**University of Alberta**

# (Under)mining the Canon:
# Engaging Alberta High School Students in the Value(s) of Literature

by

Janine May Metzner

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
Comparative Literature

©Janine May Metzner
Fall 2010
Edmonton, Alberta

Permission is hereby granted to the University of Alberta Libraries to reproduce single copies of this thesis and to lend or sell such copies for private, scholarly or scientific research purposes only. Where the thesis is converted to, or otherwise made available in digital form, the University of Alberta will advise potential users of the thesis of these terms.

The author reserves all other publication and other rights in association with the copyright in the thesis and, except as herein before provided, neither the thesis nor any substantial portion thereof may be printed or otherwise reproduced in any material form whatsoever without the author's prior written permission.

## Examining Committee

Dr. Albert Braz, Comparative Literature

Dr. Irene Sywenky, Comparative Literature and East European Studies

Dr. Ingrid Johnston, English Education and Curriculum Studies

Abstract

This thesis explores the issues surrounding the teaching of English to high school students in the province of Alberta. Its central premise is that high school students studying academic English are increasingly skeptical about the value of literature, and subsequently lack engagement with the subject area. In support of this contention is a review of the forces that have shaped canon formation and curriculum development since the mid-twentieth century, an interrogation of the documents, policies and precedents that guide the selection of texts in the classroom as well as instructional practices, and an examination of the limitations of continuing to employ the interpretive strategies of New Criticism as a primary method of explication. A selection of some of the most commonly taught texts in the province demonstrates the importance of disrupting the literal, common sense readings that often arise within the impartiality of New Criticism.

Finally there is a discussion of the field of critical pedagogy and its educational aim, critical literacy, as a possible remedy to literature and language's seeming lack of importance for students, except as a requirement for graduation.

Acknowledgements

To begin, I would like to thank my supervisor Albert Braz for his patience and understanding in my moments of silence. His encouragement and thoughtful guidance brought clarity to my vision.

Secondly, I would like to thank all of the students who knowingly or unknowingly inspired and informed this work, and for whom it was undertaken. Inevitably sacrifices had to be made but I hope the refinement of my practice, my understanding of the forces at work in teaching, and my own renewed passion will tip the balance favourably.

I would also like to thank Irene Sywenky and Ingrid Johnston for their thoughtful questions and kind words during my examination.

Lastly, and most importantly, I would like to thank my husband for his enduring love and support, his unfailing belief in me and his abiding faith in my ability, as a teacher and a scholar. Love always – J.

Table of Contents


Introduction 1

Chapter 1 -- A Question of Value 17

Chapter 2 -- Value Laden 36

Chapter 3 -- Engaging Value(s) 57

Conclusion 89

Works Cited 98

**value1** /valyooh/**noun 1** a fair return or equivalent for something exchanged. **2** the worth in money or commodities of something. **3** relative worth, utility, or importance. **4** (*usu in pl*) a moral principle or standard of behaviour.

**value2** ***verb trans*** (**values, valued, valuing**) **1a** to estimate the worth of (something) in terms of money. **b** to rate (somebody or something) in terms of usefulness, importance, etc. **2** to consider or rate (something) highly.

# Introduction

Each semester I teach a grade twelve English class, I inevitably face the question "Why do we have to do this?" In any given year, there is no predicting at what point in the course this question might arise. It is as often a spontaneous outburst in the middle of a lesson as it is a thought seemingly ruminating for some time. Nevertheless, it routinely results in other voices in the classroom chiming in. Experience has taught me to provide an answer that responds to the most straightforward interpretation of the question, one that speaks to the practicality and immediacy of the task, and relates its importance to an upcoming formal assessment. Oftentimes, this proves satisfactory but all too frequently there is a request for clarification from either the initiator of the question or another student: "No, I mean, why do we have to take *English*?" This is the conversation I hope to avoid, for I have learned that it can quickly descend into a debate over the importance of English (and the corresponding study of literature) versus that of Mathematics and Science. If I am lucky, one or two students in the class will rise in defence of literature and the analysis that accompanies it, but typically, I end up justifying the study of English, its merits both in the classroom and beyond, along with its contribution to students' development as life-long learners. At best, the discussion concludes with students reflecting on the ideas raised; more often than not they remain unconvinced, a testament to their lack of engagement in literary and language study. In many ways, these repeated dialogues are the impetus for

this thesis. The subject matter is indicative of the tensions inherent in the teaching of English, and indeed the process of education as a whole.

In 2008, Alberta's Education Minister Dave Hancock began "a dialogue with Albertans," which included "personal conversations, regional community conversations, local conversations, a provincial forum, and ongoing online conversations" with students, teachers, the general public as well as other educational stakeholders to determine the needs of twenty-first century learners (5). The recent release of the Steering Committee Report *Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans* identified six core values underlying three specific outcomes as the foundation for education over the next ninety years. It is the committee's belief that the values of "opportunity, fairness, citizenship, choice, diversity and excellence" will create the student who embodies the following:

- Engaged thinker: who thinks critically and makes discoveries; who uses technology to learn, innovate, communicate, and discover; who works with multiple perspectives and disciplines to identify problems and find the best solutions; who communicates these ideas to others; and who, as a life-long learner, adapts to change with an attitude of optimism and hope for the future.
- Ethical citizen: who builds relationships based on humility, fairness and open-mindedness; who demonstrates respect, empathy and compassion; and who through teamwork, collaboration and communication contributes fully to the community and the world.

- Entrepreneurial spirit: who creates opportunities and achieves goals through hard work, perseverance and discipline; who strives for excellence and earns success; who explores ideas and challenges the status quo; who is competitive, adaptable, and resilient; and who has the confidence to take risks and make bold decisions in the face of adversity. (5-6)

Laudable aims all, and in light of the explorations of this thesis highly significant, for the utmost value of education as an institution lies in its aims. However, having taught senior level academic English for almost fifteen years, the question becomes, as my anecdotal opening so pointedly underscores, what is the value of English language instruction in the overall process of education? Is it to simply develop competency in the skills of reading and writing? Is it to instill an understanding of cultural connectedness or commonalities within the human condition, and an appreciation of a shared literary heritage? Or, is it to foster a critical ability that allows for an interrogation of the social, and political world? These are the questions that ground this thesis, and in an attempt to provide some answers are an examination of the documents, policies and precedents that underlie classroom instruction, and the selection of texts. Problematic to the discussion is the debate over the real aim of education: Is it an indoctrination of societal values in the service of conformity and the status quo, or a transformative experience and its subsequent transfigurations?

In the twenty-first century, any discussion of value or values is likely to prove dangerous, a wading into the murky waters of ideology and constructions of

power. Despite the seeming clarity of the definitions in the epigraph and the confidence with which the term is employed, the concept defies transparency. In fact, as a signifier it is inexact, imprecise, and "impure" (Smith 3), yet it implicates judgment and e*valu*ation, deferring power and privilege, and the lack thereof. The word value denotes the binary concepts of good and bad, right and wrong, as well as all the subsequent gradations of better and lesser, and worthy, worthier, worthiest, and worthless. The concept of value becomes further complicated by the actions it incites, which can often be contradictory and oppositional. That said, no act is without value – be it spoken, physical, subtle or explicit – and artistic and literary acts are no exception. Given the temporal contingency of value (Smith 13), it might well be argued that the time of books and literature as social institutions is long past. However, both still seem to hold a central position in the process of education, evidenced by the required completion of a grade twelve English course for high school graduation. Despite this, the location and value of literature in twenty-first century education is at the intersection of many competing and often contradictory influences, including, among others, an outcomes based curriculum with high stakes testing, the intellectual tensions derived from a focus on both the transactional analysis of reader's response and the objective demands of critical interpretation, along with increasing concern over the decline in reading and writing skills. Complicating this further is the fact that the balancing of these tensions is often relegated to the classroom teacher, whose individual values and pedagogy cannot be discounted in the mediation of opposing curricular and instructional forces.

In education, scholarly examinations of values have typically not focused on literature but on the study of history or social studies, whose importance to national identity has been viewed as paramount, insomuch as whole countries' histories have been altered by the leaders of incoming and often repressive regimes, who are cognizant not only of education's value in interpreting the past but also of its construction of a future (von Heyking 2). Only recently, have critical pedagogues working within the progressive education movement demonstrated the importance of the values often hidden within the pages of literature in the promotion of social justice; indeed as spaces and openings to examine discourses, both hegemonic and subversive. Implicated in this discussion of literary value, values and evaluations is a belief in the inherent power of literary texts, an authority derived from "their being the expression of certain innate psychological powers, variously called imagination, creativity, feeling, taste, or vision, a collective unconscious, or an aesthetic instinct. The psychological powers […] are thought to be the primary powers of the mind, lying below and prior to the rational faculties, expressing our most essential humanity" (Kernan, *Imaginary* 15). Moreover, posits Alvin Kernan, these powers are not limited to "expression" but concern reception as well. Postmodern reader response theories highlight the impact of the text on the reader, and the creation of meaning through a transaction or interaction between the two. Thus, the value(s) of the text that is potentially transmitted to the reader, a process by which "our most essential humanity" may be validated, is complicated or even altered.

Still positioned at the centre of the debate over the aim of education is the ancient Greek philosopher Plato, and it is in *The Republic* that perhaps the earliest indictment of literary value appears in his admonition against poetry, and its "terrible power to corrupt even the best characters" (349). Underlying Plato's remarks is the rejection of both the worth and the desirability of literary production based on its purported misrepresentation of truth, its lack of political utility, and thus the need for censorship to restrict access to knowledge that might "breed in our young men an undue tolerance of wickedness" (84). Two millennia later, one might inquire if much has changed: traditional bans on books still occur, but rather than town hall meetings, advocates now employ technology and the Internet to encourage the boycotting of texts. In addition, the September 2010 proclamation of Bill 44 by the Alberta Legislature, an amendment to the Human Rights, Citizenship and Multicultural Act designed to prevent discrimination based on sexual orientation, is significant. The inclusion of section 11.1, a requirement of educators, to notify parents in advance of any direct or planned discussion of religion, sexuality or sexual behaviour (Bill 44), would seem proof enough of the continued merit of Plato's beliefs. Literary scholars and academics might hope that twenty-first century citizens would reject censorship, and likely most do, in theory. However, in practice that rejection has conditions most of which concern texts, even those with pedagogic merit, for children and teens. While debates over the suitability of texts for course instruction have been relegated to the past at universities, where an English professor is usually free to determine his/her syllabus, the primary and secondary school teacher must be

constantly mindful of what literature is appropriate and "authorized" for study, and even more cognizant of the ramifications of violating that boundary. As will be explored in Chapter 1, postmodern academics and literary critics are not so much concerned with what students should not read, but instead with exposing young minds to the underlying value(s) within literature. Those who would resist the moral imperative in written text would also be forced to acknowledge that there is no escaping it. The hermeneutic act is an act of evaluation, and as the existence of the literary canon proves, a valuing of one text over another. The selection and preservation of a text, be it a register as influential and intangible as the canon or as seemingly insignificant and inconsequential as the syllabus for a single English classroom is an act of value.

Despite warnings against positioning the Western canon as a "program for social salvation" (H. Bloom 29), progressively more complex theoretical interrogations have increased the intertwining of moral and aesthetic value with social, political, pedagogic and material value. Barbara Herrnstein Smith argues that "when we make explicit value judgments of a literary work," we are "(a) articulating an estimate of how well that work will serve certain implicitly defined functions, (b) for a specific implicitly defined audience, (c) who are conceived of as experiencing the work under implicitly defined conditions" (13). What this means is that personal judgments about the past and present value of a literary work are made for ourselves as well as for others; that a definition of "good literature" is self-fulfilling insomuch as those who make such judgments also determine the nature of "literature" and also "good;" and finally, that the value of

a work is defined by conventions and circumstances previously approved by the community in which the judgment has occurred (13). If we accept her assertion, it has particular significance within education, and there is perhaps no better example of the latent power conferred on literature by its value(s) and evaluation than the mandate on literary instruction in public school systems which seeks to direct not only *what* literary texts will be taught, but also *how* they will be taught, through both a prescribed formal curriculum and informal classroom practices and precedents. The seeming simplicity of this process invites complication, especially given the question of value(s) inherent in education. For what value(s) are implicated in the deconstruction of formal documents and policies that determine programs of study? What values are included and excluded in the selection of authorized texts? What knowledge is deemed legitimate or illegitimate based on school or district culture, and lastly are the value(s) professed to be of primacy in the pursuit of literary and language instruction achievable within current political, social, and pedagogic frameworks? Central to this discussion is an examination of the merits of teaching literature and a probing of what value(s) lie in the attempt to more effectively engage students in the study of literature, an engagement that in actuality is a reflection of a student's investment in what he/she is learning, an acknowledgement of the value of the course of study regardless of the subject area.

No matter of whether we view education as an agent of social change or as the vehicle by which society enforces conformity, "it develops students and teachers this way or that way depending on the values underlying the learning

process" (Macrine 121), and as such is a political process. For the teaching of English, those "underlying values" derive as much from the texts selected for study, as they do any pedagogic method, and for this reason chapter one will trace the twentieth century forces that influenced canon reformation. In 1993, John Guillory proposed a re-formulation of this process in support of his view that cultural capital no longer held value within the technocratic-professional society promoted in schools. Based on the belief that "canonicity is not a property of the work itself but of its transmission" (55), he asserted in *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* that "the literary canon has always functioned in schools as a pedagogic device for producing […] literacy" (62). As such, the preservation, reproduction and dissemination of literary works are the product of educational institutions (vii). The implications are significant in that Guillory then conflates his ideas on canon formation with Pierre Bourdieu's concept of "cultural capital" (Guillory viii). Guillory argues that debates between the right and the left over canon reformation, which focus on the diminished cultural capital of a non-traditional canon, are misguided, as this capital is determined not by the works per se but by the access to them through education. The evolution of canon to curriculum creates further complications. Both Smith and Guillory explore the role of the academy in the "continuity of […] canonical works (Smith 44). While Smith explores the multiple "contingencies that confer "value" on certain texts to form the canon, Guillory coins the term "imaginary canon," defining it as a fluid and illusory list of texts deemed aesthetically, politically, socially, morally and/or pedagogically appropriate. Guillory notes that

"many factors will enter into the situation of the reception of a given author's work, and that these factors will advance and recede at different moments in the history of the work's reception," and like Smith, he is far less concerned with what specific texts form the canon, than with the "factors," including those "institutional practices" (10) that converge to make a particular text canonical. As Guillory argues, "an individual's judgment [whether critical or scholarly] that a work is great does nothing in itself to preserve that work, unless the judgment is made in a certain institutional context, a setting in which it is possible to ensure the *reproduction* of the work, its continual reintroduction to generations of readers" (28).

The idea of a pedagogic canon, created when educational institutions select and teach one text over another, and in doing so are responsible for the recognition of value and placement in the canon, is highly significant. For the moment value is ascribed and a determination made that some texts should be read over others, no matter the reason, those privileged texts are inscribed with power and legitimacy, becoming a mirror in which marginalized texts are reflected. As Frank Kermode observes, "the association of the canon with authority is deeply ingrained in us, and one can see the simple reasons why it is so. It is a highly selective instrument, and one reason why we need to use it is that we haven't enough memory to process everything […]. It must therefore be protected by those who have it and coveted by those who don't" (114-15). Within the English classrooms of public schools these ideas have relevance as well, and relate to Henry Giroux's interrogations of not only "what" constitutes legitimate

knowledge, but also “how” some knowledge is considered legitimate and some is not (75). The choice by any teacher to teach or not to teach a given text not only places that text into a student’s conception of canonized literature but also ascribes worth to the knowledge and values within it. The values underlying these choices, whether individual or socially influenced, make classrooms politically contested spaces.

As the *Inspiring Education* report so explicitly documents, education in Alberta is solidly founded on values. Amy von Heyking notes in *Creating Citizens: History and Identity in Alberta Schools, 1905 to 1980* that “Alberta has a unique political culture in that conservative governments have fostered very progressive educational revisions” (5). Although her focus is the curriculum guiding the teaching of Social Studies in the province, it can be logically presumed that that progressiveness, in greater or lesser degrees, has been extended to curriculum development in all subject areas. Her book traces the aims of the Social Studies curriculum, and its instruction in the province. Her chapter titles – “Schooling for ‘Good Character,’” “An Education for ‘Group Living,’” and “Nurturing Social Activists” – leave little doubt of the desire to transmit positive values. Her last chapter, “Citizenship as Self Actualization,” documents a significant shift in thinking as part of the neo-progressive education movement. The 1970s marked the beginning of students discovering “their own belief systems” rather than having those values imposed upon them (131). Twenty-first century education in Alberta is student-centred and inquiry based, incorporates technology, and in terms of literary study, embraces a multi-reading approach

over authorial intention, whose roots grow out of this "values clarification" of the 1970s. Not surprisingly, criticism of this new approach at the time focused on the disappearance of any "moral authority" from teachers as classroom leaders, and texts as sources of knowledge, along with accusations of moral relativism (147). Echoes of these same philosophical shifts can be found in revisions in the English Language Arts curriculum, and will prove to have significance.

