EXAMINING CANONICITY AS AN IMPLICIT AND DISCURSIVE FRAME IN
SECONDARY ENGLISH CLASSROOMS

By

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ABSTRACT

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The idea of the literary canon is a concept that has occupied the field of English

Education for quite some time, where it is discussed, debated, and critiqued as a list of books (or

as an ideological force linked to a list of books) that is, ought, and/or ought not to be read and

engaged in the English classroom. Using a critical qualitative approach, this project rethinks or

disrupts this notion of canon as only a list of books, conceiving instead of the concept and its

impact in much broader terms, ones that explore the educational project of *canonicity*, a larger

concept that both endorses the canon as a list but also does much more to entrench the ideology

inherent in such a list through pedagogical encounters. By theorizing the latent meanings of the

word "canon" and in using data drawn from three different secondary English classrooms, this

project illustrates that the ways teachers act, think, and speak about and around canonical texts

are imbued and embedded with one ideology in particular: religiosity, or general, religious-like

discourses. It also contends that the religious-like ways and ideologies of "canon" shape

teachers' pedagogies during the teaching of canonical texts. Thus, this project demonstrates that

canonicity is an all-encompassing approach to English education, a discursive frame that actually

invites (or forecloses) certain pedagogical practices and encounters linked to instantiated

traditions, assumptions, and pedagogical practices in the field. In offering this notion of

canonicity, the project imagines a new way in which the field of English Education might deepen

its traditional critique and discussion of the canon as a list of books.

For my parents, who have given me everything but have asked for nothing.
And, of course, to Kate: "you're every line, you're every word, you're everything."

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

PROLOGUE

"If only you'd been an English Teacher… we would know what life means… An English Teacher is really someone / How proud I'd be if you had become one"
~ song lyrics from Bye Bye Birdie

I first heard these lyrics when I was a freshman in high school, having recently been cast in my school's production of *Bye Bye Birdie*. They resonated with me, I remember, because I knew from a young age that I wanted to be a teacher. For a time, I wasn't sure what kind of teacher I might be, as I generally enjoyed most of my school subjects, but I was always drawn to and deeply moved by good books. It wasn't until my experiences in my high school English classes that I knew for sure that I wanted to be a high school English teacher specifically. I think a lot of that desire, interest, or calling on my part had to do with the canon and what I saw as my teachers' somewhat divine expertise with these books – the idea that an English teacher "is really someone…"

Before high school, I would imagine that my experiences of reading in school were much like everyone else's. Quite simply, reading was a chore, something to be tested on or checked for understanding. This method of reading was ingrained in me since the first grade when, during our "free time," we were required to complete what I think were versions of Basal readers, small books with a collection of short stories followed by a series of multiple choice questions. They were not interesting to me, I felt that I was always behind the rest of the class, and I never did very well on them. These feelings, combined with being placed in the "B" reading group, turned me off from reading at an early age.

This perception of reading as a chore persisted through most of my schooling experiences. I remember in middle school that I hated reading *The Cay* and *Hatchet*, and I vividly remember stressing out while reading *Number The Stars,* wondering what "reading

comprehension" questions my teacher might ask me the next day. As a result, I saw my performance on these quizzes as "my fault" – the result of my poor skills, not because I disliked the book or didn't connect with my teacher's teaching of the book. This method of reading for comprehension didn't change much in the early part of high school either – we had similar quizzes over *A Separate Piece*, *Of Mice and Men*, and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (I even recall memorizing the name of the ferryboat in the latter – "The Walter Scott" – knowing that my teacher would ask for it on the quiz), and I loathed wasting class time to read aloud huge chunks of these novels – or worse yet, Shakespeare – simply because that was (and still is) an expected practice in the classroom.

What I thought odd, however, was that while I remained disengaged with these books and reading practices *in* school, I enjoyed reading and libraries and bookstores *outside* of school. It was no big deal to me, for example, that my mom one day brought home a copy of *Jurassic Park* for me to read as I had loved the movie and I had just finished reading Crichton's *The Andromeda Strain* (a recommendation from my dad). She knew I'd like to read the source material, and I did. Similarly, even though reading quizzes smeared my enjoyment of *The Indian in the Cupboard*, I remember relishing in the sequels soon after I had opened them on Christmas day (yes, books were a welcome Christmas present in my estimation). And that certainly was the difference – there was a feeling of joy and excitement when I read these books outside of school as opposed to those assigned for in-school purposes and read with a highlighter and pen in hand.

More than anything, though, I was an avid reader of comic books. My love of these books started at a young age, before middle school, and by accident when, one evening, I happened to notice a small magazine rack full of comic books at the local grocery story while shopping with my mom. It must have been the colors and images that caught my attention or it

could have been some depiction of Batman in particular (I had a particular fondness of Batman since Kindergarten when I would watch reruns of the old TV show after school). This time in my life was a time before superheroes became so prevalent (and cool, I might add), but there was something that day about an issue of *The Uncanny X-Men* that made me grab it and ask my mom if we could get it. She obliged without a second thought, something that I recognize now was her acknowledgement that it didn't matter what I was reading as long as I was reading. I remember that while the rest of my family watched a movie together that night, I sat at a small desk in our kitchen and, under the soft glow of a desk lamp, read that comic book. Everything changed after that – Cyclops, Storm, and Wolverine resonated with me, and I became a lover of comic books. I still have that first comic book; after all, it saved my reading life, and I recognize the great privilege I had in parents who could and would support my reading habits.

It was the storylines that intrigued me most – that these X-Men could be superheroes with special powers and yet be human at same time, dealing with human issues – acceptance and intolerance, identity and difference, empathy and alienation, and so on. More recently, these comic books have been analyzed as metaphors for the adversities that come with adolescence, suggesting one reason why they resonate with so many people and no doubt why they stuck with me. While some of these characters and storylines appealed to my awkward adolescence, on a different level, the adventures of the X-Men were epic, and I loved the battles of good versus evil that waged across the pages. I was always fascinated with the conflict of good and evil, the result, no doubt, of an early exposure to fairy tales as well as, I'm sure, my religious upbringing, where rights and wrongs and morals and morality were ingrained since childhood at church, at home, and at my Catholic schools. But while the heroes were heroic and the villains were immense, these characters were complex, sometimes evoking a moral ambiguity that didn't

easily classify them as entirely good or evil. This grayness fascinated me, and for someone who came from a White, upper-middle class background, whose Christian worldview was hardly ever disrupted, reading about these characters, who were and were not like me, was an entirely new experience.

While my reading of these comic books waned as I grew older and busier with school and other interests, my out-of-school and in-school reading practices surprisingly converged in my junior year British Literature class. It started with *Beowulf* when I saw so clearly the parallels between the comic books I enjoyed reading at home and the events and dialogue that played out in that epic poem. I noticed the same with *King Arthur* and *Macbeth*. These were epic stories about good and evil, and they all hinged on the supernatural or super-heroic. I remember regularly sharing with my mom the realizations of these parallels, amazed that those comic book writers had clearly read the same books when they were in high school too. Even the names of characters were the same. I saw similar parallels in other texts I read that year: *Brave New World*, *Wuthering Heights*, and *Lord of the Flies*. While themes of good and evil, redemption, and morality persisted in these texts, so too did those gray areas that prevented labels of "good" or "evil" or even "hero" or "villain".

But it was more than these textual themes that baited my reading interests that year. For the first time, my teacher's approach was entirely different. Rarely were we plagued with reading quizzes, forced to read aloud just to kill time, or listen to lectures on textual significance. Instead, we acted out *Beowulf* and *Macbeth* in a grand fashion, we made surprising and contemporary connections with *Brave New World*, we drew our imagined depictions of Grendel and the witches, and we were asked to chat along with "Kill the pig!" Furthermore, deliberate discussions revolved around issues of morality – should we be cloning people, were Macduff's

acts of revenge justifiable, what did these books reveal about our human nature? – rather than mere plot structure. These activities and questions helped me see reading beyond a chore; reading became performative, purposeful, and fun. There was significance to these books, and, most importantly, I finally felt as if they resonated with me so much that I knew my life had changed.

More specifically, I fell in love with these books and with the act of reading that, after junior year, I knew there was only one option for me: I was going to someday teach these same books. And so, my out-of-school reading shifted from comic books and popular fiction to canonical books, the "great works" of the modern world. This shift needed to happen, I thought, because, after all, I was going to be an English teacher. From that point on, my choices in life were determined, or at the very least, informed by my consumption of what I came to understand as the canon, that (somewhat nebulous) list of books that is, more often than not, defined by those books taught in secondary English classrooms.

In fact, my perceived love of these books clouded my perceptions of other books and even of opportunities and choices beyond text selection. There were times in my life that I thought I was going to be a math teacher or a pediatrician (despite my calling to teach), but my British Literature class completely interrupted those notions of my future self. I sought out courses in college that would expose me to more of these books, I dropped my "pre-med" major so I could read more books on the MLA's list of the top 100 novels of the twentieth century (imagine my disappointment when a senior seminar dedicated entirely to James Joyce's *Ulysses* was canceled at the last minute… not entirely a bad thing in retrospect), and I prided myself on my growing bookshelves of canonical novels and anthologies of British and American literature. All of this was done with the intention that I would one day have the opportunity to teach these

books to students who would love and value them as much as I did, whose lives would be forever changed, liked mine.

Furthermore, being the product of Catholic schooling and a student of privilege at a Catholic university, I did not question or challenge my teachers or professors, I did not question or challenge reading lists, esteemed books, or even the ways in which these books were taught – there was no need to because my teachers and these books represented *me* – a White, heterosexual, Christian male – and aligned with my own worldviews. My English classes were somewhat like my experiences at church: I was told what to read and how to think about it, and I did so without hesitation. There was an authority about these books – and about my teachers and professors who taught them – that sort of put me "in my place" as a student and as an emerging apprentice of the canon. In face, in order to more fully immerse myself in this body of literature, I abandoned my out-of-school reading interests in order to pursue the canon, which at the time represented the apex of cultural literacy for me (a notion I now certainly recognize as problematic for a number of reasons), of conversations among adults and intellectuals, of more mature audiences and themes. Mostly, they reminded me of the importance of being an English teacher, which was and still is, I feel, my own personal calling in life.

Because of my commitment to these books, teaching came easy to me, and, no joke, I jumped up when the alarm buzzed at 5am knowing I was going to "change lives" – in the ways mine had – through these great books. And so, it was with these romanticized notions of Hamlet, Jay Gatsby, Hester Prynne, Huck Finn, Jane Eyre and so many others that I marched into school everyday and taught a cultural and racial mix of students in inner-city Baton Rouge and, later, mostly white students in suburban Chicago about canonical characters. Students and parents

reaffirmed these notions for me when they respectively told me that I had "forever" changed their perspectives or instilled in their children a "love of literature."

After several years of teaching *The Crucible*, however, something just didn't feel right, and I felt growing disillusionment with the ways things were "supposed to be" in an English classroom. Nothing really happened that made me feel this way; rather, I think it was the slow realization that I had been the product of the way things had always been done and of larger concerns and values that I did not recognize at the time – schooling more generally, the Advanced Placement curricula and mindset, expectations for college readiness, and so on. On another level, I was teaching at a predominantly white, upper-middle class school where the ideas of the canon and "great books" were valorized and unquestioned – because the identities of the teachers and students (myself included) matched the characters in (and authors of) the canonical books we studied. This realization was crushing to me, and I felt that I was duped by but also complicit in some great deceit.

Funny though, in looking back, I realize now that what I perceived as a "love" of these books was perhaps more so a fascination with the idea and ideology of being an English teacher (and an ideology that was similarly raced, classed, gendered, and religioned), much like those sentiments expressed in the song lyrics that open this prologue: "an English teacher is really someone," as silly as it may sound. But, I recognize now that I was sort of "taken in" or captivated by the ideology of being an English teacher *of the canon*. I was hailed as a subject – as a type of student, as a type of reader, and even as a type of English teacher-yet-to-be – that these texts called for, of what I felt I was *supposed to be* rather than, perhaps, what could be. Even though my British Literature teacher did the most to be different in her pedagogy, and set me on the path towards becoming an English teacher, she also did the most to reify the

perception of these great books as a type of "high culture" or sophistication that would somehow advance me in the world. And she did this in small ways, mainly through aside comments that revealed insights to her personal opinions about literature, art, and pop culture. I certainly felt, in a very palpable way, that there was cultural capital that came with the reading of certain books and being an English teacher of great works of literature.

Before I get in too deep, permit me to say that I realize my story, at this point, may have taken on a tone of regret, perhaps even contriteness or repentance as I confess of my sins of the past (a point to which I will return in the Epilogue). Granted, I do wonder sometimes at what could have been – both inside and outside of the classroom – had I not been influenced by a canonical way of thinking. How would my life be different? What choices would I have or have not made? Further, why was I, out of all of my peers, the (only?) one who was influenced or taken by this perception of canonicity? Despite these questions I have come to ponder (and I will revisit them and their themes in my Conclusion), I want to unequivocally say that I was and am proud to be an English teacher. I do not regret following my calling, I do not regret my experiences as a teacher or my identity as a Catholic Christian, and I do not blame my own teachers for teaching me how they did and what they did in the classroom. I did not choose teaching as a profession; rather, I have no doubt that "teaching" found me because I have never felt more fulfilled and alive in my profession than I did when I was teaching high school English. But this project, I hope, may point to what else took place – what I could not see as a student or even as a teacher myself – in the English classroom and what might be possible otherwise.

On that note, it was not until I finally did become a teacher that I continually questioned *why* I was doing what I was doing or why English was what it was. Quite simply, I grew tired and somewhat resentful with the standard, traditional answers and rationales to curricular and

8

pedagogical questions. I grew tired with *The Crucible*, for example, not because I had read and taught it several times, but because it was *the* story. Both the text and I had become part of a script of the English classroom that *this* text should be *the* text taught to students and that there was a prescribed way of teaching it (grounded largely in close reading and literary analysis and interpretation). Further, I see how my own privilege encouraged me to valorize and uphold these texts as well as a certain teacherly mindset or disposition in my pedagogy around these books.

I realized, too, at some point, that my love of the canonical books we studied in my British Literature class was tied to *more* than just the book – it was wound up in the connections I made between these books and with my comic books, in the ways in which those books were taught to me, and in the themes and discussions my classmates and I had had around those books. To a certain extent, these connections that I was making on my own served as a disruption of those canonical books for me – that my comic books may be imbued with a value and purpose all their own that wasn't appreciated or valued in the classroom due to long held assumptions and traditions about what secondary English is and should be.

So, with this in mind, I think I began to do things in my own classroom to encourage different interpretations of the canonical texts and characters my students and I studied together, and I brought into the classroom controversies about the texts we studied – about Fitzgerald's anti-Semitism, about why we read these books in the first place, about the lack of diversity in textbooks. I tried to open up spaces of interpretation, plurality, and possibility that had otherwise been closed or not considered for my students and me. Looking back, I may ascribe this practice of mine to a British Literature class I took in college, where we read *Jane Eyre* in tandem with *Wide Sargasso Sea*. My professor's purpose in doing so was to challenge the undercurrent of colonization that pervades the former book in content, style, and structure; indeed, to read

against the book. It makes sense to me now why my own Advanced Placement (AP) English students disliked reading *Wide Sargasso Sea* out of any book I taught that year (including *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Jane Eyre*, *A Streetcar Named Desire*, but also *The Kiterunner*, *The Life of Pi*, and *The Prince of Tides*) – it was that book, perhaps, that disrupted or challenged their own worldviews or notions of privilege, indeed their (and my) own notions – in terms of plot (and a linear sense of structure), structure, genre, and even voice – of what type of books are studied in an English classroom, and one that held such high esteem as the AP English classroom. Such a designation as "AP," I believe (and suggest in this project), contributes to the minutiae of schooling that undercut or marginalize criticality (from a critical literacy or Critical English Education perspective) in the classroom.

Thus I came to graduate school with the same interest in the canon that I have had for twenty years – what it was, how it worked, what teachers believed about it – and my conversations in graduate school finally disrupted the canon for me (beyond a pedagogical approach) and provided some language to recognize the politics embedded in it (and any "list") – that the (again, somewhat imaginary) list of books that constitutes the canon was contrived as a result of specific power relations and structures that maybe had little to do with the narrative of "the cream rises to the top" or of "literary merit." These conversations helped me to see why I valued *X-Men* in one space and *Wuthering Heights* in another. Similarly, they helped me to see how the canon fit within my own privilege and personal narratives of whiteness, masculinity, Christianity, and heterosexuality – that I was indicative of its ideal audience and writers, that the canon comes from a place of privilege and special interest, and that it too plays a role in molding schools, classrooms, teachers, and students, much like the sentiment from the *Bye Bye Birdie* lyrics that began this prologue did for me. My point here is that I let the ideology embedded in

10

those lyrics, the ideology of being an English teacher of the canon, define my own interests and my own canon. Rather than letting me – or most importantly my students – define, find, or construct my own canon(s), *I let the canon in some ways define me as a person and English teacher.*

With this in mind, and in considering my own story and goals towards a critical English education, I have begun to see how the canon may serve as a metaphor for the ways in which schools and classrooms may re/produce certain sentiments, storylines, or even ways of being and thinking in and of the English classroom, as it had and has for me and my students. Thus, I hope this project is a (small but) beginning attempt in interrogating the power the literary canon exercises, not just in shaping curricula and pedagogical practices, but in shaping lives, values, and ideas. I hope, too, that it begins to break some of the unquestioned traditions associated with reading, teaching, and knowing in the English classroom.

"Where there is canon, there is both power and sanctity.
Above all, however, there is discipline." (Scholes, 1998, pp. 107-108)

"Traditional approaches to ELA instruction have long enforced master narratives, where canonical texts act as toolsets for reifying the status quo." (Kirkland, 2011, p. 204).

Introduction

The idea of the literary canon is a concept that has occupied the field of English Education for quite some time. It usually refers to or is linked to a list of texts traditionally taught (for whatever reason) as part of the curricula of the secondary English classroom. Several national studies conducted over the past several decades have investigated what texts are taught in secondary English classrooms (Applebee, 1993; Stallworth et al., 2006; Stotsky, 2010; Stallworth & Gibbons, 2012), and these studies have helped to concretize the idea of the canon as actual lists of the "most assigned and taught" texts of the English classroom (See Table 1). While not entirely unchanging, these lists of texts have remained remarkably stable since the late 1800s, and as a result, most practitioners and scholars in English Education studies (whether they agree with the idea of the canon or not) have come to associate the literary canon with a body of literature or a list of books synonymous with required reading for students of the school subject English (Stotsky, 1994; Jago 2004; Hirsch et al., 1988; Bloom, 1995; Morrell, 2005; Kirkland, 2009, 2011; Rush & Scherff, 2013; Lapp, Fisher, and Frey, 2013).

Some of these texts include, with great frequency, *The Great Gatsby*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *To Kill a Mockingbird, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and, more recently, *The Crucible* and *Night*. In addition to identifying text titles, these studies further highlight the unrelenting pervasiveness of these lists and of the idea of the canon more broadly, proving, in a sense, that students have been reading the same content in secondary English classrooms for (at least) the

past fifty or sixty years. The general stability of these lists helps to foster a definition of the literary canon as a dominant, pervading group of texts that have become staples of the secondary English classroom.

Table 1

Most Frequently Taught Book-Length Texts by Most Recent Frequency

Stallworth & Gibbons, 2012	Stotsky, 2010	Applebee, 1993
The Great Gatsby	*The Great Gatsby*	*The Great Gatsby*
Romeo and Juliet	*Romeo and Juliet*	*Romeo and Juliet*
To Kill a Mockingbird	*To Kill a Mockingbird*	*To Kill a Mockingbird*
The Crucible	*The Crucible*	*Hamlet*
Night	*Night*	*Macbeth*
The Odyssey	*Huckleberry Finn*	*Huckleberry Finn*
	Of Mice and Men	*Of Mice and Men*
	Julius Caesar	*Julius Caesar*
	The Scarlet Letter	*The Scarlet Letter*
	Lord of the Flies	*Lord of the Flies*

Historical Contexts

The inception of the idea of the canon, from the perspective of those texts taught in secondary English classrooms, can be traced back to two events: the Harvard entrance requirements of 1873-74 and the meeting of the Committee of Ten in 1892. Briefly, the 1873-74 requirement stated, for the first time, that applicants would write a short composition on a literary text, with specific options ranging from authors like William Shakespeare and Sir Walter Scott. Because specific titles were mentioned in the requirement (and in subsequent requirements), secondary school teachers felt they had no choice but to teach those specific titles in their classrooms. To capitalize on this large scale use of certain texts, publishers produced newer and annotated "study" editions of these texts, and "by the mid-1880s, annotated classics were in widespread use" (Applebee, 1974, p. 34), thus beginning the establishment of the "canon" in English classrooms. In addition to and in light of this requirement, the Committee of

13

Ten, commissioned by the National Association of Education and chaired by the president of Harvard at that time, Charles William Eliot, met in 1892 to examine and evaluate the curricula of secondary school subjects. Their 1894 report essentially created the Western, and especially American and British, literature-based "English" class, as we know it today in secondary schools (Gere, 1992; Bauer &Clark, 2008), making literary study (of the American and British traditions) a universally offered secondary school subject (Applebee, 1974; Graff, 1987). This historical context suggests that the origins of the literary canon date back to expectations of colleges and universities as well as to the influence of publishing companies (dominated by white men of the Anglo-Saxon, Protestant tradition). In other words, this historical context evidences the (raced, classed, gendered, and religioned) power and politics behind the canon, more than the regularly-cited "time and tradition," "common consensus," or "literary merit" that teachers and scholars (like Bloom, 1995) may credit as the force behind canon formation (Macaluso, 2013; Castle, 2009). But whereas universities and publishers may have contributed to or given birth to the idea of the canon as a list of specific texts, the role these texts play in the classroom, as well as the pedagogical approach to teaching literary texts in schools and English classroom, has a historical antecedent in the original, religious foundations of schooling.

Historically, literacy has been linked to the Medieval, Renaissance, and Enlightenment periods and, therefore, to the religious power and authority of Western Christianity as a means to regulate conduct, to read Scripture, and to instill accepted forms and methods of reading as well as *what* was being read (e.g., Burke, 1998; Scholes, 1998; Collins & Blot, 2003; Graff, 1987; Street, 1993; Brandt, 2004). Specifically, Graff (1987) argues that the link between literacy and religion accounts for vital but conservative legacy of reading education, noting "the religious impulse for reading for the propagation of piety and faith" (p. 29). Collins & Blot (2003),

14

similarly note, "literacy has been more about difference and hierarchy than about universal inclusion" (p. 74). As a concept, practice, and/or skill linked to religion, literacy – in both method and content – has always been about power and discipline.

In the more modern and American tradition, schooling was closely connected to and influenced by Protestant religious orientations during the early colonial period, where the school was seen as an extension of the home or church. Though different religious sects existed across the colonies (Rury, 2013), the main "activity" or purpose of school was to read and interpret the Bible, and even with the eventual separation of church and state, "the curriculum remained heavily influenced by religious writings, prayer, and Christian morality" (Pulliam, 2002, p. 232). In fact, many public schools through the mid-1800s, during the Common School movement, relied on Protestant creeds and used the King James version of the Bible in school as a way to mold "good" American citizens (Fraser, 2010).

For example, Horace Mann, founder of the Common School movement, ardently believed that "moral education is a primal necessity of social existence" (Fraser, 2010, p. 51) and advocated that all teachers impress on their students "the principles of piety, justice, and a sacred regard to truth, love to their country, humanity and universal benevolence, sobriety, industry, and frugality, chastity, moderation, and temperance, and those other virtues which are the ornament of human society" (Fraser, 2010, pp. 55-56) because these "virtues" were the Christian basis of American Protestantism and thus, the early foundation and ideology of schools (Fraser, 2010). Importantly, then – for the purposes of this project – is that *generalized* (i.e., nonsectarian) religion and education were linked from the beginning, and these schools were meant to espouse broad Protestantism, grounded in the Bible and the Ten Commandments, for example, to encapsulate as many sects as possible (e.g., Johnson, 1997, Fraser, 2010; Pulliam, 2002; Rury,

2013). Mann believed that this type of nonsectarian school would help to unify the American social fabric:

> He felt that religious sectarianism and cultural conflict threatened American institutions… This made the idea of a common school, attended by children of the different groups in society without affiliation with any particular religious viewpoint, essential to the future of the republic. [Thus] Mann advocated a nonsectarian form of Christianity for the public schools… [to] serve children across the full range of religious beliefs and cultural traditions. This became of the principal meanings behind the term common school. (Rury, 2013, p. 77)

Even though this Protestant tradition dated back to the New England settlements of the 1600s (with the Protestant Puritans and Calvinists), the reliance on Protestantism (though generalized and nonsectarian) did not sit well with other religious peoples during the mid-1800s, most particularly the Catholics, which resulted in the formation and rise of Catholic parochial schools by the late 1800s. Eventually, schools of other religious sects and churches, such as those of Lutherans, Quakers, and Jews, were also established and provided alternatives to the nonsectarian Protestant norm of the common or normal school (Rury, 2013; Pulliam, 2002).

The religious foundations of schooling also influenced the development of reading and English as school subjects. Most notably, Applebee (1974) has argued that the "ethical tradition" of English education, which "placed its emphasis on moral and cultural development" (p. 1), is the oldest and most influential instructional tradition of English education, shaping its past and current form, methods, and curricula. This tradition "firmly linked religious instruction with the teaching of reading" (p. 1) through the Protestant, Common School movement and books like *The New England Primer,* which allowed teachers to establish a "common catechism" and an

16

"ethical and cultural heritage" (p. 5) in their classes. Horace Mann, again a key figure here, argued that fiction and novels in particular should be taught in schools "because their appeal was to emotion rather than reason" (Applebee, 1974, p. 22). Applebee's history suggests that the more modern manifestations of schooling, reading, and literature instruction were deeply grounded in certain varieties of religiosity and the inculcation of Christian virtues and behaviors.

In addition to the Protestant Christian character of what was taught in these schools, Brass has historicized the traditional and taken-for-granted representations and assumptions of the school subject English to illustrate how the discipline, and English pedagogy – the method of teaching – in particular, has been linked to pastoral Christianity. Through an analysis of foundational English textbooks produced and used at the turn of the twentieth century, Brass contends that English teaching has been grounded in a discourse of "overtly Christian language" and has traditionally been focused on goals that are "'larger' than simply teaching reading, writing, and so on" (p. 155) (such as those "larger goals" shaping the discipline today, with CEE position statements grounded in models of personal growth, democratic citizenship, and social justice, etc. (Brass, 2011)).

The goals of early English teaching targeted students' "'spiritual' enlargement [and] clarification" as well as their "hearts, minds, and will" (p. 155). But while literacy was used as a tool to moralize and discipline, the *teaching* of reading of and through literature mirrored the type of reading practices in certain Protestant religious spaces. Brass uses the metaphor of "the cure of young souls" (2011), as termed in these early textbooks, to describe a pedagogy – a philosophy and its associated techniques and practices – that was meant to edify students' souls and their personal, spiritual, and social lives. According to Brass, this type of English teaching and literature instruction were linked to (and still are linked to) pedagogies and methods that

discipline and form rather than ones that solely *in*form. This type of instruction is no better

apparent than in the methods associated with New Criticism, the dominant form of English

pedagogy in the modern era since the 1930s (e.g., Applebee, 1974, 1993; Stotsky, 2010;

Grossman, 2001; Hinchman & Moore, 2013).

New Criticism, a method aligned with or similarly referred to as close reading, divorces

readers' experiences, responses, and interpretations from the "meaning" of the text. Quite

simply, it involves thorough, methodical, analytic readings of a text – "sustained probing

analyses, with students reading and rereading to obtain deep and thorough understandings of

texts and to grasp the ways texts shape understandings" (Hinchman & Moore, 2013). In short,

New Critics focus on the text itself as the source of meaning about the text – a key feature

grounded in the Protestant tradition of reading and interpreting the Bible for its meaning so much

so that Guillory (1983) has argued that New Criticism as an ideology and pedagogy amounts to a

type of orthodoxy of literature done in service to a "hidden god" of literature, and especially

canonical texts. Applebee (1974) and Scholes (1998) similarly suggest that this method

encourages technical and professional way of reading the text, even a type of allegiance. Scholes

(1998) has also expanded upon the link between New Criticism and Protestant Christianity,

noting that the method constructs school subject English as an "evangelical enterprise" (p. 25)

because New Criticism developed from and grew out of the evangelical Christianity of Billy

Phelps, an influential, white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant male professor at Yale University (a place

where the students were likewise largely white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant males). According to

Scholes (1998), "In the history of English as a field of study, Phelps represents a moment

between philology and New Criticism, a moment when it was indeed possible to profess

literature with evangelical fervor" (pp. 13-14). Importantly to note, then, is that not only were

the texts being studied representative of a certain race, class, gender, and religion, but so too were the methods by which those texts were being engaged – read, studied, taught, interpreted, etc. Furthermore, the texts studied, those of the traditional and largely British canon, were used to inculcate Protestant Christian virtues, messages, and worldviews (Scholes, 1998). Quite simply, by the mid-twentieth century, New Criticism functioned as "a safe haven for professors, who had become clergy without dogma, teaching sacred texts without a God" (Scholes, 1998, p.27).

These historical accounts are meant to show that English as a discipline, and literature instruction specifically (and especially grounded in the methods of New Criticism), has a strong, established tradition of teaching with or for traditions of religion and Christianity in particular – grounded in a white, middle-class, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant history. While this tradition may not be explicitly acknowledged today (Brass, 2011), Christianizing, or broad moralizing, has remained a goal and an accepted assumption through the teaching of literature – and, importantly, canonical literature – ever since (Applebee, 1974). Thus, from a historical perspective, "canon" operates as a list, as a method, and as a religious ideology.

Present Context

In contemporary English Education conversations, the idea of the literary canon is still very much debated and discussed *as a list of books* or as an ideological force linked to a list of books. For one, an analysis of the text exemplars of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS, 2010), the document that largely directs or informs pedagogical decisions of teachers across the country, illustrated an overwhelmingly partiality and predominance of canonical texts in that list of exemplars (Rush et al., 2011). For example, the CCSS suggests a Shakespearean play to be

studied at every grade level, and the endorsed exemplars largely consist of "classic or historically significant texts… [of] recognized value" (CCSS, 2010, p. 2). This study of the CCSS largely confirmed what we already knew – that the canon plays a pervasive role in today's English classrooms. In fact, Moss (2013) suggests that the CCSS list of text exemplars may serve to reaffirm or reinstitute "the canon" in schools because "canonical classics" are "overrepresented" (p. 49) in that list of exemplars whereas "contemporary and relevant texts" (p. 49) are hardly mentioned. Moss and Rush et al. seemed to be concerned with the over-emphasis on canonical texts (as opposed to those designated as contemporary, relevant, or diverse texts) as the list of books that shape the curricula of English education.

But the prevalence and perceived dominance of the canon is not new, as the list of the canon has been (and continues to be) contested ever since the feminist movement in academia (Gilbert & Gubar, 1979; Kolondy, 1980; Britzman, 1989), which critiqued the canon for its inherent whiteness and masculinity. Indeed the "critical turn" of English education around the 1970s and the rise of Comparative Literature as a discipline questioned and challenged "the assumptions and implications regarding the canonized work" (Banerjee, 2015) as a whole. The "canon wars" (or, similarly, the "culture wars," Ravitch, 2002) have been waged ever since, calling out white, cis-hetero-patriarchy and resulting in advocates for alternative canons (the feminist canon, the multicultural canon, etc.) and the inclusion of more diverse texts and perspectives into the canon. Despite this decades-long debate, the canon is *still* being discussed and debated today on these very grounds. For example, in his call for proposals for the 2013 NCTE Conference, titled "(Re)Inventing the Future of English," Ernest Morrell asked in reference to "canonized authors:" "Why do we insist on teaching the novels, poems, and plays of people who are long since perished?... If we hold on to the teaching of literature as a primary

20

focus, what literature should be taught…?" (2013). These questions around the canon strike a familiar cord as they have been asked for decades despite, or perhaps as a result of, the fairly stable curriculum of book length text titles at the secondary level (Applebee, 1993; Stallworth et al., 2006; Stotsky, 2010; Stallworth & Gibbons, 2012).

As further evidence of this debate in English education specifically, the editors of three NCTE journals, *English Education*, *Voices from the Middle*, and *English Leadership Quarterly* dedicated recent issues of their journals to the topics of the canon and texts and text selection for the English classroom. In their editorials, these editors invoked the idea of the literary canon, again, *as a list of books* and its role as a staple in English classrooms. They also, however, all called for an expansion or reconsideration of this list. For example, *English Education* editors Rush and Scherff titled their issue "Thinking Deeper about Text Selection" and argued that English teacher educators would "be well advised to consider how we instruct our students to think about the *texts* they plan to teach" (2013, p. 211, emphasis added). While two articles in that issue address the pedagogical uptake of texts in the classroom, the editorial does not link the specific idea of the canon with anything other than a list of books. The editors conclude that, ideally, in-service and pre-service teachers' "knowledge of texts is deep and wide, including not only those from the literary canon but also relevant young adult literature, multicultural texts, contemporary fiction and nonfiction, media and film, and other digital texts" (p. 212). Their suggestion implies that if teachers knew about texts other than those deemed "from the literary canon," then they might change the texts that are taught in their classroom and draw from other "lists" of books.

Similarly, in the *Voices From the Middle* issue dedicated specifically to the canon, with its rather ominous title of "Expanding the Canon: Virtue or Vice?", editors Lapp, Fisher, and

Frey (2013) write that they "wanted to invite educators to *once again* critically examine the texts that have been traditionally viewed as worthy of inclusion in the canon" (2013, p. 7, emphasis added) concluding "once again," like many before them, that "educators have broadened their view of what students should read" (p. 7). They cite Kirkland's piece within that issue to conclude, "… the approach [to teaching in the ELA classroom] must ultimately include reverence for an evolving canon" (p. 9) of text titles and genres. Finally, Groenke (2012), editor of a recent issue of *English Leadership Quarterly* titled "Troubling the Literary Canon," wrote, "we need to broaden our curricular offerings to include the kinds of things young people say they like and want to read" (p.1), such as high-interest young adult books. While there are few vocal advocates of the canon today (e.g., Jago, 2011, 2004; Bloom, 1995; Hirsch et al., 1988, 1999), the popular critique of the canon seems to fall along these lines, that the list needs to be expanded or revised for more and diverse books/titles/authors/genres/representations to be included. In fact, a collective set of voices has emerged in English education, calling for more inclusiveness in and alternatives to the canonical curriculum and its power over the broader English curriculum (e.g., Haddix & Price-Dennis, 2013; Stallworth et al., 2006; Rojas, 2010; Kirkland, 2009, 2011, 2013; Scholes, 2011).

The other contemporary critique leveraged against the canon comes from a branch of English Education in which I have participated and feel most closely aligned: Critical English Education. Critical English education marries the concepts of critical literacy with an overall approach to English education. Critical literacy (Janks et al., 2013; Luke, 2000; McLaughlin and DeVoogd, 2004; Vasquez et al., 2013; Comber & Simpson, 2001), grounded in critical social theory of the Frankfurt School (Habermas, 1975), disrupts the ideologies of texts and textual practices for the purpose of social transformation. Because English Education has been largely

about the consumption and transmission of traditional texts and academic language (Grossman, 2001; Stotsky, 2010), Morrell (2005) positions Critical English Education as "teaching critical approaches to the consumption and production of language" (p. 312) that challenge, critique, and destabilize the dominant ideologies perpetuated in and through, for example, the list of canonical texts. From this perspective, Critical English Education offers scholars and educators a framework for resisting, challenging, or subverting what Kirkland (2011) refers to as the status quo master narratives supported by canonical texts, including whiteness, masculinity, heterosexuality, certain veins of Protestant Christianity, and even notions of culture, literary merit, and methods of reading.

