

**UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN**

**FACULTY OF EDUCATION**

*D(reams) of existing wor(l)ds –*  
**a postmodern approach to the teaching  
of Literature in the English classroom.**

**A dissertation presented in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the Degree of**

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**BY**

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For my parents

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## Declaration

I hereby declare that this dissertation, unless specifically indicated to the contrary in the text, is my original work.

Signed by candidate

Signature Removed

Kirsty Berry  
17 March 1997

## Abstract

*Here we begin a journey - ironically, one that can never end. Why then should it be begun?*

*The aim of this dissertation is to present a means to redress imbalances that have operated in and continue to pervade our school classrooms. The singularity that is demanded by compliance, conformity and order of the Modernist era is now rejected in a celebration of diversity and heterogeneity. At the root of the journey is belief in the powerful challenges that lie within the dissolution of our foundations and frames of reference - to capture the moment, and to move beyond into a new set of relationships with a world and those who constitute it. Postmodernism is about a new way of thinking - being conscious to the manner in which we are positioned and being aware that the knowledge we gain is not innocent, but carries with it a historical weighting.*

*Our struggle in the classroom rests in language, for we fundamentally recognise that it is through language that we are constituted as subject, but also in which we act as a constituting subject. The task of the postmodernist is to disturb the constructs of our lived realities - "to make strange" and to enter into new relationships that are grounded in possibilities. It is the postmodern moment that is the point of "rupture" (Foucault's term) - that moment of realization of being within a language and a particular historical and cultural framework [Marshall:1992:3]. For this to be possible, it is necessary to uncover the mechanisms that take control and how they do so. Truths are provisional and limited, thus any transformative potential lies in the spaces that are constituted in the differences provided by that which is **meaning**. Our task in the classroom is to recognise the frames of reference which validate the subject's position in the world, and lay open alternative empowering channels to move beyond the immediate. Literature is our instrument of liberation. As we seek to understand how our meanings have been constituted, a state of constant deferral of meaning must be achieved.*

*In the classroom, such possibilities create a new type of "knower", one whose meaning is validated by experience and whose position is guaranteed by a redefined reader-text-author-teacher relationship. We regard Literature as an act of interaction, and as unity lies in its destination (the reader), it is critical that we redefine the ideas about society's centre and the margin. Our struggle in the classroom, therefore, is about the questions of **identity, place and values**.*

# Chapter One

## The Postmodern Challenge

It is a critical aim of postmodernism to present a challenge to the apparent irrefutable natural laws of reference in which self-knowledge and understanding are grounded, and which inform a response to a society's environment. It necessarily prompts risk and challenges the positioning of the self. It is the discovering of the point at which the limits of boundaries may be crossed, and a realization is reconciled that to risk conflict with the self, is a means of critical self-awareness and a tool of liberation. These are a few of the vital factors which must be incorporated into a postmodernist critique, and as such, they form the essential principles upon which this discussion is based.

### Tensions

Paul de Man contends that questions will arise only if a tension develops between the methods of understanding and the knowledge which these methods allow one to reach [Johnson:1987:42]. It is through adopting a sceptical postmodern position that the vital tension with methods of understanding is achieved. We find ourselves in a world where the *answers* that our current frames of reference present to us no longer allow us to make absolute sense of the world. It now becomes impossible to side-step the period of dissatisfaction, alienation and disassociation which pervades our world. Frederic Jameson would argue that these feelings or states are characteristic of a world that operates within a period of late capitalism [Selden and Widowson:1993:185]. In effect, the sense of meaning as a stable unified entity has collapsed in on itself, leaving in its wake no means with which to negotiate a personal meaning. What is more is that we can no longer assure ourselves of *ordinary assumptions*. Barbara Johnson [1987:3] formulates this dilemma in her example of the



real world which she defines as the place *where we are not!* This realization compels us to explore the constructed nature of our assumptions. Where and when do they arise? What legitimates them? How do we co-exist with them?

Surely one of the parties active in this manufacture is the School, for it is here by virtue of its legitimate function of socialization, that the boundaries within which we operate are created and inculcated. It is argued, however, that in the process an *unreal* constructed knowledge is transferred. This is where the conflict lies. Common wisdom is now questioned and by implication in a world undergoing transition, its *unreal* nature is exposed. It is little wonder, therefore, that modern education is felt by many to be ill-equipped in preparation of the individual for the *real* nature of a lived experience. Furthermore, it is recognized that the educational institution is underpinned by an ideological position [Hutcheon:1989:4], which allows it to assume an unquestioned powerful position. Louis Althusser [Hutcheon:1989:6] formulates the proposition that ideology is a system of representation and that it unavoidably forms part of the social totality. It thus follows that ideology produces meaning and constitutes our reality, and it is the task of postmodernism to undermine the representation, in order to avoid a closure of that reality.

It thus becomes inevitable that exploration of where the power basis is located, and where and how meaning is negotiated, takes place. The postmodernist would argue that the power nexus is in language, for postmodernism is about language. It specifically sets out to understand how we are constituted by language, how we take control of language and the recognition of who controls language [Marshall:1992:5]. With such a critique basis, postmodernism acknowledges that language is a site of struggle and it is fundamental to the *postmodern moment* that absolute concepts, such as Truth and Knowledge, are resisted. While it is recognized that these statements are themselves assumptions, it is as well to remember that they are grounded in a theoretical basis; have received their definition within a postmod-

ern interpretation; and can thus recognize its own ideological basis. With these understandings in place, it is argued that the necessary **spaces** develop where meaning may be negotiated and the constructed nature of knowledge acknowledged.

## Spaces

### Ideology

It is necessary to understand the nature of language in the modern era, for it is this that must be critiqued. The Modernist's perception of language is developed around a *mimetic* property that is argued to be inherent in language, i.e. a reality that can be represented through language. In effect, "the natural world becomes an object to be known by the human mind as a subject" [Marshall:1992:99]. Problematic in this theory is the ideological nature of representation [argued by Althusser, Foucault, Hutcheon], for it results in **doxification** [Hutcheon:1989:7], which is a process that allows the word to appear neutral and common-sensical. This state masks the constructed nature of the word and grants the meaning unquestioned value. This understanding has obvious advantages when one considers its effect in the following historical-economic paradigm. A technocratic age would demand that a citizen be *produced* that was an efficient component of a particular sphere of production. The individual's empowerment and disempowerment is perpetuated through language as a frame of reference. If it is accepted that language articulates knowledge, then the control of language would enable the control of access to that knowledge. Language is hereby given the ability to fix market forces. And the place of this determination? The schools. The traditional perception of the properties of **The Word** led to an apparent *stable and unified* language and significantly dangerous implications that have come to dominate the process of education. The effects are evident when transferred and utilized in the realms of ideological oppression; questioning a reality of experience; the suppression of individuality; it promotes reification of knowledge; and fur-

thermore, it has the ability to stagnate meaning. Postmodernism aims at exposing this situation, allowing one to recognize the language paradigm in which one is working, thereby enabling critical distancing from ideology. The crucial factor to this liberation possibility is the understanding of ideology as a *process*, in the manner defined by Terry Eagleton: “the ways in which what we say and behave connects with the power-structure and power-relations of society we live in” [Hutcheon:1988:178]. This is possible because language is a social act, and is used in the context of social and political frameworks which are determined by controls and procedures. The ideological and the aesthetic cannot be separated as independent units [Hutcheon:1988:178] from art, because all “cultural practices have ideological subtexts which determine the conditions of the very possibility of their production of meaning” [1988:xii-xiii]. The caution, which Muller and Taylor [1995:5] stress, is that one simply cannot invert the nature of the ideological constructs, for it merely reverses a contradiction, and risks furthering the *symbolic violence*. This problem needs to be addressed.

It is here that we enter the question of knowledge transference – a function of schooling. Historically, this function has been understood from a realist (Modernist) perspective as a “mirror theory of knowledge and art, whose fundamental evaluative categories are those of adequacy, accuracy, and Truth itself” [Marshall:1992:49]. The nature of this philosophy relied on the foundational assumption that language is built upon hierarchical oppositions – between presence and absence, reality and appearance, between inside and outside, between meaning and form” [Marshall:1992:21], the first word being given priority and the binary opposite receiving a derivative and dependent meaning. This is regarded as an untenable situation and as such, the postmodernist fundamentally rejects the notion, arguing that objectivity can never prevail. The observer and that which is observed is of a constructed nature, defined by cultural interpretation and mutually reliant on each other for definition. This understanding has significant implications for the determination

of knowledge, for no longer can The Word claim to represent The Truth, and neither can knowledge, therefore claim to be definitive. The question of whether a reality can be represented through language becomes obsolete. The speaker assumes the definitive role in making meaning for the self, and hereby a reality can legitimately be represented. It is language that is regarded as a site of struggle, meaning cannot be stagnated, or closed by an individual authority. The ultimate intention of the post-modern practitioner is “to replace the dominant regime of meaning by a radical anti-system which promotes the articulation of difference as an end in itself” [Rice and Waugh:1992:268]. Derrida’s concept of difference gives a theoretical framework in which to situate this understanding of liberating meaning and the production of knowledge.

### **Derrida’s Différance Theory**

Derrida states that meaning comprises identity and difference and he named this combination *différance*. This critique denies the logocentric nature of objects and the words that we use as labels for them. Derrida’s theory is centered around criticism of western philosophy as dominated by Reason, and accepting of the word as perfectly rational and representative of a timeless stable *real* world. Derrida’s refuting of this *law* lies in the notion that meaning is never inherent in the sign, but that it lies in the relationship between them. Observation is never neutral and therefore all assigned meaning is provisional and relative, and can be traced beyond the origin of the speaker. Within our experience of the communication act, we cannot avoid the issue of language, but it is also essential to realise that language is not innocent. It has historical and social foundations which we must use to question the basis of meaning. Being regarded as a construct, it is now possible to argue that language has no innate meaning, and thus it loses its ability to control. Part of this is facilitated in understanding that words refer to other words and that a reality is defined in terms of those words ‘chosen’ to refer to it, i.e. it becomes a representation. It is the missing centre that interests Derrida, and he replaces the *loss* with the sign. It is the space, as

a sign, that we must come to know, for it is here that *an-other* meaning may be conferred. In effect, the discourse is recognized as it *slips* from image to image, and not to an absolute signified, or concept (i.e. the centre's truth). It might be argued that meaning, when traditionally understood in terms of a closed binary opposition of concepts, is limited, and that the *play* – enabled by the loss of the centre – celebrates the legitimation of individual interpretation [Marshall:1992:72] in the *spaces* that appear in the deconstructive processes. The practice of Deconstruction is a methodology which has been adopted to facilitate the exposing of the traditional hierarchy operating in language. The spaces that are uncovered by this method may provide the opportunity to speak and write between, but the procedure itself requires deconstruction. The intention of *différance* is to relativize and subvert power which claims autonomy through the name of Being, Presence and Absolute Truth. It locates spaces to examine concepts of gender, cultural practices and the notion of nationhood. All these factors require negotiation in a postmodern pedagogy.

Jean-François Lyotard in his article *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* [Easthope and McGowan:1994:185] points to the possible problem with which the teacher must contend in the classroom:

there “is a conflict between a language game made of denotations answerable only to the criteria of truth, and a language game governing ethical, social, and political practice that necessarily involves decisions and obligations.”

The implications introduce a question about the position of the maker-receiver of knowledge, for now a new type of *knower* must be recognized. This is an individual, Muller and Taylor [1995:2] argue, who must be able to negotiate school knowledge and cultural knowledge. The process should crucially be non-coercive and non-dominative. They argue that a new mood or temper must prevail to allow for the disruption of rigid boundaries. They further alert us to the fact that there has always

been a contest for knowledge, for **cultural capital** [Bourdieu in Muller and Taylor:1995:5]. The answer to creating this new *knower* may well lie in liberating the nature of representation, and the ability to negotiate meaning will render **border crossing** possible. Knowledge is represented in the form of concepts and are linked by metaphors, recognised to be places of shared understanding, and are significant areas to explore in a new pedagogical approach.

It is thus essential that the disruption of the current boundaries that limit the acquisition of knowledge (and meaning) occur. It is argued that meaning is not fixed and stable, but rather it is the domain of the social context that allows for a “variety of temporal, provisional and contested fixings of meaning” [Rice and Waugh:1992:194]. Bakhtin has termed this language-in-use – **discourse**. This concept fundamentally attacks the notion of language reflecting a pre-existing reality, and is formulated in postmodern theory as a **site of struggle** [Selden and Widdowson:1993:127]. The struggle not only attends to that of contested meaning, but also in the realm of judgments of values and standards. This is because communication is recognized as a social act, with a set of varieties and registers adding to its identity, and subject to the definition of forces external to it. It is impossible to divorce language from its context for it is both a product and a producer – responding to and influencing factors such as occupational roles, social significations, and so on. Perhaps, with such a definition, we would be better off employing the term **discourse** instead of language. What such a definition provides us with is a dynamic space in which to contest meaning production and interpretation. Foucault adds the factor of *power* to discourse, for he argues that knowledge and cultural forms are bound up with established systems of meaning production and ideologies which operate in the culture, are legitimated through the institution, and from which Literature is not exempt. It is therefore necessary that one become aware of the systems of meaning and the discourses which operate within a given culture, for they are loaded with significance. It is understood that there is a reality of life that reflects a truth which can

only be interpreted through language. The questions that need then to be asked by the postmodernist are: Whose truth is represented? And whose is excluded?

### **Subjectivity**

The history of the development in the area of subjectivity is a vast field that requires space in order to discuss with justice, but such a discussion does not serve a purpose here.

The Modernist has understood the “I” to be a unified whole, and its own source of conscious action. But much of this conception has to do with the Cartesian statement *I think therefore I am*: “the act of doubting everything and anything as an act of thought could at least assure the certainty of the subject’s own being” [Marshall:1992:84]. For Descartes the mind was conceptualized in the same terms as other physical entities, and hence, subject to the same natural laws in the material world. It was thus possible that a standard of normalization was formalized. Any entity which stood outside was excluded. The development of the subject of which we speak today is argued not to have made its appearance until Descartes’s pronouncement and has historically undergone many redefinitions.

The Romantics envisaged an “I” that was filled with emotion, creativity, imagination, intuition, essentially composed with all that was considered Good and Truthful. All this transcended Reason [Marshall:1992:85]. (A means of transcending the powerful control of a mechanizing world? They were surely doomed to disillusion, living ethereal values destined to be squashed in a world of hard-core economic materialism.)

The 20<sup>th</sup> century Humanist notion is the subject of much criticism, for it is a return to Descartes! The theory stated that as speaking individuals we are capable of making our own meaning and understanding. We are in effect our own shaping

authors, and we are able to label the world according to our lived reality. As human beings we are the centre around which we give lived existence its definition, and are agents of all social phenomena, including the production of knowledge.

The postmodern response is to problematize the given relationships between language and the self. These givens now become centered in historical, societal and cultural constructions, which are responsible for an individual's identity. Accepting then that the individual's identity is constructed leads one to conclude that it is possible to be deconstructed and reconstructed. It is the postmodern agenda to destabilize and to transform the identity, to recognize the forces inherent in the paradigm, and also to undermine them. The question that arises here is whether this will provide a truer reflection of the self.

The work of Jacques Lacan presents itself as a principle theory behind a postmodern pedagogy. Although the theories present very real problems in terms of a universal critique of the subject position, it suggests the constructed nature of our identities in a symbolically ordered world, and enables the possibilities of resistance.

For Derrida the subject is a function of language and becomes a speaking subject only when conformity to systems of rules of language are adhered to as a system of differences. It further extends the Saussurian structuralist argument of the "I" being inscribed in language, but requires a response, because we need to discover what structures determine experience.

