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English Teachers' Association of NSW
www.englishteacher.com.au
Issue 2 2009

ENGLISH TEACHERS' ASSOCIATION NSW 2009

ETA EXECUTIVE 2009

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mETaphor, Issue 2 2009

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Mark Howie, Head Teacher English, Penrith High School



English teachers who truly value their professionalism would encourage a rigorous curriculum, taught with expertise, that provides all students with the best possible written and verbal communication skills and an appreciation of literature.... Only a strong curriculum, with a corresponding overhaul of teachers' training in universities, will restore English to the status it deserves.

(Editorial, *The Australian*, February 28 2009)

After the fall of English, as described by the editor of *The Australian*, what can possibly come next? There is no denying that a national curriculum for English is moving ever closer, with the actual writing process to begin in April. But can it offer salvation? Will the national curriculum be the impetus for English and its subjects to rise upwards in the light of a new dawn, the harbinger of restored grace following the long, dark night of 'postmodern English' (cf. Lucy and Mickler, 2008)?

On the terms of his own argument, the editor of *The Australian* certainly believes that a national curriculum for English must not, as a matter of the utmost priority, resemble any other English curriculum now being implemented in Australia – his newspaper has, after all, and for some decades now, been very critical of the teaching of English *everywhere* in this country. (From memory, I don't believe a single state or territory has escaped the sanction of *The Australian*. At the very least, as far as I can recall, none has been praised for its English curriculum. I would welcome being corrected on this, but I won't be holding my breath while I wait.) So, to what precisely can English be restored? Following the line of argument being put forward in *The Australian*, we are in dire need of a restorative model of English, which can only come from outside the profession, if not – and perhaps even better – from another country. (As I am typing this, the refrain "He's not the messiah. He's just a naughty boy!" is echoing in my head. I wonder what that might portend in relation to the supposedly messianic national curriculum?)

It's not of any great help to turn to the editor to see what he suggests might constitute a "strong curriculum". For example, his willingness to endorse the definition of "literature" provided in the framing paper, which he restates as "plays, novels and poems ... cinema, television and multimedia ... poetry, picture books, multimodal texts, short stories and drama, and a variety of nonfiction forms such as biography", hardly adds clarity, rigour or precision to discussions about this particular element of the curriculum. In the mind of the editor, to now

include "cinema, television and multimedia" somehow enhances the very notion of literature and how it has been understood throughout history. Puzzled? If I weren't so staunchly opposed to the great humanist project of English, being a hard line post-structuralist, just as every other English teacher who becomes involved in their professional association is also supposed to be, I'd cry. After all, if I can't turn to *The Australian* for a consistent line and a willingness to see truth as absolute and eternal, how can I ever hope to declare my sins and ask for absolution? Where else might I find a moral framework in this hollow, relativistic world? Once upon a time, and not so very long ago (February 2, 2008, to be exact), it was suggested in an editorial in *The Australian* that the use of "popular culture" texts in English classrooms amounted to serving up "drivel" to students. In this particular epistle, the editor reaffirmed his paper's commitment to "classic literature", and he was not referring to Wikipedia or old episodes of *Gilligan's Island* and *Get Smart*. Still, I want to believe. I want to believe. If *The Australian* is willing to give ground on such matters, as it apparently has in the last twelve months, it is worth further pursuing the 'fall' and resurrection of English in a considered fashion.

It has therefore come to pass that I have been doing some reading around a possible model for a national English curriculum, particularly with reference to the integration of the three elements of the national curriculum framing paper for English: Language, Literature (now so widely defined as to be unrecognisable in a historical sense) and Literacy. I am very willing to acknowledge here the spiritual guidance of the editor of *The Australian* in my search for meaning. In fact, his appropriating of the metaphor of the 'fall' of English has given me the impetus to finally read a most interesting and thought provoking book, Robert Scholes' *The Rise and Fall of English* (1998). With all of the enthusiasm and exuberance of a new convert, I am willing to state what my guru-editor is willing to intimate (how else does his argument make any sense?) but unwilling to say directly: *textuality* should be the organiser of a national curriculum. This

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is Scholes' argument in relation to the future of English (as he saw it in his work with American teachers at the end of the twentieth century). It is also the position that the editor of *The Australian* adopts, at least in effect, when he endorses a definition of literature that goes well beyond seeing it as a heightened form of linguistic and cultural expression, in familiar print forms (i.e.

As our culture is “organized by the most complex system of textuality that the world has ever known”, we need to be literate across a various and complex network of different kinds of writing and various media of communication

novels, short stories, poetry, plays), which is studied for its aesthetic and moral qualities. Appropriately recontextualised, with any necessary additions being made to acknowledge that a decade has passed since the publication of his book, Scholes' “Pacesetter English” (what a title!) introduces a potentially very generative set of possibilities for approaching the structure, scope and content of a national curriculum that both looks to the subject's future and acknowledges its past. I would hope that this might have some influence at a national level, in the movement from the framing paper to the actual writing of the curriculum. Accordingly, I offer the following summary of Scholes' “alternative to current courses [in the US] for the twelfth and final year of formal schooling” as a way of furthering discussions about what a national curriculum for English in this country might look like in the senior years, and the implications of this for the English continuum.

Scholes describes his course, which was co-developed with, and trialled by classroom teachers, as a “capstone” course. By this he means a course that will enable students to “use all that they have learned in their previous years of study” and to realise how that learning “connects to the lives they hope to live”. The “goal of such a course should be for all students to attain the highest degree of literacy they can”. The course should also cater for the different post-school destinations of students. (These, of course, are all issues that the national curriculum framing paper has raised.)

Interestingly, in light of Literacy being a discrete element in the framing paper for English, Scholes defines literacy as the “ability to understand and to produce a wide

variety of texts that use the English language – including work in traditional forms, in the practical and persuasive forms, and in the modern media as well.” As literacy is essential to the life success of all young people, Scholes argues that “language itself – and its use in various forms, genres, and media – [must be] the center of attention.” (This was also a suggestion made in the AATE response to the national curriculum framing paper. For this, the national association was castigated in *The Australian*.)

It is difficult to summarise Scholes' curriculum in detail here due to space restrictions. However, it is worth emphasising the principles of “textual power” (which is also the title of another excellent book by Scholes) upon which it is built:

- As our culture is “organized by the most complex system of textuality that the world has ever known”, we need to be “literate” across “a various and complex network of different kinds of writing and various media of communication.”
- Students need to learn to read “in the full sense of that word.” This requires students to be able to “place or situate a text, to understand it from the inside, sympathetically, and to step away from it and see it from the outside, critically.” In striving to understand a text as it is, students will also ask “how it connects – or fails to connect – to the life and times of the reader.”
- Every text “offers its audience a certain role to play.” This means that “textual power” also involves the “ability to respond, to talk back, to write back, to analyse, to extend, to take one's own textual position in relation...to any kind of text.”
- “Textual power” includes the ability to generate new texts, to make something that did not exist before...”
- Scholes explains his course through the metaphor of “voices”. He describes any culture as being a product of its history – “a history in which many voices have spoken and continue to be heard: voices from [the] past, voices from abroad, individual voices, institutional voices, the loud voice of the media and the still, small voice of individual conscience.” The course then centres on students “listening to those voices, understanding how one culture can be made out of many voices, and finding the voices that one needs to express oneself and be heard in the midst of this hubbub.”

Scholes' “Pacesetter English” is organised around six units. He stresses that “the common features of the course as it is taught in different schools should not be a particular set of works to be ‘covered’ but a set of certain kinds of works to be studied and responded to in certain

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ways." The emphasis then falls on the students' ability to "situate and comprehend a range of texts in different genres and media, from different times and places, and to produce new texts of their own in response to what they have read and considered." For every unit, there will be a "set of criteria that should enable situations to suit local conditions." All texts considered in the course "should be studied in such a way as to connect them to the issues and concerns of this country and its people at the present time", making it a truly national curriculum. The course organisation establishes a very clear entitlement for all students and suggests that teaching and learning can be differentiated to meet the particular needs of students without losing those entitlements.

Unit 1 is titled *Introduction to the 'Voices of Modern Cultures'*. This unit centres on the "student, and that student's relation to language." Students will consider "their own position as cultured speakers, with voices shaped by their heritages, their experiences, and their schooling." Each student will be asked to "investigate how he or she is 'situated' as an individual who belongs to certain groups and addresses insiders and outsiders in different voices." They will also, at the same time, "be investigating the voices of a range of writers addressing the questions 'Who am I?' and 'Who are we?'" Scholes links such a unit back to the past of English in the following way: "Like traditional courses, it will present poems and essays [for example] to be read by students. But it will present these texts as examples of textual power for students to emulate... 'What can I learn from this text, this writer, about how to express myself?' is a question that energizes the relationship of the student as reader to the text being read. It is this energy that should drive this whole course."

Unit 2 is *'Stranger in the Village': Encountering the Other, Being the Other*. This unit is about "I – they or us – them relationships." It focuses, in its reading and writing activities, on the situation of being an "other" – hence the metaphor of the 'stranger in the village.' The goal is to "help students avoid feeling like strangers in the village of literature but to feel instead like members of a literary culture that includes them..." Scholes notes, by way of example, how this theme appears in the work of writers such as George Orwell and James Baldwin.

Unit 3 is called *Cultures and Voices in a Single Text*. It explores the power of a single complex text, such as a novel, to "represent a medley of voices engaged in a conversation and/or struggle for cultural space." The novel will be chosen on the basis of its literary merit, as well as the fact that "it takes up the problem of voices speaking directly from places separated by cultural gaps." Of what

students might gain from this unit, Scholes writes: "A good novel should help us understand more about some other place or time – but it should also bring us to a deeper knowledge of ourselves and our own place and time. One reason for studying the voices in a novel is to listen for echoes of the voices that will become ours when we assert our textual powers."

Unit 4, *Inheriting Earlier Voices*, is a "major unit", eight weeks are suggested, in which a "dramatic text from the past [Scholes lists *Othello* as an example] is the center of an investigation that has two parts or tracks." The importance of this unit is put by Scholes as follows: "Neither of these tracks is simple. In a course that is built around the metaphor of voice and the concept of culture, this unit is the centrepiece around which everything else turns. In the first part, students explore the play in the history of its writing and its production down to the present time." The second track involves students thinking about the play "as theatre, as staging, as vocal interpretation and performance." From this approach, Scholes hopes students will, through their own active and generative reading, come to understand that "readers must help to renew literary texts by connecting them to their own times, their own lives."

Unit 5 is *Film, Language, and Culture*. In this unit students will study two films. The first will be studied as an "example of how the apparatus works to achieve its effects", which includes students applying their knowledge to their own creations. Scholes identifies the auteur status of the director as a good criterion for text selection in this instance. The second film "should be one in which the larger themes of the course are represented: voices in cultural conflict or conversation." With regard to the teaching of this unit, Scholes emphasises that teachers should look for opportunities to explore how aspects of visual meaning making can "help students to a better understanding of how written texts use resources that are in certain ways very similar but often crucially different."

Unit 6, *Mediating Culture / The Representation of Events and People*, is centred on those "textual media that represent culture for us and thus influence the culture itself." The aim of the unit is to help students to "understand 'mediation' (the pouring of raw data

All texts considered in the course "should be studied in such a way as to connect them to the issues and concerns of this country and its people at the present time", making it a truly national curriculum.

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through the sieve of any particular medium) as a textual process that requires interpretation." The unit will involve students in creating a "serious piece of work on the way that an event or a group has been represented in one or more media." Students will "refine their sense of how events are investigated and reported by producing an investigative text of their own."

A criticism of the framing paper made by both ETA and AATE was that it did not convey a strong enough sense of the place of students in the curriculum. For this reason, Scholes's summation of what he hopes students would learn in a course such as the one he has proposed strikes the right note for me: "Like all English courses, this one should lead to better reading and writing skills, but in this case it should also lead to a better understanding of how each student is situated in our textualized, mediated world....The purpose of this course is to help students recognize and use the many voices out of which the one nation and its culture are always being made and remade." This, it seems to me, is a pretty strong foundation upon which to build a national curriculum.

The Rise and Fall of English: Reconstructing English as a Discipline is published by Yale University Press.

As reporting (and misreporting) of the ETA and AATE responses to the framing paper for English continues in the national press, I'd urge members who have not already read the responses to do so. Corrections and clarifications in relation to the misreporting that has already taken place are also being posted at the website of each association.

You might have some thoughts on what you would like to be teaching in a national curriculum. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this with you and other members on the ETA bulletin board.

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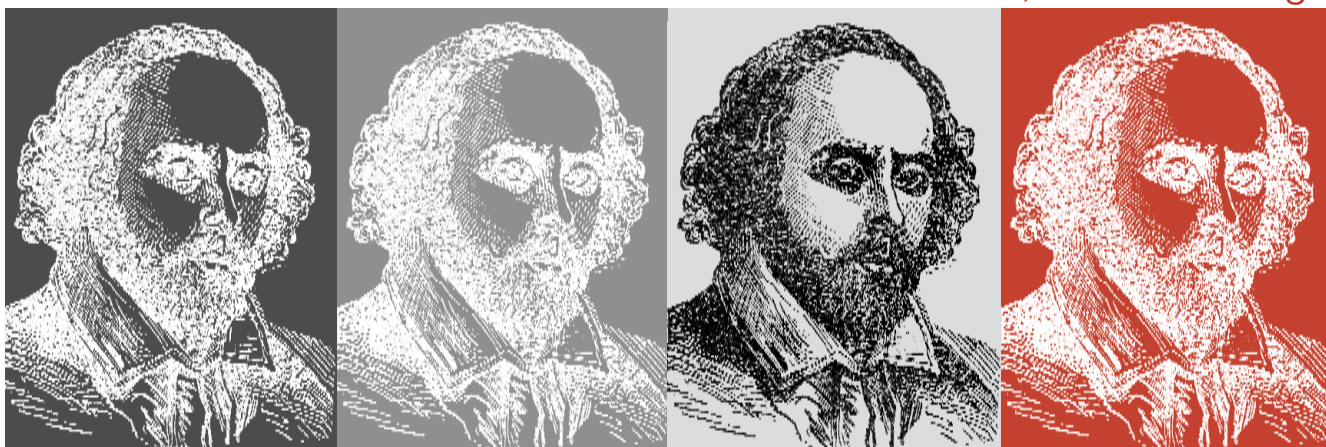
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ROMANTICISM: through 'shades of black' in Michael Almereyda's neo-noir *Hamlet* (2000)

Shaun Colnan, Barker College



'It is artificial to separate the work of performance from the work of criticism. Performance is criticism and criticism is performance.'

In an essay about the paintings of Edward Hopper, Alain de Botton contemplates 'the pleasures of sadness' that occasionally come to us, from that intimate, everyday practice of selecting, collecting and – when we take a moment - looking at the images we choose to place on the walls above our desks and in our private domestic spaces:

By buying a postcard reproduction and hanging it prominently above the desk ... we may be trying to have it as an omnipresent, solid token of the emotional texture of the person we want to be and feel we are deep down. By seeing the picture every day, the hope is that a little of its qualities will rub off on us. What we may welcome isn't so much the subject matter as the tone ... We know we will of course drift far from it – that it won't be possible or even practical to hold on to the picture's mood forever, and we will have to be many different people ... but it is a reminder and an anchor that will tug us back to the qualities within it.¹

The interior life and its sensibilities, the emotional texture of a person; the intricate connections between who we feel we are and the images we treasure that anchor us to qualities we value; our drift from these qualities; the roles we must play; and then Shakespeare's 'mind's eye' (1.2.185)² with its endless possibilities; are all ideas to which De Botton gives expression. These ideas are also at the heart of Michael Almereyda's auteurial vision in directing *Hamlet*. De Botton's evocative words could have been used by Almereyda and his Hamlet, Ethan Hawke, in rehearsal, to explore and develop Hamlet's back story, to find the actor's through line, as he performed those crucial sequences, in the space of Hamlet's apartment at

the Elsinore Hotel, midtown Manhattan. In Almereyda's filmic adaptation of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (2000)³, we are presented with, for the first time in more than forty eight film versions of the play⁴, scenes shot in Hamlet's room, his individualised, private space, rendered in precise detail through Almereyda's cluttered and eclectic mise-en-scène.

Magdalena Ciećelak describes the room:

Hamlet occupies an apartment in the Elsinore hotel but all his stuff is crammed in one room. The central place in it is the desk with his computer and the VCR equipment. The desk overflows with sheets of paper, books and all sorts of stationery. The general impression is that of creative mess, stressed by the fact that the wall over the desk is decorated with a chaotic composition of photographs, posters, postcards and pictures.⁵

The film looks most like a postmodern, new millennium, youth culture *Hamlet*, with its cold, corporate, towering backdrop, its jump-cut editing, its play with non-linear time frames and its grungy, avant-garde, Peruvian cap-wearing protagonist. *The look* is what initially draws us in. What sustains our engagement however is what I seek to explore in this paper: the ways in which Almereyda self-consciously invokes the codes and conventions of film noir in order to re-assert as the film's primary explanatory framework, the mainstream currents that we see in nineteenth century romantic literary criticism.

Huw Griffiths points out:

It is in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, that the archetypal Hamlet of popular

¹ De Botton, A. The Pleasures of Sadness, *Tate ETC Issue 1 Summer in Tate Online* (2004). Retrieved November 3, from <http://www.tate.org.uk/tateetc/issue1/article1.htm>

² Edwards, P. ed *Hamlet Prince of Denmark*, *The New Cambridge Shakespeare*, (2005).

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⁴ Davies, A. and Wells S. eds., *Shakespeare and the Moving Image: the plays on film and television*, Cambridge University Press 1994, p. 180

⁵ Ciećelak, M. *Michael Almereyda's Hamlet – An attempt at Hamlet*, *University of Lodz. NUT*, (2001), v. 1, p. 119

ROMANTICISM: through ‘shades of black’ in Michael Almereyda’s neo-noir *Hamlet* (2000)

*culture – a moody, melancholy, poetically suicidal young man – is born.*⁶

This is the Hamlet that Almereyda and Hawke give us, sitting endlessly in front of his computer screen, viewing and re-viewing grainy black and white video footage of his father, his mother and Ophelia. There are intimations of a lost past and the messy collection of pictures on his wall suggest an impulse towards aestheticism that he struggles to subdue in order to fulfil his ghastly mission. It is through noir stylistics, or through ‘painting it black’⁷ and engaging in generic experimentation, that Almereyda delivers a fresh and intense filmic representation of *Hamlet*, signposting it as a work of unity and of enduring value, primarily because, as has been the dominant way of seeing Hamlet for two centuries, he is the noble yet troubled outsider.

Almereyda, a former art history student from Harvard who dropped out to pursue a career in independent film making⁸, was certainly influenced by a range of sources, including scholarly criticism. In an interview with Jeffrey Anderson, Almereyda refers to the insights he gained from Jan Kott:

*“There’s a terrific book,” Almereyda breaks in, “that was kind of a simple overall guide, by a Polish scholar named Jan Kott called ‘Shakespeare, Our Contemporary’. His point is that contemporary themes and ideas are either anticipated or embodied by the stories and characters Shakespeare wrote 400 years ago, and if you treat him as an equal he speaks very directly to you.”*⁹

In an interview with Cynthia Fuchs, Almereyda is explicit about his intentions. In explaining his view on the decision to ‘drop the ball’ on Hamlet’s madness and focus instead on Hamlet as a depressed young man, he states:

I wanted to invoke old-fashioned romanticism and contemporary concerns ... Goethe was one of the first people to say that even if Hamlet’s father hadn’t appeared to him, Hamlet would still be in bad shape. Even if his father hadn’t been killed, there’s something in him that’s full of turmoil and doubt, and would always be looking around corners and re-examining what a lot of people take for granted. You don’t have to be mad to do that. He could be apathetic at one

*moment and really urgent and passionate the next. We wanted to play more with that, than make him hopping mad.*¹⁰

This particular type of deep fascination with Hamlet’s psychology first appeared in criticism in the late eighteenth century. A brief survey of romantic criticism about *Hamlet*, with its focus on subjectivity and aestheticism, helps to clarify the hermeneutic shift from neo-classicism and sheds light on why this period became so influential and enduring in its impact on criticism and performance from the nineteenth century to the present day. Hamlet’s rise ‘to world stature’ was due to a changed way of seeing the play, as ‘a simulacrum for solving the age’s great philosophical problems of knowledge and personhood.’¹¹ Criticism shifted from a focus on decorum and the classical unities of Aristotelian tragedy, to a new primary focus on character as psychological portrait. As the new century progressed, the image of the romantic Hamlet of moral sensitivity, hesitation and indecision became, according to Grady, a cultural obsession in Germany and in England. The play was revered as a unified, comprehensible work of great merit due to the belief that the character of Hamlet was both unified and comprehensible.

It is not surprising then, that Almereyda drew inspiration from Goethe, particularly in the former’s portrayal of Hamlet as the son of corporate America but who chooses instead to be an avant-garde videographer. His *Mousetrap* is a film within the film, compiled and edited by Hamlet. Goethe, in his bildungsroman, *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship* (1824) instigated the romantic conception of Hamlet as the poet or artist.¹² The hero is profoundly affected by his reading of *Hamlet*. He explains his thoughts about Hamlet’s plight to his friend Serlio and to his sister Aurelia:

*There is an oak tree planted in a costly jar, which should have borne only pleasant flowers in its bosom; the roots expand, the jar is shivered... A lovely, pure, noble and most moral nature, without the strength of nerve which forms a hero, sinks beneath a burden which it cannot bear and must not cast away.*¹³

⁶ Griffith, H., *Shakespeare: Hamlet*, Palgrave MacMillan, (2005) p. 20

⁷ Schrader, P., *Notes on Film Noir in Film Genre Reader*, Grant, K. ed., University of Texas Press, Austin, (1986) p. 173

⁸ Kipp, J. Michael Almereyda in *Senses of Cinema* (2003). Retrieved November 5 at www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/directors/03/almereyda.html

⁹ Anderson, J. Brushing Up Shakespeare: Interview with Ethan Hawke and Michael Almereyda, *Combustible Celluloid* (May 4th 2000) Retrieved October 23 at www.combustiblecelluloid.com/inthawke.shtml

¹⁰ Fuchs, C. Looking Around Corners, Interview with Michael Almereyda, *Pop Matters*. Retrieved October 28 at www.popmatters.com/film/interviews/almereyda-michael.shtml

¹¹ Grady, H. Hamlet and the present: notes on the moving aesthetic ‘now’ in *Presentist Shakespeares*, Grady, H. And Hawkes, T. eds, Routledge, Oxon., (2007), p. 146

¹² Griffith, *Shakespeare: Hamlet*, p. 30

¹³ Von Goethe, W. *Wilhelm Meister’s Apprenticeship*, (tr. T. Carlyle), Vol. 1 London: J.M. Dent, (1824), p. 212.

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Significantly, in Goethe’s novel, there is something about and within Hamlet that renders him unable to ‘stake his claim in the world.’¹⁴ The works of Goethe and Schlegel, with the latter’s focus on Hamlet as epitomising a world that has lost its way, influenced English writers of sensibility, such as William Hazlitt and S.T. Coleridge, to go further and to represent Hamlet in their own image: the romantic poet, the modern man.

Hazlitt’s projection of his own qualities, and indeed of all of human kind’s, onto Hamlet’s character is new:

*It is we who are Hamlet...We have been so used to this tragedy that we hardly know how to criticise it any more than we should know how to describe our own faces...His (Shakespeare’s) plays alone are properly expressions of the passions, not descriptions of them. His characters are real beings of flesh and blood; they speak like men, not like authors ... The character of Hamlet is itself a pure effusion of genius. It is not a character marked by strength of passion or will, but by refinement of thought and feeling...he remains puzzled, undecided and sceptical, dallies with his purposes, till the occasion is lost, and always finds some pretence to relapse into indolence and thoughtfulness again.*¹⁵

Similarly, in Coleridge’s *Twelfth Lecture*, he expresses intrigue about Hamlet, characterising him as having ‘a world within himself’:

*This admirable and consistent character, deeply acquainted with his own feelings, painting them with such wonderful power and accuracy ... still yields to the same retiring from reality, which is the result of having, what we express by the terms, a world within himself... all that is amiable and excellent in nature is combined in Hamlet, with the exception of one quality. He is a man living in meditation, called upon to act by every motive, human and divine, but the great object of his life is defeated by continually resolving to do, yet doing nothing but resolve.*¹⁶

While romantic critics such as Hazlitt and Coleridge redraw Hamlet in their own image, Almereyda does much the same thing. His Hamlet is an indie filmmaker, trying to no avail, due to extraordinary circumstances, to exercise directorial control over his own life. The extended takes with Hamlet gazing at footage of

moments and people from his past into his computer screen, as though it would swallow him whole, are a self reflexive, authorial feature of this film. Romantic criticism prove to be a fruitful stepping off point for Almereyda as he does what many postmodern artists do: ‘use Hamlet’s story as a way of telling their own.’¹⁷

The most well known scene from the film and highly romantic in its inflection, is the ‘To be or not to be’ soliloquy, delivered in full, as Hamlet wanders aimlessly through the aisles of a sterile, fluorescent-lit Blockbuster video store in the early hours of the morning. While the scene has attracted much attention for the ways its location speaks so particularly to its new millennium context in terms of its visual representation of the postmodern condition, with its monotonous and ubiquitous mediatisation and its bland product placement, it also aligns with Hazlitt’s, Coleridge’s and especially Goethe’s view of Hamlet. Almereyda’s Hamlet may look like the inhabitant of this mundane world but we have already, through restricted narrative perspective, learned that Hamlet the filmmaker, the thinker, the poet and the aesthete is so much finer than where he finds himself in the film, both physically and spiritually. The scene is postmodern in its self reflexivity and intertextuality. Hamlet having just filmed and viewed violent footage of himself, gun to head, gun in throat, walks through the aisles of the store and is surrounded by walls of action films. He is trapped within genre categories, unable to act and Hawke’s somnambulant performance style at this point in the film reinforces the notion that generic classifications are ultimately limiting. The decision to visit the video store is an embodiment of Hazlitt’s ‘relapse into indolence’, Coleridge’s ‘retiring from reality’, Goethe’s ‘oak tree’, ‘shivered in the jar’. Hamlet is a romantic everyman here, but he is also a noir protagonist; a dead man walking (a recurring noir motif), trapped in an alienating modern city, with a crime to avenge and no will to do so. Film noir offers up parables about downward social mobility, impaired masculinity, tales of voyeurism, corruption, surveillance, fear and loss, and about those who lose the American Dream, those who lose everything.

Ethan Hawke’s amusing one liner about the scene adds another layer:

*I don’t think there’s anybody who hasn’t walked through a video store and thought that perhaps they should kill themselves.*¹⁸

¹⁴ Griffith, H. 2005, *Shakespeare: Hamlet*, Palgrave MacMillan, p. 31

¹⁵ Hazlitt, W., *Characters of Shakespeare’s Play*, Wiley and Putnam, (1845), digitised by Google Scholar, 5th November, 2007. Retrieved November 2, pp. 70–76

¹⁶ Coleridge, S.T. *Lectures on Shakespeare and Milton: The Twelfth Lecture* (1811–1812), digitised by Google Scholar, 5th November, 2007. Retrieved November 2 p. 145, p. 149

¹⁷ Semler, L.E. *A Proximate Prince: The Goopy Business of Hamlet Criticism*, *Sydney Studies in English* (2006), p. 108

¹⁸ Anderson, J. *Brushing Up Shakespeare: Interview with Ethan Hawke and Michael Almereyda*, *Combustible Celluloid*, (2000 May 4th) Retrieved October 23 at www.combustiblecelluloid.com/inthawke.shtml

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The Blockbuster video store scene is a key moment in the film in which we see the intersection of the film’s critical and performance currents, those of romanticism and noir, resulting in a sophisticated and layered communication of meaning, in response to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* and its reception in a range of contexts over time.

