, is the possibility for students to become passive rather than active readers. This passivity is mirrored in student writing in (at least) two ways: the abundance of passive sentence construction and the absence of the personal pronoun "I."

Passive sentence construction is a grammatical distinction reserved for sentences that present the subject not as actor, but as acted upon. Take the following two
sentences, for example: "Theories and practices of reading and writing have, throughout
history, been used for various reasons"; "Throughout history, both teachers and students
have, for various reasons, adapted and relied upon a variety of theories and practices of
reading and writing." Although both sentences convey the same information, the second
sentence gives what Andrea Lunsford and Robert Connors refer to as "a sense of action or
immediacy" (226). This sense of action makes the active sentence more powerful and
direct than the passive sentence because it emphasizes human action, human agency.
Although passive voice is a stylistic technique, when student writing is replete with passive
sentences that de-emphasize human action and responsibility, I think, as teachers, we must
ask ourselves why--must ask ourselves if it's about more than style.

In The St. Martin's Handbook, Lunsford and Connors assert that "the most
problematic use of the passive voice occurs when writers seek to avoid taking
responsibility for what they have written" (226). Although I believe this to be true, I also
believe that the use of passive voice is not always the result of a conscious decision to
avoid responsibility. Perhaps students unconsciously rely on passive sentence construction
when they are unable to consciously recognize their own agency. In other words, perhaps
it is when students feel a lack of academic or intellectual control that their writing
becomes riddled with passive sentences. Because students are often uncomfortable with
themselves as writers and thinkers, it seems to make sense that they de-emphasize
themselves as makers of meaning. I think of myself as an example. On occasion my
instructors have pointed out an abundance of passive constructions in my writing. In most
cases, my use of passive constructions was not a conscious decision, but an unconscious move that allowed me to avoid asserting my own opinions.

The second means by which students dispossess themselves of authority is by avoiding references to themselves in their writing. Pedagogical instruction that discourages the use of the personal pronoun "I" is not, as Anita Helle so deftly points out in a personal interview, an attempt to "sabotage student empowerment"—even though it may seem like it at times. Instead, such instruction is an ideologically bound methodology based on the assumption that knowledge is universal, objective, and passed from generation to generation rather than personal, subjective, and continually re-created and re-situated.

So why do many teachers tell students to avoid using personal pronouns in academic writing? It seems that instructors want to teach students a stylistic technique to aid them as they attempt to enter public discourse in a critical—objective—way. Such a pedagogical directive might produce the opposite effect, however, because according to McCormick, there are gaps between what students are taught and what they actually learn (103). So even though teachers may be trying to teach students about audience awareness, about creating public texts that focus more on the needs of the reader than the writer, students might be learning something else. Avoiding the use of "I" might seem like a harmless technique for public debate that, in its abnegation of the personal pronoun, promotes objectivity rather than subjectivity. But the inherent flaw in such an argument is that all ideas are subjective because they are perforce informed by ideology. The dichotomy separating objectivity and subjectivity into discrete categories is a fallacious
one, in other words. Moreover, students often interpret the rule not as a stylistic technique to be used in certain rhetorical contexts, but as a much more basic suggestion that their ideas are unworthy of public display. This "innocent pedagogical rule," then, undermines students' abilities to see themselves as authorities.

By discouraging students from referring to themselves in their academic essays, it seems that instructors attempt to teach students how to respect authorities outside themselves. But even though the goal may not be to undermine student authority, when not taught to balance the authority of self and other, students often lose the ability to participate in a constructive dialogue in which all parties share authority. In other words, someone has to exercise absolute authority by dominating over the ideas of another.

As a teacher and a student, I have seen this all-or-nothing idea lead to two scenarios: the dominant reader and the subordinate literary text, and the subordinate reader and the dominant literary text. A reader who identifies herself as a dominant authority easily dismisses texts that do not reinforce her ideologies and experiences. I quickly dismissed one of Rush Limbaugh's essays as ridiculous, for instance, when I was told to read it for class. Unable to find common ground between the realities of my life and the representations of reality presented in the text, as a dominant reader, I denied the subordinate text's legitimacy and resisted entering a conversation with it. Neither reading interactively nor constructively, I simply dismissed the text in its entirety because it was "wrong." This stance that places so much emphasis on the reader's response could be fruitful were a teacher able to persuade a student to elaborate on why she perceives the
text to be wrong. But all too often, analysis stops with the assertion that her personal experience proves otherwise.

The second relationship that seems to occur when student readers aren't able to balance the forces exerted by reader and text serves to subordinate the reader. Unwilling to argue against or discard the dominant text, this reader denies herself almost all personal agency. Her writing, then, rather than a diatribe against the text, is a glorification of it and its apparent truth. Take my initial reading of Alice Walker's "Am I Blue?" for example. Agreeing with the text's assertions of how humans treat each other as animals, I was unwilling to read against the grain, to question or challenge the text. My rhetorical stance, then, favored the text in that I treated it as an objective body of truth.

Conclusion

In terms of cognitive theory, then, student empowerment with regard to both reading and writing is not about constructing personally relevant interpretations of texts or about negotiating meaning, but rather it is about interpreting texts "correctly" and effectively reproducing textual meaning via paraphrasing and summarizing. The ability to read, comprehend, and summarize texts are important skills; I don't want to suggest otherwise. But I think when reading becomes more about comprehending the "correct" interpretation than about personal but textually supportable interpretations, it becomes an exclusionary activity that dismisses the average reader in favor of the expert reader. Student readers, then, are considered inferior to literary critics who have been trained to expertly analyze, interpret, and discuss texts.
With all its potential to alienate students by dismissing their authority, the cognitive model, with its rigid focus on text-centered learning and correct interpretations, can transform a class of creative, interested learners into passive bodies that merely echo class discussion and professorial interpretation. I have experienced this transformation. In one class, for instance, a usually active and talkative group of upper-division and graduate students, students comfortable reading texts through a variety of lenses, became passive and silent students when repeatedly confronted with seemingly open questions that ended up being closed questions. By way of explanation, it was not the questions themselves that were closed, but rather how the instructor used the questions in a closed way. For example, the open-ended question of "How does this passage make you feel?" was used as a closed question because we were supposed to give a specific answer based on the material presented in the text. If we did not offer the sought-for answer, we received comments such as "Really; that's interesting--it shouldn't have; you were 'supposed' to feel saddened." After a short time we no longer wanted to risk such rebuffs and we stopped offering answers and interpretations. Instead, we silently listened to the voice of our instructor, bored, passive students digesting the ideas of a literary critic. We then reproduced these ideas--sometimes verbatim--on our exams so we could "prove" we learned something.

Student readers and writers working in cognitive contexts, then, are, in effect, prevented from engaging a text from a myriad of perspectives.\(^6\) When coupled with the fact that cognitive pedagogies are fairly teacher-centered approaches to the teaching of

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\(^6\) It is possible that students will be expected to favor the text in contexts that endorse other paradigms as well. The cognitive model, however, seems more likely to place the interpretive emphasis on this single force of the rhetorical situation.
literature, the people doing the work are the teachers rather than the students.

Furthermore, if, as teachers, we share the common goal of teaching critical thinking and strategies for effective written communication, there are more pedagogically sound strategies than the cognitive model provides.
Postchapter: A Cognitive-Based Alternative

Introduction

The cognitive model was useful for several purposes, all of which gave credence to the study of literature: it enabled scholars to research the discipline in a scientific way; it allowed scholars to explain both the seemingly mysterious act of reading and the arbitrary act of interpretation as acts dependent upon mental faculties; and it permitted scholars to create a stable, recoverable, and transferable body of knowledge that existed outside the reader. This so-called stability was questioned, however, as investigations into the ideological construction of epistemology increased.

The twentieth century has been an era of intense philosophical debate into the identity and limitations of knowledge. From Marxism to feminism, the epistemological arguments vary. But one idea upon which all theories seem to concur is that definitions of knowledge are necessarily value-laden. In other words, all definitions of knowledge are constructions built upon ideologically grounded assumptions and beliefs. What does this mean for literary studies? And specifically, how does it affect cognitive definitions of reading and interpretation dependent upon notions of objectivity?

In response to the destabilization of knowledge, theorists such as Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott began to assert, as they do in Bond and Beyond, that all ideas and texts are "texts in use" rather than stable bodies of fixed meaning (265). This means that there is no interpretation of literary texts that can be presented as the definitive interpretation. As bodies "in use," texts can be read through a variety of lenses (Marxist,
feminist, New Critical, for example) for a myriad of purposes. So rather than being an independent body of meaning, the text is a body of information used by various reading strategies to yield different meanings. Therefore, meaning is made—not found.

The conclusion that meaning is a construction rather than a pre-packaged "truth" calls into question the cognitive model's primary emphasis on the text. Thus, theorists began to develop other cognitive-oriented explanations of reading that addressed the legitimacy of multiple interpretations. One such alteration is presented by Linda Flower. Attempting to integrate aspects of cognitive and social explanations of reading and interpretation, Flower puts forth a social-cognitive model of reading, a model by which she attempts to combine theories that, according to her, do not make "genuine sense without the other" (33). Flower's example demonstrates how one teacher can attempt to combine paradigms to enhance classroom practice and student learning while it also demonstrates that such alteration is not as simple as it may seem.

A Theory Created on the Boundaries

As McCormick asserts in *The Culture of Reading and the Teaching of English*, much is gained by traversing the boundaries between theoretical territories. This boundary crossing is just what Flower attempts to do in *The Construction of Negotiated Meaning: A Social Cognitive Theory of Writing*. With one foot firmly planted in cognitive territory, Flower puts the other in the land of social construction. Although her primary purpose is to discuss writing, she also creates a more comprehensive definition of reading: a "social cognitive image . . . allows another part of literacy to come into focus . . . [because] it shifts our attention not only from text features to discourse practices, but from social
practices to personal literate acts" (18). Thus, Flower asserts that a social cognitive way of reading considers interpretation "a literate act or practice that is performed as part of a rhetorical, social, and cultural situation" (20). Reading and interpretation, then, are no longer considered acts independent of socio-cultural forces. Instead, reading is recognized as a complex set of strategies informed by one's context and purpose. So as schema theory altered the initial cognitive paradigm, Flower alters schema theory asserting the importance of each aspect of the rhetorical situation: text, reader, message, author, and context (of reception as well as production) are forces integral to the dynamic interplay of ideas called reading.

Flower also suggests that literacy is more than "a generalized ability [or skill] a person possesses (or does not possess) . . .[and more than] a set of technical skills for decoding language" (20). Consequently, she aligns herself with social-cultural theorists who assert that reading is a complex and context-dependent social act with "ideological significations" that impact individual readers as well as cultures in general (McCormick 2). But, unlike Eagleton who says readers "share certain 'deep' ways of seeing and valuing which are bound up with [their] social life" (14), Flower is uneasy assigning the making of meaning to large social forces. Instead, she maintains a traditional--pre-schema theory--cognitive stance: knowledge and interpretation are products of an individual's cognitive functioning, not forces of social conditioning. In a sense, she is, of course, correct--readers read as individuals with much personal interpretive agency. But individuals make meaning in socially overdetermined ways. In other words, as Stanley Fish demonstrates in *Is There a Text In This Class?* the meanings made by individuals are made only in so far as
their social context constrains and releases them to do so. For instance, I can exercise my personal interpretive agency by reading Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* as an example of how women were excluded from eighteenth-century adventure novels. I am informed by my social context which places great emphasis on issues of sexed and gendered behaviors and expectations, however, when I do so.