Lacan's work is in considerable agreement with the notion posed by Derrida that the subject is a function of language: the subject being constructed in language and therefore the individual can be responsible for her own meaning and knowledge. The entry into language is an entry into subjectivity, the symbolic order (the social world). When language is learnt the child moves into society's signifying formation.



Subjectivity is acknowledged when the distinction between “I” and the “You” is made during the “Mirror Phase” of development. The significance of this phase is that it presents the child with the understanding that there is a difference between the “I”, the subjective basis, and that subject the child knows. The child effectively makes a distinction between the “I” that looks and the “I” that is seen. Linguistically, there is a recognition of the irreconcilability of the difference between the sign and the reality of lived experience [Marshall:1992:93]. (The implications of such a notion have been widely experienced in the educational sphere.) The image appears to have an alien unity and coherence, but while the perceptions are imaginary, they are desirable and identifiable. It is this factor which contributes to the insecure status of legitimate individual meaning. The entry into language, in effect, creates a subject position in the symbolic order. It is a position that is subjected to the laws of the symbolic that pre-exists it [Easthope and McGowan:1992:68]. It is, however, necessary to remember Foucault’s contention that ideology dominates discourse and in the process mediates the subject position and experience. Always perception and position in society is altered to conform to others’ understanding of it. It is Derrida’s conception of difference that overrides the fixity of the subject from presence. Now the process depends on the presence and absence, meaning can only ever be defined as provisional and thus the subject is never construed as stable. Obviously the complexity of Lacan’s theory has not been reflected here, but what is reflected is the postmodern moment that his subject is not a unitary being, for it is constructed in a network of identities and subject to language.

Michel Foucault in his 1962 article “The Subject and Power” formulates the proposition that to resist is representative of the

“struggle which question the status of the individual: on the one hand, they assert the right to be different and they underline everything which makes individuals truly individual. On the other hand, they attack everything which separates the individual, breaks his links with others,

splits up community life, forces the individual back on himself, and ties him to his own identity in a constraining way.”

[quoted in Marshall:1992:106]

Foucault brings an aspect to the critique of subjectivity arguing that the subject is constituted in discourse through the specific vocabulary of knowledge. What must necessarily be uncovered are the vital effects of the discourse, for never can the structuring of the individual be static, as it is maintained that there is plurality and constant deferral of meaning. There is thus a battle over identity, meanings change and knowledges cannot be guaranteed.

The discourse of Foucault “refers to a regulated system of statement which can be analysed not solely in terms of its internal rules of formation, but also as a set of practices within a social milieu” [Marshall:1992:99]. He further proclaims that there are three modes of objectification of the human subject. Firstly, through modes of (particularly scientific) inquiry. Secondly, “dividing practices” where the subject is divided into herself and from others. Thirdly, where the being becomes the subject of an abstract field of experience. In an effort to come to dislocate the positions of power, Foucault suggests that one must understand the forms of resistance which operate against the power forms. One should locate the position of the power relation and the points of applications and methods, and analyze the inherent oppositions. This is carried out by considering the effects of the power’s position. One thereby resists “individualization” and it presents the means of escape. It is with the knowledge that one is able to liberate one’s self from submission to an identity which is individualizing and totalizing, and move towards self-knowledge, away from being subject to the control of someone else. Power exists only when it is put into action, thereby through establishing a relationship in a social contract – a response to actions, reactions, results -- closure can never exist. Identity and subjectivity are now regarded as involved in an exchange with one another. It is, therefore, logical to conclude that a society without power relations can exist only in abstraction.

### **Death of the Author**

This loss of identity has significant repercussions in the realm of literature and it thus becomes necessary to explore the proposition put forward by Roland Barthes in his article “The Death of the Author” [1997]. Barthes loses the author as a single factor of meaning formation. He argues that the authorial position of power is a Middle Ages’ literary construct. But such an act carries with it profound implications, for now language speaks and acts for itself, and is no longer left to the sole action of the author. After all, the act of speech and writing knows a subject, not a person. The death of the author “utterly transforms the modern text” [1977:145], and hence its approach to it. Consider the following: Barthes announced that the text is a “multi-dimensional space”, where there are innumerable expressions of culture present. No text, therefore, can be considered original. The question that Johnson [1995:40] poses in response is our focus: What should fill the gap provided by the demise of the author? Personal meaning? The logic of the text? The solution may well demand a moral decision, for the text should not be *closed* or *contained*. There needs to be a place where the *small voice* may be connected [Doris Lessing in Rice and Waugh:1992:352]. The critical factor behind this is always the influence of the reader acting upon the text – there is no correct formula. Constituted by an infinite variety of single factors (gender, race, socio-economic position, education, geographical location, age, family position, and possible combinations thereof), the reader is able to assume a spatial position of neverending interpretations. Now it is argued that because the author is no longer the perceived centre of the text, there cannot be an authoritative representation. How then must the text be *read*? There is little to gain in disputing Barthes’s contention that the “birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the author” [1977:148]. But the pedagogical problem that needs to be addressed, is the effect of the destabilized position of the “writer, reader and observer” that is highlighted by Barthes’s proposition.

## Culture

The questioning of representations and the critique of subjectivity opens a pathway to another postmodern concern, that of the authorization of mass and high culture. Culture is, however, a term that requires clarification. The term may encompass the whole ambit of beliefs and customs that form the behaviour of a community. But this understanding is non-specific, and thus requires added definition. Culture, within the Modernist paradigm, rather more specifically refers to the distinction that represents the best of the society and the self [Connor:1992:231]. The primary measurement being against that of everyday popular culture. Within this construction is incorporated a process of evaluation and judgement, that is always motivated by a purpose, which Hutcheon and Foucault would argue is politically and ideologically inspired. The results are the formulation of what has been termed *high* and *popular* culture, and the marginalization of that which does not meet the standards of the hegemonic center. The structures having manifested an “us” and “them” measurement, fundamentally affects relations amongst groups. The postmodern paradigm allows a swing away from this practice of absolute judgement, and a swing towards a reinterpretation of diversity. Interpretation is now seen in the light of understanding the effect of the centre and how the margins are created [Connor:1992:27]. The decentering of received relations enables the rejection and redefinition of the traditional judgement values of beauty and aesthetics. Flowing from this freedom is the intermingling of genre and media, categories of which were regarded as mutually exclusive, and thereby liberating culture from its exclusivity. The possibilities that may be felt in the world of education are significant, for those experiences and cultures previously marginalized are merged with those cultures that dominate the frames of reference. But there is a word of warning from Edward Said that needs to be heeded. He appears sceptical that a “knowledge that is non-dominative and non-coercive can be produced in a setting that is deeply inscribed with politics, the considerations, the positions and the strategies of power” [Selden and Widdowson:1993:190]. This warning has particular pertinence for a country that

develops in a post-colonial era, and this warning needs to be addressed in post-Apartheid South Africa. The possibility presented from within the postmodern paradigm is the call for interdisciplinary co-operation and the decentering of consciousness which *makes strange* the cultural canon. As one discourse cannot dominate the other, it is possible to cross-pollinate the experience of high and mass culture. What this leads to is a re-evaluation of what is considered good or bad, just or unjust, beautiful or ugly, and no longer can *absolute* standards dominate measurement. E. Ann Kaplan refers to this as *hybridization*, a place where high and popular culture naturally inform each other. There is a plurality of knowledge and a tool to shape the text for the self. The response is therefore ethical: repositioning that which has previously been marginalized and subject to the violent effects of dominating discourses, which question divergent cultural practices and representations. Surely this is one step towards liberation pedagogy. The concerns of postmodernism highlight difference, hence the concepts of gender, class, ethnicity assume special significance, but what must be cautioned against is a complete rejection of all order or devaluation of received ideas.

This introduction has served to highlight a number of the fundamental problems that postmodern critique seeks to expose and formulate a response to. It is this exposition which shall underpin the theoretical component of a postmodern pedagogy which affects the study of literature. Literature is a society's version of reality, expressed through a language variety that reflects that society. What requires demystification is the constructed version of that reality, for the values are neither stable nor universal. In part, the response to literature, however, needs to be more moral for it expresses how life is lived by human beings. This requires an acknowledgment of **The Other** in relationship to **The Self**. What needs to be admitted to is the diversity of the lived experience. This approach includes creating new forms of knowledge and breaking down artificial boundaries which dictate power, ethical, knowledge and cultural boundaries. Vitaly, however, it includes being self-critical.

But the  
peace  
needs to be  
disturbed.

## Chapter Two

*"To keep young, every day read a poem, hear a choice piece of music, view a fine painting, and, if possible, do a good action. Man's highest merit always is, as much as possible to rule external circumstances, and as little as possible to let himself be ruled by them."*

Johann Wolfgang van Goethe

Literature is a sensitive indicator of a society's assumptions about itself and others, and it provides insight into passions and dreams, impulses and longings [Daiches1938:10], and encompasses within it a unique perception of time and space. These measurements always occur in terms of a relationship to an exterior environment -- for that is how we make sense of that which is unfamiliar. But this has become a dangerous equation, for in the Modernist paradigm, Literature has become trapped within a *grand narrative* of political discourse. It is thus necessary to deconstruct the assumptions that underpin modern Literature study. Essentially, as Marxist discourse would maintain, the nature of modern literature has become associated as a means of ideological control that has its origins and legitimacy preserved within bourgeoisie hegemonic structures. Those readers who stand outside the bourgeoisie economic class are marginalized by this imposed relationship between text and the exterior world, which has essentially been constructed within artificial and ideological frameworks. The nature of this argument generates the polarization of a difference of thought: those who see Literature as a self-contained entity; and those who view it as a means of interacting within a given social reality, generated from the reader's or/and the author's perspective. One's views of the matter have distinct implications for a methodological approach to the subject of Literature and the teaching of it. If viewed as a totalized and independent entity, Literature shows all the signs of exclusivity and promotion of the closure we question and lay open as problematic. What necessarily requires debate, from here on, is the proposal that

"participates in the unitary flow of social life, it reflects the common economic base, and it engages in interaction and exchange with other forms of communication."

While one may point out the underlying economic paradigm behind such a position, two issues become apparent -- that of the social dimension of language and the purposeful cross-disciplinary contact which motivates its use. Such is the nature of literary language and it lays the foundation for the argument that privilege in language structure is not inherent at either a theoretical and practical level. It is, however, this practical level which must be successfully negotiated in order to formulate resistance to the privilege which pervades language usage. Clearly, while having no natural privilege, language is hi(gh)-jacked within its social context - and a means of this hi(gh)-jacking is through a literature framework.

It is Bakhtin's contention that there are different "languages" that distinguish different discourses in different functional contexts. He distinguishes between the everyday and the literary function. While this in itself is neither a new nor a problematic proposal, it does represent a point at which the establishment of borders and the application of values may occur. Fowler [1981:21] contends that one cannot speak of a natural literary language, but rather of constructions of everyday language that receive status through the mediation of particular social practices, institutions, and power relations that are distinct of the time. When the formulations surrounding these ideas become entrenched as social norms, the crisis point of interpretation of reading and ownership of the text occurs. For it is in this space that the mechanisms of insidious control or possible anarchy lie. These statements will be addressed later in this chapter.

The critiques of the Modernist view of language practice from Bakhtin and Fowler are clearly directed against reasoning the text as an absolute. For it is here that the word, understood to be a closed signifier, is not questioned. A meaning has been assigned that is perceived as universal and timeless. There is little point in elaborating upon the implications of such standardization in Literature study as they are well



documented, and any alternative approach divorces itself from such philosophy. What must necessarily be questioned, however, is what will substitute for a methodology haunted by questions defined in terms of what the poet or author is "trying to say"<sup>1</sup> and what is meant by a particular piece of work. In this process there is no object in trying to achieve meaningful understanding for the self, because essentially the self is not the meaning target. Social power groups, through the machinery of The Institution and more particularly, The School, integrate and finalize understanding. And dangerously laid open to question in the process, is the individual's "biography" [Berger and Luckmann:1971:100].

Foremost appears to be the personal interest of the author [Hirsch:1967:11] and it is perpetuated through a systems approach to the learning of literature that promotes a closed interpretation. This approach requires problematization, because the ability of the reader to function as a free interpretive agent is compromised. This reader independence, it is proposed, primarily recognizes the interdiscursive nature of subjectivity which stems from the legitimacy of, among other factors, cultural background. Consider the proposition that the writers of many texts actually envisage a potential reader from the onset of a creation of work. And that in order to create a co-operative reader, the writer accesses the codes, assumptions, contexts that are familiar to the reader. Under this premise, the text appears unproblematic. It is methodologically "safe". But this is precisely where many of the problems for school literature begin. The reader becomes uncritically dependent on the text as the means of generalised and familiar meaning stimulus and sense response, forever unable and unwilling to impose the critical dimensions of unique human experience, culture, inclinations and prejudices, simply because they are characterized as suspect. The failure to impose upon the writing these individual characteristics, makes the reader dependent upon the text, rather than the text dependent upon the reader. What must thus be necessarily developed is a relationship between reader and text that allows for different visions of the text, acknowledged through different aesthetic experiences.

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<sup>1</sup> "Trying to say" seems to imply that the poet or author has an inadequate or inferior control of language use, and that the pupil's task, being in an advantaged situation of knowing, is to decipher *exactly* what was meant.

The text is after all, as Barthes suggests, a "multi-dimensional space" of innumerable centres of culture [Culler:1994:33]. In this manner the stultifying relationship in the text between "I" (the author) and "you" (the reader) is erased. In other words, I am no longer the envisaged "you" of the author. I can be myself!

There is, however, an argument which must be addressed at this point. This is the attack launched at postmodern theory, for there is doubt about whether the text can afford to give itself over to any interpretation the reader wishes to make of it. It is the view of many, essentially of the Modernist perception, that to accept the presence of any reader interference in the author's "meaning" or "intention" of the text during the process of reading and interpretation would constitute contamination. This is particularly the case if the Sender-Message-Addressee equation is assumed to be a simple process in its operation. Umberto Eco [1979:5] concludes, in agreement with Roman Jakobson [as cited in Fowler:1981:83], that the process is not nearly so "clearcut" for there are interferences, including: inter alia, the variations of codes and various subcodes and the endless variety of sociocultural circumstances operational in the communication transaction. These factors are the variables that enable the text to assume meaningful possibilities for the reader, and that may formulate a significance different to that the author's intention (if any is indeed present). This contributes to a disturbance of the text, and generates tension on all fronts: for the author, the reader and the teacher. If novels and interpretations are embedded in social contexts, which in turn inform a potential response, then it might be argued that the pupil does not necessarily have to give over to a teacher's reading of a particular text. The reading and interpretation process must rather be regarded as an act of accommodation, not of surrender to another's experience. The creation of the text is now placed into the hands of the reader and meaning production is formulated into a process, and not accepted as a received and unquestionable entity. The proponents in the Modernist literature classroom who employ the formula that will establish *what is meant*, will soon discover the meaninglessness of such an exploration.

Richard Kearney articulates the reservation expounded by the opponents of a postmodern approach to handing the text wholly over to the reader and its application

to the teaching of Literature and its interpretation:

"If deconstruction prevents us from asserting or stating or identifying anything, then surely one ends up, not with "difference", but with indifference, where nothing is anything, and everything is everything else?"