The film embodies certain ideological tensions and complex ironies at other points of intersection between romanticism and noir, between criticism and performance. The emergence of an orthodox way of seeing *Hamlet* as a work that most closely aligns with the birth of modern selfhood, has since been reinterpreted as myopic, as an exclusively masculinist selfhood.¹⁹ Critics such as Janet Adelman and Lisa Jardine have interrogated the implications for the ways in which the women of the play and especially Gertrude have since been read and performed. Adelman refers to Gertrude’s ‘odd’ position in the play, to ‘mother as other’ and highlights that in the fantasy structure of the play ‘[t]he Queen, the Queen’s to blame.’²⁰

Jardine asks:

*Now, as I tackle Gertrude one more time, I do so under the pressure of a question which seems to me an increasingly pressing one in relation to the play, Hamlet: Why does it seem to have become necessary, at the very end of the twentieth century, in order to keep our sympathy for the hero (to sustain the tragedy), that we shift the burden of blame from Hamlet and make him blameless? And why does it seem so unavoidable that however we shift our critical terms and methodologies, the burden of blame should settle so inevitably on the fragile shoulders of Gertrude? ... Hamlet criticism (and productions of Hamlet) seem mesmerizingly powerless to rid her of blame.*²¹

Adelman’s and Jardine’s perspectives are germane to this examination of Almereyda’s treatment of Hamlet and indeed, of Gertrude and his use of the currents and undercurrents of noir to facilitate this treatment. Critics have foregrounded the interest in subjectivity during the romantic period as having a knock-on-effect for the representation and interpretation of gender and power in *Hamlet*. Feminist and psychoanalytic film theorists of the

1970s, such as Laura Mulvey,²² note that in film noir of the 1940s and 1950s, the femme fatale embodied the social and political need in post-war America to assuage the anxieties caused by the discourse of the new woman, by the return of soldiers to families and to a society that they did not recognise and by a past that was irrecoverable. The beautiful, dangerous and sexualised woman of noir, often, interestingly, a black widow, and thus spider-like, had to be ‘killed off, cooled off or fetishised.’²³

It is not surprising then that Michael Almereyda invokes noir stylistics and ideology, given the rich possibilities inherent in doing so. He directed Diane Venora to adopt a performance style strongly reminiscent of the 1940s femme fatale, with her overtly sexualised behaviour towards her new husband, her hyperbolised black costuming (at times so much like Joan Crawford), her black hair, heavy makeup, red lips, black leather boots and deterioration into drunkenness after the revelations of the closet scene. Yet, the camera’s lingering close up on her sorrow-filled face at the end of her son’s violent attack on her on the bed in the closet scene and her unequivocating protection of Hamlet in the closing sequence by drinking the poison, brings redemption to her character and creates a heightened sense for the audience about the flawed assumptions underlying the unquestioning acceptance of generic codes and their meaning. Almereyda seems to suggest that in spite of Gertrude’s appearance, perhaps she is not a femme fatale after all. Thus he engages discerningly with the codes and conventions, as well as the currents of critical thought which he employs. Neo-noir auteurs such as Roman Polanski in *Chinatown* (1974) and Ridley Scott in *Blade Runner* (1982) have similarly used the femme fatale archetype in a heightened way in order to comment on and critique the undercurrent of misogyny that has been identified in classic Hollywood film noir. An interesting discourse emerges in the film in terms of the representation of gender and power. For Almereyda, the ideologies of romanticism and film noir, not to mention the contentious ideologies at work in Shakespeare’s play, become a rich source of inspiration in the film.

Like Shakespeare’s play, Almereyda’s film is about acting and performing within generic contexts which are prone

¹⁹ Note: Hazlitt’s statement that Shakespeare’s characters ‘speak like men, not like authors.’

²⁰ Adelman, J. Suffocating mothers: Fantasies of maternal origin in Shakespeare’s plays, *Hamlet to The Tempest*, Routledge, NY, (1992) pp. 30, 31.

²¹ Jardine, L. *Reading Shakespeare Historically*, New York: Routledge, (1996) p. 148, p. 156.

²² Mulvey, L. *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema* (1975).

The article referred to is a reworked version of a paper given in the French Department of the University of Wisconsin, Madison, in the Spring of 1973.

²³ Arthur, P. *Film Noir and Cold War Culture*, (unpublished lecture, July 12, 2002, presented to Cinema Studies for the High School Teacher, NYU Summer School).

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to collapse when pushed to their limits. John C. Cawelti explains:

*The present significance of generic transformation as a creative mode reflects the feeling that not only the traditional genres, but the cultural myths they once embodied, are no longer fully adequate to the imaginative needs of our time.*²⁴

Cawelti wrote this in 1978 and then predicted the emergence of a new set of generic constructs more directly related to the imaginative landscape of the second half of the twentieth century. He was right. Generic experimentation is an important source of artistic energy for young auteurs such as Almereyda. In *Hamlet* it allows him to trace, ultimately, just as Shakespeare seems to, the collapse of generic forms and codes when they collide with a universe that is enigmatic and deeper in its destructive power than familiar narrative structures can contain. Yet I maintain that, rather than its edgy postmodern neo-noir look and feel, it is still our close association with Hawke’s highly sympathetic Hamlet that is the source of the film’s power and appeal. Almereyda’s romantic vision is richly realised, supporting the idea that this particular way of seeing the play and its hero is a compelling one.

Finally I want to turn to a brief look at Ophelia, in relation to performance and criticism, noir and romanticism. As Elaine Showalter points out, Ophelia’s behaviour, her appearance, her costumes and her props are iconographic, freighted with emblematic significance, associated symbolically with the feminine,²⁵ in both performance and criticism. Yet, Ophelia has also been dismissed almost as collateral damage, in criticism that so restrictively foregrounds the qualities and plight of Hamlet. Hazlitt refers to Hamlet’s treatment of Ophelia in these terms:

*His conduct to Ophelia is quite natural in his circumstances. It is that of assumed severity only. It is the effect of disappointed hope, of bitter regrets, of affection suspended, not obliterated, by the distractions of the scene around him.*²⁶

Lacan called Ophelia an ‘object’ and in 1959, provocatively as ‘that piece of bait named Ophelia.’²⁷ Ophelia has been silenced in much criticism of the last

two centuries and Almereyda enters into this contentious discourse, sharpened by his use of selected noir elements. While there are misogynist currents in noir, there are also racist currents. In classic Hollywood noir, Asia is exoticised but also represents an unknowable Other. Neo-noir auteurs such as Polanski, Scott and Scorsese exaggerate these currents in order to critique them. In Almereyda’s film, Julia Stiles as Ophelia is dressed in Asian inspired costumes. In some ways this reflects the hybrid, global culture of Manhattan in 2000, but combined with her silence in the film and her subjugation to the control of her father, her brother and Hamlet, Almereyda portrays a distressing and ideologically loaded representation of female suffering. In the film, Ophelia is infantilised. Her father ties her shoe laces. She is wired for surveillance. Before meeting Hamlet, Polonius in the presence of others puts his hands under Ophelia’s clothing in order to attach wires to her torso. When she goes mad in the Guggenheim Museum she is dressed like a femme fatale ragdoll. She wears a black jacket with the feathered collar of the noir woman, but it looks as though it has seen better days and may have been retrieved from a rag bag.

Ophelia is violated by others, silenced and rendered unknowable, by Almereyda’s discerning employment of noir visual codes. Yet her suffering and her ethereal presence are some of the most powerful and memorable elements of the film. She is fetishised by Hamlet as he freezes and then zooms in on old footage of her on screen, capturing an intense eye-line gaze, rendering her as dead already and ghost-like. Her father takes a precious miniature romantic woodland scene that she holds away from her and she is left to inhabit the edges of one water feature after another, until her inevitable death by drowning beneath an architecturally simulated water fall.

The figure of the madwoman permeates romantic literature and stands for sexual victimisation, bereavement and thrilling emotional extremity.²⁸ Drowning was seen as a feminine death and the connections between women, water and death have been culturally ingrained for centuries. In noir as well, there is an attachment to water. The empty noir streets glisten with rain and docks and piers, with women looking into the black depths below are common.²⁹ Again, Almereyda draws together these codes to create a mythical undercurrent about female suffering in the film and to critique cultural assumptions about gender and power which have been shaped by and are reflected in criticism about *Hamlet* and in film theory of the last twenty five years.

²⁴ Cawelti, J.C. *Chinatown and Generic Transformation in Recent American Films in Film Theory Criticism*, Oxford Press, 2nd ed. (1978), p. 578–579. ²⁵ Showalter, E. *Representing Ophelia: women, madness, and the responsibilities of feminist criticism in Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, Parker, P. and Hartman, G. eds, Routledge, (1985), p. 80.

²⁶ Hazlitt, W. *Characters of Shakespeare’s Play*, 75

²⁷ Lacan, J. cited in Showalter, E., *Representing Ophelia: women, madness, and the responsibilities of feminist criticism*. (1959)

²⁸ Showalter, E. *Representing Ophelia: women, madness, and the responsibilities of feminist criticism*, p. 83.

²⁹ Schrader, P. *Notes on Film Noir*, p. 176.

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I would like to end where we began, with a consideration of the ‘emotional texture’ of Hamlet’s inner life, reflected in the pictures above his desk. At the start of the closing sequence of the film, Hamlet in a rare, tender and quiet moment, carefully takes down the pictures from the wall above his desk, one by one. He then walks to the door, looks back into the room and turns off the light. He goes on to fulfil the familiar final moments of Act 5, with a sword fight, which becomes a bloody shoot-out on the hotel roof, true to noir conventions. It is however, that tender private gesture that stays with us beyond the film’s credits. Almereyda’s Hamlet is a noir protagonist and a romantic figure, highly sympathetic. The accomplishment of the film is that Almereyda develops the romantic idea of the rise of the modern self through this characterisation of Hamlet, but in a way that foregrounds and interacts with modern and postmodern theory, as well as with historical and cultural influences in the present and of the past. We are left also with a complex, layered and thought provoking representation of the women of the play and of the worlds they inhabit both in performance and in criticism. Perceiving performance in the light of criticism and criticism in the light of performance is a fertile realm in which to trace Michael Almereyda’s filmic expression of romantic sensibilities through noir’s shades of black.

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♦
Shaun Colnan’s essay was awarded the John Bell and Joyce Williams Prize in Shakespeare Studies, 2008, and was mentioned in the 2008 University of Sydney Dean’s List of Excellence in Academic Performance



THE FATE OF LOVE FROM WIMPOLE STREET TO WEST EGG: *The Great Gatsby* and *Sonnets from the Portuguese*

Dr David Kelly, University of Sydney

*In olden days a glimpse of stocking
Was looked on as something shocking
Now, Heaven knows, anything goes!*

This was the way that one of F. Scott Fitzgerald's contemporaries, the great Broadway composer Cole Porter, summed up the contrast between his own time and the Victorian age that preceded it in his witty but cynical love song 'Anything Goes'. In our common usage, 'Victorian' has become a term synonymous with repression, abstinence, and rigid moral behaviour. It provides a stark contrast, then, with that period in the early 20th century when Fitzgerald wrote *The Great Gatsby*, a riotous time in post World War 1 America which Fitzgerald himself famously referred to as 'The Jazz Age'. Also known as the Roaring '20s, the image we have of this period is a sort of antithesis to our stereotypic picture of the high Victorian world in which Elizabeth Barrett Browning wrote her *Sonnets from the Portuguese*. And yet, surprisingly perhaps, the two texts under consideration in this unit reverse this perception, because the Victorian text celebrates what at the time might have been regarded as reckless moral abandonment in the thrill of romantic passion; and the Roaring '20s text turns out to be a very dark moral fable in which the attitudes and moral misbehaviour of the Jazz Age are condemned for the ethical shallowness they reflect and the human wreckage they cause.

By saying that *Sonnets from the Portuguese* celebrates reckless moral abandonment I might have been overstating the case a little. But it is true that these poems are the personal record of an experience of love so intense that it undid the world as Elizabeth Barrett Browning knew it, breaking through many of the social, familial and religious constraints with which she had lived her entire life. The story of the affair is well known, becoming the basis of a popular play and two subsequent films¹ which tell of Barrett Browning's pathologically controlling father, her invalidism (which he effectively encouraged), her meeting with the younger poet, Robert Browning, and their romantic elopement to Italy and what appears to have been a blissful married life. It is one of the great love stories of our culture, but to her father, and to the many Victorians who regarded patriarchal family rule as sacrosanct, it must have seemed like scandalous behaviour.

Rudolf Besier's 1931 play *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* was filmed in 1934 and 1957, each time with popular success.

No doubt this thought occurred to Elizabeth Barrett Browning herself, and perhaps it was this that led her to, if not scandalous, at least mischievous poetic behaviour here. The form she chooses to write in is that of the Italian sonnet (which means a little song, and in particular a little love song), and it is worth pointing out that these are extraordinarily hard to do. The poet has to say what she wants to say in a very prescribed space – exactly 14 lines, and these lines have to rhyme, but the poet is only permitted four or five rhyme sounds, which is two or three fewer than a sonnet by, say, Shakespeare, who wrote what we generally refer to as English sonnets. Moreover, unlike modern rap songs, where the beat falls heavily on the rhyme word because the cleverness is in the insistence of the rhyme, here the artistry is in not making the reader or listener aware of the rhyme, while nevertheless evoking an air of elevated thought and feeling and musicality, which the rhyme helps to achieve. Italian sonnets, then, are difficult to do in English, and that is not mischievous, but it is poetically challenging, indicating the poet's willingness to test her poetic powers. But more to the point, what both Elizabeth Barrett and Robert Browning would have known is that the sonnet was traditionally the poetic form for the expression of romantic passion, and more specifically it was the voice of the male poet in love, giving voice to his emotional state and idealising his mistress. Here, Barrett Browning gives the love sonnet a feminine voice, and by doing this she makes the form more intensely expressive of the content, because in taking a whole set of poetic forms and conventions which originally were understood as masculine in character and appropriating these to her feminine voice, Barrett Browning is expressing her sense of the liberating power of the romantic experience, which it was for her both personally and, here, poetically.

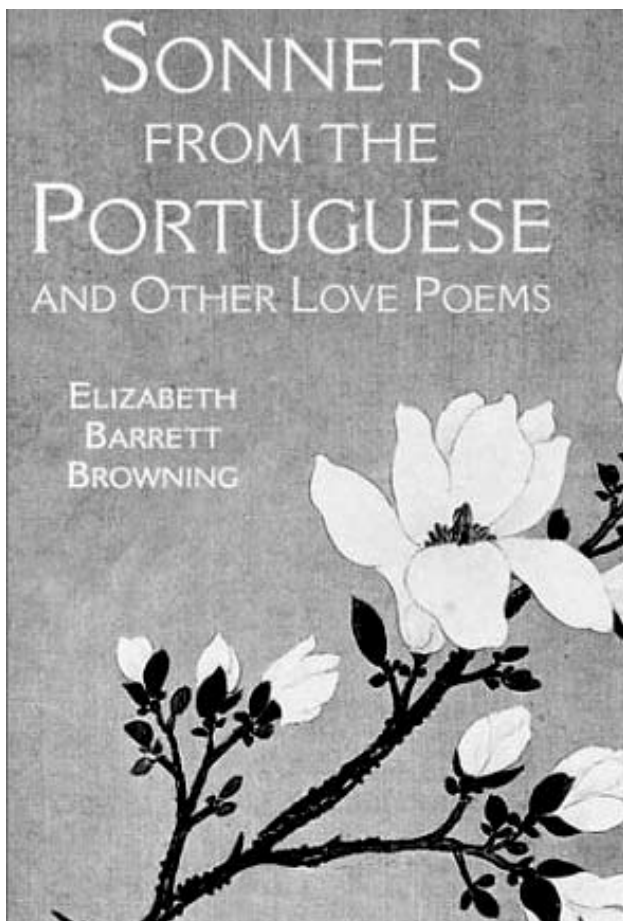
Sonnets were not only traditionally masculine love songs idealising the female beloved, they were also traditionally aggregated into long poetic cycles, known as sonnet sequences, which told the story of the poet's love. Each sonnet in the sequence would then dwell upon a particular aspect of the romantic situation and explore it from a range of possible perspectives. As such, these sonnet sequences were as much meditative exercises as they were expressions of feeling. The poetic form itself, in fact, already invites the poet to express and then to reflect: these are the two parts of the sonnet, and they are the reason that sonnets are 14 lines – because their two parts add up to 14 (an octet in which an aspect of the romantic relationship is expressed or observed, followed by a sestet in which that aspect is reflected upon). Then,

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as the sequence develops, each succeeding poem has to introduce something new, something fresh – a new inflection in the understanding of love, a new shade in the emotional experience it provides. So each poem progresses the meditation on love and amplifies the romantic sensibility of the speaker.

As is often the case with poetry, this occurs through metaphorical explorations of states of thought and feeling – Barrett Browning finds images equivalent to or evocative of her sense of the romantic experience, and then she examines the image in full before reflecting upon it, as here, in the image of the lovers' souls:

*When our two souls stand up erect and strong,
Face to face, silent, drawing nigh and nigher,
Until the lengthening wings break into fire
At either curv'd point,—what bitter wrong
Can the earth do to us, that we should not long
Be here contented?*



An early cover design, courtesy Google Image <http://images.google.com.au>

Make no mistake: this is sexually charged imagery, and as a St Elmo's fire of passion breaks out on the imagined wingtips of the lovers' erect souls they are at once absorbed in their own smouldering desires and brushed, if ever so faintly, by divine judgement. It is a complex imagery that gathers into itself a whole range of feelings and impulses. At first the wing image suggests the deep spirituality of their mutual love, so intense as to feel transcendent, angel-like; but then the wings catch fire, giving expression to an equivalent intensity of earthly passion and sensuality. And there, at the edge of the metaphor, so to speak, we might get a faint aroma of satanic rebellion, of original sin, of the Fall in the Garden of Eden, or even of the dizzy delight of Icarus, who flew too close to the sun on man-made wings, which caught fire and he perished. Implicitly there appears to be something rebellious about their passion – something that defies an ancient religious and patriarchal order. But Barrett Browning is also aware that the wings of romantic affection have traditionally been understood as enabling a sublimation of passion into a kind of bliss of divinely inspired Platonic love (especially in the courtly love sonnet sequences of the Renaissance)². It leads her to caution against them rising too high, sublimating their love into something too spiritually refined, because then it would lose its earthy intensity which is only possible because of the fleshiness, and the poignant finitude, of human existence, understood as:

*A place to stand and love in for a day,
With darkness and the death-hour rounding it.*

Indeed, overwhelmingly, these poems lead us to a sense of accommodation between the spiritual and the sensual, the passionate and the meditative, as Barrett Browning finds a language which combines the two and yields a sense of transcendence propelled by the romantic experience. In

² This is well illustrated by the final sonnet of Sir Philip Sidney's Petrarchan sonnet sequence, *Astrophel and Stella*:

Leave me, O Love which reaches but to dust;
And thou, my mind, aspire to higher things;
Grow rich in that which never taketh rust;
Whatever fades but fading pleasure brings.
Draw in thy beams, and humble all thy might
To that sweet yoke where lasting freedoms be;
Which breaks the clouds and opens forth the light,
That doth both shine and give us sight to see.
Oh take fast hold; let that light be thy guide
In this small course which birth draws out to death,
And think how evil becometh him to slide,
Who seeketh heaven, and comes of heavenly breath.
Then farewell, world; thy uttermost I see;
Eternal Love, maintain thy life in me.

THE FATE OF LOVE FROM WIMPOLE STREET TO WEST EGG: *The Great Gatsby* and *Sonnets from the Portuguese*

this sense the love she feels is mysterious to her (“How do I love thee?” she asks), but because it is mysterious it moves her to explore it in thought and feeling, and to find in it new modes of physical and spiritual vivacity of which she was previously unaware. All aspects of her life converge and find intense focus in the experience of love, and in this she re-discovers the transcendent spiritual purposes of life and thus realigns herself with the highest religious purpose, which is now no longer understood as mere familial or social duty but rather as amplitude of life and intensity of feeling. It is thrilling when it happens:

*I love thee to the depth and breadth and height
My soul can reach, when feeling out of sight
For the ends of Being and ideal Grace.*

Here, in a wonderful blending of the real and the ideal, she uses physical measurements – depth, breadth and height – to gauge spiritual states and she concludes:

*I love thee with the breath,
Smiles, tears, of all my life!—and, if God choose,
I shall but love thee better after death.*

Whatever moral or religious or familial or, indeed, poetic strictures were broken in the romantic affair and the sonnets it inspired, these are irrelevant now as a new amplitude of emotional and spiritual being is experienced by the poet, the measurelessness of which is here evoked in images that combine space and time with spirituality and the timelessness of eternity.

The *Sonnets from the Portuguese*, then, can be seen to take issue with the stuffy Victorian milieu out of which it emerged, and yet there is something in its ultimate poetic achievement that serves to re-connect it at a deeper level with its cultural context. The Victorian writers inherited from the Romantic poets who preceded them a tremendous faith in the innate abilities of the individual – a faith in the limitless capacities of human imagination and human personality. Romantic poet William Blake captured this feeling in these few lines:

*To see a World in a grain of sand,
And Heaven in a wild flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
And Eternity in an hour.*

It was the same faith that underlay the great Enlightenment belief in human potentiality, or the 18th and 19th century political experiments in democracy, and even the promises of unfettered free markets and industrialisation. Here, Barrett Browning takes that faith

and transfers it to the experience of romantic love and in this way is able to explore the spirituality of human romantic communion, creating one of the great sonnet sequences, one of the great cycles of love songs, in our language. A little more than half a century later, in the wake of the catastrophe of the First World War, people must have wondered whether there was still a place for love songs, just as they wondered whether there was still a place for faith.

It is this wonder that torments Nick Carraway in *The Great Gatsby*, because he comes to fear that he is living in a loveless and a faithless world – the ‘New World’, as Europeans called it, where the first modern experiment in democracy had taken place, and where the questionable fruits of human industrial ingenuity were increasingly evident. “Careless” is Nick’s word for it, and it is precisely this that he accuses the morally vacuous Tom and Daisy Buchanan of being:

*They were careless people, Tom and Daisy—they
smashed up things and creatures and then retreated
back into their money or their vast carelessness, or
whatever it was that kept them together, and let other
people clean up the mess they had made. . . .³*

Tom and Daisy are exemplary figures in a world made over to the selfish and the shallow, for they care for no-one but themselves, and they take care of themselves at the expense of others. Nick meets other careless people, too, like Jordan Baker, a woman in whom he becomes romantically interested. Jordan can be ruthless in getting what she wants (she is known to have cheated in golf tournaments) and in an increasingly mechanised and soulless world her name – evoking the machinery that will prove lethal in this story, for she is named after two brands of automobile⁴ – might well put Nick on guard, as her driving style does:

*“You’re a rotten driver,” I protested. “Either you ought
to be more careful, or you oughtn’t to drive at all.”*

“I am careful.”

“No, you’re not.”

“Well, other people are,” she said lightly.

“What’s that got to do with it?”

*“They’ll keep out of my way,” she insisted. “It takes
two to make an accident.”*

³ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974, first published 1926), p.186.

⁴ The Jordan Motor Car Company and the Baker Motor Vehicle Company were both founded in 1916, only ten years before Fitzgerald published *The Great Gatsby*.

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"Suppose you met somebody just as careless as yourself."

"I hope I never will," she answered. "I hate careless people. That's why I like you." (p. 65)

As Jordan implies, Nick doesn't really fit in this careless world, and indeed he is appalled by it. Nick is the one who sets the moral tone from the start – he is the one who runs his disapproving eye over the tragic state of affairs that unfolds in the narrative. Is there a place for the love song in the Jazz Age? In the words of one jazz standard of the time, love, too, is careless:

*Love, oh love, oh careless love,
You fly to my head like wine,
You've wrecked the life of many a poor girl,
and you nearly spoiled this life of mine.⁵*

Love without caring is delirious and destructive, and that's what Nick discovers – the carelessness of love in the Jazz Age. For *The Great Gatsby* is a love story, but it's the story of a failed love, and it isn't told by one of the actors in the romantic affair – like the *Sonnets from the Portuguese* – but rather by a kind of bystander.⁶ What he sees is not the great liberating power of love for the individual; rather, he sees that individuality is disappearing because everything has become inescapably enmeshed with everything else, and one can no longer escape on the wings of romantic love as the Brownings did, but only drive around in automobiles carelessly, aimlessly, fatally.

"I understand you're looking for a business gonnegtion," (p. 77) the lugubrious and vaguely Mephistophelean Meyer Wolfsheim proposes to Nick when they first meet, to which Gatsby quickly replies: "Oh no, ... this isn't

the man." Nick tries to remain disconnected from the glittering but simultaneously repulsive world of Gatsby and the Buchanans, but, as his summer fling with Jordan shows, it tries to draw him in, to connect him to it, which is why he finds himself "within and without," as he says, "simultaneously enchanted and repelled by the inexhaustible variety of life." (p.42) Gatsby offers Daisy the promise of transcendent romance, but she will not leave Tom and his money, to which she is inescapably connected, and by which she is fatally compromised. In this loveless and faithless world, everything is connected to, and so compromised by, everything else. Even Gatsby, and yet – with his first name consisting of nothing more than the Christian letter 'J', and the impression he makes on Nick, even if ironically, of being "a son of God" (p. 105) – he also has the power to restore faith, and so to reawaken belief in the ideal. When Tom angrily quizzes Gatsby about his claim to have attended Oxford, Gatsby replies:

"I told you I went there,"

"I heard you, but I'd like to know when."

"It was in nineteen-nineteen, I only stayed five months. That's why I can't really call myself an Oxford man."

Tom glanced around to see if we mirrored his unbelief. But we were all looking at Gatsby.

"It was an opportunity they gave to some of the officers after the Armistice," he continued. "We could go to any of the universities in England or France."

I wanted to get up and slap him on the back. I had one of those renewals of complete faith in him that I'd experienced before. (p. 135)

And yet Gatsby is also connected to those forces that are destructive of faith and the romantic ideal, like Wolfsheim himself:

"He's the man who fixed the World's Series back in 1919." [Gatsby tells Nick of Wolfsheim.]

"Fixed the World's Series?" I repeated.

The idea staggered me. I remembered, of course, that the World's Series had been fixed in 1919, but if I had thought of it at all I would have thought of it as a thing that merely happened, the end of some inevitable chain. It never occurred to me that one man could start to play with the faith of fifty million people—with the single-mindedness of a burglar blowing a safe. (pp. 79–80)

⁵ W.C.Handy, the great jazz composer of 'St Louis Blues', took the tune of 'Careless Love' and reworked the lyrics to poignant effect, seeing the lovelessness of modern life as part of the artificiality of modern industrial society:

Oh love oh love oh loveless love
Has set our heart on goal-less goals
From milkless milk and silkless silk
We are growing used to soul-less souls

Eight years before Fitzgerald published his novel his countryman from St Louis, T.S. Eliot, published perhaps his best known poem, 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock', and it is clear from this poem that Eliot felt the 20th century was no time for love songs.

⁶ "No, I am not Prince Hamlet, nor was meant to be," says Prufrock,
Am an attendant lord, one that will do
To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
Advise the prince.