As important as Guillory's assertions are regarding the pedagogic canon, of even more significance are the instructional practices that mine the knowledge and values of the texts within that canon. The most recent implementation of a new Program of Studies for English Language Arts (2003) continues to be rooted in the early twentieth century literary theory of New Criticism and a curricular design that sets measurable outcomes and goals as determinants of student achievement. Ralph Tyler, the originator of the outcomes based curricula, founded his work in a 1935 syllabus for a course in educational curriculum design at the University of Chicago. In the same decade, the New Critics emerged, establishing a literary theory focused solely on a close reading of the text. The compatibility of the two methods is readily evident. As teachers, we value student success and achievement, and both parents and society as a whole seek its tangible demonstration, which since 1984 has taken the form of provincial achievement testing and diploma examinations. The focus on the internal forms and structures of a text: setting, plot, character, figurative language, diction, symbol and irony as well as other formal elements more readily lend themselves to the measurability of standardized testing. Louise Rosenblatt's concept of

transactional analysis completes the mix. An early precursor to reader response theory, Rosenblatt contends that textual meaning is derived through an exchange between reader and text. Her ideas reinforced New Critical methodologies, allowing for a variety of interpretations transacted by readers as long as textual proof is present. However, this interpretive method is complicated by the cognitive state of the twenty-first century high school student. The analytically focused methodologies of New Criticism are based on an ability to close read, and a cultural competency in symbolism and allusion that is becoming increasingly rare. Embracing the multiple readings of students becomes problematic when their uncritical, common sense interpretations reveal values that run contrary to the concepts of tolerance, justice and egalitarianism so central to progressive education. The confinement of students to their own individual worlds, with little ability to see the injustice present in others' realities or even their own role in the perpetuation of that injustice, is a further complication of a focus on the personal, and a tolerance of multiple readings.

Ostensibly, the latest implementation of the curriculum is worded broadly enough to provide teachers with the freedom to translate the *Program of Studies* in a variety of ways. By doing so, it enables a desire for individuality in classroom practice, the need for differentiated instruction, and the fulfilment of the value that lies at the heart of the curriculum—critical thinking. However, a closer examination of the program and its ancillary documents and policies problematizes teachers' choices, especially in their selection of texts. Teachers, unlike their university and college counterparts, are seemingly limited to a fixed

set of texts "authorized" for study, creating in effect an expanded anthology, a canon of appropriate literature. Provisions exist for teachers to select texts beyond this canon under local approval policies, but all requests become subject to the approval of their district administration and/or Board of Trustees. These policies safeguard teachers, their schools, and their districts from public challenges by community members founded on the value(s) perceived in the text. Experienced teachers know, from personal experience and/or a collective awareness of their particular "community's standards," which texts will or will not be deemed appropriate, and considered worthy of instruction. This understanding extends even to those texts authorized for study, many of which could not be selected for classroom instruction in certain schools or districts because of their potentially controversial content. What proves to be ironic is that opportunities to hone critical thinking are most often found in texts that present the greatest challenge to widely held, and uncontested values.

The aforementioned questions and discussion underscore the myriad complex forces at the centre of English language and literary instruction in public school. The underlying issues that form the foundation of this exploration will specifically address three topics. In deference to the contention that literary texts are central to the teaching of academic English, chapter one, "A Question of Value," will examine the values underlying the formation of the traditional canon, and the political influences on its re-formation beginning in the mid-twentieth century, which correspondingly shaped views of education, and its purpose. By no means exhaustive, the information provided in this chapter will provide those

unfamiliar with the twentieth century debates over the canon and literary theory with the requisite background. Chapter one will also explore the connections between the shifts in the canon and the analogous theoretical alterations in curriculum development. A deconstruction of the values that lay the foundation, and subsequently complicate the *Program of Studies*, ancillary documents and policies guiding the teaching of English to Alberta high school students will be the focus of chapter two, "Value Laden." Accompanying this will be an interrogation of the theoretical underpinnings of the curriculum, and some discussion of the distinction between critical thinking and critical literacy. The premise of the last chapter, "Engaging Value(s)" is that it is not the authorized canon that needs reform but the *Program of Studies*, which guides teachers' instructional practice. With this understanding, I will explicate several of the most commonly taught texts in the province, those that form the backbone of English teachers' pedagogic canon, with a focus on exposing not only how a New Critical reading potentially negates the values professed in the curriculum and in public education in general, but also how controversial social and political content can engage student interest and foster the valuable and, in these times, necessary skill of critical literacy. In the conclusion, I will endeavour to demonstrate how we as teachers under-mine our canon. By this I mean, how we fail to explore literature's full potential, by allowing current methodologies and theoretical understandings to limit interpretive explorations, but more importantly, how the formal curriculum might be transformed into a meaningful and engaging "lived curriculum," by introducing controversy, undermining and challenging long held

values, and following Gerald Graff's suggestion to "teach the conflict," -- not perhaps the theoretical conflicts he intends for undergraduate and graduate students, but the conflicts in values that inevitably arise as students confront literature that represents the myriad of possibilities in the human condition. Lastly, I will speak to postmodern relativism, and the criticism that its literary theories reject the art of possibility, diminishing the trust and value a young mind places in the study of literature.

## Chapter One

## A Question of Value: The Canon and Curriculum

Any discussion of literary value must begin with an examination of the canon: the fluid, evolving, and ever expanding conception of texts viewed as possessing worth. Matthew Arnold's assertion that the main function of criticism is the dissemination of "the best that is known and thought in the world" (824), considering the integral role critics now play in literary scholarship, grounds the twentieth century debate surrounding the canon, its nature, its formation and reformation. The conception of "best," which ultimately becomes the distinction between what *should be* and just as importantly what *should not be* read, has become the fodder for an already decades' long war of words and wills. The appropriation of the morally charged and value-laden term "canon" foreshadowed the inevitable polemic. What was simple in Plato's time, when eliminating Homer and the tragedians would have proved sufficient, becomes far more complex as the volume of literary works grows and new genres emerge, negating any ability to create a mutually agreed upon, tangible list of human excellence. Formed and maintained through an incredibly complex set of sometimes pragmatic, sometimes idealistic, sometimes material, sometimes Machiavellian machinations, texts within the historical and modern canon not only attain value through their placement in this elite register but also retain that privilege by virtue of the values they espouse. Smith explores the intricacies of this process:

> An object or artifact that performs certain desired/able functions particularly well at a time for some community of subjects, being not only "fit" but exemplary—that is, "the best of its kind"—under those conditions, will have immediate survival advantage; for […] it will not only be better protected from physical deterioration but will also be more frequently used or widely exhibited, and if it is a text or verbal artifact, more frequently read or recited, copied or reprinted, translated, imitated, cited commented upon and so forth—in short culturally reproduced—thus will be more readily available to perform those or other functions for other subjects at a subsequent time. (48)

She goes on to explain that texts become and remain canonical for their embodiment and reification of "traditional values" (50), and explains the self-perpetuating cycle that is created when a text's values determine its evaluation, preservation, and promotion that then continues the reinforcement of those values previously established. Many of the projects of the postmodern thinkers have been to erode these values by interrogating the underlying hegemonies present in literary texts as well as questioning the divinity of the language used to create them. Revisions and reformations of the Western canon have focused largely on the replacing of one set of values—those of the privileged, patriarchal white male—with those that more suitably reflect the diverse identities and locations of the postmodern world. In spite of Plato's embodiment of the state, echoes of his views regarding the sway of literary texts can be heard in the voices of critics

concerned with gender, race, economic, and social equity who are keen to expose the ills of traditional values, and avoid the perpetuation of hermeneutics that promote and support out-dated, and in their minds dangerous, modes of thinking. These politically minded critics similarly view exposure to the "right" literature and its correspondingly "right" interpretation as a way to promote critical thinking; so much so that by the mid-twentieth century these evolutions in theory had caused a schism between critics, those focused solely on the text, prizing its aesthetic merits, and those who valued its political utility and literature's potential for the interrogation of societal values.

Despite warnings about critics seeking "moral values" in the literary canon (H. Bloom 29), theoretical debates over the canon kept it at the centre of academic scholarship, highlighting its social and political worth. Far from seeking moral imperatives in the text, emerging theorists instead wove a cautionary tale. Post World War II incursions into the traditional canon, surfacing in the 1960s and fully formed by the 1980s, had both political and epistemological underpinnings that corresponded with the emergence of Marxist, feminist, and postcolonial theories, all of which advanced a broader inclusion of writings by those previously marginalized and excluded from the canon, along with a more critical interpretation and examination of works authored by "dead white men." Accompanying this development was a rejection of essentialist thinking, a dismissal of authorial privilege, and a movement away from the aesthetic hermeneutic of the New Critics. Even though scholars falling under the umbrella of the postmodern are a heterogeneous group whose complex ideas and varying

views cannot be easily summarized, those who mounted the greatest assault on the traditional canon were the ones with political and social aims who sought to, at the very least, expose the hidden values it embodied. In her essay, "What Do Feminist Critics Want?" Sandra Gilbert concedes that both men and women have been the "inheritors" of Western culture; however, when the literature of that culture is reread, it becomes evident that "though the pressures and oppressions of gender may be as invisible as the air, they are also as inescapable as air, and like the weight of air, they imperceptibly shape the forms and motions of our lives" (33). Her assertion implicates the often-unconscious readings of men and women, and the importance of interrogating the implicit and explicit messages of oppression located in texts. Along with exposing those imperceptible values, feminist critics also sought to mine the literature to reveal the merits of female authors previously ignored and undervalued by previous determinants of canonicity. Likewise, race theorists and postcolonial scholars pursued a similar project, with one notable exception. At least as important as inclusion in the traditional canon was the formation of a "national canon," one with literature that fostered an identity separate and unique from the imposed other. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Franz Fanon distinguished between '"Negro"' literature and the literary tradition that will be established once a "national culture has been formed in Africa" (150-51). Both feminist and postcolonial scholars simultaneously seek entrance into the traditional canon, and a dismissal of its hegemonic influences, but they do so in order to legitimize their own conceptions of value(s). Implicated in these aims is the complexity of value(s), and the apprehension that results when

the “wrong” texts, authors and ideas are preserved, and the “right” ones are excluded. Underlying this anxiety is the belief that, without exposure to texts by women and postcolonial writers, and without the ability to critically examine and deconstruct veiled messages, readers will remain blind, “as such representation definitely harms the minds of their audiences, unless they’re inoculated against them by knowing their real nature” (Plato 336).

These debates, initially limited to the Humanities departments of universities, eventually filtered down to a more public debate. The subsequent and not wholly surprising reaction to challenges mounted against the traditional canon was marked by William Bennett’s 1984 report on behalf of the United States’ National Endowment for the Humanities entitled *To Reclaim a Legacy: A Report on the Humanities in Higher Education*. Smouldering for the thirty years since the Soviets launched Sputnik, and reflecting a fear over the loss of traditional value(s) in education, Bennett’s critique is as concerned with education and the canon as it is with the desirability and superiority of the United States’ cultural values globally. In his treatise, Bennett laments the state of the Humanities, placing the blame squarely on senior educators, specifically presidents, administrators, deans and the faculty of American universities, citing as proof enrolment and admission requirement statistics. In the report Bennett promotes a return to the study of the foundations of Western thought, quoting E.D. Hirsch’s “cultural literacy” (4). In support of Bennett’s assertion that “it is simply not possible for students to understand their society without studying its intellectual legacy” (30) is Hirsch’s definition of

> what every American needs to know, the network of information that all competent readers possess. It is the background information, stored in their minds, that enables them to take up the newspaper and read it with an adequate level of comprehension, getting the point, grasping the implications, relating what they read to the unstated context which alone gives meaning to what they read. (2)

Despite Hirsch's insistence that his cultural literacy is "descriptive," not "prescriptive" (xiv), right-wing advocates have used his work to give currency to their own cause. The subsequent release of Allan Bloom's *Closing of the American Mind* brought to public attention what came to be known as the culture wars. The book became a hinge-point on which to hang all of the conflicts, not only canonical, that had been brewing within academia for the previous twenty years: shifts in theoretical focus, identity politics, generational rivalries, department under-funding, and a growing mistrust of intellectuals. Bloom's stance reflected Bennett's, sardonically decrying the state of American education:

> Only Socrates knew after a lifetime of unceasing labor, that he was ignorant. Now every high school student knows that. How did it become so easy? What accounts for our amazing progress? Could it be that our experience has been so impoverished by our various methods, of which openness [or relativism] is one of the latest, that there is nothing substantial enough left there to resist criticism, and therefore have no world left of which to be really ignorant? (43)

The dissemination of Bloom's ideas amongst the general public opened the floodgates for many academics, who felt threatened and oppressed by the principles of liberal pluralism, shifts in theory, and a focus on signs and signifiers sweeping American campuses, to voice their concerns regarding the shifts in academia.

Subsequent and similarly toned manifestos included Roger Kimball's *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education*; John M. Ellis's *Literature Lost: Social Agendas and the Corruption of the Humanities*; and Alvin Kernan's *The Death of Literature*. Kernan saw literature's demise as a natural consequence of postmodern social and technological changes, while Kimball argued that the "assault on the canon" was merely a superficial mask for the true plagues of postmodern literary study. Selectively citing some of the foremost critics and educators of the last two generations, including Gerald Graff, J. Hillis Miller, and Elaine Showalter, Kimball echoed Bennett's sentiments as he deplored the apparent willingness on the part of teachers and scholars to "jettison the intellectual principles and [...] moral grounding that have nourished and given meaning to their disciplines" in the service of building theoretical kingdoms (50). Ellis further damned critics and scholars for their lack of love for books (59), their self-aggrandizements (8), and their selfish impositions of literary works on students (52). The arguments of Bloom, Kimball, and Ellis reinforced the belief that some texts held greater value, but more importantly that some forms of knowledge were more legitimate, reiterating the idea that if students are not educated in some manner deemed appropriate, serious, and potentially long-term

consequences will result. Graff tackled the complexities of this debate, and attempted to narrow the academic schism in *Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts Can Revitalize American Education*. By examining the numerous facets of the culture wars that became epitomized by alterations to the canon, he advocated that, rather than wallow in conflicts over which theory held primacy, increased diversity in faculty, and what should or should not be taught, these debates should be utilized by teachers to further enhance students' ability to genuinely think critically. He further suggested "educators were wasting a major opportunity, arguing that the conflicts that were now adding to the confusions of students had instead the potential to help them make better sense of their education and their lives" (11).

For years, the majority of this debate swirled through the hallways of universities and colleges. No doubt fuelled by progressive declines in the American public education system, eventually these conflicts filtered down to primary and secondary schools, where the potential for the control of curricula is much greater. Moreover, despite the fact the debate was initiated and centred in the United States, the Canadian education system did not and has not escaped its influence. Trends, philosophies, and practices, both pedagogic and administrative that have their roots in the U. S. system, typically make their way into Canadian schools with varying degrees of adaptation. These have included whole language, professional learning communities, assessment for learning, and perhaps most notably the adoption of the business model for running schools and districts. Brian Elliot and David MacLennan discuss the New Right's response in Canada

to progressive attempts to modernize curriculum and instruction in their essay "Education, Modernity and Neoconservative Reform in Canada, Britain and the U. S." In it they cite a number of attempts by the New Right to influence education, including increasing the number of private schools, a back to basics campaign, the imposition of the business model in the administration of schools, and the influence of the Fraser Institute, which annually publishes its evaluation and ranking of public high schools throughout Canada based on measurable outcomes of student achievement derived from provincial-wide standardized testing. The authors acknowledge that radical responses to perceived curricular dilution similar to those seen in Britain, which resulted in a campaign against "social science, peace studies, sex education, anti-racist and multicultural education," are unlikely in Canada and the United States due to their "irrefutably […] multi-cultural societies" (181). However, an examination of educational practices and curricula across Canada would undoubtedly reflect highly conservative values, along with a number of other challenges that currently afflict the U. S. education system: the feminization of the profession, the de-skilling of teachers, and chronic under-funding.

In addition to the culture wars, critical examinations of the canon, its tangibility or elusiveness, its formation and re-formation, its material influences and consequences, its value and values have in large measure also been limited to the universities, where individual departments and professors have far more latitude in determining curriculum and what appears on their syllabi. Even Bennett's investigation into the state of the Humanities mentioned only briefly

secondary schools, noting however the same deleterious effects there as those present in institutions of higher learning (21). Likely linked to Allan Bloom's perception that university students resembled the "natural savage," having had little genuine exposure to critical study to that point (48), his notion did little to forestall the impact of these debates. The issues central to these conflicts also influenced curriculum development for public schools, and since the 1980s theoretical work in education has focused on the "reconceptualization" of the curriculum and its development, the significance and necessity of autobiography for both students and teachers, and a focus on radical and transformative pedagogy, the latter of which has had limited impact on the development of the current *Program of Studies* for English Language Arts.