In this tradition, Critical English Educators seek to critique the ideologies perpetuated in and through the canon. For example, in their article, "Complicating What We Know: Disrupting the Canon" (2012), Cherry-McDaniel and Young argue that these ideologies include normalcy, power, whiteness, and heterosexuality. Borsheim-Black, Macaluso, and Petrone (2014) focus on reading against the ideologies of canonical texts specifically through critical literacy strategies. And, Appleman (2009) has argued, "Our responsibility as literature teachers is to help make the ideologies inherent in those texts visible to our students" (p. 3) through the use of specific literary lenses, like feminism or Marxism. Appleman, too, is deliberate about her use of critical theories with canonical texts when she says, "We could continue to uncritically teach *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* or *To Kill a Mockingbird* because they are classic pieces of literature… That decision privileges the arbitrary literary value of a canonical text over the significance and relevance of a changing student demographic" (p. 9). Whereas Morrell (2004; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008) suggests canonical texts be used as a bridge to non-canonical and non-traditional texts and literacies, Kirkland (2008, 2011) has suggested that English teachers

pedagogically "tailor" canonical texts to fit the ideologies of students so that the dominant ideologies of the text are decentered. While all of these critical efforts deal with the ideological effects of the canon, all of these authors, in addition to advocating for the oft-noted "expand the literary canon" trope like the aforementioned editors, still focus on the ideologies of and in the canon *as a list of books* – essentially asking, what or who does this list of books represent and how might that representation be challenged, undercut, or nuanced? This is a good question, of course, but even in this more "critical" terrain of English Education, the ideology of the literary canon *as a list of books* is still the object of investigation.

While I am an advocate for the inclusion of non-canonical texts in the classroom and critical approaches to literature instruction, I am suspicious of the line of thinking that preserves the canon as, and links it to, a list of books, which is what all of the aforementioned authors do and which has been the pervading perception of the canon. Indeed, this has been the argument of, about, and against the canon for decades – in fact, both the National Council of Teachers of English and its secondary-focused, practitioner-based journal publication, *The English Journal*, were originally established with the purpose to slow, stop, or counteract prescribed reading lists (Applebee, 1974; Stock, 2012) that helped to institute the canon. But it seems that little progress has been made in this regard because in addition to being a familiar argument, the reasoning about changing books or instituting new lists also neglects the argument of English literary critic and theorist John Guillory in his seminal book *Cultural Capital: The Problem of Literary Canon Formation* (1993) that creating a new list (or syllabus, as he calls it) simply reinstates a new canon, a new list, under the same ideology of "canon" – because it is still based upon the perceptions, values, and biases of one social group, ideology, or culture. In other words, all of these respected scholars in the field reiterate a well-established argument about changing or

24

critiquing the canon as a list of books. I want to build on this critique of the canon to further expand how we in English Education might deepen the ways in which we might critique the canon – by considering, for example, how English teachers' treatment of and thinking around canonical books has reinforced (rather than undercut) the canonical titles, how pedagogies associated with canonical texts may be connected to certain types of pedagogies like those described by Applebee (1974) and Brass (2011), or, more broadly, how transmission and New Critical models of pedagogy further reinforce the traditions, norms, expectations, and text titles of the English classroom (Marshall & Smith, 1997; Grossman, 2001). This project attempts to do just that.

Purpose and Questions

There certainly has been discussion in the field on how to teach canonical texts and how to critique the ideologies in and of canonical text and regardless of the fact that so much has been written in English Education about the canon, that writing has, by and large, produced a rather limited notion of what the canon means and entails – mostly, *a list of books* that is, ought, and/or ought not to be read and engaged in the English classroom. I am interested in expanding and shifting that critical focus to consider the links and histories that Applebee (1974) and Brass (2011) contend. Specifically, I am interested in another notion of Guillory's (1983) where, in discussing a certain time in history when professors used their knowledge of and about canonical texts to keep their jobs in the university, he argues, "the rule of the canon has governed our instruction" (p. 187). Though he wrote this statement to advance a different argument, I am curious about the role the canon plays not only as an ideology linked to a list of books but as an ideology (or unquestioned tradition or assumption) wrapped up in the pedagogical uptake of

25

books assigned and taught in secondary classrooms. This is a different line of inquiry than considering how to teach canonical texts because, rather than looking for an answer of pedagogical practice, it seeks to examine the (unacknowledged or unknown) traditions, assumptions, and ideologies that are already intertwined with the pedagogy associated with teaching canonical texts. With this idea in mind, I ask: How do ideologies of the canon play out beyond the text or a list of texts, particularly through pedagogy? How are the ideas inherent in such a list – a canon – embedded in pedagogical encounters? What is the relationship between the idea of canon and instruction? And, even more specifically, considering the history and connection of English Education, literacy, and the canon to religion and Protestant Christianity, I wonder how religious ideologies of "canon" play out beyond the text and through pedagogy.

My goal in asking these questions for this project is to rethink or disrupt the notion of canon as only a list of books, conceiving instead of the concept and its impact in much broader terms, ones that explore the educational project of *canonicity*, a larger concept that both endorses the canon as a list but also does much more to entrench the ideology inherent in such a list through pedagogical encounters. In other words, I hope to demonstrate that *canonicity* is an all-encompassing approach to English education, a noun and a verb, that engenders much more in the sense of pedagogy and the ways in which pedagogy interacts with, builds upon, extends, or subverts what we have, thus far, considered "the canon."

In order to investigate these questions and make this argument, I begin at the beginning – in an analysis and investigation of the word "canon" and its derivations in order to theorize the latent meanings of a term like canonicity.

26

Conceptual Framework

Rethinking "Canon"

The Oxford English Dictionary delineates several definitions for the word "canon," and most of them deal with the religious – and Judeo-Christian – nature and origins of the word. Originally the Greek *kanon* or *kanna* meant "to measure or judge by rule" and signified a reed or straight rod (either of which could have been used to rule or measure). The modern words *cane* and cannon (the gun) developed from this origin as well, but *kanon* has a more complex history as it has derived its meaning from cane reeds or rods. As Scholes (1998) explains,

> The tubular channel characteristic of reeds or canes leads to associations of the word
>
> *canon* with functions that involve forcing liquids or gases through a channel or pipe,
>
> while their regularity and relative rigidity lead toward those meanings that involve
>
> measuring and controlling (ruling – in both senses of that word). And it is likely that the
>
> ready applicability of canes as a weapon of punishment (as in our verb *to cane*, or beat
>
> with a stick) supported those dimensions of the meaning of *kanon* that connote severity
>
> and the imposition of power. (p. 105)

This Greek root of the word "canon" suggests an understanding of the word different from a set or list of something; rather it associates canon with severely imposed power: regular, rigid, and inflexible. At the same time, however, this definition corresponds to the idea of lists as something that is inflexible or unchanging or something, like a source or indicator of power, that involves measuring or ruling.

This Greek *kanon* developed into the ecclesiastical Latin *canon*, meaning "a catalogue of accepted, sacred writings" so that, with the rise of the Roman Catholic Church, ecclesiasts, and the Church more broadly, could distinguish between sacred, accepted texts from all Apocrypha

27

(those non-canonical writings), "so that 'works admitted by the rule of canon' came themselves to be called canonical or, in short, the Canon" (Scholes, 1998, p. 105). So, since roughly the fourth century, the term canon was used to designate those books accepted by Church authorities as having divine authority and, therefore, warranted recognition and inclusion in the Hebrew and New Testament Bibles. It was not until 1768 that the word was first used to describe the works of secular authors, as it used today, despite its religious and sacred denotation (Komara, 2007; Harris, 1991). Nonetheless, the authoritative connotations (of power, measurement, and inflexibility) remained as the word developed into its common definition referring to a set of books or texts recognized and accepted as sacred, genuine, or having some kind of merit or sacredness – literary, religious, or otherwise. In this way, one may consider the books or texts that make up the Biblical canon, the literary canon, or the canon of American poetry, for example.

But its other ecclesiastical Latin definition refers to the collective and official rules, laws, or decrees of the Church ("Canon," 2016). These laws constitute official doctrines of the Christian Church as well as rules for its clergy or priests as laid out by the pope or ecclesiastical councils. Similarly, but in more secular terms, canon has also come to refer to a general rule or principle or a standard for judgment and discrimination. The verb form of the word, *canonize*, means to consecrate or to sanction by the authority of the Church. Those holy men and women who are canonized in or by the church (i.e., the Saint's Canon), those who are put on a deliberate path toward sainthood, are imbued with some sacred authority and recognized for their sanctity. What is important from this etymological background here is that the word *canon* can carry several elements of its Greek, Latin, and contemporary meanings: the severity and imposition of religious power or rule combined with the sacred status of texts, whether religious or otherwise.

As Scholes (1998) so aptly acknowledges, "our current thinking about canonicity cannot afford to ignore the grounding of the modern term in a history explicitly influenced by Christian institutions" (p. 105) and traditions.

And yet they do, as evidenced by contemporary discussions about the literary canon and its debate discussed in the previous pages. I am interested, however, in maintaining the religious connotations of the words *canon* and *canonize* when thinking about the secondary English classroom. Specifically, I am interested in canons as sources of power: as authority and authorizing, as discipline and disciplining, and as sanctity and sanctifying.

Transferring these religious connotations of the word to contemporary contexts is not so far-fetched. In popular community spaces, the word canon is used in a similarly, religious way. For example, according to UrbanDictionary.com, *canon* is used in popular gaming circles to distinguish between fan-produced storylines, through media like fanfiction or fanvideos, and the official gaming storylines ("Canon," 2016a). The fan-produced stories do not necessarily deviate from the official storyline, but may add to or expand it. Similarly, in comic book communities, *canon* is used to refer to the original storylines of popular comic book characters as a way to distinguish how popular "superhero" movies may deviate from the comic book canon (or source material) to appeal to wider audiences or simplify complex narratives by altering the canon of events and narratives. Thus, in these community cases and spaces, *canon* designates something as official or original, something that carries authoritative weight or power, much in the way that scriptural canons "function as sources of truth and objects of belief" (Davies, 1998, p. 3). Even in these popular spaces, canon carries its religious overtones, referring to the official and original (we might imagine the sacred or the Alpha), the author and authority (we might imagine God or some sacred text). Again, I defer to Scholes: "Where there is a canon, there is both power and

sanctity. Above all, however, there is discipline" (1998, p. 108). And it is these con/notions of "canon" – discipline, dogma, authority, religiosity, power, sanctity – that I also see working in framing English teaching and classrooms.

In extending this theorization of canon from previous English Education scholars like Scholes (1998, 2011; and Guillory, 1993, 1983; and Harris, 1991), I argue for the concept of *canonicity* as a discursive frame and illustrate how it works in classroom data. Further, to more closely tie these concepts to secondary English classroom, let me borrow from Davies's (1998) discussion of Israel, borrowed from a different context. His theory, grounded in Biblical scholarship, is that Israel and Judah (as they were described in the Bible) "are a creation (though not necessarily entirely from nothing) of a later society" (p.3). In other words, according to Davies, though Israel and Judah exist in the pages of the Scriptural canon, these places – as historical artifacts – did not necessarily exist as they are described. Rather, the Scriptural canon produced the idea and construct of "ancient Israel" rather than the opposite, in which a group of peoples created and selected its own canon. I borrow from this theory to suggest, likewise although in a different context, that the literary canon, as we know it in English education, did not arise from a committee or a specific list, that they were selected, somehow, as representative of the best works or that they have persisted of their own accord. Rather, I would contend that the idea of the canon produced and constructed what we now consider to be school subject English, that the religious and ideological notions of canon created and produced the markers of what we might call or identify as literary instruction in English classroom. Teachers, in other words, do not teach canonical texts; teachers and students are schooled by the (discursive, ideological, religious-like in a Protestant Christian sense) ways of the canon.

Discourse

This study is grounded in a poststructural context that, as one theme or branch of the postmodern movement, makes visible and problematizes broad trends (or traditions, ideologies, authority, structures, and narratives) that are generally taken to be true, dogmatic, objective, or expected. To the postmodernist, there is a certain sense of "incredulity" toward the dogma of these grand, master, or metanarratives (Lyotard, 1984) because, while they may be perceived to be natural, normal, or objective, they have been constructed over time, developed from power relations, or grounded in historical contexts and politics. Kirkland (2011), for example, implicates both texts and pedagogy traditionally associated with the English classroom as developing or instituting dogma and accepted trends when he argues, "Traditional approaches to ELA instruction have long enforced master narratives, where canonical texts act as toolsets for reifying the status quo" (p. 204). From this perspective, what English teachers *do* (approaches to or pedagogy associated with texts, students, learning, curricula, teaching, etc.) construct or maintain long-held narratives of the English classroom.

The poststructualist attempts to shift away from these patterned structures or narratives in order to explore "new, more fluid ways of thinking about relationships" (Hancock & Garner, 2009, p. 73) through something like Foucault's (1972, 1984) notion of discourse. Discourse, or a discursive system, refers to a "constellation of discursive and material practices that produce and reproduce the status quo" (Kamberelis and Dimitriades, 2005, p. 52) and becomes naturalized over time. By becoming naturalized, discourses construct rules about knowledge and ways of knowing, "construct certain possibilities for thought" (Ball, 1990, p. 17), and are "often regarded as depoliticized speech, appearing to be stripped of ideology, politics, and history" (Segall, 2013, p. 480). In this sense, discourses construct "truths" or dogma about the world or create and

sustain certain versions of reality or narratives over others, and as a form of power, discourses help to order and organize the world.

For Foucault, discourses also "provide the *means* for statements to be assessed as true" (Usher & Edwards, 1994, p. 90, emphasis added); they "systematically form the object of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972, p. 49) and *make* the world rather than mirror it. While discourse is constructed through speech and language-in-use (Johnstone, 2008), "Discourse can never be just linguistic since it organizes a way of thinking into a way of acting in the world" (St. Pierre, 2000, p. 485). Such discourses involve proscribed, "habituated and largely unconscious ways of thinking, talking, feeling, acting, and being" (Kamberelis and Dimitriades, 2005, p. 48). In this sense, discourse is also an embedded social practice.

Discourses also produce individuals-as-subjects in that individual and collective actors "are following scripts or are constrained by discourses that hey have not invented themselves. These discourses (or scripts) limit what they can do, how they can interact with one another, and what identities they acquire and elaborate for themselves" (Hancock & Garner, 2009, p. 92). So, discourses shape individuals' experiences and subjectivities, and for those who may be deeply entrenched in a discourse or certain discursive system, discourse acts "an 'unthought.' It is not itself questioned… it 'speaks' but is yet silent − it is an absent presence, yet a powerful one, since what it is to be a speaker, an author or knower, and with what authority these positions are held, is itself a function of discourse" (Usher & Edwards, 1994, p. 90). The role of the poststructuralist is to illuminate or resist these given, taken-for-granted ways of thinking, speaking, doing, or knowing.

The concept of discourse helps me to mobilize canonicity as something other than a list of books. In this case, positioning canonicity as a discursive system allows me to see how, as I

have said, it may be an approach, both a thing and a verb, a construction that is linked to ways of thinking, feeling, being, and doing.

The Frame

The notion of the interactive frame is a tool borrowed from Goffman (1974), who argues that, quite simply, the frame is the definition of a social situation, which constructs and organizes participants' involvement in and experience of that situation. In other words, the frame "reflect[s] the notion of structures of expectations" (Tannen & Wallat, 1987, p. 206), which is usually influenced by some prior situation, event, or theory. Tannen and Wallet argue, "The interactive notion of frame… refers to a sense of what activity is being engaged in, how speakers mean what they say" (p. 207) in a certain context. Thus, the frame (in any moment of interaction or discourse) organizes individuals' roles and relationships as well as the meaning of their words, actions, experiences, and interactions during or in certain activities; it acts as an "opinion shaper or thought manipulator" (Wine, 2008, p. 1). At the same time, experience is built upon frames, and "all frames rely on layers of other frames of social meaning" (Hancock & Garner, 2009, p. 121), including discourses and the practices of social reality. In this sense, the frame (and in the way I borrow the term) refers or applies to a larger, social situation, such as a classroom, and the sets of expectations for the individuals involved in that frame.

In some circles, the concept of the frame may be equated with a discourse or discursive system. While they may be similar concepts and while I contend that canonicity is a discursive formation (because it is a construction linked to power), I also contend that canonicity operates as a frame in the secondary English classrooms I observed for this project. Frames are different from discourses in that frames "comprise a mutually agreed upon or socially accepted orientation

to life… a common pre-established point of reference" (Hancock and Garner, 2009, p.121). In this sense, they are the basis and backdrop to meaning, interaction, and context; they set the situation and foreclose what discourses may be at play or what can and cannot be said or intended. Further, though there may be several discourses operating at any one time in a classroom, especially considering the varied backgrounds of students and teacher, I will argue and show that there is a complicit ("mutually agreed upon") understanding between teacher and students in these cases about the expectations, organization, meaning, and (dare I say) structures of the English classroom especially around the study of canonical texts. Canonicity, in other words, is an always-already, pre-established, and pre-existing frame of the English classroom, even before the students and teacher enter it – canonicity is always already there, influencing what may or may not be done, felt, said, etc. In this sense, frames may act as a type of hegemonic discourse (like a "capital D" Discourse (Gee, 2012), a grand narrative (Lyotard, 1984), an ideology (Althusser, 1971), or the like) because while frames, like discourse, are connected to the ways in which people think, feel, act, and talk, frames may filter – may allow or disallow – what discourses, assumptions, and common sense notions and actions come into the secondary English classroom during periods of canonical literature instruction.

Curriculum and Pedagogy

In order to consider the relationship between a text and the teaching of a text, I also rely on theories connected to both curriculum and pedagogy. Specifically, Eliot Eisner (1985) argued that schools offer three curricula to students: the explicit, the implicit, and the null. Briefly, Eisner contends that the explicit curriculum consists of everything the teacher intends to teach from reading and writing to specific texts and skills on a syllabus or in a textbook. This

curriculum, in other words, is "advertised" through goals, lesson plans, and "covert intentions" (p. 93). The implicit curriculum, then, represents those intentional and unintentional values or messages imbued in the school or classroom – "what [the school or classroom] teaches because of the kind of place it is" (p. 97). Finally, the null curriculum simply consists of any content or skills "left out" or not taught but that could (or should) have been incorporated into any explicit teaching. In each case, the curriculum represents anything – teachers, the school, classroom, even students or pedagogy – that attempts to convey messages, values, or assumptions.

As such, pedagogy is discursively constructed, and like curricula, it is not neutral; it too is imbued with values and ideologies that "include or exclude certain meanings, produce or prevent, circulate, and legitimate particular ways of thinking, being, and imagining" (Segall, 2004, p. 496). Along the lines of the three curricula of schools, a teacher's pedagogy also emits certain messages or narratives (whether explicit or implicit) in his or her attempt to organize certain (educational) experiences for students. Britzman (1989) refers to the implicit curriculum as "the process of learning... the underlying values, expectations, procedures, social roles, social relations, cultural rules, and classroom ethos that are... naturalized through classroom routine" (p. 149). While the canon has long been the explicit curriculum and target of critique from English education scholars, I will focus more so on the way the canon is taught and how it is positioned to students by teachers. To borrow again from Britzman: "The teacher's relationship to the explicit curriculum shapes his or her responses to the play between the explicit, the implicit, and the null" (1989, p. 149). Thus, the focus is not about explicit knowledge – what is the canon, what happens in *Hamlet*, what are the themes and literary devices at play in the text – but the knowledge and ways of knowing that are produced during the teaching of a canonical text; the students' experience during their study of the text – what is and is not valued, what is

35

the process by which the text is taught or read, what is the classroom ethos during moments of classroom study around a text, what has become natural classroom routine.

Considering Canon, Curriculum, and Discourse

In drawing upon these conceptual frames for this study, I argue for canonicity as a theory that works as a discursive and implicit frame in English classrooms, where pedagogical practices and encounters as well as classroom space construct and are constructed by the notions of canon, canonicity, and religiosity described herein. In thinking about canonicity in this way – as an approach rather than simply a list of books – I highlight how the instruction of canonical literature can reflect a set of sacred beliefs, rituals, and practices and reify notions of authority, discipline, hierarchy, and tradition that can undermine critical engagement with texts due to the canonical frame of the English classroom. In the data chapters that follow, I make the following points as I show what canonicity is and how it works. Chapter 3 is about sacred beliefs and how those beliefs are tied to specific actions and "doings" of the English classroom. I will argue that teachers treat certain texts as sacred and advance an implicit hierarchy, authority, and sanctity around these texts through their pedagogical treatment of them. Chapter 4 is about ritual. I will focus on the pedagogy and classroom of one teacher in particular and liken the behaviors and practices of her English classroom to a broad sense of religious ritual. Finally, Chapter 5 is about sacred authority and the pedagogical practices associated with the teaching of canonical texts. I expand upon the first two data chapters to illustrate from where and how teachers draw their authority in teaching these texts and in teaching them in certain ways because authority is a necessary component of discipline, discipleship, and canon.

Thus, in these chapters, I will illustrate through classroom data how canonicity works on the ground and hails teachers into long-standing traditions and expectations of "doing English" that students are "discipled" or "disciplined" into joining. In this sense, my project is not about how lists of books create or define a canon or even about the teaching of the canon itself as a list of books. Rather, it is about how the very idea of canonicity associated with canonical texts implicitly constructs and produces the expectations, experiences, and perceptions of pedagogy in the secondary English classroom.

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

> The critical tradition "invites researchers to explore the ways in which discourses are
> implicated in relations of power and how power and knowledge serve as
> dialectically reinitiating practices that regulate what is considered reasonable and true."
> (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002, p. 106)

Critical Qualitative Research and Cultural Studies

Critical qualitative research (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005) is grounded in theories of poststructuralism, specifically the notion of discourse, which is the primary conceptual framework of this study. It also challenges long-held and objectivist notions of knowledge and power, acknowledging that nothing is neutral; everything – including knowledge, literacy, and even pedagogy – is political and bound in the investments of people, culture, institutions, and social situations. The task of critical researchers is to make known the discourses or discursive systems that pervade these investments, by becoming "detectives of new theoretical insights, perpetually searching for new and interconnected ways of understanding power and oppression and the ways they shape everyday life and human experience" (Kincheloe, 2008, p. 49). The primary purpose of this study is to illustrate and extend a theoretical lens of canonicity that reveals how power shapes experiences in the English classroom. Another purpose is to offer this theory of canonicity for future literacy and literary research.

One commitment of critical qualitative research is to value the local and contextual as opposed to broad, deterministic structures that espouse one version of reality. In this sense, rather than objectively describing "meaning" *about* a certain context or situation, critical researchers describe meaning *onto* events, interactions, or situations (Ropers-Huliman, 1998), illuminating the effects of discourse and discursive systems or of what may be considered the implicit or the invisible in any situation. While my project does ascribe meaning and illuminate

the implicit, I admit that it also seems to propose a structure that explains how canonicity operates in the secondary English classroom; indeed, in an attempt to resist the structure that comes with "a list," I do argue that canonicity is a structure pervading these classrooms. But discourses *do* represent the structures and relations of the world through thoughts, feelings, beliefs, practices, etc. (Fairclough, 2003). Further, I borrow from a theorist like Goffman (1974, 1981) the idea of a structural-like *metaphor* (like his notions of "the frame" and "the theatre") to describe what is possible, what can happen, or what is one *story* in thinking about certain social situations, which in my case, refers to the religiosity and canonicity in the English classroom. I do not mean to imply that canonicity is THE interpretation[1]. Rather, it is my interpretation and a schematic or heuristic that might help me (or others) to more systematically investigate the English classroom and further deconstruct its traditions and assumptions.

This project also draws from cultural studies, which has a tradition of "ascertain[ing] how certain meanings under particular historical conditions become more legitimate as representations of reality and take on the force of common sense assumptions shaping a broader set of discourses and social conjurations at work in the dominant social order" (Giroux, 2010, p. 365). In this sense, meanings (via discourses or storylines) can be traced to historical or theoretical antecedents that can perhaps explain how certain "common sense assumptions" came to be or originated. But cultural studies also posits that there are "myriad expressions of cultural production [that] should be analyzed" (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002, p. 111), including politics, religious activities, popular culture, and "the production and nature of the rules of inclusivity and

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[1] A quick point of clarification here: I do not contend that Goffman is a structuralist. Instead, I rely on the notion of a seemingly structuralist metaphor to show that canonicity is "there" in the classrooms I observed. Despite Goffman's tendency to use structural metaphors (i.e., the frame, the actor and the performance), he has been linked to postmodern or poststructural conversations (i.e., Battershill, 1990) like those in this project.

exclusivity… in particular, the way these rules shape and are shaped by relations of power"
(Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002, p. 112). In other words, because power works through any
manifestation of culture and the production of culture, whether it be in or through a movie, a
classroom, or a smart phone, any action or tradition organizes ways of knowing.

From a methodological perspective, then, a cultural studies framework to research
methods helps me to consider how the pedagogical is political, how pedagogy positions teachers
and students and is, by its very nature, value-laden (Segall, 2004; Giroux, 2010). Stuart Hall
(1990, 1992), a founding father of cultural studies, positioned "pedagogy central to the theory
and practice of cultural politics… for understanding pedagogy as a mode of cultural criticism is
essential for questioning the conditions under which knowledge is produced and subject
positions are put into place, negotiated, taken up, or refused" (Giroux, 2010, p. 342). The
pedagogical, in other words, indicates what knowledge is of most worth and how subjects may
come to know and represent something. Thus, as my data chapters will illustrate, I have a broad
notion of what constitutes pedagogy in the classroom (i.e., anything is pedagogical, including
classroom space, clothing, and handouts), and I consider how that pedagogy positions the
teachers and students involved in this study.

A cultural studies disposition combined with critical qualitative research leads to what
Moje and Lewis (2007) refer to as *critical cultural discourse analysis*, which posits, "Discourses
are *ideas* as well as ways of talking… Discourses, in their linguistic aspect, are conventionalized
sets of choices for discourse, or talk" (Johnstone, 2008, p. 3). This approach helps me to read
pedagogy as a site of meaning and helps me to see how an idea like canonicity may be embedded
in practice or can be taken up as a disposition rather than a mere list of books.

Methods

Before I begin describing the methods I used to investigate my questions, I want to admit that I know I run the risk of using and relying on canonical methods, methodologies, theories, and theorists of social science research to critique the way in which canonicity works in an English classroom. Indeed, I did; I wholeheartedly confess that my methods were entirely canonical, using standard research practices like interviews, observations, and even transcription and data analysis techniques. This irony, perhaps a contradiction in the context of my project, is not lost on me. I continue to think about – and find myself ever perplexed by – what is canon and how I might see, challenge, and/or critique it across all that I do, including my own teaching, not just my research methods.

That said, I organize this project as thematic case studies (Yin, 2003), using the intrinsic case study (Dyson & Genishi, 2005) model as its design, allowing me to deeply examine how large theoretical constructs regulate and are regulated by the teachers' pedagogies of this project. Creswell (1998) clearly defines case study as an exploration of "a bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving *multiple sources of information* (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports)" (p. 73). The result of such research is a phenomenon (Dyson & Genishi, 2005) or "a case *description*" (Creswell, 1998). The thematic and intrinsic approach to case study allows me to focus on the pedagogy as the unit of analysis, the localized events, context, and discursive practices of each teacher-participant in my study. Thus, while I prominently feature the pedagogy of one teacher-participant in each of the data chapters in this project, a thematic rendering of the pedagogies of *all three* of my participants constitute the data chapters represented herein.

Participants

Over a period of several months, I observed as many as 8 teachers for potential inclusion in this project. I never intended to include all of them in the formal analysis stages of this project, but I wanted to be able to choose whom I would include for an in-depth study. I observed these teachers for varied amounts of time, but 3 stood out to me from early on, and I decided, as time went on, that they would be the ones included in this project. These three teachers are Joe, Lisa, and Rachel – three teachers who are quite representative of the field of teachers as white, middle-class, women and men. I chose them for a variety of reasons but mainly because they provided me full access to their room and resources, they were very good teachers in my estimation, they focused on the teaching of literature as their primary means of instruction, and they expressed an interest in critical literacy or critical approaches to the teaching of literature, a personal commitment of mine. Of course, these teachers had different ideas as to what a "critical approach" meant and how it played out in each of their classrooms, but that did not play a key role in my analysis of the data. Rather, I simply found it an interesting layer to my observations overall. Again, more than anything, I found myself particularly engaged in these three teachers' classrooms – from a researcher, teacher educator, and former teacher point of view. From my perspective and based upon my observations, they were just good teachers, and the students, it seemed, enjoyed coming to class; it did not seem like mere drudgery.

Rachel

A mutual friend put me in contact with Rachel. The friend knew of my research interests and knew Rachel as an excellent teacher who had a strong background in literature and taught an

AP Literature class of "the classics." Rachel and I connected early on, as we shared similar teaching experiences and family backgrounds. She too had young children, and we invited parenting tips and stories.

Rachel, a white, middle-class woman, teaches in a largely rural school about 25 minutes from her home, and she was excited when she landed this job because she was initially hired to be the drama teacher and director, and having taken drama courses in college and even acted in school productions, Rachel referred to drama as her "first love" (Interview 1). Even though she no longer teaches drama or directs school plays, she still teaches in the designated drama classroom and tries to attend the school drama productions. After several years as the drama director, she found the position to be a heavy commitment, especially once she starting having young children at home. Once her principal asked her to take over AP English literature rather than drama, she jumped at the opportunity. She was nervous to take over AP English at first, but she felt comfortable knowing she was inheriting a list of texts from the previous teacher, rather than creating something completely from scratch. Her AP class, 4 years after taking over, "is still essentially what the previous teacher created" (Interview 1). The only change she has made to the curriculum was to swap out *Heart of Darkness* for *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, which she did after her first year of teaching the AP class. She said, "I scrapped *Heart of Darkness* because it was very difficult to get the kids to read it and get through it. It's dense. We were reading *Huck Finn* in my sophomore class and were having really great conversations about race, so I decided to replace it" (Interview 1). Besides these texts, she also teaches *The Inferno*, *Hamlet*, *Beowulf*, *The Odyssey*, *Siddhartha*, and *To The Lighthouse*, noting that "Virgina Woolfe is our only female" (Interview 1).

Rachel has a Masters Degree in Education, and has been teaching for 8 years. When I observed her, she was beginning her fourth year teaching AP English, and she mentioned that she hopes to stay at this school as long as possible because she loves the students and the classes she teaches. She felt very drawn to her rural students because she felt that her class gave them an opportunity to talk, think, and feel valued, ideas she appreciated as a student herself. She said, "A great deal of who I am I owe to teachers because I think teachers essentially made me feel like there was something important and special about me and the way I thought about things and that what I was thinking matters" (Interview 1). In thinking about her own role as a teacher, she added,

> I decided I wanted to be a teacher because I felt like so many kids just needed an adult
> that cared about them and saw that they had value. I feel like English teaching is a way
> to make kids feel valued… if you get a right kid hooked up with the right book, the right
> topic, the right conversation, you could really see things start to change in them and to
> inspire them. (Interview 1)

These personal experiences as well as her desire to care for, change, and inspire her students really made me interested to see how Rachel positioned the texts she taught, how she taught them, and how her students responded to them. Indeed, I saw Rachel foster very personal relationships with her students, as she invited them on a daily basis to share personal stories or "good things" that were happening in their lives. Class time, as a result, usually began on a fun and upbeat note, and I was interested to see how or if she channeled that energy toward the texts she taught.

Because Rachel was interested in pursuing her education once her husband finished his nursing program and established himself in his field, she regularly asked me about my

44

experiences in graduate school or for my opinions about how to teach something. She was most concerned with her "being better at questioning" (Interview 1), as that was how she understood critical literacy and wanted her students to be able to ask good questions and have good questions asked to them. She said, "It is so easy to be exposed to messages that you can take at face value, especially with social media… I want my students to question and understand things beyond what they may just seem to be" (interview 1). In thinking about the end goals of her class, she said, "My ultimate goal is that my students question everything in their life, not just literature, even their own writing and their own actions…" (Interview 1).

Lisa

I met Lisa when I was assigned to her school as a field instructor for the teacher interns I had to oversee. One of those teacher interns taught in the room next to her, and he always spoke highly of Lisa, saying that she served as another resource besides his mentor teacher. Lisa and I had brief, casual conversations every now and then in the hallway that year, and we connected quickly over the similar books we taught in our teaching careers. In addition to teaching American literature classes, Lisa also taught a film class (something I had always been interested in), so I enjoyed hearing about the films she taught. Sometimes, if I came by early, Lisa would let me into her classroom to watch the film with her class.

My initial impressions of Lisa were quite strong, but I never maintained any sustained contact with her after that year. Three years later, however, after asking my methods students for recommendations of good teachers worth observing in their schools, one of my students came up to me after class to tell me about her positive experiences with Lisa. As it turned out, my student mentioned that Lisa commented to her one day that she knew me, and thought well of me,

because some of my methods students had been her assigned classroom teacher interns in the time since. On that note, I reached out to Lisa, we met soon after and shared our mutual regard for one another, and I made plans to visit her classroom on a somewhat regular basis. She was thrilled to allow me into her classroom and gave me open access; she said I could visit any class, drop in unexpected, record sessions, and take copies of handouts and materials. She was extraordinarily generous, and she had even told her own students about me before I came in, so they were prepared for my frequent visits.

Lisa, a white, middle-class woman, taught in a suburban school system, and her classes had a diverse mix of students, including Native American, Asian American, and African American students, but about two-thirds of the classes I observed were White. Lisa, as I will explain, taught an honors class, so she moved quickly through texts. Sometimes it was hard for me to be present every day for one of her units because sometimes they only lasted a couple of days, but the benefit was that I was able to see her approach to a number of texts. These included texts like *The Crucible*, *Catcher in the Rye*, *The Joy Luck Club*, *Maus I and II*, *Of Mice and Men*, *The Scarlet Letter*, and the Stephen King novella *The Body*. She also taught shorter works from other American authors like Poe, Emerson, and Thoreau. When I asked her why she taught these authors, she replied, "respect, tradition, but also simply because we enjoy them" (interview 1). That said, however, Lisa felt that she had a lot of freedom to teach whatever she wanted in her honors class, a luxury she did not necessarily have in her regular American literature class. "I'm trusted by my department and administration as a professional who can make my own decisions about altering my curriculum," she said (Interview 1).

In light of this freedom, she mentioned that she frequently tried to change her literature circle book options in her regular American literature class, but kept things somewhat stable in

her honors class. Instead of offering the honors class a literature circle unit, for example, she required them to read *Joy Luck Club*. When I asked her why her honors students were not doing literature circles, she said, "Well, most of my honors kids have probably read some of these or would pick them up on their own. They're readers" (Interview 2). When I asked her about why she required *Joy Luck Club* specifically over another option (like the contemporary texts she offered in the regular literature circles), she said,

> It's canonical! That's why I want my honors kids to read it. And I want to have some diversity, not to sound cheesy about it. We have so many dead white guys we read, and it's written by a female, a Chinese-American author who has written some fabulous books. Typically, I have a handful of Asian students who can really relate to it, and I enjoy it… and it's challenging. It jumps around with all these women because all of the stories start running together. Even with the honors kids, I give them this graphic organizer just so they can keep track of who's who. But we have some really good discussions on this novel. (Interview 2)

These comments suggested to me that Lisa thought deeply about her curricula and considered a number of factors, canonicity being one of them, when choosing texts for classroom study.

