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## The limits of resistant reading in critical literacy practices

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The Limits of Resistant Reading in Critical Literacy Practices

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**Abstract**

*Purpose*

Inspired by work in the field of English that questions the “limits of critique” (Felski, 2015), we consider the limits of critical literacy approaches to literature instruction, focusing on the relational and affective demands that resistant reading places on readers and texts.

*Design/methodology/approach*

Drawing from post-critical (Felski, 2015) and surface (Best and Marcus, 2009) reading practices in the field of English, we perform analyses of two recent articles that illustrate critical literacy approaches to literature instruction, drawing attention to the ways the resistant reading practices outlined in each article reflect Felski’s description of critique.

*Findings*

Our readings of two frameworks of critical literacy approaches to literature instruction produce two key findings: first, in emphasizing resistant readings, critical literacy asks readers to take up a detective-like orientation to literature, treating texts as suspects; second, resistant reading practices promote a specific set of affective orientations towards a text, asking readers to cultivate skepticism and vigilance.

*Originality/value*

While we do not dismiss the importance of critical literacy approaches to literature instruction, our study makes room for other relational and affective orientations to literature, especially those that might encourage readers to listen to--and be surprised by--a text. By describing critical literacy through the lens of Felski’s work on critique, we aim to open up new possibilities for surprising encounters with literature.

The Limits of Resistant Reading in Critical Literacy Practices

**Introduction: “Once There was a Tree”**

There was a time when I (first author) found great pleasure in the day each semester when I would ask students in my children's literature course to examine Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree* (1964) through a feminist lens, an activity I hoped would foster the kinds of critical literacy practices I wanted them to be able to use in their own classrooms. I chose *The Giving Tree* deliberately: a much-beloved story that obviously reduces its female character to a selfless caregiver, the text nicely scaffolds undergraduates towards the ability to read through a feminist lens while also helping me show that unless we wear critical lenses regularly, the interplay of power and oppression can happen right under our noses, without us even realizing it.

Each semester I began the lesson by reading Silverstein's book in the lilt of a read aloud: *The boy loved his tree until the tree was no longer enough, and then the boy asked for her apples and branches and leaves until she was nothing left but a stump, and even then--after he'd taken almost everything from her--she provided a place for him to sit and rest.* Before a large group discussion, I asked my students to respond to a journal prompt that required them to read against the text (Janks, 2010) by examining it through a feminist lens (Appleman, 2000), attending to the ways gender is portrayed and considering who benefits from such a portrayal. During the class period, some students would identify and critique the book's misogyny, focusing on the way the tree is praised for sacrificing herself for the boy, while others would push back against this interpretation. At the end of the class period a handful of students would turn to me and ask--in a tone that seemed both serious and playful--why I had "ruined" the book for them, and I would be happy.

These days, however, I'm not so sure about that lesson. And the second author--who also weaves critical literacy practices into his teaching--shares these feelings of uncertainty, even more so. We have read enough Foucault to know that although we intend to give students the tools of

critique so they can liberate themselves by reading the word and the world, the act of forcing them to read through critical lenses is, of course, an expression of *our* will (Hunter, 1997). Reflecting on our investment in critical literacy alongside our interest in Foucault has compelled us to question whether critical literacy is really as emancipatory as we'd like it to be.

Additionally, we are intrigued by other reading practices--styles that don't take up the scythe of critique--from which our students might benefit. Lately we have found ourselves fascinated by work in English Studies that shifts *away* from critique by both questioning its limits (Felski, 2015) and also embracing reading practices that do not aim to unearth and expose hidden ideologies (e.g., Anker and Felski, 2017; Best and Marcus, 2009; Felski, 2015; Love, 2010; Sedgwick, 2003). Given our Foucaultian instincts and our new interest in this turn from critique, we find ourselves asking hard questions about the pleasure and satisfaction we once got from asking students to unmask the ideological underpinnings of texts like *The Giving Tree*. We wonder what we gain from scaffolding the tear-down of beloved (if problematic) books, and we wonder what effect these reading practices have on our students. We bring up [first author's] story of *The Giving Tree*, then, because the experience illustrates what we find vexing about critical literacy and its emphasis on resistant reading: while we want pedagogical tools that will encourage students to critically examine the "word and the world" (Freire and Macedo, 1987), we are wary about what critical reading practices require of students. In this paper we attend to those concerns by exploring precisely what the resistant reading practices of critical literacy require of readers, and then considering what is gained and lost when we privilege resistant reading in secondary literature instruction.