Like Nick, Prufrock too is a bystander, suggesting that the modern subject feels "out of joint" with history, not an agent but merely a witness, and an unlikely singer of love songs.

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It's the year that is so important: 1919,⁷ the year after the First World War ended, the year in which Gatsby went to Oxford, the year in which, indeed, the World Series was fixed by a gambler called Arnold Rothstein (upon whom the character of Wolfsheimer was based). It was also the year in which Prohibition was introduced in America, an appalling misjudgement on the part of American lawmakers which effectively criminalised the entire adult population, all of whom continued to drink, losing their respect for the law and enriching gangsters like Rothstein and bootleggers like Gatsby. Because that is what Gatsby is – a bootlegger, the Jazz Age equivalent of the modern day drug dealer. And that is why Nick never knows where he stands with Gatsby – on the one hand he “disapproves of him from beginning to end”, and yet he thinks him “worth the whole damn bunch put together”. (p. 160)

“I love you now – isn't that enough?” (p. 139) Daisy tells Gatsby, but the answer is no, because the love she speaks of is not the transcendent commitment of which Barrett Browning wrote, but rather the worldly and transitory love of post-1918, an illicit world, bereft of idealism. Indeed, by saying “I love you *now*,” she is confirming the very temporariness that Gatsby cannot endure, and which he wrestles with in a tortuous chop-logic that baffles Nick:

“Of course she might have loved him just for a minute, when they were first married—and loved me more even then, do you see?”

Suddenly he came out with a curious remark.

“In any case,” he said, “it was just personal.”

What could you make of that, except to suspect some intensity in his conception of the affair that couldn't be measured? (p. 158)

Couldn't be measured, or perhaps could only be measured in the way Elizabeth Barrett Browning measures her own feeling when she asks herself “how do I love thee”? For Gatsby has a sense of romantic commitment beyond the personal, touching the transcendent (like his attempt to touch the moon when first we see him). It is not Barrett Browning that Nick thinks of in this connection, however, but the Dutch sailors who first happened upon this new

⁷ “Here was a new generation,” wrote Fitzgerald of those who came of age in post-World War I America,

shouting the old cries, learning the old creeds, through a revery of long days and nights; destined finally to go out into that dirty gray turmoil to follow love and pride; a new generation dedicated more than the last to the fear of poverty and the worship of success; grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars fought, all faiths in man shaken....

This Side of Paradise, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963, first published 1920), p. 254.

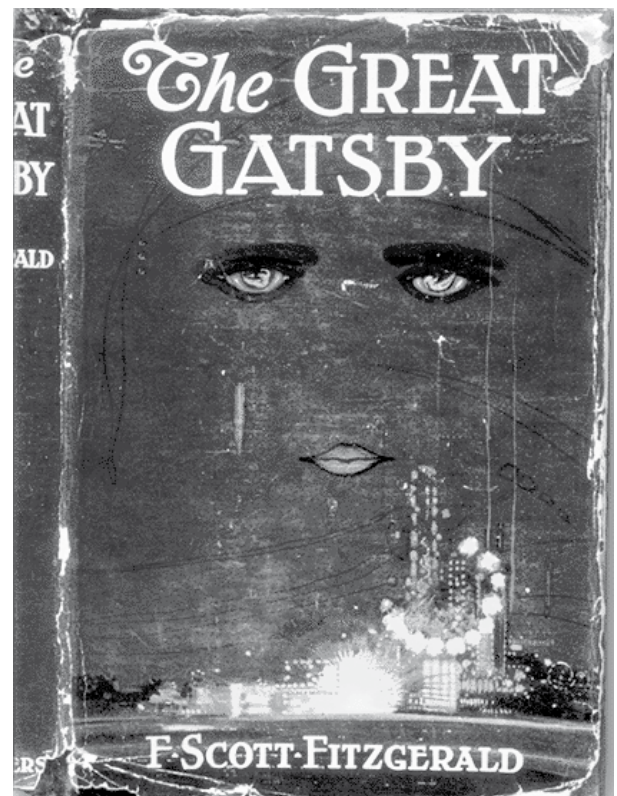
world centuries before. In reverie he imagines them at the end of the novel, in the first dawning of the magnitude of their discovery:

for a transitory enchanted moment man must have held his breath in the presence of this continent... face to face for the last time in history with something commensurate to his capacity for wonder. (pp. 187–188)

For Nick, Gatsby evokes something of this feeling:

there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life, ...it was an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person and which it is not likely I shall ever find again. (p. 8)

It is this “romantic readiness” that he brings to his love for Daisy, but ultimately she is “not commensurate to” his “capacity for wonder”, which leaves Nick wondering on the fate of love in Jazz Age America. A world away in Wimpole Street less than a century before, Elizabeth Barrett Browning could begin to gather little love songs into an epic cycle meditating on the intensity of individual passion and the profoundly liberating experience it inspires, but by the end of *The Great Gatsby* Nick Carraway has discovered the melancholy truth that there is no place for love songs in West Egg in the Jazz Age.



Francis Cugat's original jacket designed for *The Great Gatsby*.
New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1925

GETTING TO THE POINT: thinking about what it means to understand theme

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From the forthcoming *Fresh Takes on the Literary Elements*, Smith and Wilhelm, Scholastic, Inc.

In this book, Michael Smith and I explore how teachers often miss the point about literary conventions and tropes – as well as the work that understanding these can do for students as readers and for writers. By considering ideas from psychology and other fields, we consider what the “heart of the matter” is about literary elements like character, setting, perspective and theme. By connecting life to literature and literature back to life, students can use their life knowledge to become more powerful readers and writers in regards to these elements, and can use what they learn from literature, including the use of literary elements, to think more insightfully about their own lives and the world. This is the topic of a workshop I will provide this August in both Sydney for the NSW ETA and Melbourne for VATE. Following are some excerpts from the theme sections of our book.

Theme is where all the other literary elements come together to give a story’s ultimate reward and fulfil its consummate purpose. When we see characters play out various values and perspectives in particular circumstances, when we see situations, perspectives and values change, we see themes come to life. What we learn about teaching from Parson Adams in *Joseph Andrews* and what can be learned about parenting from the fathers in *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Too Late the Phalarope* are thematic generalisations that we can apply to our lives. Thematic generalisations provide the discovery, the understanding, the pleasure in recognising, “Yes, that’s the way it is” or “That’s a powerful idea to consider” or “That’s something I can use to navigate that kind of challenge in my life” or even “I profoundly disagree with that idea or way of doing things”. Theme is the element that addresses the question, “What does it all mean?”

One can read solely for information or simply to experience and enjoy story, but the most powerful reading, the kind that can help us to communicate with other perspectives and ideas we have never before encountered or entertained, the kind that can transform us and help us to outgrow our current selves, the kind of reading that literature requires of us and most deeply rewards, that’s the kind of reading we want our students to do. That kind of reading, what we’ll call point-driven reading or reading for thematic understandings, is what we will now pursue.

What Theme Is

Our understanding of theme is informed by what we do when we engage in conversation. But we’re not talking about the kind of conversation we engage in everyday. Rather we have a larger cultural conversation in mind, the kind of conversations Kenneth Burke describes in his famous parlour metaphor:

Imagine you enter a parlor. You come late. When you arrive, others have long preceded you, and they are engaged in a heated discussion, a discussion too heated for them to pause and tell you exactly what it is about. In fact, the discussion had already begun long before any of them got there, so that no one present is qualified to retrace for you all the steps that had gone before. You listen for a while, until you decide that you have caught the tenor of the argument; then you put in your oar. Someone answers; you answer him; another comes to your defense; another aligns himself against you, to either the embarrassment or gratification of your opponent, depending upon the quality of your ally’s assistance. However, the discussion is interminable. The hour grows late, you must depart. And you do depart, with the discussion still vigorously in progress.
(Retrieved from Word Works on January 15, 2009
<http://www.boisestate.edu/wcenter/ww82.htm>)

The notion of theme has a lot of near-synonyms: aphorism, main idea, moral, central focus, gist. But theme, we think, is more rich and complex than these other ideas. Here’s the point: *What makes a theme more than an aphorism, a main idea, or a moral is that theme is a rich understanding, expressed through a crafted work of art but applicable to life beyond the work, and situated in an ongoing cultural conversation that tests and complicates it.*

What to do: Ask Essential Questions.

As we have argued elsewhere (Smith & Wilhelm, 2006, Wilhelm, 2007), we think that inquiry units provide powerful motivation and support for deep understanding and use. Inquiry units are centred around essential questions, that express and frame the kind of timeless and debatable issues that draw us to literature.

Every essential question focuses on theme because it focuses on the deep meanings and possibilities for addressing the question and the problem-orientation that the question expresses.

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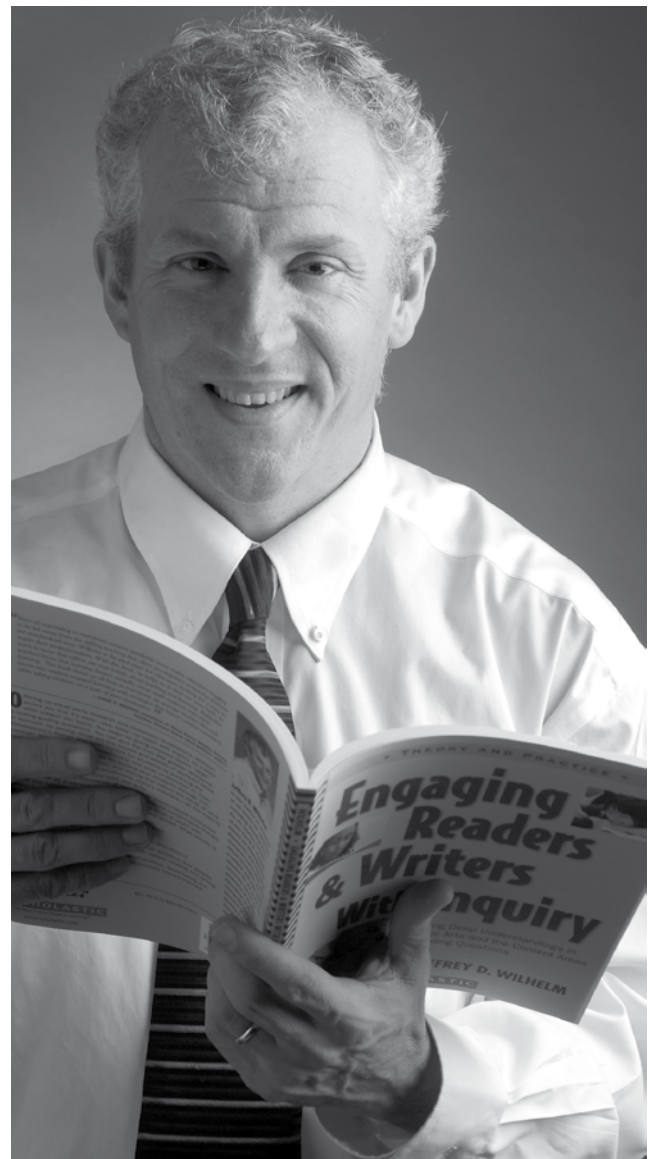
Any essential question is about an on-going disciplinary debate or cultural conversation. If it is not, it's not an essential question. If it is not, then it cannot do the work of engaging students and of furthering more expert understandings from the disciplines and the world. What is learned cannot be applied and used. Recognising how texts and data and knowledge are parts of a conversation helps us to avoid being too reductive in how we express themes.

If you see theme as an author's putting his or her oar into an ongoing cultural conversation, you'll see that even themes that can be elegantly expressed in a sentence are going to require elaboration and evidentiary justification. If a story were not part of a larger conversation, as in Burke's parlor metaphor, it would not be compelling enough to write or to read: we write and read and think about topics of important debate at play in our cultural surroundings. Because themes are a part of an ongoing conversation, they don't provide the last word. Readers can choose to embrace them *in toto*; embrace them in part; or interrogate, adapt or even resist them.

The more rich and complex the work of art, the harder it will be to reduce that work to a single theme. Quite often a rich work of art will express multiple themes, some major and others minor. Typically, those themes will relate but in some cases they may be more separate (as is true in some picaresque texts).

Let's take the case of *Romeo and Juliet*. When I taught this as part of a "What makes and breaks relationships? unit" (see Wilhelm, 2007) a year ago, I organised a debate activity in which different groups chose to justify very different themes as the central one for the play. One group said: "Love bites." Another group posited: "Love is always changing." Another group maintained: "We are controlled by fate." A fourth group argued: "Deceit causes all human problems and tragedies." Any of the themes expressed by the groups in the first round of the debate can be justified by the play but all of them ring a little hollow and sound a little flat.

Ah, but if stating and justifying the theme is your entry into an ongoing conversation, suddenly the dynamic is changed. Stating the theme isn't the end of conversation – it is the start of one. Even if you can justify that *Romeo and Juliet* expresses the theme that destiny is absolute, you will need to contend with the other authors, characters, classmates, popular culture figures, even President Obama – who clearly do not believe that fate controls all but that we can create our own destinies, at least to some degree.



Jeffrey Wilhelm, photo courtesy of the author

If the conversation is ongoing then no one can be silenced, no one perspective holds the trump card or the answer. Exploring theme opens up discussion instead of closing it down. Even a compelling argument is taken as categorically tentative. Is this always true? Or only under certain conditions? Responding to those questions makes a theme more than an aphorism or a bumper sticker.

And that's crucially important. Michael and Peter Rabinowitz (Rabinowitz & Smith, 1998) have written extensively about how treating narratives as though they are only about big ideas instead of about people who are worthy of our attention and concern is ethically problematic. But if we see texts as part of an ongoing cultural conversation, then we can't simply make some

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kind of intellectual pronouncement. We may do so when we first dip our oars into the water. But then our conversational partners will ask, “What makes you say so?” Our answer will depend on the details of the narrative, the lived experience of the characters in the text, and our lived experience reading it.

Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), the Russian literary theorist who has had so much influence on English studies, makes an even stronger statement when he contrasts authoritative discourse with internally persuasive discourse. Authoritative discourse “demands that we acknowledge it” (p. 342). That is, it puts itself beyond question and conversation. (We’d use the example of telling our daughters to do something, but sadly, our discourse seldom gets the acknowledgement we’re hoping for.) According to Bakhtin, “Authoritative discourse can not be represented – it is only transmitted” (p. 344). It becomes “an object, a *relic*, a *thing*” (p. 344, italics in original). If authoritative discourse cannot be represented, it is not the stuff of stories.

In a recent television interview on TMC, Ron Howard was reflecting on his fifty years in show business and made much the same point. He argued that what ruins art is when the author, or artist or director, can’t keep from preaching a little bit – from trying to indicate directly the message of the work. Howard indicated that this kind of move demonstrates a profound mistrust of your own artwork and of your audience, and undermines the experience, turning art into a didactic essay.

Internally persuasive discourse, on the other hand, according to Bakhtin, “is affirmed through assimilation” (p. 345). When we live through characters, we do that kind of assimilation. In Booth’s (1988) words, we “stretch our own capacities for thinking about how life should be lived” (p. 187). Internally persuasive discourse doesn’t become a relic. Rather,

it is . . . applied to new material, new conditions; it enters into interanimating relationships with new contexts. More than that, it enters into an intense interaction, a struggle with other internally persuasive discourses. Our ideological development is just such an intense struggle within us.

(Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 343–344)

Even as we imagine an ongoing cultural conversation, we can also imagine an ongoing internal conversation that guides us to become who we become.

This reminds us of Vygotsky’s (1984) contention that the self is only the self in relationship. It follows that we can only become a new self through relationship – relationships with texts, the world, each other – by

achieving intersubjectivity with another consciousness, by taking on, however tentatively, a different point of view through dialogue. This kind of powerful and potentially transformative experience is exactly what literature is uniquely poised to provide.

What Theme Is Not

When we posit a literary text as a turn in an ongoing cultural conversation, we see not only what theme is, but also what it is not. Remember the scene in *Dead Poet’s Society* in which Mr. Keating (the Robin Williams character) has his students read aloud poems that they have written? One young man writes about the girl who is the object of his affection. His classmates laugh, and as he returns to his desk, the young man says, “I’m sorry. It’s stupid.” Mr. Keating intercedes with the following: “No, it’s not stupid. It’s a good effort. It touched on one of the major themes. Love.”

We may admire how Mr. Keating sticks up for one of his charges but we don’t admire what appears to be his definition of theme. Love is certainly the topic of an ongoing cultural conversation, but it’s not a conversational turn. As Johnston and Afflerbach (1985) put it, identifying the topic of a text is only the “halfway” point (p. 214). Experienced readers recognise that understanding a theme requires more. It requires them to qualify the topic, or general subject, with some kind of comment, what Johnston and Afflerbach call the “topic-comment” strategy.

What Readers Must Do

Any teacher knows that students have difficulty in applying this topic-comment strategy. This makes sense because making thematic generalisations depends on identifying key literal information as well on making myriad complex inferences.

What Readers Do to Interpret Themes Searching for Meaning

Vipond and Hunt (1984) add specificity to the discussion of what readers must do to understand theme. They begin their consideration of point-driven reading by considering what listeners do in conversation. They argue that listeners are motivated to figure out what the speaker is “getting at”. They consider this a form of what they call “point-driven understanding”. They consider how people try to understand points in the context of conversations and daily interactions, and they then apply this process to literary reading.

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Authors Matter

Point-driven readings not only offer a powerful lived-through experience, but also attend to experiencing and reflecting on the discourse level, on the construction of text by an implied author who is trying to communicate something of import to the reader. (Both point-driven and story-driven readings would be aesthetic readings in Rosenblatt's [1938, 1975] terms.)

This is the crux: people who read for point posit texts as an intentional act written by another human being in order to communicate through the medium of text. Since this is what expert readers do, it becomes crucial to understand that *authors matter and must be specifically considered as part of the reading transaction.*

Ways of considering authors

Authors matter and must be considered as part of the reading transaction. After all, who created the text, constructed its meaning, and did all the patterning? Drama offers some powerful ways to conceive of, consider, and converse with authors. Here are just a few ideas for doing so.

Correspondence Dramas: (Wilhelm, 2004)

Students could undertake conversations with authors through correspondence dramas in which they write letters, notes, questions, advice requests, etc. to the author. These texts can be exchanged and students then respond to each other in role as the author, taking care to note how they know or why they think the author would respond in this way.

Hotseating the Author:

Hotseating is a more active drama technique in which a student (or the teacher, to provide a model) can be put in the "hotseat" in role as an author (of course this can be done with characters, as well). Students in the "forum" (in the classroom, who can also take on assigned or self-assigned roles who would have an interest in questioning or learning from the author) question the author and the hotseated person responds in ways justified by the text. Variations include letting the hotseated author have a "lifeline group" to confer with before answering, or an "alter ego" or "shadow self" who stands behind them to reveal what the author is really thinking but not saying after each comment. There are many other variations. (See Wilhelm, 2004 for examples).

To Tell the Truth:

In this hotseat variation, three or four people play the role of author and are asked questions by the audience.

At the end, the students in the forum vote for who did the best job playing the author and must justify their vote with evidence from the responses and from the text that has been read.

The Reader's Stance and Strategies Matter

There are many strategies that are useful to readers making meaning of a text. But these strategies are only of use in the specific context of a reading. No one was ever motivated to read by the cr-blend or by the strategy of prediction. But students will learn such strategies when they are reading something of interest to answer a compelling question or to engage in important work. As Vipond and Hunt (1984) explain, readers (and listeners) do not apply strategies in a vacuum. They note, in this regard, that the readers' generic expectations affect their understanding of a point. Here their work resonates with that of Northrop Frye.

Genre Matters

Frye (1957) posits that there are four basic narrative patterns. These patterns organise to a very large degree the pattern of details and events that express general themes of meaning. Frye's patterns are romance, tragedy, satire/irony, and comedy. The stories, taken together, form a circle of stories, with one type blending in to the next at its edges, and these genres represent the seasons of the year, and the larger human journey, individual and collective.

The material and organisation of these different story types pose different questions about humans, our role in the universe, and where individuals fit into the larger story. Each story expresses different specific kinds of value-seeking concepts, a general worldview, and therefore has the capacity to express a limited number of themes. In this way, genre generates and constrains theme.

The themes of romance will be about the achievement and enjoyment of satisfaction, tragedy about challenge and what contributes to downfall. Irony and satire speak to what needs to be critiqued, challenged and reformed, comedy to how we can achieve what is possible. Just as individual texts and authors are in conversation, so, too, according to Frye, are the different expressions of genre.

What you can do to help students to attend to genre:

To introduce genre, we have sometimes simply asked students:

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Why do people laugh? Responses range from “satisfaction”, “pride”, “joy”, surprise”, “incongruity” and so on. Satisfaction and pride relate to romance. Joy relates to romance but typically comedy. Surprise can be comedy but is more likely irony/satire. Incongruity is definitely irony/satire.

When asked why people cry, students typically respond as with “sadness”, “a bad shock”, “being overwhelmed/abandoned/betrayed”. All this is the stuff of tragedy.

When asked why people poke fun, students respond with a variety of ideas, but they generally revolve around being angry or disappointed that things aren’t different and better, more just and satisfactory – and this is the stuff of irony and satire.

What is important here is not only that students recognise the general shapes of the literary genres, but that they understand how the direction of the ending will shape the expressed vision or theme.

Another way to give kids lots of practice with short versions of genre is to have them read the comics page and to think about what happens and what direction things are leading. Now, some comics merely offer gags or a joke, but most imply some kind of narrative. If there is a narrative, you can discern the direction of the ending. As always, it doesn’t matter if there is disagreement on what exactly kids say. (It should be noted that most cartoons are somewhat comedic, or funny, but they can still offer a trajectory that fits another genre.) For example, the cartoon figure Dilbert has just been fired from his job and re-hired by Dogbert at half his salary. This implies a downward direction into irony and perhaps into impending tragedy. What matters here is if students get the concept of change and directionality.

Students could do the same thing with favorite movies, television shows, YouTube videos and other popular culture texts. This all translates nicely into an understanding of genre and the major patterns of literature as a whole.

It should be noted that each genre can be sliced more finely to the degree that it relates to the genre on either side of it (e.g. tragedy can be more romantic or tend more towards irony, depending on the integrity and innocence vs. experience of the falling hero). Students may notice this and these insights can be recognised and built upon to achieve a more sophisticated notion of genres and what each can express.

What Readers Should Do after Interpretation

If we take the cultural and internal conversations as metaphors for reading seriously (and we do), a reader’s

obligation doesn’t end with interpreting a theme. Rather, a reader, in our view, has to think hard about what he or she thinks about that theme. To be sure, we hope that some of the texts our students read will be internally persuasive. We hope that they will make them part of their thinking and living.

But we also want them to be able to resist the texts that they do not find internally persuasive. Let’s take the example of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, a very commonly taught novel. We’ve often used the topic of civil rights as our focus and an essential question like: What are our civil rights and how can we best work to protect and promote them? We’d argue that one theme of that novel in regards to civil rights is that change must be gradual. We think that Harper Lee sees Atticus’s parenting of his kids so that they aren’t prejudiced and his making the jury stay out longer than it typically would to convict an African-American defendant as signs of real progress. We disagree.

We are not really ready to accept this theme – we don’t want to wait for the world to change in small increments. In Dr. King’s words, we don’t want to accept “the tranquilising drug of graduation (i.e. gradual change)”. We can’t wait for generations of progressive parents to do their work. We don’t want to tolerate unjust convictions no matter how hotly contested. We think that the message of this book is too passive. We want ourselves and others to work with more agency and more urgency towards the goal of a less prejudiced society. Harper Lee dips her oar into the water to talk about what kind of change is possible. We can respectfully listen and then respectfully disagree.

What Teachers Must Do

So looking back on our discussion of theme, what can we say a teacher must do?

- Help students recognise the existence of ongoing cultural conversations and to place their reading in those conversations (for example, by using essential questions)
- Help students see the importance of coherence and develop and name useful coherence strategies (for example, by assisting students to see and make inferences and understand genre patterns)
- Help students posit an author and think about the impact of what the author has chosen to do with an awareness of other choices that were available (for example, by using drama strategies that foreground the author’s role)

GETTING TO THE POINT: thinking about what it means to understand theme

- Help students recognise the narrative surface strategies they have available, especially recognising and thinking about whatever changes in a story (for example, by noticing and explaining various kinds of changes and their causes in character, values, perspective, situation)
- Create an environment in which students feel free both to discuss, interrogate, and ultimately to accept, adapt and resist an author's theme or themes.

All of these goals can only be achieved in what can be called a dialogic or inquiry oriented classroom. Doors are closed for students when we don't teach in ways that allow students to discover for themselves the joys, pleasures and understandings that literature can bring. It's the difference between getting the joke and having the joke explained to you.

Conclusion

We have dedicated our professional lives largely to the teaching of literature. We have done so because we understand the power of literature to inform, transform and give meaning to the deepest aspects and most profound needs of human beings. Today, with schools ever more focused on preparation for work or for test scores, we know that literature fulfils a unique niche. But this can only be true if students are not told what to think, but are rather helped to learn how to experience and think for themselves about works of art in order to help them think about the world. This project is one that can be usefully undertaken by all teachers of literature.

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AN INTERVIEW WITH PETER SKRZYNECKI

Mark Rafidi, Shoalhaven Anglican School



Peter Skrzynecki is one of Australia's leading authors. He has published two collections of short stories, two novels, edited anthologies of Australian writing as well as recently publishing his memoir *The Sparrow Garden*. Peter has written numerous books of poetry, with *Immigrant Chronicle* being on the HSC reading list for several years. His latest book *Old/New World*, is a collection of New and Selected Poems.

This interview was conducted on the 18th November 2008 on the South Coast by Mark Rafidi, a former student of Peter Skrzynecki.

M.R: In the opening chapter of *The Sparrow Garden*, I was struck by the violent image of your father killing sparrows with a piece of wood and yet in *Feliks Skrzynecki* there are other images: 'My gentle father' and '...the softness of his blue eyes.' What type of man was Feliks?

P.S: He wasn't a violent man. Someone else has brought up this thing about clubbing sparrows. He was simply saving his crops. He worked hard on the garden. People feel indignant because they're sparrows but would they feel indignant if they were mice? I'm sure they wouldn't. He didn't do it a long time; he never eradicated the sparrows and stopped soon after it started. Basically it wasn't to impress his authority over the sparrows, he was simply making a point over ownership. He'd been a farmer in Poland—the law of the land, if you like.

M.R: You also speak of your father's *duty*?

P.S: *Moja służba*, literally "my duty". My father didn't believe in taking sickies. He basically believed that

it was his duty to work for a country that had given him a second chance at life. The only time I can really remember him going to hospital was when he had a foot cancer. There was no getting out of that. He was gone for a long time. They fixed the wound up but it refused to heal, so they did a graft on it, taking skin from his back. Even today, regrowing skin takes a long time. So he was gone a long time. But in my view, it was his way of saying what he thought about work. No coughs, colds, bad backs, sneezes, none of that counted. That wasn't a reason to stay home. So I prefaced *The Sparrow Garden* with that saying because I thought it was my duty to write the book.

M.R: What was Kornelia, your mother, like?

P.S: She was a very sharp woman, cluey. Today the word is feisty. She was good with English. She was the storyteller among the three of us. Read everything she laid her hands on – even train tickets, I can remember, front and back. She was smart. I think she was the sort of woman who, if she'd come to Australia at a different time and her circumstances were different, would have become a successful business woman. She always spoke up for her rights. Always.