Balancing this interplay between individual agency and social conditioning seems to be the key to Flower's social-cognitive theory. But as Patricia Sullivan points out in "Social Constructionism and Literacy Studies," Flower "loses control of this balance": even though "the word 'social' . . . is dutifully attached to 'cognition' whenever the latter makes an appearance, . . . [it is] an inert modifier, emptied of the meanings that readers outside Flower's rather small community . . . would impart to it" (955). Students in the classroom, then, would still get an impoverished sense of how textual production and reception are socially informed.

**Conclusion**

Although Flower's social-cognitive model falls short of adequately explaining acts of reading and writing as being both social and cognitive in nature, her attempt to create a model that steps across boundaries is noteworthy and particularly relevant given McCormick's social-cultural model (which I present in chapter 3), a model which incorporates facets of cognitive, expressive, and cultural models to establish a balanced rhetorical stance for the reading, interpretation, and teaching of literary texts. In addition, I think Flower is representative of how many teachers alter paradigmatic models to fit classroom contexts. Thus, my presentation of this model is an effort to acknowledge how
theory can be changed when it is transferred to the classroom. Does this admission nullify the sections of my project in which I seem to discuss theory and practice in rigid terms? I don't think so. Instead, I think it serves to re-complicate issues that any taxonomy--such as the one I use--may appear to iron out. But the overall point I am attempting to demonstrate, is that even though Flower puts the cognitive model in discussion with a social model, the paradigmatic product she creates is still unable to establish a balanced rhetorical stance. And this condition of imbalance that seems to plague most classrooms grounded in the cognitive paradigm is what I want, eventually, to overcome.
Chapter Two: The Expressive Model—Dominant Readers and Subordinate Texts

Correct interpretations are those that are considered accurate, valid, and acceptable. But acceptable to whom?
--Steven Mailloux

Introduction

The decade of the 1970s can be characterized as one of significant change in higher education. With admissions requirements being changed to encourage and enable the enrollment of both greater numbers and wider varieties of students, academia was confronted with new educational demands. In literary studies, for example, teachers could no longer assume that students were seeking degrees in or were even prepared for the study of literary criticism. Teachers gauging the needs of the students who were not studying literature for as preparation for a career began to reconsider what it was they were to teach students. Reading for pleasure and reading to learn about the self rather than about techniques for literary criticism proper, became important as a result of this reconsideration. Hence, the foundation was laid for the ascendence of the expressive paradigm.

With the widespread pedagogical goals being active reading and "authentic" interpretation based on each reader's personal and academic backgrounds, expressive models of reading attempted to free student readers and writers from the interpretive constraints imposed by the study of literary criticism as well as by the cognitive model--both of which focused more interpretive emphasis on the text as an objective body of fixed
meaning. Therefore, the teachers who embraced expressive theories argued against scientific explanations of reading and combated cognitive pedagogy by trying to make classrooms places for active learning via interaction rather than passive learning via the transmission of knowledge. Hence, by shifting the rhetorical or interpretive stance to focus largely on the role of the reader rather than the role of the text, the expressive paradigm made reading more about personal interactions with texts than correct interpretations.

Even though expressivists abandoned some cognitive explanations, practices, and assumptions, there was some overlap with schema theory in the attention paid to the reader's prior knowledge. Expressive pedagogies, however, have never supported Freirean banking concepts of knowledge that encourage teachers to "deposit" into students the correct background knowledge or the proper schema. Rather than attempt such maneuvering (some would say manipulating) to create specific interpretive outcomes, expressivist teachers empower students to create their own meanings by urging them to relate texts to their personal experiences. Given the wide range of expressive reading strategies and pedagogical models, a thorough discussion of each of them is impossible here. There are, however, two reading theorists who significantly influenced the paradigm shift toward expressive explanations of reading, interpreting, and making meaning of texts: Louise Rosenblatt and Wolfgang Iser.¹ In this chapter, I will analyze the models of reading presented by these figures, paying close attention to how each theory defines

¹ By choosing these two figures, I demonstrate the expressivist ideology of two generations of thinkers. Rosenblatt wrote between the 30s and the 70s, but is a person upon whom later expressive theorists built. Iser, a contemporary writer, demonstrates how earlier theories were altered to fit postmodern culture.
reader, text, and interpretation. In addition, before concluding the chapter, I will address how expressive models of reading affect student writing.

Louise Rosenblatt: Readers, Texts, and Transactions

A member of the Progressive Education Association, Louise Rosenblatt published much of her most famous writing in the 1930s, defining herself against and writing in opposition to the academic models of reading that dominated her era. Not only was she a woman entering a predominantly male field, a field she chides as being unconcerned with pedagogy, but, as Annika Hallin asserts in "A Rhetoric for Audiences: Rosenblatt on Reading and Action," Rosenblatt "directed attention to the audiences of literary texts . . . [who were] usually unacknowledged by literary theorists of the day." Thus, she proposed that reading and literary education should be tailored to the masses who had theretofore been denied both "flexibility and autonomy . . . [by reading strategies that] sought from them not their own responses but only supposedly correct readings of texts" (285).

Given her "outsider" status, Rosenblatt was largely ignored until the 1970s when her ideas were widely recognized and implemented, and when what John Clifford refers to as her "impassioned defense of real readers" launched the reader-response movement (1). Credited as the first person to present a transactional model of reading that locates legitimate interpretive agency in all readers, as the first person to "argue that readers should participate in and not merely receive discourse," Rosenblatt has received much recognition for her ideas (Hallin 285). She is still frequently dismissed by reading theorists, however, for her overarching concern with average readers. While acknowledging that their work builds upon hers, for example, theorists such as Stanley
Fish, David Bleich, Steven Mailloux, and Wolfgang Iser often fault her for being too practical—to too concerned with pedagogy and not concerned enough with theoretical explanations of reading. However, as a woman writing against the pedagogical ideology of her era, as a woman who "challenged . . . mainstream literary theory" (Hallin 285), and as a woman more interested in teaching reading than theorizing about reading, her dismissal should not be surprising. And as a result of her ground-breaking rhetorical stance that emphasized the reader rather than the text, Rosenblatt re-envisioned reading, interpretation, and the teaching of literature by focusing on issues of student participation and empowerment.

In *Literature as Exploration*, for example, Rosenblatt foregrounds practical rather than theoretical issues related to the processes of meaning making. So instead of discussing reading in abstract terms such as schema, Rosenblatt redefines reading as an "intense[ly] personal [and exploratory] activity" (v). By doing so, she shifts the focus from theory to practice, from theorizer to student. This is not her only re-negotiation of the rhetorical stance, however. Rosenblatt also shifts the purpose of reading from purely academic concerns to academic and personal concerns, thereby transferring the interpretive control from text to reader, teacher to student:

The teacher is [too often] concerned with making the student "see" what in the work of literature has made others *deem* it significant. Whether the student himself "feels" this is an entirely different question, and one that is rarely considered.

Undoubtedly in many English classes today the student functions on two separate and distinct planes. On the one plane, he learns the ideas about literature that his teacher or the literary critic presents to him as traditional and accepted by educated people. On the other plane, he reads the literature and reacts to it personally, perhaps never
expressing that reaction or even paying much attention to it. Only occasionally will there be a correlation of these two planes of activity. ... The novel or play or poem has been made for [him] too much something to know "about," something to summarize or analyze or define. ... (58-59, original emphasis)

Keeping in mind her words and her ideological stance, Rosenblatt's push toward personalizing student transactions² with texts can be interpreted as a reaction against objective models of reading (like the cognitive model) and their assertions of textual autonomy. Furthermore, she argues against the identification of meaning as an inherent body of knowledge located within the objective text, against the expectation of textual interpretation to be a summary of what, according to literary critics, a text means, and against the definition of reading as an academic and intellectual activity devoid of personal interaction and pertinence. As Hallin says, "according to Rosenblatt, the legitimate goal of literary study was not to interpret literary texts as isolated linguistic phenomena but to become alert to one's individual engagement with language" and meaning making (286).

Rosenblatt defends her definition of reading by asserting (repeatedly) that "all the student's knowledge about literary history, about authors and periods and literary types, will be so much useless baggage if he has not been led primarily to seek in literature vital personal experience" (59). By making the reading and studying of literature both a personal and academic activity, Rosenblatt invites once-alienated readers into the culture of reading rather than into the culture of literary criticism. Readers can, of course, be critics. But it's not Rosenblatt's goal to train literary critics; her goal is to show readers how literature can be a means to experience pleasure and self-discovery.

² The term transaction was originally used by John Dewey, Rosenblatt's teacher, to displace the term interaction which was "modeled on the stimulus-response of behavioral psychology" (Berthoff 79).
Readers, then, are invited to participate in a potentially transformative relationship created between literary texts and their readers when they come together as two "texts" informing one another. Although she presents a model of interpretation based on personal response, Rosenblatt wants her theory to be one that demands more than willy-nilly interpretations without any textual grounding. Therefore, as she herself explains, "a complete and rewarding literary experience" based on transaction requires both personal (emotional) and academic (intellectual) responses to the text (107). True textual engagement requires not only an interpretation of the text, but also an interpretation of the reader's past experiences that directly informed that interpretation. Thus, as Ann Berthoff says, "Rosenblatt . . . recogniz[es] interpretation as a process of making meaning[, as a] nonlinear, dynamic, dialectical process in which [readers] continually interpret our interpretations" (80). Practically speaking, such extensive interpretive activities require students not only to interpret the literary text, but also to analyze why they read the text as they did. Such analysis promulgates both emotional and intellectual engagement and development whereby readers use the text to illuminate their personal experience and their personal experience to illuminate the text.

Perhaps most striking about Rosenblatt's theory is that both readers and texts are considered subjective. As such, they are both active agents in meaning making rather than objective bearers of truth and passive decoders of already made and inherent meaning. No longer are readers likened to computers who decode textual meaning in objective encounters with texts. Instead, says Rosenblatt, are human readers who read with "preoccupations" while they use literature to understand themselves better (81). Most
simply explained, this means that all readers possess individual concerns, individual preoccupations that inform their transaction and lead them to notice and seriously consider certain aspects/issues in literary texts. These "noticings" create personal slants of textual interaction which, in turn, enable readers to construct their own meaning of the text.

Rosenblatt: From Theory to Practice

I can appreciate Rosenblatt's model of reading, interpretation, and analysis because, as a teacher, I recognize that it gives much interpretive authority to student readers. Although to what degree this authority is granted depends upon the specific classroom context, the expressive paradigm generally tends to emphasize the reader. As a result, students can focus on what they find particularly relevant and pertinent to their lives. Thus, they are less dependent on me to tell them what the text means. In addition, rather than attempting to ascertain exactly what an author meant--what the text was supposed to tell them--they can focus on what they heard. But, even though Rosenblatt says her model is not meant to justify the domination or dismissal of the text in favor of the reader's personal experiences (xii), and even though I find it somewhat useful, I fear that when her theory is translated into classroom practice there is all too often the tendency to over-privilege the reader. In "Democratic Practice, Pragmatic Vistas," Berthoff seems to agree with me when she says that even though the term "transaction" implies the equality of readers and texts, texts are often subordinated to their readers (81).