### **Critical Literacy and Resistant Reading**

We understand critical literacy as an approach to literacy instruction that aims to foster students' ability to critique and transform "dominant ideologies, cultures, economies, institutions and political systems" (Luke, 2012, p. 5). For theorists and practitioners of critical literacy, language is a "principle means for representing and reshaping possible worlds" (p. 7), and as such, it can perpetuate relations of domination or challenge such relations. Grounded in the assertion that language and texts are "never neutral, that discourse is constitutive, and that literate practices are inevitably concerned with power relations" (Comber, 2011, p. 7), critical literacy instruction asks students to interrogate language use, attending to the ways "semiotic resources" perpetuate relations of domination, and then to use their critiques to engage in transformative social action (Janks, 2010, p. 153). In asking students to critique the ways texts perpetuate relations of domination and to engage in transformative social action, critical literacy educators see their pedagogy as "part of a piecemeal attempt to adjust social norms" (Mellor and Patterson, 2004, p. 95).

While critical literacy always involves critique and transformation, it is practiced in myriad ways. Because it is a "theory with implications for practice rather than a distinctive instructional methodology" (Behrman, 2006, p. 490), critical literacy instruction is influenced by context and the ways educators "shape and deploy the tools, attitudes and philosophies of critical literacy" (Luke, 2012, p.9). Because there is no single model of critical literacy, we do not aim to make sweeping conclusions about how critical literacy is theorized and practiced in *all* contexts and classrooms; instead, we focus on the ways one component of critical literacy--resistant reading--is conceptualized in U.S. secondary literature instruction.

We use the term "resistant reading" to refer to the practice of reading *against* the text to determine how the text perpetuates relations of power. Following Wolfe (2010), we understand

resistant reading as the act of interrogating “how power, history, and ideology are inscribed in texts” (p. 371). Wolfe identifies resistant reading as a crucial component of critical literacy, arguing that critical literacy is “most commonly understood as the development of critical or ‘resistant’ reading skills” (p. 370). This emphasis on resistant reading is evident in the way scholars have theorized critical literacy. For example, Janks (2010) argues that critical literacy requires students to complete three tasks: (1) decode the text, (2) read *with* the text by “engaging with the writer’s meanings,” and (3) read *against* the text by interrogating its “assumptions, its values, and its positions” (p. 22). For Janks, reading against the text is essential to critical literacy because “without critique” the chance of intervening in dangerous discourses “is reduced” (Janks, 2012, p. 150).

Reviews of research and scholarship on critical literacy further underscore the important place of resistant reading in critical literacy. For example, Lewison, Flint, Van Sluys (2002) examined 30 years of professional literature and research, identifying four “dimensions” of critical literacy, two of which require students to read against the text. The first dimension--“disrupting the commonplace”--requires readers to “interrogate texts” in order to see how texts position readers (p. 383). The second dimension, “interrogating multiple viewpoints,” asks students to interrogate texts to notice whose voices and stories are heard. For their part, Petrone and Bullard (2010) explored how six years of *English Journal* articles represented critical literacy and found that when enacting critical literacy, educators attempted to develop critical and resistant reading practices in students.