Notwithstanding the theoretical stance or political slant, there is little doubt that education's major value to society is its role as a vehicle for change, the contentious aspect being what that change entails. In 1900 the father of modern education, John Dewey, stated: "All that society has accomplished for itself is put through the agency of the school, at the disposal of its future members. All its better thoughts of itself it hopes to realize through the new possibilities thus opened to its future self" (7). It is also irrefutable that schools and the process of education are highly political and rooted in history. Microcosms of the communities they serve, schools and their populations reflect the social stratifications, hierarchies of power, values and, with site based budgeting and management, the same economic competitiveness. Schools today are complicated, organic systems and gone is the binary vision of them as either

blind bastions of social reproduction or agents of change toward a utopian future. Teachers and the curriculum, both formal and hidden, are integral to this complexity.

The portion of the North West Territories that would in 1905 become the province of Alberta adopted its first course of study from Ontario, altering only the English requirement, and flexibility in course selection for high school graduation (von Heyking 9). From that point, programs of study expanded seemingly exponentially, beginning with subject areas for the primary level, then junior high, and finally for high school, (fore)shadowing the growing student population at each level. By 1922, courses of study for science, arithmetic, industrial arts, physical education, music, writing, and language and composition had been implemented. Even as early as 1912, students wrote "departmental exams" initially to move from the elementary to secondary level, and later to graduate from high school (von Heyking 9-10). In terms of English instruction, George Tomkins notes in *A Common Countenance: Stability and Change in the Canadian Curriculum* that early "readers were essentially a means of forming character through the use of moral and patriotic content" (216). In light of this, it is perhaps not surprising that, in Alberta, the first incarnation of an authorized reading list appears to be "Bible readings for schools," published in 1936 and then again in 1947. A "Programme of Study" appears for high school in 1939 and a "Reading for Pleasure" list in 1949, outlining suitable literature for junior high school students. A review of the aforementioned publications reveals that programs of study pre-dating the 1950s consisted of rote inventories of what

students were expected to know or learn throughout the course of study. The forging of a modern curriculum began with the dissemination of Ralph Tyler's *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction,* the syllabus for a course first taught at the University of Chicago. In what would become the model for most modern programs of study, Tyler's book outlined his empirically focused conceptions of educational instruction, the result of which is the assessment driven and outcomes based curricula predominant today in Alberta. More significantly, in addition to the acquisition of knowledge and skills expected in earlier forms of curricula, Tyler introduced the idea that values could and should be "formally transmitted through the educational process, to develop social attitudes" (79), hence the addition of "attitudes" to the knowledge and skills outcomes (the KSAs) that underlie the curriculum in all subject areas and overarch all classroom instruction, including the selection of resources. Evidence of Tyler's continued influence on curriculum is demonstrated explicitly throughout the current *Program of Study* for English Language Arts. Secondary English instruction is "organized according to […] five general outcomes" (5), with "specific outcomes [that] are statements identifying the component knowledge, skills and attitudes of "each of the "general outcome[s]" (*Program* 8). In accordance with this organization, "students are expected to demonstrate the specific outcomes for their current course while building on and maintaining their ability to demonstrate the specific outcomes from previous courses." By the end of grade twelve, specific "exit outcomes" (*Program* 8), the basis of the diploma examination, should be attained.

At the same time as Tyler's principles were being incorporated into curricular development, social and economic changes both in the United States and Canada were resulting in a burgeoning school population, at the post-secondary level and subsequently at the public schools. Young men and women returning to North America from World War II began attending colleges and universities in unprecedented numbers aided in the United States by the G.I. Bill, and in Canada by the Veterans' Bill. The offspring of this post-war generation, despite rejecting their parents' values, flocked to universities throughout both countries, resulting in growing admissions into liberal arts programs. With larger and more diverse numbers of students entering university and requiring English for admission, the methodologies of the New Critics gained prominence. In *Professing Literature*, Graff asserts that "the new pedagogical concentration on the literary 'text itself' was designed to counteract the large problems of cultural fragmentation, historical discontinuity, and student alienation […,] a tactic ideally suited to a new, mass student body that could not be depended upon to bring to the university any common cultural background" (173). The New Critical focus on the formal elements of literature also fit well into Tyler's measurable outcomes, and was quickly adopted into the English curriculum of public schools. The vocabulary needed to interpret a text's paradox, irony, ambiguity and tension, literary terms like simile, metaphor, personification, allusion, and symbolism, plot, character setting, point of view, rhyme and meter, could be taught and efficiently tested at the lower grades. At higher grades these same elements could be applied to increasingly more difficult and sophisticated texts, and even written

responses could be assessed with relative accuracy, given the closed nature of the text. Focusing on the "text itself" made for an effective methodology for teaching English to growing numbers of public school students as well as meeting the outcomes of a Tylerian based curriculum.

Interestingly, at the same time critical methods were gaining prominence in education, Louise M. Rosenblatt[1], a New Critic herself, developed an early reader response theory called "transactional" analysis. She rejected the singular and closed hermeneutic of the New Critics. Meaning, she concluded, is constructed only when the reader and the text interact (27). She recognized that "analysis of the techniques of the work [...] tended to crowd out the ultimate questions concerning relevance or value to the reader (30). Student inexperience and developing cognitive abilities require that teachers delve beyond "the persuasiveness" of the text, and bring "implied moral attitudes and unvoiced systems of social values [...] into open and careful scrutiny" (8). Her assertions that there is neither a single nor an infinite number of interpretations for a text (xix), and that the importance of any work is personal but that students need to be "led to discover that some interpretations are more defensible that others" (108), remain foundational to the teaching of literary works in today's high school classroom, the idiosyncratic construction of meaning advanced by later reader response theories being too problematic for an outcomes based curriculum. Moreover, despite Rosenblatt's insights into the importance and potential power

[1] Proof of Rosenblatt's continued influence is evidenced in the quote reprinted on the rubric used for assessing the written component of the diploma exam: "the evaluation of the answers would be in terms of the amount of evidence that the youngster has actually read something and thought about it, not a question of whether, necessarily, he has thought about it the way an adult would, or given an adult's correct 'answer'."

of literature "to reap knowledge of the world, to fathom the resources of the human spirit [and] to gain insights that will make his [the reader's/student's] life more comprehensible" (7), Carol Ricker-Wilson points out that "rarely do curriculum documents or textbooks encourage teachers to use such theory [reader response] to encourage students to challenge authoritative interpretations of literary works or to provide students with strategies to critically examine textual relations between power, identity and representation" (116). By the early 1980s, this conflation of New Critical and transactional analysis methodologies, each with subtly unique determiners of meaning, would form the foundations of English language curriculum in Alberta. Rosenblatt's influence would open space for students' uncritical readings as long as proof, even literal, could be found in the text.

By the mid-twentieth century, the singular focus of the New Critics on the text's formal elements began to be challenged by scholars with a more political, and social agenda. Marxist, feminist, postcolonial, and deconstruction theorists conceded the value of the New Critical methodology of close reading but only as a starting point for revealing the reifications of traditional hegemonies. Similarly, in a transformation akin to that occurring in numerous academic fields in the sixties and seventies, curriculum development underwent a "reconceptualization" marked by a conference at Ohio State University entitled "Curriculum Theory Frontiers," which was the impetus for a movement away from the "dominant technocratic emphases on curriculum design" (J. Miller 28), and towards the more eclectic and innovative postmodern approach, in theory anyway. Since this

"reconceptualization" period of the 1970s, academics have drawn on the theories of other postmodern fields to help them understand "curriculum as a multifaceted process involving not only official policy, prescribed textbooks, standardized examinations, but also the *complicated conversation* [my italics] of the participants (Pinar 18-19). Not surprisingly, the growing anti-intellectualism and distrust of academics, bred in the early years of the culture wars and associated with these and other theoretical reconstructions, diminished the influence of curriculum scholars on publicly mandated programs of instruction, and few postmodern theories, curricular or critical, made their way into the classroom. William Pinar, one of the key participants in the 1967 Ohio State conference, asserts:

> In abbreviated form, here are the facts: Schools are no longer under the jurisdiction (it was probably always more professional than legal) of curriculum theorists. Multiple stakeholders (not the least among them the textbook publishers) have created something that may look like curriculum consensus but is more like curriculum gridlock. Genuine (not just theoretical reforms) […] are certainly unlikely to be led by university-based curriculum scholars and researchers. […] The simple – if for some unassimilable – truth is that our influence has decreased over the past 30 years. (14)

Circumstances for curriculum scholars in Alberta are little different. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, concern grew over the rapidity of societal change in the province. The publication of the Department of Education's *White Paper* in 1980,

and a curriculum conference sponsored by Alberta Education, the Alberta Teachers' Association, and the Alberta School Trustees' Association in October that same year focused on the role schools and curriculum would play in a changing world. Delegates at the conference delivered papers that debated the importance of maintaining traditional values versus fostering change in education. One important speaker, George Bevan, even advanced the idea of creating a curriculum for a moral education program (*White Paper* 21), likely inspired by the "values clarification" strategies recently implemented in Social Studies. At the completion of the conference, a number of recommendations were placed on the order paper, debated, and then voted on by attendees. One of those recommendations, not debated because of time restrictions (but eventually a reality), was a decision that responsibility for curriculum development and revision would reside with Alberta Education, the reason being that teaching is a "full-time responsibility" and curriculum building "a highly specialized function requiring in-depth expertise" (*White Paper* 96). Today, the control over curriculum development and implementation rests largely with government bureaucrats. Teacher involvement is limited to selective committee work. The financial reality of the profession is that since the 1990s, curriculum specialists, a luxury of urban boards and larger budgets, are not required to possess graduate degrees, and if they do, those degrees need not be in Curriculum and Instruction. Moreover, curriculum revision falls under the purview of Alberta Education, a department whose staffing waxes and wanes on the currents of new implementations. Although seemingly transparent, given the public nature of the

policies governing development and resource selection, participation in the proceedings reveals it to be a highly opaque process involving multiple stakeholders, including teachers who must sign confidentiality agreements, public and private interest groups, and publishers vying for a captive market. An illustrative example of Pinar's "multiple stakeholders" is the recent redevelopment of the Social Studies curriculum.  Initiated in 1996 with the Western Canada Protocol, with the aim of a more inquiry based model of instruction, the process quickly became mired in the agendas of numerous special interests groups, which included (not exclusively) representation from Francophones, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit (FMNI), various provincial labour unions, Alberta Municipalities, curriculum specialists from the urban boards of Calgary and Edmonton, teachers, as well as members of the Alberta School Boards Association, the Alberta School Business Officers Association, and the Department of Education (personal communication). Fundamentally political and fraught with conflict and disagreement, attempts to realize the new curriculum resulted in numerous re-writings and delays with the final implementation of grades three, six, nine and twelve finally achieved in September 2009. The inherent evaluations in determining which viewpoints and perspectives to be presented and studied make these conflicts no surprise. On one level vexing, it is in these conflicts, however, that value is conferred, not only in the value of the subject matter, but also within the values conveyed by it, and it is through these conflicts that students may become engaged. Graff argues that the teaching of literature presents teachers with the same opportunities, opportunities perhaps not

yet realized. In his new preface to the twentieth anniversary edition of *Professing Literature* he further refines his edict to "teach the conflicts" and, in doing so, refutes Guillory's supposition that "literary education no longer serves as cultural capital" (xi). Graff's contention is that it is the literary scholars and teachers that are responsible for this decline, to some extent. Their unwillingness or inability to enter into controversy by engaging students in the value constructions of literature has proven detrimental to the field, and in their refusal, they have failed to "demonstrate to a wider public just how useful their work actually is" (xii). For teachers, this has resulted in a disinterested student body and an ambivalent society, demonstrated ironically in Alberta by the requirement that all students complete fifteen credits in English and only ten in Mathematics or science courses for a high school diploma. At the same time, students, and the public, privilege Mathematics and Science, a privileging to which a survey of enrolments in the post-secondary faculties of Engineering and Science versus Arts would attest.

# Chapter Two

## Value Laden

Education is undeniably a value-laden process, and an interrogation of the documents that guide its implementation and subsequent teacher practice reveals the values our society explicitly espouses regarding public schooling – egalitarianism, tolerance, and opportunity. However, it is the implicit functions that often prove more telling. For literature's location in the process of education, Gauri Viswanathan's distinction between *literary* education and *literature* is illuminating. When literary education is utilized as a major institutional support, as it was in the British colonial system, literature becomes an "instrument of ideology" and, "once such importance is conceded to the educational function, it is easier to see that values assigned to literature – such as the proper development of character or the shaping of critical thought or the formation of aesthetic judgment – […] are more obviously serviceable to the dynamic of power relations" (3). While no pedagogic theory today equates the relationship between students and teachers with the inequalities of colonial India, the principles underlying the power dynamic are similar. Indeed, in the formative years of Canada's history, educational leaders similarly understood the influence of schools in the formation of "values" (Berger 211). Sir George Parkin, a teacher and writer committed to "imperial unity," a notion which paired nineteenth century Canadian nationalism with closer imperial ties (Berger 3), was also devoted to the formation of a public education system modelled on Britain's. He

recognized that "the education of students from the Dominions and the colonies at Oxford would not only promote imperial unity through mutual understanding but would also inculcate that sense of obligation and self sacrificing service which was at the heart of the imperial ideal" (Berger 213).

Despite the advances in education since that period, and the advent of progressive education in the 1950s and 60s with its movement to a more student centred, inquiry based classroom, as well as shifts in thinking related to the role of a teacher summed up in the familiar catchphrases of 'sage on the stage' to 'guide on the side,' there is little doubt that the subjects taught in school are still not limited to the 3Rs. As a result of being firmly rooted in the Tylerian model of curriculum, outcomes based and focused on assessment, the *Program of Studies* for English Language Arts is, like education in general, value-laden. Revised in 2000, the School Act decrees that "all educational programs offered and instructional materials used in school *must* [my italics] reflect the diverse nature and heritage of society in Alberta, promote understanding and respect for others and honour and respect the common values and beliefs of Albertans." It further states that the aforementioned programs and materials "*must not* [my italics] promote or foster doctrines of racial or ethnic superiority or persecution, religious intolerance or persecution, [and most interestingly] social change through violent action or disobedience of laws" (*Learning* 1).

Along with these explicitly stated social and political values governing all subject areas are statements devoted to the worth of language and literature contained in the *Program of Studies* for English Language Arts. From

kindergarten to grade twelve, the English curriculum is modelled on an ascending spiral staircase or what Tyler termed “vertical reiteration” (85), with overlapping and repeating sets of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that progressively become more rigorous and complicated as students proceed through primary and secondary school. The document is formulated around five general outcomes, and while interdependency exists among all five, only two (General Outcome 2 and 4), which form two thirds of the specific outcomes, are the focus of the standardized examinations administered by Alberta Education at grades three, six, nine, and twelve. The two basic aims of the *Program of Studies* are to foster an “understanding and appreciation of the significance and artistry of literature” and “to enable each student to understand and appreciate language and to use it confidently and competently for a variety of purposes” (1). The value of literary and language comprehension is certainly not unexpected in an English curriculum. As Smith asserts:

> it is largely through the normative activities of various institutions: most significantly, the literary and aesthetic academy which, among other things, develops pedagogic and other acculturative mechanisms directed at maintaining at least (and commonly, at most) a subpopulation of the community whose members “appreciate the value” of works of art and literature “as such.” (43)

Furthermore, according to the *Program of Studies*, “literature invites students to reflect on the significance of cultural values and the fundamentals of human existence; to think and discuss *essential, universal themes* [my italics]; and to

grapple with intricacies of the human condition" (1). This explication of essentialist ideas, combined with the traditional New Critics' practice of close reading focused solely on formal elements, helps maintain the status quo and is self-protective. A text turned in on itself rather than out towards the world has little ability to challenge the literal meanings immediately evident to students. Texts left critically unexamined for their ideological messages often simply reinforce previously held views, and ironically it is the challenge of these initial conceptions that generates the most interest and attention among students, allowing a multitude of voices to be heard.

The interpretive strategy, advocated by scholars such as Harold Bloom, that focuses on "teach[ing] us how to overhear ourselves when we talk to ourselves" (31) and encourages an appreciation of literature solely for its aesthetic merits is alien to generations of students who are inundated by visual and auditory stimuli, and surrounded by a public bent on openly unburdening and exhibiting themselves on television talks shows and reality programming, Internet blogging, Facebooking or MySpacing, and the instant but mundane texting and instant messaging. Students, even those dedicated to their studies, have little time and see little purpose in inner reflection, and are often unappreciative of what they perceive to be the sterile inner workings of a literary text. Typically, they view their English course as simply a subject that they must endure to fulfil a graduation requirement. My experience in the classroom has revealed that only when students become invested in the text either through some personal connection to the experience of its characters and the underlying themes, or

become engaged by the potential issues, do they see meaning in their study of English. Analysis of character attributes directly or indirectly conveyed through the text, of the setting's role in the reflection and development of conflict, the consideration of an extended metaphor, or the symbolic motif do little to advance a more relevant engagement with the text, one that might compel students to examine their own values with a result equally meritable to an aesthetic examination: consolidation or transformation.