[Dews:1987:231]

Let's turn the negative sentiment of this question into a positive by suggesting the possibility that meaning can now be theoretically (according to Saussure) informed not only by that which is present but also by that which appears to be absent. What is argued within such a statement is that there can never be a correlation between the words of a sentence, their meaning and that which the reader experiences, and this is most evident in the Literature classroom. E.D. Hirsch [1967:32] suggests that this is a place ripe for "misunderstanding", and elaborates upon the fact using the example that different people will possess different conceptions of and response to the rainbow. He then, however, poses the question: *Must such misunderstandings occur?* I agree with him that such misunderstandings are probably unavoidable, but the question must be returned to Hirsch about whether these misunderstandings are necessarily to be construed as a negative. For difference here, if we follow Derrida's footsteps, may be the space in which we are able to identify that *which is* in meaning and that *which isn't*. Our meanings are hereby thrown into a constant state of deferral and dialogue, and are thus never closed. But these are factors which many are not prepared to risk in the teaching and study of Literature, for there is a suggestion that the autonomy granted to the individual will enable a reading of text to eventually mean anything the reader seriously believes it to mean [Ellis:1989:125]. Consequently, the result is that there can be no limit placed on the reader -- for what is sought by the reader will always be found. This is the foundation of Richard Kearney's question and the charge laid by the teacher in the Modernist school classroom. But also one which we shall address.

Faced with this potential for uncontrolled situations, how is it possible to negotiate individual understanding in a literature classroom but also to avoid a charge

of anything goes and the eventual development of a chaotic mess? At this point, I lay this notion open as a problem, but one which could be resolved through rearticulating the relationships in the Literature classroom that are grounded in the text, the context, and the 'realities' of the reader and the author.

In accepting that Literature constitutes a work of art, it has a creative source, and we accept that it is manifested as a metaphorical substitution for an experience of a real world by that author. We, therefore, can acknowledge the art as an affirmation of an experience, but also critically as a particular understanding of an experience. That is, it both exists and is recognized as an illusion. Lacan, quoted in Lerner [1983:22] poetically states, "It is the world of words that creates the world of things." Ellis [1989:202] suggests about Literature, that it be able to

"cultivate the mode of identity, the realm of metaphor, within an aesthetic frame that acknowledges its character as momentary construct and thereby its frailty as illusion."

In totality, the work can thus be recognized as a construction of its own reality. In this theoretical understanding, the reader is reformulated as the mediator of a reality, projecting an individual framework of understanding and no longer being drawn into a pre-existing and unquestioned reality. Clearly at this point the postmodern moment is realized. It is the fixed and non-negotiable quality that has allowed Literature to easily persuade the reader that there is something to be found in the text, and that there is something to be comprehended. It is a perception that has both formulated and led to closure of text. Postmodernism argues that a primary culprit of this tendency is the position assumed by the author. A concept which we must problematize.

Michel Foucault presents the basis of structuring this problem in his paper, "What is an Author?" [reproduced in Lodge:1988:209]. He extends the argument that the position granted the authorial voice is a socio-historical construction that in practice disables manipulation of composition, deconstruction and reconstruction, and was partly the result of the sacred position granted to the entity that we have understood by the term **Author**. The author in production of the text is capable of

appropriating various discourses, laying claim to their ownership, and thereby assuming an uncontested status in society. This status position must be demystified and re-evaluated, and in so doing, forcing the person practising the author-function (regarded as the omnipotent being) to rejoin the rank-and-file! Here Foucault does not formally address the response of the reader: but the questions he posits are critical in interrogation of texts. They present spaces for the reader to position the self between the physical text and the *possibilities* for which it may be used. In practice a critical and suspicious dimension is added to the reading process:

“...there would be other questions, like these: What are the modes of existence of this discourse? Where has it been used, how can it circulate, and who can appropriate it for himself? What are the places in where there is room for possible subjects? Who can assume these various subject-functions?”

[Foucault in Lodge:1988:210]

These questions facilitate independent association of the reader to the text, and the means to identify the spaces that will allow for the production of individual meaning. The author-*ity* of the author, in the transmission of meaning, is thus dispossessed, and is now transferred to the "processor" of the text – the reader.

Clearly here there is no intention to "kill" the author, as one cannot negate the participation in the creation of the text, but we accept that this is only one space to create meaning. What such a de-authorization promotes, is the acceptance of the author as involved in and of the text, and commencement of a discourse that extends across the dimension of Writer-Text-Author. A channel that itself cannot be unproblematically constituted.

In the Modern paradigm, the reader becomes subject to the critic's interpretation. In fact, Bentley's opinion determines that

"there is a necessary relationship between the quantity of the individual's response to art and his general fitness for a human existence."

[McCormick:1992:34]

Conform to the "consciousness of the age" or be damned!

It is Barthes's "killing" of the author which locates the movement to independence of these crude distinctions. Because there is "no author", interpretation is not bound to a stable meaning, the meaning cannot be located in the actions, decisions and intentions, but rather, it is argued, within the rules and conventions of the language. To paraphrase Foucault [Lodge:1988:204], the author can no longer be the de(terminat)or of explanation, the sole interpreter of certain events, or responsible for the transformations, distortions and diverse modifications that occur in confrontation with the text. Convention is defined as an organization, form, genre, cross reference, pattern of conformity and departure [Lerner:1983:45], forming a rule that generates a fixed and uncompromised public meaning, which is legitimized through social negotiation. But because this norm is granted a value, marginalization of the non-conformist is the inevitable outcome. The paradox behind this, however, is that conventions primarily originate in specific contexts, but present themselves as universal structures. Failure to come to terms with the language convention, has historically led to social and ideological disempowerment. Fundamentally, the nature of an alternative approach to literature must entail recognition of this constructed nature, and seek to demythologize the given valuation.

At this point it becomes critical to articulate a number of the proposals forwarded thus far:

- (How) is it possible to construct the "authorial" voice of the reader based on the premise that we are all authors of our own texts?
- Is meaning, and therefore, understanding, actually a process of "adding to" rather than "substituting for"?

One cannot stand apart from the social world of society, man is after all a social being, but it must also be crucially debated whether "the world" begins where the subject begins. Ideally a situation must be attained whereby the world of The Self and the world of The Other is interwoven, and that one interpretation channel is necessarily informed by, and informs the other. Here is the space for Foucault's

conception of a constituted and constituting subject, and what is in evidence is the possibility to destabilize the reader and associated paradigms. The absolute collapse in the process and interpretation of truth becomes valid and laid open to question. The nature of the reality may now be located in the author's consciousness and the mind of the perceiver-reader. Now we are able to take stock of the position of the author's presence and lend weight to the argument that there is no such thing as an *honest text*, for the text carries within it psychological and political motivations (of author and publisher) that are verbally disguised. Such a perception allows the reader to stand back, while enabling the possibility to work within the text. From this arises the contention that there can never be any correlation between the words of a sentence, their meaning and that which the reader experiences.

Elaboration in this field allows one to enter the realm of genre. Clark and Holquist forward the definition of genre as that which constitutes a specific world view - and the crystallization of the concepts of a given time and social structure in a specific society [1984:275]. Because it is regarded as a given moment, borders are maintained through convention. Implicit in this assumption, yet also operating at a covert level, is having to constantly engage that which is considered good. It seems fair to draw the conclusion that the paradigm is established by the social, political and economic elite. It is from this state that we must move to a point where there can be no privileging of voice(s) bound in culturally constructed structures. A cross disciplinary approach must be striven for, for it must become possible to read Wordsworth alongside Hegel, and Nietzsche with Freud, and so on. This is made possible because it is understood that the separation of literature from other forms of discourse is based on artificial distinctions and specializations. Now it is possible to accommodate interpretation, entertain a plurality of meaning and to tolerate the "making strange" of received notions. One route into this possibility is the critical ability to expose the norm, for once identified, one is forced into dealing with that which has been marginalized.

What must be assumed now is that it is possible to negotiate constructions and accept the plurality of meaning. It is a weakness of the technicist world view which

equates communication with a scientific formula and ignores the reality of social relationships. In the Literature classroom, the result of such an allusion is the *objectification* of the text and the *reification* of knowledge contained in it. Furthermore, such a configuration positions the teacher as the expert-knower imparting a *right* reading to the pupil, and exposing any wrong readings, i.e. that which does not conform to an accepted institutionalized interpretation. An unproblematic Modernist design on the surface, but one that is at the very heart of the crisis in Literature teaching. Giroux [1991;1992] is one who believes that subjection and domination occurs through language, thus correction must take place in language, hence his support for an oppositional and emancipatory discourse. But in turn, it is worth questioning whether such discourse perpetuates the domination in an alternate guise. Positively, what such a turn-around presents us with is the chance to collapse the "stage sets of reality" [Albert Camus cited in Greene:1971:261]. For here, critically, is the knowledge that reality is illusion -- an experience of the world that cannot be devaluated because of its personal and lived dimensions. Now, instead of discrediting a version of reality, as a teacher and a pupil, I can put myself into a secure position to ask "What if...", without the risk of undermining my own understanding and experience of reality. The borders now become permeable, and the exploration and validating of experience becomes possible without the process degenerating into chaos. But we need to follow Brian McHale's [1992:2] caution: that a fine line must be maintained between putting forward a particular version of a constructed reality and entertaining a plurality of versions. In order for this possibility to assume practical application in the Literature classroom it is necessary to come to terms with the following:

- the explicitness of the version
- the intersubjective accessibility
- the empirical-mindedness of the text

These three significant factors are suggested by Schmidt [1985] and cited in McHale [1992:2]. It is the question of intersubjectivity that poses particular problems in the practice of teaching literature, for it is essential that a sense of provisionality --



an "as if" character -- be maintained. We do after all accept that literature is also a construct. We have already concluded that viewing the text as an absolute locus of meaning is limiting, for reading has a transactional dimension deeply embedded in the communication process. Lacan provides the theoretical base for the argument that the reading of the text involves a dialectical relationship with the reader who must now be designated as the interpreting factor [Usher and Edwards:1994:69]. Such a view validates the intrusion of an unstable factor in meaning production -- a meaningful space. With this shift it is now possible for the initial utterance to exist independently of the utterer-author, to be interpreted, and ownership of meaning to be transferred beyond the author. Clearly in this case, it is possible to validate the experience of the pupil, and specifically that of the "I". Thus the text does not have meaning in itself, but rather finds meaning beyond itself, in the reader. The problematic angle evident here is that of the potential for chaos in interpretation, the charge levelled at postmodern practice.

Habermas presents an interesting but difficult avenue to a resolution of this charge. He defines intersubjectivity in terms of a medium he calls *Diskurs*:

"a form of discussion oriented towards the consensual resolution of contested validity claims by no other means than the force of the better argument"

[Dews:1987:222]

Dews highlights the weakness in Habermas's statement using the arguments of Lyotard and Foucault. They both argue that a situation where the force of argument and universal meaning is victor is only possible in an "ideal speech act". [Habermas's term] where there can be no internal distortion or external influence. The reality, they argue, is the influence of historically and socially conditioned features contingent on the truth-claims which will undermine the force of argument. Guarded against must be the unconditional acceptance that consensus is a guarantee of truth [Wellmer cited in Dews:1987:224], for argument can never be exempt from revision, otherwise oppression and closure is risked. The value of Habermas's definition is that he presents truth as a claim, rather than a given that is locked into a particular conception

of time and space. Seen in this way, the truth claim loses its foundation for absolute certainty and therefore its potential for domination. Now the presentation of the truth is forever a suspect concept in the mind of the critic. For this reason it is possible to arbitrate the validity of various truth claims, and this can be evolved within language and the dimension of culture. These are defining factors which will allow expression of the individual's unique position in the world. Habermas recognises that

"[c]ommunication is not simply a matter of the transferral of identical meanings from one consciousness to another, but involves the simultaneous maintenance of the distinct identities of – in other words: the non-identity between – the partners in communication."

[Dews:1987:225]

If one takes on an identity in juxtaposition to the other, then the possibility of self-annihilation is present. A dangerous situation evolves in the classroom as the identity of the pupil is forever at risk from the authority that is automatically given to the teacher. Surely for this reason more than any other, a revision of the language and methodology used in the classroom is critical. A correction to guard against is the substitution of the perspective of the other for one's own. Rather we must reach the point where one is able to see things from various points of view [Nealon:1993:174]. It is the point at which one moves away from the "I" perspective, where evaluation of the other always being defined in terms of the self is negated, and the "We" is acknowledged as possessing universal legitimacy. In accepting that we are all the authors of our own reality, our lived experiences are bound as "stories", and therefore all interpretations are valid, because all meaning is linked within its own limited and local grounding.

It is reasonable to accept that now we can be secure in the fact that we are

"no longer confident that we can build intellectual structures upward from firm epistemological or ontological foundations."

[McHale:1992:4]

But it is this insecurity that allows us to enter a realm that creates the tensions between experienced reality and that of possibilities. Here, the anxiety of questions such as

"what if...?" and comparison "as if..." may be tolerated, and the space allows one to disengage from and impose the self in a multiplicity of private and peripheral realities [McHale:1987:37]. This in turn enables one to become the author of one's own texts.

There is still another literature border which must be crossed, but it is an important one, for it lends weight to the argument that denies the autonomy of the text. This is a border that exists between the canon and the everyday body of Literature. Theoretically it has been shown possible that borders can be made permeable, and that the two entities can be engaged on an equal basis.

We accept that all narratives are linked to forms of culture, identity, power relations and social practices and Literature is not exempt from these social forces. Simply, Literature reflects and constructs a view of reality. The danger lies, however, in an elected corpus of knowledge represented in a selected body of Literature, which when presented as the social reality, entrenches itself as embodying rationalized and common-sense assumptions. In this manner, the knowledge domain of the other is marginalized. This has the effect of marginalizing the voices of those who do not proscribe to the centre.

At present we are all too aware of that which constitutes the centre, but what is needed is to explore the identity, place and values of that which constitutes the margins. These are the sites of alternate engagements, and no longer regarded as a negative, for they allow a deeper understanding of historical, cultural and social foundations. What we need to establish is how Literature can possibly deepen understanding: the answer may well lie in language itself, essentially because it is regarded as a discourse variety [Fowler]. Fowler [1981:22] refers to Shklovsky's proposition of the metaphorical quality of Literature. He states that Literature differs from ordinary language in being so structured that it makes obvious its own artificial presentation of the world, but in so doing lays bare our own accepted assumptions about reality in presenting them as equally artificial in nature. Clearly then, our realities are in part exteriorally controlled through the mechanism of Literature. This contention has considerable implication for the place and selection of types of

Literature in the classroom, particularly as it now becomes possible to argue that almost any form (ranging comic, poem forms, novel, etc.) has a legitimate place and application.

All of this poses the question of whether selection criteria must be applied to forms of Literature, for it appears that in so doing one places one set of boundaries in place of another, and thereby risks the possibility of stagnation. One merely needs look at past lists of approved prescribed books. The effect of such boundaries will often prompt the question from the pupil: "*What good will this book do me in the future?*" and more often than not this question will never be answered satisfactorily. What this pupil's attitude does signal, however, is that function and product is sought as an outcome of engaging the text. The question now posed is whether this is indeed the place of Literature in the classroom. As part remedy, we need to redefine an **aesthetic gage** that functions in accordance with the expectations and experience of the readers. At the root of this gage must be the intrusion of a philosophical basis that is fundamentally opposed to domination and suppression. We need in this process to be realistic and cautious in how far we can state that in redefining a politically motivated literary canon will release us from the forces that once produced them.

## Chapter Three

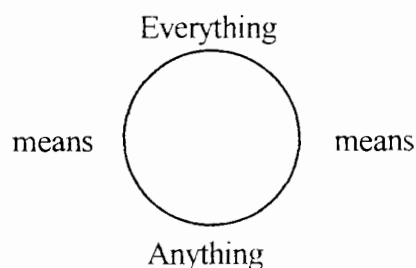
### Introduction

In order to formulate a new pedagogy for Literature study in the classroom, it is necessary to first establish the grounds upon which one places the elements that inform the process. The premise upon which this particular process stands is that of the *construction*. This idea is rooted deeply in acknowledgement that the structures of our reality are socially formulated in nature, and are not the result of some pre-ordained given. This argument lends itself to suggestion that the reading process is also constructed, and vitally therefore, must be problematized in order to liberate the elements of that process -- the author, the reader and the text. Underpinning the potential for liberation is the fact that these elements themselves are not static, but dynamic concepts. We also need to come to terms with the proposition that there is an impossibility of being able to stage any transition in a structural vacuum. Rather the postmodern moment lies in being able to recognise the nature of construction framing the change.