In addition to narrowing our focus on resistant reading, we also limit our attention to the way that resistant reading is conceptualized in a specific context: US literature instruction. We restrict our attention to this context in recognition of the fact that critical literacy has different

traditions and trajectories, depending on national and regional context. As Luke (2000) explains in his description of the theoretical and political history of critical literacy in Australia, it is “dangerous to generalise any educational approach from one national/regional and cultural context to another” (p. 449)<sup>1</sup>. Thus, although we follow Wolfe (2010) in asserting that resistant reading is a crucial component of critical literacy, we also recognize that the deployment of such reading practices will be shaped by context.

### **Complicating Critique in the Field of English**

Some literary scholars who grapple with the “limits of critique” (Felski, 2015) identify critique as a method of reading grounded in what Ricoeur (1970) calls the “hermeneutics of suspicion” (e.g., Felski, 2015; Sedgwick, 2003). The term refers to the interpretive practices ushered in by the work of Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud (Ricoeur, 1970, p. 32), and reflects these theorists’ shared commitment to unveiling the “false consciousness” on which our world is built. These three thinkers--whom Ricoeur calls the “masters of suspicion” (p. 33)--understand this false consciousness in different ways: for Nietzsche, false consciousness depends upon the will to power; for Marx it is the social being; and for Freud it is the “unconscious psychism” (p. 34). And while all three use different approaches to unveil false consciousness, Ricoeur argues that they share the conviction that interpretation is not a matter of “recollecting” meaning, but instead is the

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<sup>1</sup> It’s important to note here that the particular U.S. strain of critical literacy we respond to stands in contrast to other, different traditions. In Australia, for example, Luke (2000) explains that “critical literacy agendas have traveled a different pathway than North America” (p. 451); he goes on to note that in the Australian context “critical literacy programs have been undertaken at all ages and grade levels” (p. 455), having been “well established in many Australian state school classrooms and teacher education programs by the early 1990’s” (p. 451). This contrasts with U.S. contexts, where the institutional status of critical literacy in public schools is still contentious. Luke notes, for example, the “heated dialogue at International Reading Association conferences and other events about U.S. state and school board controversies when literacy educators take public stances around issues of recognition of difference and social justice” (Young, 1995, as cited in Luke, 2000, p. 448) of the type embodied in critical literacy. Accordingly, we turn to specifically U.S. scholarship in order to identify and describe particular phenomena at work in these approaches to thinking and teaching critical literacy.

“reduction of the illusions and lies of consciousness” (p. 32). For all three thinkers, consciousness itself cannot be trusted to access the truth, and so interpretation requires methodologies that demystify what false consciousness has hidden.

Other scholars, like Best and Marcus (2009) and contributors to the special issue of *Representations* on “surface reading,” refer to critique as a form of “symptomatic reading.” In using this term, Best and Marcus draws from the work of critic Fredric Jameson (1983), who argues that interpretation must “unmask” the ideology latent or hidden in a text (Best & Marcus, p. 5). For Jameson and other symptomatic readers, the surface of a text is “superficial and deceptive” (p. 4), hiding ideologies with which the text colludes. The critic’s job is to attend to the symptoms of the text’s ideology, examining how the surface details of the text point to the truths it hides. Crucially, the assumption that a text always hides its ideology gives the act of interpretation moral and ethical weight, and as Jameson sees it, one’s approach to reading highlights one’s relationship to dangerous ideologies: while symptomatic readers engage in a “strenuous and heroic endeavor,” those who remain at the surface become “ideologically complicit” (p. 5).

Whether they identify critique as an example of the hermeneutics of suspicion or of symptomatic reading, scholars who question the role of critique identify a number of problems with the “methodological centrality of suspicion” (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 125). Sedgwick, for example, points out that these practices rest on a specious faith in the effects of exposing the false consciousness on which a text is built. These interpretive practices, she points out, are built on the belief that if only the “true” story were known and exposed, then the world would be a better place. But she argues that this claim is spurious, pointing out that we all know that a disturbing and disproportionate number of young black men are “enmeshed in the penal system” and despite this public knowledge, nothing has been done to stem the tide of systemic racism (p. 140). One problem

with suspicious reading, then, is that it is built on a faith in exposure that does not seem to hold up.