In light of this focus on New Critical methodologies, it is interesting that two of the most significant alterations to the 2003 implementation of the new curriculum were the reintroduction of historical and contextual influences to the production of a text, and a shift in the minor response for the diploma examination from a "Reader's Response to Text" to a "Personal Response to Text." A seemingly minor and simple word change has had far greater implications. An important difference is the increase in prompting texts from one to three. Prior to 2003, students were provided with a single text, a poem, to which to respond, with the preferred response being a literary analysis of the formal elements of the poem centred on a predetermined, thematically worded topic, followed by the disclosure of some personal experience reminiscent of the poem's message. Texts included for consideration after 2003 are a poem, a prose excerpt, and a visual, reflecting the broader definition of text ushered in with the implementation. Students are encouraged, but not required, to read and examine all the texts provided and to respond to the one(s) about which they feel the most confident. Most notably, however, is the change in the form the response may

take. Rather than being limited to a personal or analytic essay, students are free to respond creatively with fictional stories, scripts, letters, journals, diaries, and rants. In fact, any prose form the student can conceive constitutes an appropriate response as long as ideas related to the assigned topic are developed and there is a reference to at least one of the prompting texts. In many ways, this shift in expectations demands even greater engagement with the text. As teachers, we might question whether the outcomes stated in the *Program of Studies* and current classroom methodologies are preparing students to, in a timed examination, probe their own values, assess those of the texts provided, compare the two and produce a meaningful response that reflects their understanding of "the intricacies of the human condition."

Within the *Program of Studies*, General Outcome 5 most explicitly deals with the acquisition of values. Focused on collaboration, the outcome states that students will respect others and strengthen the community as well as work cooperatively in groups. On the surface, these would seem to be laudable aims; however, Alfie Kohn, a leader in the progressive education movement, cautions that terms such as "respect" and "citizenship" are "slippery" as they are often "used as euphemisms for uncritical deference of authority" (180). As for cooperation, he reminds educators that too often groups are set up in competition with each other (182), for marks or approval of the teacher. While Kohn's remarks initially criticized "character education" programs, this competition can quickly spill over into other situations, when groups or individuals are pitted against one another in content review games for prizes or rewards. Moreover, in

an outcomes based curriculum that focuses on assessment, many students (at least in my experience) continue to view the attainment of "marks" as a competition, especially given the number of schools that bestow monetary awards on individuals who achieve the highest marks in a subject area and all-round highest achievement. Scholars and educators working within the progressive movement seek to remind teachers that as well as measures of performance "grades are used, in many cases as 'soft-cops' to promote social conformity and enforce institutional sanctions. Grades become […] the ultimate discipline instruments by which teachers impose their desired values, behavior patterns and beliefs upon students" (Giroux 84).

Despite the number of explicit value statements in the curriculum, they are certainly not unequivocal. For further explication of those values, an examination of the "authorized instructional materials" is necessary as these "materials play a significant role by contributing to the achievement outcomes stated in courses or programs of study" (*Learning* 1), and more definitively outline the cultural values of Albertans. This is undeniable in Alberta's English Language Arts instruction. Even a quick perusal of the authorized resources will reveal little that could be considered subversive or even controversial. Not surprisingly, in light of Smith's observation that

> The texts that survive [within the canon and most certainly the ones included in high school curriculum] will tend to be those that appear to reflect and reinforce establishment ideologies. However much as canonical works may seem to "question" secular vanities

> such as wealth, social position and political power, remind their readers of more elevated values and virtues, and oblige them to "confront" such hard truths and harsh realities as their own mortality and the hidden griefs of obscure people, they would not be found to please long and well if they were seen to undercut establishment interests *radically* or subvert the ideologies that support them *effectively*. (51)

Smith further points out that the individuals chosen to edit anthologies and select resources are likely those "who occupy positions of some cultural power." Their choices not only implicate texts as having explicit literary values, but also maintain the implicit "assumptions" and "functions" desired and deemed appropriate for their audience (46-47). However, this need not forestall a critical, and perhaps more ideological reading of a text. The appropriation of intellectuals and the downloading of responsibility for education to teachers mitigate control of the "dominant classes," opening up space for resistance and critique of existing hegemonies (Giroux 24-25). If desired, a teacher with theoretical knowledge could facilitate a more penetrating interrogation within the walls of the classroom, but the diverse nature of Alberta's school jurisdictions complicates these opportunities. The determining factor in the teacher's decision is often "culture," explained by Henry Giroux as the "mediation between a society and its institutions such as schools and the experiences of those such as teachers and students who are in them daily" (27). Hence, the culture of schools can be highly varied, even within a single jurisdiction, depending on the values of the

community the school serves, the pedagogy of the staff, and the philosophy of the administration.

Echoes of Giroux's ideas can be seen in the "Controversial Issues" policy that informs instructional delivery. The policy recognizes that there "are those topics that are publicly sensitive and upon which there is no consensus of values or beliefs […,] topics on which reasonable people may sincerely disagree" (*Guide* 84). A public endorsement of the importance of dealing with these issues is often contradicted by the reality of the classroom, for there are controversial issues and there are *controversial issues*, and the recent passage of Bill 44 with the inclusion of the section that requires parents be notified when curriculum dealing with sexuality and/or religion is presented in the classroom, provides a pointed emphasis. Ideological discussions of whether or not Canada should be in Afghanistan or have joined the United States in its invasion of Iran, or whether Shakespeare's *The Tempest* is evidence of a promotion of colonial subjugation is one debate. Discussion related to why Tommy has two fathers, birth control methods and practices other than abstinence, and the anti-Christian stance of an author can be viewed as beyond what is acceptable, and are representative of the controversial issues to be avoided. Previously, teachers were generally guided by two statements in the Controversial Issues policy to the exclusion of all others; first that controversial issues "reflect the neighbourhood and community in which the school is located" and "the school plays a supportive role to parents in the areas of values and moral development and shall handle parental decisions in regard to controversial issues with respect and sensitivity" (*Guide* 85). Experience

in the profession leads me to believe that there are few if any teachers in the province, regardless of their subject area, who fail to recognize that “the hermeneutic study that deconstructs notions of gender, sexual orientation and identity constructions” creates more hostility and opposition than any other (Slattery 160), or are willing to enter “the complex realm of antagonistic experiences mediated by the power and struggle [of parents and school boards] and rooted in the structural opposition of labor [teachers’ and students’] and capital [knowledge]” (Giroux 27). Ironically, insofar as the policy on controversial issues and a formalist focus on the text have attempted to protect students from exposure to questionable values, and teachers from public challenges, it still occurs. In most cases parent complaints related to the content of literary texts are handled at the school level, and the student is given an alternative reading and/or assignment. A couple of notable exceptions are the 2008 banning of *The Golden Compass* from Catholic school libraries for several months (Whitlock) and the 1994 challenge of John Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men* (Arthurson). The province authorized both novels for study, and no warning to teachers appeared in the annotated bibliography as to the potential for controversial content. As well, both works had been taught in classrooms for a number of years prior to the challenges. In the case of *The Golden Compass*, attention was drawn to the text more by author Phillip Pullman’s public views on the role of religion than by explicit messages in the text. In the latter case, the frequent use of the epithets “Jesus Christ” and “God-awful” by the characters in *Of Mice and Men* prompted a far more publicized challenge when the MLA of

Red Deer South, Victor Doerksen, challenged the appropriateness of the text. While neither attempt proved successful in the long run, the common thread running through both is a questioning of the value of the texts as an educational tool, as well as the values inherently promoted by each literary work.

Far more powerful than the explicit values of the formal curriculum are the values imbued within the "hidden curriculum." Studied extensively in the 1970s,[2] the term came to encompass the social interactions between students and teachers, and the material conditions of the school itself that (re)create the culture and (re)inforce desirable hegemonic discourses. Complicating early correspondence theories, Antonio Gramsci's observations that hegemonies are not simply imposed by those in power and authority, but are also maintained by the willing, albeit unknowing, acceptance by subordinate groups (242), are critical to the pervasive influence of the hidden curriculum. A school and jurisdiction's traditions, rituals, and routines create an atmosphere of harmony whereby certain values and beliefs are upheld as definitive of the institution and its population. Once these principles are established, the adults in the building need not deal with most transgressions, as peer pressure acts as a far more persuasive measure. Indeed, many of the routine rewards that students receive are not because of their success in areas related to the formal curriculum, but for exemplary attendance, punctuality, and good citizenship. By the time students enter high school, most have been shaped by the "hidden" values that will make them productive members of society. Far more significant to this discussion is what the hidden

---

[2] See Louis Althusser; Michael Apple; Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis; Henry Giroux and Anthony Penna.

curriculum conceals or excludes – what has been termed “the null curriculum.” An extension of the hidden curriculum, the null curriculum comprises those elements of the overt curriculum that are excluded because of limited time, a conscious omission, prejudice of the teacher (Slattery 234) or an understanding of what texts possess potentially controversial content. Inexorably tied to the culture of a school, these erasures can have a far more powerful effect on the students than what is formally taught, and within the realm of literary education may prove even more grave given the nebulous quality of literary interpretation. The hidden/null curriculum may result in more barred doors than entrances into a text, leaving students with fractured or fragmentary knowledge. For these reasons and many others the selection of texts and how they are taught is critical, for as Michael Apple and Linda Christian-Smith state: “Texts are really messages to and about the future. As part of a curriculum, […] they participate in creating what a society has recognized as legitimate and truthful. They set the canons of truthfulness, and as such, also help to re-create a major reference point for […] knowledge, culture, belief and morality” (4).

According to Nicholas Burbules and Rupert Berk, the literatures of critical thinking and critical pedagogy have shaped educational foundations since the 1980s, yet rarely have they discussed one another (45). Critical thinking is currently the most valued skill/ability, and the cornerstone of the English Language Arts curriculum; however no definition of the term appears in the *Program of Studies*. That omission does little to hinder instructional strategies designed to foster this ability, likely the result of the tradition’s long history, and

the fact that most teachers have been well-schooled in “the skills of formal and informal logic, conceptual analysis, and epistemological reflection, “the prime tools of critical thinking (46). In many ways, the methodologies of New Criticism support the “epistemic adequacy” (46) that critical thinking demands, and while the ability to think critically could be seen as a crucial prerequisite to critical literacy, they are not synonymous. The primary aim of critical pedagogues is to utilize the skills of close reading, an attentiveness to language use, and an understanding of context to cultivate a more perceptive literacy, one that prompts students to uncover the beliefs and values that support injustice, and then equip them with the means “to transform inequitable, undemocratic, or oppressive institutions and social relations” (47). While neither school of thought can be easily delineated, their primary criticisms of one another are significant. Ironically, advocates of critical thinking accuse critical pedagogues of crossing the “threshold between teaching criticality and indoctrination” (54), a charge more commonly levelled at schools and education in general. In contrast, critical pedagogues object to the “impartiality” of critical thinking that “simply enshrine[s] many conventional assumptions […] in a manner that intentionally or not teaches political conformity,” while simultaneously ignoring “less visible set[s] of norms and practices” (56). This “impartiality,” a value also embraced by the scholars of New Criticism, can result in a lack of “criticality” in high school students.

In the *Program of Studies* critical thinking is linked to learning and using language, making connections and anticipating possibilities, reflecting upon and

evaluating ideas, and is a precursor to students becoming independent, successful and contributing members of society (2). A clearer delineation is found in the praxis of the classroom and the summative evaluation of the skill. Driven by the requirements of the diploma examination, the critical thinking fostered in the classroom is closest to what Matthew Lipman terms "cognitive accountability" (147). In his definition, critical thinking is multi-dimensional but at its highest level is founded on "making judgments based on criteria," those criteria being reliable, respected and acceptable reasons (146). By examining the phrasing of critical response questions from the diploma examinations[3] and the descriptors in the assessment rubric (*Information* 21-25), it becomes evident that the focus of critical thinking is developing within students an ability to make interpretive and thematic judgments (Thought and Understanding) substantiated by reasonable evidence drawn from a particular text or texts (Supporting Evidence). Concentrating on the physical aspects of the text, character, setting, symbol, irony and theme, it is a far cry from Paulo Freire's conceptions of critical literacy, and is far less threatening to acceptable classroom discourse. The transformative nature of Freire's "problem-posing education" has been foundational in the development of "critical" or "radical" pedagogy, and is representative of why postmodern conceptions undermine traditional curriculum development. Very simply stated, Freire views traditional pedagogy as a performance between the

---

[3] Examples of these questions include the following: "Discuss the idea(s) developed by the text creator in your chosen text about the ways in which individuals struggle to restore honour and certainty"(January 2009), or "Discuss the idea(s) developed by the text creator in your chosen text about the significance of idealism and truth in an individual's life"(June 2009). Other examples can be found on the Alberta Education website: http://education.alberta.ca/admin/testing/diplomaexams/examples.aspx

oppressor (the teacher) and the oppressed (the student), an enterprise whereby the teacher "banks" information in the student. Within this system, the teacher owns and legitimizes the knowledge deposited in the student uni-directionally, denying students the possibilities laden within critical thought (80-85). In contrast, his problem-posing education is a guided "dialogue" between teacher and student with language at its nexus that allows people to develop the power to "perceive critically the *way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves […coming] to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (83). Decidedly Marxist in tone, Freire's model does inform the desire to provide students with an enhanced ability to see their world with greater precision, and interrogate the forces both material and ideological that shapes their reality, rather than simply provide lip service to the value of critical thinking.

A number of Freire's suppositions echo postmodern challenges to traditional curriculum development and instruction. Like Dewey, postmodern curriculum scholars are dedicated to the principles of democracy. Akin to the work of postmodernism in general, much of the work of North American educational scholars is centred on the function of race, class, and gender in schools, the reproduction of hegemonic ideologies, sites of resistance, as well as the limitations of material forces. The focus of these scholars is on how students (and teachers) can be "empowered" in such a way that they view school as meaningful and potentially transformative. William Pinar distinguishes between the "education of the public (the project of curriculum theory)" and public

education. An "education of the public" requires the teaching of "academic knowledge, but configured around faculty and student interests, addressed to pressing social (including community and global) concerns" (21). Peter McLaren speaks to Freire's critical literacy as he links "language competency" and the "analytical skills that empower individuals to challenge the status quo." McLaren's linkage echoes on a number of levels the metacognitive strand within the curriculum, which "involves reflection, critical awareness and analysis, monitoring, and reinvention" (*Program* 2). Teachers employ metacognition to engage students in a conscious evaluation of their own learning, with the aim of adapting and modifying strategies for better learning. Currently, the focus of metacognition is limited to an awareness of students' personal learning strategies, but within the underlying cognitive process lies a foundation for the interrogations required for critical literacy.

By far the ideas most militant in tone are those of Giroux, whose assertion that "the contestation for power in schools, the very power to think and act in a critical capacity, is only one step in the larger struggle to contest power concentrated in the capitalist state itself" (31). The connection between knowledge, thinking and radical change contained in these statements certainly runs contrary to the aims of a mandated curriculum. While no scholar is calling for "violent action or disobedience of laws" (*Learning*), challenges to the status quo and contestations of power are unlikely to be viewed as "desirable changes in behavior patterns" to be incorporated into the next curriculum implementation. Arming students with an ability to question the constructions of power within their school and community, as well as the authorities who hold it is equally

alarming, despite what most teachers genuinely believe to be best practice – "a self-reflexive interdisciplinary intellectuality [and] the cultivation of original thought" (Pinar 20). Moreover, few teachers welcome the riotous and chaotic atmosphere that can ensue when students begin to challenge, however legitimately, their subject matter, their teachers' instruction or their school's policies. These anxieties can be linked to a growing concern over the "de-skilling" of teachers, especially in the United States, and the prevalence of pre-packaged instructional materials, on which an over reliance leads to a lack of ability to interpret the curriculum, formulate strategies for instruction and design material for students to differentiate learning. Michael Apple connects this loss of control over the curriculum to an increased emphasis on classroom management and disciplinary techniques intent on "better controlling students" (132-33). Experienced teachers understand, often through hard-learned lessons, the inverse relationship between engaged students and misbehaving ones. Teachers proficient in their subject area, and confident of their delivery typically have far fewer management concerns. This issue, while particularly problematic in the United States, also has relevance in Canada. Notwithstanding the more rigorous teacher preparation programs, and the probationary period required for permanent certification here in Alberta, chronic under-funding has led to larger and larger class sizes at all levels over the fifteen years that I have been teaching, and increasingly greater challenges for educators. That, combined with growing demands on teachers for participation in extra-curricular and co-curricular activities necessary to keep their schools desirable in a competitive market, makes

published unit and lesson plans more attractive. Thus regardless of the reason, the results and consequences are the same – more obedient but less thoughtful students.