### The Premise

The modernist study of Literature is formulated around accepting the notion that there is a process which involves a linear production and reception of meaning. The author assuming the position of the producer and the reader as receptor. When placed in this position, the reader is unproblematically conceptualized as a passive entity, a situation reinforced by the notion of the *universalized reader*. More insidious is the belief that meaning *must* be mediated through an authorized voice. Examples of those with given authority are the author and the teacher in the classroom. The idealism of such positionings is faulted, however, for our common experiences of being unable to accommodate specific readings suggest that understandings cannot be universalized without extreme violence to the Self. If accepted that the reading

process is a construction, it is reasonable to assume that the process may be reconstructed, with the intention of providing the tools in order to affect the liberation of the individual's understanding of a particular text. Central to this argument is the acceptance of the axiom that we cannot absolutely control the production and reception of meaning in language. But it is this freedom against which many lay a charge of the dangerous implications of chaos. The acceptance of a pedagogical scenario where



has vital implications for the classroom practice, but many offers no solution in a paradigm where the aim lies in determining *the de(finit)ive* meaning of a literary text. But such a conservative stance begs an answer to moral questions:

- At what cost to the individual is a standardized approach and reading achieved?
- Is such a universal approach ever desirable?

The consequences of a one-way transaction between the reader and the text, brings with them the detachment of the self from the text, or alternatively, the self being moulded to conform to an expected response. The result is the *universalized reader*, capable of the institutionalized response, but unwilling and suspicious to read in a manner that is grounded in personal experience and understanding. The effects of assuming an individual response are evident when one considers reactions to different readings of texts. Set against an accepted understanding, Other readings are regarded with suspicion, and even contempt. They may be charged as ignorant and guilty of infidelity, or still worse, insignificant and therefore to be forgotten. With this objection in place, questions such as: Whose reading is accepted? How is it mediated? How far should such a reading be tolerated? What is the position of Other understandings? are crucial to one's positioning and action. A movement from a

pedagogy that prioritizes the dominance of the text, to a practice which grants precedence to the spaces, habits and practices of the reader, and accepted as positioned in a certain historical, personal, institutional and political situation [Hillis Miller cited in Bennet:1995:11] is crucial. Acceptance must be made of the assertion that no person will ever experience what another person does. Such a position adopted also rids the tyranny of meaning with which we must currently deal. Christopher Nash [1987:234] articulates the regime against which reconstruction organizes itself:

"Culture uses language to advance the tyranny of the elite,  
the tyranny of fixed attitudes, the tyranny of history, the  
tyranny of meaning."

For the relationship to be rearticulated, it is required that the constituents be reassembled. Firstly, the reader.

### **The Reader**

The position of the reader effectively involves reconstituting the relationship with the text, and accepting that experience of the text is greatly dependent upon what is found within the reader. We must reconcile whether as a reader we control the text or whether we must submit to the text's control, or whether it contains elements of both -- the formation of a *dialogical* relationship. What we propose is that the poem we read is the poem we create, altered through subjective experience. And this counters the argument that we only read what is prompted by the author through the text's cues. But there is a third option - all elements have a bearing upon the reading experience, each negotiating its position relative to the other. Here two questions problematize that which must be established:

- What is "in" the reader?
- What is supplied by the reader?
- What is "in" the text?
- What is supplied by the text?

Patrocinio Schweickart [Bennet:1995:81] makes known a feminist concern

that can be extended to this debate. It is essential that we do not forget the power in the text to structure experience, and thus any reading must be oppositional in nature. This means that the text must be read as it was not *meant to be read*. Meaning is therefore dependent upon the reader's interpretive strategy, the choice of which is that which is deemed acceptable in a given interpretive community. In effect then, the reading process means that one must engage reactions and inclinations. Adrienne Rich's reading process presents some interesting observations, arguing that the dialectic of control should give way to the dialectic of communication, or interaction between the author and the reader. She suggests, as cited by Schweickart [Bennet:1995:84-5], that genuine intersubjective communication is attained when the duality of the reader and author is recognized. The reader's subjectivity is placed with the text and it remains with the reader. There are no safeguards against the (mis)appropriation of the text by the reader. Meaning is always a matter of interpretation of the text, and reading is necessarily subjective. How does one guard against imposing an alien interpretation to a text? Perhaps the answer **does** in part lie with the author, for Rich argues that it is in the author's absence that the duality of the subject is compromised. For Rich it is difficult not to read a work of literature, be it poem or novel, without considering the work's own premise: that is, the understandings and exclusions which have conditioned the work.

### **The Text**

The temptation at this point is to tread heavily into the issue of intertextuality. If one views the reader as a text, whose subject position is dependent on its dynamic composition of sub-texts (race, gender, age, education, geographical location and so on), it is possible to accept the disruption of specific and constructed, cultural and historical assumptions that lie in texts. Literature texts themselves are composed of gendered, racial, political and social texts that are ever intertwined. But this is a question of intertextuality, therefore it would be advantageous to delay a deconstruction of the inner nature of the text, for our concern lies primarily in a reorientation of the components comprising the reading process. We submit here that the text be seen as a *voice* that may be critically appropriated in order to reformulate the engagement.



John Mowitt [1992:6] asks the question: to what extent does the text stand in for the agency of utterance altogether? It is this question which leads us to the author. A figure which can be de-authorized for "it is language which speaks, not the author" [Barthes:1977:143]. It now becomes possible to critically challenge the practice of finalizing and authorizing meaning. Umberto Eco [1990:45] explains that this forms what he calls the *textual root of interpretation*, but it would surely be irresponsible as a reader to be conceived of as limited by the text. The interpretation strategy must account for the generation process and the role performed by the receptor of the text. Consequently the receptor's, the text's and author's position are destined to change. According to Eco, we must acknowledge that meaning is dependent upon the context-bound interpretive choices of the receptor. The way ahead seems to be the effective exiling of the author as the absolute authority of the text. Texts possess the undeniable properties of plurality, unlimited by our own infinite interpretations based in ethical, social and political needs and wants. Theoretically, therefore, the meaning of a text is constructed in a manner we -- as reader and writer -- want it to be.

We propose that the interpretations of texts are not limited by the intention of the author, and nor must they be conceived as containing a final meaning. It is accepted that there are common grounds of meaning in which intersubjective agreement can and must be established, and conversely, there are interpretive grounds which are not legitimated by the text. This situation prompts a statement of position: while all texts and interpretations may be argued to be plural, one cannot accept all readings as valid. One needs to establish what constitutes an "appropriate" reading from an "inappropriate" one - but around what does one establish one's premise? We propose that the answer lies within...

## **The Death of the Author**

M.H.D.D.S.R.I.P.

and

## **The Matter of Representation**

Although many possible meanings are present (or absent) in the term, we understand representation to be a (particular) way of knowing. And for this reason we acknowledge the constructed nature of representations in Chapter One of this dissertation.

As we have uncovered, two of the fundamental bases which have come to underpin theories of representation are firstly, Saussure's splitting of the sign into signifier and signified, and secondly, the deconstructionist argument that accepts representation as signs that refer to other signs that refer to other signs, *ad infinitum* [Culler:1982:153].

Literature, layered with text, does not refer to any empirical world, but rather presents a scene that is filtered through the aesthetic and discursive assumptions of the author on one level, and the reader on another. Through engaging the conventions of content and form in the reading process,

(particular) sense is made of the multiplicity of text, and is further determined by what is "brought in" to the text by the individual reader.

This is a self-reflexive process, where one considers one's own construction and representation of reality, and ultimately can come to terms with how it influences one's understanding of a reading.

While the emphasis of this argument has stressed the value of individual meaning and interpretation, there are questions that might also be asked in the Literature classroom. For example, how social and literary constructions might be negotiated and used in order to attain a commonness of understanding, and just how far this agreement extends without enforcing a particular meaning of a text.

The value of representations present us with gaps that are contested cultural sites, where provisional meanings are situated, and where voices compete with other voices. There is a need to be aware that this is also seen as the site of competing power relations. Wallis quoted in Hutcheon [1988:230] reminds us that while representations are not inherently ideologically in their nature, they carry out

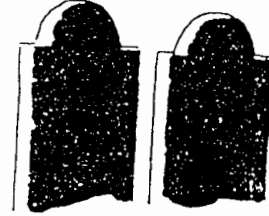
an ideological function that is used to determine meaning.

Significantly, however, Muller and Taylor have suggested that representations can be the axes upon which border crossings hinge [1995:3]. Although these two authors apply their proposition to theories regarding general curriculum knowledge, it has significant possibilities for a radical Literature methodology. Their paper suggests, among many other issues, that it is possible to redistribute knowledge by situating familiar everyday knowledge into a mathematics curriculum. This rearticulation, it is argued, would contribute to demystifying subject knowledge which is predominantly couched in abstract discourse. Knowledge is made more meaningful because it is transferred through the lived experience of the learner. Muller and Taylor admit hesitancy, however, in fully accepting the value of this recontextualization of knowledges. They warn of the potential dangers in the process: that of the localizing of knowledge, and the distortion of the experience of everyday reality. It is therefore evident that because a language (or discourse) reflects a lived reality, it is vital to engage the discourse of the Subject in order to uncover what is "brought in" to the reading process. But

clearly, we must heed Muller and Taylor's cautions if we are to proceed in suggesting that lived experience is a root of a learning methodology for Literature.

The stance adopted here is one that attempts to problematize the understanding, that it is the **object** that gives rise to representation. Now the representation should now be seen as giving rise to the object [Woolgar quoted in Muller and Taylor:1995:3].

In conclusion, the process of reading adopted in order to respond to "the epistemological question of how we know" [Hutcheon:1988:122] is engaged on many levels. Firstly, we must establish what represents a given reality. Secondly, because representations can be linked in the construction of the author's intention we can enter into a dialogue with the author through the text. Thirdly, we can legitimately negotiate *the reality* in terms of one's own experience of the social and contextual factors which condition a particular reading. Such a construction of reading is based on consideration of two aspects: the verbal information present, as well as other perceptions (which represent the differences between readers).



## Dialogue

or

## The Death of the Teacher

or

## We've listed her MIA (temporarily!)

At present dialogue among voices in the school classroom may be argued to be non-existent, or at the very least, limited. Rather the communication between pupil and teacher is characterized by the absolute position inherited by the teacher. The monological situation [J. Hillis Miller's term] results in the exercising of absolute meaning and the non-engagement of the individual's experience. There are few sites where this is more evident than in the classroom of the Literature teacher.

The question that arises in dialogue with a modernist teacher is how we might address this non-communication. The postmodern teacher might respond as follows...

### **Postmodernist (PM):**

One of the greatest problems facing the teacher in the classroom is that of the "consumption mentality" which so pervades our pupil body.

### **Modernist (M):**

And this means what?

### **PM:**

At the risk of speaking with linear simplicity, knowledge is transmitted, uncritically received, conformed to, reproduced and assessed according to pre-determined standards.

The first step to communication is acknowledging the dialogical nature of language.

If we adopt Stanley Fish's [Dias and Hayhoe: 1988:19] notion of "interpretive communities" our traditional ideas about classroom

relationships are called into question. We may now see our pupils as a heterogeneous group comprised of different experiences, and because these experiences are encountered at different times, they are subject to rapid and varied shifts in perceptions and positions. Bakhtin [Morris: 1994:35] argues that to have true understanding of an utterance requires that it be perceived as dialogic in nature. This necessitates that one position oneself in respect to the utterance. This assumed position is absolutely critical, for in Literature as in speech, meaning does not reside in the individual elements of author-speaker or reader-listener, but rather in their interaction. Spoken or written discourse is determined by a community and meaning is shaped through the interaction -- a social process that has valuable application to Literature methodology.

What this notion presents us with, is an opportunity to suggest that there can be no point of origin of meaning.

(A safety-valve of those methodologies which have advocated a more deterministic role for the teacher.) This indeterminacy is evident in recognizing that one's voice is stimulated from/by another -- being constantly in a state of merging with, rejecting, or accepting other voices in a particular context. Under these circumstances, the teacher is in no position to intervene to impose a meaning. This, because, she herself, constitutes part of the "interpretive community", and is required to (re)orientate herself in respect to it.

**M:**

It's not about the teacher losing a social position?

**PM:**

In reality, the teacher always remains a powerful factor by virtue of being an institutional entity, but within the space of the classroom, she must be willing to give up that empowered position. It's rather about acknowledging the social spaces of the teacher and the pupil, thus in effect, the positions of speech. Remember that Barthes [1977:206] cautions us, that it is the excess of speech emanating from these social spaces that

*The probable difficulty arises in the fact that the text is a refuge for the overburdened or non-confrontational teacher. - The matter lies in the teacher having the courage to move away from the safety of the text-authorizing paradigm, and into accepting that there are possibilities of meaning. Invested must be the necessary time and energy.*

concerns us.

**M:**

The teacher is, therefore, not *done away with*.

**PM:**

It would probably be more accurate to suggest that the teacher is submerged in voices. In an extreme scenario, for the teacher to become silent, she would join the ranks of those who are marginalized in silence, and burdened with experience [Barthes:1977:192].

**M:**

But I still believe there is danger. I'm suggesting that control of meaning and understanding is forfeited and released to the forces of chaos. This lack of control would create a scenario where readings validate interpretations of texts where "anything goes". And theoretically, under this premise, there can be little commonness in understanding among pupils.

**PM:**

We must remember that communication is a social interaction, where all utterances are expressed in environments filled with tension. In this interaction an utterance is capable of a multiplicity of meaning. It makes sense then that in the interactive classroom, the processes of negotiation and tensions among different loci of meaning are vital in active meaning formation. I would argue, therefore, that it appears the threat of destabilizing meaning does not lie with the pupil, but rather with a teacher unwilling to cede a power position.

**M:**

I would argue that in the Literature class, the power position does not lie with the teacher, but rather with the text. After all, meaning in Literature, is to be found in the text of the author. And as a teacher, it is my responsibility to mediate the appropriation of that meaning.

**PM:**

The question of power is deeply ingrained into the discourse between the teacher and the pupil.

*Ideally, the teacher must become integrated (and accepted) into the process. As a facilitator or mediator, she stands on the outside of the process, and is always associated as the figure of final appeal. The process intimately involves giving oneself over to the pupils, although we acknowledge that this is a risky and self-revealing action. But it would be hypocritical to do otherwise.*

*The disruption of the centrality of the text is made possible in a return to valuing storytelling. Lost in the rejection of oral culture is the affective and holistic response to the world of experience. The encounter with the story invites the listener to live through and participate in response, using both the body and mind. The social knowledge that is accumulated is deeply engrained in a community's*



So perhaps it is of more value to address this question in the situation's own discourse, in order to illustrate the tyrannical quality of language with which pupils must deal.

It's within this colonialist view of Literature teaching that we see a few of the basic foundations upon which we construct an alternative argument. You assume that the text is a unitary whole, the meaning determined, stable and closed – your function is to unlock that code and access the determined meaning. The underlying philosophical sub-text appears grounded in the assumption that the pupil is incapable of making sense of a text without the intervention of a privileged expert voice, personified by jealous you, the teacher. With such an interventionist policy, the reader is literally exiled from the text

It's necessary to consider another perspective. Our argument revolves around accepting that it is the reader, not the author, who is the primary maker of meaning in interaction with the text. This relationship is influenced by the physical, psychological, ideological and political contexts in which the work was written and in which the work is read. Given that these personal situations are never experienced in the same way, readings are always different and can never be fixed. Slipping into Marxist discourse, the space of the intervening teacher is now (pre)occupied by the pupil collective. It is this space that presents a unique understanding of what is written, as it is not prejudiced by a controlling voice.