For Felski (2015), the problem with critique is that it has become the “default option” in literary studies (p. 5), thus narrowing the “affective styles and modes of argument” with which one can engage (p. 3) and turning reading into “single-minded digging for buried truths” (p. 33). This approach to reading, she points out, positions the reader as an all-knowing and all-seeing authority, a detective who can “identify causes and assign guilt” (p. 87). Felski encourages others to resist the default option by pointing out that the ubiquity of critique is not a reflection of its rigor or superiority, but rather a manifestation of the way scholars have been “schooled” to “approach texts” (p. 18).

As scholars committed to interdisciplinary work at the intersection of English and Education, we have been fascinated by the ways Sedgwick, Felski, and others have challenged critique and imagined new approaches to engaging with literature. We have also become increasingly curious about what this might mean for our work as K-12 teachers and teacher educators, and we are driven in particular to consider what the turn from critique might mean for critical literacy. After all, as Felski points out, the hermeneutics of suspicion “reaches well beyond the confines of English departments,” showing up in any “style of interpretation driven by a spirit of disenchantment” (Felski, 2015, p. 2). We wonder, then, if we might view resistant reading practices as a manifestation of critique’s “reach” beyond English departments, and if so, what that might mean for critical literacy approaches to literature instruction.

### **Reading the Surface: A Note on the Method of our Project**

Our aim in this project is not to critique critique. We do not want to read resistant reading practices suspiciously, digging below the surface to point out how they perpetuate relations of

domination or reifies ideologies. Instead, we aim to look at resistant reading from a new angle, describing what we see without making claims about the workings of power. In order to describe critical literacy in a new light, we draw inspiration from the literary scholars whose work catalyzed the project. For her part, Felski (2015) inspired us to consider the ways our analysis might align with her vision of “postcritical reading,” an approach that rejects the hunt for “hidden causes, determining conditions, and noxious motives” and instead involves placing ourselves in front of a text, asking what it “unfurls, calls forth, makes possible” (p. 12). Best and Marcus’s (2009) description of the surface of texts inspired our approach to attending to what texts unfurl and call forth. Their contention that the surface is the “location of patterns that exist within and across texts” (p. 11) led us to read two texts that describe critical literacy approaches to literature instruction alongside Felski’s (2015) description of critique and attend to the patterns that emerge.

The texts we read alongside Felski are two articles we have used to guide our work with preservice teachers: Connors and Rish’s (2015) study in the *ALAN Review*, “Troubling Ideologies: Creating Opportunities for Students to Interrogate Cultural Models in YA Literature” and Borsheim-Black, Macaluso and Petrone’s (2014) article in the *Journal of Adolescent and Adult Literacy*, “Critical Literature Pedagogy: Teaching Canonical Literature for Critical Literacy.” Both are robust texts that nicely describe pedagogical practices that can be used to teach resistant reading in the context of US secondary literature instruction. In our analysis, we illuminate how resistant reading practices outlined in these articles ask readers to (1) take up the role of detective and to treat the text as a suspect; (2) to take a doubtful and suspicious affective orientation towards a text; and (3) to narrow one’s gaze and attend to that in the text which is dangerous or wrong, as opposed to what might be good, beautiful, or pleasing.