M.R: You said that she was a storyteller. What types of stories?

P.S: What I remember were stories from the Ukraine. Folktales. When we were in the camp at Parkes from '49 to '51 and dad was living in Sydney, she and I would walk around the perimeters of the camp at night and she would tell stories from where she grew

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up in the Ukraine, in the Carpathian Mountains. She even told me once they found these lovely flowers, these poppies that used to grow wild in the fields. We would squeeze the flower and drink the liquid and ohh, she said, it was like floating on clouds, you felt so happy. She was the one from whom I probably got the gift of words.

M.R: What do you think migrants like Feliks and Kornelia gave to Australia?

P.S: Prosperity. It was the generation which came to Australia when there was no social welfare like there is today. There were no freebies; if you wanted to get ahead in this country you went out to work. They never went to clubs, to eat at restaurants. They grew their own food. I have photographs of them in that back garden. She basically looked after the front, he looked after the back but they also looked after both front and back together and they were self sufficient for a long time. So they brought the work ethic with them from Europe, and ultimately they contributed to Australia's prosperity.

M.R: Did migrating to Australia change them?

P.S: Well I didn't know what they were like in Europe before the war but, I'm sure it did. I know for example they had a great sense of pride and ownership in the house they bought and which they paid off in four years. I've got the paperwork at home.

M.R: It's almost unheard of now isn't it?

P.S: I hear of other ethnic groups paying off their houses quickly these days also. Everything has gone up. The price of houses, salaries have gone up too. They were very careful with money; they were prudent. They didn't waste money.

M.R: You touch on your migration to Australia and the values that came with that in *The Sparrow Garden*; the motto was "Three for one and one for three". What did that mean?

P.S: It's the motto from *The Three Musketeers*, "all for one and one for all", "three for one and one for three." Basically our duty was first to support each other – physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual support. It's probably best exemplified by a family plot we have in Rookwood Cemetery. They're there and I'll be there one day.

M.R: Have you passed the same principle onto your children?

P.S: What, wanting to be buried with me?

M.R: No (laughs) the "three for one and one for three"?

P.S: Well there's three kids and now two little granddaughters. I'd like to think, yes. But it's not

that easy, the "three for one and one for three" because the two girls have husbands, one has two children. But what I have told them when I'm gone, I don't want any fighting or bickering. They'll be left a lot more than what I was left and they should be satisfied with that... The three of them were given good primary, secondary and university educations. They're in good jobs. They can provide for themselves, no worries. But the point is this: I don't want any bickering when I'm gone. They have to respect that principle.

M.R: In one of your poems, *Ancestors*, there is a profound connection with the past. You also speak to Warsaw in *Post card*. How important is your parents' heritage to your sense of identity?

P.S: The older I get the more important it becomes because I grew up really unaware of what I was passing through. I saw them mix with Australians, I saw them also retain their Polish / Ukrainian heritage, but I was a kid growing up. But I realise now what it meant to them leaving that old world behind, stepping out into the dark as it were and trying to make a go. It took a new life in a new land. It would have taken courage, it would have taken faith in God and they were both very religious right to the end and really knowing, that what they've got is because they've worked for it and they earned it. Not because someone's left it to them. It's basically again that European work ethic which they brought here and I admire that beyond words. In my eyes I could never live up to what they became. No matter how many books I write, prizes or awards I get. My parents are the real heroes of this story.

M.R: There is a striking quote from *In the folk museum* "To remind me of a past / Which isn't mine." In what ways do you connect to Australia and its past?

P.S: I'm very interested in Australian history; I studied it at university. I have a great interest in Australian writers as you know, Australian literature, Australian art. I'm not an expert, never will be, on the Aboriginal Dreamtime but that's okay because I have my own dreamtime as in that poem *Ancestors*. I've got the European dreamtime. I live in a country where there's room for everybody. When I speak generically of ancestors or the work that I'm involved with in the Immigration Bridge project in Canberra, I'm speaking for all migrants in this country. When I go to Europe there have been times when I hadn't wanted to come home. Something breaks down in the blood and says stay, but in the end I get on the plane and I come home.

M.R: Two weeks after coming to Australia, you moved to Parkes ...

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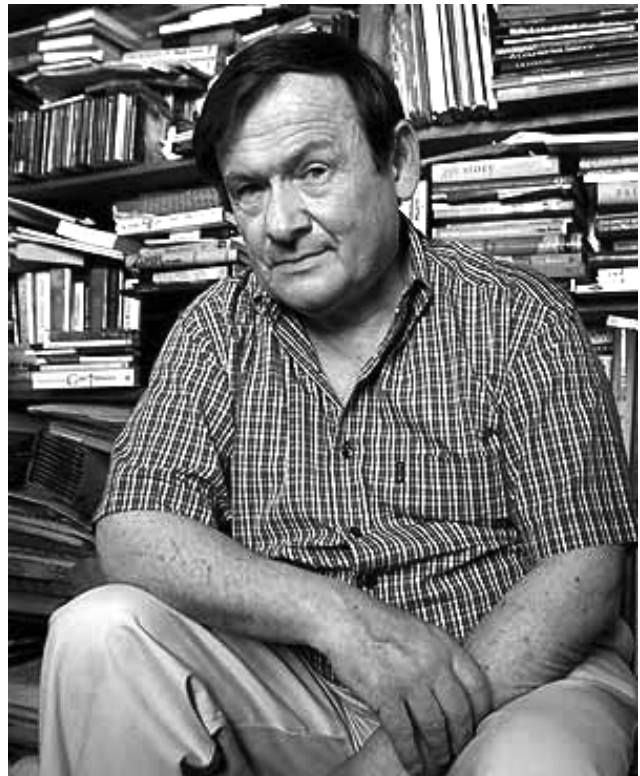
P.S: Bathurst for two weeks and then to Parkes.

M.R: What was the migrant hostel like?

P.S: It was a converted Air Force training centre. It was a basic structure, wooden and fibro; they weren't Nissen huts as some people think. Nissen huts weren't everywhere. The camps varied from place to place. They were a basic, two roomed hut; one section was living quarters and there were sleeping quarters. There were no cooking facilities; you ate in a mess hall three times a day. I can remember queuing up for food. You made do by having what they called in those days a kerosene primus. Today that would be a little heater with a butane cylinder. Extra food. I can remember the men when they came home, there's a poem about it, in *Old/New World* and in *Night Swim: "Hunting Rabbits"*. They went and hunted rabbits for the extra protein and the image I still have is of a big stew in a tin, boiling water on this primus, putting in rabbit meat and carrots and onions. Rabbit stew! (laughs)

M.R: And what about Regent's Park? What's your connection with Regent's Park now?

P.S: After my mother died I sold the house at 10 Mary Street and I haven't been back since. It was very hard not to go back immediately after the sale, but I resisted the temptation. And now I drive through the suburbs without a second thought to it. You know we owned that house for forty-six years; it was time to let go after my mother died... I've written about it in poetry in *Old/New World*. There's a poem called *The Streets of Regent's Park* and it ends up "...I don't live there anymore, leaving was like...there was no lock on the door." And what it means is that you can't put a lock on memory. And there's also a poem called *Regent's Park*, "Drab, grey working class suburb." There was never anything that stood out. Shopping centres bypassed it. Auburn got the big shopping centre and so did Bankstown. The best thing about Regent's Park and where we lived, it was a six or seven minute walk from the station, and you'd get on the train and in less than an hour you'd be in the city. It is also the junction for the Liverpool and Bankstown line. The best thing about it was transport. When I went to Poland in 1989, I went to my father's village, Raciborow, just west of Warsaw. I understood for the first time in forty years why he chose that house in that suburb. The geographical layout resembled his village. The land was low and this was the northern part of Bankstown municipality. It was very low. His village had a river behind it, we had a creek behind our place and there was a railway line running through his village, and we had the



Peter Skrzynecki, photo courtesy of the author

rail track two or three hundred metres up the road which where the line branched off and went towards Liverpool. So we were between Regent's Park and Sefton. I didn't realise when I came back to Regent's Park and I thought: where have I seen this before? I've seen this in Poland.

M.R: *Immigrant Chronicle* was first published in '75, thirty three years ago. Has your perspective changed since then of places, of people, St Pats for example?

P.S: Well it would have. Of course it has. You're not the person you were thirty three years ago. Neither am I. Well it would have, yes.

M.R: Can you explain your writing process?

P.S: Poetry is very quick and spontaneous. I carry pen and paper wherever I go. When the impulse arrives, everything else is dropped until I finish the poem. Prose is different. I write the first draft, then draft and redraft, until I think it's ready. In that way, prose is different – you've got to think it out and carry it in your head. Poetry is very spontaneous. I rarely rewrite my poems.

M.R: Speaking of your writing, the presence of birds seems to be a recurring motif...

P.S: Birds are both symbols of freedom and beauty. It goes back to when I was eight or nine. A man across the road in Mary Street gave me two zebra finches and built me a cage for them. He comes into some of the stories, though I've changed his name. I got hooked. That was it. The zebra finches in the front of *The Sparrow Garden* with my mother, that really happened. From forty to fifty years ago the spirit of those birds came back. So they exist as symbols

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of freedom and beauty but also you should know the bird is a symbol of the soul. It's a creature both of earth and air, and the soul is always - if you're a sensitive person, a thinking person - the soul, the bird, is always burdened down with something. It tries to get up, chains bring it down. It tries to get up, till finally the chains break metaphorically and the bird / soul becomes airborne.

M.R: In the opening chapters of *The Sparrow Garden*, you are airing out 10 Mary Street with your daughter Judy. Has the writing of your memoir been a catharsis?

P.S: Absolutely. I wrote *The Sparrow Garden* to come to terms with finding my mother dead. That happened in '97 and that just built up and up in the conscious and subconscious. That included visits to Parkes and speaking to those farmers, researching for the next two years. Suddenly, bang. It was time to write, so I sat down and started to write, in '99.

M.R: Your memoir is punctuated by episodes of grief, violence and tragedy: Adam and the strays (which is also a story in *The Wild Dogs*), the drowning of Aleksander, the accident with the circular saw. What keeps you optimistic?

P.S: About life?

M.R: About life.

P.S: Life itself. It's a paradox. A series of opposites. I don't know if you remember those lectures I gave at UWS: I'd show a coin. Heads / tails. Sad / happy. Male / female. Light / Dark. Sweet / sour. Pessimism is just the flipside of optimism. In the midst of life we are in death and in the midst of death we are in life. They're inseparable. You feed one, you feed the other. I think once the penny drops and all the bullshit falls away, I think it's a lot easier. And, the bullshit fell away a long time ago. You know when you find your mother dead on the floor and sit by your wife over a period of eighteen months, during two bone marrow or stem-cell transplants because she has leukaemia. Or when you have a heart attack and you're on the floor and you're put into a bed and your world is spinning because it's like someone has put a knitting needle through your heart and you come out of it. But I love it. I love life. I don't love the pain and sorrow. Again that's just the flipside of the coin. You've got to think through that. It's easier said than done, and it can't be done with a snap of the fingers, but it can be done. Think it through. Live through it, experience it, go through it. Your life is not an event; your life is a process. Just like you live through periods of happiness you've got to live through periods of pain. No-one gets away scot free.

M.R: You use a Polish word, *żal*. Can you explain its meaning?

P.S: The word *żal* literally in Polish means sorrow, or grief. But, it is not just physical, emotional grief. It's also psychological and spiritual grief. So *żal* as a word that sums up every kind of sorrow, or loss in the sense that we can experience it. It's a common Polish word, it's not unusual, and Polish people seem to recognise it among each other when someone is experiencing it; they come in to support each other.

M.R: Is *żal* always retrospective?

P.S: It can be present. It can't be future, but it can be in the present – as we are talking now.

M.R: Finally, coming back to that story at the beginning of *The Sparrow Garden*, your mother points out the zebra finches and says: "That's me and your father. We'll come back to visit you after I've gone." Has she?

P.S: They've come back in dreams lots of times. They're always younger than they were when they died. They're always moving on. She came back, when my wife was sick. The leukaemia was so bad, my wife had to go into hospital immediately. She would have been dead within two weeks if it hadn't been diagnosed. I didn't go over to the house for a few days which I normally did when passing through Regent's Park to go to work at Milperra, to clear out the junk-mail and so on. And one particular morning I saw the flyscreens had been removed and the back window was smashed and as I came around the house, that's when she came back. I literally heard her voice in one word, which is the title of a chapter, *Sprzedaj*. And that in Polish means "sell". I'd been dilly-dallying for six months. Should I keep 10 Mary Street? Should I sell it? And she had said the night before she died, the night I spent with her (she died during the night, after I went), she asked me, "What will you do with the house after I've gone?"

And I said, "What do you want me to do?"

She said, "You do what's best for you."

"How will I know?"

"You'll know when the time comes." And she kept her word. She wasn't angry when she said it, the way she said it. But she was being strict. I didn't hear it in my ears, I heard it in my guts, in my centre of being. It was one of those Zen experiences which you absorb immediately and it shoots out to every part of your being. Right to your toes and your fingers and your ears and your nose. That experience changed my life. *Sprzedaj!* It was scary, but I heard it. I knew it was time to step back, push away and let go. Become detached. She used to say, "an empty house is like a beautiful shell. It has nice music inside it, but it's still empty. It's a house, it's not a home. People make a house a home."

M. T. ANDERSON: why I write

Introduction by Mel Dixon

M.T. Anderson is an American writer of adolescent fiction whose work transcends the ordinary. It takes extraordinary talent to create the worlds that Anderson captures in his books where there are no boundaries to his imagination. Vampires, corporations, slaves, composers, mad scientists and ordinary everyday townspeople inhabit his carefully constructed worlds.

Chris, a young boy, realises that he is turning into a vampire but can't remember when he was bitten (*Thirst*); the internet becomes a powerful source of evil which feeds off humans in a world of corporate greed (*Feed*); the Age of Enlightenment breeds not only a political revolution in Boston but also provides a setting for experimentation with the mind of a young slave (*The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing, Traitor to the Nation, Volume 1: The Pox Party*). Horror, historical fiction, picture books (*Handel Who Knew What He Liked*) and humour (*Whales on Stilts*) are among the genres written by Anderson.

Anderson, a Harvard graduate, received the prestigious American prize, the National Book Award in Young People's Literature for *The Astonishing Life of Octavian Nothing, Traitor to the Nation, Volume 1: The Pox Party*, a book he describes as "a 900 page to volume epic for teens, written in a kind of unintelligible 18th-century Johnsonian Augustan prose by an obsessive neurotic who rarely leaves his house or even gets dressed". The *Octavian Nothing* volumes are original in their ideas and scope, returning us to a critical time in American history when the bonds with England were being questioned and broken, and to a place where a social experiment was taking place with an African princess and her son. Anderson's writing in this book is dense and complex as are the ideas but he is just as effective when using the American everyday idiom.



In this interview, M.T. Anderson discusses what it is that inspires him

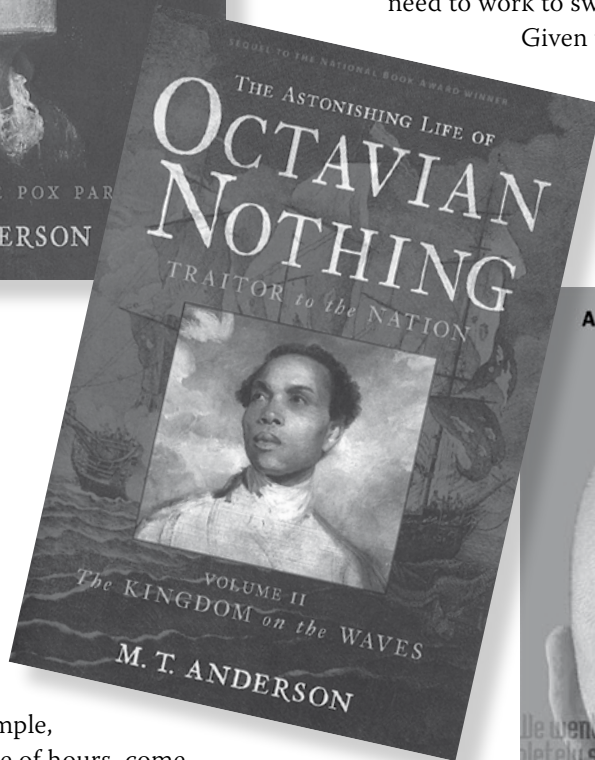
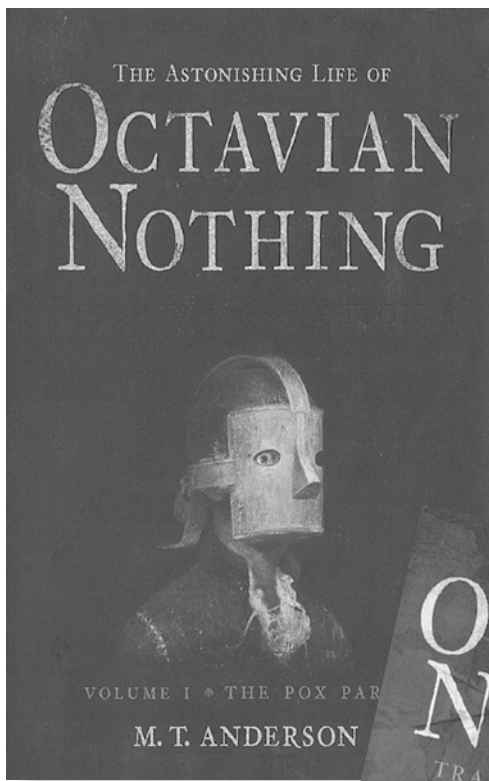
People write for children for two reasons: either they have children, or they are children. I'm in the latter category. I loved my childhood, and I write for children so that I can recall it.

I grew up in a small town in America, surrounded by apple orchards and woods that had grown up where fields once stood. I spent my childhood playing in the forest, naming the mucky rivulets and the valleys formed by quarries. The forest seemed to be bursting with fantasy. The wood led right up to our back door like George Macdonald's Fairy-Land, but peopled with bikers, keggers, stoners, and free-range junkies.

I didn't live near many kids and I was socially inept anyway, so my fantasy world was very involved and quite internal. I apparently became a little too dreamy and distracted – so much so that in fifth grade, my teachers became concerned that I was borderline autistic or had some serious learning disability; and my grandmother, seeing me whisper to some imaginary androids in the woods, became convinced that I was possessed by evil spirits. For the next ten years or so, she would regularly exorcise me.

My love of fantasy gradually became a love of literature. From the time I was eight or nine, I

M. T. ANDERSON: why I write



wrote long stories. I would think about them in the woods, then go home and write them. That's still what I do. I can't believe my good fortune, having this as my job.

In the winter, for example, I go skiing for a couple of hours, come back to the house, light a fire, cook lunch, and then spend the rest of the day making up jokes that only a ten-year-old and I would find funny. It's kind of astounding that I get paid for this at all.

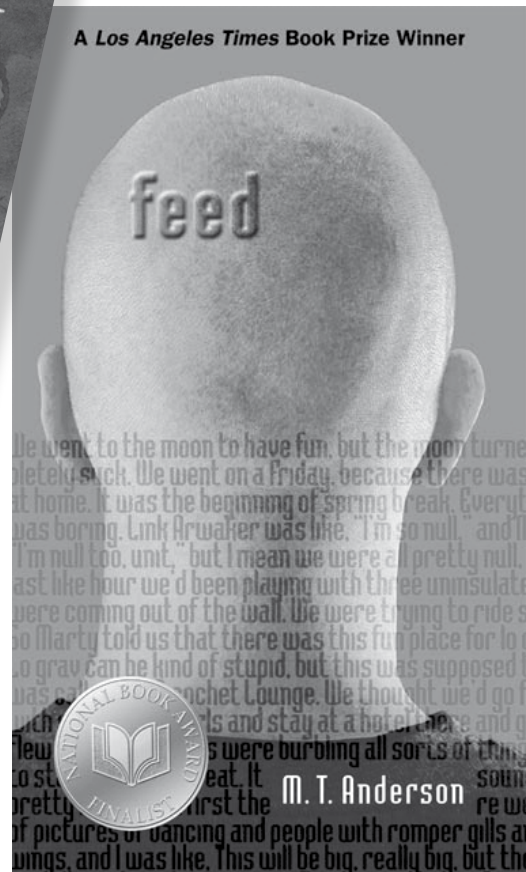
There are some parts of my work that feel a little more taxing and meticulous – that feel like work, in other words. Research is a pleasure, but sometimes an exhausting one. I've recently been writing novels set in the 18th century, and for the years that I was writing those books, I only read things written in the 18th century, written about the 18th century,

or earlier texts still read in the 18th century (Greek and Roman stuff, for example). This method-acting approach to writing worked well to get me into a kind of insane, dislocated Baroque mental space ... but good god, was I grateful when I broke my own rule and read a book in which people wore pants and didn't have consumption.

The inspiration for my stories comes from all sorts of places ... But to generalise, I'd say I'm trying to recapture and broadcast a particular emotion – whether it's child-like enthusiasm or satirical anger. I believe fiction is a machine for the reproduction of emotion. Why do we engage in this? I think it has something to do with us all trying to reorder and control our experience.

Writers are just particularly flimsy and neurotic. We really need to work to swallow experience if it sticks in our craw. Given that, I'm not sure, come to think of it, why anyone really listens to us ...

Anderson will be touring Australia in May, 2009.





FINANCIAL LITERACY IN ENGLISH CLASSROOMS

Ann Small

Consumer and financial literacy has not been a traditional area of learning for English students. And yet, in the global context in which we live, we are repeatedly reminded that we teach Citizen 2.0 in a Web 2.0 world. Marketing gurus posit that students in our classes are marketing – savvy and consumer aware: they estimate that these students consume as many as 1200 advertising messages a day, and that they are more than ready to be frank about the value or success of a product or service, and upload that frankness for publication. The participatory culture of the online world is powerful and marketers know this. Advertising is everywhere there, and not necessarily an intrusion. And then there is the concept of identity. Dr Patrick Dixon, chairman of Global Change and Europe’s leading futurist, characterises Citizen 2.0 adolescents as having an extended identity: *an identity that transcends usual limitations of location, age and upbringing*. He contends that online identity, created through blogs, gaming avatars, online friends and photos, is not a recreated identity but evidence of an extended identity.

Consumer and financial literacy, defined in the National Consumer and Financial Framework (MCEETYA, 2005), is the application of knowledge, understandings, skills and values in consumer and financial contexts and the related decisions that impact on self, others, the community and the environment.



Why the need? The world of consumers is becoming increasingly complex. Research shows that:

- levels of consumer and financial literacy among adults, parents and young people alike are insufficient to cope with many of these complexities;
- young people increasingly influence household spending and should understand the financial consequences of satisfying their needs.
- there are economic and social benefits for the whole community of increased levels of consumer and financial literacy.

From an English teacher’s perspective, several generic elements of the financial literacy content (http://www.financialliteracy.edu.au/introduction/curriculum_mapping/nsw_1.html) have been identified as convergent with aspects of the Year 7–10 English syllabus such as the student’s developing awareness of the place of the individual in contemporary Australian society, student ability to make connections between texts, the necessity for students to develop the skills of critical analysis and evaluation, and the skills of independent student investigation. To this end, two resourced units of work are being developed for implementation and will be made available on the ETA website.

Year Seven: *Invisible: NOT!*

In this unit students explore the ways young teenagers are represented in the world. They read and view a range of texts that consider the pressures in contemporary Australian society that shape the image young teenagers present to the world and on the ways young teenagers respond to these pressures and representations. Analysing texts drawn from a wide variety of contexts including literary texts, social networking sites and digital media, students make connections between texts, comparing their perspectives on the importance of brands, the world of the consumer and the associated ethical issues. Students consider the conflicting frames of reference and assumptions that underpin the texts and compare these to their own situations.

This unit focuses on the issue of teenage identity and branding and is a valuable way of introducing critical literacy to Stage 4. Such notions as *you are what you consume*, stereotyping and pressures to conform to a particular image are given a personal edge as students consider themselves in the light of marketing and spin.

FINANCIAL LITERACY IN ENGLISH CLASSROOMS

An introductory activity might involve students testing the proposition that *you are what you consume*. Students would visit a range of websites to evaluate the positioning of teenagers. Students might ask these questions from *Teaching and learning multiliteracies: changing times, changing literacies* (Anstey and Bull, 2006) of a range of websites.

- In this text, do the people being presented do the sorts of things or behave the way I do?
- Is this text trying to make me behave in a particular way?
- Is this text trying to do things that I may not want or need to do?
- Are the people in the text like me and my friends?

In each instance students would be looking at the language forms and features and the structures of texts to explain their answers.

Useful websites might include:

- ♦ <https://www.sportsgirl.com.au/index.html>
- ♦ <http://www.cocacola.com.au/csol/>
- ♦ <http://au.youth.yahoo.com/girlfriend/>
- ♦ <http://www.miniclip.com/games/en/>
- ♦ <http://australia.takingitglobal.org/>
- ♦ <http://www.takingitglobal.org/>
- ♦ <http://www.buynothingday.info/main.html>

Year 9: Watchdog: an independent learning project

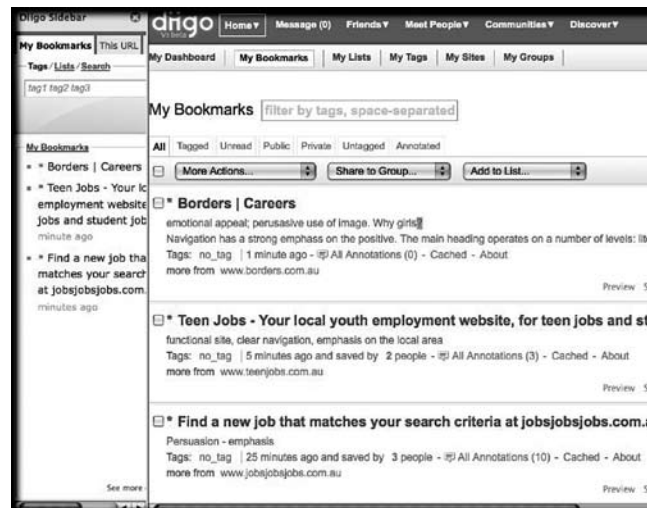
In this unit students develop their skills of investigation and critical comparison, focusing on the study of the techniques of persuasion to evaluate a range of related goods and services or employment opportunities offered to teenagers. Students identify and explain the financial implications, compare the available options and critically evaluate the marketing, advertising or employment strategies adopted in these products or jobs. This unit of work is conducted as a collaborative, independent learning project that is published as a hypertext. Adopting the role of a 'watchdog' agency, students record the development of their research, their analyses of the techniques of persuasion in student-selected texts (techniques such as over-simplification, emotive language, false assumptions, appeals to authority) and develop a community service advertisement for teenagers regarding the worth of the product or job.

The ability to direct one's own investigations and consider texts in the light of other texts is key to success in senior English. These are also of course, skills required for considered decision-making in all areas of life.

The development of independent investigation and thoughtful comparison needs to be carefully scaffolded in Stages 4 and 5 and we believe that this unit, with detailed support for a student's own research, does this effectively.

An activity in this unit might involve students comparing the techniques of persuasion used to pitch potential jobs at teenagers. Prior to starting this comparison students might learn to use the online tool <http://www.diigo.com>. This is an online note-taking, highlighting, annotation and collaboration tool for use with websites and is very useful for ease of comparison across a range of websites.