So while Rosenblatt's model offers readers avenues for entering texts in personally relevant ways, and provides teachers ways for discussing culture in relation to various textual interpretations, it might neglect to credit the text's role in interpretive acts. In
other words, in addition to creating and studying their own interpretations, perhaps
students should also be responsible for more formal textual analysis as presented by the
New Critics and the cognitivists. For even though there is much to admire about
expressive theories as they are represented by Rosenblatt, they fail to adequately address
the role of the text in reading acts: like many other expressivists, Rosenblatt can tell us
what a text is not (a container on truth and inherent meaning), but she can't explain just
what it is or what it does.

Wolfgang Iser: Cracks, Gaps, and Reading Acts

Moving on to other expressivists who propose reader-response strategies and
student-centered pedagogies, we come to Wolfgang Iser, a figure who has significantly
influenced the teaching of literature in American institutions. Writing in the 1970s, Iser
challenged objective (cognitive) models of reading and built upon earlier expressive
models of reading by doing what they failed to do: with his theory of reading as the filling
in of textual gaps, he explained how reader and text inform each other.

Breaking from the cognitive tradition that defines the text as an independent object
that embodies meaning, Iser, in *The Implied Reader*, presents the text as an "incomplete"
body because "no story can be told in its entirety" (55). Because texts necessarily say
things while leaving other things unsaid, they present readers with both interpretive
directions via provided information and unmarked streets via gaps of missing information.
Therefore, texts direct but do not determine interpretation because readers are given a
map but must determine for themselves which interpretive streets and alleyways to follow.
In other words, readers are provided with information that guides their interpretive acts,
but they also must fill textual gaps on their own by writing what the author left unwritten or what language, with its inherent ambiguity, simply cannot convey (52). And because what the reader "writes" is based upon her imagination, personal context, familiarity with various textual conventions, and basic understanding of the text's plot, Iser's theory is a model of reading exemplified by the exchange of information between reader and text, text and reader. Thus, Iser presents reading not as an act of decoding, but as an act of making meaning in the most basic sense: "The fact that completely different readers can be differently affected by the 'reality' of a particular text is ample evidence of the degree to which literary texts transform reading into a creative process that is far above mere perception of what is written" (54). Therefore, according to Iser's model, the readers gets to assume interpretive power, authority, and responsibility.

Further departing from objectivist models of reading in an effort to empower the reader, Iser asserts that authorial intention should not be used as a guide for eliminating interpretive chaos because an author's intended meaning is ambiguous at best; more often than not, it's a non-recoverable ideal that the text may not bear out. Iser would much rather define the text not as a reflection of authorial intentions, but as a reflection--a "mirror," so to speak (56)--of each individual reader. This notion of texts "as mirrors of the reader" is also discussed by Peter Rabinowitz, who suggests that when seen in this way, texts can become useful tools of analysis for literary and personal purposes (234). So Iser, like Rosenblatt, asserts that readers should "conduct a creative examination not only of the text but also of [them]selves" in order to fully engage and enjoy literature (64).
Iser and the Classroom

Even though Iser's theory offers readers interpretive power and freedom by making interpretation an act by which readers write--fill in--textual gaps, it also creates complications. Specifically, Iser fails to account for the fact that readers both are informed by their socio-cultural contexts and are quite capable of filling in the gaps in such a way as to distort the text--to compromise its integrity by asserting any interpretive outcome they choose. If it's assumed that each reader is a unique individual free to use her personal experiences to transform texts, issues of validity are sure to be raise. In order to prevent readings from across the spectrum, each asserting that their solipsistic interpretations are correct, audiences must be able to agree on some basic interpretive assumptions, some sense of common ground.

But how do readers establish or define common ground without teachers reverting to the implantation of schema? One strategy I've used is to suggest that students read a text from a particular stance, through a specific interpretive lens, so class discussion is grounded in a common interpretive slant. Another strategy is to identify the words and phrases that students find most important to their interpretations; doing so often leads to a discussion of how words have various connotations dependent upon both individual experiences and cultural contexts. The recognition that cultural contexts offer and deny common ground, provides a means for understanding culture as a force informing meaning making in distinct ways. But because Iser ignores this force, he ignores that individual personal experiences are socially constructed experiences saturated with socio-cultural ideology.
Implications for Writing When Reading from an Expressive Stance

Although both expressive theories presented in this chapter have unique theoretical qualities, when translated into practice, they seem to share similar effects on student writing. As one might suppose given the previous discussion of expressive models of reading, expressive styles of writing focus primarily on the reader and her response to the text. With its focus on the self, writing in the expressive tradition often exhibits an abundant display of the personal pronoun "I." Contrary to objective/cognitive models of writing in this regard, it seems possible that the expressive paradigm developed out of the need to re-invite students into the cultures of reading and writing which alienated them by denying their interpretive agency.

Even if it is only considered the first step toward developing an objective understanding of the text, writing based on expressive responses to texts offers students a personal rather than critically distant way to enter and discuss texts. Thus, it invites the reader into the conversation by legitimating the use of personal experience as the basis for interpretive acts. If taken a step further, perhaps readers could use the individualized slant with which they approach a text to initiate a dialectical inquiry, a (balanced) conversation between text and self that encourages textually supportable personal responses and personally relevant interpretations. But left on its own, it seems as if most expressive theories of reading and writing focus so much on the reader that the text is neglected.

3 Although I acknowledge the importance of expressive theories of composition such as those presented by Peter Elbow in Writing With Power and Writing Without Teachers, as cognitive writing strategies were not my focus in the last chapter, expressive ones are not my focus here.
Conclusion

Existing in various forms, expressive theories of reading range from "pure" expressive theories which focus only on reader response to theories that propose student-centered yet text-respectful pedagogies. Regardless of the pedagogical variations, the general expressive paradigm creates space for readers to offer their personal responses to literature and for teachers to teach textual conventions and social contexts of authorship and readership. Even with these strengths, however, McCormick asserts that the expressive paradigm is still overshadowed by the objective paradigm for three reasons: (1) it has not presented a coherent enough explanation of the text and its role in the reading process to overturn the "commonsensical objective notion of text as container of meaning" (46); (2) it claims to study social contexts of readership, yet limits such analysis to individual readers by failing to examine the general social and ideological conditions that underlie the transaction; and (3) it fails to address the reading of non-literary texts, or texts that contain factual rather than fictional representations read for comprehension rather than the making of meaning. Although theoretically speaking the expressive paradigm may be overshadowed, expressive responses to texts are acknowledged in many literature courses. Students are often asked if they like texts, for example, even when teachers' rhetorical stances favor texts over readers.

In closing, the expressive paradigm encourages personal responses and individual interpretive authority; it does not, however, sufficiently address how and why readers create meaning as they do. Although readers are encouraged to address how their personal backgrounds affect their interpretations, readers are not pushed enough to see
themselves or texts as overdetermined socio-cultural bodies. If they become too subjective and individualistic, expressive reading and interpretation fail to examine the social conditions that saturate processes of meaning making. Therefore, analysis stops at the level of reader response and analysis of self—which, although worthwhile, are only part of critical thinking.
One of the main things that keeps the design of our literature unavailable to the consciousness of the . . . reader, and hence impalpable, is the very posture of the apolitical, the pretense that literature speaks universal truths.

--Judith Fetterley

To become theoretically self-aware is to recognize the situated nature of both our critical positions and our interpretations of texts, to acknowledge that they come about as a result of certain beliefs, principles, and broader ideologies--to see that they are not universally true but rather historically [and socially] situated.

--Kathleen McCormick

Introduction

I've shown that cognitive and expressive models conceive of reading, writing, texts, readers, and knowledge differently. And even though both models have strengths, they both fail to account for reading and writing strategies that authorize students to make meaning in both critically and personally relevant ways. The cognitive model, for example, thwarts significant personal and emotional interactions between readers and texts because it favors static, objective, universal interpretations based on a text's inherent meaning. Unlike expressive theory, cognitive theory discourages the use of texts as tools for self-analysis. Instead, readers are to assume greater distance from the text--often referred to as "critical distance"--and to conduct textual rather than personal analysis. This critically distanced reading strategy is great for training literary critics because
readers learn to critically analyze texts in a seemingly objective manner. But isn't there more to reading than textual analysis?

"Yes," say expressivists who assert that there is much more to be gained from reading than cognitive theory suggests. Learning about texts as bodies of knowledge unrelated to the reader is a purely academic, intellectual pursuit. And expressivists want to move beyond this distanced type of learning so readers can learn about themselves as well as about literature; hence the expressive paradigm's denunciation of the text as objective container of meaning used to transfer knowledge to passive readers. With personal exploration as the goal of reading acts, expressivists give primacy to personal responses rather than critically distanced responses. Consequently, texts are considered points of departure for self-discovery; no longer the focus of analysis, texts are used a means for launching personal rather than academic inquiries. But whereas cognitivism ignores the agency of readers in meaning making, expressivism has a tendency to ignore the agency of the text. Assuming stances that either favor text or reader, then, cognitive and expressive theories both neglect to address the complexity of the rhetorical situation that saturates all acts of reading and meaning making.

In the past fifteen years or so, however, teachers and theorists have presented alternative models of reading that re-define the roles of readers and texts in order to address and overcome the theoretical and pedagogical shortcomings of cognitive and expressive theories as I've presented them. Often referred to as social or cultural theories, the alternative models of reading address what Karen Fitts and Alan France refer to as "the larger social context which governs the production as well as the reception" of texts (21).
By addressing the role of social forces in acts of textual creation and interpretation, social theorists create theories of criticism that merge--to various degrees--cognitivism's critical analysis and expressivism's focus on the reader as a powerful interpretive agent. Thus, they have the power to establish what Booth would refer to as a truly rhetorical stance--one that balances concerns for reader, text, message, and rhetorical context.

In this chapter, I will discuss the theories of reading presented by Stanley Fish and Kathleen McCormick, addressing how each social theorist defines text, reader, and interpretation. In addition, I will use examples from my own teaching experience to extrapolate as to the ramifications of social pedagogies on students' learning and writing.

Stanley Fish on Reading

Thus far, I have presented text-based (cognitive) and reader-based (expressive) theories of reading and meaning making. Fish's model represents a third way to think about reading, a way that is based on social communities. I include Fish in my discussion not only because he presents a third strategy for reading, but also because, as Greg Sarris tells us in "Storytelling in the Classroom: Crossing Vexed Chasms," Fish has significantly influenced theorists and teachers:

Discussion of reader response and interpretive communities fostered by Stanley Fish... have pointed to the power and potential of students' subjective responses as readers... [And, as a result,] it has become increasingly difficult to dismiss students' difficulties as mere cognitive dysfunctions; such attributions... have lost their objective value. (154)

The basic premise upon which Fish depends is that interpretive communities, or groups of readers who share some sort of common ground, control interpretation. In other words,
texts are not autonomous bodies with inherent meaning, but socially embedded bodies dependent upon groups of meaning-making readers. Hence, Fish makes his mark on the field of literary criticism by challenging the definitions of the text, reading, and interpretation.