### **A Post-Critical Reading of Critical Literacy Approaches to Literature Instruction**

The work by Connors and Risch (2015) and Borsheim-Black et al. (2014) provide thorough descriptions of instructional tasks that one might use to integrate critical literacy practices with literature instruction. For their part, Connors and Rish (2014) focus on combining critical literacy with young adult literature instruction in order to examine how these texts position readers. They contend that YA literature is not “ideologically neutral” and that--like all texts--they position readers in particular ways. The authors point out that although YA literature has the potential to expose readers to liberating ideologies, it can also “reinforce the status quo and perpetuate problematic power imbalances” (p. 22). To resist the ways YA texts attempt to position readers, the authors suggest that teachers engage in critical literacy approaches that encourage readers to read against the text, unveiling the ideologies about age, race, gender, sexuality (etc.), which sit beneath the surface. Encouraging readers to notice the assumptions that undergird a text, they argue, might help students challenge or reject these assumptions. One example they use to illuminate their approach to critical literacy is a lesson on *The Outsiders* (1967), the young adult book about a “greaser” who lives in a neighborhood rife with violence and poverty. The authors discuss how attending to the “hidden” ideology of the text illuminates the fact that the book reifies the myth of meritocracy.

Borsheim-Black et al. (2014) also illustrate critical literacy approaches to literature instruction, but rather than turning to YA literature, they focus on using resistant reading practices with canonical texts, offering readers a framework--*critical literature pedagogy* (CLP)--to guide the critique of such texts. CLP explicitly requires reading both with and against a text (p. 124). In CLP, reading *with* the text requires students to use non-critical literary analysis skills, including analysis grounded in reader response, new historicism, and new criticism, while reading *against* the text asks students to “read between the lines to expose and interrupt embedded, dominant

narratives, power dynamics, and perceived normalcy espoused by and hidden in the text, including its inclusion in school curricula” (p. 125). Although the authors note that reading *with* the text is just as important as reading *against* the text, they emphasize resistant reading of canonical novels because these books “need to be subjected to a critical eye” (p. 132). To develop their framework, the authors offer methods for reading with and against the text along six dimensions of literary study: a text’s canonicity, its social and historical contexts, its use of literary elements, the reader’s transaction with the text, and the educational assessments used alongside the text. They illustrate their framework by reading for and against *Of Mice and Men*, pointing out, for example, that through their framework, a reader might focus on the characterization of Candy, a character with a disability, and interrogate the ways Steinbeck describes characters with disabilities and the ways the text contributes to ableism.

The two critical literacy texts outlined above shed light on how some US scholars conceptualize critical literacy approaches to literature instruction. Below, we read these two texts alongside Felski’s (2015) *The Limits of Critique* and consider the ways Felski’s description of critique also applies to critical literacy approaches to literature pedagogy, paying particular attention to how critical literacy’s emphasis on resistant reading shapes the relationship between reader and text, how it impacts the reader’s affective orientation to a text, and what it encourages the reader to notice.

### *The Suspicious Text*

In her description of critique, Felski (2015) argues that critique often constitutes “forms of plotting that seek to identify causes and assign guilt” (p. 87). As such, critique encourages readers to treat a text as an “active perpetrator” (p. 97). In treating the text suspiciously, the reader is

positioned as a kind of investigator, a detective who examines the clues and interrogates the text in order to determine the nature and extent of its transgressions.

Both texts outlined above reflect this characteristic of critique. The pedagogical practices that Connors and Rish (2015) describe require students to “interrogate how individual works of YA literature reinforce or complicate dominant cultural models” (p. 23). This means students reading *The Outsiders* would “interrogate the cultural models” (p. 26). they encounter in the novel to see whether and how the text reinforces the myth of meritocracy that pervades our culture. The student becomes detective-like, examining clues in the text and discovering that *The Outsiders* “is premised” on the assumption that “so long as people work hard and take advantage of opportunities given them, they can improve their situation in life” (p. 28). Importantly, as Connors and Rish describe it, critical approaches to YA literature require students to investigate and interrogate a text, but their approach to resistant reading does not assume that the text has already committed a crime. For the authors, the critical investigation will determine whether a work of YA literature reinforces or challenges oppressive power structures.