Since the 1980 *White Paper*, there have been two implementations of English curriculum, the first accompanying the return to the provincial examinations in 1984 and the second in 2003. Versions of the *Authorized Resource List* accompanied the implementations with numerous re-versions in the interim. Texts appeared and disappeared for a variety of reasons: in concert with new or revised programs of studies; in support of a specific project or initiative; when resources were no longer readily available; and lastly to ensure currency, accuracy and appropriateness (*Learning* 4). Even with the recognition in 1980 of the tension and confusion that a pluralistic society brings, the need to highlight approaches in education other than accountability and thirty-some years of postmodern influence in curriculum theory, the 2003 implementation was fundamentally little changed from its predecessor. In 1984, the introduction of the "Reader's Response to Text," re-designated the "Personal Response to Text" in 2003, was a concession to the importance of autobiography in critical pedagogy, as well as that of reader response theory. Its accompanying instructional practice, however, bears little resemblance to the potentially transformative power of Freire's concepts. Students are encouraged to incorporate personal experience into the response but, as evidenced by their production for the diploma examination, few seem to have developed the capacity for critical reflection that espouses an understanding of their role, dominant or otherwise, in the affirmation or rejection

of social, political or economic discourses. As for alterations to the *Authorized Resources*, definitive reasons for additions or deletions are somewhat opaque, but for the most part reflect the growing ethnic diversity in Alberta, and the assimilation of multiculturalism and globalization as societal values, factors which mirror revisions to the literary canon as a whole.

Guillory's conceptions of the canon, along with Apple and Christian-Smith's assertions about texts, become particularly significant when examining the authorized list of resources. In many ways the authorized list acts as an "illusory canon" from which a "pedagogic canon" is chosen, and illumination as to what texts *are* and *are not* being taught is most evident in the written component of the diploma examination, a standardized examination Alberta re-introduced in the mid-1980s after a four-year hiatus. On one level, these examinations are the most resounding evidence of the continued influence of Tylerian principles in curriculum development. The Department of Education administers examinations in the subjects of English and Mathematics to grade three students, English, Mathematics, and Social Studies to grade six students, English, Mathematics, Social Studies and Science to grade nines and in all academic subject areas in grade twelve. The diploma examination in English consists of two parts, one written, the other a multiple choice reading comprehension. The written portion of the examination is in turn made up of two written responses, "The Personal Response to Texts" and "The Critical/Analytical Response to Texts," with a 40/60 ratio constituting 25% of the student's final mark. In keeping with the curricular emphasis on the New Critical approach, the

topics of the written response are thematically driven, requiring students to draw largely on elements of characterization and plot to respond effectively. Proficient and excellent responses often demonstrate not only the ability to perform a close reading of a text, but also an understanding of how setting, point of view, symbolism and/or motif have contributed to the development of the text's theme. It is in this second writing assignment that information can be gleaned as to what texts are most frequently selected and taught by teachers throughout the province, as well as how often selections are made that push the boundaries of the authorized list, potentially expanding the "pedagogic canon." Typically, at a single marking session, teachers can encounter up to two hundred different texts, about one third of which are not "authorized." This not only speaks to the perceived insufficiency of the authorized list, but paradoxically also validates the freedom accorded to teachers to explore options beyond the margins of the canon. Unfortunately, this freedom is often limited, as discussed previously, by the culture and community in which one teaches, creating potential inequities, especially if the engagement of students and the fostering of critical literacy are aims most genuinely valued. These inequities can be mitigated, however, by a curriculum and instructional practice focused on critical theory and transformative interrogations of critical pedagogy.

The impact of the diploma examination on classroom practice is profound. Despite protests regarding the exam's validity, it is a reflection of what skills and abilities are most valued in the curriculum, and in our students as they exit high school. While a polling of high school teachers would likely reveal a denial of

“teaching to the test,” anyone with a 30-level course in his or her timetable is aware of the reality these examinations pose for students and the importance of preparing them regardless of pedagogic stance.  The pressure is acute, for both students and teachers. Students depend on good marks for scholarships to university and trade schools, and school districts are highly attuned to their respective results, which are available for viewing on Alberta Education’s website, and used extensively to rank schools in Alberta. In a business model environment where funding is determined by enrolment, and where schools, especially in large urban centres, run aggressive recruitment campaigns, diploma results are critical to the future of the student, the school, and the teacher.

# Chapter Three

## Engaging Value(s)

The study of text in high school English classes is multi-genre in nature. Within each course of study, students are exposed to a variety of short stories and non-fiction essays, a selection of poetry, visual and multimedia texts, a modern play, a Shakespeare play (not required in the non-academic -2 classes), and then perhaps a novel, a film, or a full length non-fiction. At each grade level, teachers have a number of requirements that must be met (*Program* 10) through the use of a variety of texts that allow for some freedom in the choice of genre and titles within that genre. A brief examination of the texts available for study on the *Authorized Alberta Resources* reveals a conservative and androcentric canon. Of the major works studied at the grade 12 level, including choices of twenty-two novels, eleven non-fiction works, five modern plays, and four Shakespeare plays, twenty-nine are written by male authors and/or feature male protagonists. Female authors and protagonists fare better in short fiction, representing approximately fifty percent of the stories available for selection, but in many ways these inclusions simply "obscure the argument […] neither leaving women alone nor allow[ing] them to participate" (Fetterly xii), especially when viewed through an uncritical lens. Male lead characters largely dominate even film, despite the fact the teachers enjoy much greater freedom in their selections.[4]

[4] There is only a Recommended List of Film for study, not one that is authorized; this speaks to the controversial nature of film and the significant influence of varying community standards throughout the province.

As far as full-length texts featuring non-white protagonists, they are few in number, and include: Anita Rau Badami's *A Hero's Walk*, Thomas King's *Truth and Bright Water*, Shakespeare's *Othello*, Gabrielle Roy's *Windflower*, and the increasingly popular yet still unauthorized *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini. A few more can be added to this list if minor characters are accounted for: Barbara Kingsolver's *The Bean Trees*, Dennis Bock's *Ash Garden,* and a number of short story characters. Along with what appears within the authorized list, it is also interesting to consider what is excluded. Not surprisingly, novels, short stories and plays by gay and lesbian authors are absent, one exception being Willa Cather, and her short story "Paul's Case." As well, despite a requirement by the *Program of Studies* that one third of texts studied be Canadian in origin, of the many men and women publishing in Canada, only Timothy Findley, Thomas King, Anita Rau Badami, Lesley Choyce, Margaret Laurence, Martha Ostenso, Gabrielle Roy, and Jane Urquhart have full length works on the authorized list. Among short fiction texts is where Canadian authors are more likely found. The relative absence of Margaret Atwood, whose novel *The Handmaid's Tale* made a brief appearance in the mid-1990s, invites note. In light of the fact that the novel is thirty-seventh of the one hundred most frequently banned books (ALA), it can be inferred that Atwood's provocative subject matter made the text too controversial for study at the secondary level. Of her vast body of work, only a handful of her poems are included in the senior level poetry and multi-genre anthologies. If, as the *Program of Studies* states, "the study of Canadian literature helps students to develop respect for cultural diversity and common values" (1),

one might question the implications of omitting a mainstream author of Atwood's merit from high school English instruction.

Despite the omission, this brief quantitative evaluation of authorized texts provides only a partial picture; for while a myriad of texts are authorized for instruction, *someone* determines what texts will actually become part of the lived curriculum for each student. As was mentioned in chapter two, teachers are with increasingly regularity making choices that extend beyond the limits of the authorized resource list. These selections may be influenced by a number of factors: individual teacher preference, the material effect of resource availability in a particular school, and/or the culture present in any one English department, which may or may not have specific guidelines and requirements for text selection. In fact, in my experience the most influential factor in the choice of resources is the collaborative nature of most schools and departments. The daunting reality of a first and second year teacher's job requires at least some sharing of resources and instructional materials; so as a matter of precedent, practicality, and indeed survival, what has been taught continues to be taught. Therefore, a far more insightful look into what consistently is taught in classrooms can be gleaned from participating in provincial marking. Teachers who regularly mark the written portion of the diploma examination would acknowledge that, although the list of texts students choose to write their critical/analytic response on grows larger every year, there is a consistent core of titles that repeatedly appear regardless of the topic. It is these dozen or so texts that form a tangible list of what literature is being taught in classrooms around the

province, and it is not just a handful or classroom of students choosing these texts as their focus but hundreds and even thousands of the approximately 15,000 students who write their examinations each January and June. The prominence of these texts: Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *Othello*; Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman*; Tennessee William's *A Streetcar Named Desire*; Henrik Ibsen's *A Doll's House*; Timothy Findley's *The Wars*; Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*; and a handful of short stories that include Alice Munro's "Boys and Girls," Margaret Laurence's "Horses of the Night," Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper," Kari Strutt's "Touching Bottom," Willa Cather's "Paul's Case," and Tim O'Brien's "On the Rainy River" reveals a canon relatively deficient in terms of race, class, gender and sexuality, and even regional representation. The individual standards of each community further complicate these deficits. That said, if the aim is critical literacy "how we read is as important as what we read" (Wallowitz 1),

Proponents of critical literacy reject "essential, universal themes" in literature (*Program* 1), advocating instead a multi-perspective approach. As discussed in chapter two, there are some fundamental differences between critical thinking and critical literacy. In the classroom these distinctions can be equated to the skills of asking and answering questions. The thinking required to answer a question is investigative. When teachers ask students to think critically, we ask them to respond and, by doing so, complete a task. In an English class these exercises may take a multitude of forms: predicting outcomes, identifying purpose or rhetorical strategies employed to achieve a purpose, connecting one's own

personal experience with a character's but essentially the aim is to have students analyze, interpret, evaluate, and create a response in a reasonable, logical, and rational fashion. In fact, students *expect* to answer questions, an action they have likely been carrying out most of their school careers, but it tends to make them passive agents in the classroom. It also leads them to falsely believe that there is an answer. I cannot even begin to count the number of students frustrated when I suggest that there is no "right" answer in response to a question related to the interpretation of a text. Their discomfort is heightened even further when they are charged with designing the questions. Typically, they resort to simple recall questions, easiest to answer and construct, and sadly but likely the ones they have most familiarity with. With some prodding, some encouragement, and some examples, they often happily surprise me with questions I had not even thought of, and here lies one of the greatest differences between critical thinking and critical literacy – the active engagement of the student. In my experience, once students begin to question "the word," they can move beyond themselves and be guided into a space where they can question "the world" (Freire and Macedo 35). Regardless of the differences, of more importance to teachers is that both traditions "arise from the same sentiment to overcome ignorance, to test the distorted against the true, [and] to ground effective human action in an accurate sense of social reality" (Burbules 53).

In the applied space of the classroom, critical literacy can be an extension of critical thinking, one with the potential to more effectively engage students in their own learning. Initially, students need guidance in the modes of thinking and

questioning. Despite progressive calls for more student-centred learning, Laraine Wallowitz reminds teachers that, "a critical pedagogue must sometimes intervene and problematize a student's thought process or point out assumptions underlying his/her thinking" (5). New Critical explications of literature support any and all interpretations as long as they are supported by the text. My experience has shown that students are often highly resistant to the idea that there are interpretations of a text underlying the literal one they immediately grasp. Complicating this is the tendency for students' initial beliefs and opinions to be reinforced by these superficial readings. Notwithstanding recent expansions of thinking in regards to Rosenblatt's transactional theory of reading to include a critical stance on her efferent-aesthetic continuum (McLauglin 52), the focus of the curriculum continues to rely largely on identification as evidenced by the expectations for responses to the "Personal Response to Text" portion of the diploma examination. Even though, "as Wolfgang Iser points out […] 'literature would be barren […] if it led only to a recognition of the already familiar'" (qtd. in Kennard 66), uncritical readers frequently find challenges to their identities and their world uncomfortable. Providing students with the critical lenses to examine texts on an intellectual level allows a distancing that may initially ease their discomfort, especially since most of what is interrogated in the service of critical literacy are the issues of race, class, gender, and sexuality; this separation can potentially enable students to re-examine their own selves. Ultimately, this interrogation is crucial. For along with a more active engagement in their own learning, the goal of critical literacy is to foster in students the ability "to uncover the inequalities

that exist within society, identify the root causes that may be perpetuating the inequalities, and to take social action so as to create a more just and equal society" (Mulcahy 18), becoming active agents, and in effect transforming not only themselves but their world(s) as well. However, examinations of this nature venture into dangerous territory. Even a preliminary application of critical theories related to race, class, and gender to a text will create a space from where students could potentially examine their own values and beliefs, and perhaps even confront the ideologies of others, in the classroom or the text, that do not harmonize with their own. The "lenses" elicited by critical theory that provide students with the opportunity to interrogate, reflect, possibly reaffirm, and potentially alter their reading of the text, themselves, and the world possess benefits with implications even for an outcome based curriculum and standardized testing. In particular, apart from the fact that the diploma examination provides some insight into *what* is being taught in classrooms throughout the province, it can also provide an awareness of *how* texts are being taught, and since how texts are taught is within a teacher's most immediate control, a way of thinking and methodology that will most engage students is crucial.

Many who read the following descriptions of student interpretations of texts may be skeptical and question why there is no disruption by the teacher of these literal and "commonsense way[s] of seeing" (Hines 128). The fact is that there is little in the *Program of Studies* that demands this "disruption" and the dominant methodologies currently present in the curriculum provide little opportunity "to address how narrative might simultaneously represent, perpetuate,

and challenge through the heterogeneous voices of its characters, the best and worst practices of its culture" (Ricker-Wilson, 112). Despite the valuable technique of close reading, New Critical methods that continue to dominate curricular instruction do not necessarily prompt an investigation of the hegemonies reflected in texts, without the deliberate intervention of a teacher.

### *"Mad Women"*

Few people could refute the under-representation and/or poor representation of women in the texts most frequently taught in Alberta's high school classrooms, and there can be little doubt that the rationale for this androcentric selection grows out of renewed/continued concerns over the underachievement of boys in the area of literacy. A plethora of research exists on the possible reasons for, and solutions to the problem, which Carol Ricker-Wilson handily encapsulates in her essay, "Color Me Purple." Different learning styles required by boys, the need for male-oriented instructional strategies and, ironically, the content in texts, and the socially constructed differences between adolescent boys and girls along with the circumscription of academic behaviours, all seek to account for male underachievement especially in the subject area of English (108-9). Complicating this issue is the feminization of the profession even at the high school level, causing a lack of "positive male role models" (Litcher 4). However, in her essay "Manners, Intellect and Potential," Charlotte Lichter refutes the claim that the achievement of boys in literacy has historically surpassed that of girls. Her contention is that once girls gained access to the

educational process, their abilities, particularly in the areas of language learning, enabled them to outperform boys. This mastery did not conform to the eighteenth century belief in the inferiority of women, that "weak bodies meant weak minds," and by the end of the century "English language and skill had become gendered, in that vivaciousness of conversational skills became considered babble and feminine while taciturnity became construed as reserved and masculine" (9). Accompanying this distinction between the genders was the fear that the "genteel manners," "polite sociability, and polished modes of conduct" (6), previously valued and encouraged in men, was resulting in effeminacy, the consequence being that reticent and unruly *masculine* behaviour became acceptable in the classroom. Even into the twentieth century, boys' underachievement was viewed as a natural outgrowth of "boyishness," with "idleness, indifference […] not only normal constructs […], but also […] symbols of 'potential'" (12). Ultimately, the conflation of these sociological constructions has positioned boys for underachievement in the modern English classroom, a place that has been "poised as feminine and […] positioned against the norms of masculinity" (13).

Despite what is a complex issue with ongoing study, eavesdropping on teachers' conversations related to the erasure of girls from what is read and studied in classrooms, efficiently reveals the essence, albeit common sense interpretation, of the contemporary dilemma – most boys will not read stories about girls, but most girls will read anything. The feminist issues implicit in this assertion are numerous, not the least of which are the expectations that girls be acquiescent, docile, adaptable, and perhaps simply grateful. Granted, many

teachers are cognizant of this inequity, but they are ambivalent, and my experience has shown that few are willing to sacrifice what they see as a potential undermining of boys' educations or to face the wrath of students, girls included, in favour of a more equitable representation of women. Fundamentally this response highlights Judith Fetterly's assertion that, despite stereotypical portrayals of women in texts, "the cultural reality is not the emasculation of men by women but the *immasculation* of women by men. As readers and teachers and scholars, women are taught to think as men, identify with the male point of view, and to accept as normal and legitimate a male system of values" (xx). Moreover, even if teachers were willing to study women's fiction exclusively, it is likely impossible given the available resources. This "immasculation" of women is further complicated by the fact that few girls wish to identify themselves with the female characters they find portrayed in literature. As Lee Edwards confesses, "the first result of my reading was a feeling that male characters were at the very least more interesting than women to the authors who invented them […]. I would rather have been Hamlet than Ophelia, […and] I quickly learned that power was unfeminine and powerful women were, quite literally monstrous" (qtd. in Schweickart 40). Critical pedagogues would assert that this situation represents the requisite grounds, on which critical literacy is founded, the unmasking of stereotypical thinking and misconceptions, which perpetuate oppression and diminished opportunity.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's image of the madwoman in the attic is an apt metaphor for students' impressions of the women portrayed in the literature

available to grade twelve students, when the focus of instruction is the textual elements and the reader's response. Their elucidation of the male construction of female characters as angels, monsters or some derivation of the two is borne out in the characters of Gertrude, Ophelia, Blanche Dubois, as well as the unnamed girl and woman in the short stories "Boys and Girls" and "The Yellow Wallpaper." Even Nora, in Ibsen's *A Doll House*, can potentially be viewed as monstrous for abandoning her children. To begin with, most students quickly identify with Hamlet in their appraisals of Gertrude and Ophelia as weak and dependent, emotionally and morally: "Frailty, thy name is woman" (*Hamlet* I. ii. 146). Both women are viewed to have betrayed the men in their lives, Gertrude through her quick remarriage to Claudius, and Ophelia in her unquestioning obedience to her father. Furthermore, in the male dominated plots, Gertrude and Ophelia are rendered voiceless, their knowledge ignored and deemed illegitimate. Gertrude's insightful observation that "His father's death and our o'er hasty marriage" (II. ii. 57) is the cause of Hamlet's "antic disposition" is dismissed by Claudius in favour of Polonius's, the spurning of Hamlet's "hot love" by Ophelia (II. ii. 131-149). Similarly, Ophelia's wisdom is clouded, in this case by madness, and students are rarely attuned to Shakespeare's traditional use of fools and mad(wo)men. Her unmasking of truths about Claudius, the Queen, and her brother Laertes in the famous flower scene are misconstrued as "a document in madness" (IV. v. 174), resulting in pity rather than perception. Her madness is further denigrated when it simply becomes another tool in Claudius's arsenal of manipulation, this time of Laertes. Perhaps not surprisingly, many female students

are often far more condemning of Ophelia than of Gertrude, despite the latter's reportedly "incestuous" behaviour. Reading her innocence as naïveté and her dutifulness as stupidity, they cannot empathize with Ophelia. Her descent into madness after the death of her father, like the banishment of Hamlet to England, is incomprehensible to them. The interpretation that Hamlet "tumbled" her with promises "to wed" (IV. iv. 61-2), making her "a maid" no more (IV. iv. 53-54), does not mitigate their opinions. Few students make the contextual connection between the social, political, and economic constraints of the time, and the women's lack of choice, particularly Ophelia's now that her virginity is lost. With no requirement in the curriculum for instruction in feminist theory, even fewer students have the means to extend their thinking and question the characters' powerlessness: how they are defined and manipulated by the men in the play, how their monstrousness is only redeemed through madness and death, and how their representation as characters might reflect the social constructs of women in the Elizabethan age or even today.