Importantly, in her 9th year of teaching, Lisa mentioned that she felt like she was just now getting a handle on her courses and on teaching as a whole, knowing what she wanted to do with the texts she taught and where she wanted her students to be at the end of the year. She's enjoying teaching more now, she said, and feels the most confident she ever has. Further, she is now "open to learning new interpretations from students and remaining open to a variety of opinions about the texts I teach" (Interview 1). As part of this confidence, Lisa felt like she was better able to situate texts now in their chronological and historical context. This situating, she

believed, provided a critical context for her students, where they could base their opinions and analyses of the texts they studied on the specific context of the time in which the text was placed. Thus, for example, she taught about the Holocaust and the Great Depression before they began reading *Maus* and *Of Mice and Men*, respectively. She said specifically in relation to this approach and to the latter text,

> The students don't seem to have that historical knowledge base, so how are they supposed to feel for Lennie and George without knowing how bad it really was during that time, you know, people eating grass and weeds in Kentucky just to survive. I can't possibly teach all of it, but I want to fill in the blanks before we dive in to try to have empathy for these characters without any background knowledge. (Interview 2)

So for Lisa, using this context to have empathy for characters and to understand why characters did what they did were key parts of her goals for classroom study.

Joe

I was thrilled when one of my own preservice teachers that I had taught in my methods courses was offered a job in the area at a local school. Having known her to be a strong teacher at her placement sites as well as someone passionately committed to teaching canonical texts, I kept in touch with her, hoping that she may agree to be a participant in my study. When I finally reached out to her, she actually referred me to Joe, an established teacher at the school who was going to be her grade-level cooperating teacher. When she introduced us, Joe immediately welcomed me wholeheartedly into his classroom, saying that I had his full consent to do whatever I wanted. He said he appreciated having other people in his classroom because "it keeps me on my game" (fieldnotes). He was particularly excited about having me in his room

because he was used to only having preservice teachers observe him in his classroom; I was the first graduate student who wanted to observe him as a participant in a study. Because of this, I did feel at times like Joe was perhaps performing for me or, at the very least, justifying his pedagogy to me, especially when he felt like he was doing something (a pedagogical practice or activity) that was counter to current trends or research. I represented to him, in other words, someone from "the Academy" (and he said this on at least one occasion), whereas Rachel and Lisa saw me – perhaps because of our friendly introductions – as a colleague or friend or someone of that nature.

Two things about Joe, a white, middle-class man, stood out to me from our first interactions. First, he seemed very tech-savvy. He used online quizzes and discussion boards, an interactive whiteboard, and had scan codes posted around the room where students could use their smartphone to scan the code and get more information on a topic or assignment. Second, he seemed very "up to speed" on current educational conversations, and he referenced his Twitter account and the handles and hashtags he followed that kept him abreast of these conversations and trends. For example, one day after observing his AP English class where he had shown a documentary, he told me he felt pressure to accomplish more during classtime, rather than assigning homework because, in his words, "homework has recently fallen out of favor with the academy" (fieldnotes). I knew what he was talking about only because earlier that week I had read a recently posted article on an education website that discussed the adverse effects of assigning too much homework. So, I was interested to see how these two qualities played out in his classroom on a day-to-day basis.

Another aspect about Joe that was interesting to me was his concern with his classroom layout. When I was first introduced to Joe, he gave me a "tour" of his room, even though it

looked like a standard room and even was smaller compared to others I had seen. But, Joe added features that made it, in his words, feel less like a classroom and more like a coffee shop or lounge. Even though he had traditional student desks arranged in rows (what I would consider a typical classroom), he had 5 lamps placed around the room that provided the light for the room; he never used the overhead, halogen lights, contributing to the "ambience" of the room. He also had several plants scattered about, and he had recently (just before I started observing him) and deliberately removed his teacher desk from the classroom and only used a bookcase for his personal items and materials. He felt the desk took up too much room and distracted from the idea that the room belonged to the students just as much to him. The back corner had a small coffee table with some collapsible bungee cord chairs (they were a big hit!), and a front corner had a stack of large, orange cushions. During small group time, the students were encouraged to use these corners of the room. About halfway through my observations of Joe, he also brought in a coffee maker and said he would start making a pot of coffee on a regular basis, as long as the students brought in their own cups and mugs. As I already mentioned, despite the typical set-up of desks, these elements were meant to encourage a casual atmosphere to the classroom, and I interpreted Joe's consciousness about his room to be his deliberate, critical attempt at breaking long held expectations of the average classroom.

In addition to teaching AP English literature, Joe teaches a section of regular senior English. He had been teaching for 11 years at his current school, and he spent 5 years at a school before he moved to his current one, where he was originally hired as a math teacher (his minor), but moved over into English when a teacher retired. Though he started out teaching freshman English and AP, he now only teaches AP and senior English. On this teaching seniors and AP classes, he said,

I seem to get that everywhere I go. I think they always put me as close to college as possible… one of my students said today, 'We were talking about you at lunch. We don't know why you don't go and teach college!' I don't know. I push the envelope too much in that regard. I do have trouble bringing things down to people's level, which is a bad thing. (Interview 1)

One reason, he thinks, for this reputation as such is because he teaches difficult texts like *Oedipus Rex*, *Antigone*, *Hamlet*, *The Stranger*, several Ibsen plays, and *Death of a Salesman*. He said, "I like the different theories of tragedies, so I teach tragedies and tragic theory from Aristotle, Hegel, and Nietzsche. I also like existentialist, absurdist ideas. I really enjoy that philosophy" (Interview 1). Even though he likes all of the texts that he teaches, most of these texts were in place, according to Joe, at least two teachers before him who taught AP English at the school. When I asked him why he taught these texts, even though he could choose other ones, he said, "Well, I think those texts are in the top 50 books mentioned in the AP exam. I think that's the main reason" (Interview 1).

Beyond his degrees in English and Math, Joe also has a Masters in Curriculum and Instruction and a Masters in K-12 administration.

Interviews and Observations

I relied on methods of observation, interview, and archival data to explore teachers' approaches and orientations towards their pedagogy and curriculum. This involved, minimally, observations of at least one entire unit of instruction around one canonical text and at least two audio-recorded interviews with the teacher of about 45-60 minutes before and after that unit. With Rachel and Lisa, I conducted a third interview somewhere in the middle of the unit, and I

also had regular, informal interviews with all of the teachers during the unit, either before or after class or school, if I had questions or comments. All of these interviews, to accommodate the teachers' schedules, took place in their classrooms. Though I asked all of the teachers mostly the same questions in that first interview, I would still characterize it as semi-structured (Fontana & Frey, 2005) in nature, because I asked both standardized and spontaneous questions that helped to clarify the teachers' positioning and beliefs. Some questions from this initial interview, in addition to those that helped me to learn about them, their contexts, and their experiences, included:

What are your goals for literary study and how do the/some texts you teach meet those goals?

What is your understanding of the literary canon?

What is your understanding of how the canon came to exist?

What is it about these canonical texts that make them such a staple of high school classrooms?

So, they all knew about my interests in the canon, in teaching the canon, and in critical literacy, but they did not know about my emergent interest in, and subsequent focus on, the religious dimensions of canonicity that I wanted to explore. This is quite simply because I was not sure, to a certain extent, how or if religious dimensions of teaching, canon, or canonicity might emerge in my observations. Thus, I did not ask any questions pertaining to religion.

After an initial interview, I observed teachers during an entire unit of literary study. During observations, I audio-recorded all classroom interactions, and I took extensive field notes to help me analyze the data. These notes focused on the pedagogical moves the teachers made during each class period as well as the ways in which they framed their lessons, study, reading,

and/or analysis of texts. Because I was interested in the implicit storylines (McVee, 2011) told through my participants' the pedagogies, I essentially asked myself before the lesson began and repeatedly throughout the lesson: What story does this pedagogy tell? How do these storylines construct or contribute to a canonical discourse?

As the teacher taught, I tried to write down what "story" was being told at any moment during the class period. Closely aligned with the concept of discourse, storylines work at the micro level of conversation or interaction (in this study, the classroom) in order to position oneself and others to achieve some social objective or to define or explain some object or situation. The nature of these "objects" may vary, and they need not be discrete things; they can be concepts, themes, or behaviors, and, importantly, the storylines about these objects, and the positions they incur, create larger social meanings (Davies & Harré, 2001). So, storylines are both made available from and contribute to larger discourses, such as religiosity. Because I knew I was interested in (but not limited to) the religious dimensions of canon and canonicity, I tried to think about these "stories" in religious terms. By this I do not mean actual or explicit religious elements, but aspects and characteristics that parallel or resemble religion and religious systems: practices, rituals, and beliefs as well as ways of knowing, thinking, being, and feeling connected to religion or being religious. For example, I thought about pedagogy in the context of a religious ceremony or service, the teachers' use of language, the positioning of the students in and around the classroom, etc. I will explain these religious aspects in more detail below, as I developed a more nuanced and deliberate delineation of "religiosity" as a system of codes that arose from and helped me to analyze my data. My observations focused mainly on what was going on in and around the classroom – the teacher's pedagogy, classroom discourse, interactions, space and arrangement – to consider the messages, curricula, or "story" embedded

in these aspects of the classroom beyond the text being studied, the explicit curriculum. Finally, I also collected any handouts (worksheets, assignments, quizzes, etc.) or instructional materials (powerpoints, worksheets, etc.) the teachers used over the course of the unit.

Data Analysis

My analysis of data persisted over time and through several iterations. First, while I was observing teachers, I wrote weekly analytic memos (Charmaz, 2000) to myself, noting what happened on any given day, the relationships among the teacher, the text, and the students, and any thought on or around my broad idea of canonicity. Once I had completed my observations, I began the process of transcription. While I conducted a general transcription of all interviews, I do rely on the conventions of narrative discourse analysis (Gee, 1991) to see initial themes and patterns across classroom discourse and interactions. The data re/presented in this project, however, are presented more generally to emphasize salient pieces for analysis.

With general themes in mind, I conducted several rounds of open coding (Dyson & Genishi, 2007) to help me further theorize canonicity and to identify important ideas that ran across the different data sources, but specifically for what Dyson and Genishi (2005) refer to "theoretically rich events" (p. 88). After this step of open coding, I generated major categories around larger discourses of religion (below), informed by Beach's (1997) conceptions of a discourse of spirituality. This type of discourse, Beach says, is based on a belief of religious forces, tends to be inflexible in views, sets up simple binaries such as "good versus evil," and tends to invoke narratives of sin, salvation, healing, and the like. In addition to these general concepts, I drew concepts from my reading of scholarship around religious and literary canons (Maddix & Thompson, 2012; Davies, 1998; Abraham, 1998; Brenneman, 1997; von Hallberg,

1984; Bloom, 1995; Scholes, 1998; Applebee, 1974) as well as the concepts connected to the historical and social foundations of schooling discussed earlier, all of which are reflected in the categories below (which, of course, are culturally-situated and likewise raced, gendered, religioned, classed etc.). Importantly, I focused broadly on certain varieties of Protestant Christianity here because, like Beach (1997), I was interested in and concerned about general, religious-like, and the historically Protestant Christian experiences and principles underpinning US common schools, rather than on specific sectarian religious doctrines that fall beyond the scope of this study. I wanted to maintain the focus of this project on the English classroom and on English pedagogy around canonical literature instruction rather than on the nuances of specific Christian doctrines or traditions. Maintaining a broad (nonsectarian) sense of Protestant Christianity helped me to keep that focus.

Nonetheless, these data categories included, first, "the idea of sacred texts." Much like the Bible or any other sacred scripture, certain texts in the English classroom carry a more privileged (or sacred) status over others (i.e., *Hamlet*). While this "ranking" may be arbitrary from teacher to teacher, the idea is that certain texts, by their very own accord or "word," are charged with authority, power, or knowledge. Teachers and students, in some ways, show deference or respect to these texts and further grant their sacred status through the "worship" of these texts. As an extension of this first code, the next code was, "Good, disciplined conduct or behavior to read/understand those texts." In many religious traditions, there are expectations of decorum, respect, deference, and fortitude when reading any sacred text. Likewise, teachers have certain expectations of themselves and of their students when reading or studying canonical texts in the English classroom. This reading is not for enjoyment purposes but rather to instill certain disciplined habits (which are usually determined by what the teacher claims to do or

knows to be true) or perceived good readers. Texts deemed less worthy for classroom study (like young adult or contemporary texts) are akin to apocryphal texts – they are generally recognized but exist on the boundaries of English classrooms (outside or choice readings) because they are not considered "the word." The next code about texts was, "Pursuit of sacred truths in those texts – the need to understand them." Canonical texts, much like the Bible for some Protestant Christians, have literal, fixed, or inherent truths, interpretations, messages, or meanings that need to be "understood" by students. Understanding these truths usually requires effort (point "b" above), because the students are not yet prepared or worthy to understand them. Ultimately, however, the pursuit of these truths leads their betterment (however defined).

The next two codes centered on teachers. The first was "Teachers charged with sacred knowledge, authority that derives from the text." Teaching canonical texts invests teachers with a certain omniscient authority, power, or knowledge as well. This is not their own authority, but an authority handed down or passed on through the text. Thus, the text may be morally, ethically, or spiritually charged. The second was, "Teachers as clergy or pastors who act as arbiter/mediator between students and sacred texts (helping them understand truths)." Invested with authority (point "d" above), teachers acknowledge that students may not be prepared or worthy to understand canonical texts or the truths or messages in them; thus, they shepherd students along in "understanding" the text. They see this as part of their duty, much like a preacher may view his congregation – they interpret and explain the "word" to help their congregation interpret and understand their messages.

The final codes examined how the texts were used. The first one was, "The use of texts to awaken and in/form youth's hearts and minds – as a means to a certain end." Akin to Jesus and his use of parables, canonical texts are indicative of the stories/metaphors/imagination that

56

are meant to help students empathize with others, to see something they hadn't before, or to bring them to some higher salvation or truth. In this way, successful readings or understanding of texts can lead to success/redemption/salvation and therefore better the character of the students. The final code was, "Passive reception/acceptance of knowledge, truth, grace." Students and teachers receive the text or the "word" and do little to challenge that text or read against its truths, much like one may do with sacred scripture. The texts and textual practices used in classroom study usually result from sacred tradition – they've been passed down over time – or influenced by what's been done before (whether a previous teacher or curriculum/syllabus) or some presumed cultural/spiritual understanding.

Once I had decided upon these larger categories, I re-read all of my data, coding and classifying them for this this broader lens of religious discourse. This stage helped me to illuminate the notion of canonicity in my data. Having then categorized data in this way, I narrowed the data even more to focus on the most salient pieces that best captured these religious constructs. These data were then re-categorized into the "chapter themes" represented in this project. Finally, once the chapter themes were set, I conducted a Foucauldian (1972) version of critical discourse analysis to explore the effects of the religious discourse as well as to consider how, of anything that could be expressed or done at any given moment, "one particular statement appeared rather than another" (Foucault, 1974, p 27). Also, at this stage of analysis, considering storylines helped me to balance the *micro-interactions* (activities, discussions, pedagogical practices, etc.) at the classroom level with the *macro-discourses* I wanted to analyze. As I did during my observations, I analyzed my data for the micro-storylines that made up or were constructed in the data. Then, I considered how they are constructed and how they positioned and were positioned by the teacher participants. This analysis helped me to see (the micro-

macro) recursivity in my data: how storylines built towards larger, religious discourses and how the religious discourses shaped moment-to-moment storylines, interactions, and comments.

Of course, throughout this entire analysis process, I recognized my own role in the construction of the data and themes, (Erickson, 2004), rooted in my own "theoretical commitments and professional experiences" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 81). My story, as depicted in the prologue, attempts to reveal some of my own values and commitments and my role in the construction of the data. Specifically, I could not separate from my analysis my own Catholic identity and my past as a Catholic school students and teacher. In fact, having only known the Catholic school classroom before conducting research in public schools, I think I was poised, based upon my identity and background, to see how religiosity was ever-present or "an absent presence in" these secular classrooms. Thirty years as a practicing Catholic allowed me to see what I could not in my own context as a Catholic secondary school teacher: that a religiosity permeates the English classroom and is "always at the back of" pedagogy.

On Methodological Baggage

On this note, there is one participant who is not mentioned at all in this study, but who is, at the same time, all over this study: Robert. I have written extensively about Robert before, as his classroom served as my first research site for a previous study and, thus, as my first foray into my role as academic researcher and scholar. My experiences with Robert were the impetus for this very study, even though this study has taken on a different shape and direction than what I had anticipated. In short, what I learned about my experiences with Robert was that I was complicit, whether conscious or not, in the friendly camaraderie that developed between Robert and me as I came to his classroom on a daily basis. There was nothing necessarily overt that

58

confirmed this relationship (we did not see or talk to each other outside of the classroom, for example, and we did not know each other before I started visiting him), rather we were both white males who taught similar courses and students, we had similar interests, we both had young children at home, and we both enjoyed pop culture. As a result, I think both he and I acted a certain way in each other's presence that influenced, I think, how he taught when I observed him and, thus, the "outcomes" of my initial study. I have no doubt, in other words, that our interactions would have been completely different had I been, for example, a woman, an African-American man, or even an older man who had been observing his classroom. Specifically, I have come to realize, in reflecting on my time with Robert, that I was hailed as a gendered subject in his presence as I let him brag or assert (what I interpreted as) his "alpha male" status during interviews and whatnot. Being a younger, more novice educator but also a doctoral student, I think Robert saw my interest in him as an opportunity both to groom me and to – in a certain way – show off his knowledge about his background, the discipline, and even texts he taught. During our conversations, he also confidently and ardently staked his claims about the recent "attacks" to the curriculum from the Common Core and those who he felt were not qualified to make decisions about his own teaching. Knowing that I was an instructor of English methods courses, he also unapologetically referred to college education classes as "fluff". Instead of defending education courses or asserting my own perspectives on or experiences with the discipline, I deferred, mainly to maintain and encourage our solidarity and, however shallow, to gather rich data for my own research purposes.

I had gone back to Robert's classroom several times, hoping that he would also play a prominent role in this project, but every time I went back, I could not separate Robert from the gendered lens with which I had come to see of and in him, his interactions, and his pedagogy.

Ultimately, I decided to stop visiting Robert's classroom because it was counterproductive to my new interests – I could not see past the gendered ways in which he conducted class.

So what does Robert have to do with this current study? Two things. For one, I was much more guarded and standoffish with my participants. I was worried that knowing too much about me (as a person) and my interests (as a researcher) might influence their work. And, I think I was more aware of my presence in their classrooms as a white male and a white male "from the Academy" (as Joe put it). There were times I was worried that Rachel, for example, was trying to prove herself and play to my interests or that Joe was performing for me, which obviously affected the "data" I was "collecting." And, I do wonder if Rachel, Joe, and Lisa, knowing of my general interest in the canon, felt as though they could *not* be overly critical of the canon because they had a visitor in the back of the classroom (me) who represented everything the canon stands for: whiteness, heterosexuality, masculinity. Second, and connected to this note, while I cannot be sure of the extent to which my gender, race, age, and sexuality played a role in influencing what Lisa, Rachel, and Joe did on a day-to-day basis, I certainly know and can see how my *religious* upbringing played a role in the construction and analysis of my data. Scheurich (1995) has helped me to think about the "multiple intentions and desires" (p. 240) and the "conscious and unconscious baggage" (p. 249) I bring to any interaction or observation and, most important, to my analysis of data. I could not separate, for example, what I have come to know about Christianity, religion, and Catholicism as a practicing Catholic from my stance as a researcher. I can see what I want to see, in other words, despite any methodological or analytic rigor I may bring to the table, and my life as a student and teacher of and in Catholic schools helped me to read and re-read my data. At the same time, as a practicing and life-long Catholic, I do acknowledge some working "blindness" towards the Protestant

Christian doctrines and roots that undergird this project. Thus, I will say what I have said before based upon my experiences with Robert: I am convinced that the data re-presented in this study is the result of a "creative interaction" (Scheurich, 1995, p. 240) between my participants and me. Certainly, this data has been constructed between us, and my own positionality – my mere presence in someone else's classroom – makes me *the* participant of this study, which is why I frame this project around my story.

"Oh absolutely! It's canonical, and that's why I want my honors kids to read it!"
(Lisa, Interview 2)

"New Criticism functioned to construct for literature a safe place outside the pressures of the marketplace and the strict demands of scientific study… a safe haven for professors, who had become clergy without a dogma, teaching sacred texts without a God."
(Scholes, 1998, p. 27)

"Christian faith actually began with stories… story was of such central importance to the mission and worship of the first Christians that… there was a special calling of storyteller, whose gifts could be set alongside those of apostles, teachers, and healers, and so on."
(Drane, 2001, p. 163)

Introduction

The fundamental assumption of this project is the idea that canonical texts – those texts traditionally taught in secondary English classrooms – may have some hierarchy or authority, some "power" in teachers' estimation, that invites teachers' particular tendencies toward and practices in using these texts for classroom study. Thus, canonicity, as I have called it, is an approach, a discursive system, that does more than merely identify certain books-as-canon; it actually engenders certain pedagogical practices and encounters. This chapter considers how teachers' understanding of the innate "power" or "value" of canonical texts produces certain pedagogical practices that may convey their understanding of these texts as a type of sacred literature or, at the very least, as more sacred than other texts. Specifically, this chapter illustrates and imagines the ways in which teachers talk about, think about, and use these texts like a type of sacred (or authoritative) Scripture, where just as the Bible (as a type of sacred Scripture) is central to Christian salvation, faith, and practice (Maddix and Thompson, 2012, p. 80), so too might canonized texts in the English classroom be tied to comparable expectations and practices in the context of an English classroom. Their power, according to teachers, results

in some type of transformation of or within students that they then carry into their own lives; these texts "save" or "change" students. According to teachers, they inspire, transform, awaken, or lead directly to success and salvation.

For example, in one of my conversations with Rachel, the teacher who was hired as the drama director and drama teacher but now teaches Advanced Placement English Literature (a course known for its rigor, per AP guidelines, and usually reserved for advanced students in their junior or senior year of high school), she told me, "I kind of buy into *Hamlet* as the icon of the high school English classroom" (Interview 1). This comment, in the context of telling me about her course texts and why she teaches them, revealed a sentiment that I would see across my participants: that some texts are more "iconic," in her words, than others when it comes to the secondary English classroom. When I asked Rachel to explain what she meant by this comment, she spoke generally about the canonical texts she uses in her classroom, saying,

> These are the books that something happens, that there's something about the human experience, in terms of teaching them in a high school context, that we feel young people can connect to and learn from…. the reason things are in the canon is that there's something very powerful that people can connect with… and I've had really good experiences with the canon…. I think there's value in the canon. (Interview 2)

Rachel's iconization of *Hamlet* stems from her belief that there is "something very powerful" in it (along with other "things in the canon") that warrants its place in her curriculum. That power is why she sees "value in the canon" and positions herself among a group of English educators ("we feel") who maintain the place of the canon and *Hamlet* in secondary classrooms. Even her comment that "something happens" in canonical texts is not simply a reference to their plots but rather a nod to her notion that something happens in the *reader*, and especially "young people" –

63

some change occurs *to* or *in* them as a result of reading these canon/ized texts. Canonical texts, she implies, do more than simply inform; they bring about change, and this is their "value." Hence Rachel's notion of *Hamlet*-as-icon: her comment underscores not only that *Hamlet* is representative of the high school English classroom, but that she might consider it to be an actual icon, a venerated relic (I will expand upon this point in the next chapter). In this sense, what happens if we were to imagine her use of "iconic" to signify something held sacred? Her teaching of *Hamlet* then becomes an exercise in worship of a "powerful" text – like the Bible or sacred Scripture – and in the service of the profession more generally. From this perspective, Rachel's teaching of *Hamlet* can be seen as preserving and adoring *Hamlet* in her classroom and in the literary (rather than spiritual) formation of her students, and thus teaching *Hamlet* for Rachel may be a way of spreading "the word" or "preaching the gospel" (Mark 16:15); it's a duty, a responsibility, or an act that indicates something larger about the "human experience," as she says.

As we will see in this chapter, Rachel's veneration of canonical texts also aligns with the thinking, methods, and practices of other teachers in this study. This veneration is perhaps because a belief about the power of texts in this way might be derived from Sunday school models of English and the Protestant social foundations of education more generally, where students' souls and minds were shaped via (mostly religious) texts of classroom study. In early considerations of English pedagogy shaped by this Sunday school model, "English teachers could contend for young people's souls and minds by selecting… texts that 'embodied and created ideals that might cast their imaginative spell upon a child' and then approaching literary plots and characters in ways that 'provoked admiration… [and] action' (Chubb, 1902, 380 cf. Brass, 2011, pp. 160-161). In a contemporary context, while perceived secular, canonical texts

are not outwardly or explicitly religious in nature, the ways in which some teachers *treat* them is. This idea is implicitly reflected in Rachel's comments about *Hamlet* and its power, status, value, and ability to "connect" with young people. This description highlights the "imaginative spell" she sees *Hamlet* casting over "young people's" souls and "provoking admiration."

While Rachel features more prominently in the next chapter, I use her words to open this chapter because her veneration of *Hamlet* and other canonical texts aligns with the thinking, methods, and practices of other teachers in this study. And, most of all, her words anchor and drive the larger argument of this chapter (and indeed of the dissertation overall): that certain texts can be considered sacred or privileged in the minds of the English teachers of this study (and beyond, I think) and that this belief is tied to certain practices or pedagogical approaches that emulates the English classroom equivalent of worship or, at the very least, of sacred ideologies about texts. Like the other teachers discussed in this chapter, Rachel suggests that these texts do more than just inform; they actually form and transform, bringing about a change in her students or leading them to some higher truth or salvation. In this case, texts used for classroom study may be imagined as a type of Scripture, as "the word," because in these teachers' estimations, they are charged or imbued with sacred authority, power, truths, or knowledge. This chapter also illustrates, however, that not all texts – whether perceived canon/ized or not – carry the same "value" or (literary or inspired) weight; there exists a hierarchy or authority in teachers' minds about texts, where some texts, such as Rachel's *Hamlet*, are sanctioned or authorized over others for engagement, classroom, or even canon/ized purposes.

The idea of the canonical text as a type of sacred Scripture proposed in this chapter illustrates the ways in which a discourse of canonicity is woven into pedagogy and moves beyond the typical notion of canon as a list of books that may inform the curricula of English

classrooms. In re/presenting teacher's sentiments (beliefs or creeds) in this chapter, I reveal how their classroom practices (actions or deeds) implicitly reinscribe the deference, respect, hierarchy or even worship of some texts over others because of their perceived innate power or esteem – indeed their perceived sacredness, where, in some fundamentalist Judeo-Christian traditions, the sacred text is fixed, determined, and seemingly not open to interpretation, change, or critique. Thus, in imagining these texts as sacred, I often pepper Biblical quotations in these chapters as a way to imagine the religious discourses that may be embedded in the ways teachers act, think, and speak about and around these texts. To highlight teachers' deeds and creeds and the ways in which canonicity works as a discursive system, for the ways in which it works as believing, saying, knowing, and doing.

Sacred Practices: Canonicity and Criticality

Much like Rachel advances a hierarchy of texts in her classroom and sanctions certain texts over others, Joe (who will also be featured in a later chapter) is explicit in his creed and deeds about the sacredness of *Hamlet*. Joe, who had been originally certified as a math teacher, "had enough English credits to get [his] English certification" (Interview 1). Though he enjoyed teaching math, he felt drawn to fiction and "theories about literature" (Interview 1), which continually drew him into the English classroom. He mentioned that he's usually put in "higher-level classes," like AP Engish Literature, because he has "a harder time bringing things down in [his] English classes than in [his] math classes" (Interview 1). As a result, he focuses on preparing his students for college and teaching what he deems college-level texts, such as *Hamlet*. While his pedagogy reveals the extent to which he idolizes *Hamlet* like Rachel does, Joe also praised *Hamlet* from our first interview, saying, "I love it. It's amazing… There's

something about it that people have been intrigued by" (Interview 1). Joe's comments reveal his

esteem for *Hamlet*: he "loves" it, it is "amazing" and "intriguing," noting that so much has been

written about it. Like Rachel, Joe's comments suggest that he see some innate power, quality, or

value to *Hamlet* that warrants these feelings, and his pedagogy around *Hamlet* reinforced these

notions over the roughly four weeks he taught the text. How so? Over the course of his unit, Joe

frequently relied on methods that sanctified the word of *Hamlet*: His students had to listen to

online lectures about *Hamlet*, they had to take copious notes on their reading homework, they

had regular reading quizzes, they had to participate in online discussion forums about the text,

and they were responsible for acting out "really pivotal scenes" (2.3), predetermined by Joe, for a

grade. All of these activities elevated the word of the text, rather than the interpretation or

response of the students. Even the online discussion forums, which Joe mentioned were in the

spirit of "discourse" (2.12), were focused on an analysis of text, not about students' varied

interpretations of the text. Joe also found through online media (iTunes University) lectures

about the play given by a Stanford University professor, and because Joe "really liked [the

professor's] take on things" (Interview 1 and several times during class), he assigned those

lectures for homework and quizzed students' understanding of the lectures before they even

began reading the play together. Finally, Joe frequently lectured on *Hamlet* – an important point

because it was something that I did not see him do with *Heart of Darkness*. During those weeks

he taught *Hamlet,* lecture was *the* characteristic classroom discourse: Joe *told* his students what

they needed to know about and see in *Hamlet*. During these lectures, Joe seemed to be drawing

on *Hamlet* as a source of truth and knowledge as he pointed out important passages and

advanced his interpretation of the play that usually aligned with or expanded upon the

interpretation of the Stanford professor. And, during his introduction of the text to his students,

67

Joe told his students exactly what he told me: "No other text has been written about more than *Hamlet*" (2.3). In short, there seemed to be little contradiction between what he believed and practiced, between his pedagogical intentions and his pedagogical enactment, between his creeds and deeds. Just like Rachel, for Joe, the pedagogy around Hamlet seems to show adoration and, perhaps even more so than Rachel, worship. Across the unit, Joe's students had little opportunity to speak their mind because *Hamlet* was *the* text Joe deemed they needed to know about.

Part of Joe's veneration of *Hamlet* became clear to me during my first interview with him. When, I asked what he thought it was about canonical texts that made them so prevalent in secondary classrooms, he replied,

> They are classics for a reason. They are canonical for a reason. They reflect some of the best that Western civilization has to offer. And they're good and they're right. There's a reason we are reading Shakespeare for the last four hundred years. There's an inherent value in them… It's like [Harold] Bloom said, nothing new has been written in the past three hundred years. (Interview 1)[2]

Joe's comments reveal his understanding that these texts have "an inherent value" and are "classics for a reason." In short, he believes they are "good" and "right." Interesting, Joe's use of those words, as both connote quality, correctness, and even moral fortitude. The texts of the canon, he seems to say under my interpretation of canonicity, are in accordance with t/Truth and that which is morally proper and just. This, combined with his point about their "inherent value" seems to suggest that a text's quality and place in the canon is stripped of politics or any external factors – it came into being or was "born" through some divine means; its value (or canonicity)

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[2] A problematic statement, no doubt, for a number of reasons, including the implications that it erases other civilizations, cultures, and raced and categorically privileges a Western, or white, Anglo-Saxon, Christian, masculinist, tradition.

was conferred or established from its con/inception.   And hence, "they are canonical."   They simply are, by their very nature.

In addition to commenting on the sacred nature of these texts, Joe also mentions that they are "the best that Western civilization has to offer" and invokes Harold Bloom, a prolific spokesperson for the preservation of the canon, when he says, "nothing new has been written in the past three hundred years." Not only does this comment reinforce canonized notions of Shakespeare and texts of the Western canon, but Joe also (like Rachel) specifically likens Shakespeare to the f/Father of this canon: all literature since Shakespeare is a permutation or iteration of a Shakespearean storyline.   In other words, Joe seems to call or liken Shakespeare to the Author of the Word, as the source of Truth and origin/ality.   He is the Alpha from which all literature derives, the original storyteller, for at least "the last four hundred years."   Rather than questioning the sacred tradition canonical texts and authors like Shakespeare have in the English classroom, Joe reifies it and, in the process, reifies Shakespeare as the authority on the matter.

Joe's acceptance of this tradition was especially intriguing to me, as Joe expressed his own interest in critical literacy practices in an early interview to me (Interview 1) and, later, a specific use of "critical literary lenses to deconstruct texts" (Interview 2). I wondered how Joe would rectify his "love" of *Hamlet* with this critical interest – how would he subvert or challenge the tradition that he claimed to admire so much?

As it turned out, he didn't.   Rather, he reinforced his perceived sacred status of *Hamlet* throughout his teaching of that play (to be discussed in a later chapter), and that status was preserved or even made more explicit when I observed Joe teaching *Heart of Darkness* immediately after he had finished his teaching of *Hamlet*. Before his students began reading *Heart of Darkness*, Joe showed them the documentary *King Leopold's Ghost*. On the handout he

gave to students during this introduction (Appendix A), Joe had written, "We begin [this unit] by watching the excellent documentary *King Leopold's Ghost*, which chronicles Belgium's King Leopold II's systematic exploitation of the Congo, considered by some to be the first modern holocaust." While I knew Congo as the setting of *Heart of Darkness*, I asked Joe why he had his students watch this documentary and why it served as their introduction to *Heart of Darkness*. He replied, "I like using this documentary to set up the text and the idea of critical lenses. It's a way to understand the book from a critical perspective, since I really want them to contextualize this story's real events in its history" (3.2). By using this documentary, Joe wanted to establish in his students a critical orientation toward *Heart of Darkness* from the start, even before they began reading it. In this way, the status or canonicity of Conrad's text was immediately undercut, especially compared to their introduction to *Hamlet*, in which the students were required to listen to (and subsequently be quizzed on) online lectures about the play from the Stanford English professor. This immediate sense of criticality contributed to a postcolonial narrative (one of Joe's critical lenses) running throughout their study of *Heart of Darkness*, and this sense of criticality was not present, or even an option, during their study of *Hamlet*. *Hamlet* was thus absolved of this critical perspective.

Soon after the students had finished viewing the documentary and begun reading the text, Joe introduced to them other "critical lenses," including perspectives from post-colonialist, feminist, and Marxist criticisms and race theory. To help the students read against *Heart of Darkness* from a critical point of view and in a very explicit way, Joe required the students to post quotations (on post-it notes) on a bulletin board – titled their "Collaborative Critical Concept Map" (it's alliterative!) – at the back of the room. Student-chosen quotations from the text were written on post-it notes and then attached (via the post-it notes) to the specified critical

lenses labeled on the board that Joe had introduced and provided on a handout. This map, then, consisting of quotations from the text and critical lenses, would serve as evidence of their critical reading of the text. Firgure 1 depicts Joe's modeling of this practice with his own post-it notes and quotations from the text. Figure 2 depicts the board after several days with student additions. So, the board at the back of the room served as a visual reminder of their critical engagement with the text, and their small and large group conversations about *Heart of Darkness* were guided by this activity on a regular basis. At the end of the unit, the students would then write an in-depth critical analysis of the text using one of these literary lenses. Their assessment of that text, then, was actually an assessment of their developing critical consciousness about that text.