Borsheim-Black et al. (2014) also position the reader as a detective, one who looks for clues by reading against the grain of the text. And like Connors and Rish (2015), they also rely on the word “interrogate” as they explain and illustrate their framework. Borsheim-Black et al. (2014) point out, for example, that by attending to the perspectives that the text excludes, the reader can “interrogate how a particular text contributes to the construction of dominant ideologies” (p. 129). Using the CLP framework, one can interrogate a text with respect to all dimensions of literary study, from the reader’s personal encounter with the text, to the study of the text’s social and historical context, to the text’s use of literary elements. This is because the framework is predicated on the assumption that “language and texts are not neutral and *always* ideological” (p. 123, italics

ours). Thus, for Borsheim-Black and colleagues, the reader, taking up their critical literacy approach, treats the text as a suspect in perpetuating a potentially dangerous ideology.

### *The Vigilant Reader*

Because critical literacy positions the reader as a detective and the text as a suspect, it also promotes a specific set of affective orientations to the text. In her description of critique, Felski (2015) points out that this mode of reading requires readers to be “alert” and “vigilant” (p. 37). Importantly, “this looking,” she argues, “is not a yielding gaze of pleasure, absorption, or entrancement but a sharp-eyed and diligent hunt” (p. 37). Like the critique of literary studies, critical literacy approaches to literature pedagogy discussed here also encourage readers to take up vigilant and doubtful orientations to literature. This is particularly evident in Connors and Rish (2015), who begin their essay by pointing out that YA literature is celebrated for its “ability to foster self-understanding and empathy for others” (p. 22) and for its ability to engage readers, but ultimately argue that teens should be on the lookout for ideologies texts try to impose upon them. According to the authors, “savvy readers” are those who can “resist the subject positions that literary texts invite them to occupy” by attending to “how a text positions them” (p. 23). Thus, although *The Outsiders* might be an engaging text that “tackl[es] social justice issues” (p. 28), the savvy reader will focus on the text’s “middle-class ideologies and values” in order to resist the ways that the book’s author “invites her implied audience to embrace” faith in the meritocracy (p. 29).

Borsheim-Black et. al (2014) similarly encourage readers to take up vigilant affective orientations to the text. Their CLP framework asks readers to be on the lookout for the ways the text is “embedded in and shaped by ideologies” (p. 124). When reading *Of Mice and Men* through the CLP framework, readers will pay attention to moments when the text seems to collude with

dangerous ideologies like ableism (p. 129), heteronormativity (p. 128-129), and white supremacy (p. 128). Crucially, the authors recognize that reading against the text using the CLP framework “can sometimes leave students feeling unsettled as they begin to question ideas they have always held to be true, fixed or normal” (p. 132). For the authors, these affective responses, including “anger, sadness, or disillusionment” (p. 130), are “growing pains” (p. 130) that can be embraced as teaching tools. Thus Borsheim-Black and colleagues not only embrace the vigilant affective stance of critique, they also welcome a number of other affective responses that are nothing like the “yielding gaze of pleasure, absorption, or entrancement” (Felski, 2015, p. 37) that students might otherwise experience when encountering a text that students might otherwise experience when encountering a text.

### **Implications**

In reading these two approaches to critical literacy alongside Felski’s description of critique, we’ve drawn attention to the way resistant reading practices position readers in relation to literature and the affective orientation these practices encourage students to take. We’ve highlighted, in particular, the way that two critical literacy approaches to literature instruction encourage readers to treat the literary text as a suspect, one full of clues that the reader must follow to discern the nature and extent of the text’s transgressions. We have also illustrated how critical literacy encourages vigilant affective orientations that can lead to feelings of unease and discomfort in students. These two features of critical literacy are neither inherently good nor bad, but we think they are, as Foucault would say, potentially dangerous. Below, we’d like to share some concerns that emerged as we read these descriptions of critical literacy alongside work that questions the role of critique in the field of English.