An equally despised character is Blanche Dubois, from Tennessee Williams's *A Streetcar Named Desire*. Blanche's central role in the play makes her a popular choice for students' focus on the Critical/Analytical Response, and she is commonly characterized as a lying, 'stuck up' whore whose self-delusions lead to her downfall, a reasonable assessment if left uncomplicated by a resistant reading. Far from viewing Blanche as a sympathetic character and condemning Stanley, a formalist analysis of the play often leads students toward undiscerning interpretations. Like Gertrude and Ophelia, Blanche is robbed of her voice, not

only within the play itself but also with the reader. Despite the honesty with which she describes herself, and that she "fib[s] a good deal," that "a woman's charm is fifty percent illusion" (41), that she prefers "magic" over "realism" (145), as well as her self-admitted culpability in the suicide of her young husband Allan (114-15), the uncritical reader loses sight of her genuineness. This narrow and literal vision also blurs the wisdom with which Blanche speaks in the play. Her conflict with Stanley is predicated not only on his perceived loss of power over both Stella and Mitch, but the accuracy with which she views him as "bestial" (82), a primitive, a man to spend time with "when the devil is in you" (81), not one to marry, not one with "tenderer feelings" (83). Blanche's warnings to Stella, however, are dismissed, overpowered as she is by Stanley's raw sensuality, citing as her excuse the "things that happen between a man and a woman in the dark – that sort of make everything else seem – unimportant" (81). Mitch also ignores Blanche's explanation, quoting Stanley's male words as gospel in his denunciation of her. More significantly, it is Stella who permanently silences Blanche's voice when she "couldn't believe her story and go on living with Stanley" (165). This inability to speak elucidates the idea that "in the mouths of women, vocabulary loses meaning, sentences dissolve and literary messages are distorted or destroyed" (Gilbert and Gubar 31).

Perhaps the most interesting juxtaposition, and one rarely reflected in students' responses is the issue of male and female desire. Stanley's sexuality is palpable throughout the text: in Blanche's aforementioned description, in her observation that "the only way to live with such a man is to – go to bed with him"

(79), and in his self-admitted ability to please Stella sexually and “get the colored lights going”(133). It is further reinforced in stage directions that describe Stanley (and his poker buddies) “at the peak of their physical manhood” (46), in Stella’s “thrilled” reaction to Stanley’s violent breaking of all the light-bulbs on the night of their wedding (72-73) and in her inability to stay away from him for even one night after the “blow” (63). Not surprisingly, Stanley’s, and by extension all male, sexuality, is applauded while Blanche’s desire is condemned. Throughout the play, female sexuality is linked to filth, hence Blanche’s frequent bathing, changing of clothes, and use of expensive perfume. The monstrousness of her sexuality is further emphasized by Stella’s pregnancy and her nurturance of both Stanley and Blanche. The focus on her “belly, curving a little with maternity” (67), her constant fetching of cokes (40, 92), and her presentation of a baby boy “wrapped in a pale blue blanket” (178), all reinforce her association with the Madonna, an unattainable representation. But even this image of Stella invites question when her “angelic” nature is ripped away as Stanley proudly proclaims having “pulled” her “down off them columns and how […she loved] it” (137). Moreover, a patriarchal double standard is revealed in Blanche’s observation that “men don’t want anything they can get too easy. But on the other hand men lose interest quickly” (94). All the women in the play are objectified sexually: free to be referred to as “hen[s] (48), “wild-cat[s]”(143) and “tigers” (162), “size[d] at a glance, with sexual classifications” (25), slapped on the thigh (50), and fondled through the opening in a blouse (179). Yet, Blanche’s desire to avail herself of these inscriptions to garner a “little security” during her stay at the Flamingo, and

perhaps recapture a little of the joy she felt before the discovery of Allan's secret, is vilified. Stanley uses his discovery of Blanche's lack of "squeamishness" (119) to easily sabotage her relationship with Mitch, who ends their courtship, telling her that she is "not clean enough to bring into the house with [his] mother" (150), and to mete out her ultimate punishment, her rape. A perceptive reading of the closing scene reveals more than surrender into her delusions; Blanche's commitment to "the state institution" (171) is in reality an exile to the margins. Blanche's and Ophelia's descents into madness echo Gilbert and Gubar's assertion that, like in Swift, "female sexuality is consistently equated with degeneration, disease and death" (31).

A resistant reading of the play founded in critical literacy invites numerous questions, all connected to the relationships between men and women and the status of an unattached woman, and could include:

- What circumstances have led Blanche to behave the way she does, constantly relying "on the kindness of strangers" (173), even those as inappropriate as the seventeen-year-old student and the newspaper boy?
- If Blanche's circumstances are typical of the options open to women without the "protection" of a man (146), is it surprising that both Stella and Eunice choose to stay with their physically and emotionally abusive husbands?
- Does Blanche's early flirtation with Stanley and the reputation she gains at the Flamingo Hotel mitigate Mitch's attempt to get what he has "been missing all summer" (149) or Stanley's "date" (162)?

- In what ways does society endorse and reinforce male sexuality and condemn and deny female desire?
- Which stereotypical constructions of women are reinforced and which are challenged by the characters and events of the play?

Unfortunately, as is the case in *Hamlet*, many students' appraisals of Blanche are typically viewed through the lenses provided by Stanley and Mitch, leaving little room for any other judgment than that of "monster."

The female characters discussed to this point have been constrained by their circumstances, but two frequently taught short stories explicitly examine society's influence on women, and also provide students the opportunity to become gynocritics and read narratives created by women. Alice Munro's "Boys and Girls" and Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" present students with unnamed female narrators, each of whom struggles to escape the bonds imposed by her gender. In both stories the female protagonists seek to escape narratives written for them by others. "Boys and Girls," a coming of age story, is a fine example of Judith Butler's contention that "gender is a repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, a natural sort of being" (44). In the story, an eleven-year-old girl, recognizing subconsciously the power and status that adheres to the masculine, strives to attach herself to the male world. Fearful of the "*inside*" (115), the young narrator initially seems to slip the bonds of societal expectation. Her early attempts to write her own story reveal the desire for "a world that was recognizably [hers],

yet one that presented opportunities for courage, boldness, and self-sacrifice" (116). In her quest, the protagonist rejects her mother, her domesticity, regarding both as the "enemy" (119). The girl observes how out of place her mother is "down at the barn" (118), views the work she does as "endless, dreary and peculiarly depressing" (118-19) and considers her "easily fooled" and "not to be trusted" (119). She acknowledges that neither her mother nor her father has "time" (118) and "work[…] hard enough already" (125), but simultaneously devalues women's work, and deems men's work as "ritualistically important" (119). Unfortunately, she, like the foxes, inhabits a world her "father made" (116), and is merely an understudy for the role her younger brother Laird will fill once old enough. A multiplicity of voices invades from the outside world and the narrator begins to realize the weight of the word "*girl*," a narrow "definition" not of what she is but what she would have to become (120). Her attempts to reject the domestic and interior space of her mother and grandmother's kitchen in favour of the external space of her father's fox farm are futile.  Her unarticulated admiration of the horse Flora's wild and uninhibited spirit, symbolic of her own impossible aspirations, and the unmanly quality of compassion seal her fate. When her brother Laird, smugly reveals her "decision" (125) not to close the gate, her father, with "a curt sound of disgust," exclaims, '"she's only a girl"' (126). Her narrative is complete, the ever-closing circle of her world finds its centre and she is simultaneously banished to its margins. In one breath, she is "absolved and dismissed" (126) of any further responsibility or participation in the only world that matters, the world of men. Unfortunately, students often interpret the

narrator's acquiescence as an innate response, rather than a consequence of the social constructions of gender.

There is a breadth of critical study attached to Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper." Teaching it in conjunction with "Boys and Girls" affords students the opportunity to reflect on the idea that the young mother in Gilman's story begins her narrative at the point where the young girl's ends. Having been prescribed the "rest cure" by her husband/doctor for a "temporary nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency" (328), she is confined to an upper floor bedroom, with barred windows and a bed that has been nailed to the floor. Forbidden from any social contact for fear that it might be too "stimulating" (331), the narrator first resorts to writing in her journal, a pastime disapproved of by her husband and therefore kept hidden, and then to a study of the hideous yellow wallpaper in her room. Denied any participation in her own treatment, John, her husband and self-appointed doctor, seeks not only to define the narrator's illness and cure but also precludes the writing of her own narrative. Attempts by the protagonist to voice her need for "congenial work" (329) and "companionship" (331) are met with loving condescension, and insights into her condition that run counter to John's are dismissed. She is told again and again by John that the root of her "nervous condition" (329) is her "imaginative power and habit of story-making" (330-31), her constant "giv[ing] way to fancy" (330), and that, if she would simply employ "proper self-control" (329) and "good sense" (331), she would be well again. Her descent into madness as she attempts to literally free the woman from behind the wallpaper, and herself figuratively from

the oppression of a male dominated medical profession and society are often misunderstood by students. Like those of Ophelia and Blanche, her mental incapacity is viewed as a weakness, providing further evidence of her unfitness as a wife and mother. Students often have great difficulty with the story, particularly with discerning of reliability in the narrator. Many of them want to interpret the text in a way that reinforces their existing beliefs—that husbands love their wives and want what is best for them. Their difficulty is not surprising given the inconsistency of the narrator's voice, a demonstration of her own submission to the patriarchy under which she lives, and the conflict she feels, intuitively knowing what is best but lacking the authority to "disagree with their [John and her brother's] ideas" (328). Students resist a feminist reading of the text, dismissing the narrator as mentally unbalanced, ignoring her infantilization and oppression by the medical profession, and rejecting the idea that her madness, a state that achieves a measure of freedom, also reaffirms the narrative written for her by John (Fetterly, "Reading" 163).

In my experience both in the classroom and on the diploma marking floor, student responses to these two short stories *do*, more than those to other texts, demonstrate some awareness of the feminist perspective, specifically the symbolic qualities of internal and external space, and the patriarchal oppressions that constrain choice and voice. Unfortunately, despite these recognitions, students' beliefs that conflate biological sex and gender identity sometimes lead them to an uncritical acceptance of the father's closing inscription in "Boys and Girls," that "She's only a girl," a conclusion the narrator does not deny, as natural. As well, in

reading “The Yellow Wallpaper,” students are often blinded to the richness of potential inquiry into the text by the extremity with which the narrator pursues her escape. A close and careful examination of the reliability of the narrators and an interrogation of the values underlying each of the texts give students the opportunity to examine their own narratives with “new wariness” (Munro 123).

The construction of gender is a complex process, and the representations held up to girls and women increasingly incongruous. Teachers see the consequences of these contradictory messages played out daily in classrooms, and a summary of them, worth quoting in full, is Ruth Saxton’s:

> the icons of the Girl are constantly being rewritten. The body of the young girl—whether athlete or potential Miss America—is the site of heated battles, not only among parents, teachers and coaches, but also among those who would exploit her sexuality, lure her to internalize their fantasies and purchase their products. Told she can do anything and become anything, she is also infantilized and expected to keep to her second place in a patriarchal world of glass ceilings and second shifts. Told to develop her mind, she is simultaneously bombarded with messages that reinforce the ancient message that her body is the primary source of her power, that because she is decorative, that she should have a model’s body, that she should be beautiful within a narrow range of cultural stereotypes. Portrayed as a social failure if she procreates as a teenager, she is simultaneously taught that to be a

> mother is a mark of maturity and the passage to adulthood in society. (xxi)

If limited to the New Critical approaches for studying texts, objectively focused on character descriptions and motivations, identifications of important symbols and motifs and determinations of theme, students' typically conclude and can support textually that the women depicted are either "angels" or "monsters," and in light of Saxton's description above, clearly this is not sufficient. They, like the women writers featured in Gilbert and Gubar's study, "must come to terms with the images on the surface of the glass, with, […] those mythic masks male artists have fastened over her human face both to lessen their dread of her "inconstancy" and – by identifying with the "eternal types" they have themselves invented – to possess her more thoroughly" (16-17). Given the equivalent importance of deconstructing masculine images, all students ultimately have to "kill" through critical and resistant readings the representations constructed for them.

### *"The null curriculum" of "Don't ask; don't tell"*

A corollary project of feminist theory is the construction of masculinity and a disruption of its reification. Generally, in the texts most often studied, representations of manhood fulfil student expectations. In many ways, these gender constructions reinforce the behaviours described by Litcher that impede male achievement. It is therefore as important for students to "kill," through critical and resistant readings, the representations of men constructed for them. Wayne Martino, whose work centres on boys' underachievement particularly in

the English classroom and the role critical literacy can play in ameliorating their performance, stresses the importance of "developing reading practices that not only enhance boys' involvement and interest in reading but also encourage them to reflect on the role of masculinity in their own lives" (171-72).

The masculinity of Stanley, in Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* was established in the preceding section, and many grade twelve boys find much to admire in the character. In rural schools where small populations necessitate the combining of English 30-1 and 30-2 students into one classroom, this text is a popular choice (personal communication). Authorized for study in the 30-1 stream, the play contains sufficiently complex themes for the "Critical/Analytical Response to Texts" and also avails itself to the more literal interpretations of the 30-2 (typically male) student. Stanley's boorish resistance to Blanche's and Stella's gentility is a mirror reflecting and reifying the behaviour of many seventeen-year-old boys. Moreover, Stanley's response of never being "a very good English student" (27) when learning of Blanche's profession and Stella's unyielding belief that it is not Stanley's "genius" but "drive" (53) that marks his potential affirms Litcher's assertions related to constructions of maleness and academic success. Biff and Happy Loman from Arthur Miller's *Death of a Salesman,* similarly provide representations of men requiring resistant readings. Fundamentally, the traits of the two men/boys echo the chauvinism of Stanley, with only a measure of outward polish differentiating them, and in the current social climate, many boys can identify with their more innocuous attitudes and their athleticism. In the play, Happy refers to women as "pig[s]" (1358) and

“strudel” with “binoculars” (1398), has a competitive need to “ruin” the fiancées of his superiors (1360), and he and Biff adopt their father’s practice of using women to gain access to authority figures. These views, combined with a treatment of women as objects, to be taken and discarded at will because “they’ll be plenty of girls” (1362), and a belief that an athlete like Biff can have “any babe” (1361) all reinforce a demeaning attitude toward women if left critically unexamined.

The boys’ relationship with their mother, Linda, is considerably more complex. Both of them long to find a girl morally worthy of marriage, “somebody with substance,” “somebody with character, with resistance […]. Like Mom” (1360). Implicated in their desire is more likely the need for stoicism, for a woman who will not complain, nag or place too many demands on them, and proves to be a more discerning interpretation of Linda’s character. A critical examination of her role reveals a mother and wife constantly cooking, cleaning supporting and encouraging the men in her life. One wonders the effect these depictions of masculine and feminine roles and qualities have on young men, who increasingly face women as teachers in their classrooms. Biff, Happy, and their father Willy also present readers with the opportunity to examine Litcher’s concluding paradox related to boys, where “on the one hand there stems [an] impetus to fix boys’ problems and yet […] boys who do well in school are labeled as wimps, nerds, geeks and so forth” (13). This incongruity is demonstrated by the treatment of Bernard by the Lomans. Bernard, the hardworking but “anemic” and pesky intellectual, is juxtaposed against the athletic but academically lazy Biff.