- ♦ <http://www.jobsjobsjobs.com.au/My-jobspace.html>
- ♦ <http://www.teenjobs.com.au/index.html>
- ♦ <http://www.borders.com.au/careers/>
- ♦ <http://www.target.com.au/html/careers/careers.htm>
- ♦ <http://www.boostjuice.com.au/?#/jobs/wanna-job->



The resource package for these units of work will incorporate professional development activities that showcase engaging classroom teaching strategies that incorporate aspects of financial literacy and ICT in the English curriculum; teacher professional development strategies for use at a faculty meeting and professional development strategies for workshops at ETA branch meetings.

Available for members at the end of May:
www.englishteacher.com.au

Disclaimer

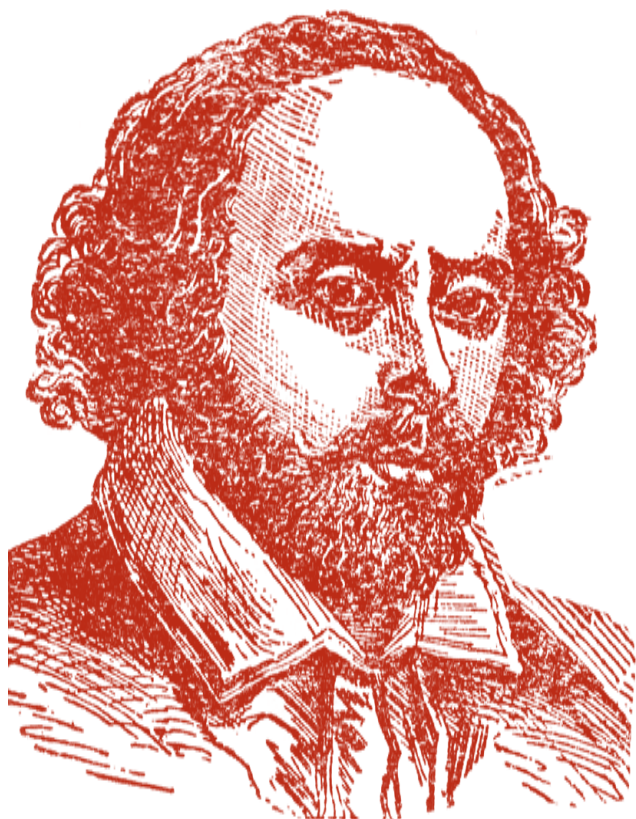
The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations.

Acknowledgement

This project was funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations as a quality teacher initiative under the Australian Government Quality Teacher Programme

TEACHING SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS: not for all time, but of an age

Dr Linzy Brady



Prefixed to the First Folio, 1623, was a poem by Ben Jonson which he wrote to 'the memory of my beloved' Shakespeare, his friend and rival, and included the endorsement "He was not of an age but for all time". However many questions this may raise in the twenty-first century, one thing is certain: approaches to teaching Shakespeare are definitely not for all time and need to be adapted to the particularities of each age. There have always been teachers who have imaginatively re-invented ways of teaching Shakespeare's plays with passion, understanding and individuality, and inspired their students to approach the plays in the same way. Early examples of innovative and inspirational teachers, who harnessed the theatricality of Shakespeare's plays to inform their teaching approaches, include Caldwell Cook and Harriet Findlay Johnson in the UK, and George Mackaness in NSW (Cook, 1917; Findlay-Johnson, 1911; Mackaness, 1928).

This same passion, understanding and individuality can be seen in the teaching approaches of many teachers who have written of their experiences and developed new approaches to teaching Shakespeare's plays (Gibson, 1990, 1998; Michaels, 1986; Salomone and Davis, 1997). It can also be seen in the number of innovative and collaborative teaching projects that are unfolding in England, Australia and America to bring secondary school students, teachers, academics and art professionals together to explore

Shakespeare's plays in new ways. Not only do these projects create dialogue between different perspectives on how to understand Shakespeare's plays, they inspire greater enthusiasm in those teachers and students involved and, more importantly, they result in resources available for uses beyond those particular projects.

This article will describe the most interesting and internationally significant projects that are exploring ways of teaching and learning Shakespeare's plays in England, Australia and America and will provide access to the websites that make their resources available online. The sites described in this article are significant because they highlight the innovative practices or current scholarship that have informed educational outreach programs or educational collaborations and make them available to all scholars, teachers and students. This article will also provide a link to the author's blog which locates and describes websites of interest to secondary school Shakespeare: a result of the many hours researching Shakespeare resources relating to secondary school that doesn't need to be repeated by teachers with a full teaching load!

The Royal Shakespeare Company down under

A new postgraduate course at the University of Melbourne aims to explore teaching approaches in collaboration with the expertise of actors, directors and other theatre professionals from the Royal Shakespeare Company in England. This course, the 'Postgraduate Certificate in the Teaching of Shakespeare', started in 2008 in Melbourne and looks to the rehearsal practices in Stratford where "actors and directors work not only with passion for the text, and theatrical understanding of how it works in action, but also with a sense of detail and discipline, and real care for the language" (O'Toole, 2007, p. 49). The similarities between the rehearsal room and the class room, where "Shakespeare rehearsal rooms nowadays are full of improvisation, hot-seating, games and techniques akin to those found in any drama classroom" (ibid, p. 49), lead O'Toole to write:

This rich convergence between the worlds of theatre and the classroom is why the time is ripe to offer Australia-wide a new course in teaching Shakespeare...which brings together the RSC's cutting-edge expertise in production and rehearsal of Shakespeare with our knowledge of Australian students and our own contemporary context (ibid, p. 49).

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O'Toole also identifies "at least three full-time educational theatre companies' dedicated to helping teachers teach Shakespeare to secondary school students" (ibid, p. 49). He names Bell Shakespeare Company, the Complete Works Theatre Company in Melbourne and the Grin and Tonic Theatre Troupe in Brisbane, and places the University of Melbourne's new postgraduate course alongside these as another opportunity to provide teachers with "a passion and enthusiasm that they can share, in a school environment which values what Shakespeare can offer students" (ibid, p. 47). O'Toole reminds us of the opportunities for learning more about Shakespeare and about teaching that may exist in the rehearsal studio and also reminds us of the resources that are available through the Royal Shakespeare Company's website.

Here a detailed range of resources are available from the Royal Shakespeare Company's Education department. The resources available on most of Shakespeare's plays include podcasts of actors in rehearsal, interviews with actors, video clips from performances, rehearsal photo galleries and performance photo galleries. This is in addition to information on the performance history of the plays, synopses and teachers' notes for all plays performed by the RSC. The site offers a valuable array of information, interactive games and audiovisual stimulus for both students and teachers in the classroom, for homework or for preparation.

One interesting interpretive game for *Richard III* (follow the Exploring Shakespeare links) asks the viewer to match photographs of Richard from different RSC productions with a relevant quotation from a theatre reviewer. For example, a photograph of Antony Sher in the 1984 production is matched with the following quotations, from which the student must choose the correct one:

1. "[He] plays the king as a man of genius who has chosen to be brilliantly evil rather than brilliantly good. His outrageous wooing of Anne is an act of sexual hypnosis with no trace of the frustrated 'normal' man who lurked behind Olivier's villain"
2. "At the Royal Shakespeare Theatre the impish Mr. Holm was not so much 'an abortive rooting hog' as a naughty schoolboy with a smile as angelic as *Bubbles*."
3. "... and the speed with which Antony Sher rises on crutches and reaches the front of the stage apparently on six legs, thin sleeves trailing like a withered third pair, has the audience drawing back in alarm."
4. "Looking like a malevolent tortoise, shaven head sticking out of a humped carapace, he stumbles and lurches from injured innocence and mock alarm to a crescendo of Pere Ubu fury after his coronation."

5. "With his shaggy beard and white face, he looks like a blend of Rasputin and Chaplin and has the ruthless humour to go with that image ... but he can swivel from jokey role-playing to psychotic fury in a moment."

Seeing photographs (all of which match one of the quotes above) from different productions and playing this game helps students appreciate the different interpretations that are available to the complex character of Richard III.

The Royal Shakespeare Company's educational resources can be found at <http://www.rsc.org.uk/learning/>

'Shakespeare For All Ages and Stages'

How Shakespeare's plays are being taught to Key Stage Three students (aged approximately fourteen years old) in England in 2009 will be influenced by some significant changes in 2008. In July 2008 *The Guardian* reported that new tools were being designed to help teachers assess Key Stage Three pupils' understanding of Shakespeare in the classroom and were to be made available to all schools and teachers in the UK. These tools would be used to "encourage lively and active approaches to Shakespeare that engage with the text as something to be performed; involve the study of the whole play; and consider Shakespeare in a wider cultural and literary context" (Gilbert, 2008). They included free live performances for students in Key Stage 3, a booklet entitled *Shakespeare for all Ages and Stages 2008* for all schools, and *Shakespeare: The Animated Tales* on DVD for all primary schools.

From 1993 to 2008, fourteen year old students across England were tested on their knowledge of two 'set scenes' from the plays studied in examinations that emphasised the analysis of character, theme and language (Coles 2003, (Batho, 1998) Marshall 2004). These examinations had the effect of stifling classroom exploration of Shakespeare's plays and led to experiences of Shakespeare that were disjointed, fragmentary and content driven (Batho 1998, Coles 2003, Wade and Sheppard 1994). Hence the demise of these examinations has been hailed as "a kind of miracle... within the teaching of English in England" in which "the dreaded tests for fourteen-year-olds are no more" and teachers "live in a halcyon phase" (Marshall 2008, p.65).

With the demise of the Key Stage Three nationwide examinations in England, the way students learn and teachers teach Shakespeare's plays will change in many ways and possibly in line with the examples of teaching strategies offered in 'Shakespeare for all Ages and Stages 2008'. The booklet is a product of collaboration between the Department of Children, Schools and Families, UK

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examination boards, teachers and arts educators in the theatre and media. A key tenet of the booklet is that Shakespeare's plays can be taught to students of all ages, and that from age five, "imaginative and practical approaches to Shakespeare" can be used to "spark children's enthusiasm and interest, the desire to study his plays further, and a lifelong love of Shakespeare's work" (*Shakespeare for All Ages and Stages* 2008, p.1). There is an explicit recognition of the value of Shakespeare for all students:

Watching, performing and reading the work of this extraordinary poet and playwright asks us both to challenge and celebrate our social and personal lives. Shakespeare can open up brave new worlds to young people and offer them fresh ways of dealing with familiar ones. His work can challenge our language skills and introduce us to new realms of poetic playfulness. He can extend our concepts of what fiction can do, and of what stories a drama can tell. Working with Shakespeare can be challenging but is eminently rewarding, rich and fulfilling (*Shakespeare for All Ages and Stages*, 2008, p.6).

The following examples of teaching Shakespeare to students in years 9 to 12 are taken from the booklet:

Ask pupils to sculpt one or more of the play's protagonists at key moments in the play. Other characters are placed and sculpted around them to represent relationships at these moments e.g. Richard III as the play begins, then as the new king, then on the night before Bosworth. Pupils are supported and guided to find textual evidence to verify the entire sculpture, focusing on the nature of the central character and his or her relationship with others at each key moment. The sculpture can be adapted if textual evidence suggests sharper detail is necessary (*Shakespeare for All Ages and Stages*, 2008, p.31).

Review a version of the current play seen either on film or in the theatre. This might take the form of a letter to the director or an actor, commenting on or questioning particular interpretive choices made (*Shakespeare for All Ages and Stages*, 2008, p.34).

Using whole class and group discussions and strategies such as 'conscience corridor', 'walk of fame' and 'walk of shame', encourage pupils to explore the moral issues that underpin the play they are studying. Build up a working wall display on these issues and allow pupils to annotate the display with quotations or their thoughts on characters' actions that exemplify these themes. Encourage them to make connections with films, novels, and popular TV series, e.g. the parallels with

the downfall of Macbeth and Darth Vader in their pursuit of power. Pupils could write the obituary for their chosen character using evidence from the play to demonstrate how their actions, their attitudes and what other characters have said and feel about them, reveal their moral position and how it is contrary to the good of society (*Shakespeare for All Ages and Stages*, 2008, p. 37).

The Booklet *Shakespeare for All Ages and Stages*, 2008 is available as a PDF document online at: http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/_doc/12715/7720-DCSF-Shakespeares%20Booklet.pdf, or by typing the Shakespeare for all Ages and Stages into the search box on the Department of Children, Schools and Families website at <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/index.htm>

Shakespeare: The Animated Tales can be purchased from Amazon at <http://www.amazon.ca/Shakespeare-The-Animated-Tales/dp/B0002CHJS2>

Shakespeare Reloaded

Shakespeare Reloaded is an Australian Council Linkage Project researching innovative approaches to Shakespeare and literature research in Australian universities and secondary schools. As stated on its website, the project:

... seeks to open up the lines of communication between school teachers and academics in order to understand better and enrich the teaching of Shakespeare at secondary and tertiary levels. Additionally, the project aims to enhance the literary research potential of Australian teenagers as they transition from senior high to junior university.

The project also aims to reach out to the "wider Australian and international communities" in its exploration of approaches to Shakespeare and literature research, making available an open access website to be launched in 2010 and an international conference at the University of Sydney in 2010.

One example of a new approach to teaching *Richard III* that has been the result of collaboration between the academics and teachers of Shakespeare, and has recently been published in the first issue of *mETaphor* for 2009, is Kate Flaherty's (2009) use of structured tableaux to explore the 'games kings play' and the machinations of Richard III as he makes his way to the throne in *Richard III* (p. 43).

After using this gaming tableau to introduce *Richard III* to senior high-school student in modern Australia, Flaherty (2009) writes that it is "accessible to the contemporary student's imagination and can therefore render insight into the notion of political strategy" and

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that it “encourages the students within the ‘picture’ to own his or her character – to see the play from the perspective of the character... by having students speak the lines of the characters at appropriate points” (p. 46). (For more information on this approach, see the previous issue of this journal).

The *Shakespeare Reloaded* website will be available in 2010 and a Google search for its name will locate it. A description of the project can be found at http://www.arts.usyd.edu.au/research/projects/slam/shakespeare_reloaded.shtml

In Search of Shakespeare

‘In Search of Shakespeare’ is an investigation into Shakespeare’s life, times and works. There is an excellent dossier called the ‘Fribbling Reports’ by John Fribbling, a fictional character who shadows Shakespeare in the 16th century and covertly compiles a dossier on all that is known of Shakespeare. The playwright game is a great way to learn about the production and reception of plays in early modern England. Both the dossier and the game are excellent resources that help students develop their knowledge of Shakespeare, their understanding of sixteenth century England and their awareness of early modern theatre.

For teachers, the educators’ section of this site includes articles for teachers’ professional development, lesson plans and classroom resources. About the resources that are available for teachers, the website states:

Developed in partnership with the Folger Shakespeare Library, these classroom resources were designed around six thematic strands: Shakespeare’s Language, Shakespeare on Film, Performance, Primary Sources, Teaching Shakespeare to Elementary Students, and Teaching Shakespeare with Technology. Under each theme you will find professional development strategies and lesson plans, a multimedia library of curriculum resources, and much more.

In Search of Shakespeare can be accessed at <http://www.pbs.org/shakespeare/events/> for the dossier and <http://www.pbs.org/shakespeare/educators/> for the educators’ section

Shakespeariana

The author of this article keeps a blog entitled Shakespeariana at <http://schoolshakespeariana.com>.

blogspot.com in which she periodically posts links to significant and relevant resources that teachers of Shakespeare’s plays to secondary school students may find useful to adapt for their own use.

Among the entries on this blog is a link to a site by Stageworks which includes interesting interviews, videos and information about *Richard III*, but by far the most interesting inclusion is a conversation with Sir Ian McKellen about Shakespeare, *Richard III* and Richard’s opening speech. This is an excellent site in which Sir Ian talks to you from the screen and answers the questions you select; at times teasing the tardy questioner or pretending to get impatient. He starts off by saying “Now, I’m an actor, so we’re going to start by reading the scene together and then I’ll stop and explain things as we go” and in the course of the interview one gets a fascinating perspective on both *Richard III* and how actors go about interpreting the Shakespeare text. It can also be found at <http://www.stagework.org.uk/mckellen/>

Also on this blog is a link to Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre’s Adopt an Actor initiative where the viewer can find out what happens behind the scenes at the theatre. Interviews and anecdotal accounts show what it is like to play Goneril in *King Lear*, Bottom in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Desdemona in *Othello*, and Timon in *Timon of Athens*. The actors give their thoughts and comments as they develop through the rehearsal processes and offer insights into their changing interpretations of the characters they are playing. This site can also be found at <http://www.globelink.org/adoptanactor/>

Another of the entries on this blog is a link to *Treasures in Full: Shakespeare* hosted by the British Library. The library built this online resource around the first folio which is carefully enclosed behind glass in a permanent exhibition there. The first folio is the edition of Shakespeare’s thirty-six plays published by Isaac Iaggard and Edward Blout seven years after his death. It was based on earlier Quartos and contained many plays that had not previously been published.

At the *Treasures in Full: Shakespeare* site, you can view 93 copies of 21 Shakespeare plays and compare them with other texts. For example an online edition of the 1603 quarto of Hamlet (1st) can be compared with the 1637 quarto of the same play (5th). Quarto versions of any other texts can also be compared, providing an easy comparison between selected scenes or lines. In addition, this site is a good source of background information for both teachers and students and includes information about Shakespeare, his works, his theatre world and the printing of his plays. There are online timelines and

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information about the ways in which Shakespeare's plays have been performed and adapted in their 'afterlife'. This includes the changes in acting styles, costumes, scenery, texts, and interpretations in the performance of Shakespeare's plays that have occurred since the Restoration of Charles III in 1660. This section also contains excerpts from selected plays from the British Library Sound Archive including Laurence Olivier as Chorus, 'O for a Muse of fire', Henry V (1931), Laurence Olivier as Hamlet and Stanley Holloway as the Gravedigger, "How long hast thou been grave-maker", *Hamlet* (1948), and Paul Robeson as Othello, *Othello* (1959). *Treasures in Full: Shakespeare* can be found at <http://www.bl.uk/treasures/shakespeare/homepage.html>.

Easy links to all of the websites and teaching and learning activities can be found in the February entries of this blog. Please feel free to follow this blog and to add any comments or suggestions of your own.

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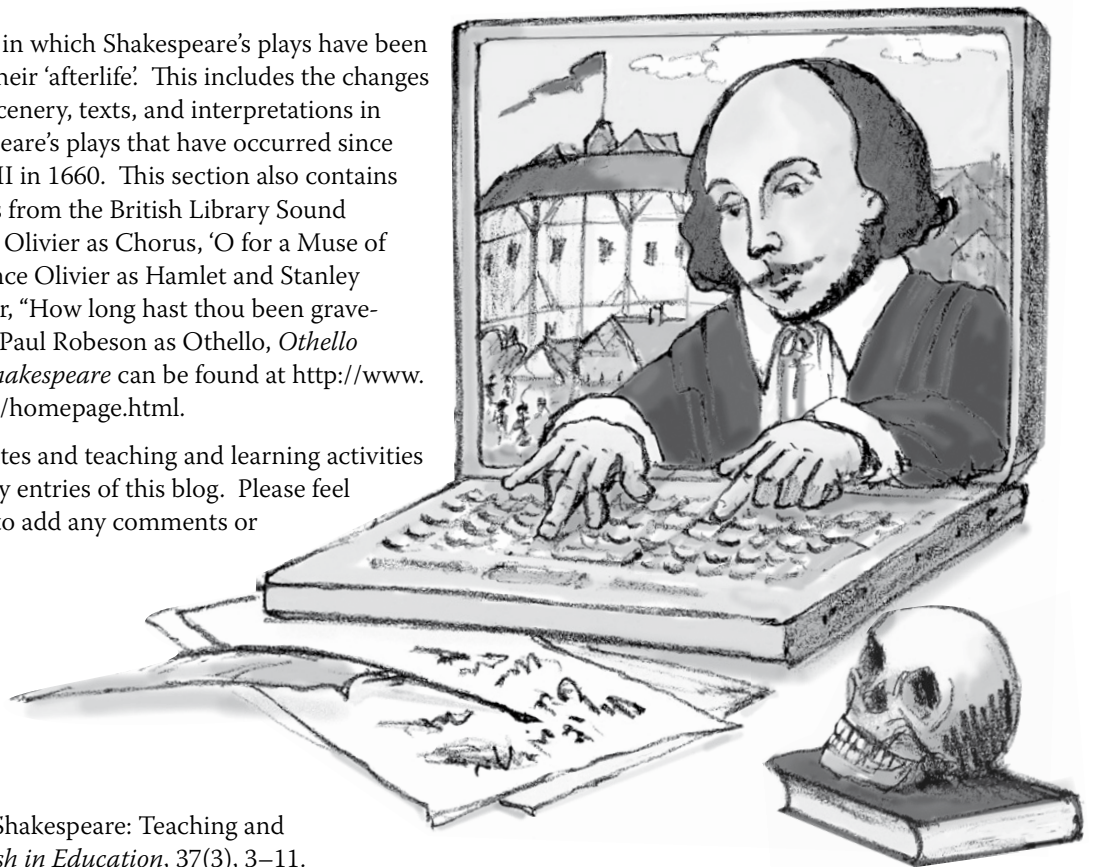
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Image – *Shakespeare* p.21 courtesy Clipart ETC, http://etc.usf.edu/clipart/2300/23032/shakespeare_23032.htm

Shakespeare discovers the laptop, an original line drawing by J. Sillar





TEACHER FEATURE – ON CROSSING THE BORDER: Shaun Mason and Ian Parr share their cross-border experiences with us

Shaun Mason: English Coordinator, Xavier High School, Albury NSW

This sign suggests our proximity to Melbourne, but don't be deceived - Albury is well and truly in NSW. We have the yellow number plates and we (at least some of us) follow NRL. But it's a town of contradictions. In the privacy of our own homes, the proud New South Welshmen are watching the Victorian television news, we're reading *The Age* (not the *Sydney Morning Herald*), we cheer on our favourite AFL team and admittedly we (I) like Melbourne better than Sydney. Nevertheless, when we arrive at school we are reminded that we are in NSW – the syllabus sits open on my desk.

I grew up in East Gippsland, Victoria. I went to uni in Melbourne. All my teaching rounds were in Victoria. Then I got a job in NSW. I've been at Xavier High School (co-ed systemic Catholic) for just over five years and I'm not alone. Xavier, like a number of schools in border regions, has a unique mix of teachers trained in different states. This brings with it opportunities and challenges. A number of our English teachers at Xavier were trained, and have taught, and may still live in Victoria. Whilst there is not a huge difference between the states in terms of content, the bureaucracy differs vastly. Terms like VELS and SACs may be more comfortable in the VATE journal, but for teachers in NSW whose children may be attending schools in Victoria or for those who have taught there, these terms are as real as Band 6, and the BOS. There should be no surprise then that for teachers in border towns, the idea of a National Curriculum takes on a whole new meaning.

This is my second year as English Coordinator. Our department is an interesting mix of 12 staff. Most of them are also in one other, maybe two other, departments. The wealth of experience in our English Department is overwhelming, ranging from 30+ teaching years, to first year. Our staff work room is an integrated one; I sit next to the part-time French teacher, the Religious Education Coordinator and a first year out English/Geography teacher. New teachers to the school have suggested that this staffroom configuration is quite supportive, but it also has the ability to make that subject specific professional

dialogue more difficult. As a result of this process of assimilation, teacher talk is formalised in department meetings and the informal chats about what's happening in the classroom are more common amongst the maze of desks.

When I was asked to write a piece about 'teaching English in the country' it would have been easy to fall into the trap of clichés – 'it's tough', 'we're so isolated', 'it's so expensive to go anywhere', and all that other humbug. However, when I asked some in our English Department, there was an overwhelming recognition of how good we have it. A first year out teacher from Sydney observed that the staff are less stressed when they arrive at school in the morning (no traffic) and that they stayed at school longer because they didn't have to 'beat the traffic'.

There is a sense (particularly when it comes to deciding on PD opportunities and how we can best spend our budget) that we are far away from the action. We have made it a priority over the past few years to send two staff members to the State Conference. We do this knowing it will be a big chunk out of our budget, but we see it as an important expense. However, we recently decided that we could not justify sending our three HSC Extension students to Sydney for the ETA Student Day. The three, one hour sessions, would turn into a two day excursion making the logistics and costs difficult, nigh on impossible, to justify.



Geoffrey Blainey wrote of how the tyranny of distance shaped Australia, and perhaps it's because we are so far away from Sydney, that our local branch of the ETA is so active. Our list of events includes an annual HSC Study Day, a variety of professional development sessions,

ON CROSSING THE BORDER: Shaun Mason and Ian Parr share their cross-border experiences with us

financial support for members to attend seminars and conferences in Sydney, and the casual sharing of ideas and information. The geography of the area seems to encourage a sense of collegiality between the Department schools and the Independent schools in the region. The ETA itself provides some relatively reasonable opportunities to get involved in the various committees that impact so heavily on our work and is always making gestures towards those members who live beyond the urban fringe.

I get the ETA faxes in my pigeon hole letting me know of upcoming events. I look at them, think how wonderful it would be to go to them, but more often than not, these faxes end up in the recycling bin. Life in regional NSW is great. We have it all. Our greatest barriers are those we all share: financial and bureaucratic. We have access to a huge range of activities and events down here. It is simply a matter of prioritising and ensuring that we also keep abreast with what's happening up there in Sydney. Sometimes, this is easier said than done, especially when driving past that highway sign each morning on my way to school.

Ian Parr: Head of English, Newcastle Grammar

Tom* arrived at school from interstate at the start of the year. He was quiet, focused, but lacking in confidence to contribute to class discussion. He handed in work conscientiously, but seriously struggled with his English essay technique.

Katherina* had arrived at school two years ago from overseas. She was happy to talk about anything and everything, but was frustrated by her inability to grasp analytical skills. She wrote about her experiences of learning to cope in a new school curriculum in a personal response on 'Belonging'.

I recognised the symptoms of both of these students because, as a teacher, I too had "crossed a border", and was now involved in new school. And I was working with a new syllabus, with all the delights and challenges that brought.

I watch in wonder as the debate over the National Curriculum unfolds. I had moved from Victoria into NSW in 2002, during the establishing years of the new HSC. I had taught for long enough to enjoy reflecting upon "subject English", and was fascinated by the cultural differences between the two states: in Victoria, as a young teacher, I had celebrated the introduction of a common study for all senior students (as a stand for social justice). Over the next 10 years this developed into a choice of core Study Designs: English, Literature, English Language or Foundation English. In NSW I discovered that the decision between Advanced and Standard allowed for a



vital differentiation of intellectual rigour and content. The NSW Extension One courses are genuinely intellectually challenging with conceptual foundations rather than textual. The pioneering originality of Extension Two was (and still is) breathtaking.

Both states' syllabi embraced important new thinking about English: a broader definition of texts to include film, visual and multi-media; a willingness to engage with texts beyond the canonical (especially the rise of adolescent fiction); a somewhat slippery understanding of teaching grammar; wide reading; the advent of new approaches to outcomes-based education and criteria-based assessment.

Despite all this, I always felt, because NSW had embarked upon syllabus reform later than Victoria, they were more far-reaching in their reform. NSW embraced critical literacy and its theoretical underpinnings in a more integrated and coherent way. I had to struggle for some time with the whole notion of a "values-based syllabus" and the idea of stepping outside the text to consider "how" meaning is created by its audience. As a teacher, I have been grateful for that challenge.