First, we are concerned that critical approaches to literature instruction may discipline the reader into a rigid set of relational and affective orientations towards texts. These rigid orientations concern us because--and here we echo Felski (2015)--they “cut” the reader off from “being touched by the genuine strangeness and otherness of the work of art” (p. 39). Here, we think of what might be lost if we read *The Giving Tree* focused only on its misogyny, thinking about the ways such a focus might prevent us from encountering the texts’ ideas about the insatiability of greed or from thinking through the text’s relationship to our nostalgic feelings about childhood and family. We think, too, of what might be lost if we attend mainly to ableism in *Of Mice and Men*. Will this focus make it difficult to attend to the complexities of the social world of the ranch? Or, in a simpler example, if we are focused primarily on ableism in the novel, will that final heartbreaking scene lose its affective force? When students are disciplined into such rigid affective orientations towards texts, resisting or suspecting them, what becomes no longer possible to feel or imagine with respect to their textual encounters? How are we foreclosing on the imaginative possibilities of literature in mandating the ferreting out of the wrong in what our students read?

A second concern deals with the ethical implications of these approaches to critical literacy. The problem is, as critic Jane Gallop (2000) notes, that of fighting prejudice with prejudice:

All too often smart, ambitious students read a book looking for what’s wrong with it, using a mental checklist to look for sexism, racism, or something else from the ever growing list of official prejudices so they can dismiss it...Coming to a book armed with a mental checklist is as much a prejudice as sexism (that is, judging an individual woman according to preconceptions about what women should be rather than on her own merits). (p. 16)

It may be that critical literacy and in particular resistant reading primes students to engage with texts by providing them Gallop’s mental checklist and encouraging prejudicial readings. The irony,

of course, is that critical literacy is typically framed as a corrective to the prejudices of a text. Ethically, however, critical literacy may yet do harm if it encourages rather than counters prejudice as it positions students to engage with texts. What's more, Gallop extends this concern beyond reading itself to our ethical interactions with other people: for her, reading is not merely about attending to what's "really on the page," but also a "means to a more just treatment of others" (p. 17). As critical literacy educators, we must ask ourselves: in teaching students to interrogate and reject the problematics of a text, are we also discouraging them from an ethical orientation that values openness towards the Other?

### **Possibilities, Trajectories**

To end, we offer three pedagogical possibilities which may help orient students and teachers differently towards literary texts. Importantly, we do not understand these approaches as replacements for or improvements upon critical literacy as an approach to literacy instruction generally; rather, they are different pedagogical options which may provide alternative ways of orienting students towards texts.

One approach draws from Gallop's (2000) conception of close reading. For Gallop, close reading requires the student to attend to "unusual vocabulary," "words that seem unnecessarily repeated," "images or metaphors," "what is in italics or parenthesis," and "footnotes that seem too long" (p. 7). In some ways, Gallop's description of close reading aligns with the way some critical literacy educators describe close reading. Luke (2000), for example, notes that Australian approaches to critical literacy equip students with the ability to notice and analyze "wordings, namings, metaphors," as well as syntactical patterns, "cohesive ties," and discourses (p. 456). Janks (2010) echoes this by developing a vision of critical literacy that asks students to notice "lexical choices," "grammatical choices" and "sequencing" (p. 63). Although the close reading practices

outlined by Luke and Janks parallel Gallop's vision, we argue that these close reading practices are different than Gallop's in their aim. For Gallop (2000), close reading is a way of "listening closely to the other" (p. 17), to come to "know something one did not know before" (p. 11). When employed by critical literacy educators, on the other hand, close reading is driven by the need to use textual analysis to discover the "designs" a text has on us (Janks, 2010, p. 98). For Janks, texts "serve interests and entice us into their way of seeing the world" (p. 72) but with a knowledge of linguistic features and their effects, readers can attend to the ways "texts work on us" (p. 72). Thus, while Gallop's close reading is driven by a desire to attend to the other, Janks's close reading is driven by the suspicious assumption that the text wants to do something to us, and we must use close analysis of texts to resist them. Because Gallop's vision of close reading does not require a suspicious orientation to the text and its "designs" on us, we wonder if her insistence on "looking at what is actually on the page" instead of "some idea 'behind the text'" (p. 7) might be a fruitful way to open up new orientations to literature.