Fish challenges the cognitive model by reducing the text to a body of words with little to no interpretive agency. Rather than considering texts as superior to their readers, Fish argues that all texts are "subordinate," acted upon by "dominant" readers. The domination of Fish's reader differs from the domination of the expressive reader, however. According to Fish, individual readers are not responsible for meaning making. The interpretive communities in which individuals take part are responsible for meaning making because these groups define and supply the lens through which textual analysis will take place. Perhaps Fish best demonstrates how interpretive communities make meaning in *Is There a Text In This Class?*

In his chapter "How to Define a Poem When You See One," Fish presents an experiment he conducted in his religious poetry course. Throughout the term, Fish and his students had been analyzing poems, looking for and interpreting religious images and allusions. They had been trained, so to speak, to seek, find, and explain religious aspects of poems. So when the students walked into class one day and found a list of names and terms written on the chalkboard, they began analyzing it as they had so many other poems. But as Fish's readers are told, the words listed on the chalkboard are entirely unrelated to each other. Moreover, they are not common--or even uncommon--religious allusions. Fish's students, however, as members of an interpretive community reading with a specific
preoccupation, approached the words as if they constituted a coherent religious poem. And that is just what they found. As a group, the students identified religious imagery and explicated the list of words as a religious poem.

The point of Fish's experiment is that communities of readers approach texts with expectations that direct the processes of reading and interpretation. It seems as if Fish is suggesting that interpretive communities can make a text mean virtually anything they want it to mean. Granted, Fish stacks the deck; he conducts his experiment in a controlled environment that guarantees the outcome. But, nonetheless, the outcome does go far to support his theory that interpretive communities make meaning by constructing interpretations based upon the assumptions with which they approach texts. And perhaps groups do make texts mean whatever it is they want them to mean, that is, once they have agreed upon the interpretive lens to apply to the text.

Feminist scholars, for example, have been interpreting texts in new ways--ways that were once believed to be entirely without merit--for the past couple of decades. In "When We Dead Awaken," Adrienne Rich says that women must read literature in new ways if they are to recognize and move beyond how it can detrimentally affect their lives:

Re-vision--the act of looking back with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction--is for us [women] more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves. . . . A radical critique of literature, feminist in its impulse, would take the work first of all as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language [and literature] has trapped as well as liberated us. (qtd. in Bartholomae and Petrosky 483-84)
And Judith Fetterley, in *The Resistant Reader*, also asserts the need for women to join together as an interpretive community to re-examine and re-interpret texts as social and political statements. She says that "Power is the issue in the politics of literature [and interpretation], as it is in anything else." Therefore, as an interpretive community, feminist readers must "become . . . resisting rather than . . . assenting reader[s. And even though women] cannot re-write literary works, . . . [they] can accurately name the reality they reflect and so changes literary criticism from a closed conversation to an active dialogue" (xxii-xxiii). Although Rich and Fetterley published their works several years before Fish published *Is There a Text In This Class?*, all three theorists describe the power of interpretive communities to analyze texts from multiple angles. So from ancient rhetorical treatises to Victorian classics to postmodern thrillers, texts are being analyzed in a variety of ways for a variety of purposes. And as Fish asserts, it seems that "skilled reading[, though] usually thought to be a matter of discerning what is [already] there [in a text], is [actually more] a matter of knowing how to *produce* what can thereafter be said to be there" (183).

Like the expressivists, then, Fish asserts that reading is a process of making—not of discerning—meaning. Like Rosenblatt, specifically, Fish discusses how readers' expectations significantly inform interpretive acts. And his notion of reading with assumptions is closely linked to Rosenblatt's idea of "preoccupations," although he may not use Rosenblatt's vocabulary. Fish differs from Rosenblatt, however, in that his focus is not on the individual, but on larger interpretive communities. In fact, this focus on the
community is one of the main differences between social and expressive theories of reading.

Jumping in the Pond: Swimming with Fish in the Classroom

Although as a teacher I do not advocate deceiving students as Fish did with his experiment, I do find it interesting to break students into reading groups with each group assigned a different reading perspective. If each group reports to the class their interpretations based on these different perspectives, students come to recognize that interpretations are socially constructed. Moreover, they can see how one text can be interpreted in different ways and for different purposes.

Perhaps the most academically rewarding aspect of reading from different perspectives is that students learn fairly quickly how to support interpretations. At first, students assume that an interpretation can be presented without offering any textual evidence; it's as if interpretations are obvious to everyone simply because it is obvious to the group members. But when groups begin asserting that one text can be interpreted as having several different layers of meaning, layers of meaning that some people cannot see immediately, evidence becomes essential. Returning to the example of Milton's "Sonnet 16," depending upon how a group chooses to define the word "light" in the first line, and how they relate that definition to the poem's other illusions of and references to light as well as Milton's life, interpretive outcomes will vary. So by presenting direct quotes from

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1 To avoid confusion, I do not assign perspectives as they are defined by literary critics, but rather I offer a general point of view from which students can read. For example, rather than saying read this text through a feminist, New Critical, or Formalist lens, I would suggest they read the text as if they were a woman, or as if they believed authorial intention and context of authorship were irrelevant to interpretation.
the text, information about the author, information about the context of authorship, and information about the reading perspective assumed, students learn to support assertions.

This ability to defend interpretative moves is beneficial not only in class discussions, but also in formal written assignments. Two major complaints of many teaching assistants is that students can neither use quotes effectively nor adequately explain why they interpret the text as they do. But I find when students practice reading from different perspectives they not only become more adept at using quotes, but also at explaining how and why they reach specific interpretive outcomes. I think this is due, at least in part, to the fact that before such a class activity they have little experience with either quoting texts or analyzing personal interpretive acts. But with this collaborative learning activity students get twice as much experience: not only do they gain experience as a result of being in their group, but they also learn from other groups as well as. Consequently, before long, they come to see how textual passages support (or negate) interpretive acts. In addition, for students who gain explicit classroom instruction and personal experience in analyzing interpretive acts, establishing and supporting arguments of interpretation cease being a mysterious acts. And when the resultant knowledge is transferred from classroom discussion to written work, methods of argumentation are sure to improve.

The Evolution of McCormick's Social-Cultural Model of Reading

Based on principles of British and European Marxism, early social/cultural theories--like that presented by Fish--asserted that readers were products of their socio-cultural contexts. In recent years, however, cultural theorists have argued against this
notion because it presents humans as bodies powerless against the forces of social
determinism. Such arguments are not intended to say that socio-cultural forces don't
influence acts of reading and meaning making, but that they don't determine them. Rather,
it is how we negotiate socio-cultural forces that leads us to various textual interpretations.

In "Texts in History," Tony Bennett says that the "reading formation"--or the
relationship between reader, text, and context--is overdetermined insofar as a myriad of
forces informs it. As McCormick points out, it is important to note that Bennett is not
asserting that "social factors cause [or force] readers to make certain moves" because the
reading formation is overdetermined but rather that, as a result of overdeterminism,
readers are confronted with a wealth of social forces that must be negotiated (58).
Therefore, interpretation is overdetermined, not predetermined. As a theorist who
exemplifies the cultural tradition, Bennett goes far to explain why disparate interpretations
occur. But as I've insisted in my discussions of cognitive and expressive theories,
pedagogies that neglect to address explicitly their own ideology, that pretend reading and
interpreting don't require significant detailed explanation, either do not realize or are
attempting to hide their ideological implications. Incorporating this explicit focus on its
own ideology and pedagogy is where McCormick's model of reading enters the picture.

Resembling H. R. Jauss's "horizon of expectation," which, as paraphrased by
McCormick, is a theory that defines comprehension as a "fusion of horizons between the
text, with all its past history--norms, assumptions, values, and its prior critical reception--
and the present cultural perspective," McCormick's theory presents a theoretical
explanation of reading and interpretation that demonstrates how readers and texts inform
each other (56). In addition, when translated into practice, her theoretical model becomes a pedagogical model that incorporates facets of cognitive, expressive, and cultural theories of reading. Consequently, McCormick offers a detailed model that not only asserts but methodically explains the acts of reading and interpreting, as well as the roles of readers, texts, and social contexts:

readers are socially constructed, interdiscursive subjects, yet [they are] not without agency . . . . They are neither the blank slates that objectivist positions maintain nor the autonomous subjects of the expressivist model. Texts are neither containers of meaning nor infinitely pliable. . . . [T]hey are produced under determinate conditions, which readers need to learn about, and they are reproduced under determinate conditions, not read "faithfully" or solely from a personal perspective. Finally, ways of reproducing texts have consequences. (60)

Re-defining reading as a deeply embedded social act, McCormick's model strongly opposes pedagogical strategies that divorce reading and learning from social contexts. Moreover, social-cultural theorists such as McCormick assert the ultimate importance not of correct interpretations or accurate comprehension, but of critical literacy: the ability to comprehend and link texts to personal experience while also being able to "perceive the interconnectedness of social conditions and practices, and to possess the critical and political awareness to take action within and against them" (McCormick 49).

And if we study the contexts of textual production and reception as well as their ramification on interpretive acts, we can begin to see reading, writing, and meaning making as context-dependent acts and negotiations of power. Hence, when both readers and texts are considered social bodies balanced between autonomy and social determinism,
reading is a process by which students learn to analyze text, self, and world in relation to social, cultural, and historical contexts.

**McCormick's Interactive Model of Reading**

In order to understand more fully how McCormick's social-cultural theory functions, it is important to note that it draws on aspects of both cognitive and expressive reading strategies. McCormick wants readers to go one step further than summarizing and personally responding allow, however, by using summary and personal response as steps in a comprehensive process of meaning making whereby students analyze a text's reception (in the present as well as in the past) and recognize how all interpretive acts are overdetermined acts with very real consequences.

Locating interpretive agency in both texts and readers, McCormick asserts that they both possess repertoires and ideologies--assumptions about social, cultural, and literary normalcy. Repertoires that inform acts of reading and writing are related to schema theory insofar as they are dependent upon one's personal experience. They are also similar to expressive theory in that each reader possesses her own expectations and assumptions. But there are two essential differences in McCormick's model. First, with her notion of repertoires, she attempts to establish a method for reading texts that relies upon a balanced rhetorical stance. So rather than limiting the schemata readers access during interpretive acts, McCormick asserts there is no ideal repertoire that will enable readers to achieve the correct interpretations (72). Hence, she undercuts the rigid, static,

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2 Although these concepts were first outlined by Eagleton in 1976, McCormick has modified and expanded them to create a thorough explanation of how readers and texts inform each other. (She first introduced this vocabulary of repertoires in her 1987 textbook, *Reading Texts*.)
universal interpretations of cognitive theory. Second, rather than swaying to the opposite extreme by making reading the interpretive free-for-all it can be with expressivist theory, McCormick's interactive model of reading establishes the possibility for intellectual and emotional engagement that embraces individuality while it also recognizes the common ground that saturates interpretive communities.³

To present her interactive model of reading and its balanced rhetorical stance, McCormick identifies connections between individuals, texts, and social ideologies that perforce inform each other. As a result, she shows that neither reader nor text nor society are autonomous bodies—they are always acting on each other. Similar to Iser's symptomatic reading, an explanation of reading as the filling in of gaps, McCormick says that texts are re-written when a reader's repertoires and ideologies clash with a text's. But because there is no ideal repertoire, there is no ideal reader that students must try to become. Her model of reading, then, embraces rather than squelches difference. In fact, as she says, it "takes as its starting point the recognition that diverse aspects of repertoire are mutually imbricated" (72). So rather than concrete bodies of literary knowledge that teachers impart to students, there are only historically and ideologically situated and informed readers, texts, and interpretations that students assume the responsibility for analyzing. But how exactly does this work?