And yet, I always come back to the classroom, and the plight of Katherina and Tom. It is my hope that a viable National English Curriculum can emerge out what I imagine is a process of very vigorous debate and politicking. In the meantime, I will do what thousands of other teachers do on a daily basis. I'll call Tom or Katherina aside, give them some time and some strategies, and try to "navigate" them through the challenges of HSC.

* *not their real names*

SIXTY LIGHTS: exploring ideas

Mel Dixon, Loreto College Kirribilli

A voice in the dark: “Lucy?”

Many reviews of *Sixty Lights* begin with the memory of the episode of the Indian man being impaled by shards of a broken mirror. The real beginning, however, starts when a disembodied voice calls in the dark. For a book which is about the visual, this beginning provides a stark contrast. The initial darkness acts metaphorically to imply the absence of life and the grief that becomes a recurring motif in the book. The sense of sound penetrates the vastness of the darkness as the story comes to life and includes the sense of touch: the humidity, the muffled gentleness, swathed in sheets with bodies conjoined in the “tropic of the bed”. Only then does the first visual image occur: of insects on the mosquito net “silver and conical” (a proleptic moment in that it anticipates the photographic process and the co-working of the photograph and memory) waving like a “tiny baby hand” in the darkness, suggesting the beginning of life and also the interplay of past, present and future in one moment. These few lines set up what is to follow: a sensual and sensuous novel in which birth, life and death, the past, present and the future, are closely linked through the character of Lucy.

The declarative statement “This is what she had seen earlier that day” then introduces with some objectivity, the horrific scene of impalement. With this memory, the introduction moves from a domestic interior, with its sense of a growing life to the outside world where death is revealed. An Indian man climbing up a high building falls to his death and is speared by the mirror he is carrying: “But what Lucy noticed most ... was that the mirror continued its shiny business ... She simply could not help herself: she thought of a photograph.” All the sensations of the opening lines lead to this moment of the photograph.

We cannot read this book without closely considering theories on light and photography. In fact, Jones invites us to make these connections in her clear acknowledgements at the end of the book: “The following texts have been extremely useful in the composition of *Sixty Lights*”. Her list includes: Lynda Nead (*Victorian Babylon: People Streets and Images in Nineteenth Century London*), Eduardo Cadava (*Words of Light: Theses on the Philosophy of History*), Roland Barthes (*Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*) and Susan Sontag (*On Photography*).

So what I want to do is to look at the opening chapter, while considering these theoretical texts and to show how necessary they are to any reading of the novel. It is critical that we consider what these theories say because



Gail Jones, photo courtesy of the author

the knowledge will enhance a much valued personal response, offering students a language for understanding the depth of what is a complex text. Gail Jones’ own context as an academic who is interested in theory demands that we look at the ideas she reads. There are, however, more theoretical positions to consider than those that Jones cites. For example, her references to grief and mourning are very much derived from Jacques Derrida and Maurice Blanchot, to whom she refers in her essays, but this paper will be restricted to a discussion of the photographic image and the concept of time in the novel. I have chosen, in many places, only to hint at the depth of ideas in the text, offering students and teachers a suggestion of areas they can explore and ways they can approach the text.

To fully understand not only the sensuousness of the experience of the first lines, but the way the preface acts to introduce the ideas of the text we need to look more closely at Eduardo Cadava’s work. The words of Cadava form the epigram to Part One:

PHOTO-GRAPH: LIGHT WRITING
“There has never been a time without the photograph, without the residue and writing of light.”

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Like Jones' heading "Photo-graph: Light writing", Cadava's book title "Words of Light" returns us to the derivation of the word "photograph" and reminds us that it literally means light writing or words of light. In his book, *Words of Light* Cadava provides this preface (bold has been added):

*There is no preface that is not an **opening to light**. The light is a small window that lets in the morning light or an aperture of a camera that gives way to images, the preface allows us to experience a kind of light. It casts **a future lens on the significance of what has already been written**. Like the photographic negative that can only be developed later, it **offers an imprint of what is to come**. At the same time it is written only to be left behind. This is why the **preface takes its place in the interstices of the past, present and future**. A photograph of time ... the preface names the transit between light and darkness, that we might also call writing. In linking the activity of writing to that of photography it can also be said to consist of words of light.*

*... words of light . This phrase also names the relations between language and light, between language and the possibility of **lucidity**, and of knowledge in general.*

Jones' introductory chapter performs closely what Cadava describes in his preface. Her first words become "an opening to light" ("a voice in the dark..."). They cast a "future lens on the significance of what has already been written" (when she sees the impaled man as a photo) and offer "an imprint of what is to come" ("a tiny baby hand") not only metaphorically in the case of the novel but literally as the passage about the impaled man and the birth of Lucy's child is revisited further into the book. (Later as she stares at the scene when it actually happens, Lucy "could not help herself; she thought of repetition; she thought of a photograph" (p. 156).)

Jones' opening chapter "takes its place in the interstices of the past, present and future" in a few ways. It is set in the Victorian past, Lucy remembers a recent past event and the verbs are in the past tense (*wanted, had been climbing, was flapping, landed*). The future, however, is also present in the verbs that follow (*will remember; will signify*) and in the impending birth of the baby and her sense of what is to come. All this is simultaneous with her present, echoed in present verbs (*senses, feels, is stranded*). The final words of this opening further confirm the co-existence of these three time periods:

She will remember this utterance of her name when she meets her own death – in a few years time at twenty-two ... For now she senses the baby story

*within her... She is stranded in this **anachronistic moment she can tell no-one about, this moment that greets her with the blinding flash of a burnt magnesium ribbon**.*
(pp. 4-5)

The conjunction of different times is evident in the future tense (*will remember*), the present adverb (*now*) and the past memory (of the Indian man). Convergences like this one take place throughout the book. Something will trigger a memory of things past or of things to come, the verb tenses will coexist to reflect this union of different periods and Lucy acts as a conduit between the different times. Lucy may appear to be anachronistic in her behaviour, pursuing the life of a photographer, at a time which is traditionally regarded as restricting for female employment. Jones' acknowledgement of the "anachronism" is explained in an interview she gave on Radio National. "The whole text, I hope, is anachronistic, that it has a mimicry of Victorian times but in fact is a modernist text". This communion between the past and modernity can be comprehended more fully by looking at another of Jones' referenced texts: Lynda Nead's *Victorian Babylon: People Streets and Images in Nineteenth Century London*.

Nead points out that one of the paradoxes of modernity is that it makes the past irrelevant by its technologies but can bring the past into the present. The photograph is a case in point, in that it captures a moment, which can be resurrected through looking at the image and yet the photo immediately relegates that moment to the past. Another paradox that Nead is conscious of is that while the past may be rejected and repressed by "the language of improvement" (p. 5), it remains to disturb and unsettle the confidence of the modern. The present, she says, "remains permanently engaged in a phantasmatic dialogue with the past." (p. 7) In other words, the modern can only be understood as modern in relation to the past that preceded it. Nead therefore offers a postmodern revision of the nineteenth century notion that time and history are serial and progressive.

Nead takes us to a critical point in the history of modernity: the Victorian period. Recent scholarship has successfully debunked many of the mythologies about Victorian society. Victorian London was very much like our own modern cities with the new co-existing alongside the old. London was a building site where Victorian developers claimed old residences, razed them to the ground and raised new buildings. This changing society was reflected not only in physical landmarks but also in the way people lived. By tracing letters to newspapers and other accounts, Nead

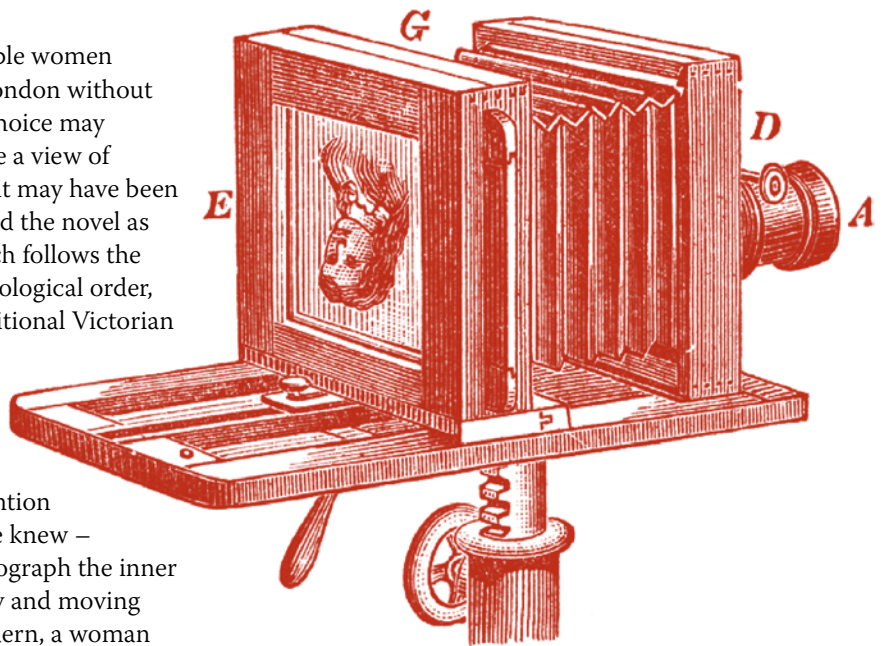
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demonstrates, for example, that respectable women did roam the night streets of Victorian London without chaperones. Lucy's freedom and career choice may seem anachronistic to us because we have a view of Victorian London created by novels, but it may have been possible. Reading Nead allows us to regard the novel as something beyond a bildungsroman which follows the growth of the protagonist, Lucy, in chronological order, to a postmodern version of this very traditional Victorian genre.

Lucy personifies the movement to modernity, the moment of the past meeting the present. She imagines the future of light and photography: the invention of the x ray machine ("someday – this she knew – doctors would have an apparatus to photograph the inner body"(pp. 189–190)), colour photography and moving pictures. She sees herself as "entirely modern, a woman of the future" (p. 141) and anticipates what is to come, unlike her employer, Mr Victor Browne, who baulks at the question, "do you think, ...that we shall one day far in the future, have the means to capture in a photograph the colour of your hair?" (p. 142). Paradoxically, for such a modern young woman, Lucy feels a sense of shock when she returns from India and the "radical modernity of London disturbed her" (p. 184) but it is this radical modernity that gives Lucy access to the world of photography.

To understand this multitemporality of history, Nead refers to the work of Michel Serres. Serres believed that historical eras were themselves an amalgam of past, present and future. Nead writes that:

"Serres argues, historical eras themselves are always simultaneously an amalgam of the past, the contemporary and the future: 'every historical era is likewise multitemporal, simultaneously drawing from the obsolete and the futuristic. An object a circumstance, is thus polychromic, multitemporal, and reveals time that is gathered together, with multiple pleats' ... the handkerchief represents a metrical, geometric concept of time, in which distance and proximity are stable and clearly defined; but crumpled in the pocket the handkerchief evokes a 'topological' concept of time in which previously distant points 'become close, or even superimposed'. Moreover, if the fabric is torn, previously adjacent points may be rendered distant and unrelated... Modernity, in this context, can be imagined as pleated or crumpled time, drawing together the past, present and future into constant and unexpected relations and the product of multiple eras."(p. 8)



The topological concept of time quoted from Serres by Nead can be seen in the buildings of Victorian London, where the past stands next to the future. This passage from Serres provides Jones with a creative metaphor that is sustained in the novel. Lucy, even as a young child, "knew it was possible that time might distort like this, might loop lacyly and suddenly fold over" (p. 29); as she grows older "years later in the middle of the night, in a pleat of time, Lucy wakes..." (p. 46) (taking us back to the first chapter); and near her death "Time was elongated and then compressed in a concertina shape" (p. 242). This analogy of the folded handkerchief doesn't only act as a metaphor but helps us to understand the construction of the novel. One fold takes us from the opening on page 3 to page 46 (when she refers to the pleat of time in her waking), then page 56 (when the event of the impaled Indian takes place); Lucy's confinement is next to her mother's confinement which leads to her mother's death; Lucy's sense of what will happen in the future interrupts any linear progression that occurs, just as the sixty lights, the record of sights in Lucy's book of Special Things Seen, interrupt the text.

To understand what is happening in the book of Special Things Seen, we can refer to the work of Walter Benjamin, who is quoted as the epigram to Part Two and also in Cadava, (in Jones' acknowledgements). Cadava's description of Benjamin's work as "snapshots in prose" (xviii) captures the essence of what Lucy is doing in recording her sixty lights – these "snapshots in prose" capture moments and freeze them. Cadava acknowledges this need when he writes "Every day the need grows

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stronger to get hold of an object as closely as possible in the image, that is in the likeness, in the reproduction” (xxv). The epigram from Walter Benjamin “Knowledge comes only in flashes” (p. 79) gives us further insight into the purpose of the book of *Special Things Seen*. Lucy’s understanding of the world emerges from the images that she captures such as the three hyacinths:

Three hyacinths:

Just that. Three sapphire-blue hyacinths in a single clay pot. They had the gravity of monuments and the perfection of Eden and they had veins like strings, like those in old human hands. (p. 89)

Rather than experiences, it is sights which form her sense of the world and inhabit her memory. These sights are not sequential but capture static moments of enfolded time.

The need to capture objects in images is a significant consideration for Susan Sontag in *On Photography*. *On Photography* considers the impact of photography on memory; Sontag discusses the aesthetics of photography and she explores the role of a few important figures in photography. She offers a survey of thinking about photography and the way it has created our perception of the past. Of specific relevance to Jones’ novel, however, are the discussions on Thoreau and Diane Arbus. Sontag writes (bold has been added):

*When Thoreau said, “You can’t say more than you see,” he took for granted that sight had pride of place among the senses. ... (Cameras) changed seeing itself, by fostering the idea of seeing for seeing’s sake. Thoreau lived in a **polysensual** world, though one in which observation had already begun to acquire the stature of moral duty. He was talking about a seeing not cut off from the other senses, and about seeing in context (the context he called Nature, that is, a seeing linked to certain presuppositions about what he thought was worth seeing (p. 93)*

Sixty Lights is a polysensual book. This sensuality persists throughout the book. Lucy Strange is a young woman who feels with intensity and sees in ways that are different. Her sensitivity to her surroundings and to the light that emanates from all that is around (the “lucidity”) leads her to construct her own book of “Special Things Seen” where she records the joy of seeing ordinary objects such as the skylight which is “so like a photographic glass plate”, the oceanic night sky “like a glimpse of creation expanded”. She sees in her own way and in this she is very much like Diane Arbus whose story takes up a considerable part of Sontag’s book. (The movie, *Fur*, 2006, starring Nicole Kidman follows Arbus’

transition from housewife to photographer of freaks.) For Arbus, the camera photographs the unknown. Arbus wrote, “You see someone on the street and essentially what you see about them is the flaw” (p. 34). This reminds me of the aesthetic that motivated Andy Warhol and it is also the aesthetic which motivates Lucy, the protagonist of *Sixty Lights*. She sees in her own way, preferring the *maculate* (as her husband Isaac Newton calls it) to the *immaculate*:

“You want the maculate, not the immaculate, he responded. “Maculare : spotted stained, blemished. Not immaculate, like the holy virgin.”

“Yes, said Lucy. “The world is like this, don’t you think? Marked, and shadowed, and flecked with time.” (p.146)

The flaws in the lens, the shadows that are cast, the mistakes that abound in the processing, the flashes of light that cast an aura, the halination, are all the things she prizes above the perfection of the photographic print.

This very individual way of seeing objects and scenes concurs with what Barthes call the *punctum*. In *Camera Lucida*, (1980) Barthes explores the nature of photography and memory deciding that the photograph is what he calls a “flat death” (p. 92). He distinguishes two themes in photography for which he coins new terms: the *studium* and the *punctum*. The *studium* is the desired message, it is “to encounter the photographer’s intentions” (p. 27) and the *punctum* “is that accident which tricks me (but also bruises me, is poignant to me)” (p. 27) and disturbs the harmony of the *studium*. It is a detail, a partial object that attracts, it is the “subtle beyond” (p. 59).

Lucy, like Barthes, is conscious that there is a difference between what others observe and the observation that she has made in the opening scene. The scene of the accident of the man impaled by the shards of the mirror is a tragedy – everyone rushed to offer assistance but while Lucy joins in this movement to the man, she becomes transfixed by the details and focuses on the mirror that “continued its shiny business: its jagged shapes still held the world it existed in, and bits and pieces of sliced India still glanced on its surface. Tiny shocked faces lined along the spear ...” (p. 4). This was her memory of an event that has been transformed into a spectacle, something that photos do to history according to Susan Sontag and Walter Benjamin.

This transformation from history to spectacle by the use of a camera alters the memory of the event. In *Camera Lucida*, Barthes reflects on connections between the photograph and memory and realises that “every photo

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is a certificate of absence” (p. 87), connected to grief and pain and memory. Barthes moves from the idea of public memory to personal memory. The occasion of his mother’s death and the act of looking at photographs after her death, leads Barthes to a reconsideration of the way our memories are framed by photos. He realises that there is a “luminosity” (p. 66) that attaches itself to the photo, a “luminescence” (p. 80), a “resurrection” (p. 80). This sense of the luminous is a recurring motif in *Sixty Lights* and reveals Lucy’s growing awareness in this bildungsroman. A “luminous image” (p. 94) is summoned when her uncle Neville attends séances to resurrect the spirit of his dead sister; Lucy’s lover, William, teaches her about bioluminescence (p. 110), but eventually she realises in India that after death “There was no redeeming conversion of death into a luminescent surface.” (p. 144)

Death creates an absence for many of the characters. The desire to remember face and features haunts Lucy who has no photographs and has to use other ways of remembering her dead mother. She realizes, even as a child, that her mother’s face “could not be willed into vision”(p. 70). Reading books in the ship’s library on her way to marry in India, Lucy closes her tired eyes and suddenly:

Her mother’s early stories flooded back to meet her. Lucy remembered oriental fantasies of dextrous artifice, fantasies of perished lovers and singular vehicles. She remembered the ice cave and a small girl learning to read. She remembered a tone of voice and the feminine scent of the gardenia. It was like something swaying in and out of vision ... a glimpse of herself... This was memory as an asterix. (p. 115)

Here, Jones reminds us that despite Cadava’s claim that photography becomes a “mode of bereavement”, memory has not always been dependent on the photo. As well as the “inheritance of story” (p. 73), as well as the scents and the sounds of her mother, she recalls her mother through objects (her mother’s fan) and colours (oriental blue of the fan). There is a world of sensuous experience that exists without the photo. This is the same sensuous experience that permeates the opening scene of darkness which acts as a preface before the action of the novel commences.

The novel, *Sixty Lights*, has a depth that has only been briefly touched on in this article. The language is lyrical, the structure is unexpected and the ideas are vast. As well as exploring the role of photography at a critical point in its history, it deals with grief, love, memory, history, sight, colonialism, women, the Victorian novel and modernity. Any close reading yields countless perspectives for students to follow and these perspectives can only be enhanced by understanding the theories that drive the textual ideas.

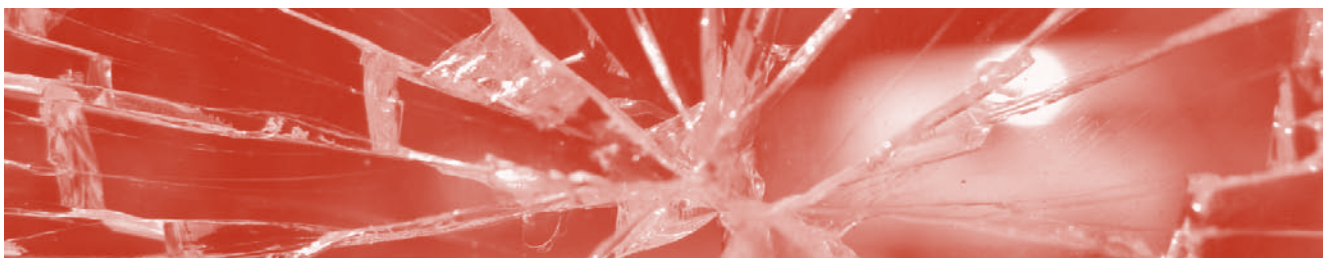
It may be best to end with Gail Jones’ own words:

I am not quite prepared to relinquish communion with the stars, but do wonder how one might achieve the starry text. How does one honour, in grief, all that up-rises? And how then does one write of it, other than employing these oddly cathected masques and stylistic hesitations? I suppose there must be somewhere a metaphysics of asterix, some sparky exclamation at the very fact of existence, and perhaps one dedicated not to the black sky, but to the lapis-blue and astrous weather of the gift.

Without Stars: A Small Essay on Grief

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INSPIRING STUDENTS TO WRITE: the anatomy of a creative writing workshop

Harry Laing

As a guest writer and teacher of creative writing workshops my role is to create an atmosphere of possibility, a space where the students are writers for a couple of hours and where writing is considered to be the most natural thing in the world. For me, there are few sights more pleasurable than a roomful of students writing away, some with heads down, some coming up for air briefly, gazing out the window and then getting back down to it again. I know I'm doing my job when the only noise is the sound of the air conditioning...

If this sounds like pie in the sky, I can assure you it's what tends to happen if students are given maximum leeway to write what *they* want to write. For me, the key is to 'set the scene' and to model an intensity and excitement about writing. And of course to have some fun.

Inevitably, having been writing for twenty odd years, I have some faith and experience in the practice. Many teachers won't, perhaps, feel the same kind of confidence. However the key in taking a creative writing workshop is to demonstrate that you too are a writer for the couple of hours or however long the workshop lasts. (It doesn't matter that you might not be a practising writer). This might mean having a go at the exercises and games yourself and sharing your results with the students.

The important thing is to trust in the students' ability to come up with the goods.

I've witnessed it over and over again: students coming up with really great work and surprising themselves and their teachers. Where did it come from? Less confident and less fluent students suddenly reading out an original and arresting piece. Could it be that simply believing it will happen makes it happen? Who knows but the one sure thing is that the imagination is a mysterious entity and silence is a wonderful midwife! I'm not advocating Trappist workshops but I find the less talk from me the better.

What I prefer to do is read a powerful piece of writing (usually a poem because of the brevity and impact of the charged language) and then get them writing on a related theme. Or I briefly introduce a theme or exercise I'd then like them to have a go at. I'm not keen on 'templates' because I think they instantly reduce the creative possibilities open to a student. And they also contribute to work that can feel pasteurised and homogenised. I would also tend not to get into the finer detail of style

until I was asked to look at, say, the work of students taking Extension 2 where learning how to edit would be important in terms of producing a long and considered piece. I don't find that Yrs 7-10 have much conception of or patience with the business of editing or revising work. Therefore, apart from the odd comment about how a poem is all about compression, or a close-up focus on detail, I'm just happy to see them writing.

Naturally there will be times when the students just can't seem to get it together, have no inspiration, feel blank. But it's amazing how, when even just a few of them get into the flow of it, the room seems to get going. Even those having trouble will begin to settle and start putting some words down. So the teacher is really pulling a bit of a confidence trick here i.e. one that is aimed at boosting confidence. Even when the students have real difficulties with words, they need to feel they have pulled themselves out of trouble with their own efforts. I was asked by a teacher at a previous PD workshop what to do with students who were really struggling with words. It would of course be tempting to feed them words and structure and get them to fill in the blanks but I'd still hold out for that magic moment when, forgetting how hard it all is, one or two will suddenly find they have something to say...and write it down.

So how might a typical workshop run and what kind of exercises and games do I use?

I find a good way to start is to introduce the concept of automatic or 'stream' writing. Ted Hughes talked about the 'Inner Policeman' who patrols the gateway to our imagination and clonks on the head all the good stuff trying to come through, saying 'Not up to much is it.' We all have an inner policeman and we all have to find our own way of outwitting him or her. Stream writing is a great way to do this. I simply ask students to write. Not to think, not to hesitate, not to punctuate. Just write. Whatever comes into their heads. The itch above their nose, the weirdness of the guy asking them to do this, what they'll be having for lunch, the fact they can't think of anything to say...just write it. The only rule is...don't take your pen off the paper. And I emphasise no-one is going to see this writing. I also ask them to try this at home when they're relaxed, just for a few minutes a day, and not to read what they've just written but instead to accumulate a couple of weeks' worth, then to read it. Often they'll discover things, images, obsessions that

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have bubbled up which can possibly be developed into more considered pieces of writing.

It's good to see students waving their hands in the air because they've got cramp from the (probably unfamiliar) act of writing hard for half a page or more. The exercise certainly limbers them up and gives them a taste of the physicality of writing which I think is still important in this era of the keyboard. In particular it's a grand defiance of the dreaded blank page.

Now they've got some words down I like to read them something strong and pungent. Something that will take them into unfamiliar territory. I often read '*Never Blood So Red*' by Grandfather Koori, a haunting poem about the death of an Aboriginal man, Robert Walker, in Fremantle Gaol. It's simple and arresting and cuts through the clutter with a chant like refrain. 'Never blood /so red so red/ in Fremantle gaol so red...' There's always a charged silence after I've performed this piece (which I do from memory.) I then tell the students that they too have been in solitary for a year, no light, tiny cell, and it's their job to get a message to the outside world. So I'd like them to write down their experience. Write it. Simple as that. They usually respond with alacrity and a commitment which I believe comes from the fact they've just been taken somewhere else, somewhere powerful and sad and raw, a place perhaps only poetry can evoke.

And this is why I use poems as ways of creating different atmospheres and encouraging reverie.

The very compression of a poem means it acts like a tuning device or a transmitter, continually giving out and evoking certain feelings and responses. Essentially poems are spells and operate by a kind of magic which has a tendency to disappear when explained or analysed! No doubt there is a time and a place for looking at the way poems work and at what they might mean but in this context I don't ask for any response from the students. I'm happy just to read them. And there is a very precious quality to this kind of rapt, focused listening.

It's also vital that students read *their* work out and hear what their peers have written. I do apply a very gentle pressure on students to read (or if they're not confident enough but are happy for me to do it for them that's fine) however I make it clear there's no obligation. So far I've found it's rare for a group of students to be reluctant readers and I'm guided by the assumption, as outlined earlier, that we're all writers for the duration of this workshop and what could be more natural than hearing each other read out our work. It's not a performance, it's a shared enjoyment and I'm sure that when the shy, less confident student takes the plunge and reads and gets some positive feedback from me or even a round



Fremantle Gaol, Garry Pettet. Image source: www.flickr.com/photos

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of applause from the rest of the class, it makes a big difference to them. I'm also sure that students surprise each other with what they've come up with. And there's nothing wrong with a little bit of competition.

If the group are quick off the mark and enthusiastic it's always worth trying to get them to write a Tanka to get some idea of how the compression of words works in poetry. A Tanka (at least in this fairly non-traditional manifestation) consists of five lines with a strict syllable count: 5,7,5,7,7. Some students will be familiar with Haiku. A Tanka gives them the opportunity to expand on a Haiku with the two extra 7,7 lines and maybe come up with a twist or surprise, having set the scene in the first three lines. Tanka are not easy but most students get the hang of them and even if some struggle to get their syllables right it's still a rewarding thing to do. The important thing is to come up with a good choice of possible titles and give them a good example, preferably one you've written yourself. Titles I've used in the past include *'Last On Earth'*, *'Bubble'* and *'Found On The Beach'*. Tanka can also look great printed up large on the page in a good choice of font.

By this time, it will be obvious that I'm particularly keen on poetry as a way of tuning students into their imagination. However I certainly don't insist on their writing poems. I say I'm happy for them to write in whatever form. Some students will attempt all the exercises in rhyming couplets, others will be happier with prose. Though hopefully it will be poetic prose.