We see our emphasis on Gallop's approach to be slightly different than advocating for a de-emphasis on "estranged" reading and an emphasis on "engaged" reading (Janks, 2010): as we see it, Gallop's approach to close reading can certainly call students' attention to relations of power in a text, but we believe it can do so without a-priori assuming that the text is trying to do something to us. A Gallopan close reading of *The Giving Tree*--a close reading that does not begin with the assumption that the text is trying to impose a gender hierarchy on us--might attend to the repetition of the clause "the tree was happy," noting moments when the clause is linked to other clauses, when it is preceded by the word "and," and when it stands alone. Such an analysis might illuminate the tree's dependency on the boy's happiness and generate a number of both estranged and engaged responses: some may see the use of "and the tree was happy" as evidence of the relationship

between the act of giving and one's satisfaction with life, while others might wonder at the anthropomorphization of the tree and ask whether or not the story implies that trees are willing participants in the degradation of the earth. In other words, a Gallopian style of close reading forestalls treating the text as an a-priori friend or foe by attending to what is on the page and allowing the text itself to drive analysis.

A second possibility centers around the concept of sincerity. To be sincere in reading a text is to give it a chance, to attempt to understand it without assuming its "pretense, deceit, or hypocrisy" (Anon, 2018). Rooted in the New Sincerity movement of authors and critics who "affirm nonironic values [and] a renewed taking of responsibility for one's words (Kelly, 2016, p. 198), this orientation begins with a faith in the value of good intentions, assuming--though not uncritically--that an author operates in good faith. Importantly, this is not to say that sincerity precludes ambiguity or even critique: as Kelly (2016) notes, operating with sincerity "means never being certain whether you are so, and whether your struggle to transcend narcissism, solipsism, irony, and insincerity is even undertaken in good faith." (p. 204-205). Nevertheless, sincerity may yet leave room to recover a text from the problems of critique detailed above because the sincere reader takes as her charge the possibility of the goodness of a text from the start. We think a sincere orientation, one done in good faith, requires the student to attend to the text and the responses it evokes, in good faith--allowing perhaps for contradictory and complicated understandings of the text. With respect to *The Giving Tree*, for example, a sincere encounter with the text might simultaneously recognize the compassion of the tree and the troubling misogyny of the boy. This double-action of sincerity provides, we think, one possibility for post-critical reading which may avoid the ethical problems of critical literacy.

Finally, we offer cosmopolitanism as a metaphor for an alternative orientation towards a text. To take up a moderate cosmopolitan orientation is to foster openness and curiosity towards difference (Appiah, 2006). Current conceptions of cosmopolitanism range from strong versions--which encourage one to prioritize the needs of the global world over one's "locally rooted loyalties"--to more moderate versions that require one to balance "receptivity to the new and loyalty to the known" (Hansen et al., 2009, p. 587). We are interested in how we might use a so-called "moderate" version of cosmopolitanism as inspiration for ethical acts of reading that elude the grip of critique. A cosmopolitan orientation towards literature pedagogy would require one to be open to the possibility of learning from complicated and complex characters, authors, scenes, and language. Such an openness, we argue, does not preclude simultaneous attention to that which troubles us about a text, the moments when the text runs up against our rooted commitments to justice and equity, but it does avoid the vigilant approach of critique. Though we recognize that this task is a difficult one, we think the ideal of cosmopolitanism may serve as an inspiration for working towards a reading of *The Giving Tree*, for example, that allows us to experience surprise, joy, heartbreak, and perhaps even motivation from the text, even as we attend to its misogyny.

Present in each of these possibilities is an embrace of nuance and an instinct to resist totalizing textual interpretations. Notably, the critical reading is not lost or dismissed but instead held up alongside other ways of encountering a text. The goal, in taking these up, is to open up rather than narrow the affective possibilities for student encounters with texts in English classrooms, creating space for novel, surprising, and ethical orientations towards the texts we teach them to read.

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