Figure 1

Joe's critical lenses and example quotations.
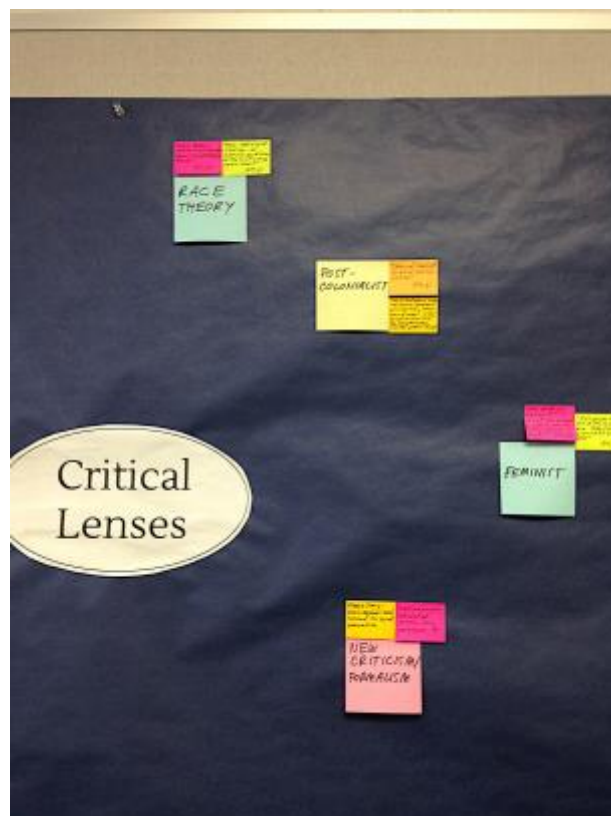
Figure 2

Joe's critical lenses with student participation after several days.
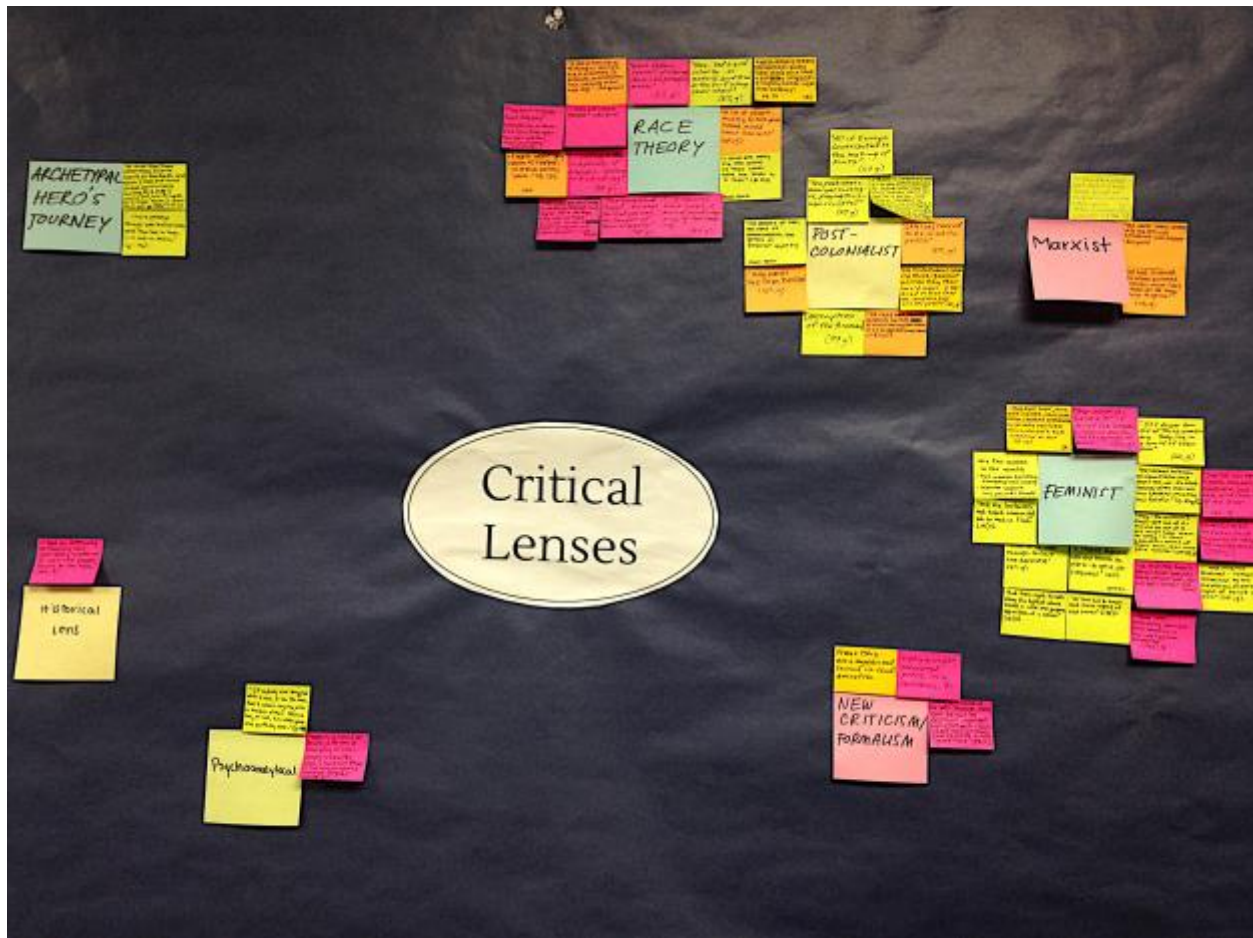
When Joe introduced the various critical lenses to his students during their early study of *Heart of Darkness*, he did reference how these lenses applied to their study of *Hamlet*. He asked his students, "There is one [lens] sanctioned by the College Board that we use all of the time, especially during *Hamlet*. Any one want to guess which one it is?" (3.6). After a moment of brief silence, one student responded with a nervous, "New Criticism?" to which Joe agreed. On his critical lenses handout, Joe had listed one lens as "New Criticism/Formalism," the method of which he described on the handout as "Discovers meaning solely through close reading of the

text itself" – a method similar to Lisa's pedagogy around *Of Mice and Men* and *The Catcher in the Rye* (which will be discussed momentarily).

Importantly, however, Joe's understanding and use of New Criticism surfaces two points. First, there is no sense of criticality or critical perspectives attached to this lens or approach; rather, the text, from this perspective, stands on its own as the only source for understanding it. In this sense, this lens works for Joe's reading of *Hamlet*, as it works to favor the text rather than to undermine it. *Hamlet*'s tradition, in other words, is still esteemed or imbued with authority despite, or rather in accordance with, this "critical" lens. Second, Joe saw this "lens" or method of reading as "sanctioned" by the College Board, the organization that administers the Advanced Placement test and curriculum. While the College Board is careful not to deliberately "sanction" anything (even though it makes plenty of recommendations and even has to approve teachers' AP syllabi before they can teach it), Joe's comment reveals how his reading and teaching of *Hamlet* aligns with a doctrine, dogma, tradition, or creed of, with, and around *Hamlet* – he follows through with what's accepted and expected with *Hamlet* (by using the preferred reading method), but, interestingly enough, not *Heart of Darkness* (in which he established a critical orientation). With *Hamlet,* Joe instilled and established (perhaps "discipled") in his students a sanctioned reading of a sanctioned text by a sanctioned author – a New Critical read of *Hamlet* by William Shakespeare. Thus, *Hamlet*'s canonicity is not only upheld but actually reinforced through the method by which Joe teaches it, a method that values the authoritative voice of the text over the voices of the students; a method largely grounded in close reading, interpretation, and, quite possibly, religious tradition. Why, then, even read *Heart of Darkness*, let alone in an un-sanctioned way, in their AP class? The implicit curriculum fostered here, in Joe's estimation,

is that there is no "meaning to discover" in *Heart of Darkness*; it offers no t/Truths or sacred tradition, which is why Joe seeks for his students to critically undercut it.

Canonical Power: Creating "Better People"

Lisa, who teaches honors and "regular" American literature, uses several canonical novels across her classes, including *The Crucible*, *Catcher in the Rye*, and *The Awakening*. When I asked her why she taught these books, she said,

> I think literature builds on your ability to empathize, and I think ultimately empathy is what creates better people because you are realizing that other people think like you or you can see where other people are coming from even if your circumstances are different. I'm hoping that's settling in with [the students], that as they read it, they think about it a little differently, and they're like 'oh ok I can see where he's coming from' and somehow magically there's some kind of translation in their life where they think about other people in that manner or can relate other people to that. (Interview 2)

Lisa's purpose for teaching literature in her classroom is grounded in the idea that her students will become better people. Literature, she argues, develops empathy, an intimate understanding of other people, which "creates better people." This sentiment did not surprise me, as my interview took place in her room, and her room is covered with familiar and inspirational quotations: "Be the change you wish to see in the world," "Evil thrives when good people do nothing," and "You will never regret doing the right thing." All of these quotations evoke or act on Lisa's students in a way beyond literary engagement; they serve as a type of curriculum that implicitly reinforces her overall goal of "creating better people."

74

But, Lisa's primary means of creating "better" students also came through the books she taught, and even from my first observation of her teaching, I saw how Lisa literally embodied this sentiment as she was wearing a purple t-shirt with "What would Atticus do?" written across it in plain white font. The shirt, of course, is both a play on the popular "What would Jesus do?" slogan and an allusion to Atticus Finch, the heralded and esteemed hero of *To Kill a Mockingbird* – a literary figure who has become iconizied or canonized for his adage, "You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view… until you climb into his skin and walk around in it" (Lee, 1960, p. 30). In that moment, and as another English teacher, I smiled at Lisa's shirt because I loved these types of allusions to literature as a teacher – it was the type of thing I would have done in my own classroom or encouraged my students to seek out. On the other hand, I also saw the way in which Lisa's shirt served as further evidence of – and even affirmation of – her participation in a type of non-literary canonicity-as-discourse. The shirt, quite literally, (re)establishes Atticus as a Christ-like figure and hails Lisa's students as disciples of Atticus Finch who might live in his tradition. In other words, the shirt serves a similar purpose to her literary goals: to bring about a change in her students, to make better people of them, to follow in the way of Atticus, and to empathize with others. Lisa's simple act of wearing this shirt shows how she embodies canonicity as a discourse. Even despite extensive scholarship and recent popular media (around the sequel's publication) which argues and points out that Atticus is not the anti-racist hero he has been portrayed to be, Lisa venerates the popular image – the canonized version of Atticus – and reifies *To Kill a Mockingbird*'s place in her classroom and in the English curriculum more broadly. Lisa and her students shape and are shaped by – indeed formed and transformed by – the canon.

75

I wonder, then, how canonical literature (like *To Kill a Mockingbird*) appears to serve as a type of metaphor for Lisa because it is a "window" to others' lives – "you can see where others are coming from," she says. Indeed, in my observations of Lisa's teaching, she regularly asked her students to consider the book's "lesson," and in thinking about literature in this way, Lisa treats her canonical texts much like a Gospel parable, where Christ told stories to inspire or illustrate a Christian value like compassion or, more specifically, empathy. The purpose of these parables was to bring about a change in people or in His disciples, to better their lives through the sacred word that applied to their actual lives in a very practical way. Lisa calls this change or application a "magical translation" for her students – again quite literally, an inspired *conversion* that evokes, in Christian theology, a repentance and change to a "godly life" ("Conversion," 2016). Lisa's English classroom and canonical curricula, then, seem to serve as important steps in the formation of students' lives: there's a change, transformation, or conversion due to the sacred literature they read, and her Atticus shirt is further evidence of this point. Like Rachel, Lisa's comments imply the power these texts hold for students beyond mere literary purposes; like sacred Scripture, the word (the text) acts as a means towards living a better life, and Lisa reinforces this point across her pedagogy, body, and classroom space.

Lisa's recognition of the power in and of these texts played a role in the way she taught them. She loved *The Crucible*, for example, "because it's such a great story of redemption" (Interview 1) and said that she taught it in a way to highlight redemption as "the lesson" to her students. In that text, the protagonist John Proctor is saved from evil and sin by sacrificing his life in the dramatic conclusion of the play. As such, scholars have drawn literary parallels between his character and Christ (like Atticus), as both are central to God's plan of redemption for His world and people. Lisa's point in referencing this canonical text serves much the same

76

purpose: that her students may be changed by Proctor's story and may then model his Christian or Gospel values of sacrifice, service, repentance, or doing good deeds. But the texts do not require a Christ-like figure for them to have power or to bring about a change in her students. For example, for her final exam on *Of Mice and Men*, Lisa asked her students to write about euthanasia, arguing whether or not it should be acceptable for both humans and animals, using the novel as support. Rather than ask the students to write about a literary aspect of the text, Lisa saw this more ethical dimension worthy of analysis and even evangelization, where the text taught a moral lesson and disciplined empathy (in opening up a space to understand why George killed Lennie) as a way to change her students for the better (more on this in a later chapter). Thus, her pedagogy advanced a curriculum (and even tested students) on the merits of the text beyond its literary or typically school-subject-English value.

In an earlier interview with Lisa, when I asked her what she hopes her students get out of the literature they read together, she replied, "My goal is just that they become better human beings and become more empathetic and understanding because I think literature has that power and ultimately as a teacher I want to foster people to be smarter and better and do good things with their lives" (Interview 1). Here, Lisa states more directly her goal that students become better "human beings," not students or readers, but *human beings* who become "better" and "do good things." The idea of "good things" or "good works" is prevalent across the Bible and Christian values, as some Christian traditions believe the combination of faith and "good deeds" is required for salvation or entrance to heaven. Lisa's goal is shaped in these pastoral terms (beyond the literary), where she attempts to "save" her students by fostering or nourishing the good of and in her students, and she credits literature with "that power" to bring about goodness

and a disposition of godly character. Lisa's pedagogical focus with *The Crucible* and *Of Mice and Men*, two canonical texts, highlights this point in fairly obvious ways.

Sacred Practice and Canonized Pedagogy

Lisa moved quickly through the texts she taught (a pedagogy she justified through the "honors" designation of the class), and so I was able to observe her teach *Of Mice and Men*, *Maus I and II*, *Catcher in the Rye*, *The Body*, and *The Joy Luck Club*, and therefore, I saw the ways in which she framed, juxtaposed, and positioned these texts with and against each other. Indeed, an analysis of her teaching across these texts highlights how canonicity operates as an approach, as an implicit curriculum, or as a form of sacred practice. Specifically, though Lisa had a certain pedagogical style that relied heavily on dialogic practices, the type of questions and activities that she utilized varied across each text, and in the process, she advanced a curriculum that some texts carried more – literary, transformative, canonical – weight than others. This became immediately apparent to me when I saw her approach to teaching *Maus I and II*, a contemporary graphic novel, after she taught *Of Mice and Men*. With *Of Mice and Men*, Lisa had her students complete a detailed graphic organizer in which the students had to describe, with "important quotes," the physical appearance and behavior of eight of the major characters. This assignment required considerable time and effort from the students beyond a mere reading or even comprehension of the book. Lisa echoed this notion in class one day when, after a weekend and an unexpected snow day, she said to her students, "Get with you partners, I hope you have something done on your charts, if not you're going to be working today. You're talking about principal appearance, behavior, personality, and then ultimately decide on 1-2 really important quotes that represent those characters well" (2.5). These charts, in short,

required "work," a mastery or understanding of the text (through character details and quotations), and revealed, to a certain extent, the value Lisa sees or places on a canonical novel like *Of Mice and Men*, a text she will use to direct her focus on empathy, euthanasia, and "fostering better people… who do good things with their lives" (Interview 1).

Lisa's emphasis on the *Of Mice and Men* chart, and the work it required, is made more apparent when juxtaposed with her assignment for *Maus I and II*, both of which detail a son's relationship with his father who survived the Holocaust through graphic (comic) means. Throughout her students' reading of those texts, Lisa had her students take notes on the graphics, the visuals. When introducing the assignment, she said,

> Given the visual nature of these books, I'm going to have you guys jot down for each chapter just a couple symbols, images, graphics – whatever stands out to you. Maybe they are obvious ones that represent something in that particular frame that you found interesting or maybe it's something drawn differently on the character than the frame before it. As you are reading, just jot these down and we'll talk through them and we'll notice things as we discuss. I don't want you to over think it. (2.17)

Lisa's directive is grounded in the "visual nature" of the book, and her assignment to "jot down… whatever stands out to you" leaves the assignment wide open for the students; there's no right or wrong answer, there's nothing specific they have to look for or do, and there's no real limit to what they can and cannot note. In short, there's an air of casualness and openness in her approach to *Maus* ("just jot these down") that was not there for *Of Mice and Men*, which required work and an analysis of "important quotes" that captured the personality of the characters. With *Maus*, Lisa just wants them to jot down some graphics that may be "interesting" to them – "don't over think it," she says. There's a difference in the type of

deference shown toward these texts, and I do wonder what role the visual nature of *Maus* plays into this difference for Lisa, let alone with canonicity associated with *Of Mice and Men*. In English classrooms, as with Scripture, there is a long tradition of valuing "the word" of the text over the visuals, images, graphic (i.e., in thinking about picture books versus chapter books). Nonetheless, there is no sense of an "open interpretation" in Lisa's teaching of *Of Mice and Men* like there is for *Maus*.

Lisa reinforces this difference in deference when, soon after introducing their *Maus* assignment, she gave the students some background on *Maus*, telling them "Art [the author] is a celebrated cartoonist.... And you think, 'Oh, well a cartoonist! They don't have the respect that John Steinbeck would have!' but this is very personal to him and something he was dying to share with everyone… It's a graphic memoir specifically" (2.17). Though this comment is meant to legitimize (perhaps sanction) *Maus* in students' minds, it actually further establishes *Of Mice and Men* as a/the legitimate text. *Maus*, in other words, is something personal to the author, a memoir, and it does not attain the level of respect, power, or authority that Steinbeck or *Of Mice and Men* does even though both texts (and "a graphic memoir" about genocide / the Holocaust perhaps even more so, one could argue) may be used for non-literary goals like "fostering better human beings." Hence, Lisa uses the typical or expected (canonized) activities or assignments one would associate with the English classroom, like character and quotation analysis, with *Of Mice and Men* but not with *Maus*. The canonicity associated with the former text engenders a canonical/ized form of pedagogy.

Similarly, at the end of her *Of Mice and Men* unit, Lisa gave her students a test on the novel, including the essay about euthanasia, but at the end of *Maus*, Lisa told her students, "you are all going to be creating your own graphic narratives about a person in your life and you're

going to be sharing them. Some will be more personal than others. It's nothing you can't handle" (2.17). My interpretation of her comments that this assignment is "more personal" and nothing the students "couldn't handle" reinforces a curriculum of sacredness around *Of Mice and Men*. For that text, there was a test, there was a day to review for the test (along with a review sheet), and preparation along the way for what Lisa saw as "important elements" of the text, those that were worthy of close study for examination purposes. None of this happened for *Maus*. Rather, their final assignment with *Maus* was "nothing they couldn't handle," most likely because it was an exercise in the "personal" but not an assessment of their understanding of the text.

Furthermore, one day while teaching a scene in *Of Mice and Men* where a group of minor characters are gathered together in one room and make verbal attacks at one another, Lisa told her students, "This is a really important scene, like really important, and your success relies in part to this part of the book" (2.11). In addition to Lisa never having acknowledged "a really important scene" in *Maus*, she directly ties the notion of students' future, and in particular their future *success* – their implied well-being, perhaps their salvation, one could imagine – to a reading, understanding, or interpretation of the text with this aside comment during class. Perhaps Lisa meant "success" for their test, for their grade, or for their overall understanding of the novel, but she lets "success" hang in the air, and it no doubt sits heavily with students. For whatever reason, they or we may infer, *Of Mice and Men* plays a role (an "important" one) and *matters* in their lives. *Of Mice and Men* offers students a pathway to some T/truth or personal fulfillment in a way that *Maus* does not or cannot. In moments like these, the metaphor (or curriculum) of *Of Mice and Men* as sacred text, "the word," or a type of sacred Scripture is carried through.

This implicit curriculum of canonicity was apparent later in the year as well, when Lisa taught Stephen King's *The Body* (a short story on which the movie *Stand by Me* was based) immediately after J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*. Lisa's pedagogy around *Catcher* was the most different than her teaching around the other texts she taught in that the weight or status she placed on *Catcher* was most palpable, even more than *Of Mice and Men*, in my interpretation. For example, for the first time in my observation of her teaching, Lisa gave regular reading quizzes of fill-in-the-blank and short answer questions to her students that tested their understanding of the text. They also had, again for the first time I had seen, more involved discussions of literary devices like symbolism and hyperbole in the text, and, again for the first time, the students had to write analysis and argumentation essays about the significance of Holden's red hunting cap and the ducks in Central Park. These types of activities are, what I would argue, the more typical, standardized, or canonical/ized activities of the English classroom, and they had not really happened to a large or noticeable extent in Lisa's classroom before her teaching of *The Catcher in the Rye*. In the case of *Catcher*, "the word" of the text was heighted or valued more than those of her students through activities and assignments like those mentioned. With the other texts I saw her teach (even with *Of Mice and Men* to a certain extent), her pedagogy was marked by a more reader response approach that heightened and valued the voices and experiences of her students more than a close reading, interpretation, or understanding of the text, of "the word" itself.

Lisa was more vocal and explicit about this difference in her pedagogy with me than she was with her students. For example, during one of my observations of her teaching on King's *The Body*, I saw student groups present on different parts of their reading, and I saw Lisa lead a whole class conversation about their journal prompt on "siblings." The atmosphere during this

class was relaxed, light, and even fun at times (especially when the students shared stories about rivalries or childhood conflicts with their siblings). After class, when I told Lisa how much I enjoyed her class, she said to me, "I don't feel the need to ask them specific questions on the text for a Stephen King book like I do for *Catcher*. The kids just want to talk about some of the good ideas that the book brings up, which is why their journal was about family today and why we talked about that" (4.24, field notes). With a Stephen King story, Lisa felt free to leave the realm of the text and talk about other themes or concepts that were tangentially related to the story, and she even allowed student groups to provide summaries of the reading, rather than herself, which she did throughout their two and a half week study of *Catcher in the Rye*. Under my interpretation, this might be because there is no sense of canon or canonicity around King and *The Body* in particular for Lisa; he's a contemporary author who, though popular, has not found a way into classrooms or teachers' estimations as a canonical author to any considerable degree. However, Lisa's comment to me suggests that she "feels the need" to ask "specific questions" about a text like *Catcher* – the tried-and-true *Catcher* whose status and canonicity remains unquestioned or unchallenged in an English classroom. Like Rachel's comments about *Hamlet*, Lisa's pedagogy around *Catcher* reinforces its sacred place in the classroom; students need to know about *Catcher* in a way that they do not need to know about *The Body*. One is more sacred than the other, and Lisa's pedagogy reflects that.

On another interesting note, during one interview, Lisa leaned in closely to me and admitted in a whispered tone, "You know, I don't even like *Catcher*. It's not one of my favorites. I don't particularly like teaching it, but I feel like the students need to get it. I've gotten to like Holden over the years, but [shrugs]..." (Interview 2). Even though Lisa does not like *Catcher* and even though she does not enjoy teaching it, she still does so because, in her own

words, her students "need to get it." Certainly there are many cases where teachers may be required to teach something they do not like or enjoy, but who is telling Lisa that her students "need to get" *Catcher*? No one. Lisa can choose not to teach *Catcher* (as she admitted to me) if she wants, but she feels beholden (no pun intended) to a text like *Catcher* because of some expectation, some notion, that her students "need to get it." A comment like this underscores *Catcher*'s unquestioned, sacred-like status in Lisa's mind. She feels a compulsory allegiance to the text, the word, and her whispered tone to me, behind closed doors, might suggest that Lisa feels bad, perhaps blasphemous, for even uttering her dislike of such an esteemed text because such a sentiment runs counter to her perceived commandments of the English classroom. And looking back, I imagine this moment – where we were seated in the middle of her classroom space, surrounded by quotations that emphasize "doing the right thing" – could have felt like a confessional for Lisa, where she was finally able to relieve herself of this secret that she has carried for long.

Conclusion

This chapter advances the idea of canonicity as an approach, a creed tied to deeds, about the teaching of texts in the secondary English classroom. In offering an interpretation of teachers' thinking and instruction around certain canonical texts in their classroom, I link the broad idea of canonicity to specific pedagogical encounters, where teachers often implicitly value a "more canonical" text over another through the pedagogical practices and beliefs associated with each. In the process, teachers naturalize a hierarchy or authority of and about the books they teach connected to their perception of the text's value or canonicity. Because of this perception, teachers, it appears, worship or revere these texts as a type of sacred (or

authoritative) text rather than merely teach them. Certainly, in teaching there is revering, but even as Lisa's case shows, where she confesses her dislike for *Catcher*, these teachers believe that texts like *Hamlet* and *Catcher* carry some weight for students. There is a desire on the teachers' part, it seems, to discipline or disciple students into the same model of thinking and doing around these texts. To a certain extent, teachers and students, upon entering the classroom, enter into this frame of canonicity, where the discourse of and around these books as sacred texts is reinforced and maintained rather than challenged or critiqued, inhibiting critical engagement with those texts.

> "I kind of buy into *Hamlet* as the icon of the high school English classroom."
> (Rachel, Interview 2)

> "All canonizing is elitist in conception and authoritarian in implementation."
> (Davies, 1998, p. 10)

Introduction

The previous chapter discussed how teachers' thinking of and around canonical texts is tied to their pedagogy of those texts, tracing the ways in which Rachel, Lisa, and Joe implicitly establish a hierarchy or authority of some texts over others. Their sanctifying of certain texts was connected to their perception of the innate power or value of and in those texts, and I offered an interpretation of their instructional practices that likened the canonical texts they taught to a type of sacred Scripture. In this chapter, I expand upon this idea and present an in depth illustration of Rachel's classroom space and pedagogy to show the ways in which a typical, secondary English classroom – the actual physical space *and* the day-to-day doings of teaching – can parallel religious practices and beliefs of a church mass, service, or experience, especially the general, broad features of a non-sectarian American flavored pan-Protestant Christianity associated with the Common Schools.

In order to provide this illustration, I isolate Rachel and her classroom space to show religiosity as a form of canonizing and to reveal the ways in an English classroom can serve as a space that canonizes. Rachel, the teacher whose comments about *Hamlet* introduced the themes of the last chapter, expressed her love for *Hamlet* from my first interaction with her, and she descried the text as her "absolute favorite" to read and teach (Interview 1). She requested that I come observe her during her teaching of *Hamlet* to her AP English seniors because she believed that her love for the text was obvious through her teaching of it. In addition to her request, I

chose to focus only on Rachel in this chapter for a couple of reasons. First, I was most intrigued by Rachel's sense of *tradition* in the English classroom; she continually reiterated to her students and me that there were certain things that *had* to happen in an/her English classroom in order for her students to have "done" English. The way she spoke about English class (and the text) in this way, and as I interpreted it, evoked a kind of religious rite of passage, even a baptism, into an accepted/ing community of believers or followers who had all "done" English or experienced certain things Rachel believed all English students had to experience. The teaching of English, in other words, is ritualistic. One of those rituals, importantly, was a study of *Hamlet*, and based upon my observations in her classroom, I wonder the extent to which her love of *Hamlet* was actually a love of the *tradition* of *Hamlet* and its place in the English classroom and in her previous experiences (and formation) as an English student.

Second, and on this note, Rachel encompasses, to the fullest manifestation, the phenomenon of canonicity that I wish to explore in this chapter, namely that the religious-like, and specifically the Protestant Christian-like, practices of the English classroom are a means to canonizing texts, the treatment (reading, teaching, or otherwise) of those texts, and the perceptions of students and teachers. So, my interpretation in this chapter moves beyond *Hamlet* as a sacred text, the explicit subject of Rachel's teaching, in order to focus on the implicit Protestant Christian-like *rituals* that come with the reading and teaching – the canonizing – of *Hamlet* as a type of sacred text. I argue that Rachel's secular English classroom evokes canonicity through the ritual-like and religious-like discourses of the taken-for-granted, traditional (i.e., white, Anglo-Saxon, Christian, masculinist) assumptions of English teaching and the English classroom.

To most English educators, the teaching of Shakespearean plays is not revolutionary or even surprising because Shakespeare continues to be one of the most frequently taught authors in American high schools, and *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, and *Julius Caesar* tend to be classroom staples reinforced through the explicit curriculum. Many English teachers, as previous English majors, also often enjoy Shakespeare. Rachel is no different; her passion and excitement for the text, indeed her adoration of it and of Shakespeare, came through during her lessons, which were mostly characterized by question-and-answer style discussion during read alouds, as well as in casual conversations, interviews, and classroom observations I had with her.

Not only did Rachel refer to *Hamlet* as her "absolute favorite," she also believed *Hamlet* played an important role in the English classroom and in students' lives. During one interview, as we were talking about the play and her reasons for including it in her curriculum, she stated very directly, "I kind of buy into *Hamlet* as the icon of the high school English classroom" (Interview 1). The general substance of this comment is also not surprising; many English teachers may express similar sentiments that *Hamlet* (or any number of other texts) may be a text all students should read in the English classroom. For Lisa, as discussed in the previous chapter, it was *Catcher in the Rye*. Lisa taught that book, even though she personally disliked it, because she believed her students "need to get it" (Interview 2). But how might Rachel's use of the word "icon" implicitly underscore the canonicity embedded in her (or any other English teacher's) thinking about *Hamlet* as a text for classroom study?

In considering its religious roots, an "icon" is any representation of holy images or persons like Christ or a Christian saint. These icons pervade most religious traditions and spaces as venerated or sacred symbols. Rachel's use of the word to refer to a secular text in her secular

classroom is an interesting one, for it likens *Hamlet* to something held sacred. In this case, a

sacred text, one that all students must experience, worship, adore, or revere. From this

perspective, how can we re-see Rachel's classroom and pedagogy as a type of religious ritual, for

the ways in which *Hamlet* may evoke "the word-made-flesh" (John 1:14), and Shakespeare, its

author, the Author of the word? Well, it comes as no surprise that a colorful poster of

Shakespeare's bust is posted on Rachel's classroom wall, front and center, above her chalkboard,

a place usually reserved for a crucifix in Catholic schools and a place that easily captures or

draws students' gaze. Having sat all over Rachel's classroom during my time observing her, I

can attest, that no matter one's position in the room, Shakespeare seemed to be looking down on

us and held our gaze. This poster, I suggest, serves as another icon for Rachel and her students –

their work in the classroom is done in service to Shakespeare, the mythical god of the English

classroom. He occupies the place "on high" while Rachel, her students, and even me, dwell on

the earthly classroom floor. While Shakespeare held this revered space, other "icons" filled the

room as well – pictures of other famous authors like Poe, Whitman, Dickinson, and Steinbeck.

These icons, however, were pasted on the back walls or side cabinets. Their place or status, in

other words, lies somewhere between Shakespeare and the students; they are not quite as

venerated as Shakespeare because they came after him or in his tradition, but they still maintain a

status "above" the heads of Rachel and her students. Gregory of Nyssa, a bishop of the 300s,

supposedly once said, "Icons are silent scriptures that speak from the walls" (Ouspensky, 1987,

pp. 83-84). Considering this idea of icons, and the posters of the authors that were literally

"from the walls" of Rachel's classroom, we might see that there was a clear sense of hierarchy in

Rachel's classroom and "English universe," a sense of higher-order religious-like forces that

demand the attention and adoration of the congregation, her students. And these students enter

Rachel's secular classroom with the expectation and understanding that they will revere Shakespeare through a study of his icons, his plays – and in this case, *Hamlet*. The classroom, then, becomes more of space for worship rather than one for play or dialogic engagement.

Reverent-Bodies/d and Sacred Space

In addition to being an AP English classroom, where Shakespearean plays are curricular staples, Rachel's class offered the apposite opportunity for the study of *Hamlet* because, having taught drama in years past, Rachel occupies the drama classroom as her designated classroom space. So, her room is huge, as the intent was obviously to use the room as rehearsal space for school productions or to act out performances studied in or during drama class. The dramatic features of the room make it an uncharacteristic or atypical school/English classroom (see Figure 3 from field notes). For example, students enter the classroom through a set of double doors that swing out into the hallway, and there is a small, enclosed hallway that leads into the classroom space. This classroom space is huge with high ceilings, so the room literally opens up as you come through the hallway, similar to the setup in a theatre, where patrons enter through side doors and into the open space of the theatre building. In the hallway, on the left, there's a large walk-in costume closet. The door to this closet has a large window, so anyone can see that it is filled with costumes and props from productions past. Costumes hang from four racks, two on each side of the closet, and various props are scattered about but mostly fill large shelves at the back of the closet.

The larger classroom space consists of four walls. The wall with the entrance from the hallway has a small, raised platform built into it, clearly meant to be a stage with two angled sides and a straight edge that projects into the classroom. This wall is covered with full-length mirrors, and the opposite wall has bookshelves, cabinets, and four classroom computers.

Rachel's desk sits between this wall and the front wall. Behind her desk is a set of double doors with large windows that lead to an outside patio. The front wall has a small bulletin board and long whiteboard, while the back wall is covered in felt bulletin boards. From this back wall is a door that leads to the large "scene shop," which stores larger scenery materials and props and is used to build and create scenery for upcoming school productions. Finally, Rachel's room is across the hall from the school's auditorium where school theatre productions are held. At the time of my observations, *Grease* was in its final dress rehearsals and performances, so I saw a bit of movement among these rooms.