³ McCormick's theory, though it's intent is to transcend students beyond the limitations of cognitive and expressive paradigms, can be used to disempower them. Like all other theories, social-cultural theory can be altered, misrepresented, and misperformed; thereby becoming a rigid system of analysis used by teachers to control interpretive outcomes. As McCormick herself asserts, "it is possible for the social-cultural model to result in pedagogies that follow an authoritarianism similar to that developed by the objectivist model or the valorization of the individual which is characteristic of the expressivist model" if the individual reader is treated as a body wholly determined by social conditions (50).
According to McCormick, both texts and readers possess ideologies ("shared though . . . diverse beliefs, assumptions, habits, and practices of a particular society") and repertoires (specific "appropriations" of ideology in the form of expectations and assumptions of normalcy [Reading Texts 15]). Both of these categories are divided further into general and literary ideologies and general and literary repertoires. General ideology refers to the social values, customs, habits, and expectations that are considered normal, "natural," or "universal" (Reading Texts 16). Literary ideology, "although closely related to general ideology, . . . refers to the particular assumptions and practices each society [and individual reader] has in relation to literature" (Reading Texts 18). For example, concerns such as "what genres and conventions are most highly valued" (Culture of Reading 15), or definitions of what it means to be an author or a reader, are concepts related to literary ideology. General repertoire refers to the "moral ideas, values, [and] religious beliefs" demonstrated by texts and readers, while literary repertoire refers specifically to literary matters such as plot, rhyme scheme, methods of characterization and narration that texts both appropriate and exhibit and that readers are experienced with and expect to find given the text's genre (Reading Texts 15). When students read texts, then, all of these forces come into contact during an interactive process by which repertoires and ideologies mingle.

This social-cultural model of reading is a comprehensive attempt to teach students about reading, writing, culture, history, and knowledge as social constructs that select,
reflect, and deflect information. As one might guess, effectively employing this strategy is no easy task—for either student or teachers. Teachers are expected to have vast understanding of social and historical practices and ideologies in order to lead students through the interpretive steps. And throughout this extensive process, students are to be active participants, interrogators, and constructors of meaning. Essentially, students and teacher find themselves deconstructing and reconstructing texts, readers, and interpretations as well as the cultures of production and reception. This extensive interpretive process is similar to Rosenblatt’s in that it requires readers to analyze interpretations. But it goes one step further because readers analyze not only how their personal experiences inform their interpretive acts, but also how social forces inform their personal experiences.

Social-Cultural Pedagogy and Student Writing

Even though McCormick never mentions the work of Sullivan, they share a common goal—the unification of reading and writing into a comprehensive pedagogy for the literature classroom. In "Writing in the Graduate Curriculum: Literary Criticism as Composition," Sullivan says that students in English courses are often expected to possess and master the ability to write without formal instruction. Based on their ability to read, students are expected to write well. As so many teachers know, it just doesn't work that way. So in order to teach students to write and to enhance literary education, both

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5 This notion was originally presented by Kenneth Burke in Language as Symbolic Action: Essays on Life, Literature, and Method. In his discussion of how language (as well as specific words) acts as a terministic screen, he says that "any given terminology is a reflection of reality, by its very nature as a terminology it must be a selection of reality; and to this extent it must function also as a deflection of reality" (45, original emphasis).
Sullivan and McCormick theorize that reading and writing should not be separated as they often are. Although as a teacher of composition I teach writing courses rather than literature courses (as chapters four and five demonstrate), I am interested in using that context as a site for social-cultural theory. But more importantly, I think literature courses should explicitly focus on both reading and writing as my composition course focuses on both writing and reading. But what happens to student writing when such a unification is attempted? I attempted to find out when I adopted a McCormickean pedagogy to teach a first-year writing course last year.

Conclusion

Social-cultural theories and pedagogies exist in a variety of forms. As a teacher and a student, I am particularly drawn to McCormick's model not only because it presents the possibility for comprehensive learning, learning that addresses both academic and personal concerns, but also because it calls for self-aware pedagogical practices. Teachers who successfully enact McCormick's model of reading and teaching assume a truly rhetorical stance because they never deny or overlook the interested nature of reading, interpreting, writing, or teaching.

At this point, I will take the opportunity to discuss further my personal experiences with translating McCormick's theory into classroom practice. In the following chapter, I present my classroom as an example of what can happen when students stop being passive receivers of prepackaged knowledge and start being active makers of meaning.
Chapter Four: Theory to Practice—
Translating and Performing Social-Cultural Theory in the Classroom

Introduction

Thus far I have focused on three strategies for defining and teaching reading. With each major theoretical section, I briefly addressed the consequences of translating theory into classroom practice. At this point, however, I want to shift my attention to present a more detailed description of how McCormick's pedagogy can be implemented. In addition, I will explore the effects of that implementation on the first-year composition courses I have taught.

Although McCormick presents her model as one to be implemented in the literature classroom—the traditional site where students read literary texts—she discusses writing about texts as well as reading and interpreting them. Moreover, she treats reading and writing as sister activities in that both are processes of meaning making. But, as I mentioned in the last chapter, McCormick goes one step further to assert that reading and writing are not only closely related to one another, but that they are interdependent. As such, they should not be separated but used to expand upon each other. For these reasons, it is not hard to adapt her theory to my composition course, in which approximately fifty percent of class time is dedicated to the reading of literature, creative non-fiction, and poetry. Getting back to the question I asked toward the end of the last chapter, "What happens when reading and writing are taught in this McCormickean way?"
First-Year Writing

As McCormick encourages, I expect my students to conduct thorough analyses of the ideological underpinnings and assumptions that they bring to the class. But I don't expect them to have much experience conducting such extensive analysis. Therefore, I often use myself as an example. Consequently, my teaching style and goals are openly discussed and analyzed as ideologically grounded constructions. As a teacher who has her students sit in a circle rather than in traditional rows, as a teacher who prefers asking questions and discussing literature rather than lecturing about it, and as a teacher who encourages students to read one text through several different lenses, for example, I have agendas. But rather than treating my pedagogy as if it were free of ideology, I treat it as if it were a text in the class--something to be read, interpreted, analyzed, and, I hope, altered a result of my students' input.

When I first required my students sit in a circle, they didn't quite know how to react. They weren't accustomed to teachers who sat down--let alone with them--rather than stood at the head of the class. It didn't seem to take long, however, for them to realize the purpose of re-organizing the seating arrangement: we were turning tradition on its head. Seated in a circle, students are looking at each other rather than at one person standing at the front of the room (often behind a podium) proffering forth knowledge of literary criticism. Consequently, instead of directing their attentions to an instructor who acts as a pundit of knowledge, they focus on each other. This focus is essential for a successful student-centered classroom based on dialogue. Sitting in the circle myself, I can, of course, ask for their attention as they ask for it from each other. But as a fellow
participant in class discussion, I rarely launch into monologue. Because I want my students to respect themselves and each other as valuable contributors to class discussion and meaning making, I prefer to prompt student learning with questions rather than presentations of what texts mean. Of course, this focus on students and their ideas can happen with more conventional seating arrangements. I, however, prefer the circle because it makes physical the pedagogical principles I espouse—specifically, the principle of discussion and communal learning.

As I discussed in my presentation of Fish, another pedagogical technique I employ is teaching students to read texts through different lenses. This is not only an effective means to teach students about interpretation as a value-laden construction of meaning making; it is also a way for me to present first-year college students with theory. Although there are debates about whether theory should be incorporated into classrooms, as I've shown in my previous chapters, theory is always already there. McCormick, too, discusses this issue in "Always Already Theorists." According to her, the debate is not really about using theory, but about being conscious and explicit about the theories that are already being used to underpin interpretive acts: "We simply have no choice about whether to have theory in the classroom. . . . We have a choice only of whether to be self-conscious (that is to say, theoretical) about the theories that guide our perceptions" (114). By drawing attention to the theoretical framework that supports interpretive acts, I am simply encouraging Freirean conscientization.¹

¹ Paulo Freire discusses conscientization in "The 'Banking' Concept of Knowledge." Most simply stated, conscientization is that act of becoming consciously aware of the social, personal, cultural, and political forces that influence human perceptions and interpretations of both text and world.
Neither I nor McCormick are teaching in the oppressive third-world context where Freire created and first applied his pedagogical principles, but American culture is just as ideologically grounded as any communist regime. Consequently, my goal is to teach students to self-consciously analyze—to theorize about—texts, situations, and interpretations. By asking questions that can lead to the exposure of both authorial and readerly assumptions, I try to propel students toward realizing how social ideology influences constructions of meaning. Class discussion, then, as McCormick asserts, becomes theoretical "when [we] stop taking influences for granted and begin to be reflective about them" (114), when we start asking why and how interpretations come to be, not when we teach Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida, or Michel Foucault.

Following McCormick's Lead: Turning the Lens of Analysis on Myself

What do my goals and pedagogical stances reveal about my ideological grounding? Resisting the "old pedagogical model" that assumes the best style of teaching is the lecture, I favor a more collaborative approach because I have been informed by sociological and psychological research about different learning styles and personality types. Postmodernism's theories of epistemological instability also shape my repertoire. I believe that any representation of truth, textual meaning, or history is a construction of "reality." And as a construction, the representation is built for specific purposes according to certain ways of seeing the world. Moreover, as a woman, I am aware of how the "old model" privileges one type of knowledge and can, consequently, feel alienating and disempowering. Thus, postmodern, feminist, and collaborative ideology all underpin my pedagogy.
Let's look a bit more at how these ideologies get played out in my classroom. I tell students repeatedly that I want them to go beyond summarizing the text because that is only the first step toward making meaning. Encouraging them to analyze texts for what is both present and absent (said and left unsaid), I push them toward forming critical opinions based on thorough analysis. Consequently, accepting neither knee-jerk reactions based on their dislike of the topic, author, or style of the text, nor whole-hearted acceptance of what the text presents because its ideas seem so commonsensical, I push my students to become more deeply engaged with textual analysis by asking questions and gently prodding them to analyze further their conclusions. One purpose for my questioning is that I want students to recognize how authors construct texts to elicit certain responses from their readers. For example, I want them to see how and why a text relies upon seemingly commonsensical ideas in order to persuade its audience. An optimist, I hope such recognition of a text's rhetorical moves as well as its affect on interpretation will help my students construct their own rhetorically successful texts. My ultimate goal, is to problematize interpretations by leading students to see that what appears commonsensical and obvious is not necessarily so—it merely appears so because it is a construction of reality camouflaged by an intricate pattern of socio-cultural beliefs. In McCormickean terms, I lead students to see how things appear obvious because the repertoires of reader and text are in alignment. What is my purpose? I want my students to see that the ideas they immediately reject are dismissed because they shake the historically, culturally, and socially constructed web of meaning that acts as their terministic screen.
Although moving students beyond their initial emotional reactions becomes easier as I gain more teaching experience, students are often resistant to my assertions that ideas they consider to be commonsensical and objective are actually steeped in ideology. But as Geoffrey Chase asserts in "Accommodation, Resistance, and the Politics of Student Writing," resistance is not "a negative concept," but a "valuable behavior." In short, resistance is an attempt to take a critical position "against the dominant ideology" from which a student wants to liberate herself (15). With this in mind, I make resistance a focus of concern when reading and discussing texts with my students. And it is through this focus that I have been better able to lead students toward greater socio-cultural awareness and understanding of themselves as members of an ideologically saturated society and interpretive community.