**M:**

The text is not mine to own. It belongs to the author, hence my responsibility is to uncover and take on-board what he says. Reading is thus an act of appropriation.

**PM:**

Let's change the perspective: as teachers we can equate ourselves as being authors in our own classrooms. We have, however, undermined the powerful potential inherent in this statement in

*construction, and differs from the technocratically rational knowledge which has excluded so many other forms of knowledge and with it, a multitude of learners.*

*It is this foundational knowledge which has enormous value in confronting every society's understanding of truth, reality, history -- our cultural lives.*

accepting that we are merely role-players in the classroom interaction. I believe that it is crucial we do not see the process of reading as measurable in terms of fixed outcomes. (Examinations need re-examination.) Our emphasis must always be directed at the pupil's world of experience and her lived contexts, and critically, the teacher should be prepared to relinquish the rei(g)ns of control. Clearly under these circumstances, measurement would be tantamount to placing a number on a pupil's life experience. And we can question the morality of this action.

**M:**

Is it then ever possible to exam whether a competent understanding of the text has been made?

**PM:**

Yes, I believe that this is a possibility, but we need to re-evaluate our forms of assessment. This is a complex issue and not one which we shall address in much detail here, however, a few points need clarification. At the root of the assessment process there needs to be the confidence of the educational authorities placed in the strategies and competence of their teachers. What needs to be established is whether a pupil has been made a *meaningful* connection with the text. If the contact with the text is created in terms of a world of personal experience, then who better to assess than the self-aware teacher? Perhaps the pupils themselves? The departments of education must risk doing away with the formal examination of literature, after all literature was never meant to be examined by regurgitating some predetermined authorized meaning.

**M:**

One can't get away from it, the process still appears to support the potential for chaos.

**PM:**

We must from the onset propose that conflict is infinitely more preferable to consensus. Roland Barthes, in an essay from *Image-Music-Text*

*A significant amount of time in the classroom and space on the worksheet must be allocated to expressing and confronting pupils' questions. Arguably, the teacher finds herself in a catch-22 situation, for her questions are always to be construed as deterministic in some way.*

*But does this mean that she must withdraw from the questioning process altogether?*

*Realistically, this would be of very little value and practically impossible. The teacher relinquishes her controlling position, by initiating and then moving away. A strategically placed open-ended question or comment is enough to engage pupil participation. Is this not so?*

entitled "Writers, Intellectuals, Teachers", suggests that teaching can (and should) build discourses against the prevailing doxa, and therefore, is itself constructed on paradox. Teaching, he continues to suggest, is a system that calls for corrections, translations, openings, and hereby finds the absent more valuable than the present [1977:200]. The question is one of how to engage the oppositional interpretation and voice. In the dialogue situation, understanding and response are naturally "dialectically merged and mutually conditioned" [Morris:1994:76]. In the classroom there is ideally an engagement amongst selves, envisaged as a situation where there is a constant re-orientation between the listener and the speaker. This repositioning is essentially promoted by exposure to new elements introduced into the pupil's discourse in dialogue with the other. The effect is to encourage the change of conceptual horizons [Morris: 1994:76]. Simply, other interpretations of a world view are integrated or rejected, allowing the individual the opportunity to position the self in relation to others. This community engagement is an important development, for it does not enforce a position or interpretation, rather it presents the opportunity to construct the self in relationship to the other. It is as a result of the fluidity of contexts that speech is subject to semantic change [Morris:1994:78], consequently the dialogical encounter has a vital role to assume in the articulation of meaning. It presents the key to crossing the boundaries of fixed meanings.

*Yet another border to be crossed. There are times when this language is impenetrable. So much for a philosophy that calls for inclusiveness and accessibility.*

**M:**

There are two questions which arise from this argument. Firstly, when is a "common" understanding of a text reached?

Secondly, there is still a chance for the pupil to hide in the dialogue. How do you propose to draw the pupil into the interaction?

**PM:**

These are certainly concerns which are necessary to address in the classroom. We will postpone an acknowledgement of the second question to the point where we consider the methods that

might be adopted in the postmodern classroom. The first question is a concern that is deeply rooted in the modernist paradigm, and understandable when locked into a results-orientated examination system. But here, I would argue that there is a core of common elements to be found in differing contexts, and are uncovered in dialogue. They represent the structures which bind a community of readers, serving as the common reference base. These are the commonalities which are interpreted and responded to as the reality of everyday existence, but as teachers we recognize that they constitute what we must approach from a critical perspective. These communal experiences highlight the "public spaces" of which Maxime Greene speaks [in Pignatelli and Pflaum: 1991:16]. Because of the socially unifying nature of these references, it has been argued that private moments have threatened uniformity in understanding, and for this reason have been regarded as deviant and deficient. What needs to be recognised is that the voice of the pupil is grounded in these private moments of histories and memories. It reasons that to take away the history and the memory is to take away voice. For these reasons, the teacher needs to recognise that there is intersubjectivity (or understanding) in differing perspectives, and needs to exploit the tensions (produced by experience) that exist in differing interpretations. We find it necessary to explore the methods which may be utilised to accomplish this.

**M:**

So we may assume that interpretation is a communal process that is grounded in a multitude of contextual situations. But you still haven't fully addressed the question that concerns the process under which intersubjectivity is reached, and how the public spaces negotiated in the Literature classroom.

**PM:**

Perhaps we need to return to the concept of the "interpretive community" in which pupils share reading strategies, also referred to as "reading

*The classroom is a place where the pupil must become a community member [Greene in Pignatelli and Pflaum: 1992:17] and*

- \* Communicate
- \* Reflect
- \* Know
- \* Imagine

*The spaces of possibility are presented where the familiar merges with the unfamiliar and where new bonds of experiences and contexts can create new meanings.*

conventions" by Jonathan Culler [Suleiman and Crosman:1988:45]. The pupil group consists of a collection of codes and texts: individual and collective, written and unwritten. The power of the interpretive community is vested in its ability to shift reading conventions according to the demands of the group, the individual reader also forever being able to shift in relation to changing community demands. The demands are influenced in terms of the multiplicity of histories, cultures, ideologies -- references that are referred to during the reading of a text. Within this group then, there is an infinite number of possible interpretations.

**M:**

But you've forgotten about the text. Apparently it's lost currency in the "experience" of reading, in fact, it appears to have been lost altogether.

**PM:**

No, to the contrary, we've already suggested that reading is a process of interaction between the reader and the text and, therefore, the text has a particular communicative role to play. Instead of the reader being positioned as the passive receptor of what is written in the text, the reader becomes its co-author [Iser cited in Dias and Hayhoe:1988:20]. We stand in agreement with Culler's assessment, that it becomes possible to assume that the reader's experience is an interpretation and therefore, contains meaning [1988:40]. The work is forever being recomposed, but unlike face-to-face interaction there is no social feedback. The interaction is technically controlled by the codes that regulate and restructure the reading process. We can argue that from this perspective, the language conventions within the text produce the symmetry in communication, allowing for a common frame of reference, while the contexts of the individual allow for the differences in a reading. Personal meaning then is attained when the text is fitted into some larger context, and because it is possible to change, subtract and add accordingly -- the text is hereby possessed.

At this point let me pose my own question: How

*Nick Peim [1993:16] presents an inquiry of traditional categories of response in analyses of stories. Responses, along with many others, are dominated with reference to*

am I going to liberate the individual's experience?

Dewey [cited in Greene:1971:17] considers that in order for an individual to become a literate and fully contributing member of a community, she must be able to: communicate, reflect, know and imagine. These, too, are our pedagogical concerns, and underline the processes which enable pupils to reach a commonness of understanding. The first process we are now familiar with, that of the dialogue. The second is more cryptic -- we must become involved in breaking the unity of the mirror.

The fundamental basis of this second process is that we understand we can *only know after a manner*. The metaphorical concept of the text as a mirror of reality is a dangerous one, for despite surface appearances to the contrary, we argue that it does not present an accurate reflection of reality. For this reason, we should become distrustful as teachers when the reflection (our pupils) imitate us -- their silence must be of great concern to us. When seen as a reflection of reality, the text has the ability to distort and displace the reader's real self, and makes known the self from an essentially (one-dimensional) passive point of view. When we alter a manner of knowing, it changes the way in which one knows the self. This produces the counter reflection: situationally what is induced is a change in one's angle. This change is achieved through the methods of replication, distortion displacement, contradiction and estrangement.

- \* *theme*
- \* *character*
- \* *presence*
- \* *reader*
- \* *meaning*

*These categories all help in attaining some of meaning from the text. What we can't do is to declare these categories invalid, but along with Peim, we will subvert them in attaining an oppositional reading.*

*In accepting the constructed nature of the convention, a few factors become evident according to Peim. I have elected to illustrate only a few of the possibilities:*

1. *we can be "unorthodox" in our choice the themes we wish to explore, because we are not reliant upon the text to choose it for us. [Peim:1993:18]*
2. *In constructing the identity of characters, gaps in the form of absences appear in terms of the things we don't know. Through exploration of the representation we can come to terms with the ideas of identity.*
3. *The reader is as*

**Doxy:** *1 a lover or mistress 2 a prostitute [16th-c cant: orig. unkn]*

*"Orthodoxy is my doxy -- heterodoxy is another man's doxy." Bishop William Warburton*

**Dedoxification:** *the recognition of the human factor as a constructor of realities, undoing the power given to signs and discourses that in turn create, and are glorified as, a "godlike-given" reality.*

**M:**

The mirror has traditionally been used as a far more positive metaphor than the one you have presented here.

It is through the mirror that we can search for repeated patterns of personal histories, and in this way make sense of current experiences. Furthermore, as it is possible to recognise images or events within any other, we can conclude that experiences are in some way connected. The

deduction is that one learns through experience [Andresen in Boud, Cohen and Walker:1993:60].

**PM:**

What you have presented here is representative of a route to a holistic way of knowing, a route that has previously been left undisturbed. We agree with you that it is in the interplay of mirrors that knowledge may be challenged. In appealing to personal experience, we can undermine a particular world view (the unity of the mirror), and return to it in a manner that can never allow it to be reconstituted in its original form. This is a dynamic learning process.

The mirror as a metaphor presents us with multiple possibilities, but we must be cognisant of the danger that lies in accepting knowledge reflected by the mirror, as a truth that is unquestionable. Hence the argument that the reflection in the mirror can be shattered, as well as utilized.

This change of position represents that counter text (or knowing the otherness of experience). As teacher it is necessary to encourage the pupil to speak with different voices. But this is not just a matter of adjusting the manner and style of speech, rather it is the recognition of the different position that subjects assume in communicative situations. There is a risk factor here, for there is disturbance in dissolving one's frames of reference. (Remember the solidity of position that is provided by the mirror?) The opportunity to master discourse is what is at stake here, for one learns how to know, rather than emphasizing what one knows. A learning outcome upon which we place enormous currency.

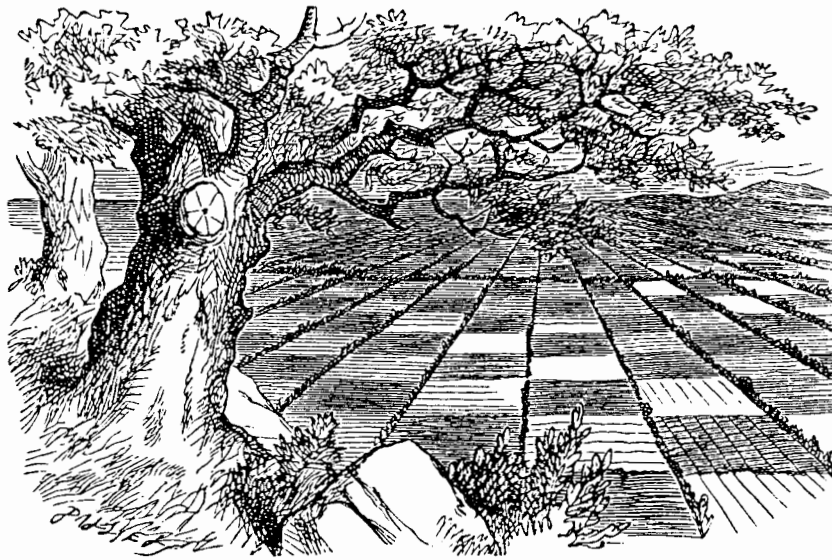
*much a presence as the author, and both are equally capable of instilling a coherence and stability in the text.*

4. *Meaning is rendered in the form of response that is grounded in experience, but the reality is that meaningful response has been **hijacked** (my words) by cultural practices in the reading process [Peim:1993:24].*

**M:**

Right, so provide an example of how this counter position is this realized in a reader's relationship with the text?

That is a question of intertextuality!





There is much debate concerning the nature of Intertextuality, but for the purposes of our classroom we will confine it to the following understanding: we accept that all texts are plural in their nature, as texts to be found between other texts, [Barthes:1977:60] and that for this reason they all contain echoes of a past. We may experience a sense of having seen or heard it all before.



The process of uncovering texts cannot be reasoned to be solely about text hunting, otherwise one becomes involved inevitably in trying to find a text of origin. We thereby risk returning to find an author, a myth we have already dispelled. This, however, does not deny that intertextuality is about literary borrowing.

An example?

An analysis of William Shakespeare's *Hamlet* reveals a multitude of texts pervading the play's construction. There are, of course, the many preceding versions of the story upon which Shakespeare has created his version, and indeed those which have followed. Within the story itself we encounter knowledge of power, regicide, madness, the Christian doctrines of forgiveness, revenge and punishment, the supernatural, filial duty, and the existence of the common man in 16th England.



What you have uncovered here are the features of an intertextual approach that Hutcheon [1988:127] considers so important. You've upset the unity of the text through recognising the historical and literary traces, acknowledging the textuality of knowledge, and disclosing its discursive form. Hutcheon also argues that only from part of a prior discourse will a text derive any meaning and significance [1988:126]. By this she relocates textual meaning within the history of discourse.



Don't forget about the texts that incorporate the reader's world!

An effect produced by the pluralizing nature of the text, and the collections of discourse found in the text, is the beginning of the teacher's liberation. No more bound to the 'canon' of elitist culture, it becomes possible to communicate with and utilise the other, represented by the term 'mass culture'.

So now, finally,  
I can take pride  
in my comic books.

And I can watch  
my films and read  
the fairy-tales.



Yes, because there is a disintegration of frames it is no longer possible to divide literary work into genres and hierarchies. To do so would be to define a centre and exile experiences. Hierarchies and genres create dangerous perceptions about the accumulation and valuation of knowledge. Dangerous, because often the knowledge basis is used to justify the power positions of social classes.

This does not mean that elite culture is dismissed, rather its edges become blurred, being appropriated and reformulated in terms of its experience from an independent reader. The valued introduction of different forms of literature, in effect, produces new knowledge in the classroom.



But it also represents the possibility for marginalized voices -- those of different nationality, class, sexual orientation, gender - to engage and impose the self in a multitude of centres.



It's about time.

In conclusion, what intertextuality provides us with in the classroom includes a way of encountering texts as discourses, operating as sites of power and control, by uncovering their instability, uncertainty and relativity [Belsey in Lodge:1988:407].



**M:**

What does all of this lead to?

**PM:**

It leads to a state of reflection, or a period which we shall call *the window period*.