Willy frequently comments that Bernard is "not well liked," confident that despite getting the "best marks in school" when both boys get "out into the business world," Biff will "be five times ahead of" Bernard (1364). Bernard's subsequent success, established when he reappears in the play as an adult, does not negate the ever-present dichotomy of passive intellectual (feminine) and the vigorous athlete (masculine). It would be interesting to know to what extent boys' resistance to critical examinations of male characters is a response to their own reluctance to confront their own gender constructions, as men and students.

In accordance with Slattery's conclusions, it is the deconstruction of masculine images, which impinges on issues of sexual orientation that offer the greatest challenge to students that most often result in an erasure of discourse. In about my fifth year of teaching, I had an encounter with a student that heightened my awareness about the dangers of challenging deeply held values in students. It was a grade eleven class and students were reading Fannie Flagg's novel *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe*. I had chosen the novel a year earlier as a change from William Golding's *Lord of the Flies,* which I felt held little appeal for the girls in the class, and Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, whose satirical qualities were becoming increasingly difficult for students to appreciate. The class was about half way through the novel, when one of the male students stayed after class to speak to me. To say that Frank (name changed) had an aura of "maleness" is an understatement; he was a celebrated member of the school's football team, and had the reputation for living life "hard" and "fast." His concern was the relationship between two of the female characters, Ruth and Idgie, in the multi-

voiced narrative. While not being able to point to any definitive proof within the text, he suspected that these two characters were engaged in a lesbian relationship, an interpretation not without merit. He was appalled and disgusted that I would submit for study a text with content of this nature, feeling strongly that by doing so, I was promoting homosexuality. The conversation became increasingly heated on his part as I tried to explain that good literature has the potential to interrogate values, and even though authors may promote a particular point of view, the acceptance of any given set of values or beliefs lies within the reader. I suggested that his feelings of discomfort in confronting the ideas of the text in contrast to his own was a testament to the novel's merit. Finally, I was able to convince him that neither Flagg nor I was attempting to impose on him an ideology he found abhorrent, and he left, outwardly placated.  I will admit, the experience left me "gun-shy." I was already somewhat aware of the community standards in the district in which I teach, and therefore did not explore with the class the nature of Ruth and Idgie's relationship to its fullest extent, but this reinforced that understanding. As it stood, the novel was rarely chosen for study by teachers in my school and after my experience, practicality and a desire for self-protection led me to abandon it as well.

Today, what this experience reinforces is Slattery's notion of the null curriculum; an inquiry that is ignored, not interrogated, and made illegitimate. Homosexuality in the small urban, rurally situated school in which I teach is largely invisible. In a population of approximately 1500 students, less than a handful are openly gay or lesbian, and the school's culture effectively polices

their behaviour and interactions. In my fifteen years of teaching I have *known* only two boys who were gay. In both cases, they neither withheld nor promoted their sexual orientation, but they worked and associated almost exclusively with girls while in my classroom. Whether or not either student was ‘open’ to the entire school population remained unknown; regardless there was a tacit understanding accompanied by a simultaneous ignoring of their sexuality by the student body. Consequently, there is no discussion of queer pedagogy in staff workrooms, a topic that is “publicly sensitive and upon which there is no consensus of values or beliefs,” one “on which reasonable people may sincerely disagree” (*Guide* 84), and while debate may ensue regarding gender issues in the classroom, only silence exists on the topic of how to engage the sexually closeted or questioning students in our midst, a silence that speaks as loudly as any discourse (Foucault 2). Ironically, it is on this particular topic more than any other that the reader “identification” we, as teachers, so strongly encourage becomes disquieting. For like the anxieties underlying Frank’s concerns, there is a fear, regardless of how unfounded, that “relating” to a gay or lesbian character may somehow lead to adoption of his/her sexuality. Jean Kennard’s essay “Ourself behind Ourself: A Theory for Lesbian Readers” unwittingly supports this concern. Framed by Wolfgang Iser’s reader response theories and psychology of gestalt, Kennard postulates a “polar reading […] method particularly appropriate to lesbian readers and others whose experience is not frequently reflected in literature” (77). She concedes that “the process of reading, ‘of losing one’s self in a book,’” can serve to facilitate “experiment[ation]” (69), and that “as readers we

do more than simply repeat ourselves," also suggesting "the process is closer to reinforcing than transforming" (70). In conjunction with the uncertainty as to whether biology, choice, or some mixture of the two accounts for sexual preference, the concern that some latent urge might be ignited by the recognition of a homosexual character in literature makes many believe its discussion and presentation in the classroom worthy of legislation.

Only a few texts offer the possibility of eliciting discussion related to sexuality, two of which are the short stories, "Paul's Case" by Willa Cather and "Glass Roses" by Alden Nowlan. "Paul's Case" is an early twentieth century story about a rebellious, young misfit with the unshakable belief that he is destined for more than the "ugliness and commonness" (175) his life on Cordelia Street promises. Paul revels in his role as usher at the local concert hall, his habit of "flippantly" wearing "a red carnation" (171), and his use of "violet water" (177), all of which are viewed with suspicion by his father, his teachers, and the members of the stock company, who agree he is a "bad case" (179). For most students, a close reading of the text reveals that Paul's arrogant and disdainful attitude masks his fear and insecurity, and offers them the opportunity to reflect on the themes of alienation, parental expectation, and societal constraint. Typically, however, the students' struggle with Cather's style, and their deficiencies in close reading cause them to miss a detail that offers not only an explanation for the story's title, but also the reason for Paul's estrangement from his father and community. Having been forced to abandon his "fairy tale" life at the theatre and concert hall to work instead for his father's employer (178), Paul

responds by absconding with Friday's thousand-dollar deposit, and escaping to New York. Once there, Paul satiates his need for luxury, outfitting himself in new "dress clothes," "shoes," "silver-mounted brushes and a scarf pin" (180), registering himself in a room at the Waldorf, and indulging himself in all that New York has to offer. Once there, he has an encounter with a "wild San Francisco boy" (183), a detail that most students overlook as significant. A resistant reading of text requires an examination of the fuller text:

> The young man offered to show Paul the night side of the town, and the two boys went off together after dinner, not returning to the hotel until seven o'clock the next morning. They had started out in the confiding warmth of a champagne friendship, but their parting in the elevator was singularly cool. […] He could not remember a time when he had felt so at peace with himself. The mere release from the necessity of petty lying, lying every day and every day, restored his self-respect. He had never lied for pleasure, even at school; but to make himself noticed and admired, to assert his difference from other Cordelia Street boys; and he felt a good deal more manly, more honest, even now that he had no need for boastful pretensions, now that he could, as his actor friends used to say "dress the part." (183-84)

This passage along with other details from the story including: Paul's affection for Charley Edwards, his "dreading [of] something," that ever since he "was a little boy […] had always been [in] the shadowed corner, the dark place into which he

dared not look, but from which something seemed always to be watching him" (181), and his rejection of the heterosexual values of maleness, marriage, and offspring (176-77) invites an interpretation of Paul's case as one of homosexuality. When combined with knowledge of Cather's own sexuality, the "case" becomes even stronger. It is the rare teacher, at least in my school, who draws attention to these details, thus encouraging erasure. Even if students ignore or resist the possibility of Paul being gay, his values, attributes and behaviour push the boundaries of masculinity, making him a character with which students rarely have sympathy.

Alden Nowlan's "The Glass Roses" likewise confronts the varying constructions of maleness. Stephen, the fifteen year old protagonist, working in a lumber camp, is told by his father early in the story, '"You got to start actin' like a man if you want to hold down a man's job"' (424-25). Very quickly, the reader, along with Stephen, learns his father's definition of "a man": "burley," "ox-like," "serious," "purposeful" and "solemn" (424). Stephen, anxious to prove himself to his father, is highly conscious of any weakness. Stephen's bunkmate is Leka, a recent immigrant from Ukraine who suffers frequent nightmares that relive his experiences in World War II. Leka is routinely referred to as "the Polack" by other characters in the story. Gentle and sentimental in nature, his reminiscence of the destruction of his mother's glass roses makes him a target of the other men's derision. His interest in helping Stephen become a better wood-cutter, and his willingness to share stories of his home cause the others, especially Stephen's father, to question Leka's motives, and to become suspicious of "his pattin' and

pokin'" (430). Although Stephen is "attracted" to Leka's "tales of far away places" (425), he fears being too closely associated with those "kinda people" (430), and when his father insinuates that Leka's attention toward Stephen is sexual, Stephen is conflicted and "edges away from him" (431). In the story's final scene, "when the Polack began to tremble and moan, Stephen hesitated for a long time before he reached out to wake him" (431). The familiarity of the masculine constructions within the story and the distrust of Leka's "casual caresses" (430) often lead students to share the father's concern.

The authorized list contains only a couple of novels in which homosexual characters, themes or incidents are explicit, and these are accompanied by the caution that "because of the […] sexual references, the book might best be offered on an optional basis" (*Authorized* 269), and many teachers know from experience not to introduce a novel for whole class study that has not been previously read and reviewed, and that "careful consideration should be given to the sensitivities of both the student audience and the community" (*Authorized* 1). In Jane Urquhart's *The Stone Carvers* the discovery that the protagonist's brother, Tilman, is gay is relatively minor in the context of the novel as a whole. However, like the title character in Cather's "Paul's Case," Tilman spends most of his life as an outsider, forever attempting to escape parental and societal expectation. Only the annotation for Timothy Findley's *The Wars* includes a reference to the novel's explicit homosexuality. That the two incidents in the novel are also sexually violent provokes question. The reality of these factors for teachers in my district is that neither of these novels is taught except perhaps to a handful of academically

advanced students. Interestingly Khaled Hosseini's *The Kite Runner*, an increasingly popular yet unauthorized novel, also includes a homosexual rape, but of a child, Hassan. Pivotal as the incident is to the protagonist, Amir, very little detail is devoted to it, the emphasis instead being on his reaction. Nevertheless, one of the first questions my students often ask is if the perpetrator, Assef, is gay. Implicit in their inquiry is the belief that homosexuality and pedophilia are linked. I try to engage students in a discussion of power and control, and the distinctions between rape and other sexual activity.

In any of the texts in which homosexuality appears, normalcy is contrasted with aberrance, an issue central to queer pedagogy, making these inquiries the most threatening to individual and community values as well as having, potentially, the greatest value. Both Rachel Matteson and Amy Winans argue that greater inclusion of GLBT texts, and the advocating of tolerance are not enough. In her article "Against 'Tolerance': Critical Historical Literacy Methods in Antihomophobia Education," Matteson contends that "tolerance-based inquiry invites students to merely learn the codes of politeness and the boundaries of the normal" (92). Studies supporting this view are cited in Winans's essay, which suggests that "simply adding materials about 'the other' does not challenge our pedagogy or conceptual framework in meaningful ways; the additive approach of inclusivity or celebration of difference tends to leave dominant cultural assumptions and their complex relationships to power unexamined" (104). It seems evident that in the case of sexuality it is important to first make visible the normative hierarchies that put heterosexuality at the centre. The facilitation of

resistant readings that “interrogate processes of normalization”, “dominant assumptions and beliefs,” and “disrupt binary models of sexuality” (Winans106-7) is critical. Despite students’ ignorance of the subject, it is part of their lived experience, and as Winans reminds us, “most student learning takes place outside the classroom and […] the development of a critical consciousness is a tool for empowering one to act in the world” (104).  That said, queer theory continues to be a contested site, and more than any other critical pedagogy, it remains difficult and dangerous to include its discourse in classrooms.

# Conclusion

In 1965, T. S. Eliot remarked that “Education is a subject on which we all feel we have something to say. We have all been educated, more or less; and we have, most of us, complaints to make about the defects of our own education; and we like to blame our educators, or the system within which they were compelled to work” (62). Unfortunately, Eliot expresses a sentiment with which most teachers still can identify. The lives of teachers are riddled with “dabbler[s]” (Eliot 63) who profess to know what will make our curriculum more sound, our teaching more effective, and our students more thoughtful. At the time Eliot made his statement regarding education, he was unsure of whether he was a “dabbler,” having taught both children and adults, and written about what he termed “the fallacies of educational theory” (62). However, just as Eliot’s comment on our collective understanding of education resounds, so do a number of his criticisms of the purposes of education. The aims of education outlined by the educator C. E. M. Joad for the mid-twentieth century: “To enable a boy or girl to make his or her living; To equip him to play his part as a citizen of a democracy; To enable him to develop all the latent powers and faculties of his nature and so enjoy a good life” (qtd. in Eliot 69) echo those included in our current *Program of Studies* for English Language Arts: “to enhance students’ opportunities to become responsible, contributing citizens and lifelong learners while experiencing success and fulfillment in life” and, to “acquire employability skills: the fundamental, personal management and teamwork skills they need to enter, stay in and progress in the world of work” (1). Eliot’s concern that, “education may come to be

interpreted as *educational adaptation to environment*" rather than a process in which students are "educated to criticize" (72-73), resonates as well. Teachers, embracing critical pedagogy, recognize "the potential richness and utility of introducing cultural criticism to their students and encouraging them to view literature through political prisms" (Appleman 52).

In her introduction to *Contingencies of Value*, Barbara Herrnstein Smith ponders the value of the sonnets to their original readers, "those thou's to whom they were addressed and into whose hands they may have been delivered" (2). Any conclusion, while interesting, would only be a footnote historically, especially given the canonicity with which those same sonnets are now viewed, for it is the "real readers," those who "look over the shoulders of those thou's" (3), those who saw fit to preserve the sonnets, and those who first included them in a course of study or syllabus who have ultimately, if perhaps only contingently, determined their value. For students reading the sonnets four hundred years later, the appreciation felt by those initial recipients can only be an echo. Many who teach and love English might dream of returning to the time when literature was considered a "social institution" (Kernan, *Imaginary* 12), when an appreciation of the aesthetic was singular and sufficient. As teachers we can strive to instil some regard for the beauty of the language and literature's aesthetic merits, but the reality is that student esteem will never measure up to those individuals for whom the sonnets held personal value. I, however, am not so naïve as to believe in the possibility of that "clock being turned back," nor am I convinced that in today's educational climate, literature's sole purpose is an analytic instruction of its form and structure. That literature has been a profound influence on society and

individuals is incontestable, especially given its roots in Biblical texts and theological dissertations, epic poetry and philosophical treatises, and innovations of genres, all of which exist under the heading of the Western canon. That being said, in our increasingly complex, and relativistic society:

> Literature is ceasing […] to be believable and useful to large and important groups in the society on whom it has depended for support, and […] literary criticism is increasingly failing to carry out its traditional functions of interpreting the works and explaining their values in such a way as to justify them to new audiences and adjust them to changing social and psychological needs. (Kernan, *Imaginary* 32)

Gerald Graff echoes this concern when he confronts John Guillory's claim that "literary education has lost some of its cultural capital" and questions whether society is a 'technobureaucracy'" that has no further need of this kind of knowledge or whether "literary educators have failed to demonstrate to a wider public [including our students] just how useful their work actually is" (*Professing* xii).

In an effort to reassert the merits of literary study, it would seem that critical pedagogy, and its ability to uncover the values of a text for the purpose of undermining hegemonic thinking presents an undertaking for which many teenagers could likely have an affinity, given what seems to be their natural penchant for questioning authority. Rather than shying away from the potential conflicts and controversy, teachers can employ these strategies to engage student

interest. In addition, "since no text tells us what to say about it," experienced and sensitive teachers can provide students with the tools and language required to have "critical conversation[s]" and "critical argument[s] in order to effectively read and write about literature" (Graff, *Professing* xviii). Implicated in this shift in praxis is the recognition and admission by teachers that "the teaching of literature is the teaching of values" (Gates 35), and the need for teachers to reflect on, and interrogate their own biases, as well as the contexts from which they make choices about what they teach. It also necessitates a re-evaluation of professional development activities, away from the Tylerian driven assessment and outcomes models, and towards a broader definition of the term "critical" and "literacy."

The founding premise of this thesis is that, at present, teachers of high school English are under-mining, in other words, under-utilizing the texts we present to students, and in doing so are missing the opportunity to engage students in the value(s) of literature and language. The reasons for this are numerous and complex, but my belief is that it is in the best interest of students to excavate the resources we have available to encourage resistant readings that ameliorate their critical literacy skills, and provide them with strategies for interrogating their world and themselves. Fundamentally, the question comes down to what do we value in education and what is the value of education? Is it the ability of our students to simply adapt to their current climate or their ability to question, and in that questioning innovate, alter, and aspire? While the answer to this question may be evident to those invested in critical literacy, and would seem to be implicated in the *Inspiring Education* report, the implications of this shift are not simple.