An example of student resistance as critical stance occurred several terms ago. We had just read an essay about Mill City, a logging town in Oregon. A young man from New York sat before his fellow students and asserted that he agreed with the text, all teens from logging towns are ignorant hicks. Now, I must admit, his interpretation of the text as an example of logging town ignorance both intrigued and amused me. I had taught this essay before, but had never heard such an interpretation. And I could see that this outspoken young man's peers--several of whom were from logging towns--were going to dissect this his interpretation, pointing out the assumptions they found along the way.

To make a long story short, as a class we discussed the specific passages that presented information about teen culture in the logging community. As an interpretive community, we discussed how the text was portraying small-town teens. Then, using
personal experience, we compared the text's representations to the realities of students in our class. As a result, we surfaced some of the author's assumptions about how teens from logging communities did and "should" behave. We were also able to ascertain why and how people with different levels of personal experience with logging towns could come to interpret the text differently, ranging from content acceptance to angry dismissal. So by identifying how texts affect them and why, as in this example, students learn to analyze repertoires and assumptions on their way toward creating critical stances and conscious sub-stances in relation to both text and culture.

**Social-Cultural Pedagogy and Student Writing in 121**

The first thing I noticed about student papers when I attempted to implement a McCormickean pedagogy in my composition course was that the papers got longer and longer. Rather than groaning about "having to" write five pages, many students asked for page extensions. In addition, they formed writing groups in which they would discuss and challenge each other's ideas so their papers became places of critical interrogation rather than shallow imitation of class discussion.

Although there was no dramatic improvement in the students' style of writing (their tone, word choice, sentence structure and variation), their ideas were richer, more complex, and more developed. In addition, their methods of defending themselves more sophisticated. Moreover, they became interested in what they were doing. Interrogating texts and their reactions to texts, balancing summary with personal response and more academic analysis, they saw a reason for writing that transcended the need to regurgitate the interpretations of others. Less about saying the right things and more about thinking,
writing, in both theory and practice, was a process of exploration and communication by which students learned not only about writing, but also about texts, cultures, and themselves. Even though it took a few weeks, once they came to appreciate that the class text was not only the one they bought at the bookstore, their writing became more personally relevant, interesting, energized, and creative.

I don't want to give the impression that all went well when I implemented McCormick's social-cultural model into my composition courses, however. I think people of all ages have difficulty realizing their own assumptions—but in front of twenty-five peers and a teacher, it is even more difficult. In addition, it is often difficult to link assumptions with the larger ideological forces that underpin them. The classroom can be a risky place when teachers call upon students to analyze themselves and their reading acts. And students often take out on and direct their fear at me, the teacher.

One student, for example, labeled me a "left-wing whacko" when I challenged his assertion that all university professors are overpaid because, unlike "real" workers, professors only work a couple of hours per week. Apparently, my student resented my attempts to surface assumptions about what it meant to be either "left wing" or a "whacko." And in general, younger students seem less willing to attempt the personal and social exploration and analysis required by McCormickean pedagogy. Perhaps they feel they expected to overturn rather than to analyze their belief systems. But with the use of academic journal writing, summary response papers, and essays, I offer students many opportunities for exploration that may seem less threatening than class discussion. Interrogating one's self, however, is never easy. The benefits do outweigh the difficulties,
though, because students not only learn how to analyze texts--literary as well as human--but they also come to see themselves as social constructions with personal agency.

**Conclusion**

As McCormick warns in *The Culture of Reading*, "it is possible for the social-cultural model to result in pedagogies that follow either an authoritarianism similar to that developed by the objectivist model or a valorization of the individual which is characteristic of the expressivist model" if teachers and students are not careful to establish a balanced rhetorical stance (50). I will admit that there are times in my classroom when I lose that very important balance. And in these situations the best I can do is attempt to determine why. Often, it is because I feel a sense if impending doom, an awareness that we are getting ourselves into rough waters that, as a teacher, I may be too inexperienced to get us out of. But there are also the times when I am simply too psychologically tired to navigate my students' course through the interrogation of ideology.

I must not punish myself for my lapses into objective and expressive pedagogies; I think they might even be inevitable. But I must continue acquiring strategies for effective socio-cultural teaching, strategies that will reduce the frequency of such lapses. And finally, I must take consolation in the fact that exploring the "space between autonomy and determination" is hard work (McCormick 155); thus any headway my students make is a success.
Chapter Five: A Student's Perspective—
Taking a Stance

Introduction

Although I think extensive examples of both cognitive and expressive strategies would be interesting and beneficial, they are not the pedagogical models I am most interested in interrogating and adopting as my own. Therefore, this chapter focuses on how a student could read, analyze, and theorize about literature in a McCormickean way. More specifically, as a diachronic analysis of Zora Neale Hurston's *Their Eyes Were Watching God*, the following paper is an example of how a student could choose to explore a text's historical and contemporary contexts in order to see how interpretations are constructed by different audiences.

There are, of course, multiple and far-ranging audiences that receive a single text at any given time. So to simplify my diachronic analysis I chose to focus on two very specific audiences: leading members of the 1930s Harlem Renaissance and myself as a reader in the 1990s. To reconstruct the era and the expectations of the black literati, I rely on works authored by two key figures of the Renaissance: W. E. B. DuBois and Alain Locke. I will also present my own interpretations and expectations of the novel while attempting to balance personal and critical response. Therefore, I will support my critical assertions with evidence from Hurston's text, contemporary literary criticism, and personal experience while establishing a balanced rhetorical stance. My purpose is to demonstrate one strategy for how a student can effectively conduct a McCormickean analysis that addresses a text's historical and contemporary receptions, interrogates assumptions that
underlie the interpretive acts of each culture of readership, and incorporates personal
response to enhance student reading, writing, and learning.

Their Eyes Were Watching God:
A Diachronic Analysis of Reception

Publishing History

Zora Neale Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God made only a faint
impression on the literary and cultural scenes of the late Harlem Renaissance. In fact,
shortly after its 1937 publication, Their Eyes went out of print, silenced and ignored for
nearly thirty years before it resurfaced in dime bookstores. And by the 1975 Modern
Language Association Convention, Hurston's text had earned an academic following:
copies of the text as well as a petition were circulated among the conventioneers in order
to stimulate support for republishing the novel. When the MLA Commission on Minority
Groups and the Study of Language and Literature published a list of the most demanded
out-of-print books in 1977, Their Eyes was at the head of the list (Washington x). Recognizing the great demand, publishing houses began to publish Hurston readers and biographies; the University of Illinois Press released a new edition of Their Eyes. Thus, by 1980, serious scholarship on Hurston had begun. Read and studied for a variety of theoretical and political reasons and taught in many courses, the once-dismissed text is now canonical. But why was the text disregarded by its contemporary readership? And why, after its resuscitation, has it thrived?
The Dusk of the Harlem Renaissance

I want to begin by reconstructing the horizon of expectation commonly linked to the Harlem Renaissance. More specifically, I want to discuss the social context and audience upon which my study is based. A time of heightened racial tension, Harlem Renaissance representations of blackness and whiteness became a focus for art and literary critics as well as members of the black literati. Alain Locke, in *The New Negro* (1925), says that too many artists portray blacks as if they are "stock figures" or static characters (3). Such representations are not necessarily produced because that's how blacks see themselves, says Locke, but because whites have psychic needs fulfilled through their consumption of racist art (14). And if artists are to be successful, they must sell their works to these largely white audiences. Hence, by presenting and reproducing stereotypical representations of race that ease whites' fears and tensions by reassuring them of their social, economical, and intellectual superiority, both the production and consumption of art, as McCormick says, can be considered a means to uphold social inequality.

W. E. B. DuBois, another significant critic of the movement, agrees with Locke and McCormick: art is a powerful tool for making social statements. Furthermore, DuBois asserts that artistic representations of blacks and blackness are too narrow and limited. He also suggests that racist art is merely an expression of racist ideology that infects society. But as Chase asserts that resistance can be a productive means for attaining emancipation, DuBois asserts that art can be "a way out" because unlike other attempts to alleviate social inequality--such as education, political action, and violence that
all rely upon opposition or accommodation--DuBois insists that the use of art as resistance
is a means to transform both racism and the generally impoverished state of black
Americans. Essentially, art can be the road to equality, the real "solution to the color
problem" in America rather than just a means for upholding white dominance by catering
to racist psychological needs (100). Thus, according to DuBois, "art [is] propaganda"
(103). And as such, he asserts that black artists should use it to uplift the race. So even
though white audiences may want blacks to be represented as jungle-like primitives,
disloyal "Uncle Tom's, . . . [and] good 'darkies' and clowns" as in the minstrel shows
(102), black artists have an obligation to frustrate such desires by presenting negroes as
serious, intelligent, "normal" (by white standards, of course) human beings.

Agreeing with Locke's assessments of art, Langston Hughes, another well-known
author of the Harlem Renaissance, says Renaissance art was more about white psyches
than black realities. He even says that "white writers wrote more about Negroes more
successfully (commercially speaking) than Negroes did about themselves" (80). Focusing
on issues of slumming, patronage, representations of primitivism, and the politics of
publishing, Hughes argues that art of the era was more about fulfilling white, racist
expectations than expressing the realities and implications of being black in America. The
bottom line seems to be that white audiences wanted art to be entertaining, to fulfill their
stereotypes, and to elevate them--as superior beings--above their black counterparts (84).

Such theoretical texts and perspectives, however, make up only a small portion of
work associated with the Harlem Renaissance. During the 1920s and 30s, Countee Cullen
was writing poetry in efforts to show that all race distinctions aside, Americans are
Americans. Marcus Garvey was using art and business endeavors to assert the need for black Americans to leave the continent for Africa because only there, on the land of their ancestry, would they ever find equality and social justice. Aaron Douglas was writing of Harlem as a unique cultural space for spiritual experience. Nella Larsen was writing of race and class passing. And Claude McKay was authoring poetry, novels, and short stories. In addition, many black artists were sculpting and painting. But regardless of the form, style, and mode of expression, the purpose of Harlem Renaissance art, according to the dominant consensus among the black literati of the 20s and 30s, was to uplift the black race by resisting and subverting white expectations. In other words, there should be no primitivistic representations, no sexualized black women or pimping black men, and no other representations degrading to the race.