Figure 3

Rendering of Rachel's Classroom, from field notes.
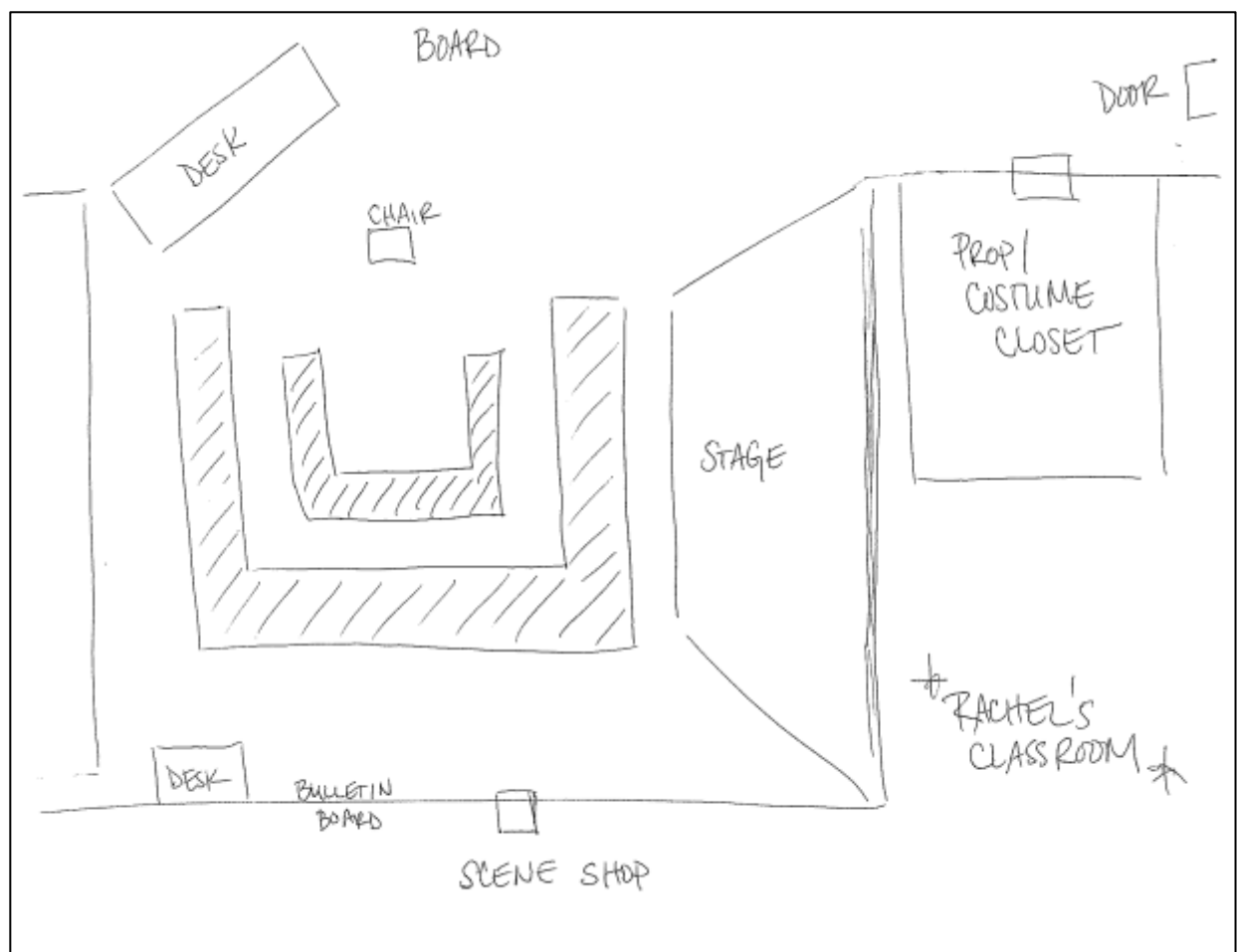
The larger point in this description is to situate Rachel's classroom in the middle of the scene shop, the costume closet, and the auditorium; thus, her room was clearly and originally meant as a staging/rehearsal space, and the drama instructor could have blocked scenes for school productions during drama class in her own room.

All of these elements were at Rachel's disposal at any point, and yet, none of them were used. This is not a criticism of Rachel's pedagogy; rather, it is a reflection of the ways in which, for Rachel, expectations about certain texts – and the pedagogy associated with those texts – have become entrenched, normative, and tied to a tradition that Shakespeare must be read and studied in the English classroom, not performed or reimagined (even though *Hamlet* is dramatic literature). In other words, that tradition contradicted, neglected, or betrayed the dramatic space and pedagogy of the classroom, where the physical space of the room acted as an invitation for play, learning, and interaction. In fact, Rachel's "AP English" class *not* being designated as a drama class only further legitimized the sanctioned practices that took place in the room. The "Advanced Placement" label of her class perhaps encouraged passive reception, rather than activity, as day after day, the students sat in their desks (arranged in a parallel u-formation), with their texts open, as a sort-of reverent-bodied, genuflection in the presence of Shakespeare (the poster that looms on the wall). They stood only for the Pledge of Allegiance during morning announcements, and, ironically, having observed Rachel's first period AP class, I often saw (and helped) Rachel and her students rearrange desks or put away drama items that had been left out the night before by students rehearsing for *Grease*. One morning, upon coming into a particularly disheveled classroom, Rachel said, "Oh the drama kids must have been in here again last night. We'll have to straighten up the room" (11.7, field notes). Comments like this one

92

reified the classroom as a sacred space, more like a cathedral rather than a theatre, and the expectations that come with it – sitting, listening, worshiping, etc.

There was some irony, of course, in all of this to me as there were plenty of opportunities for the students to use their bodies and the classroom space for a more active embodiment of the text than what was typical for their day-to-day read alouds and discussion of the text – in other words, to perform *Hamlet* themselves and in their own classroom space and as Shakespeare had intended. This irony became more apparent on a regular basis when the students begged Rachel to see a local production of *Hamlet*, performing at the end of the school year, in a town not too far away and known for its productions of Shakespearean plays. They offered to organize buses, collect money, order tickets, and plan the outing so they could partake in a collective "field trip." One day, after the students had eagerly inquired for several minutes about the possibility of the trip and shared their excitement to see *Hamlet* performed, Rachel said,

> You are so excited and that makes me happy, but we have to talk about the schedule and get back into the text. Here's how we're going to do Shakespeare. On the front [of this handout, Appendix B] is what I'm really going to talk about today. On the back of this handout there are a number of study guide questions… Let's look at the front page. I'm going to walk you through this and tell you how we are going to study the text. So some background. This is his most discussed play and probably his most discussed character, Hamlet. Oh, I'm just going to read this [handout] to you verbatim. (11.5)

In contrast to the active and performative nature of the text, Rachel explains to the students how they are going "to do" Shakespeare. What this method essentially amounts to is "getting into the text," answering "a number of study guide questions," "study[ing] the text," and listening to their teacher read – "verbatim" – from a handout. All of these aspects contrast with the active

elements of the play, and Rachel essentially prepares students' bodies for the passive reception of the word through her introduction of the text. Just as they may do during a Protestant church service, they sit in their seats and "hear and listen to the text… drawing out ideas and truths in Scripture… to discover what God may say through the biblical text as Scripture and to allow those discoveries to be internalized, resulting in formation and transformation" (Maddix & Thompson, 2012, p. 87). This type of passivity seems to reflect Rachel's view of *Hamlet* as a type of sacred Scripture, and this perception carried expectations that belied the dramatic nature of the literature *and* the classroom space with which they were engaging. Class is like certain forms of Protestant Christian church services or ceremonies, and the students sitting in their seats is perhaps indicative of genuflection in a sacred space. While logistics could easily prevent them from going to see *Hamlet* performed, nothing really prevented them from performing it for themselves in their very own classroom other than the canonized assumptions and notions about what should be done in the English classroom.

Truth and Knowledge

Similar to many other English teachers (Applebee, 1974), Rachel has a deep understanding of what should be done in an English classroom that has been built upon her previous experiences as a student (in high school and college) and teacher. In citing these experiences to explain her own classroom choices and perspectives, she regularly situated her beliefs and attitudes among a community of like-minded followers through her use of "we" (as seen in data re/presented below) and couched them in pure, absolutist, or monologic terms. This way of speaking and thinking is indicative of an authoritative discourse that "asserts the unitary meanings we desire at the expense of recognizing the complicated constructs we live" (Britzman,

1991, p. 61). Rachel sees these past experiences as representing or, rather, as sources of certain truth, knowledge, and belief to which she pledges allegiance, much as one does to a god or set of religious creeds. As such, Rachel accepts these aspects of English teaching as true or as functions of some "divine" truth and knowledge.

For example, during her in-class introduction of *Hamlet* to her students, Rachel highlighted *Hamlet* as a source of official or sanctioned knowledge. She said:

> Shakespeare is like this big, important guy creating all of these performances, and we are reading *Hamlet,* which is one of his plays that he is writing at the time it is performed and watched by many people and is appreciated. And we're still reading it now, 500 years later, and we still tend to look at *Hamlet* as one of the greatest works of English literature. (11.4)

While many students in Rachel's AP class will have likely heard of Shakespeare before, these comments may not seem all that surprising; indeed, it is an AP English class, and there certainly is an expectation that they may read Shakespeare. However, *how* Rachel talks about *Hamlet* and Shakespeare appears to instill in her students a sense of *Hamlet's* sacredness and Shakespeare's larger-than-life status. She refers to Shakespeare in the present tense, suggesting he "is," "still," and "this big, important guy" looming over them (literally – the poster – and metaphorically) and whose place is as unrivaled today as it was then. He is responsible, her comment suggests, for creating, writing, and producing plays with mass appeal ("many people") and with esteemed status ("appreciated"). Rachel's comments about *Hamlet*, likewise, position it unequivocally or generally accepted as "one of the greatest works of English literature" that is "still" being "read" (or studied, not performed) "500 years later." This comment, in other words, sanctions and sanctifies *Hamlet* as a source of t/Truth and knowledge – it has been read, appreciated, and

accepted for over 500 years; it has been invested with an unnamed sacred authority. Her use of the word "still" (twice in this short excerpt) implies the text's continued unrivaled status. It demands unconditional allegiance; to challenge *Hamlet* would be to challenge a high-order authority, let alone years of tradition and recognized merit. Rachel's canonized notions about *Hamlet* construct and are constructed by Rachel as a subject, as an English teacher and former English student, and as a fan of the text and of Shakespeare.

This short excerpt also shows Rachel's regular use of the pronoun "we" rather than "I". Her use of this pronoun is different than "we" as in "the royal we" because her comments do not suggest that she is talking about *herself* in the plural sense, about the "office" she represents, or even her specific English department at her school. Rather, her use of "we" places herself among a community of believers, a congregation, presumably of dedicated English teachers and professors, who recognize *Hamlet* as "the Word" (John 1:4), the literal substantiation of Shakespeare through whom all things were made (John 1:3). In this sense, Rachel associates herself with the unnamed authority that authorizes and is authorized by *Hamlet*, and her use of "we" positions herself as one with the masses who recognize and adore *Hamlet* as a source of t/Truth, as "one of the greatest works of English literature." The reception of these comments among students positions themselves as either with or against *Hamlet*. There's no in-between: you're either with us – a communion of believers, 500 years of authority, Shakespeare ("god"), and t/Truth – or against all for which "we" stand. It is hard to imagine any student who, in this case, would challenge the former.

These comments, made in front of her students, were reaffirmed in interviews with me, and even during the nascent stages of Rachel's *Hamlet* unit. During an interview she initiated, Rachel spoke about the pervasiveness of *Hamlet* and its place in the classroom. She said,

96

I certainly fall into that category of doings things because that's how you do it, but in some ways you kind of have to because… at some level I do feel like I am giving them some cultural capital because they've got to know something about Shakespeare. They can't really not… Shakespeare is going to be referred to throughout their life… Part of that is tradition. It's what we do. (Interview 2)

Rachel's reflection of "doing things because that's how you do it" signals an acknowledgement of the assumptions of compliance or duty for English teachers – that her teaching falls into a category of tradition. This comment reveals a critical consciousness on her part because she recognizes that she is not that different from other teachers in her teaching of *Hamlet*; she follows a certain script by teaching the play. However, she immediately qualifies the comment with the next line when she says, says "but… you kind of have to," and with this line, she maintains her compulsory compliance and underscores the authoritarian nature of canons, canonizing, and canonicity. Even with critical commentary around *Hamlet* and Shakespeare's place in the curriculum, Rachel creates a "discourse context in which there is little room for dialogic play" (Beach, 1997, p. 14). In other words, to not teach *Hamlet* would be similar to an English blasphemy, perhaps even counter to the (English) rites, beliefs, and practices she serves. Her specific use of words – "you have to" – suggests no other alternative; there are certain fixed, predetermined expectations for her and other English teachers, one of which is the teaching of *Hamlet*.

She justifies this comment by referencing the role of "cultural capital" (line 3) and her duty in "giving" that capital to her students. Her students must "know something about Shakespeare. They can't really not." In addition to echoing long-challenged notions associated with the canon (i.e., the idea that a reading or understanding of Shakespeare provides cultural

capital or cultural literacy), these comments reify Rachel's broader notions of what English

teachers or classes do: they provide students with food for the soul, cultural capital, or sanctioned

knowledge that advances their place in this world or beyond ("they've got to know something…

Shakespeare is going to be referred to throughout their life"). And while she says "I" give them

cultural capital, that giving comes from an authority invested in Shakespeare or *Hamlet*, not her

own. The text acts as an authority itself, and Rachel has been in/formed by the very capital she

claims to profess. To know about Shakespeare, then, is to be part of an official, sanctioned

tradition. Conversely, to not know would be sacrilegious because all other texts are made in the

image and likeness of Shakespeare. Likewise, to teach Shakespeare, or to "pass on"

Shakespeare, in this established tradition, is to sanctify or ordain Rachel's (and her students')

place in the world.

Rachel closes this short excerpt with the somewhat ominous, "It's what we do," referring

to Shakespeare more broadly. Again, there's no room for flexibility as Rachel invokes the

pronoun "we" and places herself in a community of followers or disciples of the discipline, much

as one might recite a religious creed amongst a congregation of like-minded believers. Like that

congregation, Rachel positions English teachers as a flock that unanimously agrees with what's

been done before. In this sense, she reifies the notion of tradition and the inherited word –

what's been passed down is considered true and sacred, much like a canon.

Discipline and Discipleship

While Rachel conveyed a strong sense of discipleship among her community of English

teachers when explaining what, how, and why she taught, a similar sentiment was evident in the

way she talked to her students about *Hamlet* and the canon more broadly. That is, she expected

or assumed her students to follow in her footsteps, as she held certain knowledge or understood certain t/Truths that they did not yet understand. Of course, not all, if any, of Rachel's students may become English teachers, but, even if not, Rachel was training her students in becoming "good" and dedicated students of English, just as she had been trained. In this context, discipleship amounts to the idea that "what is good for those intent on becoming English teachers is also good for everybody else… in which English teachers teach future English teachers of future English teachers" (Scholes, 1998, pp. 85-86). This loop of English teaching, or discipleship, illustrates the role canonizing plays in sanctifying certain, accepted scripts and in shutting down possibilities for alternatives. In short, Rachel, like any other teacher, passes on to her students not only knowledge of/about the actual text being studied, but the process by which one may read or study a text, and especially a text like *Hamlet*. Thus, her pedagogy implicitly canonizes, or re/affirms, accepted ways of reading or being and makes disciples of the discipline who share and pass on the official word, similar to the way in which Jesus instructed his own disciples to "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them…" (Matthew 28: 19-20). Rachel's past knowledge and experiences constitutes her singular, definitive perspective on the matter and constitute the implicit curriculum of her classroom.

For example, during her initial introduction of *Hamlet* to her students, Rachel explained how there were "going to do Shakespeare" (11.5). A key part of this process, she explained, involved detailed note-taking on the reading before coming to class, setting up five different sections in their notebooks and, according to Rachel, planning on about an hour's worth of homework each night. During one class period, when some students groaned at the mention of these notes, Rachel said,

I know you may think these notes are additional work, but they are really going to benefit you in the long run. And just a side note most college English classes cover *Hamlet*. This is potentially something that you can use in college. I used my *Hamlet* notes from high school when I took English classes in college, and I still have my cute little AP folder from high school and all my *Hamlet* stuff was very useful, so hang on to it! (11.4)

Rachel responds to students' groans by saying that their assigned note-taking should not be seen as additional work because it will "benefit" the students "in the long run." The combination of "benefit" and "in long run" seems to suggest here that these notes will do good or make good of the students at some point in the future, beyond where the students can see, beyond their own discipleship. Besides the idea of note-taking for the purposes of longevity, these comments imply that taking notes on *Hamlet* actually helps their well-fare, with the idea of "in the long run" having implications for this life or beyond. In other words, the good work they do in Rachel's class earns them rewards outside of the class, along the lines of, "Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up" (Galatians 6:9). That proper time may certainly be college – or their own, implied future classroom – if not their overall well-being.

As if to further encourage her students, Rachel tells them that they may use these notes in college because "most college English classes cover *Hamlet*." While this line is not qualified, she offers it, as she has before, as an undeniable t/Truth or belief, and in the process reifies (or canonizes) the notion of *Hamlet* as a worthy text, one taught in college. Just as she mentioned "in the long run," Rachel's frequent references to "college" position it as a certain end goal, salvation, or post-secondary "afterlife" that they must earn through their hard work in her class.

The second half of this short excerpt reveals the way in which Rachel conceives herself to be disciplining her students. Rachel reveals how she too, as a high school student, took notes on *Hamlet*, and suggests the "benefit:" she used them in her college English classes. In other words, Rachel trains or expects her students to follow in her own footsteps, just as Jesus did of his own disciples. If they are as good as "the teacher," then they too may use their notes in the future to achieve salvation – whether in college or in their future role as English teacher. Furthermore, Rachel tells her students that she still has her high school/AP materials that have since been useful. She ends by finally encouraging them to "hang onto it." These comments indicate that a successful reading of *Hamlet* is vital to their future success.

With the idea of discipleship and tradition in mind, it came as no surprise to learn that Rachel's syllabus (or the list of texts / required reading for her AP class) was not her own. When I asked her why she taught the canonical texts that she did in her AP English class, she said, "I inherited our list of texts, and I've done some moving around, but it's essentially what the previous teachers created" (Interview 1). No doubt this sort of passing on, or in Rachel's words, inheritance, could be one reason for the stable list of books taught in schools; teachers continue to teach what has been taught or what they have been taught in their own schooling experiences, just has Rachel indicated with *Hamlet*. But might we also view this statement from a lens of canonicity? The idea of inheritance carries canonical importance, as it signifies a reception, transmission, or acquiring "the word of the Lord," or accepted t/Truths or knowledge that is not challenged or faltered. As with other aspects of her pedagogy, Rachel pledges allegiance to those truths, or texts, similar to "The righteous shall inherit the land" (Psalms 37:39), "A good [man] leaveth an inheritance to his children's children" (Proverbs 13:22), or "Blessed are the

meek, for they will inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5). By using this inherited list, Rachel may have considered herself to be rightly conceived of or invested as an ordained English teacher.

But Rachel acted out this discipleship and disciplined her students about texts beyond those she taught in class, those she inherited from lists. In fact, every Friday, she allowed her students to bring in any book they wanted for ten minutes of "choice reading" time. In looking around the room on these days, I was not surprised to see popular, contemporary and young adult texts like *The Hunger Games* or *Divergent* series or Manga. But, what I thought interesting was that there was no accountability for books read during this time (no discussion, journaling, quizzes, etc.); Rachel just insisted that they read a *book* (as opposed to a magazine, comic book, etc.). When I asked her to explain her rationale behind this choice reading time, she said, "These books don't necessarily correspond with the canon, but they correspond with habitual reading, reading for pleasure, and possibly are an avenue to look for the kinds of devices we're finding in the course texts" (Interview 3). Rachel's comments illustrate the deeply embedded notions of texts used for classroom study. For Rachel, these other books, those generally seen as high-interest for students and young adults, are not of the same status as "the canon" read in schools (such as *Hamlet*); however, these books play an important role in encouraging "habitual reading" or "reading for pleasure." In other words, these books serve entertainment purposes and create life-long readers of students and have no place for classroom study – certainly an ironic comment to me now, as I look back on my own teaching and on Rachel's as well, but something I probably would have said as well as a secondary English teacher. With this idea, Rachel draws a distinct line between inherited texts for classroom study – those that are and have been accepted and authored/ized like *Hamlet* – and those with doubtful "authorship" or authenticity (like contemporary, young adult fiction or graphic novels). The latter texts exist literally on the

102

boundaries of her classroom, the first ten minutes of class once a week. In generally acknowledging but ultimately not accepting these texts into the sanctioned space of classroom study time, Rachel treats these texts, from my interpretation, like the Apocrypha, as a set of books that is generally acknowledged but not necessarily accepted into the sacred space of canon or Scripture. Rachel takes things a step further when she compare these texts to indulgences: they fleeting, gratuitous, pleasurable – all the makers of sin – while canonical texts are meant for close, careful study because of their perceived value and power. Reserving canonical and contemporary texts in this way reifies notions of iconic or sacred texts, genres, and authors (let alone constructs of power, privilege, and elitism), and furthermore, places apocryphal texts in service to the sacred ones. Choice read books, Rachel says, "are an avenue" to the classics, a means to an end, and ultimately a way to valorize and serve the canonical, iconized texts.

Participating With the Word

Canonized assumptions and traditions of the discipline made a disciple of Rachel and positioned her to do the same for her students. We might imagine that the pedagogical encounters described thus far in this chapter have evoked a type of "liturgy of the word," where Rachel and her students took turns reading from their sacred text, *Hamlet*, and listened to their teacher sermonize about its meaning, importance, and relevance to their lives. Indeed, Rachel believed that *Hamlet* carried deep relevance for her students, saying, "The kids get so fired up about it because you have this controversy: the uncle-father, the girlfriend that just dumped him because her daddy made her. These are all on some level stuff that teens kind of feed off of and are into, and adults too, that controversy" (Interview 2). Throughout her teaching of the text, she tried to build up this controversy, but, as her comments suggest, the text itself warranted its own

relevance or authority: upon reading it, students and adults become "fired up" and "feed off" its themes, messages, or stories. This is part of the reason Rachel believed that her students have "to know something about Shakespeare. They can't really not… Shakespeare is going to be referred to throughout their life…" (Interview 2). The idea that Rachel's students "can't not know" about Shakespeare reveals her deep-seated concern for her students' knowledge of Shakespeare and his plays (especially *Hamlet*) for their future well-being. In this case, their worship-like study of Shakespeare and *Hamlet* acts as a type of sacrament, a religious rite of passage, a baptism, where students attain the grace to survive in the real world and to become members of a larger community who knows about, reveres, and idolizes Shakespeare. Rachel's class, it seems to her, serves as an important stepping-stone for students; it is here where they are baptized into a community of Shakespeare believers or followers, or anointed in service to Shakespeare. They, in other words, are part and parcel to canons and canonizing.

The students' role in this canonizing and in the rituals of the English classroom was reinforced when Rachel explained specific activities, concepts, or passages that they were going to do each day as part of their study of the text. For example, during their study of Act 3 of the play, Rachel began class with an overview of the day. She said,

> So here's my plan for today, we are going to spend a good chunk of time just talking about and digesting Act 3. Then I have a great video on YouTube of five different performances of the 'to be or not to be' soliloquy, and you guys are going to watch them and basically analyze who did it best and I think that's kind of a fun little break in things to do, that activity. And you'll do a little write-up of that for Wednesday so tonight you have to catch up or start your write up. (11.10)

104

In this short directive to her class, Rachel implicitly makes several distinctions between the video activity and their usual reading time, and the distinctions carry implications for the ways in which the students discipline their minds and bodies in an English classroom. First, she contrasts the "good chuck of time" that they will spend talking about and analyzing the play with the "little break" and "little write-up" that will be watching and analyzing a YouTube clip. The activity with the video receives less time, attention, and reverence ("fun," "little," "break") than the play (to which she allots a "good chunk of time"). By favoring the text and referring to the video as a "break," Rachel advances a curriculum that validates the written word over a performance and suggests that an understanding of the written word requires more time and effort than an analysis of the performed play. This is not surprising, as long-held religious and English traditions favor "the word" and hold it sacred. Indeed, that idea – the sanctification of the word – is a larger point of this project. Might we see, then, that Rachel's class's study of the word parallels the sentiment that undergirds a (specifically Protestant and/or Catholic, even) Christian mass or ceremony, where a congregation is expected to listen to, read, and attempt to understand the holy Scripture (word)? Their class – in terms of work, time, and effort – becomes a time to serve the word, just as it would during a formal religious ritual.

Rachel also refers to the video activity as "a fun little break" from their normal routine. In this case, "fun" is set up in opposition to the reading and understanding of the word, the text, implying that the reading and analysis of the word is not fun or meant to be fun. Conversely, it's hard work, and it's difficult; it's a sacrifice, an activity in making good disciples or in developing good character. Students' minds and bodies are, from the outset of the activities, pre-disciplined towards the sanctity and purity of the word as opposed to video, and with the word comes reverence and discipline of mind and body. As I discussed previously, Rachel made a similar

distinction when she compared the canonical texts (like *Hamlet*) that are read for classroom and those read "for pleasure" during choice read times.

In addition to the divisions Rachel establishes within this short directive, Rachel also distinguishes between the ways in which students do or should understand the word versus video. When it comes to the word, they must "talk about and digest" it. When it comes to video, they "watch… and basically analyze." When "watch" is conflated with "basically analyze," there is the assumption that there is little effort required to determine or understand the video, in this case "who did it best," she says. In other words, there is little struggle toward understanding these performances because the video or performance is not sacred – perhaps another reason why Rachel does not use or invoke the dramatic space of the classroom. The analysis of the word, however, requires them "talking… and digesting," two words that imply effort and action – a digesting or "breaking down" of the word – especially in comparison to "watching." Furthermore, Rachel and her students must read and talk about the text, the word, together as a group. Whereas their watching and "little write-up" of the video was to be done individually, their study of the text must be in the format of a study group, similar to group Bible study, the "central aspect of Christian discipleship" (Maddox & Thompson, 2012, p. 87). During this group study, disciples come to collective understandings about t/Truths and inherent meanings in and of the word.

Like "icon," Rachel's use of the word "digest" is an interesting one to me as well. She likens "digest" to "understand," as in a way that she and her students will take in the information or t/Truths that the text has to offer. She and her students do not, obviously, actually eat or consume the text, but assimilate it mentally ("Digest," 2016). There is a one-to-one relationship here between them and the text; they will internalize it, just as they may any other text in this

context. But what if we were to read this comment through the lens of religious practice, supporting the notion of *Hamlet* as a sacred text and in Rachel's classroom that echoes Protestant Christian (and even Catholic) religious rituals? From this perspective, the word (and the meaning of the phrase) carries an entirely different meaning, as it connotes aspects of religiosity and the Catholic sacrament of Holy Communion, where "digestion" is actually connected to "consumption." Many Christian traditions (e.g., high Protestantism and Catholicism) consume some sacramental bread – a communion wafer, host, or the Eucharist – during church services. While different Christian traditions disagree on the actual presence of Christ in the wafer, they all believe in this edible ritual where, upon digestion of the host, they may receive God's grace (Catholicism), commemorate the death of Jesus, or more fully assimilate into the body of Christ – the idea that Christ is "the bread of life" (John 6:35) or that "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14). Rachel's idea that she and her students must "digest" Shakespeare's play echoes this ritual. She and her students consume *Hamlet* – the word-made-flesh, the bread of life, the actual manifestation of Shakespeare – in the hope of some divine understanding or to be more fully assimilated into the "body" of some English god like Shakespeare, whose icon adorns the front of the classroom. Just as Rachel likened the reading of *Hamlet* to a type of baptism, here too, her comments echo another sacrament, the intimate encounter with Shakespeare, which informs and is informed by her understanding of how texts are and should be treated in English classrooms for group study. From this perspective, Rachel's students are not passive disciples, but active ones partaking in such an important ritual and testament to their beliefs. Either way, the students have been pulled into the process of canonization, and their minds and bodies have been trained to participate in a study – a ritual – of the word on a regular basis.

Conclusion

As I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, Rachel's classroom happened to manifest these ideas of Christian (and, by and large, Protestant) rituals, as a part of the broader construct of canonicity, most explicitly. Other teachers and classrooms certainly also evoked these rituals to different extents and in similar ways (otherwise they wouldn't be considered rituals), but Rachel's classroom, perhaps because of her strong sense of tradition and her intense feelings for *Hamlet*, served as a continuous illustration for me of the power of rituals and the role they play in canonizing. In fact, I saw, over time, how canonicity not only acts discursively, but also acts as a type of frame (Goffman, 1974), where certain experiences, activities, and even discourses are expected and drawn upon because of prior situations, experiences, and understandings. Indeed, in this case of Rachel's classroom, canonicity as a type of frame allowed *and* prevented certain discourses (religiosity versus criticality, for example) from shaping the roles and expectations of the classroom space and of the players in that space. At first, in my initial observations and even in my initial phases of analysis, I could only see the ways in which Rachel's teaching of *Hamlet* reinscribed traditions and assumptions usually associated with texts and the teaching of texts, but a key part of this chapter also illustrates how Rachel, the teacher, and her students are called into certain roles and positioned in different ways that also reinscribe those same traditions and assumptions. Teachers, students, texts, and practices are all part of the English classroom space that canonizes.

In offering a depiction of the different features and markers of a religious mass or church ceremony in this chapter – the icons and iconization, the reverent-bodied reception and participation, the calls to discipleship, the baptismal and communion-like activities, and the adoration of the word – I hope to illustrate the Christian or religious character of the discipline of

108

English. Further, these ritual-like traits are closely aligned and inform each other, for discipleship is connected to inheritance, iconization to t/Truth and knowledge, and reverence to participation with the word. From this perspective, religiosity as a discourse plays a role in forming and informing the canonical frame that organizes Rachel's classroom and teaching.

"…a canon *itself* should be seen as a locus of power… The power of the Bible, for example is quite blatantly invoked by preachers as a means of personal authority over their congregations… Canonizing and authority are thus inseparable." (Davies, 1998, p.11)

"For God's love, let me hear!" (*Hamlet*, 1.2.205)

"Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it." (Luke 11:28)

Introduction

From our first meeting, Joe told me that he "loved" *Hamlet* (Interview 1). He considered it the highlight of his AP English class, and he taught it so near to the exam date to be sure that his students were well versed in it for the test. When I pressed him to tell me why he saw this text in particular as such a central feature of his AP class, he said simply, "… it's pretty interesting that so much has been written about it, that the criticism about *Hamlet* is more than other text in the history of Western civilization. I think that's part of the reason why it's stuck around for so long" (Interview 1). Whereas Rachel, it seemed to me, was much more enamored with the actual content of *Hamlet*, Joe's comments suggest to me that he loved *Hamlet* not only because of the nature of the text itself, but also because of the tradition and authority it carried as, in his words, the most written about text "in the history of Western civilization." Joe saw something authoritative or official in this literary criticism about *Hamlet* that authorized *Hamlet* as a type of sacred text or as an official source of something, perhaps of the type of literature expected in an AP classroom. He did add later, "There's a reason we are reading Shakespeare for the last four hundred years… It's like [Harold] Bloom said, nothing new has been written in the past three hundred years" (Interview 1). Joe's comment seems to suggest that all literature derives from a Shakespearean text like *Hamlet*; *Hamlet* is the origin/al text, and nothing else measures up.

110

In my observations of his teaching, and even during our discussions, Joe rarely mentioned the name "Shakespeare" or credited "Shakespeare" as the author of the play. Because of this, there were times when I felt like Joe thought *Hamlet* just came into existence one day, that it had been immaculately conceived or divinely inspired or produced. It was, from this sense, timeless and just seemed to *be*. Instead of acknowledging authorship, Joe focused mainly on "*Hamlet*" the text and, importantly, its related scholarship. Because he regularly invoked "the criticism that has been written about *Hamlet*," I felt that Joe held a certain level of respect, even prominence, towards the text that warranted (or was the condition of) its canonization. That *Hamlet* has been canonized, in other words, seemed to matter a great deal to Joe, and the way he talked about it seemed to evoke the way that someone may talk about some sacred Scripture: it is "amazing and intriguing," handed down from generation to generation ("stuck around for so long"), seemingly inspired, and held with a sacred status ("so much has been written about it… more than any other text"). Again, *Hamlet* is the source of something: ideas, merit, sacredness, truth, etc.

Because Joe seemed most taken with *Hamlet*'s history of scholarship, there was an added layer of esteem to the text, and I felt this in his classroom when Joe would make aside comments like, "We haven't quite studied one like this before" (2.4) or "This is it. This is the one" (2.3). I think during his teaching of *Hamlet*, Joe felt invested with and invested by the authoritative voices of scholarship, of those who had come before him in the tradition of *Hamlet*. From Joe's perspective, these collective, canonized voices of and about *Hamlet* served as sources of truth, belief, and sacred knowledge, making *Hamlet* an untouchable and indelible part of his curriculum. *Hamlet* was the epitome of canonicity and authority for Joe.

As some initial evidence to this point, I have already compared in Chapter 3 Joe's vastly different pedagogical approaches to *Hamlet* and *Heart of Darkness*. With *Heart of Darkness*, Joe did not feel or see the same esteem as he did toward *Hamlet*. In fact, from the outset of his *Heart of Darkness* unit, Joe sought to undercut that text rather than reify its status as a canonical text (or as a text frequently cited on the AP exam) as he did with *Hamlet*. But *Hamlet* is different because of the undisputed status it garners, and *Hamlet*, its scholarship, and Joe's perceptions of *Hamlet* and its scholarship all carried over into his classroom. My goal in this chapter is to show how *Hamlet*, as the epitome of textual canonicity in Joe's mind, influences his teaching and how his teaching of that text in particular retains religious overtones of authority.

In focusing on Joe, this chapter shines a light on teachers' engagement with the texts they teach and the pedagogies associated with that engagement. While the previous chapters focused on establishing the ideas of sacred texts and the rituals of the English classroom, this chapter expands upon those concepts (as well as on the other notions of canonicity: authority, tradition, discipline, and discipleship) to examine how *teachers* reap their authority, drawing from and invoking scholarship and their own histories to engage texts and, thus, to engage students with texts under a canonical frame. This engagement, I suggest, likens teachers to a type of Christian preacher, who "interprets Scripture for the community, placing it within the larger narrative of the biblical witness, and helps congregants make meaning for life" (Maddix & Thompson, 2012, p. 88). In this sense, the way in which Joe and the other teachers of this study present themselves as an authority or as an expert disciplines and forms their students in ways beyond the mere skills of reading and writing or beyond readers and writers.

I focus on Joe's pedagogy in this chapter because I saw the most clearly through my interactions with him how the phenomenon of authority – as connected to canonicity – was most

manifest. Specifically, I saw the ways in which "the Evans lectures" (as I will discuss) and the spoken word operated through him, acted as a source of t/Truth, and informed his notions of and about texts, textual interpretation, and even the processes of learning. Joe's reliance on the idea of the "lecture" in particular seemed to be the pedagogical equivalent – or perhaps an application or limitation – of listening to, proclaiming, or professing "the word." Much has been written about the prominent role of lecture in the classroom; however, in Joe's case, lecture acts as a type of professing (and, as you will see, a type of profess(or)ing), disciplining, and "spiritual reading" (Maddix & Thompson, 2012), which "requires both the practice of attentive listening and a willingness to respond to what one hears" (p. 85). In this sense, Joe seems to draw from canonized notions of pedagogy to engage with and teach *Hamlet*. This type of engagement, via lectures, secured his own authority in his classroom and, in the process, disciplined his students in engaging with *Hamlet* in a specific way, much in the way a preacher may with his congregation. In the data re/presented below, I use Christian pastoral techniques, beliefs, and practices (Brass, 2001; Maddix & Thompson, 2012) as a lens to portray Joe as an authority or interpreter (a type of preacher in a Protestant Christian tradition[3]) of a canonical text (Scripture) for his students (congregation).

Of Authority and Being Made to Listen

As already stated, the scholarship around *Hamlet* seemed to have the greatest influence on Joe's pedagogy. For example, his teaching of *Hamlet* was largely guided by online, audio lectures about the play from Martin Evans, a former Stanford University English professor. Joe told me at one point during my time with him that these lectures were foundational for his own

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[3] And, again, I acknowledge the raced, gendered, and classed identities or statuses that come with such a tradition.

study and understanding of the play, saying "I really like Martin Evans as a professor" (Interview 1), "I really like his take on things" (Interview 2), and to his students, "He has a really compelling way of understanding *Hamlet*" (2.3). In a follow-up interview after the students had listened to and were quizzed on the Evans lectures, Joe told me why he required his students to listen to the lectures:

> I like putting [students] in touch with [the lectures] because as I was learning I was like, 'Wow, what the heck I'm just going to make them listen to it instead of trying to repackage it!' [Evans] gives a big frame to understand *Hamlet*. He goes over a history of all the theories and categorizes them as three major ways of interpreting *Hamlet* and then he gives the last way, which I think is pretty much a New Critical approach… yeah, I really like the lectures. (Interview 2)

Joe values these lectures because of the way they engage *Hamlet* by going beyond *Hamlet*. They added to his respect for the play and, importantly, for its history of "theories" and scholarship. In "framing" the text, and "interpreting" *Hamlet*, the lectures appear to serve as a source of t/Truth for Joe and place *Hamlet* within a larger scholarly conversation or, to borrow again from Maddix and Thompson (2012), "within the larger narrative of the biblical witness" (p. 88). From this perspective, Joe's affirmation of the lecture is an affirmation of the canonicity of *Hamlet*, and Joe invests Evans's voice with some authority, as further evidenced by the students being tested on their knowledge of these lectures through quizzes – a way to produce truth from truth.