This stage will not differ substantially with the state of critical reflectiveness that Maxime Greene speaks of in *Landscapes of Learning*. Her stage is characterized by a deepening awareness of one's own position in relation to others, which is made possible through an understanding of one's history in the human condition. It is essentially articulated as a (constructed) cultural tradition [Merleau-Ponty's words quoted in Greene:1978:105].

The act of reflection contributes to an

understanding of the world of the self in relation to the world of the Other. But as Greene points out, it is also a consciousness that *I am able* to move beyond the immediate [1978:103]. The possibilities presented by movement into other worlds, highlights the transformative power of reflectiveness. This potential is illustrated in the Literature classroom in the readings of texts. Engagements are framed in the reader's worlds of reference, but now the self-aware reader, is presented with the opportunity to impose the self in the text, moving through it and making a place in the text for the self. This process allows the reader to assume a place inside the text and look through onto an outside world. I'll elaborate upon this.

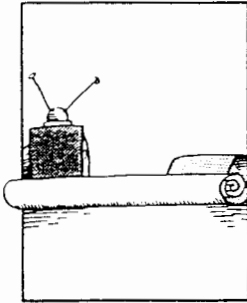
The dynamic encounter with the text allows the reader to modify her frames of reference and cultural codes, articulated as responses, as a result of the interaction. It is a process which parallels face-to-face interaction in its momentum of shifting positions. One becomes aware of operating on a number of planes: that of one's real world, the world of the text, and in the world of the other.

We stand in agreement with Bonnefoy in Bennett [1995:227] who suggests that our primary intention in the reading of the text is to interrupt its unity. An example of this is exploring the text's intertextuality. Instead of remaining as an independent, objective observer, we have entered into the text. Another mechanism is the deconstruction of images present in the text. These images induce entry into a "dream world" (Bonnefoy's words). Crucially, now, the action must be the "lifting [of] one's eyes from the text". In reflection, one moves beyond the images to the outside, recognising a world beyond (in the presence of the other). The recognition promotes the shifts of frames of time, context, perception and voice. The return to the text is now characterised by a view different from the reader's initial position.

Just as the window has the quality of transparency, it also has a quality of reflection.

*With the possibility being unsubtle and simplistic (We've just been insulted, Madam), we'll leave it up to **Madam and Eve** to provide a visual representation of how realities might be momentarily disturbed.*

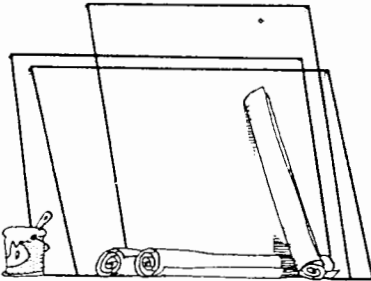
*It is, however, the wider context of the cartoon text that maintains the illusion of the characters as cartoon constructions.*



The initial perspective framed by what was known is now changed by what is learnt in the engagement with what is inside the frame. The borders which have framed ideas, perceptions and realities are clearly, no longer rigid.

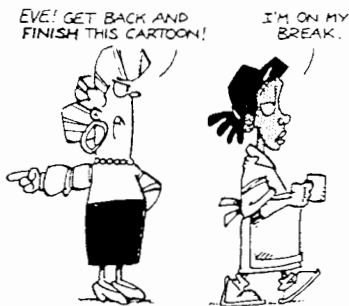
**M:**

What type of person is envisaged emanating from this form of pedagogy?



**PM:**

Ideally, the postmodern pupil is someone who can enter the world as a tolerant, courageous and articulate human being. A person clearly committed to action and social consciousness, identifying with her community, but not dependent upon it. She is attentive to life, being critical and reflective of it. But most importantly, she moves forward in living, forever true to herself. She is allowed to experience, because without experience we cannot find space.



**M:**

But to achieve this Maxime Greene argues, we need to move one step beyond into the realm of imagination.

**PM:**

The solidity of image dissolves in postmodern theory. When it is recognized that the image can never be original, images can only refer to other images in a play of imitation (pastiche). The text then constitutes endless mirrors of other texts. Barthes [cited by Bauschatz in Suleiman and Crosman:1980:286] states that the imagination is engaged in reading when "I am led to look up often, to listen to something else". We might interpret this as the process of creating new texts through a generating an infinite series of new associations from the initial text. Imagination then is perceived as re-creation and imitation [Kearney:1991:174]. Kearney further projects that a postmodern thrust is to connect ideas to a life-world of emotion and events, effectively imagination now refers to something or somebody other than itself.

*Postmodernism refers to these endless reproductions as -- Similitudes*

*Barthes might say that this is a text within a text within a text.*

*Clearly, in this case the writers are not above using techniques of deconstruction in their own texts, indicating a reality beyond the text.*

*Kearney [1991:177-178] "relocates the crisis of creativity in the context of a world which is refigured or prefigured by our imaginings."*

# The Approach to the Lesson

*Another way of seeing it*

**Community of Voices** (commonality / difference)

**Landscapes** (crossing worlds)

*Possibility of transgression through*

**Text** (secondary displaced entity)

Dewey / Greene

**Dialogue**

A story / uniquely interpreted  
 Dialogic nature of language  
 Experience (discovering borders)  
 Reflexivity  
 Position of the teacher - a voice  
 explorer/guide  
 voyeur

**Intertextuality**

**Imagination**

Open-ended possibilities  
 The Other  
 The *unaccustomed lenses*  
 The extension

**Knowing** (Mirror)

Cannot accept as given  
 Know after a manner  
 Construction legitimated  
 to/by experience: makes  
 things look the way they are  
 Shattering the mirror  
 Unsettled period / tension  
 Positioning

Transformative  
 Borders collapse

**Reflection** (Window Period)

Moving through and beyond  
 Comparison of the self as amongst others  
 Informed attendance

## Chapter Four

Before we start, reflect upon the three quotations:

*Only wholeness leads to clarity  
And truth lies in the abyss*  
Friedrich von Schiller

*Repetition is the only form of permanence  
that nature can achieve*  
George Santayana

*Reality is not perceived, it is conceived*  
Werner von Braun

### Introduction

In South Africa, many oppositional teaching methodologies have received their design in and from very specific socio-political movements. While each theory was intended to answer particular needs within a very specific context, many were incapable of adapting to the fluidity of political change, and could not be identified as an effective educational response in a new environment. Such limitation is illustrated in the short life-span of the Peoples' Education movement of the 1980s. The very same charge might be levelled at the prospects of a postmodern methodology. Does postmodernism really represent a powerful alternative as a long-term educational challenge? We know:

- its innovation lies in its fluid accommodation of other paradigms
- the centre is no longer an immovable given, and great value is placed upon the experience of that-which has previously constituted the margins
- the focus has moved to the active disruption of textual authority

- the reader assumes a new position
- there is a multitude of techniques garnered from other methodologies

To adopt a critical stance certainly does not represent any new principle in educational theory, but one of the differences offered by postmodernism is the sceptical attitude inherent in understanding of the constructed nature of our world. A sceptic is often regarded with derision in our modern world, probably as a result of the individual's unwillingness to accept things as given. The *Oxford English Dictionary*'s definition of a sceptic (*n*) is one who is inclined to doubt all accepted opinions; a cynic, and sceptical (*adj.*) is defined in philosophical terms as a person who denies the possibility of knowledge, and this description certainly meets the requirements for defining a postmodern pupil. The sceptic, as a voice of experience, is essentially unwilling to accept things as they present themselves or are represented. The question might well be posed about what would be achieved in production of a sceptical pupil, but the question that might be more pertinent is what damage will be incurred if a sceptical pupil is not produced.

The postmodern pupil is the dissenting voice. Our concern in the classroom is the creation and articulation of that voice, and the unmasking of language as a site of power. In the process, made visible, is the character of language as a medium of ideas and opinions. A further intention is to uncover the potential mechanisms of closure that presently flourish in the South African classrooms.

The material used to facilitate this discussion is taken from the 1997 WCED First Language Literature syllabus for Standard 10 and from material that has found its way into various syllabuses of the past. Extracts from poems, plays, novels and films will serve as illustrations. While I have elected to highlight particular aspects and spaces that will disrupt texts, it is in no way conceived as a complete analysis, but rather illustrative of the ways in which the postmodern moment may be accessed. Each chapter subdivision has been devoted to a postmodern issue, but inevitably (and



quite rightly) there are overlaps. As we come to terms with the complex nature of textuality, a multitude of mechanisms with which to explore texts is made apparent. The intention in this section is to provide a few ideas for accessing the text and transforming the position of the reader.

## Frameworks

“Brutus and Caesar: what should be more in that  
 “Caesar”? Why should that name be sounded more than  
 in yours?  
 Write them together, yours is as fair a name;  
 Sound them, it doth become the mouth as well;  
 Weigh them, it is as heavy; conjure with ‘em”

**Julius Caesar** [I:ii:140-144]

Cassius’s (and Shakespeare’s) recognition that the sign is a common element in identity construction, prompts the further question, “Upon what meat doth this our Caesar feed, that he is grown so great?” [I:ii:147-8]. As readers, we are required to *sound*, *write*, *weigh*, and *conjure* with, the identity of words we are given, so we too, can establish the meat upon which we feed.

## A Postmodern Classroom Lesson

Within Cassius’s words lie the components of a postmodern literature methodology, and in order to implement it, we must return to the classroom. I believe that the postmodern lesson is about **surprise**, an element which has been lost in the past. I think much of the surprise comes from realizing how our pictures of reality are formed. The four processes which make up this postmodern approach are **not** to be read sequentially and thus the space is there for the teacher to create any permutation possible. Nor does it have to form a coherent unit of all four processes. Rather each process should be used for what it offers the student as an effective means of disrupt-

tion. I think it would be difficult (although not impossible) to teach a lesson which is entirely filled with postmodern moments, for I think one could lose the critical moments of surprise. And certainly there are texts which are better able to expose the postmodern moment than others. The processes have been deliberately set within frameworks, but we shall position ourselves in opposition to them, and thus they are never given the power to stagnate. The physical object of literature itself constitutes a framework, and from the very beginning of the lesson the student must become aware of how and where the text places the reader. An awareness of the context allows the pupil-reader the chance to oppose the expectations and understandings that are demanded by those forces which reside external to the reader-text-author relationship.

Deconstructing the text is not a new concept, and its value to us is that it significantly makes visible how factors such as cultural borders, ideology and genre determine the reader's position and response. In order to expose the workings of such structures we can delve into F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*. [1990:25]:

I saw that I was not alone – fifty feet away a figure had emerged from the shadow of my neighbor's mansion and was standing with his hands in his pockets regarding the silver pepper of the stars... -- he stretched out his arms toward the dark water in a curious way, and, as far as I was from him, I could have sworn he was trembling

When asked to construct an identity for the *figure* in the extract from the novel, responses from the pupils are likely to be that he is a loner, an object of mystery, of some social standing and so on. The pupils traditionally respond according to these conventional categories because this is what is they feel is expected of them, but there is much information that is left unsaid. To answer the pupil must appeal to the intertext for help to fill the gaps. When asked to pose questions, such as: how old the figure might be; whether he is married; what his profession is; his ethnic background;

his economic standing (the list is almost endless), and speculate upon the possible answers, the pupil makes contact with the visual and linguistic cues present and absent in the text. But this is also the point at which the pupil risks disagreement, and provides a source of tension when the postmodern exercise encounters the text from an oppositional standpoint. The actual reading of the text discloses answers to the questions and reveals them as either compatible or incongruous with the reader's expectations. Dialogue is triggered with the author when disparities, in particular, are encountered, or expectations are not met. An encounter of this nature with the actual text now allows the reader to become dynamic entity in the transaction process. Responses to the questions posed, are highly likely to be revealed as controlled by dominant cultural and ideological ideas, that are also apparent in comparative texts. In recognizing that such borders are constructed, the reader is better able to determine that textual meaning is dependent upon forces that reside both internally and externally of it and thus be aware that no reading can be considered innocent. The question that lies before us in the classroom is how to liberate the pupils' voices from the forces that constrict them. It is in the non-conventional reading process that such investigation has its outcome.

## 1. **Writing**

( or *Taking up the pencil*)

This process is about writing the text differently or "making it strange". It might be about writing out a poem or extract in one's own handwriting, writing in the sand, about changing the *textures* of the letters as they appear in the book, writing words, phrases, sentences in colours according to mood, and so on. The procedure might only concern only a portion of that which has to be dealt with, for example, a particular idea or opinion. Imagine a lesson that introduces itself by referring to a pane of glass in classroom upon which has been written:

*Let me in! ... I've been a wait for twenty years  
... I'm come home: I'd lost my way on the moor!*

This extract from *Wuthering Heights* [1983:54] lends itself to the idea of the postmodern window and a discussion about who and what is on the inside and outside. The process is designed to upset the nature of the chosen textual metaphor, in this case the window.

In this framework, we are able to *weigh up* and *conjure with* the representations of others. If we regard each representation as a perception of an individual voice, we are permitted to subject the scene to differing interpretations. This suspicious relationship is provoked through deconstructing the voice present in the scene above. The pupils would unsettle the identity by posing questions such as:

Is it Brontë's voice that is present?  
Or is it Lockwood's?  
Or is it someone else's?  
How is this known?

The same style of question is raised about how the identity of the voice present in another representation -- a song from Kate Bush, called *Wuthering Heights*.

"Heathcliff, it's me. It's Cathy.  
I've come him, man. So cold  
Let me into your window."

How faithful is this narrator to Brontë's text?  
How faithful is this representation to Cathy's identity in the novel?  
Speculate upon the identity of the narrator of this text.

Through destabilising these two forms of literature a means is provided to question the narrator-author as a unquestionable source of information, and metaphorical references being regarded as beyond question.

All the extracts present different dimensions of reality (worlds) and within their metaphors the possibility of crossing boundaries. After all, it's what Cathy wants to do – to inhabit another world to which she was frustrated in access. The class having uncovered the instability in the authorial voice, can now expose the instability of representations. Kate Bush has been faithful to Brontë's text by using the window as a metaphor of barrier, but there are many other possible metaphors that might have been used. The task in the classroom would involve substituting another form of barrier (for example, a door or a computer connection) upon the action and reinterpreting the scene in a dramatic form using the alternative metaphor. The recontextualization prompts the pupil's awareness of the possibility that a text has a multitude of different layers and that references are deliberately chosen.

Another way to integrate the self into writing, and articulate a response, is through the use of colour. For this example I have chosen the poem *An Abandoned Bundle* by Oswald Mbuyiseni Mtshali, a poem possessing images that are highly visual and emotive.

### **An Abandoned Bundle**

The morning mist  
and chimney smoke  
of White City Jabavu  
flowed thick yellow  
as pus oozing  
from a gigantic sore.

It smothered our little houses  
like a fish caught in a net.

Scavenging dogs  
 draped in red bandanas of blood  
 fought fiercely  
 for a squirming bundle.

I threw a brick;  
 they bared fangs  
 flicked velvet tongues of scarlet  
 and scurried away,  
 leaving a mutilated corpse –  
 an infant dumped on a rubbish heap –  
 ‘Oh! Baby in the Manger  
 sleep well  
 on human dung.’

Its mother  
 had melted into the rays of the rising sun,  
 her face glittering with innocence  
 her heart as pure as untrampled dew

The exercise is conceived in the following manner: while the poem is being read, the pupil draws patterns of different colors to articulate her response to aspects and issues in the poem. Each colour would represent a different emotion experienced while listening to the reading. The lesson might then be turned to discussing the differences in individual responses and what has prompted them. We need now to step beyond the initial exercise by translating the emotions expressed in color into **sound**. This could be accomplished by a group *weighing up* the collective experience of emotions and then translating them into different expressions when reading the poem. The engagement with the text becomes a personal experience rather than one which is dictated by teacher or author. After all, the postmodern classroom is about having one's voice heard *and* being able to articulate one's understanding in a form free of authorial intervention. At the heart of the exercise is the legitimization of different ways of responding to literature.