One way to hone their narrative skill is to get them to do a microstory. Fifty words only. Start with a sentence such as 'I stroked the dead tiger one last time, then...' and they have to complete the job. Tell them they have to have some idea of the end before they start and a middle too. It's no use finding yourself forty five words in and just metaphorically jumping off a cliff. There's a great opportunity here for humour too.

And humour does play an important part in my workshops. I like to balance the intensity with fun though I do have to be careful not to let the fun start

happening too early or the atmosphere of hard work vanishes. A good game to finish off a workshop is to get every student to write two words down on a piece of paper and then call them out to me to write on the whiteboard. They then form groups of four and from the list of thirty or forty words on the board have to choose, say, fifteen and make a piece using those words in the exact order they appear. I then ask them to nominate a reader and make sure they know what they're about to read. It's remarkable how different each group's piece will turn out to be.

I hope I've given some idea of the kind of thing I do and at least an outline of a few useful games and exercises.

It is of course a very different thing for me to take a one-off workshop in a school to the business of having to teach students daily and inevitably I get something of a free kick from having novelty value. This makes it a lot easier for me to talk about the spell of poetry especially when I'm not attempting to teach it as part of the syllabus. However I don't think that takes away from what I've been describing in terms of a creative writing workshop or class. And I've been consistently surprised by the quality of work from students considered to have less developed literary skills.

The imagination is a bit like a muscle. It gets sluggish and needs flexing. It also responds to a good push. Giving the students permission to write as hard as they can, asking them to attempt new forms and assuming they'll come up with the goods certainly seems to work for me. I hope it works for you too.

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'Never Blood So Red'

Harry Laing

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PURSUING DEEP UNDERSTANDING IN THE AREA OF STUDY: a unit of work on *belonging* and Lahiri's *The Namesake*

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As they did in English staffrooms across the state, the new Board of Studies' prescriptions caused a flurry of frantic activity as we trawled through a range of new texts and explored the new units on offer. Of course, each new choice meant we needed to build a new unit of work that would guide our staff and shape the experience of our students. During this time Barker has been adapting the Teaching for Understanding (TfU) framework developed by Harvard's Project Zero and rejuvenating teaching programmes across the school. In English, the new prescriptions provided a valuable opportunity to construct inspiring new units in a way that integrated the TfU framework with the Board of Studies' requirements.

Teaching for Understanding is a framework that structures and guides pedagogical practice with a focus on deep learning. Classroom experiences carry students seamlessly from learning to understanding to performances of that understanding. Not only should a student be able to articulate an understanding of the particular material at hand, but they should be able to re-contextualise that understanding in such a way that they are able to use it meaningfully in a variety of situations. For example, during our study of *Belonging* a student will examine the choices Gogol makes about which culture he identifies with at various stages of his story. That student will come to understand that a sense of belonging is influenced by the choices an individual makes, and that we are integral in creating our own sense of belonging or not belonging. This student will use this understanding to compose an imaginative response about a young girl's first day at school that explores the choices she makes and the impact of these choices on her developing sense of belonging. This same student will be able to identify characters in other texts who make choices that influence their sense of belonging and draw parallels between their stories and the experience of Gogol in *The Namesake*. Each of these is a *performance of understanding* that requires the student to manipulate and apply what they have learned in a new context.

The great power of the Teaching for Understanding framework is that it enables us to create a level of understanding in our students that will ensure they carry what they learn into their world, and beyond the four walls of our classroom or the next set of examinations.

This focus on understanding and performance necessitates a clear articulation of what it is we want students to learn. These are the *understanding goals* and they reflect the core ideas we want students to take from the unit of work. These are the ideas that rise above the detail of the specific context and, when understood by students, will allow them to carry that understanding with them beyond the particular unit of work and successfully apply it in a range of situations. While these understanding goals are important in building a unit, they are also powerful for helping teachers to set the direction of the teaching and learning strategies they use and for students to maintain a focus for their learning.

To ensure that these goals are met, the TfU framework requires a high level of meaningful *ongoing assessment*. Structured activities that require performance build on student understanding as the unit progresses. Each of these performances, be it spoken or written, formal or informal, provides the opportunity for valuable ongoing assessment and feedback. Not only is this critical for the teacher's awareness of student progress, it also reveals areas of strength or weakness in the unit itself, and allows the teacher to modify and adapt the programme as required.

This unit of work called *The Ties that Bind: Threads Across Worlds and Texts* addresses the Area of Study: *Belonging* using Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake* as the primary text. The TfU framework has been used to guide its development and as a lens through which to focus the deep understanding of students. The teaching and learning strategies and experiences it contains are designed to continually build and refine student understanding in a way that will position them well for their examinations and equip them with a deep level of understanding about ideas of belonging and not belonging that will stay with them long after the unit is finished. The unit meets all of the requirements of the NSW Board of Studies.

It is hoped that this unit will provide some valuable assistance and ideas for those teaching *The Namesake* in the Area of Study: *Belonging* over the next four years.

More information on Teaching for Understanding and Project Zero can be found at <http://www.pz.harvard.edu/Research/TfU.htm>.

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The Ties that Bind: Threads Across Worlds and Texts

English (Advanced) Year 12 (Stage 6)

Focus Areas:

Ideas of belonging, and the ways they are represented and expressed in texts, will be explored through a conceptual study of a variety of texts in a range of media and a close study of Jhumpa Lahiri's *The Namesake*.

Length of Unit:

7½ Weeks

Introducing the Unit

This unit provides students with a staged approach to exploring, engaging with, understanding, and developing a personal imaginative and critical response to the key ideas of the Areas of Study: Belonging.

Students will first engage with the concept of belonging through a series of short texts and excerpts from longer texts. Background and personal reflection activities will serve to create a personal engagement with the concept. After building a developing understanding of the scope of the Area of Study, students will begin their guided study of *The Namesake* while they conduct individual preparation of related texts of their own choosing.

Students will study a range types of texts and engage with ideas in a variety of contexts. Students will be required to engage with online texts, and to synthesis ideas from different contexts and perspectives.

As they explore ideas of belonging more deeply through their study of the novel, students will begin to synthesise personal imaginative and critical responses to the concepts and the ways they are represented in texts. They will compose imaginative responses to a symbolic stimulus and critical responses to both the prescribed text and the wider area of study. In all activities and tasks, students will be required to express *their* understanding of ideas of belonging and not belonging and encouraged to develop their own *personal* theses in response to the area of study.

While developing a rich understanding of ideas of belonging, themselves and their place in the world, students will also prepare themselves for Paper 1 of the Higher School Certificate.

Understanding Goals

Students will come to understand:

- Degrees of belonging, barriers and gateways to belonging in communities and societies, and the impact experiences of belonging can have on individuals and groups;

- The ways in which composers represent ideas of belonging and not belonging in a variety of texts in a range of media; and
- How to represent their ideas about belonging through the composition of:
 - ♦ evocative, engaging and insightful imaginative responses; and
 - ♦ considered and analytic critical responses.

Outcomes:

1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13

Teaching and Learning Strategies leading to Performances of Understanding by students

Phase 1 – Engage with the concept

Lesson 1

Introduce the Year 12 (Advanced) course.

Explain the concept of an Area of Study. Read the 'Common Content – Area of Study' from the Syllabus.

Explain the scope of the Area of Study: Belonging. Read 'Area of Study: Belonging' from the Prescriptions. Identify the different focuses and requirements of the students during their study. Students should highlight and take notes.

Introduce the generative topic: "The Ties that Bind: Threads Across Worlds and Texts". Discuss the metaphor of "ties" and "threads" in terms of human relationships, connections to people and places, and belonging.

Highlight ideas of connections between:

- People;
- People and the world;
- People and texts; and
- Texts.

In particular, elucidate the idea of conceptual threads through learning (following the concept of belonging through texts and contexts) that makes this unit an **area** of study.

Watch *Toy Story* (dir. Lasseter, 1995) (The arrival of Buzz: Chap 4 – 00:21:30). Introduce ideas about individuals and communities; outsiders and insiders; belonging to 'ideas' that are bigger than ourselves. Discuss the use of symbolism to represent belonging and not belonging and, through this, the idea that students must read *through* the narrative of texts to understand the concepts that lie within. It would be worth briefly reviewing relevant film techniques and begin to focus the students on conducting close critical analysis of key scenes.

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Lesson 2

Watch *Toy Story* (Woody and Buzz miss the moving van: Chap 27 – “Look, Mum. Woody and Buzz.”). Students:

- Brainstorm ideas about belonging and not belonging through a comparison with the ‘Arrival of Buzz’ scene.
- Identify symbols of belonging and not belonging in both scenes.
- Student responses are then combined and condensed on the whiteboard through a class discussion.

Introduce students to the Supplementary Text Analysis sheet (attached as Annex A). Explain each section and the philosophy behind it. Outline how to select valuable supplementary texts (quality, length, uniqueness, variety of text types, insight, differences, similarities and links with *The Namesake* and other chosen supplementary texts). Reinforce the need for a range of supplementary texts: explain the concept of a toolbox from which they can choose the most appropriate texts depending on the question or task they face.

Lesson 3

Watch *Where the Hell is Matt?* (dir. Harding, 2008, www.youtube.com). Students select the three scenes they think are most important to their understanding of belonging. Compile a list of these scenes from student suggestions.

View the film again. Students complete a Supplementary Text Analysis sheet as a practice. During the viewing focus on:

Stone Town, Zanzibar (00:27)

Ideas of not belonging represented through:

- Setting (rain)
- Proxemics (centre of an empty street)

Lancelin, Australia (00:30)

Ideas of not belonging represented through:

- Scale (of landscape)
- Proxemics (distant and alone)

Madrid, Spain (00:58)

Ideas of belonging represented through:

- Proxemics (positioning of Matt and arrival of crowd)
- Scale (of Matt and crowd)
- Soundtrack

Demilitarized Zone, Korea (01:54)

Ideas of not belonging represented through:

- Symbolic proxemics

- Juxtaposition
- Humour

Poria, Papua New Guinea (02:12)

Ideas of belonging by degrees represented through:

- Proxemics (inclusion in the dance line, but dancing in a different style)
- Costume

Consider to what extent Matt belongs and does not belong in this scene

Gurgaon, India (02:33)

Ideas of degrees of belonging, and the move from belonging less to belonging more, represented through:

- Proxemics (positioning; dance style [and the change from one style to another])
- Soundtrack (and the way it works in unison with the visuals)
- Costume

Consider the balance of inclusion/exclusion caused by cultural difference and the universality of dance

Consider links to *The Namesake*

Discuss the film with students:

- Ideas of transient moments of belonging, and degrees of belonging in different contexts;
- The universality of dance, and the powerful unifying effect it can have;
- Cultural symbolism and its power to include and exclude;
- The power of a simple narrative structure represent and explore more complex ideas; and
- Links to *The Namesake*.

Lesson 4

Read ‘Neighbours’ by Tim Winton from *Scission* (1985).

Students complete a Supplementary Text Analysis.

In small groups discuss the following ideas in the text:

Barriers to belonging such as:

- Language
- Lack of knowledge/understanding
- Cultural differences
- Ways of living

Those **universal human experiences** that transcend cultural differences and form **gateways** to belonging, and explore the reason for this:

- Growing vegetables
- Cooking and sharing a meal

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- Pregnancy
- Birth

The way ideas of belonging and not belonging are **represented through language**:

- Symbolism
- Comparison
- Understatement
- Omission
- Narrative structure

Links to *The Namesake*.

Groups then report back during a class discussion.

Lesson 5

In pairs, students visit www.migrationheritage.nsw.gov.au and explore the site. Review key features of a website (accessibility, structure [page and site], reading paths, visual and text characteristics, links, advertising, changeability, audience interaction and participation). They complete a supplementary text analysis.

In their study, students should:

Explore personal stories of migration and consider ideas of not belonging, belonging and the transition between the two.

Ideas of belonging and not belonging represented through:

- Symbolism (incl. MHC “circle” logo, belongings, cultural symbols and colourisation);
- Site structure (inclusion of audience through sections to leave your own story); and
- Power of inclusion through understanding

Consider the impact of migrants of Australian communities and explore notions of the interactive influence of individuals and groups.

Consider links with *The Namesake*.

Discuss what students have learned about belonging and the ways it can be represented online. During the discussion, explore which particular pages or features students would consider using in future critical responses.

Lesson 6

Distribute, read through and explain the assessment task. In particular, explore the process of identifying, assessing and selecting successful symbols of belonging from *The Namesake*.

Watch *Bend It Like Beckham* (dir. Chadha, 2002) (Jess' dream sequence and the sisters go shopping: Start of film

– 00:06:00). Students complete a Supplementary Text Analysis and:

Identify cultural symbols (British and Indian).

Explore ideas of belonging and not belonging represented through:

- Cultural symbols
- Language
- Systems of value and belief

Consider the impact of Chadha's background in Bollywood on her cinematic style. Consider links with *The Namesake*.

Lesson 7

Watch *Bend It Like Beckham* (The wedding and the grand final: 01:12:25 – 01:30:50). Students continue to complete their Supplementary Text Analysis. Meanwhile, they:

Explore ideas of belonging and not belonging represented through:

- Proxemics (particularly Jess)
- Costume
- Cultural symbols
- Colourisation

Consider the ability for an individual to belong and maintain a unique identity (represented in the dressing of Jess in traditional sari in the locker room).

Watch *Bend It Like Beckham* (Cricket in the park: 01:41:00 – End of film). Students continue to complete their Supplementary Text Analysis. Meanwhile, they explore ideas of belonging, and the transition from not belonging to belonging, represented through:

- Proxemics
- Cultural symbols (particularly cricket and Soccer victory dance)

Phase 2 – Develop an understanding of the concept

Lesson 8

Read *The Namesake* (Naming Gogol: p. 24–29) and discuss the experiences of Ashoke and Ashima during this time.

Explore the way Lahiri uses language to create a sense of isolation and alienation in America, and the feeling that something significant is absent.

Lesson 9

Read *The Namesake* (Ashima loses her shopping and has it returned, and learns of her father's death: p. 40–47).

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Students write a short critical response to:

1. What do you learn about belonging, not belonging and the transition between cultures from this section? Consider the experience of Ashima and the symbolism of the journey for Gogol.
2. Why is the loss and return of Ashima's shopping a significant moment for her?

Read *The Namesake* (A new house and a trip to the beach: p. 48–53). Students write a short critical response to:

1. What do you learn about belonging from this section?
2. Explore the symbolism of:
 - ♦ The Rice Krispies, peanut and onion mix; and
 - ♦ The trip to the beach and Ashima's statement, "I'm falling. It's pulling me in."

Identify other key symbols of belonging in these passages and list them on the board.

Lesson 10

Read *The Namesake* (Ashima is pregnant again: p. 53–55) and discuss ideas of belonging and not belonging. Identify symbols of belonging. Students should highlight and take notes.

Read *The Namesake* (Gogol's good name and his enrolment in school: p. 55–60 and Sonia's name: p. 62). Students complete a short written response to:

- What is the significance of the names "Nikhil" and "Sonia" to understanding the way Ashima and Ashoke view their children and their place in the world?

Read *The Namesake* (Gogol [p. 40] and Sonia [p. 63] confront their destiny). Discuss the use of symbols in these scenes, and what it illuminates about the characters of both parents and children. Students should represent the discussion and their ideas in a mindmap.

Read *The Namesake* (Two views of language: Ashoke and Ashima [p. 65] and Gogol [p. 67]). Students begin to draft a short critical response to:

- What do these two perspectives on language reveal about the attitudes of, and sense of belonging felt by, Gogol and his parents?

Students finish their response for submission next lesson.

Lesson 11

Read *The Namesake* (Gogol visits the graveyard: p. 68–71 and Gogol's 14th birthday: p. 73–78). In small groups students identify the key symbols of belonging in these scenes.

List the identified symbols on the board. In their groups students consider the question *Which symbols are most*

significant to my understanding?

Each group is assigned six votes which they may allocate to the listed symbols in any way they wish to best illustrate the order of significance. Add a tally of these votes to the listed symbols and discuss the cumulative result (this will reflect the overall opinion of the class).

Allocate one of those symbols identified as being most significant to each group. That group must:

- Explain why the symbol is significant;
- Examine what the symbol represents; and
- The effect it has on meaning.

One member of the group then presents this briefly to the class.

Lesson 12

Read *The Namesake* (Family visits Calcutta: p. 79–88). In small groups, students discuss the compare the experience of the parents and the children. As a group, they are to prepare a brief response to the question:

- What do the experiences and reactions of Ashima and Ashoke, and Gogol and Sonia, in India reveal about their sense of belonging? Consider the extent to which they feel they belong to both the Indian and American cultures.

One speaker from each group presents their response to the class.

Read *The Namesake* (Nikhil's first semester: p. 106–108) with the class and discuss what this passage reveals about Gogol's sense of belonging, the choices he makes about belonging, and his reasons for making these choices.

Read *The Namesake* (The lecture on ABCDs: p. 116–119). Students compose a short critical response to the question:

- What does Gogol's reaction to the lecture reveal about the way he sees himself fitting in to both Indian and American culture?

Phase 3 – Express their developing understanding of belonging

Lesson 13

Explain the requirements of Paper 1, Section 2: Imaginative Response, and revisit the requirements of the assessment task.

Discuss the theory of imaginative writing.

- Issues of scope and simplicity (not too much, not too little);
- A simple narrative revealing a more complex idea or insight;

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- Making deliberate choices;
- Show, don't tell;
- Narrative structures;
- Characters (back-stories and character voices);
- The Rule of Firsts (first sentence, first paragraph and forcing the reader to question);
- Evocative language: imagery, the senses, etc;
- Symbols;
- Dialogue; and
- Formatting.

Students should take notes.

Brainstorm symbols of belonging with the class that could be used as a motif in a piece of imaginative writing. Discuss, filter and list them on the board.

Lesson 14

Students select three symbols (from the previous lesson) that appeal to them. For each, outline a narrative within which they could be used. Each narrative outline should reveal an understanding of some aspect of belonging.

Students write the introduction (first 12 lines) for one of their narrative outlines. They should focus on the 'Rule of Firsts', audience engagement, their use of language, and the presentation of both narrative and character voice. Students then share their introductions with their peers.

Present students with an image that can be employed in a symbolic or figurative way such as:

- Crowd;
- Single figure in landscape (natural, rural, urban);
- House door or garden gate;
- Mobile phone;
- Letter, postcard, email or text message;
- Ring or other piece of jewelry;
- Camera;
- Hands;
- Street sign, town sign;
- Airport, train station, port or bus station; or
- Similar.

Students complete an imaginative response that uses the image as a symbol of belonging and reveals their understanding of some aspect of belonging.

Students draft, edit, type and submit their response for feedback.

Lesson 15

Read *The Namesake* (Life with Moushumi: p211-218). Discuss, and record on the board, the ways **belonging** is

represented in this scene. Use only half of the board.

[Side discussion: Consider what Gogol's choice of girlfriends represents about his choice to belong and his sense of cultural identity.]

Read *The Namesake* (The trip to Paris: p. 230–234).

Discuss, and record on the board, the ways **not belonging** is represented in this scene. Use the other half of the board.

Compare representations of belonging and not belonging. As a class, draw a conclusion about the impact a sense of belonging or not belonging has on a character using these two scenes as a focus.

Lesson 16

Read *The Namesake* (Ashima makes croquettes: p. 274–280, and The Christmas tree: p. 284–285). In small groups students identify key symbols and representations of belonging in these scenes. List these on the board.

Students complete a short critical response to the question:

- How has Ashima's sense of belonging changed over the course of the novel, and how is this shift represented in these scenes?

Lesson 17 and 18 (break as required)

Explain the requirements of Paper 1, Section 3: Critical Response.

Discuss the theory of critical writing.

- Question
 - ♦ Understanding the question
 - ♦ Synonyms and different ways of expressing the same idea
 - ♦ Key words
 - ♦ Directive words
 - ♦ How to focus or extend a question
- Thesis
 - ♦ Brainstorm
 - ♦ Filter
 - ♦ Sequence
 - ♦ Generate a clear thesis in response to the question
 - ♦ Three layers of answer
 - First sentences
 - Introduction
 - Essay
- Evidence
 - ♦ How to choose evidence successfully
 - Brief / Succinct

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- Relevant
- Representative
- Sufficient depth (for discussion)
- ◆ How to incorporate evidence into a paragraph
- ◆ How to discuss evidence
- ◆ How to quote evidence
 - Quotation marks
 - Inset text
- Structure
 - ◆ Introduction
 - Hook (opening engagement)
 - Thesis
 - Outline
 - Foreshadow conclusion
 - ◆ Body paragraphs
 - Links
 - Specific focus (linked to thesis / variant)
 - Contextualisation
 - Evidence
 - Discussion
 - Sub-conclusion (linked to question)
 - ◆ Conclusion
 - Drawing a conclusion from your argument, rather than summarizing your argument
 - Extension and possibilities
- Language
 - ◆ Academic / formal
 - ◆ Appropriate to purpose
 - ◆ Personal and impersonal voice

Students should take notes.

Students compose a critical response to the question:

- 'A sense of belonging is a choice.'
How does individual choice influence the extent to which characters feel they belong and do not belong in *The Namesake*?

Students complete their response for homework.

Phase 4 – Reflect on, and refine, their understanding

Lesson 19

In small groups, students brainstorm those core ideas about belonging that they have learned through their study of *The Namesake*.

Encourage students to consider areas such as:

- Degrees of belonging

- Barriers and gateways to belonging
- Impact and influence of belonging on individuals and groups
- Impact and influence of personal experiences of belonging on their own character and identity

These should be general, thesis-level statements that can be used later to focus (or provide a personal voice to) their written responses.

For each, they should also brainstorm key scenes, quotes, symbols and other evidence they can use when writing critical responses. Position the thesis statement in the centre of the page and allow explanatory and evidentiary notes to flow out.

Lesson 20

Students brainstorm, discuss and refine a set of theses in response to the Area of Study. These should reflect the things they have learned about belonging and not belonging through their study.

Students should focus their thinking through:

- Degrees of belonging
- Barriers and gateways to belonging
- Impact and influence of belonging on individuals and groups
- Impact and influence of personal experiences of belonging on their own character and identity

For each, students should map out key scenes from *The Namesake* and the supplementary texts they have been preparing, quotes, symbols and other evidence they can use when writing critical responses. Position the thesis statement in the centre of the page and allow explanatory and evidentiary notes flow out to form an “understanding web”.

Students should reflect on how effectively their chosen supplementary texts support their understanding of belonging.

Phase 5 – Express a developed understanding of belonging

Lesson 21

Explain how to incorporate supplementary texts into a critical response:

- Philosophy of supplementary texts
 - ◆ Different perspectives on the area of study
 - ◆ Linked to prescribed text, but need not be “the same”
 - ◆ Critical response as a response to the area of study, rather than simply the prescribed text

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- ◆ Need at least TWO supplementary texts, but should enter an exam with four or five prepared. (Explain the “toolbox” of supplementary texts idea.)
- Proportions
 - ◆ 40-50% of the body of the response focused on prescribed text
 - ◆ 25-30% of the body of the response focused on each supplementary texts
- Forging links between the prescribed text and chosen supplementary texts
 - ◆ Strong conceptual (if not narrative) links based on a unifying thesis in response to the area of study
 - ◆ Links may be complementary or contrasting
 - ◆ Identify these links as they will become “linking” statements in critical writing
- Supplementary texts must be used to present a supporting, or contrasting perspective on the particular issue under discussion
- As with the prescribed text, discussion must be evidenced and tightly focused on supporting the central thesis in response to the question at hand

Students should take notes.

Discuss the supplementary texts individual students have prepared. List them on the board under text-type headings.

Lesson 22

Students compose a critical response to one of the following questions:

- ‘The human spirit craves a sense of belonging.’
To what extent do the texts you have studied support this idea?
In your response, refer to your prescribed text and at least TWO related texts of your own choosing.
- ‘Our lives are shaped by our sense of belonging.’

Discuss the extent to which belonging shapes our lives. In your response refer to your prescribed text and TWO other texts of your own choosing.

- To what extent has studying the concept of belonging expanded your understanding of yourself, of the world, and of your place in it?

In your response, refer to your prescribed text and at least TWO related texts of your own choosing.

- ‘Belonging is dependant on the perspective of the individual.’

Discuss this statement with a particular focus on how the composers of texts represent perceptions of belonging.

In your answer, refer to your prescribed text and at least TWO related texts of your own choosing.

Students plan and draft their response in class and complete it for homework. Students may discuss their ideas and share opinions with each other during this process (it may be beneficial to group students depending on the response they have chosen to complete.)

These responses can be recycled for revision later in the year. Students simply choose a different response to complete next time.

Appendix A – Supplementary Text Analysis (e-worksheet)

This is presented as an electronic worksheet. Students can access it from any school computer or from home.

It is presented as a Microsoft Word document and uses tables. The cells expand automatically as students type into them. By inserting carriage returns the worksheet can be fit to two pages, printed and used in hard copy for handwritten responses.

See sample worksheet *Supplementary Text Analysis* on the following page.



Indian Palace Architecture, courtesy www.flickr.com/photos/praziqatel

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Supplementary Text Analysis

Title:	
Author:	Medium:
Narrative Overview:	
Key Ideas of Belonging or Not Belonging:	
Connections to Prescribed Text:	
Connections to Other Texts:	

Key Scene Analysis – A Focus on Belonging

Scene Name:	
Narrative Action & Characters (What Happens):	Things We Learn About Belonging:
Evidence (Examples & Quotes):	

Scene Name:	
Narrative Action & Characters (What Happens):	Things We Learn About Belonging:
Evidence (Examples & Quotes):	

Scene Name:	
Narrative Action & Characters (What Happens):	Things We Learn About Belonging:
Evidence (Examples & Quotes):	



USING WEB 2.0 TOOLS: to construct a PLN (Personal Learning Network)

Darcy Moore

English classrooms are changing.

The ways students read and write changed quite a while ago and few of you would need me to quantify, or qualify (I suspect) – it is obvious – but how do English teachers inculcate the skills we know to be essential while engaging and maintaining relevance?

Here is one suggestion.

As a member of the NSW English Teachers' Association, you likely have an interest in developing a PLN (Personal Learning Network). Your current professional networks probably already extend to other teachers outside your school teaching English in different contexts, sectors, states and countries. You may have links into university faculties and the NSW Board of Studies, including HSC marking and the benefits that flow from spending time (in large tin sheds without air-conditioning) networking with colleagues. All this is good professional dialogue, experience and support.

However, *blended* professional learning, which incorporates collaboration and networking online, has the dual benefit of keeping us all up to date with technological change, especially as it pertains to teaching and learning, while significantly extending our networks with some stimulating people. The internet is the printing press of our time now we all have an unprecedented opportunity collaborate using Web 2.0 tools and concepts.

Web 2.0, coined by Tim O'Reilly (the founder and CEO of O'Reilly Media) half a decade ago, describes the second wave of internet applications and websites that do more than just allow you, the user, to customise your online experience. This second generation of tools allowed people with very little technical knowledge to create, collaborate and publish easily and inexpensively online. Your students are already doing this, and increasingly, so are your colleagues (and not just with email).

A new vocabulary has developed including well-known terms such as podcast, blog and wiki, along with the lesser known microblogging, vodcast, vlog, folksonomies, aggregator, RSS feed and API or mash-up. Not to mention a range of unusual brand names, including the ubiquitous *YouTube*, *MySpace* and *Facebook*, as well as *Delicious*, *Twitter*, *Plurk* and *Flickr*.

How engaged are you with the above? Your students? Your classroom?