Joe's comments and pedagogical practice of having the students listen to and be quizzed on "the Evans lectures" (as he referred to them in class) do not reveal Joe's attitude towards *Hamlet* as much as they do his allegiance to Evans as a professor and Evans's ideas about *Hamlet* as a way in which to engage *Hamlet* as an authoritative text. It's not just that the Evans

lectures help Joe to understand *Hamlet*, but that they further reify *Hamlet* as a type of sacred, canonized text, one that needs to be or can be vitalized through some other authority. What interests me, then, is how we might imagine a connection between Joe's reliance on these lectures and a Christian scriptural encounter, where the lectures "move the reader [Joe] to a deep level of engagement with the chosen text [*Hamlet*] and with the Spirit [Evans] who enlivens the text" (Maddix & Thompson, 2012, p. 85). From this perspective, for Joe, "the Evans lectures," as indicative of the type of scholarship with which he was so impressed, served as *the* source of t/Truth and authority about the seemingly author-less *Hamlet*. Thus, "Martin Evans" or "the Evans lectures" become as much a classroom staple (the explicit curriculum) as "*Hamlet*" throughout Joe's unit, and Joe's students are, in his words, "made to listen" to "the word" of Evans. In keeping with the lens of religiosity that underscores this project, we might see how Joe's students are disciplined (are "made to listen") to the spoken word of the preacher (in this case, Evans). At the same time, however, "the Evans lectures" also invest Joe's voice with an authority as he sought to replicate this relationship – teacher and student, preacher and disciple, speaker and listener – with his own students by privileging the model of the teacher-preacher and advancing a curriculum that embedded the idea of listening to the spoken word with truth, authority, and power.

As their introduction to *Hamlet,* Joe's students were required to listen to all three of the Evans lectures over a long weekend and take notes on them. During one of my early visits to Joe's class, the students were quizzed on their understanding of the Evans lectures. So, their introduction to *Hamlet* consisted of lectures about *Hamlet*, of listening to "the Spirit who enlivens the text," rather than the play itself or even their own reading of the play; indeed, rather than their own thoughts and interpretations. Why? Well, just as Joe learned about *Hamlet* from

listening to the Evans lectures, so too did he expect the same of his students. There's a kind of discipleship happening here, where the students were introduced to an authoritative reading of an authoritative text, one that was predetermined from the outset and positioned as t/Truth, before their actual reading of the text.

Under this model, there is little room for debate, negotiation, or interpretation; the Evans lectures represented both the sanctioned and sanctified knowledge. What student would question Joe, or Evans, when they are "made to listen" to "the Stanford professor" – an authoritative voice coming from outside of the classroom? A parallel could be drawn here to a church congregation (either Protestant or Catholic, but I am reminded in particular of my own experiences as a Catholic Christian) who, vaguely familiar with scripture, is disciplined to listen to – or, in Joe's words, "made to listen to" – the preacher. The members of the congregation know they need to listen to and internalize (to *not* question or challenge) the preacher so that they may then "see (or "hear") the light," come to know the pathway to grace and salvation, or understand the truth behind the text. From the students' perspectives, in Joe's classroom, truths and understandings are constructed about texts as well as about the process of learning through the lecture or the spoken word. This is the means to some type of textual enlightenment. This is the implicit curriculum.

But, even though Joe made his students listen to Evans, he too felt the burden of preacher and preaching, as a long held tradition in the English classroom or church, where students and followers need to be "made to listen" ("disciplined") in some tradition: Throughout his *Hamlet* unit, Joe regularly played for his students pre-recorded, audio lectures of *himself*, accompanied by PowerPoint slides, that essentially made visible *his* thinking around key parts or homework sections of *Hamlet*. The parallel here is obvious as Joe, the proper disciple, essentially stepped

116

into the role Evans played for him and became the "voice"-made-flesh, a disembodied voice like that of God, the living and active word, or "the Spirit who enlivens the text" (Maddix & Thompson, 2012, p. 85) for the students. From a Catholic perspective, this lineage (from Evans, to Joe, to the students) may be likened to the traditional hierarchy of the church, where the Catholic congregation (the students) place ultimate interpretative authority in the Pope (Evans) and then in the Cardinals, Bishops, and priests (Joe). Similarly, Joe's use of his own lectures is not just a copying of the same method as Evans; rather, it is from Evans where Joe draws his own authority in teaching *Hamlet*. Joe's method, under my interpretation, is more than mere lecturing, and certainly was more than the mere expostulating of literary devices or plot structure. Joe's lectures are an exercise in authority, in obedience, discipline, and disciplining, for "Whoever heeds discipline shows the way to life" (Proverbs 10:17). Joe's pedagogy makes a statement about discipline and discipleship, in acting on or responding to the proclamation of the word and in following a specific tradition in the English classroom.

When I asked Joe about these pre-recorded lectures, he responded by explaining his overall approach to teaching *Hamlet*, saying: "With *Hamlet*, there is an impression on the students' behalf of needing some help to understand it and that there should be some dedicated class time toward that" (Interview 2). While this comment reveals Joe's thinking about his own students and *Hamlet* as a text for classroom study and justifies his use of the audio-recorded lectures, I never heard his students say that they need help in understanding *Hamlet*. Rather, one class day before playing his recorded lecture, Joe said to his students, "I got a request maybe about 2 or 3 years ago that you wanted a little bit more input on *Hamlet*" (2.4). He used this older request to justify his current use of his and Evans's lectures during his *Hamlet* unit. He invoked the voices of his *past* students when he mentioned to me that "there is an impression on

117

the students' behalf" that they needed "input" and "help understanding" the play. These notions of "input" and "understanding" play an important part in the way Joe sees his students and their learning and understands his own role in the classroom. They also help me to advance the metaphor of Joe as a type of preacher, as both "input" and "understanding" suggest that Joe sees his students as needing his authority and knowledge of the text to fill some void in their lives. This rationale positions Joe's current students in a way that always-already makes them in need of him and *his* input and understanding. Likewise, it positions Joe as the nurturer, the one who has the authority "to give" to his students, the one who may provide or grant some "means of grace" or enlightened understanding. Might we consider then, from this perspective, that Joe's classroom parallels a Christian church ritual where *Hamlet*, not the Bible, serves as a "quasi-sacred text that could be expounded upon by a licensed teacher/preacher to reveal entrance to the kingdom of light" (Scholes, 1998, p.15)? Joe, in other words, makes his students complete, makes meaning for them, and puts them on the path to some greater understanding, some salvation. The students "bare witness" through the proclamation of the word. And, his reservation of "dedicated class time" for the breakdown of the text can be likened to his time to sermonize or preach even though the lecture is pre-recorded and can be "made to listen to" anytime or anywhere. But for Joe, the dedicated class lecture time is an important time for witnessing and listening to the word.

Towards (Building) Salvation

All of these aspects of Joe's teaching – his role as preacher, his reliance on lecture, his beliefs about textual truths and authority – construct visions of his students and for the purposes of his class and lectures. More specifically, they position the student as deficient and in need of

Joe's nurturing. Joe, in this interpretation, positioned as the teacher-as-preacher who brings grace or understanding to the child, or at the very least, some type of fulfillment that they cannot receive on their own. Joe's class, then, is very much about building towards something – the AP test, college, or the hereafter – and Joe's language is imbued with this religious discourse. For example, during one interview, I asked him to describe his teaching as a metaphor: "If you had to describe your pedagogical approach as a metaphor, how would you describe it?" He responded immediately and with purpose,

> I like the scaffold as a metaphor. I like to… set up the scaffolding, and then watch [the students] get in there and hopefully build something. There's a lot of work to do to set that up so students can do that on their own. I like to set things up so… they're not even aware that there is scaffolding there. They just have the impression that they've done something on their own. (Interview 2)

In explaining his approach, Joe relies on the popular educational term "scaffolding" and the idea that lessons and course objectives need be instrumental or arranged in a linear way so that students can progress in higher-order thinking skills and practices. This is not a surprise. But Joe means it in a very deliberate way, one in which students "have the *impression* that they've done something on their own." In other words, they have not done things on their own; Joe has done much of the building, and his students, once they have listened to the word and once they become the proper disciples, are only in a position to build with the tools of "input" and "understanding" that Joe has given them. Joe once again actualizes his role as teacher-as-preacher with his own metaphor of the scaffold and sees himself as an integral part of what the students can (and cannot) be able to do. He is like the Christian preacher who "speaks *for* God, *from* the Scriptures, *by* the authority from the church, *to* the people" (Maddix & Thompson,

119

2002, p. 88). He brings things to life for his students. But how does this happen on a day-to-day basis? Moreover, for what end is this building or scaffolding?

When Joe introduced *Hamlet* to his students, he explained their assignments, reading schedules, and his approach to the text. During this time, he told them about his expectations for lecture, for their listening to the spoken word. He said,

> I am going to occasionally just go ahead and give a lecture. I am probably going to try to keep it 20 minutes, so I'm going to give you these little oases… And hopefully on the basis of that, you can kind of bridge the gap with the remaining scenes and you'll be able to see some of these things yourself. That is the hope there. (2.4)

This short directive to his students reveals the way in which Joe's understanding of himself (as a teacher-preacher), of the text under classroom study, and of his students, inform and are informed by implicit discourses of religiosity. Similar to Rachel's use of "icon," Joe's reference to his lectures as "little oases," indicates how and what he thinks about them or, rather, what he thinks about "listening to the word." "Oases" connotes a refuge or relief, some safe haven or fertile ground, much like salvation or heaven ("Oases," 2016). Joe positions, then, his preaching of the word as a type of salvation, the end goal of any community of believers; it is in Joe's preaching that the students may find refuge. Quite literally, the implication here, of course, is that everything else in the classroom *besides* Joe's lectures constitutes barren, acid desert landscape – that's how important (sacred) Joe sees the text that they are studying as well as the practice of lecture as a means to that study. He invests the text with a God-like authority, an authority that is difficult to ascertain by the average, common, perhaps child-like individual/student, and Joe is the one who must bring or make accessible to them the "little oases." Without him, the students are desert/ed – abandoned, forsaken, and destined to wander

in the difficult text. There is a certain way of thinking embedded in this comment that, as I have already noted, positions his students as needing him, and it connects to long held assumptions and traditions in the secondary English classroom (as well as in religious practice), where the teacher (or preacher) needs to "right" the child or show them "the way."

The idea of "oases," to the biblically-literate individual, evokes images of Christ in the desert or the Israelites' flight from Egypt, and these images or allusions to those Biblical narratives align with Joe's comments about "giving," "input," and "understanding." In this brief comment, Joe tells his students he is going "to give" them "little oases." This shows Joe in an active positioning and reveals his students as deficient or lacking – they need the salvation that comes from the spoken word. This comment suggests that Joe has an understanding of his students as only partly (developmentally, academically, spiritually, etc.) formed and in need of something: meaning, enlightenment, grace, or salvation, etc. His lectures in this regard bring hope to the student and provide him or her with a means to salvation. He echoes this notion when he tells his students, "hopefully… you'll be able to see [for] yourself. That is the hope there." Joe's use of "hope" (twice) suggests that upon hearing the word, his students will have been transformed and enlightened – that is his "prayer," his hope – and will be able to achieve salvation. Much like the preacher who tends and cares for his congregation, so too does Joe as he nurtures them – through the spoken word – to attain glory or, rather, to save them because they are in need of saving.

Joe's lectures, oases, or sermons would not exist without the text, and his attitude toward those lectures rests on the assumption that the text is the word, which he brings to life. The idea of *Hamlet,* specifically, being "the word" fits with the vision of salvation and his primary goals toward literature instruction. For example, Joe said during an interview that in teaching

121

literature, "I'm trying to give them that existential dimension – that literature helps you to make sense of your place in the world and to live life more fully and abundantly… and I think [*Hamlet*] is a good opportunity to do that" (Interview 1). Joe's use of "existential" is grounded in existentialism as a philosophy, which focuses on the individual who "is held to be what he makes himself by the self-development of his essence through acts of the will (which, in the Christian form of the theory, leads to God)" ("Existential," 2016). Joe's ideas about literature instruction rest on canonized notions about sacred Scripture and literature instruction – one can find God through Scripture. Joe plays an important role in this process because he is the one who "gives… that existential dimension" to his students. He literally positions himself as giving his students access to God and God's grace (an important theological point in both Catholic and Protestant traditions), and his hope is that his students might "live life more fully and abundantly" through the word. This phrase, such a naturalized part of Joe's everyday discourse, comes right from the Bible as Jesus – He who is *the* Word – tells his student-disciples, "I came that they may have life and have it abundantly" (John 10:10). Joe's thinking about his role in the classroom is imbued with religiosity, and his words actually *do* something for *him* – they give, build, construct, and create a desirable end, purpose, or vision for preaching about *Hamlet*.

On Profess[or]ing

The idea of saving or salvation is the assumption behind lecturing, preaching, or professing: it fulfills, provides for, in/forms, and has a long, sacred tradition where "Christians engage Scripture through the preaching of the Word… Preaching transformed the lives of early Christians. In similar ways, when the Scripture is preached today, the hope is lives are changed and transformed through the word of the Holy Spirit" (Maddix & Thompson, 2012, p. 88). In

the context of Joe's classroom, if we can follow my suggestion that Joe implicitly advances the notion of himself as a preacher, his "hope" or prayer is that through his preaching, students' lives are changed when they can begin to "see" – the light, the truth, the meaning of the text – for themselves, with new eyes, and without him having to intervene. A discourse of (Christian) religiosity is prevalent in Joe's words and actions, and it canonizes his pedagogy and thinking about what his pedagogy is and who his students are.

On that note, I wonder about the extent to which Joe saw his lectures as a type of sermon, an invitation for his students to listen to the word and come to their own enlightened understanding or undergo some sacred transformation or enlightenment (salvation). Similar to the idea that his students needed input and understanding, I wonder about the role Joe felt his lectures played in his students' understanding of the text and, more generally, in their own academic formation as learners. In attempting to learn this from him, I asked him how he prepares for these audio lectures, and he said,

> I really feel like as I get into that role it's like I'm already pretending to be a college
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> professor… So usually it's me, and it's usually the night before me figuring it out, going
>
> through my sticky notes and noticing a couple things that they probably did not notice.
>
> (Interview 2)

Joe's notion of "professor," I think, carries important weight in the context of his own canonized expectations for himself and as a disciple of Martin Evans, who I have already argued can be considered his version of the Holy Spirit who brings the word to life. If he means "professor" in the sense of the traditional, academic sense of the word (as his use of "college" implies), then he sees himself as a teacher of the highest ranking, someone who has specialized in a particular branch of learning ("Professor," 2016). Here, it is in *Hamlet*, and Joe's comments illustrate his

notions of the challenging nature of the text and the rigor and method required to understand it or "figure it out." He expects himself to "notice" things his students did not, implicitly positioning himself, again, as a holder of some authority that he feels the need to share with his students, and for their own benefit, where they will be "made to listen to" the word. This is absolutely how Joe spoke about Martin Evans, and his idolization of Evans perhaps encouraged his own desire to "already" "pretend to be a college professor" – to follow in Evans's footsteps. The religiosity here is apparent, I think, when we think about Jesus and His disciples, preachers and their followers, etc. Furthermore, Joe expects a disciplined, rigorous study of the text that leads to an enlightened understanding. For him, this study is grounded in close reading, (sticky) note-taking, and unfettered review of those notes in order to "figure it out" or understand it. This type of study echoes what Joe called "New Critical" when he referred to Evans's interpretation of *Hamlet* (Interview 2). A New Critical (or close reading) approach values the text above all else and posits that any meaningful interpretation of the text can be found within it. As discussed earlier in this project, the link between New Criticism and (Protestant) Christianity has long been established (Guillory 1983; Scholes, 1998) and further constructs school subject English as an "evangelical enterprise" (Scholes, 1998, p. 25), something to which Joe clearly, but implicitly, subscribes.

Of course, this method is also done in service to the traditional, or canonized, expectations of the college classroom or lecture hall (or hallowed halls of some monastery, for that matter), where it is the job of the (traditionally white, male, Christian) professor to profess the word. Traditionally, the job of the professor was to profess, to lecture, to claim to have knowledge ("Professor," 2016). An older definition of "professor" as "a public lecturer" ("Professor," 2016) is still invoked today in variations of academic job titles and descriptions.

But Joe, interesting enough, fulfills this role in his own secondary classroom. One day after class, after he lectured on the "themes, motifs, and symbols" in the previous nights' reading, he came up to me at the back of the room and said,

> I'm always nervous lecturing in front of someone from academia. I know we aren't supposed to do that, but I do enjoy sitting at the feet of a good professor – listening to that knowledge… There must be something good in it if we've been doing it for hundreds of years and it's produced great scholars and thinkers. (2.11, field notes)

Though only a grad student, Joe associated me with "academia" and saw in me (for whatever reasons) someone who both supported and challenged the idea of the lecture ("I know we shouldn't… but I do…"). But Joe, in these comments, reaffirmed the idea of "listening to the word," of "being made to listen," and of "sitting at the feet of a good professor" in order to take in "that knowledge." He even carries a tone of insurgency when he says he knows "we aren't supposed to" lecture (for whatever reason), but he does it anyway because "we've been doing it for hundreds of years and it's produced great scholars and thinkers." Again, there is an implication of sacred tradition and expectation – canonized pedagogy – that justifies his practice. In fact, this was the first time he linked what he was doing in the classroom to the notion of professing or professor-ing.

On that note, some play with the word "professor" casts a new light on Joe and his role as the preacher/teacher/professor in the classroom. The word, of course, has religious roots in Medieval Latin, where it indicated someone who had taken the vows of a religious order or someone who openly professes the Christian faith ("Professor," 2016), no different than a preacher. In this sense, might we see that Joe's efforts are in service to his (religious) order and the complex, authoritative, and divinely inspired text or word? Under this interpretation, Joe

sees it as his duty – his canonized expectation – to profess that word. His struggle to "figure it out" hearkens to the notion that any human individual is limited in his understanding of the word – as in a sentiment attributed to St. Augustine that "if you have understood, it is not God" (as cited in Johnson, 2011). His role as teacher-as-preacher, however, gives him the apposite opportunity to make sense of the word for his own followers: just as a congregation needs a preacher in order to understand the word, so too do Joe's students, and his lectures are the means to that end. Further, Joe's use of "good" in this short comment – "good professor," "there must be something good in it" – allows me the possibility to, again, play with words and liken "good" to "righteous" or "holy". In this case, Joe, like Evans before him, is the "good professor" (a preacher?) who helps and nurtures his congregation by making sense of the word for them, relying on the Holy Spirit for the word to be actualized. Just as before ("oases"), his lectures might be seen as a means of grace, a noble deed, infused with "something good" that produces "great thinkers". Finally, Joe's comment that "we've been doing it for hundreds of years" serves not as an indicator or qualifier for change, but rather as an anchoring of his practice in canon, in sacred tradition. In this case, tradition – that which is handed down from generation to generation, from Evans to Joe to his current students – is a sacred, accepted practice that firmly solidifies the purpose of the teacher-as-preacher and allows Joe to act on his canonized expectations of his role: professing, or professor-ing, the word.

In carrying through the religious discourse, I want to suggest that his comments about himself, alone, "the night before… figuring it out" and reviewing the word echo monastic traditions of monks who labor over the word, transcribe it, and eventually profess it. And his imagery of "sitting at the feet of a good professor" parallels the people and children who would sit at the feet of Christ, listening to his parables. Those parables – stories just like *Hamlet* –

126

contain nuggets of truth and wisdom, and even His disciples struggled to understand them in

their entirety at times. These comments reify the author/ity Joe sees invested in himself, both in

telling the story (the storyteller) he sees through the word and in understanding or seeing what

his students, his congregation, cannot. But these comments were also reified *during* class when

Joe paced the room with his *Hamlet* book and clipboard cupped in his hand and at his side. This

was a daily standard during his teaching, even though he rarely, if ever, read directly from the

book during class. It reminded me of a pastor at my church when I was young who, during his

homily, used to pace the church floor in front of the congregation while holding the Gospel

under his arm. I remember thinking that practice conveyed a powerful statement: though he was

talking, the word was speaking through him. Joe's simple trait, perhaps idiosyncratic and

regardless of whether or not he purposely meant to carry his *Hamlet* book around everyday,

proved a similar and subtle indication of the word speaking through Joe, much like my own

pastor. He didn't need to "reference" the book; he knew it, and the word worked through him.

Again, there's an implicit authority being established here in the way in which he engages with

the text, and there was an implicit disciplining as well because the book was filled with the

different colored "sticky notes" he mentioned before: "it's me, and it's usually the night before

me figuring it out, going through my sticky notes" (Interview 2). These bright green, orange,

and yellow post- notes, I presume, marked important pages, passages, and quotations, and they

were visual reminders to his students that he had "the understanding," "the input," or the

authority to evangelize *Hamlet*. He was the "good professor."

He sees this as his job, and his profess[or]ing is the result of his careful, deliberate,

disciplined study of the text, pouring over it and making notes about its meanings and his

interpretations. Those notes represented the symbol of the intense and disciplined work required

127

to "understand" *Hamlet*. Joe disciplines his students (disciples) in this tradition, as they are required to take nightly notes on their reading, but the implication, as they come to class each day and are made to listen to the word, is that they are not yet capable of professing on their own; they are not yet *profess*ors. That day will come when they, after intense study, take up the mantle of teacher-as-preacher, take their vows, and profess the word, *Hamlet*, on their own (as future teachers of English?).

Other Models of the Teacher-Preacher

The vision of the teacher-preacher is not limited to Joe, of course; it looked similar in Rachel's classroom. Rachel, as discussed in the previous chapter, echoed much of what Joe said when she referenced the long tradition of reading Shakespeare in the classroom or when she mentioned to her students that she drew upon her own AP and college notes to assist in her teaching of *Hamlet*. Rachel, like Joe, relies on these previous sources (indications of canonization and authority) to mark her own authority in the classroom because she sees them as a source of official knowledge. Unlike Joe, however, these were *personal* sources of authority – *her* previous classes, not some third-party lectures. Perhaps Rachel relied on handouts, reading aloud, and question-and-answer style discussion to teach *Hamlet* because those practices had been representative of her own experiences with the text. She did not want her students to miss anything about the text, which is why so much reading aloud happened in her classroom.

In addition to those examples in the previous chapter, I want to briefly share another instance where Rachel drew from these previous experiences to establish her personal authority, like Joe, in her classroom. Upon introducing *Hamlet* to her students, she mentioned the difficulty in reading Shakespeare's language and encouraged them to read the footnotes as they

read so they could understand everything (i.e., the plot, the play on words, the metered language, etc.). After making this comment, she ran to a bookshelf and pulled two, several-inch thick paperback books off of a shelf. She told her students,

> Also, I bought these books when I was a wee thing… These books, guys [dramatically slams books down on a desk], they're definitions. Any word that appears in any Shakespeare play, look it up, it tells you what the word means, and then it lists every single play it shows up in and what line it shows up in. So as you're reading [*Hamlet*], if there is something you really want to look up, I've got the answer. (Rachel 11.4)

This short aside reveals another way that Rachel establishes her authority in the classroom, especially during her teaching of *Hamlet*. Like Joe, she draws upon these other sources, in this case Shakespearean reference books, as sources of truth and authority in their pursuit of understanding *Hamlet*. More importantly, however, drawing upon reference texts like these positions her as a type of preacher as well because it reveals that she has something the students need. *She* has "the answer," as she says, but having already told her students that she studied *Hamlet* in high school and college and with her comment that she's had these reference books since she was young ("when I was a wee thing"), she proves her knowledge about the text, grounded in her personal experiences with it. There's a disciplining of a sacred tradition and authority here, of method, where these other sources and experiences invest in and are invested by Rachel, and she makes this known to her students by drawing upon these books and her personal experiences. During my observations of her *Hamlet* unit, no student, of course, ever asked for a definition from the books, nor did Rachel refer to them again, but her point was already made when she pulled them out this one time, as those books made more a statement about Rachel than they did about the text.

Relying on other sources, as Joe and Rachel do, is not the only way a teacher may draw his or her authority. For example, during my observation of Lisa's unit on *Of Mice and Men*, I saw how she positioned herself and her students in similar ways but through an entirely different pedagogy. The day after the students completed their test on the novel, Lisa had them sit in a circle on the floor in order to talk about their "personal feelings about George's decision to kill Lennie" (2.12), a completely different direction and engagement with the text than her somewhat non-personal focus on character development had been throughout their study of the text. Whereas her teaching of the novel was mostly grounded in the means of professing the text, like Joe or Rachel, this ending conversation, I would suggest, was grounded in a method of *confessing*, where Lisa encouraged her students to provide personal narratives and stories to substantiate their claims. Confessing, too, carries religious connotations and also refers to a sacrament of confession, where one declares or admits his or her sins to a priest for absolution or forgiveness. The act of confessing is a way to set "the sinner" aright through the guidance of the priest who confers the absolution. Confessing, like professing, relies on the pastoral, allows for the teacher to reify his or her role as preacher, and serves as an authoritative source of knowledge.

How so? Well, Lisa followed her comment by saying, "Secondly, a lot of you felt like [in their pre-discussion journal time] euthanasia is ok for animals but not for humans. Some of you said, well you know my uncle had terminal cancer, and I think it's ok. With your partner, as comfortably as you can, talk about one or both them" (2.12.). Lisa's directive invites students to draw from personal stories to answer this question that is tangentially related to the text. After taking some time for partner talk and then a whole group discussion on this topic and its connection to *Of Mice and Men*, Lisa ended the discussion by saying,

Some of you talked about euthanasia with pets, and, you know, Seabiscuit [the horse], would never have gone on years later to beat the record and win the Santa Anita if he had been euthanized, and I know it's a horse story, but we hear human stories like that too when, you know, people miraculously come out of comas and stuff like that. So I can understand why some of you have a lot of compassion. You've been through it; you've seen family members and friends and think what's best and then you hear stories where the opposite can happen. So it's a tough situation, but you have to have hope. (2.12)

This short summary statement on their discussion looks nothing like anything Joe ever said to his students during their study of *Hamlet*, but like Joe, Lisa plays a role that positions herself as a teacher-preacher and disciplines her students towards a certain engagement – "confessing" – with the text, in light of the non-literary aspect of the topic under discussion, euthanasia. In this case, she uses a student example of the famous horse Seabiscuit, who was almost euthanized before his fame, and touches on the stuff of "miracles" to make the point that people can "come out of comas and stuff like that." With this, she implicitly advocates and encourages the students against euthanasia and in favor of the broad idea "to have hope" even in dire circumstances, a stance that she also implicitly suggests carries compassion. Again, though this type of discourse or this pedagogical practice did not look or sounds like anything in Joe or Rachel's teaching of *Hamlet*, might we still see that Lisa is indeed using these student stories, or confessions, to preach? Through student confessions of personal experiences and opinions, she "gives" her students not necessarily the right interpretation of *Of Mice and Men* but the right *perspective* about euthanasia in *Of Mice and Men*. In filtering their interpretation through her own lens, she's molding them toward a belief of "hope" and sets them on a path to some greater understanding about the book and about life in general.

Moments like these were characteristic of Lisa's pedagogy, offering snippets of "homilization" throughout her teaching, but they were usually disguised as a type of personal confession. For example, at the beginning of their study of the novel, when introducing what life was like during the Great Depression, Lisa told the students:

I learned about the Depression basically through my family... My grandpa, like, there were just these little things that would happen while I was growing up where he would never use a full paper towel piece. I would use like two at a time, and he would cut them in quarters and save the other pieces for later. He would never use the whole thing, and growing up we were never allowed to chew a full piece of gum. We would always have to have half a piece of gum because it's wasteful to chew an entire piece. These are things that trickled down from my grandparents, to my parents, and to me, and even today I don't give my kids a full stick of gum because it just seems wasteful. (2.5)

Like her comments about euthanasia, this short story to her class carries an implicit disciplining, where Lisa confesses some part of her life to offer some truth and to aid in her students' understanding about the topic at hand. In this sense, she uses the story of her grandfather to illustrate how she is not wasteful. In turn, she is also preaching to her students to consider their wastefulness, perhaps setting them on the right path in the tradition of her grandfather. And, of course, this is all done in the context of *Of Mice and Men*.

Lisa's act of confessing carries an important and similar purpose to Joe's professing. In both cases, the religiosity that undercuts their engagement with the texts they teach, and the canonized pedagogies (sacred traditions) associated with that engagement allows them to carry out their role in pastoral ways that discipline students beyond certain skills associated with the English classroom. It canonizes a type of reading and thinking of and about texts and positions

themselves – in different ways – as an authority in the classroom that can help or guide the students to some desirable end, to "help [their] congregants make meaning for life" (Maddix & Thompson, 2012, p. 88).

Conclusion

The goal of this chapter is to extend the notions of canonicity offered in the previous two chapters and to more tightly link what we do in the English classroom to the religious traditions that have come before and shaped the discipline. Here, I offer the idea that the teacher-preacher canonizes and is canonized by certain pedagogies and discourses fueled with religiosity, and it from these pedagogies and discourses that the teachers use and draw an authority in teaching the texts they do. For Joe in particular, he has canonized expectations as to what an English teacher should be – a professor – and what his students are or need – children in need of enlightenment. And this is especially evident during his teaching of *Hamlet*, rather than *Heart of Darkness*, because of the canonicity that *Hamlet*, in particular, carries. Because of these notions, Joe relies on canonized notions of pedagogy masked as "technology" or a "digital classroom" where lectures are audio-recorded and quizzes are given via online means. This is simply the wolf in sheep's clothing. The religious (Christian) discourse that guides Joe's thinking and practice reifies the traditions and assumptions that have always existed in the English classroom and to a large extent limit his and his students' critical engagement with the text. Indeed, notions of canon and canonicity instruct Joe as to how to approach or teach a canonical text like *Hamlet*. Joe, though a very good teacher and respected by his students, is somewhat pedagogically constrained through canonicity as the teacher-preacher.

CHAPTER 6: ON CANONICITY

> "A critical postmodern research requires researchers to construct their perception
> of the world anew, not just in random ways but in a manner that undermines
> what appears natural, that opens to question what appears obvious."
> (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2002, p. 124)

Introduction

There might be an inclination to critique the teachers of this study for their seemingly natural approaches in the English classroom and to literature instruction, but this project is not about criticizing pedagogy or delineating "good" and "bad" teaching. In fact, the previous chapters provide only brief glimpses into the pedagogy of the three participants, and even in pointing out what some may consider expected, normal, or traditional pedagogical practices – practices that to me as secondary English teacher seemed expected and obvious – I want to reiterate that these three teachers were widely respected leaders by their colleagues and their students at their respective schools. I saw the ways in which they patiently and graciously interacted with their students, and I likewise saw how much the students enjoyed coming to class on a regular basis. Furthermore, this project is not an attempt to critique the canon and to enter into the tired canon debate about what canonical texts should or should not be taught in secondary English classroom. Rather, on its most basic level, the analysis of pedagogy being offered in this project serves as a means to theorize and illustrate what canonicity is as a broad construct or approach and to argue as to how it works in secondary English classrooms. I began this project with the following, over-arching question: How do ideologies of the canon, particularly religious ideologies, play out through pedagogy? I will use this chapter to address that question and to discuss how seeing canonicity as a discursive frame may deepen English Education conversations about and critique of the canon as only a list of books.

Towards a Theory of Canonicity Revisited

The previous chapters reveal to a certain degree how the concept of the canon may be embedded in curricula and pedagogy beyond its typical (natural, normative, expected, obvious, etc.) understanding or definition as a list of books. While this project does engage scholarly conversations around the literary canon as a list of books, especially those linked to ideas of text selection, variation, and diversification across the English curriculum, it also seeks, at the same time, to expand, reframe, shift, deepen, and challenge those conversations by focusing on the broader concept of *canonicity*. In order to do this, all three data chapters offer an examination of pedagogy that explores different facets of canonicity. Chapter 3 examined how teachers think about, teach, and treat texts like a type of sacred Scripture. Chapter 4 reimagined the English classroom as a type of religious ritual. Chapter 5 drew parallels between teachers and preachers and illustrated how they positioned themselves and texts through different aspects of sacred authority. These chapters help to illustrate that traditional conversations and debate around the canon have focused on the canon as a list of books. In one sense, focusing on the canon as a list has proven to be a red herring as this project considers the unchallenged and familiar practices, modes of thought, and ways of being in the English classroom that entrench the ideology of the canon and canonicity in ELA curricula and pedagogy beyond its typical understanding as the list of books. This project serves as an initial attempt at making canonicity visible in classroom spaces, where it operates on the ground in teachers' thinking and feeling, on their classroom walls and in handouts, and through their everyday classroom practices. Indeed this project illustrates how canonicity is woven into the very fabric of English teaching, especially around the teaching of canonical texts.

I have argued throughout this project that canonicity operates as a macro and micro construct and in an implicit and discursive way to frame the English classroom. Here, I will break down this positioning of canonicity, in light of the previous data chapters. In the tradition of a Critical English educator like Appleman (2009), I want to more explicitly offer canonicity as a critical lens for seeing one way in which pedagogy may work in an English classroom.

Theorizing canonicity as frame allows me to situate it as a discourse, as a type of curriculum, and as micro and macro constructs in English classrooms. As already mentioned, the frame (Goffman, 1974) acts a structure of expectations, a "shaper" of thoughts and actions. In this sense, the frame serves as a filter to the discourses that may or may not permeate the classroom, and while multiple frames may operate in any one context, a frame also implies consensus and complicity. The cases presented in the previous chapters illustrate just that – a normative and consensual orientation on the part of teachers and students toward the teaching of canonical texts in the English classroom. There is little variation in students' experiences of Rachel's *Hamlet*, Joe's *Hamlet,* and Lisa's *Catcher* and *Of Mice and Men*; there's patterned and synchronized (Goffman, 1974) activity around these texts that comes across as normed behavior or pedagogy in the English classroom. Looking at this pedagogical behavior as a frame of canonicity suggests that there are rules and principles that guide these pedagogical encounters in the secondary English classroom. Those rules include an assumed approach toward teaching and studying canonical texts in the classroom – formal assessments, lecture, analysis and interpretation, an aura of reverence and worship, a strong work ethic, etc. These rules amount to a set of preconceived events and experiences that frame the classroom. Indeed, this frame pre-exists the classroom; it's already there, as if upon entering the classroom, the teacher and students enter this frame, this certain mindset, reality, and expectation of behavior that prepares

them for an engaged (canonical) study of a canonical text. This canonical frame, it turns out, is similar to a frame one may expect upon entering a church or cathedral; it's one of reverence, authority, and the expectation of discipline. Through the process of English, and the specific process of literary study, the teacher and the students have sub/consciously come to define themselves under this frame; they are limited in what they see and do through canonicity. At the same time, they are complicit in establishing and reaffirming it.