Ideology and Repertoires: Their Eyes in Light of Critical Expectations

Now that the social context and expectations--the general and literary ideologies and repertoires--have been explored, it is important to ask how Hurston's Their Eyes Were Watching God both refutes and reinforces this horizon of expectation by exerting its own ideologies and repertoires. In her "Foreword" to the 1990 edition, Mary Helen Washington tells readers the book had been "dismissed by the male literary establishment . . . as a 'rich and racy love story'' that presented black women as overly sexual (vii). Traditionally, women were represented as prudes or "mammies" whose sexuality went without explicit reference. But rather than creating Janie as an asexual (or de-sexualized) woman, Hurston has Janie sexually involved with three different men and refers to her maturing sexuality throughout the novel. The following passage, often quoted as the most
sexually explicit in the text, demonstrates how Hurston's protagonist deviates from the ideal representation of woman as asexual creature:

[Janie] had been spending every minute that she could steal from her chores under [a blossoming pear] tree for the last three days. That was to say, ever since the tiny bloom had opened. It had called her to come and gaze on a mystery. From barren stems to glistening leaf-buds; from the leaf-buds to snowy virginity of bloom. It stirred her tremendously. . . . It followed her through all her waking moments and caressed her in her sleep. It connected itself with other vaguely felt matters that had buried themselves in her flesh. Now they emerged and quested about her consciousness. . . . She saw a dust-bearing bee sink into the sanctum of bloom; the thousand sister-calyxes arch to meet the love embrace and the ecstatic shiver of the tree from the root to the tiniest branch creaming in every blossom and frothing with delight. (10-11)

Not only does this quote speak to Janie's sexual awakening, but it also connects her to feminine nature: the respective blossomings are reflections of each other. Even though Hurston does not locate Janie and the tree within a jungle, this human-nature allusion could be considered a reference to primitivism, to the ideology that assumed connection between blacks and the bush. In addition, Janie leaves her first husband to be with Joe Starks, a man who makes her feel more "womanly" than ever before. The implication here is that Janie acts independently of social control to fulfill her sexual desires and erotic impulses. Both these examples of Janie's independence provide grounds for the black literati's objections to the novel according to their tenets of acceptable art and acceptable representations of gender and blackness. Simply stated, the audience's repertoires and ideologies do not align with those demonstrated in the text.
When analyzed in light of the Harlem Renaissance's horizon of expectations, however, there are more explicitly problematic scenes and issues in the novel than the previous quote demonstrates. Returning to town after running away to be with Joe, Janie is met by the community folk sitting on a porch watching her approach. The folk, with their verbal traps set, are lying in wait for her. Moreover, the folk act as a chorus heralding and speculating her return: "These sitters had been tongueless, earless, eyeless conveniences all day long. . . . But now, the sun and the bossman were gone, so their skins felt powerful and human. They became lords of sounds and lesser things. . . . They sat in judgment . . . [and] made burning statements with questions and killing tools out of laughs" (1-2). To the Harlem Renaissance literati who expected art to move beyond simple representations of blackness, this quote might smack with primitive allusions and objectionable material.

In fact, from the perspective of Harlem Renaissance constructions of ideal black identity, this passage does little to portray blacks as civilized folks. First, the blacks, act out of "mass cruelty" when they are granted the authority of lords (2): they "hoped the answers [to their burning questions] were cruel and strange" (4). Moreover, they are not indicting a stranger or an outsider, but one of their own. Perhaps this antagonism directed toward another black could be translated as an indictment against the entire race for being disloyal to members of their own community--a suggestion that blacks aren't socialized enough to act civilized or to refrain from metaphorically stabbing each other with their "killing tools." Second, the quote suggests that the folk are human only in the absence of whites. If they are less than human until the bossman is gone, what are they? Beasts? If
so, are they animalistic because that's how the boss treats them or because all blacks are, by nature, primitive and animalistic? The case could be made, on the basis of this quote, that blacks are always beasts: they are less than human while the bossman is present, yet even in his absence they act beastly toward Janie. Thus, an interpretation that blacks are animalistic creatures who turn on one another in primitive--even savage-like--manners does not seem unsubstantiated.

**Questioning Authorial Intentions and Asserting Personal Interpretations**

Perhaps criticisms based on the presence of primitive allusions to racist ideology could be easily dismissed as eccentric "overstanding" were these problematic references not so prevalent. But scenes that both pit black against black and depict whites as superior to blacks resonate throughout the novel. In the trial scene, Janie must testify about shooting her husband, Tea Cake, who was crazy with rabies. Heckling her with "cocked tongues" from the back of the courtroom, the black folk attempt to shoot down Janie before she can even testify on her own behalf (177). Realistically, Janie's act is understandable and forgivable: she is acting in self defense. But the folk do not want to hear the story: they want to hang Janie, without even knowing why and what happened. They pass judgment without knowledge of her view.

Were DuBois and other critics supposed to interpret this scene as blacks defending or standing up for a dead brother? I am inclined to believe they saw it more as an indictment against the race in its allusion to the possibility of blacks being hot-headed and overly emotional people who cannot control themselves long enough to act with rational

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1 Booth uses this term in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* to refer to interpretations that reach beyond what the words in the text say. Understanding attends to actual words; overstanding, to inference.
agency or long enough to learn all the facts. Harlem Renaissance readers were on the lookout for anything that could be considered primitivistic, and, as Stanley Fish tells us, readers find what they're looking for. Therefore, it's understandable that critical reading of such scenes could yield interpretations that seemed oppositional to the movement's dictum of racial uplifting.

One final example of primitivism--marital battery--occurs late in the novel, during Janie's marriage to Tea Cake. Both husband and wife physically abuse each other. Although Janie's act is less physically endangering than Tea Cake's, she is the first to raise her fists. Tea Cake, then, follows up by whipping her as if she were a common slave woman, or worse yet, the mule her grandmother says all black women are to both men and society (14). Acting not because she has trespassed against him but because it "relieve[s] that awful fear inside him," Tea Cake whips Janie to "reassure him in possession" (140). Not only does he beat her up, but he treats her as if she were his property--as if she were his slave! Perhaps even more damaging to the text's reception by the black literati is the evidence that the community folk within the novel--Janie's peers and neighbors--do not condemn this brutal violence: "Everybody talked about it the next day in the fields. It aroused a sort of envy in both men and women" (140). So in addition to creating a sexually charged protagonist and a primitive group of folk, Hurston also presents a married couple who (at least in this scene) act like beasts in combat--all of which are representations that deviate from the ideal notion of art as uplifting the race through positive representations of blacks.
Even though *Their Eyes* refutes some expectations of Harlem Renaissance critics who considered texts significant social acts that could be used to interrogate social practices, it also reinforces other expectations. One such expectation is the desire to see black characters asserting their voices—not as entertainers in minstrel settings but as rational and knowledgeable speakers. Although there is some debate about whether the text is a detailing of Janie's rhetorical "coming to be" or a detailing of how she "acquires" a voice, the fact remains that Janie uses her voice to assert herself in rational, realistic, and believable ways that do more than just entertain the readership. Essentially, she is a strong black woman with a powerful command of language—we see this command throughout the novel, but most strikingly in her discussions with Tea Cake. Granted, her verbal actions and objections are often ignored by her spouses. And at times, especially when married to Joe, she refrains from speaking at all. But when she recognizes a rhetorical situation, when she thinks her voice can change things, she asserts it. Like the 1930s race activists, Janie needed to learn how to seize the *kairotic* moment, so to speak, before she could use her voice with confidence and accuracy.

At the beginning of the novel, Janie's grandmother dismisses her arguments against marriage not because Janie refrains from speaking or asserting her voice, but because Janie has not yet learned how to tailor her language persuasively within its discourse community. But later in the novel, when Joe goes too far by refusing to allow Janie to talk with the community folk, and when he puts her down one too many times as a stupid woman, she emasculates him verbally: When "Joe Starks realized all the meanings [of what Janie had said to him]," his vanity bled like a flood. Janie had robbed him of his
illusion of irresistible maleness that all men cherish . . . (75). And even though Joe's masculinity is sacrificed to propel Janie's empowerment and use of voice, she refrains from acting until absolutely necessary. It's only when Joe threatens her humanness that she finally defends herself. Moreover, completing her rhetorical growth, Janie moves and persuades the white jury to acquit her of murder. Thus, we have a strong black woman who learns to defend herself with intelligence and wit. With the aid of these examples, we can see how Janie's character, when analyzed through a social-cultural lens, could be considered a model for blacks who want to use their voices effectively to defend and assert their rights.

And insofar as I interpret scenes and actions as primitivistic, I think Hurston intended to allude to primitivism in order to make a social point: blacks are not untrustworthy, disloyal animals. In other words, her intention might have been to shift the gaze of white readers, to make them see slant so as to impact their social recognition. But given the context of initial reception, such a generous reading was neither probable nor likely: intense racial tension made the black literati weary of any allusions that were not more easily decodable and serviceable to their cause. According to cultural and expressive theorists such as McCormick and Rosenblatt, interpretation is always overdetermined, always interested, and always favoring ideological perspectives over others. So when I consider this text in its original context, I am not surprised that it was dismissed as harmful. Art was meant to uplift the race, and Their Eyes Were Watching God presented too many ambiguous images to be used specifically for that purpose. In other words, the text's ambiguity left too many gaps to be filled by readers. Were the text more transparent
with its meanings, perhaps critics would have embraced it. But as it was, the text did not fit the very specific goal of what the black literati considered acceptable black art in the 1930s.

**Reading Differently: Shifting Contexts**

Although *Their Eyes* was widely dismissed in the 30s and being resuscitated in the late 70s, how is it received in the 90s? If the text is now widely taught and read—held up as good as well as pleasurable literature—what has changed? How and why are we reading the same text in different ways?

Theoretically speaking, the act of reading has been re-defined since the 1930s. Rather than assuming a text, in its clarity, coherence, and transparency, should embody an easily identifiable point, we have come to see texts as more complicated bodies that are filtered through the perceptions of authors as well as readers. Ambiguity is a given. And assumptions of inherent, universal meaning are suspect. Reading and writing are both acts of interpretation dependent upon context. Thus, as a result of my socio-cultural context, I have different interests, ideologies, and repertoires than readers during the Harlem Renaissance. In other words, although I can examine or reconstruct to some extent the forces which might have shaped the horizon of expectations of the Harlem Renaissance, I do so, ultimately, from a different perspective.

**Analyzing My Ideologies and Repertoires**

First and foremost, as a white American doubly (racially and temporally) distanced from the Harlem Renaissance's aesthetic ideals, I neither expect the text to represent my
race nor to uplift it in light of racist ideologies that pervade society. Consequently, I can move beyond the mere presence of seemingly derogatory allusions to postulate and interpret deeper implications. I also expect texts to present psychologically complex characters rather than flat characters. And Janie certainly fulfills my expectation of psychological complexity, especially in terms of her notions of love and her use of voice. I also expect to learn something from texts. Whether it be about authorial strategies, my own psychology, or history, for example, I want to walk away from texts with more than the knowledge that I have read it. Hurston's text is interesting in this respect because, using Burke's term from *Language as Symbolic Action*, I identify with Janie's emerging "rhetoricity."