The mechanism behind this form of writing-reading involves creating a space in which to place the self. The *personal intertext* is a powerful interpretative element in

the reading process, but one that is not reserved for the writing component only. The implication is that the reader has the means to create any number of worlds (or landscapes, in Maxime Greene's terms) that are meaningful, but that are potentially different from that envisaged by the author. The habitation of a different world essentially brings with it a changed view and understanding. Conventional theory would have us believe that we *must* inhabit the world of the author. We argue that this is only partly true.

The personal text is a place that is intensely private, where expression may be made of symbols, pictures, and patterns, and over which, barring violent appropriation, the teacher and author have no control. But this also happens to be the most violated place in the classroom. The eternal question, "What's the right answer?" after a number of alternatives may have been forwarded, is indicative of the pupil experiencing disruption to the personal text, and being troubled when forced into accommodating answers that are at odds with individual experience. There is seemingly a much larger text at work – that of the examination. The task that lies before the teacher is to instill confidence in the legitimacy of the personal text, but the question is also at what expense to the author this accomplished. Every text is imbued with a certain amount of "missing information" and it is the personal intertext that fills the gaps. This creates the unique understanding for the individual reader. We need, however, to problematize this *unique understanding*. It is a tool composed of two elements: firstly, societal construction (the outside) which finds itself amended by the second element, personal experience (the inside). As we are already convinced about the constructed nature of reality, all realities must be regarded with suspicion, for behind the construction is the ideological and cultural dimension.

The search is now for a space that will allow for the integration of the reader's reality. The self essentially becomes an everpresent voice within and beyond the literature, and is no longer subject to the text. There are a few categories where this

intervention is made possible - **place** and **time** are two such possible points of disruption, primarily because of their constructed nature. The voice now constitutes the oppositional tool, and here is resolved the rearticulated reader-author-text relationship.

### **The Time is out of joint**

Through disturbing the properties of time and place, it is possible to come to terms with the identity of the text. For this example, extracts have been drawn from Richard Rive's *Buckingham Palace: District Six* [1996:126-7] and the methodology is an adaptation from Nick Peim [1993:90].

Richard Rive's voice, instilled with anger and frustration about the forced removals from District Six, is encompassed within the memories that return to him as an author.

Many were forced to move to small matchbox  
houses in large matchbox townships...

District Six had a soul...

And the voice whispered, "They have done  
this terrible thing to you, to you all..."

So I went to see.

These extracts stand by themselves, it seems, as an invitation to disturb the memories that lie embedded in the text. It is a note of permission to enter into the world that Rive inhabits along with many others. The disruption needs to be one that questions the text as autobiographic and/or historical. The quest in the classroom now becomes the disruption of voice through time and space in the text. The pupil must listen to and initiate dialogue with the voices of others. The voices of others (Adam Small, Achmat Dangor, Cosmo Pieterse, are among them) automatically es-



establish memories in *another* street, *another* place, *another* time, and in *another* lived ideological and cultural experience.

### **District Six (Cape Town)**

....  
As I enter this old city  
The mild films of grey sleep as they ache to dawn and spring,

And spring over some cobbles, macadam...  
And even earth, with labouring breath, I greet  
Its pain, my heart open and breaking  
For the death that germinates in these streets,  
And the buried birth waking:

...  
Cosmo Pieterse

### **Paradise**

...  
Here, around me  
they destroy my city.  
District Six,  
they dismantle you  
-stone by stone -  
rock of my history...

Achmat Dangor

“Now, years later, the  
bulldozers have gone, but walk  
through (what used to be) the  
District, and the resentment is felt,  
and hangs over the place like a  
shroud, covering and holding it,  
like a possession.”

Adam Small

**In Chapel Street**

...  
 In Chapel Street there are no lies  
 Of religion can touch  
 The Christ hangs high over the city, eyes  
 And hands perpetually still

C.J. Driver

These are that voices that the pupil must uncover to broaden the landscape of Rive's text. This may be accomplished through *analysis* of the *discourse*. The application of analysis on these extracts hardly does justice to the discipline, but the brief interrogation does provide an insight into the nature of the complexity of the text issues. Prior to reading, questions such as the following are pertinent to ask: Why do you think these texts were written? For whom were they written? Are they representative of a collective experience? Then it is necessary to supplement with questions that will allow judgements about the texts' topic, in this case the memory ("was") of District Six. The extracts reveal themselves as the representation of a past which is hardly romantic, but yet infinitely preferable to the present. The identity of *The District* must also be problematized, especially when considering that there were a number of districts, each with their own stories to tell. There is a sense that the *I* and *you* is meant exclusively, the author having some privilege to a past, from which *they* has been excluded. It is, therefore, at this interface that the validity of the romantic idyllic representation may be questioned.

Powerful tools lie hidden deep within experience, and each prompts a different relationship with a textual issue. Now we are in a position to move beyond the "original" reality, and to assume different vantage points. For this reason, no voice can be marginalized, and we come to realize that a sense of time and place is always shaped by memories. There is much still to be asked about male and female socio-

economic roles; gender relationships; and the author's anger, issues which are omitted from these extracts.

The extracts above were chosen with a dual purpose in mind – to accommodate understandings and, as readers and travellers, the chance is made available to impose ourselves into a different world, but such immigration comes with a price, and it is potentially at the expense of the author.

*Chinese Proverb: I hear and I forget, I see and I remember, I do and I understand*

*Western equivalent: You learn from experience.*

### **Disrupting the author's meaning**

We have already argued that disruption is a possibility, but the criticism is whether this is desirable, and if it is, how far might the disruption extend? Let's consider an example of extreme intervention and problematize its intention. Here, Burroughs [Hassan:1992:11] suggests "the method is simple". You might want to take up a pair of scissors and perform the procedure illustrated below. Here's the poem:

✂-----

#### **Sonnet 29**

When in disgrace with fortune and men's eyes  
 I all alone bewep my outcast state,  
 And trouble deaf heaven with my bootless cries,  
 And look upon myself, and curse my fate,  
 Wishing me to like to one more rich in hope,  
 Featur'd like him, like him with friends possess'd,  
 Desiring this man's art, and that man's scope,  
 With what I most enjoy contented least;  
 Yet in these thoughts myself almost despising,  
 Haply I think on thee, -- and then my state,  
 Like to the lark at break of day arising

From sullen earth, sings hymns at heaven's gate;  
 For they sweet love remembered such wealth brings  
 For then I scorn to change my state with kings.

William Shakespeare

✂-----

The method illustrated below might be called “cut-up” and is based on the principles of the Dadaist collage. The Dadaist deconstructionist promotes absolute disturbances by cutting up sentences, lines and words of text. The next step is to piece together the poem in a new arrangement of “witty” combinations, but this has chaotic dimensions and questionable value in the classroom. The problem is precisely contained within the multiplicity of meanings that can be created, as one gains little, if anything, from what the author has written. I think the resultant chaos is partly intended to formulate an understanding that the world, as understood by the author/poet, is not static, but rather is shown to be indeterminate. And made obvious is the mechanism of the reader as an origin of meaning. So perhaps this form of absolute destruction contributes little beyond being an example of postmodern principles in action.

*Sonnet 29* provides a form of answer to the questions we have posed above. We start this process off by questioning the response that is expected of such a work. Modern classroom paradigms in South Africa seem to dictate that a western middle class stance be assumed, and this of course, influences the parameters within which the pupil may work. It is argued that there has to be a certain meaning that extends across interpretation possibilities. It would certainly be ludicrous to suggest that *Sonnet 29* is about earthmoving equipment. The argument that this poem is about anything else but love is limited, but the **nature** of the love that is represented is the space in which we can work. I think given the opportunity any class is inclined to

argue that *Sonnet 29* is about “true love” and here is where the teacher needs to assume the role of the postmodern channel and transport the pupil to another point to view a different reality. What could be utilized is the element of surprise. The teacher deliberately sets out to problematize the dominant assumptions behind this term by redefining the identity “I” and the “you”. The rhetoric of true love is traditionally defined in western terms as heterosexual sexual relations. The question the teacher should pose the class is how this discourse changes when the sexual identity of the characters is altered. How would the concept of true love change if the lovers were of the same sex? Upset is the balanced rational concept that love poetry understands only one love – that of the heterosexual – unless clinically stated otherwise. It is a response which is aimed at disturbing the pupil’s relationship with what is considered to be the norm, raising the discomfort levels and provoking a dialogue with the assumptions and ideas expressed in the text. Pushed to the limits are the boundaries which we are inclined to perceive to be the norm – liberation comes from suggesting otherwise.

A similar type of disruption is carried out on the film, *Schindler’s List*. Again, the teacher might initiate the disruption through changing the viewing sequences, and then pose the following questions: How would the position of the viewer be changed, and the meaning of the director disrupted, if the first scene of an anonymous family lighting candles were placed elsewhere in the film? This form of splicing upsets the viewing process, and generates a re-evaluation of initial understandings and responses.

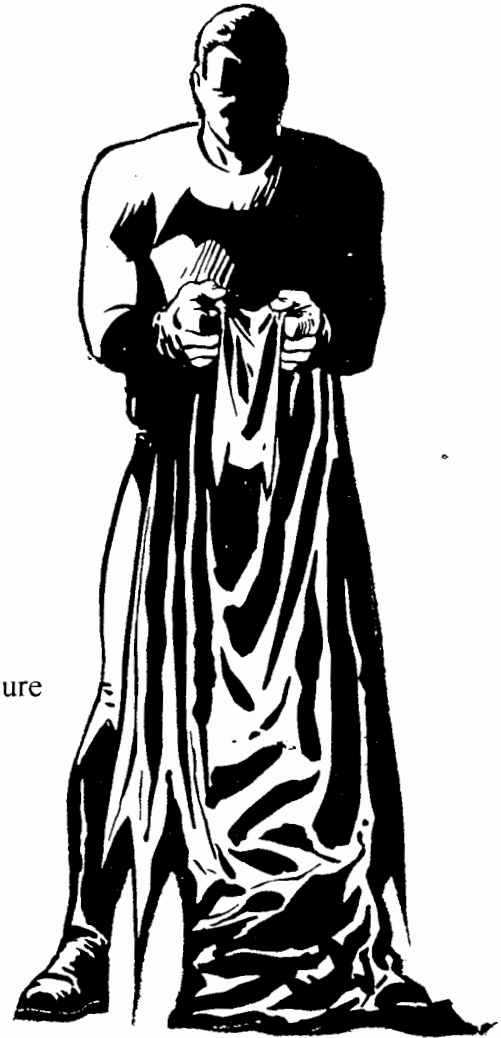
## 2. **Sound**

*(Sounding out echoes from other worlds)*

Texts echo the sounds and structures of other texts, but they are not always visible in source of reference. We have argued that no literary text may be considered innocent as they are essentially imitations of one another. Parallel developments are apparent

in two literary genres completely divorced by time and place: *Romeo and Juliet* and *West Side Story*. The traditional literary categories of character, plot and time of *Romeo and Juliet* are merely relocated in another setting and time period of New York in the 1950s. Thus the story of the Capulets and the Montagues are seen to reside in the Jets and the Sharks. Coming to terms with these two texts involves deconstructing them in the categories of time, place and context. It can be much fun looking for how each text has represented issues such as generation gaps, gang warfare, masculinity and femininity, love and so on. We may pose the questions about how faithful one needs to be to the original texts, remembering that literature reveals worlds and it is possible in such comparisons to parallel particular issues. For example, the pupils might consider their own, the author's and the directors' portrayal of women rebelling against constrictive systems. How her positions might be determined in and by the language of endearments, is one approach. The investigation would analyse how the identity of such terms are carried across the ages. All images in this sense are portrayed by different sounds (words) and the pupil needs *to hear* and *play with* the references. This exercise might be taken a step further by looking at the similar representations revealed in seemingly disparate texts, and this might equally well include texts such as advertisements, comics, rock stars and so on.

Echoes enable one to merge distinct forms of Literature. A comparison between *Hamlet* and *Batman* expose each other as legitimate forms of Literature, and promote the idea that the visual sign and the language sign are capable of triggering similar meanings. Essentially they are merely differing forms of each other. In the example below, it is necessary to establish how the language sign has been translated into the comic genre. Three such examples are: the dark and corrupt imagery of Hamlet's words and the blackness in which Batman has been portrayed in the comic genre; the isolation and intensity with which each man experiences his dilemma, as depicted in metaphorical language and how this is translated in the body language of Batman.



*Flourish. All but Hamlet off.*

O, that this too too sullied flesh would melt  
 Thaw and resolve itself into a dew!  
 Or that the Everlasting had not fixed  
 His canon 'gainst self-slaughter! O God, God  
 How weary, stale, flat, unprofitable  
 Seems to me all the uses of this world!  
 Fie on't! ah fie! 'tis and unweeded garden  
 That grows to seed, things rank and gross in nature  
 ... O most wicked speed... to post  
 With such dexterity to incestuous sheets!  
 It is not, nor it cannot come to good...  
 But break, my heart, for I must hold my tongue.

*Enter Horatio, Marcellus and Bernardo*

Act 1 scene ii lines 129-158

The class might consider how Hamlet's motivations and logic would change (if at all) if he came from another culture and ethnic background. The aim here is to compare the similarities and differences in chosen representations and to come to terms with present (and absent) ideological references that portray a man experiencing deep emotional crisis.

A similar form of disrupting the sound occurs in recontextualizing a text. Here the possibilities remain endless. One such example is to stage *Hamlet* in 1990s South Africa, in a world filled with political secrets and appearances before the TRC. Such active manipulation of the text and transposing of characters is often regarded by the purists as being disloyal to the original text, but we believe it is legitimate to generate gaps for moments of disturbance. The gaps are the places in which we can

articulate voices of different sounds and times, for there are significant parallels to be drawn.

Sounding is also about hearing other versions. We are all too aware of the editing process that occurs in school texts, but this again lends itself to highlighting the instability of the textual reading and writing processes. What is the subtext that lies behind a choice of “O, that this too too *sullied* flesh would melt...” or “O, that this too too *solid* flesh would melt...”? And as dissension exists in the editors’ minds, could the pupil not suggest a legitimate alternative herself? Also under investigation is the interpretation of a character who himself is undergoing a crisis.

In Hamlet’s Act V scene one lines 1 - 49, we enter the world of the margins and a space that is occupied by *The Other World*. It is a scene of grave-diggers, a scene separated from the goings-on in the royal court. It is, however, also a scene that is often omitted from many texts because it is deemed not to contribute a substantial amount to the central action of Hamlet’s story. But it is precisely for this reason that it is important to us, for it shows worlds of different opinions, contexts and moral comments. An interesting exercise would be to compare the reasons why different textual series either include or exclude this scene. After all, as we have said before, writing and editing does not occur in a social vacuum. Conventionally, the grave-diggers’ voices are relegated to the margins, but it would certainly be of great value to bring these voices into the center as critical comment, the very same function which they perform in this particular scene. Imagine them as voyeurs within the court when Hamlet questions his mother’s virtues in a savage attack upon her. The example comes from Act 3 scene iv lines 63-76:

	This was your husband – Look you now what follows.	
	Here is your husband, like a mildewed ear,	<b>This is a reference</b>
	Blasting his wholesome brother. Have you eyes?	<b>to Genesis 41:5-7</b>
<b>This is harsh</b>	...	
<b>isn't it?</b>	You cannot call it love, for at your age	<b>Why is Hamlet so</b>
	The hey-day in the blood is tame, it's humble	<b>jealous of his mother's</b>



<b>Has his Mother been "unfaithful" before?</b>	And waits upon the judgement. And what judgement Would step from this to this? Sense sure you have Else could you not have motion, but sure that sense Is apoplexed, for madness would not err, Nor sense to ecstasy was ne'er so thrall'd, But it reserved some quantity of choice To serve in such difference.	<b>love?          Why must this woman be forced into becoming a grieving widow?</b>
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Within this subtext lies great potential for the greatest marginalized group of all - the audience. The audience's position is usually relegated to the margins as a passive consumer, denying involvement in conversation and action. But is this a desirable position for them to be in? The answer may lie in the following: if one accepts that borders are permeable then space can be created for the reader or spectator to assume involvement. The audience might propose different ending possibilities merely by imposing comment upon the action of the play and questioning character motivations. The actors must relinquish their control over the character and allow themselves to be guided by the marginal viewpoint.