Drawing upon Eisner (1985), I have suggested that canonicity (and religiosity) is never explicitly stated or part of some explicit curriculum on the teachers' part. There is never a direct reference to it or a teaching of some religion, religious belief, or sacred Scripture. Rather, canonicity is inherent in the way Rachel, Joe, and Lisa teach; it's implicit and implied. It's unspoken and underlying what they do and how they think about the processes of learning. It's wrapped up in their discipline's history and legacy as well as their specific classroom ethos, routines, and methods for studying canonical texts. It invites particular forms of pedagogy and ways of knowing. In fact, during initial phases of my data analysis, I hypothesized that canonicity acted as a type of the *hidden* curricula, rather than the implicit and implied. While both terms imply the (perhaps) unintended transmission of beliefs, values, and norms through the classroom and learning, I realized during my data analysis that the canonicity of the classroom was not hidden. The previous chapters showed that canonicity and a discourse of religiosity pervaded specific things said and done. It was an ever-present value and expectation laced in teachers' thoughts and actions and even in the way in which students met this pedagogy with little explicit resistance or challenge.

On that note, while "implicit" refers to that which is not explicit, the Oxford English Dictionary offers another definition of the word, and one tied to, of course, the Church: the

ecclesiastical Latin *fides implicita*, or implicit faith ("Implicit," 2016). This term refers to a faith in spiritual matters that is subordinate to, or resting on the absolute authority of, the Church, such as implicit faith, implicit reverence, implicit obedience, or even implicit confidence. In other words, implicit as "unquestioning." Again, while there was no direct reference to the Church or religion in the classrooms I observed, there was an implicit expectation across these cases of what was supposed to be done in the classroom. I am reminded of Rachel's comment during an interview when, in reference to her pedagogical practices and teaching of Hamlet, she said, "It's what we do" (Interview 2). There is an implicit obedience to canonicity on her part that encourages her to teach *Hamlet* and to teach it in a certain way. This obedience is part of the reason she – like Lisa and Joe – have not changed their texts for classroom study to much degree even though they could change texts if they wanted to. I never heard a teacher rationalize his or her teaching of a text by saying something other than "it's canonical," "it's expected in AP classrooms," or "it's what we do." I also saw little resistance in the classrooms from the students' perspectives, which does not mean that it was not there (students not paying attention, reading Sparknotes at home, "playing school," etc.), but I never heard a student (or teacher, for that matter) question why they were doing what they were doing or reading what they reading. Teaching and studying these canonical texts the way in which these participants did was an assumed, unquestioned, and taken-for-granted aspect of the English classroom, no doubt the cause and result of the teachers' and students' previous experiences and expectations in other English classrooms and with other canonical texts.

From the perspective of discourse, canonicity is linked to words and actions and to regimes of truth that are exercised as a type of control or form of discipline. Canonicity, as a discourse, in other words, constitutes a discipline of power that regulates and controls the

production and circulation of rule-governed statements and actions. As indicative of a discursive system, these statements and actions are "enacted within a social context, which are determined by that social context, and which contribute to the way that social context continues its existence" (Mills, 1997, p. 10). In the context of the pedagogy studied for this project, canonicity created rules and regulations about the discipline of the school subject English, where certain religious-like ways of being, thinking, doing, feeling, etc. were connected to literary study. As I have argued, considering canonicity as a discourse allows us to see how the idea of the canon created what Rachel, Lisa, and Joe (and even my former self) consider to be the discipline of English and the methods of instruction that accompany literary study. The participants in this study have been in/formed by the canon just as much as they reaffirm the canon and canonicity; they (and their students) use and are used by canonicity, as canonicity justifies and warrants certain pedagogical encounters but also pre-conditions the situation for canonicity.

Lastly, because "Frames are indicated by cues or signs which stand in a part-whole relationship to the matter(s) framed" (Manning & Hawkins, 1990, p. 207), canonicity acts as a micro and macro construct. Canonicity works at the micro level, as illustrated in the classroom examples, through interactions and the self-presentation of teachers, and in the learning experiences of the students. Canonicity is constructed – created, reinforced, perhaps even deconstructed at times – as something authoritative and normative in and through discourses and practices. But canonicity also operates at a macro level in that it comes from regulated, authoritative experiences and understandings of what should be done in the English classroom or, in Rachel's own words, of "what we do" in the English classroom – what these teachers cite as their own previous experiences with the texts in college and high school, the AP curricula,

139

departmental and local standards and mandates, etc. These experiences, along with the canonicity they reflect and support, are likewise raced, classed, gendered, religioned, and even languaged.

I do not mean to suggest with this broad theorizing that teachers and students are "duped" upon entering the classroom, that they are mindless duds trapped in a canonical system. In fact, I want to argue the opposite: positioning canonicity as a frame helps us to see the discourses and expectations at play in the English classroom. Based upon this analysis, I also want to suggest two other points. First, there is an unnamed allegiance on the teachers' part toward these canonical texts and toward the means in which they are taught. In each case, there was some unquestioned attachment to texts and methods, even if, as in Lisa's case, the teacher did not care for the book he or she chose to teach. Both Joe and Rachel inherited their syllabi and have barely changed them because they feel that the texts they teach are the ones that "should" be taught. Their rationale for teaching these texts – even though they have the room, resources, and opportunity to change books – is beyond reason; it is not necessarily ir-rational but extra-rational – it is beyond explanation for these teachers, much like religious faith, creed, and practice are to religious followers. In this sense, canonicity is something that cannot be logically or rationally explained because of the strong attachments and engagements towards "what we do" in the classroom. Canonicity goes deeper than logic or rationality; it is something perhaps transcendent to which teachers pledge allegiance and serve, like religion, religious faith, or God. This might be one reason why conversations on the canon have remained relegated to texts and lists of books – fields of social science like English Education and Critical English Education are firmly grounded in reason and rationality and canonicity is not (more on this below).

Secondly, in considering all of these conceptual frames together, I want to suggest that canonicity may serve as a *hegemonic* (Gramsci, 1971) frame that acts as "a prison-house of language and ideas" (McClaren, 2009, p. 67). The sacred thinking about and around these texts influences the pedagogy associated with these texts – and it seems self-imposed. Certain pedagogical encounters are opened up and shut down because of the ways in which we think about texts, the English classroom, perhaps even the role of the English teacher. As I have already theorized, there is a consensual nature and complicity to the pattered activity that is the teaching of a canonical text across these cases (my own included). Teaching the canon, quite simply, looks similar across these cases. Further, Joe, Rachel, and Lisa all teach canonical texts that they either did not choose to teach (but can change if they want to) or texts they do not care for but feel compelled to teach. There is no mandate that they teach these texts; rather, they feel that the canonical nature of the texts warrants their inclusion in their class and warrants a certain pedagogy that goes along with the text. That pedagogy at times prevented, blocked, or impeded critical thinking and engagement. In this sense, Rachel, Joe, and Lisa show their active complicity with the "dominant worldview" and consent to their own domination by canonicity as they implicitly perpetuate it in and through their own pedagogy (as I did in my teaching career), and they did so most religiously when teaching canonical texts as opposed to the teaching of lesser or non-canonical texts when they infused more criticality, playfulness, and voices. There were times when I wondered what sense of agency, if any at all, they felt they had in their own classrooms when teaching canonical texts because I saw agency in other units of pedagogy, such as Joe with *Heart of Darkness* and Lisa with *The Body*. Most of all, no one was explicitly telling them what they could or could not do – or even what they could or could not teach! Instead, there seemed to be some self-disciplining on their part, that they might be committing some sin

141

or sacrilege for not doing what they thought was expected of them as secondary English teachers. These notions of sacrilege and self-disciplining (perhaps even guilt) also evoke religiosity in pedagogy.

On this note, I want to reiterate my argument that the idea of the canon – the notion of canonicity – has produced and constructed expectations for what English Education is and what it might be, rather than, despite popular belief, that English Education produced and constructed the list of the canon. These cases illustrate that the religious-like ways and ideologies of "canon" have instructed and "taught" teachers and students how "to do" English just as much as (if not more than) teachers have taught the canon.

While their teaching of these texts seemed more constrained, traditional, or constricted than innovative or original, I do not mean to imply that Rachel, Joe, and Lisa were not innovative or original at all. In fact, Lisa and I composed a manuscript for *English Journal* based upon her innovative approach to teaching literature circles and the power she leveraged in making those circles happen (see Appendix C for this manuscript. I will return to the idea behind this manuscript in my Epilogue as well). Though Rachel and Joe also showed some small moments where they played with the canonicity that permeated their room or a certain text, there was, nonetheless, an exercise of normative violence (Butler, 1993; Mills, 2007) that affirmed what has always been done in the English classroom and excluded what has always been excluded: those texts or ways of thinking and doing that do not align with "what we do" in the English classroom. Examining canonicity as a frame surfaces these ideas and highlights its religious-like and discriminatory strength.

Cross Case Discussion

In theorizing *canon*, I have suggested that we might think about the process of canonicity as an approach (or type of engagement) to teaching and learning in the English classroom that reveals how a canon as a source of power may function through pedagogy. In this case, just as a canonical list of books acts as a source of power, so too does the canonicity associated with English teachers' pedagogy around texts. Rather than recognizing the canon as the mere identification of a list of books, the previous chapters illustrate how English pedagogy can implicitly authorize, discipline, and sanctify certain ways of being, thinking, knowing, and doing in the English classroom. At its very least, canonicity authorizes some texts over others (such as, in these cases, *Hamlet* over *Heart of Darkness* or *Of Men and Men* over *Maus*), and at its most, canonicity prescribes or associates certain activities and means of engagement with certain texts (such as formal tests and assessments with *Catcher in the Rye* or lectures and analysis with *Hamlet*).

But these distinctions are only one part of the story of canonicity, as canon is inherently linked to notions of religiosity and Christianity; a religion cannot exist without some canon or without something being canonized. With its Christian origins and as implied through its connotative words like power, authority, discipline, official, and sanctity, the idea of canonicity carries explicitly religious roots and connotations. English education is certainly not a religion, but this project suggests that it has similar elements to a religion, and a religious-like discourse not only pervades the pedagogy and classrooms discussed in this study, but it also appropriates the style, structure, and ideas of religiosity. Religion and Christianity can be seen in and through the pedagogy of the participants in this study even though religious terms and constructs are not explicitly or literally mentioned or idolized. Thus, in the previous chapters I have likened

teachers' beliefs and pedagogy about and around canonical texts to sacred beliefs and practices, religious rituals, and pastoral authority.

The metaphor of religion also helps to show how teachers and students become complicit in reifying unquestioned traditions and assumptions of the secondary English classroom where certain texts and textual practices are held with greater authority or sanctity than others. English pedagogy, in other words, disciplines and makes disciples of teachers and students: the teachers implicitly reinforce a hierarchy, an importance, about texts and about the ways in which students must engage those texts. How might students' perceptions be influenced by this pedagogy? Those canonical texts studied in the English classroom are positioned as indicative of "great works" of literature, the type of literature that matters and has some value or power that can lead to change or can garner students' success somewhere, whether it be in an AP class, in college, or in some assumed social standing thereafter. Regardless of what the text can do to or for students or "where" the text gets them, the pedagogy discussed in the previous chapters suggests that a basic knowledge of or experience with these texts is a type fundamental ritual of the English classroom or even a prerequisite for being an informed, good citizen or person. In addition to knowing about these texts, the pedagogy ascribed to these texts suggests that they need to be approached with a reverence, a certain work ethic, and a willingness to know and understand – to comprehend and interpret – the details of their plot and literary merit. But canonicity lingers beyond the classroom as the teachers' pedagogy implicitly tells a story that only some texts carry esteem and need to be approached with rigor and reverence. The students most likely walked away from these experiences with an implicit understanding that *Hamlet* and the like will matter much more in their lives than anything else they may choose to read on their own, whether

young adult or multicultural literature, other genres or types of text, etc., just as I observed during choice read times.

The religious relations of canonicity are further evident in the way that some texts across these pedagogical cases are open for critical engagement while others are not. *Hamlet* in particular holds redoubtable strength and esteem that is reaffirmed and bolstered in the classroom; whereas texts like *Maus*, *The Body*, and *Heart of Darkness* are undercut in different ways. And, while there is a casual approach to texts like *Maus* and *The Body*, there is a deliberate, in-depth, and almost ritualistic approach to *Hamlet*, *Catcher*, and *Of Mice and Men* through quizzes, tests, reading checks, interpretative exercises, and lectures. Thus, not only does canonicity serve as an invitation to what has always been done in the classroom, but its religiosity also influences, even constrains, pedagogy. In some cases, the air of religiosity prevented or foreclosed critical engagement and notions associated with texts, and rather than innovation, these pedagogical encounters seemed to be defined by customs, rituals, traditions, and even the teachers' actualized authority. From this perspective, the religious, pastoral, and specifically Christian traditions, foundations, influences, and legacies tied to literacy and English education (Applebee, 1974; Graff, 1987; Collins & Blot, 2003; Brass, 2011; Brandt, 2004) seem just as strong today in forming, informing, and, perhaps, regulating the discipline. The pedagogy described herein suggests that what we do in the English classroom today is what we (as a people) have always done when we consider the religious and social foundations of schooling: include and exclude and discipline and disciple.

English Education and Critical English Education

Continued conversations in English Education will most assuredly find their way to questions about texts, just as Rush & Scherff (2013), Lapp, Fisher, and Frey (2013), and Groenke (2012) have framed and continue to frame these questions around the canon and text selection. But as this study points out, questions and conversations about texts are always linked to canon(s) and thus, to power, leading to a circuitous debate that keeps the literary canon (as a list) at its center of critique or esteem. In other words, it's always about the canon *as a list of books*. Perhaps this is one reason why there has been so little movement around or change to the required reading lists over time (Applebee, 1993; Stallworth et al., 2006; Stotsky, 2010; Stallworth & Gibbons, 2012) – that conversation rarely takes on a position other than "support or resist" or "keep or change" the canon as a list. But rather than ask what should be taught or included, this project suggests that the question to be asked is: How does our perception of a certain text allow or disallow certain ways of thinking, being, doing, and feeling in the classroom? How are the ideas and ideology of canon embedded in pedagogy? Because more than considering the ideology of texts, this project reveals how the ideology of the canon plays out beyond a list of books.

English education scholars like Arthur Applebee, Robert Scholes, and David Kirkland have called for similar shifts, but to little avail at least in the context of the cases studied for this project. Applebee (1996) has argued that English Education has long been teaching "traditions of the past," focusing on what is perceived to be "most worth knowing" in the English classroom. This has resulted in a reliance on, or tradition of, the canon and the canon as opposed to something else that is non-traditional canon (i.e., multiculturalism, contemporary YA, etc.). He emphasizes "knowledge-in-action" so that students might be prepared "to enter into and

146

participate in those [traditions] of the present and future" (p. 3). The result is a classroom grounded in the heteroglossic and dialogic rather than the authoritative and monologic that seem to characterize the classrooms in this study. Scholes (1998, 2011) and Kirkland (2008, 2013) have gone so far as to offer a complete rethinking of what we in English Education mean by "text" so as to ward off the traditional and New Critical approaches to certain texts and pedagogies. Scholes said decades ago, "I think we may at present be too concerned with teaching the right ideas in the classroom and not concerned enough with teaching the most effective ways of speaking, listening, reading, and writing" (1998, p. 65). And Kirkland has long-called for putting students' lives and texts at the center of the curriculum. But despite these decades-old calls for shifts, the cases in this study seem to suggest that tradition, normativity, and status quo persist in the secondary English classroom, especially in the context of teaching canonical texts.

As previously mentioned, the participants in this study did align themselves (as do I), however generally or vaguely, with notions of criticality, critical literacy, or Critical English Education. While Critical English Education comes close to engaging with canonicity, it also misses the mark in considering the ideologies beyond a list of books and the somewhat extra-rational pedagogical attachments these teachers have. For example, in regards to Black male youth, Kirkland (2011) has suggested that "educators tailor books to fit youth like a seamstress would mend clothes" (p. 206) by changing the curriculum and putting students' lives at the center of the English classroom. Using an example case study, he argues that students did not respond to a traditional unit on *Beowulf* but excelled during a unit on *The Iliad*. The difference was that the teacher brought in *Batman* and *X-Men* comic books as a way to frame their study of *The Iliad* and as a model for re-writing *The Iliad* in their own words and as a graphic novel.

Whereas the unit on *Beowulf* focused on comprehension and interpretation and formal quizzes and tests, Kirkland argues that the pedagogical encounters the teacher made around *The Iliad* (by bringing in comic books and re-writing it) "decanonized" the text and "brought it more in line with the pragmatic reading ideologies of contemporary populism" (p. 205). This example, I think still assumes a hierarchy on the part of the teacher, where the comic books are used as a means to an end in sanctioning and perhaps understanding *The Iliad*, the canonical text. In other words, while the ideology associated with *The Iliad* may be challenged or undercut, there is still an attachment to *The Iliad* as *the* text to be studied; the comic books do not stand on their own as a text to be sanctioned, and the teacher's pedagogy implicitly emphasizes *The Iliad*. This example again reminds me of the "Choice Read" times I witnessed in Lisa and Rachel's classrooms. Students brought in their own books to read for ten minutes of class time, and I saw many students reading graphic novels like *Batman* and *X-Men*. But like the classroom Kirkland discusses, there was no real engagement of those texts as texts themselves. They never quite make it into the classroom for their own merit.

Kirkland's idea of "decanonizing" texts, however, holds promise and certainly offers one way to challenge and resist or build upon the canonicity and religiosity associated with certain texts in the classroom. Elsewhere, Kirkland (2008, 2013) has argued that texts like graffiti, body art, hip-hop, billboards, clothing, and even a small box might serve as examples of literacy and of artifacts of student life in the classroom that would and could shake canonical foundations. Granted, I see that this example still pins the conversation of the canon to the realm of "changing texts," but I think a list of completely non-canonical texts (one in which I describe below) would begin to strip canonicity from pedagogy. Nonetheless, a curriculum of student artifacts sanctions those things as having some type of meaning or merit.

More problematic, I think, is the reliance on or justification of "academic literacy" in the English classroom. Indeed, in addition to critiquing the ideologies of texts, Critical English Education posits that "academic literacies" or "academic competencies" (Morrell, 2004; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008) remain the center of the classroom, no matter what text is taught. This seems to be the very premise of Critical English Education, even though it completely undermines the spirit of critique and criticality because notions and methods of "academic literacy" rely on the canonical. For example, Morrell (2004; Duncan-Andrade & Morrell, 2008) argues that inclusion of non-canonical texts like pop culture and media texts in the English classroom can foster academic potential, literacies, and contexts, informed and defined by standards, universities, and even the AP literature curriculum. This sense of the "academic" fails to engage what might be considered the extra-rational, or the religious-like attachments and engagements I have previously discussed, and the idea of academic literacy – including the comprehension, analysis, and interpretation of literary texts – is woven into a broad construct like canonicity, where canonical texts and methods are continually justified based upon their historical antecedents and traditions or teachers' perceptions and conceptions of content. Furthermore, while one aspect of Critical English Education calls for the inclusion of non-traditional texts in the English classroom, such as media-based youth pop culture, as Morrell (2005) suggests, these texts are used for inclusion *with* canonical texts. They, like the aforementioned *Batman* and *X-Men* comics, serve a means to an end, and a hierarchy is established about texts, not to mention a pedagogy that reaffirms "academic literacies" and, as such, canonicity.

Imagining Non-Canonical Pedagogy

This project seeks otherwise, imagining what English education might look like on it own, without establishing non-canonical texts and methods for some other purpose. While I do not claim to have an answer to the perfect model of what this may look like in the classroom, I want to offer and theorize two examples from my own experiences.

First, I recall working with two of my own students who struggled with the normed expectations (the canonical frame) of my classroom and of the college-prep school at which I worked more generally. Both of them wanted to pursue art degrees or graphic design majors in college and as a career, but "Art" as an occupation was not something that was valued or really developed at the school in which I worked. I remember feeling awkward in requiring them to do the expected literary analysis papers because those papers were going to play little to no role on their future as an artist. Sofie asked me early in the semester if she could supplement her work with renderings that were inspired by class discussions or books read in class. Eventually, and upon seeing the superior artwork she had created, I allowed her to submit her artwork instead of papers. We met to talk about what this might look like in the context of class, but she seemed thrilled that she could develop her own skills and interests towards the class rather than write papers that had little impact on her career goals.

Kevin's situation was similar, but more serious, as I have recently come to learn, as we recently reconnected via email and he filled me in about his experiences. While Sofie could play school and earn good grades aside from her artwork, Kevin could not. Before having me for class, he failed his previous English class by one point and felt entirely disconnected at the college prep school where he was enrolled and where his mom worked. He, like Sofie, knew he wanted to go to art school after high school and generally struggled in his classes. In a recent

email, he told me, "I was very down on myself, and I didn't think I would be cut out for school. I was in a very bad place." I think I remember Kevin's general disengagement in my class, and I remember meeting and working with him early on so he could feel a sense of accomplishment and efficacy in writing papers or reading the canonical novels he was assigned. Like I did with Sofie, I allowed him to be more creative than what was expected in the canonical frame of my classroom because I knew that if I did not, Kevin might have done something drastic, as both he and his mom shared some of their personal concerns with me. In the same email to me, he said,

> Seriously though, if it wasn't for you and your class, I would have dropped out of school. NO LIE. I don't know what would have happened for me. You let me be extremely creative with my writing and took time to talk to me about what I needed to do to improve. I want to thank you for that! Anyways I graduated from the American Academy of Art last April. During my time in school I had an internship which later led to being hired as a graphic designer/illustrator/architectural renderer. I have never been more happy. I'm glad I got in touch with you, and if you have a request for a painting I would love to make you one (free of charge). Just let me know.

I remember at the time feeling bad that I was allowing Kevin to, in his words, be more "creative" because I thought I was doing him a disservice by not requiring him to work within the normative frame of my English classroom – work that built upon academic literacies and instituted canonical ways of engaging with the word. There was a sense of guilt on my part that I was not preparing him for his future. His email to me showed, in a sense, what a non-canonical approach allowed him to do.

These brief examples from my previous experiences as a secondary school teacher somewhat align with Kirkland and Morrell's positioning of keeping students' lives at the center

of the curriculum. While I most certainly maintained a hierarchy and authority with the texts and textual practices I valued in the classroom, Kevin and Sofie's stories help me to see how it is possible to break the canonical frame in the classroom – and how guilty I felt at doing so, even though it ended up bettering these students' experiences and helped them keep their career goals in mind. Kevin and Sofie's stories make me wonder about the affordances of a non-canonical approach and helped me begin to imagine what such a classroom might look like. They also help me to see how committed I was (like Rachel, Joe, and Lisa) to a canonical mindset to the point that I felt guilt if I did otherwise.

Second, my own young adult literature class that I teach in the College of Education has been fundamental in helping me think about what a non-canonical curriculum and pedagogy might look like. For the first time in my career as a teacher, I was given an opportunity where I was not required to teach canonical texts or for literary analysis and academic literacies. Instead, the course was grounded in culturally-diverse, contemporary young adult literature and examined the representations of difference and diversity in these texts. The implicit goal of the class is to read culturally diverse literature as a vehicle to build an awareness and understanding of issues connected to difference, identity, and multiculturalism so that the future teachers enrolled in the course might become more critically and culturally conscious in their own classrooms one day. So, we talk about stereotypes, privilege and oppression, identities, and single and counter stories – aspects that were never really part of the explicit curriculum of the secondary English classes I used to teach; aspects that, importantly, not many would characterize as indicative of academic literacies. This literature challenges us to think differently and for the way it challenges and affirms – in fact illuminates – contemporary, relevant conversations in the news and popular media.

For example, we read books like *Openly Straight*, *American Born Chinese*, and *Absolutely True Diary of a part-Time Indian*, all of which wrestle with complex adolescent identity issues. But these texts are read alongside news articles, popular media, and cultural texts to nuance the stories or narratives being told on both sides. One text is not necessarily held in higher esteem than the other or is used as a bridge to a different text. For example, we read *Openly Straight* with a recent *New York Times* article about studies connected to sexual attraction and fluidity and several online articles, including the associated commentary through comments sections and Twitter posts, about a recently outed Olympic free-skier. We used all of these "texts" to analyze the stereotypes and counter stories embedded across the stories being told. We did the same with *Absolutely True Diary*, where we talked about contemporary mascot controversies, culturally appropriated Halloween costumes and clothing, and Native American portrayals in media and film. Again, none of these texts was given more authority than the other, but we used all of them to consider a story that is being told through contemporary culture about Native Americans.

While these are brief examples, what we were doing in these cases was a constant, iterative reading of word and world, and the students brought in examples of "contemporary commentaries" each week, where they engaged with these timely topics across social media and news articles. One final project of the course required them not just to *read* some conversation but to become a participant in it, positioning themselves as critical *producers* of knowledge – nascent social activists or agents of change – rather than simply consumers of culture or, worse yet, mere writers of literary analysis paper. This way, they question the world around them and tell a story with their digital footprints. I do not offer this brief illustration just to point out the non-canonical texts that are used but to also consider a pedagogical approach that values the

153

dialogic and seeks to challenge or rupture normativity, authority, hierarchy, and perhaps even hegemony. This type of pedagogy, however, might not have been possible had I been assigned to teach a course of canonical literature. Despite any efforts otherwise, the canonicity surrounding the canonical text would have superseded other texts offered in the course. In other words, for me, it required a complete shift to – an entirely different frame of – a class that did not mandate the teaching of canonical novels.

I do not mean to suggest that these two examples from my own experiences are fully-imagined representations of non-canonical pedagogy or classrooms where the canonical frame is broken, but I do offer them as an initial attempt, along with those of Kirkland, Applebee, and Scholes, at beginning to imagine classrooms without canonicity (or at least classrooms where canonicity is minimized) or where teachers and students feel they are invested in power relations that allow them such room and agency to sidestep canonical expectations.

Implications

Most of all, I am interested in the notion of canonicity as a lens for future research and for considering ways in which the construct of canonicity I offer here may be carried forwarded and deepened through future research. In the tradition of Critical English Education, using canonicity as a lens offers another perspective, among a plurality of perspectives, for understanding how things work in the English classroom, other classrooms, or in schools more generally. I see this as most pressing as I move forward in my own career, where I will be working with pre-service teachers largely like me: white, religious, and committed to teaching in Catholic schools. It took me stepping out of the Catholic English classroom and observing other, non-religious classrooms to see what I could not otherwise see: how my teaching of the

154

discipline looked like or was modeled on the religious models and rituals to which we subscribed. This project will inform my work with these new teachers as they begin to navigate the discipline. But I do wonder, however, about my own positioning as a teacher educator in this context as I enter a new position of familiar territory (ACE and the Catholic classroom): Will I jettison these notions of canonicity and comfortably settle into a space where canonicity is the norm? Or, will this context provide me the apposite opportunity to further nuance and call out canonicity when and I where I see it?

On this note, from a pedagogical perspective, this project may suggest that the religiosity of the English classroom should be extracted or, quite simply, kept separate from the English classroom. In other words, where the church is a place for religion (and religiosity and canonicity), then perhaps the classroom is a place for democracy and the dialogic – for students' lives, as Kirkland says. If this were to happen (as was the case, I would like to think, with my young adult literature class), then there may be a more open regard for non-canonical texts and pedagogies to permeate English classrooms – more opportunities for students' lives, interests, and varied modes of communication to become the living curriculum of the classroom.

On this note, I appreciate that the notion of canonicity as a lens can be applied to what *we do* – to ourselves and to our teaching – in the classroom rather than (as with Appleman's (2009) literary lenses) to literature. In other words, canonicity turns the lens on ourselves-as-teachers and implicates *us* in some theory instead of positioning teachers and students "outside of" theory by only using it as a lens to read or interpret books. This is a critique I have of the critical literacy and Critical English Education movements; they seem to be so focused on critiquing the ideologies of texts that they neglect the ideological implications of pedagogy, even pedagogy that seems to espouse critical means and objectives. In fact, maintaining the critique of canon as

155

a list of books allows us English educators to excuse ourselves from implication or complicity with a canonical system. Critiquing the list of books, or using critical literary lenses that allow us to critique the ideology of books, excuses us and instead points the finger to people, decisions, and ideologies of long ago. In other words, this type of critique allows for excuses like, "Well I had nothing to with that" or "That decision was made a long time ago" or "I don't have the power to change things." Instead, a theory of canonicity turns the lens on us and positions English educators in a place of power to make changes to their own pedagogy and approach.

And so, I wonder about what *other* aspects of the English classroom may be canonical besides the ones described in this project. How might canonicity work in other implicit or hidden ways that maintain the status quo and reify dated traditions? At the same time, I wonder about those classrooms where teachers are successfully and innovatively undercutting canonical texts or using non-canonical or multicultural texts as part of their curricula. How might canonicity still be at play (or not!) in those situations? Finally, I am also interested in notions of canon and canonicity in community spaces other than English Education or the English classroom (e.g., different music traditions have different canons, I presume). For example, I mentioned gaming and comic book communities earlier in this project and their uses of and adherences to their canons. How might their attachments and engagements with what is considered canon in their community be similar or different to those in English classrooms described in this project?

On another note, while colleges and universities may no longer have the strong influence over the secondary English curriculum they once did (Grossman, 2001; Applebee, 1974), this project does see ways in which things like the Common Core or, perhaps most egregiously, the AP Curriculum are instituting new canons that reaffirm, reinstitute, and reify canons of ages past,

where the same texts and the same methods (New Critical, literary analysis) continue to inform and form pedagogy. The teachers in this project all referenced and looked to the AP test and curriculum as a model of sorts or, worse yet, a type of end goal for their students. A recent analysis of the texts referenced on the AP English exam showed that AP relies heavily on traditional, canonical texts (Miller & Slifkn, 2010). This is problematic as more and more schools move toward AP classes for college readiness and credibility. Whereas Mills (2013) worries that the CCSS might reinstitute the canon, the teachers in this study seemed to reference "AP" much more than the Common Core as an influence in their pedagogical (not simply curricular) decision-making. "AP" seems to reinforce how canonical conceptions of curriculum induce a particular (and canonical) pedagogical approach. Thus, I echo Thein & Beach (2013) in looking at and critiquing the AP curriculum – and importantly, the methods encouraged through the AP curriculum – for reifying canonical curricula and pedagogy.

Another implication of this project is seeing secondary English as a religious-like experience where not just the subject matter is held as a type of sacred Scripture, but the learning experiences of students, including their (in)abilities to be critical, are reinforced through religious-like practices. Thus, this project joins a recent and budding call (Burke & Segall, 2011, 2015; Juzwik, 2014; Skerrett, 2014) to investigate the lingering legacy of religion in schooling more generally and English education more specifically – to see how it operates and how it is embedded in traditions, practices, and pedagogy. This investigation could hold some potential in reframing English Education and in moving beyond or at least further theorizing the engagements, attachments, experiences and expectations of English teachers and students in the English classroom. For example, imagine non-Christian or non-religious students who do not come to the classroom with religious literacies or with the religious experiences that make

157

familiar the secondary English practices described in this project. They may be disadvantaged or disenfranchised as they are required to learn not only the content but also to familiarize themselves with the means and methods towards learning that content. In some ways, the religious-like pedagogy associated with canonicity may be an asset to the religiously-literate student who is already familiar with these approaches through religiously-ingrained experiences at their home, Church or Sunday school. Indeed, a major limitation of this study (and a possible site of future investigation) is the lack of student voices, and I do wonder how or if students feel or experience the canonicity I have described in this project.

With that, ever my intention throughout this project has been an effort toward imagining otherwise and providing an opportunity for teachers, students, and scholars to consider or imagine other possibilities for English Education. To imagine a classroom space without hierarchies or where students and teachers deconstruct the canonical power that is exercised outside books and lists of books. But also to expand teachers' educational imagination, perhaps to break free of long-held assumptions and traditions that go beyond simply changing a list of books. In order to do this, the teacher education classroom, which tends to keep English content separate from English pedagogy, might consider that relationship between curriculum and pedagogy more broadly, to consider how pedagogy specifically interacts with canon. These cases seem to suggest that teachers' conceptions and perceptions of their curriculum certainly elicited a particular type of pedagogy.

Finally, I hope this project shifts the discourse around the canon in English Education to a discourse that implicates our pedagogy and ourselves. Teacher education classrooms might be the space to explore the (perhaps unconscious or unacknowledged) beliefs or values we carry and hope to carry into the classroom and the ways in which discourses and classroom space may

158

influence or alter critical aims, objectives, and intentions. Certainly more focused attention can be given to the canonical frames that influence pedagogy and practice.

Conclusion

I began this project with my own story as I looked back at my own schooling and teaching experiences to "unearth" and critically reflect upon my interest in the canon and my role in reifying not only canonical texts but canonical ways of thinking and doing in the classroom as a student and as a teacher. In order to theorize these experiences, I turned to *Bye Bye Birdie*, a campy musical that in no way represents the type of canonical literature expected as part of the curricula taught or studied in the English classroom. But I once again use this text to sincerely yet playfully – and to non-canonically – theorize my complicity with canonicity.

Like the character that sang that song, I recognize now that I was seduced, so to speak, by the perceived cultural capital that comes with being an English teacher of canonical works of literature. I know I was complicit in reifying the canonical frame of my English classroom, and I let it shape my life, my values, my ideas *and* those of my students. But at the same time I came to this project with a suspicion toward what was deemed "natural" in my English classroom and with deep questions about my teaching and learning experiences that haunted me and continue to do so. While this project may seem "tidy" in that it offers one interpretation of curriculum and pedagogy in the secondary English classroom, the project as a whole has been a challenging and difficult one for me because it offers an interpretation that certainly challenges my professional and personal foundations, as for me, canonicity was not only wrapped up in what and how I taught but who I am as a religious, White, heterosexual man – indicators of a canon, no doubt. But, theorizing canonicity through this project provides for me, in a sense, an opportunity for a

159

new relationship with my pedagogy and practice: for always seeking out the opportunities to challenge, examine, and investigate who I am and what I do as a teacher educator and, most of all, as an English teacher.

Novelist[s] not only put down a story, but they are the story. They are each one of the characters in a greater or lesser degree. And because they are usually moral in intention and honest in approach, they set things down as truly as they can. They are limited by their experience, their knowledge, their observation, and their feelings.
A novel may be said to be the person who writes it.
(as appropriated from Steinbeck, 1976, p. 326)[4] [5]

It would seem standard practice for such a project as this one that I should dedicate some space to "what I learned" during this foray into my life as a researcher as well as into the lives of the teachers who so graciously permitted me to enter their classrooms and observe their teaching without limitations. These brief musings offer a peak into the untidiness, the unresolved, the grayness to which I referred in my Prologue.

Early in my graduate career, I had delusions of being an objective researcher who sat at the back of the classroom and recorded the findings to my questions. But I learned early on that research is largely about chance, finding the right participants, and making the data say what I want it to say. I learned this as a researcher in Robert's classroom, and so much of who I am now and how I think as a researcher has been marred, in a sense, by my experiences and initial investigations in Robert's classroom. With Robert, I wondered soon into my observations with him whether or not he was performing for me. That, even though I sat quietly in the back of the

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[4] This is not a direct quotation because Steinbeck used the masculine pronoun throughout.