If you are asking the question, what is this article, on what has been rightly called a marketing term, Web 2.0. doing in mETaphor, it is time to explore what this is all about. You are missing an exciting time. The other description of this second generation of the internet, 'The Read/Write Web' is more likely to be more convincing to English teachers than a software analogy like 2.0 or the technical details of how XML (Extensible Markup Language) made this possible.

One of the best forms of professional development about Web 2.0 is to construct a PLN using blended learning concepts and tools.

Constructing your own PLN could take this path:

1. Open a *delicious* account so you can bookmark sites of professional interest online, <http://delicious.com/> and network with other account holders. In other words, you can access the bookmarks of other English teachers and educators.
2. Using Google Reader, <http://www.google.com/reader/> for RSS feeds/alerts to your bookmarked site updates. This saves you having to visit each site individually to check for new content.
3. Join the English Companion Ning, <http://englishcompanion.ning.com/> to network with other teachers across the globe.
4. Join the ETA Facebook group (search, when in Facebook, for 'English Teachers' Association NSW'), <http://www.facebook.com/>

USING WEB 2.0 TOOLS: to construct a PLN

5. Start your own blog using WordPress
<http://wordpress.com/> or Edublogs <http://edublogs.org/>
6. Open a Twitter account, <http://twitter.com/>

It is difficult to assist you as well as one might, dear reader, with the print copy of mETaphor but if you are interested in the above, my blog will be of much use to you as there are videos and detailed instructions on how to do the above:

<http://darcymoore.wordpress.com/2008/11/29/eta-conference-web-20-workshop/>

<http://darcymoore.wordpress.com/2008/11/28/eta-conference-blogs-and-blogging-workshop/>

<http://darcymoore.wordpress.com/2009/01/31/iser-conference-presentation-web-20-plns/>

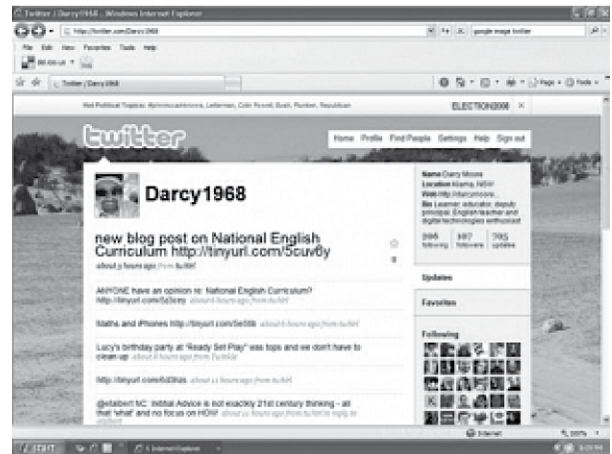
Twitter is the tool that has really led to my PLN growing significantly during 2008. Since Mark Pesce spoke about *Twitter* at an *education.au* conference back in early last year, I have been embarrassingly evangelical about this microblogging service.

Quite simply, Twitter lets you microblog pithy 140 character posts, known as 'tweets', to your friends or followers. This often seems inane to the uninitiated but the growing number of influential educators and teacher leaders, as evidenced in the *'Directory of Learning Professionals on Twitter'* provides quite a wonderful professional resource.

Using *Twitter* as an Education Tool has potential but more importantly, microblogging is a great way for educators to build Personal Learning Networks to stimulate professional learning.

The English Teachers' Association has recently opened a *Twitter* account and teachers may choose to use this tool to expand their professional networks. Every English teacher who 'follows' the ETA can then be easily discoverable by new members, as they in turn follow their colleagues. A growing timeline of links and contacts will expand rapidly.

There are a surprisingly large number of 'toys', apps, websites and Twitter oriented tools available for the enthusiast. Twirl is an essential client, if you choose to have Twitter easily accessible from your toolbar. Tweet Map allows you to see where abouts in the world 'tweets' are emanating and Betwittered is an essential iGoogle



Twitter client (that will allow you to 'tweet' even if there is a filter at your place of employment). Increasingly, I am using Twinkle or Twitterific iPhone apps to access the service when away from my computer. Twitter Grader allows you to check out the power of your network and lists the Twitterati or Top Users.

All the above links and suggested readings are at my del.icio.us page and tagged 'twitter' <http://delicious.com/Darcy1968>. You could also access hyperlinks at <http://darcymoore.wordpress.com/2008/10/18/twitter/>

While writing this article, or any article, for a print based source, it is increasing obvious that English teaching must change or face becoming irrelevant to the vast majority of students sitting in our classrooms (it must be so unsatisfying for so many students used to being online constantly). Digital technologies allow us to hyperlink and communicate in a much more collaborative, interactive manner. If you have not watched Michael Wesch's video, 'The Machine is Us/Using Us' I suggest you have a close look: http://au.youtube.com/watch?v=NLIgopyXT_g

Good luck with using Web 2.0 tools to construct your PLN.

Please email, tweet or contact me via my blog. If you would like an electronic copy of this article (in Microsoft Word) with hyperlinks, please email Darcy.Moore@det.nsw.edu.au or visit my blog <http://darcymoore.wordpress.com/>

Bibliography

- <http://twitter.com/home>
- <http://www.facebook.com/>
- <http://au.youtube>
- <http://darcymoore.wordpress.com/>



BOOK REVIEWS

Reviewers: Gersha Shteyman and Mel Dixon

TEACHING RESOURCES

Nelson Belonging: A Text For Senior Students

by Dwayne Hopwood, Nelson Cengage Learning, 2009,
ISBN 9780170178167 RRP: \$29.95

By now, most teachers are probably aware of how much more they could have done or how differently they could have worked with the concept of Belonging. It seems opportune that while we reassess what has been done, we look for better ways of doing this, so any text on belonging should be gratefully received.

Dwayne Hopwood has managed to construct a text that offers ways into all of the texts on the Area of Study. Each text has an average of sixteen pages of teaching material which can be used in any classroom.

Knowing the syllabus is essential learning upon which to build understanding. Hopwood's opening exercise requires students to deconstruct the syllabus definition of Area of Study. Each syllabus statement has to be explained in terms of "What am I expected to do." which alerts students to the expected outcomes from the start. The second chapter has even more interesting introductory exercises, such as mind maps, synonyms, antonyms, connotations, visual representations, and questions directed to the student about their own personal sense of belonging, tapping into the very sound pedagogical framework offered by the Quality Teaching Model. Requiring students to rewrite the rubric statements as questions immediately then places students into a position of knowing what it is they will be looking for in any text.

Having established this firm foundation, the book follows with a chapter on each of the prescribed texts, finishing with suggestions for related texts. Each chapter has a set pattern (with some variation depending on the genre or the particular needs of the text): context; chapter by chapter overview; concepts of belonging; textual features and belonging; weblinks and, finally, extract questions. All of this is very helpful but don't expect a workbook. Most of the text is describing and locating answers and not encouraging enough student exploration of text. There are exceptions and where these exercises occur they are well structured and develop some critical thinking in students. The extract exercises, while being well annotated, are also followed by questions under the heading of extract study. There are also two different questions per text for extended writing: analytical and creative. There is room for teachers to push their students further; for example in the chapter



by chapter sections which offer a table of each chapter with an outline and list of significant quotes, students can be challenged to think and draw connections by adding a column on "how does the quote develop the concept of belonging?"

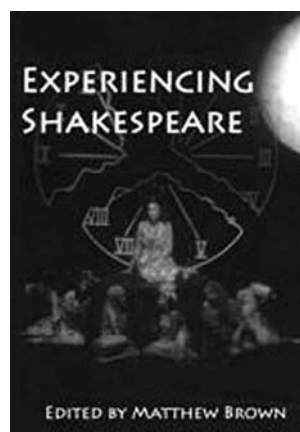
The final chapters deal with writing about belonging and choosing related texts. Lists of related texts are offered with *Robinson Crusoe*, *The Lady of Shalott* and *Mean Girls* given as extended examples. The writing chapter tries to prepare students for the HSC by discussing "what makes a good response?" Balance between texts in answers, a discussion of HOW belonging is conveyed in each text, responding in the correct text type, using a clear structure and tying together ideas are listed and explained as significant elements in a good answer. The chapter on useful related texts is directed to students and encourages them to select "quality" texts (not "overly simplistic or limited in their use of language" p. 176). This is refreshing to any marker who has seen too many examples of whole school responses using the same "related" text rather than individual choices from students as was the intent of the syllabus. Further support is offered to students with a general worksheet of questions which tie into the concept and can be applied to any text.

So overall there are some very creative ways of approaching the concept, good readings of texts are offered, useful weblinks are provided and a clear connection is made between texts and the Area of Study; there is however, some risk that students will not go beyond the quotes and summaries that are offered so make sure you add some additional exercises that extend the already excellent offerings in the *Nelson Belonging* text.

Experiencing Shakespeare

edited by Matthew Brown, Phoenix Press, 2008

ISBN: 9781921085116 RRP: \$59.95



"Oh no not Shakespeare again!" Who hasn't heard this before . . . or seen their students roll their eyes at the mention of his name. The more vocal of students will tell you how boring he is. The less vocal will simply sit and switch off. Shakespeare has a lot to offer our students in the classroom. Good teachers will tap into the universality of the themes, the richness of language,

BOOK REVIEWS

characters and plot in order to make the learning of Shakespeare more meaningful to both teacher and student alike. This is precisely what *Experiencing Shakespeare* aims to do in chapters designed to help teachers invigorate their teaching and learning of Shakespeare so that it is not just another literary study like a novel but comes alive as a dramatic text.

There are a range of expert writers who contribute to this informative book such as; Matthew Brown, Wendy Michaels, Bille Brown, John Bell, Anna Volska, John Hughes, Diana Denley, Ken Watson and Helen Sykes. Their writing style is engaging with lots of practical suggestions.

The informative chapters are as follows:

1. Why Study Shakespeare?
2. Shakespeare's life and times
3. Shakespeare's theatre
4. A Catalogue, with brief description, of all Shakespeare's plays, the themes and significant quotations from each play
5. Acting Shakespeare
6. Directing Shakespeare
7. Shakespeare's women
8. Sounds and music
9. Introducing Shakespeare's language
10. Swearing in the best Shakespearean fashion
11. Plots I have laid
12. Shakespeare in the Classroom

The chapters cover a broad range of topics that help teachers understand and teach Shakespeare's plays. All contributors aim to develop a more interactive way of understanding the subject material in detail. The chapters giving practical suggestions for performing Shakespeare by Wendy Michaels, Bille Brown and John Bell are particularly useful to English teachers who may have been used to valuing the text more as a literary text in the past. They offer very practical ideas for drama and non-drama teachers alike. The Catalogue of all Shakespeare plays with key lines from each play is also an invaluable quick reference for teachers.

In particular, I found the chapter on 'sounds and music' most enlightening as I had not considered this in too much detail before, even though it is essential to the meaning of the plays. Of course, the last chapter that includes some very practical ideas for bringing Shakespeare alive in the classroom is absolute essential reading for teachers.

The book *Experiencing Shakespeare* is highly recommended reading for any teacher who takes

seriously their teaching of Shakespeare. Above all, the book recommends that in teaching Shakespeare, we should "Be bloody, bold, and resolute". If you use some of the suggestions in this book, then never again will you have students switching off or complaining that Shakespeare is boring.

Belonging 1; Belonging 2

**J. Curran, L. Hough and G Lovell, The Learning Curve
ISBN: 9780 980440201 (www.thelearningcurve.net.au)**

These two texts offer a wealth of exercises on texts in the area of study. The prescribed texts are spread



over two books the first with *Swallow the Air*, *Strictly Ballroom*, *Ten Canoes*, Peter Skrzynecki and *The Simple Gift*; the second with *The Joy Luck Club*, *The Namesake*, *Great Expectations*, *Romulus, my Father*, *The Crucible* and *Rainbow's End*.

Both books start with the same

introductory work: an introduction to the Area of Study: Belonging, a chapter on analysing related texts and a section on writing for the HSC English Paper 1.

The opening exercises, looking at how the word belonging changes according to its part of speech, immediately alerts students to the importance of understanding language in order to interpret a word accurately. The syllabus statements are explained, and an annotated example of a personal account provides a clear sense of the HOW and the WHAT of reading a text. A passage is analysed, quotes from famous people are explored, extended writing ideas are offered and samples of poetry and a short story are analysed in order to prepare students for the area of study. There are purposeful questions listed for related texts and two language analysis worksheets (for written and visual language, respectively) which can be applied to any text. I would, however, have liked the worksheets to have gone a step further with a column asking what this illustrates about belonging. Model responses are offered to assist teachers in the classroom. The poem *My Country* sits in a table with a column on language and a column asking for aspects

BOOK REVIEWS

of belonging. Sample answers are given for students to compare to their own. Other sample related material includes: the poem, *We are Going*, a newspaper report, an extract from a visual text (*The Arrival*) and a short story. The selection of texts is very relevant and the exercises varied and interesting though, at times, too many answers are given instead of allowing students space to locate their own responses. After a list of possible texts for students to use advice on how to practise for the HSC forms the final part of the introductory material. This advice includes more information about the elements of different text types with examples. I liked the creative writing suggestions and exercises as these allowed students to develop some skills in writing.

The chapters on the prescribed texts follow a similar pattern. After a section on context, there is an overview of the chapters or scenes for each text with some annotation next to the summary of plot. The annotation targets techniques and links into the concept of Belonging or may ask questions. Tables are used in some of the extended texts such as *The Namesake* and *Great Expectations* to trace the relationships of the characters and to link the characters with aspects of belonging. Each chapter ends with extended writing activities in different forms.

The film chapter on *Strictly Ballroom* includes a glossary of film terminology (pp. 94–95). I like the exercises on storytelling for

Ten Canoes and the interesting information on the difficulties De Heer faced, summarised from a lecture by Therese Davies.

In the thorough introduction to *Ten Canoes*, *Little Red Riding Hood* is used to show how traditions are passed down. The questions in this section are complex as is the text, dealing with the depth of storytelling and postcolonialism. Each scene is explained against a belonging column and then followed by an activity which requires students to tap into their own experiences. There is a consideration of the way film techniques work to develop the concept. (p. 94–5)



This is an activity based book with well phrased questions that link directly into the Area of Study; my only reservation is that in places too much information is given and not enough space is left for the students to decide their own responses.

PLAY

Stories in the Dark

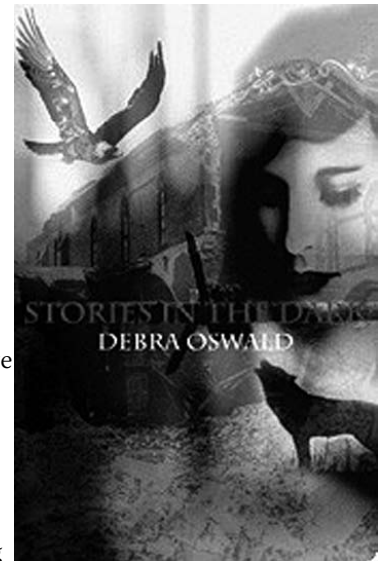
by Debra Oswald,
Currency Press, 2008
ISBN: 9780868198316
RRP: \$17.95

Stories in the Dark is a wonderful new play composed by Australian playwright Debra Oswald. The plot explores the nature and effect of warfare on teenagers as the two protagonists, Anna and Tomas are living in a bombed out house while the city is being destroyed around them. The opening of the play informs us that

the play is set in a war-torn city such as Sarajevo. Tomas is a 12 year old boy has come from the countryside to look for his family from whom he has become separated. Anna is older and more streetsmart as a city girl who lived with her single mother before the war. Both are without family, without funds and friendless. Tomas is young and naïve whereas Anna is rather scornful of him and his country ways, although we later learn it is her defence mechanism. Both go on daily and fruitless searches to find any trace of their family as they witness the suffering of people around them.

The play is about more than this though. The play is also about the power of storytelling to transcend the physical realities. As Tomas is afraid of the dark, Anna resorts to telling him stories to make him forget the suffering around him. The stories follow the structure and concerns of myths, legends and fairytales of the past. The stories have the power to both metaphorically replicate what the teenagers are suffering in the present as well as help them transcend the world around them. Through the telling of these stories based on an alternate reality, both Tomas and Anna are able to escape, albeit temporarily, the destruction of the world around them.

The text would be a wonderful addition to the English classroom at grade 9 & 10 level. There are many acting parts so that every student in class will be able to play a part. The staging directions are detailed so that students



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will be able to consider this as a way of telling the story as well as dialogue. Throughout the play, there are photographs of the recent *atyp* production of the play which will help students in consideration of staging. In performing the play the students will be able to explore meaning in a performed text as well as some of the universal issues within the text about the power of the human spirit to overcome adversity.

NOVELS

The Adoration of Jenna Fox

by Mary E Pearson, Allen & Unwin, 2008

ISBN: 9781741756401

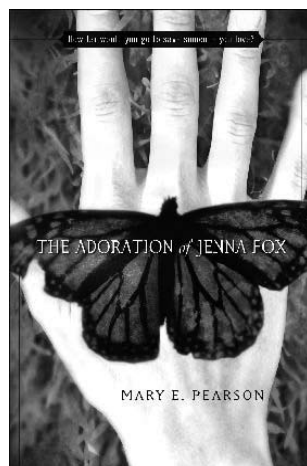
*I used to be someone.
Someone named Jenna Fox.
That's what they tell me. But I am more than a name.
More than they tell me. More than the facts and
statistics they fill me with. More than the video clips
they make me watch.
More. But I'm not sure what.*

The Adoration of Jenna Fox is a highly recommended, powerful new novel by Mary E Pearson that is at its heart a poignant exploration of humanity.

The story is set in the not-to-distant future with some advances in technology even though the world is very similar to our own. Jenna Fox's life is a mystery to herself. She is a seemingly ordinary teenage girl with an ordinary family. She is told that she has been in a terrible accident but has no memory of it. She is told that she was in a coma and has just awoken. Now that she is awake she has to relearn everything and her family are very overprotective. She is able to see old home movies of herself that help her reconstruct her past, but many of the belongings she remembers from her past are missing. The more she unlocks her past, the more the mystery grows.

At the heart of the text are fundamental and thought-provoking questions about human identity and medical/scientific ethics. The author artfully builds suspense in her well-crafted novel. Her writing style is engaging with a very interesting narrative structure.

The novel would ideally be aimed at a strong Year 8 or Year 9 class as there are many aspects that can work



well to extend student literacy and thinking skills. A class could study the narrative structure and the poetry of the novel (in between chapters) and how the author skilfully builds suspense. Ideally the novel would work well to spark thoughtful ethical debates within the classroom and could serve as a broader study of key medical/scientific/social issues in our world today.

Guyaholic

by Carolyn Mackler,
Walker Books, 2007

ISBN: 9781406312164

Sex in the City meets teen angst in this wonderfully funny and poignant coming of age story of V (for Valentine).

V finds herself hooking up for the first time in her life in a meaningful relationship with Sam Almond after a fateful hockey puck lands her right in his lap. This breaks her usual pattern of bouncing from guy to guy. Even though Sam is the right guy for her, she refuses to believe it and constantly pushes him away. The rest of her life isn't too rosy either, with her Mother dumping her with her grandparents eighteen months previously, so mum could hook up with a new boyfriend.

After receiving shocking news, V decides to go on a life-changing journey across country to finally reconcile with her mother. On the way she learns something important about her mother and herself. Her adventures and encounters along the way lead her to confront the mistakes of the past so that she can finally move on to a more fulfilling future.

Whilst the book is not a particularly a challenging read, I would suggest that because of its subject matter it is more suitable for Grades 10 and above as a text for wide reading rather than classroom work. It would particularly engage reluctant readers as the style of language and subject matter are in the popular sitcom style.



NEW PUBLICATIONS

www.englishteacher.com.au

EDITORIAL

Recently on *The 7.30 Report* the Baroness Professor Susan Greenfield, a neuroscientist from Oxford University who is setting up an adjunct chair with Royal Institution in Adelaide, was expressing her anxiety about the impact of screen culture on the brains of young people. Screen culture may be changing our brains in ways that could have a serious impact on personality and behaviour, possibly leading to an increase in ADHD, she says. The “strong audio and visual sensations, where at the press of a button you get instant feedback from whatever you’re doing” of screen culture can lack a reality that novels can present. Scarcely anything new, you say – since when has any new technology avoided its fair share of “sticks and stones”.

What attracted me were the repeated references to literature, to metaphor, to narrative and their relationship to the imagination, because it seems to me that we, as English teachers are in the business of the imagination. When Greenfield asks “What do we want young people to learn, what do we want them to be? Do we want them to be creative? ... how can we help people develop a longer attention span, how can we help people develop a notion of metaphor?” I hear this directed to me as a teacher. Our classrooms have a vital role to play in developing communication in our students but this doesn’t have to be a purely functional process because the most effective communication is also about imagining. The imagination to visualise, to empathise, to consider alternatives, to create new worlds is what we want to see developed in our students. (Paradoxically, it’s this same imagination that leads to the creation of

the very screen culture Greenfield says is destroying younger minds.)

Imagination isn’t just for students. Teachers must always have the imagination to see what might develop in their students, to see ways of doing things that may be better than established ways, to see the different worlds of their students and tap into their needs because teaching without imagination is not effective teaching. Every time we face a class and every time we develop new resources for our students and even when we write for *mETaphor*, we use our imagination.

In this issue of *mETaphor*, the imagination is at play in examining connections between texts, in imagining Almereyda’s vision of Hamlet, and in constructing units of work that fit into a vision of learning. Writer M. T. Anderson shares with us how he is inspired to create his varied imaginative spaces, linking our modern world with the worlds of the past, or taking us to fantastic imagined worlds that we as teachers then offer to our students in the hope that they too will be inspired. As teachers we search for the imagined spaces of the possible, for to be a teacher is to be an imaginer.

When I listened to Baroness Professor Greenfield asking how screen culture could capture the metaphorical level of “Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow” or “We are the hollow men” I knew that, despite her choice to become a scientist, somewhere in her background an English teacher had left a mark.

Mel Dixon

Miles Franklin Literary Award 2009

Announcing the Miles Franklin Literary Award 2009 Longlist

The ten novels selected for the Miles Franklin Literary Award 2009 longlist are:

Addition by Toni Jordan,
Text Publishing Melbourne Australia
A Fraction of the Whole by Steve Toltz,
Hamish Hamilton (Penguin Books)
Breath by Tim Winton, Hamish
Hamilton (Penguin Books)
fugitive blue by Claire Thomas,
Allen & Unwin

Ice by Louis Nowra, Allen & Unwin
one foot wrong by Sofie Laguna,
Allen & Unwin
The Devil’s Eye by Ian Townsend,
Fourth Estate (HarperCollinsPublishers Australia)
The Pages by Murray Bail,
Text Publishing Melbourne Australia
The Slap by Christos Tsiolkas, Allen & Unwin
Wanting by Richard Flanagan,
Knopf (Random House Australia)

A total of 55 books were submitted for this year’s Award. The shortlist will be announced Thursday 16 April at a media conference at the Galleries, State Library of NSW.

CONTRIBUTIONS

Contributions to mETAphor may include outlines or full units of work, annotated examples of students' work (with permission), action research projects, lectures, critical text commentary and suggested reading lists and resources.

Contributions vary in form and length but should satisfy the following criteria. Articles should:

- provide information and ideas to assist teachers in addressing students' needs and requirements in their study of English
- offer interesting and valuable ways to engage students in English through activities that are grounded in research
- reflect on the nature and processes of teaching and learning
- be well-constructed, clearly and concisely expressed
- not breach any copyright.

Please send all submissions to editor@englishteacher.com.au. Receipt of your material will be acknowledged and the item sent to an editorial board for consideration against the above criteria. ETA reserves the right to edit material for publication.

On acceptance, contributors will receive an invoice to complete for processing through the ETA office. Depending on the nature of the contribution and as determined by the editorial board, ETA pays up. to:

- \$280 for complete units of work and action research projects
- \$220 for lectures & critical text commentary
- \$190 for unit outlines, and \$90 for annotated work samples, learning ideas, suggested learning ideas and resources.

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Contributors should adhere to the following guidelines:

1. All manuscripts should be submitted as an email attachment to:
<editor@englishteacher.com.au>
2. Contributors should include their name, address, telephone number and current school/institution **ON** the submission – as well as the text of the email.
3. Manuscripts should all be in WORD and free of any hidden formatting.
4. It is the responsibility of the contributors to seek copyright clearance/permissions for any materials quoted, especially images. Please accompany your article with a copy of the permission or the image will be removed.
5. All titles of books, films etc should be italicized when referred to within the text of the article eg "In *Edward Scissorhands*..." Titles of poems should be referred to in single inverted commas In '*Kublai Khan*'..."
6. Titles of texts should be capitalised eg *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Afternoon*... NOT *The curious incident of the dog in the afternoon*...
7. There are those articles which have been used in education courses and follow a particular reference style – if you submit an article with such a list then this must be **consistent** within the article you offer.
8. **Our preferred style** however, follows the format of the NSW Board of Studies:

Books:

SURNAME, First Name, *Title of Text*, Publisher, Year.

Eg: RUSSELL, Willy, *Educating Rita*, Longman/Pearson Education, 1991.

Poems:

SURNAME, First Name, *Title of Book*, Publisher, Year, '*Title of poem included in book*'

Eg: OWEN, Wilfred, War Poems and Otehers, Random House, 1994, '*The Parable of the Old Man and the Young*'; '*Anthem for Doomed Youth*'

Films:

DIRECTOR'S SURNAME, First Name, *Title of Text*, Studio, Year

Eg: LURHMANN, Baz, *Strictly Ballroom*, Fox, 1992

Online resource:

AUTHOR, Title of Website, URL, Accessed on

Eg: WIKIMEDIA, Wikipedia – The Free Encyclopedia, www.wikipedia.org Accessed on 27th September. 2002

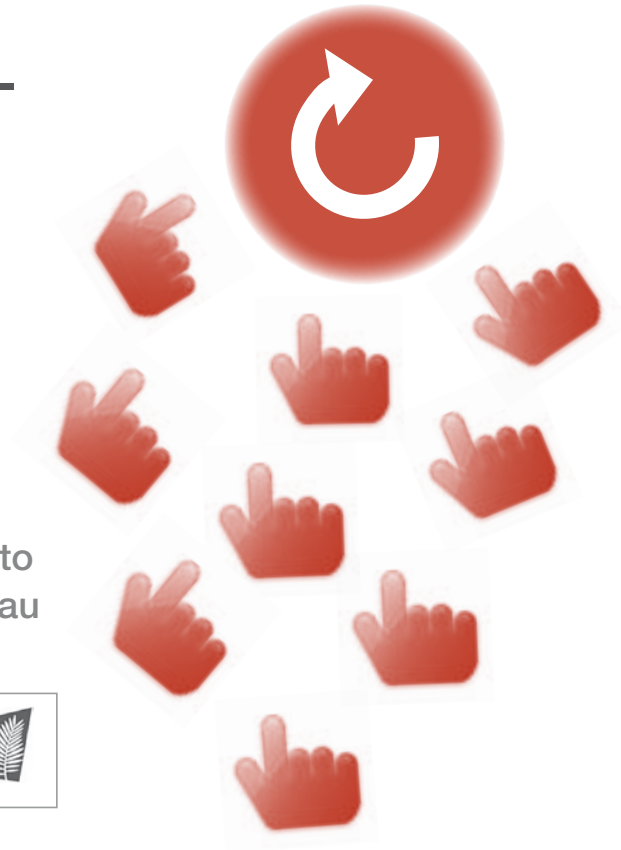


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