The interrogation of values inherent to critical literacy represents a location from which students can gain a greater appreciation of language, and the structures of a text. In my experience, all but a few rarefied students appreciate the complex and fluid functions of language, and approach the delving into character, setting and theme with any relish. However, the process by which a critically literate student would examine a text offers opportunities to link the underlying messages to not only the use of language, but also to methods of characterization, choices of setting, and even uses of irony and symbol. Students who can be guided to identify the gendered messages of womanhood in "Boys and Girls" and *A Streetcar Named Desire,* or who read the constructions of masculinity and sexuality in "Paul's Case" and "The Glass Roses," can also be led into an examination of the ways in which the formal aspects of the text amplify those said messages. The interpretive strategies of the New Critics, those so familiar to teachers, need not be completely abandoned, only problematized. Potentially, the New Critical skill of close reading, the interactivity of readers' response, and the questioning of critical pedagogy could become intertwined to form a curriculum supportive of a classroom practice that engages students and enhances their appreciation of the literary text.

Perhaps more important than the potential of investing in students a greater value of literature and its merits, are their own opportunities for growth and a broader vision. Literary instruction with a critical focus frees students, and gives them rein to explore the multiple perspectives of the text, their own lives and society as a whole. The assumption that students are unaware of the social

and political tensions within their school or community is flawed and, "by attempting to bracket the issues that students engage in deeply, we fail to engage critically with the discourse communities that play the most far-reaching roles in their lives, and we allow many of their beliefs and strategies used to normalize them to remain unquestioned" (Winans 106). Furthermore, in spite of the growing diversity in the province, and because of it as well, a disruption of students' notions of privilege is critical. Ultimately, critical pedagogy can facilitate conversations, allowing students to explore "their own role in oppression and/or empowerment" (Glazier 144), and while some individuals may remain resistant to these conversations, most teachers would acknowledge it is more about planting the seed than necessarily seeing the fruition. I know I have often thought about Frank's experience with *Fried Green Tomatoes at the Whistle Stop Cafe*, and wondered if somehow his experience in my classroom prepared the ground for greater tolerance and some future understanding. Lastly, it is my belief that an engagement in critical literacy will provide students with the power they now see themselves as lacking, the power to question, identify and effect change in a world they realize is far from perfect.

There is no doubt that the implications for educators and government would also be enormous. The shift to a focus on critical literacy would require an interrogation of the biases and contexts within which texts are interpreted; an engagement in professional development to advance understanding of critical literacy and the inherent differences between it an critical thinking; a confidence in and the professional ability to manage conflict and controversy; the pedagogic

integrity to stand up for the education most teachers believe all students deserve, as well re-appropriation of the professional judgment needed to determine at what level students are cognitively, socially and emotionally ready to confront certain issues. Most importantly, it would require a revision of the *Program of Studies* to include critical literacy as a component of critical thinking. Despite the fact that there are no specific details or timeline for curriculum revisions (*Inspiring* 5), the tone of the Minister's Steering Committee Report seems to invite this shift.

In Plato's "Allegory of the Cave" people accustomed to living in a world of shadows are brought into the world of light, where the intensity of the sun causes incredible pain and, for some, the desire to return to the familiar darkness of the cave. Plato crafted the parable as a lesson on the importance of using one's reason and intellect to distinguish between reality and illusion. Initially the allegory was written as a warning against the dangerous representations within art and poetry, those elements of study that appealed to the part of people's minds drawn toward illusion. For Plato, the enlightenment accompanying the abandonment of the cave also meant a very prescriptive form of knowledge. Today, the scope of this narrative's interpretation has broadened, and come to represent a metaphor for the ideals of education, a nudging of young minds out from the darkness of ignorance into the illumination of knowledge, interrogation and thinking. However, Plato's allegory, and its modern reading, is complicated in our new era or as Joe L. Kinchloe calls it "the era with no name" (20), a world no longer perceived simply as light and dark, black and white. In fact, a more accurate appraisal would be that we exist in a world of shadows, with shades of

grey unilluminated by the light of Truth as Plato conceived it. As well, students resist presenting themselves as vessels into which knowledge, skills and values can be poured. Nor are they pieces of clay to be moulded into "well-wrought urns." Under a myriad of twentieth and twenty-first century influences, students tend to remain imperfect and misshapen. However, it is within these ever-expanding complexities that space is opened for the lenses needed to function proactively in this global, postmodern, post 9/11 world. Perhaps we need to see education as Richard Rorty suggests: "not as helping to get us in touch with something […] called Truth or Reality, but rather in touch with our own potentialities" (25). While some might view the *Inspiring Education* document as simply another in the long line of Platonic maxims in service of the state, its vision resonates, and it seems to encourage the interrogations critical literacy promotes. As Maxine Greene states, teaching is about possibility:

> it is a matter of awakening and empowering today's young people to name, to reflect, to imagine, to act with more concrete responsibility in an increasingly multifarious world […]. The light may be uncertain and flickering, but teachers in their lives and works have the remarkable capacity to make it shine in all sorts of corners. (147-48)

She expresses a sentiment that few teachers, who view the work they do as a vocation, could deny sharing. Embracing rather than shying away from the values that present themselves in literary texts creates these possibilities, not only for

fostering better students and citizens, but also in reigniting the multidimensional value(s) inherent in the literary word and world.

## Works Cited


American Library Association. "100 Most Frequently Banned Books: 1900-1999." www.ala.org/ala/issuesadvocacy/banned/frequentlychallenged/challengedbydecade/1990_1999/index.cfm. December 30, 2009.

Althusser, Louis, "Ideology and the Ideological State Apparatuses." *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*. Trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthy Review Press, 1971.

Apple, Michael. *Education and Power*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 1995.

---. "The Hidden Curriculum and the Nature of Conflict." *Interchange* 2 (1971): 27-40.

Apple, Michael, and Linda K. Christian-Smith. "The Politics of the Textbook." *The Politics of the Textbook*. Ed. Michael Apple and Linda K. Christian-Smith. New York: Routledge, 1991. 1-21.

Appleman, Deborah. *Critical Encounters in High School English: Teaching Literary Theory to Adolescents*. 2nd ed. New York: Teachers College, 2009.

Arnold, Matthew. "The Function of Criticism at the Present Time." *The Norton Anthology of Theory and Criticism*. Ed. Vincent B. Leitch. New York: W.W. Norton, 2001. 806-25.

Aronowitz, Stanley, and Henry A. Giroux. *Education under Siege: The Conservative, Liberal and Radical Debate over Schooling*. South Hadley, MA: Bergin and Garvey, 1985.

Arthurson, Wayne. "Firemen Not Allowed." *Vue Weekly*. 24 February 2005. www.vueweekly.com/article.php?.=1535. 26 December 2009.

*Authorized Resources: ELA Novels and Nonfiction List for Grades 4-12*. Alberta Learning. Edmonton: Government of Alberta, 2003.

Bennett, William. *To Reclaim a Legacy: A Report on the Humanities in Higher Education*. Washington, DC: National Endowment for the Humanities, 1984.

Berger, Carl. *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideal of Canadian Imperialism 1867-1914*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1970.

*Bible Readings for Schools*. Department of Education. Edmonton: Government of Alberta, 1936.

*Bible Readings for Schools*. Department of Education. Edmonton: Government of Alberta, 1949.

*Bill 44: Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Amendment Act 2009*. Government of Alberta. www.assembly.ab.ca/net/index.aspx?p=bills_status&selectbill=044. 22 August 2009.

Bloom, Allan. *The Closing of the American Mind*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987.

Bloom, Harold. *The Western Canon: The Books and School of the Ages*. New York: Harcourt Brace, 1994.

Bowles, Samuel, and Herbert Gintis. *Schooling in Capitalist America*. New York: Basic, 1977.

Burbules, Nicholas C., and Rupert Beck. "Critical Thinking and Critical Pedagogy: Relations, Differences, and Limits." *Changing Terrains of Knowledge and Politics*. Ed. Thomas S. Popkewitz and Lynn Fendler. New York: Routledge, 1999. 45-65.

Butler, Judith. *Gender Trouble*. New York: Routledge, 1999.

Cather, Willa. "Paul's Case." Perrine 170-86.

*Curriculum Decision-Making in Alberta III: A Change Curriculum for the Changing World*. Edmonton: Government of Alberta, October 1980.

Dewey, John. *The School and Society* and *The Child and the Curriculum*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1956.

DiYanni, Robert, ed. *Literature: Approaches to Fiction, Poetry and Drama*. New York: McGraw Hill, 2004.

Elliot, Brian, and David MacLennan. "Education, Modernity and Neo-Conservative School Reform in Canada, Britain, and the US." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 15. 2. (1994): 165-85.

Eliot, T.S. "The Aims of Education: Can 'Education' Be Defined?" *To Criticize the Critic*. London: Faber and Faber, 1965. 61-76.

Ellis, John M. *Literature Lost*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1997.

Fanon, Franz. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Trans. Richard Philcox. New York: Grove, 2004.

Fetterly, Judith. *The Resisting Reader: A Feminist Approach to American Fiction*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1978.

Fetterly, Judith. "Reading about Reading: 'A Jury of Her Peers,' 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue,' and 'The Yellow Wallpaper.'" Flynn and Schweickart 147-64.

Foucault, Michel. *The History of Sexuality: Volume 1*. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage, 1980.

Freire, Paulo. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 30th Anniversary ed. Trans. Myra Bergman Ramos. New York: Continuum International, 2002.

Freire, Paulo, and Donaldo P. Macedo. *Literacy: Reading the Word and the World*. South Hadley, MA: Bergin and Garvey, 1987.

Flynn, Elizabeth A., and Patrocino P. Schweickart, eds. *Gender and Reading: Essays on Readers, Texts and Contexts*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1986.

Gates, Henry Louis. *Loose Canons*: *Notes on the Culture Wars*. New York: Oxford UP, 1992.

Gilbert, Sandra M. "What do Feminist Critics Want?: A Postcard from the Volcano." *The New Feminist Criticism*. Ed. Elaine Showalter. New York: Pantheon, 1985. 29-45.

Gilbert, Sandra, and Gubar, Susan. *The Mad Woman in the Attic*. 2nd ed. New Haven: Yale UP, 2000.

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. "The Yellow Wallpaper." DiYanni 328-39.

Giroux, Henry A. *Ideology, Culture and the Process of Schooling*. Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1981.

Giroux, Henry A., and Anthony N. Penna. "Social Education in the Classroom: The Dynamics of the Hidden Curriculum." *Theory and Research in Education* 7 (1979): 21-42

Glazier, Jocelyn Anne. "Anti-Oppressive Pedagogy and Curriculum in Secondary English Methods." Kumashiro 141-48.

Graff, Gerald. *Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts Can Revitalize American Education*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1992.

---. *Professing Literature: An Institutional History*. 25th Anniversary ed. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 2007.

Gramsci, Antonio. *Selections from Prison Notebooks*. Trans. Q. Hoare and G. Nowell-Smith. New York: International, 1971.

Greene, Maxine. "Teaching as Possibility: Light in Dark Times." Macrine 137-49.

*Guide to Education*. Alberta Education. Edmonton: Government of Alberta, 2010.

Guillory, John. *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1993.

Hines, Mary Beth. "Ways of Reading, Ways of Seeing." Kumashiro 125-39.

Hirsch Jr., E.D. *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know*. Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1987.

*Information Bulletin: English Language Arts 30-1*. Alberta Education: Edmonton, Government of Alberta, 2010.

*Inspiring Education: A Dialogue with Albertans*. Alberta Education: Edmonton, Government of Alberta, 2010.

Kennard, Jean E. "Ourself behind Ourself: A Theory for Lesbian Readers." Flynn and Schweickart 63-80.

Kermode, Frank. "Canon and Period." *History and Value*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988. 108-27.

Kernan, Alvin. *The Death of Literature*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1990.

---. *The Imaginary Library: An Essay on Literature and Society*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1982.

Kimball, Roger. *Tenured Radicals: How Politics Has Corrupted Our Higher Education*. 3rd ed. Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1998.

Kinchloe, Joe L. "Critical Pedagogy in the Twenty-first Century: Evolution for Survival." *Critical Pedagogy: Where Are We Now?* Ed. Peter McLaren and Joe L. Kinchloe. New York: Peter Lang, 2007. 9-42.

Kohn, Alfie. "A Critical Examination of Character Education." Ornstein and Behar-Horenstein 176-92.

Kumashiro, Kevin K., and Bic Ngo, eds. *Six Lenses for Anti-Oppressive Education*. New York: Peter Lang, 2007.

*Learning and Teaching Resources, Policy 3.2.2*. Alberta Education. Edmonton: Government of Alberta, 2005.

Lichter, Charlotte. "Manners, Intellect, and Potential: A Historiography on the Underachievement of Boys in Literacy." Kumashiro 3-15.

Lipman, Matthew. "Critical Thinking – What Can It Be?" Ornstein and Behar-Horenstein 145-52.

Macrine, Sheila L., ed. *Critical Pedagogy in Uncertain Times: Hope and Possibilities*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

---. "What Is Critical Pedagogy Good For? An Interview with Ira Shor." Macrine, *Critical Pedagogy* 97-115.

Martino, Wayne. "'Dickheads, Wuses, and Faggots": Addressing Issues of Masculinity and Homophobia in the Critical Literacy Classroom." *Negotiating Critical Literacies in Classrooms*. Ed. Barbara Comber and Anne Simpson. New Jersey City: L. B. Erlbaum, 2001. 171-87.

Matteson, Rachel. "Against 'Tolerance': Critical Historical Literacy Methods in Antihomophobia Education." Wallowitz, *Critical Literacy* 87-99.

McLaren, Peter. *Life in Schools: An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy in the Foundations of Education*. 5th ed. Boston: Pearson Education, 2007.

McLaughlin, Maureen, and Glenn DeVoogd. "Critical Literacy as Comprehension: Expanding Reader Response." *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy* 48. 1 (2004): 52-62.

Miller, Arthur. *Death of a Salesman*. DiYanni 1352-1420.

Miller, Janet L. *Sounds of Silence Breaking: Women, Autobiography and Curriculum*. New York: Peter Lang, 2005.

Mulcahy, Cara M. "The Tangled Web We Weave: Critical Literacy and Critical Thinking." Wallowitz, *Critical Literacy* 15-27.

Munro, Alice. "Boys and Girls." Perrine 114-26.

Nowlan, Alden. "The Glass Roses." Perrine 424-31.

Ornstein, Allan C., and Linda S. Behar-Horenstein, eds. *Contemporary Issues in Curriculum*. Needham Heights, MA: 1999.

Perrine, Laurence, ed. *Story and Structure*. Canadian Edition. Toronto: Harcourt, 1987.

Pinar, William. *What Is Curriculum Theory?* New Jersey City: L. B. Erlbaum, 2004.

Plato. *The Republic*. Rev. ed. Trans. Desmond Lee. New York: Penguin, 1974.

*Program of Study: English Language Arts (Senior High)*. Alberta Learning. Edmonton: Government of Alberta, 2003.

*Programme of Studies for the High School*. Department of Education. Edmonton: Government of Alberta, 1939.

*Reading for Pleasure for Junior High Schools*. Department of Education. Edmonton: School Book Branch, 1949.

Ricker-Wilson, Carol. "Color Me Purple." Kumashiro 107-23.

Rorty, Richard M. "Hermeneutics, General Studies, and Teaching." *Why Literature Matters: Theories and Functions of Literature*. Ed. Rüdiger Ahrens and Laurenz Volkmann. Heidelberg: Universitäsverlag C.Winter, 1996. 23-36.

Rosenblatt, Louise M. *Literature as Exploration*. 5th ed. New York: MLA, 1995.

Saxton, Ruth O. "Introduction." *The Girl: Constructions of the Girl in Contemporary Fiction by Women*. Ed. Ruth O. Saxton. New York: St. Martin's, 1998. xi-xxix.

Schweickart, Patrocinio P. "Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading." Flynn and Schweickart 31-62.

Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet*. DiYanni 1101-1202.

Slattery, Patrick. *Curriculum Development in the Postmodern Era*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Smith, Barbara Herrnstein. *Contingencies of Value*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1988.

Tomkins, George S. *A Common Countenance: Stability and Change in Canadian Curriculum*. Scarborough, ON: Prentice-Hall, 1986.

Tyler, Ralph. *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction: A Syllabus for Education 305*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1950.

Viswanathan, Gauri. *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study in British Rule*. New York: Columbia UP, 1989.

von Heyking, Amy. *Creating Citizens: History and Identity in Alberta's Schools, 1905 to 1980*. Calgary: U of Calgary P, 2006.

Wallowitz, Laraine, ed. *Critical Literacy as Resistance*. New York: Peter Lang, 2008.

---. "Introduction." Wallowitz, *Critical Literacy* 1-9.

*White Paper: Curriculum Policy in Alberta*. Edmonton: Government of Alberta, 1980.

Whitlock, Nathan. "Golden Compass back on shelves in Calgary." *Quill and Quire*. 24 January 2008. www.quillandquire.com/blog/index.php/2008/01/24/golden-compass-back-on-the-shelves-in-calgary/. 26 December 2009.

Williams, Tennessee. *A Streetcar Named Desire*. New York: New Directions, 2004.

Winans, Amy E. "Queering Pedagogy in the English Classroom: Engaging with the Places Where Thinking Stops." *Pedagogy: Critical Approaches to Teaching Literature, Language, Composition and Culture*. Durham, NC: Duke UP, 2006. 103-22.