It is also for this reason that we remain critical of those voices, trapped within expectations, who adopt reverent tones when reading poems such as the Shakespearean sonnets and others which form the canon of which our schools are so fond. Can it really be so disloyal to the canon to adopt the vernacular and to experiment with accents? A simple change of voice allows the listener and reader to step away creating a momentary disturbance in the traditional position and expectations of the genre. How much more will be lent to the story of *Buckingham Palace* when read in an authentic voice? How much does my white middle class South African accent detract from Richard Rive's characters' voices? Is it possible for me to add anything?

Sounding is also about moving out of the classroom and reading the poem or the novel elsewhere – in strange places and in strange ways. It's about breaking down

the classroom walls and disturbing the traditional dynamics of teacher-pupil relationship. It's about the teacher giving up the text to the environment.

### 3. **Weighing Up**

*(or weighing in...)*

Weighing up / in is a more reflective process, where the possibilities of differing interpretations might be explored. The two previous tools of reading and sounding actively managed the disruption the text. What is required of the pupil in this stage is to be able to accommodate different forms of interpretation, beyond the sacred nature of the sign and author's voice. The aim of these exercises is to expose the marginalized voices -- those voices that are present in their silence. Significantly, it is their silent position that constitutes the critical or oppositional perspective from which we must work. The example is again from Mtshali's *An Abandoned Bundle*:

The *White City Jabavu* is portrayed as a cruel heartless trap; the baby becomes a perverted image; the mother is seemingly a victim of circumstance. Such an understanding requires deconstruction, for example whose text is exposed here? For this reason we might pose the following questions:

What are you, the narrator, doing there?  
 Where is the baby's father?  
 Why did you choose to portray such a violent scene?  
 What did you do with the baby's body?

The disruption of interpretation extends to the poem, *Jerusalem* from William Blake. The suggestion is that it is possible and desirable to question the concreteness of the assumptions that are inherent in words. As an example, I have elected to highlight how Blake constructs and identifies his "heaven".

And did those feet in ancient time  
 Walk upon England's mountains green?

And was the holy Lamb of God  
On England's pleasant pastures seen?

And did the Countenance Divine  
Shine forth upon the clouded hills?  
And was Jerusalem builded here  
Among these dark Satanic Mills?

Bring me my bow of burning gold!  
Bring me my arrows of desire!  
Bring me my spear! O clouds, unfold!  
Bring me my chariot of fire!

I will not cease from mental fight,  
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand.  
Till we have built Jerusalem  
In England's green and pleasant land.

England is identified in concrete images of *pleasant pastures*, *mountains green* and *clouded hills*. Yet there is no such concreteness in the term, Jerusalem. Is this poet's manner of telling us that it is a world as yet unknown? How can it be that this world has a meaning to Blake? Or is he trying to tell us that it is an imaginary place? Why is it that Blake has no language for a place or state of which he so seemingly believes exists?

These are ideas which require investigation, but also the instability of the ideas are reinforced through a cross-textual investigation. In the process of searching for a copy of the poem, I came across three different titles: *And did those feet, Jerusalem*, and *The New Jerusalem*. Each title poses for the pupil an alternative focus in interpretation, and hereby also a new possibility of reality of which Blake is convinced.

From *Schindler's List* comes the following example of *weighing in*. As a reader the viewer must negotiate textual signboards. The first scene of an unidentified and limitedly contextualized family gathering again forms the backdrop for questions. Critical questions are posed of visual metaphors, for example:

What are the names of the family? What further personal information do you think they might be able to divulge?

Do they depict a real people? Or are they a fictional creation?

What in the scene will allow for historical placement?

Whose voice is present at the beginning of the scene?

But a question that lends itself to exploration in the processes of *writing* and *conjuring* is: **What is going on outside the window?**

Weighing up/in allows the pupil to establish a reflective position with the text through accessing the personal intertext. But in order to do so the community of postmodern pupils needs to establish criteria of judgment in regard to Literature, for unless created, the process of interpretation and meaning takes on an *anything goes* identity. This is an impractical reality in the classroom as we have already established – there is simply a world constructed that is beyond personal reality and one that exerts a powerful dimension in the individual's interaction in the world.

#### 4. **Conjuring**

Conjuring is the factor in the methodology and the classroom that is common to all the processes, and particularly to the processes of writing. Thus in this sense we have come full circle in a different methodological approach. The pupil must experience the magic of self-exploration in the world of the literary text, and this can only be done when the borders are exposed and crossed. From the poem *To whom it may concern* by Siphso Sepamla comes the possibility of testing positions.

Bearer  
Bare of everything but particulars  
Is a Bantu  
The language of a people in southern Africa  
He seeks to proceed from here to there  
Please pass him on  
Subject to these particulars

He lives  
 Subject to these provisions  
 Of the Urban Natives Act of 1925  
 Amended often  
 To update it to his sophistication  
 Subject to the provisions of said Act  
 Free only from the anxiety of conscription  
 In terms of the Abolition of Passes Act  
 A latter-day ammendment  
 In keeping with moon-age naming  
 Bearer's designation is Reference number 417181  
 And (he) acquires a niche in the said area  
 As a temporary sojourner  
 To which he must betake himself  
 At all times  
 When his services are dispensed with for the day  
 As a permanent measure of law and order  
 Please note  
 The remains of R/N 417181  
 Will be laid to rest in peace  
 On a plot  
 Set aside for Methodist Xhosas  
 A measure also adopted  
 At the express request of the Bantu  
 In anticipation of any faction fight  
 Before the day of judgement

Letters between pupils and teacher are exchanged in a role-play situation, and journals are kept in which reactions and feelings are noted. The exercise would be extended over a significant period, the teacher assuming the role of the bureaucrat, frustrating the inquiry of the family member, a role assumed by the pupil. At the heart of this engagement is the entrance into our unexplored *real* personal feelings that work alongside the poem -- a world which we have seldom been permitted to unleash. And an alternative dialogic relationship is sustained in the classroom

It is in this world that we are allowed to disrupt the construction of literary conventions. *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald contributes to expressing the fluid nature of the intertext, and how it influences the construction of identity. Gatsby's

identity undergoes radical reconstruction, and is formulated against the text of the Great American Dream. (Gatsby is one of the world's great intertextual characters.) In the realm of conjuring, we may ask the question: What would the ramifications have been if Fitzgerald had elected to represent Gatsby as a socialist? A classroom exercise could involve the "Gutter Press" of today undoing the character of this self-made man? Would Gatsby still be the same person if he had been known by the name, James Gatz? These questions are all directed at upsetting the identity of the characters and are suggestive of the political processes behind the writing and reading processes.

Clearly, this process is limited only by constrictions placed on imagination.

## **Conclusion**

(or the teacher is the postmodern guide)

In effect, it is only the personal constraints of the teacher and the pupils that will deny the postmodern process from occurring within the classroom. And it is still possible to make positive connections with material that exists in the syllabus. It has not been my intention to direct the teacher in an absolute manner. She, herself, must enter a state of awareness and allow her pupils to guide her, as she will guide the pupils. Such a methodology instills in the pupil the confidence to enter the text, to move inside and away from the text.

## The Prologue

*“What is at stake is not the extension of study into ‘new’ areas, but a reconstruction in which ‘old’ heartlands of the cultural canons are “made strange”, exposed to the personality and contradiction that the narrative of national / ethnic / racial identity may displace or repress but cannot be abolished.”*

Selden and Widdowson [1993:196]

16 February 1997

Dear W.

*“I have been a sojourner in a foreign land”* [The Bible : Exodus 2.22]

I’m sorry that I haven’t written to you for so long. For the past year, I’ve been writing the dissertation that you’ve got in your hands. And you’re getting this letter only because I have finally decided to put everything aside and actually write it. This great feat is happening in the middle of the night after a 14 hour school day of teaching (one free period to my name and the secretaries organized a meeting for that period), study, hockey practice, refereeing hockey matches, attending a hockey meeting, giving extra lessons, organizing other people’s guest speakers, setting examinations (Oh man, I’ve still got to mark them), English Olympiads, catching up on marking essays (I still haven’t caught up!) and dealing with hysterical hostel pupils. And to cap it off, I missed supper *again* this evening. I wonder if Professor Bengu really has any idea what chaos his department’s visions for the future have caused, even in these early stages. Come to think of it, I wonder whether my Principal has any idea about this. No, I think I’ll just be told it’s all part of the job, and if I don’t want to do it,

there are plenty of others who will. So please excuse the self indulgent tone with which I write this letter. We can all become so incredibly selfish in the world of our studies, and it's often at the expense of other aspects of our lives

My dissertation is finally drawing to a close, and I think the time is here to reflect upon what has been said and accomplished. It's been the one bright spot in my life for a long time, and it's been responsible a big way for me not becoming entirely disillusioned with the changes we've all been undergoing in education. You must understand that this project is first and foremost about the pupils and their relationship with others – the people who both inhabit and stand outside their worlds of understanding. But the whole experience has been incredibly self-enriching, and I'm of the opinion that success in transforming education primarily rests in changing one's outlook, or as the postmodernists would say, one's paradigm (however, much I realise that this is easier said than done).

I'm sitting in a quandary.

I simply can never end this piece of work. You see, it would imply that my discussion can be finished, and as a voice of postmodern conviction, such a position is unthinkable. The temptation is not to write this letter at all, and to allow you to draw what you can from the experience of reading. I realise that it would be silly of me to suggest how to read this work, but might I recommend that you take up a pencil or a tape-recorder, make contact with the text and contribute to its disturbance. Hear your own voice among the many others that you hear. Write back and tell me what you think of it.

I'll leave you to it. Get back to me when you have finished.

You're back.



Great.

When I began this project, accepting the philosophy proved to be a struggle at first. My first experience with postmodernism had been difficult – there were just too many unstable oppositions to allow me to accommodate the philosophy. But I guess as one works one's way through such a world, one becomes more comfortable with the sense of reality that it presents. And I think I'm fairly comfortable with it now. When doing my HDE, I was trained to a great extent in oppositional methodologies, but the postmodern approach now appears to have taken this position into another dimension. One of the distortions that I felt, however, was that my whole existence become a questionable entity, for it became obvious that my life had been established on the uncertain foundations of some-one else's reality! My borders were seemingly predefined and impenetrable. And what was even more disturbing was the realisation that as a teacher, I existed as an interpreter of those defined borders. I needed answers to the questions that I lay before you.

- How was I to reconcile that I led a potentially meaningless existence?
- As a teacher, was I a/n (willing) accomplice in perpetuating this state?
- Was it possible that I could ever construct my own reality, unobstructed by what surrounded me?
- How would it be possible to impart the tools of construction to the pupils I taught?

Difficult questions indeed, but postmodernism also provided me with some form of an answer. I learnt that my *meaningless existence* had been symptomatic of a Modern mindset that had perpetrated an illusion of reality as an absolute given. It soon became evident to me that I was not the only author of my own reality. But the question is then whose reality intervenes in mine, and whose am I representing to the pupils? Postmodernism announced that the stories, or *grand narratives*, that were told, were not so much about what they contained, but rather about who told them – a powerful cultural and ideological clique. Marshall McLuhan [cited in Casti:1995:1] argues that

*the medium is the message.* The focus in the classroom, therefore, must be to recognize that language is a discourse of power and because all representations are underpinned by an ideology that has granted the sign a meaning and value, it is essential to establish who speaks and for what purpose they do so. The insidious nature which lies under language requires the pupil to shape herself accordingly in order to conform to the predetermined structures. I have witnessed this process in the past, and have been unable to correct it. I have known pupils exiled from their worlds in the classroom. They have experienced dislocation and alienation and been cornered by the boundaries that will not be moved. The solution lies in emigrating from this world, and the means to do so is the postmodern methodology.

The value of postmodernism is that it recognizes language as incorporating simultaneous and secondary meanings, therefore in the Literature classroom, it is possible to negotiate a common understanding of a text and accommodate the possibility of a multitude of interpretations. The *other* interpretation is that of **personal voice**, an aspect that has traditionally been silenced in the classroom. It is the task of the postmodern teacher to find a means to express this voice. The postmodern methodology is intent on finding the spaces in which the voice may be articulated. This means it becomes possible for the pupils to get as close as they can to controlling the depiction of their lives [Marshall:1992:59]. Postmodernism in the classroom is about **activity and reflection**, for no longer is the pupil a passive consumer, rather she becomes active in her own construction and interpretation of meaning. She challenges received ideas, and of vital necessity, she questions her own understandings. She becomes part of a community of readers that possess sensitivity, awareness and moral judgment. And the classroom becomes a community of voices.

The postmodern lesson is identified in much the same manner. It is a world that must be transcended for it acknowledges it has a powerful dehumanizing potential. It is a world that strives to initiate the **postmodern moment**. That moment of

surprise is realized when it is possible to resist absolute identity and absolute truth. It is a place that values senses over knowing, thus in other words, it values different forms of knowing. The pupil is now able to participate in many worlds as a voice among voices, with an awareness of being within a language and a text, that is constructed within particular social, political and cultural frameworks. I need to remind you that the pupil can do this because language is neither self-sustaining, nor does it hold any special qualities that are peculiar to itself.

As a teacher I have to realize that my very profession has created the boundaries between realities, has doxified images and promoted a sense of reality of which I am myself not a part. It appears that I am guilty by association. This is the pedagogical problem which most of us face, as what we are required to teach is not necessarily within our realm of experience. It thus appears that in order to escape such oppression, we have to actively engage the structures and ideologies which encompass us. The (outside) world in which I am forced to live is defined by many categories, such as gender, race and the multitude of other texts that inhabit me. I believe that it is through language that I can transcend these realities, however, this can only be accomplished when I have died as *subject to* language.

Perhaps postmodernism doesn't hold all the answers in the classroom-- there is no definite boundary within which to work; it is exceptionally difficult to give away those assumptions and understandings which have become deeply embedded within us, multiple interpretations are still inevitably regarded with suspicion, and I still wonder how naïve we are when we suggest that the teacher hand over control of the processes to the pupils. Postmodernism is about accommodating and transcending that which may be threatening. Borders which are constructed can be crossed, and it is in this manner that we are able to come to terms with the dynamic relationship between events (which in themselves have no meaning) and facts (which are given meaning) [Marshall:1992:122].

The excitement and wonder that is bred when in possession of critical tools enables movement into new realities. And we make these realities our own through experience [Wilde:1981:137]. The experience can, however, only be meaningful when we become conscious of our own voices. But we need to heed the words of Maxime Greene [1988:2]:

*“Freedom is always an achievement within the concreteness of a lived social reality; it is not an inner state, a primordial or original possession.”*

It is a way of orientating the self.

My experience in the classroom tells me that the pupils will provide the port-hole to enter other realms and *will* challenge the boundaries of possibility. Recently, while watching Mel Gibson’s version of *Hamlet*, a pupil turned to inquire of the misplaced “Get thee to a nunnery...” speech:

***Miss, can they do that?”***

You’ve read my dissertation, how would you reply?

Kind regards

Signed by candidate

Signature Removed

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