When it comes to resisting my horizon of expectation, I think first of the spousal abuse scenes. I have been conditioned to condemn marital battery as harmful not only to individual men and women but also to the institutions of marriage and family. So when Janie and Tea Cake beat each other, and the community folk seem to celebrate and long for such abuse themselves, I become unsettled. I suppose I could consider Tea Cake's death as punishment for his behavior, but nowhere in the text is he explicitly held accountable for beating his wife. I have read that Tea Cake's actions would not have created stress to the immediate audience (other characters within the text) because battery was not only prevalent but accepted, even expected. But as a 1990s woman weary of violence, I am overdetermined to be sensitive to and condemning of such actions.

*Their Eyes* also refutes my expectations of literary language. When I read texts written by other black authors during the Harlem Renaissance, such as McKay and Larsen,
I found their language straining to read. Much of the dialect written during this time period seems to be the authors' attempts to offer "folksy," authentic speaking patterns as a way to legitimize their home speech, their texts, textual representations, and textual messages as truth. And although Hurston does use dialect in her text, it's not nearly as alienating as in other texts—it seems less coded, less foreign. Perhaps instead of using language—often to the point of alienation—to demonstrate how separate the races were, Hurston wanted to create a more inclusive story. Oddly enough, in the texts where authors try to write in perfect Edited American English (i.e., white, educated English), I find the sentences clunky, stilted, and awkward. It seems as if those authors were less worried about aesthetic concerns and more interested in presenting stories in so-called white man's language. But Hurston deviates from both types of strained language:

Now, women forget all those things they don't want to remember, and remember everything they don't want to forget. The dream is the truth. Then they act accordingly.

So the beginning of this was a woman and she had come back from burying the dead. Not the dead of sick and ailing with friends at the pillow and the feet. She had come back from the sodden and the bloated; the sudden dead, their eyes flung wide open in judgment.

The people saw her come because it was sundown. The sun was gone, but he had left his footprints in the sky.

(1)

As we see in this excerpt, Hurston's language and style are rich with beauty, raw with truth, and poetic with imagery. As a result of my previous readings of the era, I was not expecting to encounter such exceptional prose.

One final example that demonstrates how my expectations were thwarted revolves around the framing or narrative structure of the text. In the first chapter, when Janie
returns to town, she meets up with Phoeby, her best friend and confidante. The narrative is constructed as a conversation between these two women that gradually evolves (by the end of the first chapter) into Janie's monologue--her telling of her life. As a conversation between women, I am set up as an insider from the get go--the speaker and primary agent within this text is a strong black woman who seems to be speaking directly to me.

**Transitioning to an Analysis of Contemporary Social-Cultural Conditions**

While I am on the subject of Janie's strength, I could do a strong, culturally oriented, and McCormickean read of her character, not as an invitation for supporting women but as a model that can be used against them. I could begin by asking what is it about Janie that makes her so likable to 90s audiences. An obvious reason is because it centers on women. But I could also suggest that readers have come to adore Janie because she allows them to believe in the racist myth of the enduring black woman--the myth that might alleviate some of the white guilt associated with white privilege. Given the current socio-political battles waged regarding black welfare mothers, Janie creates a pretty convincing picture of black strength--thus justifying notions that by rescinding welfare we will do no harm to black women: they are strong enough to survive on their own, if they only put their minds to it. Such an interpretive tack would lead me to discuss societal conditions and their respective representations (in school and the media, for example) as I attempted to use the text as a tool to interrogate society.

Although the novel does refute several of my expectations, it also reinforces others. I expect novels to imply deeper meanings than those found on the surface, to demand close rather than rough reading. So as a reader, I expect my negotiations with the
text to create interpretations that demand some reading between the lines. And Hurston's text fulfills my expectations. In the trial scene quoted above, for example, I interpret the scene as less about primitive behaviors in the form of blacks shooting off "cocked tongues" without adequate evidence of Janie's guilt, than about issues of authority, judgment, and the state of racial relations in America. Granted, blacks are shown prematurely and even savagely judging other blacks throughout the novel, but in the trial scene, whites are also implicated in the act of judgment. If we choose to compare the whites who are granted social and judicial authority to judge Janie and the blacks who assume racial authority to judge her, we see that both parties rely on arbitrary authority, or authority granted not on the basis of knowledge but other arbitrary distinctions such as race. I interpret this scene, then, as a critique of how society grants and denies authority. But I can only interpret it this way because I am reading between the lines, making connections between the text and the cultural context in which it was produced, and distanced from the immediacy of its original context--I can step back and see a broader picture and I have little invested in the myriad of possible interpretations.

Also related to judgment and authority is Hurston's inversion of audience responsibility. In other words, Hurston uses the tension inherent in assigning and assuming authority to complicate the relationship between narrator and audience: it's the audience who must prove their right to hear the story and who must justify their authority to make judgments about it rather than the narrator who must prove her right to speak. Narrative authority, then, is never questioned within the novel; whereas audience authority is always interrogated. The immediate audience justifies their authority on the basis of a shared
history with Janie, both geographically and racially. The narrative audience depends on their ability to reconstruct a coherent and unambiguous text for their authority. And the authorial audience must be able to make intertextual and extratextual connections in order to justify its authority. But throughout the novel, the Janie assumes the right to narrate her story without qualifying or justifying herself. And throughout my research of the text, I have not uncovered any articles that question Janie's narrative reliability.

**Summing Up and Drawing Implications**

*Their Eyes Were Watching God* was dismissed for about thirty years before it was reclaimed. And although presenting all the possible reasons for the text's dismissal is beyond the scope of this paper, many reasons revolve around the 1930s expectations of texts. More specifically, the Harlem Renaissance movement demanded that texts be used to uplift the race, to present representations of blacks and blackness that would deform racist ideologies. Even though I believe this may have been Hurston's overall goal, she went about it differently than other authors of her era; rather than focusing on the bourgeois class, she chose to represent rural blacks; rather than presenting Janie as a well-bred mulatto and doctor's wife as in Larsen's *Passing*, Hurston presents Janie as the granddaughter of a slave woman, a child conceived through rape, and a woman who deviates from social norms by acting upon her sexual desires. Hence, the text fell outside acceptable boundaries.

But for 1990s readers interested in the pleasures of reading, reading as an exploration of the self, and reading as a social act with cultural implications, Hurston's text provides a rich scope of analyzable issues. And since McCormickean pedagogies accept
texts as having multiple meanings, I am not limited by having to pin down exactly what allusions mean. Consequently, I am free to explore many different possibilities. I think McCormick would agree with me when I say the text was received differently because the two time periods of analysis have different areas of interests, reasons for reading, repertoires of literature, and social ideologies that inform and shape reading and interpretive acts.
Conclusion

My inquiry into the study and the teaching of reading and writing has been driven by my roles as both a teacher and a student. As a student, I have attempted to learn why acts of reading and writing can vary from class to class. And as a teacher, I have investigated several pedagogical models in order to develop my own pedagogical strategy. There is, however, one question that saturates my dual inquiry: How do definitions of reading affect student learning and writing? Throughout my attempts to answer this question, I have reached several conclusions.

First, teachers need to be self-conscious pedagogues because everything that happens in the classroom affects students. As Russell asserts, reading and writing--and I would add teaching--are not transparent acts; they are saturated in ideology. Therefore, the methods by which we teach reading and writing, and the expectations we assume for students' reading and writing acts, are ideological constructions. As such, they impose upon students a specific way of thinking, of seeing the world and their role within it.

Text-, reader-, and social-based models, each with its own ideological grounding and rhetorical stance, are the three most prominent models for the teaching of reading. Each model assigns readers, writers, and teachers different roles. It is important to understand these three models and where one's pedagogy fits if a teacher is to understand what she is doing when she is in the classroom. If I were to rely on a text-based pedagogy for an entire term, for example, then, on the final exam, require my students to answer a question that draws heavily on how social factors influenced the author's construction of
meaning, I would be all but dooming them to failure. I never taught them or modeled for
them how to think about, let alone answer, such a question.

Second, I have learned that any interpretation of a text or situation is grounded in
a particular way of thinking about the world. This means that teachers must be aware of
the ideologies that underpin their interpretations so they can demonstrate to students how
meaning is built. Students, then, must be taught how to analyze their own intricate web of
ideology so they can recognize their own social construction. McCormick's model of
repertoires and ideologies is effective for such analysis because it offers a means for
analyzing both student and context as intertwining bodies informing one another. And
when students learn to analyze the text as well as the world, when they learn how
meanings are made, and when they learn that every text and teacher and person is a
persuasive force, they can take the first steps toward being active and informed social
agents.

Third, a rhetorically balanced social-cultural pedagogy has the power to
significantly enhance student performance. Rather than submitting papers that
demonstrate a total focus on the self with little to no evidence of textual engagement, or
papers with a total focus on the text and no references to one's own ideas, students learn
how to assume true rhetorical stances that engage the self, the text, and the contexts of
production and reception.

Fourth, although such thorough McCormickean analysis strengthens students'
ideas and critical thinking skills, there is no guarantee that the mechanics of their writing
will improve. They will, however, better be able to offer evidence for their assertions and explanation of their interpretive moves.

Therefore, to aid students in their development as writers, more writing--and more instruction about writing--must be implemented into literature classrooms. As McCormick and Sullivan discuss, reading and writing are interdependent activities. By separating the conscious study of reading and writing into isolated classrooms, we are opting to nurture only one at a time when they could best be used together. By incorporating the balanced instruction of reading and writing into one classroom, however, teachers might be able to show students how they are both receivers and producers of texts.

Many implications for teaching accompany the adoption of McCormick's social-cultural model. Rather than being the ultimate authority, for example, teachers are fellow participants in an on-going process of learning about literature, composition, and life. Students are set free to analyze and challenge interpretive acts and products--even those conducted and offered by the teacher--as empowered meaning makers. This shift in the power balance can be uncomfortable, even scary for teachers who want to act the authority. But it seems worthwhile for both students and teachers.

Students seem more willing to voice their opinions in a class if a teacher does not assume she knows all the answers. And if a teacher's job is to lead students toward (not bombard them with) knowledge, to encourage (not dismiss) critical thinking, and to offer (not deny) students exposure to strategies for effective reading and writing, it seems that the shift to a student-centered classroom is in order.
So are the risks and difficulties worth it? I think so, because by teaching my students how to read according to the socio-cultural model, I am empowering them with a strategy for reading that will authorize them to accept and challenge ideas on the basis of comprehensive and critical analysis. What more could I ask than for my students to be able to analyze texts, themselves, knowledge, and culture as dynamic, overdetermined constructs that attempt to persuade the populace by various means? As I've already mentioned, this strategy can be used to interrogate my teaching and the culture of education in general. Does it scare me? Yes. But if my students can interrogate my teaching and identify my assumptions, regardless of their conclusions, all of our efforts have been worthwhile--they will be empowered social agents who can critically engage the myriad of texts our world has to offer.
Bibliography