[5] At various points in this project, I have used quotations from canonical texts and/or authors to begin a chapter and to capture its overall themes. Assigning canonical quotations certainly gives this project and me, its author, more credence, authority, and power, but I use these authors to help me make my points because they were part of the curricula I observed in Rachel, Joe, and Lisa's classrooms. Thus, canonical authors help me to critique canonicity. At the same time, however, I hope my use of a lyric from *Bye Bye Birdie* as the thread throughout this project undercuts, or at the very least levels, the canonicity that might be associated with authors like Steinbeck or Shakespeare. Finally, I am fully aware that this write-up meets canonical expectations of what a write-up of this nature should do and look like. This is a tension I continue to consider throughout my work.

room and had never been introduced to his students and never "entered" into the classroom space in some explicit way, he saw me and saw that I looked like him (a White, heterosexual, male English teacher) and thus he felt free or encouraged to say and do things that, to me, contradicted his critical intentions and orientations. While I presume he says and does these things on a regular basis (it's just a hunch I have), during my observations of his teaching, I simply had to wait for the right moment for him to say something or do something that would count as a "theoretically rich event" (Dyson & Genishi, 2005) that I could theorize for some paper or project. And indeed, these moments happened quite frequently in the grand scheme of data collection.

Thus, I was anxious during much of my "data collection phase" for this project to find another participant like Robert who would say the things I wanted him or her to say so I could more easily analyze and theorize his or her comments for their themes or intended and unintended consequences. To a large extent, that did not happen here, and I realized that unless I wanted to spend years observing teachers in the classroom, I needed to mine my data for the story I wanted to tell. In other words, while there was a deeper sense of data analysis this time around for this project than there was for my projects with Robert, there was also a good deal of play. I don't mean to imply that I fabricated data; that is not the case. I went into this project somewhat unsure of what canonicity looked like and how it operated, so I had to let the data tell me to a certain extent what was "happening" in these classrooms, but I also used the data in way to make the story I wanted to tell work. While I cannot control what comes out of my participants' mouths, what they do in the classroom, or how they arrange their classroom, I can write the story I want my readers to read. For example, Appendix C consists of a manuscript written with Lisa and under review with the *English Journal* that highlights an innovative aspect

of her pedagogy. That manuscript takes an angle of innovation and examines a brief unit of her pedagogy not discussed herein. The story I tell in this project, of course, is different, even though I do credit Lisa with innovative aspects to her approaches and content in the classroom. Neither one of the two versions of Lisa is false, but they are incomplete. The readers of the manuscript of Appendix C will not see this project, will not see other aspects of her pedagogy, and will not see how Lisa's innovative unit only reaffirms the canonicity I described in this project. Thus, I act as a novelist, choosing what story to tell when and where.

Writing about this somewhat deviant or – dare I say – non-canonical methodology in this project that determines my future is somewhat dangerous, for it outs me as a researcher who believes that, to a certain extent, any type of research is like a novel, a work of fiction. Methodology (and this formal write-up with expected categories and chapters) is just another type of canonicity; it's an attachment or type of engagement that bestows credence and sanctity to what we do.

I have been asked many times over if I have ever sought out Robert and shown him my analysis of my observations of his teaching. I usually respond with something like, "I've thought about it, but no, I don't want him to feel bad or think he's going to get in trouble or something." And I will probably say the same about Joe, Lisa, and Rachel. While this response is indeed true, it is also only part of the answer because Robert, just like Joe, Lisa, and Rachel, do not really exist as they do in this project, in this story. While their words and actions are theirs, I have created them as characters, in a sense, and constructed "the scenes" contained through the data chapters that I want my readers to see. I have chosen what moments, events, or episodes to include and exclude.

More than anything else, though, this project is about me, and specifically about me as a *teacher* because I have always thought about myself as a teacher and seen teaching as my life's work. It's something I felt called to do from a very young age – and still do. Long before I began working on this project, I have always considered my teaching in vocational terms, a term that is likewise inherently imbued with religiosity.

So, as I indicated in the Prologue, this project helps me come to terms with who I was and am as a secondary English teacher. Foucault (1978) might say it's an exercise of "the confession" (another practice grounded in religiosity), as it is my self-disciplining or my opportunity in producing the truth that was my experience as a high school English teacher and my attempt at absolving my canonical practices, which now seem trite or silly considering their historical antecedents and their potential effect on my students. In this sense, this project has been a difficult story to tell because I have seen so much of my former self in Robert, Lisa, Rachel, and Joe – or, rather, I *am* Robert, Lisa, Rachel, and Joe, and this story is an attempt at absolution for following the canonical ways of being, thinking, knowing, and doing that defined who I was in the classroom. As I move forward with my life and career, what I have learned through this project will resonate mostly with me as a teacher because my *identity* as teacher takes on new meaning and purpose, as I continue to think, learn, and theorize about the ways in which canonicity constantly and consistently attempts to frame the type of teacher I desire to be.

One Final Note

In light of this project and the broader work I have done around the canon, I have been repeatedly asked about my stance on the canon by a number of different people – former and current colleagues, friends, advisors, strangers, family members, people at conferences and job

164

visits, and so on. While I do share my thoughts on that question throughout this project, in some ways, this project allows me to coyly deflect that question because, as I have argued, it is not about "the what" but "the how" that is entangled with "the what." To answer the question would be to undercut the theoretical work that this project sets out to do.

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Joe's **Heart of Darkness** *Handout*
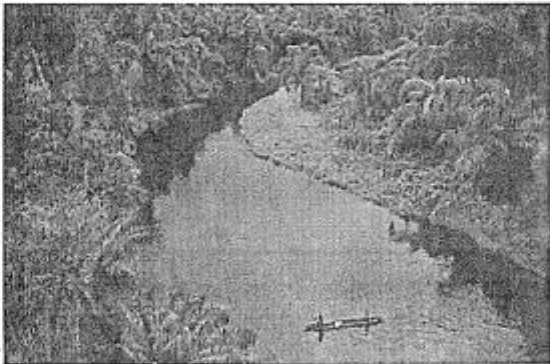
Figure 4

Joe's Heart of Darkness Handout

What is This Place?
Examining the Role of Place and Purpose on People

Overview

In Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, narrator Charlie Marlow recounts piloting a tinpot steamer up the mighty Congo River to retrieve a man named Kurtz from the Inner Station, an outpost situated for gathering ivory. The novel is an account of Marlow's two journeys—the geographical trip up the river and the psychological degeneration that the trip elicits. This unit culminates with an extended literary analysis essay. In anticipation of this endeavor, we spend a considerable amount of time learning how to read a dense literary text closely, researching its historical and cultural bases, as well as examining some critical responses to the book. Finally, we learn how to choose and develop a worthwhile thesis, spending the remainder of the unit engaged in idea development, feedback, and revision.

How to Use This Packet: This packet has all the work that we will be doing for the coming weeks, so don't be intimidated! I will be providing guidance and instruction at a pace that will have you finished by the end of the unit. Each step has its own *rationale, objectives, sequence,* and *assignments* (explained below).

Rationale: This tells you *why* we are doing something, why it's important now or in the future.

Objectives: These are the skills you should be able to demonstrate by the end of each step.

Sequence: This lists work you must complete in order to progress toward meeting our objectives.

❑ represents an assignment to turn in
○ represents steps leading up to assignments

Assignments: On the last page of the packet, all the assignments affecting your grade are check-listed in order. Assignments may be added, however, as I see necessary.

1

167

Figure 4 (cont'd)

Step One: Building background knowledge of history and culture

Rationale

For some novels, exploring the author's life and times produces few dividends, but with Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, biographical and historical information adds an element of reality to the fictional account and provides a useful lens for later analysis. We begin by watching the excellent documentary *King Leopold's Ghost*, which chronicles Belgium's King Leopold II's systematic exploitation of the Congo, considered by some to be the first modern holocaust.

As we watch the movie, we use the "concept map" method of organizing and summarizing information. Whether you use this method to take notes on a textbook, literary work, or lecture, this skill is yet another useful method for organizing and making sense of a text.

Objectives

After completing this step you should be able to

1. Use a variety of methods for gathering, organizing, paraphrasing, and summarizing information.

Sequence

❑ We watch the documentary *King Leopold's Ghost* while completing a partially completed concept map. This completed concept map can be used as a starting point for research.

Step Two: Reading *Heart of Darkness*

Rationale

Novelists are like painters who need a large canvas to express their ideas. The length of a novel allows a reader to follow one or more characters over a longer period of time. It also allows a novelist to examine a character or event in greater depth. In anticipation of our literary analysis paper, we need to adopt a focus that is *broad* enough to capture a wide variety of potential topics for writing and *sharp* enough to penetrate to the deeper layers of the text.

Objectives

After completing this step you should be able to

1. Read with developing fluency, using effective strategies to construct meaning.
2. Initiate and participate in collaborative discussions, building on the opinions of others and expressing your own clearly.

Sequence

2

Figure 4 (cont'd)

○ Pre-read Joseph Conrad's novel, completing notes on the front and back cover, biographies, introduction, afterword, selected bibliography, etc. In addition to our usual focus on reduction elements and theories of tragedy, we now touch on the concept of *critical lenses*, which provide additional ways to look at literature.

○ Given what we can glean about the text, as well as what we know about our culminating assignment, predict key topics on which to focus during reading. As a class, we create a collaborative concept map for reference and further development.

❑ As a class, read *Heart of Darkness*, using an engaged note-taking strategy. In addition to the usual reduction elements, please take note of elements related to our concept map. These notes are occasionally spot checked for completeness or used as the basis for a mini-conclusion.

❑ We extend our discussion of *Heart of Darkness* by posting in your group's discussion forum. In particular, try to use your posts to hammer out ideas for the reduction or to reflect on one or more of the "key topics" we identified. These prompts are scored using the Discussion Board Rubric.

Step Three: **Writing about literature**

<u>Rationale</u>

Writing about a novel can be difficult because fiction is generally complex and usually includes several points themes. Reading a novel closely, as we have, prepares you to say something specific, unique, and even controversial about the work. Writing, in turn, allows us to penetrate even deeper to the heart of the text, capturing and making sense of what we've read. In this step, we spend a substantial amount of time on writing instruction, idea development, feedback, and revision—processes that will be indispensable to you at the college level.

As part of this orientation to open-ended college writing, students watch, take notes on, and discuss an excellent video produced by Nancy Sommers at Harvard called *Shaped by Writing: The Freshman Experience*, which provides an especially useful frame for discussing writing at the college level.

<u>Objectives</u>

After completing this step you should be able to

1. Develop and refine a thesis.
2. Use organizational structures appropriate to the purpose and transitions that produce logical flow.
3. Use appropriate conventions of textual citation in different contexts.

<u>Sequence</u>

○ Through a series of prewriting activities, you will identify personal topic/issue of interest. You may also choose to use or slightly alter a Question 3 prompt from a previous AP Exam.

3

169

Figure 4 (cont'd)

- ○ Alternating between whole-group instruction, focused peer revision, and conferences with me, we work our way through successive drafts of our papers.

- ❑ Turn in the final draft of your literary analysis paper.

Movie Notes

Assignments

From Step One:

- ❑ **Concept Map on** _King Leopold's Ghost_

From Step Two:

- ❑ **Note-taking method on** _Heart of Darkness_
- ❑ **Weekly discussion forum posts**

From Step Three:

- ❑ **Microsoft Word-style Outline**
- ❑ **Literary Analysis Essay**

- King Leo II of Belgium
  - cousin of Victoria
- colonization
- intense industrialization of Europe
- wanted a colony for Belgium
  - only Africa up for grabs
  - in 1870s - ripe for conquest or "protection"?

- Henry Morton Stanley - explorer
  - of Congo River
  - joined/hired by Leo
  - made stations along the river
- Leo wanted "all of the ivory"
  - Leo guised as philanthropic
- new flag - gold star on black background
  - light of civ in Af.
- Congo free state - all prop of King

DQs

1. most surprising/interesting?
2. connections?
3. why consider the first real holocaust?

- George Washington Williams
  - Am journalist who accused Leo of "Tyranny"
  - "guilty of crimes against humanity"
  - (and this was before Nuremberg)

- steamboat, rifle, shackles
  → instr of white colonizers

4

170

Appendix B: Rachel's **Hamlet** *Handout*

Figure 5

Rachel's *Hamlet* Handout

AP English: *Hamlet*

Background: *Hamlet* is Shakespeare's most discussed play, and Hamlet is probably his most discussed character. In part, all this discussion is a tribute to Shakespeare's genius; in part, it represents irresolvable questions in the play itself. Hamlet vacillates between sensitivity and intellectual acuity on one hand and coarseness, brutality, and lack of remorse on the other.

Two things you must know about beliefs and values in the Elizabethan Age:
1. A son had an inviolable obligation to seek revenge on his father's murderer.
2. Ghosts weren't always trustworthy. They could be hallucinations, spirits with work they wished to complete, spirits signifying something, or devils disguised as dead people. In this latter case, a person committing murder at a devil-ghost's bidding put his own soul in mortal danger.

Reading Notes:
To get the most out of reading *Hamlet*, we will be reading quite a bit of the play aloud in class, and you will complete reading each act on your own. **For each Act, you will keep a reading log on the following topics. (You may type it if you prefer)** You will use the notes as the basis for group discussion on the day following the reading homework. **I will not be collecting these notes, but I will check to see that they are complete each time.**
1) **Who's who**—jot down brief notes about each main character as they appear in the play. Consider their relationships, their role in the enfolding drama, their personality and appearance, etc.
2) **Clarification questions**—what parts were confusing, what words didn't you understand, what events or background information do you wonder about, etc.
3) **Key passages:** As you look back on this act, what 2-3 passages stood out and why?
4) **Themes:** Consider the following list of themes in *Hamlet* and write about how one of these themes makes its appearance in this act. What are the characters' actions saying about this theme?

Disillusionment/Betrayal	Duty and Responsibility	Madness
Stereotypical Sex Roles	Honor	Appearance vs. Reality
Suicide and Morality	Twists of Fate	Love and Marriage
	Corruption in Society	

5) **Personal Reaction:** What are your overall impressions about the reading? Likes, dislikes, connections, judgments about characters, predictions, etc.—or you might choose to write responses to one of the "**study guide**" on the back of this handout.

Structure of the Play   **Reading Schedule**
Act I: 5 scenes (pgs. 7-69)   By Thurs. 11-6 read, take notes, & prepare for quiz
Act II: 2 scenes (pgs. 73-119)   By Fri. 11-7 read, take notes, & prepare for quiz
Act III: 4 scenes (pgs.123-185)   By Mon. 11-10 read, take notes, & prepare for quiz
Act IV: 7 scenes (pgs. 189-235)   By Tues. 11-11 read, take notes, & prepare for quiz
Act V: 2 scenes (pgs. 239-287)   By Weds. 11-12 read, take notes, & prepare for quiz

Unit Product Assignments:
1. Socratic Seminar: Thurs, 11-13 (Guiding questions passed out on Wednesday, 11-12)
2. In-class AP-style Free Response Essay (Friday, 11-14)

Figure 5 (cont'd)

Hamlet Study Guide

There are a million questions relevant to this play, but the following topics/questions are particularly worthy of your consideration.

1. Images to watch: ears, poison, infection, revenge, secrecy, madness, appearance vs. reality, play vs. act.
2. Consider the ghost. Should Hamlet believe him? Is he really Hamlet's dad? How does your belief in him affect your reading of the play?
3. Is there really a ghost at all? Even if an actor portrays him (as is usually done), how do you know that he is really there for Hamlet? Does the ghost ask Hamlet to do anything that has not already occurred to Hamlet? Is Hamlet sane? Are we watching/reading real, historical events or simply a play within Hamlet's mind?
4. What exactly does the ghost order Hamlet to do? How well does Hamlet follow orders?
5. Compare the 3 men of action of this play—Hamlet, Laertes, and Fortinbras. How successful is action versus contemplation in this play?
6. Consider Hamlet's "friends"—Horatio, Rosencrantz, and Guildenstern.
7. Consider the Claudius-Gertrude relationship. Did Gertrude know of Claudius' murder of her first husband? What (if anything) is Gertrude guilty of in the play?
8. Watch out for the enormous amount of play-acting within the play. Many characters are forced to put on an act. How does all of this relate to the play-within-a-play in Act III? Why is this mini-play at the center (literally) of *Hamlet*?
9. In the performance of the play-within-the-play, Hamlet assumes that a guilty man, seeing his guilt enacted before him in a drama, will be forced to somehow display his guilt. Do you think this assumption is reasonable? This idea happens to be a belief of many of the Puritan drama critics of Shakespeare's age; they feared that the sight of evil on a stage would force the audience to go out and commit evil. The playwrights responded by saying that the sight of goodness would cause goodness and the sight of evil would shame a person into confessing his crime. What does Shakespeare seem to think?
10. The $10,000 question—What, exactly, is rotten in the state of Denmark?
11. How does Ophelia relate to Hamlet? What is her purpose in the play? Does he really ever love her? Does she ever really love him?
12. Consider the roles of the two Gravediggers. How does their dialogue serve a purpose other than comic relief?

The BIG QUESTION: Why does Hamlet delay so long? Is Hamlet really mad? Does Hamlet have an Oedipal Complex? Is Hamlet a victim of a melancholic humor? As we read & discuss the play, consider these theories:

1) The Romantic View: Hamlet is a dreamer incapable of acting. He simply doesn't have it in him to act quickly and decisively because his thinking usurps his energy. He must confront the difference between his idealized concept of the world and the ugliness of the reality around him before he can fit into his world and act upon it.
2) The Melancholy View: Hamlet suffers from melancholic humor. He is physically and mentally ill—out of balance—and so cannot act.
3) The Oedipal-Complex View: Hamlet is overly attached to his mother, has suppressed that love because of its forbidden and unacceptable nature, and delays in killing Claudius because of identifying with Claudius, who has murdered Hamlet's father and married his mother.
4) The Moralistic View: Hamlet is ambitious but morally concerned. He delays because he knows that ambition rather than moral duty motivates him. He is concerned with the moral state of his soul, and by extension, the moral state of Denmark.

This manuscript, written with Lisa, one of the teacher-participants for my project, describes Lisa's innovative approach toward using literature circles in her classroom and the power she leveraged in making those circles happen. Its purpose, as we explain, is to highlight how teachers might be innovative in using diverse texts for classroom study despite their seemingly powerlessness in choosing texts for classroom study. It also offers evidence, in the context of this larger project, that the teacher-participants of this study can be – and indeed *are* – innovative and playful in their pedagogy by recognizing what is possible for literature instruction. At the same time, however, Lisa's pedagogy during these literature circles reaffirms the argument of my larger project: that though these teachers may be able to do other things or be more critical or innovative with certain texts, a canonical text incurs a canonical pedagogy. Though she uses literature circles and book-club-like discussions here (with non-canonical texts), Lisa's units on *Catcher in the Rye* and Of Mice and Men (texts she deems canonical), for example, are dictated by whole-group study, formal assessments, and even lecture.

THE CALL: Visible Teaching: Open Doors as Resistance
Submission Deadline: March 15, 2016
Publication Date: November 2016

Under pressure to adhere to a scripted curriculum or to conform to standardized instructional practices, educators might choose to adhere to a popular adage that recommends that they "close the door and teach," presumably as an act of resistance. This advice is problematic, however, because it denies the agency of teachers, as professionals, to effect change in their schools. It willfully conceals alternative instructional practices that might otherwise benefit students, and it ignores the role that shared knowledge can play in sustaining a community.

Alternatively, teaching with our doors open establishes agency where the system has denied it; offers direct alternatives to the practices we reject, especially those that are not supported by the evidence of our field; and models for students how professionals behave.

This issue of *English Journal* explores how a decision to "teach with our doors open" can be

interpreted as a form of empowerment and an act of resistance. It acknowledges teachers as agentive, and aims to understand how making one's practices visible to others can disrupt standardizing forces and disciplinary mechanisms that are intended to promote conformity and compliance.

Contributors might consider questions such as: What conditions prompt teachers to teach behind closed doors, and how can they productively be addressed? How do you negotiate space to teach with your door open, and what advice would you offer others interested in doing so? How have you engaged with colleagues who respond differently to mandated and prescribed practices that you feel are not valid or effective? If you have experienced a transformative moment—moving from teaching with your door closed to teaching with your door open—how did that look and what advice can you offer those interested in making the same transition? How can teachers work with school leaders to create a school culture that values the open exchange of ideas and embraces evidence-based practices that push against mandates? We welcome educators to share experiences that investigate this important topic in the context of scholarly literature.

We invite manuscripts of 2,500-3,750 words, written to an audience of educators in grades 7-12 English classrooms.

Respectfully Rethinking Resistance

"Where there is power, there is resistance…" (Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*)

When we conceive of teaching "'with our doors open'… as a form of empowerment and an act of resistance," we position teachers as the rebels to the empire, the oppressed to the oppressors, the cogs in the wheel of the machine. For some, this may be an apt metaphor when considering the plentitude of policies and practices mandated or imposed through standardized curricula, supposed "best practices," disciplinary traditions, and even prescribed text books, not to mention the varied standardized tests that students must endure (state-wide and national, ACT, AP, SAT, etc.) and the responsibility teachers feel to prepare students for them. We (English teachers as a whole) are forced to choose (in word or in pedagogy) which policies, mandates, or traditions we are "with" and which we are "against."

Conceiving of teaching from this perspective, that teachers could or should resist these impositions and be empowered in their work, places teachers in a precarious situation. They

become, quite simply, the Katniss to the Capitol, the Thomas to the Maze, the Jonas to the Community, and are immediately thrown into the chaos of plots that, despite small wins and successful gains, can eventually choke them in the system's firm grip. As we know from many of our favorite dystopian novels, in these cases, the rebellious are rarely victorious as the system continues to antagonize the protagonists through subsequent sequels, and more often than not, even at the very end of "the trilogy," the system remains in tact in some way or another. In reality, this metaphor helps us to see that "resistance" and "empowerment" only further displaces teachers and automatically pits them against some other, more powerful entity like the Common Core. Indeed, even conceiving of "resisting the Common Core" legitimizes the CCSS as a regime of power, a source of truth, something to which teachers must re/act. In this case, teachers will always be powerless, will always be playing catch-up, and will always find themselves subject to the rule of others who directly or indirectly claim they know better about what's best for students.

This point is no better illustrated than in research conducted over the last several decades confirming that canonical texts have long been and continue to be staples of the English classroom (Applebee; Stotsky; Stallworth). This fact is not surprising to English teachers, even though recent efforts and the rise in popularity of young adult literature (as a market) have attempted to shake those canonical foundations. However, in visiting with and observing exceptional teachers of high school English classes, I have seen how teachers include student choice (which often includes YA and non-canonical texts) reading time throughout their weeks and courses. I have been glad to see students pull from their backpacks books from various dystopian series, graphic novels, and even contemporary texts like *The Martian*, *We Were Liars*, or *All the Light We Cannot See*. The wildly popular *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time*

175

Indian has actually made its way into the official curriculum, as a text for whole-class study across several schools in the area. Sadly, however, *True Diary* is more the exception than the rule, and the students' choice reads are rarely acknowledged or discussed during class time, a prime opportunity to share reading habits and recommendations with peers. Thus, these often high-interest books are left on the boundaries of the classroom – literally, in backpacks and bookshelves – which is no doubt the result or perhaps the condition of the current CCSS-approved list of "exemplar texts" or even the Advanced Placement test exemplars, both of which continue to valorize the same texts that have always been taught in English classrooms. Many administrators and districts see and use that exemplar list as indicative of required reading, an exercise of power, as a source of truth that must be taken into account in classrooms across the country. That list, in other words, continues to push contemporary, young adult, and high-interest literature to the boundaries and perpetuates the assumption (or tradition) that the only texts worthy for classroom discussion or study are the ones that have always been assigned or taught. This may not be a bad thing, but it does *limit* what is possible in the English language arts classroom, as teachers feel that they must either give in to the system ("exemplars") or resist it (teach something else, invite other texts into classroom discussion, etc.). Again, from this perspective, teachers are positioned as powerless against a system that is always the one "in" power.

In order to move beyond this simple binary – you can or cannot, you resist or comply, you do or do not – we need to rethink teachers, teaching, and resistance so that teachers are positioned and portrayed as already vested *in* and *with* power and not necessarily always responsive or reactionary to or rebounding from some higher ordered power, like the CCSS. In other words, we need to think of teachers as *already* empowered, agentive, and working in a

regime of power *of their own*, rather than someone/thing else's. In his writings on power, French theorist Michel Foucault argues, "Power comes from below; that is, there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled... no such duality extending from the top down... Hence there is no single locus of great Refusal, no soul of revolt, source of all rebellions..." (94). Foucault here rebutts the long held view that power must exist in a binary, where someone must be imposing and someone must be resisting, such as between the rulers and the ruled or between those at the top and those at the bottom. Power, he says, does not belong to only certain groups of people or structures. Instead, Foucault suggests that power is everywhere: in situations, in relations, and, most importantly, in what is *possible*. So, rather than seeing power imposed on individuals ("I have no choice here" or "I have to choose one or the other"), one might ask: "What is *possible* in my context?" If we were to accept Foucault's rendering of power and resistance, then teachers need not be rendered as the eternally plagued dystopian protagonist; they could be a protagonist in a power network of their own accord with the likes of the CCSS or even mandated curricula constantly vying for *their* attention – those things become just one option of what's possible in their classroom. Resistance, then, is not couched against some nebulous, more powerful "other."

In order to do so, teachers need to conceive of "open door" metaphors of their own, rather than that of "resistance." The remainder of this essay offers one such alternative.

Open Door As Acts of Love

Shifting from popular dystopia to popular Disney, in the recent animated film *Frozen*, two characters connect (and sing, of course) over their past, where they have felt consistently shut out or ignored. For Anna, her life "has been a series of doors in my face," resulting in her feelings of isolation and neglect. She sings at one point, "love is an open door," a not-so-subtle

177

nod to the motif running throughout the film: open and closed doors and their emotional implications on its protagonist, Anna. At the end of the film, Elsa tells Anna that they are never closing the gates to the castle again, and Anna beams with joy. The statement, in the context of the rest of the film, serves as an act of love towards Anna, toward Elsa herself, and toward the people of the kingdom: an open door means love, acceptance, openness, and, quite simply, a consideration of what's possible.

What if we rethink open doors as acts of love – toward ourselves, our profession, and most importantly, toward our students? Toward what may be possible in the English classroom? This model makes known our intentions that our first priority in the classroom is a care and love for all of our students, for cultivating their interests and their empathy for others. It completely changes the CCSS conversation and relegates standardizing forces, rather than teachers, to the low man on the totem pole.

Conceiving of open doors as an act of love is not as far-fetched (or cheesy, given the Disney context) as it seems and may help us to move beyond the general idea of resistance as well as the notion of power as a simple binary. Walter Benjamin, the philosopher and cultural critic, sought to resist certain labels people attached to objects. In particular, he wanted to move away from capitalist ideology that saw objects for their "use-value" or "exchange-value." These terms mean exactly what they say: objects are only appraised or valued for utility or consumption purposes; they are commodities that place a "price" on one thing for another – what's it worth and what status does it bring me? Everything, from this perspective, has some purpose connected to utility or need that serves a larger system or individuals (sounds like *The Hunger Games*, no?).

Benjamin offered instead what's been referred to as a "love-value" (what he calls a connoisseur's-value or lover's value) where "things are freed from the drudgery of being useful" (19). That idea of "drudgery," I think, fits nicely with the context of teaching and standards – teachers laboriously toil to deal with imposed standards; it's a chore, rather than an act of concern with what might be best for a certain group of students in a certain context. Students, in other words, are positioned as objects of a certain exchange-value, calculating their worth according to a third-party document of "standards." With a love-value model in mind, however, objects, rather than being useful or exchangeable, can be seen with "affection and sentiment, even love" (Rando 334). Whereas Benjamin was talking about objects, what if we took this perspective into our classrooms, where we approached teaching from a love-value with doors wide open?

Love-Exemplar

I saw this model of teaching – teaching for and with love and possibility rather than use, exchange, or resistance – in my observations of Lisa, a high school English and film teacher of ten years. Though I had been observing several teachers at several different schools, Lisa's teaching was always the most different, and her class was the one I looked forward to most of all. Lisa teaches a diverse group of students in a somewhat rural area, and as I visited her classroom on a regular basis, I was amazed at how easily Lisa was able to have her students participate not only about the different texts being studied, but about their own lives and opinions. She held whole-group discussions on the floor, each lesson centered on some activity connected to the text they were reading, rarely was the topic focused on disciplinary terms or jargon, and I never once saw Lisa lecture. Further, Lisa taught and welcomed high-interest texts in her classroom. While she still taught mandated texts like *The Awakening*, *The Crucible*, and *Catcher In the Rye*, she

179

also found the time and space for graphic novels such as *Maus I & II* and *Fun Home*, and

Stephen King's novella, *The Body*. I saw Lisa's teaching as different from what was expected.

Simply, I saw on her part an act of love by prioritizing her students' interests and her goal of

empathy over mandates, the CCSS, and even the scripted curricula of her own department. And,

of course, she did all of this with her door open.

I asked Lisa to share a bit about her thinking and teaching around one specific area: her

inclusion and teaching of diverse texts. Here's what she has to say:

Including Diverse Texts

Fortunately, as an English department, we have been very receptive to adding new texts

across the curriculum, and importantly, my colleagues and administration trust me enough to let

me alter my curriculum as I see fit or necessary. I recognize that not everyone may have this

freedom, but I have found my chair and administrator receptive to my ideas when I approach

them with a plan for including other texts. In all honesty, when choosing texts for classroom

study, I keep the canon in mind in the sense that I have researched (very recently and over my

career), what typical regular, Honors, and AP courses include. Just this year, I introduced *five*

new texts into my African-American literature circles (aka Book Clubs). Logistically speaking,

it seemed too rushed for my students to read part one of *Black Boy* and all of *Their Eyes Were*

Watching God leading into our research final on dialect. Philosophically speaking, book clubs

work well when the texts have commonality, especially in regards to themes and histories. Quite

frankly, my honors classes are comprised of mostly white girls, with a few white boys and a few

minority students (Asian, African American, and Hispanic). Growing up in a smaller, very

white, rural community—as a middle-class white girl, as well—it would have been great to have

been introduced to more diverse texts, so I keep that in mind now that I have control over which texts I place in front of my students.

So, I found a way to combine existing English Department texts and (with some small, allocated funds) some additional texts I read recently to try a new book club unit with the following options for students: *Harlem Hellfighters* (graphic novel) & *Brown Girl Dreaming* (poetic memoir), *The Secret Life of Bees, Their Eyes Were Watching God, Black Boy, The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks,* and *Colored People.* Not once did I think about what the Common Core would suggest, although I know two of these three texts (TEWWG and BB) would probably qualify as canonical, and the CCSS speaks a bit to reading for pleasure, discussing literature with peers, and learning (via reading) about other cultures and history, etc. While my students may sit in my classroom with less than stellar diversity apparent on the surface, they are exposed to a variety of cultures throughout the year (Native American, Asian American, African American, Jewish American, etc.). What I enjoy most, however, is not force-feeding a particular race, gender, religion or culture to my students; it's facilitating numerous discussions about characters or real-life persons (in the case of non-fiction texts) and watching students connect with them, *regardless* of their cultural backgrounds. Certainly, we discuss and gain respect for differences among us, but the real learning and growth seems to happen when students realize that struggle and triumph are universal human experiences. For fear of sounding dismissive, sometimes focusing on the similarities among humans is more positive and productive. The students and I loved this unit for all of those reasons. It was so low-key and therefore enjoyable. Although I required written discussion tasks for each of the six meetings, I allowed the students to decide on their own topics for half of them. Students were able to read

synopses and choose texts (fiction and non-fiction) that sounded most interesting and relatable. Choice is important and great starting point.

Freedom is a great thing. For teachers and students. This is why I care about including literature circles as often as possible. In my American literature class, the literature circles center around outcast or on-the-fringes characters. We decided as a department—at the inception of our lit circles project—that thematic connections among the texts were important. Simply speaking, creating activities for up to ten different texts would be a logistical nightmare, if we couldn't find crossover themes and topics. Also important was the ability to have cross-textual discussions among book clubs, with students sharing about character motivations and plot progression and themes that would easily mirror another text. High interest texts were a must, but we've expanded beyond exclusively young adult choices by including some biographies and memoirs, also detailing stories of the "outsider" navigating life's ups and downs. Students, teenagers in general, can feel alone at varying times as young adults, so they can relate to our characters/people in these texts experiencing isolation. Thus, we chose books like *Staying Fat for Sarah Byrnes, The Secret Life of Bees, Wintergirls, Into the Wild, The Perks of Being a Wallflower* and *Looking for Alaska*. I had been enjoying graphic novels (a recommendation of my students and school librarian) and other non-fiction texts of late, so I decided to add into the mix: *Unbroken, Seabiscuit, Running with Scissors, American Born Chinese, Persepolis, Fun Home*, and *Tomboy*. Variety within genre is just as important as variety within plots. Since we were fiction heavy, I wanted to add four graphic memoirs, a prose memoir, and two biographies. While I'm all about choice and variety, I do think there's a fine balance between having too many choices, but every text except two were chosen by students in my regular American literature class last year, using a "speed dating with books" chart, where students can engage for

a few minutes with the options, take positive and negative notes, and make a thoughtful decision about which text(s) speak to them and which ones they *want* to read. The promise is that students will get one of their top three choices. Overall, it was very successful, as my students were grateful to read stories that mattered to them.

In Considering Open Doors as Acts of Love

Lisa's brief commentary around one aspect of her classroom reveals that her pedagogical decisions and choices do not originate from a place of "resistance," rather they come from somewhere much deeper – from her own experiences, from a desire for empathy, from a love for her students' interests, concerns, and well-being in the world. No doubt, there are many teachers like Lisa who see their open doors as acts of love because they prioritize their students' interests over the interests of mandates, the CCSS, etc. Further, Lisa's resourcefulness to imagine and act on what was and is possible in her classroom, rather than to see herself trapped in some power binary, moves her beyond the metaphor of resistance. Instead, Lisa found ways to work within the system to accomplish her own goals with her students in mind and through progressive pedagogies and diverse texts (see NCTE's position statement on the need for diverse books). Again, just like many other teachers, Lisa teaches with her door open as a sign of love and respect for her students, her profession, and the texts she teaches. Teaching, for Lisa, is a consideration of what's possible.

Of course there were other ways this metaphor of an open door as an act of love played out in Lisa's classroom, just as it does for English teachers across the country. Lisa welcomes people (like me) into her classroom on a regular basis, and she willfully serves as a mentor teacher to pre-service teachers. Rather than seeing herself as an authority in this position, she sees these beginning teachers as equals and encourages their new ideas; she even incorporates

their plans into her own teaching, even years down the road, as I have observed. Lisa, too, is committed to a student-centered classroom, where students discuss, facilitate, interact, and respond to each other will little imposition from her. And, Lisa establishes a comfortable, respectful classroom environment from the first week of school so students may be open to new ideas and willing to share them.

Lisa and I are certainly of the mind that we must resist "standardizing forces and disciplinary mechanisms that are intended to promote conformity and compliance," especially when we feel they are not right for our students, and I hope that highlighting one aspect of Lisa's teaching through this essay does that. But I must respectfully (and playfully) "resist" the notion of teaching as an act of resistance for fear that it may contribute to the narrative that teachers are powerless and faced only with "resist or comply" alternatives. Lisa's story shows otherwise. It shows room for creativity, for working within and without the system, and for her and her students' own purposes, needs, and interests. Lisa and her students, in other words, are already *in* power, not resisting or reacting to it. So let's continue to teach with our doors open as acts of love and in consideration of what's possible. Let us not relegate ourselves to a system where we are positioned as rebels to the empire. English teachers and English teaching have always been *the* new hope.

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